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Staatendokumentation Country Report



Iran

from the COI-CMS

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1 Country-specific comments

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Note on the Israeli operation ‘Rising Lion’ and the subsequent military conflict between Iran and Israel (13-24 June 2025)

This country information was written shortly before, during and in the first days after the end of the military conflict between Israel and Iran in June 2025. New developments have been taken into account wherever possible, but it should be noted that the situation may currently change at relatively short notice (this applies in particular to those areas that depend on the actions of various decision-makers) and that the effects of the military attacks cannot yet be assessed in all areas (e. g. economic damage). The state documentation monitors the situation on an ongoing basis and will update the country information accordingly if the need is recognised, as capacities allow, in the event of changes to the situation. In addition, we would like to point out the possibility of submitting enquiries to the Staatendokumentation if required. In the present update of the country information, changes up to 3 July 2025 were incorporated in the chapters ‘Political situation’ and ‘Security situation’, the other chapters were edited in the period before that, with the exception of the chapter [Relevant population groups / persons accused of cooperation with hostile powers](#), which was last edited on 4 July 2025.

In accordance with the statutory mandate of the Staatendokumentation, the following summarises asylum-relevant facts. This does not include information on the classification of Operation ‘Rising Lion’ the US Operation ‘Midnight Hammer’ and Iran’s military response to the operations under international law.

Notes on terms used

In this country information, the term ‘regime’ is understood as a state authority embodied by the government, administrative apparatus and other actors, without making any judgement regarding the legitimacy of the rule. In contrast to ‘government’ in German and English usage, ‘regime’ encompasses not only the official executive state authority of a ruling system, but also informal power structures that can exert considerable influence on government decisions and actions in the Iranian context. ‘Regime’ is therefore preferred to the term ‘government’ in the interest of a precise expression when these informal aspects of the power structure are also meant.

Note on currency conversions

In Iran, there are various exchange rates for the national currency, the rial (IRR), which sometimes vary considerably and are accessible with different authorisations. Information on the system of multiple exchange rates in Iran can be found in the Staatendokumentation’s thematic report ‘Financial Transfers between Iran and Europe’ published in December 2024, which can be found in the [COI-CMS](#) and on [ecoi.net](#). For currency conversions from IRR to EUR or USD, reference is made below to the exchange rate on the open market, unless otherwise stated. News articles and the currency calculators <https://www.bonbast.com/> and <https://alanchand.com/en/currencies-price/eur> were used for this purpose.

Note on the data situation

Iran is one of the most repressive states for journalists worldwide (see section on [freedom of expression and freedom of the press](#)). In addition, the conflict between Iran and Israel (and subsequently the USA), which has recently escalated militarily, is also a conflict about narratives. As a result, certain information about incidents in Iran - or their number - as well as statements by government representatives referring to intelligence information cannot be verified. In the following, an attempt has been made to fulfil the statutory mandate of the Staatendokumentation to scientifically process facts according to objective criteria by means of triangulation and by drawing on the knowledge of external experts and the knowledge available within the Staatendokumentation. In this context, however, it should be noted that the information provided can only ever be a preliminary approximation of reality and that quantitative data in particular should be regarded as approximate guidelines rather than absolute values.

The ACLED (Armed Conflict Location and Event Data) incident database cited in the chapter on [the security situation](#) records security-related incidents and fatalities by means of media monitoring and with recourse to local partner organisations and various reports, i.e. publicly available reports on security-related incidents are collected and the relevant events are included in the incident dataset using a predefined coding scheme and predefined definitions. ACLED records various types of violent incidents, though only the categories 'battles' and 'explosions/remote violence' (explosions/violence without the physical presence of the perpetrator, e.g. air strikes/drone attacks, rocket attacks, etc.) were taken into account in the available country information due to the type of conflict described. ACLED uses the smallest number of fatalities found in the sources when counting fatalities. If the information on fatalities in the sources is imprecise (e.g. 'numerous', 'some', 'several') or unknown, ACLED automatically codes ten fatalities - or three fatalities if it is known that there were fewer than ten fatalities. The data on fatalities are therefore ACLED estimates (see the ACLED [codebook](#), last updated on 3 October 2024, for further information).

2 Comparative country analysis (VLA) within the meaning of Section 3 (4a) AsylG

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Explanation

When compiling this country information, the task of the Staatendokumentation set out in Section 3 para 4a Asylum Act to analyse 'significant, lasting changes in the specific, in particular political, conditions that are decisive for the fear of persecution' was taken into account. The available information was compared with previous country information and analysed for relevant improvements as defined in the above-mentioned law.

Improvements that were deemed to meet the specifications defined above were subjected to a quality assurance-based method for determining the actual existence of a significant improvement (see methodology of the Staatendokumentation). If an actual improvement within the meaning of the law was subsequently determined, a corresponding thematic report of the Staatendokumentation on the topic was also prepared.

Improvement within the meaning of Section 3 (4a) AsylG	
Title	Chapter
A comparison of the information on asylum-relevant topics in the present country information with that of the previous country information has shown that there have been no improvements in Iran as described in Section 3 para. 4a Asylum Act.	

3 Political situation

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Iran has been an Islamic Republic since 1979 ([FAZ 24/3/2023](#)). It combines republican-democratic elements with a theocratic system, whereby the theocratic aspects largely overshadow and undermine the republican principles ([BS 19/3/2024](#)). The core concept of the constitution is the 'absolute authority of the jurists' (velayat-e faqih). According to Shiite belief, there is a hidden Twelfth Imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi, sent by God as the saviour at the Last Judgement ([BPB 10/1/2020](#)). According to this principle, a Shiite theologian is supposed to act practically as a proxy for Mahdi, who has been in hiding since 874, and steer the fate of the community ([BAMF 5/2022](#)). Building on this, in 1979 Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini created an office tailored to his needs, which stands above all elected bodies and thus neutralises the republican constitutional elements of the president and parliament: the office of the 'ruling jurist' (vali-ye faqih), whose holder is also called the 'revolutionary leader' (rahbar). The revolutionary leader exercises power on behalf of the Twelfth Imam until his return ([BPB 10/1/2020](#)).

The Leader of the Revolution (also Supreme Leader, Supreme Jurist, Religious Leader) has been Ayatollah Seyed Ali Hosseini Khamenei since 1989 ([ÖB Teheran 11/2021](#); cf. [FH 2025](#)). He is elected for life by an assembly of clerics (Council of Experts) ([AA 19/3/2025](#)), is the highest authority in the country, commander-in-chief of the armed forces and appoints the head of the judiciary as well as the state broadcaster and the members of the Arbitration Council ([FH 2025](#)). The Islamic Revolutionary Guards (Pasdaran or IRGC [Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps]), including the paramilitary Basij militias with several million members, are under his command. Religious foundations and the 'Guards' own powerful commercial enterprises that profit from the growing shadow economy as a result of US sanctions ([ÖB Teheran 11/2021](#)). The revolutionary leader has an office (beyt-e rahbari) estimated at 5,000 people with a military and intelligence department at his disposal to keep him informed of current developments. For ideological and political monitoring, he relies on the structure of the 'representatives of the revolutionary leader' (nemayandegan) and the ideological and political offices, including the Friday preachers in the country's most important mosques ([Posch/LVAk 7/2024](#)).

Despite the elections held in the Islamic Republic of Iran, the ultimate power lies in the hands of the Supreme Leader and the unelected institutions under his control. These institutions,

including the security forces and the judiciary, play an important role in suppressing dissent and other restrictions on civil liberties (FH 2025). Revolutionary Leader Khamenei is the supreme decision-making authority, but cannot make key decisions against important centres of power. The Revolutionary Guards, which report directly to the Revolutionary Leader, remain a military, political and economic power factor (AA 15/7/2024).

Decisive bodies are the Council of Experts, which is directly elected by the people, and the Council of Guardians (ÖB Teheran 11/2021). There is also the Arbitration Council. It mediates in the legislative process and also has the task of ensuring that the 'overall interests of the system' are safeguarded (AA 19/3/2025). The Council of Experts appoints the Supreme Leader and can (theoretically) also dismiss him (ÖB Teheran 11/2021). It should control the work of the revolutionary leader. In practice, however, it does not appear to challenge the decisions of the revolutionary leader (FH 2025). Although the Council of Experts is elected directly by the population, the candidates must first be confirmed by the Council of Guardians (BS 19/3/2024). Six of the twelve members of the Council of Guardians are clergymen appointed by the Supreme Leader and six are (clerical) lawyers appointed by the judiciary, who must be confirmed by parliament. The Guardian Council has powers comparable to those of a constitutional court (ÖB Teheran 11/2021), it monitors the compliance of laws passed by parliament with Islamic law (Sharia) (BS 19/3/2024), but is considerably more powerful (ÖB Teheran 11/2021). It decides who may run in parliamentary and presidential elections (BS 19/3/2024), making the Council of Guardians the central means by which the revolutionary leader exercises power (GIZ 2020).

The president is the second-highest office holder in the state after the revolutionary leader. He forms a government cabinet that must be confirmed by parliament (FH 2025). The Iranian system of government is therefore a semi-presidential system and the government is headed by the president, who is directly elected by the people for a four-year term (ÖB Teheran 11/2021) and may stand for election for two consecutive terms (FH 2025). The president is responsible for day-to-day politics and has a significant influence on the country's domestic and foreign policy (BBC 1/7/2024). However, his power is comparatively limited, especially in security matters (BBC 1/7/2024; cf. BPB 10/1/2020). The powers of the elected president are limited by the revolutionary leader and other unelected bodies (FH 2025), as well as by the parliament (BBC 1/7/2024).

The Iranian parliament with 290 members, called Majles, has one chamber and is directly elected every four years. The Majles is the country's legislature, approves the state budget, ratifies international agreements (DW 20/6/2025) and can vote to censure ministers (ÖB Teheran 11/2021; cf. AA 19/3/2025). In addition to members of parliament, ministers can also introduce legislative proposals (DW 16/6/2021; cf. AA 19/3/2025). Parliament's authority is limited by the Council of Guardians, which pre-selects all parliamentary candidates (DW 20/6/2025) and can reject laws [passed by parliament] that in its opinion are not compatible with the constitution or the principles of Islam (DW 20/6/2025; cf. FH 2025). Candidates for parliamentary seats do not receive their support from parties, but from clerical and economic interest groups (DW 16/6/2021; cf. FP 7/3/2024).

Die Islamische Republik Iran verbindet republikanische und theokratische Institutionen



After President Ebrahim Raisi, who was elected in 2021, died in a helicopter crash on 19 May 2024 ([Standard 20/5/2024](#)), new elections for the presidency were scheduled for the end of June ([Zeit Online 20/5/2024](#)). The Council of Guardians approved six candidates for election out of 80 candidates ([Tagesschau 9/6/2024](#)). Candidates who are considered moderate or reform-oriented were excluded ([BAMF 10/6/2024](#)), even though Massoud Pezeshkian, a candidate who is considered a reformist ([Guardian 11/6/2024](#)), was allowed to run. Pezeshkian won the run-off election for the presidency on 5 July 2024 with a 53% share of the vote against the conservative candidate Saeed Jalili. Voter turnout was almost 50%, after only 40% in the first round of voting ([Soufan 8/7/2024](#)).

5

The last parliamentary elections took place on 1 March 2024, with the competition essentially between hardliners and low-profile conservatives, all of whom expressed their loyalty to revolutionary ideals, while influential moderates and conservatives stayed away from the election and reformists called the election not free and unfair ([REU 4/3/2024](#); cf. [FP 7/3/2024](#)). The Guardian Council, which was responsible for selecting candidates, had disqualified a large number of candidates in advance ([Standard 4/3/2024](#); cf. [IRINTL 23/1/2024](#)) and the names of the final candidates were announced less than two weeks before the election. The election campaign lasted only ten days, so voters had little time to get to know the candidates ([NYT 28/2/2024](#)). Activists and opposition groups called for a boycott of the elections in the run-up ([REU 4/3/2024](#); cf. [NYT 28/2/2024](#)), which also led to arrests ([Standard 4/3/2024](#)). Voter turnout was 41% nationwide, which is the lowest turnout in a parliamentary election since 1979 ([REU 4/3/2024](#)). It has fallen significantly in recent years ([Clingendael 3/6/2024](#)). Turnout is seen by both supporters and critics of the government as a measure of the regime's legitimacy ([NYT 28/2/2024](#)).

The Council of Experts was also newly elected on 1 March 2024 ([Standard 4/3/2024](#); cf. [REU 4/3/2024](#)). The regime used the elections to rejuvenate the Council of Experts ([Standard 4/3/2024](#)). The 88 members of the body, which is elected for a term of eight years, appoint the religious leader, a task which it is assumed that the Council of Experts will also have to fulfil during this term in view of the health of Ayatollah Khamenei, who is over 80 years old. The selection of the candidates standing for election ensured which political direction would win. Only candidates in the spirit of Khamenei and his Islamist spiritual legacy were admitted, who are expected to 'make no trouble' in the event of his demise and not come up with reformist ideas ([Standard 4/3/2024](#); cf. [Tagesschau 11/2/2024](#)).

Democratic participation and protests

The president, parliament and council of experts are elected by the people in secret and direct elections. However, the electoral system does not meet OECD standards for the simple reason that all candidates must be approved in advance by the Guardian Council appointed by the revolutionary leader and head of the judiciary ([AA 15/7/2024](#); cf. [FH 2025](#)). However, hardly any other country in the Middle East has seen such contested parliamentary and presidential elections in the past. The existing programmatic differences reflected a pluralism that was, however, at times under severe threat ([BPB 31/1/2020a](#)). By democratic standards, there are neither free nor fair elections in Iran, but for a long time various groups loyal to the system were allowed to run. As a result, different political camps have formed the government, including hardliners as well as so-called reformers and moderates. This changed from 2019 and became visible in the 2020 parliamentary elections, but especially in the 2021 presidential elections ([Clingendael 3/6/2024](#); cf. [NYT 28/2/2024](#)).

The death of Mahsa Amini in September 2022, which triggered widespread protests, already took place in the context of a turn towards the stricter enforcement of 'Islamic values'. This is also associated with the fact that the regime will be confronted with a transitional scenario when Khamenei passes away, in which the decision-makers do not want to leave anything to

chance ([Standard 4/3/2024](#)). In this respect, according to one expert, the Islamic Republic of Iran is in a 'critical transition phase' ([Zamirirad/SWP 19/4/2023](#)). However, the presidential elections in July 2024 turned out to be more competitive than some predicted at the beginning ([ISPI 27/6/2024](#)). With Pezeshkian, a candidate supported by the reform camp won, which surprised some observers ([FA 16/7/2024](#)), as did his admission to the presidential election alone ([TWI 18/7/2024](#)), after he had first been refused permission to run in the previous parliamentary elections and then only allowed to do so after a personal intervention by Khamenei ([FA 16/7/2024](#)). Observers interpreted his authorisation to run for president as, among other things, an attempt to boost the expected low voter turnout ([TWI 18/7/2024](#); cf. [EPC 15/7/2024](#)).

Women have the right to vote, but face significant legal, religious and cultural barriers to political participation. According to the interpretation of the Guardian Council, the Iranian constitution prohibits women from taking up the offices of revolutionary leader or president, functions in the Council of Experts, Guardian Council and Arbitration Council, as well as some judgeships ([USDOS 23/4/2024](#)). Women are significantly underrepresented in politics, including the government ([FH 2025](#)). In the 2024 parliamentary elections, 1,713 of the total of 15,200 candidates were women. Compared to the parliamentary elections in 2020, however, their number has more than doubled ([NYT 28/2/2024](#)). While women have never before been allowed to stand as candidates in presidential elections ([FH 2025](#)), Pezeshkian's cabinet includes a woman, Farzaneh Sadegh, as Minister of Roads and Urban Development, the second woman in the history of the Islamic Republic to hold a ministerial office ([IRJ 11/8/2024](#)).

Under-40s, who make up around three quarters of the Iranian population, have been largely excluded from political participation. Political offices are predominantly held by men from the first generation of the Islamic Republic's elite - the founding fathers, who are now over 70 years old - and the second generation - the veterans of the Iran-Iraq war, who are now over 60, and representatives of the Revolutionary Guards ([BPB 31/1/2020a](#)).

Now that many Iranians no longer see the elections as an opportunity to bring about fundamental change, they have turned to more active forms of resistance. Both 2017/2018 and 2019/2020 saw large-scale nationwide protests, a development not seen since the Green Movement in 2009 ([Clingendael 3/6/2024](#)). In September 2022, the death of Mahsa Amini at the hands of the vice squad sparked an unprecedented wave of protest and solidarity across the country. For the first time, people of different ages, ethnic backgrounds and social classes took to the streets together ([Clingendael 3/6/2024](#); cf. [UNHRC 19/3/2024](#)). The protests were particularly supported by women, young people and marginalised ethnic groups -above all Kurds and Baluchis. They were characterised by their decentralised nature, the importance of civil disobedience and flash mobs as a form of protest - especially by women taking off their headscarves - and the lack of organisational and leadership structures ([BPB 16/2/2023](#)). The 2017/2018 and 2019/2020 protests already had no connection to existing political camps ([Clingendael 3/6/2024](#)). The lack of leadership structures was both a strength and a weakness of the protests, in which the internet and social media played a major role in mobilising and spreading the protest messages. On the one hand, the lack of leadership structures makes state repression more difficult; on the other hand, it also makes it more difficult for a movement to emerge that could represent a political

alternative to the current system (FR24 16/12/2022; cf. USIP 6/9/2023b). By the summer of 2023, the street protests had finally subsided (USIP 6/9/2023a). The Islamic Republic remained functional and no unit of the highly competitive Iranian security apparatus was observed to have weakened or behaved disloyally in the course of the protests (Posch/Chatham 5/5/2023). Apart from targeted concessions to certain groups, the government has not responded to the protests with fundamental reforms (FES 3/2024).

Effects of the Israeli Operation ‘Rising Lion’ on Iran (13.6.-24.6.2025) [as of 3.7.2025]

With Operation Rising Lion, which Israel launched on 13 June 2025, Iran experienced the largest attack on its territory since the end of the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s (NYT 23/6/2025b; cf. RUSI 16/6/2025). According to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the nuclear and missile programme was the main target of the Israeli military offensive, although the Israeli armed forces also attacked a wide range of different targets [*note: see section on the [security situation](#)*] (FR24 17/6/2025; cf. RUSI 16/6/2025), including, for example, the state radio station IRIB (Stimson 1/7/2025). In addition, Netanyahu had spoken out in favour of regime change in a series of media appearances (Axios 17/6/2025; cf. Stimson 1/7/2025). He called on the Iranian people to rebel against the Iranian regime and also used the slogan ‘Woman, Life, Freedom’, which was used during the protests from September 2022 (TIS 14/6/2025). Furthermore, he did not rule out the assassination of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei (Monde 18/6/2025), and the Israeli defence minister later confirmed this plan, which was ultimately not carried out (TIS 27/6/2025; cf. RFE/RL 27/6/2025). During the course of the conflict, Khamenei largely sealed himself off from the outside world and presented the Council of Experts, which is responsible for selecting his successor, with a three-person proposal from which the next Supreme Leader was to be chosen in the event of Khamenei’s death. In view of the war, this was intended to guarantee a quick and orderly transition (NYT 23/6/2025b). However, Khamenei survived the war and the Islamic Republic continues to exist (NYT 29/6/2025b).

Given the scale and pattern of attacks on civilian targets, Iranian analysts have spoken of a strategy of ‘socialisation’ of war, namely a deliberate effort to generate public pressure on the regime by attacking symbolic and civilian infrastructure (MECGA 18/6/2025). However, the actions have neither led to mass unrest (MECGA 18/6/2025; cf. Stimson 1/7/2025) nor to a political rupture within the Islamic Republic. There are no signs of a mobilisation of separatist forces, but authorities responsible for internal security seem increasingly alarmed about the possibility of armed uprisings, local rebellions or acts of sabotage by infiltrated networks (MECGA 18/6/2025). The unprecedented nature of the attacks and the intensity of Israeli intelligence infiltration revealed by bombings and acts of sabotage in Tehran (MECGA 18/6/2025; cf. RFE/RL 25/6/2025) have partly shifted the government’s focus to preventing internal unrest (MECGA 18/6/2025; cf. REU 26/6/2025a). Extensive arrests have been reported since the start of the Israeli attacks on 13 June 2025 (REU 26/6/2025a), including, according to media close to the regime, on the basis of espionage allegations (RFE/RL 25/6/2025; cf. KP 2/7/2025). According to human rights organisations, the authorities’ actions are currently disproportionately affecting ethnic and religious minorities, opposition figures and foreign nationals (NYT 28/6/2025).

After the end of the twelve-day war, the Iranian government officially suspended cooperation with the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) (Tagesschau 2/7/2025; cf. AlMon 2/7/2025). Public threats by Iranian politicians to withdraw from the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) have not [yet] been realised (MECGA 18/6/2025; cf. AJ 17/6/2025). Iran has been a party to this treaty since 1970, which prohibits signatory states without nuclear weapons from producing and purchasing nuclear weapons (Tagesschau 22/6/2025b). According to the 'Annual Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community', a joint report by 18 US intelligence agencies, which was presented to the US Congress by the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) in March 2025 [*note: and is cited by various sources as of the end of June 2025, as it is currently the most up-to-date publicly available intelligence assessment, while public primary sources on this topic do not exist*], the intelligence services involved in this report continue to assume that Iran is not currently building nuclear weapons and that Supreme Leader Khamenei has not resumed the nuclear weapons programme suspended in 2003. At the same time, however, the report also notes that over the past year there has been an 'erosion of the decades-long taboo' in Iran on publicly discussing nuclear weapons, which could strengthen nuclear weapons proponents within the Iranian decision-making apparatus. Moreover, Iran has a stockpile of enriched uranium at the 'highest level', which is 'unprecedented' for a state without nuclear weapons (ODNI 25/3/2025; cf. WoR 20/6/2025, BBC 19/6/2025), i.e. Iran has enriched uranium to a level for which there is virtually no civilian use, and it is therefore only a comparatively short distance to the production of bomb-grade material. However, this does not mean that a sufficient quantity of highly enriched, weapons-grade uranium is enough to produce a bomb (ÖAW 18/6/2025).

The extent to which the Iranian nuclear programme was damaged by the attacks by Israel and the USA in June 2025 is currently unclear. Estimates range from a delay of a few months to two years (HB 3/7/2025). It is currently expected that the US and Iran could resume negotiations on the Iranian nuclear programme in the near future (ISW 26/6/2025; cf. HB 3/7/2025). However, the positions remain entrenched. Iran still does not want to give up uranium enrichment, allegedly for civilian purposes. As before the war, the USA is demanding that no enrichment takes place in Iran (Tagesschau 3/7/2025; cf. ISW 26/6/2025). The law with which Iran suspended co-operation with the IAEA demands not only the right to enrich uranium but also guarantees that Iran will not be attacked again. In doing so, the regime is invoking the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Only when it receives these guarantees does it want to cooperate with the IAEA again (HB 3/7/2025).

Sources

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4 Security situation

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Compared to neighbouring countries such as Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Afghanistan, Iran has a very strong central government with a complex institutional structure. The monopoly on the use of force lies with state and semi-state institutions that make up the regime. Iran's territorial integrity is repeatedly called into question by alleged drone attacks and major explosions (BS 19/3/2024), and in June 2025 by an extensive Israeli military operation that included airstrikes and covert operations (CRS 26/6/2025) and, according to the Israeli army, the deployment of ground troops (APA 25/6/2025). Occasional border disputes (e.g. with Afghanistan in July 2022) and disputes regarding passing ships in the Strait of Hormuz with Oman and the United Arab Emirates flare up (BS 19/3/2024).

Israel-Iran war (13-24 June 2025)

From 13 June 2025, Iran was confronted with the largest attack on the country since the end of the Iran-Iraq War as a result of the Israeli operation 'Rising Lion' ('Am KeLavi' in Hebrew, INSS n.d) (RUSI 16/6/2025). The communicated goal of the Israeli government was the military elimination of 'existential threats' to Israel from the Iranian missile and nuclear programme (FR24 17/6/2025; cf. Axios 13/6/2025), in addition to statements by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and attacks on targets that were interpreted by observers as an attempt to bring about regime change (FR24 17/6/2025 cf. Stimson 16/6/2025).

Israeli forces attacked infrastructure and personnel associated with Iran's nuclear programme (AJ 13/6/2025; cf. RUSI 16/6/2025) - including a university (CFR 25/6/2025) - as well as conventional military facilities (AJ 13/6/2025; cf. RUSI 16/6/2025). Among others, several nuclear

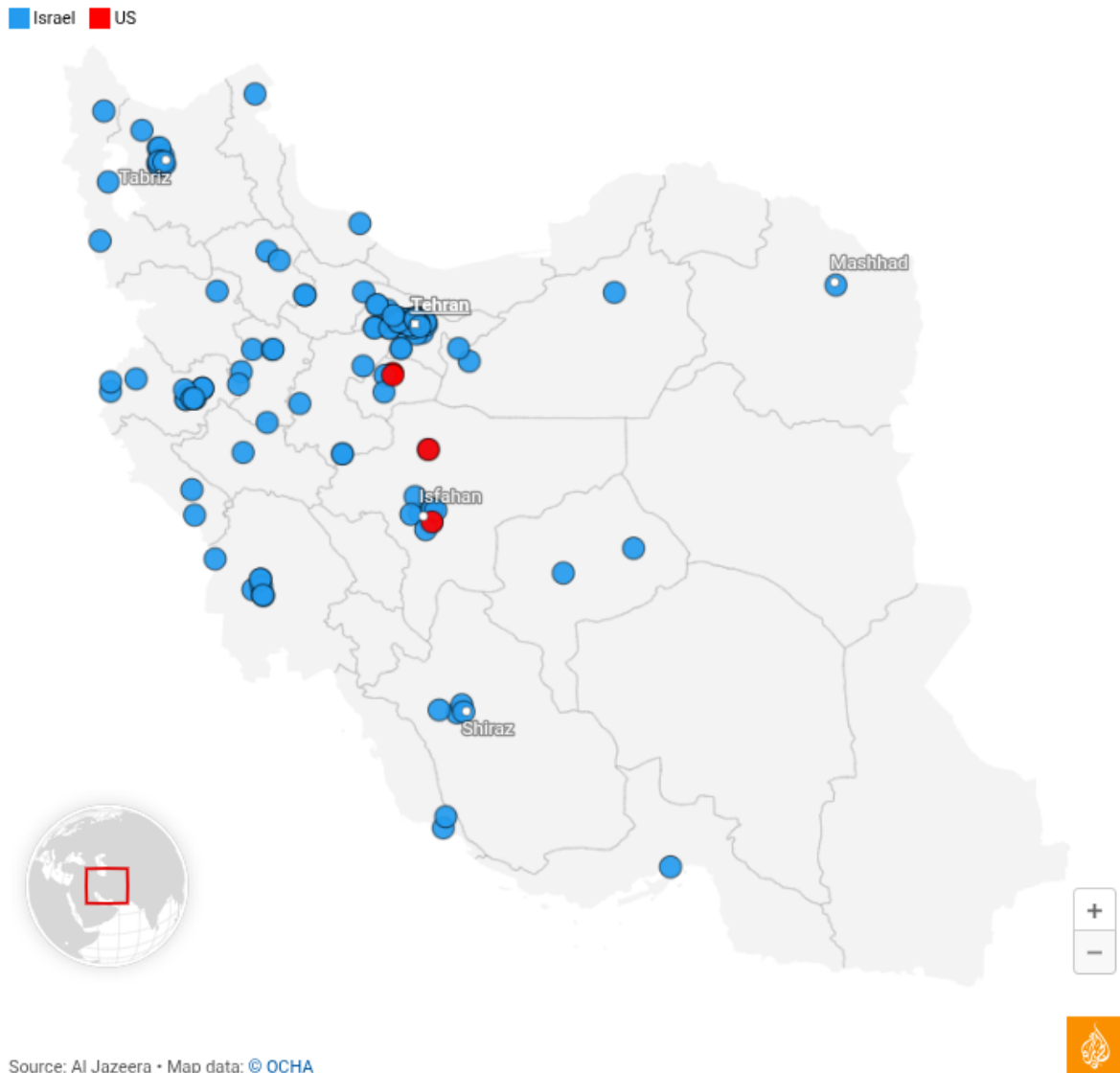
scientists and senior officers of the armed forces were targeted and killed ([BBC 26/6/2025](#); cf. [RUSI 16/6/2025](#)), with the latter amounting to a 'decapitation' of the Iranian security apparatus according to one observer ([RUSI 16/6/2025](#)). Energy infrastructure was also attacked, namely a refinery near one of the world's largest natural gas fields ([REU 26/6/2025b](#); cf. [Standard 15/6/2025](#)), as well as an oil refinery and a gas depot in Tehran ([Standard 15/6/2025](#)). In the further course, the Israeli armed forces also carried out air strikes on state facilities and administrative buildings in Tehran, including internal security institutions such as the Ministry of Intelligence (MOIS [note: also VAJA]) and the police headquarters ([ISW 15/6/2025](#)) as well as the headquarters of the Basij and the internal security of the Revolutionary Guards in Tehran ([i24 23/6/2025](#)), but also on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs ([ISW 15/6/2025](#)) and the headquarters of the Iranian state broadcaster (IRIB) ([LWJ 16/6/2025](#)). As another symbolic target, the Israeli Defence Forces bombed the entrance gate of the notorious Evin prison ([Standard 23/6/2025](#); cf. [i24 23/6/2025](#)). The Israeli defence minister stated that the Israeli armed forces had attacked 'institutions of state repression' ([i24 23/6/2025](#)). Evin was one of several targets, including the headquarters of the Basij, which had taken brutal action against demonstrators ([NYT 29/6/2025a](#)).

According to the Iranian authorities, a total of 935 people were killed in the Israeli attacks ([AP 30/6/2025](#)). A human rights organisation put the number of fatalities in the period 13-24 June 2025 at 1,190, at least 436 of whom were civilians. According to the organisation, almost 4,500 people were also injured ([HRANA 28/6/2025](#)). In contrast, the ACLED incident database recorded 415 fatalities [civilians and members of the armed forces] in the same period in the corresponding incident categories 'fighting' and 'explosions/remote violence' [Note: *The data from none of the three sources can be verified; ACLED records data using a predefined, publicly accessible scheme and uses media reports as a data source, see [country-specific notes](#) for further information. The discrepancy in the number of fatalities may be due to different data collection methods*] ([ACLED 27/6/2025](#)).

The dead also include people with no connection to the Iranian regime. In many cases, the homes of high-ranking officials were attacked - houses that were often located in densely populated residential areas, in close proximity to the homes of civilians. The Islamic Republic is practically not equipped to protect the civilian population against missile and air attacks. There is a complete lack of structural preparations for war in urban areas: there are no functioning sirens for early warning and no public shelters ([IRJ 22/6/2025](#)[BBC 18/6/2025](#)), although the metro stations in Tehran, for example, remained open 24/7 after an announcement by the Iranian government in order to provide protection for the population ([BBC 18/6/2025](#); cf. [Guardian 15/6/2025](#)). The Israeli armed forces issued evacuation orders in individual cases, for example before attacks on military facilities in residential areas ([IRJ 22/6/2025](#); cf. [LWJ 16/6/2025](#)). These warnings were disseminated in international media and social networks, but often did not reach the Iranian population due to internet outages in the country ([IRJ 22/6/2025](#)). It was also reported in one case that an Iranian government spokesperson called on the population to ignore the Israeli evacuation orders ([LWJ 16/6/2025](#)). While initially only damage to the prison infrastructure was reported after the Israeli attack on Evin Prison ([i24 23/6/2025](#); cf. [NYT 23/6/2025a](#)), a

spokesperson for the Iranian Ministry of Justice later stated that 71 people, including prisoners, relatives, administrative staff and conscripts, had been killed in the attack ([REU 29/6/2025](#)).

According to records kept by the NGO HRANA and ACLED, the largest number of attacks (HRANA) and incidents categorised as 'fights' and 'explosions/remote violence' (ACLED) took place in the capital Tehran ([HRANA 28/6/2025](#), [ACLED 27/6/2025](#)). ACLED also recorded the largest proportion of fatalities in the country, namely 163 out of 415, with most of the fatalities occurring in the first district of Tehran (91 in total) [*Note: Located in the north of the city*] ([ACLED 27/6/2025](#)). However, HRANA and ACLED recorded incidents in a total of 28 [of 31] provinces in the country ([ACLED 27/6/2025](#), [HRANA 28/6/2025](#)). Below is a map of the attacks as recorded by a fact-checking organisation of the Qatari news channel Al Jazeera, which claims to have verified some 146 airstrikes and indicates that the actual number of airstrikes carried out by Israel on military and civilian installations, industrial facilities and air defence systems throughout the country may be higher [*Note: In the case of multiple attacks in a small area, such as those that took place in several urban areas, the number of attacks cannot be accurately represented*]. ([AJ 25/6/2025](#)):



Sources 2: AJ 25/6/2025

Within their own country, Iranian security forces responded to the Israeli attacks by, among other things, deploying troops to the borders with Pakistan, Iraq and Azerbaijan to prevent an incursion by - in the words of an Iranian government representative - 'terrorists'. Representatives of Iranian Kurdish opposition parties based in the Kurdish part of Iraq reported extensive troop movements, particularly in the Kurdish region of Iran. Among other things, members of the Revolutionary Guards were stationed in schools there and new checkpoints were set up on roads. The security forces carried out more identity checks and house searches were also reported (REU 26/6/2025a).

Internationally, Iran responded to the Israeli operation 'Rising Lion' with rocket attacks on Israel (REU 14/6/2025; cf. Tagesschau 22/6/2025a, ISW 15/6/2025). While observers concluded that Iran showed restraint in this regard (MECGA 18/6/2025; cf. RAND 16/6/2025), the Iranian missiles nevertheless hit, among others residential buildings (Standard 16/6/2025) and a hospital (ORF 19/6/2025) and killed 28 people in Israel (AP 30/6/2025), all but one of whom were civilians,

according to the Israeli Ministry of Health. Furthermore, over 3,000 people were injured ([TIS 29/6/2025](#)). The not necessarily voluntary restraint was attributed on the one hand to the damage caused by the Israeli armed forces to Iran's missile infrastructure and on the other hand to Iran's fear of the USA entering the war ([MECGA 18/6/2025](#)).

After the Israeli attacks on Iranian nuclear and missile facilities caused little or no damage to the well-protected Fordow uranium enrichment facility, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called on US President Donald Trump to order the US armed forces to attack the facility with bunker-busting bombs owned by the US ([Soufan 23/6/2025](#)). The USA then dropped bunker-busting bombs on the Fordow and Natanz uranium enrichment plants on 22 June 2025 as part of its 'Operation Midnight Hammer' and also attacked a uranium conversion plant in Isfahan [*note: marked in red on the map above*] ([CFR 25/6/2025](#); cf. [Soufan 23/6/2025](#)). After the attack, Trump tried to prevent an escalation by explaining that it was a limited and targeted action against the Iranian nuclear programme and not against the regime ([Soufan 23/6/2025](#); cf. [Amwaj 22/6/2025](#)). While the US president claimed after the operation that the nuclear facilities attacked had been completely destroyed, a US intelligence report leaked to the media suggests that the Iranian nuclear programme was only set back by a few months as a result, although the authors also emphasised that this assessment was only a preliminary one ([NYT 24/6/2025a](#); cf. [CFR 25/6/2025](#)). Iran responded to the US attack by attacking the largest US military base in the Middle East, al-Udeid in Qatar, which houses the centre for all US airstrikes in the region, but not without first warning the US government, for which US President Trump publicly thanked it ([BBC 23/6/2025](#)).

On 24 June 2025, Israel and Iran agreed to a ceasefire, although both sides carried out isolated attacks after the ceasefire was announced (by the USA, Israel and Iran at different times) ([NYT 24/6/2025b](#); cf. [ORF 24/6/2025](#)). Both Israel and Iran have declared themselves the victors of the conflict ([NYT 25/6/2025](#)).

Since it is assumed that the Israeli operation was only possible due to an unprecedented infiltration of the Iranian security services by Israeli agents, the authorities are stepping up action against people suspected of co-operating with foreign intelligence services. They justify this on the grounds of national security [*Note: see also the section [Relevant population groups / persons accused of collaborating with hostile powers](#) for more information*]. ([BBC 26/6/2025](#); cf. [NYT 28/6/2025](#)).

Threats from various groups in Iran

Iran faces terrorist threats from various opposition groups, on the one hand from separatist insurgency movements in its border regions, where Arab, Baloch and Kurdish ethnic minorities live, and on the other hand from transnational groups such as the so-called Islamic State (ISIS). Separatist groups include, for example, the Arab Struggle Movement for the Liberation of Ahwaz (ASMLA) and the Ahvaz National Resistance in Khuzestan as well as Jaysh al-Adl (JAA) in Sistan and Balochistan. Various groups are active in the Kurdish regions, including the Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê [Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan] (PJAK), which is waging an armed

insurgency against the Iranian security forces and sometimes also carries out attacks ([ISPI 26/2/2024](#)).

ISIS has claimed responsibility for four attacks in Iran since 2017. The attacks were mainly directed against so-called 'high-profile' targets, i.e. targets with a high symbolic impact ([BBC 5/1/2024](#)). Almost 100 people died and over 200 were injured in an attack in the city of Kerman [Kerman province] on 3 January 2024. The attack took place during a memorial service to mark the anniversary of the death of Qassem Soleimani ([IRINTL 3/1/2024](#); cf. [Soufan 4/1/2024](#)), the commander of the Quds Forces responsible for foreign operations of the Revolutionary Guards, who was killed by a US drone attack in 2020 ([BBC 4/1/2024](#); cf. [AP 4/1/2024](#)) and who was one of the architects of Iranian policy in the region ([BBC 4/1/2024](#); cf. [Soufan 4/1/2024](#)). ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack, although according to information from a US intelligence service, ISIS's offshoot in Afghanistan, the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), was responsible for the attack ([REU 5/1/2024](#); cf. [FAZ 12/1/2024](#)). According to Iranian information, since 2015 there have been repeated arrests in Khuzestan province and other parts of the country, including in Tehran, of people who are linked to ISIS and are believed to have planned terrorist attacks in Iran ([AA 26/6/2025](#); cf. [TWI 31/10/2022](#)), most recently at the beginning of June 2025 and in August 2024 ([AlMon 4/6/2025](#)).

Tehran fears unrest among the ethnic and religious minorities in Iran's peripheral regions. Almost all Kurds in the north-west and Baluchis in the south-east of the country are Sunnis, as are a substantial minority of Arabs in the south-west. These ethnic groups are considered a security risk by the Shiite Islamic Republic, are subject to various forms of discrimination and are often in opposition to the regime. They appear to be a particularly great danger because their settlement areas are located on Iran's external borders. The Iranian leadership is therefore concerned that neighbours could try to mobilise the minorities against the state in the event of a conflict ([SWP 9/3/2024](#)) and accuses foreign powers, in particular Israel, the USA and some Gulf states, of supporting separatist opposition groups in Iran with the aim of destabilising the country ([ISPI 26/2/2024](#)).

In the province of Sistan and Balochistan, there are regular conflicts between Iranian security forces and armed groups ([AA 26/6/2025](#)), particularly Sunni militants and drug smugglers ([Arabiya 17/1/2024](#)). Freedom of movement is restricted and there are increased security and identity checks ([AA 26/6/2025](#)). Insurgent activity in south-east Iran has increased since December 2023. The Balochistan jihadist group Jaysh al-Adl [JAA, also JUA] has since carried out numerous attacks ([ISW 10/3/2025](#); cf. [LWJ 1/10/2024](#)), targeting security forces in particular, but also other representatives of state institutions, including judges and other judicial officials ([Zenith 26/1/2024](#)). In 2025, the organisation also carried out attacks or engaged in armed clashes with the Iranian security forces ([ACLED 20/6/2025](#)). The latter carry out operations against the JAA ([ISW 18/4/2025](#), [ISW 10/3/2025](#), [ISW 25/2/2025](#)).

The borders with Afghanistan and Pakistan are porous and an important smuggling route for drugs and other goods, which attracts organised crime ([DFAT 24/7/2023](#); cf. [BAMF 10/7/2023](#), [AlMon 14/4/2024](#)). Furthermore, relations between the Iranian government and the Taliban

government in Afghanistan are sometimes tense (DFAT 24/7/2023). Since the Taliban took control in August 2021, Iranian soldiers and Taliban security forces have repeatedly engaged in armed clashes along the common border (DFAT 24/7/2023; cf. Caspian 1/5/2024, IRINTL 25/4/2024).

In the province of Kurdistan and the province of West Azerbaijan, which is also inhabited by Kurds, there are repeated attacks against security forces, members of the judiciary and members of the clergy. In this context, security forces have once again stepped up their operations against Kurdish separatist groups as well as controls with checkpoints (AA 26/6/2025). The security forces are present in large numbers in the provinces of Kurdistan, Kermanshah and West Azerbaijan (MBZ 9/2023). In this Kurdish-inhabited region on the border with Iraq and Turkey (Izady/Gulf 2000 n.d), there have been several armed clashes between Iranian security forces and members of Kurdish parties with bases in northern Iraq, sometimes with deaths and injuries on both sides (MBZ 9/2023). This is despite the fact that many of the Iranian Kurdish opposition parties based in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) have concluded an agreement with the local government not to use the KRI as a base for attacks on Iran (Clingendael 3/7/2024). There are also repeated reports of Iranian security forces firing on smugglers or kolbars along the border (IRWIRE 29/6/2025b; cf. HRW 8/7/2024, Hengaw 1/8/2024).

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4.1 Banned organisations

Last modification 2025-07-17 12:31

In Iran, most civil society and political organisations have been banned for a long time. In addition to those groups that want to overthrow the regime (known as Barandazi), the legal reformist political parties that fundamentally support the Islamic Republic (known as Eslahtalab) are also subject to severe restrictions ([Clingendael 27/10/2023](#)).

Membership in banned political groups can lead to coercive state measures and sanctions. State repression against any activity that is perceived as an attack on the political system or that questions Islamic principles is particularly severe and widespread. This is particularly pronounced among groups that represent the interests of religious or ethnic minorities. Broadly defined criminal offences serve as the legal basis for this. Persons whose public criticism is directed against the system of the Islamic Republic of Iran as such and who also maintain intensive foreign contacts can be accused of espionage ([AA 15/7/2024](#)). The majority of those executed in the period 2010-2024 for membership in a banned organisation belonged to an ethnic minority ([IHRNGO 20/2/2025](#)). The Israeli military operation in mid-June 2025 led Iranian security authorities to further intensify their internal security crackdown, including mass arrests, executions and the deployment of military units. The authorities are concerned about Israeli agents, ethnic separatists and the People's Mujahadeen-e Khalq [MEK] ([REU 26/6/2025a](#)), with Israel having cultivated relations with various dissident and ethnic minority groups in the past ([Bob/Evyatar 2023](#)).

The Iranian opposition groups reflect different political grievances, ethnic tensions and ideological currents. The regime's most visible opponents are based in part or entirely outside Iran. Their goals are either regime change or the self-determination of an ethnic group within Iran. The government has persecuted and prosecuted members of the groups mentioned below. Some groups have links to neighbouring governments in the region, others operate from Europe ([USIP 2/7/2020](#)).

The militant separatist groups in Iran include in particular the Kurdish-Marxist Komala(h) Party(ies), the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (KDPI), the Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê [Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan] (PJAK), which is closely linked to its sister organisation, the Turkish Kurdistan Workers' Party - PKK, the Jundallah ([AA 15/7/2024](#)) from Balochistan, its splinter organisation Jaish al-Adl (Army of Justice [JAA, JUA]) and the Arab Struggle Movement for the Liberation of Ahwaz (ASMLA) in the province of Khuzestan. The Mujahadeen-e Khalq (MEK) advocates regime change from exile. It has renounced violence since 2003 ([USIP 2/7/2020](#)).

The Iranian secret services also monitor the activities of groups such as the MEK, members of the separatist liberation movement for the Ahwaz region and Iranian-Kurdish movements in Western countries ([BMP 7/10/2022](#)). In individual cases, there were also kidnappings and killings of dissidents abroad ([USIP 5/4/2023](#)).

The activities of Kurdish political groups in exile are closely monitored and sanctioned (AA 15/7/2024). In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) in northern Iraq in particular, there are repeated attacks on this group of people (AA 15/7/2024; cf. BAMF 18/3/2024) and the firing of missiles and drones at centres of Kurdish opposition in exile by forces of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards (AA 15/7/2024; cf. TWI 13/9/2023).

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4.1.1 People's Mujahedin (Mujahedin-e-Khalq - MEK, MKO; People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran - PMOI; National Council of Resistance of Iran - NCRI)

Last modification 2025-07-15 10:31

The exile political group Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK/MKO [also: Iranian People's Mujahedin Organisation, PMOI]), based in France and Albania, was founded in 1965 as opposition to Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. In the 1970s, the group carried out assassinations and suicide attacks on the Iranian government at the time, but also on Western - particularly US - facilities in Iran, such as hotels, companies and airlines (AA 15/7/2024). During the Iranian revolution, the group, which was labelled 'Islamist-Marxist', supported Ayatollah Khomeini in his fight against Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (Amwaj 14/12/2023; cf. SFH 20/7/2018). After the 1979 revolution, however, the group's activities were directed against the system of the Islamic Republic and the clerics' power apparatus (AA 15/7/2024). The organisation was driven out of Iran into exile in Iraq in the early 1980s after opposing Khomeini. The MEK is held responsible for various attacks

(SFH 20/7/2018), including the targeted killing of a former president and a prime minister (AJ 30/10/2023), and took part in the first Gulf War (1980-1988) as an ally of the Iraqi side. In 1987, the organisation founded an armed arm, the National Liberation Army (NLA), and from 1988 conducted armed operations from its base in Ashraf, 60km from Baghdad. During this period, the Iranian authorities executed hundreds to thousands of MEK members, who were labelled enemies of the nation and traitors. In 2003, the MEK disarmed and announced its renunciation of violence. From 2011, the majority of MEK members in Iraq settled in Albania as part of a UNHCR-supported resettlement programme. In September 2016, the last People's Mujahedeen are said to have left their camp in Iraq (SFH 20/7/2018). More than 2,000 People's Mujahideen were brought to Albania, where they set up the 'Ashraf 3' camp (MEI 22/12/2022). Many of them have since travelled on to the EU and the USA (Guardian 9/11/2018). While the MEK was classified as a terrorist organisation by the US in the years 1997-2012 (in the EU from 2002 to 2009) (AA 15/7/2024), the classification was revoked after intensive lobbying by the group and because it renounced violence (MEI 22/12/2022). In France, the MEK leadership founded the [still active] National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) in the 1980s as the political arm of the organisation (Telepolis 18/1/2019).

According to the Iranian government, the MEK is responsible for the deaths of more than 12,000 Iranians in around three decades (CFR 28/7/2014). It is classified as a terrorist organisation by the Iranian government (AA 15/7/2024; cf. Landinfo 12/4/2021) and is considered an enemy of the state. Its members are combated by all means (including abduction, alleged planning of an attack in Paris) (AA 15/7/2024). The Iranian regime accuses the MEK of instigating protests in collaboration with foreign powers. Consequently, those suspected of having links to this group - including family members - risk strong reactions (Landinfo 12/4/2021). The Iranian authorities are monitoring the activities of MEK members in exile (Landinfo 28/11/2022). In June 2018, a planned attack on an MEK meeting near Paris was foiled (ÖB Teheran 11/2021; cf. BMIH/ BfV 7/6/2022) and events in Albania in which MEK members wanted to participate were also reportedly threatened by attacks (Landinfo 28/11/2022). In addition, hostilities between the Islamic Republic and the MEK have manifested themselves in recent years primarily in the form of cyber warfare and political and legal campaigns. In December 2023, the Iranian judiciary began convicting over 100 alleged MEK members in absentia (Amwaj 14/12/2023), and the MEK is believed to be conducting covert operations and information campaigns from its foreign bases in Albania and France (Intercept 11/2/2023; cf. CNN 5/10/2022). In June 2023, the Albanian security authorities raided Camp Ashraf 3, with Albanian media reporting that this was part of a cybercrime investigation. The group's settlement in Albania had raised fears of Iranian attacks on the country. In 2022, Tirana broke off diplomatic relations with Tehran and accused Iran of carrying out massive cyberattacks against Albania (FR24 20/6/2023; cf. Amwaj 14/12/2023). One of Iran's goals is to extradite MEK supporters to the country (Amwaj 14/12/2023; cf. IRINTL 7/5/2024). After the start of the Israeli military operation against Iran in mid-June 2025, a hacker group associated with the Revolutionary Guards carried out another cyberattack in Albania (Politico 21/6/2025).

The group has changed significantly over time, both organisationally and strategically, but maintains its main goal of regime change in Iran. Although the MEK claims to represent the Iranian people and emphasises its role in the protests of recent years, there is little evidence that it receives significant support in Iran (Landinfo 12/4/2021). According to observers, the MEK is decidedly unpopular among Iranians of all political orientations (Intercept 11/2/2023; cf. Newsweek 16/6/2025, NYT 26/6/2025). The MEK plays no role in political life within Iran (CRS 25/2/2025). In recent years, it appears to have focussed on influencing public opinion and gaining international support as a viable alternative to the current regime. The organisation conducts extensive PR and lobbying campaigns, including through the above-mentioned NRCI (Landinfo 12/4/2021). Formerly considered Marxist, the MEK now maintains contacts with right-wing conservative parties such as the US Republicans (taz 11/2/2024; cf. CNN 10/7/2023) and the Spanish Vox (taz 11/2/2024; cf. Spiegel 21/11/2023) as well as representatives of the Berlin CDU (BZ 13/9/2023). The MEK's sources of funding remain opaque, but the group regularly organises rallies and public events that are also attended by foreign dignitaries (Intercept 11/2/2023).

The MEK has long maintained relations with Israel (Newsweek 16/6/2025) and while the group denies collaborating with Israel (Newsweek 16/6/2025), according to reports from 2012, the MEK has received training and funding from Israel (and the US) in the past with the aim of disrupting Iran's nuclear programme (Haaretz 7/4/2012; cf. Bob/Evyatar 2023). Just a few days before the start of the Israeli military operation in mid-June 2025, the group published information allegedly proving that Iran was secretly working on nuclear weapons (Newsweek 16/6/2025). In 2002, they were the first to publicly reveal Iran's uranium enrichment programme (REU 24/6/2025).

MEK commanders are repeatedly accused by former members of systematically abusing MEK members in order to silence them. Torture, solitary confinement, confiscation of assets and separation of families are used to maintain control over the members. Such allegations are rejected by the MEK (Guardian 9/11/2018). The MEK is also accused of being a sect (Intercept 11/2/2023; cf. AEI 17/1/2023, CFR 28/7/2014).

