

The background of the entire page is a monochromatic, orange-toned photograph of a vast desert landscape. In the foreground and middle ground, there are rolling hills and mountains with distinct vertical erosion patterns. A small cluster of buildings, possibly a village or a fortified site, is visible in a valley. The sky is a uniform, lighter shade of orange, creating a hazy, atmospheric effect.

ICOHS

# Defeating Minority Exclusion and Unlocking Potential

CHRISTIANITY  
IN THE  
HOLY LAND

Research Report





ICoHS

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CHRISTIANITY  
IN THE  
HOLY LAND

**Research Report**

Dcn. Dr. Georgios Tsourous  
ICoHS

Professor Francis Davis  
UNIVERSITIES OF BIRMINGHAM AND OXFORD

co-published with



UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM



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EDWARD CADBURY CENTRE  
FOR THE PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING OF RELIGION

## Executive Summary

Christianity in the Holy Land is globally and diplomatically significant because of its position at the heart of its region, its unique public significance to communities globally and its distinctive history and diversity. Holy places, special people, rich images of community life in the region, and those they touch well beyond, come to mind all over the world when this significance is considered.

River Jordan, the Dead Sea, Jerusalem and Bethlehem, to name but four exemplars, are localities whose global projection and image have at the deepest cultural levels and for hundreds of years, shaped the minds of children, students, and many policy makers both from the region itself and across the G7,

the Commonwealth and the BRICs countries. They are also localities in which the everyday life of ordinary Christians continues to this day.

Until now, though, how the cultural and historic significance builds important economic, social and civic value for the geographies and populations that make up the Holy Land has been massively underestimated. The contribution that the Christian community in the Holy Land – and its international supporters, allies, and diasporas – brings to the region is a fruit of the longevity of the Christian presence there, from which local governments and public services of all hues across Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian territories benefit. Any risk to this tradition,

then, would be a risk to the well-being of all local communities, and to the good will of those around the world who have been part of its development.

This report seeks to present emerging evidence of the contributions made by Christians to the well-being of the people of the Holy Land through exploratory surveys of the business, social welfare, educational and other value added that these Christians generate each year. Unique in its approach, it benefits both from ICoHS' partnership with 13 officially recognised Christian churches in the region and Professor Davis's ongoing research on the civic impacts of religions and their policy significance.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In this region Davis has previously worked with Haifa University, Jewish Distribution Committee, Order of Malta and the Ecole Biblique. Davis' previous civic and economic impact studies have included Churches in Rwanda, the UK and (forthcoming) Australia with academic outputs forthcoming from Leuven/Peters and Brussels/VUB.

The report demonstrates that this positive contribution is disproportionate to the present size of Christian communities in the Holy Land. Indeed, it is the combination of rootedness, entrepreneurial agency, human solidarity, and vulnerable minority status which make the Christian community of the Holy Land an intensively creative contributor to public value and welfare across the region. Yet the significance of this community's contribution and the vulnerability of its position can both too often be overlooked, both at home and abroad.

It is a community at grave risk, challenged in many ways – by war, inter-religious and ethnic conflict, constraints on international

investment and support as well as fears of economic and legal constraint provoked by migration. Its future could be more vulnerable than it needs to be; this is more than a matter of passing record or religious interest but runs to the heart of the values of inclusion, healthy democracy, community flourishing, and related factors of policy design and diplomatic effectiveness.

By beginning to explore these risks and threats this report also identifies pathways by which they could be mitigated, and positive experiences and opportunities enhanced through local innovation, policy improvements, international support, and thoughtful diplomacy.

Drawing on government data, desk research, bespoke fieldwork, interviews, among other sources, *'Defeating Minority Exclusion and Unlocking Potential: Christianity in the Holy Land'* is a contribution to helping all those concerned with the Holy Land's well-being. The report, therefore, offers an important opportunity to reflect again on the positive resources upon which Christians in the Holy Land and abroad can draw.<sup>2</sup> For friends and allies of Christians in the Holy Land it points to the dangers that might emerge if their solidarity were to be diluted.

<sup>2</sup> This report draws from Tsourous' anthropological work among the Christian communities in the Holy Land from the University of Kent, United Kingdom.



## THIS REPORT FORMS A BASIS FOR:

- > refreshed community and diplomatic dialogue
- > enhanced policy advocacy
- > as a basis for the planning of new investment, resource gathering and support
- > a foundation for researchers in governments and beyond to improve the evidence base through which they interpret Christian and other minority communities in the region



## Key findings and Recommendations

Our full key findings and associated recommendations are tabulated in the Appendix, on pages 60 - 66 of this report. In summary however:

### CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION AND POTENTIAL

We recorded the regionally crucial contribution made by Christians to both the tourism sector and its incoming customer bases in the region and also found Christian excellence and profoundly under-developed potential in the Israeli hi tech start up and growth sector.

We established that this part of the crucial sector (tourism) generates in excess of 3 billion USD a year in normal circumstances for Israel alone. That is greater in value than all US aid to Jordan (and, in effect, a very large Christian contribution to local wealth and revenues).

1. That further and sustained research be undertaken to quantify more fully the cultural, economic and civic contribution of Christians in the Holy Land and the value added by both these Christian communities and those offering and providing international support.

to crucial economic and civic contributions in region.

3. That this programme should prioritise engagement with US Congress and the Westminster and Canberra legislatures to ensure that parliamentarians, congresspersons and relevant diplomatic services are fully aware of the contribution made, and risks faced, by Christians in the Holy Land, and also that global advocacy is focused on particular opportunities (and blockages) that could be unlocked especially in niche cultural, economic and civic sectors.

4. That parliamentarians and churches working together engage in advocacy to embassies, business

and trade departments, business associations and funders to ensure the recognition of the positive cultural and economic contribution to the region and its need for new strategic investment.

5. A feasibility assessment should be undertaken to establish and sustain a '*Holy Land Investment Hub*' linking local Christian businesses to international investment, knowledge and skills partnerships and customer introductions to help Christian businesses and ventures grow and enhance their contribution to the Holy Land even further. This hub should develop particular expertise and networks in the tourist and hi-tech start up sectors.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

2. That both existing and new data should be gathered to inform a new programme of education, briefing and information in the Holy Land and also in the UK, US, and Australia, to increase understanding and engagement with the Christian contribution to cultural, spiritual, and its symbiotic relationship

## CIVIC CONTRIBUTION AND PUBLIC VALUE

We found that the Christian community makes a ground-breaking and wide-ranging contribution to building civil society, new start-ups, excellence in education, health and other humanitarian sectors in the country. In addition, even at the most conservative of estimates, the

incoming international resources in this regard are in excess of 250 million USD per annum in Israel alone. Including philanthropic resources sent to the region from organisations such as World Vision and Caritas<sup>3</sup>, takes that figure close to 3 billion USD.

*<sup>3</sup> NGO Monitor has expressed concerns about these organisations but from whom Jordan and the Palestinian authority area benefit.*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A programme of briefing and education is necessary to enhance understanding in churches and governments of the value that support, investment and resources (from government, investment and philanthropic sources) can make to stretched Christian civic contributors in the region.

2. This programme of briefing should include a sustained programme of work engaging with aid ministries, international non-governmental organisations and philanthropic funders to develop a framework of short-, mid- and long-term priorities for support in the Holy Land which is sensitised to the Christian community's needs.

3. In dialogue with the Israeli government and international embassies, particular attention ought to be paid to the threat that the mayor and government of Jerusalem and some other localities (and occasional proposals in the Knesset) present to the public value being added by Christians. These actions also threaten the survival of the ecosystem that sustains the Christian community in the region.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### DILUTION OF PUBLIC BENEFIT AND DISCRIMINATION

We found major concerns that the systems for visas, educational funding, and social welfare for long-term contributors to the region were not being operated fairly or transparently, thus raising concerns that uneven administration could undermine the recruitment and retention of talent and that other public contributions of Christian ministers and laypeople may be diluted or damaged.

1. That the Israeli government's performance data related to turnaround times for clergy visas should be scrutinised in order to establish if uneven administration is indeed taking place.
2. That a working group should be established to open a policy dialogue on education, education funding and international support for education and the social rights that accrue and apply evenly across all communities.

### GRIEVANCE AND FEAR

We found that, even where good local policy was in place, Christians were reporting mistreatment on grounds of religion, restrictions on their feeling free from threat and local abusive behaviour.

We found that an increasing sense of grievance and despair in parts of the Palestinian Muslim community was increasing the risk of verbal and physical attacks against minority Palestinian Christian communities.

1. That an Anglo-US joint conference of parliamentarians should be initiated in the region, to be combined with fact finding visits.
2. That an Anglo-US joint programme of church leader gatherings should be established in the region to be combined with fact finding visits.

### INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

We found evidence of under-developed potential for international support to the Christian community of the Holy Land and acknowledge the call from local Christian communities to others internationally for their support to be more generous and increasingly consistent.

1. That, in addition to our proposals around the research above, we recommend that ICoHS establish a '*Christian Funders Hub*' to enhance, consolidate and deepen support from churches to Christians in the region.
2. That a programme of work is needed to educate, support, and encourage Christian Civil Service organisations operating abroad to prioritise projects in the Holy Land, including water supplies, medical care, housing, and employment. This programme should include a strategic framework for emergency, short-, mid- and long-term support.



# List of Acronyms

## WHO ARE ICoHS?

ICoHS enjoys united support from the 13 officially recognised churches in the Holy Land. It seeks to affirm, support and celebrate their role and contribution. **Helping Communities in the Holy Land to Flourish | ICoHS**

ICoHS	International Community of the Holy Sepulchre
LoCH	Local Churches
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
PCPSR	Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research
ACAP	Arab Centre for Alternative Planning
CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics
NII	National Insurance Institute
IIS	International Strategic Studies
TMIT	Tourism Ministry Inbound Tourism Survey
IOCC	International Orthodox Christian Charities

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## 1. Introduction: Defeating Exclusion and Unlocking Potential

## 1.1 This report, its focus and who it is for

This report is based on original exploratory research undertaken during 2021. Based on interviews, new surveys, and desk research, it describes the Holy Land and its Christian communities, setting them within an international context and beginning to record the positive economic, social and welfare contributions they are

making to enhance self-help and the region's public value.<sup>5</sup>

The report then proceeds to identify the risks to and constraints upon that enduring positive contribution and identifies ways in which they can mitigated. These threats, part demographic, part legal, part resource-focused, require

urgent attention. They provide the basis of further analysis and recommendations for action by policy makers, diplomats, funders and especially the wider global community of individuals and organisations who cherish the Christian community in the Holy Land's current and future contribution.

