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2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Iran

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Islamic Republic of Iran is an authoritarian theocratic republic with a Shia Islamic political system based on *velayat-e faqih* (guardianship of the jurist). Shia clergy – most notably the *rahbar* (supreme leader) – and political leaders vetted by the clergy dominate key power structures. The supreme leader is the head of state and holds constitutional authority over the judiciary, government-run media, and other key institutions. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has held the position since 1989. The Assembly of Experts selects and may dismiss the supreme leader. Although assembly members are nominally directly elected in popular elections, the supreme leader has indirect influence over the assembly's membership via the Guardian Council's vetting of candidates and control over the election process. The supreme leader appoints half of the 12-member Guardian Council, while the head of the judiciary (who is appointed by the supreme leader) appoints the other half. The supreme leader also has indirect influence over the legislative and executive branches of government. The Guardian Council vets candidates for the presidential and Islamic Consultative Assembly (parliament/*majles*) elections, routinely disqualifying a significant number of candidates based on political or other considerations and controls the election process. Neither the 2021 presidential elections nor the 2020 parliamentary elections were considered free and fair.

The supreme leader holds ultimate authority over all security agencies. The Ministry of Intelligence and Security and law enforcement forces under the Interior Ministry, which report to the president, and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, which reports to the supreme leader, share responsibility for law enforcement and maintaining order. The Basij, a nationwide volunteer paramilitary group, sometimes acts as an auxiliary law enforcement unit subordinate to the Revolutionary Guard. The Revolutionary Guard and the national army (Artesh) provide external security. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security forces. There were reports that members of the security forces committed numerous abuses throughout the year.

Iran experienced widespread unrest during the year. Multiple nationwide protests began after the September 16 death of Mahsa (Jina) Amini in the custody of morality police after she allegedly violated mandatory veiling laws, and security forces used lethal force against protesters. Women and youth led the protests, chanting “Women, Life, Freedom” and “Death to the Dictator.” By the end of the year, security forces killed more than 500 persons, including at least 69 children, and arrested more than 19,000 protesters, including children, according to the nongovernmental organization Human Rights Activists News Agency. Some of those arrested faced the death penalty, including children. The government also routinely disrupted access to the internet and communications applications to prevent the free flow of information and to attempt to interrupt or diminish participation in protests.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: unlawful or arbitrary killings by the government and its agents, most commonly executions for crimes not meeting the international legal standard of “most serious crimes” or for crimes committed by juvenile offenders, as well as after trials without fair trial guarantees; forced disappearance attributed to the government and its agents; torture or other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by the government and its agents; arbitrary arrest or detention; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; political prisoners and detainees; transnational repression against individuals in another country, including killings, kidnappings, or violence; serious problems with the independence of the judiciary, particularly the revolutionary courts; arbitrary and unlawful interference with privacy; punishment of family members for offenses allegedly committed by an individual; serious abuses in a conflict,

including enabling abuses by terrorist groups throughout the region, the Syrian government, pro-Iran Iraqi militia groups, and Yemeni Houthi rebels, all of which were credibly accused of abuses (see the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for Syria, Iraq, and Yemen), as well as unlawful recruitment or use of child soldiers in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen; severe restrictions on freedom of expression, including violence, threats of violence, and unjustified arrests and prosecutions against journalists, censorship, and enforcement of criminal libel and slander laws; serious restrictions on internet freedom; substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association; severe restrictions on religious freedom; inability of citizens to change their government peacefully through free and fair elections; serious and unreasonable restrictions on political participation; serious government corruption; serious government restrictions on or harassment of domestic or international human rights organizations; lack of meaningful investigation of and accountability for gender-based violence, including domestic or intimate partner violence, sexual violence, workplace violence, child, early and forced marriage, female genital mutilation/cutting, femicide, and other forms of such violence; violence against ethnic minorities, including Kurdish and Baluch minorities; crimes, violence, or threats of violence motivated by antisemitism; trafficking in persons; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex persons; criminalization of consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults, and enforcement of such laws; significant restrictions on workers' freedom of association; and the worst forms of child labor.

The government took few steps to identify, investigate, prosecute, and punish officials who committed human rights abuses, including protester deaths and abuse in custody, or corruption. Impunity remained pervasive throughout all levels of the government and security forces.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person

a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings

There were numerous reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings. These included executions for crimes not meeting the international legal standard of “most serious crimes” or for crimes committed by juvenile offenders, as well as executions after trials without due process. Security forces used lethal force against peaceful protesters leading to numerous deaths. On November 13, a court sentenced one protester to death and five others to between five and 10 years in prison, according to state media. On December 1, state media reported that three children who participated in the protests were being tried on charges that could carry the death penalty. On December 8, Amnesty International reported authorities executed Mohsen Shekari less than three weeks after he was convicted on charges of “enmity against God,” “blocking a street in Tehran,” and allegedly concealing a knife on his person while attending protests. Shekari was sentenced to death after a “grossly unfair sham trial.” Majid-Reza Rahnavaard was publicly executed in Mashhad on December 12 on similar charges connected to protest activity. Amnesty International’s December report further identified at least 18 other individuals at risk of execution who were at different stages of the criminal process in connection with the protests.

Media and human rights groups documented suspicious deaths while in custody or following shooting of protesters by security forces throughout the year. Human rights nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and others assessed those authorities used the death penalty, lengthy prison sentences, mass arrests, and violence in detention to suppress freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. The government launched a so-called investigation into the nationwide protests that broke out after the killing of Mahsa Jina Amini, but it focused on the acts of the protesters (whom the government called “rioters”) with no indication it would investigate the conduct of security forces and members of the judiciary. The UN special representative on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (UNSR) noted, “The Iranian Government has consistently presented unsubstantiated ‘reports’ and reiterated assertions claiming that Amini did not die as a

result of any violence or beatings. In other reports, the government denied reports that security forces killed the children, claiming they committed suicide, fell from a height, were poisoned, or were killed by anonymous “enemy agents.”

Media and human rights groups documented allegations of deaths in custody due to actions by security forces.

In September, 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, also known by her Kurdish first name Jina, died after reportedly being beaten while in the custody of the morality police. On September 13, police detained Amini for her alleged “improper hijab” while she was visiting Tehran from her home in the Kurdistan region. According to Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA), her family was initially told she would be released from the Vorzara Detention Center in an hour, but instead she was transported to a hospital on September 14. Authorities claimed Amini had suffered a “heart problem” while in custody and was pronounced dead on September 16. A photograph was later circulated showing Amini lying in a hospital bed with apparent severe facial injuries. Her father told domestic media outlet *Rouydad 24* that the hospital at first would not allow her family to see her, and when they did, her head and body were entirely covered to hide her bruises. The family also reported being pressured by the government to bury Amini at night to bring less attention to the death.

At year’s end, HRANA reported 512 persons had been killed by security officials in protest-related clashes or had died due to unknown causes while in detention since the protests began and published the identities of 481 individuals, including 69 children. NGOs and international media reported numerous instances of protesters being tortured, beaten, or raped in detention. On December 6, the *Islamic Republic News Agency* (IRNA) reported five persons were sentenced to death for allegedly killing a member of the Basij, reportedly during protests in the city of Karaj. Many others, including children, faced charges that could carry the death penalty, including rapper Toomaj Salehi, arrested in October after posting videos of himself protesting. He was charged with “corruption on earth” as well as spreading propaganda.

Although many individuals were executed during the year reportedly for homicide, the law also provides for the death penalty in cases of conviction for “attempts against the security of the state,” “outrage against high-ranking officials,” *moharebeh* (which has a variety of broad interpretations, including “waging war against God”), *fisad fil-arz* (“corruption on earth”, including apostasy or heresy; see section 1.e., Transnational Repression), rape, adultery, recidivist alcohol use, consensual same-sex sexual conduct, “working to undermine the Islamic establishment,” “cooperating with foreign agents or entities,” and “insults against the memory of Imam Khomeini and against the supreme leader of the Islamic Republic.” The UN secretary-general noted in his June report that capital punishment was imposed for these charges, and the UNSR expressed concern in his July report that “the death penalty is imposed on the basis of overbroad and vaguely defined offenses.” Prosecutors frequently charged political dissidents and journalists with the capital offense of “waging war against God” and accused them of “struggling against the precepts of Islam” and “against the state that upholds those precepts.”

As documented by international human rights observers, so-called revolutionary courts (see section 1.e., Trial Procedures) continued to issue the vast majority of death sentences and failed to grant defendants due process. The courts regularly denied defendants legal representation and, in many cases, solely considered as evidence confessions often extracted through coercion or torture. Judges may impose the death penalty on appeal, which deterred appeals in criminal cases. The judiciary is required to review and validate death sentences, but this rarely happened.

According to the NGO Iran Human Rights (IHR), authorities executed 89 percent more persons in the first 10 months of the year, compared with the same period in 2021. According to HRANA, the 565 known executions included at least five juvenile offenders and 11 women. NGOs estimated, however, the government did not announce more than 88 percent of executions. Amnesty International and IHR noted the real numbers of persons secretly executed, as well as those at risk of execution, were likely much higher. Even in executions it made public, the government often did not release information such as names, dates, or crimes for which they were executed.

Members of marginalized ethnic communities were overrepresented among victims, in particular the Baluch minority. According to the Abdorrahman Boroumand Center, minorities made up 31 percent of the total executions during the year, with 150 of those executed – 27.5 percent of the total – from the Baluchi ethnic group, which constitutes only 5 percent of the population.

NGOs also reported multiple mass executions in prisons during the year. According to the UNSR, between March 4 and 16, at least 16 of 52 individuals sentenced to death on drug-related charges were executed at Shiraz Central Prison, while the government officially confirmed only three drug-related executions in that period. According to Amnesty International, on May 14 authorities executed nine persons in Zahedan Prison, Vakilabad Prison, Adelabad Prison, and Isfahan Central Prison (Dastgerd), followed on June 6 by at least 12 executions in Zahedan Prison and on June 15 by another 12 executions in Rajai Shahr Prison. Amnesty International also reported that an average of five persons per week were executed at Rajai Shahr Prison in the first six months of the year. According to the UNSR, “at the time of nationwide protests in May 2022, more than 55 individuals were executed, representing the highest monthly execution rate since 2017.”