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4.1.2 *Kurdish separatist groups*

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The militant separatist groups in Iran include in particular the Kurdish-Marxist Komala[h] Party[s], the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (KDPI) and the Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistane [Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan] (PJAK), which works closely with its sister organisation, the Turkish Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) (AA 15/7/2024), as well as the Kurdistan Freedom Party (PAK) [Parti Azadiye Kurdistan] (Amwaj 13/3/2024; cf. Medium 3/1/2024). The KDPI is the largest and oldest party. It tends to attract traditionalist cadres. Komala is a left-wing party that scores points above all with its progressive attitudes, especially towards women. The PAK is the smallest of the four parties and has hardly any presence outside its cadres in the Kurdistan Region, where it maintains close ties with the Erbil-based Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) (TNA 17/6/2025). Somewhat apart from this is the PJAK, the Iranian offshoot of the PKK, which is part of this transnational ideological movement. For some observers, there is little difference between the two (TNA 17/6/2025; cf. Amwaj 21/5/2025). In May 2025, the PKK announced its dissolution and an end to armed resistance. It is unclear how this will affect the PJAK in concrete terms. Although the organisation welcomed the PKK's move, it also emphasised that it would not lay down its arms or give up the armed struggle itself (Amwaj 21/5/2025; cf. TNA 17/6/2025).

The Iranian authorities regard the groups as terrorist and separatist organisations that carry out attacks on the Iranian security authorities (K24 28/11/2022; cf. Medium 3/1/2024) and are 'linked' to Israel (TNA 6/5/2024). They persecute these groups (AA 15/7/2024). Armed clashes between the regime and militant Kurdish groups flare up again and again (AGSIW 14/10/2022; cf. Rudaw 2/5/2024).

The Israeli military operation in mid-June 2025 led to the Iranian security authorities stepping up their crackdown on internal opposition even further - especially in the Kurdish region (REU 26/6/2025a). Some Kurdish groups have been in contact with Israel in recent decades (Newsweek 16/6/2025), and after the start of the Israeli military operation, the KDPI, Komala, PAK and PJAK called on the Kurdish population to overthrow the Iranian regime (TNA 17/6/2025). Representatives of large separatist groups based in Iraq have reported that a number of their activists and fighters have been arrested in Iran. A representative of the KDPI stated that the Revolutionary Guards have been going from house to house in the Kurdish areas looking for suspects and weapons, among other things. According to a Komala representative, further checkpoints were set up in the Kurdish region and searches of people and mobile phones were carried out (REU 26/6/2025a).

Since Kurdish opposition parties are illegal in Iran, the Iranian government treats their members and those who [actually or from the government's point of view] support them more harshly than civilian activists in the Kurdish region. On the other hand, the Iranian government sees any kind of political or civil activism as a potential threat, so that these activists also run the risk of being persecuted. Even simple activities, such as taking part in protest marches or general strikes, can lead to accusations of co-operating with opposition parties. A journalist based in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) stated that the Iranian authorities usually do not differentiate between party members, supporters and not even independent activists. The persecution of individuals is arbitrary and varies from case to case. Whether the Iranian government distinguishes between party members and supporters depends, among other things, on the intelligence officer in charge (DIS 7/2/2020). What is striking about the state's persecution of Kurds is the frequent convictions in connection with allegations of terrorism - in particular support for the PJAK, which is considered a terrorist organisation, or the communist Komala party[s] - and the often disproportionately high level of punishment (ÖB Teheran 11/2021).

The extent of the civil political activities of the Kurdish opposition parties in Iran, especially the KDPI and Komala, is generally limited due to the controls they face. When these parties carry out civil political activities, they do so in secrecy to prevent the authorities from taking action against them. However, the parties support the activities of others, such as organisations that focus on both environmental and social issues. The Kurdish political parties carry out propaganda activities to raise awareness of the Iranian government's policies and encourage people to protest against the government through various peaceful and solution-oriented measures such as demonstrations, general strikes and symbolic acts such as wearing Kurdish clothes on special occasions (DIS 7/2/2020). For example, following calls by human rights organisations and a Kurdish party following the execution of four Komala members, labour strikes took place in bazaars in several Kurdish cities such as Sanandaj, Saqqez and Mahabad in January 2024 (IRWIRE 30/1/2024; cf. Rudaw 30/1/2024).

With regard to the recruitment of members, it should be noted that the rules for membership in the Iranian Kurdish political parties (KDPI and Komala) are not always straightforward and membership can be obtained through various procedures. People in the Kurdish region of Iran can become members through the secret networks of these parties, or they can contact members of the party in the KRI themselves and become members. Prospective members undergo a vetting process in order to exclude spies from the Iranian government, for example. The Ministry of Intelligence and the Revolutionary Guards frequently threaten or bribe people in order to use them as scouts (DIS 7/2/2020). Both the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence (MOIS/VAJA) and the intelligence service of the Revolutionary Guards have a network of informants who follow and report on the activities of Iranian-Kurdish parties in the KRI. Members of the parties are contacted by the Iranian secret service and subjected to threats and pressure. The families of members in Iran are also frequently contacted in order to persuade family members belonging to the parties to leave the parties and return to Iran. The higher the position of a party member, the greater the pressure on the family in Iran (Landinfo 19/5/2020).

Many of the Kurdish parties, such as the KDPI, the Komala parties, PAK and PJAK, operate from the territory of the KRI (K24 28/11/2022; cf. Landinfo 18/12/2020), with most of the parties being in areas under the control of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), while PJAK operates from the Kandil Mountains, which are controlled by the PKK (TWI 13/9/2023). The status and room for manoeuvre of Kurdish opposition groups such as KDPI, Komala and PJAK have been a difficult issue in relations between Iran and the KRI. The KRI has reached agreements for a formalised presence with several Iranian Kurdish exile parties such as the KDPI, the various Komala factions and the Kurdish Freedom Party (PAK), but not with the PJAK. Due to the need for a good neighbourly relationship with Iran, the KRI has demanded that the Iranian-Kurdish parties in exile refrain from all military activities against Iran. This was a condition for the exile parties to be allowed to operate in bases and camps in northern Iraq. This formalised presence is accompanied by financial support, access to schools, healthcare and other public services (Landinfo 18/12/2020).

When protests broke out in Iran in September 2022, state propaganda focused on portraying the demonstrations, which initially erupted in Iran's Kurdish areas, as a plot by Kurdish opposition groups in exile across the border. The Kurdish parties have firmly rejected the accusations (Amwaj 1/9/2023; cf. TNA 6/5/2024). The government has deployed military forces to Kurdish areas in Iran (Amwaj 1/9/2023) and repeatedly attacked positions of Iranian Kurdish opposition groups in the KRI with drones and missiles (Amwaj 1/9/2023; cf. K24 28/11/2022, Rudaw 28/9/2022) and increased pressure on the governments in Baghdad and Erbil to take action against these opposition groups (Amwaj 13/3/2024). To allay Iran's concerns, Iraq [*note: i.e. the federal Iraqi government and not the KRG*] deployed border guards on the border with Iran in December 2022 and signed a border security agreement with Iran in March 2023 (TWI 13/9/2023), under which the Iraqi government committed to relocate the Iranian Kurdish groups and strengthen border controls (Amwaj 13/3/2024; cf. TNA 9/10/2023). The agreement also provides for the disarmament of the groups and the extradition of wanted persons by Baghdad (Medium 3/1/2024). It is questionable to what extent the agreement will be implemented (Amwaj 1/9/2023). In November 2023, representatives of the KDPI and a Komala faction as well as a member of a human rights organisation interviewed by Landinfo stated that some KDPI camps had been evacuated, while the Komala continued to hold on to their bases. PAK camps were also evacuated and the group's members disarmed. Landinfo, however, could find no evidence that the PJAK has been disarmed or that it has evacuated its positions (Landinfo 4/12/2023). It had announced that it would not be disarmed (ANF 11/9/2023).

While the attacks declined after the Iranian protests largely subsided in January 2023 following a massive crackdown, Iran has continued to carry out assassinations of Iranian-Kurdish opposition figures in the Kurdistan Region (TWI 13/9/2023; cf. Amwaj 1/9/2023). For example, Iran is credited with the killing of two KDPI members in July 2023 (TWI 13/9/2023; cf. Hengaw 7/7/2023) and one Komala member in March 2024 (BAMF 18/3/2024).

Although the aforementioned parties have military wings and carry out actions against the Iranian security forces, the importance of the Kurdish-Iranian opposition groups in the KRI is exaggerated by the Iranian regime according to one expert - primarily to justify the unlawful violent action

against the protest movement in their own country, but also to signal to neighbouring countries that the opposition groups are the real cause of instability in the country (Media Line 8/9/2023). Both the KDPI and Komala, PAK and PJAK have at times waged armed battles against the Iranian state (TNA 17/6/2025). For example, in October 2024 and June 2023, there were armed clashes between the PJAK and Iranian security authorities in north-west Iran (BAMF 28/10/2024, ACLED 6/7/2023). However, none of the parties were involved in active hostilities before the start of the war with Israel in mid-June 2025 (TNA 17/6/2025).

Note: Detailed information on some of the groups described can be found in the ACCORD report 'Iran: Information on the parties PDKI, KDP-I, Komala PIK, Komala KTP, Komalah-CPI, Komala-CPI, WCPI, WP- Hekmatist, WPI-Hekmatist (Khat Rasmi) [a-11979]' dated 24 November 2022.

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4.1.3 Ahwazi separatist groups

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Several Ahwazi separatist groups are active in Khuzestan and abroad. Groups calling for an independent Arab state include the Arab Struggle Movement for the Liberation of Ahwaz (ASMLA [in Arabic: Harakat an-Nidal al-Arabi li-Tahrir al-'Ahwaz; also al-Ahwaziya]), the National Organisation for the Liberation of Ahwaz (also known as Hazm), the Ahwazi Popular Democratic Front (APDF), the Falcons of Ahwaz (USIP 3/2/2021) and the Democratic Revolutionary Front for the Liberation of Arabistan (DRFLA) (MEE 2/12/2022).

The best-known group is the ASMLA, which consists of two rival offshoots based in Copenhagen and The Hague and the Mohiuddin Nasser Martyrs Brigade, a militia operating in Khuzestan

province (USIP 3/2/2021). The group has been linked to several attacks in Iran, including bombings in Ahwaz in 2005 and 2006, attacks on oil pipelines in southern Iran in 2017 and a deadly attack on a military parade in Ahwaz in 2018 (Amwaj 16/5/2023) in which at least 25 people were killed (VOA 12/1/2024). It is a militant separatist group that advocates for an independent state in Khuzestan (USIP 2/7/2020) and is classified as a terrorist organisation by Iran, but not by the EU (DN.nl 1/11/2022). Iranian authorities have blamed Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for violent incidents in Khuzestan. For example, after an attack in 2012, they accused ASMLA members of receiving financial support and training from Dubai (LOBE 20/11/2017). In 2022, a Danish court considered it proven that three ASMLA members had spied in Denmark on behalf of Saudi Arabia (EN 3/2/2022; cf. VOA 12/1/2024).

In May 2023, the Iranian authorities executed a former ASMLA leader and dissident following a conviction for forming and leading the ASMLA and 'corruption on earth', including for his involvement in 'numerous' terrorist attacks. The Swedish-Iranian citizen had disappeared in 2020 while travelling to Turkey and was later brought before a court in Tehran (Spiegel 6/5/2023; cf. DW 6/5/2023). In April 2024, further death sentences were reported against six people accused of membership of ASMLA and involvement in operations that led to the deaths of security forces (IRINTL 27/4/2024).

Arabs are disproportionately often sentenced to very high penalties for vaguely defined charges (such as 'mohareb' and 'mofsid-fil-arz'). After the [above-mentioned] terrorist attack in Ahwaz in September 2018, which left 30 people dead, 22 people from the underground organisation ASMLA were officially arrested, while the opposition reported up to 800 arrests (ÖB Teheran 11/2021).

Members of separatist liberation movements from the Ahwaz region are also being monitored by the Iranian side in Europe (BMP 7/10/2022; cf. Sveriges 19/9/2023). In 2017, a leader of the ASMLA was murdered in the Netherlands after having been threatened and intimidated for years (DN.nl 1/11/2022).

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4.1.4 *Baloch separatist groups*

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The Baloch ethnic group, which lives in the border triangle of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran, is united by a history of striving for independence from Tehran and Islamabad. There have been repeated uprisings in the porous border region in recent decades. The area in which they live is rich in natural resources and Baloch separatists complain that their people, who are among the poorest in the region, have received little of the wealth (CNN 18/1/2024; cf. Qantara 23/1/2024). Efforts for autonomy or independence have been violently suppressed on both sides of the border for decades. On the Pakistani side, they are seen as an attempt to divide the country; on the Iranian side, the fact that the Baloch are a Sunni minority in an otherwise predominantly Shiite country makes matters worse. Accordingly, both states are taking tough action against the ethnic group. On the other hand, some Baluchis have also become radicalised. Several groups of militant insurgents have carried out attacks on both sides of the border in the past and then used the respective neighbouring country as a retreat (Qantara 23/1/2024).

The Islamist insurgency in Balochistan took shape in its modern form about twenty years ago (Zenith 26/1/2024). From 2002, the militant Islamist group Jundallah, the 'Soldiers of God', waged an insurgency against the government (USIP 9/3/2023; cf. Mendes/JIPA 31/8/2020). Between 2006 and 2011, it carried out attacks with fatalities. The suicide attacks mainly targeted members of the security forces and Shiite believers and testify to the influence of al-Qaeda tactics on the group (Zenith 26/1/2024). In 2010, it split into several sub-groups, of which Jaish al-Adl (JAA [also JUA], 'Army of Justice'), founded in 2012, is the most influential (NCTC 10/2022; cf. Mendes/JIPA 31/8/2020). The group carries out attacks in which members of the Revolutionary Guards, the Basij and the police are killed (Zenith 26/1/2024; cf. Amwaj 9/4/2024). It has intensified its attacks since December 2023 (ISW 10/3/2025; cf. Standard 4/4/2024). In 2025,

it also carried out several attacks on security forces in Sistan and Balochistan and there were armed clashes between security forces and Jaish al-Adl (ACLED 20/6/2025).

The group's renaissance is associated with the 'Bloody Friday', among other things, in which over 90 people were killed by security forces [in Zahedan, the capital of Sistan and Balochistan] on 30 September 2022 in the course of anti-regime protests (Zenith 26/1/2024; cf. ISW 4/4/2024). The originally anti-Shia orientation of Jaish al-Adl has since given way to hostility towards the Islamic Republic of Iran. Especially after the rise of the so-called Islamic State (ISIS), the group has toned down its sectarian rhetoric. In response to the protest movement since autumn 2022, Jaish al-Adl has instead positioned itself as an advocate for equal rights for all ethnic groups in Iran (Zenith 26/1/2024). After a major attack in early April 2024, the group also cited Iranian cooperation with China, India and Russia as a further reason. Jaish al-Adl is trying to prevent construction projects on the coast in the region (ISW 4/4/2024).

The regime (allegedly and actually) persecutes militant, separatist groups such as the Jundallah (AA 15/7/2024). Jaish al-Adl is listed by the Iranian authorities as a terrorist organisation and Iranian government representatives often refer to the group as Jaish al-Zulm (Army of Injustice) or 'Takfir terrorists' (IRINTL 21/1/2024). The Iranian security authorities carry out operations against the group (ISW 18/4/2025, ISW 10/3/2025, ISW 25/2/2025). In January 2024, Iranian security forces also attacked alleged Jaish al-Adl strongholds in Pakistan with missiles. Pakistan, for its part, responded by bombing alleged positions of a Pakistani Baloch organisation in Iranian Sistan and Balochistan (AJ 18/6/2025; cf. JF 9/7/2024). For decades, the two countries have accused each other of supporting militant, anti-government groups on the other side. At the end of 2024, however, it was reported that the two countries want to expand their cooperation in the fight against the increased number of attacks (RFE/RL 3/12/2024).

Among the parties banned in Iran is the Free Balochistan Movement (FBM), which aims to unite the Baloch people in Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan (IPS 3/11/2023) and is active in Europe, among other places (India TV 20/8/2023; cf. Mendes/JIPA 31/8/2020). People who campaign for the preservation of linguistic or cultural identity are also often persecuted as separatists and sometimes sentenced to long prison terms (AA 15/7/2024).

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5 Legal protection / judicial system

Last modification 2025-07-16 08:01

The law is comprehensively codified in all areas of law, such as civil law, family and inheritance law and criminal law. The Iranian courts must dispense justice on the basis of these laws. The binding nature of jurisdiction to the law is therefore formally guaranteed (LTO 26/10/2022). Although the principle of legality is protected by the constitution, it is subject to a reservation. Article 167 of the Constitution, one of the most controversial articles, states that judges are obliged to endeavour to decide each case on the basis of codified law (Islamic Law Blog 22/11/2015). However, in case of the absence, insufficiency, brevity or inconsistency of laws, judges must decide the case on the basis of authoritative Islamic sources and authentic fatāwā in order

to prevent a case from remaining undecided (Islamic Law Blog 22/11/2015; cf. USDOS 23/4/2024).

Article 57 of the constitution gives the revolutionary leader far-reaching supervisory powers over the judiciary (BS 19/3/2024). He appoints the head of the judiciary for a five-year term (FH 2025; cf. AA 15/7/2024), who in turn is responsible for appointing and dismissing the heads of the courts (Soltani/Shooshinasab 8/2022) and judges (BS 19/3/2024). The independence of the courts, which is also enshrined in the constitution (AA 15/7/2024), and the principle of separation of powers are thus severely restricted in practice (AA 15/7/2024; cf. BS 19/3/2024).

While the courts enjoy a certain degree of autonomy within the ruling establishment, the judicial system is regularly used as an instrument to silence critics of the regime and members of the opposition (FH 2025). The security apparatus (AA 15/7/2024) - in particular the Revolutionary Guards and their intelligence service (BS 19/3/2024) - exert massive influence on sentencing, especially in political cases (AA 15/7/2024; cf. BS 19/3/2024). The judicial system is characterised by corruption. According to reliable statements by lawyers, judges are sometimes prepared to make concessions in return for appropriate compensation (AA 15/7/2024).

The authorities routinely violate basic procedural standards, especially in politically sensitive cases (FH 2025) and in revolutionary courts (HRW 16/1/2025). Activists are arrested without warrants, detained indefinitely without formal charges, and denied access to legal counsel or any contact with the outside world (FH 2025). Particularly during the investigation phase of proceedings, the authorities regularly restrict the right of detainees to access to a lawyer (HRW 16/1/2025; cf. AI 29/4/2025). Defence lawyers' access to state evidence is often restricted or denied. The presumption of innocence is not respected - especially in politically charged proceedings. Witnesses are forced to make incriminating statements through threats. Torture and psychological pressure are common means of forcing confessions in political cases. In particularly prominent cases, forced confessions are broadcast on state television. Solitary confinement is also used to put political prisoners under psychological pressure (AA 15/7/2024). Many are later convicted in trials, which sometimes last only a few minutes, on vague security charges (FH 2025), with 'confessions' that have been extorted under torture being admitted as evidence at the trials (HRW 16/1/2025; cf. AI 29/4/2025).

Legal protection is limited (AA 15/7/2024). There are cases of lawyers who represented dissidents and were subsequently imprisoned and banned from practising their profession or forced to leave the country to avoid prosecution (FH 2025). Lawyers who take on political cases are systematically intimidated or prevented from taking on mandates (AA 15/7/2024). A lawyer who has represented defendants in political cases before revolutionary courts in the past reported, among other things, permanent surveillance as soon as such cases are taken on. Some lawyers are also currently facing very long prison sentences (MRAI 19/6/2023). Foreexample, the lawyer Amirsalar Davoudi, who represented political prisoners and publicly denounced abuses in the justice system, was sentenced to 30 years in prison in 2019 (IHRNGO 1/12/2022), which has a pronounced deterrent effect on other lawyers (MRAI 19/6/2023).

Iran has a bar association (Iranian Bar Association; IBA) that is set up as an independent organisation and whose independence the judiciary attempts to restrict. IBA lawyers are subject to state pressure and intimidation (AA 15/7/2024). In order to obtain a lawyer's licence, candidates have in the past had to pass an examination at the IBA (MBZ 9/2023; cf. Soltani/Shooshinasab 8/2022). In August 2023, the Iranian parliament passed a law that transferred control over the issuing of lawyers' licences to the Ministry of Industry, Mines and Trade (MBZ 9/2023).

Cases of clan detention exist, mostly in political cases, including those with foreign connections; however, it is more common for family members to be pressurised to influence the accused to refrain from political activities (AA 15/7/2024).

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5.1 Courts

Last modification 2025-07-17 12:30

The Iranian judiciary administers a multi-layered court system. Prosecutions originate in lower courts and can be appealed to higher courts. The Supreme Court reviews cases of capital offences and decides on death sentences. It is also responsible for ensuring the proper application of the law and the uniformity of court proceedings (USIP 1/8/2015). Certain judgements can be appealed to the Supreme Court (Soltani/Shooshinasab 8/2022; cf. Landinfo/CEDOCA/SEM 12/2021). Unlike the courts of appeal, the Supreme Court is not authorised to pass a new

judgement and, in the event of a successful appeal, it refers the case in question back to a competent court ([Landinfo/CEDOCA/SEM 12/2021](#)).

There are general and special courts. The general courts have jurisdiction in all cases that do not fall within the jurisdiction of the special courts ([Soltani/Shooshinasab 8/2022](#)). They are distributed among the smaller counties, districts and boroughs of the country ([IRWIRE 9/9/2020](#)).

Since 2001, there have also been so-called dispute resolution councils (shurāhā-I hal-e ikhtilāf) as alternative dispute resolution bodies. The judges of these councils may, in consultation with the council members, rule on certain matters relating to finance, rent, inheritance, dowry and maintenance, as well as certain ta'zir offences [see Subchap. [Legal protection / Judiciary / Islamic Penal Code \(IStGB\), sentencing practice](#) f. explanation of terms] hear cases and pass judgements. However, they cannot, for example, deal with divorce issues and are not authorised to pronounce corporal or custodial sentences. The jurisdiction of the dispute resolution councils in the villages is limited to peace and compromise decisions ([Soltani/Shooshinasab 8/2022](#)).

The civil courts hear local material and non-material civil disputes that do not fall within the jurisdiction of the dispute settlement councils ([Soltani/Shooshinasab 8/2022](#)).

The family courts rule on matters such as marriage and divorce, custody [note: but not guardianship] and gender reassignment surgery. The judgements are made by a male judge after he has consulted an advisory female judge in writing ([Soltani/Shooshinasab 8/2022](#)).

The criminal courts are divided into various sub-units ([IRWIRE 9/9/2020](#)). In addition to Criminal Courts 1 and 2, there are Revolutionary Courts, Juvenile Courts and Military Courts ([Landinfo/CEDOCA/SEM 12/2021](#); cf. [Soltani/Shooshinasab 8/2022](#)). There are also several special courts ([IRWIRE 9/9/2020](#)), including, for example, a special court for the clergy (dadgah-e vīzheh-ye rouhaniyat), which is the only court that does not report directly to the head of the judiciary but to the revolutionary leader ([Landinfo/CEDOCA/SEM 12/2021](#)). Among other things, it is used to prosecute prominent clerics who criticise the regime ([IRWIRE 9/9/2020](#); cf. [USIP 1/8/2015](#)). The law also allows for the establishment of a competent court to deal with violations of the 1986 Press Law - the so-called Press Court ([Landinfo/CEDOCA/SEM 12/2021](#)).

Revolutionary Courts

The Revolutionary Courts have different branches in the capital, in the provinces and in some judicial districts ([Landinfo/CEDOCA/SEM 12/2021](#)). The Constitution does not provide for their establishment or give a mandate for the Revolutionary Courts. They were originally created after the 1979 revolution to try high-ranking officials of the deposed monarchy and were later institutionalised. They continue to operate in parallel with the rest of the criminal justice system ([USDOS 23/4/2024](#)) and are heavily influenced by the security authorities ([MRAI 19/6/2023](#)), or some sources assume that the Revolutionary Courts operate in collaboration with the Revolutionary Guards and the Ministry of Intelligence (MOIS) ([Landinfo/CEDOCA/SEM 12/2021](#)).

The Revolutionary Courts differ from other courts in terms of the matters they deal with. They primarily deal with offences related to national security, which basically includes all political and social activities of dissidents and human rights activists (MRAI 19/6/2023). According to Article 303 of the Criminal Procedure Code, the following offences fall under the jurisdiction of the Revolutionary Courts (FIDH 9/2023):

- All crimes against national and international security, mohārebeh (taking up arms against God and state) or baghei (armed insurrection against the government) (Soltani/Shooshinasab 8/2022; cf.IRWIRE 9/9/2020) and efsād fe-l-arz [corruption on earth] - each defined and criminalised in Articles 279 to 285 and 286 to 288 of the Islamic Penal Code of 2013 (IPC) (Soltani/Shooshinasab 8/2022), rebellion, collusion and assembly against the Islamic Republic of Iran or armed action, arson, destruction and waste of property to oppose the regime (Soltani/Shooshinasab 8/2022; cf.JIS 8/9/2018);
- Espionage against the regime (JIS 8/9/2018), espionage on behalf of foreigners (Art. 502 IPC) (FIDH 9/2023);
- Insulting the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Supreme Leader (Art. 514) (FIDH 9/2023; cf.JIS 8/9/2018);
- All offences related to drugs, psychotropic substances and their precursors and smuggling of weapons, ammunition and other relevant items (Soltani/Shooshinasab 8/2022; cf.JIS 8/9/2018);
- Other cases for which the Revolutionary Court has jurisdiction by law (Soltani/Shooshinasab 8/2022): e.g. offences mentioned in Art. 49 of the Constitution such as bribery, corruption, embezzlement of public funds and waste of national wealth (JIS 8/9/2018; cf.Soltani/Shooshinasab 8/2022).

While there are certain problems in all Iranian courts, the Revolutionary Courts are particularly notorious for failing to uphold even the most basic rights (MRAI 19/6/2023). According to human rights groups and international observers, Revolutionary Courts, which generally hear the cases of political prisoners, routinely hold grossly unfair trials without due process, hand down pre-determined judgements and advocate executions for political purposes. These unfair practices reportedly occur at all stages of criminal proceedings in the Revolutionary Courts (USDOS 23/4/2024).

Lawyers in Revolutionary Courts usually require permission from judges even just to be allowed to enter the courtroom. Lawyers of people who have been charged with mohārebeh in the past have sometimes been refused permission to attend the trial. In other security-related cases, they were allowed to attend, but their right to an adequate defence was restricted (Landinfo/CEDOCA/SEM 12/2021). An amendment to the Code of Criminal Procedure in 2015 further eroded the already limited rights of defendants in trials for offences against national security. For example, the amendment denied defendants and their lawyers the right to a copy of the court file (MRAI 19/6/2023) and, at least at the beginning of a trial (AA 15/7/2024) - the investigation stage - (MRAI 19/6/2023), defendants may only choose from a list of lawyers approved by

the state and therefore presumed to be system-friendly (AA 15/7/2024; cf. MRAI 19/6/2023). Sensitive information is often uncovered during this important phase of the proceedings, and this restriction of selection gives rise to concerns about the fairness and transparency of the proceedings (MRAI 19/6/2023).

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5.2 Islamic Penal Code (IPC), sentencing practice

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The Iranian judiciary is a unique system in that it combines Islamic principles and an overall structure inspired by the French system. After the Islamic revolution, the judicial system was heavily modified to incorporate Sharia law. However, the new system was built on a pre-existing secular structure, resulting in a very complex judicial system (Landinfo/CEDOCA/SEM 12/2021).

The Islamic revolution of 1979 saw the reintroduction of Islamic criminal law, which replaced the previous legislation influenced by the 'code pénal napoléon' of 1810 (BAMF 5/2021). The severity and nature of an offence and the prescribed punishment determine which court is responsible for deciding a case. Article 14 of the Islamic Penal Code (IPC) divides crimes into four categories of punishment according to Sharia law: hadd, qisas, diyah and ta'zīr (Landinfo/CEDOCA/SEM 12/2021).

Hadd offences include fornication/adultery (zina), sodomy (levat), lesbian relationships (mosa-heqeh), procuring prostitution (qavadī), false accusation of fornication/sodomy (qazf), slandering the Prophet (sabb-e nabī), alcohol consumption (shorb-e khamr), robbery/theft, taking up arms against God (mohārebeh ba khoda), corruption on earth (mofsad/efsad fe-l-arz) and rebellion

(baghei). The hadd punishments include the death penalty, also in the form of stoning or crucifixion, flogging, amputation (of hand and foot), life imprisonment and banishment. The nature and extent of these punishments are determined by Islamic law and are considered to have been determined by God; they can therefore not be changed by a judge, nor can convicts be pardoned ([Landinfo/CEDOCA/SEM 12/2021](#)).

Iranian activists and dissidents, including members of ethnic and religious minorities, usually face vaguely worded and broad charges stemming from the IPC. The hadd offences of 'taking up arms against God' (mohārebeh) and 'corruption on earth' (efsād fe-l-arz) are the most notorious ([Landinfo/CEDOCA/SEM 12/2021](#)). Some interpretations of 'taking up arms against God' (mohārebeh) even include knives as weapons. It can therefore happen that people are accused of mohārebeh because they were carrying a knife. This offence is used in particular against minority groups such as members of the Kurdish community if they are accused of having links to militant groups. Mofsad/efsad fe-l-arz ('corruption on earth'), on the other hand, is a completely different category. The definition of this term is up to the respective judge. This can include sexual offences as well as white-collar crime if the act is interpreted as so serious that it poses a serious threat to society ([MRAI 19/6/2023](#)). Hadd penalties are dealt with in the second book of the IPC (Art. 217-288) ([BAMF 5/2021](#)).

Qisas offences are so-called talion or retributive punishments ([Landinfo/CEDOCA/SEM 12/2021](#); cf. [BAMF 5/2021](#)). They are based on a principle of Islamic law that allows victims to receive analogous retribution for violent crimes such as manslaughter or assault - provided that the offences were intentional. Relatives of a homicide victim (next of kin) and victims of bodily harm can also demand monetary compensation (diyah or blood money) instead of retribution and arrange for the release of the perpetrator. They can also forgive the offender completely and waive diyah. The Iranian legal system regards these crimes as a matter between private individuals. The role of the state is to facilitate investigations and trials in these cases and to ensure that subsequent punishments are carried out in an organised manner. However, even if the blood avengers waive their right to retribution, the state may impose an additional penalty if it considers that the crime disturbs public order and the security of society ([Landinfo/CEDOCA/SEM 12/2021](#)).

In cases of bodily harm, retribution is rare. Even in cases of murder, it is often more attractive for relatives to accept diyah. In cases of non-intentional bodily harm or manslaughter, however, diyah is generally provided for (and not only considered as an alternative to retribution, if the victims or their relatives agree). Diyah is also applied in some cases of intentional bodily harm where retribution is prohibited or impracticable ([Landinfo/CEDOCA/SEM 12/2021](#)). Qisas penalties are dealt with in the third book (Art. 289-447) and blood money or diyah in the fourth book (Art. 448-728) of the IPC ([BAMF 5/2021](#)).

For all other offences deemed punishable by the legal system, **ta'zīr penalties** ([BAMF 5/2021](#); cf. [Landinfo/CEDOCA/SEM 12/2021](#)) - discretionary penalties - and so-called 'deterrent penalties' (mojāzāt-e bāzdārandeh) are provided. The latter serve to maintain public order. While hadd, qisas and diyah are defined by Islamic law, ta'zīr and deterrent punishments are derived from

state law. These categories include, for example, offences against the internal and external security of the state (Art. 498-512 and 610-611 IPC); forgery (Art. 523-542 IPC); offences against public morality and decency (Art. 637-641 IPC) - for example, improper relations between men and women, such as touching and kissing (Art. 637) or un-Islamic clothing (Art. 638); theft (Art. 651-667 IPC); and public consumption of alcohol, gambling and vagrancy (Art. 701-713 IPC). Ta'zīr penalties are imposed at the discretion of the judge (based on codified law) (Landinfo/CEDOCA/SEM 12/2021).

Due to the severity of hadd punishments and the fact that they are immutable, they are subject to strict evidentiary and other requirements (Landinfo/CEDOCA/SEM 12/2021), such as a certain number of witnesses or repeated confessions. In addition, however, there is also the evidentiary rule of 'judicial knowledge' ('elm-e qāzī) (Landinfo/CEDOCA/SEM 12/2021; cf. MRAI 19/6/2023), which is applied in many hadd cases (MRAI 19/6/2023) - although the NGO Iran Human Rights (IHRNGO) also reported a case in which a conviction under this principle was based on a qisas offence (murder) (IHRNGO 20/2/2025). 'elm-e qāzī means that the judge must decide whether the defendant is guilty or not on the basis of circumstantial evidence (MRAI 19/6/2023). While the law stipulates that judgements based on a judge's 'knowledge' must be based on evidence or circumstantial evidence and not merely on the judge's personal belief that the accused is guilty of the offence, IHRNGO has documented cases of arbitrary application of 'elm-e qāzī (IHRNGO 20/2/2025). An amendment to the criminal law in 2013 weakened the application of 'elm-e qāzī in cases of adultery. In charges based on the hadd offences of mohārebeh and mofsad/efsād fe-l-arz, 'judicial knowledge' is still one of the main factors in determining the guilt or innocence of a defendant (MRAI 19/6/2023).

Another way of determining the guilt of a defendant, originating in Islamic jurisprudence and used in Iran, which can be applied in qisas offences (murder or assault) when there is insufficient evidence and a judge still has doubts about the innocence of the defendant, is the principle of qassameh or 'sworn oath'. The persons who swear an oath - a certain number of relatives of the victim - do not have to have been direct witnesses to the crime (IHRNGO 20/2/2025).

Criminal prosecution and sentencing practice

Corporal punishment can be imposed and executed at any time for offences that strongly contradict Islamic principles (ÖB Teheran 11/2021). Iranian criminal law provides for corporal punishments such as the amputation of fingers, hands and feet or blindness (one eye or both) as a retributive measure. It is not possible to estimate the number of amputations carried out, as few reports are made public (AA 15/7/2024). However, there are reports of amputations being carried out (AI 29/4/2025; cf. TST 10/6/2025). The penal code provides for flogging for certain offences such as drinking alcohol, breaking the fast or having sex outside of marriage. In some cases, it is possible to avert this by paying a fine (AA 15/7/2024). Injured parties can waive the application of the retributive punishments (qisas) of amputation (e. g. of fingers in the case of theft) and blinding in return for a fine (diyah). At present, adultery is still punishable by stoning. This can also be waived by the injured party in return for diyah. In 2002, a moratorium was

placed on the imposition of the stoning penalty (ÖB Teheran 11/2021), and no more cases of stoning have been reported since 2010 (IHRNGO 20/2/2025).

Reliable statements on prosecution and sentencing practices are only possible to a limited extent, as these are characterised by arbitrariness. Sometimes deliberately vague formulations of criminal offences and legal consequences as well as insufficient control within the judiciary allow judges to act arbitrarily. Furthermore, courts do not act independently in political proceedings. Arbitrary arrests also occur frequently and lead to prisoners being held for months without any pending criminal proceedings. Political conviction is probably the most common basis for discrimination in the area of criminal prosecution. Suspects and defendants are deprived of basic rights that are actually guaranteed under Iranian law. Detainees on remand are held indefinitely without charge if suspected of a criminal offence. Prisoners often receive no legal assistance during ongoing investigations because they are deliberately denied this right or lack the financial means. Particularly in politically motivated proceedings against members of the opposition, charges are often brought on the basis of fabricated or pretextual offences. The penalties are often disproportionately high in relation to the alleged offence, especially in the case of convictions for statements made on social media or for opposing the obligation to wear the hijab (headscarf) (AA 15/7/2024).

Prison remission is possible after serving half of the sentence. Amnesties are granted irregularly by the revolutionary leader on the recommendation of the head of the judiciary in connection with high religious holidays and the Iranian New Year on 21 March (AA 15/7/2024).

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5.3 Double jeopardy, offences committed abroad, conviction in absentia

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According to a confidential source from the Dutch Foreign Ministry, Iran adheres to the *ne bis in idem* principle when it comes to ta'zir offences. In the case of hadd and qisas offences, however, double prosecution is possible. It is also possible for a court to impose a ta'zir sentence on a person, but for the public prosecutor to subsequently state that this was a mistake and that the offence falls under a hadd offence. In this case, a person can be sentenced twice for the same offence, but in practice this rarely happens (MBZ 9/2023).

Iranian citizens are also subject to Iranian legislation abroad and can be prosecuted in Iran for offences committed abroad in accordance with Article 7 of the IPC 2013 (Landinfo 9/11/2022). The ban on double jeopardy only applies to a very limited extent in this case. Under the IPC, Iranians or foreigners who have committed certain offences abroad and are arrested in Iran are punished in accordance with the applicable Iranian laws. Foreign court judgements have no influence on the imposition of Islamic punishments [note: hadd and qisas punishments]; the courts issue their own judgements. Drastic penalties are imposed, particularly for narcotics offences (AA 15/7/2024). However, a lawyer interviewed by Landinfo in 2021 painted a more nuanced picture and stated that offences committed abroad that affect internal and external security in particular are prosecuted in Iran. According to the lawyer, alcohol consumption or 'lewd' behaviour by Iranian citizens abroad, for example, are not prosecuted in Iran (Landinfo 9/11/2022). No cases of double jeopardy have been reported in the recent past (AA 15/7/2024).

In practice, people in Iran are convicted in absentia for activities carried out abroad, for example for publishing critical posts on social media. Several sources have reported such cases of well-known activists abroad (MBZ 9/2023). There are a number of known cases in which Iranian nationals, especially those with a wide reach as journalists or bloggers, who express critical views on political issues in Iran (human rights violations, corruption and enrichment of public officials, women's rights, internal power struggles) were abducted in third countries and taken to Iran, where they were sentenced in (show) trials and sometimes even executed. There are also credible reports of assassination attempts abroad on this group of people (AA 15/7/2024).

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5.4 Court documents

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According to a lawyer who used to work in Iran, court documents are largely standardised. For example, a judgement must always contain the file number, the archive number and the jurisdiction of the court. It also contains a summary, the length of which can vary. The judgement should consistently refer to the relevant articles of the applicable code - for example, in criminal proceedings, the relevant articles of the Criminal Code. In addition, the language used in the judgement should be consistent in terms of content and wording throughout the document (this refers to the use of language, not formatting; inconsistencies in font sometimes occur within a document) (MRAI-2 13/6/2025).

Paper documents such as court documents, summonses and land deeds are relatively easy to obtain by fraudulent means (DFAT 24/7/2023) and for judicial documents such as judgements, summonses etc., indirect forgery cannot be ruled out due to corruption in the judicial system. If the documents are stored in the SANA judicial database, their authenticity can be assumed (AA 15/7/2024).

Both the documents issued by the Iranian authorities and by the Afghan embassy in Iran confirm incorrect information. It is not possible for the Austrian embassy to verify this. The embassy cannot check arrest warrants due to data protection (ÖB Teheran 11/2021).

SANA system/Justice database Adliran

Due to the gradual digitalisation of the judicial system, judicial documents can be accessed via the so-called SANA system [or in the Adliran database] since the end of 2016 (AA 15/7/2024). The SANA system is an electronic legal database of the judiciary that is used to register and track cases. Lawyers and clients can access the documents of a case via the SANA system (MBZ 9/2023). Since 2019, judicial documents in all provinces have generally been communicated almost exclusively via this database (cf. Art. 175 Iranian Code of Criminal Procedure as amended in 2013/14) (AA 15/7/2024). The SANA system is mandatory and almost all court cases are now processed in the SANA system (MRAI-2 13/6/2025).

If a person has to appear in court, they are notified by text message that a letter is available in the SANA system. If they do not have a SANA account, a paper notification will be issued. This will state that the addressee must register via the SANA system for the next steps (MBZ 9/2023). Registration takes place in person or via a type of video identity verification procedure. In addition, the Kart-e melli number and an Iranian mobile phone number are required, to which a temporary password is sent (AA 15/7/2024). Third parties can also access a person's judicial documents if they have the person's ten-digit 'national number' (the user name) and the six-digit temporary password, which is sent by SMS. With the credentials, anyone, including family members and legal representatives of defendants, can access the information stored in the database and print documents (Landinfo/CEDOCA/SEM 12/2021; cf. MBZ 9/2023).

Anyone who has a SANA account [i.e. has already registered in the SANA system] can also access it from abroad. In some cases, however, a VPN may need to be used to access the

portal from outside the country. For Iranians living outside the country, a new website (<https://international-sana.itsaaz.com/>) has been set up to facilitate their access. They can now use internationally recognised payment cards and their foreign phone number (MRAI-2 13/6/2025). However, Iranians living abroad report that registering from outside the country is not easy. For example, to open a bank account, they need a new 'smart' ID card (MRAI-2 13/6/2025; cf. Migrationsverket 28/10/2024), which they cannot [usually] obtain from consulates abroad (MRAI-2 13/6/2025), although the authorities announced in 2022 that Iranians living abroad could now register for 'smart' ID cards at the Iranian consulate in Vienna (TEHT 10/4/2022). Only a few Iranian consulates abroad support their citizens in accessing the SANA system. The consulate in Amsterdam, for example, offers this service. There are also websites that offer to set up a SANA account for a fee, but the Iranian embassy in the UK, for example, has advised against using them (MRAI-2 13/6/2025).

Some documents cannot be accessed in the SANA system (e.g. minutes of meetings or most files of revolutionary courts) (MRAI-2 13/6/2025). It is unclear what specific information users can access in the SANA system and to what extent this varies from case to case. In general, the use of the SANA portal is more restricted in the revolutionary courts than in other courts (Migrationsverket 28/10/2024). The Revolutionary Courts only upload notifications of the trial date of a court case and that a court judgement has been issued to the SANA system (MRAI-2 13/6/2025). Military courts hearing offences committed by members of the armed forces in the performance of their duties are legally obliged to make documents relating to judgments available in the SANA system. However, according to a source interviewed by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, whether a judgement of a military court is visible in the SANA system depends on the case. In sensitive cases, the courts can request the officers to appear in person to view the judgement (MBZ 9/2023).

Applicants can only submit documents from the SANA system to the asylum authorities if they are registered in the SANA system. In security-related cases, summonses may only be issued by telephone. Legal proceedings may begin with a phone call or text message from security officers or sometimes even a knock on the door. In many cases, individuals with legal problems leave Iran afterwards, i.e. during the investigation phase, and often in a hurry, which means that they may not have many - or any - official documents to prove their legal case. These individuals may leave Iran for fear of persecution, including lengthy prison sentences, after learning that they are under investigation, as many acts are criminal offences in Iran. These include 'lifestyle' choices such as possession of books on spiritual teachings, pranic healing [note: esoteric healing practice] or other materials considered contrary to Islamic teachings, possession of alcohol that could be discovered during house searches, or participation in gatherings and mixed-gender classes, such as yoga classes for men and women. In some cases, investigations can take up to two years before 'official' proceedings are initiated. Sometimes the authorities avoid leaving evidence for these investigations (MRAI-2 13/6/2025).

During the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' protests, numerous people were detained and interrogated by the security forces, but in many cases no formal criminal charges were brought against them. In these circumstances, there is probably no case or related documentation in the SANA portal.

In other cases, formal charges have been brought against individuals arrested in connection with the protests. The charges may include, for example, 'public order offences' or security offences. When formal charges are brought against a person, a file number is usually entered into the SANA system. However, this often does not apply to charges of security offences dealt with by the Revolutionary Courts. Although they are sometimes assigned a case number in the SANA system, no documents are usually uploaded in these cases (Migrationsverket 28/10/2024).

Supplementary remark on files of the revolutionary courts

Revolutionary courts usually do not provide copies of the case files (MRAI-2 13/6/2025; cf. MBZ 9/2023) and usually refrain from sending the judgement to the defendants. As a rule, they summon the defendant's lawyer to court and read out the judgement. Such judgements are therefore not available in the SANA system (Landinfo/CEDOCA/SEM 12/2021). The defendants or their lawyers are usually only allowed to inspect case files and take notes; making copies is not permitted. However, some branches may provide a copy of the judgement, but this is not common practice, especially in Tehran (MRAI-2 13/6/2025).

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6 Security authorities

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Iran has a strong central government with a complex institutional structure. The monopoly on the use of force lies with the state and semi-state units that make up the regime. The Revolutionary Guards are the most powerful force in the Iranian security apparatus (BS 19/3/2024), but vigilante groups recognised by the regime also use violence, for example when it comes to suppressing

street protests ([BS 19/3/2024](#); cf. [IRWIRE 25/9/2022](#)). The Supreme Leader - and not the president - is the supreme commander of all armed forces. He can declare war or peace and authorise military operations ([DIA 2019](#)).

Iran has a large number of different security and law enforcement agencies ([Landinfo/CEDOCA/SEM 12/2021](#)). There are some peculiarities that can be attributed to the 'revolutionary nature' of the regime, namely the coexistence of traditional state arms carriers, such as the army and police, with revolutionary institutions. This situation leads to duplication, overlapping and unclear allocation of competences as well as institutional competition. At the same time, efforts have been underway for years to rationalise this parallelism and assign different tasks to different institutions, so that today it must be assumed that all elements are being merged ([Posch/LVAk 7/2024](#)).

The Law Enforcement Command (FARAJA) [pronounced: FARADSHA, Farmandehi-ye Entezami-ye Jomhuri-ye Eslami-ye Iran], which reports to the Ministry of the Interior, is the country's uniformed police force and is responsible to the president, as is the Ministry of Information or Intelligence (VAJA) ([CIA 14/5/2025](#)). The full name of the organisation is Vezarat-e Etela'at-e Jomhuri-ye Eslami-ye Iran, in English, the term Ministry of Intelligence/Information and Security or the acronym MOIS is widely used ([Ward 2024](#)). The acronym VEVAK used in some publications, however, is a misnomer ([Posch/LVAk 7/2024](#)) and was never used in Iran ([Ward 2024](#)). Together with the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps [Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enghelab-e Islami - English acronym: IRGC], which reports directly to the Supreme Leader, FARAJA and VAJA/MOIS are responsible for internal security and law enforcement in the country. The Basij, a paramilitary group made up of volunteers, operate in part under the Revolutionary Guards as auxiliary law enforcement units ([CIA 14/5/2025](#)).

The military forces are divided into the Revolutionary Guards Corps and the regular army (Artesh [Artesh-e Jomhuri-ye Eslami-ye Iran]) ([CIA 14/5/2025](#)). The Artesh is a legacy of the security authorities from the Shah era. It exists alongside the Revolutionary Guards, which were founded by Khomeini in 1979 as a force loyal to the regime ([CRS 30/12/2024](#)) and focuses primarily on the defence of Iran's borders and territorial waters against external threats. In contrast, the Revolutionary Guards have a broader mission, namely to defend the Iranian revolution against any external or internal threat ([CIA 14/5/2025](#)).

Information on the number of troops in the Iranian armed forces varies. Around 400,000 soldiers serve in the regular armed forces and up to 190,000 in the Revolutionary Guards, including around 5,000 in the Quds Forces ([CIA 14/5/2025](#); cf. [IRJ 1/2/2021](#)). As of 2025, the Basij have an estimated 90,000 active paramilitary forces ([CIA 14/5/2025](#)), although estimates of the total number of Basij members vary widely and range up to several million ([ÖB Teheran 11/2021](#)).

According to Israeli officials, 30 high-ranking representatives of the Iranian security authorities were killed during the 12-day Israeli military operation in June 2025 ([REU 27/6/2025](#); cf. [ABC News 28/6/2025](#)), including, right at the beginning of the operation on 13 June 2025, the head of the Revolutionary Guards, the chief of staff of the armed forces, the commander of the central headquarters Khatam al-Anbiya ([AJ 15/6/2025](#); cf. [Amwaj 30/6/2025](#)), which is responsible for

coordinating the various Iranian armed forces (Alma 17/6/2025), the supreme commander of the Revolutionary Guards Air Force (AJ 15/6/2025; cf. Amwaj 30/6/2025) and the head of the Revolutionary Guards Intelligence Organisation (IRGC-IO) (Amwaj 30/6/2025). According to the Israeli authorities, 720 military installations in Iran were hit (ABC News 28/6/2025). In addition to initially disabling Iranian air defences (ORF 13/1/2025; cf. t-online 13/6/2025) and attacking Iranian missile launch sites (NYT 18/6/2025; cf. t-online 13/6/2025), Israeli forces also attacked internal security facilities, various Revolutionary Guards command centres, including the Internal Security Headquarters of the Revolutionary Guards, and the Basij headquarters, among others (JPOST 23/6/2025; cf. YNET 23/6/2025), according to the Israeli Ministry of Defence. Iranian authorities believe that the targeted killings of senior security force commanders were possible due to unprecedented infiltration of Iranian security services by Israeli agents (BBC 26/6/2025).

Treatment of the civilian population

In terms of monitoring the population, it is not known what the capacity of the Iranian authorities is. The authorities cannot monitor everyone at all times, but have created an atmosphere in which citizens assume they are under constant surveillance (DIS 23/2/2018).

Impunity within the security apparatus continues to be a problem. Human rights groups accuse regular and paramilitary security forces (such as the Basij) of committing numerous human rights violations, including torture, enforced disappearances and acts of violence against protesters and bystanders at public demonstrations (USDOS 23/4/2024). Arbitrary arrests can and must be expected at any time, as the secret services (of the government and the Revolutionary Guards) and Basij can de facto act arbitrarily. Even the conspicuous listening to (especially Western) music, unusual clothing, parties or young, unmarried men and women travelling together by car can provoke the displeasure of Basij who happen to be present or people who sympathise with them. Arbitrary arrests or mistreatment by Basij cannot be ruled out in this context (ÖB Teheran 11/2021).

According to Iran expert Walter Posch, the brutal enforcement of rules such as the obligation for women to wear headscarves, which triggered the protests in September 2022, is not necessarily focussed on the regular police units, but on 'overambitious volunteers' who are usually recruited from the Basij militias. They call themselves the 'Hezbollahis' [note: not to be confused with the Lebanese Hezbollah], i.e. 'partisans of God', and represent the Islamic principle of the 'mandating the good, prohibition of the bad' (al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-n-nahy 'ani-l-munkar). The police have little incentive to protect women from arbitrariness and to engage with the politically well-connected Hezbollahis (Zenith 21/9/2022).

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6.1 Police (law enforcement command/FARAJA), vice squad

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Note: As part of the 12-day Israeli military operation 'Rising Lion' from 13 June 2025, the Israeli armed forces attacked facilities of various security agencies (see the general information section). The effects on the organisational structures of the security authorities cannot yet be meaningfully assessed at the present time [as at 30 June 2025] and are therefore not yet taken into account below. The Staatendokumentation continues to monitor the situation and information will be added in future updates. In addition, reference is made to the possibility of submitting enquiries to the Staatendokumentation if necessary.

The 'Islamic Republic of Iran Law Enforcement Command' (Farmandehi-ye Entezami-ye Jomhuri-ye Eslami-ye Iran, FARAJA/FARAJA) ([Posch/LVAk 7/2024](#)) or Law Enforcement Command is Iran's uniformed police force and includes departments for public security, traffic control, counter-narcotics, special forces (counter-insurgency, counter-terrorism, hostage rescue, etc.) as well as intelligence and criminal investigations. FARAJA is also responsible (via the Border Guard Command) for border security ([CIA 14/5/2025](#)).

