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2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Iran

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Islamic Republic of Iran's already severe restrictions on human rights worsened in a number of areas during the year. Women continued to face discrimination, including through enhanced means for enforcing the mandatory dress code, which led to acts of civil disobedience. A total of 798 citizens were executed during the year, marking a 37 percent increase from 2022. Some political prisoners, including approximately 22,000 persons detained in connection with the 2022-23 protests, were released from prison in February as part of a general amnesty, although many were forced to sign purported confessions of guilt and commit not to participate in further protests, and many of those released as part of the amnesty were later rearrested. Restrictions on religious freedom intensified during the year, particularly against members of the Baha'i community, who were arrested and sentenced in large numbers.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: arbitrary or unlawful killings by the government and its agents; enforced disappearance; torture or other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by the government or on behalf of its agents; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest or detention; serious problems with the independence of the judiciary; political prisoners or detainees; transnational repression against individuals in another country; arbitrary and unlawful interference with privacy; punishment of family members for alleged offenses by a relative; serious abuses in a conflict, including unlawful recruitment or use of child soldiers and enabling abuses by terrorist groups throughout the region, the Syrian government, Iran-aligned militia groups in Iraq, and Yemeni Houthi militants, all of which were credibly accused of abuses; severe restrictions on freedom of expression, including violence, threats of violence, and unjustified arrests and prosecutions against journalists, censorship, and enforcement of criminal libel and slander laws; serious restrictions on internet freedom; substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association; restrictions of religious freedom; restrictions on freedom of movement and residence within the territory of a state and on the right to leave the country; refoulement of refugees to a country where they would face torture or persecution; inability of citizens to change their government peacefully through free and fair elections; serious and unreasonable restrictions on political participation; serious government corruption; serious government restrictions on or harassment of domestic or international human rights organizations; extensive gender-based violence, including domestic or intimate partner violence, sexual violence, workplace violence, child, early and forced marriage, femicide, and other forms of such violence; instances of forced sterilization; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting ethnic groups, including Kurdish and Baloch minorities; crimes, violence, or threats of violence motivated by antisemitism; trafficking in persons; laws criminalizing consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults, which were enforced; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex persons; significant restrictions on workers' freedom of association; and existence of any of the worst forms of child labor.

The government did not take credible steps to identify and punish officials who may have committed human rights abuses.

Section 1.

Respect for the Integrity of the Person

A. ARBITRARY DEPRIVATION OF LIFE AND OTHER UNLAWFUL OR POLITICALLY MOTIVATED KILLINGS

There were numerous reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings, during the year. These included executions for crimes not meeting the international legal standard of “most serious crimes” or for crimes committed by juvenile offenders, as well as executions after trials without due process. Media and human rights groups documented allegations of deaths in custody due to actions by security forces.

In July, the Kurdistan Human Rights Network reported that detained Kurdish-Iranian citizens Mousa Esmaeili and Peyman Galvani were tortured to death at a Ministry of Intelligence detention center in Orumiye. Esmaeili had been reportedly accused of membership in a Kurdish opposition party, and Galvani was arrested without explanation.

Although many individuals were executed during the year reportedly for homicide, the law also provided for the death penalty in cases of conviction for attempts against the security of the state, outrage against high-ranking officials, *moharebeh* (which had a variety of broad interpretations, including waging war against God), *fisad fil-arz* (corruption on earth, including apostasy or heresy, rape, adultery, recidivist alcohol use, consensual same-sex sexual conduct, working to undermine the Islamic establishment, cooperating with foreign agents or entities, and insults against the memory of Imam Khomeini and against the supreme leader of the Islamic Republic. Prosecutors frequently charged political dissidents and journalists with the capital offense of waging war against God and accused them of struggling against the precepts of Islam and struggling against the state that upholds those precepts.

As documented by international human rights observers, so-called revolutionary courts continued to issue the majority of death sentences and failed to grant defendants due process. The courts regularly denied defendants legal representation and, in many cases, solely considered as evidence confessions often extracted through coercion or torture. Judges could impose the death penalty on appeal, which deterred appeals in criminal cases. The judiciary was required to review and validate death sentences and overturned some death sentences during the year.

According to the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Human Rights Activists (HRA), authorities executed 37 percent more persons during the year than in 2022. HRA reported that known executions included at least two juvenile offenders and 25 women. NGOs noted the real number of persons executed was likely much higher than what had been publicly acknowledged. Even for executions it made public, the government often did not release information such as names, dates, or crimes for which individuals were executed.

Three protesters – Saleh Mirhashemi, Majid Kazemi, and Saeed Yaghoubi – were executed on May 19 after being convicted of killing three members of the security forces in Isfahan in November 2022. Human rights organizations raised concerns regarding serious procedural flaws in their trials, lack of evidence, and forced confessions reportedly extracted under torture; Amnesty International called their trials “grossly unfair.”

Members of marginalized ethnic communities, in particular the Baloch minority, were overrepresented among those executed. According to the Abdorrahman Boroumand Center, minorities made up 28 percent of the total executions during the year, with 172 of those executed – 21 percent of the total – from the Baloch ethnic group, which constituted only 5 percent of the population.

Islamic law as applied by the country’s judicial system allowed for the execution of juvenile offenders, starting at the legal age of “maturity” (age nine for girls and 13 for boys). HRA reported that two individuals were executed during the year for alleged offenses committed when they were younger than 18. Majid Tafreshi, a senior official and member of the state-run High Council for

Human Rights, disputed criticism of the execution of juvenile offenders in a 2021 interview with Agence France-Presse but acknowledged the government executed juvenile offenders “three to four times” a year and asserted those executed were age 17 and who the courts had determined to have reached “maturity.”

Capital punishment also could be imposed for possession, sale, or transport of more than approximately 110 pounds of unprocessed drugs, such as opium, or approximately 4.4 to 6.6 pounds of manufactured narcotics, such as heroin or cocaine. It also could be applied to some drug offenses involving smaller quantities of narcotics if the crime was carried out using weapons, employing minors, or involving someone in a leadership role in a drug trafficking ring or someone previously convicted of drug crimes and sentenced to more than 15 years’ imprisonment. The Abdorrahman Boroumand Center reported that 57 percent of executions during the year were for drug-related offenses.

According to human rights organizations and media reports, the government continued to carry out some executions by cruel and inhuman practices, including hanging by cranes, in which prisoners were lifted from the ground by their necks and died slowly by asphyxiation. Adultery remained punishable by stoning to death, although the head of the judiciary instructed judges to impose a moratorium on stoning in 2002, and no stoning sentences had been carried out since 2010.

B. DISAPPEARANCE

There were reports of disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities. Plainclothes officials seized lawyers, journalists, and activists without warning, and government officials refused to acknowledge custody or provide information on them. In most cases, the government made no efforts to prevent, investigate, or punish such acts.

Four members of the Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan, Pezhman Fatehi, Mohsen Mazloum, Mohammad Faramarzi and Vafa Azarbar, had been detained since July 2022 and, as of year’s end, their whereabouts remained unknown despite the government broadcasting that apparently forced confessions from the detainees on state television.

Political activist Ebrahim Babaei remained forcibly disappeared since 2021. According to media reports and NGOs, multiple persons disappeared during the protests in the fall of 2022 following the death of Mahsa Zhina Amini in “morality police” custody. According to the NGO United for Iran, Iman Valadbeigi and Reza Abbasi disappeared during the protests, and their whereabouts remained unknown at year’s end.

C. TORTURE AND OTHER CRUEL, INHUMAN, OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT, AND OTHER RELATED ABUSES

Although the constitution prohibited all forms of torture “for the purpose of extracting confession or acquiring information,” use of physical and mental torture to coerce confessions was prevalent, especially during pretrial detention, including in cases of detained protesters, and there were reports that security forces and prison personnel tortured and abused detainees and prisoners throughout the year. NGOs and international media reported numerous instances of security forces and prison personnel torturing, beating, or raping individuals in detention throughout the year.

Commonly reported methods of torture and abuse in prisons included threats of execution, rape, and sexual assault; threats of rape of prisoners or their family members; forced vaginal and anal examinations; sleep deprivation; waterboarding; suspension; forced ingestion of chemical substances; deliberate deprivation of medical care; electroshock, including the shocking of genitals; burnings; the use of pressure positions; and severe and repeated beatings.

Courts imposed corporal punishments, including flogging. Blinding, stoning, and amputation were legal means of punishment, but there were no known instances carried out during the year. At least 148 crimes were punishable by flogging, while 20 could carry the penalty of amputation.

Human rights organizations frequently cited several prison facilities for their use of cruel and prolonged torture of political opponents, including Evin Prison in Tehran, Rajai Shahr Prison in Karaj, Greater Tehran Penitentiary, Qarchak Prison, Adel Abad Prison, Vakilabad Prison, Zahedan Prison, Isfahan Central Prison (Dastgerd), and Orumiye Prison; Wards 209 and Two of Evin Prison, reportedly controlled by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), were particularly cited. Authorities also allegedly maintained informal secret prisons and detention centers outside the national prison system, where abuse reportedly occurred.

According to the NGO Hengaw and multiple media outlets, dissident rapper Saman Yasin was subjected to severe mental and physical torture during his detention, including a mock execution. Yasin reportedly was suspended from a rope attached to the ceiling for three days, forcefully injected with an unknown substance, and subjected to electroshocks until he lost consciousness. He was sentenced to death on charges of waging war against God. At year's end, he was still being held in Ghezel Hesar Prison in Karaj, Alborz Province, in a state of legal uncertainty and without access to medical services.

Human rights groups accused regular and paramilitary security forces such as the Basij of committing numerous human rights abuses, including torture, forced disappearances, and acts of violence against protesters and bystanders at public demonstrations. The government generally viewed protesters, critical journalists, and human rights activists as engaged in efforts to undermine the 1979 revolution and consequently rarely punished security forces for abuses against those persons, even when the abuses violated domestic law.

Impunity remained a widespread problem throughout all security forces. The attorney general was responsible for investigating and punishing security force abuses, but investigations often lacked transparency, and there were few reports of government actions to discipline abusers.

In another high-profile case, a revolutionary court sentenced Mojahed (Abbas) Kourkouri to death in April for allegedly killing Kian Pirfalak, age nine, in November 2022, even though the boy's family and Amnesty International asserted he was shot and killed by security forces. Amnesty International described Kourkouri's trial as grossly unfair and marred by confessions induced through torture. Amnesty also noted that authorities arbitrarily arrested Kourkouri's sister Negar after she advocated on his behalf.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison conditions were harsh and frequently life threatening due to overcrowding, withholding of adequate medical care, and physical abuse.

Abusive Physical Conditions: There were NGO reports that overcrowding in prisons continued to be a problem. Problems of overcrowding were partially reduced when thousands of prisoners were released in February. During the year, according to judicial authorities, approximately 90,000 individuals were pardoned, including an estimated 22,000 participants in the Woman, Life, Freedom protests. The NGO HRA confirmed the identities of at least 5,200 protesters released as part of this amnesty.

Prison authorities often refused to provide medical treatment for pre-existing conditions, injuries suffered at the hands of prison authorities, or illnesses resulting from the poor sanitary conditions in prison. Human rights organizations reported that authorities used denial of medical care as a form of punishment for political prisoners and as intimidation against prisoners who filed complaints or challenged authorities.

According to *IranWire* and human rights NGOs, guards beat political and nonpolitical prisoners during raids on wards, performed nude body searches in front of other prisoners, and threatened prisoners' families. Media and NGOs reported deaths in custody and prisoner-on-prisoner violence, which authorities sometimes failed to control. Prisoners often announced hunger strikes in protest of their treatment. Following their hunger strikes, Jafar Panahi, Farhad Meysami, Armita Abbasi, Benjamin Briere, Siamak Namazi, and Bernard Phelan were released from prison. Others who went on hunger strikes, including Golrokh Iraee, Bahareh Hedayat, Narges Mohammadi, and Mohammad Najafi, remained in prison.

There were also reports of attempted prisoner suicides throughout the year in response to prison conditions or mistreatment. According to the Kurdistan Human Rights Network and Reuters, on September 16, as part of a raid on Qarchak Women's Prison, special forces beat and fired pellet bullets at inmates who had reportedly burned their clothing to protest on the one-year anniversary of the death of Mahsa Zhina Amini in police custody.

