Let her be heard

The untold stories of indigenous religious minority women in Mexico

March 2022

Full report

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HIDALGO
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OAXACA
CHIAPAS

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Content warning

Murder of a child, pregnancy loss, torture, violence, sexual violence against children

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Note on currency

The cases described in this report take place over a significant period of time, during which the currency of Mexico, the peso (MXN), has undergone revaluation and other adjustments. We have therefore stated the peso value of any currency amounts mentioned without providing an approximate conversion to USD/GBP, as any such conversion would likely be inaccurate. It is important to note that in cases of violations of freedom of religion or belief, including those in this report, the fines applied are designed to cause hardship to the targeted individuals or families. These people are usually on a limited income, so the fines can have a devastating impact.

Note on terminology

In Latin America the term 'Christian' is often used interchangeably with Protestant or Evangelical, and is understood to refer to people who are not Roman Catholics.

Executive summary

The Mexican constitution guarantees freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) and other human rights to all its citizens. However, in practice FoRB violations are a common occurrence in certain regions across Mexico, in particular indigenous communities governed under the Law of Uses and Customs.

The Law of Uses and Customs protects the right of indigenous communities to maintain their cultural and traditional methods of local governance, with the caveat that it must be applied in line with human rights guarantees in the Mexican constitution and in the international conventions to which Mexico is party. However, the Mexican government on both the federal and state levels does little to ensure that these protections are upheld.

As a result, in many communities a religious majority attempts to enforce religious uniformity, with consequences ranging in severity for members of religious or belief minorities who do wish to practise a faith of their choosing or no faith.

CSW has worked on FoRB issues in Mexico, including those experienced by indigenous people, for over a decade. In 2021, in response to a dearth of information and analysis by monitoring bodies and experts regarding the unique experiences of indigenous religious minority women in Mexico, CSW carried out an investigation into whether the ways in which indigenous religious minority women in Mexico experience FoRB and other human rights violations are gender-specific and/or gendered.

Between March and June 2021, CSW's in-country partners held a total of ten gatherings of indigenous women from religious minority communities in the states of Chiapas, Hidalgo, Guerrero, Jalisco and Oaxaca, to listen to their stories.[1] During these gatherings, CSW's in-country female Data Collector utilised three research methods: semi-structured interviews, art-based participatory method, and focus group discussions with participatory ranking.[2] Twenty-five indigenous women and two mestizas[3] women were interviewed and feature in this report. As the interviews took place, the rest of the women participants (known hereafter as participants) were encouraged to use paint and/or embroidery to illustrate their 'hopes for the future' on a plain canvas bag.


Women preparing food in Guerrero

This research found that many types of FoRB violations, occurring in all five states, appear to affect both men and women equally. These include being barred from holding or participating in religious services, from receiving visitors of the same religious group, and from sharing religious beliefs publicly; as well as forced participation in religious majority activities, and harassment when participating in religious services. Other intersecting forms of discrimination against participants that do not seem to be gender-specific include the denial of burial rights and the right to register a birth, threats to or attacks on property and land, forced displacement, and the denial of access to basic services, all of which can create barriers to paid and unpaid work.


Women working in Codorniz, Mezquitic Municipality, Jalisco

A few types of discrimination that appear to affect religious minority women disproportionately or exclusively include barriers to benefiting from government programmes aimed at women, as well as the denial of prenatal healthcare services to pregnant women because of their religious beliefs.

While most forms of discrimination mentioned by the participants seem to have been experienced by their entire family, rather than being specific to them as women, the unspoken psychological and physical impact

1 The findings in this report are limited by the time constraints of the research process. While CSW was able to hold two gatherings in each state, each gathering lasted between three and seven hours because participants had to travel long distances to get there. This meant that it was rarely possible to conclude the art and participatory ranking exercises with focus group discussions as planned, which would have refined the analysis in this report.

2 For details of the research that inspired this report's methodology, as well as its strengths and limitations, please see the Appendix of the full report.

3 Mestizo (fem. mestiza, fem. pl. mestizas) denotes a person of mixed European and indigenous ancestry.



The Data Collector interviewing women in Chiapas

of FoRB violations on religious minority women in Mexico must not be overlooked.

It became clear through the course of the research that the way in which indigenous women and men are affected by some of the same FoRB and associated human rights violations appears to be gendered, i.e., shaped by their gender-based roles and responsibilities within their households and communities. This was made most apparent in how the participants reported that religiously-motivated attacks on property and denial of access to basic services affect indigenous men and women's ability to complete income-generating and unpaid work, usually divided along gender lines.

Many participants shared how basic domestic responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning, and washing clothes become extremely challenging when their access to water and electricity is blocked because of their family's religious beliefs. This type of violation can also have implications for health, with women being forced to wash, cook with and consume untreated water, for example from rivers; or having to walk significant distances to and from a water source while carrying heavy objects such as jugs of water or baskets of wet laundry.

Several participants also alluded to the knock-on effect that discrimination against religious minority children has on them as mothers, with some taking on more work on top of their regular household responsibilities, to instruct their children after they were denied access to education.

Notably, several participants implied that religious minority men are disproportionately affected by certain FoRB violations, and some participants explicitly stated that indigenous men are subject to religiously-motivated violence more often than women.

In indigenous communities across Mexico, men and women are included on a community task list and expected to perform services for their community. However, the participants' accounts suggested that religious minority men are much more likely to be assigned roles within religious majority functions, and then subjected to arbitrary detention for not participating. This is likely because, in many cases, adult men represent their family at community assembly meetings as the perceived 'head' of their household. Single women, including widows, may be subject to more discrimination than married or young women still living at home with their parents, but CSW was unable to draw any significant conclusions on this theory as most participants were married.

A culture of impunity surrounds the majority of FoRB and related human rights violations in Mexico, where 94.8% of reported cases go unpunished.[4] The true percentage is likely to be even higher, given the number of individuals who are unable to report cases due to linguistic and educational barriers. This high level of impunity and the lack of protection granted by state officials, who often side with those of the majority religion, was a common complaint among participants. Eighteen participants (67%) indicated that they are unable to access justice following experiences of discrimination and/or violence. Most participants specified that the local authorities are either the perpetrators of, complicit in or dismissive of these incidents.

4 México Evalúa, 'Hallazgos 2020: Seguimiento y evaluación del sistema de justicia penal en México', 2020 (Spanish) www.mexicoevalua.org/mexicoevalua/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/hallazgos2020-7octubreok.pdf



Corn harvest, Chiapas

Some participants have accessed justice mechanisms, with varying degrees of effectiveness, following interventions by bodies such as the National Human Rights Commission, state human rights commissions and Offices of Religious Affairs at the state government level, as well as through legal cases. However, the persistent lack of intervention by the state governments to uphold FoRB is a clear indication that, in general, government officials, especially at the state level, continue to misunderstand FoRB and view FoRB violations as community issues or minor 'problems' rather than violations of fundamental human rights.

It is important to note that many of the experiences shared by the participants had occurred over a span of years, in some cases over generations. This is reflective of the wider issue of FoRB violations in indigenous communities, which the Mexican government has failed to address in any effective way, dating back decades.

It does not appear that growing religious diversity will be a solution. Rather, a culture has been allowed to develop where it is accepted and even expected that a majority at the local level has the right to enforce religious uniformity. This culture has been strengthened by the strategy of some state governments to 'resolve' cases of religious intolerance, by establishing new communities exclusive to the affected religious minority. In some cases, those who were once a religious minority now find themselves a majority and have embraced their 'right' to enforce religious uniformity.

For this reason, although all the women who participated in this research identify as Protestant Christians, the findings of the report have implications for those of all faiths and beliefs.

Introduction

In 2014, CSW conducted a fact-finding assignment to document and better understand violations of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) affecting indigenous communities in Mexico. CSW's Research and Advocacy (R&A) Officer met with indigenous communities who had been forcibly displaced because of their religious beliefs. As in previous visits, the meetings were well attended by scores of people who were willing to share their personal experiences of FoRB violations. However, in most of these meetings, CSW's R&A Officer was the only woman present. While the affected communities consisted of entire families, those who travelled to participate and share in these meetings were overwhelmingly male victims of FoRB violations accompanied by their male pastors or local missionaries. In meetings where men, women and children were present, the men still tended to act as spokespeople for their families and their communities.

In a dirt courtyard in a city in central Chiapas, where a forcibly displaced community was living in crowded conditions, having received refuge through a local church, the CSW R&A Officer listened as one of the leaders of the community shared the series of violations, many of them violent, that had led up to their forced displacement. As some of the women in the community prepared food in large cast iron pots over an open fire behind him, he shared how the men and boys had been arbitrarily detained for days and subjected to harsh treatment, including violence, mentioning briefly that some of the women had been sexually assaulted. No further details about the assault were provided and, given the sensitivity and trauma associated with sexual assault, the R&A Officer did not press for additional information at the time. It was noted, however, that there had been no action from the government to hold the perpetrators of any of the acts of violence to account.



Codorniz, a locality attached to El Chalate, Mezquitic Municipality, Jalisco

This conversation in the church courtyard stood out because, although many of the FoRB violations that CSW had been informed of thus far included acts of violence, they were almost exclusively acts of violence perpetrated against men, or against men and women together as part of a group. There was rarely any mention of violence experienced just by women, leaving the R&A Officer with a question as to whether this was because those committing the FoRB violations generally only targeted men; or if, for any number of reasons, women's experiences of FoRB violations were not being reported.

This question was answered to a certain degree later the same year, when the CSW R&A Officer held a listening session in a remote part of Hidalgo State, with people representing various indigenous communities. While the majority of those in attendance were male, there was one woman present who was visibly and vocally irritated by some of the men's habit of talking over her. She insisted on being allowed to tell her story, without interruption.

She shared that she and other non-Roman Catholic women in her community were regularly assigned responsibility for cleaning the Roman Catholic church, and given additional responsibilities of procuring and arranging flowers in the church when religious celebrations took place. Declining this assignment was met with threats, fines and other unspecified types of punishment. While a common FoRB violation shared with CSW up to that point had been how non-Roman Catholic indigenous men were sometimes forced to take leadership roles in Roman Catholic religious festivities, this was the first time that the unique experience of women, though likely just as common, had been shared with the R&A Officer.

Over the past decade of research and advocacy on FoRB in Mexico, CSW has noted the particular challenge of trying to raise awareness of human rights violations experienced by a minority within an already marginalised community. In 2018, CSW published a report on violations of FoRB in educational settings around the world, with one

chapter focusing on the experiences of religious minority, mostly indigenous, children in Mexico.[5] It became increasingly clear that another story, untold and virtually unknown outside their communities, was the experiences of women in these same communities. They represent a sector of the population that is marginalised in multiple ways, including their ethno-linguistic identity, their socio-economic status, their gender and their religious beliefs.

This report is an attempt to allow them to articulate and share their experiences in the hope that more women will feel empowered by knowing that their stories matter, and those in positions of power will recognise their responsibility to protect proactively the fundamental human rights of all.

Religion in Mexico

Mexico has a highly religious population and the majority identify as Roman Catholic, although religious diversity is increasing. According to the 2020 census,[6] approximately 78% of the population identified themselves as Roman Catholic, down five percentage points from the previous census in 2010.[7] 11% identified as Protestant or Evangelical Christian and 0.2% are affiliated with other religions, including Judaism, Jehovah's Witnesses, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and Islam.[8] The number of those who said that they practise no religion at all increased from 5% in 2010 to 8.1% in 2020. 2.5% said that they practised a religion not included in the census questions.


Cathedral in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas

Roman Catholicism was introduced to Mexico during the Spanish conquest in the early sixteenth century, when the then colony was referred to as New Spain. It has played a significant role in the country's history and culture ever since. The Spanish Crown did not tolerate the existence of other religions in New Spain. Non-Roman Catholics were persecuted and the Crown zealously supported efforts to convert indigenous populations to Roman Catholicism.[9] Some Roman Catholic missionaries assimilated traditional indigenous beliefs into their teachings, often appropriating indigenous symbols and rituals to this end.[10] While some indigenous populations resisted these efforts, many of those who survived the Conquest eventually converted, very often retaining and integrating pre-Columbian belief systems into their practice of Roman Catholicism.[11] This resulted in varying degrees of religious syncretism between Roman Catholic and pre-Columbian beliefs and practice within indigenous communities across Mexico.

Religion is deeply intertwined with governance and culture in Mexico. The Virgin of Guadalupe as patron and a revered and widely accepted symbol of Mexico itself plays a key role in the overlap between Roman Catholicism and Mexican culture, tradition and politics.[12] In addition to the Virgin of Guadalupe's importance as a national symbol and patron,[13] cities, towns and villages will often hold as patron of their locale a Roman Catholic saint, whose favour and interventions are critical to a prosperous and healthy community. United devotion on the part of community members to these saints is often understood, at the local level, as essential to receiving such favour and interventions, hence the importance of retaining religious uniformity.

Studies by Mexico's National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination (CONAPRED) show that stereotypes and negative attitudes towards religious diversity remain a serious and pervasive

5 CSW, 'Faith and a Future: Discrimination on the Basis of Religion or Belief in Education', 2018 www.csw.org.uk/faithandafuture
6 National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics (INEGI), '2020 Census of Population and Housing Units' en.www.inegi.org.mx/programas/ccpv/2020/#General_results
7 National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics (INEGI), '2010 Census of Population and Housing Units' en.www.inegi.org.mx/programas/ccpv/2010/
8 The word 'Evangelical' is used interchangeably with Protestant and is generally understood in Latin America to mean the same thing, in contrast with Europe or North America where 'evangelical' usually denotes a specific subset of Protestant Christianity.
9 Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs, 'Mexican Catholicism: Conquest, Faith, and Resistance', 22 March 2019 https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/posts/mexican-catholicism-conquest-faith-and-resistance
10 Khan Academy, 'Religious Syncretism in Colonial Mexico City' www.khanacademy.org/humanities/whp-origins/era-5-the-first-global-age/53-the-colombian-exchange-betaa/a/read-religious-syncretism-in-colonial-mexico-city-beta
11 'Pre-Columbian' refers to the period before the arrival of Christopher Columbus in the Americas in 1492. Khan Academy, 'What do "Pre-Columbian" and "Mesoamerica" mean?' www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-americas/beginners-guide-art-of-the-americas/mesoamerica-beginner/a/pre-columbian-mesoamerica
12 Khan Academy, 'Religious Syncretism in Colonial Mexico City', ibid.
13 University of Dayton, 'Our Lady of Guadalupe: Mexican National Symbol' https://udayton.edu/imri/mary/o/our-lady-of-guadalupe-mexican-national-symbol.php

problem in many parts of Mexico. The 2017 National Survey on Discrimination (ENADIS) found that, after physical appearance, religious beliefs were the second most frequent grounds for discrimination.[14] The study also found that 45% of men and 44% of women believe that the more religions permitted in the country, the more social conflicts there will be.[15] In the face of government inaction to promote and encourage a culture of tolerance and acceptance of religious diversity, it is likely that levels of religious discrimination will worsen.

The Mexican government is often averse to involving itself in 'religious affairs', and reluctant to prosecute those responsible for criminal acts linked to FoRB violations, due to an extremely strict interpretation of the concept of separation of church and state.[16] FoRB as a basic and comprehensive right is also generally not well understood by local, state and federal government officials. These factors, along with a larger and more general culture of impunity in the country, combine to ensure that FoRB violations experienced by indigenous Mexicans are rarely if ever addressed in a way prescribed by the law. Even more severe criminal acts, such as arbitrary detention, violent assault and forced displacement, linked to FoRB violations, are rarely prosecuted.

Law of Uses and Customs

Within indigenous communities,[17] the state's reluctance to defend FoRB proactively is compounded by the Law of Uses and Customs. This law ensures that these communities maintain significant autonomy to implement and maintain their own social and cultural norms, as a way to protect their culture and identity. The law is meant to be exercised in line with human rights guarantees in the Mexican constitution, but in practice this is not enforced.

Many local authorities of communities functioning under the Law of Uses and Customs mandate community uniformity in terms of religious practice and belief, compelling all members to participate in the religious activities of the majority or face punishment. When the state government does intervene, the most common 'solutions' are negotiated agreements which victims are pressured to sign.[18] These often include problematic provisions such as the payment of illegal fines, prohibiting members of the religious minority from openly practising or sharing their faith, and obligating them to participate in activities associated with the majority religion.


Cathedral in Guadalajara, Jalisco

A culture of religious uniformity at the community level in regions with a high frequency of serious FoRB violations has been reinforced over the past few decades, to date, by the creation of new communities based on religious identity. This is a result of state government strategies to address severe cases of religious intolerance where forced displacement has occurred or is threatened by, for example, relocating an entire religious minority group from one community to a newly created settlement just for them.

It should be noted that while, historically and in this report, most violations of FoRB involve a Roman Catholic majority and one or more religious minorities, this is not always the case. Over the past decades, a culture in which the religious majority mandates religious adherence and practice, even as

14 National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics (INEGI), Encuesta Nacional Sobre Discriminación, 'Principales Resultados', 2017 (Spanish) www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/programas/enadis/2017/doc/enadis2017_resultados.pdf

15 This study also found that 32.3% of women and 24.8% of men over the age of 18 suffer discrimination because of their religion or belief, which excludes children below the age of 18 who suffer discrimination for the same reason. ibid.

16 Crux, 'Mexico president opposes bill to end church-state separation', 18 December 2019 https://cruxnow.com/church-in-the-americas/2019/12/mexico-president-opposes-bill-to-end-church-state-separation/

17 'Indigenous' can be a problematic identifier. Following her official visit to Mexico in 2017, the former Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, noted that the proportion of Mexico's population recognised as indigenous in official statistics would increase from 6.5% to 21.5% if the criterion of self-identification were used instead of language. Most participants in this research self-identify as indigenous because of their community of origin, where people's primary (or 'maternal') language is usually indigenous.
United Nations General Assembly, 'Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples on her visit to Mexico', 28 June 2018, A/HRC/39/17/Add.2, para 5 https://undocs.org/A/HRC/39/17/Add.2

18 Although the term 'agreement' implies a decision reached by all parties, in this context the agreement is drawn up by the local authorities, in some cases with the approval of the village assembly, and imposed on the members of the religious minority, who are not permitted to participate in the drafting of the agreement.

religious diversity has grown, has been normalised in parts of the country. As a result, there have been cases of disputes involving different factions of the local Roman Catholic Church, and in a handful of cases, a Protestant Christian majority has attempted to mandate adherence to its group, punishing or expelling Roman Catholics or members of other Protestant Christian denominations. Other factors can also play a role. These include family disputes and struggles for political power, where religion may be one of several contributors to a local conflict, or where acts of religious discrimination take place alongside other human rights violations or repressive measures.

This report refers to communities and individuals as a 'religious majority' or 'religious minority' for simplicity. As noted by scholars, this binary categorisation may wrongly imply homogeneity within these groups, and it may not reflect their own self-identification.[19] It also risks presenting discrimination as solely based on religion when a group or individual's experience is in fact determined by a multitude of intersecting factors connected to their social positionings. However, it functions in this report to distinguish between religious individuals and groups that are a majority or minority both numerically and in terms of the authority or influence they have within their community.[20]

Why focus on women?

By focusing on the experiences of indigenous women from religious minority communities in Mexico, CSW aims to contribute to a growing field of research on religious minority women's experiences, and to draw attention to a country that has received scant attention in existing research on FoRB. In doing so, it builds on previous analysis of the intersection between FoRB and women's right to equality, which will be reviewed briefly in this section.

FoRB and women's rights

Intersectionality is key to understanding the multifaceted experiences of women from religious minority communities. Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, the term intersectionality describes a conceptual framework for analysing how people are affected by multiple and intersecting forms of systemic discrimination (e.g. racism, sexism, classism) because of their social positionings (e.g. their race, gender, class), which should not be viewed in isolation.[21] United Nations (UN) experts and bodies have applied this principle to human rights violations, highlighting that gender-based discrimination intersects with discrimination on the basis of 'race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status',[22] and 'women frequently experience multiple or intersecting forms of discrimination emanating from their status as members of religious minorities and as women or girls'.[23]

Historically, the intersection between women's right to equality and FoRB has been predominantly discussed within the context of 'religious' tradition being used to justify discrimination against women, and how this has resulted in a perceived antagonism between these human rights norms. However, human rights organisations have begun in recent years to focus on how religious minority women experience intersecting forms of discrimination.

The use of 'religion' to justify discrimination and violence against women has been critiqued and challenged by relevant UN monitoring bodies and Special Procedures mandate holders.[24] For example, the Centre for Civil and Political Rights (CCPR) stipulates that States Parties must guarantee that 'women's right to equality before the law and

19 Mariz Tadros, 'Invisible Targets of Hatred: Socioeconomically Excluded Women from Religious Minority Backgrounds', CREID Working Paper 2, Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development, Institute of Development Studies, September 2020, pp.11-14 https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/handle/20.500.12413/15614

20 All participants in this research belong to a religious group rather than adhering to a belief system such as humanism or atheism, or no religion.

21 Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics', University of Chicago Legal Forum, Volume 1989, Issue 1, Article 8 https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=uclf

22 Centre for Civil and Political Rights, General Comment No. 28 on Article 3 (The Equality of Rights Between Men and Women), 29 March 2000, CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.10, para 32 www.refworld.org/docid/45139c9b4.html

23 United Nations General Assembly, Effective promotion of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, 5 August 2013, A/68/268, para 56 https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/756210?ln=en

24 United Nations General Assembly, Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Yakin Ertürk, 17 January 2007, A/HRC/4/34, para 19 https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/595330?ln=en
United Nations General Assembly, Interim report by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Heiner Bielefeldt, 7 August 2013, A/68/290, para 30 www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Religion/A.68.290.pdf
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Joint general recommendation/general comment No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on harmful practices, 4 November 2014, CEDAW/C/GC/31-CRC/C/GC/18, para 6 www.equalrightstrust.org/ertdocumentbank/CEDAW%20CRC_GR31%20GC18.pdf
United Nations General Assembly, Elimination of all forms of religious intolerance, Ahmed Shaheed, 28 August 2017, A/72/365, para 36 www.undocs.org/A/72/365

equal enjoyment of all Covenant rights' are not infringed on the basis of 'traditional, historical, religious or cultural attitudes'.[25] It clarifies that the rights granted to minorities in Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) – regarding their culture, religion or language – do not permit 'any State, group or person' to violate women's right to enjoy Covenant rights equally.[26] Similarly, Article 4 of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women prevents States from evading their obligation to eliminate violence against women by invoking 'any custom, tradition or religious consideration'.[27]

Despite these provisions, the misuse of religious norms, laws and FoRB to restrict women's rights has resulted in these human rights norms being misconstrued as conflicting rather than interrelated and 'mutually reinforcing'.[28] As several human rights experts and organisations have highlighted, FoRB functions to protect and empower human beings, not to defend religious traditions per se.[29] Therefore, the right to FoRB – as laid out in Articles 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the ICCPR – cannot be used to justify the violation of other human rights, including discrimination and violence on the grounds of gender.[30] The former Special Rapporteur on FoRB, Heiner Bielefeldt, has also emphasised that viewing women's right to equality and FoRB as antagonistic 'fails to do justice' to individuals whose experiences fall in the intersection of these rights, which disproportionately affects women who have religious or belief minority status.[31]

While these interventions are necessary, CSW has found that overemphasis on the perceived antagonism between FoRB and women's rights on a theoretical level has historically eclipsed women and girls' actual experiences of FoRB violations. For example, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom's (USCIRF) 2017 report, 'Women and Religious Freedom: Synergies and Opportunities', critiques the misperception that these rights are antagonistic without exploring how women experience violations of FoRB in particular contexts.[32] Research by Open Doors,[33] the Coalition

25 Centre for Civil and Political Rights, ibid., para 5

26 ibid., para 32

27 The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1993. Article 1 defines violence against women as 'any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty.'
United Nations General Assembly, Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, 20 December 1993, A/RES/48/104 www.refworld.org/docid/3b00f25d2c.html

28 United Nations General Assembly, Interim report by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Heiner Bielefeldt, 7 August 2013, A/68/290, para 30 www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Religion/A.68.290.pdf

29 ibid., paras 23 and 26
Danish Institute for Human Rights, 'Promoting freedom of religion or belief and gender equality in the context of the sustainable development goals: a focus on access to justice, education and health', 2020, p.12 www.humanrights.dk/sites/humanrights.dk/files/media/document/_%2019_02922-22%20freedom_of_religion_or_belief_gender_equality_and_the_sustainable_development_%20fd%20487747_1_1.PDF
Stefanus Alliance (2021), 'Freedom of Religion or Belief: Women in focus', p.8 https://d3lwycy8zkggea.cloudfront.net/1615188865/kvinner-og-trosfrihet-hefte-2021-web.pdf

30 In 2018, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Ahmed Shaheed, reiterated that 'freedom of religion or belief can never be used to justify violations of the rights of women and girls' and 'it would be contrary to both women's human rights as well as freedom of religion or belief provisions to allow one set of rights (i.e. women's rights) to be undermined on the basis of claims made in defence of the right to freedom of religion or belief.'
Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, 28 February 2018, A/HRC/37/49, para 42 https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1629601?ln=en
This principle is affirmed in Shaheed's 2020 report:
United Nations General Assembly, 'Gender-based violence and discrimination in the name of religion', 24 August 2020, A/HRC/43/48, p.17 https://undocs.org/A/HRC/43/48

31 United Nations General Assembly, Interim report by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Heiner Bielefeldt, 7 August 2013, A/68/290, Summary www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Religion/A.68.290.pdf

32 US Commission on International Religious Freedom (2017), 'Women and Religious Freedom: Synergies and Opportunities' www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/WomenandReligiousFreedom.pdf

33 Open Doors has published several reports on patterns of 'gender-specific religious persecution' against Christian men and women internationally, based on primary research with Christian communities in 74 countries. Open Doors has identified 'pressure points' affecting Christian men and women respectively, positing that women and girls from religious minorities face 'double vulnerability' and often 'hidden, violent and complex' violations of FoRB because of their religion and gender.
Open Doors International, 'Same faith, different persecution', WWR 2021 GSRP Report, 2021 www.opendoors.org/Same_Faith_Different_Persecution_Report.pdf
Open Doors UK, 'Hidden, Violent, Complex: The Double Vulnerability of Faith and Gender', 2021 https://media.opendoorsuk.org/document/pdf/Womens-Report-2021.pdf
See also reports listed on Open Doors Analytical, 'Gender-specific religious persecution' https://opendoorsanalytical.org/gender-specific-persecution/

for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development (CREID),[34] Stefanus Alliance[35] and the Danish Human Rights Institute[36] has begun to address this imbalance in the literature in recent years, by spotlighting how women from religious minority backgrounds experience intersecting forms of discrimination on the grounds of their gender, religion or belief, and other social positionings.

Like these organisations, CSW has found women's experiences particularly difficult to document during fact-finding assignments. In many patriarchal cultures and religious communities specifically,[37] official representatives are men who speak on behalf of their entire community.[38] Further, when faced with language and/or educational barriers, women often communicate through male translators, who could be their relative or religious leader, which filters their testimony and might hinder them from sharing honestly.[39] The shame and stigma surrounding certain experiences of discrimination and violence can also inhibit women from fully disclosing certain incidents. As a result, women's experiences of FoRB violations are generally underreported, and organisations need to mitigate these barriers to ensure that their stories are heard.

To date, CSW has not identified any research conducted specifically on how indigenous women experience violations of FoRB in Mexico. This is mirrored in limited references to FoRB in Mexico in reports by international bodies, with the exception of the US State Department's annual reports on international religious freedom.[40] While Mexico is monitored by USCIRF, it is not identified as a Tier 1 or 2 country and therefore does not feature in its annual reports. From 2019-2021, 106 written questions referring to Mexico were asked in the UK Parliament; however, none of them raised the issue of FoRB violations affecting women.[41] CSW found no mention of violations of FoRB against women in Mexico in any parliamentary debates from 2019-2021. Further, human rights issues in Mexico have not featured in the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's Human Rights and Democracy Reports to date, let alone violations of FoRB.[42] The unique vulnerabilities facing religious minority women in Mexico are also seldom mentioned in analysis by UN monitoring bodies and experts (see 'Legal framework' chapter). Moreover, CSW found no specific mention of violations of FoRB affecting women in Mexico in an analysis of articles published by global media outlets from 2019-2021, using Meltwater's Media Monitoring function.[43] This report seeks to redress this imbalance by highlighting the prevalence, severity and significance of FoRB violations in Mexico.

34 Focusing on 'the intersections of gender, class and religious marginality', CREID has presented five propositions about the general experiences of women who belong to religious minorities, and launched a series of papers on how poor women from religious minority backgrounds experience marginality in selected countries, beginning with Pakistan. These papers aim to 'make visible the invisible experiences and forms of targeting that are associated with the nexus of religious marginality, gender, and class'.
Mariz Tadros (2020), 'Invisible Targets of Hatred: Socioeconomically Excluded Women from Religious Minority Backgrounds', CREID Working Paper 2, Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development, Institute of Development Studies https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/handle/20.500.12413/15614
Jaffer Mirza, M.K., Mariz Tadros, Maryam Kanwer, Naumana Suleman, Sadiqa Sultan, Seema Rana Maheshwary (2020), 'Violence and Discrimination against Women of Religious Minority Backgrounds in Pakistan', CREID Intersections Series, Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development, Institute of Development Studies https://creid.ac/violence-and-discrimination-against-women-of-religious-minority-backgrounds-in-pakistan/

35 In 2021, Stefanus Alliance published a booklet that explores existing interpretations of the relationship between FoRB and women's rights, how women can be uniquely affected by FoRB violations, factors that undermine women's right to FoRB, and practical ways to strengthen women's ability to exercise FoRB. It helpfully includes questions for discussion and case studies throughout.
Stefanus Alliance, 'Freedom of religion or belief: Women in focus', 2021 https://d3lwycy8zkggea.cloudfront.net/1615188865/kvinner-og-trosfrihet-hefte-2021-web.pdf

36 In 2021, the Danish Institute for Human Rights published a paper, authored by Marie Juul Petersen, that analyses that intersection between FoRB and gender equality, including the rights of sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) minorities, within the context of the Sustainable Development Goals, focusing on justice, education and health. It concludes with practical recommendations that cut across these three thematic areas.
Danish Institute for Human Rights, ibid.

37 Patriarchy denotes the systematic privileging of males in institutionalised social structures. However, as feminist scholars like Suad Joseph have argued, patriarchy is 'not a fixed, stable social structure' because manifestations of it are contextual and historically changeable.
S. Joseph (1999), Intimate Selving in Arab Families: Gender, Self, and Identity, Syracuse University Press, p.2. See also bell hooks (2010), Understanding Patriarchy, Louisville Anarchist Federation Federation https://imaginenoborders.org/pdf/zines/UnderstandingPatriarchy.pdf

38 Kathryn Ramsay notes that indigenous women 'are seldom called upon to represent the community to outsiders'.
Kathryn Ramsay, 'Why focus on minority and indigenous women?', 2011, p.18 https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/old-site-downloads/download-1013-Why-focus-on-minority-and-indigenous-women.pdf
Stefanus Alliance, 'Freedom of Religion or Belief: Women in focus', 2021, p.7

39 This is particularly common within indigenous communities. For example, a study into gender and power dynamics within Mexican indigenous communities noted that, during a meeting with the Abeja community of El Nuevo Paraiso, it was 'a male representative of the community who guided the conversation and translated for everyone,' and further that said representative 'paid little attention to the women as they spoke'.
Marc Becker, 'Gender and Power in Indigenous Communities in Mexico', 7 August 2007 https://upsidedownworld.org/archives/mexico/gender-and-power-in-indigenous-communities-in-mexico/

40 United States Department of State, '2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Mexico', 12 May 2021 www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/mexico/

41 CSW documented 17 written questions relating to FoRB in Mexico in the UK Parliament between 2019 and 2021, but none of these made specific mention of the experiences of women.

42 Gov.uk, 'Human Rights and Democracy Reports' www.gov.uk/government/collections/human-rights-and-democracy-reports

43 Articles mentioning women's experiences of violations of FoRB were identified using the following search term: (ingress:"freedom of religio*" or ingress:"freedom of worship" or ingress:"freedom of belief" or ingress:"religious freedom") AND ("woman" or "women" or "female*" or "girl*" or "gender").



The Data Collector interviewing women in Chiapas

Methodology

This section summarises the methodology for this report. For detail on the research that inspired the methodology, as well as its strengths and limitations, please see the Appendix.

Using the framework of intersectionality, this research aimed to investigate the challenges facing indigenous women from religious minority communities in Mexico. The primary research questions were:

1. What forms of discrimination do indigenous women from religious minority communities in Mexico face on account of their religion and gender?

2. How do the experiences of indigenous women from religious minority communities compare with those of indigenous men from the same religious minority communities, and indigenous women from the religious majority community?

To address these questions, CSW held gatherings of indigenous women from religious minority communities between March and June 2021, in five Mexican states (Chiapas, Guerrero, Hidalgo, Jalisco and Oaxaca) on two occasions. There were ten gatherings in total. During these gatherings, CSW's in-country female Data Collector utilised three research methods: semi-structured interviews, art-based participatory method, and focus group discussions with participatory ranking.

Based on previous experience, CSW expected men to accompany the participants to the gatherings, to provide security during their often-long journeys there. CSW's Data Collector therefore travelled with a male colleague, who spoke with the men during the gatherings so that the women could speak with each other in private.

First gatherings

Interviews

During the first gatherings, the participants were interviewed individually by CSW's Data Collector. The interview questions addressed how indigenous

women from minority religious communities in Mexico experience violations of FoRB and other forms of discrimination that intersect with the denial, repression and restriction of women's right to FoRB, or are an outworking of it. While individual interviews may not reveal the same insights as group discussions, they offered participants enough time to recall details of events that are essential to CSW's documentation of human rights violations and subsequent advocacy. Language barriers between some participants also necessitated individual conversations.

Art

As the interviews took place, the rest of the participants were encouraged to use paint and/or embroidery to illustrate their 'hopes for the future' on a plain canvas bag. Participants were then invited to explain their artwork to each other, which facilitated conversations about their struggles and hopes. This method was inspired by the rich heritage of textiles and embroidery in Mexico,[44] and by projects that have used art to engage vulnerable participants whose ability to articulate their experiences may be hindered by language abilities, experiences of trauma or other life circumstances.[45] The creation of art was intended to facilitate focus group discussions about the changes that participants wanted to see in their communities, and how they would like specific groups to help bring about these changes. This aimed to encourage participants to develop their own strategies and recommendations. Unfortunately, there was rarely enough time to have these discussions; however, the overall effectiveness of including art was still apparent.[46]



Maria Francisca creating her 'Hope for the future' artwork

Second gatherings

All women who participated in the first gatherings were invited to attend a second which took place around one month later, although not all women could. During the second round of gatherings, CSW's Data Collector asked previous participants follow-up questions and interviewed new women who had been unable to attend the first gatherings. Where time permitted, the women also participated in a focus group discussion with participatory ranking.

Focus group discussions with participatory ranking

The Pile, Rank and Analyse (PRA) participatory ranking methodology involves asking a group of participants a specific question and then piling, ranking and accounting for their answers.[47] CSW's Data Collector asked participants to share their views on the most significant challenges facing religious minority women in their communities. Each participant shared their perspective, and the

44 Victoria and Albert Museum, 'Mexican embroidery' www.vam.ac.uk/articles/mexican-embroidery
Mexican Textiles, 'Mexican Indigenous Textile Project' www.mexicantextiles.com/

45 Flor Rivera López, Fern Wickson, Vera Helene Hausner (2020), 'Bridging different perspectives for biocultural conservation: art-based participatory research on native maize conservation in two indigenous farming communities in Oaxaca, Mexico', Environ Dev Sustain, Volume 22 https://doi.org/10.1007/s10668-019-00530-1
Sara Coemans, Karin Hannes (2017), 'Researchers under the spell of the arts: Two decades of using arts-based methods in community-based inquiry with vulnerable populations', Educational Research Review, Volume 22, pp.32-33 https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2017.08.003
Art & Reconciliation, 'The Weavers of Mampujan' https://artreconciliation.org/arts-and-reconciliation/case-studies/the-weavers-of-mampujan/

46 In their feedback surveys, four women from Hidalgo State and two women from Oaxaca State stated that they would like to learn embroidery skills at future meetings. Two women from Guerrero State said they would like to learn embroidery as a trade after losing their income because of attacks on their land. CSW's Data Collector also observed how the art facilitated conversations between the participants and even helped some of them feel more awake after a long journey to the gathering.

47 Alastair Ager, Lindsay Stark, Alina Potts, 'Participative Ranking Methodology: A Brief Guide: Version 1.1', 2020 http://dx.doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.34356.45448
CSW's use of this method was inspired by its proven effectiveness in CREID's research on how women from religious minority backgrounds in Pakistan experience FoRB violations.
Jaffer Mirza, M.K., Mariz Tadros, Maryam Kanwer, Naumana Suleman, Sadiqa Sultan, Seema Rana Maheshwary (2020), 'Violence and Discrimination against Women of Religious Minority Backgrounds in Pakistan', CREID Intersections Series, Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development, Institute of Development Studies https://creid.ac/violence-and-discrimination-against-women-of-religious-minority-backgrounds-in-pakistan/



Participatory ranking exercise in Oaxaca

Data Collector compiled the themes emerging from their answers. Participants were then asked to find objects in their immediate surroundings that could represent the problems identified by the group. They were invited individually to position these objects in order of seriousness – from the most significant problem to the least significant problem – based on the frequency and intensity of the problem for them, and to explain their ranking to the group. It was possible to conduct this exercise during four out of five of the second gatherings, with varying levels of openness between the participants. However, in most gatherings there was not enough time for the participants to explain and discuss their rankings, which unfortunately reduced the insights offered by this exercise.

Research participants

25 indigenous women and 2 mestizas[48] women were interviewed during this research and feature in this report: six from Chiapas, five from Hidalgo, five from Guerrero, five from Oaxaca and six from Jalisco.[49] The participants were carefully identified by CSW's in-country Data Collectors through their existing indigenous contacts in the chosen states. The selection criteria were indigenous women from communities that are currently experiencing discrimination because of their religious beliefs, or who have experienced some form of discrimination because of their religious beliefs in the past four years. It should also be noted that while the participants are all indigenous women who share religious minority status and comparably low-income socio-economic positions, their experiences vary according to their age, life stage, marital status, number of children, education and geographical location. 81% of participants are married to men and 93% have children.

Hence, the research participants are not a representative sample of indigenous women from religious minority communities across Mexico, and CSW does not intend to use their stories to make generalisations about the extent of discrimination against indigenous religious minority communities. Nor does this report offer a comprehensive review of FoRB violations in Mexico at large.[50] Nevertheless, the experiences of participants offer a vivid window into the challenges facing many indigenous women and men from religious minority communities in Mexico, and the similarities and differences between them have been used to develop recommendations to relevant national, regional and international bodies.

48 Mestizo (fem. mestiza, fem. pl. mestizas) denotes a person of mixed European and indigenous ancestry
49 All these women were interviewed during the gatherings except two mestizas women from Chiapas state.
50 For example, participants did not mention the impact of illegal armed groups on FoRB in Mexico. For more information on this and other FoRB-related issues see: CSW, 'A culture of impunity: religious discrimination in Mexico', 2020 www.csw.org.uk/2020-mexico-report

Are FoRB violations in Mexico gender-specific?

While this report centres on the experiences of women, it also refers to acts of discrimination against indigenous men from the same religious minority communities. In part, this was inescapable because most participants shared from the perspective of their husband or whole family, rather than their own. However, this research also aimed to test the premise that the way Mexican indigenous women and men experience violations of FoRB and other human rights is shaped by gender roles and norms within their communities. It sought to understand how far their experiences are gender-specific (i.e. unique to indigenous women or men from the same religious minority community because of their gender) or gendered (i.e. indigenous women and men may be subject to the same type of discrimination because of their religion, but the way they are affected differs according to their gender-based roles and responsibilities). Since CSW did not conduct the same research with men, this report cannot offer a systematic comparison along gender lines or verify whether indigenous women and/or men are disproportionately affected by certain human rights violations. Still, it explores how FoRB violations can be gender-specific and/or gendered in Mexican indigenous communities based on the reflections of participants, conversations with their male relatives, and secondary research.

Report structure

Chapter One situates the experiences of participants within the context of Mexico's national, regional and international human rights commitments, highlighting the frequent disconnect between the government's policies and its practice regarding FoRB violations. Chapter Two examines the common themes and human rights violations across all five states and considers whether they are gender-specific and/or gendered. This chapter should be viewed as a lens through which to understand the gendered power dynamics that might influence and be reflected in the cases described in the state-specific chapters. Chapters Three to Seven focus on the experiences of participants in each state and detail the cases of discrimination they shared during this research. The state-specific chapters also exhibit the artwork created by participants during the gatherings, and their corresponding descriptions.



Small grocery store in El Encanto, Las Margaritas Municipality, Chiapas

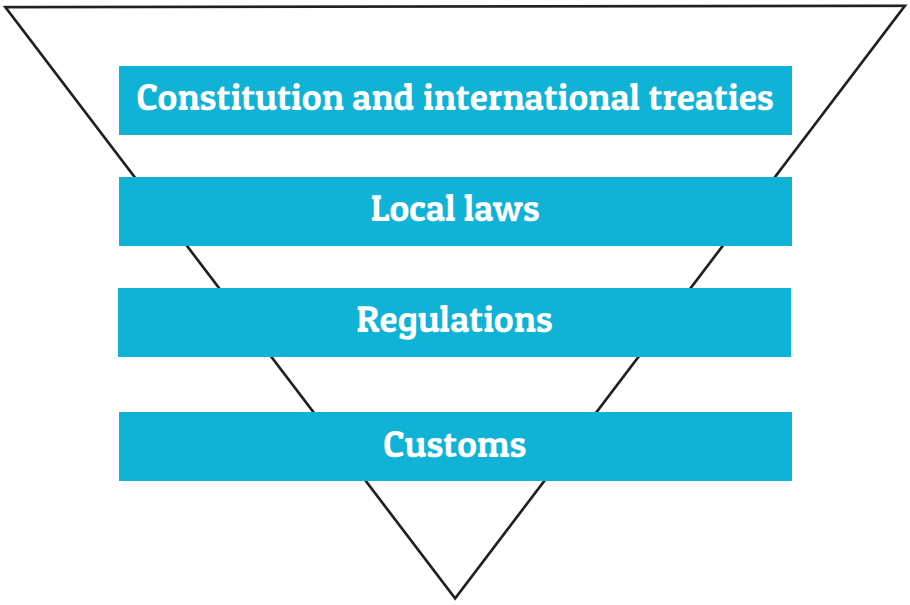
Legal framework

This chapter explores three aspects of Mexico's legal framework: its national legal commitments, its regional and international human rights commitments, and the disconnect between policy and practice in relation to FoRB violations. The first section outlines protections for FoRB, gender equality and related human rights in Mexico's constitution and national policies. It then assesses how far Mexico's human rights bodies and policies account for the intersecting inequalities experienced by indigenous women from religious minority communities.

The second section details Mexico's regional and international human rights commitments, including analysis by United Nations (UN) monitoring bodies and Special Procedures mandate holders on Mexico's observance of these protections. The last section evaluates the implementation of these legal commitments.

It should be noted that the constitutional reforms of 2011 put international human rights commitments on par with, or in some cases superior to, the Mexican constitution.

Hierarchy of laws[51]



51 The pyramid graphically represents the idea of a staggered legal system, which is the way in which a set of rules are related based on the principle of hierarchy. The pyramid depicts the hierarchical order laid out in Article 133 of the Mexican Constitution: 'This Constitution, the laws derived from and enacted by the Congress of the Union, and all the treaties made and execute by the President of the Republic, with the approval of the Senate, shall be the supreme law of the country. The judges of each state shall observe the Constitution, the laws derived from it and the treaties, despite any contradictory provision that may appear in the constitutions or laws of the states.' 'Regulations' refers to secondary laws that detail, expand upon and specify precepts within the Constitution, in order to correctly apply the constitutional precept that they regulate. 'Customs' refers to habitual norms or practices in a given place and time formed through a gradual but uniform passage of time. 'Customs' are only recognised as a source of law when the law explicitly provides for such recognition.

National commitments

Constitution of Mexico

The Constitution of Mexico guarantees FoRB as well as other rights that are frequently violated on the grounds of an individual's religion or belief.[52]

Right to non-discrimination

Article 1 explicitly states that 'Any form of discrimination, based on ethnic or national origin, gender, age, disabilities, social status, medical conditions, religion, opinions, sexual orientation, marital status, or any other form, which violates the human dignity or seeks to annul or diminish the rights and freedoms of the people, is prohibited.'