The organisation used to be known as the 'Law Enforcement Agency of the Islamic Republic of Iran' (NAJA/NAJSA) ([IRWIRE 25/9/2022](#); cf. [Posch/LVAk 7/2024](#)). In 2021, a far-reaching reform was carried out and the NAJA was transformed into the FARAJA, giving the organisation a military appearance. Military-style defence and reconnaissance units were also introduced. The newly created reconnaissance organisation (Sazeman-e Ettelaat-e FARAJA) also has a new subordinate public order police ('Police for Public Security', Polis-e Amniyat-e Omumi, PAVA) ([Posch/LVAk 7/2024](#)[IRWIRE 25/9/2022](#)). The renaming was accompanied by an expansion of powers and facilities ([IRWIRE 25/9/2022](#)).

Vice Squad

The PAVA subdivision of FARAJA in turn has a subdivision called the 'Moral Security Police' or vice squad [Polis-e Amniyat-e Akhlāqī] ([AI 6/3/2024](#); cf. [Landinfo/CEDOCA/SEM 12/2021](#)). Their task is to monitor the dress code for women and men in public (avoiding an 'un-Islamic' appearance) and to monitor (and prevent) behaviour against 'Islamic morality' in general. The morality patrol (Gasht-e Ershād [also: 'instruction patrol']) is a sub-unit of the vice squad. It consists of both male and female security forces and is usually stationed in police cars in public places. There they monitor the situation and arrest people, especially women who are allegedly dressed 'lewdly', or try to prevent mixing of the sexes [note: if the men and women concerned are not closely related] ([Landinfo/CEDOCA/SEM 12/2021](#)).

The vice squad is accused of arbitrarily arresting women for offences. The death of 22-year-old Mahsa Jina Amini, who had previously been arrested by the vice squad for allegedly improperly wearing a hijab, sparked months of protests from September 2022 ([DW 4/12/2022](#)). After the nationwide protests began, the vice squad largely disappeared from the streets ([USIP 6/9/2023a](#)). At the beginning of December 2022, the media reported that it was to be disbanded ([DW 4/12/2022](#); cf. [Tagesschau 11/3/2023](#)), which was seen as a concession to the protest

movement (Tagesschau 11/3/2023). In fact, however, the vice squad was never disbanded (USIP 6/9/2023a; cf. RFE/RL 20/7/2023) and the white vans of the vice squad were soon to be seen again in the streets of Tehran and other major cities (AJ 30/3/2025; cf. FR24 13/8/2024).

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6.2 Revolutionary Guards and Basij

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Note: As part of the 12-day Israeli military operation 'Rising Lion' from 13 June 2025, the Israeli armed forces attacked facilities of various security agencies (see the super-chapter for general information). The impact on the organisational structures of the security authorities cannot yet be meaningfully assessed at the present time [as at 30 June 2025] and is therefore not yet taken into account below. The Staatendokumentation continues to monitor the situation and information will be added as part of future updates. In addition, reference is made to the possibility of submitting enquiries to the Staatendokumentation if necessary.

The Revolutionary Guards (also known as Pasdaran or Sepah) are a military fighting force, security authority and intelligence organisation as well as a social and cultural power and an

industrial and economic conglomerate (Landinfo/CEDOCA/SEM 12/2021). Several goals were defined for the organisation when it was founded, first and foremost the protection of the ideology of the revolution, the maintenance of internal security and the prevention of a coup. In addition, the organisation was to form a counterweight to the standing army, although it was to act in coordination and cooperation with the latter (Shapira/INSS 11/2023). The Revolutionary Guards have very close ties to the revolutionary leader (AA 15/7/2024).

The Revolutionary Guards are deployed against 'hard' as well as 'semi-hard' and 'soft' threats. This means that there are both ground troops of the Revolutionary Guards, which are stationed in various parts of the country to ward off threats to the integrity of the country, such as invasions and civil wars, as well as units that act against 'semi-hard' threats such as insurgencies and other internal security problems. This area of responsibility falls to the Revolutionary Guards Intelligence Organisation [IRGC-IO], among others, but there are also, for example, Revolutionary Guards riot units that are deployed to quell internal dissent and maintain public order. The latter units have a close relationship with the police, with the purpose of effectively controlling society. To combat 'soft' or 'cultural' threats, organisational units of the Revolutionary Guards exercise control over a wide range of educational activities and fulfil social and cultural missions. In all these activities, the Revolutionary Guards are also supported by the Basij (Golkar 6/2020).

Today, the Revolutionary Guards are the most important military organisation in the country. They receive priority resources and are responsible for all sensitive projects (Shapira/INSS 11/2023; cf. AA 15/7/2024), such as the Iranian missile programme and the protection of Iran's nuclear facilities (Posch/LVAk 7/2024). The Revolutionary Guards have five branches of the armed forces (Niruha-ye Panjganeh): Land, Sea and Air Forces, as well as the Basij and the Quds ('Jerusalem') Special Forces (Posch/LVAk 7/2024), as well as its own intelligence services, and they operate their own prisons (AA 15/7/2024).

The Revolutionary Guards are tasked with exporting the Iranian revolution to the world (Shapira/INSS 11/2023; cf. CFR 13/6/2025). The Quds branch (niru) is the most internationally recognised unit of the Revolutionary Guards. Its focus is on military advice, the organisation, monitoring and implementation of the transfer of expertise and technology, including the transfer of missiles, as well as intelligence activities at all levels (Posch/LVAk 1/2/2024). Quds is Iran's most important means of carrying out unconventional operations abroad. It has more or less close ties to state and non-state actors around the world (DIA 2019), although active combat missions and military operations are somewhat less important in the Quds' remit. These fall within the remit of the special unit Saber of the Revolutionary Guards (Posch/LVAk 7/2024).

There are only a few conflicts in the region in recent years in which the Revolutionary Guards have not been or are not involved. Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Yemen - they are involved everywhere (Tagesschau 8/6/2017; cf. MAITIC 10/4/2025, CFR 13/6/2025) and support non-state armed groups or the regime of President Bashar al-Assad in Syria [overthrown in December 2024] (CFR 13/6/2025). However, the Hamas attack on southern Israel on 7 October triggered a chain reaction in the conflict between Israel and Iran and its proxies. The Quds forces became the main targets of Israeli attacks and dozens of their senior commanders across the region were

killed by Israeli forces (AlMon 5/1/2025). After the fall of President Bashar al-Assad in December 2024, most of the Iranian troops left Syria, including the Revolutionary Guards (TNA 7/1/2025; cf. Shafaq 12/5/2025).

In addition to their prominent role in the security apparatus, the Revolutionary Guards have over time penetrated the economy, politics and administration and developed into a state within a state (AA 15/7/2024). They play a dominant role in the Iranian economy (FH 2025). Their activities have expanded from infrastructure reconstruction into many other sectors, including banking, shipping, manufacturing and consumer goods imports (CFR 13/6/2025) and telecommunications (FA 15/8/2024). Thanks to their political influence, companies belonging to the Revolutionary Guards receive contracts not put out to tender by the state and play an important role in various black markets (CFR 13/6/2025). The Revolutionary Guards' construction conglomerate Khatam al-Anbiya, also known by the acronym GHORB (BBC 3/1/2020), is one of the largest construction companies in Iran [*note: not to be confused with the Central Headquarters Khatam al-Anbiya, the central coordination centre between the armed forces, see superchapter (FA 15.8.2024)*] (BBC 3/1/2020). The Revolutionary Guards control Iran's airports (WFP 1/2024) and seaports and thus decide which goods are allowed into the country and which are not (DW 18/2/2016; cf. RFE/RL 5/6/2018). It is not possible to say how large a share of the Iranian economy the Revolutionary Guards now control, as precise statistics and data are lacking (DW 7/3/2023). However, the economic activities of the Revolutionary Guards outside the normal market are now so extensive that the private sector no longer exists in many areas (IRJ 1/2/2021). The Revolutionary Guards have their own sources of wealth and power, while they have little accountability to external actors (FA 15/8/2024).

Basij

According to Iran expert Saeid Golkar, the Basij are the largest civilian militia organisation in the world (TWI 5/1/2018) and an important part of the regime's security apparatus (DIA 2019). They form a network of Basij bases, districts and regions. Due to their high visibility (50,000 locations throughout Iran), the Basij bases are the backbone of the organisation at grassroots level (TWI 5/1/2018). The Basij have bases in schools and universities, among other places, ensuring permanent control of Iranian youth (ÖB Teheran 11/2021), and are also stationed in mosques (DW 7/3/2023; cf. Golkar 6/2020).

The Basij have specialised departments for different segments of Iranian society (DIA 2019; cf. ABC News 13/10/2022), including the student Basij (Basij-e Danesh-Amouzi), student Basij (Basij-e Daneshjouyi, Student Basij Organisation, SBO) or the worker Basij (Basij-e Kargaran), which are intended to form a counterweight to civil society organisations such as trade unions or student associations (USIP 6/10/2010; cf. Golkar 6/2020). The Basij's security apparatus includes armed brigades, counter-insurgency units and an extensive network of informants (ABC News 13/10/2022), the latter of which the Revolutionary Guards' secret service can draw on (TWI 5/1/2018).

Not all Basij members are involved in political repression. Nevertheless, the organisation has several security and military units (TWI 5/1/2018) and the regime deploys a select group of Basij

in civilian clothes for security agendas and for 'crowd control' (Kayhan 14/10/2022), i.e. for the violent suppression of demonstrations, in which case these Basij members are armed. They played a key role in the suppression of the protests [from September 2022] (DW 7/3/2023). In Tehran, the Basij special unit Fatehin was deployed during the 2022-2023 protests (Posch/LVAk 1/2/2024). It is considered the 'actual militia' of the Basij. Members of this volunteer unit were also deployed in the Syrian civil war from 2015 (Posch/LVAk 1/2/2024; cf. DIA 2019). However, the student Basij was also involved in the violent suppression of protests at universities from September 2022 (NLM 20/4/2023; cf. IRINTL 22/5/2023). The intelligence elements of the Basij, which are visibly present at schools and academic institutions, compile personal files on the political views of their fellow students and teachers, prevent debates critical of the regime within the student body and are an important element in the armed suppression of protests (Posch/LVAk 7/2024).

There are different types of Basij members - namely regular, active, cadre and special members (Golkar 6/2020; cf. DIA 2019) - with increasing levels of skill and training, although the exact terms and descriptions for these levels vary. There is also a group of potential Basij who, although not formal members, are supporters of the Islamic Revolution and participate in Basij activities. While this group, like the regular Basij, work on a voluntary basis, the active and special Basij members (DIA 2019), as well as the cadre Basij (Golkar 6/2020), receive salaries in addition to more extensive training. The special Basij, the best trained and most experienced members, are comparable to full-time soldiers in the Revolutionary Guards (DIA 2019). They are hired for a fixed period of time (usually five years) for military missions at a fixed salary. Among other things, the Revolutionary Guards deploy members of the Special Basij in provinces such as Kurdistan or Sistan and Balochistan (Golkar 6/2020). The mostly young Basij volunteers, on the other hand, usually undergo limited training to serve as auxiliaries for local security and to enforce state control over society (IRINTL 1/7/2022), with all Basij members over the age of 15 required to undergo two months of military training with the Revolutionary Guards as part of their service (FP 30/1/2023).

Membership of the Basij is seen as proof of political and ideological reliability, comes with social benefits and facilitates entry into the bloated civil service, the country's largest employer (Posch/LVAk 7/2024). Joining the Basij opens up educational and career prospects for many young people. In order to fully benefit from membership and thereby enjoy loans, shorter military service and better job prospects, special training programmes must be completed that last at least six months (Zamirirad/SWP 19/4/2023).

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6.3 Main intelligence and secret services: VAJA/MOIS and IRGC-IO

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Note: As part of the 12-day Israeli military operation 'Rising Lion' from 13 June 2025, the Israeli armed forces attacked facilities of various security agencies (see the general information in chapter introduction). The effects on the organisational structures of the security authorities cannot yet be meaningfully assessed at the present time [as at 30 June 2025] and are therefore not yet taken into account below. The Staatendokumentation continues to monitor the situation and information will be added in future updates. In addition, reference is made to the possibility of submitting enquiries to the Staatendokumentation if necessary.

Iran has a total of 16 intelligence organisations (DIA 2019). The two most important intelligence services in Iran are the VAJA/MOIS and the Revolutionary Guards Intelligence Organisation (English acronym: IRGC-IO) [Sāzmān-e Ettelā'āt-e Sepāh-e Pāsdārān-e Enqelāb-e Eslāmī] (USIP 17/2/2023; cf. DIA 2019). Other intelligence services are located in the regular army (Artesh) and the law enforcement agency [FARAJA] (DIA 2019). As with all military or paramilitary units, there is a defence organisation or counterintelligence service within the FARAJA, which is located at the highest management level. This service is responsible for information security, the security of personnel, means of communication and the protection of properties. Similar units exist in the army and the Revolutionary Guards, although the service has developed a life of its own in the latter and is considered an independent actor [English acronym: IRGC-CIO] (Posch/LVAk 7/2024).

The head of the VAJA/MOIS holds a cabinet post and is responsible to the president. The Revolutionary Guards Intelligence Service, on the other hand, falls under the military chain of command and reports directly to the Supreme Leader (USIP 17/2/2023; cf. DIA 2019). The organisation is only nominally and for historical reasons part of the Revolutionary Guards, in reality it is an independent service (Posch/Chatham 5/5/2023). The branched intelligence service

structures are also intended to ensure that none of the services becomes too powerful (DIA 2019).

The civilian VAJA/MOIS (DIA 2019) is tasked with protecting national security, counter-intelligence and monitoring religious and illegal political groups (AA 15/7/2024). It is divided into a domestic intelligence service, foreign intelligence service, technical reconnaissance service (AA 15/7/2024; cf. Ward 2024), counterintelligence and anti-corruption (Ward 2024). The domestic intelligence service monitors the political opposition and exerts pressure on it (AA 15/7/2024). A civilian defence element that reports to the VAJA/MOIS is the 'National Protection Organisation' (Sazeman-e Herasat-e Koll-e Keshvar, SHKK). It is responsible for property protection, personnel protection, communication, information security, etc. The SHKK's area of responsibility extends across the entire country and includes all ministries, all state companies, revolutionary organisations and institutions, banks, provincial and municipal administrations and all bodies responsible for the selection and training of personnel for the civil service. The main tasks of the SHKK are to make public servants aware of the possible influence of foreign agents and counter-revolutionary elements at home and abroad, to monitor the mood of the population, to provide training in self-protection and defence, etc. (Posch/LVAk 7/2024). The SHKK probably also performs tasks in the vetting of candidates for elections to political offices (Ward 2024). To fulfil its tasks, the SHKK operates various protection or defence offices (Daftar-e Herasat) in public institutions. The SHKK is omnipresent and is considered to be very efficient. Above all, however, the organisation is hardly known to the public and is almost invisible despite its influence and importance (Posch/LVAk 7/2024). It acts as the eyes and ears of the political system. Legally, the SHKK is not allowed to question or arrest people. Nevertheless, there are reports of interrogations and attempts at intimidation by SHKK members (Landinfo/CEDOCA/SEM 12/2021).

The IRGC-IO was founded in 2009 on the basis of existing intelligence units of the Revolutionary Guards (Ward 2024; cf. Landinfo/CEDOCA/SEM 12/2021) and is Iran's most important military intelligence service (DIA 2019). It is also a law enforcement agency. However, its full tasks and limits are not clearly defined in the constitution or in laws. In practice, it is actively involved in the detection and investigation of offences that are arbitrarily classified as security crimes, many of which are politically motivated. It focuses on suspected spies and political and security threats. The judiciary works closely with the IRGC-IO in the area of law enforcement and the IRGC-IO maintains its own network of formal and informal detention centres, which are not under the jurisdiction of the State Penitentiary Service (Landinfo/CEDOCA/SEM 12/2021).

The missions of the VAJA/MOIS and the IRGC-IO overlap significantly (USIP 17/2/2023; cf. Landinfo/CEDOCA/SEM 12/2021, DIA 2019), as both institutions have extensive areas of responsibility (USIP 17/2/2023). The main task of both the VAJA/MOIS and the IRGC-IO is to keep the Islamic Republic in power. The surveillance of dissidents at home and abroad and the suppression of organised opposition are important tasks of both services (USIP 17/2/2023).

In the last ten years, Iran has also built up an infrastructure for worldwide assassinations and kidnappings, which are carried out by the Revolutionary Guards and the VAJA/MOIS. Different

departments within the two organisations are active in the same areas and pursue similar goals, which leads to a dynamic of cooperation as well as competition (LWJ 6/2/2025). The Iranian intelligence and secret services also rely on third parties, such as criminals, for their operations in Western countries (WP 1/12/2022; cf. Soufan 1/11/2024).

Both the VAJA/MOIS and the IRGC-IO are active in Austria. Responsibility is generally based on the area of responsibility, whereby the VAJA/MOIS is primarily responsible for Iranian citizens and the intelligence service of the Revolutionary Guards and the Quds Forces, for example, for Hezbollah and Arabs (this does not refer to Iranian Ahwazi Arabs, who tend to fall within the area of responsibility of the VAJA/MOIS) (Posch 5/7/2024). According to the Office for the Protection of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany, the VAJA/MOIS is, for example, the main actor of Iranian intelligence activities in Germany. It focuses in particular on Iranian opposition groups, although the Quds forces are also active in Germany (BMI-D 10/6/2025). Vienna is home to one of the largest embassies of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Europe, which disguises intelligence officers with diplomatic posts. It is a nerve centre for Iranian intelligence activities in Europe (BMI/DSN 26/5/2025).

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6.4 Authorities for monitoring internet activities

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Note: As part of the 12-day Israeli military operation 'Rising Lion' from 13 June 2025, the Israeli armed forces attacked facilities of various security agencies (see the general information in chapter introduction). The effects on the organisational structures of the security authorities cannot yet be meaningfully assessed at the present time [as at 30 June 2025] and are therefore not yet taken into account below. The Staatendokumentation continues to monitor the situation and information will be added in future updates. In addition, reference is made to the possibility of submitting enquiries to the Staatendokumentation if necessary.

The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance and the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology are the main regulators of Internet content and systems and exercise comprehensive control over Internet traffic entering and leaving the country. The Office of the Supreme Leader, which includes the Supreme Council for Cyberspace (SCC), is responsible for regulating content and systems (OFpra 24/12/2024). The SCC is the country's supreme internet regulatory authority (FES 6/2024). It is made up of high-ranking military officers and politicians (DIF 26/9/2022; cf. RSF n.da). It oversees the National Centre for Cyberspace (NCC) (OFAC 12/1/2018), which coordinates all of Iran's cyber activities, i.e. collects and disseminates relevant information as well as policy guidelines and monitors the implementation of guidelines and laws (INSS 1/2024).

There is a 'Committee for the Identification of Unauthorised Websites' (OFpra 24/12/2024; cf. INSS 1/2024). Together with the FATA (Polīs-e Fazā-ye Toulīd va Tabādol-e Ettelā'āt - Farsi synonym for 'Police for Virtual Space and Information Exchange', (Landinfo/CEDOCA/SEM 12/2021) this body serves as a cyber police force that monitors online activities both for the purpose of political repression and in the fight against cybercrime (INSS 1/2024). For example, FATA deals with white-collar crime, fraud cases, violations of privacy on the internet and the monitoring of activities in social networks and other politically relevant statements on the internet (AA 15/7/2024). For example, it monitors the content of influencers perceived as apolitical (Medium 18/2/2019) and online shop owners on social media with regard to compliance with the hijab requirement (FR24 6/3/2024). Investigating sellers of virtual private network (VPN) access is also one of FATA's tasks (Landinfo/CEDOCA/SEM 12/2021).

In addition, there are various units and organisations tasked with protecting Iran's infrastructure and carrying out [aggressive] cyber operations. The Revolutionary Guards are a dominant player here, although the VAJA/MOIS, which has been active for a long time, also performs tasks in this area (INSS 1/2024). With regard to monitoring the domestic opposition, it is known, for

example, that the VAJA/MOIS attempted to disrupt the activities of dissidents using malware as early as 2007 (Ward 2024).

Various organisations also outsource cyber activities to volunteers or proxies (INSS 1/2024, Ward 2024, Medium 18/2/2019). According to its own information, the FATA employs around 42,000 volunteers who perform tasks in monitoring virtual space and creating and promoting content (Medium 18/2/2019; cf. Landinfo 9/11/2022). The Basij, which are subordinate to the Revolutionary Guards, rely on various hacktivist groups that independently launch cyberattacks on different targets, including dissidents at home and abroad (INSS 1/2024). The VAJA/MOIS has also used a private company as part of a disinformation campaign against the People's Mujahideen (MEK), for example. Some of the Iranian groups that conduct cyber operations against foreign states as well as activists and journalists, and which are believed to be linked to the VAJA/MOIS, are better known by the names they have been given by US security companies: namely,

for example, the 'advanced persistent threats' (APTs) APT33 ('Refined Kitten') or APT39 ('Remix Kitten') (Ward 2024).

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6.5 Regular army (Artesh)

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Note: As part of the 12-day Israeli military operation 'Rising Lion' from 13 June 2025, the Israeli armed forces attacked facilities of various security agencies (see the general information in chapter introduction). The effects on the organisational structures of the security authorities cannot yet be meaningfully assessed at the present time [as at 30 June 2025] and are therefore not yet taken into account below. The Staatendokumentation continues to monitor the situation and information will be added in future updates. In addition, reference is made to the possibility of submitting enquiries to the Staatendokumentation if necessary.

The regular military (Artesh) (Posch/LVAk 7/2024) is primarily deployed along Iran's borders to repel invading forces (CRS 30/12/2024; cf. AA 15/7/2024) and fulfils building security tasks (AA 15/7/2024). The army (like the Revolutionary Guards) has land, air and naval forces (CRS 30/12/2024; cf. DIA 2019).

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7 Torture and inhumane treatment

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Torture is prohibited under Article 38 of the Iranian Constitution. Nevertheless, mental and physical torture, including sexualised violence against women and men, as well as inhuman and degrading treatment during interrogation and in detention, particularly in political cases, are common (AA 15/7/2024). The Constitution also does not contain an absolute prohibition of torture or ill-treatment, as it restricts the definition of torture to acts carried out 'for the purpose of extracting a confession or obtaining information'. Furthermore, although Iranian legislation prohibits certain types of abusive behaviour during interrogation, it does not contain an explicit criminal offence of torture or its definition, thus preventing appropriate punishment for such offences (UNHRC 19/3/2024).

Torture is used in particular against persons accused of offences against national security, political offences or drug-related offences ([UNHRC 9/2/2024](#)). In political cases, torture is not only tolerated, but sometimes ordered or, as in the case of the participants in the 2022 protests, systematically used to intimidate the population and deter further protests. This applies to unregistered prisons, but also 'official' prisons, in particular the notorious Wing 209 in Tehran's Evin Prison, which is directly under the control of the Ministry of Intelligence [MOIS/VAJA] and where political prisoners are held ([AA 15/7/2024](#)). Torture and ill-treatment often began immediately after arrest and continued during transfer to detention centres, police stations, MOIS or Revolutionary Guards detention centres and prisons, according to affected participants in the Women, Life, Freedom protests. Most violations occurred during the initial period of detention, particularly during interrogations. The worst violence, including rape and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence, was committed in unofficial detention centres of the Revolutionary Guards and the MOIS ([UNHRC 19/3/2024](#)).

On the one hand, the aim of torture is to obtain confessions, on which the Iranian justice system relies heavily ([IRWIRE 17/2/2023](#); cf. [AA 15/7/2024](#)). Former prisoners report that they were beaten and tortured during detention until they confessed to crimes dictated by interrogators ([FH 2025](#)). On the other hand, the systematic and widespread use of torture serves as a deterrent. The third motive for torture, which is linked to the previous one and applies exclusively to political prisoners, is the public display of broken personalities. Torturing political opponents with the aim of extracting false confessions and broadcasting them publicly sends a message to society that the government can crush any resistance ([IRWIRE 17/2/2023](#); cf. [AA 15/7/2024](#)). State television is known for broadcasting confessions of political prisoners extracted under duress, torture or other ill-treatment ([FH 2025](#); cf. [AI 29/4/2025](#)).

There are also reports of people who were arbitrarily detained in psychiatric institutions for political reasons and subjected to torture and other ill-treatment, including the forced administration of medication ([AI 29/4/2025](#)). The use of torture involves the risk of death. There are also reports of suicide after release from prison, particularly among younger detainees ([AA 15/7/2024](#)).

Impunity remains a widespread problem among all security forces ([USDOS 23/4/2024](#); cf. [AI 29/4/2025](#)).

The Iranian Penal Code (IPC) contains punishments that are tantamount to torture, including flogging, blinding, amputation, crucifixion and stoning ([AI 29/4/2025](#)). Corporal punishment can be imposed and executed at any time for offences that contradict Islamic principles. Even the possession of small amounts of alcohol can lead to a sentence of lashes (a two-digit number of lashes is quite realistic). The most common cases for which the punishment of flogging is carried out are illegitimate relationships, extramarital sex, participation in mixed-sex events, drug offences and offences against public safety. Floggings are also sometimes carried out in public ([ÖB Teheran 11/2021](#)). There are reports of cases in which amputation punishments ([IRINTL 12/9/2024](#); cf. [KHRN 16/1/2025](#), [OHCHR 10/4/2025](#)) and floggings were imposed and executed ([IRWIRE 2/12/2024](#), [IRWIRE 28/10/2024](#); cf. [HRW 16/1/2025](#)). Since 2002, there has been a moratorium on the execution of stoning sentences ([IRINTL 14/1/2023](#)) and since 2010 there

have been no reports of any executed stoning sentences, although the decision on the type of execution of the death penalty lies in principle with the judge (BAMF 12/2024).

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8 Corruption

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Transparency International ranks Iran 151st out of 180 countries surveyed in its 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index with 23 (out of 100) points (0='highly corrupt', 100='very clean') [2023: 149th out of 180] (TI 11/2/2025). There are numerous reports of corruption by government agencies

(USDOS 23/4/2024). Corruption remains widespread at all levels of the bureaucracy, although the authorities regularly call for the problem to be tackled (FH 2025). It is also widespread within the political elite. Members of the political elite are rarely prosecuted, and when they are, it is mainly because of political rivalries (BS 19/3/2024). Nepotism or cronyism is also a significant factor in the Iranian political system [Note: This is not to be equated with corruption, but may favour it]. In many countries, especially in authoritarian and patrimonial states, formal government structures are underpinned by informal social relations that determine access to positions of power and influence. Iran is no exception. Family ties, revolutionary merit and a clerical lineage are important tickets to the Iranian government apparatus and the privileges associated with it (Clingendael 19/12/2024).

The judiciary is characterised by corruption. According to reliable statements by lawyers, judges are sometimes prepared to make concessions in return for appropriate compensation (AA 15/7/2024). There are reports of 'grand' corruption by high-ranking representatives of the security and law enforcement authorities (FP 28/2/2023; cf. IRWIRE 4/6/2021) as well as the payment of bribes ('tea money') to police officers, for example to avoid penalties for speeding or drug possession offences. Sometimes members of the Revolutionary Guards and Basij or judges are also bribed to avoid punishment for more serious offences or to influence court proceedings. Conversely, victims of burglary sometimes pay bribes to police officers to 'increase the chances of catching the thief' (IRWIRE 28/4/2021). Bribery of military personnel, police officers and other members of law enforcement in Iran has been described as 'systemic'. Favouring factors include the recruitment of people with criminal records as police officers. Inequalities and wage discrimination also play a role, as does the lack of adequate supervision by responsible officers. The police also suffer from 'inefficient organisation' (IRWIRE 6/9/2021).

In 1979, the Islamic Republic initiated an economic reorganisation to protect the interests of the poor. This included the centralisation and nationalisation of banks and industries that were previously privately owned, as well as the establishment of 'charitable foundations' to manage investments and distribute resources for the benefit of society. However, this system proved to be highly susceptible to corruption (BS 19/3/2024). The charitable foundations, or bonyads, contribute between a quarter and a third of the country's economic output. They receive favours from the government, but their financial conduct is not monitored. Opposition politicians and international organisations regularly accuse the Bonyads of corruption. These tax-exempt organisations are run by people close to the government, such as members of the military or the clergy. Numerous companies linked to the Revolutionary Guards are, sometimes illegally, involved in trade and commerce, including telecommunications, mining and construction. Other Revolutionary Guards companies are involved in the smuggling of medicines, drugs, raw materials and weapons (USDOS 23/4/2024).

The law provides for penalties for corruption in the public sector, but the government implements this only arbitrarily. Sometimes corruption cases against public officials are legally prosecuted, while at the same time politically motivated charges are brought against regime critics or political opponents (USDOS 23/4/2024). There are institutional measures to combat corruption, but

their effectiveness and implementation have been criticised. Iran's Supreme Audit Court (Di-vân-e Mohâsebât-e Keshvar, SAC), which is formally supervised by parliament, is responsible for auditing government spending. Concerns have been raised about its independence and effectiveness, as it operates under the de facto supervision of the judiciary, which is influenced by political and religious authorities. For example, the SAC is not allowed to audit the finances of the Revolutionary Guards, which is believed to have caused most of the corruption in the country (BS 19/3/2024).

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9 NGOs and human rights activists

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Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) concerned with human rights violations are generally suppressed by the state (FH 2025). The government restricts the activities of such local or international organisations and does not cooperate with them. It restricts the work of domestic activists and often responds to their requests and reports with harassment, arrests, online hacking and surveillance of individual activists and organisations' workplaces (USDOS 23/4/2024). Political dissidents and human and labour rights defenders continue to face arbitrary sentences, and the influence of the security apparatus on the courts has reportedly increased in recent years (FH 2025). Active, public human rights work is therefore not possible, is persecuted by the security forces and punished by the judiciary under pretence. The Ministry of the Interior warns against contacts with foreign countries and criticism of the Islamic Republic, which is harshly prosecuted in the form of criminal offences such as 'propaganda against the regime' or 'activities against national security'. In addition, NGOs have great difficulty tapping into financial

sources ([AA 15/7/2024](#)). According to the law, NGOs must register with the Ministry of the Interior and apply for authorisation in order to receive foreign subsidies ([USDOS 23/4/2024](#)). Recourse to foreign funding can result in prosecution for espionage, contact with the foreign opposition or similar charges ([AA 15/7/2024](#)).

In light of Israel's military operation against Iran in mid-June 2025, Iranian authorities have tightened internal security measures across the country, including mass arrests, executions and military operations, particularly in the restive Kurdish region. According to one activist, there are fears that the regime could exploit the situation to crack down on activists. A number of people have been summoned by the authorities and either arrested or warned against expressing any form of dissent ([REU 26/6/2025a](#)).

Human rights organisations are few and far between as they are under enormous pressure ([ÖB Teheran 11/2021](#)). The authorities routinely crack down on human rights defenders, preventing them from leaving the country, threatening them or arresting them arbitrarily. Government officials also harass and sometimes arrest family members of human rights defenders. Courts routinely suspend sentences against human rights defenders, allowing authorities to arbitrarily arrest or detain people on previous charges at any time ([USDOS 23/4/2024](#)). Many human rights defenders, labour rights activists and other civil society activists are behind bars ([HRW 16/1/2025](#)).

NGOs can only work in certain areas (such as the fight against drugs and refugee support); in other areas (women's rights, LGBT rights and, since 2018, environmental protection), NGOs are often not registered and operate under the threat of persecution ([ÖB Teheran 11/2021](#)). In recent years, there has also been a crackdown on groups that focus on [previously] 'apolitical' issues ([FH 2025](#)). For example, the closure of several NGOs carrying out charitable work has been reported, including NGOs supporting women ([IRINTL 30/4/2024](#)).

The Iranian authorities' efforts to suppress critical voices and restrict civil engagement extend beyond the country's borders and affect Iranian communities worldwide. Through patterns of repression and control mechanisms in other countries, they have effectively restricted the diaspora's freedom of expression, association and assembly and, in extreme cases, orchestrated the assassination of Iranians abroad ([UNHRC 12/3/2025](#); cf. [USDOS 23/4/2024](#)).

Historically, the US government's financial support of critics of the Islamic Republic has been a source of tension between Tehran and Washington, with Iran often accusing the US of seeking regime change through such measures. In early 2025, the US administration of President Donald Trump temporarily froze funding for dozens of organisations that aim to promote human rights and democracy in Iran. While this has implications for the work of human rights groups and dissidents, the move has been welcomed by pro-regime Iranian media ([Amwaj 3/2/2025](#)).

Note: On the treatment of activists returning to Iran and on transnational persecution, see also the chapter [Return / Transnational Repression, Treatment of Activists on Return](#). The chapter also contains information on the treatment of family members of exiled Iranian activists living in Iran.

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10 Military service

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Military service is compulsory and applies to all men between the ages of 18 and around 40 (DFAT 24/7/2023; cf. CIA 14/5/2025). Until October 2023, it was 18 to 24 months long, but has since been shortened to a minimum of 14 and a maximum of 21 months (AA 15/7/2024; cf. e-estekhdam n.d). The changed periods of service apply to all conscripts and are determined on the basis of the specific place of service and the type of duties assigned (IRNA 22/10/2023). There is no alternative military service on grounds of conscientious objection (DFAT 24/7/2023).

There are exemptions from military service for various reasons, including, for example, health problems or possibly being the only son, as well as temporary exemptions to pursue higher education (Amwaj 26/2/2025, TABNAK 13/8/2024). Transgender, homosexual and bisexual men may be exempted for medical reasons if their sexual orientation or identity is classified as a medical condition. Exemption cards will list the article and corresponding section under which the exemption is granted under military law. The entry in the exemption cards thus exposes the persons concerned to an increased risk of physical abuse and discrimination in everyday life (MBZ 9/2023; cf. DFAT 24/7/2023).

Exemption from military service could be purchased until 2019. A paid exemption scheme was announced in January 2022, but was quickly withdrawn after a public backlash (DFAT 24/7/2023). The draft budget for 2025/2026 does not provide for a corresponding regulation either (Namnak 17/11/2024), and exemption from military service is not possible (e-estekhdam n.d). In the past, fines could be paid for absenteeism, which enabled wealthy people to avoid service.

Now, wealthy Iranians sometimes try to avoid conscription by migrating, or by paying a bribe (DFAT 24/7/2023).

According to confidential sources from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it is possible for expatriate Iranians to buy their way out of military service (MBZ 9/2023). According to the website of the Iranian Consulate General in Munich, however, no implementing regulation has been issued to date (Generalkonsulat München n.d), while the Consulate General in Frankfurt states that exemption from military service is prohibited (Generalkonsulat Frankfurt n.d). Short visits by Iranians living abroad lasting less than three months are possible in Iran under certain conditions without being immediately drafted into military service (MBZ 9/2023; cf. DFAT 24/7/2023, Generalkonsulat Frankfurt n.d).

Conscripts are not called up individually by letter, but must report to the military authorities themselves. Conscription for service takes place at the age of 18 and is a recognised legal obligation. Individuals are obliged to report for duty at their local conscription centre without being asked (SFH 17/5/2022), or within six months of the call-up being published (TABNAK 13/8/2024), whereby the call-up announcements are published via the media according to an older source (SFH 17/5/2022). In March 2025, for example, several websites published an announcement by FARAJA (police) calling on people born between 1976 and 2007 to 'determine their military service status' (IREST 26/3/2025, Tasnim 25/3/2025).

After completing their military service, conscripts receive a certificate card 'on the end of military service' (kart-e payan-e khetmat) (FP 30/1/2023; cf. USDOS n.d), which all men in Iran must have (FP 30/1/2023). This identity card is important in everyday life; it is required, for example, when looking for a job, applying for a passport or even when buying a motorbike (WP 27/2/2021) and ensures that the majority of young men complete their military service (SFH 17/5/2022).

Men who are exempt from conscription are given an exemption card (kart-e mo'afiyat az khed-mate doreye zaroorat). In the case of mass exemptions from compulsory military service, a copy of the exemption certificate and the birth certificate (proof of status) can be submitted instead of this card. Temporary student exemptions can also be documented by a letter from the military service authority and proof of the student's deposit payment for departure from Iran (USDOS n.d).

With a few exceptions, conscripts, i.e. male citizens over the age of 18 who are not temporarily exempt from compulsory military service because they are studying, are not allowed to leave the country before completing their military service (i.e. they will only receive a passport afterwards) or must pay a larger deposit (ÖB Teheran 11/2021). Students who wish to travel abroad as tourists or for research purposes can pay a deposit to the conscription authority (police) in order to leave the country. The amount of the deposit is determined by the conscription authority and is said to vary between EUR 60 (e.g. for pilgrimages) and EUR 900 (studies) (AA 15/7/2024). Members of the armed forces and police may only leave the country with the consent of their employer (ÖB Teheran 11/2021).

Conditions in the Iranian military can be very harsh, especially in remote areas, with conscripts' experiences varying depending on where they are deployed and the type of work they do (DFAT 24/7/2023).

Military service with the Revolutionary Guards

Military service can be performed with the following organisations, among others: regular armed forces (Artesh), Revolutionary Guards (IRGC), police, Ministry of Defence, Security Guard of the judicial authorities, but also with nature conservation authorities and city administrations (AA 15/7/2024). Conscripts cannot choose the type of service or the place to where they are deployed (DFAT 24/7/2023), and therefore not whether they perform their military service with the regular army or with the Revolutionary Guards. An exception is made if they have previously worked for a particular organisation (ACCORD 7/2015).

Of the approximately 400,000 annual recruits, around 50,000 do their military service with the Revolutionary Guards (FP 30/1/2023). There are basically two different ways in which conscripts are accepted into the Revolutionary Guards. On the one hand, the military service authority randomly assigns recruits to the organisation, as it does to other places of service for conscripts. On the other hand, in contrast to places of service such as the Artesh, it is also possible to actively apply for military service with the Revolutionary Guards (IRTAHSIL 12/3/2024).

Since 2010, efforts have been underway to enlist mainly active members of the Basij volunteer militia as conscripts in the Revolutionary Guards. Since then, the majority of conscripts in the Revolutionary Guards have been recruited from Basij volunteers who are ideologically affiliated with the Revolutionary Guards (FP 30/1/2023; cf. IRTAHSIL 12/3/2024), although there are also Basij members who have joined the militia in order to shorten the duration of their military service or to complete it in a government office instead of at a military base, for example, and who are not ardent supporters of the regime (Kayhan 14/10/2022). The remaining proportion of conscripts in the Revolutionary Guards is made up of university graduates who can apply for desk jobs in organisations associated with the Revolutionary Guards (cultural, political, economic) on the basis of their professional specialisations by means of directives (Amriyeh). Each of these conscripts must make a personal and proactive decision on where to apply for their Amriyeh. On the other hand, the Conscription Authority also allocates conscripts to the Revolutionary Guards in those areas where there are too few Basij members for military service (FP 30/1/2023). Another source describes the observation, based on individual cases, that well-educated conscripted men in their mid or late 20s who have made full use of their opportunities to defer military service are conscripted into the Revolutionary Guards, while 18- or 19-year-old recruits who are less educated or come from rural areas are more likely to be deployed in the regular armed forces to secure the borders, although nothing is known about the specific selection process (Jezebel 8/10/2024). Even though many volunteer for the Revolutionary Guards, this does not apply to all recruits working there (Posch 5/7/2024).

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10.1 Evasion of military service, desertion

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Conscripts who fail to report to the conscription centre for service after reaching the age of 18 are considered draft evaders (SFH 17/5/2022). Draft evaders are liable to prosecution (AA 15/7/2024). Criminal sanctions include fines or prison sentences or the withdrawal of driving licences, passports or permission to leave the country (DFAT 24/7/2023). According to the German Foreign Office, however, the Iranian criminal authorities do not prosecute conscientious objectors very intensively in peacetime (AA 15/7/2024). Instead, the delinquents have disadvantages when taking up employment with state institutions and are prevented from leaving Iran (no passport issued) (AA 15/7/2024; cf. DFAT 24/7/2023). In addition, the period of military service can be extended depending on the absence. According to the Federal Foreign Office, nothing is currently known about further reprisals. Pardons on high Iranian holidays regularly affect those convicted of conscientious objection to military service (AA 15/7/2024). The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs also reports that those who leave the country and return before the age of 40 are conscripted [note: for a stay of more than three months, see main chapter]. Those over the age of 40 are likely to be fined (DFAT 24/7/2023), and conscientious objection to military service will not be recognised (CPTI 8/2022; cf. ACCORD 7/2015).

The punishment for desertion in peacetime differs from that in wartime (ISNA 15/1/2022). According to Article 59 of the Military Penal Code, a soldier who is absent for more than fifteen consecutive days in peacetime without a valid reason is considered a deserter and, if arrested, is sentenced to three months to one year's imprisonment or an additional three months to one year's compulsory service. Anyone who reports back within 60 days without the case having been reported to the judicial authorities must serve up to three months' additional service in accordance with Article 60. If more than 60 days have elapsed, a sentence of two to six months' imprisonment may be imposed (Bonyad Vokala 10/12/2024; cf. ISNA 15/1/2022). When imposing sentences, judges may also take into account special circumstances under which the desertion took place, such as family problems or great financial hardship. Remorse and a good reputation, for example, can also lead to a prison sentence being commuted to a fine (Bonyad Vokala 10/12/2024).

A pre-planned escape by more than two people is considered an 'escape with conspiracy'. According to an Iranian news agency close to the state, if those involved are considered combatants, it is likely that the death penalty will be imposed, or otherwise three to 15 years in prison in wartime and two to five years in peacetime (ISNA 15/1/2022). The only mention of offences relating to members of the armed forces in the Iranian Penal Code (IPC) is found in Article 504 (FIDH 2020), which states: 'Whoever effectively incites combatants or members of the armed forces to rebel, flee, surrender or disobey military orders with the intention of overthrowing the government or defeating the national armed forces against the enemy shall be considered mohareb; otherwise (if he does not act with intent) he shall be sentenced, if his actions are effective, to two to ten years, otherwise to six months to three years imprisonment' [Note.: regarding 'mohareb' or 'mohārebeh ba khoda' s. Chapter on [legal protection / judiciary / Islamic Penal Code \(IStGB\), sentencing practice](#)] (IStGB 15/7/2013). Furthermore, desertion is regulated in the Military Penal Code of 2003 [see above] (FIDH 2020).

Draft evaders, i.e. if someone does not report for military service, is tried before the General and Revolutionary Prosecutor's Office and then the Second Criminal Court. Desertion, i.e. if someone has reported for military service and is then absent for a longer period of time, is first tried by the Military Prosecutor's Office and then by the Second Military Court (Bonyad Vokala 10/12/2024).

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11 General human rights situation

Last modification 2025-07-17 06:41

The Iranian Constitution (IRC) of 15 November 1979 contains a comprehensive catalogue of fundamental rights. However, the general proviso of compliance with Islamic principles in Art. 4 of the IRC allows for considerable restrictions. The 'High Council for Human Rights' created in 2001 is directly subordinate to the judiciary and does not fulfil the requirements of the 'Paris Principles' adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1993. For decades, Iran has not complied with the majority of requests for visits from the special mechanisms (special rapporteurs) of the United Nations Human Rights Council, and the regime also refused to cooperate with a UN fact-finding commission to investigate the violent crackdown on the protests in autumn 2022. The last UN General Assembly resolution against Iran in 2022 denounced serious human rights violations and called on Iran to cooperate internationally. However, Iran rejects UN resolutions specific to Iran, accusing the West of instrumentalising human rights for political purposes, and does not engage with the content of the resolutions (AA 15/7/2024).

Iran is one of the countries with a persistently worrying human rights situation, particularly with regard to political and civil rights, and the scope for civil society engagement in the area of human rights has narrowed considerably in recent years (ÖB Teheran 11/2021). The Iranian state regularly violates human rights according to the Western definition, but also repeatedly violates those defined by Islam (GIZ 2020). State repression against any activity that is perceived as an attack on the political system or that questions Islamic principles is particularly severe and widespread. This is particularly pronounced among groups that represent the interests of religious or ethnic minorities. The legal basis for this is provided by broadly defined criminal offences (cf. Art. 279 to 288 of the IPC) and state protection offences (in particular Art. 1 to 18 of Book 5 of the IPC). Persons whose public criticism is directed against the system of the Islamic Republic of Iran as such and who at the same time maintain intensive foreign contacts run the risk of being accused of espionage. Prosecution is often arbitrary and selective, even for low-level criticism (AA 15/7/2024).

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12 Freedom of opinion and freedom of the press

Last modification 2025-07-17 12:30

The constitution provides for the right to freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, unless the statements are considered 'harmful to the fundamental principles of Islam or the rights of the public' (USDOS 23/4/2024), although the term 'harmful' remains undefined and, together with the overlapping jurisdictions of different institutions, contributes to uncertainty in the application of the law, which favours arbitrariness, repression and censorship (MLDSC 2019a).

The legislation allows for prosecution for incitement to commit offences against the state or national security and for 'insulting' Islam and spreading 'propaganda' against the Islamic Republic of Iran or in support of opposition groups and associations (USDOS 23/4/2024), although 'propaganda' is not defined (ÖB Teheran 11/2021). The government uses this legislation to intimidate or prosecute individuals who directly criticise the government, raise human rights issues or question the government's enforcement of moral codes (USDOS 23/4/2024). In practice, freedom of expression and freedom of the press face severe restrictions (AA 15/7/2024; cf. HRW 16/1/2025), both online and offline (FH 2025).

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12.1 Access to information, National Information Network (NIN/SHOMA)

Last modification 2025-07-17 10:44

According to the Press Act, newspapers and other publications can only operate under the supervision of the authorities (GEOPQ/Shahadha/et al. Q2/2023). Newspapers must be authorised by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance before publication in accordance with Art. 21 of the Media Law. In any case, the press is characterised by a large number of highly changeable 'red lines' of the revolutionary leader, which are not set out in writing and lead to a considerable degree of self-censorship. Violations can result in sanctions, including the banning of newspapers (AA 15/7/2024), although independent newspapers are rare anyway (GEOPQ/Shahadha/et al. Q2/2023). However, the Iranian press landscape reflects a certain range of different positions within the existing political spectrum (AA 15/7/2024; cf. IRINTL 29/9/2024).

There is a state monopoly on broadcasting ([AA 15/7/2024](#); cf. [Landinfo 9/11/2022](#)) and the head of the state broadcasting company (in Farsi: Seda va Sima, in English: Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, IRIB) is appointed by the revolutionary leader ([MLDSC 2019b](#); cf. [GEOPQ/Shahadha/et al. Q2/2023](#)). The state broadcaster is strictly controlled by hardliners and influenced by the security apparatus. News and analyses are heavily censored, although state television is an important source of information for the Iranian population ([FH 2025](#)). Reception of foreign satellite programmes is prohibited without special permission, although it is widespread ([AA 15/7/2024](#)). Satellite dishes are prohibited and Farsi-language transmissions from abroad are regularly jammed. The police occasionally raid private homes and confiscate satellite dishes ([FH 2025](#)).

Access to the internet, National Information Network (NIN/SHOMA)

As of January 2024, just over 80% of the population used the internet ([FH 16/10/2024](#)), with more than 60% of data traffic already running via mobile internet in 2022 ([RSF 5/10/2022](#)). Since 2009, the authorities have invested considerable resources in expanding the infrastructure, but also in monitoring its use ([Landinfo 9/11/2022](#)). The government's investments in ICT infrastructure have increased internet connectivity and speed. However, the expansion of the country's national internet architecture, the National Information Network (NIN) [in Farsi: SHOMA], also enables the government to deliberately restrict internet access ([FH 16/10/2024](#)). The NIN is therefore a double-edged sword ([FES 6/2024](#)).

The NIN is a mixture of regulations, market incentives, infrastructure and technologies designed to exclude Iranian internet users from the global internet ([FES 6/2024](#)). Through the NIN, the authorities have taken steps to introduce a 'layered' or 'tiered' Internet structure, where certain groups of people have access to the global Internet while the rest remain on the domestic network. Government figures on the development status of the NIN have been controversial in the past, but the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (ICT Ministry) is encouraging the Iranian population to switch to the domestic internet infrastructure by reducing bandwidth and increasing prices for international internet services. In early 2024, the Ministry of ICT received a 25% budget increase to further drive the expansion of the NIN and to minimise dependence on the global internet ([FH 16/10/2024](#)).

Among other things, the government is therefore trying to use price incentives to encourage internet users to switch to national platforms ([FES 6/2024](#); cf. [Filterwatch 27/1/2023](#)). For example, the tariffs for data traffic on the website Aparat, which is similar to YouTube ([FH 16/10/2024](#)), or when using Iranian apps, are cheaper. Users are also forced to download Iranian messaging apps such as Rubika, Bale, Gap, Eitaa and Soroush to gain access to certain services such as e-government and banking functions ([FES 6/2024](#); cf. [Filterwatch 27/1/2023](#)). These apps and services are more vulnerable to government control, they allow access to data and monitoring of users and content ([Filterwatch 27/1/2023](#); cf. [FH 16/10/2024](#)), and are a massive repository of user data that is easily accessible to the authorities and allows them to link information ([FES 6/2024](#)).

The NIN was built on the basis of the existing infrastructure that connects Iran to the global internet (FES 6/2024). The telecommunications company that controls internet traffic to and from Iran is owned by the Revolutionary Guards (Landinfo 9/11/2022). This company alone is authorised to import Internet bandwidth into Iran and distribute it to local Internet providers. The centralised gateway system that connects Iran to the outside world makes it easier for the authorities to separate the NIN from the global Internet (FES 6/2024). In addition, the authorities oblige all internet providers operating in Iran to use censorship and filtering software. When notified by the authorities, they must continuously add new websites to their censorship list (GEOPQ/Shahadha/et al. Q2/2023). According to reports from 2020 and 2022, the Iranian regime is increasingly relying on so-called whitelists: access to certain websites and services must be explicitly permitted by the provider instead of being explicitly blocked, as is the case with blacklisting (Manafi 1/12/2022; cf. u/TSMWorldChampions 24/9/2022, Geneva 18/3/2020). This also makes it more difficult to use tools to circumvent censorship, such as VPNs (virtual private networks) or proxies (u/TSMWorldChampions 24/9/2022; cf. Geneva 18/3/2020).

Foreign platforms such as Facebook, SnapChat, TikTok, X, YouTube - and, since the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' protests, Instagram - are blocked or filtered, as are the messaging apps Viber, Telegram and Signal (FH 16/10/2024). Restrictions on WhatsApp, which was accessible until the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' protests in Iran (FH 16/10/2024), were lifted in December 2024, according to an announcement by the High Council for Cyberspace, as was access to the Google Play app store (IRINTL 24/12/2024; cf. Heise 27/12/2024). However, social media platforms, which are banned in Iran along with thousands of websites, continue to be popular with millions of users, which has led them to resort to circumvention tools to access them for years (AJ 24/2/2024; cf. Landinfo 9/11/2022).

VPN services are primarily used to circumvent filtering and blocking (BAMF 12/12/2024; cf. Stimson 9/9/2024). Their purchase and sale was banned in 2022. Since February 2024, their use has also only been permitted with a licence (AJ 24/2/2024; cf. FH 16/10/2024). The Iranian authorities blocked numerous proxy servers and VPNs from September 2022 in response to the 'Women, Life, Freedom' protests (FH 16/10/2024). The authorities filter and block VPN traffic so that Iranian internet users have to keep switching between different VPNs. There is a black market for VPN services, many of which are operated by the regime itself. Insecure VPN connections pose a security risk as they can be vulnerable to hacking attacks and data leaks (Stimson 9/9/2024).