According to reports from human rights NGOs, prison authorities regularly denied prisoners access to visitors, telephone calls, and other correspondence privileges. Families of executed prisoners did not always receive notification of scheduled executions, or if they did, it was often very short notice. Authorities frequently denied families the ability to perform funeral rites or to have an impartial and timely autopsy performed.

Prisoners practicing a religion other than Twelver Shia Islam reported experiencing discrimination.

Administration: In most cases, authorities did not initiate credible investigations into allegations of inhuman conditions or suspicious deaths in custody. Prisoners were able to submit complaints to judicial authorities but often faced censorship or retribution if they did so, including beatings, torture, and denial of medical care and medication or furlough requests, as well as charges for additional alleged crimes. Prisoners and their advocates often wrote open letters to highlight and protest their treatment.

Independent Monitoring: The government did not permit independent monitoring of prison conditions.

D. ARBITRARY ARREST OR DETENTION

Although the constitution prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention, the government generally did not observe these requirements. Detainees could appeal their sentences in court but were not entitled to compensation for detention.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

The law required a warrant or subpoena for an arrest and stated that arrested persons should be informed of the charges against them within 24 hours. Authorities, however, frequently held some detainees, at times incommunicado, for prolonged periods without charge or trial and frequently denied them contact with family or timely access to legal representation.

The law obligated the government to provide indigent defendants with attorneys for certain types of crimes. The courts routinely set prohibitively high bail, even for lesser crimes, and in many cases, courts did not set bail. Authorities often compelled detainees and their families to submit property deeds to post bail, effectively silencing them due to fear of losing their family property.

The government continued to use house arrest without due process to restrict movement and communication. At year's end, former presidential candidates Mehdi Karroubi and Mir Hossein Mousavi, as well as Mousavi's wife Zahra Rahnavard, remained without formal charges under house arrest imposed in 2011. Security forces continued to restrict their access to visitors and information. In September, 570 political and cultural activists issued a statement decrying the

deteriorating health conditions of Mousavi, Rahnavard, and Karroubi in connection with their house arrests and poor medical treatment provided by authorities.

Arbitrary Arrest: Authorities commonly used arbitrary arrests to impede alleged antiregime activities. Plainclothes officers arrived unannounced at homes or offices, conducted raids, arrested persons, and confiscated private documents, passports, computers, electronic media, and other personal items without warrants or assurances of due process.

Individuals often remained in detention facilities for long periods without charges or trials, and authorities sometimes prevented them from informing others of their whereabouts for several days or longer. Authorities often denied detainees access to legal counsel during this period.

International media and human rights organizations documented dual nationals enduring arbitrary and prolonged detention on politically motivated charges. Dual nationals, like other citizens, faced a variety of violations of fair trial guarantees and other human rights violations or abuses, including those involving lack of prompt access to a lawyer of their choosing, summary trials during which they were not allowed to defend themselves, and denial of timely medical treatment.

Authorities released French prisoners Fariba Adelkhah, Bernard Phelan, and Benjamin Briere during the year. Adelkhah had been serving a five-year sentence on national security charges after being initially detained in 2019. Briere was arrested in 2020 and sentenced to eight years and eight months in prison for espionage. Phelan had been detained on espionage charges in October 2022. At year's end, at least four French nationals remained in prison.

On May 26, Iran released Belgian aid worker Olivier Vandecasteele from prison in exchange for the release of Iranian diplomat Assadollah Assadi from prison in Belgium. Assadi was an Iranian diplomat convicted of terrorism by a Belgian court in 2021. Vandecasteele was arrested in Iran in February 2022 and sentenced to 40 years in prison on espionage charges.

In September, authorities released U.S.-Iranian dual nationals Siamak Namazi, Morad Tahbaz, Emad Shargi, and two individuals whose names were not publicly disclosed in exchange for the release of five Iranian prisoners held in the United States and the release of \$6 billion in Iranian funds which had been held in South Korea.

Namazi had been imprisoned since 2015 on spurious charges of espionage following a lower court trial with numerous procedural irregularities, according to international media and NGO reports.

U.S.-Iranian dual nationals Morad Tahbaz and Emad Shargi had been imprisoned following convictions on charges that international human rights organization stated were lacking evidence and were tried without fair trial guarantees. Tahbaz was arrested in 2018 and sentenced to 10 years in prison for assembly and collusion against national security and espionage. Shargi was first arrested and imprisoned in 2018 and subsequently rearrested in 2020, having been convicted in absentia on charges his family said were unclear.

Pretrial Detention: Pretrial detention was often arbitrarily lengthy, particularly in cases involving alleged violations of the "national security" law. Authorities sometimes held prisoners incommunicado for lengthy periods before permitting them to contact family members. Instances of unjust and arbitrary pretrial detention were commonplace and well documented throughout the year. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), a judge could prolong detention at his discretion, and pretrial detentions often lasted for months. Often authorities held pretrial detainees in custody with the general prison population.

E. DENIAL OF FAIR PUBLIC TRIAL

The constitution provided for an independent judiciary, but the court system was subjected to political influence, and judges were appointed "in accordance with religious criteria." International

observers criticized the lack of independence of the country's judicial system and maintained that trials did not adhere to international standards of fairness.

Trial Procedures

The constitution and law provided defendants the right to a fair trial, to be presumed innocent until convicted, to have access to a lawyer of their choice, and to appeal convictions in most cases that involved major penalties. These rights were frequently not upheld.

Panels of judges adjudicated trials in civil and criminal courts. Human rights activists reported trials in which authorities appeared to have determined the verdicts in advance, and defendants did not have the opportunity to confront their accusers or meet with lawyers. For journalists and defendants charged with crimes against national security, the law restricted the choice of attorneys to a government-approved list.

When statutes enacted since the founding of the Islamic Republic did not address a situation, the government advised judges to give precedence to their knowledge and interpretation of sharia (Islamic law). Under this method, judges could find a person guilty based on the judges' own "divine knowledge."

The constitution did not provide for the establishment or the mandate of the revolutionary courts, which were originally created after the 1979 revolution as a temporary measure to try high-level officials of the deposed monarchy, but they were institutionalized and continued to operate in parallel to the criminal justice system. Human rights groups and international observers often identified the revolutionary courts, which were generally responsible for hearing the cases of political prisoners, as routinely holding grossly unfair trials without due process, handing down predetermined verdicts, and rubberstamping executions for political purposes. These unfair practices reportedly occurred during all stages of criminal proceedings in revolutionary courts, including the initial prosecution and pretrial investigation, first instance trial, and review by higher courts.

Human rights groups and international media noted the absence of procedural safeguards in criminal trials, and courts routinely admitted as evidence confessions made under duress or torture. Often these forced confessions were broadcast on state television.

The Special Clerical Court was headed by a Shia Islamic legal scholar, overseen by the supreme leader, and charged with investigating alleged offenses committed by clerics and issuing rulings based on an independent interpretation of Islamic legal sources. As with the revolutionary courts, the constitution did not provide for the Special Clerical Court, which operated outside the judiciary's purview. Clerical courts were used to prosecute clerics who expressed controversial ideas and participated in activities outside the sphere of religion, such as journalism or reformist political activities.

In January, the Kurdistan Human Rights Network reported that the Special Clerical Court of Hamedan sentenced Kurdish Sunni cleric Seyyed Seyfollah Hosseini to 17 years in prison and 74 lashes for his membership in the religious movement of the Kurdistan Quran School. Charges included inciting persons to disrupt the security of the country, for insulting the founder and leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, for disrupting public order, and for propaganda against the regime. The court also stripped Hosseini of his clerical status.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were numerous NGO reports of political prisoners and detainees. Although there were no official statistics regarding the number of citizens imprisoned for their political beliefs, the NGO United for Iran identified at least 1,074 prisoners of conscience in the country at year's end.

The four most common reasons for imprisonment were “propaganda against the regime,” “disruption of public order,” “gathering and collusion with the intention of acting against national security,” and “membership in groups opposed to the regime.” The government often charged political dissidents with vague crimes, some of which carried the death penalty, such as “antirevolutionary behavior,” “corruption on earth,” “siding with global arrogance,” “waging war against God,” and “crimes against Islam.” Prosecutors sought strict penalties against government critics for minor violations.

The political crimes law defined a “political crime” as “propaganda” or “insult” against the ruling establishment, or acts committed with “the intent to reform the domestic or foreign policies of Iran,” while those with the intent to “damage the foundations of the ruling establishment” were considered national security crimes. Insulting or defaming government officials, visiting heads of state, or political representatives were considered political crimes. Courts and the Public Prosecutor’s Office retained responsibility for determining the nature of the crime.

Under the political crimes law, the accused had certain rights during arrest and imprisonment. Individuals charged with political crimes were to be held in detention facilities separate from ordinary criminals; exempt from wearing prison uniforms, not subject to rules governing repeat offenses, not subject to extradition, and exempt from solitary confinement unless judicial officials deem it necessary. They also had the right to see and correspond with immediate family regularly, and to access books, newspapers, radio, and television. Many of the law’s provisions were not implemented, however, and the government continued to arrest and charge students, journalists, lawyers, political activists, women’s rights activists, artists, and members of religious minorities with “national security” crimes. Political prisoners were also at greater risk of torture and abuse in detention and were mixed with the general prison population, increasing the chance of attacks by fellow prisoners.

The government often placed or “exiled” political prisoners to prisons in remote provinces far from their families as a means of reprisal, denied them correspondence rights and access to legal counsel, and held them in solitary confinement for long periods. The government reportedly held some detainees in prison for years on unfounded charges of sympathizing with real or alleged terrorist groups.

Lawyers who defended political prisoners or expressed support for them were often summoned to court, arrested, detained, and in some cases prosecuted for engaging in regular professional activities or advocacy. In October, the Kurdistan Human Rights Network reported that Saleh Nikbakht, lawyer of the family of Mahsa Zhina Amini, was sentenced to one year in prison for propaganda against the regime. The government imprisoned lawyers and others affiliated with the Defenders of Human Rights Center advocacy group.

The government issued travel bans on some former political prisoners, barred them from working in their occupations for years after incarceration, and imposed internal exile on some. Authorities occasionally gave political prisoners suspended sentences and released them on bail with the understanding that renewed political activity would result in their return to prison. The government did not permit international humanitarian organizations or UN representatives access to political prisoners.

In September, prison authorities beat human rights defender and journalist Narges Mohammadi for refusing to wear a hijab during a routine medical examination. She had been incarcerated at Evin and Qarchak Prisons since 2021 serving a nine-year and eight-month sentence on politically motivated “national security” charges. As a result of her legal advocacy for human rights and gender equality, campaign against the death penalty, and criticism of the regime’s use of torture and sexual violence, she had been arrested 13 times and sentenced to a total of 31 years in prison and 154 lashes as of year’s end.

In January, Mohammadi released a letter in which she expressed her willingness to testify to acts of assault, torture, and sexual assault she observed while in Evin Prison. In late April, Mohammadi submitted written comments to an online Clubhouse discussion titled “Dialogue for Saving Iran,”

which led to the arrests of several participants. In May, Mohammadi participated in a sit-in protest against executions with a group of women prisoners at Evin Prison. In August, Mohammadi was sentenced to an additional year in prison for propaganda against the regime, following a complaint by the Ministry of Intelligence related to Mohammadi's activities in prison.

In October, Mohammadi was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. The spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Nasser Kanaani reacted by saying, "The Nobel Peace Committee has awarded its peace prize to someone who has been found guilty of frequently violating the law and engaging in criminal acts. We condemn the move by the Nobel committee as spiteful and politically motivated."

According to the Human Rights Activists News Agency, as of December 2, officials at Evin Prison were denying Mohammadi the right to meet with her family or contact them by telephone. According to PEN America, after her children received the Nobel Peace Prize on her behalf on December 10, the Revolutionary Court tried and charged her with an additional sentence on December 19. She was simultaneously notified that for "political and security" reasons, she would be forced to serve out her sentence outside of Tehran.

