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Home Office

Country Policy and Information Note

Iran: Women fearing ‘honour’-based violence

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Preface

Purpose

This note provides country of origin information (COI) and analysis of COI for use by Home Office decision makers handling particular types of protection and human rights claims (as set out in the [Introduction](#) section). It is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of a particular subject or theme.

It is split into two main sections: (1) analysis and assessment of COI and other evidence; and (2) COI. These are explained in more detail below.

Assessment

This section analyses the evidence relevant to this note – i.e. the COI section; refugee/human rights laws and policies; and applicable caselaw – by describing this and its inter-relationships, and provides an assessment of, in general, whether one or more of the following applies:

- A person is reasonably likely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm
- The general humanitarian situation is so severe as to breach Article 15(b) of European Council Directive 2004/83/EC (the Qualification Directive) / Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights as transposed in paragraph 339C and 339CA(iii) of the Immigration Rules
- The security situation presents a real risk to a civilian's life or person such that it would breach Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive as transposed in paragraph 339C and 339CA(iv) of the Immigration Rules
- A person is able to obtain protection from the state (or quasi state bodies)
- A person is reasonably able to relocate within a country or territory
- A claim is likely to justify granting asylum, humanitarian protection or other form of leave, and
- If a claim is refused, it is likely or unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

Decision makers **must**, however, still consider all claims on an individual basis, taking into account each case's specific facts.

Country of origin information

The country information in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), dated April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation's (ACCORD), [Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual, 2013](#). Namely, taking into account the COI's relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

The structure and content of the country information section follows a [terms of reference](#) which sets out the general and specific topics relevant to this note.

All information included in the note was published or made publicly available on or before the 'cut-off' date(s) in the country information section. Any event taking place or report/article published after these date(s) is not included.

All information is publicly accessible or can be made publicly available, and is from generally reliable sources. Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion. Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

- the motivation, purpose, knowledge and experience of the source
- how the information was obtained, including specific methodologies used
- the currency and detail of information, and
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources.

Multiple sourcing is used to ensure that the information is accurate, balanced and corroborated, so that a comprehensive and up-to-date picture at the time of publication is provided of the issues relevant to this note.

Information is compared and contrasted, whenever possible, to provide a range of views and opinions. The inclusion of a source, however, is not an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a brief footnote; full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the [bibliography](#).

Feedback

Our goal is to continuously improve our material. Therefore, if you would like to comment on this note, please email the [Country Policy and Information Team](#).

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

The [Independent Advisory Group on Country Information](#) (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to support him in reviewing the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of approach of COI produced by the Home Office.

The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office's COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy. The IAGCI may be contacted at:

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Information about the IAGCI's work and a list of the documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's pages of the [gov.uk website](#).

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Assessment

Updated: 25 March 2021

1. Introduction

1.1 Basis of claim

- 1.1.1 Fear of persecution or serious harm by non-state actors because the woman or girl is at risk of honour-based violence.

1.2 Points to note

- 1.2.1 An 'honour' crime is an act of violence or abuse, including killing, which has been or may be committed to protect or defend the honour of an individual, family and/or community for alleged or perceived breaches of the family and/or community's code of behaviour.
- 1.2.2 Although 'honour' crimes may be committed against both men and women, this note is confined to 'honour' crimes against women and girls only.
- 1.2.3 Decision makers should also refer to the instruction on [Gender issues in the asylum claim](#) and [Processing children's asylum claims](#).

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2. Consideration of issues

2.1 Credibility

- 2.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).
- 2.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).
- 2.1.3 Decision makers should also consider the need to conduct language analysis testing (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

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2.2 Exclusion

- 2.2.1 Decision makers must consider whether there are serious reasons for considering whether one (or more) of the exclusion clauses is applicable. Each case must be considered on its individual facts and merits.
- 2.2.2 If the person is excluded from the Refugee Convention, they will also be excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection.
- 2.2.3 For further guidance on the exclusion clauses and restricted leave, see the Asylum Instructions on [Exclusion under Articles 1F and 33\(2\) of the Refugee Convention](#), [Humanitarian Protection](#) and [Restricted Leave](#).

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2.3 Convention reason(s)

- 2.3.1 Actual or imputed membership of a particular social group (PSG).

- 2.3.2 Establishing a convention reason is not sufficient to be recognised as a refugee. The question is whether the person has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of an actual or imputed Refugee Convention reason.
- 2.3.3 Women form a PSG in Iran within the meaning of the Refugee Convention because they share an innate characteristic or a common background that cannot be changed, or share a characteristic or belief that is so fundamental to identity or conscience that a person should not be forced to renounce it and have a distinct identity in Iran because the group is perceived as being different by the surrounding society.
- 2.3.4 Although relating to forced marriage and not 'honour' crimes as such, the reported case [TB \(PSG, women\) Iran \[2005\] UKIAT 00065 \(09 March 2005\)](#), heard 30 November 2004 and promulgated 9 March 2005, found:
 'The real risk of this appellant suffering serious harm on return to Iran is primarily for non-Convention reasons (the vindictiveness and retribution of the appellant's father and the Mullah). However, as we consider there would also be a failure of state protection against that serious harm, we find that there is a causal nexus between the persecution (accepting that: Persecution = failure of state protection + serious harm) and her membership of a particular social group...' (paragraph 69 iv)
- 2.3.5 As women who suffer persecution or serious harm for honour-based violence may not have state protection, in line with the above, they may also form a PSG.
- 2.3.6 For further guidance on Convention reasons see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.4 Risk

- 2.4.1 The penal code does not specifically criminalise 'honour' crimes and Islamic law gives individuals the right to demand retaliation in kind for a murder or deliberate body injury (see [Penal Code](#)).
- 2.4.2 An 'honour' crime may be committed or ordered by a husband, a father, a brother or another relative as a punishment to a family member because they have gone against social or cultural norms and are perceived to have damaged the family's reputation by their actions. This may be, for example, by: having extramarital sex, refusing an arranged marriage, choosing one's own spouse without the family's approval, becoming a victim of rape, having same-sex relations or being excessively liberal in their behaviour and dress (see [Cultural and societal attitudes towards women](#), [Definition and motives](#) and [Demographic and socio-economic factors, and perpetrators](#)).
- 2.4.3 For an assessment of risk in relation to extramarital sex, refusing an arranged marriage and having same-sex relations, see the Country Policy and Information Notes on [Iran: Adulterers](#), [Iran: Women – early and forced marriage](#), and [Iran: Sexual orientation and gender identity](#).
- 2.4.4 There are no precise or reliable statistics on the number of 'honour' crimes or killings in Iran. According to a 2019 research report, 30% of all murders were 'honour' killings of women and girls and, in December 2019, a state-run

news agency reported that between 375 and 450 ‘honour’ killings occur each year. The number of ‘honour’ killings are likely to be under-reported because they are covered up by families and not reported to the authorities. Some women are also pressured into taking their own lives. Sources reported that fathers or grandfathers may also enlist another relative to commit the crime and then ‘pardon’ the killer, or else hire outsiders to carry out such crimes (see [Prevalence](#) and [Demographic and socio-economic factors, and perpetrators](#)).

- 2.4.5 Between May and June 2020, amongst the sources consulted, there were media reports of at least 7 women and girls who were murdered by male relatives in separate incidents on the pretext of honour. A further 3 killings of women occurred between November 2020 and January 2021. Whilst the ethnicity of the victims was not always determined, most killings took place in provinces where the majority population is non-Persian (see [Prevalence](#)).
- 2.4.6 Honour crimes are less common in major cities and more prevalent amongst ethnic minority groups (Kurds, Lori, Arabs, Baloch and Turkish-speaking communities), whose social practices are more conservative. Most ‘honour’ crimes occur in rural and tribal regions such as Kurdistan, Khuzestan, Azerbaijan, Ilam, Kermanshah, Sistan and Baluchestan, Lorestan, Hamadan, Fars and Khorasan (see [Demographic and socio-economic factors, and perpetrators](#)).
- 2.4.7 In general, women and girls are not at risk from an ‘honour’ crime. However, this will depend on their particular circumstances, including age, family background, ethnicity, place of residence, education and socio-economic status. Although ‘honour’ crimes can take place in all kinds of families, there is a greater risk of an ‘honour’ crime against a woman or girl from a poor, more traditional, religious family, especially in rural or tribal areas. If a woman or girl can show there is a real risk she has been, or will be, subject to honour-based violence, this would amount to persecution or serious harm, but the onus is on her to show this.
- 2.4.8 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#), [Gender issues in the asylum claim](#) and [Processing children’s asylum claims](#).

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2.5 Protection

- 2.5.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from non-state actors, decision makers must assess whether the state can provide effective protection.
- 2.5.2 Although women are protected by law, in practice this is not systematically enforced because of deep-rooted patriarchal, social and cultural barriers and prejudices. Women are regarded both legally and through patriarchal social systems as inferior to and of less worth than men (see [Cultural and societal attitudes towards women](#)).
- 2.5.3 The Penal Code does not specifically criminalise ‘honour’ crimes and the law allows for punishments for such crimes to be reduced for grandfathers and fathers who kill their children. The law also provides a defence for a husband

if he kills his wife for committing zina (adultery), although cases in which the provision is applied in practice are rare due to high evidentiary standards (see [Penal Code](#) and the [Country Policy and Information Note on Iran: Adulterers](#)).