In theory, satellite internet also provides access to uncensored, reliable and relatively fast internet (FES 6/2024). However, the necessary receivers must be purchased on the black market, which, together with its relatively high costs, makes the service a limited option (BAMF 12/12/2024; cf. FES 6/2024). Satellite internet is banned in Iran (IRINTL 6/1/2025; cf. FES 6/2024) and providers require a licence (FES 6/2024). According to a member of the Iranian e-commerce association, the (unlicensed, FES 6/2024) satellite internet provider Starlink still has 100,000 users in Iran as of January 2025 (IRINTL 6/1/2025).

Selective internet shutdowns are often used to prevent protests. For example, the massive protests against the government from September 2022 were accompanied by numerous localised internet and mobile phone shutdowns (FH 16/10/2024). Internet speeds were also throttled (USDOS 23/4/2024; cf. NatGeo 17/10/2022). In light of the Israeli military operation in Iran in mid-2025, extensive nationwide internet outages were reported, with some connections failing completely and others only being available inconsistently, making communication difficult. An expert interviewed by Radio Farda, the Farsi-language station of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), surmised that the authorities had throttled the internet to prevent an uprising (RFE/RL 19/6/2025). Apart from the government's security-centred policy, internet outages are also associated with economic and technical reasons (Filterwatch 16/4/2025; cf. Filterwatch 30/5/2025).

In addition to the restrictions imposed by the Iranian government, the access of Iranian residents to online content is also restricted by the sanctions regimes of Western states (FES 6/2024; cf. Stimson 9/9/2024). Many Iranian companies, websites and users have been banned from US and European servers and services, forcing them to migrate to the NIN (FES 6/2024). However, in the wake of the protests, the US Treasury Department also created exemptions from the sanctions regulations from September 2022 to allow the export of software and communication tools. This made several platforms and services accessible to Iranians (FH 16/10/2024).

In recent years, the number of Iranian websites that can no longer be accessed from abroad [or with a foreign IP address] has also increased as a result of so-called geo-blocking by the Iranian regime. This makes it difficult for journalists, human rights organisations, academics and governments to gain insights into the situation on the ground (CIRA 30/4/2023).

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12.2 Freedom of expression and censorship in traditional media, artistic and academic freedom

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Reporters Without Borders describes Iran as one of the most repressive countries in the world in terms of press freedom. Following the extensive wave of protests from September 2022, Iran is one of the countries with the most imprisoned journalists worldwide. In 2024, the country ranked

176th out of 180 in the organisation's press freedom index with a score of 21.3 [*note: the lower the rank, the lower the press freedom*] ([RSF n.db](#)).

A list compiled by Reporters Without Borders of legal measures taken against female journalists in connection with the 'Women, Life, Freedom' protests includes the following charges, some of which have (already) resulted in convictions: Spreading propaganda against the Islamic Republic (Art. 500 IPC); assembly and conspiracy to act against national security; offences against national security; disturbing public order; spreading lies, defamation and threats; disturbing public opinion by spreading lies on social media and appearing in public without proper concealment; blasphemy; collaborating with a foreign state ([RSF 16/9/2024](#)).

Newspapers and media are always exposed to the risk of being shut down if they report in an unfavourable manner. This also applies to regime media. Newspaper editors are often arrested in this context. Employees of foreign news organisations (especially critical Farsi-language media such as the BBC, DW or Voice of America) and independent journalists are reportedly often confronted with delays in the granting of press licences by the Iranian authorities, arrests, corporal punishment ([ÖB Teheran 11/2021](#)) or intimidation of their relatives ([ÖB Teheran 11/2021](#); cf. [RSF 17/4/2024](#), [FAZ 28/11/2023](#)). Intimidation, summonses and criminal charges against journalists were also reported in 2025, e.g. to obstruct reporting on a large-scale explosion in Shahid Rajaei harbour in April that left 65 people dead ([CPJ 6/5/2025](#); cf. [Guardian 29/4/2025](#)). Editors of newspapers and news agencies - including the state agency IRNA - were also convicted in press courts ([CPJ 6/5/2025](#)).

Iranian journalists also faced intimidation and attacks in countries such as the UK, France, Germany, Sweden and the US ([RSF 17/4/2024](#)), including a plot to assassinate two well-known television presenters from an exiled Iranian broadcaster in the UK ([Guardian 30/1/2024](#); cf. [RSF 17/4/2024](#)).

Artistic and academic freedom

Artists are also under pressure, especially if their art is seen as 'un-Islamic' or critical of the regime, or if they sell their films to foreign film production companies or even just show them abroad (this is subject to authorisation). Numerous artists have been fined for mostly 'anti-regime propaganda' and other charges. Many are regularly imprisoned or have been sentenced to long-term activity and interview bans ([ÖB Teheran 11/2021](#)). In 2024 and 2025, for example, there were reports of internationally renowned directors being sentenced to prison ([BAMF 14/4/2025](#), [Profil 9/12/2024](#)), as well as the conviction of a cartoonist accused of 'insulting sacred values' and 'propaganda' ([RFE/RL 13/6/2024](#)). According to the authorities, a well-known singer was temporarily detained in February 2025 for singing solo without a licence and the content of her Instagram account was deleted ([BAMF 3/3/2025](#)). A death sentence imposed on rapper Toomaj Salehi was cancelled in June 2024 and he was released from prison in December 2024. The well-known musician had publicly supported the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' protests and was subsequently imprisoned in October 2022. Salehi, who sharply criticised the political leadership in his lyrics, had already been banned from giving concerts ([BBC 2/12/2024](#)).

Academic freedom is still restricted. Supreme Leader Khamenei has warned that universities should not be turned into centres for political activities. University professors have been dismissed in large numbers for supporting the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' protests, or for other political reasons (FH 2025). In August 2024, an Iranian daily newspaper reported that President Pezeshkian, who was elected in July, had asked the Minister of Health and Medical Education, Mohammad Reza Zafarghandi, to review the cases of all dismissed or terminated professors and to reinstate the dismissed students who had been expelled from universities after the protests in 2022. In September 2024, Zafarghandi ordered the suspension of all judgements against students who had been suspended in the last two years (HRW 16/1/2025; cf. FH 2025). At least one professor was allowed to teach again, but many others testified that they remained barred (FH 2025).

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12.3 Freedom of expression and censorship on the internet

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The debate critical of the regime largely takes place on social media. For illegal opposition parties, the internet is the favoured channel for exchanging information ([Landinfo 9/11/2022](#)). The 'Woman, Life, Freedom' protests have led to an unprecedented level of critical expression online (as well as offline), from activists and human rights defenders as well as ordinary citizens ([FH 16/10/2024](#)). Iran's vaguely defined speech restrictions, harsh criminal sanctions and government surveillance of online communication are among the factors that discourage citizens from engaging in open and free private discussions. Self-censorship is widespread online, although many express their dissenting opinions despite the risks and restrictions on social media, in some cases by circumventing government blocks on certain platforms ([FH 2025](#)).

In light of the Israeli military operation against Iran in mid-2025, the Iranian authorities have tightened internal security measures across the country ([REU 26/6/2025a](#)). Among other things, arrests were also reported for 'spreading rumours' on social media ([FR24 24/6/2025](#)).

In the second half of 2024, the NGO Miaan Group recorded the following activities in the digital space, which it attributed to the Islamic Republic of Iran's policy of digital control and repression: targeted 'content management' such as the deletion of posts on social media through mass reporting [to the operator, i.e. usually Western platforms], cutting journalists' SIM cards and forcing them to delete their posts on social media, deleting activists' social media accounts and also spreading false information to discredit activists and disseminate misleading information to the public; targeted cyberattacks, e.g. hacking of accounts, phishing, spreading malware and identity fraud; and arrests and confiscation of devices, including to access activists' online accounts and personal data ([MIAAN 25/2/2025](#)).

Internet history is 'filtered' or can be read. Anyone who expresses criticism of the regime online runs the risk of being accused of waging a 'cyber war' against the country and inciting protests ([AA 15/7/2024](#)). The state monitors social media for activities it deems illegal. In May 2020, for example, the cyber police FATA announced that not wearing the hijab online would be considered a criminal offence and violators would be prosecuted ([FH 16/10/2024](#)). With the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' protests, there have been increasing reports that the Iranian authorities are using AI-powered technologies, including facial recognition, to identify protesters - particularly women who violate hijab legislation ([FH 16/10/2024](#); cf. [FES 6/2024](#)). So far, however, the only evidence that the Iranian authorities are using AI-powered facial recognition technologies is their own assertion. The extent to which they actually use these technologies is not known. However, research by a specialist organisation has shown that the Islamic Republic is clearly trying to develop facial recognition technologies and image processing software that can be used to examine online images to see if they violate Iranian laws. The emerging surveillance technologies also include reporting apps and a lifestyle monitoring system based on big data ([FES 6/2024](#)).

Iranian authorities exert direct pressure on content creators by threatening, interrogating, arresting and imposing punitive measures on online activists, social and political figures, celebrities and influencers ([FES 6/2024](#)). For example, after [large-scale] explosions at Shahid Rajaei

harbour in Bandar Abbas, the authorities attempted to stop the flow of information by, among other things, summoning social media activists and influential Instagram users and forcing them to delete their online posts (Filterwatch 16/5/2025).

Security agencies such as the Revolutionary Guards are pressurising imprisoned activists to disclose their social media credentials. They are then used for surveillance and phishing attacks. Iranian state actors often carry out hacking attacks against activists, including those in the diaspora (FH 16/10/2024). Around 70% of all cyberattacks recorded by the Miaan Group in the second half of 2024 concerned the security of user accounts (MIAAN 25/2/2025). In addition, the Iranian authorities also carry out distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks in which websites of independent media are paralysed (FH 16/10/2024).

According to surveys by the Miaan Group, in the second half of 2024 (MIAAN 25/2/2025) - similar to 2023 (Filterwatch 27/11/2023) - members of ethnic minorities such as the Baloch, Kurds or Turkmen or activists for the rights of these groups were particularly affected by cyberattacks, as well as dissidents, participants in protests, women's rights activists and artists (MIAAN 25/2/2025).

The Iranian regime also deploys a 'cyber army' (IRWIRE 5/6/2023) to influence narratives in social media (NLM 5/9/2023 cf. IRWIRE 5/6/2023) and spread disinformation. The aim of disinformation campaigns is less to convince people of their own narrative than to sow doubt so that internet users ultimately no longer trust any sources on social media - even people who are credible per se. In addition to creating confusion, discrediting and undermining the opposition is a key component of Iranian cyber activities. In part, this is also done via hacking attacks on opposition members and through fake social media accounts (so-called sock puppet accounts). The aim is to play different factions of the opposition off against each other. These efforts are also part of a broader effort to create the impression that no one is trustworthy and credible (Wired 21/3/2023). In January 2024, according to the opposition news website Iran International, the regime's 'cyber agents' also uncovered the identities of people who had previously operated anonymous opposition social media accounts. Several people were arrested as part of the online campaign, which is interpreted as a broad-based intimidation campaign against regime critics (IRINTL 6/1/2024).

Note: Information on the Iranian security authorities responsible for monitoring the internet can be found in the sub-chapter [Security authorities / Authorities monitoring internet activities](#). Information on the types of online activities of Iranians living abroad that may attract the attention of the Iranian authorities can be found in the subchapter [Return / Transnational Repression, Treatment of Activists on Return / Online Activities](#).

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13 Freedom of assembly and association, opposition

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The constitution states that public demonstrations are permitted if they are 'not detrimental to the basic principles of Islam'. In practice, only state-authorised demonstrations are generally permitted (FH 2025). The exercise of the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of assembly and association is subject to authorisation for public assemblies. Demonstrations by organisations close to the system take place on specific occasions and are usually orchestrated by the state; employees of the public administration as well as schoolchildren and students are obliged to participate, for example in rallies in front of Western embassies. Demonstrations by the political opposition, on the other hand, have not been authorised since the 2009 elections (AA 15/7/2024). In recent years, the security forces have violently dispersed unauthorised gatherings, arrested participants and even used lethal force (FH 2025).

Protests against the regime have repeatedly taken place in the Islamic Republic of Iran in the past, for example in 2009 due to massive fraud in the 2009 presidential elections (TWI 28/9/2022), or in December 2017/January 2018 due to price increases for basic goods (BBC 2/1/2018) and in 2019 following increases in petrol prices (TWI 28/9/2022). Iranian security authorities

used lethal force to suppress protests in 2019, including live ammunition fired indiscriminately at protesters ([DIS 1/7/2020](#)). In 2021, there were also protests by workers, pensioners and farmers over wages, job security and the right to organise collectively ([UNHRC 13/1/2022](#)), as well as protests in Khuzestan province over lack of access to water ([HRW 22/7/2021](#)). The latter were violently suppressed ([HRW 22/7/2021](#); cf. [UNHRC 13/1/2022](#)). Following the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Jina Amini in mid-September 2022, who was taken into custody by the security authorities for allegedly wearing inappropriate clothing, the largest protests in years took place under the slogan 'Woman, Life, Freedom'. They were also violently suppressed by the Iranian authorities ([EN 1/2/2023](#); cf. [Guardian 17/2/2023](#)). Around 550 protesters were killed, with the authorities taking particularly brutal action in areas inhabited by ethnic minorities and using militarised violence ([UNHRC 19/3/2024](#)). According to the Iranian government, over 20,000 protesters were detained at times ([DW 13/3/2023](#)).

Isolated anti-government demonstrations were also reported in 2025, e.g. in February ([IRINTL 12/2/2025](#) cf. [IRWIRE 10/2/2025](#)) and March ([Media Line 19/3/2025](#)). In February 2025, there were also reports of arrests to prevent a protest rally to mark the now 14-year house arrest of opposition politician Mir Hossein Mousavi and his wife Zahra Rahnavaard ([DW 6/3/2025](#); cf. [BAMF 17/2/2025](#)). In view of the Israeli military operation against Iran in mid-June 2025, the Iranian authorities tightened internal security measures throughout the country to prevent possible unrest ([REU 26/6/2025a](#)).

Observers of the protests from September 2022 reported that many protesters were not arrested on the streets, but at home a day or two later ([Wired 10/1/2023](#)). Little is known about specific technical aspects of the authorities' approach to suppressing the protests. It is believed that the authorities are using a computer system that works behind the scenes of Iran's mobile phone networks, providing operators with a wide range of remote commands to alter, disrupt and monitor the use of their customers' phones, such as slowing down data connections, cracking the encryption of phone calls, tracking the movements of individuals or large groups, and creating detailed summaries of metadata about who has spoken to whom, when and where ([Intercept 28/10/2022](#)). For example, a surveillance system installed on pickup trucks near universities and protest centres, which was reported on in 2020, intercepts Bluetooth transmissions to monitor political activists, dissidents and protesters ([Intel471 8/7/2020](#); cf. [Khorrami/TWI 29/3/2024](#)). Iranian mobile phone users reported receiving text messages from local police stations informing them that they had been in an 'unrest area' and should not visit this area again or contact 'anti-revolutionary' government opponents online ([Intercept 28/10/2022](#)).

There are also reports of local interruptions ([Filterwatch 16/4/2025](#), [FH 16/10/2024](#), [HRW 22/11/2023](#)) and internet speed throttling in connection with protests ([NatGeo 17/10/2022](#)), with the Filterwatch project, which specialises in analysing internet outages in Iran, linking 10% of all internet outages registered in March 2025 to protests, for example ([Filterwatch 16/4/2025](#)).

Note: Detailed information on the extensive 'Woman, Life, Freedom' protests between September 2022 and spring/summer 2023 can be found in the subchapter 'Protest wave 2022/2023'

of version 9 of the country information on Iran published by the Staatendokumentation on 17 October 2024.

Trade union activities

Iran has detailed regulations on employee organisation and association. These legal foundations institutionalise a weak system of employee representation, and the applicable labour law severely restricts freedom of association. Each company or occupational group may only form a single trade union. These organisations are weak and exist mainly at local company or district level. Formal trade union organisations remain linked to marginalised reformist factions in Iranian politics, which were largely excluded from political influence under [the late] President Raisi, who died in May 2024. In addition to the formal trade union organisations, there are also numerous independent trade union initiatives in Iran. However, due to state repression, these initiatives are often localised and short-lived (FES 3/2024). There is no possibility for independent trade unions to operate (ÖB Teheran 11/2021; cf. FH 2025), only state-sponsored labour councils are allowed. Labour rights groups have come under pressure in recent years (FH 2025). Leaders and activists have been sentenced to prison on national security-related charges (FH 2025; cf. AA 15/7/2024).

In addition to the above-mentioned restrictions on unionisation, there are clear de jure restrictions on the right to strike and the right to collective bargaining. Although both are formally permitted, extensive requirements for arbitration and strike procedures make these rights impracticable in practice. At the same time, the government informally tolerates strikes and often sides with the workers during strike action. They are rarely prosecuted for their participation in strikes. In contrast, independent forms of workers' organisation, longer-term and 'non-spontaneous' forms of strike action and protests with political demands face systematic state repression (FES 3/2024). Striking workers can be threatened with dismissal and arrest. Despite such reprisals, labour protests have increased in recent years due to growing economic hardship (AA 15/7/2024). At the end of May 2025, there were reports of over a week of strikes by lorry drivers in more than 130 Iranian cities against significant increases in insurance premiums and cuts in diesel subsidies. This is one of the largest strikes in recent years (RFE/RL 30/5/2025; cf. BBC 30/5/2025). It is supported by the lorry drivers' union. The authorities responded at the end of May by announcing that they would respond to the union's demands. At the same time, however, there were also reports of arrests of protesters (BBC 30/5/2025).

Political parties and opposition

The constitution allows the establishment of political parties, professional associations or religious organisations as long as they do not violate Islamic principles, national unity or the sovereignty of the state and do not question Islam as the basis of the system of government (ÖB Teheran 11/2021; cf. FH 2025). In addition, draconian punishments are repeatedly imposed for diffuse criminal offences ('anti-regime propaganda', 'insulting the Supreme Leader', etc.) (ÖB Teheran 11/2021).

Although there are political parties and groups (BS 19/3/2024; cf. MEHR 10/2/2024), they are not at the centre of the political process. In particular, they do not serve as a hub for political decision-making, the inclusion of popular demands in the political process, the implementation of measures, the control of the government or the recruitment of political personnel (BS 19/3/2024). Rather, politics in the Islamic Republic is conducted via (sometimes somewhat fluid) personal networks between the regime's elites (BS 19/3/2024; cf. FP 7/3/2024). Influential movements, groups and personalities publish lists of their favoured candidates during elections (FP 7/3/2024).

In parliament, there is no parliamentary opposition organised in fixed parliamentary groups comparable to European democracies. In both presidential and parliamentary elections, the Council of Guardians selects the candidates. Candidates are eliminated on flimsy grounds (ÖB Teheran 11/2021). Where there was a competition in the parliamentary and Expert Council elections in March 2024, this took place between various conservative factions. In the capital Tehran, for example, new conservatives with comparatively strict positions on Islamic law and a negative stance on reforms challenged established conservatives (FP 7/3/2024). The existing reform parties are rather weak (Stimson 10/3/2025). Reform-oriented politicians operating within the system are under increasing pressure and are not perceived as a legitimate alternative by large sections of the population (AA 15/7/2024). President Massoud Pezeshkian, who was elected to office in the summer of 2024, described himself as a 'reformist principlist', a combination of the two predominant political currents in Iran. He was never formally part of the reformist faction and differs in his demands from other contemporary reformists, many of whom are excluded from 'official' politics and some of whom are also under house arrest or in imprisonment (Stimson 30/7/2024FH 2025). While there has been some scope for power shifts between recognised factions within the establishment in the past, the unelected institutions of the political system are a permanent obstacle to opposition electoral victories and genuine power shifts (FH 2025).

There is a broad spectrum of ideologies that reject the Islamic Republic, ranging from nationalists to monarchists and communists. The scope for extra-parliamentary opposition is restricted above all by a surveillance state, which makes the networking of opposition groups extremely risky (restriction of the right of assembly, telephone and internet surveillance, spying, omnipresence of Basij representatives in schools, universities and Basij sympathisers in public spaces, etc.). Members of the extra-parliamentary opposition are repeatedly arrested on other charges (ÖB Teheran 11/2021). Many supporters of the opposition movements have been arrested, have left Iran or are no longer politically active (AA 15/7/2024). Leading opposition figures are restricted in their freedom of movement. Mir Hossein Mousavi, Zahra Rahnava and Mehdi Karubi, the leaders of the reform-oriented Green Movement, whose protests were violently suppressed after the disputed presidential elections in 2009, have been under house arrest without official charge since 2011 (FH 2025). The protests in autumn 2022 also failed to identify a leading figure, with the security apparatus immediately arresting anyone with a perceptible degree of visibility or networking. The protest was characterised by a high degree of decentralised activities, which are less visible than large demonstrations, but are also less easy to control as a result. The

opposition of the population, especially young people, also manifested itself in acts of civil disobedience (AA 15/7/2024; cf. USIP 6/9/2023b).

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14 Prison conditions

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According to the Iranian Prisons Organization (State Prison and Security and Corrective Measures Organization, [Landinfo/CEDOCA/SEM 12/2021](#)), there are currently around a quarter of a million (official) prisoners in 268 prisons and detention centres, which are actually only designed to hold around 88,000 people. It is likely that the total number of detainees is higher, as the

Prisons Organisation, which is formally responsible for Iran's prisons, has no authority over the prison wings, interrogation and detention centres of the Revolutionary Guards and the Ministry of Information (MOIS/VAJA). Access to official information about these prisoners, who are detained in the notorious Wing 209 of Evin Prison, for example, is very limited. These statistics also fail to take into account those who are on probation and under house arrest or whose detention has been suspended, as well as the increasing number of Afghan and Iraqi refugees being held in detention centres for migrants ([Nikpour 2024](#), p. 171f.).

The conditions of detention in Iranian prisons are characterised by massive overcrowding ([FH 2025](#); cf. [USDOS 23/4/2024](#)). Prisoners often complain about poor prison conditions, including the denial of medical care ([FH 2025](#); cf. [UNHRC 12/3/2025](#)). There were also reports of inadequate food supplies, which can lead to long-term damage ([ÖB Teheran 11/2021](#)), physical abuse and inadequate sanitary conditions ([USDOS 23/4/2024](#); cf. [AI 29/4/2025](#)), including poor ventilation, mice and insect infestation, and lack of or inadequate access to bedding, toilets and washing facilities ([AI 29/4/2025](#)). In Qarchak Prison, for example, women have to buy sanitary towels, which poses problems for those who do not have the necessary financial means ([UNHRC 12/3/2025](#)). There have been hunger strikes by prisoners to protest against their treatment, as well as attempted suicides attributed to the prison conditions. According to reports from human rights organisations, prison authorities regularly deny prisoners access to visitors, telephone calls and other correspondence privileges ([USDOS 23/4/2024](#)).

The conditions of detention vary from case to case depending on the prison wing and the status of the prisoners, although it is not possible to make generalised statements. In Evin Prison in Tehran, for example, one wing is reserved for foreigners, one wing is administered by the Revolutionary Guards Intelligence Service and some wings are underground ([ÖB Teheran 11/2021](#)). The infrastructure of Qarchak Women's Prison in Tehran, a former chicken farm, is inadequate. It lacks adequate ventilation, windows and sanitary facilities ([UNHRC 12/3/2025](#)). Human rights organisations frequently cite several detention centres where political opponents are tortured cruelly and for long periods of time, including in particular sections No. 209 and No. 2 of Evin Prison. The authorities also allegedly maintain unofficial secret prisons and detention centres outside the state prison system where ill-treatment occurs ([USDOS 23/4/2024](#)).

The conditions of detention for political and other prisoners differ greatly. This primarily concerns access to medical care (including denial of basic care or essential medicines) and hygiene conditions ([AA 15/7/2024](#)). Political prisoners are at greater risk of torture and ill-treatment in detention and are grouped together with the general prison population, which increases the risk of attacks by fellow prisoners. Human rights organisations report that the authorities use the denial of medical care as a form of punishment for political prisoners and to intimidate prisoners who file complaints or challenge the authorities ([USDOS 23/4/2024](#)).

Torture and other ill-treatment remain widespread and systematic ([AI 29/4/2025](#)). As a form of psychological torture, activists are also held incommunicado ([DW 6/10/2023](#)). Media and non-governmental organisations report deaths in custody and violence between detainees, which the authorities sometimes fail to control ([USDOS 23/4/2024](#)). Between 2010 and 2022, Amnesty

International (AI) documented 88 deaths of detainees due to torture and 96 deaths due to denial of medical care (FH 2025).

The government does not allow independent monitoring of prison conditions. Prisoners and their families frequently write letters to the authorities and in some cases to UN bodies to highlight and protest against their treatment (USDOS 23/4/2024).

The boundaries between freedom, house arrest and imprisonment are blurred in Iran. People who are considered politically unreliable are sometimes taken to 'safe houses' under the control of the Iranian security authorities. They are held there for months or even years without trial (ÖB Teheran 11/2021).

Treatment of minors

Minors are sometimes placed together with criminal offenders, which means that assaults are not uncommon (ÖB Teheran 11/2021).

A large proportion of those detained during the crackdown on the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' protests were children and young people (UNHRC 18/3/2025), and children were reportedly detained alongside adults (UNHRC 18/3/2025, AI 12/2023) and subjected to the same patterns of torture and other ill-treatment, including sexual violence. Women and girls were often held in detention centres run by all-male intelligence and security forces without regard to their gender-specific needs, putting them at increased risk of rape and other forms of sexual violence. Amnesty International documented cases of sexual assault and rape of schoolchildren during their detention in connection with the protests (AI 12/2023).

Children who are detained with their mothers are affected by inadequate nutrition, health care and educational opportunities. The lack of basic facilities in prisons has a particular impact on these children (UNHRC 12/3/2025).

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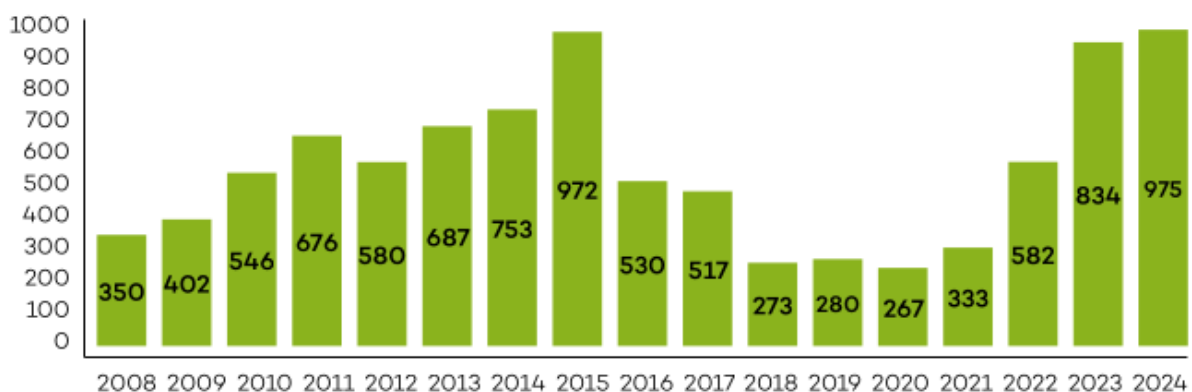
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15 Death penalty

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After China, Iran is the country in the world where the death penalty is carried out most frequently (FH 2025; cf. HRW 16/1/2025). Various sources report 901 (OHCHR 7/1/2025), 972 (AI 8/4/2025) and 975 executions in 2024 (IHRNGO 20/2/2025). Compared to the previous year, this is an increase of around 15% (AI 8/4/2025, IHRNGO 20/2/2025). The number of executions in 2015 was similar to 2024, then fell until 2020 and has more than tripled since then [note: see chart below] (IHRNGO 20/2/2025). The Iranian authorities do not publish official statistics on the number of death sentences and executions, so estimates must be used (UNHRC 12/3/2025; cf. IHRNGO 20/2/2025). In 2024, less than 10% of the executions counted by IHRNGO were publicly announced by the authorities (IHRNGO 20/2/2025).

EXECUTION TRENDS IN THE LAST 17 YEARS



Sources 3: IHRNGO 20/2/2025

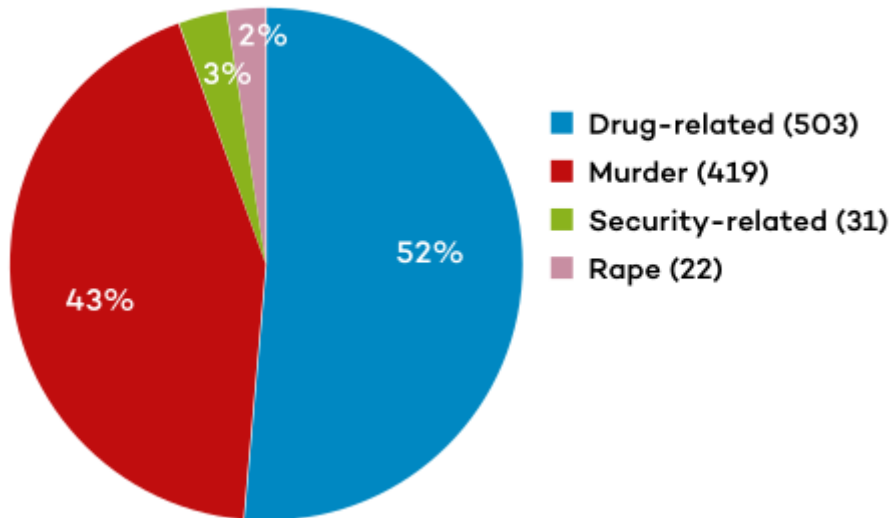
The death penalty is imposed for murder (though the victim's family can waive the execution in exchange for payment of blood money), sexual offences, robbery by multiple offenders, repeated aggravated theft, drug smuggling (only for particularly serious offences), taking up arms against God (mohārebeh ba khoda) and homosexual or extramarital acts as well as serious crimes against state security (ÖB Teheran 11/2021), such as espionage, including terrorist activities, arms procurement, treason and treachery, embezzlement and misappropriation of public funds,

gang formation, insulting or desecrating holy institutions of Islam or holy persons (e.g. through missionary activity), rape and sexual intercourse between a non-Muslim and a Muslim woman. Apostasy from Islam can also be punished with the death penalty. However, to the knowledge of the Federal Foreign Office of Germany, there have been no executions for this reason in the last 20 years. In 2023, three men were executed for the first time in a long time for 'blasphemy' and adultery [note: see also the section on [apostasy, conversion to Christianity, proselytism, house churches](#)] (AA 15/7/2024). In addition to the offences of 'immorality' and 'immoral behaviour', rape victims can also be prosecuted for adultery, for which the death penalty can be imposed (USDOS 23/4/2024). The death penalty is applied, among other things, to offences which, according to international law, are not among the 'most serious crimes' - interpreted as premeditated murder (UNHRC 12/3/2025; cf. IHRNGO 20/2/2025, AI 29/4/2025). The death penalty has also been imposed after grossly unfair trials and for acts that should actually be protected by the right to privacy and freedom of expression, religion or belief (AI 29/4/2025).

The government and NGOs are endeavouring to prevent executions by facilitating the blood money process. Foreexample, blood money is collected through appeals for donations [Note: Blood money, also known as *diyah*, can be used for so-called *qisas* crimes such as murder, see chapter on [legal protection / Judicial system / Islamic and republican elements in the judicial system, criminal law, sentencing practice](#)] (ÖB Teheran 11/2021). On the other hand, IHRNGO also argues that the 'eye for an eye' principle in *qisas* crimes indirectly favours arbitrary killings by private individuals, for example in the form of honour killings (IHRNGO 20/2/2025). Moreover, as the amount of blood money is discretionary, it creates a two-track justice system in which wealthy offenders can buy their freedom while poor offenders face execution because of such socio-economic discrimination. This violates Article 6 (1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), ratified by Iran, which prohibits the arbitrary deprivation of life. In addition, *diyah* circumvents the crucial legal safeguards under Articles 6 (2) and 9(3) of the ICCPR, according to which death sentences may only be imposed on final judgements of competent courts (UNHRC 12/3/2025).

According to IHRNGO records, executions by the Iranian judiciary in 2024 were carried out proportionally on the following charges

EXECUTIONS IN 2024 BASED ON CHARGES



Sources 4: IHRNGO 20/2/2025

As in 2023, most executions in 2024 were carried out following convictions for drug-related offences (503 or 52%), followed by murder (419 or 43%). Together, these offences accounted for 95% of all executions in 2024 (IHRNGO 20/2/2025). More than half of the executions counted by Amnesty International in Iran (972) were carried out for offences that are not punishable by the death penalty under international law, including drug-related offences and overly broad and vaguely worded charges that do not comply with the principle of legality, such as 'enmity against God' (moharebeh) and 'corruption on earth' (mofsad/efsad fe-l-arz) (AI 8/4/2025).

In 2017, an amendment to the penal code for drug offences came into force, which limited the death penalty for drug-related crimes to certain constellations of cases. Minor offences are thus exempt from the death penalty. Accordingly, the number of executions for drug-related offences initially fell sharply after this change in the law. Since October 2021, there has been a renewed increase in the number of executions for drug-related offences (AA 15/7/2024; cf. IHRNGO 20/2/2025). Increased drug-related crime due to the Taliban coming to power in Afghanistan and the associated lack of border controls on the Afghan side was suspected to be one reason for this (AA 15/7/2024). Another source linked this to new top officials in the judiciary who were appointed by President Raisi from August 2021 [*note: Ebrahim Raisi died during his term of office in May 2024*] (AI 4/4/2024).

The Iranian regime uses the death penalty as a means of political repression against protesters, dissidents and ethnic minorities (AI 29/4/2025; cf. IHRNGO 20/2/2025, HRW 20/11/2024). According to IHRNGO records, there is a correlation between the number of executions and political events. As of February 2025, a total of ten people had been executed following convictions for murder and security-related offences in direct connection with the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' protests from September 2022. At least 13 other protest participants have been sentenced to death and are awaiting execution. IHRNGO also links executions following convictions for

drug-related offences to political repression ([IHRNGO 20/2/2025](#)). In 2023, the number of death sentences for drug-related offences rose significantly by 84% compared to the previous year. Many of those executed for drug-related offences came from marginalised groups and ethnic minorities, particularly the Baloch ([IHRNGO 5/3/2024](#)). The 'Woman, Life, Freedom' protests lasted longest in Sistan and Balochistan and the Kurdish areas. In terms of their share of the total population, members of the Baloch ethnic minority continue to be overrepresented among those executed for drug-related offences in 2024 (2-6% of the total population, but 17% of all executions for drug-related offences). In addition, the majority of those executed for political offences belong to ethnic minorities, particularly Kurds. The regime often characterises critics from ethnic minority areas as separatists, and the presence of armed groups in these regions makes it even easier for the authorities to hand down death sentences on the grounds of 'separatism' or 'terrorism'. At least ten people executed in 2024 were linked to organisations banned in Iran. Nine of them were Kurdish political prisoners. Kurds are significantly overrepresented among those executed due to security-related offences ([IHRNGO 20/2/2025](#)).

During the 12-day war between Iran and Israel in June 2025, targeted killings of high-ranking representatives of the Revolutionary Guards and nuclear scientists took place, which Iran attributed to the Israeli secret service Mossad ([BBC 26/6/2025](#)). The Iranian authorities responded with a wave of arrests and have carried out several executions on espionage charges since the beginning of the war. Many fear that this is also a means of suppressing dissent and tightening control over the population ([BBC 26/6/2025](#); cf. [CHRI 26/6/2025](#)).

Iran is one of the few countries in the world that still applies the death penalty to juvenile offenders, even though this contradicts the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Iran has signed ([IHRNGO 20/2/2025](#)). The Iranian Penal Code (IPC), adopted in 2013, explicitly defines the 'age of criminal responsibility' for children as the age of maturity according to Sharia law, which means that girls over nine lunar years old and boys over 15 lunar years old are eligible for execution if convicted of hadd or qisas offences [*note: hadd offences include, for example, fornication (zina), taking up arms against God (mohārebeh ba khoda) or alcohol consumption; qisas punishments are retributive or talion punishments that are applied, for example, in cases of murder or bodily harm, cf. chapter [Legal protection / Judiciary / Islamic Penal Code \(IStGB\), Sentencing practice](#)*] ([IHRNGO 20/2/2025](#); cf. [UNHRC 9/2/2024](#)). The imposition of the death penalty is possible from this age, and execution can take place when the offender reaches the age of majority ([AA 15/7/2024](#)). According to Article 91 of the IPC, a judge may refrain from imposing the death penalty for hadd or qisas offences committed by persons under the age of 18 if there are doubts about the mental maturity and insight of the convicted person. According to the IHRNGO, this provision is vaguely formulated and is applied inconsistently ([IHRNGO 20/2/2025](#)). In the period 1990-2024, according to AI records, a total of over 120 people were executed who were under the age of 18 at the time of the offence. In 2024 alone, this applied to at least four people ([AI 7/4/2025](#)). At least one person executed in 2024 was only 16 years old at the time of the offence. The death sentence was carried out after their 18th birthday ([IHRNGO 20/2/2025](#)).

At least 31 of the 975 people executed in 2024 were women ([IHRNGO 20/2/2025](#)). Between 2010 and 2024, a total of at least 241 women were executed, most after being charged with drug

offences or murder, with around 70% of women executed on murder charges being convicted of killing their partner (IHRNGO 6/1/2025).

Death sentences and executions continue to be imposed and carried out arbitrarily, in violation of the right to life, following grossly unfair trials in revolutionary courts. These courts are not independent, are under the influence of security and intelligence services and regularly rely on 'confessions' extracted through torture to issue convictions and death sentences (AI 8/4/2025). Torture affected not only those convicted on political or security-related charges, but also those detained for drug-related offences during the investigation phase, with IHRNGO also documenting that they were denied access to a lawyer (IHRNGO 20/2/2025).

All death sentences must be confirmed by the Supreme Court. In addition, the head of the judiciary must authorise all Qisas executions before they are carried out. It can take years, months or weeks between the first and last instance death sentences. According to the law, the lawyers of those sentenced must be informed 48 hours before execution. In practice, this does not always happen, especially in political or security-related cases (IHRNGO 20/2/2025).

Executions continue to be carried out regularly without the legally required prior notification of family members (AA 15/7/2024), or after only very short notice, and the authorities often deny families the opportunity to perform funeral rites or to have an impartial autopsy performed in a timely manner (USDOS 23/4/2024). The release of the body is sometimes refused or delayed (AA 15/7/2024).

While most executions are carried out in prisons, four executions took place in public places in 2024 (IHRNGO 20/2/2025; cf. AI 8/4/2025).

In addition to executed death sentences, extrajudicial killings by members of Iranian authorities are also documented. According to a submission by the Kurdistan Human Rights Network (KHRN) to the UN Human Rights Council, at least 62 Kurdish cross-border couriers (so-called kolbars) were killed between January and November 2024 by shelling by Iranian border guards or explosions of landmines. In Balochistan, 216 Baloch fuel transporters and smugglers (sukhtbars) died in the same period (UNHRC 12/3/2025).

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16 Religious freedom

Last modification 2025-07-17 12:30

It is estimated that around 88.4 million people live in Iran (CIA 14/5/2025), of which, according to official figures, around 99% belong to Islam. According to this, 90 to 95% of the population are Shiites and 5-10% Sunnis. According to government figures, the remaining one per cent is made up of Baha'is, Christians, Yaresan (Ahl-e Haqq), Jews, Sabaeen-Mandaeans and Zoroastrians (USDOS 26/6/2024). In a much-noticed and widely discussed (NYMAG 21/10/2022) online survey conducted by the Gamaan organisation in 2020, in which 40,000 Iranians living in Iran and around 10,000 Iranians living abroad took part, the following attitudes and religious orientations were stated: only around 32% of the population profess Shiism, 5% Sunnism and around 8% Zoroastrianism. 9% identified themselves as atheists, 7% as 'spiritual' and 6% as agnostics. Others stated that they follow Sufism, Humanism, Christianity, the Baha'i faith or Judaism (proportions between around 0.1 and 3%) and around 22% of respondents did not wish to identify with any of the groups mentioned (GAMAAN 25/8/2020). Even if it is not possible to say exactly to what extent the figures presented by Gamaan can be applied to the total population of Iran, there is a clear discrepancy with the national census. The study reveals an erosion-like fragmentation of the religious field, at least among the Iranians surveyed.

Among other things, it is interesting to note the variety of different religious beliefs, ranging from non-denominationalism and atheism, both of which are actually taboos in an officially Islamic society like Iran's, to Zoroastrianism and trends towards spiritual and esoteric sects, as well as agnosticism, Sufi movements, the Baha'is and Christianity. According to the study, the latter only represent a relatively small group (BAMF 5/2022). In a leaked (Amwaj 3/4/2024) survey commissioned by the Ministry of Information (MOIS) in January 2024 and kept under wraps, 70% of respondents stated that they wanted a secular system of government. A majority rejected the legal requirement for women to wear hijab (Standard 1/3/2024).

The map below shows the main settlement areas of the largest religious groups in Iran. According to the map, the majority of Sunnis live in the border regions in the far north-west of Iran, in the north in an area on the border with Turkmenistan [Golistan province] and in the south near Bandar-e Abbas [Hormuzgan province] and on the border with Pakistan and south-west Afghanistan [in Iran: Sistan and Baluchistan province]. The majority of the country is inhabited by Shiites. Minority groups such as Zoroastrians, Baha'is, Jews and Sikhs are not shown on the map; especially in urban centres, the population is very heterogeneous and cannot be shown on this map (BMI/BMLVS 2017).



Sources 5: BMI/BMLVS 2017

Legend:

59	Sunni Muslims
60	Twelver Shia Muslims
59/60	Sunni Muslims and Twelver Shia Muslims
58	Ismailis
56	Hindus
61	Yezidis/Kaka'i/Yarsani/Ahl-e Haqq
57	Ibadi Muslims
59/57	Sunni Muslims and Ibadi Muslims
53	Christians

According to the constitution, Iran is an Islamic republic and Shia Twelver or Ja'afari Islam is the official state religion. The constitution stipulates that all laws and regulations must be based on 'Islamic criteria' and an official interpretation of Sharia law. The constitution states that citizens

should enjoy all human, political, economic, social and cultural rights 'in accordance with Islamic criteria' (USDOS 26/6/2024).

Nevertheless, the 'book religions' recognised in Article 13 of the Iranian constitution (Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism) are allowed to practise their faith relatively freely in their communities. They enjoy constitutional autonomy in matters of marriage and family law (AA 15/7/2024). However, the freedom to practise their faith is dependent on the interpretation of religious scholars and the ambiguity or interpretability of laws often leaves room for judges to make arbitrary decisions, which increases the vulnerability of minority communities (IRWIRE 4/3/2024). The right of recognised minority religious communities to freely practise their religion has been increasingly restricted in practice since the Raisi government took office [2021-2024]. This primarily affects Jews, especially since the Hamas terrorist attack on Israel on 7 October 2023 (AA 15/7/2024). The USCIRF commission set up by the US government to monitor international religious freedom reported, among other things, acts of vandalism against Jewish religious sites in 2024, as well as the establishment of separate polling stations for citizens of the Jewish faith during the 2024 presidential elections in order to monitor their voter turnout and voting behaviour (USCIRF 1/3/2025). Zoroastrians are also considered suspicious by the regime, as the religion is closely associated with the secular, monarchist heritage (AA 15/7/2024).

Adherents of religious minorities are subject to restrictions on access to higher state offices. Only Shia Muslims are allowed to participate fully in political life (AA 15/7/2024; cf. MRG 24/11/2022). Sunnis are discriminated against, particularly when it comes to career advancement in the civil service (ÖB Teheran 11/2021). Discrimination in the workplace is institutionalised through the practice of gozinesh, a mandatory screening process that anyone seeking employment in the public or semi-public sector must undergo. This involves an assessment of the potential employee's adherence to Islam and loyalty to the Islamic Republic (MRG 24/11/2022; cf. UNHRC 19/3/2024). Applicants must recognise the principle of the rule of the jurist (Velayat-e Faqih) (UNHRC 19/3/2024), which does not exist in Sunni Islam [or non-Islamic religions] (USDOS 23/4/2024). The gozinesh criteria not only exclude followers of unrecognised religions from seeking employment, but also discriminate against Sunnis and anyone who holds views contrary to the official values of the Islamic Republic (MRG 24/11/2022; cf. UNHRC 19/3/2024).

Recognised religious minorities (Zoroastrians, Jews, Christians) are discriminated against, but also have certain legally guaranteed minority rights (ÖB Teheran 11/2021). In parliament, for example, five of the 290 seats are reserved for their representatives: two for Armenian Christians, one for Jews, one for Zoroastrians and one for Assyrian Christians (Zeit Online 19/1/2023; cf. FH 2025). However, members of non-Persian ethnic minorities and especially non-Shiite religious minorities are rarely appointed to high government positions, and their political representation remains weak (FH 2025).

Non-Muslims face unfavourable treatment in family and inheritance law as soon as a Muslim is part of the relevant group of people (AA 15/7/2024; cf. IRWIRE 4/3/2024). Constitutionally recognised minorities do not have the same rights as Muslims in cases of murder or accidental death. According to the Islamic Penal Code (IPC), the survivors of a victim have the right to seek

retribution or compensation if the victim is Muslim. If the victim belongs to another [recognised] religion, the perpetrator only has to pay ransom (IRWIRE 4/3/2024).

The curricula of all public and private schools must include a course on Shia teachings. Sunni students, as well as those belonging to a recognised religious minority, must take and pass the courses on Shia Islam, although they may also take separate courses on their own religious beliefs. Recognised religious minority groups, with the exception of Sunni Muslims, are allowed to operate private schools (USDOS 26/6/2024).

Most of the country's ethnic minorities are also religious minorities. The discrimination experienced by these groups is intersectional in nature (UNHRC 19/3/2024). Ethnic and religious minorities, who suffer from systemic discrimination and persecution (UNHRC 12/3/2025), have been disproportionately affected by the wave of repression since the protests began in September 2022 [Note: see also subchapter Sunnis for more information] (UNHRC 7/2/2023).

In response to Israeli airstrikes beginning on 13 June 2025, Iran tightened its internal security measures and carried out mass arrests, executions and military operations, particularly in the restive [majority Sunni] Kurdish region (REU 26/6/2025a). In late June 2025, it was reported that Iranian authorities are targeting hundreds of people suspected of being spies or agents. Some fear that this campaign could lead to wider repression of political opponents and minorities. According to human rights groups, ethnic and religious minorities have been disproportionately affected by the security crackdown since the start of Israeli airstrikes (NYT 28/6/2025). Among others, arrests of Baha'is (CHRI 26/6/2025; cf. IRJ 27/6/2025) and some leading members of the Jewish community in Iran have been reported. Some arrested Jews were questioned about online contacts with relatives in Israel or past trips to the country, which are serious accusations in Iran (Media Line 27/6/2025). Iranian media close to the regime, on the other hand, published reports that the Jewish community in Iran supported the Supreme Leader and the Iranian armed forces (Media Line 27/6/2025, TEHT 27/6/2025).

There are no legal guarantees of protection for unrecognised religious groups. These groups - e.g. Baha'i, Sabaeen-Mandaeans, Yaresani [note: also Ahl-e Haqq] (MRG 24/11/2022; cf. BAMF 5/2022), followers of Far Eastern or esoteric philosophies and cults (IRINTL 25/1/2022), converted evangelical Christians, Sufi (dervish order), atheists - are persecuted to varying degrees (ÖB Teheran 11/2021).

The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (USDOS 26/6/2024) and the security authorities monitor religious activities (USDOS 26/6/2024; cf. OpD 2025). The Iranian government sometimes persecutes members of religious minorities on the pretext that they are a threat to national security (CNEN 4/2/2023; cf. OpD 2025), and not because they are Christians, for example (CNEN 4/2/2023).

Opposition Shiite clerics and Muslim sects are also subject to persecution (ÖB Teheran 11/2021). A special court exists to sanction offences such as 'heresy', 'deviation' and 'propaganda' by clerics, which has its own police force, code of criminal procedure, prisons and its own catalogue of punishments, including bans on holding seminars or wearing the cleric's robe in

public, as well as banishment, prison sentences and death sentences (Qantara 16/5/2023). The special court for clergymen is directly subordinate to the revolutionary leader and, like the revolutionary courts, is not provided for in the constitution (USDOS 26/6/2024).

Although these incidents were not entirely new, the protests also led to an increase in attacks from the civilian population on Shiite clerics, who are equated with the Iranian regime due to the comprehensive politicisation of religion and act as enforcers of its political goals (INSS 18/5/2023; cf. Qantara 16/5/2023).

Muslim clerics sometimes call for violence against religious minorities (OpD 2025). At the same time, Iranian society is less fanatical than its leadership (OpD 2025; cf. NLM 23/2/2023). This is partly due to the widespread influence of the more moderate Sufi Islam and the Iranian people's pride in their pre-Islamic Persian culture (OpD 2025). Nevertheless, there are sometimes reports of threatening discrimination against non-Shiites on the part of the family or social environment (ÖB Teheran 11/2021). Religious families exert pressure on family members who have turned away from Islam and become Christians (OpD 2025).

According to the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs, non-practising Iranian Muslims are at low risk of official or social discrimination, particularly in the major cities (DFAT 24/7/2023). Mosque attendance in Iran, for example, is not widespread compared to other Muslim countries (Moaddel/FTJ 2022; cf. MRAI 19/6/2023, Amwaj 3/4/2024), and people are not considered atheists per se because they do not attend mosques. This also applies in rural areas. Many Iranians also do not strictly observe the Ramadan fasting rules in private. As long as the fasting rules are not broken in public, this has not usually led to any problems (MRAI 19/6/2023). Officials accuse those who do not observe the fasting rules in public of 'making a spectacle out of not fasting' (IRINTL 5/3/2025). According to Article 638 of the Iranian Penal Code (IPC), consuming food and drink and smoking in public during Ramadan can be punished with penalties such as lashes and imprisonment (IRINTL 13/3/2024). Every year, arrests are made during Ramadan and businesses are forced to close temporarily for violating these rules. The number of Iranians who fast voluntarily is unclear, but many probably feel compelled to do so for fear of reprisals or the possibility of 'offending' those who observe the fast (IRINTL 5/3/2025).

According to the law, non-Muslims may not proselytise or attempt to convert a Muslim to another faith (USDOS 26/6/2024). Parliament further undermined the right to freedom of religion and belief in 2021 by adding two new sections to the IPC (Art. 499 bis and 500 bis), according to which the 'defamation of state-recognised religions, Iranian population groups and Islamic faiths' and 'deviant educational or missionary activities that contradict Islam' can be punished with a prison sentence of up to five years and/or a fine (AI 29/3/2022; cf. HRW 4/2024). The vaguely formulated offences in Articles 499 bis and 500 bis of the IPC also allow the authorities to convict members of unrecognised religious groups, such as the Baha'i, for practising their religion if they consider it to be contrary to Islamic principles (HRW 4/2024). The regime also takes a critical view of Far Eastern or esoteric philosophies and cults (IRINTL 25/1/2022). Among others, a yoga teacher was also charged with 'propaganda against the sanctities of Islam' before a revolutionary court, with his lawyer stating that the authorities had falsely interpreted his activities

as a meditation and yoga teacher as anti-Islamic (RFE/RL 7/11/2023). The possession of books on spiritual teachings, alternative healing methods or other writings that are considered contrary to the teachings of Islam can be prosecuted, as can attending mixed-gender yoga classes (MRAI-2 13/6/2025).