Islamic law as applied by the country’s judicial system allows for the execution of juvenile offenders, starting at age nine for girls and 13 for boys, the legal age of maturity. As of January, the United Nations reported more than 85 individuals remained on death row for alleged offenses committed when they were younger than 18. The NGO Center for Human Rights in Iran (CHRI) reported three juveniles were among the 15 protesters tried in a revolutionary court in the city of Karaj and faced charges of “corruption on earth” and “waging war,” which carry the death penalty, for allegedly being involved in the death of a Basij member on November 3. According to IHR, authorities executed Afghan national Mohammad Hossein Alizadeh in Qom Central Prison on August 10, accused of homicide in a fight at age 16, and ethnic Baluch Omid Alizehi in Zahedan Central Prison on August 19, accused of homicide in a fight at age 17.

In January UN Human Rights Council experts called for a stay of execution for Hossein Shahbazi, who was sentenced to death for crimes he allegedly committed at age 17 based in part on confessions obtained through torture and mistreatment.

According to HRANA, in February the Supreme Court revoked the death sentence of Mohammad-Reza Haddadi, sentenced for a crime committed at age 15. Haddadi spent 18 years in prison and was sent to the gallows on multiple occasions prior to the revocation of the sentence.

Responding to criticism from the United Nations on the practice of executing juvenile offenders, Majid Tafreshi, a senior official and member of the state-run High Council for Human Rights, documented the government’s current position in a 2021 interview with *Agence France-Presse* that criticism of the practice of executing underage individuals was “not fair.” Tafreshi said the government executed juvenile offenders “three to four times” a year, “mainly our 17 years old big boys (where) the court recognized their maturity,” and he claimed this was “not a symbol of violations of human rights.”

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

On January 13, according to HRANA, Isfahan Central Prison authorities executed Abolrahim Sargolzai and Shahin Khosravi for drug-related crimes. On September 7, according to IHR, Minab Prison authorities executed Allah Nour Salarzei, a Baluch, for drug-related offenses.

According to human rights organizations and media reports, the government continued to carry out some executions by cruel and inhuman practices, including hanging by cranes, in which prisoners

are lifted from the ground by their necks and die slowly by asphyxiation. Adultery remains punishable by death by stoning, although provincial authorities were reportedly ordered not to provide public information regarding stoning sentences since 2001, according to the NGO Justice for Iran.

On October 26, a terrorist attack on a Shia shrine in the southern city of Shiraz killed 15 individuals and injured an estimated 40 others. The Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack. On November 7, the intelligence ministry announced the arrest of 26 individuals on charges related to the attack. President Raisi attempted to connect the protests to the attack, saying in televised remarks that “these riots pave the ground for terrorist attacks.”

b. Disappearance

There were reports of politically motivated abductions during the year attributed to government officials. Plainclothes officials seized lawyers, journalists, and activists without warning, and government officials refused to acknowledge custody or provide information on them. In most cases the government made no efforts to prevent, investigate, or punish such acts. The UN secretary-general’s annual report on the human rights situation in Iran published in June noted that protesters were subject to enforced disappearances, with several initially held in facilities run by the Intelligence Ministry or the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). NGOs reported disappearances continued during the protests following Mahsa Amini’s death.

On September 20, teenager Nika Shakarami disappeared after taking part in protests. She was missing for 10 days, until authorities called her family and said they could pick up her body from the morgue. Authorities claimed she committed suicide by jumping off a building, but her family and NGOs stated she was killed. Her mother said in a video message broadcast by Radio Farda that authorities were pressuring her to parrot the official line that Shakarami died by suicide. She also said that security forces seized her daughter’s body while the family was planning funeral services and secretly buried her.

On November 29, according to *IranWire*, 17-year-old Iliad Rahmanipour disappeared. Three days later, authorities told his family they found his body surrounded by pills and empty glasses, implying he had killed himself with alcohol and drugs. His family said his face was bruised and he appeared to have been beaten. Prior to his disappearance, Rahmanipour had posted on his Instagram page in support of the protests and had attended demonstrations. His family said he sent a video to a friend before his death in which he discussed committing suicide – a video his family believed was forced.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and Other Related Abuses

Although the constitution prohibits all forms of torture “for the purpose of extracting confession or acquiring information,” use of physical and mental torture to coerce confessions remained prevalent, especially during pretrial detention, including in cases of detained protesters. There were credible reports that security forces and prison personnel tortured and abused detainees and prisoners throughout the year.

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

Human rights organizations frequently cited several prison facilities, including Evin Prison in Tehran, Rajai Shahr Prison in Karaj, Greater Tehran Penitentiary, Qarchak Prison, Adel Abad

Prison, Vakilabad Prison, Zahedan Prison, Isfahan Central Prison (Dastgerd), and Orumiyeh Prison, for their use of cruel and prolonged torture of political opponents, particularly Wards 209 and Two of Evin Prison, reportedly controlled by the IRGC. Authorities also allegedly maintained informal secret prisons and detention centers outside the national prison system, where abuse reportedly occurred.

There were widespread reports of torture and sexual assault against detained protesters. On August 11, *Iran International* reported that military intelligence agents repeatedly threatened to kill or rape Ali Younesi and Amir Hossein Moradi, two physics students arrested in 2020 on charges of affiliation with the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK) opposition group, while they were in solitary confinement. NGOs and media reported widely that prior to their July 2021 conviction, the students were beaten while held in solitary confinement to force confessions, which both retracted in court. Younesi reportedly bled from his eye for 60 days from beatings after his arrest.

On November 30, *IranWire* reported that a 22-year-old woman detained during the protests told fellow inmates at Urmia Prison that IRGC agents repeatedly raped her during her interrogation. She reportedly took her own life after release from detention. A political activist who previously spent time in Urmia Prison told *IranWire* she had heard from at least eight women who said IRGC members raped them during their preliminary interrogation. Davand also said those who were arrested during the protests were being kept away from other prisoners, packed into overcrowded rooms, and forced to take sleeping pills.

Courts continued to impose corporal punishments. These included flogging, blinding, stoning, and amputation. At least 148 crimes are punishable by flogging, while 20 may carry the penalty of amputation. On May 31, according to Amnesty International, authorities at Evin Prison amputated the fingers of Sayed Barat Hosseini without anesthesia. Hosseini was previously sentenced to amputation after a criminal court in Kermanshah convicted him of theft.

In June the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) urged the government to rescind sentences to amputate the fingers of eight prisoners convicted of theft. Hadi Rostami, Mehdi Sharafian, Mehdi Shahivand, Amir Shirmard, Morteza Jalili, Ebrahim Rafiei, Yaghoub Fazeli Koushki, and one unnamed man were sentenced to “have four fingers on their right hands completely cut off so that only the palms of their hands and their thumbs are left.” The Abdorrahman Boroumand Center reported that three of the men, Hadi Rostami, Mehdi Shahivand, and Mehdi Sharafian, were interrogated for more than a month in police investigation bureaus in Orumiyeh, Ardebil, and Bandar Anzali, and were kicked, beaten, flogged with a cable, and hung from their wrists and feet. One was threatened with rape. Rostami said he was beaten until he signed a blank piece of paper, which was then populated with admissions to burglaries he had not committed. His codefendants said they were coerced to testify to Rostami’s involvement in the thefts. While awaiting amputation, Rostami attempted suicide twice. No updates were available by year’s end regarding the other seven prisoners.

Impunity remained a widespread problem throughout all security forces. The attorney general is responsible for investigating and punishing security force abuses. If any investigations took place during the year, the process was not transparent, and there were few reports of government actions to discipline abusers. According to the July UNSR report, “No steps were taken to strengthen the accountability framework in law or policy to allow effective channels for obtaining truth, justice and non-occurrence of serious human rights violations.”

Human rights groups frequently accused regular and paramilitary security forces such as the Basij of committing numerous human rights abuses, including torture, forced disappearances, and acts of violence against protesters and bystanders at public demonstrations. The government generally viewed protesters, critical journalists, and human rights activists as engaged in efforts to undermine the 1979 revolution and consequently did not punish security forces for abuses against those persons even when the abuses violated domestic law.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison conditions were harsh and frequently life threatening due to food shortages, gross overcrowding, physical abuse, inadequate sanitary conditions, and withholding of adequate medical care. Prisoner hunger strikes in protest of their treatment were frequent. With the surge in arrests during the protests, NGOs and media outlets reported the conditions deteriorated further with an influx of inmates.

Abusive Physical Conditions: Overcrowding, widespread infrastructure deficiencies, lack of clean water, lack of quality food and sanitary facilities, denial of access to medical care, and insufficient numbers of beds continued to represent serious threats to prisoners' lives and health. According to *IranWire* and human rights NGOs, guards beat both political and nonpolitical prisoners during raids on wards, performed nude body searches in front of other prisoners, and threatened prisoners' families. There were reported deaths in custody and prisoner-on-prisoner violence, which authorities sometimes failed to control. Overall health-care conditions, which worsened significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic, remained dire. In December human rights activist Atena Daemi reported on the situation facing women inmates in Evin Prison in a series of Twitter posts, based on information from recently released women. She reported that seven or eight prisoners were held in one cell, leaving no room to move around or lie down. Daemi said shower use was limited to twice a week due to high numbers of prisoners, and officials refused to provide cleaning supplies to address the problem of dirty bathrooms.

Prison authorities often refused to provide medical treatment for pre-existing conditions, injuries suffered at the hands of prison authorities, or illnesses due to the poor sanitary conditions in prison. Human rights organizations reported that authorities used denial of medical care as a form of punishment for political prisoners and as intimidation against prisoners who filed complaints or challenged authorities. Medical services for women prisoners were reported as grossly inadequate. An August report from the UN secretary-general expressed increasing concern regarding denial of adequate medical care or medical furlough, even for severely ill inmates, and particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, noting a number of cases of denial of medical care had resulted in deaths. According to an Amnesty International report released in April, at least 92 men and four women in 30 prisons had died in state custody since 2010 due to deliberate denial of access to adequate health care.