- 2.5.4 A law protecting children and adolescents against violence, including abuse or exploitation, was passed in June 2020. As a result, the State Welfare Organization has the authority to remove from a family a child who is deemed at risk, although the law still does not address child protection concerns such as child marriage (see also the Country Policy and Information Note on [Iran: Women – early and forced marriage](#)).
- 2.5.5 In January 2021, the government passed a bill criminalising violence against women, including action or behaviour that causes physical or mental harm, although allows for alternative sentencing for husbands and parents, and puts an emphasis on mediation rather than protection and prosecution in domestic violence cases. At the time of writing, the bill had yet to be passed by parliament or the Guardian Council, which consists of jurists and religious experts who have the authority to reject laws if not consistent with the constitution or Islamic law (see [Laws aimed at protecting women and children](#)).
- 2.5.6 Discriminatory attitudes towards women in the justice system prevail. Women do not receive equal treatment under the law. Corruption in the justice system is rife and often dependent on personal connections or the attitudes of particular police or judges. Women may be reluctant to report a crime due to social stigma, particularly around issues deemed family or marital matters, or are prevented or pressured by their family into not reporting. Authorities in tribal areas may consider the matter a private family concern. There are reports of women being returned to their families by the authorities even after they have warned of the dangers of return (see [Access to justice](#)).
- 2.5.7 Support in the form of hotlines, as well as social emergency centres, health and safe houses, exist although the latter are poorly resourced, unable to provide long-term support, are not present throughout the whole country and rare in rural areas. Given that some women require the permission of a male guardian to leave the home alone, access to such services may be limited (see [Shelter and support](#) and [Cultural and societal attitudes towards women](#)).
- 2.5.8 In general, the state is able to provide effective protection to a woman or girl in fear of an ‘honour’ crime. However, due to discriminatory laws and practices against women and girls, the state – particularly in rural, more traditional areas – may be unwilling to provide effective protection. Decision makers must consider each case on its facts. The onus is on the person to demonstrate why they would not be able to seek and obtain state protection.
- 2.5.9 For further guidance on assessing the availability of state protection, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#), [Gender issues in the asylum claim](#), [Processing children’s asylum claims](#) and the [Country Policy and Information Note on Iran: Actors of Protection](#).

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2.6 Internal relocation

- 2.6.1 Decision makers must give careful consideration to the relevance and reasonableness of internal relocation taking full account of the individual circumstances of the particular person.
- 2.6.2 The Court of Appeal in [SC \(Jamaica\) v Home Secretary \[2017\] EWCA Civ 2112](#) held that, 'the evaluative exercise is intended to be holistic and ... no burden or standard of proof arises in relation to the overall issue of whether it is reasonable to internally relocate' (paragraph 36).
- 2.6.3 Whilst there are no legal barriers to a woman resettling elsewhere in Iran, official and societal discrimination may impede women from doing so, for example, some landlords may be reluctant to rent property to a single woman. Given that some women require the permission of a male guardian to leave the home and travel alone, especially in traditional, rural areas, internal relocation is likely to be an unreasonable option in some cases. If the woman is financially independent, has the support or permission of a male guardian, or support of extended family or network, internal relocation may be an option. Each case will need to be considered on its individual facts (see [Internal relocation](#)).
- 2.6.4 When assessing internal relocation, in the reported case of [TB \(PSG, women\) Iran \[2005\] UKIAT 00065 \(09 March 2005\)](#), the Tribunal took into account the position in Iranian society of the persons feared. In the case of [TB](#), the appellant feared her father and intended husband (a Mullah), both of whom were members of the Niru-Entezami (Law Enforcement Forces – LEF). The Tribunal concluded that an internal relocation alternative was not realistically available due to the influence of the appellant's potential persecutors on the state authorities and mechanisms (paras 68 and 69.v).
- 2.6.5 For further guidance on internal relocation see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#), [Gender issues in the asylum claim](#), [Processing children's asylum claims](#) and also the [Country Policy and Information Background Note on Iran](#).

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2.7 Certification

- 2.7.1 Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.
- 2.7.2 For further guidance on certification, see [Certification of Protection and Human Rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 \(clearly unfounded claims\)](#).

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Country information

Section 3 updated: 24 March 2021

3. Legal context

3.1 Penal Code

3.1.1 The Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) noted, in its April 2020 Iran report, based on a range of sources, 'The Penal Code does not specifically criminalise honour crimes and, in line with sharia principles, provides for reduced sentences for those who commit them.'¹

3.1.2 The Suuntaus project report on violence against women in Iran, compiled by the Country Information Service of the Finnish Immigration Service, based on a range of sources, dated 26 June 2015, stated that:

'Islamic law includes a principle called qisas, which gives private individuals the right to demand retaliation in kind for a murder or deliberate bodily injury. The principle is prone to creating a culture of impunity in situations in which the perpetrator and the victim are from the same family. In honour killing and domestic violence cases, it is extremely unlikely for the head of the family to demand punishment. Perpetrators therefore frequently get away with a short prison sentence or may avoid punishment altogether if the head of the family forgives the act. The qisas principle does not apply if a father or a grandfather kills his own child or grandchild. In these cases, a judge will impose a prison sentence of between three and ten years.'²

3.1.3 Human Rights Watch (HRW) noted 'Under Iranian law, intentional murder is punishable by death unless the family of the victim forgives the killer. The law, however, provides that if a father or paternal grandfather kills his child or grandchild, his sentence is reduced to up to 10 years.'³

3.1.4 The Finnish Immigration Service report referred to Articles 299 and 630 of the Iranian Penal Code, noting they 'protect perpetrators of honour killings', adding:

'Pursuant to Article 299, the qisas punishment that normally follows from a murder, which can be as severe as execution, does not apply to a father or a paternal grandfather who kills his own child. Article 630 gives a man the right to kill his adulterous wife and her lover if he catches them in the act. Although a man has a legal right to kill his wife and lover if he catches them in the act of adultery, cases in which the provision is applied in practice are rare. According to Sharia law, the man would need to have four witnesses to the act, which is almost impossible to achieve in practice.'⁴

3.1.5 An article in The Lancet, dated October 2020, which referenced a number of research papers, noted 'Article 301 of the [Penal] Code stipulates that the

¹ DFAT, '[Country Information Report Iran](#)' (paragraph 3.133), 14 April 2020

² Finnish Immigration Service, '[Violence against women...](#)' (page 20), 26 June 2015

³ HRW, '[Iran: Adopt Draft Law to Protect Women](#)', 4 December 2020

⁴ Finnish Immigration Service, '[Violence against women...](#)' (page 20), 26 June 2015

father and paternal grandfather are not to be retaliated against for killing the child.⁵ Or, as described by the Iran Human Rights Monitor (Iran HRM), 'Article 301 of the Punishment Law states that retribution for the murderer, i.e. execution, is applicable only if the murderer is not the father or paternal grandfather of the victim.'⁶

- 3.1.6 The Iran HRM further noted that, 'The Iranian Constitution, which considers fathers and paternal grandfathers the "owners" of their children's blood, inherently condones honor killings.'⁷
- 3.1.7 In its assessment of the Penal Code in 2012, HRW indicated that Article 303 is related to 'retribution crime' penalties, noting:

'Pursuant to article 303 of the new code, judges cannot issue a "retribution crime" punishment against fathers or grandfathers who kill their children. Additionally, article 303 of the new code provides exemptions for "retribution crime" punishments, one of which includes "crimes of passion" or situations where a man walks in on his wife as she is engaged in the act of adultery. Under these circumstances, the law allows the man to kill both his wife and the male adulterer without being subjected to the "retribution crime" laws.'⁸
- 3.1.8 The Iran Human Rights Documentation Centre (IHRDC) provided English translations of the Iran Penal Code, including [Book One and Book Two](#) (Articles 1-288), amended in January 2012, and [Book Five](#) (Articles 498-728), 'which was adopted permanently in 1996 and not subject to the January 2012 revisions.'⁹ ¹⁰ The IHRDC noted 'Book Three and Book Four address qisas (retaliation) and diyat (monetary compensation for deaths and bodily injuries).'¹¹ CPIT was unable to source an English translation of Book Three and Book Four at the time of writing of the CPIN.