People whose parents have been categorised as Muslims by the authorities run the risk of arbitrary imprisonment, torture or the death penalty for 'apostasy' if they adopt other religions or atheistic beliefs [Note: see subchapter [Apostasy, Conversion to Christianity, Proselytism, House Churches](#) for more information] (AI 29/4/2025; cf. [ÖB Teheran 11/2021](#)).

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16.1 Christians (recognised religious communities)

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According to the 2016 census, the Iranian state statistics office states that there are 117,700 Christians of recognised denominations in the country. Some estimates assume that there could be many more Christians living in the country [note: also includes those not recognised by the state]. According to Boston University's 2020 World Religion Database, there are around 579,000 Christians. The Christian human rights organisation Article 18 estimates the number of Christians in the country at 500,000 to 800,000, while the Christian human rights organisation Open Doors International puts the figure at 1.24 million (USDOS 26/6/2024). Armenians are the largest group among the [state-recognised] Christian communities (IRINTL 27/12/2024). According to estimates by religious representatives, their number is around 20,000 to 50,000 people, while the Assyrian and Chaldean churches together have around 7,000 followers in the country. There are Catholics and Protestants in the country, although there is disagreement as to how large the Protestant community is, as many Protestants or converts practise their faith in secret (USDOS 26/6/2024). There is no reliable data on the number of converts in the country (IRINTL 27/12/2024), although Christian NGOs state that many Christians have converted from Islam or other recognised faiths (USDOS 26/6/2024). It is estimated that converts now number several hundred thousand, making them the largest group of Christians living in Iran, ahead of members of traditional churches (AA 15/7/2024).

Christianity is recognised as a religion in the Iranian constitution, although this does not apply to Evangelical free churches. The historically established churches, which predominantly represent ethnic groups (the Armenian, Assyrian and Chaldean churches) are recognised as having a special status (ÖB Teheran 11/2021). As conversion from Islam to another religion is prohibited, the government only recognises these historically resident Christians, as these groups were already in the country before Islam, or citizens who can prove that their families were Christians before 1979 [Islamic Revolution]. Sabaeen-Mandaeans are also listed as Christians, although they do not describe themselves as such. Citizens who do not belong to the recognised religious communities or who cannot prove that their families were Christians before the Islamic Revolution are considered Muslims. Members of the recognised minorities must register. Registration comes with certain rights, including the use of alcohol for religious purposes (USDOS 26/6/2024). The authorities can close a church and arrest its leaders if churchgoers fail to register or if unregistered persons attend services (USDOS 26/6/2024; cf. DFAT 24/7/2023).

Historically resident Christians enjoy freedom of worship within the walls of community centres and churches (ÖB Teheran 11/2021; cf. AA 15/7/2024). Congregations are prohibited from supporting Christian converts from Islam (AA 15/7/2024), preaching to other Iranians or even allowing them into their churches (BBC 1/4/2024). Worship services in Farsi are prohibited, as is the distribution of Christian writings (AA 15/7/2024). The activities of recognised Christian communities are strictly regulated in order to prevent missionary activity. Recognised Christian groups therefore reject missionary work, which is regularly checked by the authorities (DFAT 24/7/2023). All Christians and Christian churches must be registered with the authorities, and only recognised Christians are allowed to attend church. Security authorities closely monitor registered churches to ensure that services are not conducted in Farsi (they must be conducted in the traditional language of the church and not in the vernacular) and conduct regular identity checks on worshippers to verify that no non-Christians or converts are attending services (DFAT 24/7/2023; cf. ARTICLE18 n.d).

Although Armenian and Assyrian Christian communities are formally recognised and protected by law, their parishioners are nevertheless subject to legal and social discrimination [including as non-Muslims, see supra-chapter] (OpD 2025). Even if premises are available for religious ceremonies, it can sometimes be difficult for minority groups to obtain important ritual objects. For example, a case was reported in which a member of a religious minority was fined for possession of alcohol because, in the judge's opinion, he was allowed to perform the mass ritual and consume mass wine, but not to transport or possess alcohol (IRWIRE 4/3/2024).

Foreign Christian communities can practise their religion largely unhindered, but are closely monitored by the state (AA 15/7/2024).

There are churches that are recognisable as such from the outside (STDOK 3/5/2018; cf. Qantara 14/8/2020, IRINTL 27/12/2024).

Christian symbols and decorations

In large cities, Christian symbols are used as fashion accessories and are also sold in the relevant shops. Decorations with Christian motifs are also not uncommon. According to the Western embassies represented in Tehran, such commercial presentations have not yet led to any criminal proceedings (BAMF 3/2019). Christmas decorations are popular in many cities in Iran and are easy to find (MRAI 19/6/2023; cf. IRINTL 27/12/2024, BAMF 3/2019). Christmas trees are placed in front of some churches in Tehran for the Christmas holidays, for which the state repeatedly sends its congratulations (BAMF 3/2019). However, the increased popularity of Christian Christmas celebrations and Christmas trees as well as Valentine's Day and Halloween among Muslim Iranians has also been criticised by conservatives (IRINTL 27/12/2024; cf. IRJ 30/12/2019).

While the state can raise concerns or impose restrictions on shops selling these decorations, it does not usually prosecute for possession or use of these decorations (MRAI 19/6/2023). Among other things, it also tries to prevent the widespread celebration of Valentine's Day in Iran, which coincides with the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution. For over two decades, the

production of posters, brochures, boxes and cards with love heart symbols and red roses, which are given as gifts on Valentine's Day, has been officially banned. Nevertheless, such goods are offered by shopkeepers and bought by customers, with shopkeepers risking sanctions such as temporary shop closures (NLM 14/2/2022). However, according to an Iranian lawyer, wearing Christian symbols [such as cross pendants] can lead to problems for individuals depending on the interpretation of the morality police. For example, the authorities can classify this as a general and ambiguous offence in connection with crimes against chastity and public morality. Ultimately, it is up to the judge or the police to decide whether the use of Christian symbols falls under these offences. Another possible approach is to accuse people of 'disturbing public values'. There are cases in which the vice squad has arrested people for wearing Christian symbols (MRAI 19/6/2023). According to a source from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a judge may include visible Christian tattoos or jewellery or pictures with Christian symbolism confiscated during the arrest of a convert in the burden of proof in connection with a conversion. However, this may vary from case to case (MBZ 9/2023).

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16.2 Apostasy, conversion, proselytism, blasphemy

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Legal framework

Apostasy (Farsi: ertedad) falls within the scope of the so-called hadd punishments of the Sharia, which are generally punishable by death (BAMF 5/2022) - if the accused are men; for women, apostasy is punishable by life imprisonment (until repentance and return to Islam) (Landinfo 20/10/2023). However, Islamic authoritative legal sources such as the Koran and hadiths (sayings of the Prophet) are not always clear and are sometimes contradictory. The Criminal Code of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IPC) is not identical to Sharia law and apostasy is not listed as a criminal offence in the IPC. In cases such as these, Article 167 of the Constitution allows judges to fall back on traditional Islamic legal sources (Koran, Hadith and Fatwas, so-called legal opinions). This means that, at least in theory, it is legally possible to punish apostasy in accordance with Islamic legal sources and fatwas. Although the Iranian authorities sometimes threaten apostasy charges, these are very rare (BAMF 5/2022; cf. ARTICLE19 6/7/2022).

Converts to Christianity can also be charged on the basis of other criminal offences, whereby these charges belong to the so-called Ta'zir punishments (discretionary punishments), in which the sentencing and the level of punishment are at the discretion of the presiding judge. Possible charges that are punishable with prison sentences of varying lengths according to the IPC are, for example, actions against national security (IPC 5thBook/Art. 498-99) (BAMF 5/2022), including the establishment and membership of an illegal group (Landinfo 20/10/2023), propaganda against the system (IPC 5th Book/Art.500), insulting sacred Islamic values and principles (IPC 5thBook/Art. 513), assembly and conspiracy to undermine the country's security (IPC/Art.610) or consumption of alcohol [in the course of Holy Communion] (IPC/Art.701) (BAMF 5/2022), whereby the consumption of alcohol is permitted as part of the religious rites of a registered community (ÖB Teheran 11/2021; cf. USDOS 26/6/2024). Christians in particular are also convicted under amendments 499 and 500 bis IPC ('defamation of state-recognised religions, Iranian population groups and Islamic faiths' and 'deviant educational or missionary activities that contradict Islam' (AI 29/3/2022), which came into force in 2021 (OpD 1/2025). Other politically motivated charges such as enmity against God (moharebeh) and corruption on earth (efsad-e fi'l-arz) [note: both are hadd punishments] have also been documented on various occasions, but are rather rare in connection with professions of religious alternatives (BAMF 5/2022).

Missionary activity - i.e. any non-Islamic religious activity in public - is prohibited and punished (ÖB Teheran 11/2021; cf. USDOS 26/6/2024). Missionary activity can be punished with two to

five years' imprisonment, and up to ten years' imprisonment in the case of financial or organisational assistance from abroad ([USDOS 26/6/2024](#)). In extreme cases, proselytising can also be punished with death ([ÖB Teheran 11/2021](#)), with the last execution of a non-Muslim specifically for proselytising occurring in 1998 ([USDOS 26/6/2024](#)).

In November 2021, the Supreme Court ruled that participation in house churches and propagating the 'evangelical Zionist sect' are not considered an offence against national security. According to the NGO Open Doors, the judgement could have an impact on current and future cases involving converts from Islam to Christianity. As a result, in February 2022, the appeals court in Tehran acquitted nine Christian converts who had been accused of 'acts against national security'. However, one of them was almost immediately re-arrested and returned to prison after another division of the Supreme Court overturned an earlier acquittal on almost identical charges, while two others were instead charged with 'propaganda against the state'. The contradictory judgements probably point to internal differences within the Supreme Court. According to Open Doors, the charge of 'propaganda against the state' against the above-mentioned converts is most likely related to a successful online campaign in which the defendants publicly asked the Iranian regime in video messages where they could practise their faith after their release ([OpD 1/2025](#)).

The offence of blasphemy in the IPC can be directed against both recognised and non-recognised religious minorities and atheists ([MRG 12/12/2023](#)). According to Art. 262 and Art. 513 IPC, *sab al-nabi* ('insulting the Prophet') and 'insulting sacred Islamic values' can be punished with death ([USCIRF 14/9/2023](#)), even if this is not common in practice ([MRG 12/12/2023](#)). In May 2023, however, two executions were reported following convictions for blasphemy [note: see also section on atheism] ([RFE/RL 8/5/2023](#); cf. [AJ 8/5/2023](#)). According to Art. 513 IPC, prison sentences are also possible ([USCIRF 14/9/2023](#)). In May 2024, for example, a well-known, controversial rapper was sentenced to three years in prison for blasphemy after he had previously been transferred from Turkey to Iran ([Spiegel 19/5/2024](#)). 'Blasphemers' are also prosecuted for 'corruption on earth' and 'enmity towards God'. The 2021 amendment to the IPC [mentioned above] (Articles 499 bis and 500bis) further restricts the rights of religious minorities, in particular the right to freedom of expression and the right to freedom of religion and belief ([MRG 12/12/2023](#)).

Although charges or death sentences for apostasy ([BAMF 5/2022](#)), proselytising ([USDOS 26/6/2024](#)) and blasphemy or 'insulting the Prophet' or 'insulting sacred Islamic values' are rare ([MRG 12/12/2023](#)), there have been reported cases of death sentences imposed on these charges in connection with the protests from 2022 onwards, which were later overturned or commuted to prison sentences ([Hengaw 28/5/2025](#), [AI 13/5/2024](#), [Hengaw 3/3/2024](#), [AI 7/9/2023](#)). In one case, however, a person sentenced to death for apostasy died in custody before his case could be retried ([AI 7/9/2023](#)).

Treatment of converts

According to Christian non-governmental organisations, Christians, especially evangelicals and other converts from Islam, continue to be disproportionately arrested and detained and subjected

to a high level of harassment and surveillance (USDOS 26/6/2024; cf. AA 15/7/2024). Human rights organisations and Christian NGOs continue to report that the authorities arrest Christians, including members of unrecognised churches, on the basis of their religious affiliation or activities and accuse them of operating illegally in private homes or supporting and accepting aid from 'enemy' countries. According to human rights organisations, the government also continues to enforce the ban on missionary work (USDOS 26/6/2024). According to the NGO Article 18, a total of 139 Christians were arrested for their faith in 2024, 96 were sentenced to a sum total of 263 years in prison, 37 years in exile within the country and almost USD 800,000 in fines (ARTICLE18 1/2025). Compared to the previous year, the prison terms imposed have increased sixfold (IRINTL 2/4/2025). In the second half of 2024, a new development occurred in which the financial transactions of Christians and their lawyers were scrutinised to uncover funds they had received from friends, family members or Christians abroad. Over a two-month period, Christians in at least five cities were detained or summoned for lengthy interrogations by Revolutionary Guards officials on suspicion of receiving funds from abroad. They were threatened with charges under the amended Article 500 bis of the Criminal Code, which stipulates a prison sentence of ten years for people who carry out 'propaganda against the holy religion of Islam' while receiving financial or organisational support from abroad. Over 70% of charges against Christians in 2024 were brought under Article 500 bis, according to Article 18 (ARTICLE18 1/2025).

Converts in Iran naturally refrain from public testimonies of their conversion, keep their Muslim name and present themselves as Muslims in schools, universities and the workplace. The problems that can arise from conversion are wide-ranging. They begin at school, where children from converted families risk expulsion or being refused entry to university if they fail to attend religious education, Islamic studies and Koran classes (ÖB Teheran 11/2021).

Despite the ban on 'apostasy from Islam', there is a continuing trend towards conversion to Christianity in Iran. Many Iranians, especially younger ones, have turned away from religion altogether because they do not agree with the political and social changes since the Islamic Revolution (AA 15/7/2024). The regime is endeavouring to protect the values of the Islamic Revolution of 1979, from which it derives its legitimacy. The Christian faith is seen as a dangerous Western influence and a threat to the Islamic identity of the republic (OpD 2025). Conversion and commitment to Christianity are thus acts of protest, fundamental opposition and a break with the Islamic Republic (BAMF 5/2022; cf. taz 19/2/2024). This explains why converts who have turned away from Islam and towards the Christian faith in particular have been convicted of 'crimes against national security' (OpD 2025). Due to the frequent support of foreign churches for churches in Iran and the return of Christians from abroad, the judgement is often also based on suspicion of espionage and links to foreign states and enemies of Islam (e.g. Zionists) (ÖB Teheran 11/2021). Free-church Protestants are accused of being 'evangelical and Zionist' Christians or sects (BAMF 5/2022).

House churches

As the recognised Christian communities are prohibited from preaching to other Iranians or allowing them into their churches, those who have converted from Islam to Christianity can only

practise their faith in secret, e.g . in so-called house churches ([BBC 1/4/2024](#)) or alone via Christian satellite channels and the internet ([Landinfo 20/10/2023](#)). Some converts have joined the Assemblies of God churches, others belong to various evangelical house church networks ([RFE/RL 5/5/2022](#)). The closures of Assembly of God churches in 2013 led to a proliferation of house churches ([DIS 23/2/2018](#)). House churches vary in size, type and structure. Most are small and informal, consisting of close relatives and friends who meet regularly to pray and read the Bible or watch Christian TV programmes in Farsi ([DFAT 24/7/2023](#)). While meetings in larger groups used to be more common, there are now many small house churches with a maximum of ten members ([Landinfo 20/10/2023](#)).

The house church associations are under particular scrutiny, their meetings are regularly dissolved and their members are occasionally arrested ([AA 15/7/2024](#); cf. [Landinfo 20/10/2023](#)). It is unclear to what extent the Iranian security services have an overview of the convert communities in Iran. One interviewee interviewed by Landinfo stated that the now smaller size of the house churches makes it more difficult for the security authorities to maintain an overview. Another interviewee was of the opinion that the security authorities were probably aware of most of the house churches in the country, but did not have the capacity to take action against all of them. The authorities do not necessarily take action against all known convert communities. According to a convert interviewed by Landinfo, they do so especially when the communities are actively involved in spreading Christianity and the community is growing. Regardless of whether or not raids are carried out against house churches, converts can sometimes also be summoned for questioning. The aim is to ascertain the environment to which the person belongs. If the convert provides the names of other converts during questioning, they can also be summoned for questioning ([Landinfo 20/10/2023](#)). Surveillance of telecommunications, social media and online activities is common if a Christian has attracted the interest of the authorities ([DIS 23/2/2018](#)). Once the security services have discovered a house church, they usually monitor it for a period of time and gather further information. This includes shadowing the converts, analysing their movements and online activities, including on social media ([Landinfo 20/10/2023](#)).

The security services use threats as one of several means by which they attempt to stop the growth of converted communities. Threats are often made in the context of interrogations and include, for example, the prospect of prosecution, or threats that an 'accident' could happen to a family member of a priest. According to one interviewee interviewed by Landinfo, the authorities are increasingly using threats and harassment instead of arrests ([Landinfo 20/10/2023](#)).

Some of the Christians who have received the most severe sentences (2-10 years in prison) have been convicted of leading/organising house churches ([Landinfo 20/6/2022](#)). Sources interviewed by Landinfo in 2023 largely agreed that the authorities primarily want to prevent the spread of Christianity. Accordingly, their efforts are focused on people who lead and organise house churches and engage in missionary work. All other converts who do not have such leadership or outreach roles are rarely at risk of imprisonment and prosecution, but may face other reactions such as interrogation by the security authorities, threats and pressure to sign declarations that they would not attend Christian gatherings. They may also be affected by the loss of their jobs ([Landinfo 20/10/2023](#)). In contrast, the NGO Open Doors, which campaigns on

behalf of Christians, states that even ordinary members who do not hold leadership positions are accused (OpD 2025). The statement that pastors, missionaries or organisers of house churches are particularly in the focus of the security authorities does not mean that the risk for normal church members who are not involved in such activities is automatically reduced to zero (BAMF 5/2022). For example, sources interviewed by Landinfo in early 2023 reported that they were aware of cases of converts who had been sentenced to prison merely for participating in house churches. They had neither proselytised nor taken on leadership roles. However, most of those sentenced to prison are leaders of house churches (Landinfo 20/10/2023).

In addition to prison sentences, converts are sometimes also obliged to attend Islamic religious instruction, which is intended to convince them to return to Islam. The lessons are often organised by the security authorities without a court order (Landinfo 20/10/2023).

On the one hand, there are repeated reports of raids and arrests of Christians, signalling a harsh state crackdown. This unpredictability is intended to keep the communities in fear and uncertainty. On the other hand, individual examples show that it always depends on the person facing the accused. Personal attitudes and characteristics of public officials also play a role. In some cases, there can be considerable differences (BAMF 5/2022). The way the security services deal with converts varies greatly in different parts of the country. Some members of the security services are corrupt. They threaten or make arrests in order to extort bribes. Their informants, who can be found in all local communities, can also be corrupt and demand bribes from converts not to report them to the security services (Landinfo 20/10/2023).

Imprisoned Christians, especially Christian converts, are often offered release on bail. This usually involves large sums of money, reportedly between USD 2,000 and USD 150,000. The Christians concerned or their families are thus forced to mortgage their homes or businesses. Those who are released on bail often remain silent for fear of losing their family property. The Iranian regime urges them to leave the country and lose their bail (OpD 2025).

Treatment of converts after their return

Some clerics who were persecuted or murdered in Iran in the past had converted to Christianity abroad. The extent of the consequences for those Christians who have converted abroad and return to Iran depends on the religious and conservative attitude of their environment. However, there are reports of marginalisation by their families as well as problems finding their way in the Islamic structure of the state (e.g. marriage, social life) (ÖB Teheran 11/2021). Informants in Western countries report to the Iranian secret service about the activities of Iranian Christians abroad (OpD 2025).

The return of converts to Iran does not necessarily lead to arrest or imprisonment (BAMF 3/2019). If a convert was not previously known to the authorities, a return is largely unproblematic. Converted returnees who do not engage in any activities related to Christianity are also of no interest to the authorities. If a convert was already known to the authorities before leaving the country, the situation may be different. Converts who make their conversion public may also face problems. If a returning convert is very outspoken about their conversion on social

media channels, there is a possibility that the authorities will become aware of them and arrest and question them on their return. What happens next depends on what the convert tells the authorities. If the convert is not a high-profile case and is not engaged in missionary work or other activities that are considered a threat to national security, harsh punishment is unlikely. Disclosure of conversion on Facebook alone does not usually lead to prosecution, but it can certainly lead to being watched. A photo posted on the internet can be analysed by the authorities, together with a profile and the activities of the converted person. If the person had no connection with Christianity before leaving the country, they are unlikely to be persecuted. However, if a convert uses religion in a political way, for example to compare the disadvantages of Islam with the advantages of Christianity on social networks, this can lead to problems (DIS 23/2/2018). In this context, one lawyer interviewed also described cases in which people were imprisoned on the basis of posts on social networks with a limited reach or posts on profiles that could only be viewed 'privately' because they had been reported by people close to them. The state is legally able to prosecute individuals in such cases for 'offences against national security' or 'offences against Islam' (MRAI 19/6/2023Landinfo 20/6/2022). The Iranian authorities have recently been increasingly focusing on online activities when monitoring converts (Landinfo 20/6/2022).

Baptism

Whether baptism is significant for the Iranian authorities cannot be said with certainty. While Amnesty International and an anonymous local source state that baptism has no significance, a foreigner in contact with Christians in Iran is unsure; Middle East Concern, an organisation that looks after the needs of Christians in the Middle East and North Africa, is of the opinion that a documented baptism can alert the authorities and be problematic (DIS 23/2/2018). The NGO Open Doors states that baptism is seen as a public sign of renunciation of Islam and is therefore prohibited (OpD 2025).

Christian scriptures

According to Christian NGOs, government restrictions on the publication of religious material continue, although government-authorised translations of the Bible are reportedly still available. Government officials frequently confiscate Bibles and similar non-Shia religious literature and pressure publishers who print unauthorised non-Muslim religious material to cease operations (USDOS 26/6/2024). The possession of Christian literature in Farsi, especially in large quantities, suggests that it is intended for distribution to Muslim Iranians (OpD 2025). At the same time, it is known that a project to translate the 'Catholic Jerusalem Bible' into Farsi was authorised and implemented by the Erschad Ministry. The University of Religion and Confession in Qom, which conducts religious studies, also translated the 'Catechism of the Catholic Church' into Farsi in 2015. As of 2019, both products were available in bookshops without any problems (BAMF 3/2019).

Atheism

Legally speaking, it is not possible in Iran not to profess a religion. There are several situations in which Iranians must declare their religious affiliation to the authorities (MBZ 9/2023). People

who publicly renounce Islam can be charged with apostasy (DFAT 24/7/2023) and blasphemy (SäkF 24/8/2020; cf. RFE/RL 8/5/2023). For example, in May 2023, two atheist activists were executed after being sentenced to death for blasphemy for allegedly promoting 'atheism and insulting religious and Islamic sanctities' on social media (RFE/RL 8/5/2023; cf. AJ 8/5/2023). Atheists are therefore usually discreet in flaunting their views (DFAT 24/7/2023; cf. USDOS 26/6/2024). If they do not publicise them widely, it is unlikely that they will come to the attention of the authorities (DFAT 24/7/2023). Among other things, the press law also expressly prohibits the dissemination of atheistic content or content that is considered harmful to Islamic codes or insulting to Islamic jurists. The broad definitions facilitate comprehensive censorship and deny citizens access to various sources of information (ARTICLE19 27/2/2018).

Atheists from conservative families could face family pressure and potential ostracism if their atheism were to become known. Atheists from more liberal families and parts of the country, such as northern Tehran, do not face such pressure (DFAT 24/7/2023). According to another source, however, atheists stated that they have to hide their atheism in most social and even family contexts for their own safety (IRWIRE 27/2/2023).

Returning to Islam

Those who return to Islam do so without a special religious ceremony in order to avoid a stir. It is sufficient for the person concerned to give a credible assurance that they will continue to follow the Islamic faith or will do so again. There are certain religious formulas for the returnee that are similar or almost identical to those used when joining Islam (ÖB Teheran 11/2021).

Conversion from Shia to Sunni, conversion from a non-Islamic religion

There are no data or details on jurisdiction and official practice in connection with 'conversion' from Shi'ism to Sunnism. This change [between the two main branches of Islam] is also not to be regarded as apostasy; no such case has yet been regarded as apostasy (ÖB Teheran 11/2021). It is not considered a conversion because it is not a change of religion; after all, both Sunnism and Shiism are part of Islam. One lawyer interviewed does not believe that there are any specific formal requirements or rules for converting from Shia to Sunni Islam. People who wish to do so can simply go to a Sunni mosque and pray there. From a legal point of view, there is no problem with converting from Shia to Sunni. There are no known cases of legal persecution similar to the conversion of Muslims to Christianity (MRAI 19/6/2023). However, due to discrimination against Sunnis in Iran, publicly 'converted' Sunnis could experience disadvantages in their professional and private lives. There are no special provisions for conversion from a non-Islamic religion to another non-Islamic religion, as this is also not considered apostasy (ÖB Teheran 11/2021).

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16.3 Baha'i

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Although followers of the Baha'i faith recognise the legitimacy of Islam - including the Twelver Shia, the official religion of Iran - they have been regarded as potential challengers by the regime's clerics since the early days of the Islamic Republic (TWI 21/1/2022). They are not regarded by the government as members of a religious community, but as apostates (AA 15/7/2024) or followers of a deviant sect (HRW 4/2024). The Baha'is believe that the teachings about the Twelver Shi'a Messiah (the Mahdi) became irrelevant when their own faith supplanted Islam. However, this view is not propagated in a confrontational manner - Baha'is are considered a very peaceful religious community, rejecting any kind of violent conflict. However, they also firmly believe that it is their duty to proselytise in the name of their religion. In particular as belief in the Mahdi is a main pillar of the Twelver Shia faith, the regime tries to prevent the spread of a faith that rejects this by force (TWI 21/1/2022). Since the Baha'i religious centre is located in Israel, they are also accused of being agents of Israel (IRJ 27/6/2025; cf. Zeit Online 19/6/2025). After the start of the 12-day war between Israel and Iran in June 2025, numerous Baha'is throughout Iran were targeted for arrest (CHRI 26/6/2025; cf. IRJ 27/6/2025, IRWIRE 29/6/2025a).

As an unrecognised religious minority, the Baha'is cannot practice their faith freely, even in private, and cannot establish official institutions (HRW 4/2024). Baha'is have long been subject to systematic persecution, oppression and intimidation with the aim of persuading them to leave the country (TWI 21/1/2022). The approximately 300,000 Baha'is in Iran are subject to massive economic, political and social discrimination. They are the minority with the most restricted rights and have been discriminated against and persecuted to varying degrees since the founding of

their religious community in the 19th century. Baha'is are excluded from the pension and social security system, victims of crime receive no state compensation and trade licences are refused on the grounds of Baha'i affiliation. There are reports of de facto occupational bans (AA 15/7/2024). In 2024, there were also reports of destruction of Baha'i graves by the authorities and acts of vandalism at a Baha'i cemetery (AI 29/4/2025; cf. FH 2025). The authorities prevented the burial of Baha'is in a cemetery in Tehran that the community had been using for decades (AI 29/4/2025). Land confiscation and confiscation of property during house searches occur repeatedly (AA 15/7/2024; cf. USCIRF 1/3/2025, AI 29/4/2025). They are also denied access to higher education (AA 15/7/2024). In November 2024, the human rights organisation Center for Human Rights (CHRI) and the Baha'i International Community stated that 1,200 Baha'is are currently on trial or have been sentenced to prison and that 93 of them have been summoned to court or sent to prison so far in 2024 (FH 2025). The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran also expressed alarm at the increasing persecution of Baha'i women in the Islamic Republic of Iran, which reveals a systematic pattern of targeting under religious discrimination and gender-based oppression. Baha'i women appear to make up two-thirds of all Baha'i detainees in the country, according to information from 2024, many of whom are held without due process or in undisclosed locations (UNHRC 12/3/2025).

The authorities use a range of tactics to prevent Baha'is from earning a stable income in the private sector, including denying trading licences, harassing Baha'i business owners and confiscating land and assets (MRG 24/11/2022; cf. HRW 4/2024). In particular, the removal of the 'other religions' option from the ID card application form at the beginning of 2020 put the Baha'i under pressure (ÖB Teheran 11/2021). Only one of the religions recognised in the constitution - i.e. Islam, Christianity, Judaism or Zoroastrianism - can be specified (AA 5/2/2021). This forces them to either not fill in the form truthfully (which their religion forbids them to do) or to accept severe restrictions (ÖB Teheran 11/2021). This also denies them access to higher education (FH 2025; cf. IRINTL 20/8/2022).

Since the 1979 revolution, government officials, state institutions, state media and the Shia clerical establishment (which is closely intertwined with the Iranian state) have repeatedly incited hatred against the Baha'i community in Iran in their speeches (HRW 4/2024). The widespread media campaign against the Baha'is has long utilised a narrative that accuses the Baha'is of political influence and intrigue. They are also accused of 'moral depravity' (USCIRF 7/2022).

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16.4 Sunnis

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Sunni Islam in Iran is mainly concentrated in regions with a high proportion of Kurds, Baluchis and Turkmen. These include the provinces of West Azerbaijan, Kurdistan and Kermanshah, Golestan and North Khorasan (collectively known as Turkmen Sahra) as well as Sistan and Baluchistan. Some ethnically Persian and Arab Sunni communities also exist in southern and western Iran (AIC 17/10/2019; cf. Qantara 11/1/2016). There are therefore clear overlaps between ethnic and religious minorities (UNHRC 19/3/2024).

In the Sunni settlement areas in the west and south-east of Iran, religious practice is possible without restrictions (AA 15/7/2024). Sunnis can practise their faith more freely in the province of Sistan and Baluchistan, for example, than in Tehran (Qantara 3/7/2017), where there is not a single official Sunni mosque (DW 7/4/2024; cf. UNHRC 19/3/2024, Qantara 3/7/2017). Sistan

and Baluchistan have developed into a centre of Sunni scholarship in recent decades ([USIP 9/3/2023](#); cf. [Clingendael 31/7/2024](#)).

The Iranian constitution recognises the four Sunni schools of law of the Hanafis, Hanbalis, Shafiites and Malikis and allows them to regulate matters of religious education and personal status (regarding marriage, divorce, inheritance/estate) according to their own jurisdiction ([UNHRC 19/3/2024](#)). Despite legal protection, they are affected by discrimination ([UNHRC 19/3/2024](#); cf. [HRW 16/1/2025](#)), both through laws and in daily life ([AI 29/4/2025](#)). For example, the Iranian president must be Shia according to the constitution ([UNHRC 19/3/2024](#)), although a Sunni Baloch was appointed provincial governor for the first time after President Masoud Pezeshkian took office in 2024 ([IRWIRE 24/1/2025](#)). The application of the gozinesh system contributes to the marginalisation of Sunnis [*Note: see above for a description*] ([Clingendael 31/7/2024](#)). A law prohibits the construction of Sunni places of worship in urban areas that are predominantly inhabited by Shiites, and vice versa ([Qantara 3/7/2017](#)). Sunni citizens are often forced to gather in private prayer centres, some of which have been closed by security forces ([UNHRC 19/3/2024](#); cf. [AIC 17/10/2019](#)). In addition, several Sunni mosques and religious schools have reportedly been demolished and confiscated in recent years ([UNHRC 19/3/2024](#)).

In the course of the protests from September 2022, prominent Sunni voices such as Kak Hasan Amini, one of Iran's most prominent Sunni clerics, and Mawlawi Abdulhamid Ismaeelzahi [*note: Mawlawi is an honorary title*] from Balochistan, leader of the Sunni community in eastern Iran, also criticised the regime ([Posch 2023](#)). Sunni clerics are repeatedly arrested ([ÖB Teheran 11/2021](#); cf. [USIP 9/3/2023](#)). In February 2024, a death sentence was also reported against a Sunni cleric who had given a speech at the funeral of a protest participant who had been killed ([IRWIRE 13/2/2024](#)). The rector of the Great Makki Mosque in Zahedan in the province of Sistan and Balochistan, Mawlawi Abdulhamid, has repeatedly spoken out in his speeches against the Iranian regime's approach to the protests from September 2022 and called for, and still calls for, equal rights for the country's ethnic minorities ([USIP 9/3/2023](#)). At the end of 2024, for example, he criticised the increased number of executions among members of ethnic minorities in Iran ([IRWIRE 19/12/2024](#)). He has thus become one of the (few known) faces of the opposition within Iran ([Standard 11/9/2023](#)). After his Friday prayers, weekly protests took place in Zahedan from September 2022 ([IRINTL 15/9/2023](#); cf. [IRWIRE 17/11/2023](#)), Zahedan developed into a protest stronghold ([DW 7/4/2024](#)). The deadliest incident occurred on 30 September 2022 ([UNHRC 7/2/2023](#)), when security forces fired into the crowd from rooftops near the Makki mosque. Around 80 to 100 people died in the incident ([UNHRC 19/3/2024](#); cf. [DW 7/4/2024](#)).

Sunnis are sometimes discriminated against on the basis of both their religious and ethnic affiliation, as many are of Kurdish, Arab or Baloch ethnicity ([AA 15/7/2024](#); cf. [UNHRC 19/3/2024](#)). There are strong autonomy movements in the Sunni settlement areas, against which the central government in Tehran is taking action. Members of the ethnic minorities therefore have less access to water, housing, work or education. Sunnism, ethnicity and aspirations for autonomy are intermingled in the perception of the state ([Qantara 11/1/2016](#)). [*Note: see also the section on [ethnic minorities](#)*].

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16.5 Dervish orders, Sufis (Nematollah Gonabadi order)

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The Ne'matollahi lineage of Sultan Ali Shahi Gonabadi is one of the best-known mystical orders in Iran, dating back to around the 14th century. The Gonabadi dervishes follow the school of Sufism and Islamic mysticism (Kayhan 25/10/2023). Although Sufism is not illegal in Iran (IRWIRE 25/1/2023) and the Gonabadi order (the largest Sufi order in Iran) belongs to the Shia, its members are regularly persecuted and arrested because they reject any form of political Islam and therefore do not recognise the principle on which the Islamic Republic of Iran is based (AA 15/7/2024). Members of the dervish community are severely persecuted, including arbitrary arrests and demonisation (including on state television) and confiscation of their property (ÖB Teheran 11/2021). For example, Sufis are occasionally stigmatised in the Iranian media as devil worshippers and Satanists (AA 15/7/2024) or defamed as perpetrators of political violence, as well as 'Zionists' and 'ISIS supporters' (USCIRF 7/2022). Their places of worship are also repeatedly destroyed and they are imprisoned (FH 2025). The reasons given for the arrests include disturbing public order, spreading anti-system propaganda, acts against national security, membership of illegal groups and insulting the Supreme Leader (ÖB Teheran 11/2021).

Following violent protests by Gonabadi dervishes in February 2018, in which five security forces were killed, over 200 dervishes were sentenced to prison and in some cases corporal punishment (ÖB Teheran 11/2021). Some were also sent into exile within Iran (IRWIRE 26/5/2025). One dervish was sentenced to death and executed after an unfair trial and a forced confession (ÖB Teheran 11/2021). Later, some Gonabadi dervishes were pardoned (ÖB Teheran 11/2021; cf. IRWIRE 27/2/2023), but many dervishes are still in prison. Since then, the community has become quiet in public, with any remaining active members of the community likely to practise strong self-censorship (ÖB Teheran 11/2021). According to an exiled Iranian religious scholar, the dervishes in Iran are heavily monitored by the security and intelligence services, especially those who were arrested during the incident in February 2018, as well as those who were previously imprisoned and tortured, who lost their social status and suffered a lot. They are still under surveillance by the security authorities and cannot move freely under the current circumstances (Kayhan 25/10/2023).

In July 2024, a Sufi sheikh was murdered in unexplained circumstances shortly after he reportedly refused to use his influence at the request of the authorities to call for participation in the presidential elections. A video leaked to the exiled Iranian news portal Iran Wire in October shows a raid by plainclothes security forces on the Sufi lodge in Saqqez previously led by the murdered Sufi sheikh. The officers beat those gathered and confiscated a number of electronic devices. According to Iran Wire, the raid took place after Sufis wrote the word 'martyr' and lines of Kurdish poetry on the grave of the murdered sheikh (IRWIRE 24/1/2025).

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16.6 Ahl-e Haqq/Yar(e)san

Last modification 2025-07-17 09:11

The Yar(e)san ('Circle of Friends'), also known as Ahl-e Haqq ('People of Truth'), are a religious community whose members are mainly ethnic Kurds. Large communities live in western Iran in the Guran region, but also in Azerbaijan and Tehran (as well as in northern Iraq, where they are known as Kāka'i ['members of the Brotherhood']). There is disagreement both among the Yaresan themselves and among scholars as to whether the Yaresan religion is a form of Shia Islam with a strong addition of pre-Islamic elements or rather an independent religious tradition with some Shia components (UHH 2/5/2024). The government often considers Yaresan to be Shia Muslims who practise Sufism, while the Yaresan consider their religion to be a separate faith. Yaresan can also register as Shiites to gain access to government benefits (USDOS 26/6/2024).

In Iran, there are two branches of the Yaresan or Ahl-e Haqq: the so-called modernists/reformists and the traditionalists. The modernists declare themselves to be Shia Muslims and are also accepted as such by the authorities. This group consists mainly of educated urbanites. Their beliefs are primarily based on the teachings of Hajj Ne'matollah Jayhunabadi (1871-1920), his son Nur Ali Elahi (1895-1974) and his son Bahram Elahi (1931-). Jayhunabadi claimed that Yaresan were Muslims and merged the Yari faith with Shiism. He also opened the religion to people who were not born Yaresan. Many people became his followers, especially in and around Sahneh [note: city and district of the same name in Kermanshah province]. This group is also known as the Elahi branch or Elahi followers. The traditionalists see themselves as non-Muslims and tend to come from rural areas, especially from the Guran district in Kermanshah. Around half a million Yaresan live there. This grouping has always been closed to non-Yaresan. The

traditionalists are vilified as 'devil worshippers' by the Iranian authorities. Other Yaresan groups live in other areas of Iran, such as West Azerbaijan, Lorestan, Tehran, Hamadan, Kelardasht, Karaj and Saveh. There are no exact figures on how many Yaresan there are. Estimates vary between one and four million. Originally, the Yaresan come from the area around Guran, in the western part of Kermanshah. Due to their intellectual background, it appears that there are more modernists, but in fact the number of traditionalists is probably higher (DIS 6/4/2017).

Outside of their homes, Yaresan act as Muslims, otherwise they might get into trouble with the authorities. This also facilitates access to education and work in the public sector. In terms of consequences for Yaresan who speak publicly about their faith and describe it as non-Muslim, it is assumed that the group as a whole is not targeted by the authorities and systematically harassed and imprisoned simply for being Yaresan. Repression and persecution are based on individual cases, for example, a community leader or other high-profile individuals experience pressure from the authorities. There have been some cases of harassment and abuse in recent years. Measures are taken against Yaresan communities from time to time, similar to those taken against Sufi orders. However, it is difficult to say whether individual Yaresan are being persecuted because of their religion or for political reasons. As many Yaresan are Kurds, any persecution may also be for this reason. The public expression of Kurdish identity is a sensitive issue in Iran [Note: see chapter on Kurds]. It is important to mention that the authorities' approach to religious and ethnic minorities is not static. There is also a growing interest among young Yaresan in their own religion. There is particular interest in textual material about the traditional version of the Yari faith. Such texts are considered illegal in Iran, while texts from the Elahi (modernist) branch are considered legal and have been reprinted several times. Yaresan who publicly and actively declare their Yari identity and religion attract the attention of the authorities. Although it is forbidden for Yaresan to lie about their faith, the majority of Yaresan feel compelled to do so in order to avoid problems with the authorities. People who are religiously and/or politically active and are caught in possession of illegal writings, for example, risk being arrested and questioned. Normally, the person would be ordered to either cease their activities or otherwise serve a prison sentence. Followers of the Elahi branch also sometimes experience repression and mistreatment by the authorities. From time to time they are victims of raids and sometimes leaders are imprisoned (DIS 6/4/2017).

Yaresan followers face various problems, including difficulties in registering their children as Yaresan at birth, restrictions on building places of worship and persecution for printing their holy book (IRINTL 8/11/2023). Like other unrecognised religious communities, Yaresan are forced to practise their faith in secret. The authorities deny Yaresan access to higher education or employment in the civil service if they do not declare themselves as belonging to one of the recognised religious communities. Activists and non-governmental organisations reported that the government continues to arrest or disappear Yari activists and community leaders for drawing attention to government practices or discrimination against the Yari community, such as the requirement that Yaresan identify themselves as Shia in order to gain access to employment or higher education (USDOS 26/6/2024). The Yari community's January 2021 application for

recognition under the Iranian constitution failed, and Iran's National Defence University published an article in spring 2021 describing the community as a 'security threat' (USCIRF 4/2022).

The Yaresan not only face state repression, but are also considered 'impure' by some fanatical Shiite members of the Azerbaijani ethnic minority or the Sunni Kurds, according to an expert on religious minorities in Iran. This religious chauvinism has forced some to leave their homes (GLV 12/7/2024).

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17 Ethnic minorities

Last modification 2025-07-17 12:30

Only about one in two Iranians have Persian as their mother tongue; the terms Iranian and Persian are by no means identical and Iran has been a multi-ethnic state for three millennia (BPB 13/1/2020). Members of ethnic minorities make up about half of the Iranian population, including Azeris, Kurds, Gilaki and Mazandarani, Arabs, Turkmen, Lurs, Baluchis, Zaza, Armenians, Assyrians and Georgians (AA 15/7/2024). According to other sources, an estimated 30 to 35 out of a total of around 80 million Iranians belong to an ethnic minority. The state does not publish any figures on this - for fear of abuse by foreign policy opponents, but also to avoid encouraging demands from the minorities themselves (BPB 13/1/2020).

According to calculations, Azeris make up around 20% of the population, Kurds 10%, Lurs 6%, Arabs and Baluchis 2% each, Turkmen 1%. Furthermore, several million Afghans live permanently in Iran, many of them already in their second generation (BPB 13/1/2020). The minorities by no means only live in the regions that bear their respective names, such as Kurdistan or Azerbaijan. Iran's ethnic and linguistic map resembles a colourful patterned carpet [*note: cf. map below*] (BPB 13/1/2020; cf. Izady/Gulf 2000 n.d), with most of these minorities living in the border provinces and having links to ethnic groups in neighbouring states such as Iraq, Azerbaijan, Pakistan (FP 19/10/2022) and Afghanistan (MRG 6/2018).

The ethnic minorities are also predominantly religious minorities (UNHRC 19/3/2024). The country's Sunni ethnic minorities include the Turkmen in the north-east, the Kurds in the west,

[illegible]

The constitution grants equal rights to all ethnic minorities and allows the use of minority languages in the media. The law grants citizens the right to learn, use and teach their own languages and dialects (USDOS 23/4/2024). Nevertheless, representatives of ethnic minorities experience various forms of discrimination (FH 2025; cf. USDOS 23/4/2024), including restrictions on the use of their languages. Representatives of non-Persian ethnic minorities and especially non-Shia religious minorities are rarely given senior government positions and their political representation remains weak (FH 2025). Farsi is the predominant language in the country and speaking other languages is banned or severely restricted in schools, media and public life, although there have been efforts to promote linguistic and cultural diversity in Iran, for example through the introduction of some minority language courses in schools and universities (TGP 21/2/2023). There are also state radio stations that broadcast some programmes in Kurdish, Turki, Arabic, Baluchi and Turkmen at provincial level. However, the authorities often crack down on unofficial language courses for minority languages held by volunteer 'mother tongue' activists, especially in Turki and Kurdish-speaking areas (IRINTL 23/2/2025).

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not is often left to the discretion of the local authorities. However, the law has been systematically used to deny ethnic and religious minorities the choice of name for their children (Jadaliyya 1/11/2022; cf. VOA 19/5/2022), and many Iranians therefore have two names - one used in legal documents and another for family and friends (VOA 19/5/2022).

There are also differences in treatment between ethnic groups: Azerbaijanis, for example, have been a pillar of the Iranian administration for centuries, and more recently members of the community have assumed important positions of power, serving in the military and the Revolutionary Guards (MEI 27/2/2024; cf. USDOS 23/4/2024). However, Azerbaijanis also reported attacks on activists (HRW 14/2/2025; cf. USDOS 23/4/2024) and the denial of Turkic-language names for children (USDOS 23/4/2024).

Regions populated by minorities such as Khuzestan, Kurdistan or Sistan and Balochistan remain economically underdeveloped (MRG 24/11/2022). They have been neglected for decades in terms of government investment, infrastructure development and employment opportunities (AGSIW 14/10/2022; cf. AA 15/7/2024). Compared to the Persian-dominated centre, they face major difficulties, including poverty, poor access to state services, environmental degradation and water scarcity (FP 19/10/2022). Environmental degradation due to unsustainable resource extraction and mismanagement and the effects of climate change disproportionately affect areas inhabited by ethnic minorities (UNHRC 12/3/2025). The mismanagement of water resources by the authorities has led to water scarcity, particularly in the provinces of Khuzestan, Sistan and Balochistan (AI 29/4/2025).

Ethnic minorities are overrepresented in the number of imprisonments (FP 19/10/2022) and executions (IHRNGO 20/2/2025), with the Baloch and Kurdish ethnic groups being mentioned in particular in this context (AI 8/4/2025; cf. IHRNGO 20/2/2025). The majority of those executed for their political affiliation between 2010 and 2024 also belonged to an ethnic minority, with Kurds being the largest group, followed by Balochis and Arabs. According to the NGO Iran Human Rights (IHRNGO), one explanation for this could be that the authorities are using more violence to incite fear because there is greater resistance among the population in these regions. During the nationwide protests following the assassination of Jina (Mahsa) Amini, the Kurdish regions and Balochistan were the areas with the longest-lasting protests. The authorities also engage in targeted propaganda, labelling their critics in ethnic minority regions as separatists, and the presence of armed groups in these regions makes it easier for the authorities to justify death sentences under the pretext of fighting terrorism and separatism. IHRNGO also believes that local judicial authorities in areas with difficult socio-economic conditions - such as the ethnic minority provinces of Kurdistan, West Azerbaijan, East Azerbaijan and Sistan and Balochistan - are more lawless and arbitrary than elsewhere (IHRNGO 20/2/2025).

Security forces used particularly brutal and militarised violence during the 2022 and 2023 protest crackdown in regions with minority populations, resulting in a higher death toll. Almost half of all protesters killed on the streets were from Balochistan, Kurdistan and West Azerbaijan (UNHRC 19/3/2024).

NGOs document cases of excessive and lethal violence by the authorities against predominantly Kurdish border couriers known as kolbars (HRW 16/1/2025, UNHRC 12/3/2025), as well as against Balochistani sukhtbars (UNHRC 12/3/2025). The Kolbars in Kurdistan, as well as the Sukhtbars in Balochistan, are cross-border smugglers who have been affected by extrajudicial executions for decades (NLM 8/11/2022; cf. IRWIRE 9/1/2025, IRWIRE 29/10/2024), with reference being made in this context to the limited earning opportunities and poverty in the areas they inhabit (NLM 8/11/2022; cf. HRW 16/1/2025).

In response to the Israeli airstrikes from 13 June 2025, Iran tightened its internal security measures and carried out mass arrests, executions and military operations, particularly in the troubled Kurdish region (REU 26/6/2025a). In late June 2025, it was reported that Iranian authorities were targeting hundreds of people suspected of being spies or agents. Some fear that this campaign could lead to wider repression of political opponents and minorities. According to human rights groups, ethnic and religious minorities have been disproportionately affected by the security crackdown since Israeli airstrikes began (NYT 28/6/2025).

Both before and after the revolution, Iranian governments justified the 'iron fist policy' in the country's peripheral areas as a means of preserving Iran's territorial integrity (Stimson 27/2/2023; cf. BPB 13/1/2020). In the past, the state's dealings with the Sunni Baloch and Kurds in particular were mostly security-orientated. The state security forces prioritise border security and view minorities as a political risk (Clingendael 31/7/2024). The regime (allegedly and actually) persecutes militant, separatist groups. However, people who campaign for the preservation of linguistic or cultural identity are often persecuted as separatists and sometimes sentenced to long prison terms (AA 15/7/2024). The Iranian government views any kind of political or civil activism as a potential threat; therefore, political and civil society activists are also at risk of persecution (DIS 7/2/2020).

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17.1 Kurds

Last modification 2025-07-17 12:31

Kurds make up between eight and ten per cent of the Iranian population, although official statistics do not exist (Cabi 2024, p. 6). They live mainly on the borders with Iraq and Turkey. Another large community of Kurds lives in the north-east, along the border with Turkmenistan (MRG 12/2017b). Kurds thus live not only in the Iranian province of Kurdistan, but also in West Azerbaijan, Ilam and Kermanshah (Republik 17/2/2023; cf. Cabi 2024, p. 6) as well as North Khorasan and Razavi Khorasan (Bas n.d). Kurds come from different peoples with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The Kurdish dialect Kurmanji (rarely: Kirmanji) is spoken in northern Iran and in large parts of Turkish Kurdistan, while Sorani is spoken in most parts of Iranian and Iraqi Kurdistan. In southern Iran, Gurani [also: Gorani, Hewrami], an independent language, is spoken, while the Kurds around Kermanshah [note: western Iran] speak a dialect that is closer to Farsi (MRG 12/2017b). Keluhri and Feyli are spoken there and in the province of Ilam. In Kermanshah and Kurdistan there are also Hewrami [Gorani] speakers (Bas n.d). There are Sunnis and Shiites among the Kurds; little fuss is made about the denomination, the Kurdish identity is more important. The Kurdish Sunnis are dominated by Sufi movements, which also allow women to engage in ecstatic practices. Unlike in Turkey, Kurdish dress was never banned in Iran and is therefore not a symbol of cultural resistance (BPB 13/1/2020).