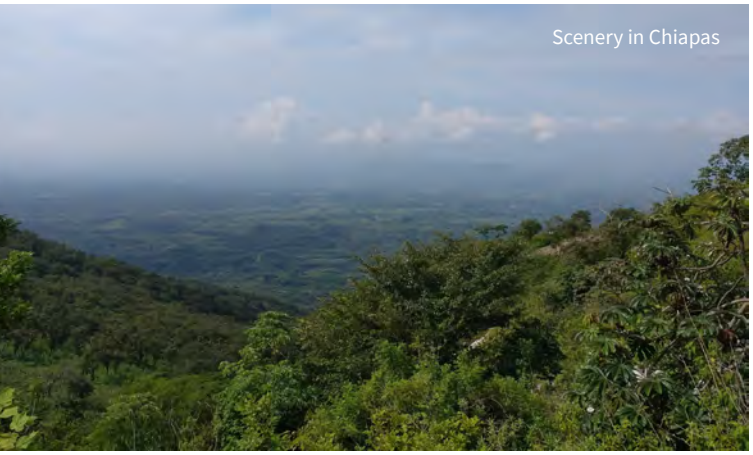
Right to freedom of religion or belief

Article 24 guarantees FoRB: 'Every person has the right to have freedom of ethical convictions, of conscience and of religion, and to have or to adopt, as the case may be, the one of her preference. Such freedom includes the right to participate, individually or collectively, in both public and private ceremonies, worship or religious acts of the respective cult, as long as they are not a felony or a misdemeanor punished by law.' This Article also affirms that 'all religious acts…that extraordinarily are practiced outside temples must adhere to law' and 'Congress cannot dictate laws that establish or abolish any given religion.'

Freedom of association and assembly is protected in Article 9, and Articles 6 and 7 guarantee the right to freedom of expression.

Gender equality

According to Article 4, 'man and woman are equal under the law' and 'the law shall protect the organization and development of the family'.


Scenery in Chiapas

Rights of indigenous women

Article 2 (B) states that 'In order to promote equal opportunities for indigenous people and to eliminate discriminatory practices, the Federation, the Federal District, the States and the local councils shall establish the necessary institutions and policies to guarantee indigenous people's rights and comprehensive development of indigenous communities. Such institutions and policies shall be designed and operated together with them. In order to eliminate the scarcities and backwardness affecting indigenous towns and communities, authorities are obliged to: '…V. Promote indigenous women [sic] development by supporting their productive projects, protecting their health, granting incentives for their education and fostering indigenous women's participation in decision-making process of their communities.'

Right to education

Article 3 (1 and 2) refers specifically to the relationship between education and religious observance. It states that 'According to the Article 24 regarding the freedom of religion, the education provided by the State shall be secular, therefore, state education shall be maintained entirely apart from any religious doctrine' and 'based on scientific progress and shall fight against ignorance and its effects, servitude, fanaticism and prejudices'. Article 3 ensures that the State will provide 'mandatory' preschool, elementary, middle and high school education, and this education shall 'contribute to a better human coexistence…avoiding privileges based on race, religion, group, sex or individual' (Article 3 2c).

Right to access basic services

According to Article 4, the State will also guarantee that 'any person has the right of access, provision and drainage of water for personal and domestic consumption in a sufficient, healthy, acceptable and affordable manner', as well as 'the right to nutritional, sufficient and quality nourishment' and 'health protection'.

Right to property

Article 27 states that 'private property shall not be expropriated except for reasons of public use and subject to payment of indemnity.'

52 Constitute, 'Mexico's Constitution of 1917 with Amendments through 2015' www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Mexico_2015.pdf?lang=en

Right to work

Article 5 states that 'No person may be prevented from performing the profession, industry, business or work of his choice, provided that it is lawful.'

Law of Uses and Customs

Article 2 of the Mexican constitution affirms that Mexico is a 'multicultural' nation 'based originally on its indigenous peoples' who inhabited the country before colonisation. The constitution guarantees indigenous people several rights to self-determination, including the rights 'to decide... their social, economic, political and cultural organization' (Article 2 A. 1.), to 'preserve and enrich' their languages and culture (Article 2 A. 4.), and to 'solve their internal conflicts' through their own legal systems (Article 2 A. 2.), which must be practised in accordance with constitutional law and respect the 'human rights…dignity and safety of women'. Article 2 thereby affirms the indigenous customary law called the Law of Uses and Customs, which is in effect in parts of the country with a significant indigenous population.

The Law of Uses and Customs guarantees local and regional autonomy to members of indigenous communities and delegates considerable power to local authorities. It must be practised in accordance with the Mexican constitution which requires fundamental human rights, including the right to FoRB and gender equality, to be respected. Furthermore, the International Labour Organisation's Convention 169 on 'Indigenous and Tribal Peoples', which Mexico ratified in 1990, specifies that 'These peoples shall have the right to retain their own customs and institutions, where these are not incompatible with fundamental rights defined by the national legal system and with internationally recognised human rights' (Article 8. 2.).[53]

Law on Religious Associations and Public Worship

Article 2 of the Law on Religious Associations and Public Worship, adopted in 1992 and amended in 2015, stipulates the rights and protections associated with FoRB.[54] It guarantees individuals 'the following rights and freedoms as they pertain to religion':

Article 2(a): 'To hold or to adopt the religious belief of one's choosing and to practise, individually or collectively, the acts of worship or rites according to their preference.'

Article 2(b): 'Not to profess religious beliefs, to abstain from practising religious rites and acts and not to belong to a religious association.'

Article 2(c): 'Not to be a target of discrimination, coercion or hostility because of their religious beliefs, nor to be obligated to publicly state their beliefs.'


Streets in Oaxaca

'Religious motives may not be alleged to prevent anyone from engaging in any kind of work or activity, except in the cases provided for in this and other applicable regulations.'

Article 2(d): 'Not to be obligated to lend personal services nor to contribute money or any other kind of support to an association, church, or any other religious grouping, nor to participate or contribute in the same way to rites, ceremonies, festivals, services or acts of religious worship.'

Article 2(e): 'Not to be subject to any judicial or administrative inquisition for the expression of religious ideas; and'

Article 2(f): 'Associate or meet peacefully for religious purposes.'

53 International Labour Organization, 'Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169)' www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312314

54 Cámara de Diputados del H. Congreso de la Unión, 'Ley de Asociaciones Religiosas y Culto Público', 17 December 2015 (Spanish) www.diputados.gob.mx/LeyesBiblio/pdf/24_171215.pdf

National laws and policies regarding women and girls

The **General Act on Equality between Women and Men** was adopted in 2006, to regulate and guarantee equality between women and men, to promote the empowerment of women and to combat discrimination on the basis of sex.[55] Article 12 renders the federal government responsible for ensuring equal opportunities 'through the adoption of policies, programmes, projects and…affirmative action' and the three orders of government will be in charge of the application of this law, according to Article 13. Article 5 (2) of the Act recognises that any 'distinction, exclusion or restriction' on the basis of 'ethnic or national origin, sex, age, disability, social or economic condition, health conditions, pregnancy, language, religion, opinions, sexual preferences, marital status or any other' prevents people from exercising their rights and opportunities.

In 2007, the **General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence (GLAWLFV)** was enacted by Congress, 'to prevent, punish and eradicate violence against women, to establish principles and modalities to guarantee women's access to a life free of violence'.[56] It defines different types of violence against women, provides 'protection orders' for survivors of violence, and confers responsibility to the federation, the states and the municipalities to issue legal regulations and take 'related budget and administrative measures to guarantee the right of women to a life free of violence', in accordance with relevant international agreements ratified by Mexico.[57] According to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights' (IACHR) report on Mexico in 2015, all 32 Mexican states have their own state law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence and their own state system to 'Prevent, Punish and Eradicate Gender Violence against women'.[58] Twenty-nine of those states have the corresponding regulation to the law and Campeche, Michoacán and Tamaulipas states are in the process of adopting it. However, in his presentation of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Committee's 2018 report of Mexico, the Under-Secretary for Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mexico, Miguel Ruiz Cabañas, stressed that there is a gap between policy frameworks on preventing violence against women and advancing gender equality and their practical implementation, in all areas.[59]



Woman and child, Guerrero

The **General Act on the Rights of Girls, Boys and Adolescents** was adopted in 2014.[60] Article 10 states that 'The federal authorities, federal, municipal entities and territorial demarcations of the Federal District, within the scope of their respective competencies, will adopt special protection measures for the rights of girls, boys and adolescents who are in a vulnerable situation by circumstances specific to [their] socioeconomic, dietary, psychological, physical, disability, cultural identity, ethnic or national origin migratory

55 Global Regulation, 'General Law for Equality Between Women and Men', 2 August 2006 www.global-regulation.com/translation/mexico/560303/law-general-for-equality-between-women-and-men.html
56 Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 'General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence', 2007, Article 1 www.summit-americas.org/brief/docs/Law_on_access_to_a_life_free_violence.pdf
57 The Act was amended in 2016 to include stipulations criminalising femicide, which is the intentional killing of females (women or girls) on the grounds of their sex.
58 Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, 'The Human Rights Situation in Mexico', 31 December 2015 www.oas.org/en/iachr/reports/pdfs/Mexico2016-en.pdf
59 United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, 'Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women reviews report of Mexico', 6 July 2018 www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23344
60 Global Regulation, 'Law General of the Rights of Girls, Children and Adolescents', 2014 www.global-regulation.com/translation/mexico/560281/law-general-of-the-rights-of-girls%252c-children-and-adolescents.html

status or statelessness, or, [circumstances] related to aspects of gender, sexual preference, religious beliefs or cultural practices, or othe[r] [circumstances] that restrict or limit the exercise of their rights'. This Act also includes provision on the equal rights of girls and boys to 'right to freedom of ethical convictions, thought, conscience, religion and culture', the right to education and the right to protection of health and social security in Articles 12 (13), (11) and (9) respectively. The minimum age of marriage for both girls and boys was raised to 18 through Article 45.

The **National Women's Institute Act** was adopted in 2001 and last reformed in 2015.[61] The Act outlines the general objectives of the National Institute of Women, a decentralised body of the Federal Public Administration. Article 4 states that the role of the Institute is 'to promote the conditions that enable non-discrimination, equal opportunities and equal treatment between genders.' Several more specific and targeted objectives are outlined throughout the Act, including: 'the promotion, protection and dissemination of the rights of women and girls' and 'the promotion of the culture of non-violence, non-discrimination against women' in Articles 6 (1) and (3) respectively.

The **Law on the National Institute of Indigenous Peoples** was adopted in 2018, to outline the purpose, power and functions of the National Institute of Indigenous Peoples.[62] Articles 4 (4), (5) and (47) respectively state the responsibility of the institute to promote measures and actions for the respect and exercise of the rights of indigenous women; to promote the recognition, respect and protection of indigenous girls; and to 'follow up the actions of the federal, state, Mexico City and municipal authorities for the prevention, protection, punishment and eradication of all forms of discrimination and violence against indigenous and Afro-Mexican women and girls.'

The **National Development Plan 2019-2024 (PND)** was adopted in 2019.[63] The plan sets out several aims, including to advocate gender equality and 'reject all forms of discrimination based on physical characteristics, social position, education, religion, language, culture, place of origin, political and ideological preference, gender identity, orientation and sexual preference.' It states that 'government work will promote equality as a guiding principle: equality effective rights between women and men, between indigenous and mestizo'. The plan also affirms that special attention will be paid to combating several crimes, including gender-based violence.

FoRB, gender equality and indigenous rights in Mexico

The intersection between women's right to equality and the rights of indigenous peoples are acknowledged by the government of Mexico's federal institutions and committees.[64] However, the vulnerabilities of indigenous women from religious minorities, whose needs and experiences often fall into the intersection of these rights and the right to FoRB,[65] are notably absent from discussion.

The National Human Rights Commission

The National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) is a watchdog institution that has the authority to review alleged human rights violations and issue recommendations to the federal and state governments. The CNDH acknowledges the vulnerability of women in Mexico and the varying nature of this vulnerability across states. One CNDH press release welcoming a reform that speeds up the issuance of protection orders for women notes that not all Mexican women can utilise these protection orders, because the mechanism is complex and women have not been adequately educated in how to access them, leaving women in some states 'totally defenceless, affecting her [physical] integrity and putting her life in danger'.[66]

In its '2019 Basic Agenda of Human Rights', the CNDH recommends that information about legal resources and judicial assistance is made available and accessible to all women who are subject to discrimination, particularly women with disabilities, women who live in remote rural areas, and/or who

61 Global Regulation, 'The National Women's Institute Act', 12 January 2001 www.global-regulation.com/translation/mexico/1424908/the-national-womens-institute-act.html

62 Global Regulation, 'Law on the National Institute of Indigenous Peoples', 4 December 2018 www.global-regulation.com/translation/mexico/22532702/law-on-the-national-institute-of-indigenous-peoples.html

63 Diario Oficial, 'Plan Nacional de Desarrallo 2019-2024', 12 July 2019 (Spanish) www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/487316/PND_2019-2024.pdf

64 To ascertain how far the Mexican federal government acknowledges the intersecting vulnerabilities facing indigenous women from religious minority communities, CSW reviewed 21 documents by the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), the National Council to Prevent Discrimination (CONAPRED), the National Institute of Indigenous Peoples (INPI), the National Institute for Women (INMUJERES) and the Continental Meeting of Indigenous Women of the Americas (ECMIA).

65 The former Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Heiner Bielefeldt, makes this point in his 2013 interim report. United Nations General Assembly, 'Interim report by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief', 7 August 2013, A/68/290, Summary www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Religion/A.68.290.pdf

66 National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), 'Comunicado de Prensa: DGC:070/2021', 21 March 2021, p.1 (Spanish) www.cndh.org.mx/sites/default/files/documentos/2021-03/COM_2021_070.pdf

speak indigenous languages.[67] In this agenda, the CNDH lists 'women' and 'the indigenous population' as among those at greater risk of human rights abuses, but not religious or belief minorities.[68] The CNDH identifies religion as a factor that can increase an individual's vulnerability to human rights abuses in its 'Institutional Strategy Plan 2020-2024', stating that 'multiple factors with cultural, social, economic, political, juridical or even religious origin' can together 'create conditions of vulnerability in the population for producing or being the victims of human rights violations'.[69] This is one of only a few mentions of religion across the CNDH documents reviewed by CSW.

The National Council to Prevent Discrimination

The National Council to Prevent Discrimination (CONAPRED) refers briefly to the problem of religious intolerance in indigenous communities. Its report on human rights emphasises 'a marked intolerance by communities in Chiapas, Oaxaca and Hidalgo towards people and families who leave the traditional Catholic religion'.[70] Like the CNDH, CONAPRED frequently acknowledges the unique vulnerabilities facing indigenous communities and women, with scarce reference to how they intersect with discrimination on the grounds of religion.

The National Institute of Indigenous Peoples

Similarly, the National Institute of Indigenous Peoples (INPI) recognises that indigenous women are particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence and 'face a triple discrimination for reasons of poverty, gender and ethnicity', but not because of their religion.[71] The INPI created the Programme for the Comprehensive Wellbeing of Indigenous Communities (PROBIPI) in 2021, which regards the promotion of indigenous women's rights as a key objective.[72] Objective A action point 3 calls for 'support for family survival, with emphasis on indigenous and Afro-Mexican women in a situation of enforced internal displacement'. Objective D emphasises a focus on promoting indigenous culture and preserving indigenous identity, which could be problematic for those within these communities who do not wish to conform to all aspects of their cultural heritage, including the traditional religion or belief.

The National Institute for Women

The Mexican federal office for gender equality, known as the National Institute for Women (INMUJERES), briefly recognises vulnerabilities among indigenous people, women and religious minorities. In a report on its National Programme for Equality Between Men and Women, INMUJERES calls for women's independence to be advanced 'without discrimination and with complete respect for cultural, sexual, political and religious diversity'.[73] This is one of only two references to religion in the 176-page document. The report gives greater recognition to the vulnerability of women within indigenous communities. It states that 'attention will be prioritized for groups with greater vulnerability and historical disadvantages, such as indigenous women'.[74] Priority strategy 4.4.2 aims to promote specialised legal support for female victims of violence, 'prioritising services relevant to indigenous women, migrants, refugees, trans people, those with disability, the poor, the illiterate'.[75] This priority recognises the heightened vulnerability of women from the indigenous community, but religious minorities are not included as a vulnerable group.

The Continental Meeting of Indigenous Women of the Americas

In its 2010-2022 strategic plan, the Continental Meeting of Indigenous Women of the Americas (ECMIA) states a commitment to the rights of indigenous women. Section 1.2 of the report calls for complete respect of the rights of women, young people and indigenous peoples.[76] Section 2 strategic value C further calls for 'respect for

67 National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), 'Agenda Básica de Derechos Humanos 2019', 1 April 2019, p.51 (Spanish) www.cndh.org.mx/sites/default/files/documentos/2019-06/Basica-de-DDHH-2019.pdf
68 National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), 'Agenda Básica de Derechos Humanos 2019', 1 April 2019, p.45 (Spanish) www.cndh.org.mx/sites/default/files/documentos/2019-06/Basica-de-DDHH-2019.pdf
69 ibid.
70 National Council to Prevent Discrimination (CONAPRED), 'Ficha Temática Discriminación Por Religión', p.4 (Spanish) www.conapred.org.mx/userfiles/files/Ficha%20Religiones%20.pdf
71 National Institute of Indigenous Peoples (INPI), 'Comunicación Social INPI Comunicado 71', 25 December 2020 (Spanish) www.gob.mx/inpi/prensa/inpi-reafirma-su-compromiso-por-garantizar-el-pleno-ejercicio-de-los-derechos-de-mujeres-indigenas-y-afromexicanas-258065?idiom=es
72 National Institute of Indigenous Peoples (INPI), 'Programa para el Bienestar Integral de los Pueblos Indígenas PROBIPI', 7 June 2021 (Spanish) www.gob.mx/inpi/acciones-y-programas/programa-para-el-bienestar-integral-de-los-pueblos-indigenas-probipi
73 National Institute for Women (INMUJERES), 'PROIGUALDAD 2020-2024: Programa Nacional para la Igualdad entre Mujeres y Hombres', 9 December 2020, p.17 (Spanish) http://cedoc.inmujeres.gob.mx/documentos_download/Proigualdad%202020-2024%20Web.pdf
74 ibid.
75 ibid, p.94
76 Continental Meeting of Indigenous Women of the Americas (ECMIA), 'Plan Estrategico ECMIA: 2010-2022' (Spanish) www.ecmia.org/index.php/ecmia/plan-estrategico-2010-2022

the rights of independence and free-choice of indigenous peoples and women, within the framework of individual and collective rights.'[77]

In short, the CNDH, CONAPRED, INPI, INMUJERES and ECMIA account for the vulnerability of women and indigenous peoples to human rights violations, while generally overlooking how indigenous women can face intersecting forms of discrimination because of their religion or belief. Therefore, further national efforts are needed to ensure that indigenous women from religious minority communities in Mexico receive attention, protection and access to justice mechanisms, both in policy and practice.

Regional and international commitments

Mexico ratified the American Convention on Human Rights (San José Pact) on 2 March 1981.[78] The principle of non-discrimination is articulated in Article 1, and Article 12 contains comprehensive guarantees for 'freedom of conscience and of religion':

Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience and of religion. This right includes freedom to maintain or to change one's religion or beliefs, and freedom to profess or disseminate one's religion or beliefs, either individually or together with others, in public or in private. No one shall be subject to restrictions that might impair his freedom to maintain or to change his religion or beliefs. Freedom to manifest one's religion and beliefs may be subject only to the limitations prescribed by law that are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals, or the rights or freedoms of others. Parents or guardians, as the case may be, have the right to provide for the religious and moral education of their children or wards that is in accord with their own convictions.

Mexico then ratified the Additional Protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights in the Area of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (San Salvador Protocol) on 3 August 1996.[79] Mexico is also party to the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (Belém do Pará Convention).[80]

The following international treaties were ratified by Mexico on 23 March 1981: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR),[81] the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).[82] Mexico ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on 21 September 1990.[83]

77 ibid.

78 American Convention on Human Rights (Pact of San Jose Costa Rica), 1978 www.oas.org/dil/treaties_B-32_American_Convention_on_Human_Rights.htm

79 This Protocol aimed to reaffirm and provide greater protection for 'fundamental economic, social and cultural rights' in America, including: the right to education that fosters 'tolerance' and 'friendship' among all racial, ethnic or religious groups (Article 13); the right to health (Article 10); the right to food (Article 12); and the right to work in 'just, equitable, and satisfactory conditions' (Article 7).
Organization of American States, 'Additional protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights in the area of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights "Protocol of San Salvador"' www.oas.org/juridico/english/treaties/a-52.html

80 Articles 3 and 4 of the Convention affirm that 'every woman has the right to be free from violence in both public and private spheres' and the right to enjoy all the human rights enshrined in regional and international human rights instruments respectively. This includes 'freedom to profess her religion and beliefs within the law' (Article 4i), the right to equal protection before the law (Article 4f), and freedom from all forms of discrimination (Article 6a). Article 9 specifies that they should 'take special account' of people who are particularly vulnerable to violence due to their social background and position, including their race, ethnicity, age, socio-economic, migrant or refugee status. Religion or belief are notably omitted from this list.
Organization of American States, Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (Belém do Pará Convention) www.oas.org/juridico/english/treaties/a-61.html

81 Article 18 of the ICCPR states that the right to freedom of religion or belief includes the right to have or adopt a religion or belief of your choice, and to manifest your religion or belief individually or with others, in public or in private. This manifestation can be in worship, observance, practice and teaching, and 'freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others'. Article 27 also explains that ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities within a State shall not be deprived of the right to collectively 'enjoy their own culture', 'profess and practise their religion' or 'use their own language'. Further, Article 3 places a duty on States party to the Covenant to ensure that men and women equally enjoy all of the civil and political rights laid out in it.
United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CCPR.aspx

82 The CEDAW explains what discrimination against women comprises and establishes measures that States can undertake to eliminate such discrimination and bring about equality between women and men. Under Article 3, States Parties are required to 'take in all fields…all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women' so that their enjoyment and exercise of human rights might be equal to that of men. Notably, the Convention neither addresses discrimination against women on religious grounds, nor features the terms 'religion' or 'belief'.
United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women www.ohchr.org/documents/professionalinterest/cedaw.pdf
While the CEDAW was being drafted, States often invoked religious laws and norms with the aim of countering or confining the parameters of gender equality. For further information on this see:
Heiner Bielefeldt, Nazila Ghanea, Michael Wiener (2016), Freedom of Religion or Belief: An International Law Commentary, Oxford University Press, p.368

83 The CRC was the first human rights instrument to articulate civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and apply them directly to the child. Article 14 (1) enjoins States Parties to 'respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.' Article 30 asserts that 'in those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or which is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practise his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language.' United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, Convention on the Rights of the Child www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx



Woman sitting on a bench, Oaxaca

UN Commentaries

In its third Universal Periodic Review (UPR) cycle in 2018, Mexico accepted three recommendations pertaining to the protection of religious leaders and religious minorities, including Pakistan's recommendation to 'ensure freedom of religion for all people, especially of indigenous populations, so that they are not forcibly displaced or compelled to convert'. Mexico accepted 34 recommendations to continue and strengthen its efforts to prevent all forms of violence and discrimination against women.

Several reports from UN bodies, working groups and Special Procedures mandate holders acknowledge indigenous rights and women's right to equality in Mexico. Seven out of nine UN reports reviewed by CSW raise concerns about indigenous people and women's access to justice and legal protections in Mexico.[84] For example, in its September 2019 report, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) expressed concern that 'corruption and the lack of transparency, as well as the persistence of discriminatory practices in the justice system, significantly hamper indigenous peoples' access to justice'.[85] Similarly, the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers concludes that 'access to justice is an area in which Mexico must do more for the sake of many of its citizens, especially women, the indigenous population, immigrants and people living in poverty'.

More specifically, several UN reports call for wider translation and communication of Mexican policies in indigenous languages. The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) recommends that the State party have 'the Federal Act on the Prevention and Elimination of Discrimination translated into all indigenous

84 CSW researched references to FoRB, women and indigenous peoples in UN reports using the search engine https://uhri.ohchr.org/en/, which identified nine documents pertaining to these rights, written by a range of bodies and individuals, namely the Committee on Civil and Political Rights, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, and the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers.

85 Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, 'Concluding observations on the combined eighteenth to twenty-first periodic reports of Mexico', 19 September 2019, CERD/C/MEX/CO/18-21, para 26 https://uhri.ohchr.org/Document/File/448a0f13-01c9-46ef-8ed0-8c8cf9a5c64a/7AAB12A8-474D-481B-AFA2-462F2F07E885

languages in accessible formats.'[86] Similarly, the CEDAW Committee calls on the State party to 'ensure that information on legal remedies is available to women who are victims of gender-based violence and all forms of discrimination, including in indigenous languages.'[87] CSW echoes this call for laws and policies in Mexico to be available in indigenous languages, with specific reference to legislation on FoRB.

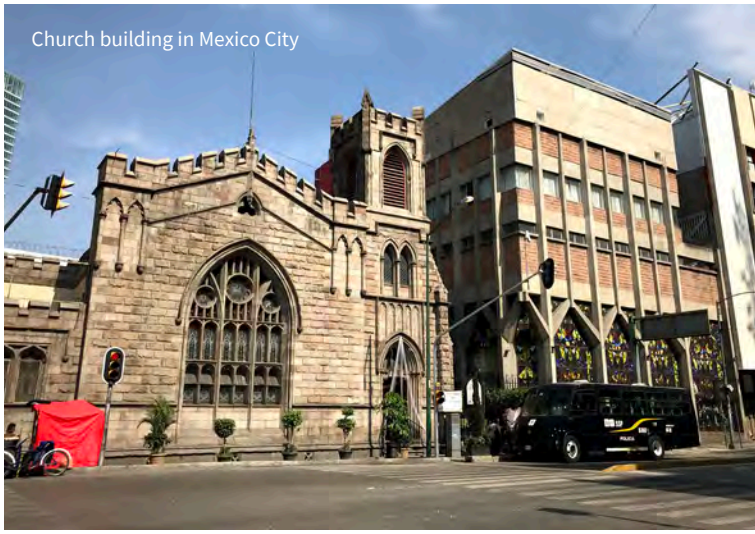
Several UN reports also highlight the lack of consideration given to multiple forms of discrimination, including discrimination against indigenous women. The CERD calls for the State party to 'step up its efforts, while giving due consideration to cultural and linguistic differences, to combat the multiple forms of discrimination faced by indigenous women'.[88] The CEDAW Committee asserts that Mexico has 'failed to eliminate discrimination, notably intersecting forms of discrimination, in particular against indigenous women, Mexican women of African descent, migrant women, women with disabilities, lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and intersex persons.'[89] Notably, neither report mentions religious minority peoples in their discussions of intersecting forms of discrimination. In fact, a consideration of minority religious and belief groups, and of FoRB more generally, is noticeably absent across UN reports on Mexico.

Policy versus practice

Despite Mexico's strong legal protections for FoRB, state and federal governments often fail to acknowledge and respond adequately to acts of discrimination and violence on the grounds of religion. Human rights violations against religious minorities in indigenous populations are often justified under the Law of Uses and Customs, and stem from religion being deeply intertwined with all aspects of governance and culture within indigenous communities.

Church and State

While there are high levels of adherence to Roman Catholicism in the general population and its influence on almost every aspect of Mexican life is apparent, the relationship between Church and State has been an uneasy one since Mexico became independent in 1821. Attempts were made by some national leaders in the nineteenth century to protect religious freedom and encourage tolerance for other faiths.[90] However, at other points in Mexico's history, violent anti-clericalist policies characterised some governments and led to the persecution of the Roman Catholic Church and priests in particular.[91]


Church building in Mexico City

The establishment of Mexico as a *laico* state, modelled on the French concept of *laïcité*, created an official legal division between the Church and State that is not reflected in its culture or frequently in its politics. FoRB as a basic right is not generally well understood in political circles. For example, notwithstanding laws prohibiting this, federal and state government officials and public employees sometimes participate in or actively promote Roman Catholic festivals or holidays in their official capacity, particularly those around the Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe, and pressure colleagues and employees to participate. When challenged, they often justify this as a cultural

86 United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 'Concluding observations on the initial report of Mexico', 27 October 2014, CRPD/C/MEX/CO/1, para 12 https://uhri.ohchr.org/Document/File/e939932e-ca3b-4a01-8f66-242747507692/AE8652DA-ABD9-463D-BCBC-5656F98C8D2B

87 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 'Concluding observations on the ninth periodic report of Mexico', 25 July 2018, CEDAW/C/MEX/CO/9, para 14 https://uhri.ohchr.org/Document/File/775dfc0d-d7cd-4c36-8fae-ac1dda5be33f/07A0B598-F28B-41FB-B154-015F84B1A4C0

88 Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, 'Concluding observations on the combined eighteenth to twenty-first periodic reports of Mexico', 19 September 2019, CERD/C/MEX/CO/18-21, para 25 https://uhri.ohchr.org/Document/File/448a0f13-01c9-46ef-8ed0-8c8cf9a5c64a/7AAB12A8-474D-481B-AFA2-462F2F07E885

89 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 'Concluding observations on the ninth periodic report of Mexico', 25 July 2018, CEDAW/C/MEX/CO/9, para 11 https://uhri.ohchr.org/Document/File/775dfc0d-d7cd-4c36-8fae-ac1dda5be33f/07A0B598-F28B-41FB-B154-015F84B1A4C0

90 Glen Levin Swiggett (1936), 'Conflict of Church and State in Mexico', World Affairs, Volume 99, Issue 1 www.jstor.org/stable/20662711

91 Donald J. Mabry (1978), 'Mexican Anticlerics, Bishops, Cristeros, and the Devout during the 1920s: A Scholarly Debate', Journal of Church and State, Volume 20, Issue 1 www.latinamericanstudies.org/mexico/cristeros-debate.htm

activity, ignoring the religious aspect. At the same time, strict or confused interpretations of *laïcité* have made Mexican government officials often averse to involving themselves in 'religious affairs' and thereby reluctant to defend FoRB for all proactively. Although the *estado laico* is enshrined in law at both federal and state levels, the concept comes into direct conflict with the implementation of the Law of Uses and Customs in indigenous communities, where religious practice and governance are often deeply interlinked. In many indigenous communities, which can be remote, there is often no real state presence to monitor the implementation of the Law of Uses and Customs and ensure that it is practised in accordance with human rights guarantees in state and federal law.

Enforcing religious uniformity

Community cohesiveness and participation are also inextricable from daily life in many indigenous communities. This extends to religious practice. Many local leaders in communities functioning under the Law of Uses and Customs mandate religious uniformity and compel all community members to participate in the religious activities of the majority, or face punishment. For example, all members of a community might be expected to participate in the observance of the festival of the local patron saint, or in ceremonies related to other important religious dates such as the Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe, All Souls Day or the Day of the Dead. Participation could include the role of master of ceremonies, which often rotates among adult men in the community, or responsibility for cleaning the church and preparing decorations and flower offerings for religious services. In most cases, a financial contribution is also required.

Opting out of any of these duties is often seen as unacceptable to those of the majority religion, who usually hold leadership roles in the community.


Church building in Guadalajara, Jalisco

A failure of all members of the community to participate in religious activities is often perceived as an indication of a fracture within the community, which in and of itself is something to be avoided, and which some also believe can bring additional negative consequences such as a poor harvest or otherwise adverse consequences for the community. Local authorities often use the Law of Uses and Customs to justify violations of FoRB, arguing that they have the right to protect their culture; the majority religion, usually Roman Catholicism, is included as a key part of that.

Culture of impunity

In many cases, the government, at both state and federal levels, fails to take any significant action to ensure that FoRB and other human rights are protected. According to the law, the state government is primarily responsible for dealing with religiously-motivated conflicts that occur within the state boundaries; however, it often fails to take swift or effective action to do so. State government officials have been accused of trying to 'eliminate' or lower statistics of cases of FoRB violations by labelling them as 'political and social' not religious problems. For several reasons, they often defer to the local leadership responsible for committing the violations. Such situations are often allowed to escalate to the point of violence before state officials take steps to address the conflict in question. In addition, charges are rarely, if ever, filed against those responsible for criminal acts including vandalism and acts of violence.

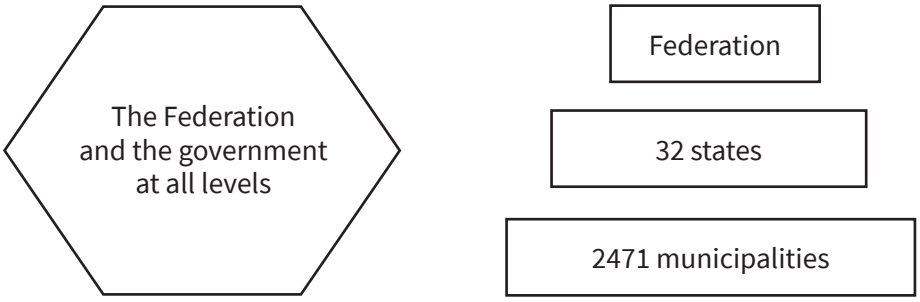
The federal and all state governments have a designated office to deal with religious affairs, and it is the responsibility of these offices, particularly on the state level, to address FoRB violations and actively mediate a solution to religious conflicts. The officials in these offices are often poorly resourced and usually lack expertise and training in human rights, including FoRB. This severely limits their ability to address these situations effectively. In addition, the position of director of the Office of Religious Affairs is a political appointment, answering to the governor of a given state, rather than an integrated office within the permanent state civil service. This means that the activities of the office are often heavily influenced by political interests, with political leaders reluctant to anger local community leaders who can be counted on to secure them votes. There is rarely political will to address these cases, which involve a marginalised minority within an already marginalised minority. Many religious affairs officers appear to view their responsibility as primarily to contain cases of


Streets in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas

FoRB violations, to reduce the number of reported cases, or to make them disappear, rather than to acknowledge publicly the extent of the problem and take action to ensure that FoRB for all is protected.

When the state government fails to fulfil its responsibilities, the federal government should intervene to ensure that rights guaranteed under Mexican law are protected. However, despite recommendations issued by the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), the federal government continually fails to ensure that the constitutional rights of victims of FoRB violations are upheld. The failure of the government at all levels to protect FoRB, in addition to the geographic remoteness of indigenous populations, language barriers, poverty, and the victims' low awareness of their rights, along with the historic marginalisation of these communities, all contribute to a culture of impunity and perpetuate a cycle of religious intolerance.

Article 40 of the Mexican Constitution establishes a structure for the political system in the following way: 'It is in the will of the Mexican people to constitute into a representative, democratic, secular, federal, Republic, made up by free and sovereign States in everything related to its domestic regime, but united in a federation established according to the principles of this fundamental law.' Article 115 states: 'The states comprising the United Mexican States shall adopt a republican, representative, democratic, secular and popular form of government for their own organization. The states shall be divided into municipalities, which shall be the basis of the political and administrative organization' according to the criteria laid out in the Article 115.[92] The following diagram depicts the structure of the Mexican government at all levels:



92 Constitute, ibid.

Key findings across all states

This chapter examines the prevalent human rights violations and themes across all five states. Drawing on the accounts of participants and existing research on gender relations within indigenous communities in Mexico, it explores how gender roles and norms shape the way Mexican indigenous women and men experience violations of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) and other intersecting human rights.[93] This chapter also highlights factors and dynamics that were observed and sometimes unspoken during the women's gatherings held by CSW, particularly how the participants' culture, language, education and literacy levels impact their ability to identify and report human rights violations.

While gender roles vary by community and family, and often fluctuate according to life stage, indigenous women in Mexico typically rely on men – often their fathers, husbands and/or sons – to provide some of the income for their family and to represent them in political processes such as community 'assembly' meetings and governance. Indigenous women's economic opportunities are often reduced by their lower levels of education and, in many cases, their disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work.[94]

The roles performed by participants tended to align with this gender division, with 81% being married to men and 93% being mothers. It should also be noted that most participants live in rural communities with limited economic and educational opportunities. This is reflective of Mexico's indigenous population where, in 2018, 69.5% were living in poverty and 27.9% in extreme poverty, according to the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL).[95] CONEVAL reported that, in nine out of ten indigenous municipalities, more than 60% of the population was living in poverty in 2020.[96]

Key themes

The following graphic illustrates, in order of frequency, the forms of discrimination identified and experienced by the 25 indigenous women and 2 mestizas women from religious minority communities who participated in this research.

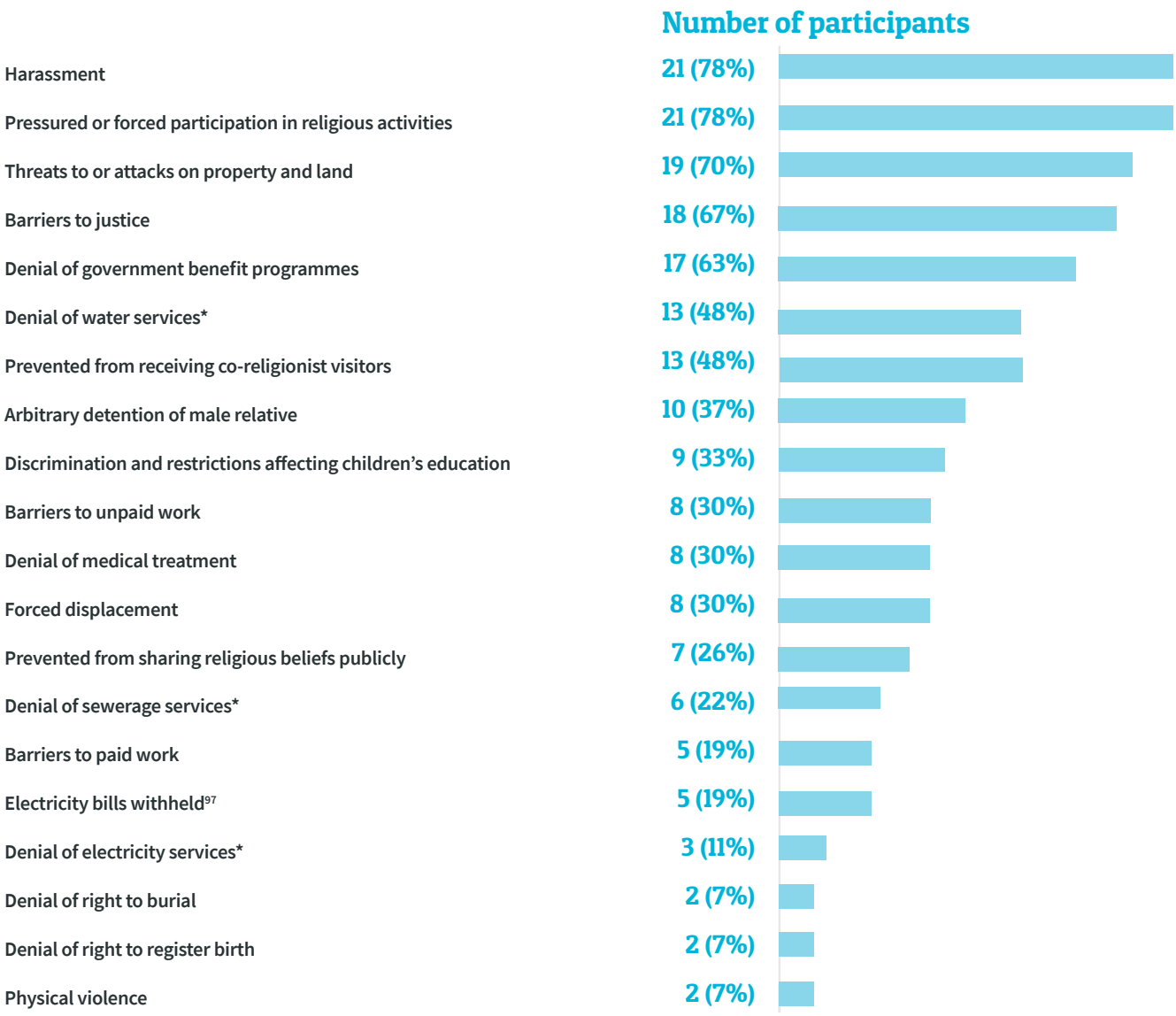
93 In short, gender roles are the socio-cultural expectations of the attributes, behaviours and responsibilities that someone of a particular gender ought to assume, which are typically learnt through socialisation and vary between contexts.

94 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 'Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women for Inclusive Growth in Mexico: Remarks by Angel Gurría, OECD Secretary-General', 9 January 2020 www.oecd.org/about/secretary-general/gender-equality-and-empowerment-of-women-for-inclusive-growth-mexico-january-2020.htm
C. Hall, 'Latin America's Indigenous Women', 2012 www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Latin-America-%E2%80%99-s-Indigenous-Women-Hall/e9ff87c31d26c26af00ec287fd2b68a80e4f7fdc

95 CONEVAL, 'Medición de pobreza 2018. Población según pertenencia étnica', 2018 (Spanish) www.coneval.org.mx/Medicion/MP/Paginas/Pobreza-2018.aspx

96 CONEVAL, 'Coneval da a Conocer la Información de la Medición de Pobreza Municipal 2020', 15 December 2021, p.1 (Spanish) www.coneval.org.mx/SalaPrensa/Comunicadosprensa/Documents/2021/COMUNICADO_016_MEDICION_POBREZA_MUNICIPAL_2020.pdf

Forms of discrimination experienced by 25 indigenous and 2 mestizas women from religious minority communities on the grounds of their religion



*Overall number who experienced denial of basic services (electricity, sewerage or water): 13 participants, 48%

This data resulted from a thematic analysis and manual qualitative coding of the reflections and examples given by participants during their interviews. The accuracy of this data is limited by not all participants answering every interview question due to time restrictions, and sometimes due to a lack of knowledge and/or understanding. Furthermore, participants may have inadvertently or intentionally omitted additional incidents. Therefore, it is possible that more participants were affected by the identified forms of discrimination, and potentially other human rights violations that have not been recorded. In some cases, participants recounted experiences that other participants shared in, but did not report themselves.

Participants reported both past and present experiences of discrimination. Hence, this data, and the list of violations displayed in the table below, does not represent the number of participants currently facing these forms of discrimination.

97 Five participants explained that the local authorities withhold their electricity bills when they arrive at the community commissariat so the families might accidentally miss a payment, causing the electricity supply company to disconnect their service.