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3.2 Laws aimed at protecting women and children

- 3.2.1 A bill aimed at protecting children and adolescents against violence was passed in June 2020¹².
- 3.2.2 HRW noted that the law 'includes new penalties for certain acts that harm a child's safety and well-being, including physical harm and preventing access to education. The law also allows officials to relocate a child in situations that seriously threaten their safety. But the law fails to address some of the most serious threats against children in Iran, such as child marriage and imposition of the death penalty.'¹³
- 3.2.3 Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty (RFERL) reported on 4 January 2021 'The Iranian government has passed a bill that criminalizes violence against

⁵ The Lancet, '[Honour killings and violence against women in Iran...](#)', October 2020

⁶ Iran HRM, '[Violence Against Women in Iran Mandated by Law](#)', 24 November 2020

⁷ Iran HRM, '[Violence Against Women in Iran Mandated by Law](#)', 24 November 2020

⁸ HRW, '[Codifying Repression: An Assessment of Iran's New Penal Code](#)', 28 August 2012

⁹ IHRDC, '[English Translation of Books I & II of the New Islamic Penal Code](#)', 4 April 2014

¹⁰ IHRDC, '[Islamic Penal Code of the Islamic Republic of Iran – Book Five](#)', 15 July 2013

¹¹ IHRDC, '[English Translation of Books I & II of the New Islamic Penal Code](#)', 4 April 2014

¹² Radio Farda, '[Iran Finally Adopts A Child-Protection Law, Held Back...](#)', 8 June 2020

¹³ HRW, '[Iran: Child Protection Law Positive, but Insufficient](#)', 23 June 2020

women, including action or behavior that causes “physical or mental harm” to women.’¹⁴ However, as noted by Al Jazeera, the Protection, Dignity and Security of Women Against Violence bill had still to be approved by parliament before being scrutinised by the constitutional vetting body, the Guardian Council, consisting of jurists and religious experts¹⁵. The Guardian Council has the authority to reject legislation passed by parliament if they deem it to be inconsistent with the constitution and Islamic law¹⁶.

3.2.4 Commenting in December 2020 on the draft bill aimed at protecting women, HRW noted that, ‘While the law increases penalties for physical violence, it allows for alternative sentences if the offender is the victim’s husband, father, or mother. It also does not repeal laws that endorse violence against women, including those with lighter sentences.’¹⁷

3.2.5 HRW also noted ‘The draft law has a number of positive provisions, including to form an inter-ministerial national committee to draft strategies and coordinate government responses to violence against women. It also obligates ministries and government agencies to undertake measures to help prevent violence and assist women, including by forming special police units for these cases. It also would create restraining orders and a fund to support women.’¹⁸

3.2.6 However, the same report also noted that:

‘The draft law provides that in cases in which a father or husband is accused, the authorities should refer the case for mediation for a month, returning the case to the judiciary if it is not resolved. The United Nations Women “Handbook for Legislation on Violence against Women” provides that mediation should be prohibited in all cases of violence against women and at all stages of legal proceedings because mediation removes cases from judicial scrutiny.

‘Promoting reconciliation reflects an assumption that both parties have equal bargaining power and may be equally at fault and reduces accountability for the offender.

‘The mediation period can also create further barriers for victims of domestic violence to obtain immediate protection through a protection order. The law would provide for such orders, though only if the victim files a criminal complaint and there is a serious threat of beating or further harm. UN Women has [recommended](#) that domestic violence survivors be able to seek protection orders without pursuing other legal proceedings, such as criminal charges or divorce. And while the draft law includes positive provisions with respect to protecting the identity of the plaintiff, it does not offer any protection to witnesses.’¹⁹

¹⁴ RFERL, ‘[Iran's Cabinet OKs Bill To Protect Women From Violence...](#)’, 4 January 2021

¹⁵ Al Jazeera, ‘[Iran gov't approves bill to combat violence against women](#)’, 4 January 2021

¹⁶ IRNA, ‘[The Guardian Council](#)’, 21 May 2013

¹⁷ HRW, ‘[Iran: Adopt Draft Law to Protect Women](#)’, 4 December 2020

¹⁸ HRW, ‘[Iran: Adopt Draft Law to Protect Women](#)’, 4 December 2020

¹⁹ HRW, ‘[Iran: Adopt Draft Law to Protect Women](#)’, 4 December 2020

- 3.2.7 RFERL noted ‘According to the bill, the judiciary will be tasked with setting up and sponsoring offices that provide support for women who suffer some type of violence or who are susceptible to violence. The bill also requires the establishment of special police units to ensure the safety of women.’²⁰
- 3.2.8 At the time of writing, CPIT was not aware of information in the sources consulted indicating that the Protection, Dignity and Security of Women Against Violence bill had been enacted (see [Bibliography](#)).
- See also [Access to justice](#).

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Section 4 updated: 24 March 2021

4. Position of women in society

4.1 Cultural and societal attitudes towards women

- 4.1.1 The report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, dated 21 July 2020, stated that ‘Discrimination on the basis of gender permeates several areas of public and private life in law and practice, including employment, political and judicial positions and family life.’²¹
- 4.1.2 Another report by the UN Special Rapporteur, published in January 2021, repeated these same concerns and stated that, ‘... the Special Rapporteur remains deeply concerned at the persistent discrimination against women and girls in public and private life, enshrined in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran and within law and practice.’²²
- 4.1.3 The report further noted that ‘Patriarchal values and misogynist behaviours permeate many segments of Iranian family life, with discriminatory legal provisions ... exacerbating the vulnerabilities of women to domestic abuse.’²³ See the [full report](#) for a comprehensive and up to date overview of the position of women in Iranian society.
- 4.1.4 In its concluding observations on a 2013 report titled ‘Gender Inequality and Discrimination: The Case of Iranian Women’, the IHRDC report noted that:
- ‘... in stark contrast to Saudi Arabia and countries with similar gender oppression, Iranian women have the equal right to drive, vote, do not need to be accompanied by a male member of their families in public places, and have surpassed men in university entrance exams unlike any other country in the region. However, despite these relative strides, the IRI [Islamic Republic of Iran] legal system recognizes women as dependent upon men and incomplete human beings who need to be supervised and controlled by men and the State. While the IRI Constitution claims to guarantee equality for both genders, women are still treated as second class citizens under the IRI legal system. For instance... under the Islamic Penal Code, the value of a woman’s worth is only half that of a man’s. That is, blood money paid for

²⁰ RFERL, ‘[Iran’s Cabinet OKs Bill To Protect Women From Violence...](#)’, 4 January 2021

²¹ UN General Assembly, ‘[Situation of human rights...](#)’ (paragraph 46), 21 July 2020

²² UN General Assembly, ‘[Situation of human rights...](#)’ (paragraph 40), 11 January 2021

²³ UN General Assembly, ‘[Situation of human rights...](#)’ (paragraph 48), 11 January 2021

murder or bodily injuries of a female victim is half that of a male victim; or, a woman's testimony in court is given half the weight of a man's testimony.'²⁴

- 4.1.5 The report added that Iran's 'construction of gender roles and the patriarchal control of women have produced a [legal] framework that demands women's obedience to their husbands and has its roots in the idea of male superiority and female inferiority. It clearly insists on roles and expectations based on gender stereotypes, and results in the economic, social and political predominance of men and dependency of women.'²⁵ The IHRDC noted, however, that, '... legal inequalities do not solely originate from deficiencies in laws, but also from social customs and traditions that retain the bias of pre-modern and patriarchal social systems.'²⁶

- 4.1.6 The Finnish Immigration Service report of 2015 provided an overview of the status of women in Iran:

'Women in Iran are subject to systematic discrimination on the basis of gender, which stems from culture, religion, society and legislation. The country's male-dominated and conservative governance structure is conducive to discrimination against women in multiple spheres of society from criminal and family law to education and employment. Iran is one of the few countries in the world that have not ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

'Women in Iran are subject to restrictions imposed by both their family and society. The country has a patriarchal culture that gives men power over women and property. According to the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, the subordinate status of women in Iranian society is perpetuated by two main factors: patriarchal values and attitudes favouring the norm of male supremacy and a state-promoted institutional structure based on hard-liner interpretations of Islamic principles. While the former is a universal phenomenon, the latter is particular to Iran's gender politics and policies prevalent in the country since the 1979 Revolution. Both factors emphasize the notion that a woman's role is primarily that of a wife and a mother, which is used as justification for restricting women's public lives.'²⁷

- 4.1.7 The same source also noted that:

'Iran has an unwritten law of honour and shame, which is reflected not just in the relationship between the sexes but also more generally in the values and ideals of society.