The constitution, which was introduced in 1979 in the course of the Islamic Revolution, established Farsi as the official language and, among other things Kurdish lessons were permitted at primary level. This was the first time Kurdish was recognised as a language in Iran, although this article has only been gradually implemented in recent years (Bas n.d), with the establishment of a faculty for Kurdish language and literature in the province of Kurdistan (Bas n.d; cf. BPB 13/1/2020) and Kurdish now being taught in some schools (Bas n.d) and at language centres in some Kurdish cities (Rudaw 24/2/2020). There are Kurdish-language media, most of which publish in Sorani (Bas n.d). Although some Kurdish expressions are tolerated in publications and on the radio, there are also restrictions in the field of education (MRG 12/2017b). In recent years, there have been repeated reports of arrests of Kurdish teachers (Hengaw 21/12/2024, KHRN 9/12/2024, Hengaw 21/2/2023), including those who had taught Kurdish on a voluntary basis (Hengaw 21/2/2023, Hengaw 21/12/2024). The government has also reportedly banned Kurdish-language newspapers, magazines and books and punished publishers, journalists and writers who oppose and criticise government policies (USDOS 23/4/2024). There are also reports of restrictions on the registration of Kurdish names for children (MRG 12/2017b; cf. Jadaliyya 1/11/2022), as well as bans on Kurdish signs and names in public by some authorities (Jadaliyya 1/11/2022). However, the authorities do not prohibit the use of the Kurdish language in general (USDOS 23/4/2024).

The government restricts Kurdish cultural and political activities ([HRW 16/1/2025](#)). It uses laws to arrest and prosecute Kurds who exercise their right to freedom of expression and association ([USDOS 23/4/2024](#)). The regime persecutes Kurdish (allegedly or actually) militant, separatist groups, but also people who campaign for the preservation of linguistic or cultural identity ([AA 15/7/2024](#)). The Kurdish NGO Kurdistan Human Rights Network (KHRN) counted a total of 474 arrests of Kurdish civilians and activists in 2024, which according to the NGO were for political reasons, as well as 97 convictions by revolutionary and criminal courts. The convictions included executions, unconditional and suspended prison sentences, floggings, exile, fines and other punishments. Some of these sentences were upheld by appeals courts and the Supreme Court ([KHRN 16/1/2025](#)[IHRNGO 20/2/2025](#)). According to records of the NGO Iran Human Rights (IHRNGO), a total of 52% of all persons (in absolute numbers: 85 out of 164) executed between 2010 and 2024 for membership of a banned party or armed group in Iran were Kurds ([IHRNGO 20/2/2025](#)).

The Kurdish region of Iran is militarised ([KHRN 16/1/2025](#); cf. [DIS 7/2/2020](#)). According to the NGO KHRN, the Revolutionary Guards have also built military bases and roads in mountainous regions near the Iraqi border in 2024 ([KHRN 16/1/2025](#)). The Iranian government controls the Kurdish population with regular checkpoints, as well as monitoring their use of telecommunications and social media. Some members of the local population work as informants for the authorities ([DIS 7/2/2020](#)). The military and intelligence presence is not always visible. Surveillance in the area is not systematic, but structured and not random, but targeted ([DIS/DRC 23/2/2018](#)). After the Israeli attack on Iran on 13 June 2025, the Revolutionary Guards increased their presence in the Kurdish regions ([REU 26/6/2025a](#)). Among other things, there were reports of arrests at checkpoints ([CHRI 26/6/2025](#)) and searches in which the Revolutionary Guards went from house to house ([REU 26/6/2025a](#)).

The Kurdish population played an important role in the protests from September 2022, which were triggered by the death of Kurdish woman Mahsa Jina Amini, and the state crackdown was particularly harsh in Kurdish areas ([FH 2025](#)), leading to a higher number of deaths in these areas ([UNHRC 19/3/2024](#)). Events in the Kurdish city of Javanrud, Kermanshah province, are extensively documented: In October-December 2022, security authorities there used military weapons against peaceful protesters, killing at least eight unarmed civilians and injuring at least 80 people, including children ([CHRI/KHRN 9/2023](#); cf. [UNHRC 19/3/2024](#)). As part of the counterinsurgency operation, the Revolutionary Guards took control of the city and by March 2023, checkpoints were set up at all entrances and exits to the city ([UNHRC 19/3/2024](#); cf. [CHRI/KHRN 9/2023](#)). According to one witness, a military and economic blockade was imposed to punish the entire city for the protests ([CHRI/KHRN 9/2023](#)). On the second anniversary of the killing of Mahsa Jina Amini and the subsequent protests, strikes took place in large parts of Kurdistan in September 2024, even though the security authorities had tried to prevent this through intimidation, threats and summonses to business owners, entrepreneurs and human rights activists ([KHRN 16/1/2025](#)).

Kurds also face discrimination in Iran as they are predominantly Sunni ([taz 24/10/2022](#); cf. [USDOS 23/4/2024](#)).

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17.2 Arabs

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Arabs make up between two (USDOS 23/4/2024) and four million of the total Iranian population. Those who live in the province of Khuzestan are also called 'Ahwazi Arabs' (MRG 12/2017a). Ahwazi Arabs also refer to the province as Arabistan or Ahwaz [*note: this is also the name of the province's capital*] (AN 18/10/2022). The minority language Khuzestan Arabic is spoken in Khuzestan. Almost all speakers are bilingual in Arabic and Farsi. Lori is also spoken in the northern and eastern cities of Khuzestan (Bahrani/Modarresi Ghavami 23/9/2019). In the province of Hormuzgan, where other parts of the Arab ethnic minority live (Izady/Gulf 2000 n.d), the languages spoken include Gulf Arabic and Shihhi Arabic, which is spoken by some families on an island south of Bandar Abbas (Mohebbi Bahmani/Rashidi/Anonby/et al. 2024). While the majority of Ahwazi Arabs in Khuzestan are Shiite, the Arabs further south near Bandar Abbas [*note: Hormozgan province*] are predominantly Sunni (MRG 12/2017a). There are around 110 tribes of Ahwazi Arabs (USDOS 23/4/2024).

On paper, Khuzestan is an engine of the Iranian economy. The province accounts for almost 15% of the country's gross domestic product and is synonymous with Iran's energy industry: it is estimated that more than 80% of the country's oil and gas reserves are located in the province, and more than a third of Iran's petrochemical plants are based there. The province also grows around 14% of Iran's agricultural produce, mainly wheat, more than any other province, and has around 33% of Iran's surface water. One of the most important trading hubs, the Imam Khomeini seaport, is located in the province (ICG 21/8/2023). However, Khuzestan is also notorious for its pollution (MEE 2/12/2022; cf. ICG 21/8/2023). This has led to a reduced water supply. In mid-2021, water shortages sparked protests (ICG 21/8/2023), which were violently suppressed by the authorities, including several deaths (UNHRC 19/3/2024). A third of the population lives in poverty. The long-standing political resentment of the Arab minority in Khuzestan is linked to the socio-economic and environmental problems in the province. Ahwazi Arabs complain of discrimination and neglect by the central and local authorities (ICG 21/8/2023). Ahwazi rights activists also report that the government continues to confiscate Ahwazi property to use for government development projects and refuses to recognise property titles from the pre-revolutionary period (USDOS 23/4/2024).

There are other points of contention. One of them is the lack of native language education for Arabs in Khuzestan (ICG 21/8/2023). Due to the lack of education in their mother tongue, many Arabs are illiterate (AN 18/10/2022). The government restricts the cultural and political activities of Arabs (HRW 16/1/2025), with President Massoud Pezeshkian, elected in 2024, appointing a

member of the Arab ethnic minority as governor of Khuzestan province for the first time (AGSIW 25/10/2024).

Ahwazi Arabs can be targeted by the authorities if they are journalists or political activists who campaign for minority rights (DIS/DRC 23/2/2018). Civil society organisations are suppressed in most regions of Iran, including the parts of Khuzestan which are inhabited by Arabs. Arabs have been banned from forming their own political parties or interest groups, and international human rights groups have noted that the government harasses civil society activists in the province and accuses them of having links to separatism or terrorism (ICG 21/8/2023). For example, around the turn of 2024/2025, a human rights organisation reported a series of arrests of members of the ethnic Arab minority, including civil rights activists, labour rights activists, as well as poets and religious figures (CHRI 29/1/2025; cf. BAMF 27/1/2025). The Ahwaz Public Prosecutor's Office confirmed the arrest of over 180 people who were labelled as 'disrupters of public security' (IRWIRE 22/1/2025). According to surveys by the NGO Iran Human Rights (IHRNGO), 16% (in absolute figures: 24 out of 164) of those executed between 2010 and 2024 for membership of a banned political party or armed organisation were Arabs (IHRNGO 20/2/2025), with the ethnic group accounting for around 2% of the country's total population (BPB 13/1/2020).

In recent years, Khuzestan has repeatedly experienced violent unrest, sometimes as an echo of nationwide protests, such as after the death of Mahsa Amini in September 2022, and in other cases, such as the water crisis in 2021, the trigger was at local level (ICG 21/8/2023). At the beginning of the wave of protests from September 2022, there were no protests in the areas inhabited by Ahwazi Arabs. This changed when the formulated protest goals broadened (MEE 2/12/2022). Many oil processing companies in Khuzestan went on strike and oil workers took part in the protests (AN 18/10/2022). The Iranian security authorities cracked down on the minorities in the Ahwaz region almost immediately after the protests began in Kurdistan and deployed a large number of troops to the region. The security authorities carried out mass arrests of activists, intellectuals, poets, writers and others who they feared might 'incite insurgency' (TWI 14/10/2022). According to rights activists, a number of prominent Ahwazi activists were arrested and then 'disappeared' in Iranian prisons (MEE 2/12/2022) or died in unexplained circumstances after their arrest, with relatives and activists assuming that the victims had previously been tortured (MEE 2/12/2022; cf. TWI 14/10/2022).

Media close to the Iranian regime reported arrests of 'spies' in Khuzestan in June 2025 in response to the Israeli attacks on Iran from 13 June 2025 (AlMayadeen 26/6/2025, IRNA 21/6/2025). A human rights organisation also reported individual cases of arrests of ethnic Arabs, which the organisation called a 'security operation disguised as a war measure' (Hengaw 30/6/2025).

The Revolutionary Guards and the Ministry of Intelligence carry out activities in Khuzestan and other places where Ahwazi Arabs live (DIS/DRC 23/2/2018) and also monitor members of separatist liberation movements from the Ahwaz region in Europe (BMP 7/10/2022; cf. Sveriges 19/9/2023).

Arabs of Sunni faith are also discriminated against because of their religion (MRG 12/2017a). Complaints from the ethnic minority in Khuzestan have also led to increased support for forms of Salafism in recent years. While most Arabs in Khuzestan are Shiites, some have turned to Salafism as a sign of rejection of the Shiite political elite and have converted to Sunnism (ICG 21/8/2023).

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17.3 Baluchis

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The approximately 1.5 million Iranian Sunni Baloch reside in underdeveloped areas in the south-east on the border with Pakistan and Afghanistan (ÖB Teheran 11/2021), with a larger proportion of Baloch living across the border in Pakistan, as well as others in south-west Afghanistan (MRG 6/2018; cf. EB 14/1/2025). The Baloch are not homogeneous, but are divided into various subgroups. In Iran, for example, there are Sulemani or Eastern Baluchis (MRG 6/2018). The Baluchis also tend to be organised in tribes (Qantara 23/1/2024). The Baluchis in Iran speak their own language. They are an ethnic and, as Sunnis, also a confessional minority (BPB 13/1/2020), although there are also a small number of Shiite Baluchis. There are at least two different intellectual groups within the Baloch community: educated and secular Balochs and religious Balochs, who also make up part of the community's political elite. The Baloch community is characterised by its diversity (Clingendael 31/7/2024).

Baloch cultural and political activities are restricted by the government (HRW 16/1/2025), although for the first time in the history of the Islamic Republic the cabinet of President Massoud Pezeshkian appointed a Sunni Baloch as governor of Sistan and Balochistan in October 2024 (AnA 30/10/2024). Farsi is the only language of instruction, which discriminates against Baloch people who speak their own language (USIP 9/3/2023).

Baloch are also disadvantaged as members of the Sunni religious minority. According to the researcher Hessam Habibi Doroh, the marginalisation of the group is even mainly due to their denomination (Clingendael 31/7/2024), even though Sunnis can practise their faith more freely in the province of Sistan and Balochistan than in Tehran, for example (Qantara 3/7/2017). In recent decades, the province has developed into a centre of Sunni scholarship (USIP 9/3/2023; cf. Clingendael 31/7/2024) and the Makki Mosque in Zahedan, or rather its leader Mawlawi Abdolhamid Ismaeelzahi [*note: Mawlawi is an honorary title*], also plays an important role in mobilising Sunni votes (Clingendael 31/7/2024).

The Balochistan region is considered Iran's 'poorhouse'; illiteracy is still prevalent here in a way that the remainder of country no longer knows (BPB 13/1/2020; cf. [USIP 9/3/2023](#)). The Iranian parliament's research centre has described the province of Sistan and Balochistan as the most deprived region in the country, referring to limited access to services such as healthcare, education, roads, energy, clean water and sanitation. Residents of the region have held protests demanding that the government find solutions to problems such as poverty, unemployment, food insecurity, frequent power and water cuts and declining purchasing power ([IRWIRE 25/4/2024](#)). Baloch have long felt discriminated against ([Wilson 23/1/2024](#)).

Baluchis were again disproportionately affected by executions in 2024 ([IHRNGO 20/2/2025](#); cf. [AI 8/4/2025](#)). At least 108 members of the minority were executed. This corresponds to 11% of all executions, although Baloch only make up between 2 and 6% of the total population. 85 of the 108 Baloch people executed were sentenced to death for drug-related offences ([IHRNGO 20/2/2025](#)), with the authorities neglecting the root causes of involvement in drug-related crimes, such as economic deprivation and systemic marginalisation, according to Amnesty International ([AI 4/4/2024](#)).

In the wake of the nationwide protests following the death of Jina Mahsa Amini, Zahedan, the provincial capital of Sistan and Balochistan, emerged as a protest stronghold ([DW 7/4/2024](#)), although there had already been tensions beforehand, with local problems mingling with nationwide demands ([Clingendael 31/7/2024](#)). The security authorities used militarised violence on a particularly large scale to combat the protests in Sistan and Balochistan from September 2022, which led to higher casualty figures ([UNHRC 19/3/2024](#)). In one of the deadliest state interventions during the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' protests, around 100 protesters died in Zahedan on 30 September 2022, which became known as 'Blood Friday', after security forces opened fire on them ([CHRI 23/1/2025](#)). More than a year after 'Bloody Friday', protests were still taking place in Zahedan on an almost weekly basis ([IRWIRE 17/11/2023](#)), some of which were still being violently dispersed by the security authorities ([HRW 22/11/2023](#); cf. [AI 26/10/2023](#)).

The Makki mosque in Zahedan was a centre of the anti-regime protests ([IRINTL 26/3/2024](#)). The weekly protests took place after the Friday prayers of Mawlawi Abdolhamid ([IRINTL 15/9/2023](#)). The head of the Great Makki Mosque in Zahedan, Mawlawi Abdolhamid Ismaeelzahi, has repeatedly spoken out against the Iranian regime's actions in connection with the protests in his speeches and called for equal rights for the country's ethnic minorities ([USIP 9/3/2023](#)). He has thus become one of the (few known) faces of the opposition within Iran ([Standard 11/9/2023](#)).

As part of tightened security measures following the Israeli attack on Iran on 13 June 2025 ([REU 26/6/2025a](#)), media close to the regime also reported on the arrest of alleged spies in the province of Sistan and Balochistan ([KP 2/7/2025](#), [MEHR 1/7/2025](#)), although the province is one of the few areas in which there were no military incidents during the 12-day war ([Haalvash 1/7/2025](#)).

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18 Relevant population groups

18.1 Women

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In general, the family enjoys a high status in Iran, as it does in most other Islamic societies. However, the difference between urban and rural areas is also noticeable here in terms of the relationship between men and women and the role of women in society. In the countryside, the traditional Islamic role model is largely followed, with the chador, the full-body veil, dominating the street scene. In the big cities, this understanding of roles has now shifted, although not in all neighbourhoods. During the Iran-Iraq war, despite any ideological reservations, women's labour was indispensable. After the war, it was impossible to even consider removing women from public life. The different and changing position of women is also reflected in the number of children: While five children are the norm in many rural areas -especially in the more remote ones - the average in Tehran and Isfahan is less than two. Young women in particular are rebelling against the formally very strict rules, and the battle between a more secularly orientated youth in the cities and the system is being fought out in public, particularly with regard to the dress code for women (GIZ 12/2020).

Women and girls played a central role in the nationwide protests from September 2022 (AI 27/3/2023). Shortly before her death, Amini was arrested by the vice squad for allegedly violating the dress code for women and, according to eyewitness reports, was beaten (BBC 16/9/2022). The protests under the widespread slogan: 'Woman, Life, Freedom' (in Kurdish: 'Jin, Jîyan, Azadî') (NatGeo 17/10/2022), which were mainly started by women (EN 1/2/2023), were joined by Iranians of all ages and ethnicities, with the younger generations in particular taking to the streets (NatGeo 17/10/2022). Many opponents of the government also expressed their protest

through civil disobedience, for example by ignoring the obligation to wear headscarves ([Spiegel 19/1/2023](#)). The authorities responded with severity, using lethal force and reportedly resorting to rape and other forms of sexual violence to quell the protests. Thousands of people were arrested, including celebrities, human rights defenders and others who had expressed support for the movement through posts on social media or by publicly disobeying the hijab regulations that led to Amini's arrest and death ([FH 2025](#)). The authorities continued their efforts to enforce the hijab requirement in 2024 ([HRW 16/1/2025](#)).

After the start of the Israeli military operation against Iran in mid-June 2025, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called on the Iranian people to overthrow the Iranian regime, using the slogan 'Woman, Life, Freedom' ([TIS 13/6/2025](#)). The Iranian government has not officially responded to the Israeli Prime Minister's calls, but some hardliners and media figures have mocked and dismissed the remarks. Meanwhile, the authorities have warned against sharing campaigns and statements by Israeli and US politicians on social media ([BBC 20/6/2025](#)). Media and NGOs have reported increased persecution of individuals based on allegations of espionage or collaboration since the start of Israel's operation Rising Lion, including arrests for 'spreading rumours' on social media ([FR24 24/6/2025](#)).

Various legal prohibitions make it impossible for women to participate in social life to the same extent as men: A strict dress code, a ban on access to sporting events (despite announcements to the contrary for football stadiums and rare exceptions), the need for permission from the husband or father regarding employment or travel ([AA 15/7/2024](#)). Women have the right to vote ([USDOS 23/4/2024](#)), but are excluded from some state functions (e.g. judgeship, president) by law or due to corresponding appointment practices ([AA 15/7/2024](#); cf. [USDOS 23/4/2024](#)) and are underrepresented in politics ([FH 2025](#)).

Iran is one of only three countries in the world that has not signed the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) ([AA 15/7/2024](#); cf. [FNS 8/12/2022](#)) and the Iranian Minister of Education, for example, has described UNESCO's 2030 Agenda for Education, which is committed to combating gender discrimination in education, as contradictory to Iranian culture ([IRINTL 5/5/2024](#)).

Legal status of women

The Iranian constitution stipulates 'equal rights for all before the law', but it is also conditional upon the goals of the Islamic Republic, which can only be achieved by 'observing Islamic norms'. As all simple legal norms must be compatible with Sharia law and a traditional interpretation of Sharia law is followed in Iran, there are considerable disadvantages for women, particularly in the areas of marriage and divorce law, child custody and inheritance matters ([BAMF 1/2023](#)). The role of the woman (wife) as subordinate to the man (husband) is defining, as can be seen in questions of self-determination, custody, divorce and inheritance law ([AA 15/7/2024](#); cf. [AI 29/4/2025](#), [HRW 16/1/2025](#), [BAMF 1/2023](#)).

For example, a married woman may not obtain a passport or travel abroad without the written authorisation of her husband (or guardian) [*Note: see the section on [freedom of movement](#) for*

more information] (HRW 16/1/2025; cf. BAMF 1/2023). According to the Civil Code, a husband has the right to choose the place of residence and can prevent his wife from practising certain professions if he considers them to be contrary to 'family values' (HRW 16/1/2025). In criminal law and criminal procedure law, girls reach the age of criminal responsibility at the age of nine (boys at 15) (AA 15/7/2024). Witness statements by women are only given half the weight (AA 15/7/2024; cf. FH 2025), and the financial compensation awarded to the family of a female victim after her death is only half as high as the compensation for a male victim (FH 2025; cf. ÖB Teheran 11/2021). Even car insurance companies only pay half the amount for personal injuries suffered by women. Women also inherit only half of the inheritance share of men [*note: if Shiite personal status law applies to them*] (ÖB Teheran 11/2021).

Dress codes and cultural participation

According to the law, all women in Iran from the age of nine must comply with the Islamic dress code in public (BAMF 7/2020). Article 638 of the Iranian Penal Code (IPC) criminalises disregarding the hijab rules and violating gender segregation as sinful or indecent public acts and is a cornerstone of gender-specific, systematic oppression (JS 11/4/2024). Women who do not cover their hair or the contours of their body (AA 15/7/2024) or appear in public without 'appropriate clothing', such as a cloth scarf over the head (hijab) and a cloak/manteau, or a chador [floor-length cloak that leaves only the face exposed] (USDOS 23/4/2024), can be punished with a prison sentence of ten days to two months and/or a fine (AA 15/7/2024), which varies between IRR 6.6 million and IRR 33 million. In addition, alternative penalties such as writing an essay, washing a corpse, etc. can also be imposed (MRAI-2 13/6/2025). In principle, the imposition of up to 74 lashes for offences against public morality is also possible; this does not occur if the families make use of the option to buy their freedom (AA 15/7/2024). For a first offence, women are usually taken to the police station and forced to sign a document promising not to do it again. Sometimes their family members are also asked to bring 'appropriate clothing' for them to the police station. This is not in accordance with the legally prescribed procedure, but is due to practical constraints: Due to financial constraints, the authorities cannot bring all hijab offences to court. However, some cases do go to court (MRAI-2 13/6/2025).

Currently, women are punished for hijab offences in public primarily by means of Section 638 IPC. However, judges can also refer to Islamic law (MRAI-2 13/6/2025). The 'Hijab and Chastity Act' passed by parliament in June 2023 (IRINTL 12/5/2024), which provides for stricter penalties for women who do not comply with clothing regulations in public (JS 11/4/2024; cf. IRWIRE 13/3/2024), has not yet been implemented (MRAI-2 13/6/2025). In an unprecedented move, the Supreme National Security Council, a twelve-member body responsible for the country's external and internal security, paused the implementation of the law in December 2024 (CCMES 12/2024; cf. Rudaw 25/5/2025).

Although the law has not yet officially entered into force, many of the measures covered by the law are already being implemented (JS 11/4/2024). Even without a legal basis, there have already been cases of multi-year prison sentences for the (high-profile) removal of the hijab (AA 15/7/2024). Amnesty International documented confiscations of cars for alleged hijab violations

by women, as well as denials of access to public transport, with some women receiving text messages and being prosecuted for being filmed by surveillance cameras without a hijab or in non-compliant clothing. Some women were only warned, others were obliged to attend a 'morality class'. One victim reported that her laptop was confiscated and she was prosecuted because of pictures published on social media ([AI 6/3/2024](#)). As the hijab and chastity law has not yet come into force, the authorities have also issued directives to businesses not to serve customers without a hijab ([MRAI-2 13/6/2025](#)). There have been closures of cafés, restaurants and shops that have served women without hijab ([IRWIRE 16/5/2024](#); cf. [NYT 5/5/2023](#)), and some owners refuse to serve women with loose headscarves due to pressure from the security authorities. The Islamic Republic's policy aims to deny women a presence in urban spaces ([IRWIRE 16/5/2024](#)).

Women who have participated in online and offline campaigns against the hijab requirement have also been charged with security offences for not wearing the hijab correctly in public ([DIS 3/2023](#)).

These and other regulations authorise various bodies in the workplace, education, healthcare and cultural institutions to impose a wide range of disciplinary measures and restrictions on women who do not comply with the hijab requirement and gender segregation regulations ([JS 11/4/2024](#)). The penalisation of women's appearance, court proceedings and much more also put women under psychological pressure. Measures such as the confiscation of cars for violating hijab regulations also lead to many disputes within families ([MRAI-2 13/6/2025](#)).

To the best of our knowledge, the so-called morality police 'Gasht-e Ershad' was never formally disbanded, despite statements to the contrary by Iranian government representatives. Since July 2023, so-called 'morality police', albeit without a visible logo, have once again been increasingly enforcing dress codes in public spaces. There have been repeated violent clashes, even resulting in death [*note: see also the section on [security authorities / police \(law enforcement command/FARAJA\)](#), [vice squad](#) for more information on the vice squad*] ([AA 15/7/2024](#)).

Nevertheless, many women, especially in the cities, continue to ignore compliance with the headscarf requirement despite countermeasures ([BAMF 4/12/2023](#); cf. [DW 21/5/2025](#)). From May 2023, for example, the metro stations in Tehran turned into battlegrounds between opponents and supporters of the mandatory hijab. Women wearing green shoulder sashes labelled 'Orientation Ambassadors' stop women there who are not wearing headscarves and urge them to comply with the hijab requirement ([IRINTL 25/11/2023](#)), with some of the women complaining of harsh treatment by these 'ambassadors' ([IRWIRE 23/11/2023](#)). The authorities have been even more on alert since a 17-year-old [according to some sources also 16-year-old] died in October after a confrontation with the morality police in the Tehran metro ([RFE/RL 6/11/2023](#)). According to witnesses, the young woman, who was not wearing a headscarf, was pushed by a hijab enforcer, causing her to fall with her head on a metal object. She then lost consciousness and died after a few weeks in a coma ([TIME 28/10/2023](#); cf. [RFE/RL 6/11/2023](#)).

According to official statistics, around 70% of the Iranian population are against the compulsory hijab ([BAMF 1/2023](#)).

Numerous restrictions are aimed at women in sport and culture (ban on singing except in choirs, ban on dancing, ban on access to football stadiums, etc.) (ÖB Teheran 11/2021). Women are prohibited from singing alone in public. Dancing in public is not explicitly prohibited, but individuals can be prosecuted if the authorities deem their actions indecent or immoral. There have been several reports of girls being arrested in 2023 after posting videos of themselves dancing in public without headscarves. In many cases, women have been banned from attending sporting events, although women are allowed to participate in gender-segregated sports (USDOS 23/4/2024). Since 1979, women have been denied entry to major football stadiums. Under pressure from FIFA and other organisations, women have been allowed to attend a handful of national matches in recent years. In August 2022, they were allowed to attend a league match for the first time (AJ 25/8/2022). In May 2024, there were again reports of women being banned from entering a stadium (IRWIRE 16/5/2024). In February 2024, for example, a ban was reported in the province of Khorasan Razavi that restricts women from playing sports in parks (IRWIRE 6/2/2024).

Economic participation

Although the Islamic Republic restricted the social and economic rights of Iranian women in many areas after the revolution, the new social order also opened up opportunities for large sections of Iranian society. The gender segregation in the education system introduced after the revolution prompted many religious families to send their daughters to secondary school and university. It also increased employment opportunities for women in areas such as education, healthcare, retail and other services specifically targeted at women. In some cases, this segregation gave women privileged access to jobs and positions in higher education, allowing them to advance into these fields without direct competition from male counterparts. The economic growth of the 1990s and 2000s increased women's labour market participation and improved their socio-economic status (CCMES 12/2024), although women's labour market participation is below the average for the Middle East region (WB 13/10/2024). Macroeconomic developments have a major impact on women's labour market opportunities. For example, women's labour market participation increased from 12% to 18% between 2015 and 2018 when some of the sanctions imposed on Iran were suspended, and women held around 41% of newly created jobs. With the re-imposition of sanctions and the economic shocks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, women's labour market participation fell again to 13% and women were significantly more affected by job losses than men (CCMES 12/2024).

More than half of university graduates are women, but the unemployment rate for women is twice as high as that of men (FA 2/2/2023). According to the most recent data (2024), only around 13% of all women over the age of 15 are employed in Iran (WB 7/1/2025a), compared to an estimated 66% of men (WB 7/1/2025b). Women face discrimination in the labour market in terms of employment opportunities and equal pay. In addition, they are not allowed to practise certain professions (e.g. judgeships) (BS 19/3/2024).

Access to the labour market and professional opportunities for women are restricted by social and legal regulations, with the aim of limiting women to their role as mothers and wives. Women

are often required to obtain the consent of their husband or father in order to take up gainful employment. Legally, a husband can forbid his wife from going to work at any time. Job advertisements are often gender-specific and only advertised for men. Women are regularly dismissed after returning from nine months' maternity leave. The severe restrictions on freedom of association prevent working women from joining trade unions. Conservative politicians have tried several times in the past to further restrict women's employment or ban it in some sectors (ÖB Teheran 11/2021).

Access to education

Although primary school attendance is free and compulsory for all up to the age of eleven, media and other sources report lower enrolment in rural areas, especially among girls. They can be exempted from compulsory education if they are married (USDOS 23/4/2024). On the one hand, there is institutionalised gender inequality in schools, which actively affects the quality of education that women receive. All schools are segregated by gender, both in terms of students and teachers. Iranian textbooks are known to contain images and writings that discriminate against women in favour of men. Furthermore, it is reported that three times as many girls of school age do not receive an education as boys (BAMF 7/2020; cf. AIC 12/7/2022). On the other hand, Iran has made immense progress in the areas of female literacy, primary education and higher education. Most notable is the female dominance in tertiary education (AIC 12/7/2022). In a regional comparison, the Iranian education system therefore offers slightly more opportunities for women (BS 19/3/2024). Almost 60% of students are female (TEHT 27/6/2023; cf. SRF 22/10/2022), although there are access restrictions for women to certain fields of study (Zeit Online 10/3/2023). The majority of universities offer joint access for men and women. However, there are some universities in Iran that are only accessible to men or women (BAMF 7/2020).

Reproductive rights

After the end of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), when families were encouraged to have more children, the Iranian leadership feared that the country's population growth would outstrip its resources. It therefore began to implement nationwide family planning programmes. Under the leadership of then Supreme Leader Ruhollah Khomeini, the government encouraged families to have only one or two children, discouraged underage pregnancies, provided free condoms and subsidised vasectomies, among other initiatives. Even in rural areas, women and pregnant women generally had reliable access to health check-ups at clinics and other family planning services (WP 1/12/2021). By 2020, the birth rate had fallen to 1.75 children per woman, down from 6.5 children per woman in 1979 (CCMES 12/2024). In a time of population decline, the calculation seems to have shifted (WP 1/12/2021; cf. BNE 17/5/2024). In November 2021, a new law was passed to 'rejuvenate society and protect the family', which has been described by UN human rights experts as contrary to human rights (DW 1/6/2025). The law instructs the authorities to prioritise population growth. This policy includes measures such as banning voluntary sterilisation and prohibiting the free distribution of contraceptives through the public health system. The law also stipulates that content on family planning in university textbooks should be replaced with materials on an 'Islamic-Iranian way of life' (USDOS 23/4/2024). Legal

abortions can now only be carried out with official authorisation. Despite the threat of punishment, illegal abortions are carried out underground. According to estimates by the Ministry of Health published by an Iranian news website in June 2024, around 600,000 illegal abortions are carried out in Iran every year ([DW 1/6/2025](#)).

The state does not grant victims of sexual violence access to sexual and reproductive health services. Emergency contraception and post-exposure prophylaxis [*note: to prevent infection with sexually transmitted diseases*] are not routinely available as part of the clinical treatment of rape. According to the US State Department's human rights report, there are no reports of forced abortions, but there are isolated reports of involuntary sterilisation by the authorities. The human rights organisation Haalvash, for example, reported cases of women in the province of Sistan and Balochistan who had their wombs removed without their consent after giving birth ([USDOS 23/4/2024](#)).

Protection from violence

The state is obliged to protect women from sexual violence ([AA 15/7/2024](#)). Women who are subjected to spousal or domestic violence cannot fully trust that effective state protection will be granted. Laws to prevent and punish gender-based violence do not exist ([AA 15/7/2024](#); cf. [MRAI 19/6/2023](#)) and domestic violence is not prohibited by law. The authorities regarded abuse in marriage and within the family as a private matter and rarely spoke publicly about it ([USDOS 23/4/2024](#)). Nevertheless, government documents indicated that more than 74,000 women had visited forensic centres for medical examination following spousal abuse, although the actual number of such cases may be higher [*note: the period involved is not known, the context suggests up to three years*] ([RFE/RL 3/2/2025](#)). In April 2023, Parliament approved the principles of a draft law entitled 'Defence of Dignity and Protection of Women from Violence', which had been on the table for over a decade. Some of the provisions were referred to the relevant parliamentary committees for further examination ([AI 24/4/2024](#)). The bill has so far remained pending in parliament. The bill did not define domestic violence as a criminal offence, did not criminalise marital rape and child marriage, and did not ensure that men who murder their female relatives face appropriate penalties ([AI 29/4/2025](#)). According to Iranian health researchers, there are 26 women's shelters in Iran. They offer both short-term (such as food, clothing and shelter) and long-term (such as counselling for support and self-empowerment) services [*Note: no information could be found on their actual availability and accessibility during a time-limited search*] ([Larki/Azmoude/Manouchehri 2024](#)).

Rape is illegal and subject to severe penalties, including the death penalty. The law considers sexual intercourse within marriage to be consensual by definition and therefore does not address marital rape, even in cases of forced marriage. Most rape victims do not report crimes because they fear state retaliation or punishment for rape, such as charges of indecency, immoral behaviour or adultery. Adultery, in turn, is also punishable by death. Rape victims also fear social reprisals or marginalisation ([USDOS 23/4/2024](#)). A former lawyer working in Iran with extensive experience in this area stated that she never advised her clients to report sexual assault or rape, as they would then run the risk of being accused of extramarital relationships. In addition,

access to legal advice is often limited and lawyers are expensive. While people can turn to the bar association in criminal cases, the quality of public defence lawyers provided by the state is generally rather poor. They are underpaid and often lack expertise in such cases. This has led to a large number of problems in stoning and self-defence cases involving women [*note: stonings have not been carried out recently*] (MRAI 19/6/2023).

Honour killings

An honour killing (qatl-e namusi) is a murder committed within a family, by a father, husband or other male relative, to punish a family member (usually women and girls) who has damaged the family's reputation and honour. Typical causes of damage to family honour include premarital or extramarital sex, rape, resisting a forced marriage and refusing to enter into an arranged marriage (BAMF 1/2023). According to a women's rights activist, honour killings are often committed with the consent or even support of the family. Family members who speak out against it later report that they were put under pressure not to report it or to talk to the media (IRJ 18/5/2024). Honour killings committed by a father, grandfather or a male relative are not included in the qisas punishments (retributive criminal law) according to Art. 301 of the Islamic Penal Code (*IStGB*) 2013 [*Note: see section on legal protection / judicial system / Islamic Penal Code (IStGB), sentencing practice for explanations of the terms hadd, qisas, ta'zir and diyah*]. Instead, the payment of blood money (diyah) and ta'zir or discretionary penalties are provided for here. Only if, according to Art. 612 IPC 1996, the honour killing constitutes a disturbance of public safety and order and of society is the perpetrator sentenced to a prison term of three to ten years. According to Art. 630 IPC 1996, a husband is not punished under the law of retribution (qisas) if he catches his wife in the act of adultery with another man and kills her or is certain that it is not rape. The payment of blood money (diyah) is also waived in this case. If the wife is raped by another man (adultery against the will of the wife), the husband can only kill the perpetrator with impunity [*Note: The IPC 1996 was enacted for an indefinite period, both the IPC 2013 and Book 5 of the IPC 1996 are applicable*] (BAMF 1/2023).

Honour killings are particularly widespread in rural areas and are mostly directed against women and girls. They are mostly recorded in the following provinces: West Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Kermanshah, Ilam, Lorestan and Khuzestan. Arab, Kurdish and Lurian population groups live here (BAMF 1/2023). There are no official statistics on femicides. According to the NGO Iran Human Rights, murders of women often go unreported or are falsely reported as suicides or accidents. According to an analysis by Radio Farda, the Farsi-language station of Radio Liberty/Radio Free Europe (RFE/RL), 133 women were murdered by their spouses, fathers or brothers for 'honour' or other reasons in the past Persian calendar year (RFE/RL 3/2/2025).

Female genital mutilation (FGM)

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is prohibited by law (UNFPA 3/2024). Data on the prevalence of FGM in Iran is limited. The practice occurs mainly in the provinces of West Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Kermanshah and Hormuzgan and is particularly associated with the Sorani-speaking Shafi'i Kurds (Ahmady 2022). UNFPA reports isolated cases of FGM within the Sunni minority. The majority of Iranian society rejects FGM (AA 15/7/2024) and according to data from the

period 2009-2014, the prevalence of FGM has also decreased in the four provinces mentioned (Ahmady 2022).

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18.1.1 Marriage, divorce, guardianship and custody of children

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Note: The three religions Judaism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism recognised in the Iranian constitution enjoy constitutional autonomy in matters of marriage and family law (AA 15/7/2024) and are therefore entitled to apply their own civil status laws, although these must comply with Iranian public order legislation (McGlinn 2001). Sunnis are also authorised to operate their own courts in matters of personal status. Persons who are recognised as members of the aforementioned religious groups must resolve personal status issues before the courts of their

respective religious community. They cannot turn to the state courts in these cases. In terms of their rights, this can be positive for women in some cases, but not in others. For example, some Christian communities do not provide for the possibility of divorce and in some Sunni communities women have no right to inherit from their father, while the personal status law applicable to Shiites guarantees these rights. Some Christian communities - although not the majority of communities of this recognised religious minority - are more progressive and grant women the same rights as men (MRAI 19/6/2023). The following section focuses on the legal situation of women from the Shiite majority community and the unrecognised religious groups, who are not granted the right to their own marriage and family law. For information on the marriage of under-18s, the treatment of illegitimate children and the passing on of citizenship by mothers, see the section on [relevant population groups / children / citizenship and birth registration, legal treatment of illegitimate children](#).

The law does not recognise marriages between Muslim women and non-Muslim men (USDOS 23/4/2024; cf. IRWIRE 13/2/2014). Muslim men, on the other hand, may marry non-Muslim women from the three recognised religions of the book in temporary marriages [also: sigheh, mut'a marriage], while opinions on permanent marriages differ. Some legal scholars assume that they are permissible, others do not (IRWIRE 13/2/2014). Men are legally permitted to have up to four wives and an unlimited number of 'temporary wives' based on a Shia custom that allows civil and religious contracts of limited duration. The law does not grant women the right to multiple husbands (USDOS 23/4/2024). In practice, however, male polygamy is not widespread in Iran (USIP 4/8/2023). According to the law, virgin women need the consent of their fathers or grandfathers or the permission of a court to marry (USDOS 23/4/2024).

A woman can divorce only under certain conditions (USDOS 23/4/2024: cf. BAMF 7/2020), such as if her husband signs a contract granting her this right, if he is unable to provide for his family, if he violates the terms of the marriage contract, or if he is a drug addict, mentally ill or impotent. A man can divorce his wife without giving reasons. The law recognises the right of a divorced woman to a share of the joint property and maintenance. This is not always enforced (USDOS 23/4/2024). Women can sue for this right, but this is a time-consuming and costly process (MRAI 19/6/2023).

According to Iranian law, in the event of a permanent marriage, the woman's family demands a not inconsiderable mahr (or mehrieh, a bride wealth obligation) in the form of money, real estate or gold coins (BAMF 1/2023). Mahr [Mehrieh] is regarded as the traditional Islamic marriage contract. According to the terms of the agreement/contract, the husband agrees and undertakes to pay an agreed sum to the wife similar to a dower (Maclean 17/7/2019). The wife can demand the fulfilment of this agreement at any time during the marriage or even during the divorce. In a conservative Islamic society, the mahr serves to provide for the wife in the event of divorce (BAMF 7/2020). Some women also use their mahr to persuade their husbands to divorce them by waiving payment, or by demanding a smaller sum if the husband agrees to the divorce (IRINTL 8/8/2022; cf. MRAI 19/6/2023). Mahr is an important instrument for women in these cases. They can use it as leverage to negotiate other rights, such as the right to divorce - but at the expense of their financial security. Around 15 years ago, marriage contracts were still

considered something that only the elite used in Iran. Now it is no longer a taboo subject, but it is difficult to say how widespread marriage contracts actually are. They are probably more common among educated or urban population groups than in other parts of society. The three most important clauses in marriage contracts usually concern divorce issues, the division of joint property (MRAI 19/6/2023MRAI 19/6/2023) and the right of wives to travel without their husbands' consent (MRAI 19/6/2023; cf. IRWIRE 2/11/2019). Marriage contracts, on the other hand, cannot contain clauses concerning the custody of any children, as this can only be decided after the birth of the children. However, a corresponding official agreement can be made after the birth of a child (MRAI 19/6/2023).

Guardianship for minors lies with the father or paternal grandfather according to the legal provisions. If they are unable to assume responsibility, a substitute can be appointed by the court (Landinfo 5/8/2022; cf. MRAI 19/6/2023). In the absence of a father or grandfather, it is possible for the mother to take over guardianship of her child if a court agrees. However, according to an expert interviewed by Landinfo, it is highly controversial among Islamic legal scholars whether mothers can actually assume guardianship (Landinfo 5/8/2022). An Iranian lawyer emphasises that guardianship is decided by courts other than the family courts. These courts are very restrictive in awarding guardianship to women. Surprisingly, even in cases where there was no father or grandfather, they did not award guardianship to the mother but to a third party. Guardianship is decisive when it comes to school enrolment, opening bank accounts and other important issues. Decisions on these matters therefore still lie with the fathers or grandfathers (MRAI 19/6/2023).

In contrast, the law stipulates that divorced women should preferably be given custody of their children until they are seven years old. After that, custody should be given to the father unless he is unable to provide for the child. If divorced women remarry, they lose custody of children from a previous marriage (ÖB Teheran 11/2021). There have been positive developments in the area of custody in recent years: Due to changes in the law, judges now have more leeway to consider the needs of children, and mothers are now more likely to be awarded custody than before. However, a range of different approaches to this issue can be observed among judges, with decisions being made on a case-by-case basis (MRAI 19/6/2023).

If single women lack the support of their partner or their own family, they quickly find themselves on the margins of society and are forced to come to terms with society for the sake of their child. It is true that the natural parents of illegitimate children are obliged to fulfil their parental duties with regard to personal care, and the natural father or the biological grandfather on the father's side are also obliged to pay maintenance to an illegitimate child. However, if both are unknown or both evade their responsibility, the mother must financially support her child alone (ÖB Teheran 11/2021). Information on possible (financial) support from the state for single parents or single women is not attainable (ÖB Teheran 11/2021).

Due to the difficulty for women to gain a foothold in the labour market, family support is all the more important for single women. However, some women who live outside the social norm (such as lesbian women or prostitutes) receive no support from their families and can become

victims of domestic violence and forced marriage. Single women often have difficulty finding accommodation or work as they are mistaken for prostitutes (ÖB Teheran 11/2021).

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18.2 Children

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Iran has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (subject to compliance with Islamic law) (CRC) and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (CRC-OP-SC) (AA 28/1/2022; cf. UNHRC n.d). Following an increase in so-called honour killings, Parliament passed a law in 2020 to strengthen the protection of children from violence, including by relatives (AA 15/7/2024). The law 'to support children and young people' includes new penalties for certain acts that affect the safety and well-being of a child, including physical harm and preventing access to education. The Act also allows authorities to move children in situations that seriously jeopardise their safety. However, the law does not address some of the most serious threats to children in Iran, such as child marriage or the imposition of the death penalty (HRW 13/1/2021).

Maturity and treatment in the penal system

According to Note 1 to Section 1210 of the Civil Code (ICC), the age of majority for boys is 15 years, while the age of majority for girls is when they reach the age of 9. In addition to the age of majority, legal capacity also includes maturity, which must be assessed independently. According to Section 1208 ICC, a person is immature if they are unreasonable in disposing of their own assets or financial rights. According to Section 1209 ICC, which has since been repealed, a lack of maturity was presumed for girls and boys up to the age of 18. Although the necessary maturity must be determined separately since the repeal of Section 1209 ICC, no separate determination is made in practice. Instead, the repealed Section 1209 ICC continues to be applied in practice. The distinction based on gender with regard to the age of majority can also be found in the Penal Code (IPC). Accordingly, girls reach the age of criminal responsibility at nine and boys at 15 lunar years (Art. 147 IPC) ([BAMF 7/2020](#)).

The 'Chapter on Penalties' of the Iranian Penal Code contains detailed regulations on how to deal with juveniles. For offences punishable by ta'zir [*Note: see chapter on legal protection / judicial system / Islamic Penal Code (IStGB), sentencing practice for explanations of the terms hadd, qisas and ta'zir*], a series of educational measures are imposed on children and adolescents under 15 lunar years of age; between the ages of 12 and 15, light punishments are also possible, such as an admonition by the judge or a voluntary commitment not to commit any more offences. For serious and moderately serious offences, placement in an educational centre for three months to one year is possible, irrespective of the milder penalties also provided for (Art. 88 IPC). Juveniles between the ages of 15 and 18 are punished with placement in an educational centre, which can last up to five years for serious offences. For moderate and minor offences, a fine or community service can be imposed instead (Art. 89 IPC). In the case of hadd and qisas offences, a person who has reached the age of criminal responsibility but is not yet 18 years old and has not grasped the nature of the offence and its prohibition, or whose mental and psychological maturity is in doubt, is punished with the same penalties as for ta'zir offences, depending on the circumstances (Art. 91 IPC). To establish such doubts, the court may obtain the opinion of a forensic expert; however, it may also use any other means (legal explanation to Art. 91 IPC). This means, for example, that it can question relatives, neighbours, teachers or other people in the immediate vicinity. However, this gives the court so much leeway that it can almost always avoid the severe hadd and qisas penalties for persons under the age of 18 ([BAMF 7/2020](#)). However, convicts can be executed for crimes committed when they were under the age of 18 ([FH 2025](#)). The death penalty can be imposed on young males from the age of 15 and on girls from the age of nine and can be carried out when they reach the age of majority. There are reports of cases of executions of people who were minors during the time of the offence or even at the time of execution [*Note: see also section on the death penalty for further information*] ([AA 15/7/2024](#)).

According to Article 304 of the Iranian Code of Criminal Procedure, criminal proceedings involving under-18s are dealt with by a court for children and adolescents ([BAMF 7/2020](#)).

In prisons, adults and minors are often not housed separately ([AA 15/7/2024](#); cf. [ÖB Teheran 11/2021](#)).

Marriage of minors

Note: The three religions Judaism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism recognised in the Iranian constitution enjoy constitutional autonomy in matters of marriage and family law ([AA 15/7/2024](#)) and are therefore permitted to apply their own personal status laws, which must, however, comply with Iranian public order legislation ([McGlinn 2001](#)). Sunnis are also allowed to apply their own civil status law and must appeal to Sunni courts in civil status matters ([MRAI 19/6/2023](#)). With regard to these areas of law, this section discusses the situation of the Shiite majority society and the non-recognised religious groups, who are not granted the right to their own marriage and family law, as regulated in the Iranian Civil Code (ICC).

The legal minimum age for marriage in Iran is 13 years for girls and 15 years for boys. However, a marriage can also be entered into below these age limits if it is 'in the interests of the child' and the parents and a court give their consent ([IRJ 18/5/2024](#); cf. [USDOS 23/4/2024](#)). Parents may marry their adopted children if a court agrees ([AA 15/7/2024](#)). From the point of view of the four Sunni schools of law, which have their own personal statutes in accordance with Art. 12 of the constitution, the minimum age for marriage is nine years for girls and nine to twelve years for boys. This is one of the reasons why child marriages of girls are particularly common in the areas populated by Sunnis, who are considered a religious minority in Iran. Although there have been various reform plans to change the laws on child marriage in Iran in recent years, these plans have failed due to resistance from conservative members of the government ([BAMF 1/2023](#)). According to human rights groups, a state 'marriage loan' programme has actually contributed to an increase in the number of child marriages between 2019 and 2022, as it provides financial support to poor families who want to marry off their daughters ([USDOS 23/4/2024](#)).

Most Iranian women do not marry before their twenties, and the average age of marriage for men was 28 in 2014, according to Iranian state sources. Nevertheless, hundreds of girls under the age of 13, or even under the age of ten, are forced into marriage by their families ([USIP 4/8/2023](#)). Between 2017 and 2022, around 184,000 marriages of girls under the age of 15 were registered ([IRINTL 24/12/2023](#)). Forced marriages of minors occur primarily in rural areas. This mostly affects girls and serves to ease the financial burden on the family ([AA 15/7/2024](#)). Child marriages are particularly widespread in the peripheral provinces inhabited by ethnic and religious minorities. They are particularly common in the six provinces of Sistan and Baluchistan, Khuzestan, Khorasan Razavi, Golestan, Kerman and East Azerbaijan ([BAMF 1/2023](#); cf. [USDOS 20/3/2023](#)). The causes of child marriages are conservative religious and cultural backgrounds; fear of violating family honour through premarital sex; drug addiction; rural exodus; a low level of education ([BAMF 1/2023](#)) and poverty as a main reason in disadvantaged areas ([IRINTL 24/12/2023](#); cf. [BAMF 1/2023](#)).

The legal age for consensual sex is the same as for marriage, as sex outside marriage is illegal. There are no specific laws to combat the sexual exploitation of children, as such offences fall

under the category of either child abuse or sexual offences of adultery. The law does not directly address sexual harassment and does not penalise it. The ambiguity between the legal definitions of child abuse and sexual harassment may lead to cases of sexual harassment of children being prosecuted under the Adultery Act. While there is no separate provision for rape of a child, the offence of rape can be punishable by death regardless of the age of the victim (USDOS 23/4/2024).

Education

Note: see Women for information on girls' and young women's access to education.

Iran is a country in which education is highly valued (BAMF 7/2020). Iranian schools offer both men and women a high-quality education in the sciences and humanities that is comparable to other countries in the region. The Iranian school system can be divided into two basic levels: Primary and secondary education. However, many families choose to enrol their child in pre-school as well. In Iran, primary school lasts six years, starting at the age of six for most children. Primary education is compulsory and free, which is why 99.8% of Iranian children aged six to twelve are enrolled in primary schools. After completing primary school, Iranian students enter secondary school, which is divided into two stages: lower secondary and upper secondary. The upper secondary level is divided into three branches: academic, technical and vocational. Whether students can enter the academic stream is determined by their examination results at the end of lower secondary level. All three streams cover a period of three years with completion of one of the programmes leading to the higher education entrance qualification. In addition, students who complete either the technical or vocational pathway receive a 'technician certificate'. In order to continue on the tertiary academic pathway, a national standardised entrance examination, the 'Konkur', must be passed. Only around 10% of those who pass the exam are offered a place at a public university. However, tertiary education remains very popular in Iran: almost 60% of Iranians between the ages of 18 and 22 are enrolled in a post-secondary educational institution. In Iran, higher education takes place in a combination of public and private institutions. Public tertiary institutions are mostly free of charge, while private institutions usually charge tuition fees (AIC 12/7/2022).

Children who do not have a government-issued identity document are denied the right to education [*Note: see the chapter on [refugees / Afghans in Iran](#) for information on access to education for Afghan nationals*]. The use of minority languages as the language of instruction in schools is not permitted (USDOS 23/4/2024). Educational opportunities also depend largely on the income status of families (RFAR 14/5/2025). Dropping out of school is associated with rising poverty in the country, among other things (RFE/RL 27/3/2024). According to official figures, 790,000 children were not enrolled in school in the 2024/2025 school year (K24 22/9/2024).