Name	Ethno-linguistic identity	State	Forms of discrimination experienced
Josefina Cruz Ruiz	Tzeltal	Chiapas	• Pressured or forced participation in religious activities • Harassment • Threats or attacks to property and land • Barriers to justice • Denial of basic services (water) • Barriers to unpaid work • Physical violence
Consepción Gómez Santiz	Tojolab'al	Chiapas	• Pressured or forced participation in religious activities • Barriers to justice • Denial of basic services (water, electricity, sewerage) • Barriers to unpaid work • Discrimination and restrictions on affecting children's education • Denial of medical treatment • Barriers to paid work
Elsa Gabriela Vázquez Ico	Tzotzil	Chiapas	• Harassment • Threats or attacks to property and land • Denial of government benefit programmes • Denial of basic services (water, electricity) • Arbitrary detention of male relative • Forced displacement
Ana Cristina Arguello Gómez	Tzotzil	Chiapas	• Pressured or forced participation in religious activities • Harassment • Threats or attacks to property and land • Barriers to justice • Denial of government benefit programmes • Barriers to unpaid work • Discrimination and restrictions on affecting children's education • Forced displacement
Reina Balcazar Najera	Mestiza, Spanish	Chiapas	• Pressured or forced participation in religious activities • Harassment • Threats or attacks to property and land • Denial of government benefit programmes • Denial of basic services (water, sewerage) • Prevented from receiving co-religionist visitors • Barriers to unpaid work • Electricity bills withheld

Name	Ethno-linguistic identity	State	Forms of discrimination experienced
Genara González Gómez	Mestiza, Spanish	Chiapas	• Pressured or forced participation in religious activities • Harassment • Threats or attacks to property and land • Denial of government benefit programmes • Denial of basic services (water, sewerage) • Prevented from receiving co-religionist visitors • Barriers to unpaid work • Electricity bills withheld
Juana Custodio Bernabe	Mixtec	Guerrero	• Pressured or forced participation in religious activities • Harassment • Threats or attacks to property and land • Barriers to justice • Denial of government benefit programmes • Prevented from receiving co-religionist visitors • Electricity bills withheld • Barriers to paid work
Leovarda Jiménez García	Mixtec	Guerrero	• Pressured or forced participation in religious activities • Harassment • Threats or attacks to property and land • Barriers to justice • Denial of government benefit programmes • Prevented from receiving co-religionist visitors • Discrimination and restrictions on affecting children's education • Electricity bills withheld • Barriers to paid work
Rufina Aburto Victoriano	Tlapanec	Guerrero	• Pressured or forced participation in religious activities • Harassment • Threats or attacks to property and land • Barriers to justice • Denial of government benefit programmes • Denial of basic services (water) • Arbitrary detention of male relative • Discrimination and restrictions on affecting children's education

Name	Ethno-linguistic identity	State	Forms of discrimination experienced
Marta Cándido Espiandolo	Tlapanec	Guerrero	• Pressured or forced participation in religious activities • Harassment • Threats or attacks to property and land • Barriers to justice • Denial of government benefit programmes • Arbitrary detention of male relative • Discrimination and restrictions on affecting children's education
Rafaela Rodríguez Nicolas	Dialect of Mixtec	Guerrero	• Pressured or forced participation in religious activities • Harassment • Barriers to justice • Denial of government benefit programmes • Arbitrary detention of male relative • Denial of right to burial
Maria Francisca Martínez Hernández	Náhuatl	Hidalgo	• Pressured or forced participation in religious activities • Harassment • Threats or attacks to property and land • Denial of government benefit programmes • Denial of basic services (water, sewerage) • Prevented from receiving co-religionist visitors • Barriers to unpaid work • Denial of medical treatment
Angelina Martínez Hernández	Náhuatl	Hidalgo	• Pressured or forced participation in religious activities • Harassment • Threats or attacks to property and land • Barriers to justice • Denial of government benefit programmes • Denial of basic services (water, sewerage) • Prevented from receiving co-religionist visitors • Barriers to unpaid work • Denial of medical treatment

Name	Ethno-linguistic identity	State	Forms of discrimination experienced
Angélica Hernández Baltazar	Náhuatl	Hidalgo	• Pressured or forced participation in religious activities • Harassment • Threats or attacks to property and land • Barriers to justice • Denial of government benefit programmes • Prevented from receiving co-religionist visitors • Arbitrary detention of male relative • Discrimination and restrictions on affecting children's education • Denial of medical treatment • Physical violence • Denial of right to burial • Denial of right to register birth
Brígida Hernández Hernández	Náhuatl	Hidalgo	• Pressured or forced participation in religious activities • Harassment • Threats or attacks to property and land • Barriers to justice • Denial of government benefit programmes • Prevented from receiving co-religionist visitors • Barriers to unpaid work • Discrimination and restrictions on affecting children's education • Denial of medical treatment • Electricity bills withheld
Adelina	Náhuatl	Hidalgo	• Pressured or forced participation in religious activities • Harassment • Threats or attacks to property and land • Barriers to justice • Denial of basic services (water, electricity, sewerage) • Arbitrary detention of male relative • Denial of medical treatment • Forced displacement • Barriers to paid work • Denial of right to register birth
Lorenza Garcia Benitez	Wixárika	Jalisco	• Pressured or forced participation in religious activities • Harassment • Denial of government benefit programmes • Prevented from sharing religious beliefs publicly

Name	Ethno-linguistic identity	State	Forms of discrimination experienced
Adelia de la Cruz de la Cruz	Wixárika	Jalisco	• Pressured or forced participation in religious activities • Harassment • Barriers to justice
Maria Luisa de la Cruz Carrillo	Wixárika	Jalisco	• Harassment • Threats or attacks to property and land • Barriers to justice • Denial of government benefit programmes • Denial of basic services (water) • Arbitrary detention of male relative • Discrimination and restrictions on affecting children's education • Forced displacement • Barriers to paid work
Valentina Vicente de la Cruz	Wixárika	Jalisco	• Threats or attacks to property and land • Denial of government benefit programmes • Denial of basic services (water) • Arbitrary detention of male relative • Discrimination and restrictions on affecting children's education • Denial of medical treatment • Forced displacement
Yolanda Estela de la Rosa Cruz	Wixárika	Jalisco	• Pressured or forced participation in religious activities • Threats or attacks to property and land • Barriers to justice • Denial of government benefit programmes • Prevented from receiving co-religionist visitors • Denial of medical treatment • Forced displacement • Prevented from sharing religious beliefs publicly
Victoria de la Cruz Carrillo	Wixárika	Jalisco	• Pressured or forced participation in religious activities • Threats or attacks to property and land • Prevented from sharing religious beliefs publicly
Francisca Pérez Velazco	Zapotec	Oaxaca	• Pressured or forced participation in religious activities • Harassment • Prevention from receiving co-religionist visitors • Prevented from sharing religious beliefs publicly

Name	Ethno-linguistic identity	State	Forms of discrimination experienced
Gudelia Maldonado Velazco	Zapotec	Oaxaca	• Pressured or forced participation in religious activities • Harassment • Threats or attacks to property and land • Barriers to justice • Prevention from receiving co-religionist visitors • Prevented from sharing religious beliefs publicly
Mabél Ramos Yesca	Zapotec	Oaxaca	• Harassment • Prevention from sharing religious beliefs publicly
Gudelia Lucas Pérez	Zapotec	Oaxaca	• Barriers to justice • Denial of basic services (water) • Prevented from receiving co-religionist visitors • Arbitrary detention of male relative • Forced displacement
Patricia Lucas Pérez	Zapotec	Oaxaca	• Barriers to justice • Denial of basic services (water) • Prevention from receiving co-religionist visitors • Arbitrary detention of male relative • Forced displacement • Prevented from sharing religious beliefs publicly


Woman in Guerrero

Pressured or forced participation in religious activities

The joint most frequent form of discrimination reported by the participants was being pressured or forced to participate in the religious activities of the religious majority community. Twenty-one participants (78%) said they had experienced this violation of FoRB.

In indigenous communities across Mexico, men and women are expected to perform services for their community which, in most of the participants' communities, are referred to as *faenas* or *tequios.* The community's *faenas* participation list is mostly comprised of men who contribute on behalf of their family; however, single mothers and widows are included if they are considered the representative for their household.[98] For men, typical *faenas* might include cleaning and repairing the roads and facilities used by the community, such as wells, the local health clinic and buildings used for religious worship. Women are typically tasked with sweeping the streets, and cleaning the local school and sometimes the buildings used for religious services. In return for completing their *faenas*, families receive the benefits of being recognised as full members of the community, including access to land, a voice in community decisions and sometimes coverage of healthcare expenses.

When members of a religious minority community decline to perform *faenas* that are associated with the majority religion, such as preparing for religious festivals, or refuse to pay a financial contribution for such activities, they are considered to be in breach of their obligations as members of the community and various punitive measures can be applied.

One of the most common punitive measures is the imposition of a fine.[99] A few reflections by participants and their husbands revealed the emotional burden that indigenous men can experience when a family's challenging



Women sweeping the streets, Hidalgo

98 In most cases, the list of *faenas* usually includes official duties assigned to the men or heads of household. However, there are unofficial responsibilities, such as cleaning and cooking for events, including religious events, which are not listed but which women are usually expected to fulfil.

99 According to the Internal Regulations of communities under the Law of Uses and Customs, which must be approved by the National Agrarian Registry, local authorities are allowed to fine residents who do not attend assembly meetings or participate in community work. The Agrarian Authority does not permit local authorities to impose fines on community members who refuse to participate in or contribute financially to traditional religious festivities, which makes these fines illegal. Town councils sometimes offer families who refuse to participate in religious majority activities financial support to pay these fines, to preserve community cohesion and prevent conflict from escalating. However, this short-term remedy does not resolve the conflict, and religious minority families may still refuse to pay out of principle, which often results in further threats and discrimination.

economic situation is worsened by attacks on their livelihood and the imposition of illegal fines for not participating in religious majority activities. For example, one participant shared that her husband would go out to the fields to cry, because of the pressure he felt due to the debt their family incurred by paying such fines on top of other bills. This economic burden is exacerbated in cases where families are prevented from working their own lands, and male family members are forced to find work outside of the community. This can leave women more vulnerable to the threat of physical violence (see 'Gender-based violence' section).

If members of religious minorities still refuse to cooperate, the local authorities often attempt to increase pressure on them by removing their access to basic services, such as water, electricity and sewerage services, government benefit programmes, and communal tools or facilities. In some cases, religious minorities are not physically expelled from the community but they are removed from the register of inhabitants, thereby erasing their legal existence, preventing them from receiving community and government benefits, and removing their right to vote in community assembly meetings. In the most extreme cases, members of religious minorities are forcibly displaced from the community and lose all their legal rights in the process.

Angélica Hernández Baltazar



In one example, Angélica Hernández Baltazar, whose family has been removed from the register of inhabitants in Coamila, Huejutla de Reyes Municipality, Hidalgo, explained:

'The local authorities force us to put money towards the construction of the Catholic church and they also ask us for materials. My husband spoke with the [community] delegate and told him that we understood from what the Bible says what is right and what is wrong. The delegate became annoyed and threatened us. He told us that they [the community leaders] were going to throw us out [of the community]…We replied to the delegate that we would continue to help with the activities of the school and the delegate threatened to call the neighbours to see what they would say. The neighbours came and answered that they would throw us out and that if we wanted to stay there, we had to be Catholics. We said that we were going to renounce the Catholic Church and the neighbours [who had grown] unruly said that they were no longer going to give [us] community services…'

While both men and women from religious minority communities face pressure to participate in religious majority activities as part of their *faenas*, participants suggested that it is indigenous men who are more often assigned roles and responsibilities for Roman Catholic functions. This is likely due to their perceived position as the head of their household. For example, when asked whether her mother was forced to participate in Roman Catholic activities in San José Quianitas, Santa María Quiegolani Municipality, Oaxaca, Gudelia Lucas Pérez responded:

'No because [in San José Quianitas] they almost always take the men more into account [than women] if their [female] partner is alive, but if there is a widow, it is her duty to go. They take into account the man who attends the meetings and all that more [than women].'

The view that men are disproportionately pressured to participate is also reflected in many participants centring their accounts of forced participation on the experiences of male relatives.

For example, while three participants from Guerrero said they were 'always' forced to participate in religious majority activities, they then gave examples of incidents that involved their husbands, who were threatened and/or arbitrarily detained for refusing to perform roles at Roman Catholic festivities.

This could stem from language barriers or perhaps because they, and participants from other parts of the country, tend not to distinguish their individual experience from their family's collective struggle. This is implicit in the way that many married participants shared from the perspective of their husband or whole family, rather than their own as an individual.

Arbitrary detention of male relative

The local authorities in Mexican indigenous communities sometimes subject members of religious minorities to arbitrary detention as a means of pressuring their families to participate in religious majority activities. This can be a way of preventing them from attending important community meetings regarding their family's future in the community.

Participants highlighted 13 separate incidents of religious minority men being imprisoned illegally for these reasons,[100] across all five states, and three related incidents of religious minority women being arbitrarily detained.

In one example, a religious minority woman was jailed in place of her husband. During a community assembly meeting in El Encanto, Las Margaritas Municipality, Chiapas, in 2017, the husband was pressured to sign an agreement that his family would return to Roman Catholicism. He later retracted his commitment and was detained as punishment. After 24 hours he became seriously ill and his wife, who was pregnant, was given permission to take his place in prison where she stayed for 36 hours. The stress caused by the day and a half in prison had a significant impact on the woman and resulted in serious complications to her pregnancy (see Chiapas chapter for more information).

Ten participants (37%) across all five states reported a male relative being arbitrarily detained for not cooperating in religious majority activities, often because they declined a leadership role they had been assigned. In one example, Marta Cándido Espiandolo's husband, Juan Rivera Galeana, was imprisoned for 24 hours on 21 January 2020 for refusing to accept a 24 hour a day role at the community police station, which involved running errands for the Roman Catholic church in Pueblo Hidalgo, San Luis Acatlán Municipality, Guerrero.

Though most participants did not elaborate on how the arbitrary detention of Protestant Christian men has affected their female relatives, it is likely that the emotional and physical burden on women is heightened by the economic and social insecurity caused by the absence of their male relatives, who are usually the main income provider. Moreover, it is common that those in jail will receive no food or water for the duration of their detention and will have to pay a fine for each day they are detained. The burden typically falls on their wives or other relatives to find a way to pay the fines and provide them with food and water – a burden which can cause acute levels of stress. When CSW's Data Collector asked participants how the detention of their husband or father affected them personally, most struggled to articulate their thoughts and feelings. Marta Cándido Espiandolo wept and said, '***It did affect us, seeing my husband imprisoned***,' but did not go into detail.

One participant explained the pressure her mother faced after their father was forcibly displaced from their community. In 2017, Gudelia and Patricia

Marta Cándido Espiandolo



100 Some of these incidents involved numerous men being imprisoned. The total number of religious minority men has not been recorded as many participants could not verify the exact figures.

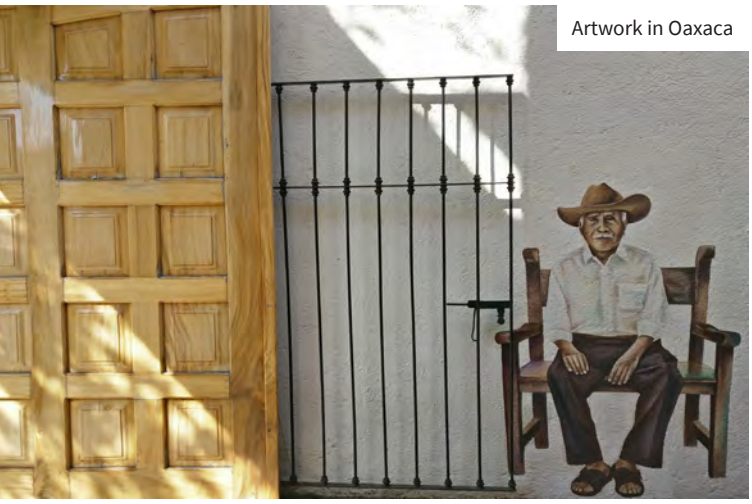
Lucas Pérez's father and uncle refused to act as stewards for the Roman Catholic church in San José Quianitas, Santa María Quiegolani Municipality, Oaxaca. In response, the local authorities ordered members of the religious majority to force them into a truck and drop them off five hours away from the town. Their father took refuge in the state capital, Oaxaca City, for one week. During this time their mother 'was left in charge' and pressured by the local authorities to sign a document renouncing their family's religious beliefs. She refused to do so.

Gudelia Lucas Pérez recalled her mother protesting to the local authorities: ***'I still have a husband and he is the head [of the household]; if he did not sign, I do not want to.'***

As illustrated in Gudelia Lucas Pérez's account, indigenous women and girls frequently defer to and rely on men for leadership when it comes to decision-making and family affairs. Religious minority women are likely to be increasingly vulnerable to harassment and other types of violations from the religious majority community, in the absence of a male authority figure (see also 'Gender-based violence' section).

Harassment

The other most frequent form of discrimination experienced by participants was harassment by members of the religious majority community. Twenty-one (78%) participants reported such incidents. The most common forms of harassment were verbal abuse in public, such as being called 'saint burners', 'gospels' or 'hallelujahs' in a derogatory way, and people throwing stones at Protestant churches and/or church members as they travelled to attend religious services. These incidents were reported in all five states. The examples given by participants, detailed in the state-specific chapters, indicate that both women and men from religious minority communities are subject to verbal harassment and attacks on religious gatherings.



Artwork in Oaxaca

Additional forms of harassment shared by the participants included members of the religious majority community positioning signs outside Protestant churches to prevent members from entering, and putting up barriers to hinder their freedom of movement in and out of the community. Thirteen participants (48%) reported that members of the religious majority community have prevented them from receiving visitors who belong to their religious group. This is significant, as many of them look to pastors or missionaries outside their community for instruction and encouragement.

Threats to or attacks on property and land

Across all five states, hostility and harassment have escalated to threats of violence or attacks on the private property and/or land of religious minority families. This includes theft and the illegal confiscation and destruction of land. Nineteen participants (70%) reported threats to or attacks on their property and/or land.

Forced displacement

In the most extreme cases, members of the religious minority are forcibly displaced from their community; eight participants (30%) reported that their families had experienced this.[101] As in other cases documented by CSW, not included in this report, their accounts indicate that victims of forced displacement are usually dispossessed of their land and often forced to take refuge in larger urban areas, where they have limited employment opportunities due to various factors including linguistic barriers and limited levels of education. Many are forced to become dependent on government assistance, which is not always forthcoming or easy to access, or aid from local churches and charities, which are often operating with limited resources.

101 Forced displacement is when an individual or group of people are 'forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters'. This definition is adapted from the one used by the UN for internally displaced persons.
United Nations Commission on Human Rights, 'Report of the Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Francis M. Deng, submitted pursuant to Commission resolution 1997/39. Addendum: Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement', 11 February 1998, E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2, p.5 www.refworld.org/docid/3d4f95e11.html

In many cases, working age adults and sometimes children in these communities, who often have few transferable skills to an urban setting, are forced to seek work in the informal sector.[102] It is practically impossible for forcibly displaced families to become part of another *ejido* (an area of communal land generally used by community members for farming) or community unless the government intervenes in some way. In some cases, a new community is established for the displaced community as a type of solution, but this can cause additional problems if, for example, the community does not have legal recognition, or if the community is created around another unique religious identity, perpetuating a culture of religious uniformity.

In most cases, the homes and lands of forcibly displaced families are destroyed or taken over by those responsible for their expulsion, to ensure that the victims do not return. For example, in October 2019, three months after Adelina's[103] family was forcibly displaced from Cuamontax, Huazalingo Municipality, Hidalgo, the local authorities gave her husband a one-week ultimatum to collect their belongings. If he failed to do so, the authorities threatened to distribute their possessions among members of the community. Before they managed to, their belongings were taken, and the doors and windows of their home were broken. Barbed wire was placed around the house to prevent their family from returning.

In August 2020, the local authorities in Cuamontax harvested the crops from the lands belonging to her father-in-law without his permission. The local authorities have since begun a process of dispossessing the *ejido* belonging to Adelina's family. In January 2022, the local authorities threatened to convert their home into a new community police station. Adelina, like many of those who have been displaced, doubts whether they will ever be able to return home and recover their property.

Denial of basic services

One of the most common human rights violations associated with attacks on FoRB in Mexico is the blocking of access to basic services, including water, electricity and sewerage. Thirteen participants (48%) have been denied access to water services, six (22%) have lost their access to sewerage services, and three (11%) have had their electricity supply cut off because of their refusal to comply


Water tanks in El Encanto, Las Margaritas Municipality, Chiapas

with the demands of the religious majority. For many participants, these basic services were cut off simultaneously, affecting their entire household. Five participants (19%) have had their electricity bills purposefully withheld by the local authorities when they arrive at the community commissariat, in the hope that their family will accidentally miss a payment, causing the utility company to disconnect their electricity.

The removal of water services creates a burden for those who are targeted. This seems to have a disproportionate impact on women, who tend to be responsible for domestic tasks that rely on water, such as cooking and cleaning (see 'Barriers to paid and unpaid work' section). Lack of clean water can also exacerbate and lead to serious health issues such as parasitosis, amoebiasis, malnutrition, diarrhoea and gastrointestinal disorders.

In January 2019, the families of Maria Francisca Martínez Hernández and Angelina Martínez Hernández, who live in La Mesa de Limantitla, Huejutla de Reyes Municipality, Hidalgo, refused to sign an agreement renouncing their religious beliefs. In response, the local authorities removed their access to water, sewerage services, government benefit programmes and the community corn mill, used to process their staple food, for one year.

In April 2019, after a few months of carrying jugs of water from the river to her house, Maria Francisca Martínez Hernández developed an inguinal hernia and a lump under her right arm, which continued to grow. She underwent two operations to remove

102 Forcibly displaced women and girls often go into domestic service, which can leave them vulnerable to abuse. Being forced to work in the informal sector often leaves adults and children from minority groups vulnerable to human traffickers and others who would take advantage of their situation.
103 This participant requested that her surnames not be included in this report.



Maria Francisca (left), Maria Francisca and Angelina's mother (middle), Angelina (right) with their artwork

the lump and inguinal hernia on 16 December 2019. One week after her operations, her open wound became infected, and worsened due to her continued exposure to the unsanitary conditions of the river water.

Angelina Martínez Hernández also developed a serious health condition due to being forced to carry heavy containers of water from the river; the condition necessitated an operation during this time (see Hidalgo chapter for more information). The recoveries of both women took place without access to water services, a functioning bathroom or support from friends or family, as the local authorities threatened to cut off the basic services of anyone who visited or tried to help either of the two women. The local authorities also forbade them from visiting each other during this time.

Barriers to paid and unpaid work

Most indigenous communities in Mexico are located in rural areas with high levels of poverty and are composed of small-scale farmers with relatively low levels of education, who speak and understand Spanish as a second language if they speak it at all. Attacks on property and the removal of basic services can be catastrophic to a family's source of food and income, as well as their ability to perform domestic tasks.

In most rural indigenous communities, indigenous men are predominantly responsible for cultivating land to produce crops that are used to feed their family and sell for an income; this makes them the main income provider. Women might assist male relatives in the field and sell their family's produce in local markets; however, they tend to be primarily responsible for unpaid domestic and care work based in the home, such as cooking, cleaning and childcare.[104] The scholar María Cristina Osorio Vázquez suggests that, at least in the case of indigenous Mayan communities in Mexico, this is partly due to women's lack of education: 'low levels of education do not allow them to compete fairly in the labor market'.[105] This gendered division of labour is largely characteristic of the participants' families.

104 Rostas, Susanna (1999), 'A Grass Roots View of Religious Change Amongst Women in an Indigenous Community in Chiapas, Mexico', Bulletin of Latin American Research, Volume 18, Issue 3, p.329 https://booksc.org/book/9705398/a7c7a3

105 Center for Universal Education at Brookings, 'Understanding Girls' Education in Indigenous Maya Communities in the Yucatán Peninsula', 2017, p.4 www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/maria-cristina_final_20171101_web.pdf

Five participants (19%) have faced barriers to income-generating work, including selling crops and running small businesses, due to religiously-motivated discrimination. Many reported cases involved members of the religious majority destroying or stealing the participants' families' crops and livestock with impunity. In one example, in November 2020, the village commissioner encouraged the residents of El Mesón Zapote, Ayutla de los Libres Municipality, Guerrero, to loose their cows on land owned by Juana Custodio Bernabe's family, to eat and trample their crops as punishment for converting away from the majority religion. As a result, Juana Custodio Bernabe's family lost the four hectares of bean crop they had planted, equivalent to ten months' worth of food and income.

Some participants who had experienced forced displacement from their communities have also been prevented from returning with their family to cultivate their land. In all these cases, prior to their displacement participants conducted paid work in tandem with their male relatives, especially their husbands. A few participants were the sole person in their family responsible for selling the family's produce in local markets.

The ability of indigenous religious minority women to carry out their mostly domestic, unpaid work, including preparing meals, cleaning their home, washing clothes and childcare, has been directly impacted by the authorities cutting their basic services. Eight participants (30%) reported facing barriers to these unpaid tasks.

In one example, after their water supply was cut off on 3 May 2021, Josefina Cruz Ruiz and other Protestant women from Nueva las Tacitas, Ocosingo Municipality, Chiapas were forced to make daily trips to a small stream 20 minutes away from their homes, to collect water for both drinking and everyday tasks like cooking and cleaning. They would fill 2.5 litre soda bottles with water and carry them home in wheelbarrows. These women also relied on the stream to wash their family's laundry, carrying between 10 and 15kg of clothes on their heads as they journeyed to and from the stream, with their children's assistance, several times a day. Approximately one month later Josefina Cruz Ruiz and her husband saved enough money to pay the fine so that the local authorities would reinstate their water services.



Families from Rancho Nuevo and Coamila, Hidalgo

The removal of electricity services can also make the work of childcare more difficult for mothers. Rebeca Vazquez Cruz, a Protestant woman from El Encanto, Las Margaritas Municipality, Chiapas has had to attend to her baby, including changing nappies, at night by candlelight, the light from a mobile phone flashlight or, in the absence of either of those, in darkness, since the local authorities disconnected her family's access to electricity in July 2020.

Discrimination and restrictions affecting children's education

Despite not being a prescribed interview topic, nine participants (33%), all of whom have children, from every state except Oaxaca, raised the issue of discrimination and restrictions affecting the education of religious minority children. This suggests its significance to them as mothers. According to Article 3 of Mexico's constitution, 'education shall be maintained entirely apart from any religious doctrine'. Yet violations of FoRB and the right to education occur in educational settings in three main ways: forced participation in religious activities, prohibiting religious minority children from attending school, and forced displacement which results in children being unable to continue their studies.[106]

Most participants did not expound on how they are personally affected by discrimination against their children in school; however, in some interviews, the emotional and practical impact this has on parents or guardians was clear. For example, Rufina Aburto Victoriano from Pueblo Hidalgo, San Luis Acatlán Municipality, Guerrero shared her sadness that her son's name was purposefully left until the end during a graduation ceremony in his secondary school, because he is the son of a Pentecostal church leader.

It is also likely that women are required to spend more time caring for and/or tutoring children who are unable to attend school, if they have the literacy skills and resources to do so. In August 2018, the local authorities ordered the local schools serving the communities of Rancho Nuevo and Coamila, Huejutla de Reyes Municipality, Hidalgo to be closed, to prevent children from Protestant Christian families from attending classes there. Since then, two participants and three other women from the Fundamental Baptist Church of the Great Commission have held classes for Protestant children aged 3 to 12 years old twice a week in their church, using teaching materials provided by a local missionary. This is unpaid voluntary work that takes them away from other responsibilities they have.

Woman walking in Cuamontax, Huazalingo Municipality, Hidalgo



Denial of government benefit programmes

Seventeen participants (63%) have been prevented from receiving economic support through government benefit programmes they are entitled to.[107] These programmes are listed in the table below.[108] Twelve participants were blocked from receiving the conditional cash-transfer *PROGRESA*, *Oportunidades* or *Prospera* programmes, enacted in 1997, 2002 and 2014 respectively, which women, and often indigenous women, were the main transfer holders of.[109]

106 For more information on discrimination against religious minority children in educational settings in Mexico, see:
CSW, 'A culture of impunity: religious discrimination in Mexico', ibid.
CSW, 'Faith and a Future: Discrimination on the Basis of Religion or Belief in Education', ibid.

107 Participants reported both past and present cases of being denied access to government benefits. Hence, this is not the number of participants currently living without access to the government benefit programmes listed below.

108 The statistics on participants denied access to government benefit programmes are limited by not all participants being able to name the programmes they are entitled to. For example, rather than identifying the Sowing Life Programme, participants would refer to 'the programme for fertiliser'. Further, most participants referred to the *Oportunidades, Prospera* and the Wellbeing for Girls and Boys, Children of Working Mothers programmes, which offer similar benefits but were enacted in different periods, as 'Bienestar' instead of naming the specific programme they were denied access to. Where participants could not confirm the exact programme, CSW has cross-checked the dates of their cases with the relevant government programmes running at the time. For information on which programmes the 17 affected participants have been denied access to, please refer to the state-specific chapters. Participants reported both past and present cases of being denied government benefits. Hence, this is not the number of participants currently living without government benefits.

109 The Mexican federal government launched the PROGRESA programme (Programa de Educacion, Salud y Alimentacion, also known as Bienestar) in 1997 to improve education, health and nutrition in poor communities. It was restructured and renamed Oportunidades in 2002 and then Prospera in 2014.
Ortiz Casillas, Samantha O. (2017), 'Gubernamentalidad y política pública: estudio alternativo del programa Prospera', Revista Mexicana de Sociología, Volume 79, Issue 3 (Spanish) http://revistamexicanadesociologia.unam.mx/index.php/rms/article/view/57677/51145
Inter-American Development Bank, 'How Does Prospera Work?: Best Practices in the Implementation of Conditional Cash Transfer Programs in Latin America and the Caribbean', April 2016 https://publications.iadb.org/en/how-does-prospera-work-best-practices-implementation-conditional-cash-transfer-programs-latin

Prospera was discontinued in 2019 and replaced by programmes such as the Support Programme for the Wellbeing of Girls and Boys, Children of Working Mothers[110] and the Benito Juárez Basic Education Welfare Scholarship Programme.[111]

Government benefit programme	Number of participants denied access
PROGRESA/ Oportunidades/ Prospera	12
Direct Farm Support Programme (PROCAMPO)/ Productive PROAGRO[112]	8
Sowing Life[113]	5
Benito Juárez Basic Education Welfare Scholarship	3
Rural Housing Programme (Vivienda Rural)[114]	2
Piso Firme[115]	2
Strategic Project for Food Security (PESA)[116]	2
Pension Programme for the Welfare of People with Disabilities[117]	1
Support Programme for the Wellbeing of Girls and Boys, Children of Working Mothers	1

110 The Support Programme for the Wellbeing of Girls and Boys, Children of Working mothers, enacted in 2019, seeks to ensure that working or studying mothers, single parents or guardians have the resources they need to care for their children aged 1-4, specifically through economic support for childcare. Every two months, the Ministry of Welfare gives support payments to households with up to three children (MXN 1,600 for each child or MXN 3,600 for children with a disability).
Secretaría de Bienestar, 'Programa de Apoyo para el Bienestar de las Niñas y Niños, Hijos de Madres Trabajadoras', 5 June 2019 (Spanish) www.gob.mx/bienestar/acciones-y-programas/programa-de-apoyo-para-el-bienestar-de-las-ninas-y-ninos-hijos-de-madres-trabajadoras-203284

111 The Benito Juárez Basic Education Welfare Scholarship Programme, enacted in 2019, provides scholarships to low-income families with at least one child under the age of 18 who is enrolled in a state-run school for their initial, preschool, primary or secondary education. The government of Mexico gives these families support payments of MXN 840 per month, which is delivered for the ten months of the school year.
Gobierno de México, 'Beca para el Bienestar Benito Juárez de Educación Básica', 9 February 2022 (Spanish) www.gob.mx/becasbenitojuarez/articulos/beca-bienestar-para-las-familias-de-educacion-basica
See also:
Observatorio de Desarrollo Social en América Latina y el Caribe, 'Benito Juárez Scholarships for the Well-being (2019-)' https://dds.cepal.org/bpsnc/programme?id=175

112 The Direct Farm Support Programme (PROCAMPO), enacted in 1994, encouraged crop production by providing monetary support to rural farmers who register their land with the programme. The scheme aimed to compensate Mexican farmers for subsidies received by foreign competitors. PROCAMPO was reformed and renamed Productive PROAGRO (PROAGRO Productivo) in November 2013 to improve its effectiveness. PROAGRO was then replaced with the Production for Wellbeing Programme (Produccion para el Bienestar) in 2019.
Gobierno de México, Secretaría de Agricultura y Desarrollo Rural, 'Programa de Apoyos Directos al Campo (PROCAMPO)', 9 November 2018 (Spanish) www.agricultura.gob.mx/evaluaciones-especificas-de-desempeno-eed/programa-de-apoyos-directos-al-campo-procampo
USDA Foreign Agricultural Service, 'Mexico: Mexico Announces New "Production for Wellbeing" Support Program', 19 February 2019 www.fas.usda.gov/data/mexico-mexico-announces-new-production-wellbeing-support-program

113 The Sowing Life Programme, enacted in 2018, seeks to address both rural poverty and environmental degradation. All those living in deprived rural localities who own or hold 2.5 hectares of land available to be used as part of an agroforestry project are eligible.
Gobierno de México, 'Programa Sembrando Vida', 6 November 2020 (Spanish) www.gob.mx/bienestar/acciones-y-programas/programa-sembrando-vida
Gobierno de México, 'Sembrando Vida supera las metas de 2019: María Luisa Albores', 10 July 2019 (Spanish) www.gob.mx/bienestar/prensa/sembrando-vida-supera-las-metas-de-2019-maria-luisa-albores

114 The Rural Housing Programme, enacted in 2012, provided subsidies to Mexican households in rural areas with incomes below the welfare line, so that they can improve their housing conditions. In 2016, the Decent Housing and Rural Housing Programmes combined to form the Housing Support Programme.
Gobierno de México, 'Programa Vivienda Rural', 1 December 2012 (Spanish) www.gob.mx/fonhapo/acciones-y-programas/programa-vivienda-rural

115 The Piso Firme Programme, launched in 2000, provides rural homes with cement flooring, using financial support drawn from state and federal budgets. The movement away from dirt floors reduces instances of parasites, diarrhoea and anaemia among children.
Center for Global Development, 'Mexico's "Piso Firme" Program', 2016 https://repository.gheli.harvard.edu/repository/10668/

116 The Strategic Project for Food Security (PESA) (also known as the Special Programme for Food Security) is implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) across Central America. It provides individuals and families in marginalised rural communities with technical and material support, to increase their agricultural and fishing activities.
Gobierno de México, 'Proyecto Estratégico para la Seguridad Alimentaria (PESA)', 4 October 2015 (Spanish) www.gob.mx/agricultura/es/articulos/proyecto-estrategico-para-la-seguridad-alimentaria-pesa

117 The Pension Programme for the Welfare of People with Disabilities, enacted in February 2019, offers support for all those with permanent disabilities aged 0-29, or aged 0-64 for indigenous peoples. Direct monetary support of MXN 2,550 is given every two months, with the aim of supporting one million people.
Gobierno de México, 'Programa Pensión para el Bienestar de las Personas con Discapacidad', 11 February 2019 (Spanish) www.gob.mx/bienestar/acciones-y-programas/programa-pension-para-el-bienestar-de-las-personas-con-discapacidad

The government of Mexico stipulates that 'the public servants involved in the operation of [these programmes] will be encouraged to promote, respect, protect and guarantee the effective exercise of the human rights of the beneficiaries… with adherence to the criteria of equality and non-discrimination.'[118] However, the experiences of participants reveal that the local authorities in many indigenous communities disregard this standard. Some of those who have sought resolutions at the municipal level have been turned away and told to go back to the local authorities, meaning many women do not have effective recourse to challenge or appeal denial of access to these programmes. There were some cases, however, where participants had successfully appealed the denial of access, or where they found an effective workaround, such as having the benefits sent to a different community where they were able to collect them.

There are two main ways in which local authorities have leveraged access to government programmes to pressure indigenous families to return to the majority religion. Firstly, they can refuse to approve their application, as most government programmes require applicants to present a birth certificate and a proof of address, or proof of residence from the local authority. Secondly, the local authorities can threaten or refuse to pass on the financial support. Financial support is usually delivered directly to programme recipients via a designated bank card. However, if a community does not have a cashpoint where recipients can withdraw the money, which is often the case in rural indigenous communities, financial support is delivered in cash to the community commissariat who oversees its distribution.[119]

Juana Custodio Bernabe from El Mesón Zapote, Ayutla de los Libres Municipality, Guerrero has been subjected to both tactics. She shared that the village commissioner sent a Roman Catholic catechist to inform her that he would sign and approve the document for the Pension Programme for the Welfare of People with Disabilities, to which her daughter is entitled, if her family returned to Roman Catholicism. She refused and, as of March 2021, had not received financial support through this programme for eight months because the local authorities refused to pass on the money when it arrived at the commissariat.

Government aid is particularly important to widows who cannot rely on their spouses to provide an income. As a 70-year-old widow, Genara González Gómez from Mariano Matamoros, Venustiano Carranza Municipality, Chiapas relies on the Mexican government's Programme for the Wellbeing of Older Adults to cover her living expenses. The local authorities have blocked her access to four other government programmes.[120] Genara González Gómez explained that living off this income alone, she is limited in what she can afford:

'I have to stretch [the funds from the aid]. I buy my corn and bean[s], my vegetables, with it, but it is not enough for chicken and meat.'



Genara González Gómez

In recent years, due to pulmonary emphysema caused by a lifetime of cooking with fire and wood, one of her lungs stopped working and the other lung lost half its capacity. Genara González Gómez used to purchase vitamins to improve her health; however, since her husband died (approximately 20 years ago) she can no longer afford vitamins or medical treatment for her lungs. She has lived with her daughters and relied on them for practical support ever since.

Denial of medical treatment

Healthcare within indigenous Mexican communities is a complex problem. Fifteen participants (56%) are currently living without access to adequate healthcare services. Samuel Loewenberg states: 'In three of Mexico's poorest states, Oaxaca, Chiapas,

118 Gobierno de México, 'Programa Pensión para el Bienestar de las Personas con Discapacidad', ibid.

119 Article 32 of Mexico's Agrarian Law states: 'The *ejido* commissariat is the body in charge of executing the assembly's agreements, as well as the representation and administrative management of the *ejido*. It will be made up of a President, a Secretary and a Treasurer, owners and their respective alternates. Likewise, it will have, where appropriate, the commissions and auxiliary secretaries indicated in the internal regulations. This shall contain the form and extent of the functions of each member of the commission; if there is nothing available, it will be understood that its members will work together.'
Justia Mexico, Ley Agraria, Artículo 32 (Spanish) https://mexico.justia.com/federales/leyes/ley-agraria/titulo-tercero/capitulo-i/seccion-tercera/

120 Namely the *Prospera* programme, the Productive PROAGRO programme, the Piso Firme programme and the Rural Housing programme.

and Guerrero, the health issues affecting women, especially maternal mortality, are far worse than in the rest of the country – in the case of Oaxaca, maternal mortality rates are nearly double that of the national average.'[121]

One of the main barriers to indigenous people receiving healthcare is their geographical location. For example, there are no health centres, doctors or nurses in the communities of participants from Mezquitic Municipality, Jalisco, because of its remote mountainous location. Therefore, participants living in San Miguel and El Chalate, Mezquitic Municipality, rely on medical treatment from doctors and/or nurses travelling to their community. Participants living in Codorniz, Mezquitic Municipality, must make the two-hour journey by foot to El Chalate to receive attention from these visiting professionals. For more urgent or serious medical needs, participants must travel to larger towns that have health centres, such as Huejuquilla el Alto, Colotlán Municipality, which is more than six hours away by van. Another challenge is finding the funds to pay for the journey, with fuel



A doctor speaking with Juana and Leovarda, Guerrero

alone costing around MXN 1,500. In an emergency, families will rely on others to lend them money, but it could take more than two days to gather enough money to pay for the journey. These limitations to accessing healthcare affect all people in the communities of participants from Jalisco, regardless of their religious affiliation.

Some participants also highlighted that they are entitled to receive financial support for healthcare and related travel expenses in return for completing their *faenas*. Religious minority families who do not complete their *faenas* on account of their religious beliefs face further barriers to healthcare, and may be forced to take out loans or rely on the ability and willingness of local churches or foreign missionaries to help them. This level of uncertainty can cause severe stress which, in turn, has the potential to exacerbate existing health problems or increase the risk of developing more serious health conditions.[122]

Eight participants (30%) have been denied medical treatment because of their religion, and two participants reported that members of the religious majority have discouraged visiting doctors from giving assistance to members of religious minorities. Some of these healthcare services were specific to women. For example, the health clinic serving the communities of Rancho Nuevo and Coamila, Huejutla Municipality, Hidalgo is supposed to offer folic acid supplements to pregnant women, but clinic staff refused to give them to Angélica Hernández Baltazar and other Protestant Christian women. As a result, Angélica Hernández Baltazar had to travel at her own expense by bus to the municipal seat, Huejutla, to receive care and vitamin supplements during her pregnancy in 2017 and 2018, a journey which takes one hour and costs between MXN 40-260.

A few participants experienced serious health issues as a result of their water service being disconnected by the local authorities. CSW has received reports of this happening to both men and women,[123] and one gender-specific instance was shared during this research. In 2019, Angelina Martínez Hernández suffered a uterine prolapse when she attempted to carry a 20-litre container of water from the river to her home. Due to the risk of the same thing happening again, doctors recommended surgery and she underwent a hysterectomy on 22 July 2019.

Overall, health issues and pregnancy were topics that participants seemed to find easier to isolate and articulate their individual and sometimes gender-specific experience of. This is evident in the Maria Francisca Martínez Hernández and Angélica Hernández Baltazar testimonies detailed above and in the Hidalgo chapter. This may be because they were personal bodily experiences that their family members were not subject to, even if they were indirectly affected by them.

121 Loewenberg, Samuel (2010), 'The Plight of Mexico's Indigenous Women', The Lancet, Volume 375, p.1,680 www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(10)60721-0/fulltext

122 American Psychological Association, 'Stress effects on the body', 1 November 2018 www.apa.org/topics/stress/body

123 For an example of this affecting indigenous religious minorities in Chiapas State see:
CSW, 'Mexico: Protestants barred from village in Chiapas', 4 September 2015 www.csw.org.uk/2015/09/04/press/2758/article.htm
CSW, 'Villagers [sic] electricity and water restored', 23 February 2016 www.csw.org.uk/2016/02/23/news/2990/article.htm

Physical violence

Academics and human rights organisations have highlighted the prevalence of gender-based violence[124] in Mexico and its indigenous populations especially, where many families live under the pressures of poverty, limited educational and economic opportunities and widespread substance abuse.[125] Cases of femicide (the murder of women or girls because of their gender) in Mexico have received particular attention internationally.[126]

It is therefore surprising that no incidents of physical violence against women were reported in Guerrero and only one in each of Hidalgo and Oaxaca.[127] Participants from the Wixárika communities in northern Jalisco reported the highest number of violent incidents overall.[128] In total, 15 participants (56%) gave examples of violence against women, including five cases of domestic violence and six incidents that involved the perpetrator being intoxicated. Two participants (7%) recounted personal experiences of religiously-motivated violence. Three incidents were shared of pregnant women being assaulted by members of the religious majority community. In one example, when she was in the early stages of pregnancy, Angélica Hernández Baltazar and a 70-year-old woman from her church were thrown to the floor, after an intoxicated man with a machete kicked the bench they were sitting on out from under them, during a Bible study at their church in Coamila, Huejutla de Reyes Municipality, Hidalgo.

The lack of examples shared by religious minority women in Guerrero, Hidalgo and Oaxaca States should not be seen as indicative of the non-existence of cases of physical violence in these states. The participants are not a representative sample of indigenous women in their state, and there are several potential reasons why reported cases of physical violence do not reflect recognised levels of gender-based violence in Mexico.[129] There are several psychological, cultural and structural barriers to indigenous women disclosing experiences of gender-based violence, including the shame and stigma surrounding these experiences, self-blame, fear of the ramifications, economic dependency, language difficulties, lack of



Woman walking in Hidalgo

124 UN Women defines gender-based violence as 'harmful acts directed at an individual or a group of individuals based on their gender', which are 'rooted in gender inequality, the abuse of power and harmful norms.'
UN Women, 'Frequently asked questions: Types of violence against women and girls' www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/faqs/types-of-violence

125 For example:
International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 'Community Gender Emergency: Indigenous women's response to multiple forms of violence and territorial dispossession in Mexico', 25 May 2021 www.iwgia.org/en/mexico/4386-community-gender-emergency-indigenous-women-s-response-to-multiple-forms-of-violence-and-territorial-dispossession-in-mexico.html
Minority Rights Group International, 'Mexico: Indigenous Peoples' https://minorityrights.org/minorities/indigenous-peoples-4/
Valdez-Santiago, Rosario; Híjar, Martha; Rojas Martínez, Rosalba; Ávila Burgos, Leticia; Arenas Monreal, María de la Luz (2013), 'Prevalence and severity of intimate partner violence in women living in eight indigenous regions of Mexico', Social Science & Medicine, Volume 82 https://booksc.org/book/25014990/ec16f0

126 Amnesty International UK, 'Mexico: authorities failing victims of femicide as gender-based violence continues at a terrifying pace', 20 September 2021 www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/mexico-authorities-failing-victims-femicide-gender-based-violence-continues
The Prospector, 'Activists, academics say indigenous women are among most vulnerable in Mexico's femicide crisis, amid global protests', 23 December 2019 www.theprospectordaily.com/2019/12/23/activists-academics-say-indigenous-women-are-among-most-vulnerable-in-mexicos-femicide-crisis-amid-global-protests/

127 The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women defines violence against women specifically as 'any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty'. The responses of participants suggest that they interpreted violence against women as acts of physical or sexual violence rather than threats and psychological violence.
United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, 'Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women', 20 December 1993, A/RES/48/104, Article 1 www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/violenceagainstwomen.aspx

128 The Wixáritari (plural of Wixárika) are an indigenous community known externally as the Huichol, who inhabit the Gran Nayar and the Sierra Madre Occidental regions that encompass parts of Jalisco, Nayarit, Durango and Zacatecas states.
Omar Sierra Gutiérrez (2014), 'Protection of the Sacred Lands and Culture of the Wixárika people. Domestic and International Legal Perspective over the Wixárika Mining Case', University of Lapland, unpublished Master's thesis https://lauda.ulapland.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/60009/Sierra.Omar.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y

129 Statista, 'States with the highest number of feminicides in Mexico in 2021' www.statista.com/statistics/979224/mexican-states-highest-number-femicides/

awareness of their rights, and the normalisation of such incidents within their culture.[130]

These gendered power dynamics were exposed when one participant was asked about gender-based violence. She looked at her husband for guidance and chose not to share an incident within her family, which had already been mentioned by another participant, after he shook his head in response. It is also possible that participants from Jalisco were more forthcoming and felt safer disclosing sensitive information because their translator was known to and trusted by the women. Therefore, CSW believes that there may be more cases of violence against religious minority women within indigenous communities that were not revealed through this research.

A few cases seem to indicate that indigenous women's vulnerability to gender-based violence is often increased when they are physically apart from male relatives. Such instances might occur when men are working, attending community meetings, imprisoned, or if a woman does not live with a man because she is single or widowed.

In 2016 Josefina Cruz Ruiz and her husband, who live in Nueva las Tacitas, Ocosingo Municipality, Chiapas converted to Protestant Christianity. This angered relatives who followed the majority religion, including her brother. One day a short time later, while she was alone and her husband was at work, the brother entered her home while inebriated and attacked her with a machete. This caused her to suffer a miscarriage.

In another example from Oaxaca, a neighbour attempted to sexually assault the mother of Gudelia and Patricia Lucas Pérez one night after their father was forcibly displaced from the village. Patricia Lucas Pérez recalled:

'When we were living on our own, one night my mum was filling up a container with water and a man (our neighbour) wanted to abuse her... He tried to pull her down, but she cried out and my sister and I went out to help her. The man went off before we surprised him. Then we decided not to make a complaint so as not to make the problem bigger.'