<sup>5</sup> While desk research and some interviews reached across the whole of the geography, we delineate some of our findings and recommendations have Israel particularly in mind. This is because the Palestinian authority area was in effect closed because of Covid 19 measures undertaken in the region.

AS SUCH, THIS REPORT WILL BE OF PARTICULAR INTEREST TO:

> Those who feel an affinity towards, or directly support, the Holy Land, its minorities and especially its globally significant Christian community.

> Those in the region and globally who are concerned to recognise the positive contributions of minorities in general and the Christian

minority in the Holy Land and protect its life, contribution and status.

> Those who are members of the Christian community in the Holy Land and those in regional governments, agencies and NGOs seeking to work with this community and enhance their capacity.

> Those in government, donor institutions and funding bodies seeking to enhance the evidence base for policy and planning design when it comes to local welfare and investment and international diplomacy and support for Christian communities.



## 1.2 The Holy Land: An idea, a place, and a living community

The Holy Land <sup>6</sup>, the area roughly located between the Mediterranean Sea and the Eastern Bank of the Jordan River, is home to some of the most important religious sites for the three Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. For Christianity, this landscape is sacred because it is the place where Jesus Christ lived and preached; the region is full of sites associated with Jesus' life and mission. Among the Holy Land's cities, Jerusalem stands prominently, featuring the sites of the Crucifixion and

Burial of Jesus, and almost all the Christian denominations and traditions have, or aspire to maintain, a presence there. Some 2.5 billion Christians globally look upon the Holy Land as the place Christianity started. <sup>7</sup> The Holy Land acts as a focal point for pilgrims from a variety of Christian traditions, who seek to connect personally to the sacred localities.

However, while Christians from across the world focus on the experience of a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, little attention

is given to the indigenous Christians who have lived in the region for generations, practicing the Christian faith and protecting sites holy to Christianity. Several academic studies on Christianity in the Middle East reveal interesting points of comparison between the Christian communities.<sup>8</sup> However, the non-religious factors and processes which affect the status of Christians are frequently overlooked.

There is a lack of appropriately evidenced understanding of the size, shape and role of local Christian communities and consequently how best they can be supported to allow them to continue to exist in an area which is fundamental for Global Christianity and where their contribution is fundamental to maximizing local public value.

<sup>6</sup> **Holy Land** - The term 'Holy Land' usually refers to a territory roughly corresponding to the modern State of Israel, the Palestinian territories, western Jordan, and parts of southern Lebanon and southwestern Syria. In this report, the term Holy Land refers to the territories of Israel, the Palestinian territories and Jordan.

<sup>7</sup> *Palestinian/Jordanian Christian vs Arab Christian* - In Jerusalem and other areas in Israel, local Christians of Arab origin have a clearly developed sense of identity, one affiliated to the Palestinian national label. Similarly, in Jordan, Christians refer to themselves as Jordanian Christian. As such,

this report has opted for the use of the term 'Palestinian Christian' and 'Jordanian Christian' rather than the term 'Arab Christian'.

<sup>8</sup> The work of scholars such as Robert Betts, Kenneth Cragg, Philippe Fargues, Andrea Pacini and Anthony O'Mahony – which has been published under such titles as 'Christians in the Arab East', 'The Arab Christian: A History in the Middle East' and 'Christian Communities in the Arab Middle East' – have tended to prioritize the religious component of Christian identity in their analysis of the status of various Christian communities in different Middle Eastern states.

1.3 Christianity in the Holy Land: Demography and Presence

The Christian communities and organizations based in the Holy Land are an important part of regional life and represent a cultural and historical wealth of denominational variety. The Christian communities may be divided into four basic categories: Chalcedonian-Orthodox, Non-Chalcedonian Orthodox, Roman Catholic (Latin and Uniate) and Protestant.

These communities consist of 20 ancient and indigenous churches, and another 30, primarily Protestant, denominational groups. Except for national churches, such as the Armenian, the indigenous communities are predominantly Arabic speaking; most of them descendants of the early Christian communities formed in Jerusalem during the Byzantine period. These include the Greek Orthodox, Latin

Catholics, Armenians, Copts, Ethiopians, Syrians, Greek Catholics, Syrian Catholics, Armenian Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans, Baptists, Russian Orthodox, and Romanian Orthodox. There are also relatively small communities of Seventh-day Adventists, Messianic Jews and Jehovah's Witnesses that established a presence in Jerusalem during the 20th century.

CHRISTIAN POPULATION IN THE HOLY LAND <sup>9</sup>

Table 1  
POPULATION BY GROUP AND RELIGION (END OF 2020)

	Total	Jews	Arabs			
Total (in thousands)	9,140.5	6,773.2	1,919			
				Christians	Muslims	Druze
CBS Statistical Abstract of Israel (No. 71)				177.2	1,635.8	145.1

<sup>9</sup> Data present in this section are taken from the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) and, to a lesser extent, from statistical databases and reports produced by governmental and non-governmental organisations such as the Arab Centre for Alternative Planning (ACAP) in Israel, the Institute for International Strategic Studies (IIS) and the National Insurance Institute (NII) of Israel. However, given that statistics are, by their nature, malleable and subject to diverse interpretations, they cannot, in the context of their political functionality, be entirely relied upon or trusted.

### 1.3.1 Palestinian Christians

According to the data provided by CBS, Israel had a total population of just over 9 million people at the end of 2020, of which only 6.7 million was Jewish. Approximately 2.4 million people, representing 20 per cent of all Israeli citizens, were Arab, with the remaining 4.4 per cent or so of the population 'not classified by religion'. As *Table 1* shows, there were 177,000 Palestinian Christians living inside Israel at the end of 2020, representing just under 8 per cent of all Arabs and 1.9 per cent of the total Israeli population. Most non-Jewish citizens are of Arab origin. This includes approximately 77

percent of the country's 177,000 Christians, according to the CBS as of December 2020. The CBS data also includes approximately 280,000 Arab permanent residents who are not Israeli citizens, including approximately 10,000 Palestinian Christians who are listed as permanent residents of East Jerusalem.

Recent surveys on Palestinian Christians in the West Bank<sup>10</sup> estimate that of the 162,000 Palestinian Christians living in the combined area of Israel and Palestine in 2020, the majority live inside Israel (excluding East

Jerusalem) with the remaining 52,000 distributed throughout East Jerusalem (10,000), the West Bank (40,000) and the Gaza Strip (2,000). The CBS estimates 15,000 Christians live in the current municipal boundaries of Jerusalem.

Non-Palestinian Christians also live in Jerusalem. According to the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Catholics among the foreign worker population include 30,000 Filipinos, 15,000 Indians, 5,000 Sri Lankans, 2,500 Colombians, and 1,100 individuals from other South American countries.

In short, Christians make up approximately 2% of Israel's population (some 180,000 individuals) and 2.4% of the Palestinian territories (100,000).<sup>11</sup> Recent research conducted by the Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research (PSR) suggests that Christians make up less than 1% of the population in Palestine<sup>12</sup> (although there are large communities in the diasporas.)

<sup>10</sup> Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, 2020. *Migration of Palestinian Christians: Drivers and Means of Combating it*. [pdf] Ramallah, Palestine: Survey Research Unit.

<sup>11</sup> Pew Research Center, 2015. *Religious Composition by Country, 2010-2050*. Pew Research Center, [online] 2 April. Available at: <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projection-table/>

<sup>12</sup> Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, 2020. *Migration of Palestinian Christians: Drivers and Means of Combating it*. [pdf] Ramallah, Palestine: Survey Research Unit. Available at: <http://pcpsr.org/sites/default/files/Poll%20Findings%20of%20Emigration%20Among%20Palestinian%20Christians%20June%202020.pdf>



### 1.3.2 Christian denominations and their population in Israel

The Palestinian Christian minority is the smallest officially recognised religious group in Israel.<sup>13</sup> It is also the grouping which demonstrates the highest level of internal diversity, with around 20 different Christian denominations represented. Of these, 13 receive official recognition from the state: the Greek Orthodox, the Greek Catholic (Melkite), the Latin, the Armenian Orthodox, the Armenian Catholic, the Coptic Orthodox the Syrian Orthodox, the Syrian Catholic, the Chaldean Catholic, the Maronite, the Ethiopian and the

Anglican (Evangelical Episcopal) and Lutheran Churches.

The majority (two thirds) of Palestinian Christians in Israel today are **Greek Catholic or Melkite**, numbering approximately 70,000 followers.<sup>14</sup> As the largest Christian denomination in the land, they are also the most widely distributed of all the Christian denominations with their strongest concentrations found in the villages and towns of the Galilee region. Their clergy are predominantly Arab and its laity completely Palestinian Arab.

The **Greek Orthodox community** is the second-largest Christian denomination in Israel after the Greek Catholic Church. It also represents the largest Christian denomination in the city of Nazareth with 17,000 followers there in addition to smaller concentrations throughout the Northern Region as a whole.<sup>15</sup> The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate is based in the Old City of Jerusalem and the head of the Greek Orthodox Church in Israel is Patriarch Theofilos III who was elected in November 2005, but only recognised by the State of Israel in December 2007.

<sup>13</sup> *Except for the Baha'i faith, CBS Statistical Abstract of Israel (No. 71), 2020.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ateek, N. (2006) 'The Churches of the Holy Land: A Rich Mosaic', Cornerstone, 42: 3–5, Jerusalem: Sabeel.*

The **Latin Rite Catholic** community is the third-largest Christian denomination in Israel and Palestine with 32,200 followers.<sup>15</sup> In Israel, it is mainly concentrated in the larger urban localities of Nazareth and Haifa, with a minor presence in the smaller rural localities of the north. The Latin Patriarchate is based in Jerusalem, and the head of the Latin Church in Israel is Patriarch Pierbattista Pizzaballa, who was appointed in October 2020.

The **Maronite community** in Israel has approximately 10,000 members and is concentrated in the northernmost part of the Galilee, primarily in villages close to the Lebanese border. Haifa represents the single largest Maronite parish in Israel, but smaller congregations are also present in Nazareth, Akka and Jaffa.