'Men have a duty to protect their women against men from outside the family, and failure to do this results in an extremely humiliating loss of reputation (nang) in the eyes of society. This concept of honour makes men suspicious of the women in their family and causes them to exercise power on the excuse of protecting their morality. A man's protectiveness and jealousy, however aggressive, is traditionally viewed as a positive trait by society. This culture that perpetuates men's possessiveness is

²⁴ IHRDC, '[Gender inequality and discrimination...](#)' (Conclusion), 5 March 2013

²⁵ IHRDC, '[Gender inequality and discrimination...](#)' (Conclusion), 5 March 2013

²⁶ IHRDC, '[Gender inequality and discrimination...](#)' (Conclusion), 5 March 2013

²⁷ Finish Immigration Service, '[Violence against women...](#)' (page 2), 26 June 2015

counterbalanced by a culture of modesty in the case of women (farhang-e 'effat), which determines the behaviours that are acceptable for a woman. Families perceive a woman's refusal to a marriage that has been arranged for her or a woman's desire to divorce a man chosen for her as a shameful blow to their honour.'²⁸

- 4.1.8 The Middle East Institute (MEI), a US-based think tank, reported in March 2020 on the position of women in Iran:

'Since the revolution in 1979, Iranian women have experienced the Islamization of their country through laws regulating their attire (such as that requiring the hejab), enforcing certain Islamic traditions (such as the legal age of marriage), and expanding men's authority over women, a move justified by reference to "family values." During these same years of Islamization, however, the level of education, literacy rates, and the percentage of women attending university all increased dramatically. In Iran, 97 percent of women are literate, and more than 60 percent of university students are now female. Never before have so many women been educated as journalists, doctors, lawyers, engineers, and artists. However, this is not reflected in equal representation in the workforce. In fact, only 15.2 percent of Iranian women are employed, compared to 64 percent of men, and their representation in political life is even less: There are currently only 17 female members – a total of just 6 percent of MPs – in the Iranian Parliament (Majlis), elected in 2016.'²⁹

- 4.1.9 Writing on the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) Middle East Centre Blog in July 2020, UK-based Middle East consultant, Kaveh Ghobadi, stated:

'After the revolution, women's gains over the past five decades were eradicated one after another. Under the new regime, women became subject to all sorts of gender discrimination. The revolutionary government made the hijab mandatory for all women in 1983, and forbade married women from travelling outside the country without prior permission from their husbands.

'Although more than 50 percent of university students are women (according to official statistics) and they are becoming more involved in the political process and decision-making, there continue to be major obstacles to finding work. Women make up only 19 percent of the workforce. According to the 2006 national census, 'some 33% of Iran's female labor force is in professional jobs, concentrated in education, healthcare, and social services', with less than 4 percent in senior, executive or managerial positions. Now 14 years later, Iranian women still suffer from discriminatory policies. The majority of women still have little choice but to get married and become housewives. Women are barred from becoming president and are largely excluded from key positions in government. This institutionalised discrimination has made Iran one of the world's worst places to be a woman, placing it at the bottom of the World Economic Forum's 2020 Global Gender Gap ranking (148 out of 153).'

²⁸ Finnish Immigration Service, '[Violence against women...](#)' (page 18), 26 June 2015

²⁹ MEI, '[The role of women in building Iran's future](#)', 24 March 2020

³⁰ Ghobadi, K., '[Political Islam in Iran and the Perpetuation of Violence against Women](#)', 6 July 2020

4.1.10 The same source also stated that:

‘... a major challenge for further progress is the Islamic regime’s systematic discrimination and violence against women. The Iranian state’s political Islam has emboldened more conservative strata of society, which in turn has led to far reaching implications for women in both their public and private lives. The regime has used all means within its control to propagate strict gender roles which confines women to the domestic sphere. Despite all its efforts to encourage patriarchy and traditional gender roles, there has been a gradual relaxation of social and familial restrictions on women over the past three decades. That said, women are largely expected to respect the codes of honour and to protect and maintain their virginity before marriage.’³¹

4.1.11 The US Department of State International Religious Freedom Report for 2019 (USSD IRF Report 2019) noted in regard to women’s clothing:

‘The government continued to require women of all religious groups to adhere to “Islamic dress” standards in public, including covering their hair and fully covering their bodies in loose clothing – an overcoat and a hijab or, alternatively, a chador (full body length semicircle of fabric worn over both the head and clothes). Although the government at times eased enforcement of rules for such dress, it also punished “un-Islamic dress” with arrests, lashings, fines, and dismissal from employment. The government continued to crack down on public protests against the compulsory hijab and Islamic dress requirements for women.’³²

4.1.12 DFAT noted in its report on Iran that ‘Women from more religiously-minded families generally require the permission of a male guardian to travel alone and can face societal harassment for doing so, particularly in more conservative areas. Married women require the written permission of their husbands, and non-married women under the age of 40 the permission of their fathers or other male relatives, to obtain a passport and travel abroad.’³³

4.1.13 The USSD Human Rights Report for 2019 noted ‘Women often required the supervision of a male guardian or chaperone to travel and faced official and societal harassment for traveling alone.’³⁴

See also [Internal relocation](#) and the section on women in the [Country Background Note: Iran](#).

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Section 5 updated: 24 March 2021

5. Honour-based violence

5.1 Definition and motives

5.1.1 The Finnish Immigration Service report noted:

‘Both women and men are vulnerable to honour-related violence in Iran. An honour killing is a murder committed or ordered by a husband, a father, a

³¹ Ghobadi, K., ‘[Political Islam in Iran and the Perpetuation of Violence against Women](#)’, 6 July 2020

³² USSD, ‘[2019 Report on International Religious Freedom](#)’ (section II), 10 June 2020

³³ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Iran](#)’ (paragraph 3.122), 14 April 2020

³⁴ USSD, ‘[2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#)’ (section 2d), 11 March 2020

brother or another relative as a punishment to a family member who is seen to have damaged the family's reputation by their actions. Such actions can include extramarital sex, refusal to an arranged marriage, choosing one's own spouse without the family's approval, becoming a victim of rape, homosexual acts or excessively liberal behaviour and dress. In the most extreme cases, even a suspicion of such actions is enough. Due to cultural reasons, women and girls are the mostly likely victims of honour killings.

'In most cases, the victim is a woman and the perpetrator is a male member of the victim's family. Adultery by a married woman is considered the most serious offence in this respect. Honour killings are often based on unconfirmed suspicions and rumours, which in the most conservative communities can be sparked by very minor acts, such as talking to an unknown man in a public place. No comprehensive statistics are available on the subject, but Iran's criminal police occasionally publish information about cases and the number of honour killings known to the police.'³⁵

5.1.2 The Finnish Immigration Service report added:

'In the most conservative communities, even the slightest indiscretion can lead to an honour killing. One example is an honour killing case from Bushehr in which a brother killed his sister because the boy next door had attempted to talk to her on the street. According to police statistics, a considerable percentage of murders in Bushehr are honour-related, but the province is small and the total number of cases is therefore low. Many cases involve murders of girls who have told their parents about a potential suitor, as just talking to a strange man is seen as enough justification for an honour killing in these traditional communities.'³⁶

5.1.3 In May 2015, the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) published a written statement submitted by the non-governmental organisation, Verein Sudwind Entwicklungspolitik (Austrian Information Service for International Development Policy³⁷), regarding honour killings in Iran's Kurdish regions, which noted:

'Honour killing is not an act of violence by one man against a woman. It is a set of male-dominated system which demonstrates itself in forced marriages, early marriages, female virginity, female genital mutilation, acid attack, deprivation from education, all of which systematise social relations between men and women. The killing of a woman is related to the man's honour to sustain the system of male domination.

'Men's social status is diminished among their tribe, village, and hometown and within the family if such code of honour is broken by a female family member. Often those who kill a family member admit pressures by the society they live in plays an important role.'³⁸

5.1.4 Writing on the LSE Middle East Centre Blog in July 2020, UK-based Middle East consultant, Kaveh Ghobadi, stated:

³⁵ Finnish Immigration Service, '[Violence against women...](#)' (page 17), 26 June 2015

³⁶ Finnish Immigration Service, '[Violence against women...](#)' (page 20), 26 June 2015

³⁷ Südwind, '[About Südwind](#)', no date

³⁸ UNHRC, '[Written statement submitted by the Verein Sudwind ...](#)', 25 May 2015

'Honour-related crimes are embedded in a patriarchal culture which views women as representing a family's honour (namus/sharaf) whose protection is bestowed upon men. A man's honour is perceived to be damaged if one of his female relatives engages in an illicit sexual relationship. He will usually come under pressure from his own community to regain his honour by killing the women who has transgressed the sexual code of conduct. Such notions of honour, which renowned Moroccan writer Fatima Mernissi describes as "locat[ing] the prestige of a man between the legs of a woman", have resulted in a considerable number of honour killings in the country. The Iranian regime has promoted its own version of hegemonic masculinity to uphold the patriarchal social order upon whose survival it depends. Its archetype is a devout Muslim man who abides by the government interpretation of Islam and has a strong sense of honour and protectiveness towards his female siblings and other close relatives.'³⁹

- 5.1.5 Reporting on the well-publicised honour killing of Romina, a 14 year-old girl from a village in northern Iran who was beheaded by her father in May 2020 after she tried to elope, Deutsche Welle (DW) cited Iran journalist Mahrokh Gholamhosseinpour, who has researched the issue of honour killings in Iran for years, "In a traditional society, honor is a woman's most important asset," [said Gholamhosseinpour] "A man whose wife or daughter has lost her honor is rejected, humiliated and ignored by such a society".⁴⁰

- 5.1.6 BBC Monitoring reported in May 2020:

'According to the pro-reform Sharq newspaper, being influenced by the views of the tribe or community, coupled with the culture of domestic violence, can contribute to the causes of honour killings. In some regions, Sharq wrote, public opinion supports the person who murders for the sake of honour, and in some cases, this person becomes a "hero" in the eyes of the community.