Political prisoner Fatemeh Sepehri reported that she had been sentenced to 18 additional years in prison for "propaganda against the regime," "collaborating with hostile governments," and "insulting the supreme leader," among other charges. This added to her earlier sentence of one year from January. Sepehri had been jailed several times in the past decade, once after signing the "Statement of 14 Political Activists" in 2019, which called for the resignation of the supreme leader and a new constitution. She was most recently jailed during the Mahsa Zhina Amini protests of 2022. In September, Sepehri's brother reported that authorities had prevented Sepehri from undergoing medical tests in prison that were prescribed by doctors.

As of year's end, six environmentalists affiliated with the now defunct Persian Wildlife Heritage Foundation – Niloufar Bayani, Sepideh Kashani, Sam Rajabi, Taher Ghadirian, Amir Hossein Khaleghi, and Houman Jokar – remained incarcerated in Evin Prison on various "national security" charges, which were often used to silence critics of the government.

In February, authorities announced a general amnesty that led to the release of many political prisoners, including Mohammad Rasoulof, Shapour Ehsani Rad, Zhila Karamzadeh Makvandi, Arash Ganji, Vajiheh Pari Zanganeh, Zahra Mohammadi, Mehdi Darini, Asrin Darkaleh, Reza Khandan Mahabadi, Mojgan Ilanlu, and Kamal Jafari Yazdi.

Many of the released prisoners already had served years in prison, and several had engaged in hunger strikes to protest their prolonged imprisonment and poor conditions. Former body builder Khaled Pirzadeh reported to the UN special rapporteur on human rights in Iran that, as a result of beatings and torture by prison agents, he suffered a fractured spine and broken leg and had lost more than half his body weight. When he was released from prison in February, he was unable to walk. Pirzadeh was arrested in 2019 after being accused of writing antigovernment slogans. He was sentenced to seven years in prison for assembly and collusion and insulting the leadership. Pirzadeh was arrested again in September as he was attempting to leave Iran and remained in prison at year's end.

Some of those released were reportedly forced to sign a "statement of repentance" as a condition for amnesty. Some were later rearrested, including Sara Sabet Rasekh (sentenced to eight years in prison in June), Zartosht Ahmadi Ragheb (rearrested in March and sentenced to five years in prison), Ali Asghar Hasani-Rad (rearrested in August and sentenced to eight years in prison), Meysam Dehbanzadeh (sentenced to six years in prison in August), and Sakineh Parvaneh (sentenced to seven and a half years in prison in September).

F. TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION

The government continued to engage in acts of transnational repression to intimidate or exact reprisal against individuals outside of the country's sovereign borders, including against members

of diaspora populations such as political opponents, civil society activists, human rights defenders, and journalists.

Extraterritorial Killing, Kidnapping, Forced Returns, or Other Violence or Threats of Violence: The government was alleged to have killed or kidnapped persons and used violence and threats of violence against individuals in other countries, including to force their return to the country, for purposes of politically motivated reprisal.

In January, the U.S. Justice Department unsealed indictments of Khalid Mehdiyev, Polad Omarov, and Rafat Amirov on charges of murder-for-hire and money laundering in connection with a plot targeting U.S.-based journalist and women's rights activist Masih Alinejad. In 2021, a New York federal court had unsealed indictments of four different Iranian intelligence officials on charges connected to a plot to kidnap Alinejad and forcibly transport her to Iran to silence her criticism of the Iranian government. The intelligence officials reportedly directed a "network" that targeted and surveilled victims in Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

In February, a court sentenced Iranian-German national Jamshid Sharmahd to death on charges of corruption on earth. Sharmahd was a member of the promonarchist group Tondar (Thunder) or Kingdom Assembly of Iran, which was based outside the country. According to *IranWire*, NGOs, and other reporting, Ministry of Intelligence officials detained Sharmahd in 2020 while he was on a layover in the Dubai airport on his way to India. Shortly after his detention and disappearance in Dubai, a video appeared of him on Press TV, the English-language service arm of the state's Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) channel, giving a forced confession of planning a terrorist attack in 2008. Sharmahd was accused of being responsible for a deadly 2008 bombing at a religious center in Shiraz and of plotting other attacks, which he denied.

Threats, Harassment, Surveillance, and Coercion: The regime employed a range of tactics to exert pressure on or exact reprisal against individuals located outside the country, including harassment, intimidation, and surveillance, according to multiple NGO sources.

In February, media outlet *Iran International* temporarily relocated its headquarters from London to Washington, D.C., after London's Metropolitan Police warned the organization that their journalists were facing threats that posed "an imminent, credible and significant risk to their lives and those of their families." In an interview with Iran state news agency IRNA in November 2022, Intelligence Minister Esmail Khatib stated the Islamic Republic recognized *Iran International* as "a terrorist organization" and that anyone affiliated with the channel would be pursued. In September, *Iran International* moved its headquarters back to London.

Also in February, Norwegian police warned that the Iranian regime had been engaging in digital surveillance of dissidents in Norway. The Head of Counterintelligence for the Norwegian Police Security Service Hanne Blomberg said Iranian authorities had been using the information obtained through cyberespionage to threaten, influence, and plot assassinations against dissidents. According to Blomberg, Iranian digital espionage involved hacking and gaining control of the mobile devices and computers of Iranians residing in Norway and infecting the devices with malware through malicious SMSs (texting) or emails.

Microsoft reported that the U.S.-sanctioned Iranian "cybersecurity" firm Emennet Pasargad was behind cyberattacks on the website of the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in early January. The magazine was hit by the cyberattack after it published cartoons of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. Iranian officials harshly condemned the "insulting" cartoons and vowed an "effective response."

In March, the Washington D.C.-based National Union for Democracy in Iran reported that its website experienced a significant cyberattack after the organization unveiled a new "Maximum Support" policy focused on supporting the Iranian people.

G. PROPERTY SEIZURE AND RESTITUTION

The constitution allowed the government to confiscate property acquired illicitly or in a manner not in conformity with Islamic law. The government appeared to target religious minorities, journalists, and dissidents in invoking this provision.

In June, a member of the Baha'i community, Hami Bahadori, was sentenced to five years in prison for gathering and collusion, and an additional one-year sentence for spreading propaganda against the regime under the guise of preaching for Baha'is. According to the verdict, authorities also seized property belonging to him and his wife, including a computer, camera, hard drive, modem, and jewelry. According to credible reports, authorities routinely seized property of other Baha'is arrested during the year.

In July, human rights lawyer Marzieh Mohebbi reported she had been sentenced to "exclusion from Estiman," an Islamic law concept permitting authorities to seize the property and assets of "nonbelievers." *IranWire* reported that this was the first known case of the Islamic law concept being used against a political dissident.

H. ARBITRARY OR UNLAWFUL INTERFERENCE WITH PRIVACY, FAMILY, HOME, OR CORRESPONDENCE

The constitution stated that "reputation, life, property, [and] dwelling[s]" were protected from trespass, except as "provided by law." The government routinely infringed on this right. Security forces monitored the social activities of citizens; entered homes, offices, and places of worship; monitored telephone conversations and internet communications; and opened mail without court authorization. No comprehensive data protection laws existed to provide legal safeguards to protect users' data from misuse. The operation of domestic messaging applications was based inside the country, and content shared on these applications was susceptible to government control and surveillance. Authorities also claimed to use facial recognition technology to identify and punish violators of mandatory hijab laws.

The government routinely intimidated activists and government critics by detaining their family members as a form of reprisal. In June, security forces arrested several family members of protester Abolfazl Adinehzadeh, age 16, according to the family's lawyer. Abolfazl's sister, father, and uncle were arrested on June 16, and his mother and other relatives were also later arrested. The family's lawyer said Abolfazl's relatives were violently arrested despite not having engaged in any illegal acts. The arrests came after Abolfazl's mother reported that authorities rebuked her for including the slogan "Woman, Life, Freedom" on her son's grave.

According to *IranWire*, on the one-year anniversary of Mahsa Zhina Amini's death, September 16, Amini's father Amjad Amini was temporarily detained by authorities and prohibited from visiting his daughter's grave or leaving his residence. On September 5, *IranWire* also reported that Mahsa Zhina Amini's uncle Safa Aeli was arrested on unknown charges and taken to an undisclosed location.

I. CONFLICT-RELATED ABUSES

The government provided financial, military, and fighter recruitment support to armed groups and others throughout the Middle East. This included the IRGC-Qods Force giving significant financial aid and military support to Hamas, Hizballah, Iran-aligned militia groups in Iraq and Syria, the Houthis in Yemen, and the Assad regime. The government continued to transfer hundreds of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and other weapons to Russia, which Russia used in strikes that damaged civilian infrastructure in Ukraine and killed civilians.

Child Soldiers: The Secretary of State determined Iran had governmental armed forces, police, or other security forces and government-supported armed groups that recruited or used child soldiers

during the period of April 2022 to March 2023. See the Department of State’s annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Other Conflict-related Abuse: The government supported regimes and groups in other countries that committed human rights abuses and other abuses.

In Syria, there continued to be reports the Iranian government, primarily through the IRGC, directly supported the Assad regime and supported militia groups that contributed to prolonging the civil war, associated abuses, and the deaths of thousands of Syrian civilians during the year (see the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for Syria).

The government continued to provide support to Hamas, with the stated goal to bolster Hamas’s fight against Israel. Iran’s financial and arms support for Hamas contributed to its ability to launch a full-scale attack on Israel on October 7. Other Iran-backed groups and partners, including Hizballah and the Houthis, also conducted attacks against Israel during the ensuing conflict.

The government supported Iran-aligned militia groups in Iraq, including terrorist organizations Kata’ib Hizballah, Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq, and Kata’ib Sayyid al-Shuhada. Militias in Iraq were reportedly complicit in summary executions, forced disappearances, and other human rights abuses in Iraq (see the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for Iraq).

In Yemen, the government had provided financial support and weapons to the Houthis since 2015 that exacerbated and prolonged the conflict there, including support to Houthi rebels in developing their UAVs capability. Houthi rebels used Iranian funding and weapons to launch attacks impacting civilians and civilian infrastructure within Yemen and the region, including against international commercial shipping in the Red Sea (see the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE).

The government’s continued military support to Russia included violations of UN Security Council Resolution 2231 through the transfer of UAVs to Russia without requisite advance, case-by-case approval of the UN Security Council. The production and transfer of the country’s Shahed- and Mohajer-series UAVs to the Russian Federation resulted in the death of Ukrainian civilians and caused significant damage to Ukraine’s critical infrastructure (see the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for Ukraine and Russia). In July, the government helped Russia establish a drone manufacturing plant on Russian territory, which began producing UAVs for use in Russia’s war against Ukraine.

Section 2.

Respect for Civil Liberties

A. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, INCLUDING FOR MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND OTHER MEDIA

The constitution provided for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, except when deemed “detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam or the rights of the public.” According to the law, “Anyone who engages in any type of propaganda against the Islamic Republic of Iran or in support of opposition groups and associations shall be sentenced to three months to one year of imprisonment.”

The nonbinding Charter on Citizens’ Rights – signed in 2016 by then President Rouhani – acknowledged the right of every citizen to freedom of speech and expression, including the right to

seek, receive, publish, and communicate views and information, using any means of communication. The charter had not been implemented as of year's end.

Freedom of Expression: The law provided for prosecution of persons accused of instigating crimes against the state, crimes against national security, or “insulting” Islam. The government severely restricted freedom of speech and of the press and used the law to intimidate or prosecute persons who directly criticized the government or raised human rights concerns or questioned the government's morality code enforcement. The government routinely cut off access to the internet, slowed internet speeds, and blocked websites and social media platforms. According to an Access Now report published in February, in 2022, authorities imposed an unprecedented 18 shutdowns across the country as part of an escalating wave of digital repression responding to protests sparked by the death Mahsa Zhina Amini.

Authorities did not permit individuals to publicly criticize the country's system of government, supreme leader, or official religion. Security forces and the judiciary punished those who violated these restrictions, as well as those who publicly criticized the president, supreme leader, cabinet, and parliament. The government monitored meetings, movements, and communications of its citizens and often charged persons with crimes against national security for insulting the regime, citing as evidence letters, emails, social media posts, and other public and private communications. Authorities threatened individuals with arrest or punishment for the expression of ideas or images they viewed as violations of the legal moral code.