Finally, the **Anglican community** is the smallest of the four main Christian denominations in

Israel with about 7,000 followers across the Holy Land region.<sup>16</sup> Concentrated in urban localities such as Nazareth, Haifa, Ramla, Kfar Yasif, Shfar'amr and Reine, the leadership ranks of the Anglican Church in Israel are made up of a mixture of Arabs and Britons, while the laity is predominantly Palestinian Arab. The head of the Anglican community in Israel is Archbishop Hosam Naoum and his seat is in Jerusalem.

<sup>15</sup> Collings, Rania Al Qass; Kassis, Rifat Odeh; Raheb, Mitri (2008). *Palestinian Christians: Facts, Figures and Trends*. Bethlehem: Diyar Consortium. pp. 6–12.

<sup>16</sup> <https://j-diocese.org/wordpress/>


Most of the Christian population, about 75%, is located in western Galilee, concentrated in the cities of Haifa and Nazareth, and in villages such as Shfaram and Kfar Yasif, where the population includes Muslims and Christians. The only completely Christian villages in Israel are Ma'aliya and Fassuta in northern Israel.

### 1.3.3 The 'Official' and the 'Unofficial' Christian Diasporas

Christian communities and places are connected to an empire of sympathetic civil society bodies and support. In this sense, Christians in the Holy Land benefit from an unofficial diaspora of other Christians and those with affinities for their current contribution and cultural and diplomatic significance.

Recently, Israeli government leaders have celebrated the strength of part of this alliance. The Jordanian government has encouraged international inter-religious dialogues. It is also estimated that up to half of all Palestinian Christians are found in the diaspora scattered across the world.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> [https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/naftali-bennett-christian-love-for-israel-is-legendary-679933?fbclid=IwAR1WX8lg3-KzT1MTYe1WI\\_b5jnH2ZleUDI-IMU3s3aSHr2aBuWKhqQfr7A0](https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/naftali-bennett-christian-love-for-israel-is-legendary-679933?fbclid=IwAR1WX8lg3-KzT1MTYe1WI_b5jnH2ZleUDI-IMU3s3aSHr2aBuWKhqQfr7A0)



## 2. Adding Demonstrable Value: Quantifying the Positive Spiritual, Social, Cultural, and Economic Contribution of Christianity in and to the Holy Land

As we have seen, the Christian community is relatively small but, in this section, we will begin to reveal how it leverages public value and contributions out of all proportion to its size and some of the perceptions held of it by others.

An exploratory study cannot be definitive in these regards, so we have concentrated on five key inter-locking areas of contribution within the Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian societies of the Holy Land.



> Cultural Heritage and Future Life: Preserving sites holy to Christianity

> Economic Contributions: the case of tourism/pilgrimage

> Building community Integration and Social capital: The case of Jordan

> Fostering high-quality education

> Supporting civil society and social support organisations in the region

## 2.1 Cultural Heritage and Future Spiritual Life: Preserving sites holy to Christianity and associated hospitality

The Christian Holy Sites are widely considered to be different from other forms of archaeological sites and cultural heritage in that they are those places associated with Jesus' life. Because of their tangible and intangible associations and meanings and, more importantly, because these sites remain *active places of worship*, they are of utmost importance for the local Christian communities and the Global Christian institutions they are part of. Furthermore, the Holy Sites in the Holy Land are among the world's most popular visitor attractions, receiving millions of tourists every year.

For the Christian Churches and communities, the principal Holy Places are the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, the churches and Holy Places in Nazareth, and especially, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre remains an important symbol of Christian presence and custodianship in Jerusalem. Under the *Status Quo Legislation of the Holy Places*, an arrangement agreed by various nations at the end of the Crimean War in 1856 and reaffirmed in the Berlin Treaty of 1878, a variety of Christian traditions share firmly established custodial

rights over the Holy Sites scattered throughout Israel and the Palestinian territories. These various Christian Churches maintain custodian groups of clerics that are dedicated to preserving and protecting these sites not only for access to Christians but to everyone, as the sites are characterised as world heritage sites by UNESCO.

## Holy Sites

- > 13 Churches look after over 40 sites associated with Jesus' life and Biblical events
- > Sacred sites in Israel, Palestine and Jordan attract millions of tourists and pilgrims every year
- > Most of these sites remain active places of worship where services are performed regularly
- > All are symbolic points of global interest and informal relationship connection supported, studied, witnessed, and explained to millions of children, students, churchgoers, and citizens worldwide

The Holy Sites of course form part of an ecosystem of spiritual care, hospitality, welcome and contribution. This ecosystem includes places to stay, eat, pray, worship, study, reflect and simply enjoy the history, landscape and life of the region.

### FINDING NUMBER ONE

We found dynamic Christian communities providing and building significant cultural, and spiritual capital through their personal relationships

and especially in the ecosystem of the Holy Sites and supporting ministries of hospitality and care.

## 2.2 Economic Contributions: The case of tourism/pilgrimage <sup>18</sup>

Christians run every kind of venture in the Holy Land, trading both at the bottom and the top of the economic pyramid. Holy Land executives from Christian backgrounds have gone on to play key leadership roles in, for example, Israeli real estate, regional medicine and the global leadership of companies such as Apple. There have been major campaigns to attract Evangelical venture capital to support Israel's crucial tech sector.<sup>19</sup> The Jordanian Investment Commission offers specialist consulting services to support others who may explore an equivalent path.<sup>20</sup> However, a fragmented investment scene in the Palestinian Authority

geographies means that aid, foreign direct investment (FDI) and other investment capital is not finding ways to back local innovation.<sup>21</sup> For the purposes of this report, we have restricted our analysis to the case of tourism, pilgrimage and technology.

The Christian Holy Places are sites of the utmost importance for Christian pilgrims and popular attractions for international tourists. Christmas and Easter have always drawn vast numbers of visitors, and ceremonies such as the Miracle of the Holy Fire, which is celebrated at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre before Easter, are becoming major global focal points of religious and cultural tourism.

These religious sites form cluster points around which strategically important economic contributions emerge and are sustained. This economic contribution has further potential to grow. And, contrary to some reports,<sup>22</sup> these Christian visitors benefit the wider visitor economy with over **90% of all Christian visitors to Israel choosing to visit the Western Wall** - more than those who visit Tel Aviv, Eilat and the Red Sea combined and even **slightly more than those who visit the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and its associated missions and services.**

<sup>18</sup> Tourism Ministry Inbound Tourism Survey 2019 (TMIT) and Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS).

<sup>19</sup> Bible-based Investment in Israel is 'Tremendous Fit' For Evangelical Christians ([israel365news.com](http://israel365news.com)).

<sup>20</sup> *home new - JIC.*

<sup>21</sup> *Does Palestine have investment-ready startups? - Wamda.*

<sup>22</sup> *It's Not Persecution To Tax Church-Owned Businesses In Israel* ([thefederalist.com](http://thefederalist.com)).

STRIKINGLY,  
IN THE YEAR  
BEFORE  
COVID 19:

- > More than half of the tourists visiting Israel were **Christian (54.9%)**.<sup>23</sup> The total value of their visits to the local economy was **3 billion USD** (excluding inward flights and a full costing of the supply chain benefits).
- > **20% of all incoming tourists** are pilgrims planning to visit Christian holy places.
- > There were **220,447-day trippers** who visited Israel in 2019 and of these **98.2% were Christian**.
- > The average cost of a day tour or package for a tourist who came to Israel as part of an organized trip was 124 USD. These tourists spent an additional 42 USD in Israel adding up to a total expenditure of 166 USD per day tripper.

COMPARING  
INVESTMENT AND  
VALUE ADDED

Christian 3 billion USD annual Tourism/Pilgrimage Contribution only	Sector Comparison
	3 billion USD is just over 6% of all Israeli Foreign Direct Investment <sup>24</sup>
	3 billion USD is just under double total investments secured by the Israeli Tech Industry in 2017 <sup>25</sup>
	3 billion USD is just overall official USAID support to Jordan <sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> 54.9% Christian, 27.5% were Jewish, 2.4% Muslim, 0.1% Baha'i, 0.7% Hindu, 0.5% Buddhist, 1.0% belonged to other religious, and 12.9% had no religious affiliation.

<sup>24</sup> Israel Economy: Population, GDP, Inflation, Business, Trade, FDI, Corruption (heritage.org)

<sup>25</sup> Israeli High-Tech Sector (jewishvirtuallibrary.org)

<sup>26</sup> Jordan - Country Dashboard (usaid.gov)



It is notable that the ‘Christian footfall’ represents participants on a truly global scale and most especially from the faster growing segments of global Christianity.

#### AMONG CHRISTIANS

**30.6%** were Protestant, **42.8%** Catholic, **23.7%** Orthodox, and **2.8%** declared other denominations.

#### AMONG PROTESTANTS

**82.7%** were Evangelical, (this group constitutes **25.3%** of Christian tourists and **13.2%** of all tourists), **15.6%** were mainstream churches and historically black churches, and **1.9%** were Methodist.

#### AMONG ORTHODOX

**73.8%** were Russian Orthodox and the remaining **26.2%** belonged to Greek Orthodox and other Orthodox churches.

#### DRIVING ECONOMIC BENEFIT ACROSS THE REGION: CHRISTIAN VISITS

##### Main places visited by Christian tourist/ pilgrims in 2019

- > Jerusalem was visited by 95% of the visitors
- > Dead Sea region was visited by 94.5%
- > Bethlehem was visited by 93.9%,
- > Tel- Aviv Jaffa was visited by 15.5%
- > Eilat and the Red Sea by 13.2%

##### Main sites visited by Christians in 2019

- > The Western Wall was visited by 90.3% of the visitors
- > Church of the Holy Sepulchre by 87.9%
- > other Christian sites by 11.8%
- > The Jewish Quarter by 9.7%
- > and Mount of Olives by 9%

> Yad Vashem has just under a million visitors per annum. A conservative estimate would place 10% to 20% of its visitors within the Christian community in addition to the thousands who study it in global school curricula. <sup>27</sup>

## FINDING NUMBER TWO

We found then that a very large number of Christians work in the tourism and pilgrimage sector and its supply chain. This is a critically important industry to Israel and the

wider Holy Land attracting in excess of 3 billion USD a year in normal circumstances (and, in effect, a very large Christian contribution to local wealth and revenues.)