'In another article, Sharq wrote that men usually feel pressured by their community to kill their close female relative in order to save their reputation and honour.'⁴¹

- 5.1.7 The Lancet article of October 2020 also stated that 'The social construction of honour as a value system, norm, or tradition is the main justification for the perpetration of violence against women.'⁴²

- 5.1.8 According to Middle East Consultancy Services (MECS), cited in a joint report on relations outside of marriage and marriages without the acceptance of the family, by the Danish Immigration Service and the Danish Refugee Council, published February 2018, 'Honour crimes have support from the community and the family. Often an honour crime is not perceived as a criminal act, due to cultural beliefs. Violation of honour is usually concerned with female sexuality.'⁴³

³⁹ Ghobadi, K., '[Political Islam in Iran and the Perpetuation of Violence against Women](#)', 6 July 2020

⁴⁰ DW, '[Iran debates "honor killings" after girl's murder shocks country](#)', 3 June 2020

⁴¹ BBC Monitoring, '[Explainer: 'Honour killings' in Iran: social pressure...](#)', 29 May 2020

⁴² The Lancet, '[Honour killings and violence against women in Iran...](#)', October 2020

⁴³ Danish Immigration Service, '[Relations outside of marriage in Iran...](#)' (page 28), February 2018

- 5.1.9 As reported by Minority Rights Group International (MRG) in September 2019, writing on the discrimination of women in Iran, ‘Sometimes ‘honour’ crimes take the form of forced self-immolation, allowing the woman’s death to be reported as suicide or an accident.’⁴⁴
- 5.1.10 BBC Monitoring reported in May 2020, ‘Ensaf news has quoted scholar Matin Sharafi as saying: “Men are also abused. Society imposes the concept of honour and dishonour on them. If they do not use violence in such cases, they will be stigmatised as dishonourable”.’⁴⁵

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5.2 Demographic and socio-economic factors, and perpetrators

- 5.2.1 The Finnish Immigration Service report of 2015, citing sources dated between 2010 and 2014, indicated that honour killings were less common in cities, noting:

‘Honour killings most commonly take place among the ethnic minorities living near Iran’s borders (Kurds, Lori, Arabs, Baloch and Turkish-speaking communities), whose social practices are more conservative than those of the mainstream Persian population.

‘The number of honour killings is highest in Kurdistan, Khuzestan, Azerbaijan, Ilam, Kermanshah, Sistan and Baluchestan, Lorestan, Hamadan, Fars and Khorasan. Honour killings are also common in Ardabil and Bushehr. According to a news report by ISNA [state-run Iranian Students News Agency], a considerable percentage of murders in the southern parts of the Kerman Province are honour-related. According to a field study conducted by the women’s rights association Anjoman-e Zanan-e Marivan, an honour killing takes place in Marivan every month. Most of the murders are committed in the villages surrounding the city. In West Azerbaijan, honour killings are reported to take place especially in the northern parts inhabited by Kurds. In Hamadan, areas inhabited by Kurds, Lori and Azeris have most honour killings. Similar findings have been reported from Kurdistan, Kermanshah and Lorestan.’⁴⁶

- 5.2.2 The same source also noted that:

‘In murder cases in which the victim and the perpetrator belong to the same family, honour-related motives are the most common reasons alongside financial reasons and problems caused by drug addiction. One murder of this kind takes place every day, and the victims are mostly women. In most cases a husband kills his wife in a sudden fit of rage. In those cases in which a woman has killed her husband, the act has usually been premeditated for a long time and a third party hired to commit the murder. A common reason for men to kill their wives is a suspicion of adultery, while women mostly murder their husbands due to unsuccessful divorce petitions.’⁴⁷

⁴⁴ MRG, ‘[Beyond the Veil: Discrimination against women in Iran](#)’ (page 34), 16 September 2019

⁴⁵ BBC Monitoring, ‘[Explainer: ‘Honour killings’ in Iran: social pressure...](#)’, 29 May 2020

⁴⁶ Finnish Immigration Service, ‘[Violence against women...](#)’ (page 19), 26 June 2015

⁴⁷ Finnish Immigration Service, ‘[Violence against women...](#)’ (page 18), 26 June 2015

- 5.2.3 According to MECS, cited in the 2018 Danish Immigration Service report, ‘... honour crimes are primarily taking place in rural and tribal regions as Kurdistan, Loristan and Khuzestan, among minority groups.’⁴⁸
- 5.2.4 The 2019 MRG report also noted that ‘Women from minority backgrounds are at highest risk of ‘honour’ killings, which are particularly widespread among Kurdish, Lur, Arab, Baluchi and Azerbaijani Turkish communities.’⁴⁹
- 5.2.5 The DFAT report noted:
 ‘International human rights observers note that honour killings are an established phenomenon in many of Iran’s outermost provinces, particularly in areas where state infrastructure is scarce and tribal traditions strong. While honour killings can take place in all kinds of families, from different social classes and educational backgrounds, the likelihood of honour killings decreases with education, urbanisation and access to social services. For cultural reasons, women and girls are the most likely victims.’⁵⁰
- 5.2.6 Referencing a number of research papers, Iranian academics Bijan Pirnia and others, writing in the Lancet, observed in an October 2020 article, ‘Within Iran, provinces with the highest rates of honour killings also have the highest rates of unemployment and poverty.’⁵¹
- 5.2.7 Referring to a 2012 study, the Finnish Immigration Service report noted the study ‘... consisted of interviews with 45 men who were serving prison sentences for acts that have the characteristics of honour killings. Most of the interviewed men considered their acts to have been justified. Most of the inmates were young men who had killed their sister or wife in a fit of rage brought on by loss of honour.’⁵²
- 5.2.8 BBC Monitoring reported in May 2020 that honour killings were ‘...usually inflicted by close male relatives of the victims, namely their fathers, husbands or brothers.’⁵³
- 5.2.9 Reporting on honour crimes in Iran and citing the May 2020 murder of 14 year-old Romina from a village in northern Iran, who was killed by her father after she tried to elope, Deutsche Welle (DW) noted:
 ‘In many cases, the father or grandfather enlists a brother or a cousin of the “dishonored” girl to carry out the murder. After the crime has been committed, he takes responsibility himself or pardons the killer. “In most honor killings, there are no complaints by the plaintiff or guardian. And the murderer is quickly released at the agreement of both parties,” said [US-based Iranian journalist] Gholamhosseinpour. Romina's elopement or abduction would have probably not resulted in her murder if she and her family had lived in a larger city...’⁵⁴
- 5.2.10 BBC Monitoring noted:

⁴⁸ Danish Immigration Service, ‘[Relations outside of marriage in Iran...](#)’ (page 28), February 2018

⁴⁹ MRG, ‘[Beyond the Veil: Discrimination against women in Iran](#)’ (page 34), 16 September 2019

⁵⁰ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Iran](#)’ (paragraph 3.132), 14 April 2020

⁵¹ Pirnia, B, et al, ‘[Honour killings and violence against women in Iran...](#)’, October 2020

⁵² Finnish Immigration Service, ‘[Violence against women...](#)’ (page 19), 26 June 2015

⁵³ BBC Monitoring, ‘[Explainer: ‘Honour killings’ in Iran: social pressure...](#)’, 29 May 2020

⁵⁴ DW, ‘[Iran debates “honor killings” after girl’s murder shocks country](#)’, 3 June 2020

'If the brother or other relatives of the victim are found guilty of murder, they can be sentenced to qisas (the act of retribution in Shariah law). However, they can be pardoned by the family. There are concerns that in some cases, brothers would commit the crime with peace of mind, knowing that their parents would pardon them later and spare their lives. Sometimes older men in the family or community encourage underage brothers of the victims to kill their sisters because they are less likely to be held liable because of their young age...' ⁵⁵

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5.3 Prevalence

- 5.3.1 According to MECS, cited in the Danish Immigration Service report of 2018, 'Honour killings are investigated as murder in Iran; however, there is no statistics for tried guilt or guilty verdicts or punishments. Furthermore, reporting such crimes is seen as shameful and a private affair.' ⁵⁶ Hengaw, an NGO reporting on human rights abuses in Kurdistan, Iran, stated in June 2020 that the exact number of honour killings was unknown 'as Iran does not publicly release crime statistics.' ⁵⁷
- 5.3.2 IranWire noted in a June 2020 report on a series of honour killings seen in Iran throughout the May and June of 2020 that 'reported honor killings are regularly covered up by the family and the wider community', and that, according to a relative of one 'honour'-killing victim, 'families are being pressured by authorities not to speak to the media.' ⁵⁸
- 5.3.3 Citing sources dated 2013 and 2014, the Finnish Immigration Service report noted:
- 'According to police statistics, there are 2,500 murders in Iran per year. Men account for approximately two thirds of all murder victims. A total of 15-18% of the murders known to the police are honour-related. Moreover, approximately one in three murders is committed by a member of the victim's family or a relative. Of these, approximately one in five is a case in which one married partner, usually the husband, murders the other. As many as 62% of murders in which the victim is female are committed by a member of the victim's family or a relative, which is strongly suggestive of these cases being honour killings.' ⁵⁹
- 5.3.4 However, the same source also stated that, 'It is difficult to estimate the prevalence of honour-related violence against men, as there are no statistics on it. Honour-related violence is primarily seen as criminality targeted at women by their family members or relatives, which means that victims who are not related to their perpetrators and male victims are left out of the definition and, therefore, statistics.' ⁶⁰