In January, according to multiple NGOs and media reports, poet and filmmaker Baktash Abtin died in state custody after contracting COVID-19 in Evin Prison, after reportedly being denied access to adequate health care. According to PEN America, Abtin was serving a six-year sentence on charges of "anti-government propaganda" and "assembly and collusion against national security." In 2019 Abtin told CHRI that the charges were for statements made by the Iranian Writers Association, of which he was a board member, articles in the organization's internal newsletter, and holding memorial ceremonies for association members who were believed to have been killed by the state in 1998.

In March prison officials refused to release labor rights activist Sepideh Gholian to the hospital when she became seriously ill from COVID-19, moving her to the prison quarantine but denying medical care. Gholian was initially arrested in 2018 and was held in several prisons, including Bushehr Prison. In September 2021, she detailed, in a series of Twitter posts while she was on temporary furlough from Bushehr Prison, the abuse she witnessed of fellow inmates in the women's ward.

The judiciary's news agency, *Mizan*, reported that eight prisoners were killed and 61 injured when a fire broke out at Evin Prison on the night of October 15. *IranWire* later reported the number of dead at 13, claiming that four died in the hospital while eight were shot. HRANA reported that external security forces armed with pellet guns and live ammunition clashed with prisoners. Authorities claimed "rioters" in the prison started the fire, while NGOs alleged the authorities started the fire to cover up shootings at the prison.

Authorities occasionally held pretrial detainees with convicted prisoners. A 2020 UNSR report noted that child and juvenile detainees were reportedly held in the same cells as adults in some facilities, including Saghez Central Prison in Kurdistan Province. Male juvenile detainees were

held in separate rehabilitation centers in most urban areas, but female juvenile detainees and male juvenile detainees in rural areas were held alongside adults in segregated detention facilities, according to NGO reports.

Regulations allow women prison inmates to keep their children with them until the age of two, but *IranWire* reported in March that children often stayed behind bars until they were much older. The NGO Children of Imprisoned Parents International reported older children who lived with their incarcerated mothers in multiple prisons did not have access to medical care or educational and recreational facilities. The children were often exposed to drug use and witnessed violence and in some instances subjected to physical and sexual abuse from inmates.

In March hacktivist group Edalat-e Ali (Ali's Justice) released video footage to Radio Farda showing prisoners in Evin Prison lying wall-to-wall on floors and stacked three-high on metal bunk beds. The group released similar footage in November 2021. In August a letter written by a group of women political prisoners held in Evin Prison emphasized a sharp increase in the prison population and corresponding concerns regarding the rise of COVID-19 among inmates. Also in August, imprisoned journalists and women's rights activists Narges Mohammadi and Aliyeh Motalebzadeh – who had been held in Qarchak Prison (a women's prison) prior to their July transfer to Evin Prison – wrote a separate letter in which they called for the closure of Qarchak Prison due to inhuman conditions. These included lack of effective air-conditioning, dirty undrinkable water (unusable even for showers), lack of natural light or a sewer system, old and unsuitable facilities, and sudden transfer of political prisoners, which they stated was a tactic used to silence inmates.

There were also numerous reports of attempted prisoner suicides throughout the year in response to prison conditions or mistreatment. According to Kurdistan Human Rights Network, Saada Khedirzadeh, a Kurdish woman from West Azerbaijan, attempted to hang herself on August 18 in Urmia Prison. *IranWire* reported Khedirzadeh was arrested in October 2021 on unknown charges. In May, while pregnant, she went on an 11-day hunger strike and was denied medical furlough. She told a human rights organization she was being “held on trumped-up charges” and “threatened with a forced confession.”

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

Administration: In most cases authorities did not initiate credible investigations into allegations of inhuman conditions or suspicious deaths in custody. According to an April report from Amnesty International, since 2010 authorities had not conducted independent and transparent investigations into the deaths in custody of almost 100 persons whose cases involved allegations of denied medical care.

Prisoners were able to submit complaints to judicial authorities but often faced censorship or retribution in the form of slander, beatings, torture, and denial of medical care and medication or furlough requests, as well as charges of additional crimes. According to CHRI, on July 23, human rights lawyer Mostafa Nili tweeted that he was being put on trial for “propaganda against the state” for giving an interview in which he described the conditions his clients endured in Qarchak Prison.

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

Independent Monitoring: The government did not permit independent monitoring of prison conditions. Prisoners and their families often wrote letters to authorities and, in some cases, to UN bodies to highlight and protest their treatment (see section 1.e., Political Prisoners and Detainees). The UNSR noted continued denial of access to the country in his July report.

D. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

Although the constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, the practices occurred frequently. Detainees may appeal their sentences in court but are not entitled to compensation for detention.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

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

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

The government continued to use house arrest without due process to restrict movement and communication. At year's end, former presidential candidates Mehdi Karroubi and Mir Hossein Mousavi, as well as Mousavi's wife Zahra Rahnavard, remained without formal charges under house arrest imposed in 2011. Security forces continued to restrict their access to visitors and information. Concerns persisted regarding Karroubi's deteriorating health, reportedly exacerbated by his treatment by authorities.

Arbitrary Arrest: Authorities commonly used arbitrary arrests to impede alleged antiregime activities, including by conducting mass arrests of persons in the vicinity of antigovernment demonstrations, including during the protests that began in September in response to the death of Mahsa Amini in custody of the morality police. According to Amnesty International, these arrests sometimes included children and bystanders at protests and were often conducted in a violent manner, to include beating detainees. Plainclothes officers arrived unannounced at homes or offices, conducted raids, arrested persons, and confiscated private documents, passports, computers, electronic media, and other personal items without warrants or assurances of due process.

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

According to an Amnesty International report released in March, in 2021 several thousand men, women, and children were interrogated and unfairly prosecuted or arbitrarily detained solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly during the November 2019 protests.

During the protests that began in September, HRANA reported that security forces arrested more than 19,000 protesters by year's end. Arrests were often conducted with brutality, and detainees were commonly charged with vague offenses such as "assembly and collusion to act against national security," "propaganda against the state," and "disrupting public order," according to Human Rights Watch (HRW).

International media and human rights organizations documented dual nationals enduring arbitrary and prolonged detention on politically motivated charges. Dual nationals, like other citizens, faced a variety of due-process violations, including lack of prompt access to a lawyer of their choosing, summary trials during which they were not allowed to defend themselves, and denial of timely medical treatment. In March 83-year-old Australian-Iranian Shokrollah Jebelli died in detention

after being denied medical furlough despite deteriorating health. He was transferred to the hospital one day before his death.

Authorities continued to detain dual national Siamak Namazi on spurious charges of espionage following a lower court trial with numerous procedural irregularities, according to international media and NGO reports. After more than seven years in prison, Namazi was furloughed to house arrest on October 1 but forced to return to Evin Prison on October 12. Authorities detained Namazi in 2015, followed by his father, Baquer, in 2016. Baquer Namazi was granted medical furlough in 2018 and was subsequently cleared of all charges, but he was not allowed to leave the country until October 5, at the age of 85.

Dual nationals Morad Tahbaz and Emad Shargi also remained in detention after convictions on charges that international human rights organization stated were lacking evidence and were tried lacking fair trial guarantees. Tahbaz was arrested in 2018 and sentenced to 10 years in prison for “assembly and collusion against Iran’s national security” and espionage. In March he was briefly released on furlough, and in July his lawyer said he had been released on bail, but in October his family said he had been returned to prison. Shargi was first arrested and imprisoned in 2018, and although he was cleared of charges and released later that year, authorities retained his passport and he was unable to travel. He was subsequently rearrested in 2020, having been convicted in absentia on charges his family says were unclear.

Other dual and foreign nationals reported by the UN secretary-general who remained in arbitrary detention included Ahmadreza Djalali, Kamran Ghaderi, Massud Mossaheb, Mehran Raoof, and Nahid Taghavi (see section 7.a.).

Pretrial Detention: Pretrial detention was often arbitrarily lengthy, particularly in cases involving alleged violations of “national security” law. Authorities sometimes held prisoners incommunicado for lengthy periods before permitting them to contact family members. Instances of unjust and arbitrary pretrial detention were commonplace and well documented throughout the year involving numerous protesters and prisoners of conscience who were not granted furloughs despite continued waves of COVID-19 spreading through prison populations. According to HRW, a judge may prolong detention at his discretion, and pretrial detentions often lasted for months. Often authorities held pretrial detainees in custody with the general prison population.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution provides that the judiciary be “an independent power” that is “free from every kind of unhealthy relation and connection.” The court system, however, was subjected to political influence, and judges were appointed “in accordance with religious criteria.”

The supreme leader appoints the head of the judiciary. The head of the judiciary, members of the Supreme Court, and the prosecutor general are clerics. International observers continued to criticize the lack of independence of the country’s judicial system and maintained that trials did not adhere to international standards of fairness.

Trial Procedures

According to the constitution and law, a defendant has the right to a fair trial, to be presumed innocent until convicted, to have access to a lawyer of his or her choice, and to appeal convictions in most cases that involve major penalties. These rights were frequently not upheld.

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

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

The constitution does not provide for the establishment or the mandate of the revolutionary courts, which were created pursuant to the former supreme leader Ayatollah Khomeini's edict immediately following the 1979 revolution, with a sharia judge appointed as the head of the courts. The courts were originally intended as a temporary measure to try high-level officials of the deposed monarchy, but they were institutionalized and continue to operate in parallel to the criminal justice system. Human rights groups and international observers often identified the revolutionary courts, which are generally responsible for hearing the cases of political prisoners, as routinely holding grossly unfair trials without due process, handing down predetermined verdicts, and rubberstamping executions for political purposes. These unfair practices reportedly occur during all stages of criminal proceedings in revolutionary courts, including the initial prosecution and pretrial investigation, first instance trial, and review by higher courts.

During the year human rights groups and international media noted the absence of procedural safeguards in criminal trials, and courts routinely admitted as evidence confessions made under duress or torture. Often these forced confessions were broadcast on state television. The UNSR expressed extreme concern regarding the continued practice of confessions extracted under torture and a lack of due process or a fair trial, citing, in particular, the use of closed proceedings and a "low standard of evidence used...in cases involving the death penalty."