There are reports of partly overcrowded schools and a shortage of teachers (IRWIRE 3/12/2024; cf. K24 22/9/2024). A directive issued by the Ministry of Education in May 2025 authorised the recruitment of clergymen and seminarians as teachers. This was intended to combat the shortage of teachers, but critics see this as a shift away from civilian education towards military-ideological indoctrination (IRWIRE 3/6/2025). Schools played an important role in the 'Woman,

Life, Freedom' protests from September 2022 (IRWIRE 3/6/2025; cf. RFE/RL 13/11/2023); teachers were also arrested. Later, almost 20,000 school principals were replaced in order to 'bring about change' in the schools (RFE/RL 13/11/2023).

In the winter of 2024/2025, school closures were ordered in some provinces due to low temperatures and problems with the energy supply (FR24 9/2/2025; cf. TNA 11/1/2025). Following the start of Israeli airstrikes and escalating tensions, the authorities ordered school closures in mid-June 2025 [*Note: As of 26 June, there is no reliable information on the duration of the closures; the general extent of the impact of the Israeli military operation on the Iranian education system cannot yet be estimated*] (AnA 15/6/2025).

Child labour

Iranian law prohibits child labour until the age of 15; there are various restrictions until the age of 18 (e.g., no heavy/night work). However, the law does permit the employment of children under the age of 15 in family businesses. The Iranian government estimates that two million children work in the country, while unofficial estimates suggest that up to seven million children are affected (mainly Afghan refugees) (AA 15/7/2024). Reasons for this include deteriorating economic conditions for Afghan families and a lack of education. Most of these children are reportedly between ten and 15 years old, and the majority are undocumented foreigners. The number of children working in transport, waste collection and disposal, 'dumpster diving', car washes, brickyards, construction sites and the carpet industry is reportedly increasing. These children are exposed to abuse, wage deprivation and potential infectious diseases - all signs of forced labour (USDOS 24/6/2024).

The Revolutionary Guards have reportedly recruited thousands of Afghan migrants living in Iran to fight in Syria using coercive tactics, including children (FH 2025). The Iranian authorities are reportedly still forcibly recruiting Afghans, including children, into military units in the region. The Revolutionary Guards and its affiliated paramilitary Basij militias have also used children in domestic counterinsurgency operations (USDOS 24/6/2024).

Human trafficking

Due to the government's lack of transparency regarding human trafficking in Iran, especially with regard to women and girls, no statistics are provided (NCRI 21/4/2021). Children of undocumented Afghans and other ethnic minorities have difficulty obtaining legal documents, which increases the vulnerability of this population group to trafficking. According to the US Department of State, the measures taken by the Iranian authorities are not sufficient to prevent human trafficking (USDOS 24/6/2024).

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18.2.1 Citizenship and birth registration, legal treatment of illegitimate children

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Note: For information on guardianship and custody, see chapter [Relevant population groups / Women / Marriage, divorce, guardianship and custody of children](#).

Birth within the country's borders does not lead to the acquisition of citizenship unless a child is born to unknown parents, one of the foreign parents was also born in Iran, or a person born in Iran with a foreign father lives in Iran for at least one year after reaching the age of 18. Iranian men automatically pass on their citizenship to their children, unless it is a temporary marriage. In this case, the father must explicitly recognise paternity. This also applies if the mothers and wives are foreign nationals (SEM 26/1/2023). If the relationship between the father and a child born abroad is not documented, an Iranian family court must decide whether there are sufficient grounds for granting citizenship (Landinfo 8/2/2024). Iranian women married to foreign nationals, on the other hand, have only been able to pass on their citizenship to their children upon application since 2020 (USDOS 23/4/2024; cf. SEM 26/1/2023). A corresponding law was passed in 2019. However, there are a number of bureaucratic and financial hurdles for applicants when it comes to its implementation. The law is also applied inconsistently in the various provinces. Applicants also often require security clearance from the security authorities, with the granting process described as 'highly restrictive and subjective' (IOM 9/5/2025).

Possession of a birth certificate is legally required for Iranian citizens (IHME 3/5/2024). The National Organisation for Citizen Registration (registry office) is responsible for registering and issuing a birth certificate (Shenasnameh). The father, paternal grandfather or mother of the child are authorised to apply (BAMF 1/2023). Nevertheless, according to an announcement made in October 2023, the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour and Welfare has identified around 43,000 children without birth certificates. According to a 2021 study, the majority of those affected are poor families, as well as children of fathers without a residence permit, for example. In the province of Sistan and Balochistan, the authorities have stopped issuing birth certificates in connection with the repeated, sometimes violent Friday protests in the capital Zahedan (IRWIRE 26/10/2023).

The right to issue a birth certificate for illegitimate children, which is also compliant with Sharia law and has the force of law, has existed since a Supreme Court ruling in 1997. However, applying

for a birth certificate for illegitimate children is not without risk. As soon as it is established that a child was born to unmarried parents, the parents are considered criminals by law for having had illicit sexual intercourse and can be punished with 100 lashes under Article 221 of the 2013 IPC. Even in cases where the father of the child is unknown, the mother can apply to the court and obtain a birth certificate for her child with the approval of the Attorney General. This birth certificate then contains the mother's surname. This is the only situation in which the law allows the mother's surname to be assigned to her child. Otherwise, the child automatically receives the father's surname. In this exceptional case, however, the birth certificate may not only be issued with the mother's first name and surname, but also contains a 'hypothetical' name of the unknown father in order to avoid the section with the father's name remaining blank (BAMF 1/2023).

As children of unmarried parents are not assumed to have a family lineage, inheritance claims are generally excluded. In addition to these restrictions, people born to unmarried parents cannot hold high key positions in Iranian society. However, in the areas of tax matters, marriage and divorce, custody, guardianship and maintenance, children born out of wedlock are in principle equal to legitimate children in legal terms, provided that a birth certificate is issued to the illegitimate children (BAMF 1/2023).

It is possible to have the family legalised retrospectively after the birth of a child. If the parents of an illegitimate child subsequently marry, the child acquires the status of a legitimate child. However, if single women lack the support of their partner or their own family, they quickly find themselves on the margins of society and are forced to come to terms with society for the benefit of their child. According to a judgement by the Supreme Court, the natural parents of illegitimate children are obliged to fulfil their parental duties with regard to personal care, and the natural father or the biological grandfather on the father's side are obliged to support the illegitimate child. However, if both are unknown or both evade their responsibility, the mother must financially support her child alone (BAMF 1/2023).

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18.3 Sexual orientation and gender identity

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Historically, Iran has had a paradoxical relationship with same-sex desire and intimacy, vacillating between acceptance and rejection of such behaviour. The Islamic Revolution of 1979 reinforced the intolerance, persecution and criminalisation of same-sex intimacy (Sato/Alexander 2/2021). Members of sexual minorities regularly experience discrimination, harassment and abuse - including from non-state actors, such as family members, and from society (ÖB Teheran 11/2021). The law categorises homosexual men and transgender women as mentally ill and therefore exempts them from compulsory military service, which otherwise applies to male citizens. Military ID cards list the subsection of the law that mandates the exemption, thus identifying homosexual or transgender individuals and putting them at risk of physical abuse and discrimination in everyday life, including the threat of arrest (USDOS 23/4/2024). Abuse cases of homosexuals are not reported for fear of punishment (ÖB Teheran 11/2021). Members of sexual minorities are harassed and discriminated against, although the problem is little reported due to the criminalisation and hidden nature of this community in Iran (FH 2025). So-called conversion treatments, which amount to torture and other ill-treatment, are recognised by the state and are still frequently applied, including to minors (AI 29/4/2025). Discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity is not prohibited (USDOS 23/4/2024).

The Iranian Penal Code (IPC) criminalises all sexual relations outside of traditional marriage (FH 2025; cf. USDOS 23/4/2024). According to various sections of the IPC, certain same-sex acts can be punished with flogging or death (Sato/Alexander 2/2021; cf. ILGA World n.d), whereby the punishment for same-sex acts between men is usually more severe than that for women (ÖB Teheran 11/2021; cf. Böll 21/5/2024) and the standard of proof is high. Due to the lack of transparency in the court system, the extent of criminal prosecutions for homosexuality cannot be clearly determined. Homosexual acts are punishable, but in practice they are usually prosecuted in conjunction with other criminal offences in order to conceal them (AA 15/7/2024).

For fear of prosecution and social ostracisation, coming out in public is rare (AA 15/7/2024). Most members of the Iranian LGBTIQ community (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer people) are forced to hide their sexual orientation. They often lead a double life (RFE/RL 5/3/2024). In westernised parts of the country, homosexual relationships are de facto tolerated or ignored. Lesbian women from traditional, poor families often feel pressurised to marry a man for socio-economic reasons or by the family (AA 15/7/2024).

The government censors all materials relating to the status or behaviour of sexual minorities. In particular, the authorities block websites or content from websites that deal with issues related to sexual minorities, including censorship of Wikipedia pages (USDOS 23/4/2024). Advocacy

for gay rights is hardly possible and is closely monitored by the security authorities (AA 15/7/2024).

Transsexuality has been permitted since 1987, but is defined by law as a mental illness (ÖB Teheran 11/2021). A fatwa by Ayatollah Khomeini authorises sex changes for 'diagnosed' transgender people (ÖB Teheran 11/2021; cf. DW 16/5/2021). These are therefore permitted, and corresponding operations are subsidised (HRW 16/1/2025; cf. DW 16/5/2021) or partially subsidised (AA 15/7/2024), even if there are still clerical authorities who are critical of gender reassignment surgery (Böll 21/5/2024; cf. AA 15/7/2024). Sex reassignment or reassignment surgery is often seen as a way of legalising sexual orientations or identities that deviate from heterosexuality. Iran has the highest rate of gender reassignment surgery in the world after Thailand (AA 15/7/2024). Khomeini's fatwa made operations possible in order to achieve legal gender recognition, but at the same time denied non-binary individuals full self-determination and agency (Böll 21/5/2024); a third gender is not allowed to exist (AA 15/7/2024). Those affected report great pressure from the health authorities, but also from (conservative parts of) society, to undergo surgery (AA 15/7/2024; cf. USDOS 23/4/2024). Non-binary and deviant people face widespread social stigmatisation and state attacks, especially if they have not obtained legal recognition of their gender or do not conform to traditional gender norms in their appearance (ILGA World n.d). Internet platforms and human rights activists regularly draw attention to the social and societal persecution of transgender people (AA 15/7/2024).

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18.4 Individuals accused of collaborating with hostile forces

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Israel is widely believed to have carried out a series of high-profile assassinations and sabotage missions deep inside Iran in recent years, revealing extensive infiltration of Iran's security and intelligence services ([RFE/RL 25/6/2025](#); cf. [NYT 28/6/2025](#)). Iranian officials also assume that the Israeli foreign intelligence service Mossad was supported by agents on the ground during the execution of Operation Rising Lion in June 2025 ([NYT 28/6/2025](#)). Only a few hours after the operation began, a number of high-ranking commanders and nuclear scientists were killed at their homes ([NYT 28/6/2025](#); cf. [BBC 26/6/2025](#)) and missile launching and air defence facilities were destroyed ([NYT 28/6/2025](#)), which, according to observers and members of the Iranian security authorities, was probably only possible due to intelligence information ([NYT 28/6/2025](#); cf. [BBC 26/6/2025](#)). Iranian officials also claimed to have seen evidence that Israeli missiles had been assembled and deployed inside Iran. Thousands of miniature attack drones were allegedly discovered in the capital Tehran ([NYT 28/6/2025](#)).

As to who would collaborate with the Israeli security forces, various speculations are currently being made ([NYT 28/6/2025](#)). The Iranian security authorities have issued directives calling on the population to report suspicious persons or vehicle movements ([NYT 23/6/2025b](#); cf. [NYT 28/6/2025](#)) and to refrain from photographing attacks on sensitive sites ([NYT 23/6/2025b](#)). The Ministry of Intelligence [VAJA/MOIS] used mass text messages to warn people of prosecution if they followed or interacted with Israel-related content on social media. No distinction was made between active cooperation and passive online behaviour ([AIMon 28/6/2025](#)).

The authorities are now stepping up action against people suspected of collaborating with foreign intelligence services, citing national security as the reason ([BBC 26/6/2025](#)). According to a news agency affiliated with the Revolutionary Guards, by 25 June 2025 more than 700 people have been arrested on suspicion of spying for Israel since the start of the Israeli operation ([RFE/RL 25/6/2025](#)), and by 25 June 2025, the execution of at least six people (including three Kurds) on espionage charges had been reported ([FR24 27/6/2025](#)).

Official announcements, televised 'confessions' and media reports suggest that the following acts have led to prosecution so far: photographing or filming strategic or military infrastructure, especially in places that have been hit by Israeli airstrikes (such as the residences of Revolutionary Guards commanders or nuclear scientists); sharing images or locations through mobile apps; sending footage of bombed or sensitive sites to foreign or exile media ([MRAI 4/7/2025](#)); using or sharing unauthorised communications equipment, such as satellite internet ([MRAI 4/7/2025](#)); using or sharing unauthorised communications equipment, such as satellite internet ([MRAI 4/7/2025](#); cf. [AIMon 28/6/2025](#)); renting flats or warehouses that Iranian authorities later linked to Israeli intelligence operations; contact with international NGOs, UN mechanisms, exile Iranian networks, or human rights groups; expressing ideological or symbolic alignment with Israel, e.g. by sharing online content that is critical of Iran's regional policies [*note: e.g. criticising Iranian support for groups such as Hezbollah or Hamas*], or that is perceived as supportive of Israeli actions ([MRAI 4/7/2025](#)).

Many of the defendants were shown in state media with forced confessions. Some, including Afghan labourers, have claimed to have been instructed to collect geolocation data. Others have been charged solely on the basis of digital traces, mobile communications or statements of satisfaction about Israeli attacks. These individuals were mostly civilians with no access to classified information, but their actions were considered sufficient to charge them under anti-espionage and national security laws (MRAI 4/7/2025). In Sistan and Balochistan, 50 people were arrested and two killed in raids. Authorities reported the seizure of US-made weapons and have claimed that those arrested were part of a Mossad-linked spy network (MRAI 4/7/2025; cf. KP 2/7/2025). At the same time, Sistan and Balochistan were one of the few provinces in which there were no tensions or military incidents during the escalation between Israel and Iran [Note: *There is, however, an active insurgent group there, Jaish al-Adl, see chapter [Security situation / Prohibited organisations / Baloch separatist groups](#)*] (Haalvash 1/7/2025).

According to human rights organisations, ethnic and religious minorities, opposition members (NYT 28/6/2025; cf. CHRI 26/6/2025, MRAI 4/7/2025) and foreigners (NYT 28/6/2025) - i.e. Afghan migrants (Qantara 23/6/2025) as well as dual nationals (MRAI 4/7/2025) - are disproportionately affected by the intensified security measures (NYT 28/6/2025). Kurds, Baluchis and Ahwazis are often accused of separatism or of collaborating with foreign powers (MRAI 4/7/2025), and the arrest of Kurds, for example, was reported (CHRI 26/6/2025; cf. KHRN 30/6/2025). Baha'i followers (AIMon 28/6/2025; cf. CHRI 26/6/2025), Jewish Iranians in Tehran and Shiraz (AIMon 28/6/2025; cf. Media Line 27/6/2025) as well as activists and family members of victims of police violence who had campaigned for a legal investigation into the incidents were now also arrested or subjected to other measures, such as house searches (CHRI 26/6/2025). People with international connections or who are exposed on social media were also affected (MRAI 4/7/2025).

Legal situation

There are various criminal offences in Iranian legislation that can be used for arrests and prosecution on espionage charges, particularly in relation to Israel. The most important are (MRAI 4/7/2025):

- Art. 501 Islamic Penal Code (IPC) - Espionage: criminal offence of cooperating with foreign states against Iran's national interests. Often used in conjunction with 'moharebeh' or 'efsad fel-arz' [Note: see also [Legal Protection / Judiciary / Islamic Penal Code \(ICC\), sentencing practice](#) for information on these offences].
- Art. 279 IPC - moharebeh ('taking up arms against God'): Originally intended for armed insurrection, it is now frequently applied in political and espionage cases, even if no violent acts have occurred.
- Art. 286 IPC - efsad fel-arz ('corruption on earth'): Used to prosecute a wide range of non-violent acts that are considered harmful to national security. Prosecuted with the death penalty.

- Art. 287-288 IPC - baghi ('armed rebellion'): Directed against organised armed opposition. Used in espionage cases with suspected links to Kurdish or Baloch armed groups (e.g. Komala, Jaish al-Adl), sometimes without evidence of armed activity.
- Armed Militants Law: Although not codified in a single law, this legal concept supports charges such as moharebeh and baghi in cases where co-operation with armed or foreign-backed opposition forces is suspected. Applied in cases where Balochi defendants are alleged to have links to cross-border armed groups.
- 'Law on Combating Hostile Acts of the Zionist Regime' from 2020: Criminalises any form of cooperation - real or perceived - with Israel, including cultural or media links. Authorises the imposition of the death penalty and civil penalties. Originally intended as a political statement, the law has since become an important legal instrument through which individuals can be prosecuted on charges of endangering national security. Article 6 of the law explicitly states that 'any form of cooperation in the field of intelligence or espionage in favour of the Zionist regime is considered moharebeh and efsad fel-arz and is punishable by the most severe penalty'. This provision legally equates such acts with the most serious offences under the Iranian penal code and allows the death penalty to be imposed even in cases where no use of force can be proven. The law was applied in 2025 in the executions of Mohsen Langarneshin and Esmail Fekri, who were both accused of collaborating with the Israeli secret service, although the offences they were accused of were not violent in nature. Since then, the law has been increasingly applied in cases involving digital activities, symbolic statements or international communications. The law's vague wording allows authorities to blur the line between ideological dissent and criminal behaviour, and its overlaps with existing provisions of the IPC - such as Art. 279 (moharebeh) and 286 (efsad fel-arz) - further increase the risk of politically motivated prosecution and arbitrary application of the death penalty ([MRAI 4/7/2025](#)).

In June 2025, a judiciary spokesperson announced that the current provisions of the Penal Code would not be sufficient to combat modern espionage techniques ([CHRI 26/6/2025](#)). On 23 June 2025, the Iranian parliament approved the general guidelines of the 'Law on Intensifying Punishment for Espionage and Collaboration with the Zionist Regime and Hostile States'. The nine-article draft law was referred to parliamentary committees for review, and once passed by parliament, the law must also be approved by the Guardian Council to enter into force ([MRAI 4/7/2025](#)). In this case, it would extend the application of the death penalty ([MRAI 4/7/2025](#); cf. [RFE/RL 4/7/2025](#)). The bill introduces several offences. The most serious offences - such as espionage, disclosure of intelligence information, participation in cyber or military operations or the provision of strategic resources - are classified as efsad fel-arz and are punishable by death under Art. 286 IPC. Less serious offences, including media-related activities or the use and dissemination of unauthorised means of communication (such as Starlink [*note: satellite internet provider, see section on [freedom of expression and the press / access to information, National Information Network \(NIN/SHOMA\)](#)*]), are punishable by long prison sentences and a permanent ban from holding public office ([MRAI 4/7/2025](#)).

The draft law redefines 'cooperation with hostile states' and now includes not only direct cooperation in the area of intelligence or the military, but also a variety of indirect or symbolic acts. This includes online communication, cyber activities, cooperation with the media (e.g. sending images or videos to foreign media), economic and technological support and even ideological or cultural consensus. The scope of application is deliberately broad so that authorities can interpret many forms of cooperation as criminal offences. The occurrence of actual damage does not have to be proven in court; it is sufficient that an act was 'consciously' related to a hostile state. There are also fears that the law could be applied retroactively after some people who were arrested after the Israel-Iran war in June 2025 were charged under the definitions of the draft law, even though the law has not yet been passed (MRAI 4/7/2025).

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19 Freedom of movement

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The law provides for freedom of movement within the country, travelling abroad, emigration and repatriation. In principle, the government respects these rights, but there are some restrictions, especially for women, refugees and prisoners ([USDOS 23/4/2024](#)). Court judgements sometimes include internal exile after release from prison. This prevents people from travelling to certain provinces. Refugees are only allowed to move or settle in certain provinces [*Note: see chapter [Afghans in Iran](#) for more information*] ([USDOS 23/4/2024](#)). While checkpoints were already omnipresent in the Kurdish region, for example ([Zinati 2024](#); cf. [DIS 7/2/2020](#)), an intensification of the presence of security forces on the streets was reported after the start of the Israeli military operation in mid-June 2025 ([REU 26/6/2025a](#)). According to exile Iranian media, the Revolutionary Guards and Basij increasingly set up checkpoints to control the movements of citizens ([IRINTL 14/6/2025](#); cf. [IRWIRE 16/6/2025](#)). After the ceasefire with Israel was declared, the authorities focussed on suppressing possible internal uprisings, especially in the Kurdish regions ([REU 26/6/2025a](#)).

Departure

To leave the Islamic Republic of Iran legally, Iranian citizens require a valid passport and proof of payment of the exit fee. According to the German Foreign Office, in the event of a lawful departure via Imam-e Khomeini International Airport in Tehran, it can be virtually ruled out that a person wanted by Iranian security forces will be able to leave the country unchallenged with their own documents, given the security systems in place ([AA 15/7/2024](#)). Passports are stamped on entry and exit at the border crossing. If the exit stamp is missing when re-entering Iran, this will lead to questioning. Illegal departures are usually penalised with fines ([MBZ 9/2023](#)) if nothing else is available. Persons who leave the country illegally and have committed no other criminal offences can obtain a passport replacement document from the Iranian diplomatic missions abroad and return to Iran ([AA 15/7/2024](#)).

Married women may not travel abroad without the consent of their husbands ([USDOS 23/4/2024](#); cf. [HRW 16/1/2025](#)), while unmarried and divorced women and widows [over the age of 18] do not need permission from their father or a male guardian to travel ([CEDOCA 30/3/2020](#)). However, wives can agree on a marriage contract clause with their husbands that grants them general permission to leave the country ([BAMF 1/2023](#); cf. [IRWIRE 2/11/2019](#)). The husband's authorisation to leave the country must take the form of a power of attorney registered with the notary's office ([Eli Gasht 14/3/2024](#)). Husbands can withdraw their authorisation at any time ([HRW 16/1/2025](#); cf. [Eli Gasht 14/3/2024](#)). The fathers of unmarried women and the husbands of married women can apply for a ban on women leaving the country, even if they have received a passport ([MBZ 9/2023](#)).

The written consent of the spouse or father is required to issue a passport to women with an Iranian spouse or to children under the age of 18 ([IRIMFA n.d](#); cf. [Eli Gasht 14/3/2024](#), [BAMF 7/2020](#)). If the husband or father is not present, the woman must contact the competent authority of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs if she wishes to leave the country, unless written permission

has been granted ([BAMF 7/2020](#); cf. [IRIMFA n.d](#)). Divorced or widowed women do not need a declaration of consent to obtain a passport ([Eli Gasht 14/3/2024](#)).

Certain groups, such as employees in sensitive sectors, Iranian students abroad and all men between the ages of 18 and 30 who have not yet completed their military service, require a special exit permit ([Landinfo 21/1/2021](#) cf. [CEDOCA 10/5/2023](#)). Conscripts must pay a deposit in order to be allowed to leave the country ([Ekhtebar 22/4/2024](#)). Citizens who were educated at state expense or received scholarships must either repay the scholarship or receive a temporary exit permit. The government restricts travel abroad by some religious leaders, members of religious minorities and academics in sensitive areas. Journalists, academics, opposition politicians, artists and human and women's rights activists are affected by travel bans and confiscation of passports ([USDOS 23/4/2024](#)). In 2024, individual cases were reported in which Iranian diplomatic missions in Europe refused to renew the passports of participants in the protest rallies from September 2022, critics of the regime and journalists ([IRWIRE 15/2/2024](#)).

Exit bans and imposition of bail

It is relatively common for people under investigation in connection with the 'Women, Life, Freedom' protests and other demonstrations to be released from custody on bail or with travel restrictions. According to the Swedish Migration Agency, a prerequisite for the release of a person on bail or under travel restrictions is that their case goes through formal court proceedings ([Migrationsverket 28/10/2024](#)).

An arrested person can be released on bail as long as a criminal investigation is ongoing and the court has not yet passed judgement. The public prosecutor's office decides on a case-by-case basis whether and in what form a person can be released on bail. People who are released on bail deal with the situation in different ways. Many stay in Iran and make themselves available for the court proceedings, as bail is often set very high and family members have to help set bail. At the same time, there are people who agree with their families that they will flee, but also those who evade justice against their family's will. If a person is not available for court proceedings, their bail is confiscated. In conversation with Migrationsverket, Amnesty International reported cases where people released on bail left the country with their passport for fear of re-arrest and torture, as well as cases where release on bail was linked to the revocation of the passport. At the same time, many people also leave the country irregularly ([Migrationsverket 28/10/2024](#)).

Travel restrictions are less common than the imposition of bail and are applied in cases where the authorities suspect that a person will leave the country. Prosecutors make an assessment in each case. Courts can also decide on travel restrictions. In practice, this is a restriction that is primarily directed against high-profile individuals. Decisions on travel restrictions are communicated to the passport and border police, who are responsible for their implementation. A decision on travel restrictions is valid for six months and expires if it is not extended. If the decision is not extended, a person can leave the country as usual. The authorities do not always communicate decisions on travel restrictions ([Migrationsverket 28/10/2024](#)).

According to a confidential source interviewed by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, an application for a travel ban submitted to the court by the public prosecutor cannot be viewed in the SANA system by the person against whom the travel ban has been imposed (MBZ 9/2023). An Iranian news site specialising in legal issues states that according to criminal procedure law, investigators can issue an exit ban as a judicial surveillance order in two steps, one before contact with the accused and the other after contact with the accused. According to this source, exit bans can be viewed in the SANA system under certain circumstances. Travel bans (which in addition to criminal law grounds and the above-mentioned travel bans for women, can be imposed e.g. due to bank or tax debts and for people with a 'bad reputation') can also be checked on the website of the State Organisation for the Registration of Deeds and Properties (SSAA), the tax office (Ekhtebarebar 22/4/2024), or in person at the passport office (Ekhtebarebar 22/4/2024; cf. Migrationsverket 28/10/2024).

In addition to public prosecutors and courts, security forces such as the police can also decide to confiscate a person's passport. This effectively prevents the person concerned from travelling abroad. There are also reports that various Iranian intelligence services have lists of people who are to be prevented from travelling abroad (Migrationsverket 28/10/2024).

Alternative options

Where repression is practised, it is nationwide. Civilian and military administrative structures work effectively. There are no possibilities for evasion (AA 15/7/2024).

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20 Refugees

20.1 Afghans in Iran

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Iran has signed the Geneva Refugee Convention with reservations and does not fully implement it in practice (IOM 9/5/2025), but the country has offered refuge and support to millions of Afghan and Iraqi refugees and migrants for decades (AA 15/7/2024; cf. SEM 30/3/2022). It is estimated that a total of five to eight million Afghans live in Iran, which is around 5-9% of the total Iranian population (Clingendael 11/3/2025). Iran is host to one of the largest refugee and migrant populations in the world, especially Afghans (MPI 7/1/2025). Iran tolerates many Afghan nationals residing irregularly in the country. A significant proportion are in Iran as part of labour migration, which is an important economic factor for the country. With various regularisation initiatives, the Iranian authorities have made it possible for some of them to stay in the country on a regular basis or to obtain tolerated status (SEM 30/3/2022).

The traditionally high migration of Afghans to Iran (SEM 29/8/2023; cf. Stimson 24/10/2023) has increased further with the Taliban's takeover in August 2021 (SEM 29/8/2023; cf. MPI 7/1/2025),

although no exact figures on the entry of Afghans have been available since then. The Iranian authorities do not collect or communicate any reliable figures on this (SEM 29/8/2023). Of the 2.6 million previously undocumented persons recorded in a census in 2022, around one million are estimated to have entered Iran after the Taliban took power in August 2021 (IOM 9/5/2025). According to the latest available annual data from IOM Afghanistan, around 1.4 million Afghans left Afghanistan for Iran in the period May 2024 - May 2025, while around 2.5 million returned to Afghanistan (IOM 23/6/2025).

Under President Ebrahim Raisi [note: in office 2021-2024], a new authority, the 'National Migration Organisation' (NOM), was to take over the tasks of the previous Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrant's Affairs (BAFIA) (SEM 29/8/2023), i.e. the registration of asylum seekers and refugees and the determination of refugee status in accordance with Iranian legislation (UNHCR 26/9/2021). However, the establishment of the NOM did not receive the necessary parliamentary approval. Following the appointment of Masoud Pezeshkian as President of Iran in 2024, the organisation was dissolved and replaced by the Center for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants' Affairs (CAFIA), which reports to the Ministry of Interior. The newly appointed head of CAFIA has cancelled some of the directives of the former head of NOM (IOM 9/5/2025). UNHCR does not accept or decide on asylum applications in Iran (UNHCR 26/9/2021).

Residence options

People seeking refuge from Afghanistan have the following de facto residence options in Iran: regular residence via passport and visa; regular residence as 'recognised refugees' (for Afghans: holders of the Amayesh card, for Iraqis: holders of the Hoviat card (UNHCR n.da)); semi-regular residence as registered, irregular refugees (with laissez-passer); and irregular residence as non-registered refugees (SEM 29/8/2023). The legal regulation of Afghan migration takes place primarily via decrees. Decrees can be issued ad hoc. For the migrants concerned, this means a lack of security and predictability regarding their residence status. The residence permits mentioned are valid for a limited period of time and must be renewed each time (Asghari/RLI 3/2024).

According to the UNHCR, as of April 2025, there are a total of 3.49 million displaced persons in Iran who could potentially require international protection. This includes 770,000 people officially recognised as refugees by the Iranian authorities who hold either the Amayesh card (758,000 Afghans) or the Hoviat card (12,000 Iraqis). In addition, there are 2.72 million other people in a refugee-like situation (UNHCR n.db).

In Iran, it is not possible to submit an asylum application to the national authorities with reference to the Geneva Refugee Convention (IOM 9/5/2025). With few exceptions, asylum seekers have not been granted asylum since 2003 (SEM 29/8/2023). While some sources refer to Amayesh card holders as Afghan 'refugees', neither the Iranian authorities nor UNHCR have made a refugee status determination in the strict sense when granting this status (Asghari/RLI 3/2024). The provisions on restrictions on freedom of movement and work opportunities for Amayesh card holders are also not identical to the rights of refugee status under the 1951 Geneva Convention (Eurac 3/7/2023). Nevertheless, Amayesh cardholders are considered refugees under Iranian

national legislation ([IOM 9/5/2025](#)) and UNHCR recognises Amayesh cardholders as 'persons of concern', making them the closest group to refugees in Iran. They are the only group of Afghans in Iran protected by UNHCR ([Asghari/RLI 3/2024](#)).

In addition to Amayesh card holders, there are also families who hold a family passport, which is considered the closest equivalent to the Amayesh system ([IOM 9/5/2025](#)). According to the UNHCR, there were around 267,000 Afghans with a family passport ([UNHCR 31/12/2023](#)) or household passport in Iran ([Asghari/RLI 3/2024](#)) at the end of 2023. These are Afghans who were previously undocumented and have registered since 2010 to obtain Afghan passports with visas, which have been renewed several times since 2012 ([MBZ 9/2023](#); cf. [Asghari/RLI 3/2024](#)) - albeit with a gap between 2016 and 2020, during which the passport holders were considered undocumented ([Asghari/RLI 3/2024](#)). According to an announcement by UNHCR, the last extension took place at the beginning of 2025, with visas and work permits being extended until 21 June 2025 ([UNHCR 15/1/2025](#)). According to the IOM, however, family passports are generally renewed annually. The possibilities for adding new persons to family passports are limited, although newborn children of family passport holders can still be added to family passports ([IOM 9/5/2025](#)).

In 2022, the Iranian authorities registered an additional 2.6 million Afghans as part of a headcount of foreigners without residence status and issued them with *headcount slips* (in Farsi: *bargeh sarshomari*, [DIP 10/6/2025](#)), i.e. laissez-passer for temporary residence status ([UNGA 6/10/2023](#); cf. [UNHCR n.db](#)), an earlier round of registration had already taken place in 2017. The aim of the census was to register previously undocumented Afghans ([IOM 9/5/2025](#)). Among other things, Afghans who had entered the country irregularly before and after 2021 were given temporary protection and access to certain state services. In March 2025, Iran introduced a regularisation measure for foreign nationals in the country who have one of the *headcount slips* issued as part of the census ([UNHCR n.db](#)). This cancelled the validity of the *headcount slips* or legal residence and the holders are again considered undocumented ([DIP 10/6/2025](#)), unless they fall under an exemption, such as families with mixed documentation status, individuals who are at risk upon return (e.g. former military and government officials), and individuals with children attending primary or secondary school in Iran. Holders of *headcount slips* who do not fulfil these criteria are being asked to return to Afghanistan voluntarily to avoid deportation with a five-year entry ban and to apply for a (work) visa to return to Iran ([UNHCR n.db](#)). The future of *headcount slip holders* is unclear after 20 March 2025. For those who do not fall under the exceptions mentioned, there is a high risk of being deported ([IOM 9/5/2025](#)).

There are currently no plans to legalise illegal residents in Iran. They are at risk of deportation and are not entitled to state benefits ([IOM 9/5/2025](#)). Since the end of 2024, a significant increase in deportations of undocumented Afghans has been reported [note: see section 'Voluntary and forced return' for more information] ([DIP 10/6/2025](#); cf. [IOM 9/5/2025](#)).

Another group are Afghans who have a passport with a valid visa, for example a study visa or a visa for long-term stays. Both types of visa must be renewed annually ([Asghari/RLI 3/2024](#)). Only those in possession of a valid passport and visa for Iran can enter Iran legally. Iran

temporarily suspended some of its consular services after the Taliban came to power (e.g. in Herat), meaning that no new visas could be applied for. Since the end of 2021, however, normal visa applications can be submitted in Afghanistan again, albeit sometimes with interruptions (e.g. in April 2022 or late 2022/early 2023 in Herat). Nevertheless, the vast majority of entries to Iran are probably still irregular (SEM 29/8/2023).

In June 2023, the Iranian government introduced a smart card system for Afghan nationals in order to standardise and simplify the identification and administration of foreign Afghan residents in the country. This was intended to combine various identification documents previously used by foreigners into a single, standardised smart card. An investment programme was also to be introduced at the same time. However, the benefits of the smart card system remained unclear and the programme was eventually stopped. Since July 2024, smart cards have no longer been issued and the authorities are once again using the Amayesh system (IOM 9/5/2025).

Amayesh programme

The Amayesh system was introduced for Afghans by the Iranian government in the early 2000s and is Iran's main tool for managing Afghan (and originally also Iraqi) refugees, granting them limited legal status and access to basic services. While the system provides a degree of protection, it has been criticised for the financial burden it places on cardholders, who must pay a renewal fee each time, for restrictions on their rights and the exclusion of undocumented or newly arrived refugees. No Amayesh cards have been issued since 2008, with the exception of certain categories of family members. In addition, children of Amayesh holders (both parents must be Amayesh holders) are also entitled to an Amayesh card (IOM 9/5/2025).

The Amayesh cards were issued for households (and not individuals), with the registration of households based primarily on the applicants' own information (Asghari/RLI 3/2024). In practice, only refugees who were already in Iran before 2001 and their children (including those born later) are entitled to the Amayesh card [note: see below regarding the transfer of status] (SEM 29/8/2023). Registration for Amayesh status was a unique opportunity in this regard, which was not converted into [permanent] access to a residence status that would be granted on the basis of established eligibility criteria (Asghari/RLI 3/2024).

Officially, the Amayesh card is a temporary residence permit. The card must therefore be renewed regularly. Since 2011, it has been valid for one year at a time (SEM 29/8/2023). As part of the last renewal cycle (Amayesh 18 around the turn of the year 2024/2025), however, the validity was reduced to six months (IOM 9/5/2025). Card holders who have missed a registration round or cannot afford the renewal costs, which are not insignificant for some Afghans, lose their card and thus their residence status (Eurac 3/7/2023, NRC 1/6/2023). In the past (Amayesh rounds 14, 15 and 17), however, some exceptions were made for former Amayesh card holders who had forgotten to register (SEM 29/8/2023).

Rights and access to benefits

Iran has long been a place of refuge for Afghans fleeing instability and conflict. The Islamic Republic initially welcomed the first waves of refugees and other migrants from Afghanistan.

Over time, however, Iran has become increasingly restrictive due to economic pressures and security concerns ([MPI 7/1/2025](#)). The escalation of the conflict between Israel and Iran in mid-June 2025 has further exacerbated the situation for Afghans ([DW 19/6/2025](#); cf. [TNA 24/6/2025](#)). Undocumented Afghan nationals are not only at risk of airstrikes, but also face a tightening net of systematic discrimination, movement restrictions and mass deportations ([TNA 24/6/2025](#)), with the number of those returning to Afghanistan from Iran reportedly increasing in June 2025 due to Israel's airstrikes and Iranian plans to increase deportations ([AP 20/6/2025](#); cf. [AP 28/6/2025](#), [TN 22/6/2025](#)).

Iranian authorities are working with UNHCR to provide assistance to refugees, refugees returning to Afghanistan from Iran, asylum seekers and others ([USDOS 23/4/2024](#)). International organisations such as UNHCR and NGOs confirm that Iran has received and treated Afghan refugees very generously in recent years, but has received very little international support ([ÖB Teheran 11/2021](#)).

While many Afghans are able to take advantage of the hidden subsidies provided by the government to control the prices of food, medicine and petrol, people without residency status are unable to open bank accounts or buy flats and SIM cards for mobile phones, for example ([AJ 12/6/2022](#)). Afghans with residence status are also affected by certain restrictions ([8am 24/2/2024](#)).

Freedom of movement

Iran restricts the freedom of movement and choice of residence for Afghan citizens. Since 2007, Afghans have been prohibited from living in certain cities and provinces designated as 'no-go areas' for foreigners, unless they live in a settlement within these areas or are married to an Iranian national living there. In September 2022, almost two-thirds of the country's districts were classified as no-go zones ([MPI 7/1/2025](#)). Holders of an Amayesh card and a family passport are only allowed to live in the province indicated on their card. For any type of travel, they must inform the authorities and apply for a laissez-passer document indicating the authorised travel area and duration ([IOM 9/5/2025](#); cf. [MPI 7/1/2025](#)). Holders of a *headcount slip* are considered undocumented and therefore have no legal basis to travel within the country. The stay and travel of undocumented Afghans is illegal throughout the country. However, holders of an international passport with a valid visa can move freely throughout the country ([IOM 9/5/2025](#)), as long as these are not prohibited zones for foreigners. Travelling abroad is also possible with a residence visa. Holders of Amayesh cards cannot leave the country, otherwise they will lose their status ([Asghari/RLI 3/2024](#)).

Education

Holders of an Amayesh card and a family passport can usually enrol their children in school. For holders of *headcount slips*, access to education varies depending on the province. In some areas, Afghan families who only have a *headcount slip* have been able to obtain a unique code (YEKTA code), which is required for school enrolment. However, access to schooling for children of *headcount slip holders* depends on the subjective judgement of the respective

school headmaster - some allow enrolment, but most do not. As a result, many children who only have a *headcount slip* are unable to attend school. Undocumented Afghans (who have no legal residence documents) have no access to formal education ([IOM 9/5/2025](#)). In addition to this, not all children find a place at school, for example because there is a lack of affordable transport, children are sent to work illegally, the general enrolment fee is too high, or parents of Iranian children are against the admission of Afghan children ([ÖB Teheran 11/2021](#)).

Since 2012, Afghan refugees [i.e. Amayesh card holders] who wish to attend university must give up their residency status, obtain an Afghan or other passport, and then re-enter Iran as international students ([MPI 7/1/2025](#)).

Refugee children study side by side with their Iranian classmates according to the Iranian curriculum. There are some schools run by the Afghan community that teach in Dari or other languages spoken in Afghanistan. These schools are now recognised, having previously been regularly closed by the authorities ([ACCORD 4/5/2020](#)).

Healthcare system

Amayesh card holders can sign up for the Universal Public Health Insurance (UPHI) programme as well as Social Security (SSO) or private insurance plans. Family passport holders have access to SSO insurance, provided they have a valid work permit. In theory, primary healthcare services in Iran are accessible to all people for a fee, regardless of their legal status. However, the cost of treatment for foreigners is usually much higher than for Iranian citizens. IOM Iran also reports cases of undocumented persons receiving emergency medical care on humanitarian grounds. In practice, healthcare providers are increasingly reluctant to treat undocumented persons for fear of violating legal regulations ([IOM 9/5/2025](#)). Conversely, undocumented patients are often reluctant to seek medical help for fear of being reported to the authorities ([IOM 9/5/2025](#); cf. [Eurac 3/7/2023](#)).

Access to the labour market

Male Amayesh-registered Afghans between the ages of 18 and 60 must apply for a work permit in order to work legally in Iran ([IOM 9/5/2025](#)). The work permit is applied for together with the Amayesh extension ([Diaran 25/7/2022](#)) and is restricted to certain sectors, such as construction ([IOM 9/5/2025](#)) or agriculture ([MPI 7/1/2025](#)). Afghan women have no legal access to the labour market. However, some find work in the low-wage sector, for example as domestic helpers, often without contractual or legal safeguards. Holders of an international passport can also obtain a work permit via a visa, but this is usually limited to highly skilled jobs ([IOM 9/5/2025](#)).

Anyone with a valid work permit is entitled to register with the Social Security Organisation (SSO) ([IOM 9/5/2025](#)).

Most Afghans tend to work in low-paid jobs (construction, cleaning/garbage collection or agriculture). Employment in highly qualified professions is not permitted ([AA 15/7/2024](#)). Many have difficulties earning a living ([MPI 7/1/2025](#)). Nevertheless, some Afghans have also managed to climb the social ladder and establish themselves as entrepreneurs ([Clingendael 11/3/2025](#)).

Access to social benefits

State cash grants and other social benefits are reserved for Iranian citizens [Note: see chapter on [basic services and the economy / social benefits](#) for a description of the benefits]. Amayesh cardholders living in special settlements are an exception. They receive a monthly cash subsidy of IRR 10 million (EUR 10.58) from the World Food Programme (WFP). Beyond this, there are no state support programmes specifically aimed at vulnerable groups without Iranian citizenship. Benefits from the State Welfare Organisation (SWO) [Behzisti] are limited to Iranian nationals. However, there are charitable organisations that support people with disabilities, for example, regardless of their citizenship or residency status, with limited financial resources or relief items ([IOM 9/5/2025](#)). There are some Iranian NGOs that take care of Afghan refugees. However, the Iranian authorities have restricted the scope of these independent organisations in recent years ([SEM 30/3/2022](#)).

Access to housing

Afghan nationals are not allowed to officially register a tenancy agreement. In practice, however, according to information from the IOM office in Tehran at the beginning of May 2025, anyone can rent accommodation with an unofficial agreement (verbal agreement with a deposit) ([IOM 9/5/2025](#)). However, in a further tightening of conditions for undocumented Afghans, the authorities announced at the end of June 2025 that the rental agreement for any property rented by Afghan nationals without legal residence status would now be declared invalid in accordance with a new directive and the properties could be sealed and confiscated by the authorities ([BNE 27/6/2025](#); cf. [RFAR 28/6/2025](#)).

According to the UNHCR, around six per cent of Afghans live in camps, while the vast majority live among the Iranian population ([AJ 12/6/2022](#)). There are officially designated settlements, mostly in remote areas called 'host towns', where around three per cent of Amayesh cardholders live ([Asghari/RLI 3/2024](#)).

Access to financial services

Amayesh card and family passport holders are allowed to open bank accounts and access a range of financial services. Individuals with an international passport and valid visa can also open bank accounts. However, the process is much more time-consuming and administratively complex for them. Once their visa expires, their bank accounts are usually blocked and in some cases all associated accounts are frozen ([IOM 9/5/2025](#)). However, according to a directive reported in early 2024, Afghans with a residence permit are now only allowed to open bank accounts at one bank (and not several) ([8am 24/2/2024](#)). Afghan nationals without residence documents do not have access to formal financial and banking services. Holders of *headcount slips* also fall under this category ([IOM 9/5/2025](#)).

Access to Afghan documents

Afghan nationals in Iran can currently renew or obtain an Afghan passport through the Afghan Embassy in Tehran or the Afghan Consulate in Mashhad. However, a valid Tazkira (Afghan

identity card) is a prerequisite for obtaining a passport. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the issuing of new tazkiras in Iran has been suspended. Although the Afghan embassy has stated its intention to resume issuing them - possibly via an e-Tazkira system - an official date has not yet been announced. Currently, people who do not yet have a Tazkira must travel to Afghanistan to apply for one. When applying, they must present a Tazkira from a close male relative - for example, their father, uncle, grandfather or male cousin - to prove their Afghan ancestry (IOM 9/5/2025).

Holders of a family passport can extend both their passport and their visa via the so-called Kefalat offices in Iran (IOM 9/5/2025).

Marriage and passing on Iranian citizenship to children

Afghan citizens legally residing in Iran can legally marry Iranian citizens (or other legal residents) after a formal procedure. They must register their marriage with the Iranian authorities. Afghan nationals who are legally married to an Iranian citizen can apply for a residence permit. The procedure requires authorisation from the Ministry of Interior. Marriage to an Iranian woman can lead to a residence permit, but not automatically to citizenship (IOM 9/5/2025).

Afghan nationals without legal residency status face significant challenges when registering their marriage. The Iranian authorities can refuse to process the marriage without a valid residence permit or identity documents. Many undocumented Afghans resort to informal or purely religious marriages (Nikah) without registering them with the Iranian civil authorities. These marriages are not legally recognised and can lead to complications, especially for children born from these marriages. Therefore, undocumented Afghan nationals must first clarify their lack of legal residency status before they can benefit from marital residency rights or citizenship (IOM 9/5/2025).

Marriage does not automatically lead to papers. An Amayesh card holder does not pass on their residence status to their spouse upon marriage (IOM 11/4/2024). If the holders of an Amayesh card and a residence visa marry, the spouses can each retain their own residence status. However, if the couple has children, the children can only obtain papers if the parent with the Amayesh card changes their residence permit to a residence visa (Asghari/RLI 3/2024).

It is possible for Iranian women to pass on their citizenship to children with a foreign father, even if this does not happen automatically but must be applied for (USDOS 24/6/2024; cf. IOM 9/5/2025). A corresponding law was passed in 2019. However, there are a number of bureaucratic and financial hurdles for applicants when it comes to implementation (IOM 9/5/2025). Applicants also often require security clearance from the security authorities (IOM 9/5/2025; cf. USDOS 24/6/2024). A child born to an Iranian father and an Afghan mother as part of an official marriage automatically receives Iranian citizenship (IOM 4/5/2022).

Other aspects

Factors such as shared cultural ties, language and the Shia identity of the Hazara community, combined with a relatively open 900 km border, have historically favoured migration from Afghanistan, while Iran also tends to act as a transit country for Afghan migrants on their way to Turkey and Europe ([Clingendael 11/3/2025](#)). Since the return of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan in August 2021, Iran's attitude towards Afghan refugees and migrants has become increasingly complex. Recent developments indicate a tightening of policy and increasing social tensions ([IOM 9/5/2025](#)), with the increase in new arrivals after the Taliban takeover in particular causing tensions ([Clingendael 11/3/2025](#)). Anti-Afghan sentiment among the population has increased, fuelled by political rhetoric and public debates. As a result, Afghans face growing obstacles to integration. During the 2024 presidential elections, candidates openly blamed Afghans for economic and social problems. Slogans such as 'Expulsion of Afghans, a national demand' could be read on social media, underlining the growing support for tougher policies. This sentiment is in line with recent political trends, including increased deportations and restrictions on social benefits. Iran's recent history shows a growing tension between its ability to absorb refugees and its internal socioeconomic challenges ([MPI 7/1/2025](#); cf. [Clingendael 11/3/2025](#)). The recent Israeli military operation against Iran has also led to allegations that some Afghan nationals are spying for Israel ([RFAR 28/6/2025](#); cf. [BNE 27/6/2025](#)).

While Afghans have mainly been used as cheap labour in Iran for decades, the state also uses them in the security sector and has recruited Afghan migrants into units that fight outside Iran's borders ([Clingendael 11/3/2025](#)). The Revolutionary Guards are said to have recruited thousands of Afghan migrants living in Iran, including children, to fight in Syria using coercive measures ([FH 2025](#); cf. [Clingendael 11/3/2025](#)). In 2024 and 2025, media reported the presence of members of the Fatemiyoun unit and other Afghan military units in the province of Sistan and Balochistan ([IRINTL 1/9/2024](#)) and in Iraq ([TWI 29/1/2025](#)). It was also reported that former Afghan military personnel living in Iran were at risk of being recruited to fight against Ukraine ([RFAR 28/12/2024](#); cf. [Guardian 31/10/2022](#)).

Voluntary and forced return

There is no reliable data on either voluntary or involuntary returns from Iran to Afghanistan. Different sources provide different estimates at different times ([SEM 29/8/2023](#)). According to IOM Afghanistan records, around 2.5 million Afghans returned to Afghanistan from Iran between May 2024 and May 2025 [latest available data] [*note: no distinction is made between voluntary and involuntary return*]. This was offset by around 1.4 million new arrivals of Afghans in Iran ([IOM 23/6/2025](#)). From the end of 2023, the number of [voluntary and involuntary] returnees increased due to announcements by the Iranian authorities regarding tougher action against foreigners residing in the country illegally ([AP 20/6/2025](#)).

Voluntary UNHCR-assisted returns of registered Afghan refugees took place at a lower level than before between August 2021 and the second half of 2024, according to UNHCR data. Thereafter, the number of voluntary returnees increased again slightly, but did not reach the pre-2020 level [most recent data: 31 March 2025] ([UNHCR n.db](#)). Nevertheless, in 2024, 1,092

Afghans were assisted by UNHCR to return from Iran to Afghanistan, roughly twice as many as in 2023 (UNHCR 30/5/2025).

At the end of 2024, there was a significant increase in deportations of undocumented Afghans (DIP 10/6/2025; cf. IOM 9/5/2025). According to official Iranian figures, around one million Afghans were deported between March 2024 and March 2025 and the authorities announced that another million would be deported. The Taliban reported the arrival of around 3,000 Afghans at official border crossings during this period, which roughly matches IOM Afghanistan data (IOM 9/5/2025). In May 2025, IOM recorded a 'sharp' increase in forced deportations compared to previous months (IOM 2/6/2025). Due to Israel's airstrikes and Iran's plans to increase deportations, the number of arrivals of returnees from Iran increased further in June 2025, according to Taliban representatives (AP 20/6/2025; cf. TN 22/6/2025). At the end of June, the Iranian security authorities announced that all foreign nationals without a legal residence permit would now have to leave Iran. While the conditions for Afghans have recently become increasingly difficult due to the tense economic situation and sentiment towards Afghan nationals without residence permits, especially those who have sought refuge in the country after the Taliban returned to power, some Afghan nationals now also have to face being accused of acting as spies for Israel since the attacks by Israel and the USA (BNE 27/6/2025; cf. RFAR 28/6/2025).