Civil and labor activist Sepideh Qolian was released in March after serving more than four years in prison but was rearrested four hours later after chanting antiregime slogans. Subsequently, she was sentenced in May to two years' imprisonment for insulting the supreme leader. The court also gave her a two-year ban on using a smartphone, residing in Tehran or neighboring provinces, and being a member in a political or social group. In September, Qolian received an additional 15-month prison sentence for slander after she accused a proregime reporter of interrogating and torturing her while in prison.

Musician and composer Erfan Khalilian was sentenced in January to almost 10 years in prison and 74 lashes for insulting the leadership, insulting the founder of the revolution (Ayatollah Khomeini), attending illegal gatherings, and disrupting national security.

The government maintained control over cinema, music, theater, and art exhibits, and censored those productions deemed to transgress Islamic values. According to the NGO Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC), the nine-member film review council of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, consisting of clerics, former directors, former parliamentarians, and academics, had to approve the content of every film before production and again before public presentation. Films could be barred arbitrarily from presentation even if all appropriate permits were received in advance. The government censored or banned films deemed to promote secularism and those containing what it deemed to be un-Islamic ideas concerning women's rights, unethical behavior, drug abuse, violence, or alcohol.

The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance was required to approve song lyrics, music, and album covers to ensure they complied with the country's moral values, although many underground musicians released albums without seeking such permission.

In July, Rapper Toomaj Salehi was sentenced to six years and three months in prison by the Isfahan Revolutionary Court on charges of corruption on earth, according to one of his lawyers. He was also given a two-year ban on producing music or singing. Toomaj was initially arrested in October 2022 after releasing rap lyrics that criticized the government for a “year of colossal failure” and sharing videos on his Instagram account in support of public protests.

On November 18, the Supreme Court rejected the ruling and Toomaj was released on bail. Less than two weeks later, however, Toomaj was rearrested in the city of Babol by plainclothes agents wielding Kalashnikovs and handguns, according to the Center for Human Rights in Iran (CHRI). At the year's end, he was awaiting a sentence.

Violence and Harassment: The government and its agents harassed, detained, abused, and prosecuted publishers, editors, and journalists and members of their families, including those involved in internet-based media, for their reporting on topics considered sensitive by the government.

In October, Niloufar Hamed and Elaheh Mohammadi, two of the first journalists to report on Mahsa Zhina Amini's death, were sentenced to 13 and 12 years in jail, respectively. They were charged with collaborating with the "hostile American government," colluding against national security, and spreading propaganda against the regime, according to the government's judiciary news website. Judiciary spokesperson Masood Setayeshi had previously stated that both journalists were accused of collaborating with "the hostile government of the United States." At the time of their sentencing, they had been held in temporary detention for more than one year, which exceeded the maximum time permitted for temporary detention under the criminal procedure code. In September, media reported that Mohammadi was in a "dire health situation" in prison.

IranWire journalist Sima Shahrabi, who was based abroad, reported in late May that her brother Sajjad Shahrabi had been in police custody for more than three weeks because of her work. She also reported that her family members were summoned by intelligence officers and interrogated regarding her activities. Sajjad Shahrabi was later convicted of collusion to commit a crime against internal and external security and propaganda against the regime, for which he received a 10-month prison sentence, a two-year travel ban, and a two-year ban from using social media.

Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media: The government largely controlled the country's media. According to Reporters Without Borders, the constitution protected press freedom, but the 1986 press law enabled authorities to prevent journalists from "endangering the Islamic Republic" or "offending the clergy and the supreme leader."

The government's Press Supervisory Board regulated media content and publication, including the issuance of press licenses, which it sometimes revoked or did not renew in response to articles critical of the government or the regime or for those who were incarcerated for political reasons. The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance reviewed all potential publications, including foreign printed materials, prior to their domestic release and could deem books unpublishable, remove text, or require edits. Independent print media companies existed, but the government severely limited their operations. During the year, the government banned, blocked, closed, or censored publications deemed critical of officials.

The Press Supervisory Board banned *Sazandegi* newspaper on February 20 after alleging the news outlet published false content and had disturbed public opinion, citing a story that claimed the government was mishandling escalating meat prices. The ruling was overturned on March 1 after a prosecutor from the Ministry of Culture found no factual contradictions and concluded that the newspaper had only taken an analytical approach.

On September 4, the Press Supervisory Board ordered the closure of the news site *Entekhab*, according to *Entekhab* and other domestic press outlets. As reported by the *Fars* media outlet, *Entekhab* was closed due to the publication of a video and article that criticized the government's foreign policy toward Russia and China.

Private broadcasting was severely restricted, since it required obtaining a permit, which was rarely granted. The government maintained an effective monopoly over all television and radio broadcasting facilities through IRIB, a government agency. Radio and television programming, the principal source of news for many citizens, particularly in rural areas with limited internet access, reflected the government's political and socioreligious ideology.

The government jammed satellite broadcasts, a continuous practice since at least 2003. Satellite dishes were illegal but ubiquitous. Those who distributed, used, or repaired satellite dishes could be subject to fines.

The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance severely limited and controlled foreign media organizations' ability to work in the country. The ministry required foreign correspondents to provide detailed travel plans and topics of proposed stories before granting visas, limited their ability to travel within the country, and forced them to work with a local "minder."

The government censored publications that criticized official actions or contradicted official views or versions of events. IRNA determined the main topics and types of news to be covered, and distributed topics required for reporting directly to various media outlets, according to IHRDC. "Damaging" information included discussions of women's rights, the situation of minorities, reports of government corruption, and references to mistreatment of detainees. Authorities also banned national and international media outlets from covering demonstrations.

Officials routinely intimidated journalists into practicing self-censorship through arrests and imprisonments. Public officials often filed criminal complaints against newspapers, and the Press Supervisory Board referred such complaints to the Press Court for further action, including possible closure, suspension, and fines. The judicial system and other government entities often overtly censored journalists who had been imprisoned in the past.

In January, journalist Nazila Maroufian was given a two-year suspended sentence and a five-year ban on leaving the country on charges of antigovernment propaganda and spreading false news. Maroufian had been arrested after interviewing Mahsa Zhina Amini's father and publishing an article that challenged the official government account that Amini died in custody as a result of pre-existing medical conditions. Maroufian reported that the court reached its decision in her case without a hearing and in the absence of a defense lawyer. In July, Maroufian was rearrested and charged with propaganda against the regime and with assembly and collusion against the regime. In August, Maroufian was arrested again for allegedly "promoting immorality" by wearing "inappropriate clothing" in public and publishing photographs on social media. The Committee for the Defense of Political and Civil Prisoners and Maroufian's neighbors reported that security forces assaulted her during the arrest. Maroufian reported that she had also been sexually assaulted during her arrest.

Libel/Slander Laws: Libel, slander, and blasphemy were criminal offenses. The government continued to use libel and slander laws, among others, to suppress criticism. According to the law, if any publication contained personal insults, libel, false statements, or criticism, even if truthful, the insulted individual had the right to respond in the publication within one month. By law, "insult" or "libel" against the government, government representatives, or foreign officials while they were in the country, as well as "the publication of lies" with the intent to alter but not overthrow the government, were considered political crimes and subject to certain trial and detention procedures. The government applied the law throughout the year, often citing statements made in various media outlets or on internet platforms that criticized the government in the arrest, prosecution, and sentencing of individuals for crimes against national security.

In July, Behrooz Behzadi, the editor in chief of *Etemad* newspaper, was found guilty of publishing false content based on a complaint filed by the IRGC regarding *Etemad*'s reporting on the government's targeting of artists who supported the protests. Authorities banned Behzadi from engaging in any media activities, including those online, for one year.

On May 8, Yousef Mehrdad and Sadrollah Fazeli-Zare were executed for insulting the prophet, blasphemy, insulting the prophet's mother, and belittling the Quran. The charges were based on messages the two broadcast on a Telegram channel they administered called "Criticism of Superstition and Religion." Authorities also claimed to have found evidence of burning the Quran on Mehrdad's cell phone.

National Security: Authorities routinely cited laws on protecting national security to arrest or punish critics of the government and human rights defenders or to deter criticism of government policies or officials.

In July, authorities sentenced two journalists – Saeideh Shafiei and Nasim Sultan Beygi – each to four years and three months in prison on charges of propaganda against the regime, assembly, and collusion to commit acts against national security. Shafiei was charged for writing several articles on rising poverty and government management of public resources. Sultan Beygi's charges were reportedly based on her collaboration with domestic and foreign media outlets.

At year's end, activist and 2021 reformist presidential candidate Mostafa Tajzadeh was serving a five-year prison sentence on charges of conspiracy to act against the country's security, according to semiofficial Fars news agency. His arrest in July 2022 came after Tajzadeh had criticized authorities on social media and called for reform.

Internet Freedom

The government restricted and disrupted access to the internet and censored online content, and there were reports that the government monitored private online communications. The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance and the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology were the main regulatory bodies for content and internet systems, and they maintained monopoly control over internet traffic flowing in and out of the country. The Office of the Supreme Leader included the Supreme Council of Cyberspace, charged with regulating content and systems. The government collected personally identifiable information in connection with citizens' peaceful expression of political, religious, or ideological opinion or beliefs.

The law prohibited use of virtual private networks and circumvention tools.

The country's Radio Communications Regulatory Organization had to approve all internet service providers. The government also required all owners of websites and blogs in the country to register with the agencies that comprised the Commission to Determine the Instances of Criminal Content, the governmental organization that determined censoring criteria. These agencies included the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Ministry of Information and Communications Technology, Ministry of Intelligence, and Tehran Public Prosecutor's Office.

According to Freedom House, authorities employed a centralized filtering system that could effectively block a website within a few hours across the entire network. Private internet service providers were forced either to use the bandwidth provided by the government or to route traffic containing site-visit requests through government-issued filtering boxes developed by software companies within the country. This routing allowed government censorship of online content and surveillance of all activities through these websites.

The government continued to implement the National Information Network (NIN, also known as SHOMA in Persian). As described by Freedom House, NIN enabled the government to reduce foreign internet connections during politically sensitive periods, disconnect the national network from the global internet and all its content, and disrupt circumvention tools.

According to a report by the Tehran Electronic Trade Association, one-third of the 200 most popular websites available via the global internet were inaccessible in Iran due to filtering or blocking by authorities. Many websites of popular international news outlets, the political opposition, ethnic and religious minority groups, and human rights organizations were inaccessible. Authorities blocked widely used online messaging tools, including Facebook, YouTube, X (formerly Twitter), Telegram, TikTok, and WhatsApp, although the government operated X accounts under the names of Supreme Leader Khamenei, President Raisi, Foreign Minister Amir-Abdollahian, and other government-associated officials and entities. Individuals and groups practiced self-censorship online.

Government organizations, including the Basij Cyber Council, Cyber Police, and Cyber Army, which observers presumed to be controlled by the IRGC, monitored, identified, and countered alleged cyberthreats to national security. These organizations especially targeted citizens' activities

on officially banned social networking websites, and they reportedly harassed persons who criticized the government or raised sensitive social problems online.

B. FREEDOMS OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY AND ASSOCIATION

The government severely restricted freedoms of peaceful assembly and association. The government's failure to investigate or prosecute attacks on human rights defenders and peaceful protesters led to de facto restrictions on freedoms of assembly and association.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The constitution permitted assemblies and marches of unarmed persons, "provided they do not violate the principles of Islam." To prevent activities it considered antiregime, the government restricted this right and closely monitored gatherings such as public entertainment and lectures, student and women's meetings and protests, meetings and worship services of minority religious groups, labor protests, online gatherings and networking, funeral processions, and Friday prayer gatherings.

According to activists, the government arbitrarily applied rules governing permits to assemble, with proregime groups rarely experiencing difficulties, while groups viewed as critical of the regime experienced harassment regardless of whether or not authorities issued a permit. Authorities responded to antiregime protests with force, including beatings, shootings, and arrests, resulting in injuries and deaths.

On September 29, CHRI, NGO Haalvash, and media outlets reported that at least 29 protesters were injured by rubber bullets after authorities opened fire on protests in Zahedan. The protests marked the one-year anniversary of "Bloody Friday," in which NGO Hengaw claimed more than 100 protesters in Zahedan were killed by security forces the year before.