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

Political Prisoners and Detainees

Official statistics regarding the number of citizens imprisoned for their political beliefs were not available. As of year's end, the NGO United for Iran identified at least 1,134 prisoners of conscience in the country.

The four most common reasons for imprisonment were "support for underground opposition groups," "alleged rebellion," "religious practice," and "political activism." The government often charged political dissidents with vague crimes, some of which carry the death penalty, such as "antirevolutionary behavior," "corruption on earth," "siding with global arrogance," "waging war against God," and "crimes against Islam." Prosecutors imposed strict penalties on government critics for minor violations.

The political crimes law, adopted in 2016, defines a "political crime" as "propaganda" against the ruling establishment (as opposed to action against the ruling establishment, which is considered a national security crime). Insulting and defaming government officials as well as visiting heads of state or political representatives are considered political crimes if carried out with "the intent to reform the country's affairs without damaging the foundations of the ruling establishment. Courts and the Public Prosecutor's Office retain responsibility for determining the nature of the crime. Under the political crimes law, the accused has certain rights during arrest and imprisonment. Political criminals should be held in detention facilities separate from ordinary criminals. Political criminals should also be exempt from wearing prison uniforms, not subject to rules governing repeat offenses, not subject to extradition, and exempt from solitary confinement unless judicial officials deem it necessary. Political criminals also have the right to see and correspond with immediate family regularly and to access books, newspapers, radio, and television.

Many of the law's provisions were not implemented, however, and the government continued to arrest and charge students, journalists, lawyers, political activists, women's rights activists, artists, and members of religious minorities with "national security" crimes that do not fall under the political crimes law. Political prisoners were also at greater risk of torture and abuse in detention. They were often mixed with the general prison population, and former prisoners reported that authorities often threatened political prisoners with transfer to criminal wards, where attacks by fellow prisoners were more likely. Previous reports indicated a deliberate practice of holding political prisoners in wards with allegedly violent and dangerous criminals, with the goal of "breaking" the political prisoners' will.

In August the Hengaw Human Rights Organization reported that inmates convicted of violent crimes beat political prisoner Khadijeh Mehdipour in Ilam Prison. She was previously attacked by inmates in February, resulting in an eye injury. IRGC intelligence agents arrested Mehdipour in October 2021, and in January the Islamic Revolutionary Court of Ilam sentenced her to 20 months in prison for "propaganda against the regime, insulting the founder of the Islamic republic and insulting its leadership," based on her activism on social media. According to HRANA, she also faced new charges while in prison for "insulting Islamic sanctities."

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

Lawyers who defended political prisoners were often arrested, detained, and subjected to excessive sentences and punishments for engaging in regular professional activities. The government continued to imprison lawyers and others affiliated with the Defenders of Human Rights Center advocacy group.

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

In January, while serving a 30-month sentence for propaganda and defamation charges, human rights defender and journalist Narges Mohammadi was sentenced to an additional eight years in prison and 70 lashes. She had been incarcerated at Evin and Qarchak Prisons since November 2021, reportedly in solitary confinement. In February she was granted a medical furlough to undergo heart surgery but returned to prison on April 12. Her husband said she had been denied necessary medication since her reincarceration. According to PEN America, Mohammadi was again hospitalized in June for arrhythmia and shortness of breath but was returned to prison days later. Mohammadi had been previously arrested in 2015, convicted in 2016, and given a 16-year sentence for "propaganda against the state," "assembly and collusion against national security," and establishing the organization Step by Step to Stop the Death Penalty. After her release in 2020, Mohammadi led a high-profile lawsuit by civil rights activists against the use by authorities of prolonged and routine solitary confinement in prisons. She also detailed via a video message in February 2021 how Evin Prison warden Gholamreza Ziaei beat her for participating in a peaceful sit-in inside the prison in 2019.

According to HRW, on June 19, Branch 29 of the revolutionary court sentenced five human rights defenders to prison for attempting to file a lawsuit in accordance with Article 34 of the constitution against state officials for grossly mishandling the COVID-19 pandemic and negligence, including, "causing the death of thousands of Iranians" by banning Western-made vaccines and hiding the extent of infections and deaths. The five – Mehdi Mahmoudian (civil activist), Mostafa Nili (lawyer), Arash Keykhosravi (lawyer), Mohammadreza Faghihi (lawyer), and Maryam Afrafaraz (civil activist) – received sentences ranging from 95 days to four years in prison and other

penalties, including one-to-two-year bans on media appearances or practicing law. The defendants' lawyers said they planned to appeal their convictions.

As of year's end, seven environmentalists affiliated with the now-defunct Persian Wildlife Heritage Foundation – Niloufar Bayani, Sepideh Kashani, Sam Rajabi, Taher Ghadirian, Amir Hossein Khaleghi, Houman Jokar, and Morad Tahbaz, who also holds U.S. and United Kingdom citizenship – remained incarcerated in Evin Prison on charges for various “national security” crimes, which are used to silence critics of the government. They were arrested and convicted in 2018 following a trial in which a judge handed down the sentences in secret, did not allow the defendants access to defense lawyers, and ignored their claims of abuse in detention. An eighth environmentalist, Abdolreza Kouhpayeh, was convicted alongside them but was released on medical furlough in 2020. A ninth, Iranian-Canadian national Kavous Sayed Emami, died in detention in 2018 only 18 days after his arrest, reportedly as a result of torture. His family's request for an autopsy was denied.

Transnational Repression

The government continued to engage in acts of transnational repression to intimidate or exact reprisal against individuals outside of the country's sovereign borders, including against members of diaspora populations such as political opponents, civil society activists, human rights defenders, and journalists. In its report on transnational repression released in June, Freedom House noted Iranians were among those nationalities subjected to “digital and physical transnational repression while in Turkey” and stated extraterritorial killings “have been a staple of the Iranian regime since the 1979 revolution.” Iran was listed in the report as one of six countries known to be conducting aggressive campaigns against political opponents abroad. Freedom House reported the Iranian regime had an “expansive definition of who constitutes a threat,” labeling dissidents and journalists as terrorists to justify violence and disregard for due process.

Extraterritorial Killing, Kidnapping, Forced Returns, or Other Violence or Threats of

Violence: The country is credibly alleged to have killed or kidnapped persons and used violence and threats of violence against individuals in other countries, including to force their return to the country, for purposes of politically motivated reprisal.

In July New York City police arrested Khalid Mehdiyev outside the home of U.S.-based journalist and women's rights activist Masih Alinejad. Mehdiyev was carrying a loaded assault rifle; the U.S. Department of Justice stated Mehdiyev and two others arrested were part of a murder-for-hire plot. This incident occurred a year after a New York federal court indicted four Iranian intelligence officials on charges connected to a plot to kidnap Alinejad and forcibly transport her to Iran to silence her criticism of the Iranian government. The intelligence officials reportedly directed a “network” that targeted and surveilled victims in Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

In August Hadi Matar stabbed and severely wounded author Salman Rushdie multiple times as Rushdie prepared to deliver a lecture at the Chautauqua Institution in New York State. Rushdie is the subject of a still active, 33-year-old fatwa issued by Ayatollah Khomeini following the publishing of his book *The Satanic Verses*, which the then supreme leader deemed blasphemous. In 2019 Ayatollah Khamenei tweeted that his predecessor's fatwa was “irrevocable.” The Iranian 15 Khordad Foundation offered a bounty of more than three million dollars for Rushdie's life. Matar pleaded not guilty to second-degree attempted murder and assault charges in a New York state court; the judge ordered him to remain in custody without bail.

In July Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court held the sixth session of the trial of Jamshid Sharmahd, a member of the promonarchist group Tondar (Thunder) or Kingdom Assembly of Iran, which was based outside the country. According to *IranWire*, NGOs, and other reporting, Ministry of Intelligence officials detained Sharmahd in July 2020 while he was on a layover in the Dubai airport on his way to India. Shortly after his detention and disappearance in Dubai, a video appeared of him on *Press TV*, the English-language service arm of the state's Islamic Republic of

Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) channel, giving a forced confession of planning a terrorist attack in 2008. Sharmahd was accused of being responsible for a deadly 2008 bombing at a religious center in Shiraz and of plotting other attacks, which he denied.

Threats, Harassment, Surveillance, and Coercion: Freedom House reported the regime employs a range of tactics to exert pressure on or exact reprisal against individuals located outside Iran, which “amount to a constant barrage of harassment, intimidation, and surveillance.”

In February the BBC filed a complaint with OHCHR regarding escalating “extra-territorial threats” against journalists working for the BBC’s Persian language service and their families, both in Britain and other countries. The complaint included reports from staff members of increased harassment of family members in Iran, increased financial pressure including asset freezes, increased intelligence and counterintelligence activity, and increased and continued online attacks. The BBC stated such threats from Iran had continued for more than a decade but worsened since 2021. OHCHR raised these concerns with Iran authorities in May in a communique made public in August. The BBC reported the Iranian government responded with claims that the BBC’s journalism “is aimed at ‘the overthrow of the Islamic Republic’” and complained of “hostile” coverage that had “incited riots.”

In September cybersecurity firm Mandiant released a report on APT42, an Iranian state-sponsored cyber espionage and surveillance group that employs highly targeted social engineering tactics to target civil society organizations, nonprofits and education organizations, governments, and media in at least 14 countries. The report noted that the group was believed to operate on behalf of the IRGC. In addition to spear-phishing campaigns designed to steal users’ credentials, the group was also believed to conduct surveillance operations targeting the locations and communications of “individuals of interest to the Iranian government, including activists and dissidents.”

In August the U.S. Justice Department announced charges against Shahram Poursafi, also known as Mehdi Rezayi, for “the use of interstate commerce facilities in the commission of murder for hire and providing and attempting to provide material support to a transnational murder plot” against former U.S. national security adviser John Bolton. Poursafi is a member of Iran’s IRGC and allegedly sought to have Bolton killed in retaliation for the 2020 killing of IRGC general Qassem Soleimani by the United States.

Misuse of International Law Enforcement Tools: Unlike in 2021, there were no credible reports that the government attempted to misuse international law enforcement tools for politically motivated purposes as reprisals against specific individuals located outside the country.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Citizens had limited ability to sue the government and were not able to file lawsuits through the courts against the government for civil or human rights abuses. The High Council for Human Rights, a subdivision of the judicial branch, “is charged with the responsibility of guiding and following up on all human rights related matters, domestically as well as internationally.” Much of the High Council’s messaging, however, was focused on countering accusations of human rights abuses from other countries.