The literature distinguishes between pushbacks of newly arriving refugees at the border and returns of refugees from inside the country. There are no precise figures on this ratio either. The Iranian authorities deport irregularly arriving Afghans back to Afghanistan as soon as possible. Afghans without legal residence in Iran are also at risk of being returned to Afghanistan (SEM 29/8/2023). There are numerous reports of cases of refoulement and forced returns of Afghan nationals from Iran, especially since 2024. The deportees report that they were forcibly expelled without an adequate assessment of their need for protection (IOM 9/5/2025). With regard to pushbacks at the border, reports also include the use of force by border officials (AMU 29/5/2025; cf. BAMF 21/10/2024). There are currently no explicit legal provisions that would protect vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities or unaccompanied minors, from refoulement or forced return. However, according to IOM's observations in Iran, vulnerable persons such as women, minors and persons with disabilities are less at risk of being included in deportation groups than others (IOM 9/5/2025).

UNHCR mentions several 'transit or deportation centres' along the Iran-Afghanistan border as well as 'formal detention centres' in various cities (SEM 29/8/2023). These facilities are often described as overcrowded and dirty, with a lack of food and medical care (SEM 29/8/2023; cf. BBC 31/5/2025).

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21 Basic supplies and economy

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Note: As of 27 June 2025, the impact of the Israeli airstrikes from 13 June 2025 on Iran's economic and supply situation cannot yet be meaningfully assessed (e.g. in terms of loss of prosperity due to infrastructure damage, temporary standstill of economic life, or the financial burden on the Iranian state budget, which is already under pressure due to intensified military operations; in addition, the events also have an impact on commodity and foreign exchange markets). For this reason, only a very limited discussion of developments since the start of the military operations is provided below. Please consult the Staatendokumentation if necessary.

The economy is characterised by its hydrocarbon, agriculture and services sectors, as well as a notable state presence in manufacturing and financial services. Iran ranks second in the world in terms of the size of natural gas reserves and fourth in terms of proven crude oil reserves (WB 20/10/2022). Although the Iranian economy is relatively diversified for an oil-exporting country (WB 20/10/2022; cf. Clingendael 30/1/2025), has now developed into a service-based economy (Clingendael 30/1/2025) and has a pool of well-trained workers (BPB 15/5/2020), economic activity and government revenues are dependent on oil revenues and are therefore volatile (WB 20/10/2022; cf. BPB 15/5/2020). The oil and gas sector is still a driving force of the Iranian economy, even though it was hit hard by the reintroduction of US sanctions in 2018 (WKO 4/2025). As part of their Operation Rising Lion in mid-June 2025, Israeli forces also bombed Iranian energy infrastructure (Standard 15/6/2025), including a refinery near one of the world's largest natural gas fields, which accounts for the largest share of Iran's gas production, causing Iran to partially shut down gas production at the field for several days (REU 26/6/2025b; cf. Standard 15/6/2025). In addition, an oil refinery and a gas depot in Tehran were also attacked (Standard 15/6/2025).

The state sector (state-owned and semi-state-owned companies) accounts for around 80% of Iran's economic activity, with the private and co-operative sector responsible for the remaining 20% (BS 19/3/2024). Although there were extensive privatisations of state-owned companies from the 1990s onwards, the companies were often taken over by quasi-state conglomerates. Iranian economists therefore also referred to the processes as 'pseudo-privatisation'. The

beneficiaries of privatisation were, for example, military institutions (e.g. the Revolutionary Guards, Basij, armed forces), religious, cultural or scientific foundations, welfare and pension funds as well as revolutionary foundations (e.g. the Mostazafin Foundation) (Harris/Diwan/Malik (A.)/Atiyas 2019, p.363), the economically powerful religious, revolutionary and military foundations are also known as bonyads (BS 19/3/2024). The Iranian economy is thus not simply under the control of the Iranian government. Institutions linked to sovereign bodies outside the government (e.g. the Revolutionary Guards and the Supreme Leader's Office) control large parts of the country's economy (EPC 28/3/2023; cf. BS 19/3/2024). The intermingling of the political and economic spheres has promoted a state policy of distribution and patronage that is accompanied by high levels of corruption (BPB 31/1/2020b; cf. MEI 7/6/2022).

According to the Human Development Index (HDI) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Iran is among the countries with a high level of development with an index value of 0.799 for the year 2023 [latest available data] and this value represents an all-time high for Iran since measurements began in 1990. The HDI measures the level of development of countries based on the factors 'long and healthy life', 'access to education' and 'decent living standards for the population' (UNDP 6/5/2025). With a GDP per capita of USD 4,465.6 in 2023 [latest available data], the World Bank ranks the Islamic Republic of Iran in the 'upper middle-income' category (WB n.d) and in 2024 Iran recorded economic growth of around 3% (WKO 4/2025). However, the country's GDP growth, measured in constant dollar terms, has remained largely unchanged since the early 2010s and GDP per capita at purchasing power parity is around 10% below the level of the late 2000s (FES 3/2024). The economy suffers from various imbalances caused by misguided subsidy policies, mismanagement and corruption, among other things. Major phenomena undermining economic performance are the budget deficit, electricity shortages and financial sector inadequacies, with the main causes of instability being high inflation and [Western-imposed] sanctions (Clingendael 30/1/2025). Inflation and the low exchange rate of the Iranian rial (IRR) are putting pressure on the Iranian economy (WKO 4/2025). Iran's economic performance is also strongly influenced by domestic politics, regional security issues and geopolitical developments (Clingendael 30/1/2025).

The IRR exchange rate was IRR 42,000 to USD 1 when the US sanctions were imposed in 2018. It subsequently depreciated significantly (IRINTL 29/1/2024; cf. ALCH 11/6/2025); as of 27 June 2025, the exchange rate on the free market is IRR 836,500 to USD 1 [*Note: Iran has a multiple exchange rate system; reference is made here to the (generally unrestricted) exchange rate on the free market. Information on the multiple exchange rate system can be found in the thematic report mentioned below*] (ALCH 27/6/2025). The IRR experienced further exchange rate losses with the start of the Israeli military operation in mid-June (RFAR 19/6/2025). The exchange rate continues to react highly sensitively to any political developments (WKO 4/2025). The low IRR rate is making imports in particular more expensive across the board (BAMF 13/2/2023).

The officially announced annual inflation rate has always been above 30% since 2018, which has driven a large part of the middle class into poverty (Clingendael 30/1/2025). According to World Bank data, inflation was even above 50% in 2023-2024 (WB 10/2024). An annual average of 38.5% is expected for 2025. However, many product groups have a much higher inflation rate

(according to estimates by independent experts, this is currently just under 80% for food) ([WKO 4/2025](#)). High inflation disproportionately affects low-income households, as their expenditure on food and housing accounts for around 80% of their budget, while their real wages are falling ([WB 24/8/2023](#)).

According to the World Bank's definition of the poverty line for Iran (availability of at least USD 6.85 per day), 19.9% of Iranians were below the poverty line in fiscal year 2023/2024 [note: latest available data], a slight decrease after a peak during the COVID-19 pandemic ([WB 23/4/2025](#)). A representative of the Iranian Institute of Labour and Welfare, on the other hand, put the proportion of Iranians struggling to meet their basic needs at up to 27% in January 2025 ([IRWIRE 6/1/2025](#)). Another Iranian economist quoted by an Iranian news website said that around half of the population would be living below the poverty line in early 2025 ([AFTAB 6/1/2025](#)). There are also still regional differences, particularly in relation to rural and south-eastern regions. The inequalities have been exacerbated by persistent drought and water shortages. The south-eastern provinces, particularly Sistan and Balochistan, are affected by severe poverty, which is significantly higher than the national average ([WB 4/2024](#)).

According to the latest report by the Iranian Statistical Centre, the annual cost of living in Tehran, the country's most expensive city, was more than IRR 2 billion (over EUR 2,100) in 2022/2023, with the cost of living having risen significantly, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic. The World Bank defines the poverty line for a family of three in countries with a similar economic level to Iran at IRR 450 million (EUR 476.19). However, the statutory minimum wage for a married worker is only IRR 110 million (EUR 116.40) per year ([IOM 9/5/2025](#)).

Basic services are guaranteed, thanks to state aid, close family ties and the Islamic donation system ([AA 15/7/2024](#)). Access to basic services is almost universal throughout the country, with the exception of access to modern sewage systems and the internet, where there is a large gap between rural and urban households ([WB 11/2023](#)). Although Iran is one of the countries with the largest oil and gas reserves, an energy crisis was reported in the winter of 2024/2025, resulting in power cuts to maintain the largely gas-dependent heating system for the population. In addition to mismanagement, the sanctions imposed and outdated infrastructure, this was also attributed to Israeli attacks in February 2024 that damaged two Iranian gas pipelines ([NYT 26/12/2024](#)).

Iranian banks are effectively excluded from the global financial system ([BS 19/3/2024](#))

Note: Information on the sanctions regimes imposed on Iran and their impact on the Iranian banking system as well as the possibilities for cross-border money transfers can be found in the Staatendokumentation's thematic report on 'Financial Transfers between Iran and Europe', which can be found in the [COI-CMS](#) and on [ecoi.net](#). The thematic report also contains information on the multiple exchange rate system and various options for transferring money between Iran and Europe, including a description of the hawala system.

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21.1 Social benefits

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Iran's welfare state system consists of subsidies for basic goods, cash transfers, poverty alleviation organisations that provide for a portion of the poorer population based on need, and social insurance organisations that cover the country's middle and upper income groups (CERI 12/2021). Security measures include unemployment insurance and unemployment benefits, sick leave, maternity benefits and allowances for the disabled (WB 11/2023). Education and health services are available to all Iranian nationals, including returnees, through the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health and Medical Education (IOM 9/2024).

Social security benefits

The Iranian social security system is supervised by the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour and Welfare and administered mainly by the Social Security Organization (SSO [Farsi: Sazman Tamin Ejtemaei]) (SSA n.d) as a social security institution with around 27 million beneficiaries (Bimeh 24/9/2024). According to Iranian labour legislation, all regular employees in the private sector must be insured by the SSO (SAIS Rethinking Iran 2023; cf. Bimeh 24/9/2024), with insurance premiums being covered by contributions from employers and employees as well as government subsidies. Public employees with fixed-term contracts are also insured with the SSO (Landinfo 12/8/2020). There are special insurance schemes for [other] government employees and members of the armed forces (IOM 9/2024). Freelancers can take out voluntary insurance with the SSO (Bimeh 24/9/2024). Since the 1990s, employees in small companies and informal self-employed workers have also been encouraged to take out SSO insurance (Landinfo 12/8/2020), subject to certain conditions (IOM 9/2024). People in the lowest income brackets are covered by Salamat insurance, which provides basic medical care through state funding (Amwaj 29/4/2024).

According to official statistics, around half of the Iranian population receives some kind of benefit from the SSO (IRINTL 26/10/2023; cf. Amwaj 29/4/2024), including dependants of insured persons (Landinfo 12/8/2020). Around a third of the population is insured through Salamat (Amwaj 29/4/2024). Data on the size of the informal sector of the Iranian economy varies. According to this, 25 to around 60% of the labour force is employed informally (SAIS Rethinking Iran 2023). According to a Landinfo report from 2020, around 25% of employees, especially in the informal sector and among seasonal workers, are not covered by pension insurance (Landinfo 12/8/2020). According to data from the International Labour Organization from 2019, 87.2% of the population at retirement age received an old-age pension (ILO 24/9/2024), with only those people who have also paid into the pension insurance scheme receiving an old-age pension. There are different insurance options, e.g. for employees and self-insured persons, including special insurance plans for housewives or entrepreneurs (IOM 9/5/2025). The SSO offers its members health insurance, pension and unemployment insurance benefits (IOM 9/2024; cf. Bimeh 24/9/2024).

Employees who have paid social security contributions for at least six consecutive months and become involuntarily unemployed can receive unemployment insurance benefits for at least six months. They receive 55% of their stated monthly salary. This also applies to returnees. Beyond this, there is no state unemployment benefit (IOM 9/2024). The self-employed and civil servants are not covered by unemployment insurance, as it is assumed that their employment contracts cannot be cancelled (Landinfo 12/8/2020).

The funds for the old-age pension are covered by joint contributions from the insured person, the employer and the government and vary according to the years of contributions. The survivor's pension is paid to relatives of an insured deceased person (Landinfo 12/8/2020). The average pension amount is currently around IRR 150 million (EUR 158.73) per year (IOM 9/5/2025).

Other benefits

The state provides cash grants to Iranian citizens as part of the Iranian Targeted Subsidy Plan. Under this plan, subsidies are paid according to income brackets. People in the three lowest income brackets receive a monthly cash subsidy of IRR 4 million (EUR 4.23), while those in the five income brackets above receive IRR 3 million (EUR 3.17) (IOM 9/5/2025).

According to the IOM office in Tehran, there are no cash benefits that are specifically aimed at families apart from cash grants. However, in view of the ageing population and falling birth rate, the legislator is trying to promote early marriage and childbirth through certain measures. These include loan programmes, for example, where loans can be granted for marriage, the birth of a child or for rental costs (for married women under 35 or men under 45). The sums for the loans, which have a term of ten years and an interest rate of four per cent, vary between IRR 1 billion and IRR 3.5 billion depending on the occasion and amount. The loans are only available to Iranian citizens (IOM 9/5/2025).

There are social security mechanisms, such as foundations for the poor and homes for children, the elderly, women and the disabled. Aid to the needy is organised by the state, mosques, religious foundations, poor people's foundations and often also by NGOs or privately (e.g. women's groups) (AA 15/7/2024; cf. IOM 9/2024).

There are two public organisations for vulnerable groups. Depending on the needs of the target groups, they provide services for specific vulnerable groups. One of the most important public organisations is Behzisti [note: also State Welfare Organization, SWO], which provides a wide range of services for various vulnerable groups, such as drug addicts, single mothers, working children, unaccompanied minors and the elderly. Services include socio-psychological sessions, counselling services, temporary shelters (Garm Khaneh) and hostels, mental and physical rehabilitation services, addiction treatment and more. The Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation also provides services to women-headed households, orphans, families of prisoners, etc. to improve their living conditions (IOM 9/2024).

People with mental or physical disabilities can also receive support from the SWO or Behzisti. They can register with the organisation and apply for an ID card that documents the type and degree of their disability. However, the services of the SWO are only available to Iranian citizens. There are also charitable organisations that support people with disabilities, for example, with limited financial resources or assistive devices, regardless of their nationality or residence status (IOM 9/5/2025).

Behzisti and the Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation also help people in need to rent a flat. Eligible people receive a monthly allowance for basic needs such as housing under special conditions. Due to the increase in housing prices and the decline in income, these amounts cannot cover housing costs in Iran (IOM 9/2024).

According to the IOM, the SWO is very strict when it comes to issues concerning children. If a minor is identified as unaccompanied, the child is placed in an SWO centre and given access to services, including food and clothing, provided the child has Iranian citizenship (IOM 9/5/2025).

Reception centres for returnees and their families are not known (AA 15/7/2024; cf. IOM 9/2024). However, hotel rooms for a few days can be booked on request for returnees as part of the IOM project 'Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration' (AVRR). Temporary accommodation, also known as Garm Khaneh, only accommodates extremely vulnerable homeless people and drug addicts (IOM 9/2024).

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22 Medical care

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Note: As of 27 June 2025, the impact of the Israeli airstrikes from 13 June 2025 on health care in Iran is not foreseeable, especially with regard to possible longer-term consequences on the availability of medicines, infrastructure and financial resources. Iranian authorities and Iranian media close to the regime claim that Israel also bombed hospitals in Tehran and Kermanshah, among other places, which cannot be verified at present (AnA 20/6/2025, TEHT 19/6/2025). During the phase of intensive aerial bombardment, some hospitals in Iran were confronted with a flood of wounded, which overloaded the health facilities (Guardian 16/6/2025). The situation continues to be monitored by the Staatendokumentation. Please consult with the Staatendokumentation if necessary.

In general, medical care, especially in rural areas, does not meet (Western) European standards. However, the country has invested heavily in the national healthcare system in the decades since the revolution in 1979. Maternal and infant mortality rates have fallen significantly in recent years, and life expectancy has risen to 74 years (men) and 78 years (women) (AA 15/7/2024).

Even in rural areas, 85% of the population have access to primary healthcare, 90% are supplied with clean drinking water and 80% are connected to appropriate sanitary facilities. Nevertheless, by no means everyone has access to complex, specialised and therefore more expensive services ([AA 15/7/2024](#)). In many parts of the country, specialised medical care, especially in emergencies or accidents, is not on a par with the capital in terms of medicine, hygiene, technology and organisation. In Tehran, medical care in all specialised disciplines is usually available at a fairly high level ([AA 12/12/2024](#)). Even though access to primary healthcare is largely guaranteed, there are still serious differences in quality between the regions. Health services are not distributed geographically according to frequency of need, but rather according to wealth ([ÖB Teheran 11/2021](#)).

Almost the entire rural population has access to primary healthcare services, which are provided in health houses and rural health centres. At provincial level, the universities of medical sciences and the health services are the most important state institutions that provide people with health services. At urban and rural level, a district health network, consisting of a district health centre, urban and rural health centres, health posts and health houses, is entrusted with this task. In addition to the universities of medical sciences and the health services, some of the services are provided by insurance companies and the provincial and district units of the Social Welfare Organisation [Note: State Welfare Organization (SWO), Behzisti]. The peripheral facilities (health houses/provincial health centres) on the premises of the medical colleges offer free health services. In other facilities, patients have to pay part of the amount based on their health insurance ([IOM 9/2024](#)). State institutions such as the Iranian National Oil Corporation, the judiciary and the Revolutionary Guards operate their own hospitals ([Landinfo 12/8/2020](#)) and most government agencies have their own social service centres, which provide health services for their employees ([SAIS Rethinking Iran 2023](#)).

In addition to the responsible ministry and universities, there are also health service providers in the private sector and NGOs ([ÖB Teheran 11/2021](#); cf. [Landinfo 12/8/2020](#)). However, these tend to provide secondary and tertiary care, while primary/basic care (e.g. vaccinations, prenatal care) is provided by the state ([ÖB Teheran 11/2021](#)). The private sector is mainly represented in the larger cities and offers various price categories to those who wish to use private hospitals and healthcare services. In public hospitals, almost all healthcare services are available at a lower price and can be covered by health insurance [note: but with deductibles, see below]. Due to long admission times, overcrowded public centres and better services in private health centres, people may prefer to pay more and go to private health facilities ([IOM 9/2024](#)).

Emergency assistance in the event of natural or man-made disasters is provided by the well-equipped and comprehensively organised Iranian Red Crescent ([ÖB Teheran 11/2021](#)). All hospitals are obliged to accept emergencies around the clock ([IOM 9/2024](#)). A reliably functioning rescue system does not exist everywhere, even in the cities ([AA 12/12/2024](#)).

All Iranian citizens, including returnees, are entitled to basic healthcare services (PHC) and other healthcare services. The two most common types of primary health insurance are Tamin Ejtem-aei and Salamat (Khadamat Darmani) [note: also Universal Public Health Insurance (UPHI)]. The

primary insurance covers the costs of medication, medical and hospital services, vaccinations, etc. [Note: see also below regarding deductibles]. Companies must insure their employees with Tamin Ejtemaei ([IOM 9/2024](#)), the 'Social Security Medical Insurance' (bimeh-ye darmani-ye ta'min-e ejtema'i), which is provided by the Social Security Organisation (SSO) [Note: on social insurance, see chapter on [social benefits](#)] ([Landinfo 12/8/2020](#)). In addition, voluntary insurance via Tamin Ejtemaei is also possible under certain conditions, for example for the self-employed or housewives. With Salamat insurance, the applicant's financial situation is assessed and the amount of the insurance premium is calculated on this basis. In some cases, the insurance premium may be waived. Salamat policyholders are not entitled to insurance from Tamin Ejtemaei. The insurance also only covers medical services in public and university medical centres ([IOM 9/2024](#)). Public employees and students are also insured through Salamat, or the Iran Health Insurance Organisation (IHIO) ([Landinfo 12/8/2020](#)).

Although primary healthcare services are free of charge and government spending on healthcare has increased considerably, insured persons are still required to pay deductibles ([ÖB Teheran 11/2021](#)). Due to the budget deficit of many social insurance organisations, on average only around 30% of healthcare expenditure is covered by the public sector, with patients having to pay the rest themselves ([Amwaj 29/4/2024](#)). In general, insurance cover under primary health insurance is limited. For more benefits, people usually take out private supplementary insurance. This is intended to cover the costs of services and deductibles that are not covered by basic insurance ([IOM 9/2024](#)). It can be assumed that a large number of households cannot afford adequate healthcare ([ÖB Teheran 11/2021](#)). Charitable organisations, including the 'Imam Khomeini Foundation', take care of uninsured people - such as destitute people or unrecognised refugees [note: see section [Afghans in Iran](#) on healthcare for Afghan citizens in Iran] ([ÖB Teheran 11/2021](#); cf. [Landinfo 12/8/2020](#)).

Medicines

Iran produces a large proportion of the medicines needed in the country itself ([AA 15/7/2024](#)). According to the IOM, most medicines are generally available in Iran. There is no serious shortage of medicines ([IOM 9/2024](#)). However, although US sanctions against Iran exempt humanitarian trade, there are de facto transaction barriers that prevent the import of certain medicines ([BNE 13/8/2023](#); cf. [IRWIRE 8/1/2025](#), [AA 15/7/2024](#)). There are therefore bottlenecks in the import of some specific groups of medicines and this has also led to price increases for some medicines ([IOM 9/2024](#); cf. [AA 15/7/2024](#)). While there is no reliable information on the quantity of supply bottlenecks ([AA 15/7/2024](#)), exile Iranian media reported supply bottlenecks in various provinces in early 2025, which also affected essential medicines ([IRINTL 19/2/2025](#); cf. [IRWIRE 8/1/2025](#)). Iranian pharmaceutical companies are therefore struggling with government price controls, a lack of foreign currency when purchasing raw materials and the massive government budget deficit. In-house has recently decreased in the pharmaceutical sector ([IRWIRE 8/1/2025](#)). According to the companies, the lack of foreign currency and the devaluation of the rial (IRR) have significantly increased the cost of imported medicines as well as medicines that rely on imported ingredients ([IRINTL 19/2/2025](#)).

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23 Return

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The Iranian government has long pursued a policy of not allowing forced returns. Voluntary returns are possible and are sometimes supported by the returning governments individuals are returning from or the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). In cases where an Iranian diplomatic mission has issued temporary travel documents, the authorities are informed of the person's imminent return (DFAT 24/7/2023).

There is little information on the situation of Iranian asylum seekers returning to Iran (Landinfo 22/11/2024; cf. CEDOCA 10/5/2023). There is still no systematic monitoring of returnees that

would allow general conclusions to be drawn about the treatment of returnees (ÖB Teheran 11/2021; cf. Landinfo 22/11/2024, CEDOCA 10/5/2023).

The Federal Foreign Office of the Federal Republic of Germany is not aware of any cases in which discrimination has occurred solely on the basis of an asylum application abroad (AA 15/7/2024). A search carried out by the Belgian country of origin research unit CEDOCA in January 2023 on cases in this regard was unsuccessful (CEDOCA 10/5/2023) and the Norwegian Landinfo has also recently found no concrete evidence that returned persons have been prosecuted or experienced other reactions solely because of their asylum application, although it emphasises that the level of knowledge about what did lead to reactions in the individual cases reported is very low (Landinfo 22/11/2024).

Until the suppression of the protests in autumn 2022, there were no indications that asylum seekers or recognised refugees or their families living in Iran were subjected to reprisals as a result of contacting Iranian diplomatic missions abroad, e.g. in Germany, for example to apply for a new Iranian passport. Due to the increased interest of Iranian services in regime-critical activities outside Iran, this risk has increased significantly for regime critics (including asylum seekers and recognised refugees) when contacting the relevant Iranian missions abroad [*Note: see the subchapter [Return / Transnational Repression, Treatment of Activists upon Return for information on the treatment of regime critics and politically active Iranians](#)*] (AA 15/7/2024).

In general, the authorities pay little attention to rejected asylum seekers on their return to Iran. The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs assumes that their activities (including social media posts about local activities) are not routinely scrutinised by the authorities. However, authorities may scrutinise social media activity of Iranians known in Australia (or elsewhere) (DFAT 24/7/2023) and, according to an expert consulted by CEDOCA, it is becoming increasingly common for authorities to instruct returnees to disclose their social media accounts (CEDOCA 10/5/2023). According to a source consulted by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the authorities question almost every person who they know has applied for asylum to find out what the reason for the asylum application was and whether the person may have engaged in political or religious activities. The authorities can find out whether returnees have applied for asylum abroad, for example, from relatives or friends of the person concerned, from intercepted communications or from a review of content on social media (MBZ 9/2023).

There are slightly different views on what could arouse the authorities' interest in a rejected asylum seeker. The general impression is that those who were targeted by the authorities before leaving Iran can expect reactions upon their return (Landinfo 22/11/2024; cf. MRAI-2 13/6/2025). Other factors mentioned include what information the authorities have received about a person's activities abroad and whether these activities are considered harmful to the regime (Landinfo 22/11/2024). According to one source, the ethnic or religious background or sexual orientation of a returnee does not in itself play a role. According to another source, these factors can have a cumulative effect (MBZ 31/5/2022; cf. MBZ 9/2023).

It is not entirely clear what reactions returnees can expect if they are found to have left Iran irregularly. 'Illegal departure' includes everything from leaving the country without a passport

or with forged documents to disregarding an exit ban. According to the passport law, leaving the country without documents can be penalised with a prison sentence or a fine, although according to Landinfo it is difficult to find information on the current amount of the fine ([Landinfo 22/11/2024](#)). If the illegal departure is prosecuted, the most common punishment appears to be a fine or a suspended prison sentence - unless other offences are also suspected ([Landinfo 22/11/2024](#); cf. [MBZ 9/2023](#)). If the person has left Iran illegally to avoid prosecution or is involved in criminal activities such as smuggling and human trafficking as well as activities of militant groups at the border, the response is much harsher ([CEDOCA 10/5/2023](#)).

Persons who leave the country illegally and have committed no other criminal offences can obtain a passport replacement document from Iranian diplomatic missions abroad and return to Iran. Particularly in cases where Iran has been left illegally, questioning must be expected. As part of the questioning, the passport is regularly withheld and a ban on leaving the country is imposed. To date, there have been no known cases of returned persons being psychologically or physically tortured during questioning ([AA 15/7/2024](#)). If people return to the country with a laissez-passer instead of a regular travel document, this can lead to questioning, as this could mean that the persons concerned have left the country illegally and/or have applied for international protection abroad ([CEDOCA 10/5/2023](#); cf. [MBZ 9/2023](#)). In this context, a Kurdish human rights organisation pointed out that the security authorities tend to suspect Kurds of being activists and would then regard illegal departure as evidence of activism. This would put Kurds at risk of arrest simply because they had left the country illegally and applied for asylum ([Landinfo 22/11/2024](#)). It can also lead to questioning if no exit stamp is noted in the passport when re-entering the country ([MBZ 9/2023](#)).

Some members of the Iranian diaspora return to Iran regularly, for example for a holiday or to visit relatives ([MBZ 9/2023](#)). The vast majority of these exiled Iranians have no problems on their return ([Landinfo 22/11/2024](#)). Other Iranians living abroad are reluctant to travel to Iran for fear of being arrested or prevented from leaving the country due to their political activities or statements critical of the regime ([IRINTL 9/1/2024](#)). Some Iranians are able to enter and leave Iran, although this is surprising given their public profile. Some are engaged in regime propaganda and/or may have been recruited by the regime. It is difficult to know who can and cannot travel to Iran, nor is the procedure necessarily consistent ([Posch 5/7/2024](#)). Whether someone is questioned on return depends on the circumstances of the individual case. It often only becomes clear over time whether there is a real threat ([MBZ 31/5/2022](#)). For some time now, travellers to Iran have had to increasingly expect to be arbitrarily arrested and, in this case, charged. Furthermore, in 2024 the Iranian services apparently also favoured the use of targeted intelligence service speeches with the purpose of obliging people to cooperate with Iranian intelligence services. This applies in particular to individuals who are associated with an opposition group by Iranian agencies or who are suspected of having contacts with individuals from the opposition scene. Those affected are threatened with several days of questioning by Iranian intelligence services, during which considerable pressure is exerted on them. In addition, mobile phones and information and communication hardware can be read or manipulated ([BMI-D 10/6/2025](#)).

Iran does not legally recognise dual citizenship and treats Iranians with dual citizenship as Iranian citizens. At the same time, Iran uses the second citizenship to exert political pressure. It can be assumed that Iran will continue to deliberately arrest Western nationals under fabricated pretexts and use them as a means of exerting pressure in a kind of 'hostage policy'. This serves to enforce its political goals, for example to achieve an exchange for people imprisoned abroad (BMI-D 10/6/2025). A number of dual nationals who have returned to Iran are being held in the country in this way (CHRI 22/1/2022; cf. BBC 7/6/2022, IRWIRE 14/2/2024).

In December 2021, the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs set up a web portal where Iranians who are abroad and considering returning to Iran can upload their data, whereupon they will be informed whether they can enter and leave the country safely and unhindered or whether there are any open cases against them. However, not everyone in the Iranian diaspora is convinced that this system works and that he or she can travel to Iran without worry. One reason for this is that not all Iranian intelligence services work together in a coordinated manner and therefore there is always the possibility that returnees will nevertheless be apprehended (IRINTL 7/1/2022; cf. MBZ 9/2023).

Note: see section on [legal protection / judiciary / double jeopardy, offences committed abroad, conviction in absentia](#) for information on double jeopardy and conviction in absentia.

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23.1 Unaccompanied minor refugees (UMF)

Last modification 2025-07-04 10:31

Returned unaccompanied minors are cared for by the ‘Social Affairs Office at the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ and transferred to orphanages if prior notification is given (AA 15/7/2024).

Source

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23.2 Transnational repression, treatment of activists upon return

Last modification 2025-07-17 12:30

Iran’s primary goal is to secure and strengthen its regime. This is closely linked to the leadership’s desire to protect Iran from perceived external threats. Central to Iran’s agenda in this regard is intelligence gathering and targeting dissident movements and the Iranian diaspora, regardless of where in the world they are located (SÄPO 2025FH 2021), with the Iranian regime’s broad definition of who poses a threat to the Islamic Republic contributing to the scope and intensity of transnational repression efforts (FH 2021). The fight against opposition groups and individuals is the focus of Iranian intelligence activities both at home and abroad (BMI-D 10/6/2025; cf. SÄPO 2025). Iranian intelligence services in Austria also endeavour to promote the interests of their state and shield the regime from potential threats. They identify and monitor critical voices from opposition members, the media, human rights organisations or minorities and look for ways to suppress or silence them (BMI/DSN 26/5/2025).

Iranians who live abroad and publicly criticise the regime there (offline and online) must expect repression and prosecution if they return to Iran. Their activities are closely monitored by Iranian services. Their families living in Iran are regularly put under pressure (AA 15/7/2024). The ‘red lines’ for activists in Iran are very unclear. They are somewhat clearer for activist activities abroad. So-called ‘high profile’ activists, for example those with a large online following, are particularly affected by persecution. However, with regard to the issues that activists deal with, it sometimes seems that it makes no difference whether a person takes actions that may even benefit the country. Sometimes the authorities simply seem to be misinformed. The Iranian authorities

focus primarily on associations, i.e. who is working with whom and for which organisation. Participation in street protests, on the other hand, is less at the centre of attention (IRMEX 6/6/2025). The Iranian security authorities in Austria focus on organisations of various ethnic groups, opposition groups such as the People's Mujahideen (MEK) and all Iranians abroad who make public political statements. For example, there is definitely an interest in persecuting members of Ahwazi organisations (Posch 5/7/2024).

The activities of Iranian intelligence services in Europe, the Middle East and North America include assassinations, kidnappings, intimidation in the digital space, the use of spy software (FH 2021; cf. Landinfo 28/11/2022), movement restrictions and Interpol abuse [note: by issuing 'red notices' so that people are detained in third countries] as well as coercion by third parties (FH 2021). Apart from its intelligence services, the regime also relies on criminal networks (SÄPO 2025; cf. LWJ 17/3/2025, ICCT 16/10/2024).

The known victims of murder, attempted murder and kidnapping by Iranian regime forces abroad are leaders of large opposition groups or separatist organisations such as the MEK and the Arab Struggle Movement for the Liberation of Ahwaz (ASMLA), as well as leaders and activists of Iranian-Kurdish parties in exile and activists abroad who have attracted a lot of attention in Iran through their online campaigns (Landinfo 28/11/2022; cf. IRINTL 7/1/2024). There are known cases in which Iranian nationals, especially if they have a wide reach as journalists or bloggers and have made critical statements on political issues in Iran (human rights violations, corruption and enrichment of public officials, women's rights, internal power struggles), have been abducted in third countries in order to bring them to Iran, where they have been sentenced in (show) trials (AA 15/7/2024). Among journalists, those working for well-known media platforms such as the BBC, Iran International, Deutsche Welle, Radio France Internationale, Voice of America, Radio Zamaneh or others in Farsi are particularly targeted by the Iranian security authorities, as they are most likely to reach a large audience in Iran (RSF 1/4/2024).

Iranian intelligence services actively seek to recruit informants within opposition groups (Landinfo 28/11/2022). An expert told ACCORD in June 2019 that the Iranian authorities had succeeded in infiltrating most opposition organisations [in exile] (ACCORD 5/7/2019). The authorities are focussing on the MEK, ethnic groups (ACCORD 5/7/2019); cf.

Landinfo 28/11/2022) and Sunni jihadists (ACCORD 5/7/2019), among others. Cases of uncovered informants are known, for example, from Sweden (concerning the ASMLA) and the USA (concerning the MEK) (Landinfo 28/11/2022).

While the Ministry of Intelligence (VAJA/MOIS) plays an important role in the surveillance of Iranian citizens abroad, the consular and protocol departments of Iranian embassies abroad also play an important role, as they pass on information to Tehran when consular services are used, for example regarding the civil register. The Iranian authorities are very well networked with each other and exchange information. This is why the Iranian secret services appear so powerful. In addition, monitoring the situation and reporting to the authorities in the home country is part of the routine work of every foreign mission (Posch 5/7/2024).

Persecution of family members living in Iran

Whether family members of expatriate Iranians living in Iran are persecuted depends, among other things, on the following factors: the behaviour of the family members in Iran and their relationship to the activities or statements of their relatives abroad; the profile of the expatriate Iranian relatives; as well as personal circumstances, e.g. disgruntled neighbours who are Basij members and therefore hold a position of power. In specific individual cases, it is difficult to predict the level of danger (Posch 5/7/2024). According to CEDOCA's research, most cases of proxy punishment of family members can be categorised as follows: Dissidents belonging to political groups, well-known or influential political and human rights activists, dissident social media influencers with large followings, or dissidents appearing in the media. However, an expert interviewed by CEDOCA also pointed out that the repression against family members of dissidents abroad is arbitrary and aims to create insecurity and instil fear in all members of the dissident diaspora that something could happen to their family members. There are also reports of acts against families of anti-government protesters and Christians in Iran (CEDOCA 16/10/2024).

With regard to isolated known cases of politically active expatriate Iranians in Austria, it can be assumed that family members of exposed expatriate Iranians are particularly affected, and not so much those who have only attended a demonstration once or twice. For example, relatives of people who regularly give interviews to Iranian diaspora media are affected. Media such as Iran International, for example, have a very wide reach, which is a thorn in the side of the Iranian regime. Relatives receive phone calls, for example, where the callers do not introduce themselves and are assumed to belong to the MOIS. The family is then told that their relatives in Europe or Austria should no longer give interviews or comment on the political situation in Iran, otherwise they may be arrested (Zehetner-Hashemi 28/8/2024).

Family members living in Iran of journalists from the BBC's Farsi-language programme, BBC Persian (BBC 12/1/2023), and the Farsi editorial department of Deutsche Welle reported threats from the Iranian authorities (FAZ 28/11/2023). Family members of BBC Persian journalists are facing a 'disturbing increase' in persecution, according to the BBC in June 2025. Among other things, they are subject to arbitrary questioning, travel bans, confiscation of passports and threats to freeze assets (BBC 2/6/2025).

According to research by the exiled Iranian news platform Iran Wire, family members of ethnic Arab activists who have fled abroad have also recently come under increasing pressure from the security authorities (IRWIRE 27/3/2024).

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23.2.1 Participation in street protests abroad in 2022/2023, especially in Austria

Last modification 2025-07-04 11:19

A large number of exiled Iranians took part in protests and solidarity marches around the world [from September 2022] (Landinfo 5/7/2023). In Vienna, for example, demonstrations took place weekly for months (Zehetner-Hashemi 28/8/2024). In connection with the protests from September 2022, Iranian activists reported attempts at intimidation in Austria, for example through conspicuous filming and photography of protesters as well as threatening phone calls or messages. They assume that the Iranian authorities are behind the incidents (Zehetner-Hashemi 28/8/2024, Datum 11/2022).

According to a senior employee of an NGO involved in the protest movement, participants in the vigils in front of the Iranian embassy in Vienna, for example, received WhatsApp messages with very detailed information about their protest activities and the request to no longer take part in the protests, as otherwise the safety of family members living in Iran could no longer be guaranteed. It is suspected that the Iranian authorities had the contact details of the protest participants, as they have to contact the Iranian embassy to renew Iranian identity documents, for example (Zehetner-Hashemi 28/8/2024). During the 2009 Green Movement protests in front of the Iranian embassy in London, Iranians reported that the Iranian consulate had identified them as protesters and refused to process their consular affairs. However, the image quality of cameras outside embassies has since improved and the Iranian state claims to be using facial recognition technology (CEDOCA 10/5/2023). On the other hand, screenshots of messages circulated after the start of the protests claiming that the Iranian embassy in Vienna had called on people to report protesters, although the embassy denied this (Datum 11/2022).

The calls or messages described above particularly affected those who organised the protests in Vienna or who were particularly frequently present at the demonstrations. One person who was heavily involved in the organisation of the protests in Vienna also reported a visit by an embassy employee to her workplace, which was interpreted as an attempt to threaten her, even though nothing else happened (Zehetner-Hashemi 28/8/2024). According to an expert interviewed by CEDOCA, it is unlikely that the Iranian authorities consider people who merely participate in demonstrations abroad to be high ranking targets. However, the expert also states that he would be concerned about individuals who have participated in the protests and return to Iran, although this does not mean that these individuals would be immediately arrested upon return. This depends on the profile of the individuals. The organisers of the protests would encounter problems if they returned (CEDOCA 10/5/2023). The senior NGO employee interviewed by the Staatendokumentation reported that she was not aware of any cases in which those who had only taken part in a demonstration once or twice had encountered problems when entering or leaving Iran, but those who had taken part in the demonstrations more often had (Zehetner-Hashemi 28/8/2024).

Since the bloody suppression of the protests following the death of Mahsa Amini, returnees have been subject to increased scrutiny by the security services. Since then, Iranian intelligence services have also been monitoring the activities of people outside Iran, e.g. statements on

social media or participation in protests abroad. These individuals are then subjected to thorough searches and interrogations when they enter Iran. This applies both to written documents in their luggage and to electronic means of communication such as mobile phones, notebooks or tablets, the data from which is used as a pretext for criminal charges. There are known cases of long prison sentences imposed on such grounds. Even people who have been able to enter and leave the country without any problems in the past can be arbitrarily arrested on the basis of (long) past or new criminal charges. Long prison sentences under harsh conditions and torture are possible; in the case of more serious charges, corporal punishment or the death penalty may also be imposed. Even before the current protests, there have been individual cases of questioning by the security authorities about their stay abroad, the outcome of which is unknown by the Federal Foreign Office (AA 15/7/2024). People from the Iranian diaspora who travelled back to Iran in spring 2023, for example, were often stopped on entry. Their mobile phones or iPads were then checked and it was checked whether they had been to demonstrations in Europe, especially in Austria. In some cases, people were detained for several days. However, the leading NGO employee interviewed by the Staatendokumentation is not personally aware of any cases of prolonged detention, although she is aware of brief detentions (Zehetner-Hashemi 28/8/2024).

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23.2.2 Online activities

Last modification 2025-07-04 11:28

A significant proportion of surveillance by the security authorities takes place online (CEDOCA 10/5/2023), with the authorities stepping up their efforts in this regard after the start of the protest in mid-September 2022 (LOT 15/12/2022). The authorities monitor activists in exile, but do not have the capacity to monitor all of them. The regime sets priorities based on its interests, and these priorities can change (CEDOCA 10/5/2023). Iranian authorities may not take posts critical of the regime with low reach on social media very seriously, as they assume that this is part of the normal activities of students, for example. However, the Iranian security authorities are monitoring and collecting information, and Iranian students abroad are also vulnerable, for example, in that they need a visa to leave Iran and for their stay abroad (Posch 5/7/2024).

According to a source interviewed by CEDOCA, the focus as of 13 September 2022 [note: i.e. shortly before the large-scale wave of protests began] was on journalists and ethnic minority activists. According to the source, the amount of criticism a person makes of the regime is not a major factor that increases the risk of being monitored as an online dissident in exile. Rather, the influence a person has determines whether they are prioritised by the regime (CEDOCA 10/5/2023), with two factors in particular being decisive: Access to public attention and connections to the home country (Michaelson 2020). For example, those who appear on television channels such as Iran International or Voice of America (VOA) are considered influential. On social media, the number of followers can be seen as a certain benchmark, but there is no simple formula. Rather, the focus is on the question of whether a person succeeds in shaping the discourse with their posts. In any case, a source interviewed by CEDOCA considers it very unlikely that a Facebook profile of someone outside Iran with around 500 'friends' that criticises the Iranian government would be monitored by the authorities, with twitter.com, Instagram and Telegram being more important platforms for reaching an Iranian audience than Facebook or blogs (CEDOCA 10/5/2023).

The way Iranian authorities monitor Iranians abroad depends on the target. Iranian authorities target some high profile dissidents in the diaspora with malware. Social media profiles of people who are not high-profile dissidents can also be monitored. For example, the Iranian authorities can read what someone is tweeting about or see who is part of a person's network. For this, the Iranian authorities use publicly available information and do not monitor private [i.e. not publicly viewable] accounts. According to this source, when monitoring the Iranian diaspora, the Iranian authorities mainly target leaders and organisers, i.e. people who lead a group or party, or people who are a group of people pays attention to. The regime may view high-level political activists as a threat and then launch sophisticated cybersecurity attacks against them (CEDOCA 10/5/2023). While the regime usually focuses its surveillance on important figures, according to another source, 'mid-level' activists are also targeted by hacking attacks, and even 'ordinary' Iranians are sometimes monitored, as any kind of information is useful to the authorities (IRB 22/2/2021). For example, the senior NGO employee interviewed by the Staatendokumentation in August 2024 [note: who has a certain level of recognition in Austria due to her work and social media presence] reported rather clumsy, easily identifiable phishing attempts in which she was sent links that she suspects would have downloaded spyware onto her devices (Zehetner-Hashemi 28/8/2024). An Iranian lawyer interviewed also noted [when talking about the dissemination of Christian content on social media] that there are cases of people who have had problems with the authorities because of posts on social media with a low reach or despite having private accounts because they were reported by people in their surroundings. The state is legally able to prosecute such persons (MRAI 19/6/2023).

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23.3 Return assistance from the Austrian state

Last modification 2025-01-09 14:36

*[This chapter is based on information provided by the Austrian Federal Agency for Care and Support Services (BBU GmbH) as of **December 2024** (BMI 6/12/2024). Changes may occur at short notice in the area of return assistance. For further information, please refer to the relevant [BBU page](#)].*

The employees of the Federal Agency for Care and Support Services (BBU GmbH) provide individual information on the options for voluntary return and the available support services.

Return assistance includes the following services:

- Free individual counselling on voluntary return including application for financial support from the BBU
- Organisational support with travel preparations
- Assumption of the costs of travelling home
- Financial start-up aid of up to €900
- Participation in a reintegration programme in the destination country after return

There is no legal entitlement to these support services. Authorisation is granted by the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum (BFA). Further information on the current support programmes (return support including reintegration support) is available on the website www.returnfromaustria.at.

The BBU provides support with travel planning and flight bookings as well as with the procurement of travel documents home, any necessary medical care and the assumption of return travel costs. Organisational support can generally be provided in any procedural constellation. The prerequisite for the assumption of the costs of travelling home is that the returning person is destitute.

Financial start-up aid

The amount of financial start-up assistance is regulated in a degressive model and is staggered according to the time of application for assisted voluntary return:

- During the ongoing asylum or foreign law procedure up to one month after the return decision becomes final: €900 per person; from one month after the return decision becomes final: €250 per person
- Core families: maximum amount of €3 ,000 per family
- Special constellation: For vulnerable returnees who would generally be excluded from the financial start-up aid, a one-off amount of € 250 per person can be granted following an individual case-by-case assessment by the Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum (BFA).

Criteria for receiving financial start-up assistance and reintegration support (exceptions possible in individual cases):

- Voluntary departure
- Financial need or destitution
- First-time receipt of the support benefit
- Sustainability of the departure
- No evidence of a security risk due to voluntary return
- No serious criminal offence

EEA citizens, persons from the Western Balkan states and citizens of countries with visa-free entry to Austria (e. g. Georgia, Moldova) are excluded from receiving financial start-up assistance.

Special constellation: For vulnerable returnees from these regions, who would generally be excluded from financial start-up assistance, a one-off amount of € 250 per person can be granted following an individual case-by-case assessment by the Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum (BFA)

Reintegration support

For 42 countries of origin , voluntary returnees can apply for reintegration support worth up to €3 ,500 in line with the guiding principle of 'return with prospects'.

The reintegration offer is processed with the cooperation partners:

- Frontex ([EU Reintegration Programme EURP](#))
- IOM Austria ([RESTART IV reintegration programme](#))
- Caritas Austria ([IRMA plus III reintegration programme](#))
- OFII (French [Office for Immigration and Integration](#))
- ETTC ([European Technology and Training Centre](#), an NGO active in Iraq)

As part of the reintegration programmes, returnees receive comprehensive support for reintegration in their country of origin. This includes individual, personal counselling and mainly benefits

in kind, e.g. economic, social and psychosocial support. The programmes offer a wide range of services to ensure the best possible use of resources.

Further information on the respective programmes and for which countries of origin they are offered can be found on the above pages ([BMI 6/12/2024](#)).

Source

- BMI - The Federal Ministry of the Interior [Austria] (6/12/2024): Österreichische Rückkehrunterstützung – Übersicht der Leistungen

24 Documents, registration and civil status register

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All Iranian nationals receive an identity booklet (Shenasnameh) [also: family book/family register] when registering their birth ([Landinfo 5/1/2021a](#); cf. [DFAT 24/7/2023](#)). This is available in two versions: one for children up to the age of 15 and one for people over the age of 15. The Shenasnameh is updated in the event of changes in marital status and family circumstances. In addition, the Iranian authorities issue a national identity card (Kart-e melli) for Iranian citizens over the age of 15. This is now an electronic chip card that has gradually become the most important identification document for Iranians in their daily lives ([Landinfo 5/1/2021a](#)). It is required, for example, to apply for passports, driving licences and for banking transactions ([DFAT 24/7/2023](#)). Both the Shenasnameh and the Kart-e melli are issued by the National Organisation for Civil Registration (NOCR). The Passport and Immigration Police issue passports based on the Shenasnameh and Kart-e melli ([Landinfo 5/1/2021a](#)).

Iranian citizens receive a national ID number at birth registration, which is noted in both the Shenasnameh and the Kart-e melli and the passport. The ten-digit ID number consists of an area number indicating a person's place of birth, a serial number and a control digit. The date of birth is not included in the ID number ([Landinfo 5/1/2021b](#); cf. [ARKA n.d.](#)).

According to the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs, Iranian identity documents have security features that are costly to forge, making them prohibitively expensive for most Iranians ([DFAT 24/7/2023](#)). While the latest editions of the Shenasnameh and Kart-e melli have more advanced security standards than their predecessors, old versions are still in use and are far easier to tamper with ([Landinfo 5/1/2021a](#)). Other types of documents, such as military service exemption cards, are technically more vulnerable to forgery as they have less robust security features, but they are also expensive. Paper documents such as court documents, summonses and property deeds, on the other hand, are relatively easy to obtain by fraudulent means ([DFAT 24/7/2023](#)). According to the findings of the German Foreign Office, it is relatively easy for Iranian nationals to obtain forged documents, which can also be explained by the generally poor quality of original documents. The spectrum of forgeries ranges from false stamps and noticeable adhesive edges to simple reproductions. Documents with identified forgery features are adapted within a very short time. High-quality forgeries of Iranian passports, on the other hand, are rather untypical and have only been identified in individual cases ([AA 15/7/2024](#)).

Genuine documents with incorrect content are easy to obtain. This applies in particular to the Shenasnameh. It is relatively easy to have a different date of birth entered in a genuine shenasnameh. In the case of children born out of wedlock, an arbitrary name is usually entered as the father in order to protect the children from disadvantages at school and in adult life. After a divorce, women often have a new shenasnameh issued that does not show the previous marriage (AA 15/7/2024).

There are also reports of a 'booming' market for the 'rental' of Kart-e melli cards. The ID cards are passed on for a fee, for example to register cars imported from abroad. Due to the residence and work restrictions imposed on foreign nationals in Iran, many of them have turned to renting Iranian ID cards via intermediaries, for example to rent a flat or purchase mobile phone connections [note: mainly affects Afghan nationals]. Passing on identity documents is a criminal offence which, according to announcements by the judiciary and police, will also be prosecuted (IP 3/11/2024).

The documents issued by both the Iranian authorities and the Afghan embassy in Iran confirm incorrect information. It is not possible for the Austrian embassy to verify this (ÖB Teheran 11/2021).

Note: Information on court documents and the judicial database Adliran or SANA can be found in the subchapter [Legal protection / Judiciary / Court documents](#).

Registration system and civil status register

There is no registration system comparable to the German system (AA 15/7/2024).

There is a central registry authority (saseman-e sabt-e Ahwal keshwar), which keeps data on birth, marriage/divorce and death as an electronic register. Register entries can be issued by the respective district office for civil status matters. Information on marriage contracts concluded at the time of marriage can also be obtained from the notary where they were concluded (AA 15/7/2024).

The official registration authority adds all Iranian nationals to its database after their identity has been verified by the police and information services. Diplomatic missions are not authorised to obtain information. There is no known formal procedure for determining nationality (AA 15/7/2024).

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25.3 Published Versions

- Version 9, Valid from 17-10-2024 to 17-07-2025
- Version 8, Valid from 26-06-2024 to 17-10-2024
- Version 7, Valid from 26-01-2024 to 26-06-2024
- Version 6, Valid from 13-04-2023 to 26-01-2024
- Version 5, Valid from 23-05-2022 to 13-04-2023
- Version 4, Valid from 22-12-2021 to 23-05-2022
- Version 3, Valid from 01-07-2021 to 22-12-2021
- Version 2, Valid from 29-01-2021 to 01-07-2021
- Version 1, Valid from 29-06-2020 to 29-01-2021

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