216,478 Christian day-trippers spent a total of **35,935,506 USD** in 2019 – equivalent to just over a third of First Israel Bank's revenues alone.<sup>28</sup>

## 2.3 Building community Integration and Social and spiritual capital

### 2.3.1 Job Creation and (social) Venture Capital: case studies of impact

Unlocking Investment: Promoting microfinance and job-training programs for Christians in Israel, the Palestinian territories and Jordan.

As part of understanding how to support the Christian communities in a sustainable way, interviews were conducted with those who are engaged with investment and development projects in Israel, Palestine, and Jordan.

#### EXAMPLES

##### Invest Palestine – ‘Finance for Jobs’ project

Invest Palestine is a non-profit organisation with the objective to generate and facilitate encounters between Palestinian entrepreneurs and potential investors, to finance projects and businesses with a high return potential, aiming at boosting the local economy in Palestine.

The Finance for Jobs project addresses the issue of youth unemployment in Palestine and aims to improve the education and technical skills of young Palestinian engineers.

This is because:

- > Youth unemployment has been high in the West Bank and Gaza – 40% of young Palestinians are unemployed <sup>29</sup>
- > 30,000 young people graduate from Palestinian universities each year
- > Despite this, employers report difficulty filling jobs with qualified candidates

In response to the problem of high youth unemployment, the Palestinian Ministry of Finance and Planning, the World Bank, Social Finance, and investors developed an employment-focused Development Impact Bond (DIB).

The main purpose of the first Palestinian Employment Development Impact Bond (DIB) is to match employment opportunities with suitable employees by purposefully training job seekers

in employer-demanded skills. The DIB, which was launched at the end of 2019, will provide approximately 1,500 unemployed Palestinian job seekers, aged 18–29 years (of which at least 30 percent are women), with skills training and training-to-employment support, over a period of three years.

For this purpose, F4J Consulting Services, a Palestinian company based in Ramallah, Palestine, was established to manage the implementation of this first Palestinian Employment DIB. The DIB’s four investors are: Palestinian Investment Fund (PIF), European Bank for Reconstruction and

Development (EBRD), FMO - Dutch entrepreneurial development bank, and Invest Palestine through the Chilean-Palestinian Diaspora Investment Fund “Semilla de Olivo”. The design of the DIB was led by Social Finance UK.

## International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) - Boosting Productivity on Family Farms in Jordan

International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) provides training programmes to farmers in animal husbandry and water conservation with the aim of expanding farming families’ harvests so that they can feed themselves and generate

income by selling produce. IOCC support has helped build water catchments for reliable irrigation, in addition to supplying farmers with cows, chickens, or goats so they can build up their herds—and their livelihoods (<https://iocc.org>).



### 2.3.2 Christian contribution to Israeli tech start-ups and ecosystems

Israel has been described as the “Start-up Nation,” due to the large number of entrepreneurs developing start-ups and building businesses in the country, particularly in cities like Tel Aviv.<sup>30</sup> Among the plethora of tech firms in Israel, according to Israel’s Economy Ministry, over 30 tech firms are led by Palestinian Arab entrepreneurs. Most of these Arab-led start-ups currently generating revenue in Israel, are focused on the design of software.<sup>31</sup>

Many leaders from within the population of Palestinian Arab start-ups in Israel are of Christian origin and live in the Galilee region. They have

studied at Technion Israel Institute of Technology, often referred to as the MIT of Israel, in the city of Haifa.<sup>32</sup>

The Christian contribution builds on stellar examples such as Johnny Srouji, Apple’s vice president, who serves as senior vice president of Hardware Technologies at Apple, reporting to CEO Tim Cook. He was responsible for setting up Apple’s Research and Development (R&D) centre in Israel and has led Apple’s efforts into building a team of silicon and technology engineers, overseeing the development of new silicon and hardware technologies.

However, despite these exceptional contributors and despite Israel’s Palestinian Arab community making up around 20 percent of the country’s population, the community only accounts for around 2% of workers in the high-tech sector. This is a critical structural gap given the sector’s future importance to the region.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.businessinsider.com/itzik-frid-why-israel-has-so-few-arab-led-startups-2018-9?r=US&IR=T>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/business/arabs-seeking-greater-share-in-israels-high-tech-startup-success-1.5375226>

<sup>32</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/israel-uae-](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/israel-uae-)

[arab-business-technology/2021/01/15/647e9efa-541a-11eb-acc5-92d2819a1ccb\\_story.html](arab-business-technology/2021/01/15/647e9efa-541a-11eb-acc5-92d2819a1ccb_story.html)

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.timesofisrael.com/government-set-to-implement-5-year-nis-500-million-tech-plan-for-israeli-arabs/>

## SEVERAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTE TO THIS LOW PARTICIPATION IN THE START-UP SCENE

> **Networks and capital:** There is evidence that the shared experience of military service among Israelis helps build networks which subsequently enhance access to capital, collaborators, customers and mentors.<sup>34</sup>

> **Geography and access:** Most Christians in Israel live in the periphery in the Galilee region or in the south, in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas, far from Tel Aviv, Israel's tech hub.<sup>35</sup> This restricts their

access to the agglomeration effects of clusters such as 'Silicon Valley' in the US, Hoxton and the 'Silicon Fen' in the UK.

> **The Lack of Freedom of movement:** West Bank Palestinian Christians who were interviewed as part of this report argued that certain Israeli policies currently in force hinder business activity, such as, for example, travel restrictions, especially in relation to international travel. Palestinian Christians

are not able to use Israel's international airports, thus having to travel abroad through Jordanian airports.

> **Impact of Covid:** The lack of visitors during the pandemic has been devastating for the Christian commercial and civil ecosystem of Bethlehem. This has been especially felt during Christmas 2020, when normally hundreds of thousands of pilgrims and tourists visit the city that Jesus was born in.

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.israel21c.org/where-arab-led-israeli-startups-find-mentors-and-partners/>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.businessinsider.com/itzik-frid-why-israel-has-so-few-arab-led-startups-2018-9?r=US&IR=T>

Vincenzo Bellomo, Project Manager of Pro Terra Sancta, a charity that operates in the Holy Land (Jerusalem and Bethlehem), explains the difficulties that the city is experiencing:

*"About 80-85% of Bethlehem's businesses rely on tourism and pilgrims. Many people suddenly (when the Covid lockdown hit) found themselves without income in a*

*place where the state practically does not exist. As a result, sending their children to school, paying school fees and even accessing necessities has become impossible for many families".*

In recent years, government programs have encouraged tech firms to hire more employees of Palestinian descent. An example of this is *Hybrid*, an accelerator program that helps start-ups by building mixed Arab and Jewish teams, in the Arab-majority city of Nazareth.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/business/arabs-seeking-greater-share-in-israels-high-tech-startup-success-1.5375226>

The government is reportedly set to implement a five-year plan worth over NIS 500 million (154 million USD) to boost high-tech and science programs in Israel's Palestinian Arab community.<sup>37</sup>

But, for the reasons above, for Christian entrepreneurs raising investment, seeking networks

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.timesofisrael.com/government-set-to-implement-5-year-nis-500-million-tech-plan-for-israeli-arabs/>

of skills, mentoring and advice on leadership growth conditions remain tough not least because incoming international investment tends to replicate the inequalities of local arrangements and access. There is an opportunity to create a level playing field across communities here.

## FINDING NUMBER THREE

We found that there is current engagement and a shared aspiration of Palestinian Arab communities and the Israeli government to build a

Christian contribution to tech start-up firms and ecosystem. We found that this aspiration is highly under-developed and championed.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That ICoHS, working with UK APPG, in dialogue with high-tech businesses in Silicon Fen (Cambridge), Hoxton (London) and Silicon Valley to explore skills and mentoring swaps between Christian and sympathetic executives there and in the Holy Land.

2. That ICoHS explore tech start-up equity, revolving loan, or other resource support to fledgling firms.

### 2.3.3 Christians in Jordan

Christians are exceptionally well integrated into Jordanian society, forming a significant part of the kingdom's political and economic elite. **In the political realm, Christians hold 9 out of a total of 130 seats in the Jordanian parliament and also hold important ministerial portfolios, ambassadorial**

**appointments, and positions of high military rank.**

Christians enjoy a high level of freedom, though this freedom does not extend to openly evangelizing Muslims. Christians also enjoy high economic and social opportunities compared to the

position of other Christians in the rest of the Holy Land, and the wider Middle East. Christians have historically supported the Hashemite royal family and various Jordanian government officials, and the royal family regards Jordanian Christians as an integral part of the Jordanian society.

### 2.3.4 Fostering high-quality education in Israel

There are currently 47 Christian schools in Israel, run by the Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, the Church of Scotland, Christ Church and Baptist Churches. These Christian schools accommodate annually approximately 33,000 Christian, Muslim, Druze and Jewish students from across the country. <sup>38</sup>



In terms of academic standards, Christian schools are considered as being ‘far superior to their Muslim and Jewish counterparts.’<sup>39</sup>

Christian students in Israel stand out for their scholastic achievements in the matriculation exams, higher than any other ethnic or religious group in Israel. For example, the percentage of Christian students who earned matriculation certificates in 2012 was 69%, higher than the Jewish at 61%, the Druze at 64%, and the Muslim community at 50%. This impressive academic potential is reflected in the integration of the Christian community into the Israeli

economy. A high percentage (25%) among those employed in this community are in academic and technical professions in 2014.<sup>40</sup> A similar percentage was reported for the Israeli Jewish community and together both rising cohorts provide a pool of talent to build upon for the future.

Christians in Jerusalem have privileged access to schools run by European Church Missions and local Churches. Christian schools are open to pupils regardless of religious (or Church) affiliation, following non-discriminatory Western educational policies. In these schools, students attain a basic mastery of European languages

such as English, French, Italian, Greek and German, and are introduced to the culture and history of some of the main European powers.

Christian schools are considered by the Christian community as one of the most effective tools to promote the Churches’ mission in the Holy Land and promote Christian values such as tolerance, love, compassion, and solidarity among the Holy Land’s society.<sup>41</sup>

Most Christian schools are defined as private schools that are ‘recognized (by the State of Israel) but not official’.