The women's decision not to report the assault, based on fear that this would only cause more problems for them, highlights the vulnerability of religious minority women and girls, especially when they do not have or, as in this case, are separated from a male protector, husband or father.

While this research cannot determine whether religious minority women are disproportionately subject to gender-based violence, it is worth noting that several participants conveyed their perception that religious minority men were more likely to be assaulted by the religious majority community than were religious minority women. Eight incidents of such violence against men were shared. When asked whether women from her religious community in Coamila, Huejutla de Reyes Municipality, Hidalgo have experienced violence, Angélica Hernández Baltazar replied:

'Not towards women but towards my father, who went to Huejutla and a drunk who was in a truck recognised him and hit him with the truck and later beat him with his hands. They do not assault women like they do men. My husband was tear gassed. One of his nephews wanted to force him to drink beer. He refused, and they sprayed the gas in his eyes. My mother-in-law, another woman and I witnessed this.'

Based on the examples shared, religious minority men could be targeted more frequently because they are expected to represent their family in local governance meetings and assume a role within religious majority activities. This could increase their exposure to hostility. Notably, one participant from Hidalgo recalled a man from the religious majority community going to hit her mother-in-law and sister-in-law, and his companion intercepting the assault with the warning that ***'Women have many rights.'*** This suggests that individuals could be dissuaded from violence against women because of greater awareness of women's rights. However, it seems more likely that incidents of violence against women are underreported, due to the barriers cited above.

Barriers to justice

Eighteen participants (67%), and 90% of those who answered questions on this topic, indicated that they are unable to access justice following experiences of discrimination and/or violence.[131] Most participants specified that the local authorities are either the perpetrators of, complicit in or dismissive of these incidents. Some participants have accessed justice, with varying degrees of effectiveness, following interventions by bodies

130 UC Berkeley School of Law Human Rights Center, 'The silence I carry: Disclosing gender-based violence in forced displacement. Guatemala & Mexico. Exploratory Report 2018' https://humanrights.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/publications/5c081eae4.pdf

131 This percentage is unsurprisingly high given that the participants were selected on the basis that they have experienced a violation of FoRB.

such as State Human Rights Commissions, State Offices for Religious Affairs, and through legal cases.

In one example, Rufina Aburto Victoriano's family had their access to water reinstated after her husband visited the Costa Chica regional office of the Guerrero State Human Rights Commission (CDHEG) in Ometepec city in November 2016. In response, officials from the CDHEG then travelled to Pueblo Hidalgo, San Luis Acatlán Municipality, Guerrero on 5 December 2016, and ordered the local authorities to reconnect the service, which they did the same day.

Overall, the entire families of participants seem to be affected by a culture of impunity that surrounds the majority of FoRB violations, rather than their experience being gender-specific. However, indigenous women appear to face additional barriers to reporting human rights violations, which corresponds with a gender imbalance within local governance. For example, participants explained that the local authorities have summoned their husbands, fathers or fathers-in-law, but not women, to assembly meetings where the community decided the consequence of their family's refusal to comply with religious majority activities. Several married participants also relied on their husbands to seek justice for their family by visiting regional bodies like the State Human Rights Commission.

When asked why she did not accompany her husband to the CDHEG, Marta Cándido Espiandolo replied that men resolve such conflicts because they are the 'heads of the family', echoing the earlier comment by Gudelia and Patricia Lucas Pérez's mother that she would not act differently from her husband because 'he is at the head'. This indicates that patriarchal structures within the family and community may influence indigenous women's ability to access justice mechanisms.

Education, literacy and language

Indigenous women's language skills and levels of education, as well as their roles within their family and community, significantly influence their ability to identify and report violations of human rights including FoRB. While this topic was not initially included in CSW's interview questions, it became apparent that it is crucial to understanding the different experiences of indigenous men and women from the same religious minority communities in Mexico.

One of the greatest barriers to education for indigenous women and girls in Mexico is language. Teaching in schools is largely carried out in Spanish, which makes it difficult for indigenous language-speaking students – both male and female – to learn.[132] According to Oxfam Mexico, 43.2% of people who speak an indigenous language in Mexico have not completed primary school.[133] In 2012, GlobalGiving reported that only 27% of indigenous children in Mexico graduated from secondary school, and the illiteracy rate among indigenous people is 44% compared with a national illiteracy rate of 8.4%.[134]

Indigenous women and girls in Mexico face disproportionate sociocultural barriers to education. In a 2017 study of indigenous Mayan communities, María Cristina Osorio Vázquez found that 'due to high rates of poverty and the patriarchal structures inside indigenous families, the limited economic resources available for attending school are primarily given to boys' and girls are often required to contribute to household tasks instead.[135] A 2005 National Household Survey found that 'indigenous women had about half as much education and were less likely to speak Spanish than indigenous men'.[136]

Importance of linguistic skills

Almost half the participants in this research spoke little or no Spanish and had to communicate through or with assistance from an indigenous translator.[137] Many of the participants were illiterate, and those who were not needed help to read and write answers to an evaluation survey at the end of the gatherings. Most of the participants who were fluent in Spanish had lived outside their indigenous communities for a period of time, in urban areas where speaking Spanish is essential to everyday life and work. Indigenous men, and male church leaders especially, are often more proficient in Spanish than indigenous women because they are more likely to travel to cities in their municipality to buy and sell products, to find paid work and to carry out other business such as dealing with legal or financial affairs.

132 Center for Universal Education at Brookings, ibid., p.3
133 Oxfam Mexico, 'Por mi raza hablará la desigualdad: Efectos de las características étnico-raciales en la desigualdad de oportunidades en México', 2019 (Spanish) www.oxfammexico.org/sites/default/files/Por%20mi%20raza%20hablara%20la%20desigualdad_0.pdf
134 GlobalGiving, 'Higher education for indigenous women in Mexico', 2012 www.globalgiving.org/projects/higher-education-for-15-indigenous-women-in-mexico/
135 Center for Universal Education at Brookings, ibid., pp.4-6
136 Minority Rights Group International, ibid.
137 Seven out of 27 participants could only speak their maternal indigenous language. Five could speak broken Spanish.

Some participants indicated the impact that speaking Spanish has on indigenous people's ability to advocate for themselves. When Baptist Christian families in La Mesa de Limantitla, Huejutla de Reyes Municipality, Hidalgo were being threatened and harassed for meeting together, they sought help from a person who presented himself as a church leader and stated fraudulently that he held accreditation with the federal Office of Religious Affairs and unnamed international human rights institutions.

This person, who was working with a Mexican national resident in the US who impersonated a Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) officer, promised to visit the Office of Religious Affairs in Mexico City on their behalf in order to secure some kind of permit for them to gather as a church, which they could supposedly then present to the local authorities. According to Maria Francisca Martínez Hernández, they urged this man to go because he spoke Spanish well. But instead, he and the other man colluded with local authorities and state officials, pressuring the Baptist families and threatening them to sign an agreement that obligated them to participate in and contribute to Roman Catholic festivals.



Building in Mexico City

In another example, Protestant Christians in Pedernales de Santa Catarina, Mezquitic Municipality, Jalisco were able to regain access to a government benefit programme after one woman was able to redirect the benefits to Tenzompa, Huejuquilla el Alto Municipality. This woman made the three-hour journey there every two months to verify that they were receiving their government support. Yolanda Estela de la Rosa Cruz stated that this woman could influence this change 'because she knew how to speak Spanish'.[138]

During this research, both indigenous religious minority men and women indicated that group representatives tend to be appointed according to their proficiency in Spanish. This means that education and linguistic skills can enable indigenous women to assume this role, regardless of patriarchal gender norms. Like the participants, some indigenous religious minority men also asked CSW to speak with a male relative or church leader who was fluent in Spanish instead, because they thought that person could communicate their experience more effectively.

Ability to recount experiences

The manner in which participants responded to the interview questions also suggested that many were not used to recounting their experiences. This could stem from gender norms of men communicating publicly on their behalf, a lack of understanding of the information that is required to build a legal case, and a different cultural approach to dates and time. In particular, many participants found it difficult to recall details such as when, where, why and to whom an incident happened, and some appeared distressed when they could not provide this information.[139] For example, rather than stating the date on which an event happened, participants would say that something happened around four or five years ago, and some offered a timeframe that conflicted with the testimony of another participant. Several participants were unable to share the year in which they were born.

138 Like many others, this incident was difficult to decipher because Yolanda Estela de la Rosa Cruz could not speak Spanish, so she relied on a translator from Pedernales de Santa Catarina to recall and communicate this information.

139 CSW relied on the male and female relatives of participants, church leaders, local partner organisations and, where available, previous CSW documentation on incidents recounted by participants, to verify this information. CSW recognises that there may be some inaccuracies in this report due to these sources misremembering events.

One participant from Jalisco struggled to remember the details of her husband's detention, stating: ***'When they told me that my husband was detained, I was at home, my husband still had the papers, he brought them to the event. I went to see him in jail, I don't remember any more details.'*** Consequently, many case studies shared in the following chapters were pieced together with the help of information subsequently shared by male relatives or church leaders.

During the interviews, four married participants explicitly deferred to their husbands for information on what happened to their family. One participant said, 'I don't remember, you can ask my husband,' who had accompanied her to the gathering. Another participant from Guerrero thought that she did not need to share her experience because she overheard her husband telling the Data Collector's male colleague what happened to them. Therefore, CSW's Data Collector had to clarify that the purpose of this research was to hear her story and perspective, regardless of what her husband had shared.

Some participants also were vague or inaccurate regarding details of their individual or familial circumstances. One participant from Jalisco said that the local authorities 'tried' to remove her access to a government benefit programme, but her husband clarified that this support was in fact cut off. Similarly, a participant from Hidalgo State shared that her family did not register the birth of her child in Cuamontax, Huazalingo Municipality, following their forced displacement, because they were not sure how the local authorities of Cuamontax would respond. However, her husband informed CSW that they had to register the birth in their new residence because they are no longer recognised as members of Cuamontax.

Collectively, these examples suggest that indigenous religious minority women in Mexico may have a different cultural approach to facts, dates and time, and may rely on male relatives to remember, record and represent these details because, through their interaction with non-indigenous people outside of their communities, the male relatives have had more exposure to this cultural approach of recording data.

Domestic violence and alcoholism

In each women's gathering, additional themes emerged that the participants seemed to link with their experience of FoRB violations. Across the states, participants mentioned domestic violence, excessive consumption of alcohol, and a general culture of 'machismo' as issues that had directly affected them and their families.

It is worth noting that the religious minorities represented by the participants are teetotal, and a key characteristic of their conversion away from the majority religion is giving up all consumption of alcohol. This can sometimes be a point of tension between members of the religious minority and majority, noted in more detail in later chapters, when members of the religious majority expect those of the religious minority to participate in all community activities, including the consumption of alcohol, and members of the minority refuse to based on their religious convictions.

When participants from Chiapas were asked whether machismo culture (usually characterised by male dominance) is present in their communities,[140] Ana Cristina Arguello Gomez asserted that women in San José Yashtinín, San Cristóbal de las Casas Municipality do not have a voice because men there tell women ***'I'm in charge and you don't get involved. I know what I'm doing'***. Josefina Cruz Ruiz responded: ***'I have the same rights as a man. I am not less. We must be equal.'***


Josefina Cruz Ruiz

140 Traditionally, there are two primary gender norms in Mexico: *machismo* and *marianismo*. According to Alicia Nuñez et al: *'Machismo* encompasses positive and negative aspects of masculinity, including bravery, honor, dominance, aggression, sexism, sexual prowess, and reserved emotions, among others…[as well as] attitudinal beliefs that consider it appropriate for women to remain in traditional roles', while '*[m]arianismo* emphasizes the role of women as family- and home-centered; it encourages passivity, self-sacrifice, and chastity…[it] depicts women in nurturing roles and prescribes respect for patriarchal values.'
Nuñez, Alicia; González, Patricia; Talavera, Gregory A.; Sanchez-Johnsen, Lisa; Roesch, Scott C.; Davis, Sonia M.; Arguelles, William; Womack, Veronica Y.; Ostrovsky, Natania W.; Ojeda, Lizette; Penedo, Frank J.; Gallo, Linda C. (2016), 'Machismo, Marianismo, and Negative Cognitive-Emotional Factors: Findings From the Hispanic Community Health Study/Study of Latinos Sociocultural Ancillary Study', Journal of Latina/o Psychology, Vol 4 (4), pp.202-217 www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5102330/

Five participants (19%) referred to domestic violence within their indigenous communities specifically, which two personally experienced while their family was following the majority religion. Many of these participants noted a correlation between domestic violence and alcoholism in their communities, which is in line with existing research. Rosario Valdez-Santiago's study into intimate partner violence (IPV) in indigenous Mexican communities found that 'the overall IPV prevalence in indigenous women was 25.1%'.[141] 'Of the male partner variables, the most important predictor for IPV was the male partner's reported higher frequency of alcohol use…women whose partners used alcohol daily had a 13.35 times greater risk of experiencing severe IPV than women whose partners never used alcohol.'[142]

Three participants from Jalisco highlighted their belief that women from both the religious majority and minority communities in El Chalate, Mezquitic Municipality, are at particular risk of violence around the time of religious majority festivals, during which, the participants said, adult participants often become intoxicated.

Another three participants from Chiapas also linked incidents of men beating women in their family to the excessive consumption of alcohol. One participant from Chiapas recalled:

'My father was an alcoholic, he abused my mother, beating her and everything, but upon knowing Christ his life changed; we saw the change as much in my father as in his way of treating us… Before my dad despised us for being women, it was there in the community, [where] there is a lot of machismo.'

Perceptions

Finally, it is worth noting the way in which the participants and indigenous men who accompanied them presented the challenges they face on account of their religious beliefs.

During the gatherings, both religious minority men and women tended to present the discrimination they face as normal rather than a violation of their human rights. Some participants and accompanying men were not forthcoming with examples of discrimination, because they did not seem to perceive these incidents as noteworthy.[143]

For example, after the interview, they would mention in passing that people threw stones at them, rather than when they were asked a direct question about harassment. CSW's Data Collector and male colleague paid close attention to and inquired about some of these casual reflections; this sometimes led to additional human rights violations being disclosed. The way some individuals dismissed their experiences of discrimination as normal, or qualified their testimony with the comment 'But we are fine', indicates the importance of raising awareness within indigenous religious minority communities of their rights according to Mexico's national and international legal commitments.

The Data Collector and Rufina Aburto Victoriano



Moreover, both religious minority women and men expressed how valuable freedom of religion is to them, particularly in group discussions. During the participatory ranking exercise conducted in four states, a total of 12 participants were asked what they considered to be the most significant challenges facing women in their religious community, after which they individually ranked the problems raised from most to least significant to them.

141 Valdez-Santiago, Rosario et al, ibid., p.54
142 ibid pp.54-55.
143 For this reason, it is very likely that more violations have occurred than were able to be garnered through the interviews and group discussions.

Across the four states, 22 challenges were identified that can be grouped into the following nine thematic areas (in no particular order):

1. FoRB violations,
2. denial of basic services,
3. threats to property or land,
4. children's access to education,
5. denial of government benefit programmes,
6. harassment,
7. denial of medical treatment,
8. family rejection, and
9. forced displacement.

The most frequently referenced themes were FoRB (encompassing nine identified challenges), harassment (encompassing five identified problems), denial of basic services (encompassing two identified problems) and denial of government benefit programmes (encompassing two identified problems). Notably, while harassment was the second most referenced theme, it received a low aggregate score in all states where it was mentioned, which suggests that participants perceive it as prevalent but comparatively less difficult to bear.

Despite this exercise not being uniform or representative enough to yield statistically significant results,[144] it revealed the importance that participants attribute to freedom of religion. Violations of FoRB were raised as a problem in all four states, and FoRB was ranked by participants as the most pressing issue overall during this exercise. The importance of FoRB was echoed by the religious minority men who accompanied participants to the gatherings. While they also highlighted their economic insecurity and frustration towards government inaction, among other challenges, the male colleague of CSW's Data Collector noted that they consistently returned to their desire for freedom to practise their religion.

The way in which participants experience violations of FoRB, and other forms of discrimination that intersect with or are an outworking of restrictions on FoRB, are detailed in the state-specific chapters.

144 Each state-specific chapter lists the challenges identified by participants in that state and their aggregate rankings. Because participants only ranked the challenges identified within their state, which were not necessarily the same as the challenges raised during the participatory ranking exercises in other states, it was not possible to calculate a representative average score across all four states where this exercise was conducted.

Chiapas

This chapter focuses on the experiences of four indigenous and two mestizas[145] women, aged 26 to 70, who have experienced discrimination because they belong to minority Pentecostal and Presbyterian churches in Chiapas state. Four of them are married, one is widowed and one is in a common law marriage with the father of her children.

- Josefina Cruz Ruiz lives in Nueva las Tacitas, Ocosingo Municipality. She speaks Tzeltal.
- Consepción Gómez Santiz lives in El Encanto village, Las Margaritas Municipality. She speaks Tojolab'al.
- Elsa Gabriela Vázquez Ico was forcibly displaced from Lázaro Cárdenas Chilil, Huixtán Municipality and now resides in San Cristóbal de las Casas City in San Cristóbal de las Casas Municipality. She speaks Tzotzil.
- Ana Cristina Arguello Gómez was forcibly displaced from San José Yashtinín,[146] San Cristóbal de las Casas Municipality and now resides in San Cristóbal de las Casas City in San Cristóbal de las Casas Municipality. She speaks Tzotzil.
- Reina Balcazar Najera and Genara González Gómez live in Mariano Matamoros, Venustiano Carranza Municipality, a mestizo community. They speak Spanish.

Despite Mariano Matamoros not being an indigenous community, the local authorities apply the Law of Uses and Customs.[147]

The majority religion in all these communities is Roman Catholicism.

This chapter explains the key themes emerging from interviews CSW conducted with these women, as well as a participatory ranking exercise that two of them completed during the second women's gathering.

Reina Balcazar Najera and Genara González Gómez were interviewed separately in Mariano Matamoros, rather than during the women's gatherings. Their answers have been combined with those of the gathering participants because they were asked the same questions, and their positionality is comparable as religious minority women living in a community governed according to the Law of Uses and Customs.



Participants from Chiapas

145 Mestizo (fem. mestiza, fem. pl. mestizas) denotes a person of mixed European and indigenous ancestry.
146 Since 2015, San José Yashtinín has been referred to as Yashtinín.
147 See 'Legal framework' chapter for more information on the Law of Uses and Customs in Mexico.

Themes

Violations of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB)

Pressured or forced participation in religious activities

Three participants said they are 'always' forced to participate in the religious activities of the religious majority community, and five gave examples of this happening in their community.[148]

Mariano Matamoros, Venustiano Carranza Municipality

In Mariano Matamoros women are required to clean the Roman Catholic church as part of their *faenas*.[149] Protestant Christians have been pressured to contribute financially to Roman Catholic saint festivals. According to Reina Balcazar Najera and Genara González Gómez, Protestant women choose to sweep the park instead. Protestant Christians more generally have refused to make required financial contributions to the community, following the confiscation of their land alongside the local authorities' decision to no longer recognise them as members of the community in 2012. Protestant Christians do not receive community benefits such financial contributions to healthcare as a result.[150]

San José Yashtinín, San Cristóbal de las Casas Municipality

In San José Yashtinín, Protestant women are obliged to clean the Roman Catholic church, wash the curtains and source flowers for the building. Protestant men are required to ring the church bell. If members of the community do not comply, they are usually subject to an illegal fine. On 3 May 2021, a single woman and the only Protestant Christian woman still living in San José Yashtinín, was forced to participate in the Santa Cruz (Holy Cross) Roman Catholic festival. While she could not afford to contribute financially, as required, she gathered some money to make a small offering because the local authorities threatened to take her land away if she did not comply.

Nueva las Tacitas, Ocosingo Municipality

In Nueva las Tacitas, all Protestant Christians are forced to participate in the Santa Cruz Festival on 3 May each year. This celebration is referred to locally as *Convivio del Agua*, during which the members of the community light a candle to images of saints over a water container. They are given an illegal fine of MXN 300-500 if they do not participate. If they do not pay the fine, their water supply is cut off until they are able to pay the fine (see 'Denial of basic services' section for more information).



El Encanto, Las Margaritas Municipality, Chiapas

El Encanto, Las Margaritas Municipality

Similarly, in El Encanto, Protestant women are required to clean the Roman Catholic church every four months, despite not using its facilities. If they refuse to do so, they are forced to pay an illegal fine of MXN 5,000 to the community assembly. If they do not pay, their family's access to water, electricity and sewerage services is removed (see 'Denial of basic services' section for more information).

Prevented from receiving co-religionist visitors

Mariano Matamoros, Venustiano Carranza Municipality

Reina Balcazar Najera and Genara González Gómez highlighted that threats from members of the religious majority have caused non-resident religious leaders to stop visiting their church in Mariano Matamoros, Venustiano Carranza Municipality.

In 2018 two non-resident religious leaders visited their church twice a week. That year, members of the religious majority community shouted at them, threatening to chase them out of the town, imprison

148 The only participant who did not give an example was Elsa Gabriela Vázquez Ico, which is likely because she was forcibly displaced from her community of origin in 2009 and her family have not been targeted because of their religion in their new residence.
149 *Faenas* (also known as *tequios*) are community services that men and women from indigenous communities are usually expected to perform. See Key findings across all states chapter for more information on *faenas*.
150 See 'Key findings across all states' chapter for an explanation of what these community benefits usually entail.

or hang them. As a result, the religious minority community received no visits from outside church leaders for one year. One of their church leaders stopped visiting them indefinitely out of fear. This has a negative impact on their church, which meets in the homes of its members and is reliant on teaching and encouragement from religious leaders who do not live in their community.



Nearby Mariano Matamoros, Venustiano Carranza Municipality

Harassment

Five participants highlighted that they have been publicly mocked by members of the religious majority community, who call members of their church 'hallelujahs'[151] and 'saint burners' for example.

Mariano Matamoros, Venustiano Carranza Municipality

Reina Balcazar Najera and Genara González Gómez stated that there is 'always' someone from the religious majority community harassing them on the street when they attend their Pentecostal church in Mariano Matamoros. They recalled that during health talks as part of the government's former *Prospera* programme, women from the religious majority taunted them, calling them ***'saint burners'*** and asking ***'Where are you going? To bend your knee [and] lift your ass in church?'***

Members of the religious majority community have also thrown stones at the homes of church members and, on one occasion, threw a stone so big that it left a large hole in the roof that needed repairing.

Related human rights violations

Arbitrary detention

Five participants recounted incidents of Protestant Christians being imprisoned because they would not renounce their religious beliefs, including one woman and one participant's father.

Mariano Matamoros, Venustiano Carranza Municipality

In 2012, an assembly meeting was held in the *ejido* house[152] during which members of the community agreed to imprison Protestant Christian men who would not renounce their religious beliefs. According to Reina Balcazar Najera and Genara González Gómez, these Protestant men were tied to a pillar by their hands and feet, and beaten by members of the religious majority community.

A crowd of Protestant Christian men and women gathered outside the jail entrance to protest the treatment of the men, and they were told that anyone who defended the men would also be beaten. When a Protestant boy got out his phone to check his messages, someone from the religious majority assumed he was filming the incident and started shouting at him. A Protestant woman, who was 72 years old at the time, attempted to defend the boy, and the prison commander, Cristino Gómez, then hit her. Another elderly woman was punched in the throat and thrown to the ground amid the altercation.

Nueva las Tacitas, Ocosingo Municipality

Josefina Cruz Ruiz explained that in 2015, after members of her Presbyterian church in Nueva las Tacitas, Ocosingo Municipality, held a celebration with music to mark the anniversary of their church, the local authorities confiscated their instruments and imprisoned six male church members for 24 hours. The men were tied up, beaten by 80 men from the community, and then forced to pay an illegal fine of MXN 25,000. Josefina Cruz Ruiz stressed that Protestant women have not been subject to imprisonment in her community and members of the religious majority can hold religious celebrations freely.

El Encanto, Las Margaritas Municipality

Consepción Gómez Santiz highlighted the case of a Protestant husband and wife who were imprisoned

151 'Hallelujah' is a term used by members of religious majority communities in Mexico to refer to Protestant Christians. It is often used in a derogatory way.

152 The *ejido* house is the place where the *ejido* commissariat practises their role. According to Mexican Agrarian Law, Article 32, 'the *ejido* commissariat is the body in charge of executing the agreements of the assembly, as well as the representation and administrative management of the *ejido*. It will be made up of a President, a Secretary and a Treasurer, owners and their respective alternates.'
Justia México, 'Ley Agraria' (Spanish) https://mexico.justia.com/federales/leyes/ley-agraria/titulo-tercero/capitulo-i/seccion-tercera/

in El Encanto, Las Margaritas Municipality, in 2017 because they would not return to the majority religion. During a community assembly meeting, the husband was pressured to sign an agreement that his family would return to Roman Catholicism. However, his wife, Eduvina López Sántiz, then protested that she would rather separate from him than renounce her religious beliefs. He retracted his promise to return to Roman Catholicism and was consequently detained.

When Eduvina López Sántiz visited her husband on his second day in prison, she learnt that he was unwell and struggling to breathe. Eduvina López Sántiz accepted the local authorities' offer that she could take his place in prison, and she remained there for one and a half days. The stress caused by this experience caused her to lose weight, fall ill with tachycardia, and suffer a difficult pregnancy, during which she was warned that childbirth would potentially put her life at risk.

Lázaro Cárdenas Chilil, Huixtán Municipality

Elsa Gabriela Vázquez Ico's father was arbitrarily detained by the local authorities on 2 December 2010, who claimed that this was ***'an opportunity [for him] to correct himself and deny the faith'***.

Physical violence

The section above illustrates that the arbitrary arrest and detention of Protestant Christians in Chiapas is often accompanied by physical violence. Two incidents of religiously-motivated violence against women were shared by participants from Chiapas: the assault on Protestant women outside the prison in Mariano Matamoros (see section above) and the assault of Josefina Cruz Ruiz by a male relative.



Josefina Cruz Ruiz

In 2016, Josefina Cruz Ruiz and her husband converted to Protestant Christianity. This angered relatives who followed the majority religion, including her brother. One day a short time later, while her husband was at work, the brother entered her home while inebriated and attacked her with a machete. This caused her to suffer a miscarriage.

When asked about gender-based violence, three participants referred to a culture within their communities of religious majority men drinking excessively and beating women in their family. One participant said that she experienced domestic violence by a male partner before they both converted to Protestant Christianity. Another participant witnessed her mother being abused by her father while she was a teenager, and contrasted his treatment of women before and after he converted:

'My father was an alcoholic, he abused my mother, beating her and everything, but upon knowing Christ his life changed; we saw the change as much in my father as in his way of treating us… Before my dad despised us for being women, it was there in the community, [where] there is a lot of machismo.'

All three participants highlighted that their male relatives stopped behaving in this way and treated women with greater respect after they converted to Protestantism and simultaneously stopped abusing alcohol.[153] One participant recalled her relatives commenting:

'We now see that you speak differently, and your husband no longer hits you. The women are happy.'

Forced displacement

Harassment and threats by members of the religious majority community culminated in the forcible displacement of the families of both Elsa Gabriela Vázquez Ico and Ana Cristina Arguello Gómez to San Cristóbal de las Casas city in San Cristóbal de las Casas Municipality.

Lázaro Cárdenas Chilil, Huixtán Municipality

On 22 November 2009, four Protestant Christian families from Lázaro Cárdenas Chilil, Huixtán Municipality were forcibly displaced to San Cristóbal de las Casas city, San Cristóbal de las Casas Municipality. Members of these families informed CSW that their expulsion was instigated by a former

153 Protestant religious groups in indigenous communities tend to be strictly teetotal. An important step in conversion to Protestantism in these communities is the giving up of all consumption of alcohol.

member of the Chiapas State Congress, Javier Martínez Vargas, who declared the village to be a 'Roman Catholic-only zone'.[154] Women from these families were reportedly the first to be expelled and they were forced to sign a document confirming their expulsion.



Elsa Gabriela Vázquez Ico

In December 2010, following nearly two years of harassment and threats by members of the religious majority community, including the arbitrary detention of her father, Elsa Gabriela Vázquez Ico's family was forcibly displaced from Lázaro Cárdenas Chilil to San Cristóbal de las Casas city, San Cristóbal de las Casas Municipality. Elsa Gabriela Vázquez Ico, who was a teenager at the time, remembers the local authorities announcing to the community through a megaphone: ***'To all the hallelujahs, we are going to get you.'*** She recalled her siblings, who were seven and nine years old, coming home from primary school after hearing this threat and crying as they had to leave their toys, clothes and new shoes behind.[155] The Mexican government initially housed them in a shelter alongside addicts and homeless people, after which they were relocated to rented accommodation.

San José Yashtinín, San Cristóbal de las Casas Municipality

In 2012, 12 Protestant Christian families (40 individuals) were forcibly displaced from San José Yashtinín, San Cristóbal de las Casas Municipality, after the local authorities mobilised members of the religious majority community to demolish and set fire to their houses, because of the Protestants' refusal to participate in Roman Catholic celebrations.[156] Roman Catholic leaders, including a priest, who attempted to intervene on behalf of the Protestants were also threatened with expulsion. Some members of the community were threatened with fines if they did not participate in the mob violence. The displaced families moved into a former homeless shelter in San Cristóbal de las Casas, where up to nine people lived in a five square metre room. Tragically, an 18-month-old girl from San José Yashtinín died in her sleep that year, likely due to asphyxiation related to the overcrowded conditions.

One year later, when Ana Cristina Arguello Gómez's family stopped participating in Roman Catholic festivals, they started receiving threats that their home would be torched. The local authorities threatened to imprison or destroy the homes of the remaining Protestant Christians in San José Yashtinín. In response, Ana Cristina Arguello Gómez fled with her five children (then aged four months to 14 years), her partner and three other Protestant families to San Cristóbal de las Casas city for safety.[157] Ana Cristina Arguello Gómez highlighted that they can only afford to live in a dangerous neighbourhood where water is scarce. They generally rely on a private water service, which, due to high demand, often arrives at midnight. The families have to be ready to fill their barrels when the water supply arrives.

Ana Cristina Arguello Gómez



Threats to or attacks on property and land

Five participants reported threats to, theft, confiscation and/or destruction of their homes and/or land.

154 For more information on this case, see CSW's 2014 Mexico assignment report:
CSW, 'CSW finds religious freedom violations in Chiapas', 19 May 2014 www.csw.org.uk/2014/05/19/news/2055/article.htm
155 Despite these events happening over ten years ago, Elsa Vázquez Ico wept as she recounted them, which indicates the immense effect it had on her personally.
156 For more information on this case, see CSW, 'CSW finds religious freedom violations in Chiapas', ibid.
157 Since there was no more room in the shelter where the other Protestant families from San José Yashtinín had taken refuge, they rented a house together with the support of the Maranatha Living Faith Church (Iglesia Fe Viviente Maranatha Church) in San Cristóbal de las Casas.

Lázaro Cárdenas Chilil, Huixtán Municipality

The family of Elsa Gabriela Vázquez Ico owns land in Lázaro Cárdenas Chilil, where they were displaced from. They have heard from members of the community that the members of the religious majority community want to confiscate these lands.

San José Yashtinín, San Cristóbal de las Casas Municipality

After their forced displacement, the family of Ana Cristina Arguello Gómez returned to their house in San José Yashtinín, to discover that everything they had left behind had been stolen. This included construction materials, roof sheets, wood, blankets, beds and clothes. Consequently, her family, including five children, did not have enough clothes or blankets to keep them warm for six months. According to Misión 21 Gramos, a non-governmental organisation based in Chiapas, ten houses belonging to Protestant Christians who were displaced from San José Yashtinín have since been knocked down with electric saws and sledgehammers.

Nueva las Tacitas, Ocosingo Municipality

Josefina Cruz Ruiz stated that three times a year during the harvest season, a member of the religious majority community steals the crops from her family's land – crops which she relies on to cook meals for her family. Although the authorities know who this person is, they have taken no action to stop him.



Josefina Cruz Ruiz

Mariano Matamoros, Venustiano Carranza Municipality

In March 2012 Protestant Christians in Mariano Matamoros decided to set aside a piece of land to build a house of prayer. They sought permission from the local authorities; however, the communal property commissariat (*comisariado ejidal*) refused to grant planning permission.[158]

The request precipitated further acts of discrimination against the Protestants. In May 2012, the local authorities summoned all Protestant Christians to an assembly meeting and issued an ultimatum to renounce their religious beliefs or be imprisoned and have their land confiscated, asking ***'What do you want, your lands or the Gospel?'*** After they refused to renounce their beliefs, on 31 May 2012 the Protestant men were imprisoned and beaten (see 'Arbitrary detention' section). Three families had their access to water and sewerage services cut off (see 'Denial of basic services' section). The local authorities also gave them three days to remove the wire fencing that surrounded and protected their lands (*ejido*).

Reina Balcazar Najera and Genara González Gómez recalled a Protestant man answering: ***'See here, I am not going to remove the wire fence, nor will I abandon my beliefs because I am free to believe whatever I want.'*** In response, the local authorities appointed men from the town to remove the wire fencing on 30 and 31 May 2012, so that the Protestants' animals (horses and donkeys) would escape. They also cut down the silver cedar and oak trees – a valuable resource – on land owned by these families.

At the beginning of May 2013, lands legally owned by Protestant Christians in Mariano Matamoros were confiscated, divided and sold as lots for MXN 500 each to Roman Catholic inhabitants. According to Article 68 in Mexico's Agrarian Law, the legal assignment of lots to landowners (*ejidatario*) must take place in the presence of the Agrarian Attorney's Office.[159] Local partners report that sometimes the local authorities will send money to the representative of the Agrarian Attorney's Office, in order to bypass this legal requirement. This suggests that the Agrarian Attorney's Office

158 In Mexico, individuals need permission from the communal property commissariat (*comisariado ejidal*) to build a property, convert a property in a residential area for other use, or change the named owner of a property. See:
Fideicomiso Fondo Nacional de Fomento Ejidal, 'Estructura de Ejidos y/o Comunidades - Comisariado Ejidal o de Bienes Comunales' (Spanish) www.fifonafe.gob.mx/gerenciamiento/sec2.php?id=29

159 Each Mexican state has an agrarian registry, and the state government must send a representative to verify the legality of changes in land ownership by the *ejido* commissariat and that the land is then registered with the agrarian registry. Article 68 of the Agrarian Law states: 'The assembly will assign lots to the *ejidatarios*, determining in an equitable manner the area that corresponds to each one of them. This assignment will be made in the presence of a representative of the Agrarian Attorney's Office and in accordance with the lots that result from the plan approved by the same assembly and registered in the National Agrarian Registry'. Justia México, 'Ley Agraria' (Spanish) https://mexico.justia.com/federales/leyes/ley-agraria/titulo-tercero/capitulo-ii/seccion-cuarta/

may have been complicit in the confiscation of their land, as it appears that no formal assembly took place with a representative from the Agrarian Attorney's Office.

In May 2021, Reina Balcazar Najera was warned that her house and additional land she still owns with her brother could be confiscated as well.



Scenery in Chiapas

Denial of basic services

The families of five participants have had their water supply cut off by the local authorities because of their refusal to renounce their religious beliefs. For the same reason, three participants have been unable to access sewerage services, two have been prevented from accessing electricity, and two have had their electricity bills purposefully withheld, in an attempt to force them to miss a payment which could result in the supplier cutting off their electricity.

Lázaro Cárdenas Chilil, Huixtán Municipality

In 2010 Elsa Gabriela Vázquez Ico's family was summoned to a community assembly meeting, during which her father was given an ultimatum to sign an illegal agreement to renounce his family's religious beliefs, or their access to water, electricity and other basic services provided by the community would be cut off. He would not sign and the local authorities removed their access to these services. They lived without the services until they were forcibly displaced.

Nueva las Tacitas, Ocosingo Municipality

Every year on 3 May, Protestant Christian families from Nueva las Tacitas who refuse to participate in the Santa Cruz Festival are forced to pay an illegal fine of MXN 300 or have their water supply cut off. On 3 May 2021, Josefina Cruz Ruiz's family and five others from the Alpha and Omega Christian Church refused to participate in the festival.[160] In response, the local authorities imposed an increased fine of MXN 500 per family, and subsequently disconnected their water supply when they could not afford to pay it.

While Josefina Cruz Ruiz's family have a latrine in their house, they cannot use it without water access, so they were forced to relieve themselves outside in the open, in the mountains. Josefina Cruz Ruiz's family and some others have since managed to gather enough money to pay the fine to have their water supply reinstated.[161] If they do not pay the fine, their water supply is cut off until they are able to pay it; as a result, some years they have been without access to water for five months.

El Encanto, Las Margaritas Municipality

Protestant Christian families in El Encanto, Las Margaritas Municipality, have been prevented from accessing water, sewerage and electricity services because of their refusal to cooperate with religious majority activities.

On 26 November 2016 a group of Protestant Christian families from El Encanto, who belong to the King of Kings United Pentecostal Church of Mexico, refused to sign an agreement obliging them to participate in religious activities associated with Roman Catholicism and to help with the upkeep of the local Roman Catholic church. They also refused to pay a fine of MXN 5,000. In response, local authorities had the families' water supply disconnected and two years later, in July 2018, when the village drainage network was being built, the authorities did not allow sewerage facilities to be installed in the families' homes.

In July 2020, the local authorities instructed the company responsible for upgrading electricity services in El Encanto not to install electricity in the homes of the affected Protestant Christian families. Because of this pressure, two families made the decision to resume making financial contributions to Roman Catholic festivals. Each family also paid an illegal fine of MXN 5,000 to have their basic services reinstated.

To date, Consepción Gómez Santiz's family have relied on a generator for electricity, which costs between MXN 150 and 200 per week to run.

160 These six families comprise 16 adults.
161 Josefina Cruz Ruiz's husband explained that there is currently a shortage of water in Nueva las Tacitas because the pipe supplying the water tank is damaged. Therefore, removing Protestant Christians' access to water increases the supply available to the religious majority community.

Mariano Matamoros, Venustiano Carranza Municipality

In May 2012, Protestant Christian families from Mariano Matamoros, Venustiano Carranza Municipality, refused to renounce their religious beliefs during an assembly meeting. As a result, on 21 October 2012, the local authorities disconnected the water and sewerage services of three families including the households of Reina Balcazar Najera and Genara González Gómez.



Reina Balcazar Najera

In June 2015, the local authorities cut off the water supply and sewerage services to around 30 Protestant Christian families in Mariano Matamoros, who have been without these services to date. Initially, the affected families were able to access water through the remaining parts of a hose; however, Reina Balcazar Najera recalled that:

'We [Protestant] Christians used one hose to drink water, because when they took away our water, there were still some parts left of the hoses that they had cut that went along the street, and a Catholic woman who realised that we drank the water from there burned the part of the hose that passed through her house. She said that she did it to burn garbage but she really did it to not let us drink even a little water.'

These families have since bought two 120 litre and one 160 litre tanks, which they must refill with water every 15 days to survive. They can do so because a Protestant Christian from Nuevo León, Teopisca Municipality, has offered them his truck to travel to a water source outside Mariano Matamoros and transport the filled tanks, only charging them for the petrol costs which are around MXN 320 per month.

According to Misión 21 Gramos, the deaths in Mariano Matamoros of two elderly men suffering from diabetes can be linked in some degree to their lack of access to water. Reina Balcazar Najera and Genara González Gómez highlighted that some Roman Catholics in the community have expressed fear that their water supply will also be cut off if they are seen helping the Protestant Christians.

Protestant families in Mariano Matamoros have also faced issues with their electricity bills. In 2015, the local authorities would not deliver the electricity bills of Protestant families to the police station (*comisaria*). The authorities were hoping that this would result in missed payments and that the Protestants would then have their electricity services terminated. The situation was only resolved after Protestant Christians travelled to the municipal seat, Venustiano Carranza City, to request that their bills to be sent directly to them, rather than through the *comisaria*.

Barriers to paid and unpaid work

Five participants have faced barriers to unpaid work because of the actions of the religious majority community. For four participants, threats to and attacks on their property have directly impacted their ability to work and their family's source of income.[162] Four participants explained how the removal of basic services such as water and/or electricity has affected their ability to complete domestic tasks such as washing clothes and cooking, as well as income-generating work in the case of one participant.

Mariano Matamoros, Venustiano Carranza Municipality

When their land was confiscated in May 2012, Protestant families in Mariano Matamoros lost their source of food and their ability to work and earn and income, as farming is their trade. Genara González Gómez deplored:

'They have only left us our little house, but we don't have anything now, not even land for the men to work and cultivate.'

To continue working, these families were forced to rent farmland for around MXN 2,000 per year per hectare; this would amount to MXN 166,000 annually if they were to rent the 83 hectares of land they previously owned. When families could not secure land to rent, they had to purchase corn and

162 One objective of the arbitrary destruction of property is to remove the victims' ability to earn a living. Most indigenous communities in Mexico live in remote rural locations, and are comprised of small-scale farmers with low levels of education and Spanish as a second language, if at all. Barred from working their land, they are often left with few alternatives to earn an income.

beans which, under normal circumstances, they would have cultivated themselves. Families who could not afford food due to a lack of work suffered from ill health.

The cost of renting land has also driven young Protestant men to seek work in neighbouring communities. Reina Balcazar Najera's nephews no longer live in Mariano Matamoros due to the lack of work opportunities, and her son was once arrested when he tried to leave the town to work elsewhere. Anticipating this risk, Reina Balcazar Najera had warned her son not to retaliate if he was arrested. She shared how this incident left her feeling anxious and distraught.

In 2012 the local authorities ordered the entrance to the town, where vehicles pass through, to be put under guard 24 hours a day to stop Protestant families from leaving to buy necessities or sell their produce. For around one year, Reina Balcazar Najera and Genara González Gómez tried to exit the town in vehicles with other Protestant women, but they were not permitted to leave. Reina Balcazar Najera was forced to either sneak out through the coffee plantations and mountains on foot to buy food and groceries, or to send her children surreptitiously in the early morning or late at night to buy necessities like soap, and lime for tortillas.

The lack of water supply to Protestant homes has made the women's daily tasks of washing clothes and cleaning the home more taxing. In order to do the washing, the women must walk 30 minutes to a well, carrying their laundry themselves. For indoor tasks like mopping the floors, they must buy water or use rainwater they have collected in buckets from a well.[163] Reina Balcazar Najera's brother or husband assist her by bringing water from the well to her.

Consepción Gómez Santiz, El Encanto, Las Margaritas Municipality



El Encanto, Las Margaritas Municipality

Since their water supply was cut off in 2016, Consepción Gómez Santiz and other Protestant Christian women from El Encanto had travel by truck twice or three times daily to buy water, a total of 60-90 minutes' travel time. Their families had to cover the cost of fuel for each journey. Since August 2021, these families have reportedly been given access to water from a well on their friend's property, who lives 15 minutes away by truck and allows these families to use the well for free.

Consepción Gómez Santiz's family has also suffered financially due to the lack of electricity. She and her husband run a small grocery store in which they used to sell ice lollies, ice, meat, cheese, chicken, ham and sausages, all of which require refrigeration or freezers. When the local authorities cut off their electricity supply, they lost around MXN 3,000 in products because they had just stocked up. Without a running refrigerator, they are forced to throw away leftover food that becomes spoiled.

If Consepción Gómez Santiz wishes to use the family washing machine rather than doing the laundry by hand, she must put five litres of fuel into an electricity generator for each load of washing, which is very costly.

The removal of electricity has also made childcare harder for some Protestant mothers. For example, a Protestant Christian woman called Rebeca Vazquez Cruz was one month pregnant when the local authorities of El Encanto disconnected her family's electricity supply. Since the birth of her daughter, whenever she changes nappies outside of daylight hours, she has to use candlelight or light from her mobile phone. CSW met with Rebeca Vazquez Cruz following this research and she stated:

'I had my daughter in the time when we had no light. Yes, I have suffered a lot because I used candles, but they do not last all night. The candles last at most three hours. I was using votive candles in glass, but they make a lot of smoke and I started thinking and saying it's going to affect my girl because I'm in a small room, all the smoke is locked up, so I told my husband that I was no longer going to use that. When the girl woke up in the middle of the night, I had to use the mobile phone flashlight and if it ran out of battery because we didn't have a way to charge it, we did it in the dark. There is a streetlight and with this we were able to see a little… my little girl

163 Indigenous people in Mexico require two types of water: water for drinking and cooking which is suitable for human consumption, and water for cleaning, washing and cultivation which is not suitable for human consumption.

has now turned eight months old and so, we have lived with this way all this time, the little girl has learned to live in the dark.'



Rebeca Vazquez Cruz and her daughter

Consepción Gómez Santiz reflected that the complications of living without basic services have weighed down the Protestant families in El Encanto with sadness and stress.

Nueva las Tacitas, Ocosingo Municipality

After 3 May 2021, when their water supply was cut off, Josefina Cruz Ruiz and other Protestant women travelled daily to a small stream 20 minutes away from their homes, to collect water for drinking and everyday tasks like cooking and cleaning. They filled 2.5 litre soda bottles with water, carrying them home using wheelbarrows. Protestant women also relied on the same stream to wash their family's laundry. With their children's assistance, they carried between 10 and 15kg of clothes on their head to and from the stream, several times a day.