Freedom of Association

The constitution provided for the establishment of political parties, professional and political associations, and Islamic and recognized religious minority organizations, as long as such groups did not violate the principles of freedom, sovereignty, national unity, or Islamic criteria, or question Islam as the basis of the country's system of government. The government limited the freedom of association through threats, intimidation, the imposition of arbitrary requirements on organizations, and the arrests of group leaders and members (see section 5 and section 7.a.). The government continued to broaden arbitrarily the areas of civil society work it deemed unacceptable, to include conservation and environmental efforts. Authorities targeted school and university campuses to suppress social and political activism by banning independent student organizations, arresting activists, suspending or expelling students, and demoting or dismissing teachers and professors.

On May 9, teachers staged protests in 12 provinces in response to reports of school poisonings predominantly in girls' schools, to demand better salaries and pensions, and to denounce pressure on union activists and ideological indoctrination in educational materials. Security forces reportedly dispersed a teacher protest in Mashhad and assaulted protesters in Sanandaj. According to reports, several teachers who participated in the protests were arrested and several others summoned by prosecutors. Many teachers were later demoted or otherwise penalized for participating in protests, according to NGO reports.

C. FREEDOM OF RELIGION

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/international-religious-freedom-reports>.

D. FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT AND RIGHT TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY

The law provided for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights, with some exceptions, particularly concerning released prisoners, women, and migrants.

In-country Movement: Judicial sentences sometimes included internal exile after release from prison, which prevented individuals from traveling to or living in certain provinces. Refugees were also restricted to only live in or travel to certain provinces.

Foreign Travel: Citizens who were educated at government expense or received scholarships had either to repay the scholarship or receive a temporary permit to exit the country. The government restricted the foreign travel of some religious leaders, members of religious minorities, and scientists in sensitive fields.

Numerous journalists, academics, opposition politicians, civil rights activists, and artists were subject to foreign travel bans and had their passports confiscated. Married women were not allowed to travel outside the country without permission from their husbands.

Political activists Golrokh Ebrahimi Iraee, Majid Tavakoli, Mahmoud Ojaghlo, and Ali Bahrampour were banned from leaving the country as part of their sentences issued during the year. Charges against them included inciting persons to fight and kill each other with the intention of disrupting the country's security, insulting the leadership, assembly and collusion against the regime, gathering and collusion against the security of the country, and propaganda activity against the Islamic Republic.

Filmmakers Mohammad Rasoulof, Masoud Kimiai, and Ali Ahmadzadeh were banned from leaving the country to attend international film festivals during the year. Filmmakers Asghar Farhadi and Manijeh Hekmat also reported that they had been banned from leaving the country or working.

In August, Tehran's Islamic Revolutionary Court sentenced film director Saeed Roustaei and producer Javad Noruzbegi to six months in prison for showing their film "Leila's Brothers" at the 2022 Cannes Film Festival without government permission. The pair served an estimated nine days in prison, with the remainder of the sentence "suspended over five years," preventing them from continuing their film work. Domestic media reported the court convicted them of "contributing to propaganda of the opposition against the Islamic system," required them to take a filmmaking course on "preserving national and ethical interests" at the government-affiliated Qom branch of IRIB University. The court also prohibited the pair from having contact with the film industry for five years.

E. PROTECTION OF REFUGEES

The government cooperated with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in providing protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern. According to UNHCR, most refugees in the country were from Afghanistan.

UNHCR noted in August that, as of 2022, the government recognized 762,000 Afghan refugees under a system known as *Amayesh*, through which authorities provided refugees with cards identifying them as de facto refugees. The country also recognized 12,000 Iraqi refugees under a similar system known as *Hoviat*. A survey by the Ministry of Interior in April-June 2022 recorded 2.6 million undocumented Afghan nationals in the country.

Access to Asylum: The law provided for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government had established a system for providing protection to refugees. The right to seek political asylum was incorporated into the 1979 constitution, based on the 1963 "Regulation

relating to Refugees.” The regulation specified that asylum should be granted if the application had not been made in bad faith and the purpose of the application was not to seek employment. The Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrant Affairs under the Ministry of Interior was responsible for registering asylum seekers, processing asylum applications, and issuing refugee identification cards.

Amayesh cards enabled refugees to access basic services, facilitated the issuance of conditional work permits, and served as a safeguard against arrest and deportation. Those without cards were not eligible for formal employment or financial services. Amayesh cardholders had to obtain permission for any travel outside their province of registration, could not attend university, and were not permitted to obtain a driver’s license unless they had a family member in need of intensive medical care. Amayesh cardholders could overcome these restrictions if they ended their refugee status and received a student or work visa. Such visas were valid for only three months.

In recent years, according to UNHCR, the government introduced policies to increase the provision of Amayesh cards; however, NGO sources reported these cards, which were valid for only one year, were increasingly difficult to renew and could be prohibitively expensive for refugees to maintain, due to high annual renewal fees and reports of required bribes.

Refoulement: The law stated that refugees could not be forcibly returned to a country where their life or freedom was in danger due to political, racial, or religious reasons, or due to their membership in a particular social group. According to activist groups and NGOs, authorities routinely arrested Afghans without Amayesh cards and sometimes threatened them with deportation. The government returned Afghans who were apprehended while trying to enter Iran, despite advocacy by UNHCR to provide asylum to those fleeing conflict. According to UNHCR estimates, 40 percent of new arrivals were returned by the government, and International Organization for Migration reports indicated that approximately 40,000 Afghans were denied entry at the Iranian border each month. There were reports of government security forces shooting at Afghans attempting to cross into Iran, resulting in deaths and injuries.

Abuse of Refugees and Asylum Seekers: HRW and other groups reported the government continued its mistreatment of many Afghan refugees, including through physical abuse by security forces, detention in unsanitary and inhuman conditions, forced payment for transportation to and accommodation in deportation camps, forced labor, forced separation from families, restricted movement within the country, and restricted access to education or jobs.

Freedom of Movement: Refugees faced restrictions on in-country movement and were restricted from entering certain provinces, according to UNHCR. They could apply for laissez-passer documents allowing them to move among those provinces where refugees were permitted to travel.

Employment: Only refugees with government-issued work permits were able to work. Even those with Amayesh cards were limited in the type of employment they could pursue, which included construction, agriculture, and other vocational industries. There were reports that the government imposed restrictions on refugees’ ability to work after gaining official refugee status.

Access to Basic Services: As part of an agreement with UNHCR, all registered refugees had access to the national health insurance system, covering both hospitalization and paraclinical services at a subsidized rate. Refugees without any form of registration were not eligible for access to the universal public health insurance, with some exceptions, although primary health care was available free of charge regardless of documentation status.

Hospital treatments were also accessible to undocumented refugees, but at higher fees than for Iranian nationals. During the year, UNHCR covered the insurance premiums for 95,000 of the most vulnerable refugees, including those suffering from severe diseases and their families. Other refugees could enroll in health insurance by paying the premiums themselves.

Durable Solutions: By law, refugees could obtain Iranian nationality if they had reached the age of 18, had resided five years in the country (continuously or intermittently), were not deserters from

military service, and had not been convicted in any country of nonpolitical major misdemeanors or felonies. Additionally, refugees could naturalize through marriage to an Iranian national, although for male refugees this process was not automatic. In 2022, the UNHCR worked with the government to resettle refugees.

F. STATUS AND TREATMENT OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS (IDPS)

Not applicable.

G. STATELESS PERSONS

The country contributed to statelessness, including through discrimination against women in nationality laws and birth registration problems. There were no accurate numbers on how many stateless persons resided in the country. According to the Stateless Journeys campaign – led by the civil society alliance European Network on Statelessness – populations particularly at risk of statelessness included Farsi Kurds, Khavari, Baloch living near the Afghan border, and Afghan refugees. Persons without birth registration, identity documents, or refugee identification were at a heightened risk of statelessness. They were subjected to inconsistent government policies and relied on charities, principally domestic, to obtain medical care and schooling. Authorities did not issue formal government support or travel documents to stateless persons.

By law, the children of Iranian women and foreign men qualified for citizenship, although it was not automatic; the mother had to apply for the children. Children who turned 18 could apply for nationality themselves, even if their mother was deceased. Foreign men married to Iranian women could apply for legal residency. Before 2020, female citizens married to foreign men were not able to transmit citizenship to their children, while male citizens transmitted citizenship to their spouses and children automatically. As a result of this disparity, up to 200,000 children of Iranian women married to foreign men lacked Iranian nationality, according to the European Union Agency for Asylum. In December 2020, UNHCR reported that of nearly 75,000 children of Iranian mothers and foreign fathers who were assessed to be at risk of becoming stateless, approximately 10,000 had their citizenship applications accepted and were issued Iranian identity documents.

Section 3.

Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The constitution provided citizens the ability to choose the country's president, as well as members of the Assembly of Experts and parliament, in periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage, but candidates had to be vetted and approved by the Guardian Council. Candidate vetting conducted by unelected bodies, however, abridged this right in all instances.

Government constraints on freedom of expression and media, peaceful assembly, association, and the ability freely to seek, receive, and impart information and campaign also limited citizens' right to freely choose their representatives in elections.

ELECTIONS AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Abuses or Irregularities in Recent Elections: Presidential elections held in 2021 were widely reported to not be fair and free of abuses and irregularities, primarily because of the Guardian Council's controlling role in the political process, including determining which individuals could

run for office and, in certain instances, arbitrarily removing winning candidates. State-controlled media selectively promoted government-preferred candidates. The council barred all reformist candidates from running, as well as the conservative former parliament speaker Ali Larijani, who was widely considered the strongest challenger to Raisi, and former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Similarly, parliamentary elections in 2020 also fell short of international standards for free and fair elections. The Guardian Council disqualified 7,296 candidates of the 14,500 who registered to run, which prevented reformist candidates from contesting 230 of the 290 seats, according to the Atlantic Council.

Political Parties and Political Participation: The constitution provided for the formation of political parties, but the Interior Ministry granted licenses only to parties deemed to adhere to the “guardianship of the jurist” system of government embodied in the constitution. Registered political organizations that adhered to the system generally operated without restriction, but most were small, focused on an individual, and lacked nationwide membership. Members of political parties and persons with any political affiliation that the regime deemed unacceptable faced harassment and sometimes violence and imprisonment. The government maintained bans on several opposition organizations and political parties. Security officials continued to harass, intimidate, and arrest members of the political opposition.

Participation of Women and Members of Marginalized or Vulnerable Groups: Women had the right to vote and exercised that right but faced significant legal, religious, and cultural barriers to political participation. According to the Guardian Council’s interpretation, the constitution barred women, as well as persons of foreign origin, from serving as supreme leader or president; as members of the Assembly of Experts, Guardian Council, or Expediency Council; or as certain types of judges.

Although then Guardian Council spokesperson Abbas Ali Kadkhodaei claimed in a 2020 press conference there was no prohibition on women running for president in the 2021 election, the Guardian Council disqualified all 40 women who attempted to register as candidates.

All cabinet-level ministers were men. A limited number of women held senior government positions, including that of vice president for women and family affairs. Women made up approximately 6 percent of parliament.

Practitioners of religions other than Shia Islam were barred from serving as supreme leader or president, as well as from being a member of the Assembly of Experts, Guardian Council, or Expediency Council. There were two seats reserved in parliament for Armenian Christians, one for Assyrian and Chaldean Christians together, one for Jews, and one for Zoroastrians. There were no non-Muslims in the cabinet or on the Supreme Court. The law allowed constitutionally recognized religious minorities to run in local elections.

Section 4.

Corruption in Government

The law provided criminal penalties for corruption by officials, but the government implemented the law arbitrarily, sometimes pursuing apparently legitimate corruption cases against officials, while at other times bringing politically motivated charges against regime critics or political opponents or ignoring allegations of corruption against proregime officials. There were numerous reports of government corruption. International NGOs reported widespread expectations of bribes for providing routine services, and routine bribery of officials to obtain permits for otherwise illegal construction.

Corruption: Endowed *bonyads* (religious charitable foundations) accounted for one-quarter to one-third of the country's economy, according to some experts. Government insiders, including members of the military and clergy, ran these tax-exempt organizations, which were defined in law as charities. Members of the political opposition and international corruption watchdog organizations frequently accused bonyads of corruption. Bonyads received benefits from the government, but no government agency was required to approve their budgets publicly.

