

**COI QUERY**

<b>Country of Origin</b>	Pakistan
<b>Main subject</b>	<b>Nusayri/Alawite</b>
<b>Question(s)</b>	Information on the presence and treatment of the Nusayri (Nusayr, Nusari, Nusairi, Nosairi, Nosayri, Nusehri, Nuseri) religious group, also known as Alawite (Alawi)
<b>Date of completion</b>	<b>16 July 2018</b>
<b>Query Code</b>	<b>Q97</b>
<b>Contributing EU+ COI units (if applicable)</b>	BE, DK, FI, HU, IE, SK

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*This response to a COI query has been elaborated according to the [Common EU Guidelines for Processing COI](#) and [EASO COI Report Methodology](#).*

*The information provided in this response has been researched, evaluated and processed with utmost care within a limited time frame. All sources used are referenced. A quality review has been performed in line with the above mentioned methodology. This document does not claim to be exhaustive neither conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to international protection. If a certain event, person or organisation is not mentioned in the report, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organisation does not exist. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.*

*The information in the response does not necessarily reflect the opinion of EASO and makes no political statement whatsoever.*

*The target audience is caseworkers, COI researchers, policy makers, and decision making authorities. The answer was finalised on the 16 July 2018. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this answer.*



## COI QUERY RESPONSE

### 1. Presence and treatment, in Pakistan, of the Nusayri (Nusayr, Nusari, Nusairi, Nosairi, Nosayri, Nusehri, Nuseri)<sup>1</sup> religious group, also known as Alawite (Alawi)

Amongst all sources consulted, scarce information was found on the presence and treatment of the religious group Nusayri - also referred to as Alawite (Alawi) - in Pakistan.

The website [Overview of World Religions](#) (OWR)<sup>2</sup> – run by the Division of Religion and Philosophy, University of Cumbria (UK) – lists the ‘Nusayriyyah’ as an extreme branch of the Shia Muslim religion.

The Nusayri group derives its name from the founder of the doctrine, Abu Shu'ayb Muhammad ibn Nusayr<sup>3</sup>. However, the designation ‘Alawite’ (or Alawi) became widespread during the 1920s. Ever since, the community started calling itself ‘Alawite’ (or Alawi) and nowadays, the term ‘Nusayri’ is used only by non-Alawites and often in anti-Alawites contexts<sup>4</sup>.

The largest Nusayri community lives in Syria<sup>5</sup>. However, members of this sect are also present in Turkey and Lebanon, as explained in a 2015 article by Fabrice Balanche - associate professor in Middle East Studies and research director at the University of Lyon<sup>6</sup>.

The 2012 travel book, *Innocence and War: Mark Twain's Holy Land Revisited*, by writer Ian Strathcarron, makes reference to members of the Nusayri community in Pakistan<sup>7</sup>. The author travelled across Syria, Lebanon, the West Bank retracing the itinerary made a century and half earlier by Mark Twain and offering an account of the region. In the chapter, *Damascus*, the author interviewed a Syrian pastor who stated:

‘Everything here changed here with the 1970 coup. The al-Assads are Alawites, a minority Muslim sect that even the Muslims think are a bit wacky. In Pakistan they are still persecuted, mosque-bombed and suchlike. In Saudi, forget it – it's lamppost time. That's an unhappy place, Pakistan, by the way. The al-Assads knew that the only way to protect a minority is to declare majorities illegal – and unwholesome. It's worked. They've done wonderfully for all minorities’<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> For ease of reference, the spelling ‘Nusayri’ will be used throughout the document.

<sup>2</sup> The ‘Overview of world religions’ website is the outcome of a collaborative project undertaken by the Museum of World Religions in Taiwan and the Department of Religion and Social Ethics at the University of Cumbria, UK (previously St. Martins' College). It provides an interactive resource of religions of the world. For more information on OWR, see: University of Cumbria, *Insight/ Overview of world religions*, last updated 22 November 2017 ([url](#)).

<sup>3</sup> University of Cumbria (PHILTAR, Division of Religion and Philosophy), *Overview of world religions (OWR) – Nusayriyyah*, last update 22 November 2017 ([url](#)).

<sup>4</sup> Encyclopaedia Iranica, *Nosayris*, last updated 20 July 2003 ([url](#)).

<sup>5</sup> For information on the social perception of members of the Nusayri/Alawite and their treatment by State and non-State actors in Syria, it is possible to consult the references listed below in the ‘Sources Consulted’.

<sup>6</sup> Balanche F., (Middle East Institute), *The Alawi community and the Syria Crisis*, 14 May 2015, ([url](#)).

<sup>7</sup> According to the website the Biographers' Club, Lord Ian Strathcarron is a British travel writer, publisher and mediator. For more information, see: Biographers' Club, *Ian Strathcarron*, 25 February 2012 ([url](#)).

<sup>8</sup> Strathcarron I., *Innocence and War: Mark Twain's Holy Land Revisited*, Signal Books, 13 January 2012, p. 78 ([url](#)).