⁵⁵ BBC Monitoring, '[Explainer: 'Honour killings' in Iran: social pressure...](#)', 29 May 2020

⁵⁶ Danish Immigration Service, '[Relations outside of marriage in Iran...](#)' (page 28), February 2018

⁵⁷ Hengaw, '[Brothers kill their sister for out-marriage relationship in Kermanshah](#)', 21 June 2020

⁵⁸ IranWire, '[Another Young Woman Murdered as Families of Honor Killing Victims...](#)', 22 June 2020

⁵⁹ Finnish Immigration Service, '[Violence against women...](#)' (page 17), 26 June 2015

⁶⁰ Finnish Immigration Service, '[Violence against women...](#)' (page 18), 26 June 2015

- 5.3.5 HRW also reported in 2020 that ‘There are no clear statistics about the number and prevalence of so-called “honor killings” in Iran, but in 2014, the deputy police chief to combat criminal charges [said](#) that about 19 percent of murders in Iran are “honor”-related and that 63 percent of women killed are killed by a family member. Other [academic research](#) cites statistics as high as 40 percent in some provinces, such as Khuzestan, Kermanshah, and Ilam.’⁶¹
- 5.3.6 The Lancet article of October 2020 stated that, between 2010 and 2014, there were a reported 8,000 so-called ‘honour’ killings⁶². The same article noted ‘Honour killings are common in some cities in Iran. About 20 percent of all murders and 50 percent of family murders in East Azerbaijan province are related to sexual and honour issues.’⁶³
- 5.3.7 As noted in the June 2020 article by DW, ‘According to a study carried out by the Iranian Police Academy, up to 45% of murders committed in several particularly tradition-bound provinces in the west and south of Iran are honor killings.’⁶⁴ Hengaw reported in June 2020, ‘A 2019 report by a research center affiliated with Iran’s armed forces found that nearly 30 percent of all murder cases in Iran were honor killings of women and girls.’⁶⁵
- 5.3.8 The Iran HRM noted in a November 2020 article that, ‘The exact number of murders known as “honor killings” in Iran is not disclosed by officials, but in December 2019, the state-run ISNA news agency reported that “between 375 and 450 honor killings” occur annually in Iran.’⁶⁶
- 5.3.9 The USSD Human Rights Report 2019 noted ‘There were no official reports of killings motivated by “honor” or other harmful traditional practices during the year [2019], although human rights activists reported that such killings continued to occur, particularly among rural and tribal populations.’⁶⁷
- 5.3.10 The NGO Hengaw reported that, between 25 November 2019 and 25 November 2020, ‘... at least 21 Kurdish women and girls were killed, most of them by relatives... most of these killings were due to family disputes and 3 cases were honor killings.’⁶⁸ According to Hengaw, the deaths occurred in the provinces of West Azerbaijan, Kermanshah and Ilam⁶⁹.
- 5.3.11 A report on the death penalty in Iran in October 2020 by the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the League for the Defence of Human Rights in Iran (LDDHI) stated that, ‘While many honor killings went unnoticed or unreported in the past, the advance of the social media has helped draw attention to more cases, including a number of recent high-profile cases. Several honor killings were widely reported in 2020.’⁷⁰

⁶¹ HRW, [‘Iran: Adopt Draft Law to Protect Women’](#), 4 December 2020

⁶² Pirnia, B, et al, [‘Honour killings and violence against women in Iran...’](#), October 2020

⁶³ The Lancet, [‘Honour killings and violence against women in Iran...’](#), October 2020

⁶⁴ DW, [‘Iran debates “honor killings” after girl’s murder shocks country’](#), 3 June 2020

⁶⁵ Hengaw, [‘Brothers kill their sister for out-marriage relationship in Kermanshah’](#), 21 June 2020

⁶⁶ Iran HRM, [‘Violence Against Women in Iran Mandated by Law’](#), 24 November 2020

⁶⁷ USSD, [‘2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices’](#) (section 6), 11 March 2020

⁶⁸ Hengaw, [‘November 25, International Day for the Elimination of Violence...’](#), 25 November 2020

⁶⁹ Hengaw, [‘November 25, International Day for the Elimination of Violence...’](#), 25 November 2020

⁷⁰ FIDH and LDDHI, [‘No one is spared: The widespread use...’](#) (page 29), October 2020

5.3.12 At least 7 suspected honour killings were reported in the media between May and June 2020:

- In May 2020, Hajareh Hosseinbor from Baluchistan was killed by her husband, relatives of whom described the murder as an honour killing⁷¹. A few days later, Romina Ashrafi, aged 14, was beheaded by her father in Talesh, Gilan Province, after she tried to elope^{72 73}. In June 2020, Rayhaneh Ameri, aged 22, was reportedly killed by her father in Kerman, after breaking a curfew^{74 75}. Also in June 2020, it was reported that Fatemeh Borhi, aged 19, escaped an unhappy marriage but after being convinced to return by her father she was killed by her husband in Abadan, Khuzestan province^{76 77}. In the same area, an unidentified woman was stabbed to death by her brother, although the reason was not provided⁷⁸.
- In June 2020, the International Centre for Human Rights (ICHR) reported on other deaths committed 'in the name of honour', including, 'Leila Farrokhi, a young girl who was shot dead by her husband in Karaj [and] Somayeh Fathi [who] was forced to take her own life by her father, brother and other family members.'⁷⁹ Reporting on the death of Somayeh Fathi in Kermanshah, who was 18 and pregnant, the NGO Hengaw stated she was forced to consume aluminium phosphide (a pesticide⁸⁰) after she had an affair with another man⁸¹.

5.3.13 Hengaw reported on 3 murders, purportedly on the pretext of honour, in November and December 2020 and January 2021. In November 2020, Sargul Habibi, aged 31, from Sanandaj, Kurdistan, was beheaded by her brothers⁸². In December 2020, a woman identified as Vafa Abdullah Zadeh, aged 43, from Sardasht, West Azerbaijan was shot dead by her brothers⁸³. In January 2021, Sonia Dehghan also from Sardasht, was killed by her brother and cousin, apparently ordered by her father, who disagreed with her choice of husband⁸⁴.

5.3.14 According to the Finnish Immigration Service report 'Women are also sometimes pressured into committing suicide so that no one will be punished for their deaths.'⁸⁵ For example, BBC Monitoring reported that prior to killing

⁷¹ Iran HRM, '[Teenage Girl Beheaded by Father in Iran Honor Killing](#)', 26 May 2020

⁷² Al Jazeera, '[Romina Ashrafi: 'Honour killing' sparks outcry in Iran](#)', 27 May 2020

⁷³ Radio Farda, '[Iranian Father's Light Sentence For Honor Killing Rekindles...](#)', 28 August 2020

⁷⁴ Iran HRM, '[Honor Killings Sanctioned by Law Take New Toll on Iranian Women](#)', 16 June 2020

⁷⁵ Radio Farda, '[Third "Honor Killing" In One Month Shakes Many Iranians](#)', 18 June 2020

⁷⁶ IranWire, '[Iran is Repulsed by Another Honor Killing](#)', 16 June 2020

⁷⁷ Iran International, '[Iran's police confirmed the fourth case of honor killing...](#)', 19 June 2020

⁷⁸ Iran International, '[Iran's police confirmed the fourth case of honor killing...](#)', 19 June 2020

⁷⁹ ICHR, '[Iran: Girl Day Is Celebrated, while Honour Killings reigns the country](#)', 22 June 2020

⁸⁰ Public Health England, '[Aluminium phosphide: general information](#)', 8 January 2019

⁸¹ Hengaw, '[Brothers kill their sister for out-marriage relationship in Kermanshah](#)', 21 June 2020

⁸² Hengaw, '[UPDATE: Additional report on the brutal murder of a woman ...](#)', 1 December 2020

⁸³ Hengaw, '[Honour killing occurred in Sardasht](#)', 17 January 2021

⁸⁴ Hengaw, '[Honour killing occurred in Sardasht](#)', 17 January 2021

⁸⁵ Finnish Immigration Service, '[Violence against women...](#)' (page 21), 26 June 2015

her, Romina Ashrafi's father tried to convince her to kill herself with rat poison, and had also told her mother to teach Romina how to hang herself⁸⁶.