Numerous companies and subsidiaries affiliated with the IRGC engaged in trade and business activities, sometimes illicitly, including in the telecommunications, mining, and construction sectors. Other IRGC entities reportedly engaged in smuggling pharmaceutical products, narcotics, raw materials, and weapons.

In June, the daughter-in-law of the head of the Endowment and Charity Organization, which managed the bonyads, rented a 370-acre plot of land belonging to a state-run charitable trust for a minimal sum – a report confirmed by the son of the land's custodian. In July, parliament announced plans to open a probe into the organization.

In May, media outlet Shargh reported widespread corruption in foreign exchange markets due to pressure from the Central Bank of Iran to manipulate exchange rates.

Also in May, parliament impeached Minister of Industry, Mines, and Commerce Reza Fatemi-Amin, partly based on accusations of corruption. On April 25, parliamentarian Ali-Reza Beigi accused Fatemi-Amin of giving sports utility vehicles to 70 members of parliament or their close aides. Based on this accusation, Beigi was sentenced in July to one year in prison for "spreading lies."

For additional information about corruption in the country, please see the Department of State's *Investment Climate Statement* for the country, and the Department of State's *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, which includes information on financial crimes.

Section 5.

Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental Monitoring and Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

The government restricted the operations of, and did not cooperate with, local or international NGOs monitoring or investigating alleged violations of human rights. The government restricted the work of domestic activists and often responded to their inquiries and reports with harassment, arrests, online hacking, and monitoring of individual activists and organization workplaces.

By law, NGOs had to register with the Ministry of Interior and apply for permission to receive foreign grants. Independent human rights groups and other NGOs faced harassment because of their activism, as well as the threat of closure by government officials, following prolonged and often arbitrary delays in obtaining official registration.

According to NGOs, including HRW and Amnesty International, the government's human rights record and its level of cooperation with international rights institutions was poor. The government denied requests from international human rights NGOs to establish offices in or conduct regular investigative visits to the country.

Retribution against Human Rights Defenders: Authorities routinely engaged in retribution against human right defenders, barring them from leaving the country, threatening them, or subjecting them to arbitrary arrest. Human rights activists reported intimidating telephone calls, threats of blackmail, online hacking attempts, and property damage from unidentified law enforcement and other government officials. The government summoned activists repeatedly for questioning and confiscated personal belongings such as mobile phones, laptops, and passports.

Government officials sometimes harassed and arrested family members of human rights activists. Courts routinely suspended sentences of convicted human rights activists, leaving open the option for authorities to arrest or imprison individuals arbitrarily at any time on the previous charges.

Two married human rights defenders, Golrokh Ebrahimi Iraee and Arash Sadeghi, were sentenced for their advocacy in connection with mass protests in 2022. In May, Sadeghi was sentenced to three years and seven months for assembly and collusion against national security and eight months for propaganda against the regime. In July, Iraee was sentenced to five years in prison for assembly and collusion and propaganda against the regime.

The United Nations or Other International Bodies: The government denied repeated requests by the UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran to visit the country. In November 2022, the UN Human Rights Council approved a resolution creating an independent fact-finding mission to investigate human rights violations in the country relating to the protests that began in September 2022. As of July, the fact-finding mission had sent seven letters to the government, including repeated requests for a visit to the country to gather information critical to its investigations, but these requests were unanswered.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The High Council for Human Rights was part of the judicial branch of the government. It lacked independence and was generally ineffective. The council, led by Kazem Gharibabadi, continued to call for an end to the position of the special rapporteur for Iran and called the fact-finding mission “politically motivated and unacceptable.”

Section 6.

Discrimination and Societal Abuses

WOMEN

Rape and Domestic Violence: Rape was illegal, including the rape of men, and subject to strict penalties, including death, but it remained a serious problem. The law considered sex within marriage consensual by definition and, therefore, did not address spousal rape, including in cases of forced marriage. There were no known reports of corrective rape of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex (LGBTQI+) persons.

Most rape victims likely did not report the crime because they feared official retaliation or punishment for having been raped, including charges of indecency, immoral behavior, or adultery, which carried the death penalty. Sex outside of marriage in any form was a crime with varying punishments. Rape survivors also feared societal reprisal or ostracism. For a conviction of rape, the law required four Muslim men or a combination of three men and two women, or two men and four women, to have witnessed a rape. A woman or man found making a false accusation of rape was subject to 80 lashes.

The law did not prohibit domestic violence. Authorities considered spousal and intrafamilial abuse a private matter and seldom discussed it publicly.

There were reports that security forces incited, perpetrated, or condoned gender-based violence. There were numerous reports of sexual abuse, rape, and threats of rape against prisoners and detainees, including women and men who were imprisoned for participating in the protests that began in September 2022.

In January, protesters Mehdi Mohammadifard and Javad Rouhi were sentenced to death based on forced confessions obtained through sexual abuse, according to Amnesty International. Security agents reportedly raped Mohammadifard while in custody and tortured Rouhi by placing ice on his

testicles for two days. In May, the Supreme Court canceled their convictions and overturned their death sentences. Rouhi died in custody in August; there was no known investigation into his death.

Majid Kazemi, a protester who was executed in May, said in an audio recording from prison that he was forced to make false self-incriminating statements after interrogators beat him, gave him electric shocks, subjected him to mock executions, and threatened to rape him, execute his brothers, and harass his parents.

Other Forms of Gender-based Violence or Harassment: There were reports of killings motivated by “honor” or other harmful traditional practices during the year. There were no official statistics kept in the country concerning “honor killings,” but according to academic estimates cited by the daily newspaper *Ebtekar*, every year between 375 and 450 such killings occurred, mostly women killed by their male relatives in the name of preserving the family’s “honor.”

The law provided lesser penalties for fathers and other family members who were convicted of murder or physically harming children in domestic violence or “honor killings.” According to the Legal Information Institute of Cornell Law, the law “allows a man who witnesses his wife in the act of having sexual intercourse with another man to kill both of them if he is certain that his wife is a willing participant.” If a man was found guilty of murdering his daughter, the punishment was three to 10 years in prison rather than the normal death sentence or payment of *diya* (blood money) for homicide cases, because fathers (but not mothers) were considered legal guardians and were exempt from capital punishment for killing their children.

In July, a man in West Azerbaijan Province shot and killed his daughter, age 15, in response to an SMS message she received indicating a relationship with a boy, according to *Etemad* newspaper. *IranWire* reported this was the ninth “honor killing” perpetrated by a father in four months.

In the first half of the year, there was a wave of poisonings at schools in almost every province that primarily affected girls’ schools. Hundreds of schoolgirls were hospitalized with symptoms of respiratory distress, numbness in the limbs, heart palpitations, headaches, nausea, and vomiting. In March, authorities reported they had detained more than 100 individuals responsible for the incidents, but the investigations lacked transparency, according to NGOs. The exact causes of the symptoms, motives for the attacks, and perpetrators were unknown.

Discrimination: The law did not provide equal rights and protection for women as for men. Provisions in the law, particularly sections dealing with family and property law, discriminated against women. Judicial harassment, intimidation, detention, and smear campaigns against NGOs and activists significantly hindered the ability of civil society organizations to fight for and protect women’s rights. Women’s and human rights observers reported that sexual harassment was the norm in many workplaces.

The law provided that a woman who appeared in public without appropriate attire, such as a hijab and a *manteau* (long jacket), or a chador (large full-length cloth covering), could be sentenced to flogging and fines. According to the country’s Islamic penal code, “Women that appear in the streets and public places without the Islamic hijab shall be sentenced from 10 days to two months’ imprisonment or fined 50,000-500,000 Rials.” There was no similar rule for men in the penal code.

On September 20, parliament approved the intensely controversial “Bill to Support the Family by Promoting the Culture of Chastity and Hijab.” If adopted, the new law would set new penalties for noncompliance with the Islamic dress code as interpreted by authorities, with new fines and prison terms of up to 10 years. According to press reports, the bill also called for more strictly segregating the sexes in schools, parks, hospitals, and other locations. The bill reportedly extended punishments to business owners who served women not wearing hijab and activists who organized against it. Celebrities not wearing hijab properly could be banned from leaving the country and performing.

Enforcement of hijab laws resulted in fines, imprisonment, and other punishments such as mandatory psychiatric care for many women, and allegedly led to the death of Mahsa Zhina Amini

in September 2022. Amini died after reportedly being beaten while in the custody of the morality police, who detained Amini for her alleged “improper hijab.”

IranWire and *The Guardian* reported that a woman wearing a chador assaulted Armita Geravand, age 16, on a subway train in Tehran on October 1, causing Geravand to fall, hit her head, and lapse into a coma. The assault reportedly occurred after a verbal dispute in which the woman, who some reports claimed was a member of the morality police, criticized Geravand for not wearing the hijab. Geravand died four weeks later. NGO Hengaw reported that authorities pressured Geravand’s family, friends, and classmates to not speak out against the government’s official account that Geravand fainted due to a drop in blood pressure.

During the funeral for Geravand, authorities also beat and detained multiple attendees for protesting or not wearing hijab, including prominent human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh. Sotoudeh was charged with removing the hijab and acting against society’s psychological security according to the IRGC-affiliated Fars News Agency. She was released from Evin Prison on bail on November 15.

Multiple businesses were closed by authorities for violations of hijab policies by staff.

Laws recognizing a divorced woman’s rights to alimony and part of shared property were not always enforced. A woman could divorce only if her husband signed a contract granting her that right, could not provide for his family, violated the terms of the marriage contract, or was a drug addict, insane, or impotent. A man could divorce his wife without providing any reason.

The law provided divorced women preference in custody for children up to age seven, but fathers maintained legal guardianship rights over the child and had the right to decide upon many legal aspects of the child’s life (such as issuing travel documents, enrolling in school, or filing a police report). Additionally, the civil code stated, “If the mother becomes insane or marries another man during her period of custody, the custody shall devolve upon the father.” After the child reached age seven, the father could gain custody unless he was proven unfit to care for the child.

The law permitted a man to have as many as four wives and an unlimited number of *sigheh* (temporary wives), based on a Shia custom allowing limited duration civil and religious contracts. The law did not grant women the right to multiple husbands.

The government did not recognize marriages between Muslim women and non-Muslim men, irrespective of their citizenship. The law stated that a virgin woman or girl wishing to wed needed the consent of her father or grandfather or permission from a court.

Women sometimes received disproportionate punishment for crimes such as adultery, including death sentences. The judiciary’s interpretation and application of Islamic law retained provisions that equated a woman’s testimony in a court of law to one-half that of a man’s and valued a woman’s life as one-half that of a man’s life. The amount paid in “blood money” for the intentional or unintentional physical harm to a woman was one-half that paid for harm to a man, but a publicly funded trust paid the difference.

Women had access to primary and advanced education. Quotas and other restrictions nonetheless limited women’s admissions to certain fields and degree programs. In April, the Ministry of Education stated it would no longer provide educational services to students in schools and universities who did not follow dress codes, including wearing headscarves.

The government made systematic efforts to limit women’s access to the workplace, and their participation in the job market was as low as 14 percent, according to World Bank data. The unemployment rate among women was nearly twice as high as for men. Hiring practices often discriminated against women. The laws stated that the top priority for hiring should be given first to married men with families and then married women with families. The law restricted women from working in jobs deemed hazardous or arduous. Women reportedly earned significantly less than men for the same work.

Women faced discrimination in home and property ownership, as well as in access to financing. In cases of inheritance, male heirs received twice the inheritance of their female counterparts, a law based on sharia that also applied to the country's religious minorities. The government enforced gender segregation in many public spaces. Women had to ride in a reserved section on public buses and enter some public buildings, universities, and airports through separate entrances.

Women were banned from singing solo in public. Dancing in public was not explicitly illegal, but persons could be prosecuted if authorities deemed their acts indecent or immoral. There were multiple reports of girls being arrested during the year after posting videos of themselves dancing without headscarves in public. In many cases, women were barred from attending sporting events, although women were allowed to participate in gender-segregated sports.

