

Mission Beyond our Borders (MBoB) Country Profile – April 2024

Last year the MBoB group presented country profiles on nations where Christians **face persecution**. In May we considered the situation in **Iran**. For this year we are looking at where the church is **growing**. It may be surprising to note, that according to research by the organisation Operation World the fastest growing church is in **Iran**.

A reminder about some background of the nation:

Iran became an Islamic republic in 1979, when the monarchy was overthrown, and clerics assumed political control under Ayatollah Khomeini. **Ayatollah Ali Khamenei** is currently The Supreme Leader - the highest power in the land - appoints the heads of the judiciary, military and media. He also confirms the election of the president. All broadcasting from Iranian soil is controlled by the state and reflects official ideology. A wider range of opinion may be found online and in the printed press. Iran is one of the world's most repressive countries for journalists.



How many Christians are there in Iran?

At the time of the Revolution in 1979 it was thought that there were as few as 500 Christians from a Muslim background. It is now believed to be over 1 million Christians in a population of more than 86 million. In an article by **“Heart 4 Iran Ministries”** on the underground church in Iran, we are told:

“Iran is a country known for its strict adherence to Islamic law, which makes practicing any religion other than Islam difficult, especially for Christians. Despite the challenges, the underground church in Iran has been growing over the past few decades, and it is shaping the future of the Church in this restricted country.

The underground church in Iran comprises a network of secret Christian believers who gather in homes, in small groups, and online. They do not have access to church buildings, and they often worship in secrecy to avoid persecution. Iranian authorities view Christianity as a threat to their Islamic regime, and Christians who openly express their faith face arrest, torture, and even death.

Despite the risks, the underground church in Iran is thriving.

Estimates suggest that there are currently between 300,000 to one million Christians in Iran, most of whom are part of the underground church. This growth can be attributed to several factors.

Firstly, the underground church in Iran has a strong sense of community. Christians in Iran face many challenges, including social isolation, discrimination, and persecution. The underground church provides a sense of belonging and support to believers who might otherwise feel alone.

Secondly, the underground church in Iran is innovative in finding ways to connect with other believers and spread the Gospel. They use social media, satellite TV, and other online platforms to connect with each other and share the good news of Jesus Christ. This has been particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has made physical gatherings impossible.

Thirdly, the underground church in Iran is committed to discipleship and training new leaders. Christian leaders in Iran face significant risks, and there is a shortage of trained pastors and teachers. The underground church has taken on the responsibility of training new leaders and helping them to grow in their faith.”

Pray for:

- Young people are particularly responsive to the gospel. Much of the underground church is made up of this younger generation. Pray for growth in maturity and protection as they share their faith.
- Good leadership training and development. This is crucial if the burgeoning Church in Iran is to continue to grow and mature.
- The Iranian diaspora. There are congregations in many of our cities, including Liverpool.
- TV ministry is an area of huge growth for reaching and training Iranians, along with ministry through the internet. Pray that these will be used effectively to encourage and build up Christians.