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4323529,00.html>, <https://www.makorishon.co.il/nrg/online/1/ART2/319/566.html>

<sup>40</sup> *Spotlight, The Christian Communities in Israel*, MFA, 2014.

<sup>41</sup> *ICoHS Rapid Assessment Report, 2021, “Strengthening the education system of the churches in Israel, Palestine and Jordan” Barbara Drake García and Mireia Gallardo Avellan.*

## 2.3.5 Building Civil Society, adding public value, participation and defeating need

A huge array of church-founded, church-funded, church-backed and ventures supported by the global Christian community work to increase social inclusion across the Holy Land. Their reach and service is very significant.

A cursory valuation of these contributions took us very quickly to a figure more than 3 billion USD above and beyond contributions to tourism and the Holy Sites. At this point, however, we focused in detail only on

those humanitarian, emergency and civil society bodies which have not been formally criticised by any local government or government linked research body.

**In the West Bank, Christians are responsible for over 53% of all NGOs providing education, health, and other social services for the wider population. <sup>42</sup>**

OUR SURVEY IDENTIFIED CIVIL SOCIETY BODIES ARE WORKING TOWARDS DEVELOPING

- > cooperation for international development
- > charity
- > protection and enhancement of the cultural heritage
- > promotion and protection of human, civil, social, and political rights

- > education and professional training
- > organisation and management of tourist activities of social, cultural, and religious interest
- > organisation and management of cultural activities

- > fair and equitable trade programmes and ethical, social, and micro-credit finance programmes
- > child sponsorship

From only 250 Christian charities whose data we have ascertained (and who are not subject to criticism from, for example, the Israeli think tank

NGO monitor) a small sample of only 26 Christian charities contribute a total of 103,501,590 USD to the economies of Israel and Palestine.

**Examples** of Christian NGOs that contribute financially to humanitarian programmes in the Holy Land:

FRANCISCAN FOUNDATION FOR THE HOLY LAND	<p>Total Program expenses = 3,449,095.00 USD</p> <p>Largest programmes = Education 949,374 USD</p> <p>Humanitarian 488,977 USD</p> <p>Housing 157,735 USD <sup>43</sup></p>
PRO TERRA SANCTA	<p>Total Typical Activities = 4,354,637 USD</p> <p>(53.52% of Annual activities spending) <sup>44</sup></p>
INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN EMBASSY JERUSALEM	<p>Total program expenses = 3,531,463 USD <sup>45</sup></p>
INTERNATIONAL ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHARITIES	<p>Total program expenses = 3,616,545 USD <sup>46</sup></p>

Notably, the Christian contribution to activities in other parts of the region – including refugee care for displaced Christians – is very significant indeed.

<sup>43</sup> Charity Navigator - Rating for Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land Home - Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land (ffhl.org)

<sup>44</sup> 2020-Annual-Report.pdf (proterrasancta.org)

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.ecfa.org/MemberProfile.aspx?ID=37789>

<sup>46</sup> <https://iocc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/IOCC-2020-Financial-Statement.pdf>

CASE STUDY:  
THE EXAMPLE OF  
DAR AL MAJUS  
COMMUNITY  
HOME – THE  
HOUSE OF THE  
THREE WISE MEN

An effective way to create job opportunities and support the Christian community has also been the renovation and conservation of Christian properties. Such projects offer an opportunity to train skilled workers and craftsmen, create jobs especially for the most vulnerable population groups (young people, women, people with disabilities), as well as generate income sources through social and cultural activities linked to sustainable tourism and new forms of hospitality.

Vincenzo Bellomo, Project Manager of Pro Terra Sancta, explained how the charity focused on the designing and the first steps of the restoration of *Dar al Majus Community Home*, a cultural centre dedicated to the promotion of educational and cultural activities, work placement and assistance for the most vulnerable social groups of Bethlehem. The design and restoration involved local suppliers and personnel to contribute to the community's economic development and the

creation of job opportunities. In addition, the Christian charity organised events and meetings to promote, inform and involve the local community in the project.

Providing **jobs** for Christians in Bethlehem is an effective way to encourage young people to stay in the Holy Land.

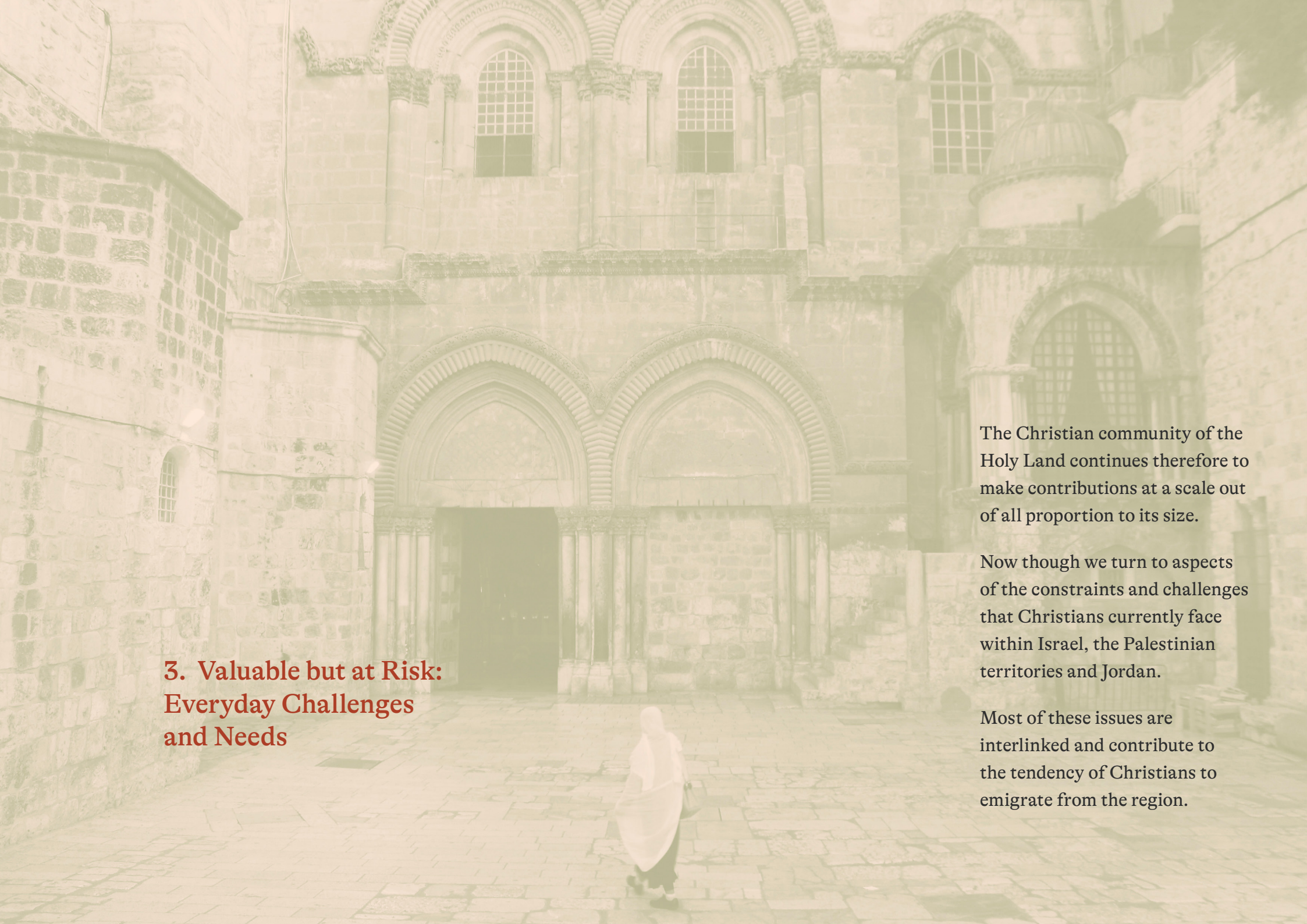
## FINDING NUMBER FOUR

We found then that the Christian community makes a ground-breaking and wide-ranging contribution to building civil society, new start - ups, excellence in education and in health and other humanitarian sectors in the country.

In addition, even at the most conservative of estimates, the incoming international resources in this regard are in excess of 250 million USD in Israel alone. Including philanthropic resources sent to the region, such as World Vision

and Caritas, about whom the NGO Monitor research group has expressed concerns but from whom Jordan and the Palestinian Authority area benefit, it takes that figure close to 3 billion USD.





### **3. Valuable but at Risk: Everyday Challenges and Needs**

The Christian community of the Holy Land continues therefore to make contributions at a scale out of all proportion to its size.

Now though we turn to aspects of the constraints and challenges that Christians currently face within Israel, the Palestinian territories and Jordan.

Most of these issues are interlinked and contribute to the tendency of Christians to emigrate from the region.

## 3.1 The Risk of Undermining the Cultural and Spiritual Contribution

### 3.1.1 State taxation on Christian Churches as engines of the ecosystem of spiritual, cultural, economic and civic public value

A bill was introduced in 2018 by the Israeli parliament that would allow Jerusalem's municipality to modify a religious tax exemption resulting in heavy taxation on Church properties leased to private companies. There seemed to be confusion here on the part of the civil authorities of Jerusalem regarding the part played by the ecosystem of hospitality and support to pilgrims located in many of these sites and the way that the churches recycle rental revenues into their wider ministry of welcome, humanitarian support and economic benefit for the whole community of Jerusalem and Israel.

This local leadership confusion endures in some quarters. Although the Israeli government has long exempted churches from taxes, Jerusalem's municipality has demanded that their 'businesses' pay local levies disregarding the important contribution of the ecosystem to the region.<sup>47</sup>

Local Christian leaders complained of the plans, stating that this was 'an attempt to weaken the Christian presence in Jerusalem'. In January 2018, the LoCH closed the doors of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to the public in protest.

Following protests and international outcry, Israeli PM Netanyahu suspended tax procedures on Jerusalem churches.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2018/03/01/a-dispute-over-real-estate-roils-jerusalem>

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium-churches-fume-as-city-of-jerusalem-claims-186-million-in-overdue-tax-1.5803236>



## FINDING NUMBER FIVE

We found that major concerns remain that Jerusalem's leadership, supported by some others, may attempt again to put the positive contributions at risk through taxation.