5.3.15 The Finnish Immigration Service report also stated that:

'The details of women's deaths are often obscure, as families prefer not to talk about the subject for fear of the shame caused by loss of reputation, especially if suspicions of rape or other loss of honour are involved. Investigations into the cause of death are also hampered by the unacceptability of suicide in the Islamic faith, which is why families may report suicides to the police as murders due to the shame attached to suicide. Families of women who have committed suicide by self-immolation rarely talk about the subject, and the gravestone may state the cause of death as 'heart attack', for example, to alleviate the shame.'⁸⁷

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Section 6 updated: 24 March 2021

6. Access to protection and justice

6.1 Attitudes towards women in the justice system

6.1.1 The Finnish Immigration Service report noted:

'The Constitution of Iran guarantees all citizens the right to seek justice and to receive legal aid and advice. However, cultural factors often form barriers to women's opportunities to seek and get justice. As Iran's legislation is based on Islamic criteria that discriminate against women, men rule the justice system. Studies on the subject reveal that women have a negative attitude towards the justice system and their opportunities of getting justice through the system. Taking domestic violence cases to court is seen as shameful, which is why only few cases ever go that far. The formal justice system is therefore not enough of a guarantee of an individual's rights, taking into account the underlying customs and sociocultural norms.

'The general socio-legal status of women is a much researched topic in Iran, but no accurate qualitative or quantitative information is available on the gender-based bias of the justice system. For example, the cultural factors that restrict women's access to justice are not adequately known. There are also no official research data on the opportunities of women to get justice in domestic violence cases in practice. In her book on women's access to the justice system, [Sahar] Maranlou [University of Essex] nevertheless identified certain gender-based obstacles to getting justice, such as cultural factors, lack of legal knowledge, the justice system's bias against women, lack of financial independence, discriminatory legal provisions and fear of social ostracism.

'Women's threshold for turning to the justice system can be extremely high, as there is often a social stigma attached. Iran's traditional culture views divorce and talking about marital problems as shameful, which is why friends and relatives of women who are victims of domestic violence often pressure them to keep quiet about the issue for as long as possible.

⁸⁶ BBC Monitoring, '[Explainer: 'Honour killings' in Iran: social pressure...](#)', 29 May 2020

⁸⁷ Finnish Immigration Service, '[Violence against women...](#)' (page 21), 26 June 2015

'Iran's justice system has been described as chronically incompetent at identifying women whose lives are at risk if they have to return to their violent husbands. Moreover, Iran is a society built on social connections: the justice system is corrupt and much depends on personal connections. Knowing someone who works in the justice system can be instrumental in pushing a case forward or holding one back. Other common obstacles to justice in Iran include the cost of court proceedings, long processing times, insufficient number of judges and competent staff, and limited opportunities for receiving legal assistance and reimbursement for costs.'⁸⁸

- 6.1.2 Freedom House stated in its annual 2020 Freedom in the World Report for Iran that 'Women do not receive equal treatment under the law and face widespread discrimination in practice. For example, a woman's testimony in court is given half the weight of a man's, and the monetary compensation awarded to a female victim's family upon her death is half that owed to the family of a male victim.'⁸⁹
- 6.1.3 The USSD Human Rights Report for 2019 observed that 'The constitution provides for equal protection for women under the law in conformity with its interpretation of Islam. The government did not enforce the law, and provisions in the law, particularly sections dealing with family and property law, discriminate against women. Judicial harassment, intimidation, detention, and smear campaigns significantly challenged the ability of civil society organizations to fight for and protect women's rights.'⁹⁰
- 6.1.4 Amnesty International reported in its Submission for the UN Universal Periodic Review in November 2019 that 'Amnesty International's research shows that women face entrenched discrimination in family law and criminal law. Iran's legal system puts women in a subordinate status relative to men. Under the penal code, the testimony of a woman is accorded half the value of that of a man. The age of criminal responsibility is set at nine lunar years (eight years and eight months) for girls but at 15 lunar years (14 years and six months) for boys. Women are also discriminated against under the Civil Code, notably in matters relating to marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance.'⁹¹
- 6.1.5 According to an anonymous source, cited in the Danish Immigration Service report of 2018, 'Honour crimes are more widespread among minority groups, including traditional Kurdish groups and Ahwazi Arabs. Usually, the victims cannot be protected by the authorities, because the girls, who often are the victims, do not know who to reach and where to find help and because they will be sent back if they contact the authorities.'⁹²
- 6.1.6 The same anonymous source said:

'Firstly, a girl beaten by her family will not succeed in reaching the authorities as her family will prevent it. Secondly, even if she contacts the authorities, they will ask her to document the injuries. It is not common to send a woman

⁸⁸ Finnish Immigration Service, '[Violence against women...](#)' (pages 21-22), 26 June 2015

⁸⁹ Freedom House, '[Freedom in the World 2020: Iran](#)' (section F4), 4 March 2020

⁹⁰ USSD, '[2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#)' (section 6a), 11 March 2020

⁹¹ Amnesty International, '[Iran: Falling on All Fronts...](#)' (page 8), November 2019

⁹² Danish Immigration Service, '[Relations outside of marriage in Iran...](#)' (page 23), February 2018

to [for example] forensics for documentation of injuries. Thirdly, if she can document the injuries, she will not have the courage to report her family. The source added, in the end it is up to the judge whether a case will be raised. In the tribal areas the authorities might be inclined to let the family deal with the matter.⁹³

6.1.7 According to MECS, as cited in the Danish Immigration Service report, opportunities for protection against an honour-related crime would depend on the attitude of the police and local judges⁹⁴. For example, in May 2020, Romina Ashrafi, who ran away to elope, was returned to her father by the police by order of the court, even though she warned authorities that she would be in danger⁹⁵ ⁹⁶. In August 2020, her father was sentenced to 9-years in prison for Romina's murder⁹⁷. Another case where the police returned a woman to her family despite the possible risk of harm was reported to have occurred in November 2020⁹⁸.

6.1.8 The Finnish Immigration Service report noted also that:

'The fact that Iranian culture encourages honour killings nevertheless contributes more to honour killings than legislation. Experiences from Khuzestan show that when the authorities tried to weed out the tradition by sentencing perpetrators to long prison terms, a new strategy quickly evolved to circumvent punishments: families began to hire outsiders to run over girls who needed to be murdered for damaging the family's honour, which left them with just small fines to pay. Tribes in Khuzestan even have shared kitties for paying blood money. Based on the interviews conducted by Bakhtiarnejad, perpetrators of honour killings in Khuzestan in particular know the law and the potential repercussions well. Perpetrators get a prison sentence of ten years at most or possibly just one or two years and are celebrated as heroes after their release. The local community gives strong support to perpetrators, and whole neighbourhoods can join forces to prevent the police from arresting the guilty parties.'⁹⁹

6.1.9 A report by the UN Special Rapporteur in January 2021 stated, in relation to the killing of Romina Ashrafi, that:

'The Special Rapporteur expresses alarm at laws that exonerate perpetrators or reduce punishment for such [honour] crimes. There are exemptions from criminal liability and qisas for a man who witnesses his wife committing adultery and kills and assaults either or both parties. The Penal Code creates exemptions for men who kill their children or grandchildren. Ms. Ashrafi's father stated in court he had murdered his daughter because the law did not carry a severe punishment. Such incidents confirm the failure of the law to protect victims and to punish perpetrators of honour crimes. Treaty bodies have stated that legislation which exonerates or mitigates

⁹³ Danish Immigration Service, '[Relations outside of marriage in Iran...](#)' (page 24), February 2018

⁹⁴ Danish Immigration Service, '[Relations outside of marriage in Iran...](#)' (page 28), February 2018

⁹⁵ DW, '[Iran debates "honor killings" after girl's murder shocks country](#)', 3 June 2020

⁹⁶ Al Jazeera, '[Romina Ashrafi: "Honour killing" sparks outcry in Iran](#)', 27 May 2020

⁹⁷ Radio Farda, '[Iranian Father's Light Sentence For Honor Killing Rekindles...](#)', 28 August 2020

⁹⁸ Hengaw, '[UPDATE: Additional report on the brutal murder of a woman ...](#)', 1 December 2020

⁹⁹ Finnish Immigration Service, '[Violence against women...](#)' (pages 20-21), 26 June 2015

criminal responsibility for so-called honour crimes must be removed, and a holistic framework to prevent their occurrence implemented.’¹⁰⁰

- 6.1.10 The July 2020 UN Special Rapporteur report on the situation of human rights in Iran also stated that, ‘The need for urgent reform is highlighted by the killing of 14-year-old Romina Ashrafi by her father on 21 May 2020. Before her death, Ms. Ashrafi had reportedly informed the authorities that she feared her father would harm her, but the police nevertheless returned her to him.’¹⁰¹
- 6.1.11 For further information on the judiciary, see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Iran: Actors of protection](#).

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Section 7 updated: 24 March 2021

7. Support and internal relocation

7.1 Shelter and support

- 7.1.1 The Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre, Landinfo, provided information in a report on Iran’s welfare system, based on a range of sources, dated August 2020, which noted the State Welfare Organization (SWO), part of the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour and Social Welfare, offered some avenues of support for women and girls affected by domestic violence:

‘Since 1999/2000, the SWO started to build a system offering support to people exposed to social harms, in particular women and girls as victims of domestic violence. This includes the social emergency institution (urzhans-e ejtema’i), an institution running two hotlines, ambulant teams, and its own centres in all larger cities in the country.