These families have their access to water services reinstated at various points over the year, depending on when each family is able to gather the funds to pay a fine to the local authorities. If they do not pay the fine, their water supply is cut off until they are able to pay it; as a result, some years they have been without access to water for five months.

San José Yashtinín, San Cristóbal de las Casas Municipality

In San José Yashtinín, members of the community use wood from the surrounding mountains to cook and to heat their homes. Before Ana Cristina Arguello Gómez's family was forcibly displaced in 2013, members of the religious majority prevented them from fetching firewood. This forced the family to chop down their own trees, which are a valuable commodity, for firewood. Ana Cristina Arguello Gómez's family was also barred from using the communal lands to sow crops, which meant that they could not grow corn and beans to feed their family.

Forcibly displaced communities in San Cristóbal de las Casas

After being forcibly displaced to San Cristóbal de las Casas town, San Cristóbal de las Casas Municipality, members of the families of Ana Cristina Arguello Gómez and Elsa Gabriela Vázquez Ico found jobs in the informal sector in order to make ends meet. The women typically cleaned people's homes and washed clothes, while the men sold ice lollies outside local schools. However, in 2020, they were unable to carry out this kind of work due to the COVID-19-related safety precautions and school closures. This meant they sometimes lacked enough money to buy food to eat. All but one member of Elsa Gabriela Vázquez Ico's extended family lost their jobs and at around the same time, the government stopped paying their rent as it had promised to do.

The loss of income meant that Elsa Gabriela Vázquez Ico's family could not afford medical attention when they all contracted COVID-19. Fortunately, the government resumed their rent payments after members of the family heeded the advice of Misión 21 Gramos to visit the state government offices in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, the capital city of Chiapas. Over the past decade, both families have relied on emotional and financial support from local Protestant churches and charities like Misión 21 Gramos to survive.

Denial of government benefit programmes

Four participants have been prevented from accessing government benefit programmes.[164]

Forcibly displaced communities in San Cristóbal de las Casas

When Ana Cristina Arguello Gómez and Elsa Gabriela Vázquez Ico's families were forcibly displaced to San Cristóbal de las Casas city, San Cristóbal de las Casas Municipality, they lost access to all government programmes they were entitled to because financial support from these programmes was delivered to the towns from which they were displaced. Elsa Gabriela Vázquez Ico's mother lost access to the *Oportunidades* programme, and her family were no longer

164 See 'Key findings across all states' chapter for descriptions of the government programmes referenced in this section.

entitled to the Direct Farm Support programme (PROCAMPO) having been displaced from the lands they used to work.

Ana Cristina Arguello Gómez stated that she lost access to *'all'* government benefit programmes when her family were displaced, which is likely to have included the *Oportunidades* and PROCAMPO programmes. She had heard that the whole town of San José Yashtinín, San Cristóbal de las Casas Municipality, had agreed to block her from obtaining her benefits from government programmes if she visited to collect them. They threated to beat her family if she attempted to do so. She recalled the local authorities saying:

'If they are already "hallelujahs", they can look elsewhere for anyone to give them the support, because we aren't going to allow them entry here.'

Mariano Matamoros, Venustiano Carranza Municipality

In 2015, after Reina Balcazar Najera and Genara González Gómez's families refused once again to renounce their religious beliefs, the local authorities blocked their access to the following government programmes:

- *Prospera*
- Productive PROAGRO
- Piso Firme
- Rural Housing (Vivienda Rural) for house repairs.

Protestant families in Mariano Matamoros have particularly needed support through government housing programmes as they lack the means to maintain their properties. The added financial burden of being forced to rent farmland and pay for water tanks means that many Protestant families cannot afford to repair their houses, many of which are collapsing and some of which have leaking roofs. In addition, some of their homes were affected by a 2017 earthquake. Local authorities prevented Protestant families from receiving resources that were delivered to Mariano Matamoros to repair the buildings.

As a 70-year-old widow, Genara González Gómez relies on the Mexican government's Programme for the Wellbeing of Older Adults to cover her living expenses. Launched in 2019, this programme offers people aged 65 or older living in indigenous communities, and 68 years or older in the rest of the country, approximately MXN 3,105 every two to three months.[165] She is able to receive the support by travelling to a neighbouring municipality where the aid is sent. Genara González Gómez explained that living off this income alone, she is limited in what she can afford:

'I have to stretch [the funds from the aid]. I buy my corn and bean[s], my vegetables, with it, but it is not enough for chicken and meat.'

In recent years, due to pulmonary emphysema caused by a lifetime of cooking with fire and wood, she lost lung function in one of her lungs and lost 50% capacity in the other lung. Genara González Gómez used to purchase vitamins to improve her health; however, since her husband died (approximately 20 years ago) she can no longer afford vitamins or medical treatment for her lungs. She has lived with her daughters and relied on them for practical support ever since.



Consepción Gómez Santiz

El Encanto, Las Margaritas Municipality

Four families from Consepción Gómez Santiz's church in El Encanto, Las Margaritas Municipality, have received threats of the local authorities blocking their access to the Benito Juárez Basic Education Welfare Scholarship Programme; however, the local authorities have not been able to intercept this financial support because their children are enrolled in a school in a neighbouring community.

Denial of medical treatment

Three participants highlighted that they cannot receive medical attention where they live, but only one suggested that this was because of their religious beliefs.

165 Secretaría de Bienestar, 'Programa para el Bienestar de las Personas Adultas Mayores', 11 February 2019 (Spanish) www.gob.mx/bienestar/acciones-y-programas/programa-para-el-bienestar-de-las-personas-adultas-mayores

El Encanto, Las Margaritas Municipality

Protestant Christians are not permitted to receive medical attention in El Encanto because of their religious beliefs, so they must travel to the municipal seat, Las Margaritas City, to receive healthcare.

Mariano Matamoros, Venustiano Carranza Municipality

There is an empty health centre in Mariano Matamoros, with no resident doctor or nurse. According to Reina Balcazar Najera and Genara González Gómez, conflict from legal cases within the community has caused staff not to remain in post for long. Furthermore, according to the two women, residents who formed a health committee in Mariano Matamoros did not fulfil their responsibilities, and this caused doctors to leave.

Discrimination and restrictions affecting children's education

The children of two participants have faced barriers to education, at least in part because of their religious beliefs.

Forcibly displaced communities in San Cristóbal de las Casas

When Ana Cristina Arguello Gómez was forcibly displaced from San José Yashtinín with her children and partner, school officials did not inform her of how to access the paperwork required to enrol her son in another school. She was eventually able to retrieve this paperwork with assistance from Misión 21 Gramos. However, the delays in this process meant that by the time her children were able to enrol in school they were significantly older than others in that academic year, so they were left with the option of attending afternoon classes or a school with older children, despite having missed out on vital years of schooling. Ana Cristina Arguello Gómez chose not to enrol them there.

El Encanto, Las Margaritas Municipality

In 2017 the local authorities in El Encanto village prevented children of four Protestant families from being re-enrolled in the local school, because their parents refused to participate in religious activities associated with the majority. Parents were forced to enrol their children in a neighbouring community 20 minutes away by public transport or longer by foot: each journey by public transport costs MXN 36, which is equivalent to the cost of one meal in the area.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the children of four religious minority families have been unable to participate in online classes because in order to access the internet, they need electricity, which they have lived without since 2020 (see 'Denial of basic services' section).

Consepción Gómez Santiz explained that her 23-year-old daughter, Damaris Pérez Gómez, has also struggled to attend university classes online since the classes began in September 2020, due to their electricity services being cut off by the local authorities. Her daughter was forced to live with her aunt in Comitán, Comitán Municipality, Chiapas for four months in order to attend these classes. She has since returned to El Encanto and has been attending classes with the use of a battery charged electricity source that costs over MXN 2,500 every five months and provides power for less than two hours.



Children from El Encanto, Las Margaritas Municipality, Chiapas

Barriers to justice

In the cases throughout this chapter, local authorities have been complicit in or perpetrators of human rights violations affecting religious minority communities. Out of the four participants who were asked how often they can access justice after experiencing discrimination, three answered 'never', one said 'rarely', and the remaining two gave examples of justice not being served. Three participants specifically referred to the municipal authorities failing to act on behalf of religious minorities facing discrimination in their community. The Chiapas State government has also historically been reluctant to intervene in cases of religious intolerance in the state; however, CSW has observed a positive shift in the government's approach to FoRB at a state level following the appointment of a new director of Religious Affairs for Chiapas State in January 2021.[166]

166 Cuarta Poder, 'Diversidad religiosa, entre el conflicto y la tolerancia', 27 June 2021 (Spanish) www.cuartopoder.mx/chiapas/diversidad-religiosa-entre-el-conflicto-y-la-tolerancia/369676/

The cases below illustrate that the local authorities' tendency to refuse any attempts to dialogue to reach a fair solution is one of the greatest barriers to justice for indigenous religious minorities in Mexico. It also reveals how government officials often propose short-term or even illegal solutions that avoid addressing the root causes of conflicts and allow local authorities to continue to violate FoRB with impunity.

Nueva las Tacitas, Ocosingo Municipality

Unlike the other communities referred to in this chapter, Nueva las Tacitas village in Ocosingo Municipality is governed by the Zapatista National Liberation Army (ELZN).[167] Josefina Cruz Ruiz highlighted that neither men nor women from the religious minority community are listened to by the Zapatista leaders, but members of the Roman Catholic majority are. The approach of the religious minority is to be discreet and avoid causing trouble, which means not demanding justice when their rights are violated.

Josefina Cruz Ruiz's husband, who translated for her, deplored:

'Those shameless people, they can do anything [but] they do nothing and we do not fight or get involved in disputes, so that we can be a witness [to our faith] before the authorities.'

Small store in El Encanto, Las Margaritas Municipality, Chiapas



Lázaro Cárdenas Chilil, Huixtán Municipality

A complaint was filed with the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) immediately after the forced displacement of Protestant families from Lázaro Cárdenas Chilil, on 22 November 2009. Elsa Gabriela Vázquez Ico's father was summoned to a meeting with the Department of Religious Affairs in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas, where he shared his family's desire to return to Lázaro Cárdenas Chilil.

The state government responded by sending someone to negotiate with the local authorities; however, a resolution was not reached, and the government officials reported back continued threats against the family if they returned. The CNDH investigated the case and published its conclusions and recommendations in September 2011.[168] The CNDH found that the group's right to FoRB had been violated and the Chiapas state governor, the president of the Chiapas State legislature and the Municipal Assembly of Huixtán were responsible for these violations.

Members of the displaced community told CSW that following the CNDH's report, state officials tricked them into signing documents that were then sent to the CNDH as 'proof' that the case had been satisfactorily resolved. They were given a small amount of money, which did not cover the loss of their land or homes. Leaders of the displaced community were told that they would receive nothing at all if they did not accept the offer and sign the documents.

Despite the case being officially filed as resolved, the state government then provided the families of Elsa Gabriela Vázquez Ico and others with financial aid, covering the costs of their rented accommodation from their displacement until April 2017, when they suspended the payments without notification until August 2018 when payments were re-established.

In 2015, the government promised to give Elsa Gabriela Vázquez Ico's family economic compensation for their displacement, so that they could buy land and build a new home for themselves in San Cristóbal de las Casas. However, it was not until 2021 that they received the full compensation. This final resolution to their case resulted from intervention by the new Director of Religious Affairs for Chiapas.

167 For further information on the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico, see: Cultural Survival Quarterly Magazine, 'Comments on the Zapatista Movement', March 1994 www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/comments-zapatista-movement

168 See Appendix A (Spanish) or Appendix B (English) of CSW's 2014 Mexico assignment report: CSW, 'CSW finds religious freedom violations in Chiapas', ibid.

Mariano Matamoros, Venustiano Carranza Municipality

Protestant Christian men in Mariano Matamoros have filed several complaints against the local authorities since 2012 in Tuxtla Gutiérrez. To date, these complaints have not produced any resolution to their situation and no charges have been filed against those responsible for crimes, including violent attacks, experienced by the religious minority community.

The group has received no government support in terms of food or monetary aid and no reparation for their loss of property. Travel to Tuxtla Gutiérrez is time-consuming and prohibitively expensive for the members of the group, many of whom lost their only source of income when their land was confiscated. This has made it almost impossible for the group to pursue their case effectively and monitor its progress.



Woman and child from Mariano Matamoros

El Encanto, Las Margaritas Municipality

Despite several complaints, thus far municipal, state and federal authorities have not provided any lasting solutions in the case of the six Protestant Christian families and a single man from El Encanto, Las Margaritas Municipality, who are living without water, electricity or sewerage services. In 2020, men from these families visited the municipal seat, Las Margaritas, to request support in their case. However, according to Consepción Gómez Santiz, the municipal agent, Marin Gómez Jastañel, said:

'We already know why they're coming with their same problem, and we are not going to listen to them.'

The approach of municipal and state authorities, including from the Chiapas Human Rights Commission (CEDH), has been deeply problematic. Municipal authorities have offered to pay the illegal fines imposed by the local authorities in order to reinstate the basic services of the six Protestant families and a single man. CEDH officials recommended that the families sign the illegal agreement renouncing their religious beliefs, suggesting that dialogue with the local authorities might improve if they are considered community members again and are able to attend the assembly meetings. Both of these approaches, by government offices responsible for upholding the law, in effect legitimise the local authorities functioning outside the law, imposing illegal fines and attempting to force members of the religious minority to convert to the majority religion.

According to Misión 21 Gramos, more recently municipal authorities have showed a willingness and have attempted to begin a dialogue with the local authorities in El Encanto, but the El Encanto authorities have refused to attend any meetings.

The religious minority families have the option of filing a legal case against the local authorities. They have been unwilling to do so, however, because their hope is for a peaceful solution that that does not exacerbate the conflict or cause the local authorities, some of whom are their relatives and former friends, to suffer.

Participatory ranking

Only Ana Cristina Arguello Gómez and Josefina Cruz Ruiz completed the participatory ranking exercise during the second women's gathering. Consepción Gómez Santis and Elsa Gabriela Vázquez Ico were unable to join, and Reina Valcazar Najera and Genara González Gómez did not attend either gathering, instead being interviewed separately.

Ana Cristina Arguello Gómez and Josefina Cruz Ruiz were asked what they considered to be most significant challenges facing religious minority women in their indigenous communities. The table below displays the seven challenges they identified and their aggregate rankings from most significant problem (1) to the least significant problem (7).[169]

169 The accuracy of these scores is limited by Josefina Cruz Ruiz only ranking four options, as she stated that three of them did not affect her. To account for this, those three challenges (confiscation of land, threats of removing electricity, and denial of government benefit programmes) were attributed a score of seven.

Challenge	Average score
Lack of water services	1
Freedom of religion	2
Fines for not participating in religious majority activities	3
Discrimination and restrictions affecting children's education	4
Confiscation of land	5
Threats of removing electricity	6
Denial of government benefit programmes	7

'Hope for the future' artwork

Elsa Gabriela Vázquez Ico

Elsa Gabriela Vázquez Ico drew a tall tree like those found on her mother's land in Lazaro Cardenas Chili. Her hope for the future is that one day her family will have a house to live in, on the outskirts of San Cristóbal, and a church where they can worship God freely.



Elsa Gabriela Vázquez Ico with her 'Hope for the future' artwork

Josefina Cruz Ruiz

Josefina Cruz Ruiz drew a heart surrounded by flowers. She hopes that one day her entire community will know the love of Jesus. Josefina's water access in Nueva las Tacitas has been cut off [in the past]. She shared her hope that God might give her a well, so that she would no longer have problems with access to the [water] tank, and so that water could be provided to all [Protestant] Christian families who resist participating in Catholic festivals and the Santa Cruz Catholic festival [referred to locally as 'Convivio de Agua'] that they hold on the water tank of their community.



Josefina Cruz Ruiz drew a second drawing of a heart to represent the unity that she felt at the meeting, sharing that she felt very happy. She also drew a faint picture of a dove above the heart, which she said represented God's blessing.

Ana Cristina Arguello Gomez

Ana Cristina Arguello Gomez drew flowers outside a brown house. She said that in the future she would like to have a little house like it, surrounded by trees and flowers.

Consepción Gómez Santiz

Consepción Gómez Santiz's hope for the future is that each family in the church would have their basic amenities restored, and that her village would come to believe that there is a 'living God'. She drew a picture of her church.

Overview

This chapter has explained the challenges identified and experienced by four indigenous and two mestizas women who are religious minorities in five different municipalities of Chiapas State; two of the women have experienced forced displacement from their community. In order of frequency mentioned, the forms of discrimination that have affected the participants on the grounds of their religion, in the past and present, are:

Form of discrimination	**Number of indigenous women and mestizas women from Chiapas who said they were affected** **(out of 6)**
Barriers to unpaid work	5
Denial of basic services	5 (1 denied access to water, electricity and sewerage services, 1 denied access to water and electricity services, 3 denied access to water services alone)
Harassment	5
Pressured or forced participation in religious activities	5
Threats or attacks to property and land	5
Denial of government benefit programmes	4
Barriers to justice	3
Forced displacement	2
Prevented from receiving co-religionist visitors	2
Electricity bill withheld	2
Discrimination and restrictions affecting children's education	2
Arbitrary detention of male relative	1
Barriers to paid work	1
Denial of medical treatment	1
Physical violence	1

Guerrero

This chapter focuses on the experiences of five married indigenous women, aged 42 to 47, who have experienced discrimination because they belong to minority Pentecostal churches in Guerrero State.

- Juana Custodio Bernabe lives in El Mesón Zapote, Ayutla de los Libres Municipality, and attends the same church as Leovarda Jiménez García in Coacoyulichán, Cuautepec Municipality. She speaks Mixtec.
- Leovarda Jiménez García lives in El Mesón Zapote, Ayutla de los Libres Municipality, and attends the same church as Juana Custodio Bernabe in Coacoyulichán, Cuautepec Municipality. She speaks Mixtec.
- Rufina Aburto Victoriano lives in Pueblo Hidalgo, San Luis Acatlán Municipality, and attends an Assemblies of God church led by her husband. She speaks Tlapanec.
- Marta Cándido Espiandolo lives in Pueblo Hidalgo, San Luis Acatlán Municipality, and attends the same church as Rufina Aburto Victoriano. She speaks Tlapanec.
- Rafaela Rodríguez Nicolas lives in El Capulín, Tlacoachistlahuaca Municipality. She speaks a dialect of Mixtec.

The majority religion in all these communities is Roman Catholicism.

This chapter explains the key themes emerging from interviews CSW conducted with these women, including examples they gave of discrimination against male and female relatives.



Marta, Rosa, Juana, Leovarda, Rufina

Themes

Violations of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB)

Pressured or forced participation in religious activities

Three participants from Guerrero State said they are 'always' forced to participate in the religious activities of the religious majority community, and all five explained the pressures their families have faced to do so (see also 'Arbitrary detention' section).

El Mesón Zapote, Ayutla de los Libres Municipality

In 2018, Leovarda Jiménez García's husband told the religious majority community that he did not wish to participate in the *mayordomías,* tasks assigned to community members around the religious festivals, in El Mesón Zapote. In response, the commissariat summoned the residents of the community for a community assembly meeting. Leovarda Jiménez García's husband and other Protestant men from their church were told, 'Grab your stuff,' and ordered to leave El Mesón Zapote because a requirement of staying in the community was that they must be of service during patron saint festivities.[170] However, the families refused to leave. Leovarda Jiménez García's translator explained:

'The [Protestant] Christians decided not to leave because they know that they have not done anything wrong, and they are aware that there is a law that defends and protects them.'

On 23 May 2019, several Protestant Christians from El Mesón Zapote, including the husbands of Leovarda Jiménez García and Juana Custodio Bernabe, were threatened with imprisonment and illegal fines if they did not accept Roman Catholic leadership roles in the community. After intervention from the Guerrero State Office of Religious Affairs, agreements were signed stipulating that the rights of all families in the community should be respected. The agreements also clarified that members of the religious minority families did not have to take up positions that conflicted with their religious beliefs.

However, later in 2019, some of the Protestants reported that the local authorities were not respecting the agreements.

One year later, in November 2020, the local authorities threatened to forcibly expel ten Protestant Christian families from El Mesón Zapote, including those of Leovarda Jiménez García and Juana Custodio Bernabe, after they declined to make a monthly financial contribution of MXN 500 towards the construction of a new Roman Catholic church, with the payments to continue until its completion.



Rafaela Rodríguez Nicolas

El Capulín, Tlacoachistlahuaca Municipality

Rafaela Rodríguez Nicolas and her husband have been pressured to participate in religious majority activities. She reported that her sister-in-law from El Capulín has received threats linked to forced participation in religious majority activities. In 2014, residents of El Capulín threatened to burn down her sister-in-law's home because she did not want her husband to participate in the *mayordomía* of the Roman Catholic church. According to her family, members of the religious majority community planned to carry out the attack and were on the verge of doing so, cans of petrol in hand, but they had been drinking and an unidentified person persuaded them to delay the action until the following day when they were sober and knew what they were doing. They never carried out the proposed attack.

Prevented from receiving co-religionist visitors

El Mesón Zapote, Ayutla de los Libres Municipality

Leovarda Jiménez García highlighted that members of her and Juana Custodio Bernabe's church who live in Coacoyulichán, Cuautepec Municipality, are not permitted to enter El Mesón Zapote to meet with their co-religionists. If they wish to do so, they must sneak in to avoid being arrested and

170 In El Mesón Zapote, all men from the community are expected to participate in the San Isidro Labrador and Immaculate Conception of Mary festivities on 15 May and 8 December respectively each year.

imprisoned by the El Mesón Zapote community police. By contrast, Roman Catholic priests from outside El Mesón Zapote are permitted to visit the community without hindrance.

Harassment

All five participants shared that their families have been harassed by the religious majority community. The harassment frequently took place when the participants were attending church services.

El Capulín, Tlacoachistlahuaca Muncipality

Rafaela Rodríguez Nicolas from El Capulín shared:

'When we go to the church the children throw stones; on one occasion they kicked a man. They talk to us in an ugly way. They don't want us to go to the church. They want us to go with the [Roman] Catholics to parties, to dance, to drink. That's how they want us to live, but when we heard the Word[171] we stopped going to bars and we don't go out to the parties or the dances.'

El Mesón Zapote, Ayutla de los Libres Municipality

Juana Custodio Bernabe and Leovarda Jiménez García relayed how their families are verbally attacked by people from the religious majority community almost every week, during their two hours' walk from El Mesón Zapote to their church in Coacoyulichán, Cuautepec Municipality. They are called *chinqueque*; the translator explained that this is a slang term denoting someone who is prostrate on the floor, or a social parasite, in their indigenous Mixtec language.



Juana and Leovarda

They have also heard from men who work with their husbands that a committee from the religious majority in El Mesón Zapote spies on them during prayer meetings and then speaks ill of them to people in the community.

Pueblo Hidalgo, San Luis Acatlán Municipality

In 2020 an intoxicated young man interrupted a church service led by Juan Paulino Cosme, the husband of Rufina Aburto Victoriano, in Pueblo Hidalgo, and assaulted Marta Cándido Espiandolo's husband, father-in-law and 16-year-old son. According to Rufina Aburto Victoriano, the same man threw water from his roof, which is next to the church, onto church members several times at the beginning of 2021.

Marta Cándido Espiandolo also highlighted the insults an 87-year-old widow from her church has received. When taking a gift of food to the pastors of her Protestant church, a drunken man yelled ***'Judas!'*** several times at her and that she was a ***'traitor to the Catholic church'***.

Related human rights violations

Arbitrary detention of male relative

The husbands of three participants have been imprisoned for not cooperating in the religious activities of the religious majority community.

Pueblo Hidalgo, San Luis Acatlán Municipality

In Pueblo Hidalgo, everyone in the community is required to make a financial contribution of MXN 400 per family towards Roman Catholic festivals, and men, single women and widows are assigned duties for the preparations.

On 22 October 2016 Rufina Aburto Victoriano's husband, Juan Paulino Cosme, was imprisoned for 24 hours because he refused to be a '*mayordomo*' for a Roman Catholic festival. He was fined MXN 200 in order to be released from prison. Rufina explained: ***'When they told me that my husband was detained, I was at home. My husband still has the papers [detailing his crime] – he [has] brought them to the [women's] event. I went to see him in jail; I don't remember any more details.'***

On 21 January 2020 Marta Cándido Espiandolo's husband, Juan Rivera Galeana, was imprisoned for 24 hours and no longer recognised as a member of the community, because he turned down a

171 Christians use 'the Word' as a synonym for the Bible; 'hear the Word' sometimes means becoming a Christian.



Marta Cándido Espiandolo

community role that includes running errands for the Roman Catholic church.[172]

El Capulín, Tlacoachistlahuaca Municipality

Rafaela Rodríguez Nicolas's husband, Agustin Comonfort Vivar, has been imprisoned twice for not participating in the *mayordomía* of the Virgin of Guadalupe and San José patron saint festivals, both associated with the religious majority, in El Capulín. Agustin Comonfort Vivar was imprisoned for 24 hours in 2005, and again before 2015 (but they could not remember the year). Rafaela Rodríguez Nicolas recalled her husband being locked up one night in a nearby community. She recounted some boys seeing him there, removing his clothing, ripping his trousers and hitting him.

Threats to or attacks on property and land

Four participants reported threats to, theft of and/or destruction to their homes and land. This has been detrimental to two participants' access to food and income (see 'Barriers to work' section for incidents in El Mesón Zapote, Ayutla de los Libres Municipality).

Pueblo Hidalgo, San Luis Acatlán Municipality

On 27 September 2015 Octavio Galena Bolaños, the then commissioner of Pueblo Hidalgo, confiscated land belonging to Rufina Aburto Victoriano's family two kilometres away in Pajarito Chiquito, San Luis Acatlán Municipality, and gave it to a Roman Catholic man. The commissioner only paid their family MXN 10,000 for some of the trees they had planted on the land, well below the value of the land itself.

When Rufina Aburto Victoriano's husband was detained on 22 October 2016, the local authorities of Pueblo Hidalgo gave her family eight days to leave their home, or they would be forcibly removed. This issue was resolved following the intervention of the Guerrero State Human Rights Commission (CDHEG) in their case (see 'Denial of basic services' and 'Barriers to justice' sections).

On 24 July 2019 the local authorities of Pueblo Hidalgo instructed workers to pave Marta Cándido Espiandolo's road and partially brick up the entrance to her home. The entrance was obstructed to a height of approximately 1.2 metres high. Marta Cándido Espiandolo's family, including two adult children and her 67-year-old parents-in-law, must climb over the bricked-up section to enter the house. This has caused injuries to her 21-year-old daughter, and it has hindered members of her church from visiting their home, including an 80-year-old woman who used to see them often. Marta Cándido Espiandolo asked, ***'Why do the people do things like this? With my body it is very difficult to get down.'***



Partially bricked-up entrance to Marta Cándido Espiandolo's house

Juan Rivera Galeana, Marta Cándido Espiandolo's husband, presented a request to the local authorities for support to remove the bricks. In response, the commissioner summoned the community for an assembly meeting during which they decided to imprison Juan Rivera Galeana for making this request. Juan Rivera Galeana and his father were arbitrarily detained for 24 hours on 25 July 2019.

Denial of basic services

One participant had their water supply disconnected by the local authorities because of her family's religious beliefs, and two participants

172 Juan Rivera Galeana was also detained with his father for 24 hours in July 2019, for requesting the removal of the bricks after the entrance to their house had been partially bricked up (see 'Threats or attacks to on property and land' section).



Rufina Aburto Victoriano

have had their electricity bills withheld by the local authorities.

Pueblo Hidalgo, San Luis Acatlán Municipality

On 22 October 2016 the local authorities in Pueblo Hidalgo cut off the water supply of Rufina Aburto Victoriano's family (on the same day that her husband, Juan Paulino Cosme, was imprisoned for 24 hours) for not cooperating with the Roman Catholic festival. Their water supply was disconnected for over six weeks, during which they relied on people from her church, including the family of Marta Cándido Espiandolo, bringing water to their house.

In November 2016 Rufina Aburto Victoriano's husband travelled to Ometepec City to the Costa Chica regional office of the CDHEG with other men from their church to request support. In response, officials from the CDHEG travelled to Pueblo Hidalgo on 5 December 2016 and ordered the local authorities to reconnect their water service, which they did the same day.

The local authorities have since tried to cut off their water supply again; however, Rufina Aburto Victoriano's family anticipated this and blocked access to their land to prevent the local authorities from doing so. Rufina Aburto Victoriano recalled hearing people try to enter the property and then leaving angrily.

El Mesón Zapote, Ayutla de los Libres Municipality

In November 2020 the families of Leovarda Jiménez García and Juana Custodio Bernabe were told during an assembly meeting that they were no longer considered part of El Mesón Zapote because they had left the Roman Catholic church. In an attempt to deny them access to the electricity service, the local authorities have withheld their electricity bills when they arrive at the commissariat. To date they have not been able to pay these bills, meaning the supplier could cut off their service at any moment.

Barriers to paid work

Juana Custodio Bernabe and Leovarda Jiménez García's families have lost their sources of food and income due to attacks on and stealing from their property and land.

El Mesón Zapote, Ayutla de los Libres Municipality

In November 2020, the commissioner of El Mesón Zapote encouraged residents to put their cows on land owned by Juana Custodio Bernabe and her family, to eat and trample on their crops. This was a punishment for converting away from the majority religion. After members of the community did so one night, Juana Custodio Bernabe's family lost the eight kilograms of bean seeds they had planted on four hectares of land, the equivalent of ten months' worth of food and income. In February 2021, Juana Custodio Bernabe's neighbour, a member of the majority religion, put cows on the field where her family cultivates corn and sugar cane. The cows ate the corn and destroyed the cane, leaving Juana Custodio Bernabe's family with little to survive on. Whenever Juana Custodio Bernabe's husband has complained about this to the local authorities, he is told that they will not take action to help them because his family 'changed course' in their religion and the cows are owned by members of the majority religion.

Leovarda Jiménez García



Leovarda Jiménez García's source of income has also been targeted and stolen by members of the religious majority. In May 2021, Leovarda Jiménez García's neighbours stole *panela* (a solid form of unrefined whole cane sugar) her family had made, which equated to four days' worth of work.[173]

173 For Leovarda Jiménez García and Juan Custodio Bernabe's families, making *panela* involves crushing sugarcane husks so that sugarcane juice can be extracted. This juice is left to dry and then rolled into balls of *panela*, an unrefined cane sugar. *Panela* is also known as *pilonciollo* in Mexico.
Local Futures, 'Panela - artisan sugar production - Chiapas, Mexico', 10 February 2022 https://vimeo.com/675995821

Leovarda Jiménez García and Juana Custodio Bernabe both assist their husbands in making *panela*. The couples then sell it in local markets; however, people from El Mesón Zapote will no longer purchase it from them because they are Protestant Christians. They are forced to travel to other villages to sell their produce. This involves walking for approximately two hours, carrying around 15kg (33 lbs) of *panela*.

Leovarda Jiménez García also reported that members of the community have used large pipes to redirect a stream that waters the land where they grow beans. As a result, they have lost the crop, which they rely on for food.

Her son has been forced to move to Mexico City to find work to pay for food for the family.

Denial of government benefit programmes

All five participants have been prevented from accessing government benefit programmes they are entitled to.[174]

El Mesón Zapote, Ayutla de los Libres Municipality

On 25 May 2019, the commissioner and commander of El Mesón Zapote threatened Leovarda Jiménez García and Juana Custodio Bernabe that if they did not convert to the majority religion and provide community services to the Roman Catholic church, they would be blocked from accessing government benefit programmes. The programmes include the provision of fertiliser and manure for their crops, their only source of food and income. In November 2020, the commissioner drafted an official document that would prevent the families of Leovarda Jiménez García, Juana Custodio Bernabe and two other Protestant families from receiving several Mexican government benefit programmes.

Throughout 2021, Leovarda Jiménez García and Juana Custodio Bernabe did not receive the fertiliser they are entitled to through the Mexican government's Sowing Life programme because the commissioner refused to pass it on to their families after it arrived at the commissariat.

To date, the commissioner of El Méson Zapote has also blocked Juana Custodio Bernabe's access to financial support through the Mexican government's Benito Juárez Basic Education Welfare Scholarship Programme. Leovarda Jiménez García's son and daughter-in-law have been prevented from receiving the Benito Juárez scholarship, despite not being Protestant Christians themselves, because their children attend Leovarda Jiménez García and her husband's Protestant church on Sundays.


Juana Custodio Bernabe

Juana Custodio Bernabe's 15-year-old daughter has a disability which means that she cannot attend mainstream school; she is entitled to financial support through the Mexican government's Pension Programme for the Welfare of People with Disabilities. The financial support arrives at the commissariat in her daughter's name but the commissioner, Isidoro Carpio, has refused to pass on the money.

The local authorities' interception of financial support for her daughter violates the operating rules of this government programme, which stipulate that 'financial support will be delivered directly – without intermediaries – through the use of a bank card' and 'the public servants involved in the operation of [these programmes] will be encouraged to promote, respect, protect and guarantee the effective exercise of the human rights of the beneficiaries…with adherence to the criteria of equality and non-discrimination.'[175]

In the summer of 2020, Isidoro Carpio sent a Roman Catholic catechist to tell her family that he would sign and approve the document for Juana Custodio Bernabe's daughter's financial support if they returned to Roman Catholicism.

Having refused to do so, Juana Custodio Bernabe lives under constant stress and exhaustion as her daughter's primary caregiver. This reduces her capacity to do other domestic tasks. The lack of financial support has also created a financial and emotional burden for Juana Custodio Bernabe as she is worried both about her daughter and about her ability to properly feed her family.

174 See 'Key findings across all states' chapter for descriptions of the government programmes referenced in this section.
175 Secretaría de Bienestar, 'Programa Pensión para el Bienestar de las Personas con Discapacidad', 11 February 2019 (Spanish) www.gob.mx/bienestar/acciones-y-programas/programa-pension-para-el-bienestar-de-las-personas-con-discapacidad

Pueblo Hidalgo, San Luis Acatlán Municipality

On 22 October 2016 local authorities in Pueblo Hidalgo prevented Rufina Aburto Victoriano from receiving the Mexican government's *Prospera* programme. Her family relied on this programme to buy food. However, after Rufina Aburto Victoriano's husband met with the CEGDH in November 2016, the financial support was redirected so that her family would receive the benefits directly, rather than through the community delegate.

Since September 2019, when her husband was no longer considered a member of the Pueblo Hidalgo community, Marta Cándido Espiandolo's family has been unable to receive fertiliser through the Sowing Life Programme. In February 2020 Marta Cándido Espiandolo's 18-year-old son became eligible to enrol on this programme, but the commissariat refused to give him the required certificate on the grounds that ***'[his] father has problems'***.

El Capulín, Tlacoachistlahuaca Municipality

Rafaela Rodríguez Nicolas stated that in 2015 her fertiliser benefits, presumably from the government's Productive PROAGRO programme, were taken away and given to other residents in El Capulín. However, her access has since been restored and she is now able to receive all the government benefits she is entitled to.

Limited access to healthcare

Only one participant discussed limitations to accessing healthcare services in their area.

El Mesón Zapote, Ayutla de los Libres Municipality

Leovarda Jiménez García highlighted that all adult residents of El Mesón Zapote, regardless of their religious affiliation, must travel to a different municipality to receive medical attention for serious health issues. Nurses and/or doctors sometimes travel to El Mesón Zapote to tend to children; however, this is infrequent.


Rafaela, Juana, Leovarda

Discrimination and restrictions affecting children's education

Three participants raised concerns about the treatment of children from Protestant Christian families in school.

Pueblo Hidalgo, San Luis Acatlán Municipality

Marta Cándido Espiandolo shared that in Pueblo Hidalgo, San Luis Acatlán Municipality, children from Protestant Christian families are forced to participate in the Day of the Dead (*Dia de los Muertos*) festival. Teachers threaten to give them low grades if they do not cooperate. Rufina Aburto Victoriano's son has faced discrimination in school because the teachers know that he is the son of a Pentecostal church leader. For example, during a graduation ceremony in his secondary school, his name was purposefully left until the end, which saddened Rufina Aburto Victoriano.

El Mesón Zapote, San Luis Acatlán Municipality

In 2019 members of the religious majority community in El Mesón Zapote, San Luis Acatlán Municipality, unanimously agreed to ban Protestant children from attending the local school, Escuela Primaria Federal Emiliano Zapata. However, school activities moved online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and Protestant children have not been prevented from participating online thus far. Yet according to Leovarda Jiménez García, children from the religious majority community continue to bully Protestant children; for example, they insult them when they notice the teacher's attention is elsewhere.

Denial of right to burial

Rafaela Rodríguez Nicolas's family was denied the right to bury their grandson in El Capulín, Tlacoachistlahuaca Municipality.

On 15 April 2015 Rafaela Rodríguez Nicolas's 12-year-old grandson, Carlos Manuel Santiago Comonfort, was murdered. According to Rafaela Rodríguez Nicolas's family, a leader in the community, who was intoxicated, sought to attack them in their home. When the leader could not find adults from the family there, he strangled and hung the boy with a hammock.

The local authorities requested ten cases of beer, soda and food as payment to bury Carlos

Manuel Santiago Comonfort in El Capulín. Rafaela Rodríguez Nicolas's family would not comply with this because of their moral objection to buying alcohol, so the local authorities refused to allocate them a place to bury their grandson. Two days later, Rafaela Rodríguez Nicolas's husband, Agustín Comonfort Vivar, travelled to a neighbouring community, Tlacuache, to request permission to bury him there. This was rejected on the grounds that the body should be buried in their own town.

Agustín Comonfort Vivar then visited the Municipal President in Chilpancingo, the capital city of Guerrero, who addressed this issue with the local authorities in El Capulín. Finally, Rafaela Rodríguez Nicolas's family was allotted land in Tlacuache to bury their grandson.

Barriers to justice

The examples in this chapter illustrate that the local authorities of indigenous communities are often complicit in and perpetrators of human rights violations against religious minorities in Guerrero State. All five participants expressed their frustration and/or sadness that local authorities have ignored the complaints of their families and refused to help them because of their religious beliefs.

For example, when Rafaela Rodríguez Nicolas's 12-year-old grandson was murdered in 2015 (see 'Denial of right to burial' section), the local authorities refused to investigate his death, deeming it an accident. No one was held to account for the murder. This experience has informed Rafaela Rodríguez Nicolas's opinion that the local authorities will not assist her family unless they give them beer, which is against their religious convictions:

'Right now, we feel a little sad because we do not know if they will take us into account or if they will help us, because if we ask for their help it is certain that they will refuse. They do not consider us to be people or citizens of the place (that is to say, they don't think we are part of the community). If we ask them to do something, they ask us for beer or other things that they have asked us for; they always ask for alcoholic beverages. In the municipality they listen, they don't do that there, they don't ask for things in return...'

Similar to Rafaela Rodríguez Nicolas's contrast between responses from the local authorities and the municipal authorities, Rufina Aburto Victoriano and Marta Cándido Espiandolo compared the local authorities' indifference with the efficacy of the CDHEG. Rufina Aburto Victoriano's family had their access to water reinstated after her husband visited the Costa Chica regional office of the CDHEG, in Ometepec city. Officials from the CDHEG then travelled to Pueblo Hidalgo, San Luis Acatlán Municipality, on 5 December 2016 and successfully ordered the local authorities to reconnect the service.

Rufina Aburto Victoriano has also been able to receive support from the Mexican government's *Prospera* programme because the CDHEG ordered the financial support to be redirected to the regional office in Ometepec, where her family collects it from, instead of it being delivered to and withheld by the commissariat.

Based on this experience, Rufina Aburto Victoriano and Marta Cándido Espiandolo both believed that they could request the CDHEG's intervention in conflicts relating to the local authorities; however, they both conveyed that their husbands have the ability and responsibility to pursue this, not them. When asked why she did not accompany her husband and Rufina Aburto Victoriano's husband to the CDHEG, Marta Cándido Espiandolo said that men are the 'heads of the family' so they resolve situations like this.

Leovarda Jiménez García also displayed some awareness of human rights mechanisms beyond the local authorities, though she could not identify specific means of accessing justice. Her translator relayed her saying:

'The local authorities do not respond to us. We would have nowhere to go, only with other Christians. Yes, I have heard that some Christians have gone to the human rights [commissions].'



Leovarda Jiménez García

Participatory ranking

It was not possible to conduct the focus group discussion with participatory ranking during the second gathering in Guerrero, due to a lack of time and the participants speaking three different indigenous languages without suitable translators.[176]

Instead, the participants were asked to state what they perceived as the most significant challenge facing religious minority women in their indigenous communities. Marta Cándido Espiandolo, Leovarda and Juana Custodio Bernabe responded that the religious majority community want to ***'kick [them] out'*** of the community. Rafaela Rodríguez Nicolas stated that her grandson was murdered, referred to the lack of justice they have received, and '***they do not let us share our faith***'.

'Hope for the future' artwork

Leovarda Jimenez Garcia

Leovarda Jimenez Garcia embroidered a flower and shared her hope that God would bless the community so that they can live in peace, that they can be tranquil, and there will be no more injustice.



Leovarda Jiménez García with her 'Hope for the future' artwork

Juana Custodio Bernabe

Juana Custodio Bernabe did not create a piece of artwork depicting her hope for the future, but she shared her desire for peace for everyone in the town. In her interview, she said that there had been several acts of retaliation against the Christians within her community, particularly when walking the two hours to her church.

Marta Cándido Espiandolo

Marta Cándido Espiandolo drew a heart to represent Jesus and said that she wants everyone in Pueblo Hidalgo to know Jesus.



Marta Cándido Espiandolo with her 'Hope for the future' artwork

Rufina Aburto Victoriano

Rufina Aburto Victoriano drew a church in Colonia Pajarito Chiquito, which she hopes will be a real building in the future.



Rufina Aburto Victoriano with her 'Hope for the future' artwork

176 Three participants at the second gathering could not speak Spanish and relied on their husbands, who were not adept translators, to communicate with the group.

Overview

This chapter has explained the challenges identified and experienced by five indigenous women who are religious minorities in three different municipalities of Guerrero. In order of frequency mentioned, the forms of discrimination that have affected the participants on the grounds of their religion, in the past and present, are:

Form of discrimination	**Number of indigenous women from Guerrero who said they were affected (out of 5)**
Barriers to justice	5
Denial of government benefit programmes	5
Harassment	5
Pressured or forced participation in religious activities	5
Threats to or attacks on property and land	4
Discrimination and restrictions affecting children's education	3
Arbitrary detention of male relative	3
Barriers to paid work	2
Prevented from receiving co-religionist visitors	2
Electricity bills withheld	2
Denial of basic service	1 (denied access to water services)
Denial of right to burial	1

Hidalgo

This chapter focuses on the experiences of five married indigenous women, aged 27 to 52, who have experienced discrimination because they belong to minority Baptist churches in Hidalgo.

- Maria Francisca Martínez Hernández lives in La Mesa de Limantitla, Huejutla de Reyes Municipality. She is the sister of Angelina Martínez Hernández. She speaks Náhuatl.
- Angelina Martínez Hernández lives in La Mesa de Limantitla, Huejutla de Reyes Municipality. She is the sister of Maria Francisca Martínez Hernández. She speaks Náhuatl.
- Angélica Hernández Baltazar lives in Coamila, Huejutla de Reyes Municipality. She speaks Náhuatl.
- Brígida Hernández Hernández lives in Rancho Nuevo, Huejutla de Reyes Municipality. She speaks Náhuatl.
- Adelina[177] was in born in Temalacaco, Axtla de Terrazas Municipality in San Luis Potosi State. She speaks Náhuatl. When she married in December 2018, she moved in with her husband's family in Cuamontax, Huazalingo Municipality, Hidalgo State. These families were forcibly displaced to Atlaltipa Tecolotitla, Atlapexco Municipality, Hidalgo State in July 2019 and are currently living in rented accommodation in Atlapexco, Atlapexco Municipality, Hidalgo State funded by the donations of a local organisation.

Protestant Christians in Coamila and Rancho Nuevo, neighbouring communities, form one church, which Angélica Hernández Baltazar and Brígida Hernández Hernández both attend.

The majority religion in all these indigenous communities is Roman Catholicism.

This chapter explains the key themes emerging from their interviews and a participatory ranking exercise with participants from La Mesa de Limantitla during the second women's gathering in Hidalgo.



Participants from Hidalgo

177 Adelina requested that her full name not be used.

Themes

Violations of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB)

Pressured or forced participation in religious activities

All five participants highlighted that they and male members of their families have been pressured and sometimes forced to participate in the religious activities of the Roman Catholic religious majority. Brígida Hernández Hernández shared her personal experience of being asked to clean the Roman Catholic church despite not being a member. The rest gave examples of their husbands or fathers-in-law facing pressure to participate.