Property Seizure and Restitution

The constitution allows the government to confiscate property acquired illicitly or in a manner not in conformity with Islamic law. The government appeared to target ethnic and religious minorities in invoking this provision. Amnesty International reported an increase in seizures affecting members of the Baha’i religious minority. On June 25, an appeal court upheld a verdict authorizing the confiscation of 18 Baha’i properties in Semnan Province, alleging the owners were leaders of the “perverse Baha’i sect” who had engaged in “illegal activities and espionage to the advantage of foreigners.”

Amnesty International reported that between July 31 and August 24, Ministry of Intelligence agents raided and confiscated dozens of Baha'i properties. The ministry accused targets of engaging in espionage, propagation of Baha'i teachings, and seeking "to infiltrate various levels of the educational sector across the country, especially kindergartens."

On August 2, according to Amnesty International and reported in *IranWire*, authorities bulldozed six Baha'i houses and confiscated more than 50 acres of land in the village of Roshankouh in Mazandaran Province in northern Iran." State media reported several judicial and executive officials observed the incidents. Residents told Amnesty International more than 200 security agents descended on the village, confiscated residents' mobile phones to prevent documentation, and beat residents who protested the demolition.

f. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The constitution states that "reputation, life, property, [and] dwelling[s]" are protected from trespass, except as "provided by law." The government routinely infringed on this right. Security forces monitored the social activities of citizens; entered homes, offices, and places of worship; monitored telephone conversations and internet communications; and opened mail without court authorization. The government routinely intimidated activists and government critics by detaining their family members as a form of reprisal. No comprehensive data-protection laws exist that provide legal safeguards to protect users' data from misuse. The operation of domestic messaging applications was based inside the country and content shared on these applications was susceptible to government control and surveillance.

In September HRANA reported the arrest of the sister, brother, and sister-in-law of wrestler Navid Afkari, executed in 2020 for confessing under torture to the killing of a law enforcement officer during antigovernment protests in 2018 in Shiraz. Elham Afkari, along with Habib Afkari and his wife Fatemeh Namjoo, were detained on their way to commemorate the anniversary of Navid's death at his grave but were later released. In November security forces arrested Elham and her three-year-old daughter for allegedly cooperating with diaspora-based media. In December HRANA reported that Elham was sentenced to five years in prison on charges of "intention to cause unrest and disruption via spreading the calls for protests on the Internet." Another brother, Vahid Afkari, remained in solitary confinement in Adelabad Prison as of July 31, according to NGO United for Iran. He was arrested with his brother Navid and received a 25-year prison sentence for allegedly aiding Navid.

Activists Manouchehr Bakhtiari remained in prison in poor health serving a three-and-a-half-year sentence on charges related to activism on behalf of his son, Pouya Bakhtiari, who was killed by security forces in Karaj City during the November 2019 protests. The government previously detained 10 other members of Pouya Bakhtiari's family, including his 11-year-old nephew and two of his elderly grandparents, to prevent them from holding a traditional memorial service for Bakhtiari 40 days after his death. Manouchehr Bakhtiari's wife and Pouya's mother, Fatemeh Sepehri, was also in prison.

g. Conflict-related Abuses

The government provided financial but also military and fighter recruitment support to armed groups and others through the Middle East. This included reports of primarily the IRGC-Qods Force directly supporting the Assad regime and assisting in the recruitment of fighters, providing support to pro-Iran militias and armed groups in Iraq, and giving significant financial and military technical support to the Houthi rebels in Yemen. In 2022, the IRGC-Qods Forces' military support to Russia caused significant civilian harm.

Child Soldiers: The U.S. Government has determined that Iran recruited or used child soldiers from April 2021 to March 2022. Please see the Department of State’s annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Other Conflict-related Abuse: The government supported regimes in other countries whose governments committed human rights abuses.

In Syria, there continued to be reports the Iranian government, primarily through the IRGC, directly supported the Assad regime and recruited Iraqi, Afghan, and Pakistani Shia fighters, as well as Syrians, which contributed to prolonging the civil war, associated human rights abuses, and the deaths of thousands of Syrian civilians during the year (see the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for Syria).

In Iraq, Iranian government supported pro-Iran militias operating inside Iraq, including terrorist organization Kata’ib Hizballah, which reportedly was complicit in summary executions, forced disappearances, and other human rights abuses in Iraq (see the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for Iraq). During the protests in Iran in September and November, news outlets widely reported Iranian missile and drone strikes in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, targeting the headquarters of Iranian Kurdish opposition parties, which the government claimed to be supporting the protests. The strikes reportedly killed at least 28 individuals and injured dozens, including Iranian refugees.

In Yemen, the Iranian government has provided hundreds of millions of dollars in support to Houthi rebels since 2015 and proliferated weapons that exacerbated and prolonged the conflict there, including support to Houthi rebels in developing their unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) capability. Houthi rebels used Iranian funding and weapons to launch attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure both within Yemen and in Saudi Arabia (see the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for Yemen and Saudi Arabia).

Iran’s military support to Russia resulted in violations of UN Security Council Resolution 2231 through its provision of military UAVs without requisite advance, case-by-case approval of the UN Security Council. The production and transfer of Iranian Shahed- and Mohajer-series UAVs to the Russian Federation resulted in the death of Ukrainian civilians and caused significant damage to Ukraine’s critical infrastructure (see the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for Ukraine and Russia).

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the Press and Other Media

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

The nonbinding *Charter on Citizens’ Rights* – signed in 2016 by then President Rouhani – acknowledges the right of every citizen to freedom of speech and expression, including the right to seek, receive, publish, and communicate views and information, using any means of communication. The charter has not been implemented.

Freedom of Expression: The law provides for prosecution of persons accused of instigating crimes against the state or national security or “insulting” Islam. The government severely restricted freedom of speech and of the press and used the law to intimidate or prosecute persons who directly criticized the government or raised human rights concerns or questioned the

government's morality code enforcement. During the protests that began in September, the government routinely cut off access to the internet for hours at a time, often specifically targeting areas where large protests were expected.

In July the NGO Article 19 released an analysis of penal code additions enacted in 2021, asserting the additions further restrict freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief. Article 19 also claimed the additions effectively criminalize many forms of expression and disproportionately affect ethnic and religious minorities.

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

On October 16, rock climber Elnaz Rekabi participated in an international competition in Seoul without wearing a hijab. Several years previously in an interview with *Euronews*, she called the hijab an impediment to women athletes. Images of her competing were widely shared on social media. After a period of silence after her competition ended, during which friends reported unable to contact her, Rekabi posted on Instagram saying that "she inadvertently had a wardrobe malfunction." Upon return to Iran, Rekabi spoke to state news cameras and repeated that she accidentally forgot the hijab. According to *IranWire*, authorities threatened Rekabi with confiscation of her family's property if she spoke further with media or engaged in social media.

On November 24, domestic media reported that authorities arrested former member of the national soccer team Voria Shafouri, an outspoken supporter of the protests. Outlets reported Shafouri had been arrested for "insulting the national soccer team" and "propagandizing against the regime." He reportedly was released on bail several days after his arrest.

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

During the nationwide protests that began in September following the alleged killing of Mahsa Amini by police while in custody, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) documented 86 arrests of journalists. Arrests were often accompanied by raids of journalists' homes and intimidation of their families and neighbors. These arrests included Niloofar Hamed and Elahe Mohammadi, two of the first journalists to report on Amini's death. CPJ reported that Hamed, a reporter for semireformist *Shargh Daily*, was among the first to report on Amini's hospitalization and published a photograph of Amini's parents in the hospital. Authorities reportedly raided her home and arrested her on September 22. She was held in Evin Prison in solitary confinement. In November a government official announced Hamed had been charged with "colluding with the intention of acting against national security and propaganda against the state." Mohammadi, a reporter with state-run *Hammihan Daily*, was also arrested on September 22, when security forces broke into her home and confiscated personal devices, according to CPJ. CHRI reported that Mohammadi was detained for traveling to the city of Saqqez to report on Amini's funeral. According to CHRI, on October 28, the Intelligence Ministry and the IRGC's intelligence organization released a joint statement claiming that Hamed and Mohammadi were "foreign agents" engaged in "multidimensional wars" organized by "Western and Zionist intelligence agencies." The statement falsely claimed that Hamed had published the widely shared photograph of Amini in a hospital bed. According to HRANA, on December 17, both women were transferred from Evin Prison to Qarchak Prison for Women.

According to Voice of America, on September 24, Navid Jamshidi, editor in chief of financial news outlet *Asia News*, was arrested during a raid on his home in Tehran. According to his father, Jamshidi was not told of charges against him or shown an arrest warrant. His father also reported that Jamshidi was treated violently during interrogations. Jamshidi was released on bail in early December.

According to HRANA and CPJ, in January Judge Iman Afshari of Branch 26 of Tehran's Islamic Revolutionary Court sentenced Amirabbas Azarmvand, a reporter for the state-run economic newspaper *Samt*, to four years and four months in prison on charges of "colluding against national security" and "propaganda against the regime." Freed on bail, Azarmvand did not start serving his sentence until his rearrest on March 8 at a march for International Women's Day in Tehran, at which time he was taken to Evin Prison.

Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media: The government largely controlled the country's media. According to RSF, Article 24 of the constitution protects press freedom, but the 1986 press law enables authorities to prevent journalists from "endangering the Islamic Republic" or "offending the clergy and the Supreme Leader." International NGOs reported that many journalists covering the nationwide protests in September were summoned for questioning, subject to threats from authorities, and arrested.

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

Under the constitution, the supreme leader appoints the head of the Audiovisual Policy Agency, a council composed of representatives of the president, judiciary, and parliament.

Private broadcasting is illegal. The government maintained a monopoly over all television and radio broadcasting facilities through IRIB, a government agency. Radio and television programming, the principal source of news for many citizens, particularly in rural areas with limited internet access, reflected the government's political and socioreligious ideology.