### 3.1.2 Delaying or denying visa access to Christian clergy

During our research Christian leaders reported little difficulty obtaining visas for clergy to serve in Israel.

However, the exception here was for Christian clergy from Arab countries. Many of these reported long delays for, and periodic

denials of their visa applications. Without good reason.

The Israeli government stated Christian clergy from Arab countries were subject to the same entry laws and similar security procedures as clergy from other parts of the world and

that any visa delays or denials were due to security reviews. The government also said that there were some "unavoidable delays" in cases of applicants from countries that did not have diplomatic relations with Israel.

## FINDING NUMBER SIX

We found major concerns that the system was not being operated fairly or transparently thus increasing concerns that uneven administration would undermine the recruitment and retention of the ministerial talent that the churches (and the other public contributions they make) require.

## RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that ICoHS and parliamentary partners explore with the Israeli government the ways in which it could publish the performance data of the relevant government departments reporting that data by origin, ethnicity, religion and client satisfaction.

### 3.1.3 Employment Discrimination against Christian Clergy

Church officials noted that when the clergy visas were awarded, they did not allow the bearer access to basic social benefits such as disability insurance or national health insurance that would be available to foreign nationals working in other sectors of the economy.<sup>49</sup>

In some cases, this exclusion applied even for those who had served in the country for more than 30 years.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>49</sup> *International Religious Freedom Report: Israel, West Bank and Gaza, U.S. Department of State, (2019).*

<sup>50</sup> *International Religious Freedom Report: Israel, West Bank and Gaza, U.S. Department of State, (2019).*

#### FINDING NUMBER SEVEN

We found major concern that clergy serving and making even a long-term contribution to building up the communities and life of the Holy Land would, especially in Israel, not be entitled to benefits that might accrue of right to those working in other sectors.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. We recommend that ICoHS and its parliamentary partners enhance the data available on the position and circumstances of long-term contributors to the region who have not been granted such benefits and that they be benchmarked by ethnicity and religion.
2. We recommend that the programme of parliamentary briefing have this as one of its work strands.

## 3.2 The Risk of Undermining the Economic Contribution

### 3.2.1 Government Pressure on Tourism due to COVID – A Current Concern

Our research included interviews across Christian communities in and aligned with the travel sector.

Having noted the extraordinary contribution of Christian communities to public value in the tourism and pilgrimage sector above, we noted that the Israeli authorities have set new conditions and (temporary) restrictions for tourists/pilgrims arriving in the Holy Land following the pandemic. While these actions apply across the board, the huge importance of Christianity to the sector mean that the restrictions are particularly onerous for Christian pilgrims and those who receive them in-country.

The main updates that could potentially have a negative impact on Christian travel agencies are the following:

- > Authorization is reserved for members of a 5 to 30 people tour group, traveling to and from Israel on the same flights, and hosted by a local travel agency approved by the Israeli government (commission charge per tourist to be provided to the local agency).<sup>51</sup>

- > Only Israeli agencies and Palestinian tour operators based in East Jerusalem registered at the Israeli Ministry of Tourism have this possibility; tour operators based in the Palestinian territories, including Bethlehem, are still excluded.

- > On top of a complete vaccination for each tourist, and a negative PCR test performed less than 72 hours before departure, visitors must agree to undergo another PCR test at Ben Gurion airport (approx. 23 USD if prepaid - online registration by travel agency/tour operator),
- > Mandatory stay in Jerusalem with West Bank pilgrimage sites therefore out of reach.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, *Pilgrimages to the Holy Land, update on health protocols* - [https://www.lpj.org/posts/pilgrimages-to-the-holy-land-update-on-health-protocols.html?fbclid=IwAR3gbC6YI5UnDebXyutoKK8sQU\\_fgHrDdtMFz8\\_NidgmZu1pjwpgsF0fSc0](https://www.lpj.org/posts/pilgrimages-to-the-holy-land-update-on-health-protocols.html?fbclid=IwAR3gbC6YI5UnDebXyutoKK8sQU_fgHrDdtMFz8_NidgmZu1pjwpgsF0fSc0)

<sup>52</sup> Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, *Pilgrimages to the Holy Land, update on health protocols* - [https://www.lpj.org/posts/pilgrimages-to-the-holy-land-update-on-health-protocols.html?fbclid=IwAR3gbC6YI5UnDebXyutoKK8sQU\\_fgHrDdtMFz8\\_NidgmZu1pjwpgsF0fSc0](https://www.lpj.org/posts/pilgrimages-to-the-holy-land-update-on-health-protocols.html?fbclid=IwAR3gbC6YI5UnDebXyutoKK8sQU_fgHrDdtMFz8_NidgmZu1pjwpgsF0fSc0), see also, *Holy Land Incoming Tour Operators Association* [www.hltoa.com](http://www.hltoa.com)



### 3.2.2 Local concerns regarding the need for more international support

Many of the organisations we interviewed communicated Palestinian Christians' 'disappointment' that Western Christians seem to be comparably unaware of their position and the risks they face.

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#### PALESTINIAN CHRISTIANS REPORTED:

> A lack of awareness of their plight among Western Christians

> Few Westerners are likely to directly contact indigenous Christians during pilgrimage or educational tours to the Holy Land.

> The opportunity therefore to build on tourism, aid, civil society capacity building to bring foreign Christians to Israel, the Palestinian territories and Jordan for educational experiences, awareness-raising conferences and to share skills, networks and resources.

## FINDING NUMBER EIGHT

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We found under-developed potential for enhancing international support and a call from local Christian communities to others internationally.

Examples of civic initiatives that already take place in Israel and Palestine are:

- > The Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre organizes ‘witness visits’
- > The Holy Land Trust brings foreign participants to join in a Palestine Summer Encounter
- > The Bethlehem Bible College has taken the initiative to organize a biannual conference known as ‘Christ at the Checkpoint.’
- > A small number of LoC and Christian organisations maintain efforts to bring Christians from abroad to the region to experience life with Christian and non-Christian Palestinians in the Holy Land.

### 3.2.3 Minority within a minority - Social Hostilities in Israel and Minority Status in the Palestinian Authority and Gaza:

In many interviews the active social marginalisation of Christians frequently arose.

Interviewees talked about discriminatory policies by, and attitudes of, people in the Israeli public services. The most often reported include:

> Less-than-equal treatment from public services by comparison with other Israeli citizens.

> An educational culture that encourages Jewish children to treat Christians with ‘contempt’ and that such habits have not been adequately policed by the criminal justice system.

> These fears and concerns were reported at community level and have been raised as concerns by senior leaders including Patriarch Theophilos the 3rd and Latin Patriarch Pierbattista Pizzaballa.

> Tense relations with religious ultra-Orthodox Jews (Haredim), who openly expressed hatred through ‘price tag’ attacks.<sup>53</sup>

Such fears were not restricted to Israel. Respondents also reported:

> An increase in radicalisation among some younger Muslim communities that manifested itself in intolerance of Christians, less radical Muslims, and Jews.

> Attacks on Christians minorities that were confirmed by the press and other reports.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>53</sup> *International Religious Freedom Report: Israel, West Bank and Gaza*, U.S. Department of State, (2020).

<sup>54</sup> *Rovati (2020), Religious affiliations and social coexistence in the Islamic Middle East countries in* Migrants and religion: paths, issues,

and lenses: a multidisciplinary and multi-sited study, *Boston: Brill. International Religious Freedom Report: Israel, West Bank and Gaza*, U.S. Department of State, (2020).

Attacks on Christian properties and churches in the Holy Land have risen in recent years with incidents of vandalism amounting to 24 over the past six years. <sup>55</sup>

<sup>55</sup> *International Religious Freedom Report: Israel, West Bank and Gaza, U.S. Department of State, (2019).*

<sup>56</sup> <https://www.timesofisrael.com/attack-on-jerusalem-graves-unnerves-christians/>, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20210521-palestine-condemns-israel-settlers-attack-on->

These attacks on Christian properties consist of writing anti-Christian slogans on the walls of churches, burning of churches and cemeteries and include physical attacks on Christian

[christian-clergy-in-jerusalem/](https://english.alaraby.co.uk/news/jerusalem-priest-hospitalised-after-attack-israeli-settlers), <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/news/jerusalem-priest-hospitalised-after-attack-israeli-settlers>

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/cemetery-attacked-near-jerusalem-catholic-officials/1286000>

clergy. <sup>56/57</sup> This is a dangerous phenomenon that is affecting the Christian presence in the Holy Land and puts Christian clergy in physical danger.

## FINDING NUMBER NINE

We found that even where good local policy was in place Christians were reporting mistreatment on grounds of religion, restrictions on their feeling free from threat and local abusive behaviour.

We found that increasing grievance and despair in parts of the Palestinian Muslim community was increasing the risk of verbal and physical attacks against minority Palestinian Christian communities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That churches should develop interfaith awareness programmes with the support of government authorities in Israel, Israeli and Jewish non-profit organizations involved in interfaith and reconciliation programmes. <sup>58</sup>

2. That churches should develop interfaith awareness programmes with the support of Palestinian authorities and Palestinian non-profit organizations involved in interfaith and reconciliation

programmes. Implementing such a programme in schools would provide students with knowledge and insights into religious diversity.

<sup>58</sup> One such initiative is 'The Parents Circle', [www.theparentscircle.com](http://www.theparentscircle.com). Similar organisation here: [www.theocracywatch.org/christian\\_zionism\\_reconciliation](http://www.theocracywatch.org/christian_zionism_reconciliation).

### 3.3 Undermining Building Community Integration: The Threat to Spiritual and Social Capital

#### 3.3.1 Unemployment - Poverty

Half of all Palestinian Arab families in Israel live in poverty today, a rate which is more than three times higher than that experienced by Jewish families.<sup>59</sup> NII figures illustrate a marked imbalance in government welfare injections and other policy measures designed to reduce poverty within different segments of the population.

While such measures have reduced the Jewish poverty rate by 46.2 per cent, the Arab poverty rate has been reduced by only 13.5 per cent.<sup>60</sup> As the statistical agencies do not provide data by religion, it is not possible to determine the Palestinian Christian poverty rate in comparison to other groups in Israel.

#### FINDING NUMBER TEN

We found that the absence of adequate data collection, research and thus an evidence base to properly tracking and addressing Christian poverty was undermining the

community and the government's own claims to 'be doing better' just as anecdotal and informal evidence of increasing poverty suggested its rapid increase.