‘People can get in touch with the social emergency institution either by calling the hotlines or by visiting one of their centres. There are two hotlines: the hotline 123, which serves as a general hotline for the SWO, particularly also for victims of domestic violence, and the hotline 1480, a specific hotline for children.’¹⁰²

- 7.1.2 Landinfo also noted that the hotlines can refer people to:

‘... social emergency centres, which exist in 232 Iranian cities and offer counselling by a team commonly consisting of a social worker, a psychologist, a psychiatrist, a physician, a nurse, and a legal advisor. The social emergency centres basically offer outpatient services, but some also offer inpatient services for a duration of up to 20 days. They also refer people with more specific needs to other centres offering longer treatment.’¹⁰³

- 7.1.3 The DFAT noted ‘According to official sources, there are 400 “social emergency shelters” countywide that provide services to domestic violence

¹⁰⁰ UN General Assembly, ‘[Situation of human rights...](#)’ (paragraph 51), 11 January 2021

¹⁰¹ UN General Assembly, ‘[Situation of human rights...](#)’ (paragraph 47), 21 July 2020

¹⁰² Landinfo, ‘[The Iranian Welfare System](#)’ (pages 32-33), 12 August 2020

¹⁰³ Landinfo, ‘[The Iranian Welfare System](#)’ (page 33), 12 August 2020

victims. These are generally located in the major cities, are poorly resourced and advertised, and tend to focus on reconciling women with their abusive husbands. A domestic violence hotline offers social and medical support to women in need.¹⁰⁴

7.1.4 HRW indicated ‘As of March 2019, there were 24 safe houses across the country, with places for 1,500 women for stays of up to a year.’¹⁰⁵

7.1.5 The UN Special Rapporteur’s July 2020 report noted that ‘... Iran lacks sufficient domestic violence shelters, which number only 28 ..., including 20 that are run by non-governmental organizations. The Government stated there were also 357 social emergency centres for victims of violence and 31 girl-only medical centres.’¹⁰⁶

7.1.6 The Landinfo report noted that the SWO offered services for victims of domestic violence in the form of health houses and safe houses¹⁰⁷. The report noted:

‘... up to 2019 there were 31 health houses and 26 safe houses. Despite contradictions in the literature, in theory, the health houses seem to be reserved for women “in danger of social harms”, that is younger or unmarried women, while the safe houses seem to be reserved for women affected by “social harms”, that is older or married women. In some provincial capitals, however, only one such centre seems to exist, offering support to both groups of women.’¹⁰⁸

7.1.7 The 2019 MRG report also noted that:

‘In addition to the lack of legal deterrents to domestic violence, there are also insufficient support services for women trying to escape abusive situations. Both the state and non-governmental organizations run safe houses across the country, with the State Welfare Organization reporting that shelters take in approximately 2,000 victims of domestic violence in a year. However, existing shelters are not enough to accommodate all potential survivors and do not provide long-term support. Also, some shelters are apparently designed for prostitutes and drug addicts, rather than domestic violence survivors.’¹⁰⁹

7.1.8 A report by the UN Special Rapporteur in January 2021 stated that:

‘Support systems for domestic violence survivors are insufficient. Law enforcement agencies are often reluctant to intervene in such cases, commonly using mediation to resolve them, even when a woman claims her life is threatened. The 28 shelters established in 27 out of 31 provinces since 2014 lack capacity to provide long-term support to victims and mostly focus on reconciling and returning victims home. The Government claimed that family protection meant there was limited demand for shelters, but necessary arrangements would be made available if needed. A hotline and 358 social

¹⁰⁴ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Iran](#)’ (paragraph 3.126), 14 April 2020

¹⁰⁵ HRW, ‘[Iran: Adopt Draft Law to Protect Women](#)’, 4 December 2020

¹⁰⁶ UN General Assembly, ‘[Situation of human rights...](#)’ (paragraph 47), 21 July 2020

¹⁰⁷ Landinfo, ‘[The Iranian Welfare System](#)’ (page 33), 12 August 2020

¹⁰⁸ Landinfo, ‘[The Iranian Welfare System](#)’ (page 33), 12 August 2020

¹⁰⁹ MRG, ‘[Beyond the Veil: Discrimination against women in Iran](#)’ (page 34), 16 September 2019

emergency units had been established across the country to respond to social issues, including suicide attempts and domestic violence. According to the State's welfare organization, 8 per cent of calls to the hotline and 10 per cent of in-person social emergency unit visits concern violence against women.¹¹⁰

- 7.1.9 The Danish Immigration Service report of 2018 stated that, according to one source, 'The existing protection centres are unable to provide long-term support and are limited in numbers; furthermore, they are rare in rural areas...'¹¹¹ The CHRI noted in January 2021 that there were no shelters in a third of the country¹¹².

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7.2 Internal relocation

- 7.2.1 Some women, especially from more traditional families, require permission from their male guardian to travel alone^{113 114}.
- 7.2.2 Freedom House stated that 'Freedom of movement is restricted, particularly for women and perceived opponents of the regime. ... Women are banned from certain public places and can obtain a passport to travel abroad only with the permission of their fathers or husbands.'¹¹⁵
- 7.2.3 According to a Western Embassy, cited in the Danish Immigration Service report of 2018:
- 'A man would be able to live elsewhere in Iran if he has a conflict with his family or the girl's family. There are more obstacles for a woman; but it depends on a case by case assessment whether a girl can live in another part of Iran. The Embassy assumed the only time, where relocating might be an issue for a woman, is, if she has a marriage proposal and has had a pre-marital relationship with another man. If a woman needed to live in another part of the country she would probably turn to friends, extended family, network etc. It is more difficult for a single woman to rent an accommodation than it is for a single man. It would be difficult if the woman does not have a network.'¹¹⁶
- 7.2.4 The same report also cited an anonymous legal source, who stated, 'A girl can formally relocate and settle elsewhere, but in practice it would be more difficult in the countryside, as neighbours in small villages would be watching her. This is not the case in big cities, where people live in apartments.'¹¹⁷
- 7.2.5 An anonymous source mentioned in the Danish Immigration Service report noted that:

¹¹⁰ UN General Assembly, '[Situation of human rights...](#)' (paragraph 48), 11 January 2021

¹¹¹ Danish Immigration Service, '[Relations outside of marriage in Iran...](#)' (page 10), February 2018

¹¹² CHRI, '[Women's rights in Iran](#)', 6 January 2021

¹¹³ DFAT, '[Country Information Report Iran](#)' (paragraph 3.122), 14 April 2020

¹¹⁴ USSD, '[2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#)' (section 2d), 11 March 2020

¹¹⁵ Freedom House, '[Freedom in the World 2020: Iran](#)' (section G1), 4 March 2020

¹¹⁶ Danish Immigration Service, '[Relations outside of marriage in Iran...](#)' (page 14), February 2018

¹¹⁷ Danish Immigration Service, '[Relations outside of marriage in Iran...](#)' (page 23), February 2018

‘Regarding relocation in case a person has a conflict with his/her family members, the source said, if the family want they will find out where the person is. The person might hide for some time, but sooner or later, the family will find him or her. In cases where the person has violated the honour of the family, the authorities will not intervene to protect her, if the family will punish it. It is the source’s impression that the authorities will be more inclined not to interfere in cases amongst minority groups. Punishing defamatory behaviour is also present in the cities, as there are conservative families residing there too.’¹¹⁸

7.2.6 An Amnesty International representative interviewed for the same report stated that:

‘... voluntary internal relocation depends on where in the country the relocation is; there is a difference between a big and a small city, but even relocation to a big city like Shiraz could be complicated. Generally, regardless of personal circumstances or profile, moving internally inside of Iran is possible in theory (from one city to another), but if an individual is part of an ethnic and/or religious minority, such moves would not be as easy if they would not have a similar community type to go to.’¹¹⁹

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¹¹⁸ Danish Immigration Service, ‘[Relations outside of marriage in Iran...](#)’ (page 24), February 2018

¹¹⁹ Danish Immigration Service, ‘[Relations outside of marriage in Iran...](#)’ (page 18), February 2018

Terms of Reference

A 'Terms of Reference' (ToR) is a broad outline of what the CPIN seeks to cover. They form the basis for the [country information section](#). The Home Office's Country Policy and Information Team uses some standardised ToR, depending on the subject, and these are then adapted depending on the country concerned.

For this particular CPIN, the following topics were identified prior to drafting as relevant and on which research was undertaken:

- Legal context
 - Penal code
 - Laws protecting women and girls
- General position of women in society – cultural and societal attitudes
- Honour-related crimes
 - Definition and reasons
 - Regional differences, socio-economic factors, perpetrators
 - Prevalence
- Access to justice
 - Attitudes towards women and ability to seek protection
- Support and relocation opportunities

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Clearance

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Renamed. Updated assessment and country information.

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