The government jammed satellite broadcasts as signals entered the country, a continuous practice since at least 2003. Satellite dishes remained illegal but ubiquitous. Those who distributed, used, or repaired satellite dishes faced fines. Police conducted periodic campaigns to confiscate privately owned satellite dishes throughout the country.

The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance severely limited and controlled foreign media organizations' ability to work in the country. The ministry required foreign correspondents to provide detailed travel plans and topics of proposed stories before granting visas, limited their ability to travel within the country, and forced them to work with a local "minder." During the protests that erupted in September, authorities further restricted foreign media coverage by imposing new sanctions and restrictions on international media outlets.

During the year the government censored publications that criticized official actions or contradicted official views or versions of events. IRNA determined the main topics and types of news to be covered and distributed topics required for reporting directly to various media outlets, according to the NGO Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC). "Damaging" information included discussions of women's rights, the situation of minorities, criticism of government corruption, and references to mistreatment of detainees. Authorities also banned national and international media outlets from covering demonstrations to censor information concerning protests and intimidate citizens from disseminating information regarding them. Officials routinely intimidated journalists

into practicing self-censorship through arrests and imprisonments. Public officials often filed criminal complaints against newspapers, and the Press Supervisory Board referred such complaints to the Press Court for further action, including possible closure, suspension, and fines.

The judicial system and other government entities often overtly censored journalists who had been imprisoned in the past on charges related to their work. In June journalist Maryam Shokrani posted on Twitter that the Oil Ministry ordered her to not print a story on an Iranian vessel seized in international waters.

Libel/Slander Laws: Libel and slander are criminal offenses. The government commonly used libel and slander laws to suppress criticism. According to the law, if any publication contains personal insults, libel, false statements, and criticism even if truthful, the insulted individual has the right to respond in the publication within one month. By law “insult” or “libel” against the government, government representatives, or foreign officials while they are in the country, as well as “the publication of lies” with the intent to alter but not overthrow the government, are considered political crimes and subject to certain trial and detention procedures (see section 1.e.). The government applied the law throughout the year, often citing statements made in various media outlets or on internet platforms that criticized the government in the arrest, prosecution, and sentencing of individuals for crimes against national security.

In June *Iran International* reported that Tehran prosecutor Ali Salehi said complaints against media – mostly from government entities – had increased 50 percent since March.

According to CPJ, on January 16, Judge Moslem Salari of Branch 2 of Jiroft City Penal Court in central Kerman Province convicted journalist Mansour Iranpour on charges of spreading false news. Iranpour began serving his one-year sentence in May. He wrote for the partially government funded Ashkan News and the state-run Tabnak news site. His conviction was based on his reporting alleging embezzlement and corruption among local government officials, including a Kerman Province parliamentarian.

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

In July authorities arrested activist and 2021 reformist presidential candidate Mostafa Tajzadeh on charges of “conspiracy to act against the country’s security,” according to semiofficial *Fars News Agency*. His arrest came after Tajzadeh had criticized authorities on social media and called for reform. According to the judicial news agency *Mizan*, Tajzadeh’s trial began in August at Branch 15 of Tehran’s Revolutionary Court before judge Abdolghassem Salavati. Tajzadeh served as the deputy foreign minister under reformist former President Mohammad Khatami and subsequently became an activist who was arrested on multiple occasions on the grounds of harming national security and propaganda against the state. On October 11, Tajzadeh was sentenced to five years in prison.

Internet Freedom

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

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

The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance must approve all internet service providers. The government also requires all owners of websites and blogs in the country to register with the agencies that comprise the Commission to Determine the Instances of Criminal Content (also referred to as the Committee in Charge of Determining Unauthorized Websites or Committee in Charge of Determining Offensive Content), the governmental organization that determines censoring criteria. These agencies include the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Ministry of Information and Communications Technology, Ministry of Intelligence, and Tehran Public Prosecutor's Office. The Ministry of Information and Communications Technology regulations prohibit households and cybercafes from having high-speed internet access.

According to Freedom House, authorities employed a centralized filtering system that can effectively block a website within a few hours across the entire network. Private internet service providers were forced either to use the bandwidth provided by the government or to route traffic containing site-visit requests through government-issued filtering boxes developed by software companies within the country.

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

Authorities restricted access to tens of thousands of websites, particularly those of international news and information services, the political opposition, ethnic and religious minority groups, and human rights organizations. They continued to block online messaging tools, such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, although the government operated Twitter accounts under the names of Supreme Leader Khamenei, President Raisi, Foreign Minister Amir-Abdollahian, and other government-associated officials and entities. The messaging application Telegram remained blocked during the year, although it continued to be accessed using circumvention tools. Individuals and groups practiced self-censorship online.

Government organizations, including the Basij Cyber Council, Cyber Police, and Cyber Army, which observers presumed to be controlled by the IRGC, monitored, identified, and countered alleged cyberthreats to national security. These organizations especially targeted citizens' activities on officially banned social networking websites, and they reportedly harassed persons who criticized the government or raised sensitive social problems online.

In March human rights activists and NGOs signed an open letter strongly opposing the "Regulatory System for Cyberspace Services" bill before parliament. The groups expressed concern that the bill would further restrict access to the global internet and would "place Iran's Internet infrastructure and Internet gateways under the control of the country's armed forces and security agencies," entities that regularly commit human rights violations, thus enabling them to further obscure these violations. Attempts to pass the bill stalled amidst fierce criticism, but in September, NGO Article 19 reported that the Supreme Council of Cyberspace – headed by the president – was circumventing the parliamentary process and quietly implementing parts of the bill.

During nationwide protests following the death of Mahsa Amini, *IranWire* and NGOs reported widespread internet shutdowns across the country starting on September 19. Throughout the protests, censors regularly shut down mobile networks between late afternoon and midnight to make it more difficult to organize protests and to publicize authorities' repressive tactics. Cybersecurity watchdog organization Netblocks also reported targeted shutdowns, such as a loss of internet connection at Amirkabir University. Others reported blocked access to popular mobile applications such as WhatsApp and Instagram, as well as disruptions to landline connections. Officials defended the blackouts as necessary security measures. Authorities used similar tactics when responding to protests marking the 40-day anniversary of Amini's death, and users experienced outages of both domestic intranet and global internet connections. Some virtual private networks were also fully blocked, according to internet watchdog organizations.

Authorities employed similar but more localized tactics during the May protests, according to CHRI, blocking or disrupting internet access in several cities and throughout Khuzestan Province, where the protests were centered.

Restrictions on Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The government significantly restricted academic freedom and the independence of higher education institutions. Authorities systematically targeted university campuses to suppress social and political activism by banning independent student organizations, imprisoning student activists, removing faculty, preventing students from enrolling or continuing their education because of their political or religious affiliation or activism, and restricting social sciences and humanities curricula. Universities and schools became targets of repression during the protests that broke out following the September death of Mahsa Amini in police custody, as students protested across the country. On October 2, according to media reports, security forces responded to a peaceful protest and boycott of classes at Sharif University by surrounding the university and preventing students from departing while they fired tear gas and paint bullets. NGOs and media also reported beatings and arrests of students.

Authorities continued to bar Baha'i students from higher education by falsely claiming their applications were defective or incomplete. HRANA reported in August that at least 62 Baha'i students had been rejected from university during the 2022 application period because of their faith; the Baha'is of the United States estimated the number to be twice as high.

The government maintained control over cinema, music, theater, and art exhibits and censored those productions deemed to transgress Islamic values. The government censored or banned films deemed to promote secularism and those containing what it deemed as non-Islamic ideas concerning women's rights, unethical behavior, drug abuse, violence, or alcoholism.

According to the IHRDC, the nine-member film review council of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, consisting of clerics, former directors, former parliamentarians, and academics, must approve the content of every film before production and again before public presentation. Films may be barred arbitrarily from presentation even if all appropriate permits were received in advance.

In May security forces arrested documentary filmmakers Firouzeh Khosrovani and Mina Keshavarz and raided the homes of at least 10 other filmmakers and producers, confiscating their mobile phones, laptops, and hard drives, according to a statement from three cinema guilds. Khosrovani and Keshavarz were released on bail following a week of detention but were barred from leaving the country. According to the International Coalition for Filmmakers at Risk, no charges were announced. In July directors Jafar Panahi and Mohammad Rasoulof were also arrested (see section 1.c., Prison and Detention Center Conditions).

On October 30, according to numerous NGOs and media outlets, rapper Toomaj Salehi was arrested after releasing rap lyrics that criticized the government for a "year of colossal failure" and sharing videos on his Instagram account in support of the demonstrations. On November 27, Salehi was charged with "corruption on Earth," an offense that could carry the death penalty.

On November 14, the Iranian Alliance of Motion Picture Guilds, Khaneh Cinema, reported that 100 artists had been detained or banned from leaving the country since the start of the September protests. These included actress Shaghayegh Dehghan, who was arrested on December 5 for posting a photograph of herself without the hijab.

Officials continued to discourage teaching music in schools. Authorities considered heavy metal and foreign music religiously offensive, and police continued to repress underground concerts and arrest musicians and music distributors. Women remained banned from singing in public. According to *IranWire*, in July an appeals court upheld a 2019 one-year prison sentence for six women singers and the men who worked with them on a 2016 music video.

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

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

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

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The constitution permits assemblies and marches of unarmed persons, "provided they do not violate the principles of Islam." To prevent activities it considered antiregime, the government restricted this right and closely monitored gatherings such as public entertainment and lectures, student and women's meetings and protests, meetings and worship services of minority religious groups, labor protests, online gatherings and networking, funeral processions, and Friday prayer gatherings. According to activists, the government arbitrarily applied rules governing permits to assemble, since proregime groups rarely experienced difficulties, while groups viewed as critical of the regime experienced harassment regardless of whether authorities issued a permit. Authorities responded to antiregime protests with force, including use of tear gas, beatings, and arrests, resulting in reported injuries and deaths.

In May protests against sharply rising food prices due to subsidy cuts started in Khuzestan Province and, according to HRANA, spread to at least 20 cities in six provinces, lasting approximately two weeks. According to Amnesty International, CHRI, and other NGOs, authorities violently repressed the protests using live ammunition, birdshot, tear gas, and water cannons. At least four persons were killed in the crackdown. Law Enforcement Forces spokesman Mahdi Hajian stated on May 12 that police discovered 1,500 tons of hoarded essential goods and arrested 257 individuals over a 24-hour period throughout the country. Amnesty International stated the government's actions were taken "without any regard for the principles of legality, necessity and proportionality."