<sup>59</sup> *Poverty and Inequality Tables, NII, 2019.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*



### 3.3.2 Lack of Housing for Christian families

Data from within the last 15 years indicate that there is an immediate need to construct residential units for Christians within the precincts of the Old City as well as outside its walls.<sup>61</sup> Interviewees expressed their concern regarding the lack of housing for Christians living in Jerusalem and areas controlled by Israel and stressed that the lack of housing has a negative impact on social life and is one of the causes that leads to Christians leaving the Holy Land.<sup>62</sup>

Local Church leaders indicated that requests for housing have increased in the last 15 years. According to the Franciscan Custodia of the Holy Land, in 2006 alone, there were 650 requests for additional housing from Catholic families living in Jerusalem.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Bernard Sabella, 'Jerusalem: A Christian Perspective', *Al-Bushra* magazine, June 2006, [www.albushra.org](http://www.albushra.org)

<sup>62</sup> <http://en.lpj.org/2012/01/10/coordination-de-terre-sainte-quid-du-logement-des-chretiens-a-jerusalem/>

<sup>63</sup> Bernard Sabella, 'Jerusalem: A Christian Perspective', *Al-Bushra* magazine, June 2006, [www.albushra.org](http://www.albushra.org)

### 3.3.3 Diluting the Extraordinary contribution of Christian Education in Israel, Palestine, and Jordan

#### 3.3.3 (a) Israel

In 2015, we were told, two measures introduced by the Israeli Ministry of Education (MoE) put Christian schools at the heart of an unprecedented crisis.

Over the years leading up to 2015, the Israeli government reduced the budget allocated to Christian schools, by 30% of grants received in education. Parents were expected to cover the shortfall in tuition fees. Simultaneously, MoE produced an order limiting the ability of Christian schools to receive funds from the parents.

When leaders of the Christian schools reacted to these measures, the MoE responded with an invitation that Christian schools join the system of Israeli public schools: a proposal rejected by the Christian schools who saw their identity threatened and the dilution of their service through gradual and deliberate over - regulation (or nationalisation by the back door).<sup>64</sup>

In September 2015, the Office of Christian Schools in Israel organized a strike, arguing that the Jewish schools, assumed

to be in the same category as Christian schools in the Israeli system, are fully funded by the government while maintaining their autonomy. After 27 days of mobilization, the strike ended with an agreement with the Ministry of Education that Christian schools receive NIS 50 million (15,631,645 USD) by March 31, 2016, to offset the budgetary restrictions imposed in previous years.

#### FINDING NUMBER ELEVEN

We found that concerns that the Ministry of Education will once again seek to use regulation and funding regimes to undermine Christian schools are rife.

We found that already Christian schools were struggling to be treated by the Ministry of Education on a level playing field to equivalent schools in these regards.

<sup>64</sup> <https://www.haaretz.com/.premium-christian-schools-to-reopen-monday-as-strike-ends-1.5403000><sup>65</sup> Bernard Sabella, 'Jerusalem: A Christian Perspective', *Al-Bushra magazine*, June 2006, [www.albushra.org](http://www.albushra.org)

### 3.3.3 (b) Education in Palestine and Jordan

A recent Rapid Assessment Report conducted by ICoHS (2021), concluded that with the current model of tuition fee collection, most Christian schools are not able to achieve financial independence in the long-term, regardless of any

improvement in the systems, and they will remain dependent on the churches' subsidies to a greater or lesser extent.

A solution is higher enrolment, supported by better curriculum and a gradual increase in fees.

## FINDING NUMBER TWELVE AND THIRTEEN

We found that the schools financial independence is constrained by two key factors.

First, due to wider unemployment related to the COVID 19 pandemic, Christian families cannot afford to pay tuition fees for the Christian schools. In Jordan, 40,000 children withdrew from Christian schools in the last 2 years and enrolled at public Jordanian schools. Enrolment rates in the Christian schools in the WB and Jordan are low and therefore, a sustainable income is not generated.

Second, this is compounded by the nature of the curriculum. The Jordanian Ministry of Education has developed a highly advanced national curriculum in recent years with the aim to ensure that the quality of education and level of skills offered can help young Jordanians become employable. Jordan's education system is seen as a model by other countries in the region. However, the Christian heritage, positive economic and social contribution and future potential to the Holy Land is still absent from current curricula and proposals.

### 3.4 Economic, social and educational pressure and the rise in emigration

Emigration is not a general Palestinian phenomenon but rather a Palestinian Christian one.

Since the late Ottoman period (circa 1900), Palestinians have emigrated to seek a better life in cities throughout the Middle East and in other parts of the world.

However, the rate of emigration has been *higher* among Christians, having a far more

visible effect on their presence in Israel and the Palestinian territories (less in Jordan).<sup>65</sup>

Scholars have emphasised the combination of low birth-rates and high rates of emigration for hastening the reduction of the Christian presence in what today constitutes the Palestinian territories, with a drop from 12 per cent in 1914 to less than

1.5 % today.<sup>66</sup> Such a drop in numbers has been a source of great concern among Palestinian Christians in Israel, many of whom fear the disappearance of their communities. Statements like *'In fifteen years there'll be none of us left!'* are quite common and reflect a widely shared sense of urgency within the Christian communities.

<sup>65</sup> Sabella, 1999, 2005.

<sup>66</sup> Sabella, 2006: 49 also Raheb, Kassis and Collings (2012).

According to a report published by PCPSR in 2020, 36% of Palestinian Christians are considering emigrating from the West Bank and Gaza. Emigration consideration is higher in the Gaza Strip, standing at 48%, compared to the West Bank where it stands at 35%.

This finding indicates that the desire to emigrate is higher among Palestinian Christians than Palestinian Muslims.

As the Christian community has been seriously depleted through emigration, inter-sectarian marriages, as a phenomenon, has become a necessary adjustment to the demographic realities.<sup>67</sup>

As one Orthodox cleric mentioned, *‘people are looking for the future of their children, to live in a more peaceful atmosphere and enjoy better conditions’*.

<sup>67</sup> Kårtveit, B. (2014). *Dilemmas of attachment: Identity and belonging among Palestinian Christians*. Leiden: Brill.

## Factors contributing to Christian *emigration* include:

- > political instability
- > the inability to obtain residency permits for spouses due to the 2003 Law of Citizenship and Entry
- > the limited ability of Christian communities in the Jerusalem area to expand due to building restrictions
- > the difficulties Christian clergy experienced in obtaining Israeli visas and residency permits
- > loss of confidence in the peace process
- > economic hardships created by the establishment of the barrier and the imposition of travel restrictions (exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic)



In the middle of the last century, the population of Christians in Jerusalem was 30,000;<sup>68</sup> today, it is fewer than 10,000.<sup>69</sup> Given the city's population growth, it is estimated that the population of Christians in Jerusalem could be around 100,000 today; instead, the number is 1/10th of that.<sup>70</sup> In Jerusalem alone, the Christian population made up 20% of the Holy City's population in the middle of the twentieth

century, but it only makes up 2% of Jerusalem today.<sup>71</sup> In the Old City of Jerusalem, church leaders estimate that only 1,000 - 2,000 Christian residents remain.

A contributing factor to the emigration of Christians is certain Israeli policies directed towards the (Christian) Palestinian residents of Jerusalem that hinder their economic development and affect their

daily life in the city. For example, West Bank Palestinians can no longer obtain residency permits if they want to live in Jerusalem. Likewise, they cannot obtain building permits for new homes construction, or expansion and repair of housing in the Old City and East Jerusalem. Such policies accelerate the migration of the Christian community abroad.

## FINDING NUMBER FOURTEEN

We found an enduring risk of emigration triggered by multi-faceted risks such as those we have described. We were told that there were no local policy investments, strategies or responses designed to reduce

this risk. Consequently, that Christians did not work on a level playing field from other groups who have access to better support in the region together with incentives to remain invested in the region's life.

<sup>68</sup> Tsimhoni, D., 1978. *Demographic Trends of the Christian Population in Jerusalem and the West Bank 1948-1978*. *Middle East Journal*, 37①, p. 57.

<sup>69</sup> Raheb and Kassis, 2012, p. 11.

<sup>70</sup> Sabella, B., 2007. *Palestinian Christians: Historical Developments, Current Politics and Attitudes Towards Church, Society and Human Rights: The Sabeel Survey on Palestinian Christians in the West Bank*

and Israel – Summer 2006. [pdf] Greenwood Village, CO: Friends of Sabeel North America. p. 4. Available at: <https://www.fosna.org/files/fosna/events/SabeelSurveyPalestinianChristians.pdf>

<sup>71</sup> Lev, D., 2009. *Study: Christians in Jerusalem Down to Just 2% from 20%*. *Arutz Sheva: Israel National News*, [online] 5 February. Available at: <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/131150>





#### 4. The Future of the Christian Presence in the Holy Land Conclusion and Recommendations

The ICoHS ‘Defeating Minority Exclusion and Unlocking Potential: Christianity in the Holy Land’ report set out to record the positive, spiritual, social, cultural, and economic contribution of Christianity in and to the Holy Land. To that end, the report documents the public value that Christians add in the region’s societies and their special importance and influence on the social fabric of the Holy Lands cities. The analysis we conducted by looking at socioeconomic data and through interviewing key people in the Holy Land sheds light on the unique nature of the Christian community in the Holy Land.

Christians preserve sites holy to Christianity and, this way, ensure the continuation of the Christian faith in its birthplace. The Holy Sites are not only significant to the local communities;

local Christians are linked to international Churches and their global communities of 2.5 billion Christians who look upon Jerusalem as a holy place central to the origins of Christianity.

Entrusted with this important task, Christians in the Holy Land have created an ecosystem of symbiotic Holy Sites, hospitality centres, ventures of welcome that make the interaction of the local and global Christian community and those interested in it possible. In the process they have created an ecosystem that facilitates, for example, a huge part of the Israeli tourist footfall a full fifth of which is specifically linked to its presence and service.

The data indicate that Christian hospitality makes a significant economic contribution which, when seen comparably within Israel/Palestine and Jordan’s

societies, it drives a massive economic and social benefit across the region.