Some women who had been arrested and tried for protesting the dress code were released from prison as part of a general amnesty in February, including Yasaman Aryani, her mother Monireh Arabshahi, and Mojgan Keshavarz, who were serving sentences of five and one-half years for spreading propaganda against the regime and inciting corruption and prostitution. These convictions pertained to their posting a video for International Women's Day in 2019 in which the three women walked without headscarves through a Tehran metro train. Activist Saba Kord Afshari was also released in the general amnesty after serving three years of a five-year sentence for walking without a hijab and opposing the dress code.

Reproductive Rights: There were no reports of coerced abortion, but there were isolated reports of involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities. In June, Haalvash reported a hospital in Sistan-Balochistan Province, home to the country's ethnic minority Balochi population, performed postpartum hysterectomies on several women without their consent. Women who gave birth at Imam Ali hospital in Chabahar reportedly had their uteruses removed without their or their families' consent.

A 2021 law directed authorities to prioritize population growth. These policies included measures such as outlawing voluntary sterilization and banning the free distribution of contraceptives by the public health-care system. The law also stipulated that content on family planning in university textbooks should be replaced with materials on an "Islamic-Iranian lifestyle," with a framework drawn up in cooperation with religious seminaries and the Islamic Propaganda Organization.

It was illegal for a single woman to access contraception without a doctor's prescription, but most single women had access to contraception, particularly in urban areas.

The government did not provide access to sexual and reproductive health services for survivors of sexual violence. Emergency contraception and postexposure prophylaxis were not routinely available as part of the clinical management of rape.

SYSTEMIC RACIAL OR ETHNIC VIOLENCE AND DISCRIMINATION

The constitution provided for equal rights to all ethnic minorities, allowing minority languages to be used in media. The law provided for the right of citizens to learn, use, and teach their own languages and dialects. Nonetheless, the government discriminated against minorities.

Human rights organizations observed that the government's application of the death penalty and extended pretrial detention disproportionately affected ethnic minorities. Authorities reportedly subjected members of minority ethnicities and religious groups in pretrial detention to more severe physical punishment, including torture, than other prisoners, regardless of the crime of which they were accused. These ethnic minority groups reported political and socioeconomic discrimination, particularly in their access to economic aid, business licenses, university admissions, job opportunities, permission to publish books, and housing and land rights.

Ethnic minority groups, particularly Ahwazis, Azeris, and Lors, complained regularly that the government diverted and mismanaged natural resources, primarily water, from regions occupied by

minorities, often for the benefit of IRGC-affiliated contractors. According to international media and human rights groups, these practices devastated the local environment on which farmers and others depended for their livelihoods and well-being, resulting in forced migration and further marginalization of these communities.

The law required religious screening and allegiance to the Shia concept of “governance by the jurist,” not found in Sunni Islam, which impaired the ability of Sunni Muslims (many of whom were also Baloch, Ahwazi, Kurdish, or Turkmen) to integrate into civic life and to work in certain fields.

The estimated eight million ethnic Kurds in the country frequently called for greater regional autonomy. The government arrested and prosecuted Kurds for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and association. The government reportedly banned some Kurdish-language newspapers, journals, and books and punished publishers, journalists, and writers for criticizing government policies. Authorities suppressed the activities of Kurdish NGOs by denying them registration permits or bringing security charges against persons working with such organizations. Authorities did not universally prohibit the use of the Kurdish language.

International human rights observers, including the IHRDC, stated that the country’s estimated two million Ahwazi Arabs, representing 110 tribes, faced continued oppression and discrimination. Ahwazi rights activists reported the government confiscated Ahwazi property to use for government development projects, refusing to recognize property titles issued during the prerevolutionary era.

Ethnic Azeris, who numbered more than 18 million, or approximately 24 percent of the population, were more integrated into government and society than other ethnic minority groups. Supreme Leader Khamenei was an ethnic Azeri. Azeris reported the government discriminated against them by harassing activists or organizers and prevented some parents from giving Turkic names to their children.

Local and international human rights groups alleged discrimination against the Baloch ethnic minority, estimated at between 1.5 and two million persons. Areas with large Balochi populations were severely underdeveloped and had limited access to education, employment, health care, and housing. In 2021, Balochi activists reported that more than 70 percent of the population lived below the poverty line. According to activist reports, the law limited Sunni Balochi and Turkmen employment opportunities and political participation.

CHILDREN

Education: Although primary schooling until age 11 was free and compulsory for all, media and other sources reported lower enrollment in rural areas, especially for girls. Girls were also exempt from fulfilling their educational requirements if they were married, which could happen with parental consent at age nine. Children without state-issued identification cards were denied the right to education. The government consistently barred use of minority languages in school for instruction.

Child Abuse: The law stated, “Any form of abuse of children and juveniles that causes physical, psychological, or moral harm and threatens their physical or mental health is prohibited.” Such crimes carried a maximum sentence of three months in confinement. It defined a set of punishments, which included imprisonment and “blood money,” for negligence by anyone, including parents, that resulted in death, disability, bodily harm, and sexual harassment. The law required the State Welfare Organization to investigate the situation of children in “extreme danger” of abuse, exploitation, or being out of school, among other concerns. The state also had the authority to remove children from a household and put them under state supervision until the prosecutor took on the case. The law applied to all citizens younger than age 18, despite the earlier age of maturity.

There was little information available on how the government dealt with child abuse. According to the Midterm Universal Periodic Review Report on the Islamic Republic of Iran's Human Rights Achievement in Light of U.P.R. Recommendations (2020-2021), 22 clinics aimed at protecting children's rights had been set up in various provinces of Iran. At the clinics, children were reportedly offered psychological counseling, and legal, judicial, and educational support. There were no reports on the effectiveness, results, or exact activities of these centers.

According to testimonies obtained by HRW, government security forces restrained, blindfolded, and tortured children in detention. Authorities reportedly beat and sexually assaulted a boy, age 17, according to one of his family members. A high school student said that security forces beat and whipped her during interrogation and interrogators allegedly tortured another boy by shoving needles under his nails.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: The legal minimum age of marriage for girls was 13, but girls as young as age nine could be married with permission from a court and their fathers. *IranWire* reported in May that child marriage had been rising since 2019. In April, the National Organization for Civil Registration released its annual report for 2022, which showed that 27,448 marriages involving girls under age 15 were recorded during the previous year. According to the government's Registration Organization, in April 2022, there were 1,474 babies born to mothers ages 10-14. According to human rights organizations, the increase in child marriage was due in part to a government "marriage loan" program providing financial relief to poor families who wanted to marry off their girls.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: There were no specific laws regarding child sexual exploitation, with such crimes either falling under the category of child abuse or sexual crimes of adultery. The law did not directly address sexual molestation nor provide a punishment for it. The legal age requirements for consensual sex were the same as those for marriage, as the law did not address spousal rape, including in cases of forced marriage, and as sex outside of marriage was illegal.

According to CHRI, the ambiguity between the legal definitions of child abuse and sexual molestation could lead to child sexual molestation cases being prosecuted under adultery law. While no separate provision existed for the rape of a child, the crime of rape, regardless of the survivor's age, was potentially punishable by death.

ANTISEMITISM

The law recognized Jews as a religious minority and provided for their representation in parliament. According to the Tehran Jewish Committee, the country's population included an estimated 9,000 Jews. Members of the Jewish community were reportedly subjected to government restrictions and discrimination. Government officials, including the supreme leader, president, and other top officials, routinely engaged in egregious antisemitic rhetoric and Holocaust denial and distortion. Supreme Leader Khamenei's social media accounts repeatedly contained antisemitic attacks and tropes. State-run media routinely claimed "Zionists" influenced Western nations on topics affecting Iran and blamed "Zionists," among others, for fomenting unrest in the country.

According to NGO reports, school textbooks included content that incited hatred against Jews as part of the state curricula for history, religion, and social studies.

For further information on incidents in the country of antisemitism, whether or not those incidents were motivated by religion, and for reporting on the ability of Jews to exercise freedom of religion or belief, please see the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

FORCED ORGAN HARVESTING

It was legal for persons to sell their own kidneys. The government matched buyers and sellers and set a fixed price. A black market for kidneys and other organs also existed.

ACTS OF VIOLENCE, CRIMINALIZATION, AND OTHER ABUSES BASED ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION, GENDER IDENTITY OR EXPRESSION, OR SEX CHARACTERISTICS

Criminalization: The law criminalized consensual same-sex sexual activity, which was punishable by death, flogging, or a lesser punishment. There were no reports of such punishments being enforced during the year. The law did not distinguish between consensual and nonconsensual same-sex intercourse, and NGOs reported this lack of clarity led to both the survivor and the perpetrator being held criminally liable under the law in cases of assault. Hate-crime laws or other criminal justice mechanisms did not exist to aid in the prosecution of bias-motivated crimes.

LGBTQI+ activists expressed concern that the government prosecuted LGBTQI+ individuals under the pretext of more severe, and possibly specious, criminal charges such as rape and incest. Those accused of sodomy often faced summary trials, and evidentiary standards were not always met. The Iranian Lesbian and Transgender Network (6Rang) noted that individuals arrested under such conditions were traditionally subjected to forced anal examinations and other degrading treatment and sexual insults.

The Supreme Court overturned the conviction and death sentences of Zahra Seddiqi Hamedani and Elham Choubdar, active members of the LGBTQI+ community, and both were released on bail in March. In September 2022, a court had reportedly sentenced them to death after finding them guilty of corruption on earth and human trafficking.

Violence and Harassment: LGBTQI+ persons were often subjected to violence. Security forces harassed, arrested, and detained individuals they suspected or perceived as being LGBTQI+. In some cases, security forces raided houses and monitored internet sites for information on LGBTQI+ persons.

6Rang reported dozens of LGBTQI+ persons who participated in the protests to mark the one-year anniversary of the death of Mahsa Zhina Amini said they experienced "aggravated violence, including sexual and physical abuse, as well as verbal harassment" by authorities. Protesters, including LGBTQI+ persons under age 18 and women, also reported "sexual assault and rape" during the protests and while in police custody.

Discrimination: The law did not prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics and did not recognize LGBTQI+ individuals, couples, or their families. The law classified gay men and transgender women as having mental disorders and, on those grounds, exempted them from the otherwise mandatory military service for male citizens. Military identity cards listed the subsection of the law dictating the exemption. According to 6Rang, this practice identified gay or transgender individuals and put them at risk of physical abuse and discrimination in everyday life, including risk of arrest.

Lesbians and bisexual women were denied full rights as women, and for lesbians, these vulnerabilities could be greater and could include forced marriage. Although the government did not collect official data on discrimination against LGBTQI+ individuals, NGOs reported that members of the LGBTQI+ community experienced widespread discrimination in education, employment, health care, personal safety, and within their own families.

Availability of Legal Gender Recognition: Individuals were able to change their gender identify markers on government-issued identification cards after gender-affirming surgery and by court permission.

Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices: A number of private and semigovernmental psychological and psychiatric clinics allegedly continued to engage in “corrective treatment” or reparative therapies of LGBTQI+ persons. 6Rang reported the use at such clinics of electric shock therapy to the hands and genitals of LGBTQI+ persons, prescription of psychoactive medication, hypnosis, and coercive masturbation to pictures of persons of the opposite sex. One such institution, the Anonymous Sex Addicts Association of Iran, had branches in 18 provinces. The prevalence of conversion therapy practices was also documented by Outright International and public health scholars.

Some clerics believed LGBTQI+ persons were trapped in a body of the wrong sex, and NGOs reported that authorities sometimes pressured LGBTQI+ persons to undergo gender reassignment surgery. Reports indicated these procedures disregarded psychological and physical health and some persons recommended for surgery did not identify as transgender but were forced to comply to avoid punishment for their LGBTQI+ identity.

Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly: The government censored all materials related to LGBTQI+ status or conduct. Authorities blocked websites or content within sites that discussed LGBTQI+ topics, including Wikipedia pages defining LGBTQI+ and other related topics.

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The law provided for access to government-funded buildings, and new structures appeared to comply with these standards. There were efforts to increase access for persons with disabilities to historic sites. Government buildings that predated existing accessibility standards remained largely inaccessible, and general building accessibility, including access to toilets for persons with disabilities, were a problem. Individuals with disabilities had limited access to informational, educational, and community activities.