However, additional information could not be found to corroborate information provided by the aforementioned source.

## 2. Nusayri/Alawite and Ismailis (Isma'lis)/Nizari

It should be noted that the below information points to similarities between the Nusayri/Alawite and the groups of Ismailis (Isma'lis) and Nizari.

Under the term 'Nosayris', the Encyclopaedia Iranica reads:

'The Nosayris believe that the deity manifests itself in history in the form of a trinity. Influenced by the concept of cyclical revelation, which may have been borrowed from the Isma'ilis, they also believe that this trinitarian revelation is not limited to a single episode, but is in fact a theophany that has recurred in the seven eras (called akwār, adwār or qobab/qebāb) in the course of history'<sup>9</sup>.

The book 'Religions of the World: A comprehensive encyclopaedia of beliefs and practices' takes the association between Nusayri/Alewi and Ismailis even further, stating:

'Groups coming under the category of Alevi are known by different names in various countries: Isma'lis in Pakistan, Jaferis in Iran, Zeydi in Egypt and Yemen, Nusayris in Syria and Druze in Lebanon'<sup>10</sup>.

The 2015 EASO Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan also mentions the 'Nizari Ismailis' as a sub-sect of the Shia Muslims in Pakistan:

'The Shia in Pakistan also divide themselves into different sub-denominations. The majority of Pakistani Shia adheres to the Twelver (athna ashariya) school of thought, but there are significant other sub-sects such as Nizari Ismailis, the second-largest branch of Shia Islam in Pakistan, the Daudi Bohras and Sulemani Bohras'<sup>11</sup>.

The presence of the Ismailis in Pakistan is also confirmed by the 'The News Encyclopaedia of Islam':

'Today's Isma'ilis are found mainly in India and Pakistan (both Nizari and Mustali branches) with smaller groups in the Yemen (chiefly Sulaymani-Musta'li), Syria (chiefly Nizari), Central Asia (Nizari), and Iran (Nizari)'<sup>12</sup>.

An article (2012) by Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty notes:

<sup>9</sup> Encyclopaedia Iranica, *Nosayris*, last updated 20 July 2003 ([url](#)).

<sup>10</sup> Melton G., Baumann J. M., *Religions of the world: A comprehensive encyclopedia of beliefs and practices*, ABC-CLIO, 2010, p. 69 ([url](#)).

<sup>11</sup> EASO, *EASO Country of Origin Information Report: Pakistan Country Overview*, 28 August 2015, p. 100 ([url](#)).

<sup>12</sup> Glasse, C., *The New Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2011, p 227 ([url](#)).



‘Most Ismailis – also known also Nizari Ismailis – live in African and Asian countries, including Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Iran. There are also sizeable communities in the United States, Canada, and Britain’<sup>13</sup>.

Encyclopaedia Britannica refers to the Nizari, commenting on the derogatory terms used for them:

‘Nizārīs were present largely in Syria, Iran, and Central and South Asia. The largest group was in India and Pakistan, where they were known as Khōjās and owed allegiance to the Aga Khan. Legends about the early Nizārīs grew from stories that Crusaders had heard and misinterpreted in Syria and then brought back to their home countries. [...] Two of these misinterpretations, often originating with the Nizārīs’ enemies, were that the Nizārīs were killers under the sway of the mysterious “old man of the mountain” and that they used hashish in order to induce visions of paradise before setting out to face martyrdom. The Arabic term ḥashīshī, “hashish smoker,” which was used as a derogatory term for the Nizārīs, became the root of the English term assassin and its cognates in other European languages and took on the meaning of a hired, cold-blooded killer’<sup>14</sup>.

In 2015, the BBC reported on an attack by gunmen on a bus in Karachi which killed dozens of members of the Pakistani’s Ismaili Shia minority. The article states:

‘Ismailis interpret the Koran symbolically and allegorically and believe in a religious hierarchy. In Pakistan, the largest Shia group, the Asna-e-Ashari, has been the main target of armed Sunni extremists. Ismailis, Bohras and other smaller Shia sects, though occasional targets, have largely stayed unhurt, because of their smaller populations, relative affluence and their tendency to live in close-knit community. [...] They say they [Ismailis] have a population of about 15 million people worldwide, including 500,000 in Pakistan. There are also large populations in India, Afghanistan and Africa. [...] In Pakistan, the Ismaili urban population is mostly concentrated in Karachi. But they have a presence in most major cities in Sindh, Punjab and parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. They are mostly rich businessmen from the Gujrati-speaking belt of India, or small traders and office workers from Sindh. They tend to live close to their mosques, often apart from other communities. This indicates a feeling of insecurity which pervades minorities everywhere in Pakistan’<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, *Five Things To Know About The Aga Khan*, 24 August 2012 ([url](#)).

<sup>14</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, *Nizārī Ismā‘īliyyah*, 22 January 2018 ([url](#)).

<sup>15</sup> BBC, *Karachi bus massacre: Who are the Ismailis?*, 13 May 2015 ([url](#)).



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