In September following the death of Mahsa Amini, protests that began in Amini's hometown of Saqqez in Kurdistan erupted across the country and continued through the end of the year. HRANA reported that demonstrations were held in at least 161 cities and 143 universities across all provinces. Authorities responded with violence, arrests, and internet disruptions, using live ammunition to suppress protests. According to HRANA, more than 19,000 persons were arrested in connection with the protests as of December, including 683 students, and more than 500 protesters were killed, including 69 children. As of the end of the year, two protesters had been executed and authorities had confirmed the death sentences of at least 11 others.

Freedom of Association

The constitution provides for the establishment of political parties, professional and political associations, and Islamic and recognized religious minority organizations, as long as such groups do not violate the principles of freedom, sovereignty, national unity, or Islamic criteria, or question Islam as the basis of the country's system of government. The government limited the freedom of association through threats, intimidation, the imposition of arbitrary requirements on organizations, and the arrests of group leaders and members (see section 7.a., Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining). The government continued to broaden arbitrarily the areas of civil society work it deemed unacceptable, to include conservation and environmental efforts (see section 1.d., Arbitrary Arrest).

The July UNSR report identified a "coordinated policy of silencing teachers' protests," noting between April 30 and June 26, more than 230 teachers and teachers' rights advocates were arrested,

including six members of the Iranian Teachers' Trade Association: Rasoul Bodaghi, Jafar Ebrahimi, Mohammad Habibi, Eskandar Lotfi, Shaban Mohammadi and Masoud Nikkhah. The teachers protested poor working conditions, low wages, and rising food prices. They were not given access to legal representation and were referred to as "hostile enemies." Bodaghi and Ebrahimi were sentenced to five years in prison on the charges of "assembly and collusion" and "propaganda against the state." On October 24, HRANA reported Habibi was sentenced to a total of four years, seven months in prison. According to HRANA, Lotfi and Nikkhah, who had been released on bail on August 20, were rearrested on October 8.

c. Freedom of Religion

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

d. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country

The law provides for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights, with some exceptions, particularly concerning released prisoners, women, and migrants (see section 2.e.).

In-country Movement: Judicial sentences sometimes included internal exile after release from prison, which prevented individuals from traveling to certain provinces. Women often required the supervision of a male guardian or chaperone to travel and faced official and societal harassment for traveling alone.

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

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

In January the NGO Journalism is Not a Crime reported that the government had barred sociologist and journalist Saeed Madani from leaving the country. Madani learned of this restriction in December 2021, when the IRGC stopped him at the airport, interrogated him, and confiscated his passport as he was departing to conduct research at Yale University, an institution the government designated in 2010 as "undermining the Islamic Republic." The semiofficial news agency *Mehr* reported that Madani was subsequently arrested in May on charges of "suspicious foreign connections" and "measures against the security" of the country. As of December, Madani remained in pretrial detention. In July his attorney tweeted that Madani had been transferred to ward 209 of Evin Prison.

In October Iranian filmmaker Mani Haghighi posted a video on Twitter in which he claimed authorities had banned him from leaving the country to attend his film showing at the London Film Festival due to his support for the protesters. He said officials stopped him from boarding his flight and confiscated his passport.

e. Protection of Refugees

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in providing protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as

other persons of concern. According to UNHCR, most refugees in Iran are from Afghanistan; quoting government figures, UNCHR reports 800,000 registered refugees live in the country – 780,000 Afghans and 20,000 Iraqis. As of August, government estimates put the number of undocumented Afghan nationals at an estimated 2.2 million.

UNHCR noted in August that as of October 2020 (the last time figures were made available), the government recognized the 780,000 Afghan refugees under a system known as *Amayesh*, through which authorities provide refugees with cards identifying them as de facto refugees. The country also recognized 20,000 Iraqi refugees under a similar system known as *Hoviat*.

Amayesh cards enable refugees to access basic services, facilitate the issuance of conditional work permits, and serve as a safeguard against arrest and deportation. Amayesh cardholders must obtain permission for any travel outside their province of registration. In recent years, according to UNHCR, the government has introduced policies to increase the provision of Amayesh cards; however, NGO sources reported these cards, which are valid for only one year, were increasingly difficult to renew and could be prohibitively expensive for refugees to maintain, due to increased annual renewal fees.

Additionally, UNHCR cites estimates of 2.1 million undocumented Afghans and nearly 600,000 Afghan-passport holders in the country. In August UNHCR noted government estimates suggest between 500,000 and one million Afghans fled to Iran since the Taliban took control of Afghanistan in August 2021, with an estimated 50,400 of those approaching UNHCR requesting assistance and protection. UNHCR estimated that at the end of the year, 274,000 of these new arrivals would remain in Iran.

Access to Asylum: The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status to qualified applicants through the Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrant Affairs. While the government reportedly has a system for providing protection to refugees, UNHCR did not have information regarding how the country made asylum determinations.

Afghans not registered under the Amayesh system who had migrated during past decades of conflict in their home country continued to be denied access to an asylum system or access to registering with UNHCR as refugees. They faced extreme restrictions accessing employment, education, and health care, and live under the threat of deportation.

Refoulement: According to activist groups and NGOs, authorities routinely arrested Afghans without Amayesh cards and sometimes threatened them with deportation. The government continued to return Afghans who were apprehended while trying to enter Iran, despite advocacy by UNHCR to provide asylum to those fleeing conflict. UNHCR estimates that 65 percent of new arrivals from Afghanistan were returned by the government.

An Amnesty International report released in August found a “pattern of violent pushbacks at borders and unlawful deportations of thousands of Afghans via land and air.” The report found that tactics included shooting at Afghans attempting to cross, resulting in deaths and injuries. It also claimed Iranian authorities did not believe Afghans were at risk of facing serious human rights violations upon return to Afghanistan and forcibly returned thousands of Afghans daily without assessing individual cases.

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

In March the border commissioner of Nimroz Province in Afghanistan told Amnesty International that Iranian forces were killing 25 to 30 refugees a day, including women and children. One refugee told Amnesty International that he was detained by security forces after sustaining a gunshot

wound to the head. During his detention he reported the guards beat him multiple times on the wound.

On October 18, according to CHRI, Afghan national and journalism student at a Tehran university Sahra Rezaei disappeared. On November 26, defense lawyer Reza Shafakhah said in an interview Rezaei had been arrested but she could not be in any prison, detention center, hospital, or cemetery in Tehran.

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

Employment: Only refugees with government-issued work permits were able to work. Even those with Amayesh cards were limited in the type of employment they could pursue, including construction, agriculture, and other vocational industries.

Access to Basic Services: Amayesh cardholders had access to education and health care, including vaccinations, prenatal care, maternal and child health care, and family planning from the Ministry of Health. All registered refugees may enroll in a basic health insurance package like the package afforded to citizens, which covered hospitalization and paraclinical services (medicine, doctor's visits, radiology, etc.). During the year UNHCR covered the insurance premium for 120,000 of the most vulnerable refugees, including those suffering from special severe diseases and their families. Other refugees may enroll in health insurance by paying the premium themselves.

The government claimed to grant Afghan children access to schools. According to UNCHR, this year 500,000 Afghan children were enrolled in primary and secondary schools, including some undocumented Afghan children.

Most provinces' residency limitations on refugees effectively denied them access to public services, such as public housing, in the restricted areas of those provinces.

f. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons

Not applicable.

g. Stateless Persons

The country contributes to statelessness, including through discrimination against women in nationality laws and birth registration problems. There were no accurate numbers on how many stateless persons resided in the country. According to the Stateless Journeys initiative, a campaign run by a civil society alliance of more than 170 organizations called the European Network on Statelessness, populations particularly at risk of statelessness include Faili Kurds, Khavari, Baluch living near the Afghan border, and Afghan refugees. Persons without birth registration, identity documents, or refugee identification were at a heightened risk of statelessness. They were subjected to inconsistent government policies and relied on charities, principally domestic, to obtain medical care and schooling. Authorities did not issue formal government support or travel documents to stateless persons.

By law the children of Iranian women and foreign men qualify for citizenship, although it is not automatic; the mother must apply for them. Children who turn 18 may apply for nationality themselves, even if their mother is deceased. Foreign men married to Iranian women may apply for legal residency. UNHCR reports that according to the government, 88,000 applications for nationality under the law have been launched. Before 2020, female citizens married to foreign men were not able to transmit citizenship to their children, while male citizens transmitted citizenship to their spouses and children automatically. As a result of this disparity, between 400,000 and one

million children of Iranian women married to foreign men lacked Iranian nationality, according to media reports.

Human rights activists noted concern that the law requires the Ministry of Intelligence and the IRGC's intelligence organization to certify that no "security problem" exists before approving citizenship for these specific applications, and this vaguely defined security provision could be used arbitrarily to disqualify applicants if they or their parents were seen as critical of the government.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The constitution provides citizens the ability to choose the president, as well as members of the Assembly of Experts and parliament, but candidates must be vetted and approved by the Guardian Council. Elections are based on universal suffrage. Candidate vetting conducted by unelected bodies, however, abridged this right in all instances. Government constraints on freedom of expression and media, peaceful assembly, association, and the ability freely to seek, receive, and impart information and campaign also limited citizens' right to freely choose their representatives in elections.

The Assembly of Experts, composed of 86 popularly elected clerics who serve eight-year terms, elects the supreme leader, who acts as the de facto head of state and may be removed only by a vote of the assembly. The Guardian Council vets and qualifies candidates for all Assembly of Experts, presidential, and parliamentary elections, based on criteria that include candidates' allegiance to the state and adherence to Shia Islam. The council consists of six clerics appointed by the supreme leader and six jurists nominated by the head of the judiciary (who is appointed by the supreme leader) and approved by parliament.