Beyond that Christian contribution to society is wider still: Christians make valuable contributions in numerous fields and are involved in various businesses in the Holy Land trading in real estate, regional medicine, academia and also contributing to technological aspects of local economies, such as for example in tech start-ups and ecosystems.

Christians also add significant public value by having established schools run by the LoC. These schools foster high-quality education within Israel, Palestine and Jordan and are considered as being far superior to their Muslim and Jewish counterparts. Their work promotes social inclusion across the Holy Land by



being open to pupils regardless of religious affiliation and advances tolerance and fosters positive engagement between diverse pupils by following non-discriminatory Western educational policies.

The report, however, also works towards identifying the risks and constraints that exist to restrain that enduring positive contribution. These include:

State taxation on Christian Churches directly threatens the very existence of these institutions; delaying or denying visa access to Christian clergy pose great challenge to the everyday pastoral ministerial administration and running of the churches; government pressure on tourism directly affects Christian businesses; also ineffective international support,

social hostilities in Israel and the status of Christians as a minority in Palestine, as well as unemployment and poverty, exacerbated by the recent pandemic threaten the very existence of Christians in the Holy Land.

Most of these issues, part demographic, part legal, part resource-focused are identified as threats that require urgent attention. Most importantly, the issues are interlinked and contribute to the tendency of Christians to emigration.

Considering these challenges and risks, the report identifies ways in which they can be mitigated, though with necessary coordination between ICoHS, the LoC, Church-affiliated organisations, external donors and investors and

the local communities. The recommendations offered, map possible new directions to overcome the challenges identified and meet the needs of Christians of the Holy Land.

These strategies could help reduce emigration and stop the exodus of Christians from the Holy Land. They open channels for dialogue and participation amongst state and non-state actors; they contribute to building enhanced policy advocacy for Christians in the Holy Land to create change in policies that affect them. They function as a basis for the planning of new investment, resource gathering and support; a foundation for researchers in governments and beyond to improve the evidence base through which they interpret Christian and other minority communities in the region.

More importantly, this exploratory report provides the basis of further analysis and recommendations for action by policy makers, diplomats, funders and especially the wider global community of individuals and organisations who cherish the Christian community in the Holy Land's current and future contribution.

## Map of the Holy Land Since 1948

Retrieved from Simon Sebag Montefiore's *Jerusalem: The Biography*. London: Phoenix, 2012: 645 (modified)



## Appendix

### FINDING 1

We found dynamic Christian communities providing and building significant cultural, and spiritual capital through their personal relationships and especially in the ecosystem of Holy Sites and supporting ministries of hospitality and care.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

That further and sustained research be undertaken to quantify more fully the cultural, economic, and civic contribution of Christians in the Holy Land and the value added by them and those offering and providing international support.

That existing data and new data should be used to inform a new

programme of education, briefing and information in the Holy Land and also in the UK, US, and Australia. Its purpose should be to increase understanding and engagement with the Christian contribution to cultural, spiritual, and its symbiotic relationship to crucial economic and civic contributions in region.

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### FINDING 2

We found then that a very large number of Christians work in the tourism and pilgrimage sector and its supply chain. This is a critically important industry to Israel and the wider Holy Land attracting in excess of 3 billion USD a year in normal circumstances (and, in effect, a very large Christian contribution to local wealth and revenues.)

### RECOMMENDATION

That existing data and new data should be used to inform a new programme of education, briefing and information in the Holy Land and also in the parliaments of UK, US, and Australia. Its purpose should be

to increase understanding and engagement with the Christian contribution to cultural, spiritual, and its symbiotic relationship to crucial economic and civic contributions in region.



### FINDING 3

We found that there is current engagement and a shared aspiration of Palestinian Arab communities and the Israeli government to build a Christian contribution to tech start-up firms and ecosystem. We found that this aspiration is highly under-

### RECOMMENDATIONS

That ICoHS, working with UK APPG, in dialogue with high-tech businesses in Silicon Fen (Cambridge), Hoxton (London) and Silicon Valley to explore skills and mentoring swaps between Christian and sympathetic executives there and in the Holy Land.

That ICoHS should explore tech start-up equity, revolving loan, or other resource support to fledgling firms.

### FINDING 4

We found then that the Christian community makes a ground-breaking and wide-ranging contribution to building civil society, new start - ups, excellence in education and in health and other humanitarian sectors in the country.

In addition, even at the most conservative of estimates, the

incoming international resources in this regard are in excess of 250 million USD in Israel alone. Including philanthropic resources sent to the region, such as World Vision and Caritas, about whom the NGO Monitor research group has expressed concerns but from whom Jordan and the Palestinian Authority area benefit, it takes that figure close to 3 billion USD.

### RECOMMENDATION

That existing data and new data should be used to inform a new programme of education, briefing and information in the Holy Land and also in the parliaments of UK, US, and Australia. Its purpose should be to increase understanding and engagement with the Christian contribution to cultural, spiritual, capital and its symbiotic relationship to crucial economic and civic contributions in region.

## FINDING 5

We found that major concerns remain that Jerusalem's leadership, supported by some others, may attempt again to put the positive contributions at risk through taxation.

## RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that as part of ongoing international parliamentary scrutiny ICoHS should encourage particular attention to the role of city and town leaders in Israel and also

any administrative or legislative efforts to modify or change tax, legal and other treatments of Christian charities and other ventures that support the local ecosystem of contribution.

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## FINDING 6

We found major concerns that the visa system was not being operated fairly or transparently thus increasing concerns that uneven administration would undermine the recruitment and retention of the ministerial talent that the churches and the other public contributions they make, require.

## RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that ICoHS and parliamentary partners explore with the Israeli government the ways in which it could regularly publish its relevant departmental performance data reporting that data by origin, ethnicity, religion and client satisfaction across all communities.

## FINDING 7

We found major concern that clergy serving and making even a long-term contribution to building up the communities and life of the Holy Land would, especially in Israel, not be entitled to benefits that might accrue of right to those working in other sectors.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that ICoHS and its parliamentary partners enhance the data available on the position and circumstances of long-term contributors to the region who have not been granted such benefits and that they be benchmarked by ethnicity and religion against all

those who have been admitted to work in country.

We recommend that the programme of parliamentary briefing have this as one of its work strands.

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## FINDING 8

We found under-developed potential for enhancing international support and a call from local Christian communities to others internationally.

## FINDING 9

We found that even where good local policy was in place Christians were reporting mistreatment on grounds of religion, restrictions on their feeling free from threat and local abusive behaviour.

We found that increasing narratives of grievance and despair in parts of the Palestinian Muslim community was increasing the risk of verbal and physical attacks against minority Palestinian Christian communities.

<sup>72</sup> One such initiative is 'The Parents Circle', [www.theparentscircle.com](http://www.theparentscircle.com). Similar organisation here: [www.theocracywatch.org/christian\\_zionism\\_reconciliation](http://www.theocracywatch.org/christian_zionism_reconciliation).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

ICoHS and its partners should convene a meeting across religious, government and civil society organisations to explore what community level strategies might reduce these attacks. Consideration should be given to inter-religious initiatives, police training, cross community collaboration on matters of common interest and regular meetings between religious leaders.<sup>72</sup>

ICoHS and its partners should convene a meeting across religious, government and civil society organisations to explore what community level strategies might reduce these attacks. Consideration should be given to schools based personal development and encounter, inter-religious initiatives, police training, cross community collaboration on matters of common interest and regular meetings between religious leaders.

## FINDING 10

We found that the absence of adequate data collection, research and thus an evidence base to properly tracking and addressing Christian poverty was undermining the community and the government's own claims to 'be doing better' just as anecdotal and informal evidence of increasing poverty suggested its rapid increase.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

That further and sustained research be undertaken to quantify more fully the social, economic and civic position of Christians in the region.

That existing data and new data should be used to inform a new programme of education, briefing and information in the Holy

Land and also in the UK, US, and Australia. Its purpose should be to increase understanding and engagement with the Christian contribution to cultural, spiritual, and its symbiotic relationship to crucial economic and civic contributions in region.

## FINDING 11

We found that concerns that the Ministry of Education will once again seek to use regulation and funding regimes to undermine Christian schools are rife. We found that already Christian schools were struggling to be treated by the Ministry of Education on a level playing field to equivalent schools in these regards.

## RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that as part of the recommended programme of parliamentary briefings a programme of work focused on equalities in educational support and funding be prioritised.

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## FINDING 12 & 13

We found that this is constrained by two key factors.

First, due to wider unemployment related to the COVID 19 pandemic, Christian families cannot cover tuition fees for the Christian schools. In Jordan, 40,000 children withdrew from Christian schools in the last 2 years and enrolled at public Jordanian schools.

Enrolment rates in the Christian schools in the WB and Jordan are low and therefore, a sustainable income is not generated.

Second, this is compounded by the nature of the curriculum. The Jordanian Ministry of Education has developed a highly advanced national curriculum in recent years with the aim to ensure

that the quality of education and level of skills offered can help young Jordanians become employable. Jordan's education system is seen as a model by other countries in the region. However, the Christian heritage, positive economic and social contribution and future potential to the Holy Land is still absent from current curricula and proposals.

## FINDING 14

We found an enduring risk of emigration triggered by multi-faceted risks such as those we have described. We were told that there were no local policy investments, strategies or responses designed to reduce

this risk. Consequently, that Christians did not work on a level playing field from other groups who have access to better support in the region together with incentives to remain invested in the region's life.

## Methodology

The data in this report draw on diverse research approaches comprising of documents, published academic research including the review of official documents, library resources and over 40 new interviews with key individuals in the Christian community and beyond in the Holy Land. More specifically, the report draws on socioeconomic data from the most recent reports available from Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) and the National

Insurance Institute (NII), as well as non-governmental organisations, such as the Arab Centre for Alternative Planning (ACAP) and the Institute for International Strategic Studies (IIS). Furthermore, the report documents findings from semi-structured interviews and conversations with Church leaders, community representatives, employees of Church-based agencies in Jerusalem and Bethlehem as well as employees of NGOs operating

in the Holy Land. Independent Christian businessmen in Israel/Palestine were also interviewed to grasp the socio-economic issues on the ground. Interviewing investors working with Christians in the Holy Land from abroad helped in shaping potential recommendation for future support. Desk based research and interviews were undertaken from Birmingham and Oxford of external funders.



## Acknowledgements

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