According to HRW, the law for the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities increased pensions and extended insurance coverage to disability-related health-care services, but it did not explicitly prohibit discrimination. According to CHRI, the government did not allocate a budget to enforce the disability law, and according to NGOs, it remained unimplemented. According to law in force, persons with vision, hearing, or speech disabilities were prohibited from running for seats in parliament. While the law provided for government-funded vocational education for persons with disabilities, domestic news reports noted vocational centers were located only in urban areas and were largely unable to meet the needs of the entire population.

Mandatory government medical tests often excluded children with disabilities from the public school system. Based on the latest available government figures (2021), 142,000 children of school age with disabilities were enrolled in school, with 65,000 attending inclusive schools. Estimates put the total number of school-age children with disabilities at 1.5 million. They faced stigma and discrimination from government social workers, health-care workers, and others. Subsequently, many persons with disabilities were unable to participate in society on an equal basis.

In October, members of the disability community protested the government’s failure to implement an article of the law that required the government to provide the equivalent of a minimum annual wage to persons with severe disabilities who lacked income. According to *IranWire*, on October 11, officers of the Intelligence Ministry raided the home of the director of the Campaign in Support of Disabled People, Behrouz Morovati, and confiscated some of his personal belongings. He was required to appear at the Intelligence Ministry on October 12. Disability rights lawyer Nasser Saragaran was also detained on October 11, according to CHRI.

OTHER SOCIETAL VIOLENCE OR DISCRIMINATION

Despite government programs to treat and provide financial and other assistance to persons with HIV or AIDS, international news sources and organizations reported that individuals known to be infected with HIV or AIDS faced widespread societal discrimination. Individuals with HIV or AIDS, for example, were denied employment as teachers.

According to CHRI, followers of the Baha'i faith in the country were routinely imprisoned for practicing their religion and were denied basic rights, including land and business ownership, equal access to employment, equal access to education, and equal burial rights. Persecution of the Baha'i community escalated between April and November with increased raids, confiscation of property, arrests, and convictions. According to the U.S. Baha'i National Center, 70 to 90 Bahai's were in prison during the year, with more than half of them women. Baha'i International Community (BIC) reported authorities arrested or imprisoned 60 Baha'is from mid-July to mid-August and closed 59 Baha'i-owned shops and businesses.

In December 2022, the government announced the sentencing of Mahvash Sabet and Fariba Kamalabadi to 10 years in prison on national security charges, working to undermine Islam, and furthering the interests of dominant foreign countries. Fellow prisoner Faezeh Hashemi reported that Sabet's kneecaps were broken by her interrogator while in custody. According to BIC, Sabet did not receive medical treatment for this injury. Sabet and Kamalabadi were members of the informal leadership group of the Baha'is of Iran until their incarceration in 2008 and the dissolution of their group.

In several localities, including Tehran, the government blocked Baha'is from carrying out burials of their deceased. Several burials were taken over by authorities, who buried the deceased without Baha'i rites. Three Baha'is were arrested for managing Baha'i burials within the Baha'i section of Khavaran Cemetery in Tehran, and another was arrested for repeatedly appealing to authorities to permit her to bury her grandmother in the cemetery. On May 31, the four Baha'is – Shadi Shahidzadeh, Ataullah Zafar, Valiollah Aghdamian, and Mansour Amini – were sentenced to five years in prison for membership in groups opposed to the regime and for illegal acts with the aim of disrupting the security of the country.

According to the U.S. Baha'i National Center, X (formerly Twitter) accounts linked to the IRGC continued a campaign of disinformation against the Baha'i community with tens of thousands of posts calling for violence and persecution of Baha'is.

According to CHRI, Sunni religious leaders in the Sistan-Balochistan Province and in Kurdish-majority provinces were increasingly targeted by authorities for persecution, arrest, and imprisonment in retaliation for their criticism of the government. In June, the Friday prayer leader of Zahedan and de facto Sunni leader of the Balochi community, Molavi Abdolhamid, was allegedly the target of an attempt to kill him, according to Haalvash. In June and July, security forces detained at least seven close associates of Abdolhamid, including his grandson. Dozens of other Balochi Sunni clerics and religious teachers who criticized the government were arrested, and several received harsh prison sentences.

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/.

Section 7.

Worker Rights

A. FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND THE RIGHT TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

The law provided for workers to form and join independent unions and conduct legal strikes, but it did not prohibit antiunion discrimination. The law stated workers could establish an Islamic labor council or a guild at any workplace, but the rights and responsibilities of these organizations fell significantly short of international standards for trade unions.

The government did not effectively enforce all applicable labor laws protecting freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the right to strike for workers. While labor unions were not explicitly forbidden by law, registration as a civil society organization was typically denied for independent labor unions. The law required prior authorization for organizing and concluding collective agreements and for conducting strikes. In practice, the Ministry of Interior did not provide permits for conducting strikes, which were thus deemed illegal by authorities. Private-sector workers could conduct “peaceful” campaigns within the workplace. The law did not apply to establishments with fewer than 10 employees.

The government severely restricted freedom of association and interfered in worker attempts to organize by arresting and jailing individuals for union activities (see section 2.b., Freedom of Association), and restricted workers’ right to collective bargaining. The law did not prohibit antiunion discrimination and did not require reinstatement of workers fired for union activity. Penalties for violations of laws protecting freedom of association and the right to strike were less than those under other laws involving denials of civil rights. Penalties were rarely applied against violators. Courts often labelled strikes and labor protests as security threats.

The government harassed trade union leaders, labor rights activists, and journalists during crackdowns on protests and strikes. According to NGO and media reports, as in previous years, several trade unionists, including members of teachers’ unions, petroleum industry workers’ unions, and bus drivers’ unions were imprisoned or remained detained for their peaceful activism. Independent trade unionists were subjected to arbitrary arrests, tortured, and if convicted, subjected to lengthy prison sentences.

In September, 17 workers of the National Iranian Steel Company were fined and given suspended sentences of 74 lashes for protesting. The workers were found guilty of disrupting public order by creating commotion and controversy.

According to CHRI, the labor councils, which consisted of representatives of workers and a representative of management, were essentially management-run unions that undermined worker efforts to maintain independent unions. The councils, nevertheless, sometimes could block layoffs and dismissals. There was no representative worker organization for noncitizen workers.

According to international media reports, security forces continued to respond to workers’ attempts to organize or conduct strikes with threats, arbitrary arrests, and violence. As economic conditions deteriorated, strikes and worker protests occurred across the country throughout the year, often prompting a heavy police response.

Amid widespread strikes in late April, authorities arrested teachers’ rights activist and spokesperson for the Iranian Teachers’ Trade Association Mohammad Habibi. Habibi was previously imprisoned from October 2022 to February. Habibi was rearrested with other labor activists, including Reyhaneh Ansarinejad and seven others. In July, Reyhaneh Ansarinejad was sentenced to four years in prison on charges of assembly and collusion against national security. Labor activist Anisha Asadollahi, who was arrested with Habibi, was sentenced in May to five years in prison for assembly and collusion against national security and eight months for propaganda against the regime.

Authorities arrested striking contractors working in the South Pars gas fields project in response to a wave of worker strikes in late April and early May. Authorities had summoned and threatened several labor activists in the period preceding the strikes.

Also, in early May, labor activists Kamal Karimi, Shadman Abdi, Abdullah Khairabadi, Sirvan Mahmoudi, Iqbal Pishkari, Khabat Mahmoudi, and Habibullah Karimi were reportedly beaten while being placed under arrest by authorities in Sanandaj for unknown charges. According to NGOs Kurdistan Human Rights Network and Hengaw, in the following month Kamal Karimi, Shadman Abdi, and Khabat Mahmoudi were released from prison on bail, and in July they were each given suspended prison sentences. Karimi was sentenced to nine months in prison for membership in political Kurdish opposition to the government. Khabat Mahmoudi was sentenced to 18 months in prison for collusion against internal and external security. Shadman Abdi was sentenced to three years in prison for establishing an illegal group.

B. PROHIBITION OF FORCED OR COMPULSORY LABOR

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

C. PROHIBITION OF CHILD LABOR AND MINIMUM AGE FOR EMPLOYMENT

The law did not prohibit all of the worst forms of child labor and did not effectively enforce the law. The labor law prohibited the employment of children under age 15. By law, children ages 15-18 could be employed if they were evaluated and considered as medically fit for work by the government's Social Security Organization.

Labor laws limited working hours to 44 hours per week and required that children ages 15-18 work half an hour less than adults daily. Children working in the informal sector were not protected by labor laws. There were no reports of violators of child labor laws being held accountable. The government did not effectively enforce the applicable laws. There was limited information on whether penalties were commensurate with or less than those for analogous crimes.

Laws lacked clarity regarding the following: forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale of children or child sex trafficking; debt bondage and serfdom; forced or compulsory labor, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict; the use, procuring, or offering of a child for commercial sex, or for the production of pornography or for pornographic purposes; and the use, procuring, or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs.

The head of the country's Socially Disadvantaged Affairs Office estimated there were 120,000 working children in the country, and authorities identified 14,500 street children. Sodeh Najafi, head of the Health Committee of Tehran City Council, said in June there were 70,000 "working children" in Tehran alone. Multiple official statements claimed that children of Afghans and other foreign nationals comprised the majority of working children. A report by parliament's Center for Research indicated the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor, and Social Welfare found an average of 326 children engaged in the worst forms of child labor per year during the period of 2012-22.

D. DISCRIMINATION (SEE SECTION 6)

E. ACCEPTABLE CONDITIONS OF WORK

Wage and Hour Laws: The law provided for a national minimum wage for all sectors of the economy. In March, the Supreme Labor Council, the government body charged with proposing labor regulations, agreed to raise the minimum monthly wage by 27 percent. Labor leaders criticized the increase for not sufficiently keeping up with inflation, which consistently above 40

percent per annum. Labor groups reported that even with the increase, the minimum wage was less than half of what would be required to reach the poverty line for a family.

The law established a maximum six-day, 44-hour workweek with a weekly rest day, at least 12 days of paid annual leave, and several paid public holidays. Any hours worked above that total entitled a worker to overtime pay. The law mandated a payment above the hourly wage to employees for any accrued overtime and provided that overtime work was not compulsory. The law did not cover workers in workplaces with fewer than 10 workers, nor did it apply to noncitizens.

Employers sometimes subjected migrant workers, most often Afghans, to abusive working conditions, including below-minimum-wage salaries, nonpayment of wages, compulsory overtime, and summary deportation. According to media reports, many workers continued to be employed on temporary contracts, under which they lacked protections available to full-time, noncontract workers. These workers were ineligible for benefits or insurance and could be dismissed at will. By law, the length of employment contracts for all legally residing foreigners was set at one year, with the potential for extension.

Low wages, nonpayment of wages, and lack of job security due to contracting practices continued to contribute to strikes and protests, which occurred throughout the year, particularly among workers on temporary contracts. HRA reported that at least 3,337 workers were owed a total of more than 262 months of backpay. Three-quarters of the delayed wage payments were in the public sector.

Occupational Safety and Health: Little information was available regarding labor inspection and related law enforcement activity. While the law provided for occupational safety and health (OSH) standards, the government did not effectively enforce the standards. The law stated inspections could be done day or night, without prior notice, and initiate sanctions. Inspections of family businesses required written permission of the local prosecutor. Inspectors could report violations to the labor department and issue a notice of violation to the violating enterprise. The law did not provide workers the right to remove themselves from a hazardous workplace without jeopardizing their employment.

Labor organizations reported that hazardous work environments resulted in the deaths of hundreds of workers annually. HRA reported that at least 4,018 persons were injured in work-related incidents and at least 1,252 died in work-related incidents during the year. Work-related incidents were most common in the construction sector, followed by heavy industry, mining, service sector, small workshops, municipal services, and agriculture/animal husbandry.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement: The government did not effectively enforce minimum wage, overtime, and OSH laws, and there were no reports of penalties applied against violators. Responsibility for identifying unsafe situations rested with the technical protection and occupational health committee of workplaces designated by the Ministry of Labor. The ministry employed 840 active inspectors responsible for enforcing compliance with the labor code. The number of labor inspectors was insufficient to enforce compliance.

In August 2020, the Iranian National Tax Administration estimated the informal economy to have reached 37.7 percent of GDP. The government claimed to enforce labor laws in the informal sector, while some NGO reporting countered it did not.