La Mesa de Limantitla, Huejutla de Reyes Municipality

In 2019 Angelina Martínez Hernández and Maria Francisca Martínez Hernández's husbands, Nemesio Cruz Hernández and Eligio Santiago Hernández, were pressured to act as bell ringers for the Roman Catholic church in La Mesa de Limantitla and threatened with illegal fines if they did not comply. After Nemesio Cruz Hernández refused to accept the position of bell ringer, the local delegate, Raul Francisco, reportedly said ***'Sign, renounce [your faith] or do you want to lose everything?'***

Coamila, Huejutla de Reyes Municipality

Angélica Hernández Baltazar's family were forced to contribute materials and financial support to the construction of a Roman Catholic church in Coamila:

'The local authorities force us to put money towards the construction of the Catholic church and they also ask us for materials. My husband spoke with the [community] delegate and told him that we understood from what the Bible says what is right and what is wrong. The delegate became annoyed and threatened us. He told us that they [the community leaders] were going to throw us out [of the community]…

'We replied to the delegate that we would continue to help with the activities of the school and the delegate threatened to call the neighbours to see what they would say. The neighbours came and answered that they would throw us out and that if we wanted to stay there we had to be Catholics. We said that we were going to renounce the Catholic Church and the angry neighbours said that they were no longer going to give [us] community services…'

Prevented from receiving co-religionist visitors

Four participants said they could 'never' receive visits from non-residents of the same denomination, and described how these visits are obstructed by members of the religious majority.

Coamila and Rancho Nuevo, Huejutla de Reyes Municipality

In Coamila and Rancho Nuevo, visitors from the Baptist denomination no longer visit by car. This is because church leaders have been tied up, beaten and their cars taken by members of the religious majority, who held them hostage, levying illegal fines for the return of the car and the release of the church leaders.

The Fundamental Baptist Church of the Great Commission, Hidalgo



La Mesa de Limantitla, Huejutla de Reyes Municipality

In La Mesa de Limantitla, members of the religious majority community have created rope barriers to the community in order to block visiting pastors from attending Baptist meetings. Angelina Martínez Hernández shared:

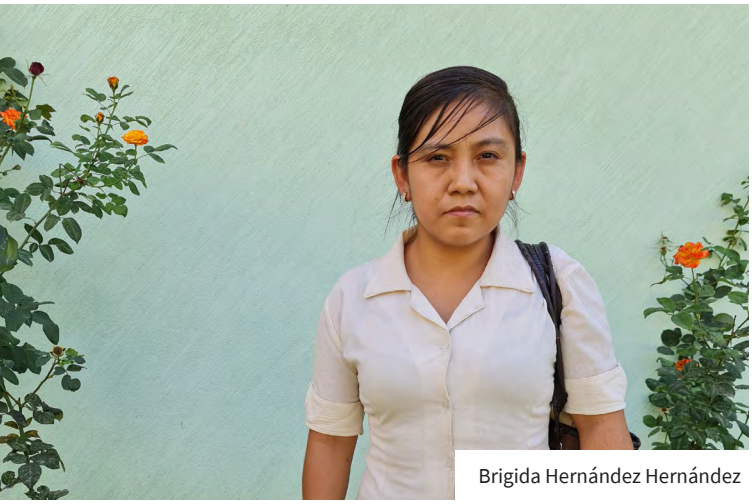
'Every two months we would have a fellowship meeting. People from the Baptist denomination would come to visit us. Neighbours in La Mesa placed cords and ropes in order to block the visitors' cars from passing through, so they were unable to arrive. They threw stones at their cars and at the place of our meeting.'

Harassment

All five participants gave examples of harassment they have experienced from members of the religious majority. Four participants highlighted the resistance they face when trying to attend their churches. One said they 'always' encounter resistance, two 'often' encounter resistance and one 'sometimes' encounters resistance. Two

participants shared that they have experienced people from the religious majority mocking them in public, for example calling them 'brothers' as an insult and saying, 'The [Protestant] Christians swap husbands.'[178] All participants referred specifically to members of the religious majority community throwing stones at them when they attend church services. Brígida Hernández Hernández stated:

'They want us to stop meeting. They continue to get angry. They throw stones at the shingles [of the roof of the church].'



Brigida Hernández Hernández

La Mesa de Limantitla, Huejutla de Reyes Municipality

Angelina Martínez Hernández shared that in La Mesa de Limantitla:

'Since 2007, they do not want to allow us to meet. They asked that we not gather together, that we not make a racket, that we should return to the Catholic Church. The meetings were in our house. They threatened us, they cut off our utilities. They threw stones and put up ropes so that the visitors did not come to my house for the bimonthly fellowship meeting.'

She also reflected on being deliberately ignored by members of the religious majority:

'They stopped visiting and speaking to us. When we walked in the street, they would not turn to look at me, as if I were a little animal.'

Coamila and Rancho Nuevo, Huejutla de Reyes Municipality

In 2019, Angélica Hernández Baltazar witnessed members of the religious majority community putting two signs (*letreros*) outside the Fundamental Baptist Church of the Great Commission to block members from entering. These signs stated that 'brothers' (referring to Protestant Christians) could not enter.

Cuamontax, Huazalingo Municipality

In 2009, Baptists in Cuamontax were issued a written order that forbade them from meeting. Large signs (*mantas*) saying, 'Access to Protestants prohibited' were placed outside the entrance to their church. The Baptists have held church meetings in a different village since 2010. The signs were removed in 2021.

Related human rights violations

Arbitrary detention of male relative

The husband of one participant and the father-in-law of another participant have been imprisoned for not cooperating in the religious activities of the religious majority community.

Coamila, Huejutla de Reyes Municipality

On 3 March 2018, Angélica Hernández Baltazar's husband and five other men were detained for 24 hours after they gathered to celebrate the anniversary of the arrival of Protestantism in Coamila. The men were not given food or water in jail.

Cuamontax, Huazalingo Municipality

On 1 February 2019 Adelina's father-in-law, Gilberto, was arbitrarily detained for 24 hours along with another Protestant man. Their arbitrary detention was an effort by local authorities to force them to participate in traditional Roman Catholic festivals.

Physical violence

One participant has been assaulted and another participant shared that her mother-in-law and sister-in-law were almost attacked. On both occasions, the attacks appear to be religiously motivated.

Cuamontax, Huazalingo Municipality

When Gilberto was imprisoned on 1 February 2019, Adelina's mother-in-law, Agustina, and sister-in-law went to the jail to visit him. The same day, members of the religious majority community began a riot outside the jail. A man in the crowd attempted to hit Agustina and her daughter. Another man from the religious majority blocked him from doing so. The

178 In Latin America the term 'Christian' is often used interchangeably with Protestant or evangelical, and is understood to refer to people who are not Roman Catholics.

second man warned against hitting women because now ***'Women have many rights.'***

Coamila, Huejutla de Reyes Municipality

In December 2017, Angélica Hernández Baltazar attended a Bible study at Fundamental Baptist Church of the Great Commission in Coamila. The Bible study was interrupted by an intoxicated man holding a machete. The man entered the church and kicked over the bench upon which Angélica Hernández Baltazar, who was pregnant at the time, and a 70-year-old woman, were sitting, throwing the two women to the ground.



Angelina Martínez Hernández

La Mesa de Limantitla, Huejutla de Reyes Municipality

Threats of expulsion and losing her home made Angelina Martínez Hernández afraid of travelling alone to her family's cornfields, where she sows seeds and works the land to feed her family (see 'Barriers to paid and unpaid work' section). Not knowing when and how the people of the town were going to fulfil the threat, whether they were going to hurt her or not let her return home, made her feel very stressed and afraid. She explained she does not walk without her husband, because she fears being attacked if someone sees her alone:

'We were very stressed and we were very afraid. We thought that at any minute they would take away the house that we built, at great sacrifice, and our coffee plants and the cedar saplings that we planted so that they would grow into trees and that we would be unable to enjoy any of this. This is why we cried. We only knew that they were not going to be able to take away from us faith in our God; they could take everything else.'

Forced displacement

Harassment and threats by the religious majority community culminated in the forced displacement of the family of one participant.

Cuamontax, Huazalingo Municipality

On 28 July 2019 Adelina was forcibly displaced from Cuamontax to Atlaltipa Tecolotitla, Atlapexco Municipality, with her husband, Uriel, and her parents-in-law, Agustina and Gilberto. The local authorities in Cuamontax informed the family that their expulsion was a consequence of their failure to sign an agreement that prohibits Protestants from entering the village. Their displacement also meant that the family was left with no access to their lands to work them.

After the family was displaced, Adelina gave birth to her daughter. The family has been unable to register the child's birth in Cuamontax because her family are no longer recognised as members of the community. Instead, they registered the birth in Atlapexco Municipality where they now live in rented accommodation. Uriel and Adelina worry that their daughter will grow up with no sense of belonging to the home of her ancestors, and not being able to inherit the lands that rightfully belong to her family. In October 2019, community leaders gave Adelina's husband one week to collect the family's belongings and threatened to distribute them among members of the community if he failed to collect them. However, before they had managed to do so, their belongings were removed and the doors and windows of their home were broken. Barbed wire was placed around the house to make it uninhabitable and to prevent the families from returning.

Adelina and her daughter



In August 2020, the local authorities in Cuamontax harvested crops on the lands belonging to Adelina's father-in-law, without his permission. This was an attempt to confiscate the lands now that he

is displaced.[179] The local authorities have since begun a process of dispossessing the *ejido* (an area of communal land generally used by community members for farming) belonging to Adelina's family. The authorities claim that the lands will be confiscated because of their failure to care for them, ignoring the fact that these families have been denied access to the land since being forcibly displaced. In January 2022, the local authorities threatened to convert the family's home into a community police station.

Threats to or attacks on property and land

All five participants reported threats of violence and/or attacks on their personal property, which is often connected to their family's source of food, income and land rights, and usually affects the whole family.

La Mesa de Limantitla, Huejutla de Reyes Municipality

Since 2007, the local authorities have prevented Angelina Martínez Hernández's family from registering land they purchased in their own name. This is a tactic meant to pressure them to return to Roman Catholicism and to maintain the land as communal property.

Since 2019 Angelina Martínez Hernández's neighbour from the religious majority has stolen materials, including firewood, and harvested crops from her land with impunity, including *nopales* (prickly pear cactus) and squash, and has stolen their chickens, all of which are sources of food for her family. Angelina Martínez Hernández mentioned that in the community, the authorities will only take action in such cases if the victim is a Roman Catholic. Non-Catholics can be targeted with impunity.

Angelina Martínez Hernández creating her 'Hope for the future' artwork



Since 2019, the local authorities have also threatened Angelina Martínez Hernández's family with forced displacement and confiscation of their property:

'I always share my faith with my neighbours. I share the Word with them and they do not listen. The ones who do want to listen to us are threatened. [They threaten us] in the same way when they say that they will take our houses and throw us out of the community. They have told us to renounce our beliefs. They have threatened us.'

Rancho Nuevo, Huejutla de Reyes Municipality

Brígida Hernández Hernández shared that she had been threatened with the confiscation of her house and her husband's land in Rancho Nuevo. While these threats have not been carried out, the local authorities continue to harass her husband when he visits his land (la milpa). Brígida Hernández Hernández asserted, 'We know that it is ours.'

Coamila, Huejutla de Reyes Municipality

Angélica Hernández Baltazar's family have been threatened with the loss of their home and have had land confiscated. Her brother-in-law, Diego Hernández Solorzano, stole their personal property while he was a delegate in Coamila:

'They have stolen clothes from me…they stole pots with plants from me, they stole an animal from me, they also hurt a pig…They have told us they are going to take away our house – in fact they took two plots of land from us.'

In 2018, Diego Hernández Solorzano gave away two plots of land belonging to her husband to Roman Catholic members of the family. She recalled him saying, ***'It was your inheritance, but you now have chosen your path, and you are going to give up everything you have.'***

Denial of basic services

The families of three participants had their water and sewerage services disconnected because they refused to comply with the activities and demands of the religious majority. One of these families also had their electricity supply disconnected. Another participant's family had been prevented from receiving their electricity bills, in an attempt to

179 CSW, 'CSW urges Hidalgo states officials to intervene in religious freedom cases', 17 March 2021 www.csw.org.uk/2021/03/17/press/5200/article.htm

force them to miss payments so that the electricity supplier would cut them off.

La Mesa de Limantitla, Huejutla de Reyes Municipality

Protestant families in La Mesa de Limantitla have been under pressure since January 2019, when many were forced to sign an agreement renouncing their religious beliefs. Eight families signed the agreement; however, Maria Francisca Martínez Hernández, Angelina Martínez Hernández and their respective husbands, Nemesio Cruz Hernández and Eligio Santiago Hernández, refused to do so.

In response, in January 2019 the local authorities removed their access to water, sewerage services, government benefit programmes and the community mill for over a year. On 15 January 2020 they were forced to sign an illegal agreement in which they renounced their right to hold religious services.

Both women underwent significant medical procedures during this time and their recovery took place without access to water services and a functioning bathroom. They were forbidden from visiting one another and from visiting their parents; when they attempted to visit them the townspeople would say '***You went to bathe at your parents' house – you are going to ask them for water.'*** They were even denied support from friends as the village delegate threatened to cut off the basic services of anyone who visited them.

The townspeople prohibited them from accessing the river shore closest to their homes, forcing them to walk uphill one kilometre to bathe and to obtain drinking water for use at home. They both had to rely on their grandchildren, under ten years of age, to help them carry buckets of water from the river to their homes.

In 2019, Angelina Martínez Hernández suffered a uterine prolapse when she attempted to carry a 20-litre jar of water from the river to her home. Due to the risk of the same thing happening again, doctors recommended surgery and on 22 July 2019, she underwent a hysterectomy. Her daughter-in-law, who was pregnant at the time, lived with her for a short time, acting as her carer immediately after the operation. The daughter-in-law, however, was forced to return to her own home because she could not manage without access to water and sewerage services.

The lack of visitors and support following her surgery left Angelina Martínez Hernández feeling isolated and alone. She told CSW in 2019, ***'Nobody has visited me…I feel rejected, like I am worth nothing.'***

In April 2019, after a few months of carrying jugs of water from the river to her house, Maria Francisca Martínez Hernández developed an inguinal hernia and a lump under her right arm, which continued to grow. She remembers fetching water from the river at night with her grandchildren and crying because she could not bear the coldness of the water. Maria Francisca Martínez Hernández recalled the community delegate telling her husband:

'Your wife is dying. Renounce your religion and we will connect your water. You have to renounce [your religion]. Do you want to be without sewerage? … [You] are going to die, and we are not going to let them bury you here. Let the "brothers" bury you. Don't you want your house? Don't you care about your land? You want to be on the streets!'

Maria Francisca Martínez Hernández



Maria Francisca Martínez Hernández was told by doctors in Huejutla de Reyes, the municipal seat of Huejutla de Reyes Municipality, that she was at risk of dying. She underwent surgery on 16 December 2019 to remove the lump under her arm and the inguinal hernia. One week after her operations, her open wound became infected and worsened due to the unsanitary conditions of the river water.

Less than a month after her surgery, on 15 January 2020, the local authorities in La Mesa de Limantitla levied a fine of MXN 57,700 on her family as part of an illegal agreement that would reinstate their access to basic services in return for them stopping their religious services. The local authorities held a meeting with her husband to discuss this agreement and insisted that Maria Francisca Martínez Hernández attend too, despite the fact

that she was physically frail having just undergone surgery. She recalled going to the meeting wearing a bandage and crying due to the pain. She could not sleep that night because of the stress and the soreness of her wound. Maria Francisca Martínez Hernández reflected:

'I ask my husband why do they do this to us? We don't do them any harm…What they did to me still hurts me, with my injury and surrounded by people making fun of us and shouting at us..'

Cuamontax, Huazalingo Municipality

In October 2018 Adelina's father-in-law, Gilberto, expressed a desire to continue contributing to and participating in all non-religious community activities, but asked the local authorities to excuse him from required financial contributions and community work linked to the celebration of Roman Catholic festivals and activities associated with the Day of the Dead, referred to locally as 'Xantolo', in Cuamontax.[180] The local authorities rejected his request and issued him with an illegal fine. Gilberto maintained his position that he would not participate in Roman Catholic and Xantolo-related religious activities. On 8 November 2018 the local authorities cut off the electricity supply to his home. On 25 November 2018 the family's water and sewerage services were disconnected, and the local authorities fenced off the entrance to their house to prevent them from receiving visitors.

Shortly afterwards, in December 2018, Adelina got married and moved into this house with her husband. The basic services were not restored before Adelina, her husband and parents-in-law were forcibly displaced to Atlaltipa Tecolotitla, Atlapexco Municipality, in July 2019.

Rancho Nuevo, Huejutla de Reyes Municipality

While Brígida Hernández Hernández's family has maintained access to basic services, local authorities in Rancho Nuevo sometimes hide the family's electricity bills in the hope that the family will accidentally miss a payment, causing the utility company to disconnect their electricity.

Barriers to paid and unpaid work

All participants from Hidalgo provide for their families through unpaid domestic and care work, such as cooking, cleaning and educating children. Three participants reported being prevented from performing some of these tasks due to restrictions imposed on account of their religious beliefs. Another participant has been prevented from running a cybercafé with her husband, which is income-generating work.

Cuamontax, Huazalingo Municipality

After the electricity supply to their home was disconnected by local authorities on 8 November 2018, Adelina and her husband Uriel were unable to run their cybercafé business. This resulted in the loss of their source of income. On 1 February 2019, the local authorities ordered her husband to remove the internet antennas from their house. He did so after he heard that the community delegate and *ejido* (communal landholding) commissariat had sent people to steal and destroy the antennas.

Adelina's parents-in-law were similarly prevented from earning money because of their religious beliefs. Adelina's mother-in-law, Agustina, sold bananas and papayas grown by her husband, Gilberto. However, people would not buy produce from Agustina because she is a Protestant Christian, so a non-Protestant neighbour sold the fruit on their behalf. In February 2019, the local authorities prohibited Gilberto from sowing crops on his land until his family renounces their religious beliefs.

Rancho Nuevo, Huejutla de Reyes Municipality

Brígida Hernández Hernández has been forbidden from carrying out her *faenas*, required community service, of cleaning the school that her children attend since she became a Protestant Christian in 2015. As a result, she has been removed from the community *faenas* list and is no longer considered part of the community. This means she is unable to receive medical attention at the local health clinic in Rancho Nuevo, and has been denied access to government benefit programmes.[181]



Brígida Hernández Hernández

180 In the Huasteca Region, the local version of the Day of the Dead is referred to as 'Xantolo'. These festivals, which include dances, vigils and altars associated with the deceased, typically begin at the end of October and last for a couple of days.

181 See 'Key findings across all states' chapter for more information on *faenas* tasks.

La Mesa de Limantitla, Huejutla de Reyes Municipality

In January 2019, local authorities in La Mesa de Limantitla blocked the access of Angelina Martínez Hernández and Maria Francisca Martínez Hernández to the community mill, hindering their ability to make food for their families. The women also saw their basic services cut and their access to government benefit programmes removed. Women in the community rely on the mill to grind corn weekly and to make tortillas daily, one of their primary sources of food. Without this access, they are forced to purchase food and use a hand mill, which requires a great deal of strength and energy, leaving them exhausted when it comes time to carry out other tasks for which they are responsible.

Threats to Angelina Martínez Hernández's home have also made her afraid of travelling alone to carry out tasks for which she as a housewife (*ama de casa*) is responsible, such as sowing seed on her families' land. She explained that she does not walk without her husband to her family's cornfields (*la milpa*), where she sows seeds and works the land to feed her family, because she fears being attacked if someone sees her alone. The families of Angelina Martínez Hernández and Maria Francisca Martínez Hernández have been prevented from receiving income generated from an ecotourism centre in La Mesa de Limantitla.[182] Their husbands worked on the roads and electricity for this centre for several years as part of the River Programme, to which men from La Mesa de Limantitla were assigned as part of their *faenas*. The centre generates income that is distributed to members of the community, in return for their work. The religious majority community has agreed not to allocate any of the income to the Protestant Christians.

Denial of government benefit programmes

Local authorities have prevented four participants from accessing government benefit programmes to which they are entitled.[183]

La Mesa de Limantitla, Huejutla de Reyes Municipality

In 2019, the local authorities blocked Angelina Martínez Hernández and Maria Francisca Martínez Hernández's access to the government-run *Prospera* programme and the Strategic Project for Food Security (PESA), implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) across Central America,[184] which provides families like theirs with chickens, cattle, clothes, bricks and other material support. Angelina Martínez Hernández informed CSW in December 2019 that she was simultaneously stripped of her position as the community representative for the PESA programme. This took place at the same time as the families of the two women had their basic services cut off.

Angelina Martínez Hernández



Coamila and Rancho Nuevo, Huejutla de Reyes Municipality

In the communities of Coamila and Rancho Nuevo, Protestant families have been removed from the register of inhabitants, which essentially erases their legal existence. Accordingly, the local authorities removed Brígida Hernández Hernández and Angélica Hernández Baltazar's access to benefits from the *Prospera* programme in 2017. They have also been unable to benefit from the Mexican government's Benito Juárez Basic Education Welfare Scholarship Programme because their children are no longer registered in the state-run school due to the discrimination this would expose them to. Both women are also unable to access the Sowing Life Programme and Angélica Hernández Balthazar is prevented from receiving financial support through the Support Programme for the Wellbeing of Girls and Boys, Children of Working Mothers.

Angélica Hernández Baltazar also highlighted that it is easier for religious minorities to register the births of their children in the municipal seat, Huejutla de Reyes, because the delegate of Coamila is likely to deny them this service. The inability to

182 Facebook, 'Centro Ecoturistico La Mesa de Limantitla' www.facebook.com/Centro-Ecoturistico-La-Mesa-de-Limantitla-886691524731441/
183 See Key findings across all states chapter for descriptions of the government benefit programmes referred to in this section.
184 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 'Programa Especial para la Seguridad Alimentaria (PESA) Centroamérica' (Spanish) www.fao.org/in-action/pesa-centroamerica/resumen-del-proyecto/es/

register a birth in Coamila means that Protestant Christian families face greater difficulty in accessing government benefit programmes.



Angélica Hernández Baltazar holding her son

Brígida Hernández Hernández's husband elaborated, stating that when a baby is born to Protestant Christian families in Coamila or Rancho Nuevo, the local authority delegate refuses to issue a birth certificate, saying they are no longer considered part of the community. Therefore, they must travel to the civil registry in the municipal seat where they are questioned by the person in charge, who presupposes that the delegate of Coamila or Rancho Nuevo had refused to grant the certificate due to misconduct on the part of the family.

They are then turned away because the civil registry insists that they cannot do anything for them without the certificate. Typically, after three or more attempts, the civil registry understands and accepts that they are being denied the birth certificate on account of their religious beliefs. The civil registry will then redirect them to the Municipal Human Rights Commission to issue a birth certificate, so that the civil registry can register their children. What would normally be a simple process becomes a long and exhausting one. It is an obvious form of discrimination that continues to happen to date.

Denial of medical treatment

All five participants from Hidalgo are unable to access the limited healthcare services available in their communities, and reported being denied medical treatment on the grounds of their religion.

La Mesa de Limantitla, Huejutla de Reyes Municipality

There are no medical centres or doctors in La Mesa de Limantitla, so members of the community must travel to the city of Huejutla de Reyes for any major operations, as Maria Francisca Martínez Hernández and Angelina Martínez Hernández did in 2019 (see 'Denied basic services' section). The community in La Mesa de Limantitla relies on visiting medical personnel. Angelina Martínez Hernández reported that when these visits take place, Protestant Christians, including Maria Francisca Martínez Hernández and herself, are not attended to.

Coamila and Rancho Nuevo, Huejutla de Reyes Municipality

There is a health clinic in Rancho Nuevo and Coamila; however, Protestant Christians are denied medical attention because of their religious beliefs. Brígida Hernández Hernández shared that since 2016, Protestant Christians in Rancho Nuevo have been travelling to hospitals in Huejutla de Reyes for treatment because they know the local health clinic will refuse to see them.

The health clinic is responsible for providing pregnant women with folic acid supplements, but Angélica Hernández Baltazar and other Protestant Christian women were refused the right to receive these supplements. As a result, in 2017 and 2018, throughout her pregnancy, Angélica Hernández Baltazar was forced to travel by bus to the city of Huejutla de Reyes, a journey which takes one hour and costs MXN 40-260.

Cuamontax, Huazalingo Municipality

Adelina stated that Protestant Christian families in Cuamontax can receive basic healthcare only if they comply with the demands of the local authorities and contribute to the religious activities of the local Roman Catholic church.



Catholic church, Cuamontax, Huazalingo, Hidalgo

Discrimination and restrictions affecting children's education

Coamila and Rancho Nuevo, Huejutla de Reyes Municipality

Angélica Hernández Baltazar and Brígida Hernández Hernández expressed their concerns about the lack of education for children from religious minority families in Rancho Nuevo and Coamila, and shared how they personally have responded to this.

In 2018 Protestant Christian families in Coamila were warned months before that their children would not be allowed back to pre-school in August 2018. When the teacher, who was hired by the government and from outside the community, tried to defend the children's constitutional right to study, the local authorities ordered the local pre-school in Coamila to close for one week in order to expel her. She was warned not to attempt to re-enter the community.

In the same year, in Rancho Nuevo, the school committee and the teachers told primary aged children whose parents are Protestant Christians, that they were no longer welcome to attend classes there. The Protestant Christians continued to send their children to school, because the school committee and the teachers had no physical way to bar them from attending. However, the teachers then refused to teach their children.

The Fundamental Baptist Church of the Great Commission, Hidalgo



Since 2018, Brígida Hernández Hernández, Angélica Hernández Baltazar and three other women from the Fundamental Baptist Church of the Great Commission have led twice-weekly classes for children aged three to 12 years, in their church, using teaching materials provided by a local missionary. According to Angélica Hernández Baltazar, these children have had their school supplies stolen, are shouted at and have stones thrown at them on their way to attend the classes.

At the time of writing, around 40 pre-school and primary children from religious minority families in Coamila and Rancho Nuevo remain without access to education provided by the state.

Denial of right to burial

Another means of pressuring people from the religious minority in Rancho Nuevo and Coamila, is threatening to deny their right to burial in the local cemetery. One participant was prevented from burying her baby after she suffered a late term miscarriage.

Coamila and Rancho Nuevo, Huejutla de Reyes Municipality

In March 2018, when Angélica Hernández Baltazar's husband and five other Protestant Christian men were arbitrarily detained, she was advised by a man from her church to travel quickly with five other women to the Public Ministry in the city of Huejutla de Reyes, to seek help for the men. While travelling, Angélica Hernández Baltazar, who was around six months pregnant at the time, fell and felt a severe pain in her back. A month later, following intensifying pain in her back, she went to the hospital and discovered that her baby had died in utero. She was barred from burying her baby in the local cemetery because the local authorities of Coamila have removed her and other Protestant Christians from the register of inhabitants:

'We did not bury my baby in Coamila. My husband's brother was the delegate, and it was he himself who threatened us. We had to find another way. They told us that they no longer considered us part of the community. We looked for a cemetery in the municipal seat and we buried him in Huejutla [de Reyes City].'

Brígida Hernández Hernández's religious minority community in Rancho Nuevo faced a similar restriction in 2016. In another instance, on 28 October 2016, one Protestant Christian woman learned at a pre-natal medical appointment that her baby had died. The woman's husband sought permission from the community delegate, Alfredo Zerón Ortiz, to bury the baby in the local cemetery – a right of all members of the community with the support of a local authority. After repeatedly ignoring the Protestant Christian man, the delegate responded that he would not permit this because he was a member of a Protestant Christian church, and the man was not on the list of faeneros. The delegate told the man to 'analyse well where [he was] going' in his religious beliefs.

Barriers to justice

Four participants indicated that they have been unable to access justice following experiences of discrimination and violence. Two participants contended that the local authorities will not address their complaints.

Angelina Martínez Hernández highlighted that the delegate and secretary of La Mesa de Limantitla, Huazalingo Municipality, are responsible for the fine on her family as part of an illegal agreement to reinstate their basic services.[185] Her family has not made an official complaint to the local authorities regarding the thefts from their property because, in Angelina Martínez Hernández's words, ***'They are against us.'***

Similarly, Brígida Hernández Hernández said that her family no longer raises complaints with the local authorities because they know they will not respond:

'[The local authorities] pay attention to the Catholic women; [for the Protestant Christian women] everything happens the other way around.'

In Mexico the state government is primarily responsible for enforcing the law, including ensuring that the local authorities of indigenous communities govern in accordance with human rights guarantees. While the participants did not comment on state government responses to violations of FoRB in their communities, there is evidence of state government officials in Hidalgo dismissing the existence of these violations, or in some cases contributing to them.



Clock tower in Pachuca, Hidalgo

In 2019 José Antonio Vital Pérez, Director of Religious Affairs in the Huasteca region,[186] and Iván Huesca Licona, General Coordinator of Religious Affairs for the Hidalgo state government, gave numerous interviews to local press in which they blamed Protestant Christians for rebuffing an agreement that would obligate them to participate in and contribute financially to Roman Catholic religious activities.[187]

On 16 December 2019 Simón Vargas Aguilar, Government Secretary of Hidalgo state, denied that there were any cases of religious intolerance in the Huasteca region during an interview with a local media outlet, Criterio Hidalgo.[188] In the interview Mr Vargas Aguilar referred specifically to the case of the participants from La Mesa de Limantitla, claiming that their situation is a result of a cultural issue and is not related to their religious beliefs.

To date, Adelina's family has resisted signing an agreement to renounce their religious beliefs, despite coming under direct pressure to do so from José Antonio Vital Pérez and Iván Huesca Licona. In January 2021, her husband filed a complaint with the Hidalgo State Human Rights Commission (CDHEH) calling for his family's property rights to be respected. Despite the formal complaint and various appeals and complaints filed with the regional human rights commission office, municipal authorities, the Office of Religious Affairs at the federal level and the state governor, there has been no follow-up action thus far. In September 2020, Adelina's husband told CSW:[189]

'I have reported it to the Public Prosecutor, but the government has not done anything about it. As I said, the leaders of the region in charge of reviewing the matter claim that it is a case of Uses and Customs. The case was also submitted to the United Nations Human Rights Office, but the government's response did not address the specific questions raised.'

Thus, religious minority communities in Hidalgo state lack protection at a local, state and even federal level.

185 Illegal agreements are often used in Mexico in lieu of appropriate justice mechanisms when the rights of religious minorities are violated. For the most part, these agreements tend to uphold the position of the majority and often invite further restrictions on freedom of religion or belief (FoRB).
186 La Huasteca is a geographical and cultural region which includes parts of the states of Tamaulipas, Veracruz, Puebla, Hidalgo, San Luis Potosí, Querétaro and Guanajuato.
187 Criterio Hidalgo, 'Niega Asuntos Religiosos que haya pleito de fe', 11 July 2019 (Spanish) https://criteriohidalgo.com/noticias/niega-asuntos-religiosos-que-haya-pleito-de-fe
188 Criterio Hidalgo, 'Problemas religiosos, por usos y costumbres: Simón Vargas', 16 December 2019 (Spanish) www.criteriohidalgo.com/regiones/problemas-religiosos-usos-costumbres-simon-vargas
189 FoRB in Full, 'Waiting for action: An interview with a victim of forced displacement in Mexico', 14 September 2020 https://forbinfull.org/2020/09/14/waiting-for-action-an-interview-with-a-victim-of-forced-displacement-in-mexico/

Participatory ranking

The second women's gathering was only attended by María Francisca Martínez Hernández, Angelina Martínez Hernández and their mother, all from La Mesa de Limantitla, Huejutla de Reyes Municipality. During this gathering, they were asked what they considered to be the most significant challenges facing religious minority women in their indigenous communities. The table below displays the seven challenges the three women identified, the objects they chose to represent them, and their aggregate rankings from the most significant problem (1) to the least significant problem (6):

There were only marginal differences in scores between these women, which is probably because they belong to the same family and community, and perhaps because they were influenced by each other's rankings. Nonetheless, it is notable that the greatest challenges they perceived were associated with FoRB. Despite their impoverished socio-economic status, they ranked issues connected to freedom of religion and harassment from the religious majority higher than being unable to receive financial support from the government.

Challenge	Object	Average score
Prevented from receiving co-religionist visitors	Rope	1
Prevented from holding religious services	Bundle of threads	2
Forced financial contributions to religious majority activities	Coin	3 (joint)
Threats	Scissors	3 (joint)
Harassment	Black paint	5
Mocking	Embroidery needles	6 (joint)
Denial of government benefit programmes		6 (joint)



Huejutla de Reyes, Hidalgo

'Hope for the future' artwork

Maria Francisca Martínez Hernández

Maria Francisca Martínez Hernández shared that her greatest desire is for her 29-year-old son to reconcile with his family and with God. Her son abandoned his wife and two children, and people from the religious majority community mock and blame her for his decision to leave.[190] She drew a picture of a man and a guitar to represent '[her] son playing during worship in the church'. ***'I made a picture with my son singing praises because my son is lost, far from God.'***



Maria Francisca's 'Hope for the future' artwork

Angelina Martínez Hernández

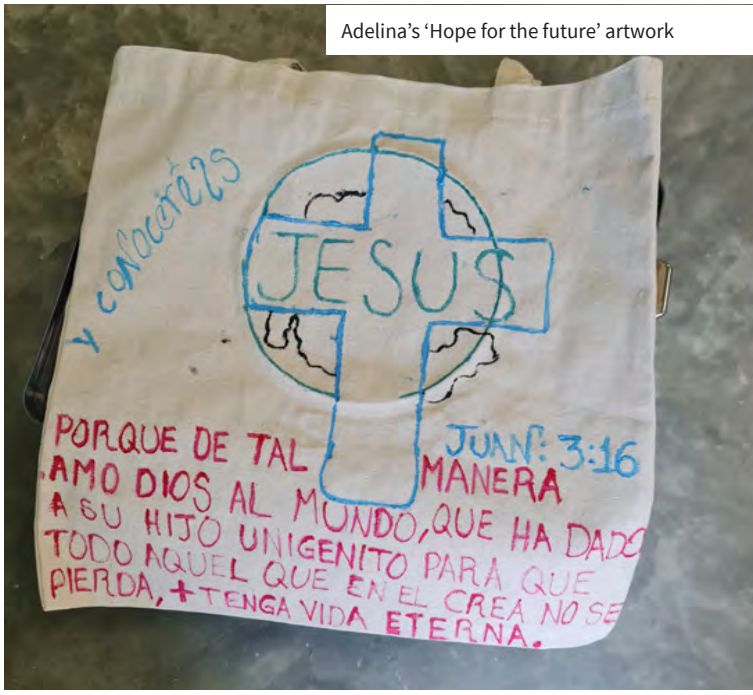
Angelina Martínez Hernández's hope for the future is that there will be peace in the community and God will allow the authorities to reconsider [their decision] so this can take place. Angelina Martínez Hernández requested assistance to write 'God is love' and drew a heart with a circle around it, to represent the world. She would like freedom to share her faith with her relatives and her community.



Angelina's 'Hope for the future' artwork

Adelina

Adelina drew a world with a large cross with the word 'Jesus' and two Bible verses above it: 'And you will know the truth and the truth will set you free', and below she wrote the words of the Bible verse John 3:16. She shared her hope that the government will respond to her family's case, that they might return to the house they were thrown out of, and that they might meet freely as a church in the future.



Adelina's 'Hope for the future' artwork

Angélica Hernández Baltazar

Angélica Hernández Baltazar requested help to draw a world and the hand of God holding it together, with the Bible verse John 3:16.[191] She did not explain her illustration.



Angélica's 'Hope for the future' artwork

Brígida Hernández Hernández

Brígida Hernández Hernández drew a heart that said 'God is love' and then the first part of the Bible verse John 3:16. Although she is shy, Brígida Hernández Hernández shared her hope for 'everyone to hear the Gospel'[192] and know Jesus, and experience his love, just as she has.

190 CSW has been informed that Maria Francisca Martínez Hernández's son passed away in November 2021, and his body was returned to La Mesa de Limantitla on 20 November 2021.
191 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. – John 3:16
192 'The Gospel' denotes the central tenet of Christianity that Jesus Christ, whom Christians believe is the Son of God, died for the sins of humanity and rose from the dead, so that people can be reconciled to God and receive eternal life in heaven. In Mexico, Protestant Christians refer to themselves as 'Christians' and Roman Catholic Christians as 'Catholics'. Many Protestant Christians believe that Catholics in Mexico have not heard 'the Gospel'.

Overview

This chapter has explained the challenges identified and experienced by five indigenous women who are religious minorities in Huejutla de Reyes Municipality and Huazalingo Municipality, Hidalgo State. In order of frequency mentioned, the forms of discrimination that have affected the participants on the grounds of their religion, in the past and present, are:

Form of discrimination	**Number of indigenous women from Hidalgo who said they were affected (out of 5)**
Pressured or forced participation in religious majority activities	5
Threats to or attacks on property and land	5
Harassment	5
Denial of medical treatment	5
Prevented from receiving co-religionist visitors	4
Barriers to justice	4
Denial of government benefit programmes	4
Denial of basic services	3 (2 denied access to water and sewerage services, 1 denied access to water, sewerage and electricity services)

La Mesa de Limantitla case timeline

Protestant families in La Mesa de Limantitla have been under pressure since 2007. The situation grew worse in January 2019, when many Protestant Christian families were forced to sign an agreement renouncing their religious beliefs.

2019

January 2019

On 14 January 2019 Protestant Christian families are forced to sign an illegal agreement renouncing their religious beliefs. Under pressure, eight families sign the agreement. Two couples, Maria Francisca Martínez Hernández and Nemesio Cruz Hernández, and Angelina Martínez Hernández and Eligio Santiago Hernández, refuse to. As a consequence, their access to water, sewerage services, government benefit programmes and the community mill is eliminated.

March 2019

On 19 March 2019 the two families visit the Government Secretary, the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Human Rights Commission in Huejutla de Reyes City to ask that their right to freedom of religion or belief be protected.

May 2019

On 23 May the two families again visit the Government Secretary, the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Human's Rights Commission in Huejutla de Reyes City to ask that their right to freedom of religion or belief be protected.

July 2019

The two families are threatened with forced displacement if they do not apologise to community leaders and agree to participate fully in all community activities, including contributing financially to Roman Catholic festivals and ringing the bells of the Roman Catholic church.

On 22 July 2019 Angelina Martínez Hernández has a hysterectomy operation. She is prevented from receiving visitors and support during her recovery. The local authorities threaten to cut off the basic services of any community members who visit her.

August 2019

On 12 August 2019 the two families again visit the Government Secretary, the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Human's Rights Commission in Huejutla de Reyes City to ask that their right to freedom of religion or belief be protected.

December 2019

On 16 December 2019, Maria Francisca Martínez Hernández undergoes two operations to remove a lump under her arm and an inguinal hernia, which grew due to damage caused by being forced to carry heavy jugs of water from the river to her house, after her water supply was cut off.

2020

January 2020

On 15 January 2020, in order to have their access to water and other essential services reinstated, the two families are forced to sign an illegal agreement in which they renounce their right to hold religious services.

In their desperation, the families visit the Government Secretary, the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Human's Rights Commission in Huejutla de Reyes City, Huejutla de Reyes Municipality to ask that their right to freedom of religion or belief be protected. The local authorities then compel more than 200 members of the community to travel to Huejutla de Reyes and hold a demonstration, protesting against the state authorities' investigation into the complaints.

2020 contd.

January 2020 contd.

A fine of MXN 57,700 is levied against each family as part of the agreement and to cover the transportation costs of the community members travelling to Huejutla de Reyes. The state authorities pay part of the fine to the community.

August-November 2020

During subsequent community meetings, including on 22 August and 7 November 2020, the families, who cannot afford to pay the remainder of the fine, are repeatedly threatened that they face being cut off from essential services again or expelled from the community.

2021

August 2021

On 3 August 2021 community leaders José Marcos Martínez and Julio Alvarado Hernández call a meeting with the two men, Nemesio Cruz Hernández and Eligio Santiago Hernández, during which they threaten to cut off their access to water and sewerage services once again, and instruct them to stop holding religious services in their father-in-law's home.

September 2021

At a community meeting on 6 September 2021, the families are forbidden from speaking. They are threatened with being cut off from essential services or expelled from the community if they continue to hold religious services, and if they do not pay the rest of the illegal fine that was levied as part of the January 2020 illegal agreement. The two families are forced to take out loans in order to pay the remainder of the fine.

October 2021

Tensions come to a head on 4 October when the local authorities are notified that the investigation into the case has not been closed and that a court hearing will be held on 5 October. Once again, the community leaders attempt to mobilise the community to travel to the hearing in order to disrupt it and to pressure the government to shut down the criminal proceedings.

However, on the day of the hearing, events take an unexpected turn. Rather than a violent protest, the local authorities visit the Criminal Court to see if the accusation against them is real. Upon returning to the community they communicate that they are open and prepared to talk with the Criminal Court in order to resolve the case peacefully.

2022

January 2022

The two families now have the opportunity to speak in the community meetings.

Despite this, at the time of writing the two families are still forbidden to hold any religious service or activity within the community.

The community leaders and the two families are waiting for a new date for the hearing.

Jalisco

This chapter focuses on the experiences of six married indigenous women, aged 28 to 62, who have experienced discrimination because they belong to minority Protestant Christian denominations in northern Jalisco.

- Lorenza Garcia Benitez lives in El Chalate, Mezquitic Municipality. She speaks Wixárika.
- Adelia de la Cruz de la Cruz lives in El Chalate, Mezquitic Municipality. She speaks Wixárika.
- Maria Luisa de la Cruz Carrillo was forcibly displaced from El Chalate, Mezquitic Municipality and now lives in Codorniz, a locality attached to El Chalate, Mezquitic Municipality. She speaks Wixárika.
- Valentina Vicente de la Cruz was forcibly displaced from El Chalate, Mezquitic Municipality and now lives in Codorniz, a locality attached to El Chalate, Mezquitic Municipality. She speaks Wixárika.
- Yolanda Estela de la Rosa Cruz was forcibly displaced from Pedernales de Santa Catarina, a neighbourhood of Santa Catarina Cuexcomatitlán, Mezquitic Municipality and now lives in La Cofradía, Huejuquilla el Alto Municipality. She speaks Wixárika.
- Victoria de la Cruz Carrillo lives in San Miguel Huaixtita, Mezquitic Municipality.[193] She speaks Wixárika.

This chapter explains the key themes emerging from interviews CSW conducted with these women, and a participatory ranking exercise with two additional women during the second women's gathering in Jalisco.

Where relevant, it includes examples the women gave of discrimination against religious minority men and women in their communities. This includes the first-hand testimonies of two women from Codorniz, who briefly joined the interviews at the first gathering to share their experiences of violence, as well as a woman from Las Guayabas, Mezquitic Municipality, interviewed by CSW after the gatherings.

Within the Wixárika communities in Mezquitic Municipality, Jalisco, the majority religion is Wixáritari.[194] Because the religious culture in this area is distinct to that of other regions, a brief general overview of the Wixáritari belief system is included here.



Women who attended the second gathering in Jalisco

193 Unlike the other participants, Victoria de la Cruz Carrillo grew up in various towns in Mezquitic Municipality and only visited San Miguel Huaixtita during school holidays because her parents travelled for work. She is more educated and proficient in Spanish than the other participants. This is reflected in her provision of translation for three of them.

194 Official information on religious demographics in Mezquitic Municipality is sparse and, in some respects, reflects the government's problematic approach to religion. For example, the Jalisco state government's webpage says that the majority of people in Mezquitic Municipality practise Roman Catholicism but then gives a figure of only 28.34% for those of that faith. By contrast, it does not mention traditional beliefs at all, stating only that 68.1% follow 'other' beliefs. Around 2% are Protestants (Jehovah's Witnesses are included in this group) and around 0.1% have no beliefs. There is no explanation for the approximately 5% remaining. Gobierno del Estado de Jalisco, Mezquitic www.jalisco.gob.mx/es/jalisco/municipios/mezquitic

The Wixáritari

The participants from Jalisco belong to the Wixáritari.[195] The Wixáritari inhabit the Gran Nayar and the Sierra Madre Occidental regions that encompass parts of Jalisco, Nayarit, Durango, Zacatecas and San Luis Potosí states.[196]

Communities are led by *kawiterutsixi*, a council of wise men, or elders, often composed of shamans. The *kawiterutsixi* assign religious responsibilities to members of the community. They also choose who will sit on the tribal council and who will hold the position of governor, a role which also has a religious aspect.[197]

Family relationships are extremely important to the culture and the social structure is built around them. Rancho settlements are inhabited by extended families, with each nuclear family living in an individual house. Ranchos share a kitchen and the *xiriki*, a shrine dedicated to the family's ancestors. A group of related ranchos comprise a temple district, and temple districts together form a community district which is overseen by the *kawiterutsixi.*[198] The highest mechanism of decision making for the Wixáritari is the assembly, which is convened by the Agrarian Committee.[199]

A house in Codorniz, Mezquitic Municipality, Jalisco



Over the centuries the Wixáritari have maintained their traditional shamanistic belief system, based around the worship of spirits linked to the natural world and ancestors, and have largely rejected outside influence. Some of the most important Wixárika ceremonies are closely related to the agricultural cycle. Wixárika communities believe that performing such ceremonies correctly, along with the observance of festivals, will bring health and good fortune to their communities.

Collective participation in all aspects of the culture is important. This is especially the case when it comes to religion; decisions are often made through consensus based on collective dreams or visions.[200] Disruption of the collective is believed to bring dire consequences. One participant, Victoria de la Cruz Carrillo, said,

'When [the Protestant Christians] express their disagreement and their desire to stop being part of these religious celebrations, the council of elders and the shamans threaten them, saying that this is why people die and get sick and that is what will happen to them if they do not do what they ask them to do.'

One of the religious assignments designated by the *kawiterutsixi* is the role of *xukurikate* (*jicarero*), who holds key responsibilities in religious ceremonies and festivals. It is a five-year position which can be assigned to men or women. If the appointed person refuses the role, they must pay a fine that is given to the person who takes their place as *jicarero*.

In March each year, a group of up to 30 *jicareros* travel with their families to Wirikuta, the semi-desert in the north of San Luis Potosí State, to collect peyote (*hikuri*), a cactus containing psychoactive alkaloids, including mescaline.[201] During the pilgrimage, *jicareros* are believed to transform into peyote and thereby receive the 'gift of seeing'.[202] They then return to their community for a week-long festival, during which members of the community ritually ingest peyote, often accompanied by the consumption of alcohol.[203]

195 Plural of Wixárika; the indigenous community is known externally as the Huichol.
196 Biblioteca de Publicaciones Oficiales del Gobierno de la República, 'Wixárika, un pueblo en comunicación', 6 February 2019 (Spanish) www.gob.mx/publicaciones/es/articulos/wixarika-un-pueblo-en-comunicacion?idiom=es
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197 Schaefer, Stacy, ' (PDF). Archived from the original (PDF) on 2013-12-12.
198 ibid.
199 de la Peña, Guillermo (2011), 'Ethnographies of Indigenous Exclusion in Western Mexico', Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies: Vol. 18 : Iss.1, Article 13 www.repository.law.indiana.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1445&context=ijgls
200 Schaefer, Stacy, ibid.
201 C.M. Stork, S.M. Schreffler, 'Peyote', Encyclopedia of Toxicology (Third Edition), 2014 www.sciencedirect.com/topics/neuroscience/peyote
202 Wixárika Research Center, 'What is Wirikuta?' www.wixarika.org/what-wirikuta
203 ibid.

Themes

Violations of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB)

Pressured or forced participation in religious activities

Four participants reported being pressured or forced to participate in the religio-cultural practices of the religious majority. All four highlighted that men and women are pressured or forced to drink alcohol as part of these celebrations, which usually involve dancing and music. While individuals can refuse to participate, they face further marginalisation and discrimination within their community as a consequence. This is detailed in subsequent sections.



Victoria de la Cruz Carrillo

San Miguel Huaixtita, Mezquitic Municipality

Victoria de la Cruz Carrillo stated that Wixárika families in the municipality are obliged to take the position of '*mayordomo*'. This involves taking care of their community's saint, and that they must assume roles in religious majority celebrations assigned to them by the local authorities and shamans. For example, men are required to participate in hunting rituals which are accompanied by excessive alcohol consumption.

Victoria de la Cruz Carrillo said her family is forced to make financial contributions to six Wixárika religious celebrations each year. During one festival, the local authorities select families who must each provide a cow, the value of which is around MXN 8,000, for consumption during the festival. She stated that her family is also required to host pilgrims who travel to attend the religious festivals. For one festival, Victoria de la Cruz Carrillo said her family made a financial contribution rather than participating in the hunting ritual.

El Chalate, Mezquitic Municipality

On 15 November 2020, during a community assembly meeting, the local authorities of El Chalate threatened to expel Protestant Christians, including the families of Lorenza Garcia Benitez and Adelia de la Cruz de la Cruz. Protestant Christian families were told to ***'leave the rancho'*** because they did not want to participate in communal religious practices. In response, the Protestant Christians explained that they should not be forced to leave, because of their status as 'natives'; and becausealthough they did not want to participate in religious ceremonies, they continued to make financial contributions to the community, to participate in the assemblies and to feed pilgrims who were visiting for religious ceremonies every two months.

Subsequently, the families of Lorenza Garcia Benitez and Adelia de la Cruz de la Cruz moved to the outskirts of El Chalate to avoid pressure from the religious majority community. To date, the local authorities have not acted on their threat of expulsion.



Adelia de la Cruz de la Cruz's 'Hope for the future artwork'

Adelia de la Cruz de la Cruz explained that in the past her husband, a Protestant Christian pastor, was often selected to be a *jicarero.* However, she said, he has not been assigned this duty recently because of their family's repeated refusal to participate. In addition, since the family's move to the outskirts of El Chalate, they are no longer considered for festivals in the same way as who live in the centre

of the rancho. Adelia de la Cruz de la Cruz stated that, in El Chalate, only men are assigned duties for religious festivals. They are required to drink tequila and *tejuino* (a fermented corn drink) as part of these duties. In 2006, the religious minority men were jailed because of their refusal to drink alcohol, but since then the situation has improved and '***now they respect that they do not drink* tejuino**.'

Maria Luisa de la Cruz Carrillo noted that some women have been beaten and verbally abused for refusing to dance or drink alcohol at religious festivals in El Chalate, though she said that men are more commonly subjected to this treatment.

Lorenza Garcia Benitez also shared that she has faced opposition in El Chalate for converting to Protestant Christianity. On one occasion, her uncle became intoxicated and tried to force her to drink alcohol, insisting that she return to her Wixárika roots.

Santa Catarina Cuexcomatitlán, Mezquitic Municipality

In 1999, the local authorities of Santa Catarina Cuexcomatitlán issued the Tuapurie Communal Statute. According to Victoria de la Cruz Carrillo, the document was supposed to deal only with environmental issues like reforestation and endangered deer; however, it extended to provisions that 'all Wixárika must be subject to the Uses and Customs'.

The statute obliges all those living in Wixárika communities to participate in religious and cultural practices, warning that sanctions will be imposed on those who refuse to accept community positions such as *jicarero*; the sanctions would consist of the loss of agrarian rights and, consequently, the need to abandon the community.[204]

According to Victoria de la Cruz Carrillo, a similar statute was adopted in San Andrés Cohamiata in 2018, but was not unanimously well received, including among non-religious minority members.

Yolanda Estela de la Rosa Cruz highlighted that residents of Pedernales de Santa Catarina, a neighbourhood of Santa Catarina Cuexcomatitlán, are forced to drink *tejuino,* and risk being expelled from the community and losing their property if they do not comply.

Prevented from sharing religious beliefs publicly

Three participants shared that pressure from the religious majority means that Protestant Christians cannot publicly share their religious beliefs or gather in their religious communities.



Yolanda Estela de la Rosa Cruz

Pedernales de Santa Catarina, Mezquitic Municipality

Yolanda Estela de la Rosa Cruz explained that in Pedernales de Santa Catarina:

'They do not let them listen [about a different faith]; if they find a Bible they expel the family. Those who want to hear the Word travel by foot for three days, or by car for about four hours. There is no church. There is no Bible study, not even in secret.'

She stated that anyone identified as a Protestant Christian in Pedernales de Santa Catarina is summoned to an assembly meeting in the main town square, where they are questioned. If they do not renounce their religious beliefs, they are expelled from the community.

Pedernales de Santa Catarina was the only town mentioned where Protestant Christians have been hindered from receiving visitors of the same faith. Yolanda Estela de la Rosa Cruz highlighted that*:*

'They visit for just one day, but they can't talk about the faith. No more than one day because they'll fine you 50 pesos a day.'

El Chalate, Mezquitic Municipality

Lorenza Garcia Benitez explained that there are only a few Protestant Christians where she lives in El Chalate because in 1989 most Protestant Christian families moved to Codorniz after being forcibly

204 Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos México www.cndh.org.mx/sites/default/files/doc/Recomendaciones/2004/REC_2004_062.pdf

displaced. To avoid harassment, she practises her religion privately in her home. When she wants to meet with other Protestant Christians, she walks for two hours to Codorniz.

San Miguel Huaixtita, Mezquitic Municipality

Victoria de la Cruz Carrillo also practises her faith privately at home. She believes this is why she has not experienced harassment or resistance from the religious majority community in San Miguel. She declared:

'We have to go out and not be afraid. We have to defend ourselves. I am not ashamed to be a [Protestant] Christian. They have tried to sow fear in us with threats, exclusion and jail, but they cannot change us.'

Harassment

Three participants have been verbally harassed by members of the religious majority since converting away from the majority religion.[205]

El Chalate, Mezquitic Municipality

Lorenza Garcia Benitez shared that people from the religious majority community in El Chalate, Mezquitic Municipality, verbally insult her when they see her pass by.

Adelia de la Cruz de la Cruz explained that people from the religious majority, including her relatives, have been hostile and insulting towards her family since they became Protestant Christians in 2004, repeatedly telling them to leave El Chalate because they do not want Protestant Christians in the community. When her family lived in the centre of El Chalate and gathered with other Protestant Christians there, people from the religious majority would throw stones at the house they met in.

However, for over ten years they have lived in a brush shelter – a temporary dwelling made from branches – on the edge of the town far away from other houses in the community, where there is no streetlamp nearby, so most people do not notice them. This has reduced the harassment they receive.

Maria Luisa de la Cruz Carrillo explained that, before her family was forcibly displaced to Codorniz, her neighbours from the religious majority would insult and swear at them, telling them to leave the community and threatening to throw them off their land. Her family continues to face harassment whenever they return to their land in El Chalate to sow crops, such as corn and amaranth, which they use to feed their family and also sell. As the couple works on the land, people from the religious majority community in El Chalate taunt them by asking why they bother planting crops if they do not participate in religious majority customs:

'Why plant if you have already abandoned the culture that worships corn? If you no longer want to be part of this lifestyle, why do you want to sow? Get out of here and then see what you'll eat!'

Related human rights violations

Arbitrary detention

Two participants have experienced a male relative being arbitrarily detained because of their religious beliefs. Another two participants recounted the arbitrary detention of religious minority men and women known to them.

A pastor who lives on the outskirts of El Chalate



El Chalate, Mezquitic Municipality

Valentina Vicente de la Cruz recalled that in 1988, the leaders of El Chalate tricked her father, two uncles (one of whom is married to Maria Luisa de la Cruz Carrillo) and grandfather into travelling to San Andrés Cohamiata, an important autonomously governed Wixárika ceremonial centre, by telling them that there was a job waiting for them there. Instead, the men were jailed and arbitrarily detained for one day. In 1994, the same four men were arbitrarily detained again for 48 hours and

205 In addition to the examples below, Victoria de la Cruz Carrillo highlighted the abuse received by a Protestant Christian woman living in a neighbouring town she frequently visits called Tecolote, Mezquitic Municipality. When she has met with other Protestant Christians to pray or sing, her relatives have shouted at them and played loud music to distract or annoy them. They insult them by calling them 'hallelujahs' and making derogatory comments like 'You are brothers of the pigs'.

forced to sign an agreement renouncing their rights as members of the community.

Tecolote, Mezquitic Municipality

According to Victoria de la Cruz Carrillo, in September 2020 a husband and wife, both Seventh Day Adventists, were imprisoned for a day in the nearby community of Tecolote because the husband declined the assigned role of *jicarero*. The couple, both over 70 years of age, were given no food or water while they were jailed. The husband has also been denied the right to speak during assembly meetings, because, according to the local authorities, ***'He speaks nonsense.'***

Pedernales de Santa Catarina, Mezquitic Municipality

Yolanda Estela de la Rosa Cruz said that in Pedernales de Santa Catarina, Protestant Christians who share their beliefs with others are imprisoned, tied up, verbally harassed and sometimes beaten by the *tupiles* (traditional police). She recalled that on 17 June 1999, the local authorities imprisoned six Protestant Christians – three men and three women – and a six-month-old baby for 72 hours. The group received no food during their detention.

Forced displacement

The families of three participants have been forcibly displaced from their communities due to harassment and threats by the religious majority community, on account of their differing beliefs.

El Chalate, Mezquitic Municipality

The families of Valentina Vicente de la Cruz and Maria Luisa de la Cruz Carrillo lived in El Chalate before escalating threats finally forced them to flee in 1989 to Codorniz, a locality in El Chalate, Mezquitic Municipality.



Valentina Vicente de la Cruz

Valentina Vicente de la Cruz's parents converted to Protestant Christianity in the 1980s and thereafter faced harassment from members of the religious majority community in El Chalate. On 19 and 20 June 1989 assembly meetings were held in San Andrés Cohamiata, during which the local authorities imposed an illegal fine of MXN 15,000 on her parents.

The families sold all of their livestock but still could only afford to pay MXN 10,000. The local authorities, including the Agrarian Committee, continued to demand that they pay the remaining amount. The harassment finally culminated in her parents leaving El Chalate under duress in 1989, along with Maria Luisa de la Cruz Carrillo's family and other Protestant Christians from El Chalate, and relocating to Codorniz. Their former neighbours destroyed their property to ensure that the families would not return.

Wooden homes in Jalisco



Pedernales de Santa Catarina, Mezquitic Municipality

On 2 August 2002 an assembly meeting was held in Pedernales de Santa Catarina, during which members of the religious majority demanded the expulsion of Protestant Christians from the community. The religious minority was given ten days to leave or, the assembly threatened, they would be thrown out violently and their homes would be burnt down. On 12 August 2002, 13 Protestant Christian families (56 men, women and children), including Yolanda Estela de la Rosa Cruz's, were forced onto a truck and were driven away from Pedernales de Santa Catarina. They were only able to take a change of clothes with them.

Banned from returning to their homes, the displaced families lost access to their lands, and were prevented from harvesting their crops or recovering their livestock. This included cows which

they rely on to produce food and earn an income, and donkeys which they use to travel across the mountainous area they live in.

When a neighbour in Pedernales de Santa Catarina tried to advocate for the Protestant Christians, he was beaten and accused by local authorities of being '…on the side of the hallelujahs'.

Threats to or attacks on property and land

Four participants reported threats to or theft from their property and land; the families of three of these participants were forcibly displaced and experienced barriers to paid work as a result.

Codorniz, Mezquitic Municipality

Valentina Vicente de la Cruz explained that after the Protestant Christians moved to Codorniz in 1989, the local authorities of San Andrés Cohamiata, San Sebastián Teponahuaxtlán and Santa Catarina Cuexcomatitlán – all important ceremonial centres in Mezquitic Municipality – agreed during an assembly meeting not to allow any of the Protestant Christians to present complaints to the authorities; they agreed that they would not be heard, and that the religious majority that continued to follow the traditions were free to do what they wanted to them. Subsequently, in 1994, men from neighbouring communities stole cattle from the family of Valentina Vicente de la Cruz with impunity. This resulted in her family losing all the livestock they owned in Codorniz, including 18 heads of cattle.

El Chalate, Mezquitic Municipality

According to Maria Luisa de la Cruz Carrillo, members of the religious majority in El Chalate warned them to leave the land that they own and cultivate since they no longer live there. They have gone so far as to threaten to physically remove them from their land. Maria Luisa de la Cruz Carrillo stated that both men and women from the religious minority are subject to these threats, whereas people who follow the Wixáritari belief system or Roman Catholicism are not.

Pedernales de Santa Catarina, Mezquitic Municipality

When Yolanda Estela de la Rosa Cruz's family were forcibly displaced from Pedernales de Santa Catarina in 2002, they were prevented from harvesting their crops and they were not allowed to take their livestock with them. The crops and livestock are integral to their income and food supply (see 'Forced displacement' section).

Yolanda Estela de la Rosa Cruz also shared that in August 2018, following the refusal of a Protestant Christian couple to participate in a religious majority festival, local authorities appropriated their home and sold the wife's livestock, which was worth around MXN 40,000 at the time, without her permission. They were also fined MXN 15,000. In response, the couple filed a legal claim.

Yolanda Estela de la Rosa Cruz beading



The local authorities at first expressed their willingness to come to an agreement, but they then pressured the couple to drop the case, threatening them with imprisonment and the permanent loss of their home. The local authorities continue to refuse to compensate the couple for the loss of their livestock.

After sharing this incident, Yolanda Estela de la Rosa Cruz deplored:

'The same situation goes on and on. They do not want any belief other than theirs. They force you to believe what they believe. They force you to practise the customs, even if it is against what you believe, and if you do not do it, they sell your things to pay the fine, whatever thing you own.'

San Miguel Huaixtita, Mezquitic Municipality

Victoria de la Cruz Carrillo inherited land from her mother in San Andrés Cohamiata, where her mother is from. However, her family has obstructed her attempts to claim it because of her conversion away from the majority religion. Although initially her father granted her permission to begin building on the land, her sisters and father later went to the Prosecutor's Office without saying anything to her, to ask them to put a stop to the construction. The Prosecutor's Office reportedly refused to listen to her family's requests due to a lack of evidence.

The building work finished in 2021, but Victoria de la Cruz Carrillo's sisters are harassing her because they say she does not have the right to inherit the land because of her religious beliefs.



Maria Luisa de la Cruz Carrillo

Barriers to paid work

Only one participant discussed how their ability to work and generate an income had been affected by discrimination on the grounds of their religion.

Maria Luisa de la Cruz Carrillo shared that some residents in El Chalate, Mezquitic Municipality refuse to purchase crops from them because they are Protestant Christians.

Denial of basic services

Two participants have been denied access to water services. A third participant does not have electricity or sewerage services because her family moved to the outskirts of the community due to harassment from the religious majority.

El Chalate, Mezquitic Municipality

In 2006, the local authorities of El Chalate ordered Protestant Christian families living in Codorniz to detach the hosepipe that connected their locality to El Chalate's water supply, leaving them without access to water in their homes for a period. Consequently, these families were forced to fetch water from springs several kilometres away and to walk their animals there to water them. While Maria Luisa de la Cruz Carrillo did not comment on how this affected her personally, it is likely that these living conditions made caring for her nine children much more difficult.

In 2007, Protestant Christians from Codorniz travelled to the Communal Agrarian Commissariat in San Andrés Cohamiata to request materials for a new hosepipe which they would connect to a water spring independent of El Chalate. The Communal Agrarian Commissariat granted their request; however, the families living in Codorniz had to install the water hose themselves.

In 2014, Adelia de la Cruz de la Cruz's family moved to the outskirts of El Chalate in order to avoid continued harassment. There is no electricity supply or sewerage services in this location.

Denial of government benefit programmes

Four participants have been prevented in the past from receiving support from government benefit programmes to which they are entitled.[206] One participant remains without this support.

El Chalate, Mezquitic Municipality

In 2018, the local authorities in El Chalate refused Lorenza Garcia Benitez's application for the government *Prospera* programme because they were unhappy that she was travelling to Codorniz to meet with other Protestant Christians. Therefore, she travelled to San Andrés Cohamiata, and the local authorities there processed her paperwork allowing her access to the programme.[207]

Since moving from El Chalate to Codorniz, Protestant Christians have not been considered part of El Chalate, despite Codorniz being a subsidiary of El Chalate. The local authorities in El Chalate still will not grant them access to these programmes, which would offer them scholarships, fertilisers and money to buy food.

Maria Luisa de la Cruz Carrillo's and Valentina Vicente de la Cruz's families lived without access to any government benefit programmes for over 30 years because the local authorities in El Chalate would not allow them to apply because of their

206 See 'Key findings across all states' chapter for descriptions of the government programmes referenced in this section.
207 The Agrarian Committee for El Chalate residents sits in San Andrés Cohamiata, Mezquitic Municipality.

religious beliefs. This is likely to have included benefits from the *PROGRESA, Oportunidades* and *Prospera* programmes (variants of a similar programme targeting women) and the Direct Farm Support Programme (PROCAMPO) (renamed Productive PROAGRO in 2013). In 2019, Protestant Christians in Codorniz were granted access to the Mexican government's Benito Juárez Basic Education Welfare Scholarship Programme, after a government representative visited Codorniz directly to enrol them onto this programme.

Pedernales de Santa Catarina, Mezquitic Municipality

In 2000, the local authorities in Pedernales de Santa Catarina began to mark Yolanda Estela de la Rosa and other Protestant Christians as absent from meetings, even though they were present. This meant that she and the others were unable to access the PROGRESA programme and the PROCAMPO programme. In 2000, Protestant Christians from Pedernales de Santa Catarina regained access to government programmes after a resident was able to redirect their grants to a neighbouring community, Tenzompa, travelling there every two months to check that the financial support was being delivered.

Denial of medical treatment

All six participants have limited access to healthcare, as does everyone else in the communities in which they live. There are no health centres, doctors or nurses in the remote mountainous areas where their communities are located. People living in San Miguel and El Chalate, Mezquitic Municipality, rely on medical treatment from doctors and/or nurses travelling to their community. Those who live in Codorniz travel to El Chalate to receive attention from these visiting professionals. For more urgent or serious medical needs, inhabitants must travel to larger towns with health centres such as San Andrés Cohamiata, Mezquitic Municipality.

Two participants said that they have been denied medical treatment on the grounds of their religion. In Pedernales de Santa Catarina, Yolanda Estela de la Rosa Cruz was denied medical attention from visiting nurses between 2000 and 2002, because the nurses were pressured by the religious majority to do so.

Valentina Vicente de la Cruz said that she is either denied medical treatment or given it begrudgingly when she visits the health centre in El Chalate.

All other participants stated that they are treated well by visiting medics.

Discrimination and restrictions affecting children's education

Codorniz, Mezquitic Municipality

The two participants from Codorniz raised the lack of educational opportunities for children as a significant challenge facing Protestant Christian families in their community.

Since their displacement from El Chalate, the children from Protestant Christian families living in Codorniz have been unable to receive consistent, quality education because there is no government-run school with permanent teachers in Codorniz, and they have been banned from attending classes in El Chalate.

In 2001, the municipal president of Mezquitic granted Codorniz resources from the federal government to construct a school building. Once the building was complete, the community was blocked from submitting an application to the government to send teachers by the Agrarian Committee in San Andrés Cohamiata, on the basis that they did not want Protestant Christians living in the municipality.



Wixáritari women and children in Codorniz, Mezquitic Municipality

To date, these families have relied on the Department of Indigenous Education CONAFE (*Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo)* to send students to Codorniz as short-term teachers. Valentina Vicente de la Cruz stated that the CONAFE student teachers are not dependable and do not seem to take their responsibilities seriously, sometimes instructing the children for one day and not returning for the rest of the week.

Valentina Vicente de la Cruz and Maria Luisa de la Cruz Carrillo estimated that 60 school-age children in Codorniz, including their grandchildren, are seriously behind in their education as a result.

As further detailed in the 'Physical violence' section below, these families in Codorniz face the additional challenge of a neighbour in a neighbouring community, Huizache, Mezquitic

Municipality, harassing parents of children in the school, including mothers when they visit to clean and maintain the building. He has also surrounded the land on which the school sits with a wire fence, in an attempt to drive Protestant Christian families away.

Physical violence

Four participants gave examples of violence against women in their community, including one incident of a woman being tortured because she refused to accept a role in a religious majority activity. One participant said they had previously experienced domestic violence.



Adelia de la Cruz de la Cruz

Three participants expressed their belief that all women, from both the religious majority and minority communities, are at risk because of a high incidence of domestic violence in their communities and because of increased violence around the time of religious majority festivals, when many participants are intoxicated.

Adelia de la Cruz de la Cruz said that she worries about her female neighbours, whom she hears crying during violent fights with their male partners. She is also sheltering a woman and her three children because this woman was physically abused by her husband, who later abandoned her. Another participant said that she used to be abused by her partner before they converted to Protestantism and stopped drinking alcohol.

Abuse has significantly affected the family of one participant,[208] whose 15-year-old daughter was raped by an adult relative and became pregnant. The participant and her husband considered asking the perpetrator, who is not a Protestant Christian, to look after their daughter and the baby, but members of their church dissuaded them, explaining that it would cause further harm to their daughter. The girl suffered serious complications while giving birth, including a haemorrhage, and was sent to a hospital in Zacatecas State, which saved her life.

To date, the participant and her husband have raised the child as their own and have not reported the rape to the authorities, because the husband 'thought that if he sued, [the authorities] would contradict him,' suggesting that he was pessimistic that they would be treated fairly. The experience brought great pain to the family.

While it is unclear if the abuse was religiously motivated, one other participant expressed concern that not reporting the crime, especially as 'the whole town knows' what happened, could cause people to believe that they can abuse religious minority women and girls without consequence.

Las Guayabas, Mezquitic Municipality

On 30 September 2003 Fidelia Gonzáles Carrillo, a Protestant Christian friend of Valentina Vicente de la Cruz, was tortured by members of the religious majority community because she refused to accept the role of the *jicarera*. Her parents were *jicareros* so she was expected to become one.

Fidelia Gonzáles Carrillo, who was in the late stages of pregnancy, was left alone after her husband was summoned to a meeting with the local authorities. While she was alone she was taken by force to the *tukipa*, the ceremonial centre, in Las Guayabas. She was hung by her hands in front of the members of the community, including the *kawiterutsixi*, the local authorities, the honorary commissioner, and the women and children.

Fidelia Gonzáles Carrillo was then whipped by her maternal uncle. Valentina Vicente de la Cruz recalled seeing the injuries on her back and the marks from where her hands had been tied; they looked bruised and swollen. She believes that Fidelia Gonzáles Carrillo was punished publicly as an example of what people who refused to participate in the religious majority activities would suffer.

208 Because this case involves a minor, the participant has been anonymised.

Codorniz, Mezquitic Municipality

When Protestant Christian families finished constructing a school for their children in 2001, Petronilo Benítez de la Cruz, whose son is one of the CONAFE teachers in Codorniz, built himself a room adjoining one of the classrooms. He has lived there ever since.

Since 2007 Petronilo Benítez de la Cruz, originally from Huizache, a community located next to Codorniz, has harassed and been violent towards Protestant Christian women and men in Codorniz. He wants them to leave the area as he does not recognise their identity as Wixárika.

According to Valentina Vicente de la Cruz, he has assaulted three women and one man in Codorniz. She invited Petra Rosales Jimenez and Rosalía de la Cruz Muñoz to share their experience of this during her interview.

According to the two women, in 2017 Petronilo Benítez de la Cruz assaulted Petra Rosales Jimenez and Rosalía de la Cruz Muñoz when they were at the school with several other women to clean it, as mothers of the students are expected to. Petronilo Benítez de la Cruz ordered them to clean his house instead and to leave Codorniz.

He attacked Rosalía de la Cruz Muñoz, kicking her leg so hard that she could not walk for several days. Rosalía de la Cruz Muñoz said: ***'[Petronilo Benítez de la Cruz] grabbed me very hard by the neck with both hands and he wanted to hit and hurt me with a machete,'*** but she managed to throw him off and run away.

These women explained that the children and their mothers in Codorniz are now afraid that they will be attacked by Petronilo Benítez de la Cruz when they attend school. Mothers also fear the problems that might arise if Petronilo Benítez de la Cruz assaults their children when they are older and stronger, and they attempt to defend themselves.

Houses in Codorniz, Mezquitic Municipality, Jalisco



Pedernales de Santa Catarina, Mezquitic Municipality

Yolanda Estela de la Rosa Cruz reported that a 12-year-old Protestant Christian girl was raped by a young male *tupile* (traditional police) in 2002, around the time when the first Protestant Christian families were expelled from Pedernales de Santa Catarina (see 'Forced displacement' section).[209] Yolanda Estela de la Rosa Cruz stated that three *tupiles* tricked the child into going to the jail and on the way, one of them sexually assaulted her. A complaint was made with the authorities and, in the end, the rapist served one year in prison while the other two men were released from prison after one month.

Barriers to justice

Three participants indicated that they are unable to receive justice when they or members of their community face discrimination.[210]

Two participants from El Chalate explained that they do not bring their complaints to the local authorities because they do not expect them to pay attention to them. Maria Luisa de la Cruz Carrillo stated that the local authorities ignore religious minorities, and on previous occasions have responded that Protestant Christians must endure their suffering because the Bible teaches them to 'turn the other cheek'. Adelia de la Cruz de la Cruz said that the local authorities do not care about Protestant Christians, and specifically mentioned that more generally, women do not report domestic violence in El Chalate because of a culture of impunity around such crimes.

Most of the cases in this chapter indicate that the local authorities are often perpetrators of or are implicated in human rights violations against women and men belonging to religious minority communities in Mezquitic Municipality. Yolanda Estela de la Rosa Cruz highlighted that some of the local authorities in Pedernales de Santa Catarina were the ones who set up and perpetrated the rape of a Protestant Christian girl in 2002 (see 'Physical violence' section).

Yolanda Estela de la Rosa Cruz also deplored what she saw as the light punishment received by the perpetrators, who were all imprisoned after

209 According to CSW's local contacts there were three displacements. The first took place in 2002, the second in 2005 and the third in 2017.
210 This number is limited by not all participants discussing this topic during their interview.

members of her community reported the incident to the municipal authorities of Mezquitic Municipality and Huejuquilla, El Alto Municipality, where they had been relocated following their expulsion. The rapist was released after one year, and the other two men involved in the crime were released on bail after one month.

However, other cases highlight that the attitudes and responses of local authorities in Mezquitic Municipality are not uniform. For example, Victoria de la Cruz Carrillo shared an example of a community delegate whom she knows personally telling her that he would not be persuaded by her family's accusations against her, and he told her that he did not want to get involved in her father and sisters' attempts to prevent her from inheriting land from her mother (see 'Threats to or attacks on property and land' section).

Two participants also indicated that the ability of people from the religious minority community to seek justice is hindered by their own lack of understanding of their legal rights and how to advocate for themselves. When reflecting on the forced displacement of Protestant Christians from Pedernales de Santa Catarina, Yolanda Estela de la Rosa Cruz reflected: ***'At that time, we [Protestant] Christians were ignorant of the laws and rights, and we did not continue [to seek justice] due to lack of direction.'***

However, they were able to file a complaint with the National Human Rights Commission which issued Recommendation 062/2004 on the case on 31 August 2004, stating: 'The traditional Huichols, when applying their Communal Statute, sanctioned the evangelical minority, resulting in them having had to leave the community, without the municipal authority having adopted preventive actions even when it was aware of the incidents, being its obligation, by provision of law, to hold the function of providing public security to the population, but on the contrary, with the attitude that it adopted, it can be affirmed that it was even permissive towards said behaviours.'[211]

Victoria de la Cruz Carrillo has offered the religious minority community in El Chalate guidance in how to respond to the local authorities and the evidence they should gather, in case they need to file a legal complaint or to submit a case to the State Human Rights Commission regarding threats of forced displacement.

One case in the state of Jalisco reached Mexico's National Supreme Court of Justice (SCJN). A group of Jehovah's Witnesses, who belong to same indigenous group mentioned in this chapter, were expelled from their homes in Tuxpan de Bolaños, Bolaños Municipality, Jalisco, on 4 December 2017 because they refused to participate in certain community activities due to their religious beliefs. Several Protestant Christians were also expelled from the community.[212]

In July 2020 the SCJN granted reintegration and protection to the Jehovah's Witnesses who were expelled from their homes in the state of Jalisco on account of their religious beliefs.[213]

The group of Jehovah's Witnesses had appealed to the SCJN in response to their expulsion, and a ruling was delivered in their favour by the Second Chamber of the SCJN. This ruling is the first to provide protections for indigenous communities whose rights have been violated by village authorities through an abuse of Mexico's Law of Uses and Customs.

Participatory ranking

The second gathering in Jalisco was attended by ten women. While there was not enough time to interview more than six of these women (four of whom had attended the first gathering), eight women gathered for the participatory ranking exercise. Due to time constraints, the five oldest women were invited to share what they considered to be the most significant challenges facing religious minority women in their indigenous communities, and the youngest three women then individually ranked the problems in order of severity. The table below displays the five challenges identified by these women, the objects they chose to represent them, and their aggregate rankings from the most significant problem (1) to the least significant problem (5), based on rankings of three participants.

There was little variation in scores between the problems because one participant placed all the objects on top of each other, saying: ***'Everything is important, and everything is huge.'***

The only issue raised during the ranking exercise that was not also discussed during the interviews regarded art. A woman from Santa Catarina Cuexcomatitlán, who was not interviewed, highlighted that people from the religious majority community criticise religious minority women when they make crafts that include representations of

211 National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) (Spanish) www.cndh.org.mx/sites/default/files/doc/Recomendaciones/2004/REC_2004_062.pdf
212 CSW, 'Mexico: Expulsion of Multiple Religious Minorities', 6 December 2017 www.csw.org.uk/2017/12/06/press/3795/article.htm
213 CSW, 'Supreme Court rules in favour of displaced indigenous minorities', 14 July 2020 www.csw.org.uk/2020/07/14/press/4734/article.htm

deer and other figures associated with Wixáritari religio-cultural practices. She finds this hurtful. She stated that the creation of art is not a matter of religious belief, and all women should be free to create art.

Challenge	Object	Average score
Denial of medical treatment	Medicine bag	1 (joint)
Rejection by family/community	Box of coloured pencils	1 (joint)
Hurtful comments regarding artistic creation	Woven bracelet	3
Harassment	Pencil sharpeners	4
Forced participation in religious activities	Scissors	5

'Hope for the future' artwork

The participants did not have time to do the art at the first gathering. At the second gathering some of the women made jewellery and drew pictures, but due to time constraints it was not possible to record discussions regarding their hopes for the future.

Overview

This chapter has explained the challenges identified and experienced by six indigenous women who are religious minorities from Wixárika communities in northern Jalisco – three of whom have been forcibly displaced from their community of origin. In order of frequency mentioned, the forms of discrimination that have affected the participants on the grounds of their religion, in the past and present, are:

Form of discrimination	Number of indigenous women from Jalisco who said they were affected (out of 6)
Pressured or forced participation in religious activities	4
Threats to or attacks on property and land	4
Denial of government benefit programmes	4
Forced displacement	3
Barriers to justice	3
Prevented from sharing religious beliefs publicly	3
Harassment	3
Denial of basic services	2 (2 denied access to water services, 1 does not have electricity or sewage services due to remote location)
Denial of medical treatment	2
Discrimination and restrictions affecting children's education	2
Arbitrary detention of male relative	2
Barriers to paid work	1
Prevented from receiving co-religionist visitors	1

Oaxaca

This chapter focuses on the experiences of five indigenous women, aged 19 to 45, who have experienced discrimination because they belong to minority Pentecostal churches in Oaxaca. Two of them are single, two are married, and one is separated from her husband, who now lives in the United States.

- Francisca Pérez Velazco lives in San Juan Tepanzacoalco, San Pedro Yaneri Municipality. She speaks Zapotec.
- Gudelia Maldonado Velazco lives in San Juan Tepanzacoalco, San Pedro Yaneri Municipality. She speaks Zapotec.
- Mabél Ramos Yesca is an indigenous missionary who lives in Santa María Yaviche, which was once part of Tanetze de Zaragoza Municipality but now considers itself independent. She speaks Zapotec. She frequently visits Protestant Christians in San Juan Tepanzacoalco.
- Gudelia Lucas Pérez lives in Oaxaca City, the capital of Oaxaca, after being forcibly displaced from San José Quianitas, Santa María Quiegolani Municipality, in August 2018. She speaks Zapotec. She is the sister of Patricia Lucas Pérez.
- Patricia Lucas Pérez lives in Oaxaca City, the capital of Oaxaca, after being forcibly displaced from San José Quianitas, Santa María Quiegolani Municipality, in August 2018. She speaks Zapotec. She is the sister of Gudelia Lucas Pérez.

The majority religion in these indigenous communities is Roman Catholicism.

This chapter explains the key themes emerging from their interviews and a participatory ranking exercise four of them completed during the second women's gathering in Oaxaca.



Patricia Lucas Pérez during the participatory ranking exercise

Themes

Violations of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB)

Pressured or forced participation in religious activities

The two participants from San Juan Tepanzacoalco, San Pedro Yaneri Municipality, Francisca Pérez Velazco and Gudelia Maldonado Velazco, are forced to participate in religious majority activities. Another two participants were forcibly displaced from San José Quianitas, Santa María Quiegolani Municipality, after their father refused to participate in religious majority activities (see 'Arbitrary detention of male relative and forced displacement' section).



Gudelia Maldonado Velazco

San Juan Tepanzacoalco, San Pedro Yaneri Municipality

Since 2017, the local authorities in San Juan Tepanzacoalco have permitted Protestant Christians to hold religious meetings and receive visitors from their denomination, as long as they continue to perform their assigned duties and participate in Roman Catholic activities. According to Francisca Pérez Velazco, each year Protestant Christians must contribute MXN 500 towards Catholic festivals on 24 June and 8 December. They are also required to provide firewood and tortillas around every two months for Roman Catholic festivals. In addition, women in San Juan Tepanzacoalco are required to clean the Roman Catholic church once a year, by for example, dusting, sweeping, mopping and washing vases. However, they must perform additional tasks if women from the religious majority do not complete theirs, one participant explained,

'Sometimes there are [Roman] Catholic women who make an excuse and don't do it when it's their turn; that's why the [Protestant] Christians have to go twice. But the [Protestant] Christian women agreed to do everything that the [Roman] Catholics ask for so as not to have problems with the [Roman] Catholics.'

Gudelia Maldonado Velazco remarked:

'One does not choose to participate; you always have to accept the assignment. The men and the women carry out the assignments. All the single mothers have to clean the Catholic church.'

San José Quianitas, Santa María Quiegolani Municipality

The family of Gudelia and Patricia Lucas Pérez was forcibly displaced from San José Quianitas, Santa María Quiegolani Municipality, in 2017 and 2018. Initially, their father was displaced in December 2017 for refusing to participate (see 'Forced displacement' section). Their mother waited eight months for the school year to finish and then took their seven children to be with her husband. Gudelia Lucas Pérez was 19 at the time and Patricia Lucas Pérez was 15.

Prevented from receiving co-religionist visitors

Three participants reported that the local authorities have prohibited non-residents from their denomination from visiting their communities. Another participant, Mabél Ramos Yesca, received threats from the religious majority community in San Juan Tepanzacoalco, San Pedro Yaneri Municipality, shortly after she began visiting the community in her capacity as a Protestant Christian missionary.

San José Quianitas, Santa María Quiegolani Municipality

According to Patricia Pérez Lucas, non-resident Protestant Christians used to be allowed to visit San José Quianitas, but in 2017 the local authorities put a stop to this.

San Juan Tepanzacoalco, San Pedro Yaneri Municipality

In San Juan Tepanzacoalco, a local act established prior to 2014 prevents non-Roman Catholic non-residents from visiting the community. The local authorities fear that these visits might cause division within the community.

According to Francisca Pérez Velazco, the illegal agreement that bans Protestant Christians from visiting the community claims ***'We do not want another church or denomination, we already have our customs and culture.'*** The agreement also prohibits religious minorities from sharing their religious beliefs publicly; this included both door-to-door preaching and holding formal religious services.

In 2014 Mabél Ramos Yesca, a Zapotec indigenous missionary, started visiting San Juan Tepanzacoalco to support Gudelia Maldonado Velazco's husband in leading Bible studies in his house. Three months later, when the local authorities discovered that they had been holding Bible studies, the whole community was summoned to an assembly meeting. They threatened to burn down the home of the Protestant Christian resident and to expel him from the community if he continued to host Mabél Ramos Yesca. Members of the religious majority made death threats and they agreed to ban Mabél Ramos Yesca from visiting the community again.



Mabél Ramos Yesca during the participatory ranking exercise

Nonetheless, Mabél Ramos Yesca continued to visit Protestant Christian residents regularly and was not prevented from doing so.

In 2018, the local authorities warned Mabél Ramos Yesca that they would report her to the municipal seat in Ixtlán de Juárez if she continued preaching to members of the religious majority. She recalled them warning her: ***'The people here are bad. If you go out at night, we will not take responsibility for what could happen to you.'***

To date, Mabél Ramos Yesca has been able to visit and meet with Protestant Christians in San Juan Tepanzacoalco because they comply with the demands of the religious majority, and she does not preach publicly.

Prevented from sharing religious beliefs publicly

Four participants said they are not allowed to share their religious beliefs publicly because they do not align with those of the religious majority.

San Juan Tepanzacoalco, San Pedro Yaneri Municipality

According to Mabél Ramos Yesca, the local authorities currently in post have been more flexible and permitted Pentecostal Christians from San Juan Tepanzacoalco to gather informally in their homes since 2019, because the Pentecostal Christians cooperate financially and comply with all other demands made by the religious majority community. However, under the terms of the illegal agreement, they do not practise or share their faith publicly (see previous section). Gudelia Maldonado Velazco stated that she is able to share her religious beliefs but ***'only if I want to share my faith in my house, but one cannot in a public place.'***

Similarly, Mabél Ramos Yesca does not preach in public when she visits the participants from San Tepanzaculacos: ***'If someone is going to preach from house to house, they put him in jail. I have not gone to preach from house to house.'***

San José Quianitas, Santa María Quiegolani Municipality

When asked how often she could share her religious beliefs in San José Quianitas, Patricia Lucas Pérez answered:

'Speaking personally one on one, yes, but they do not permit an evangelistic event in a public place. If anyone tries to, they try to run them off or they would throw them out or throw stones at them, or they switch off the electricity to frighten them so that they leave.'

Mabél Ramos Yesca also highlighted that the extent to which religious minorities are granted freedom depends on the individuals in post, and not all local authorities have the same attitudes. When asked whether religious minorities can freely share their beliefs, she said:

'It also depends on the commissariat and the delegate that year, whether they are flexible or inflexible.'

Harassment

In addition to the threats against Mabél Ramos Yesca attempting to stop her visiting San Juan Tepanzacoalco, two participants reported their experiences of harassment.

San Juan Tepanzacoalco, San Pedro Yaneri Municipality

Gudelia Maldonado Velazco's husband converted to Protestantism in 2011. Following his conversion, he was mocked and harassed by members of the religious majority in San Juan Tepanzacoalco. The local authorities pressured him to stop meeting with Protestant Christians outside the community. This caused Gudelia Maldonado Velazco to fear for their safety:

'They ridiculed my husband. They called him to the village agency around three times and issued a decree each time. I was scared. I wanted to know what was going to happen, and I told him it would be better to renounce the faith. So, the local authorities asked him to stop going to visit [Protestant] Christians [outside the community] and not to meet, because the [Protestant] Christians divide the village, but now they don't say anything to them.

'I thought that they were going to burn the house down or drive us from the village or kill us. I could not think, and I did not know what to do. We were the only [Protestant] Christians. They would not allow anyone else to meet with us. I thought a lot and I asked my husband: Why did you involve yourself in all of this? What will happen to us?'



Francisca Pérez Velazco

Francisca Pérez Velazco explained that although Protestant Christians in San Juan Tepanzacoalco have not been threatened since 2019, after they agreed to contribute to tasks associated with the Roman Catholic church, they continue to be mocked in public. For example, members of the religious majority have said to one Protestant Christian resident: ***'Here comes the hallelujah, the pastor,'*** and they use the Zapotec phrase '*shvan rushi*' which means 'there goes the evil spirit.'

Related human rights violations

Arbitrary detention of male relative and forced displacement

San José Quianitas, Santa María Quiegolani Municipality

The family of Gudelia and Patricia Lucas Pérez was forcibly displaced from San José Quianitas over an eight-month period, beginning with the expulsion of their father in December 2017 and ending with the expulsion of the two sisters and their mother in August 2018, when they were aged 19 and 15 respectively. Their father was forcibly displaced from the community after he refused to participate in religious majority activities and sign an agreement renouncing their Protestant Christian beliefs.

In December 2017, leaders from the religious majority appointed their father to be a steward for the Roman Catholic church because he had recently converted to Protestant Christianity. '***They chose him because he had changed faith,'*** said Patricia Lucas Pérez. Gudelia Lucas Pérez explained:

'My father accepted some assignments but he did not want to participate in the religious positions [mayordomías], which are tasks for the Catholic festivals. The village chooses who is to celebrate and carry out the assignment, so they must participate in the Catholic Mass [and] in various things related to the celebration. We were the only [Protestant] Christians in the village, my father's family and my uncle. They wanted my father to participate in the Masses and celebrations for one year, but he only went to open the door [of the Roman Catholic church] but he did not want to participate...

'The village wanted him to fulfil [his responsibilities] for the patron saint festivals. My father did not want to and the people from the village rose up against him until they reached the

point of expelling him on 10 December, four years ago in 2017. They expelled him in an assembly where all the people were [present].'

During this assembly, the local authorities ordered members of the community to force the women's father and uncle who had refused to act as '*topil',* an agent who runs errands for the Roman Catholic church, onto a truck and to drop them off five hours away from the village.


Gudelia Lucas Pérez

Their father spent a week in Oaxaca City. During this time their mother 'was left in charge'. She was pressured by the local authorities to sign a document renouncing their family's faith, but she refused to do so. Gudelia Lucas Pérez recalled:

'[The local authorities] called my mother to sign the act they had drawn up, to force us to participate in the town's patron saint festivities. My mother did not sign the act and said: "No, I still have a husband and he is at the head [of the household]; if he did not sign, I do not want to." And she added "If I chose you to be an agent and to hold the position, it was for you to do justice and not for you to force us to do something we do not want; you are doing an injustice." My mother went but I am a little more fearful.'

When their father returned to San José Quianitas, a week after his expulsion, the local authorities similarly pressured him to sign an illegal agreement renouncing the family's faith. When he also refused to do so, he and their uncle were imprisoned for the rest of the day. At midnight they were put on a truck and driven away. They were dropped off at a crossroads five hours away from the community and left to fend for themselves. Gudelia, Patricia and their mother lived with their grandparents during this time.

Patricia Lucas Pérez shared, ***'Because of this, we went to live with my maternal grandmother. We thought the drunks could come to throw stones or shoot [a gun]. We were just women and the grandparents. Her uncles were in the other house and so were more people.'***

Gudelia Lucas Pérez added, ***'My grandmother went to the jail to see him and she asked him to sign and my dad said no, because what he wanted was for us to have the freedom to express our faith in the future.'***

Their father and their uncle were removed from prison and forcibly displaced that same day. They all relocated to Oaxaca City in August 2018.

Gudelia Lucas Pérez said:

'We were outside the community (living in the city of Oaxaca) because they had driven out my dad and forced my family to cooperate in this; therefore it was better for us to come to the capital, my dad on 10 December 2017 and all the rest on 6 August 2018.'

Threats to or attacks on property and land

One participant has received threats to their personal property and land, and two other participants gave examples of the land rights of religious minorities being restricted or infringed upon.

San Juan Tepanzacoalco, San Pedro Yaneri Municipality

Gudelia Maldonado Velazco shared that in 2011 the local authorities of San Juan Tepanzacoalco threatened to destroy her home and confiscate her family's land, because of their religious beliefs; but in the end the threats were not carried out.

In addition, Pentecostal Christians in San Juan Tepanzacoalco have been unable to build a meeting place on land which was given to them by an elderly member of the church, because the local authorities have refused to recognise their right to the land. This has prevented them from taking the next step which would be to request planning permission, because they expect their application to be rejected by the local authorities.

San José Quianitas, Santa María Quiegolani Municipality

The land belonging to Gudelia and Patricia Lucas Pérez is shared with their grandparents, who remain part of the religious majority, and for

this reason it has not been threatened. However, they shared that the local authorities of San José Quianitas threatened to burn down the home of their aunt and uncle – their uncle is the leader of the Protestant Christian church. These threats are ongoing but have not been acted upon.

'They wanted to take away my uncle's land from him because he is like the head. He is at the front of the [Protestant] Christian church. He is a leader. The authorities threatened him. He had a house where they held [Protestant] Christian services. They said they would burn his house and the musical instruments…They wanted to make the house where they met communal land.'

Denial of basic services

The local authorities disconnected water services to the family of two participants.

San José Quianitas, Santa María Quiegolani Municipality

The day after the expulsion of Gudelia and Patricia Lucas Pérez's father and uncle from San José Quianitas on 10 December 2017 by the local authorities (see previous sections for detail), members of the community were ordered to remove the water pipes of both families in order to disconnect their water supply.

Gudelia Lucas Pérez recalled:

'After expelling my father because they no longer recognised him as part of the village, they cut off our water. The whole village came and removed the pipes. This happened the day after the meeting, which is usually at 8 or 9am, Sunday the 10th. I remember because it was my dad's birthday. We went to my grandmother's house and when we returned, from the hill one could see people gathered in my house…

'Later we went to live with my grandmother who had water, in my same village. The authorities kept watch over us. They called my grandfather and warned that if he continued to share the water, they would take the pipe away from him, too…They reconnected the water two weeks later because [my] grandparents lived there and there were no problems with them, only with us.'

The local authorities also removed the water hoses used to irrigate the avocado grove belonging to Gudelia and Patricia Lucas Pérez's aunt and uncle, an important source of income, and disconnected the family's electricity supply on 10 December 2017. To date, this family have not had access to water and electricity in San José Quianitas.

Denial of government benefit programmes

None of the participants interviewed from Oaxaca have been personally denied access to government benefit programmes; however, two participants said that their mother had experienced this.

San José Quianitas, Santa María Quiegolani Municipality

After their family were displaced to Oaxaca City in August 2018, Gudelia and Patricia Lucas Pérez's mother continued to receive financial support through the government *Prospera* programme. The support was delivered in cash to the local authorities in San José Quianitas. On one occasion, the local authorities tried to withhold the money from her when she visited to collect it, but a visiting health promoter prevented this from happening.

Patricia Lucas Pérez



Patricia Lucas Pérez stated:

'The authorities and those in the village wanted to take it away from her but the health promoter said that [my mother's] children were studying, and this support is for everyone, and it is nothing to do with [religious] beliefs.'

Limited access to healthcare

Participants from both San Juan Tepanzacoalco, San Pedro Yaneri Municipality, and San José Quianitas, Santa María Quiegolani Municipality, are able to receive medical treatment, although one participant mentioned past, unsuccessful attempts to block them from being treated. While medical services are available to the participants, they also

mentioned that many in their communities also rely on traditional healers.

San Juan Tepanzacoalco, San Pedro Yaneri Municipality

A doctor stays in San Juan Tepanzacoalco from Monday to Friday and attends to all residents.

Gudelia Maldonado Velazco reported that religious minorities tend to receive better care when the doctor is from a different municipality, as local doctors usually side with the religious majority.

San José Quianitas, Santa María Quiegolani Municipality

People from San José Quianitas rely on a team of nurses visiting their community once a month. Occasionally doctors will visit. Patricia Lucas Pérez stated that at one point the local authorities tried to prevent her and Gudelia's mother from receiving medical care; however, the doctors defended her and persisted in providing the necessary treatment.

Physical violence

One participant reported an incident of gender-based violence against a female relative.

San José Quianitas

Patricia Lucas Pérez recounted that a neighbour attempted to sexually assault her mother one night, while they were living with their grandparents in San José Quianitas following their father's forced displacement to Oaxaca City.

'When we were … on our own, one night my mum was filling up a container with water and a man (our neighbour) wanted to abuse her... He tried to pull her down, but she cried out and my sister and I went out to help her. The man went off before we surprised him. Then we decided not to make a complaint so as not to make the problem bigger.'

The women's decision not to report the assault, based on the fear that this would only cause more problems for them, highlights the vulnerability of religious minority women and girls, especially when they do not have or, as in this case, are separated from a male protector, husband or father.

Barriers to justice

Three participants indicated that they have not received justice following acts of discrimination, for several reasons. These include the refusal of local authorities to recognise the outcome of a legal case, as well as an inability to afford legal assistance.

San José Quianitas, Santa María Quiegolani Municipality

After Gudelia and Patricia Lucas Pérez's father and uncle were expelled from San José Quianitas, their uncle took legal action against the local authorities with the help of a lawyer. In February 2019, Gudelia and Patricia Lucas Pérez were both required to testify during the court hearing in Oaxaca City.

Gudelia Lucas Pérez explained:

'We went to Human Rights[214] and to the public prosecutor and I don't remember what else. They listened. They never went to visit the village. I do not know why. They issued a summons to the local authorities but [they] never presented themselves at the hearings.' Their uncle won the case in February 2020. The ruling confirmed their families' right to return to San José Quianitas; however, they have remained in Oaxaca City because the local authorities have refused to accept the verdict.

Patricia Lucas Pérez shared:

'The local authorities are against us…We finished the [legal] process, they gave us the document which [shows] we won. But in the village, they said we didn't win. They don't recognise it. They say we cannot return…The authorities of the village in San José Quianitas say the documents are false.'

Gudelia Lucas Pérez added:

'They told us that we are free to return to the village, but the people of the village still do not accept us. They do not want to.'

The case shows that, even if a family can afford legal assistance and legal action is successful at least on paper, this is often an insufficient remedy, when the legal decision is not enforced. In this case the local authorities, who were found to be responsible for violating the rights of the two families, simply refused to recognise the ruling, and to date there have been no consequences for their failure to act within the law.

This culture of impunity leads to many not even attempting to seek justice. One participant stated that in their community, members of religious minorities often simply choose to participate in

214 She is referring to the Oaxaca State Ombudsman which acts in the same way as Human Rights Commissions in other states.

the religious majority practices without complaint, in order to avoid harassment and potentially expulsion from the community.

Francisca Pérez Velazco explained that Protestant Christians in San Juan Tepanzacoalco have not needed to seek justice because they cooperate with religious majority activities, so they are not disturbed and can still receive visits from Mabél Ramos Yesca.

Participatory ranking

Four participants partook in the participatory ranking exercise during the second women's gathering in Oaxaca, during which they were asked what they considered to be the most significant challenges facing religious minority women in their indigenous communities. The table below displays the six challenges they identified, the objects they chose to represent them, and their aggregate rankings from the most significant problem (1) to the least significant problem (6):

Challenge	Object	Average score
Forced participation in religious activities	Bible	1
Prevented from building a church	Packet of paints	2 (joint)
Forced displacement	Black paint	2 (joint)
Prevented from sharing religious beliefs publicly	Mobile phone	4
Threats of violence and expulsion	Scissors	5
Mocking	Needles	6

‘Hope for the future’ artwork

Francisca Pérez Velazco

Francisca Pérez Velazco wrote that we should trust in God and not in men. She wrote the Bible verse, ‘Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge’. She shared that her hope for the future is that one day there will be a Protestant Christian church in her town.



Gudelia Maldonado Velazco with her ‘Hope for the future’ artwork

Gudelia Maldonado Velazco

Gudelia Maldonado Velazco drew a church. She shared her hope that her community might be given the freedom to build a church building. Currently, the authorities will not give them the stamp and signature to put the land in the name of Protestant Christians.

Gudelia Lucas Pérez

Gudelia Lucas Pérez drew her town and a church, to illustrate her desire to build a church. She hopes that in the future there will be more Protestant Christians who can preach ‘the Word’. At the top of her drawing is a dove, representing her hope ***‘that there will be peace that gives us the freedom to express our faith. It does not matter that there are [Protestant] Christians and Catholics; that they leave us to ourselves. That the church arises because it is our desire to spread the Word. Now there are more brothers and more sisters, that makes me happy! Living in Oaxaca we ask for God’s direction if nothing can be done. God is going to do the work and is going to open the doors, and the Church will rise up. God works wonders. Before I didn’t want to, but now I see what God does - the miracles and how he changes us and for this reason I want the rest of the people to know the Lord.’***

Patricia Lucas Pérez

Patricia Lucas Pérez also drew a church and said, ***‘I want there to be freedom for us to meet and worship there in town. And that the number of [Protestant] Christians would increase and there would be freedom to preach the Word because right now people don’t want to know about the Word, and they don’t accept [Protestant] Christians and they get upset with us. A group of people in the town say that the [Protestant] Christians are going to get rid of the customs.’***

Mabél Ramos Yesca

Mabél Ramos Yesca’s hope for the future is to have the freedom to share the Word of God from house to house, to have more Protestant Christians in the community, and to have the courage to face non-Protestant Christians and to build a church together. She shared her feeling that if the church grew, they would have the strength and courage to face the authorities united.

Overview

This chapter has explained the challenges identified and experienced by five indigenous women who are religious minorities in Oaxaca – two of whom have been forcibly displaced from their community of origin. In order of frequency mentioned, the forms of discrimination that have affected the participants on the grounds of their religion, in the past and present, are:

Form of discrimination	**Number of indigenous women from Oaxaca who said they were affected** (out of 5)
Prevented from sharing religious beliefs publicly	4
Prevented from receiving co-religionist visitors	4
Barriers to justice	3
Harassment	3
Pressured or forced participation in religious activities	2
Denial of basic services	2 (denied access to water services)
Arbitrary detention of male relative	2
Forced displacement	2
Threats or attacks on property and land	1

While this is the least number of human rights violations recorded across the five states CSW visited, this should not be interpreted to mean that indigenous communities in Oaxaca are markedly more tolerant of religious minorities. According to Porfirio Flores Zúñiga, legal representative of the Confraternity of Christian Pastors of the State of Oaxaca (Copaceo), there are at least ten active cases of religious discrimination in the state.[215]

Oaxaca was the most challenging state to visit and identify participants from during this research project, due to COVID-19 restrictions. In June 2020 the Mexican government instituted a traffic light system to monitor and track the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time the research took place, Oaxaca was the only state to be listed as 'orange' by the Mexican government, the second highest level in the four tier system. This resulted in the first gathering in Oaxaca being postponed and then only two participants attending it because the participants from a different municipality were under local travel restrictions due to the pandemic.

215 Porfirio Flores, 'Al menos 10 casos de intolerancia religiosa persisten en Oaxaca', 1 March 2021 https://porfirioflores.org/al-menos-10-casos-de-intolerancia-religiosa-persisten-en-oaxaca/

Conclusion

While the participants in this research, in such a limited number, are not necessarily representative of all indigenous women from religious minority communities across Mexico, their experiences reaffirm the value and necessity of research that documents and spotlights their stories.

By focusing on their perspectives, this research found that the way in which indigenous women and men in Mexico are affected by some of the same violations of FoRB and associated human rights appears to be gendered, i.e. shaped by their gender-based roles and responsibilities within their households and communities.

This was most apparent in how the participants reported that religiously-motivated attacks on property and denial of access to basic services affect indigenous women and men's abilities to complete income-generating and unpaid work, often divided along gender lines.

Their experiences also revealed a few types of discrimination that appear to affect religious minority women disproportionately or exclusively, including barriers to benefiting from government programmes aimed at women, and the denial of prenatal healthcare services to pregnant women because of their religious beliefs.

Many participants centred their accounts on the experiences of their husband or whole family, which suggests that they may not distinguish their individual experience from their family's collective struggle.

The Data Collector highlighted that the participants were often visibly moved but unable to articulate how incidents made them feel personally; this is exemplified in the example of one woman who, when asked whether her husband's imprisonment affected her, wept and said ***'It did affect us,'*** without elaborating on this. The participants seemed to find it easier to isolate and discuss their health issues and pregnancies, perhaps because they are bodily experiences their family members cannot share in.

Coupled with the way participants relied on male relatives for translation, and frequently deferred to them for information on their case, this indicates that many indigenous religious minority women in Mexico may look to male relatives or leaders, such as a pastor, to remember, record and represent their experiences of human rights violations. All of this may also stem from women rarely, if ever, being asked directly about their experiences of human rights violations, including FoRB violations, by government officials, researchers and human rights defenders; highlighting once again the significance of this study and report.

The discrepancy in reported cases of gender-based violence across the states is also noteworthy. It is possible that there may have been fewer incidents to report in Guerrero, Hidalgo and Oaxaca because the individual participants from these states were comparatively less affected by this issue. However, the psychological and sociocultural barriers that inhibit women from disclosing experiences of violence must be considered. CSW hopes to develop a deeper understanding and knowledge of gender-based violence within indigenous communities in Mexico as it continues to build relationship with the participants.

The findings of this research highlight the need for government interventions that consciously consider the vulnerabilities and barriers facing indigenous religious minorities and especially women in these communities, who are often further marginalised, in part because of limited economic and educational opportunities that are underpinned by patriarchal structures.

Since language and education, in addition to their roles within their family and community, can influence women's ability to identify and report violations of human rights, the federal and state governments must be proactive to ensure that justice mechanisms are understood by and accessible to all indigenous religious minority women in Mexico.

The government at all levels must ensure that equal access to education is provided to all indigenous girls, regardless of their religious beliefs, and offer incentives in order to curb school dropout rates. The state and municipal governments must work together to intervene rapidly and effectively when barriers to education are put in place by local authorities of indigenous communities and, in cases of forced displacement, develop creative solutions for parents attempting to enrol their children in local schools.

The federal, state and municipal governments must take concrete and proactive steps to prevent



Streets in Oaxaca

all types of FoRB violations from taking place. Perpetrators must be held to account when a crime has been committed. Special attention should be given to ensure that less visible types of human rights violations affecting more vulnerable sectors of the population – including women and children – are not overlooked. These include the denial of access to government programmes and water services.

There must be greater political will to promote religious literacy and human rights at every political level, down to the local government structures, in an increasingly diverse religious landscape. Public awareness and education programmes, as well as training in FoRB for local authorities and public officials, must be prioritised in order to create a more pluralist, tolerant society in which FoRB and human rights for all indigenous religious minorities are respected.

Recommendations

To the government of Mexico at all levels

- Fully guarantee rights associated with the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This includes ensuring that these rights, as set out in Mexico's constitution, as well as in the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights (San José Pact), and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) are upheld for all inhabitants and citizens of Mexico.
- Uphold legal guarantees for freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) for all; and where other laws apply, for example in communities governed by the Law of Uses and Customs, practise these in accordance with Mexico's constitution and its international human rights obligations.
- Provide regular training in mediation and in human rights law, particularly pertaining to FoRB and the rights of indigenous peoples and women, to government officials at the municipal, state and federal levels responsible for religious affairs, in order to ensure better law enforcement and human rights promotion and protection.



Trees in Mexico City

- Provide regular training to the State Human Rights Commissions, State Offices of Religious Affairs, and State Indigenous Affairs Offices in mediation, Mexico's legal commitments pertaining to FoRB, and the vulnerabilities of indigenous women and men from religious minority communities.
- Engage with local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working on FoRB to design and implement a training programme for the local authorities of communities governed by the Law of Uses and Customs, in order to ensure that this law is practised in accordance with Mexico's constitutional and international human rights obligations, including the right to FoRB.
- Ensure that the state commissions for human rights continue to engage actively with local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working on FoRB, and with victims of FoRB violations, in order to continue to raise the profile of the issue, give a voice to the survivors and contribute to a culture of tolerance and freedom of religion in their respective states.
- Ensure that government officials who have been shown to be derelict in their duties to uphold FoRB are removed from their positions.
- Provide sufficient resources to government officials responsible for religious affairs at the state and federal levels to carry out their duties, and in particular those in regions where there are frequent violations of FoRB or conflicts between religious communities.

Access to justice

- Actively pursue legal action against all individuals and groups responsible for violations of FoRB and other fundamental rights, and hold them to account for their actions. Individuals and groups who have committed criminal acts should be charged and prosecuted according to the law.
- Ensure safe return for the victims of forced displacement and/or compensation including provision for adequate and safe resettlement, only when there is no alternative, including because the victims are too fearful to return to their homes. Those responsible for their displacement must face justice.
- Restore access to basic services for all religious minority communities and ensure that nobody has their access to electricity, water, education or healthcare restricted because of their religious beliefs.
- Ensure that information about legal resources and government benefit programmes is accessible to indigenous populations by translating them into

indigenous languages, and where individuals are illiterate ensure that information is communicated clearly through awareness campaigns or local radio.
- Introduce a system of mobile courts and free judicial assistance aimed at facilitating access to justice for women who live in remote rural areas.
- Provide officials working in the Public Prosecutor's Office with training in Mexico's legal commitments pertaining to FoRB, the rights of indigenous peoples and the rights of women.
- Provide a government legal representative to indigenous religious minorities who cannot afford to pursue legal action against perpetrators of FoRB violations, as the government does for civil and family affairs.
- Provide indigenous religious minorities subject to FoRB violations with financial assistance to travel to meetings with state and federal government officials.



Guadalupe, La Cofradía, Huejuquilla el Alto Municipality

Women's rights

- As part of the National Women's Institute Act (2015), strengthen the commitment to protect the rights of women and girls, monitor programmes aimed at enabling non-discrimination and equal opportunities, and promote a culture of non-violence against women, ensuring the vulnerabilities of women from religious minority communities are taken into account.
- As part of the General Law on Population (2012), continue to strengthen policies, strategies and actions aimed at ensuring equal opportunities for women, and ensure a gender focus is considered in all agencies and entities of the Federal Public Administration. This includes ensuring that Article 27, which states that all Federal Executive programmes relating to women will consider indigenous women and violence against women, is upheld.
- As part of the General Law on Population (2012), ensure that Article 24.IX, which states that population programmes will design campaigns contributing to the prevention of violence against women, is enacted and strengthened, taking into account the intersecting vulnerabilities of indigenous women from religious minority communities.
- As part of the Law on the National Institute of Indigenous Peoples (2018), strengthen the commitment to promoting the protection and respect of indigenous women and girls, ensuring the inclusion of women from religious minority communities.
- As part of the Federal Act to Prevent and Eliminate Discrimination (2003), continue to strengthen access for all people to equality of opportunity, taking into account the unique vulnerabilities that face indigenous communities, religious minorities and women.
- As part of the National Water Plan 2020-2024 (2020), continue to promote universal water access. Uphold the commitment to focus investments on women and to promote projects that target indigenous communities.
- As part of the General Law on the Rights of Girls, Boys and Adolescents (2014), continue to ensure the full protection of the human rights of girls. Uphold and strengthen Article 62, which states that girls, boys and adolescents are entitled to freedom of religion and culture.
- As part of the General Act on Equality Between Men and Women (2006), continue to strengthen policies, programmes and projects that promote the empowerment of women and/or combat discrimination on the basis of sex.
- As part of the General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence (2007), continue to prevent and punish violence against women, ensuring the vulnerabilities of indigenous women from religious minority communities are taken into account.

Government benefit programmes

- Regularly inspect the operation of government benefit programmes, particularly in communities governed under the Law of Uses and Customs and in rural and remote locations, to ensure that recipients are able to access without impediment the financial support they are entitled to.
- Provide regular training to public servants responsible for operating government benefit programmes, including the local authorities of indigenous communities, in order to ensure that non-discrimination is observed at every stage of the operation, including the authorisation of personal documents, provision of proof of address, and distribution of financial support.
- Provide information regarding the requirements, operating rules and means of accessing government benefit programmes in every indigenous language, both in writing and orally through awareness

campaigns, local radio or regular visits from the municipal authorities, so that indigenous religious minority women are aware of their rights.
- Where financial support cannot be delivered directly to recipients through the use of a bank card, ensure that the authority responsible for distributing this financial support does so in a timely manner and without discrimination. In the event that religious minority women are prevented from accessing government benefit programmes, the municipal authorities must guarantee access to this support by sending it directly to the individuals who are entitled to it.

Educational and linguistic barriers

- Ensure that all official documents (e.g. regarding scholarships for women) are available in every indigenous language.
- Ensure that translation services are provided at all meetings with State government bodies, including the State Human Rights Office, the State Office of Religious Affairs and the State Indigenous Affairs Office.
- As part of the Indigenous Education Support Programme promote the permanence, continuity and completion of educational training for indigenous girls from religious minority communities.
- Continue to provide scholarship programmes for children, adolescents and young persons, including in rural and remote areas, in order to ensure that children have access to and remain in the educational system.
- Closely monitor at the state level the right of all girls to receive an education, and intervene to protect this right in any case where girls are barred from attending school because of their religious beliefs or those of their parents.
- Promote awareness-raising campaigns on the importance of education and provide ongoing learning opportunities for indigenous women, especially early school leavers.
- Provide training to teachers and school administrators on FoRB, and promote awareness-raising campaigns within the state education system on tolerance and respect for religious diversity.
- Provide training on FoRB and intersectionality with women's rights to local authorities, community leaders and teachers, in areas where the Law of Uses and Customs is in effect.
- Put in place mechanisms to respond swiftly to cases of forced displacement, in order to ensure that any girls involved are not deprived of their right to an education during the period of displacement.
- Ensure that all indigenous families understand the requirements for school enrolment and, in cases of forced displacement, expedite these cases and ensure that no child is barred from attending school if they do not have the necessary paperwork.

Land and property rights

- Ensure rightful ownership of community lands and rights over the *ejido*, as per agrarian law, to all religious minority communities.
- Ensure that no one is restricted access to lands that are rightfully theirs, and that corresponding property certificates are issued in a timely manner without discrimination and are not cancelled arbitrarily.
- The Agrarian Prosecutor's Office, the Agrarian Court and the corresponding authorities must intervene in the cases mentioned in this report in order to end the abuse of power and illegality on the part of the ejidal authorities in the procedures corresponding to the ejidal property.

To the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH)

- Redesignate religious minorities as a category of vulnerable groups.
- Ensure that the CNDH's protection orders are made available and accessible to indigenous women by having relevant documentation translated into all indigenous languages in accessible formats.

To the CNDH, individual state commissions for human rights, and the National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination (CONAPRED)

- Continue their important work monitoring and investigating cases of FoRB violations and religious discrimination.
- Design measures that enable indigenous women, and religious minority women specifically, to be accompanied by a translator and receive cultural interpretation to report complaints and receive attention from state and federal government bodies responsible for religious affairs.
- Acknowledge the unique vulnerabilities facing indigenous women from religious minority communities and take this into account in all programmes and policies.

To the Continental Network of Indigenous Women (ECMIA), the National Institute for Women (INMUJERES), National Commission to Prevent and Eradicate Violence against Women (CONAVIM) and the Specialised Prosecution Office for Violence Against Women and Human Trafficking (FEVIMTRA)

- Uphold the right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) for all; and where other laws apply, for example in communities governed by the Law of Uses and Customs, practise these in accordance with Mexico's constitution and its international human rights obligations.

To the European Union (EU) and member states

- In line with the EU Guidelines on freedom of religion or belief (FoRB), regularly engage with the Mexican federal government and state governments on cases and issues related to violations of FoRB. Special focus should be given to collaboration with the National Commission for Human Rights, the National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination, and state commissions for human rights, on issues related to FoRB. This should include awareness-raising and capacity-building within government institutions, for example through exchanges of best practice.
- Ensure that the Mexican government adequately recognises existing FoRB violations ahead of ratification of the EU-Mexico Free Trade Agreement (FTA), and the potential of these violations to constitute non-compliance with the 'essential elements clause' and with the Chapter on Trade & Sustainable Development of the FTA. On the latter, the evidence shared in this report concerning barriers to paid and unpaid work, land rights and forced displacement may be particularly relevant.
- As part of the EU Delegation and Member State Embassy strategic plans on human rights, coordinate efforts to monitor FoRB issues closely. This should be undertaken with input from civil society groups, with whom wider awareness-raising and capacity-building activities on FoRB as a human right should also be undertaken.

To the government of the United States of America (USA)

- In line with the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA), regularly engage with the Mexican government on cases and issues related to violations of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB), and encourage them to implement the recommendations above.
- The US Embassy should actively monitor cases of violations of FoRB, feeding these back to the State Department for use in its reports and designation of Countries of Particular Concern.
- The Ambassador for International Religious Freedom should carry out a follow up visit to Mexico, including on the itinerary states with high numbers of FoRB violations, and building on the 2016 visit by Ambassador David Saperstein; and continue to raise FoRB violations regularly with the government of Mexico.
- The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) should add Mexico to its list of actively monitored countries and raise FoRB with the Mexican government at every available opportunity, and should conduct a visit to the country, including to states with high numbers of FoRB violations.



Local transport in Codorniz, Mezquitic Municipality, Jalisco

- Work closely with the National Commission for Human Rights, the National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination, and state commissions for human rights on issues related to FoRB, and cooperate in awareness-raising and capacity-building within government institutions.
- Develop and maintain ties with civil society groups working on the issue of FoRB, and work with them in awareness-raising and capacity-building.
- Create and maintain funding opportunities for projects that promote FoRB for all, with priority given to those that target states and communities with high numbers of FoRB violations.

To the government of the United Kingdom (UK)

- In line with the UK's commitment to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB), continue to raise FoRB cases in Mexico as a matter of urgency with the Mexican government.
- Ensure that the UK embassy develops and maintains ties with civil society groups working on the issue of FoRB, and work with them on awareness-raising and capacity-building on the subject within Mexican civil society, at the national and state levels.
- Create and maintain funding opportunities for projects that promote FoRB.
- Ensure commitment to Recommendation 7 of the Truro Report by researching the intersection between FoRB and other human rights, particularly women's rights and indigenous rights in Mexico, and use this research to articulate FoRB-focused policies that address these issues.

To the United Nations (UN) and member states

- Ensure that the right to freedom of religion or belief, indigenous rights and women's rights are consistently raised with the government of Mexico, including during high-level visits and other bilateral exchanges, both in public and in private, as well as in multilateral forums such as the UN Human Rights Council.
- Urge the government of Mexico to increase proactively efforts to address intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief and/or gender in indigenous Mexican communities, including by providing training for the judiciary and local authorities.
- Call on the government of Mexico to ensure that the right to water and sanitation is upheld and promoted in indigenous communities, particularly for women from religious minority backgrounds, and ensure water and sanitation services are unconditionally restored in cases where such rights have been denied.
- Encourage the government of Mexico to raise awareness and support the education of women in indigenous communities, including regarding their rights within their state according to federal and state law and international human rights law.
- Urge the government of Mexico to ensure that indigenous women do not have their access to justice hampered by prejudice, discrimination or linguistic barriers, providing all necessary assistance.
- Urge all relevant UN mechanisms, including the Special Procedures and UN Treaty Bodies, to consider in their reporting the interrelatedness of women's rights, the rights of indigenous peoples and the right to freedom of religion or belief, acknowledging the unique vulnerabilities faced by indigenous women from religious minority communities in Mexico.
- Encourage the UN Special Procedures, including the Special Rapporteurs on freedom of religion or belief, minority issues, cultural rights, the rights of indigenous peoples, the right to health, safe drinking water and sanitation, education, adequate housing, independence of judges and lawyers, violence against women, and the Working Group on Discrimination against Women and Girls to visit Mexico, in line with Mexico's standing invitation to UN Special Procedures.
- Encourage UN Special Procedures to meet with members of all religion or belief communities, including women and human rights defenders working on freedom of religion or belief issues, during country visits, in order to give recommendations to the government of Mexico, and present their findings to the Human Rights Council in line with their reporting.
- Encourage the Regional Offices of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and UN Special Procedures to actively monitor cases of violations of freedom of religion or belief, including the situation for religious minority women from indigenous Mexican communities, and to issue communications where appropriate, strongly urging the government of Mexico to implement the recommendations in this report.
- Encourage in-country embassies to monitor carefully the situation of human rights including freedom of religion or belief in indigenous Mexican communities, and strongly urge the government of Mexico to protect the right to freedom of religion or belief, indigenous rights and the rights of women in accordance with its obligations under international and constitutional law.
- Monitor and support the implementation of recommendations accepted by Mexico during its third Universal Periodic Review, providing assistance where necessary, and longer term, to provide robust recommendations on the protection and promotion of freedom of religion or belief during Mexico's fourth review in 2024.
- Urge UN actors and state representatives to engage regularly with in-country civil society, including human rights defenders (HRDs) and NGOs, and to support civil society initiatives to promote FoRB and women's rights in Mexico, including the rights of indigenous women.
- Actively support the engagement of Mexican HRDs and other members of civil society with the UN mechanisms for the promotion and protection of human rights, and condemn any reprisals against such individuals.
- Urge UN programmes, including those run by UN Women, the UN Development Programme and the UN World Food Programme, to consider and work to overcome the additional barriers faced by indigenous religious minority women who face discrimination and threats on the basis of their religion or belief, so that these communities have equal access to programme support.
- Call on the government of Mexico to work with the UN Division for Sustainable Development Goals (DSDG) to ensure 'no one is left behind' in the realisation of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Mexico, including SDGs on education, gender equality, water and sanitation, and reducing inequalities.



Maria Luisa and Valentina

Appendix: Methodology

Using the framework of intersectionality, this research aimed to investigate the challenges facing indigenous women from religious minority communities in Mexico. The primary research questions were:

1. What forms of discrimination do indigenous women from religious minority communities in Mexico face on account of their religion and gender?
2. How do the experiences of indigenous women from religious minority communities compare with those of indigenous men from the same religious minority communities, and indigenous women from the majority religious community?

To address these questions, CSW utilised three research methods within the context of women's gatherings:

- Semi-structured interviews
- Art-based participatory method
- Focus group discussions with participatory ranking

Between March and June 2021, CSW's in-country female Data Collector and male colleague held gatherings of indigenous women from religious minority communities in five Mexican states (Chiapas, Guerrero, Hidalgo, Jalisco and Oaxaca) on two occasions – in total ten gatherings. All five states have significant indigenous populations. Chiapas, Guerrero, Hidalgo, Jalisco and Oaxaca were selected because, over the past decade, CSW has found that a high number of reported FoRB violations within indigenous communities are concentrated in these states, and has established strong connections with contacts there. Cases have also been reported in Puebla, Michoacán, Veracruz and Nayarit states.



Amelia, La Cofradía, Huejuquilla el Alto Municipality

CSW chose to conduct this research within the context of women's gatherings for several reasons. Firstly, CSW had learned from previous research in Mexico that men are more likely to speak over, or on behalf of, women if they are interviewed together. Inviting participants to a women-specific event mitigates this risk. Secondly, scholars have found that conducting research in group settings can make participants feel more comfortable discussing sensitive topics, and thereby offer greater insight into their perceptions and experiences. In addition to data collection, these gatherings aimed to offer participants encouragement and to foster solidarity between them.

First gatherings

Interviews

During the first gatherings, women participants were interviewed individually by CSW's Data Collector. The interview questions addressed how indigenous women from minority religious communities in Mexico experience violations of FoRB and other forms of discrimination that intersect with the denial, repression and restriction of women's right to FoRB, or are an outworking of it. They included a mixture of Linkert scale questions, open-ended questions and closed questions that covered the following topics:

- freedom of religion or belief
- access to basic services
- access to government benefit programmes
- civil and political rights
- right to property
- right to work
- access to justice
- gender-based and sexual violence.

While individual interviews may not reveal the same insights as group discussions, they offered participants enough time to recall details of events that are essential to CSW's documentation of human rights violations and its subsequent advocacy. Language barriers between some participants also necessitated individual conversations.

Art

As the interviews took place, the rest of the participants were encouraged to use paint and/or embroidery to illustrate their 'hopes for the future' on a plain canvas bag, which they could take home. Participants were then invited to explain their artwork to each other, which facilitated conversations about their struggles and hopes.

This method was inspired by the rich heritage of textiles and embroidery in Mexico, and projects that have used art to engage vulnerable participants whose ability to articulate their experiences may be hindered by their language abilities, experiences of trauma or other life circumstances. In particular, it draws on Rivera López, Fern Wickson and Vera Helen Hausner's use of art-based participatory research to investigate perspectives on native maize farming among indigenous communities in Oaxaca, Mexico.

López et al encouraged indigenous participants to create a piece of art that expressed their thoughts and feelings about the challenges facing native maize conservation, and what they wanted the future of native maize to look like. Afterwards the participants presented their art in age- and gender-specific small groups, and discussed strategies for addressing the challenges they had identified. Like other participatory research methods, López et al found that an art-based approach helped to disrupt the usual power imbalances and knowledge hierarches between researchers and participants, by empowering the latter to represent and recognise the validity of their knowledge, concerns and desires.

The pertinence of this method to CSW's research was apparent from previous meetings with indigenous religious minority communities in Mexico, during which women would often embroider. CSW's researchers also anticipated that it would offer women whose communication was hindered by language barriers and/or illiteracy another tool to express themselves and build relationship with the other participants.



Josefina Cruz Ruiz drawing her 'Hope for the future'

As in López et al's methodology, the artwork was intended to facilitate a focus group discussion about the changes that participants wanted to see in their communities and how they would like various groups to help bring about these changes. This aimed to encourage participants to develop their own strategies and recommendations. Unfortunately, there was rarely enough time at the end of CSW's gatherings to have these discussions.



Marta Cándido Espiandolo with her feedback survey

Still, the overall effectiveness of including art was clear. In their feedback surveys, four women from Hidalgo and two women from Oaxaca stated that they would like to learn embroidery skills at future meetings. Two women from Guerrero said they would like to learn embroidery as a trade after losing their income because of loss of access to their property and land. The Data Collector also observed how the art facilitated conversations between the women, and noted that some participants remarked that it made them feel more awake after a long journey to the gathering.

Second gatherings

All women who participated in the first gatherings were invited to attend the second around one month later, although not all women could. The second gatherings provided an opportunity for the Data Collector to deepen her rapport with these women and for them to get to know each other more. She asked previous participants follow-up questions and interviewed new women who could not attend the first gatherings. Where time permitted, the women also participated in a focus group discussion with participatory ranking.

Focus group discussion with participatory ranking

The Pile, Rank and Analyse (PRA) participatory ranking methodology involves asking a group of participants a specific question and then piling, ranking and accounting for their answers. CSW's use of this method was inspired by its proven effectiveness in the Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development (CREID)'s research on how women from religious minority backgrounds in Pakistan experience FoRB violations. CREID's researchers asked participants to identify and rank the problems or challenges they face, according to their intensity and frequency. This exercise was often combined with a focus group discussion, in which participants were encouraged to explain their answers with stories and examples.

In employing this method, CSW's Data Collector similarly asked participants to share their views on the most significant challenges faced by women from their religious and geographic communities. Each participant shared their perspective, and the Data Collector compiled the themes emerging from their answers (piling stage). On some occasions, she prompted the participants with problems they had highlighted during their interviews.

Participants were then asked to find objects in their immediate surroundings that could represent the problems identified by the group. They were invited individually to position these objects in order of seriousness – from most significant problem to least significant problem – based on the frequency and intensity of the problem for them (ranking stage). Participants were then encouraged to explain their rankings to the group (accounting stage), which facilitated a group discussion about their shared struggles where time permitted.

It was possible to conduct this exercise during four out of five of the second gatherings, with varying levels of openness and solidarity shown between the participants. The physicality of moving objects helped the women to remain focused and pay attention to each other. It also provided a mutual access point that overcome the language barriers and low literacy levels of some participants.

The Data Collector found that the women listened attentively to each other when they spoke the same indigenous language, as in Hidalgo and Jalisco. However, the exercise was slow and undynamic when the participants, who were from different communities, spoke different primary languages. In most gatherings there was not enough time for the participants to explain and discuss their rankings, which unfortunately reduced the insights offered by this exercise.



Women in Jalisco being interviewed

Limitations

In addition to the challenges noted above, it is worth highlighting several other limitations to this report's methodology.

Research participants

Twenty-five indigenous women and two mestizas women were interviewed during this research and feature in this report: six from Chiapas, five from Hidalgo, five from Guerrero, five from Oaxaca and six from Jalisco. These participants were carefully identified by CSW's in-country Data Collectors through their existing contacts in the chosen states. The selection criteria were indigenous women from communities that are currently experiencing discrimination because of their religious beliefs, or who have experienced some form of discrimination because of their religious beliefs in the past four years.

It should also be noted that while the participants are all indigenous women who share religious minority status and comparably low-income socio-economic positions, their experiences vary according to their age, life stage, marital status, number of children, education and geographical location. 81% of participants are married to men and 93% have children. Hence, the research participants are not a representative sample of indigenous women from religious minority communities across Mexico, and CSW does not intend to use their stories to make generalisations about the extent of discrimination against indigenous religious minority communities.

Positionality of the researchers

Critical to any study is the positionality of its researchers, meaning how the different facets of their social positionings affect the way they relate to and are construed by the subjects of their research and the socio-political contexts in question. Qualitative researchers are encouraged to be 'reflexive' by continually evaluating the biases and power dynamics caused by their positionality, and how this might strengthen and/or limit the research process.

Best practice for this research would have been to work with indigenous Mexican women belonging to religious minority communities to conduct all stages of the research particular to their respective ethno-linguistic groups, especially given the history of Western scholars producing research on rather than for and with indigenous people. Unfortunately, CSW was not able to identify someone of this positionality to oversee the research design and data collection.

Instead, CSW appointed a female Protestant Christian from Mexico City, who has experience working directly with indigenous communities experiencing FoRB violations in Mexico, to carry out the fieldwork as the Data Collector. In terms of ethno-linguistic identity, the Data Collector identifies as Mexican and believes that the participants would likely perceive her as mestiza.

All participants in this research belonged to a Protestant Christian denomination, which helped the Data Collector to build trust and enabled her to understand the theological terminology and religious language they used. On the other hand, the Data Collector could not speak the various indigenous languages of the participants, and she was sometimes viewed as an outsider, particularly given her relative wealth as an educated, urban woman.

The methodology and analysis of this research were overseen by British, UK-based researchers with experience conducting qualitative research and expertise in FoRB in Mexico and other parts of the world, in consultation with CSW's in-country Data Collectors who ensured that the different components of the research were as accessible and relevant as possible to the participants and contexts.

Language barriers

Each gathering was attended by women from different indigenous ethnic-linguistic communities within the same state, which meant that they often spoke different languages. Since some of the women could speak little or no Spanish, there was sometimes a language barrier between the Data Collector and the participants, as well as among the participants themselves, which limited their conversations. To mitigate this, the women who could not speak Spanish were asked to attend the gatherings with a local female translator.

However, on a few occasions participants requested that their male relative translate for them, as female translators were unavailable. While these men did not dominate the interviews or appear to make the women participants less comfortable, this filter limits CSW's understanding of their own reflections and expressions. Further, out of the participants who could speak Spanish, many were not fluent and therefore had a limited vocabulary to express themselves. Conducting interviews in Spanish, therefore, restricted many participants' ability to communicate freely.

Data from this research was also recorded in Spanish, not the participants' indigenous languages. Where language is pertinent to what is being shared, the original phrasing was noted and is referred to in this report. However, this report was written originally in English, based on data translated from Spanish to English, which may cause some subtleties in the participants' accounts to be lost.

Comparisons between women and men

Finally, the comparisons that this report makes between the experiences of indigenous women and men from the same religious minority community are limited. It was not possible to conduct the same systematic research with such men for a direct comparison, due to practical and budgetary constraints. CSW's male colleague was however able to speak with the male relatives who accompanied participants to the gatherings.

These conversations – combined with the reflections of women participants, previous interviews with indigenous men and women, and secondary research into gender relations in Mexico – have informed this report's gender analysis of FoRB violations. However, CSW does not have enough representative data to quantify whether indigenous women and/or men are disproportionately affected by certain human rights violations. Therefore, this report can only analyse general similarities and differences between religious minority men and women's experiences, based on what this cohort of indigenous participants shared.

During this research, CSW tried to compare the experiences of indigenous and non-indigenous women from minority religious communities through an online survey aimed at the latter. The purpose of this survey was to gauge how far ethno-linguistic identity and geographical location account for women's susceptibility to FoRB violations. However, this survey did not have a high enough response rate to be useable.

Practical challenges

Some women who agreed to attend the gatherings cancelled at short notice or did not turn up on the day, for various reasons such sickness, lack of travel options and last-minute family obligations.

The challenge of securing participants was exacerbated by COVID-19, which was being monitored by the Mexican government with a traffic light system at the time of the gatherings. All states CSW visited during this research were listed as 'green' and functioning as normal, except Oaxaca which was listed as 'orange', the second highest level in the four tier system. This resulted in the first gathering in Oaxaca being postponed, and then only two participants attending it because the participants from a different municipality were under local COVID-19 travel restrictions.

To mitigate the risk of COVID-19, participants were asked not to attend the gatherings if they had any symptoms. Upon arrival, their temperature was taken, and they were asked to use hand sanitiser throughout. Some participants chose to wear face masks during the gatherings.

Another practical challenge was providing a female-only space for the participants to meet in. Based on previous experience, CSW expected men to accompany the women participants to the gatherings, to provide security during their often-long journeys there and back. Some women brought their children too. CSW's Data Collector therefore travelled with a male colleague, who spoke with the men during the gatherings so that the women could speak with each other in private.

Unfortunately, it was not possible for the women and accompanying men to gather in separate rooms at every gathering as intended. Some facilities catered to this, and others did not have enough space. When a separate room was not available, interviews took place in a private part of the shared space.



Wixárika woman embroidering, Jalisco

Safeguarding

The wellbeing and informed consent of participants was an utmost priority throughout this research.

Potential participants were informed about the research project's aims, methods and how the information they share would and would not be used, before they agreed to partake. This was reiterated at the start of each gathering, when the Data Collector also set clear expectations for what they would involve, including the topics she planned to discuss with them during their interview.

CSW's Data Collector and male colleague were equipped with training in best practice for conducting the interviews and data collection before beginning the data collection. At the start of each interview, participants were asked to give verbal consent for participating in this research and whether they were comfortable being photographed. They were not asked to give written consent because many people from indigenous religious minority communities have negative experiences of being forced to sign documents renouncing their faith, and also because some of the participants were illiterate. All participants gave permission for their names and photographs to be included in this report.

Participants were reminded that they could share as many personal details as they were comfortable with, and they could terminate the interview when they liked. Questions about gender-based violence were also flagged before being asked.

Most participants appeared very comfortable sharing their stories with the Data Collector because they already knew and trusted the male colleague. Some were shyer and more reserved at the start, but they seemed to relax over the course of the gatherings as the Data Collector built rapport with them. Many participants cried as they shared their experiences. However, this appeared to be a cathartic experience for them, with one participant sharing in her feedback survey: 'What I had in my heart, I took everything out. I took a weight off. I feel happy and encouraged.'

Part of CSW's safeguarding strategy was to administer surveys at the end of the gatherings, to find out how the participants were feeling and whether they had any concerns about the research. If participants were illiterate, their oral responses were recorded. Encouragingly, all participants who completed a survey stated that they wanted to attend the second gathering and the only concerns raised were about the discrimination they were already facing.

‘We only knew that they were not going to be able to take away from us faith in our God; they could take everything else.’

Angelina Martínez Hernández

CSW everyone free to believe

CSW is a human rights organisation advocating for freedom of religion or belief, and as Christians we stand with everyone facing injustice because of their religion or belief.

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