Observers noted that the supreme leader's public commentary on state policy exerted significant influence over the actions of elected officials.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: Presidential elections held in June 2021 did not meet international standards for free and fair elections, primarily because of the Guardian Council's controlling role in the political process, including determining which individuals could run for office and, in certain instances, arbitrarily removing winning candidates. State-controlled media selectively promoted government-preferred candidates. The election turnout of 48.8 percent was the lowest in the history of the country. Hardline conservative former judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi won the election and took office in August 2021. The council barred all reformist candidates from running, as well as the conservative former parliament speaker Ali Larijani, who was widely considered the strongest challenger to Raisi, and former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Domestic and foreign media reports and social media users noted mostly unspecified or ambiguous violations on election day. One incident acknowledged by officials occurred when some electronic voting machines in Tehran went offline for brief periods of time, but those officials stated backup analog vote-counting procedures prevented significant voting disruptions.

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

Political Parties and Political Participation: The constitution provides for the formation of political parties, but the Interior Ministry granted licenses only to parties deemed to adhere to the "guardianship of the jurist" system of government embodied in the constitution. Registered

political organizations that adhered to the system generally operated without restriction, but most were small, focused around an individual, and without nationwide membership. Members of political parties and persons with any political affiliation that the regime deemed unacceptable faced harassment and sometimes violence and imprisonment. The government maintained bans on several opposition organizations and political parties. Security officials continued to harass, intimidate, and arrest members of the political opposition (see section 1.e.).

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

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

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

There was no update by year's end in the case of former Vice President for Women and Family Affairs Shahindokht Molaverdi, who was sentenced in 2020 to 30 months in prison. The charges against her included divulging "classified information and documents with the intent of disrupting national security," "propaganda against the sacred regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran," and "corruption, prostitution, and sexual deviance." *IranWire* and Radio Farda reported Molaverdi was a constant target of religious extremists and conservative media while in office for her attempts to promote women's rights. Hardliners also launched a campaign against her for, in 2019, posting the UN International Day of Families poster on social media, which included an image of a same-sex couple and their family.

In 2021 President Raisi appointed Ansieh Khazali as the vice president for women and family affairs. Unlike Molaverdi, Khazali opposed UNESCO's Education 2030 agenda that includes eliminating gender discrimination from education and stated she supported child marriage.

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

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

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

Endowed religious charitable foundations (*bonyads*) accounted for one-quarter to one-third of the country's economy, according to some experts. Government insiders, including members of the military and clergy, ran these tax-exempt organizations, which are defined in law as charities.

Members of the political opposition and international corruption watchdog organizations frequently accused bonyads of corruption. Bonyads received benefits from the government, but no government agency is required to approve their budgets publicly.

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

Corruption: In August a parliamentary investigative committee released the results of a three-year investigation into the country's largest steelmaker, the Mobarakeh Steel Company, alleging three billion dollars in corrupt dealings, including ties to former President Rouhani and members of his administration. Among the allegations, the investigation found that senior officials, branches of the military, regional police in Isfahan Province, and leaders of Friday prayers received payoffs in exchange for granting state contracts to the company. Investigative journalist Saba Azarpeik posted a list of individuals on the company's payroll, which included persons linked to grand ayatollahs, state television, and the hardline daily newspaper *Kayhan*, which is directly supervised by the supreme leader. While President Raisi has called for those responsible at the steel plant to be fired, and head of the judiciary Gholamhossein Mohseni promised quick action on the parliamentary report, as of year's end the only known action taken was removing the company from the stock exchange. Activists speculated that parliament released the report with the hopes of implicating reformers who were involved, but reporters and citizen journalists on social media publicized the government hardliners who were involved.

See section 2.a., Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the Press and Other Media; and Violence and Harassment for examples of journalists persecuted for reporting on corruption.

Section 5. Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

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

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

According to NGOs including HRW and Amnesty International, the government's human rights record and its level of cooperation with international rights institutions remained poor. The government continued to deny requests from international human rights NGOs to establish offices in or conduct regular investigative visits to the country. The most recent visit of an international human rights NGO was by Amnesty International in 2004 as part of the EU's human rights dialogue with the country.

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

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

In his July report, the UNSR stated he was “dismayed” at the continued intimidation and imprisonment of human rights defenders and lawyers. He noted forcible prison transfers appeared to be used as punishment and that women, minorities, and defense lawyers were particularly vulnerable to harassment, arrest, and detention (see section 1.e., Political Prisoners and Detainees).

On October 12, according to CHRI, at least three human rights lawyers were arrested during a peaceful demonstration outside the Iranian Bar Association in support of nationwide protests. CHRI reported that Mohammad Reza Faqihi, Saeed Sheikh, and a third woman lawyer were arrested after security forces attacked the protesters with teargas. CHRI characterized this arrest as a continuation of a government strategy to deny detainees access to due process by arresting lawyers to prevent them from assisting detainees.

On December 2, UN human rights experts called for the release of human rights defender Arash Sadeghi, who has been imprisoned on multiple occasions for his work in defense of human rights. His most recent arrest, on October 20, was for unknown reasons, after which he was held at Ward 209 of Evin Prison. UN experts reported Sadehi was being deprived of medication he needs to treat bone cancer. Previously, on September 26, Sadeghi’s wife, human rights advocate Golrokh Ebrahimi Iraee, was rearrested after intelligence service agents reportedly broke into her home, assaulted her, and confiscated some of her belongings. She was charged with “assembly and collusion” and “propaganda against the state” for her activity on social media in support of the protests. She has been arrested several times due to her human rights activism.

On June 6, human rights attorney Amirshar Davoudi, who had been free on bail, was transferred to prison to start a 10-year sentence, according to NGO United for Iran. HRANA reported that he was arrested without notice upon appearing at the Evin courthouse to inquire concerning his case. In December 2021, Branch 36 of the Tehran Court of Appeal sentenced Davoudi to a total of 14 years in prison on charges of “offensive statements against the supreme leader of Iran”, “disturbing public opinion,” and “creating a group which threatens national security.” Davoudi was initially arrested in 2018.

The United Nations or Other International Bodies: During the year the government continued to deny repeated requests by the UNSR on the situation of human rights in Iran to visit the country. On November 24, the UN Human Rights Council approved a resolution creating an independent fact-finding mission to investigate human rights violations in the country relating to the protests that began in September.

Iran’s foreign ministry denounced the establishment of the fact-finding mission, and it would not cooperate with it. On December 14, the UN Economic and Social Council passed a resolution removing the country from the UN Commission on the Status of Women in response to the death of Amini and the government’s systemic abuse of the rights of women and girls.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The High Council for Human Rights is part of the judicial branch of the government and lacks independence. The council, led by Kazem Gharibabadi, continued to call for an end to the position of the UNSR for Iran and heavily criticized the August UN secretary-general’s report as politically motivated and unsubstantiated. In February, in response to the EU parliamentary resolution calling for a moratorium on the death penalty in the country, Gharibabadi called on the EU to “respect the laws of countries and cultural diversity in human rights,” according to *Mehr News*.

Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: Rape is illegal, including the rape of men, and subject to strict penalties, including death, but it remained a serious problem. There were reports that police or other government agents incited, perpetrated, or condoned gender-based violence, including numerous reports of sexual abuse of women who were imprisoned for participating in the protests that began in September (see section 1.c.).

CHRI reported that on November 17, activist Soha Mortezaei was arrested by security officials, physically and sexually assaulted, and transferred to Evin Prison. The University Students Trade Unions Council reported, “officers tied Soha’s right hand to the top of one seat and her right leg to the top of another seat and while suspended, she was beaten and sexually abused by a female officer.” In 2019 Mortezaei was banned from completing her Ph.D. in political science due to allegedly engaging in political activism.

The law considers sex within marriage consensual by definition and, therefore, does not address spousal rape, including in cases of forced marriage. Most rape victims likely did not report the crime because they feared official retaliation or punishment for having been raped, including charges of indecency, immoral behavior, or adultery, which carries the death penalty. Rape survivors also feared societal reprisal or ostracism. For a conviction of rape, the law requires four Muslim men or a combination of three men and two women, or two men and four women, to have witnessed a rape. A woman or man found making a false accusation of rape is subject to 80 lashes.

In September NGOs and international media reported that a police commander of Sistan and Baluchistan province, Colonel Ebrahim Kouchakzaei, raped a 15-year-old Baluch girl. Sunni Imams condemned the rape, which led to increased protests after Friday prayers in Zahedan. Authorities responded with violence, reportedly killing several dozen persons on September 30, according to HRW. Local media reported Kouchakzaei was arrested in the days following the protests but released on bail on October 12.

The law does not prohibit domestic violence. Authorities considered spousal and intrafamilial abuse a private matter and seldom discussed it publicly. According to *Iran International*, in March a 17-year-old girl identified as F. Marandegani, died by suicide in Sistan and Baluchistan province due to her husband’s alleged physical and mental abuse.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): The law criminalizes FGM/C and states, “The cutting or removing of the two sides of female genitalia leads to diya [blood money] equal to half the full amount of diya for the woman’s life.”

Little recent data were available on the practice inside the country, although older data and media reports suggested it had been more prevalent in Hormozgan, Kurdistan, Kermanshah, and West Azerbaijan Provinces, and was inflicted on girls ages five through eight, primarily in Shafi’i Sunni communities.

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

The law reduces penalties for fathers and other family members who are convicted of murder or physically harming children in domestic violence or “honor killings.” According to the Legal Information Institute of Cornell Law, Article 630 of the Iranian Penal Code “allows a man who witnesses his wife in the act of having sexual intercourse with another man to kill both of them if he is certain that his wife is a willing participant.” If a man is found guilty of murdering his daughter, the punishment is from three to 10 years in prison rather than the normal death sentence

or payment of diya for homicide cases, because fathers (but not mothers) are considered legal guardians and are exempt from capital punishment for murdering their children.

Several news outlets reported that in February, 17-year-old wife and mother Mona Heydari was beheaded by her husband and his brother in an “honor killing” in the southwestern city of Ahvaz. Authorities closed *Rokna* news agency after it released footage of the husband carrying his wife’s head around town, accusing the outlet of breaching “public decency.” Heydari reportedly had been forced into marriage and gave birth at age 14. She was killed a few days after returning to Iran after having fled to Turkey. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) reported that her family had ensured her return by assuring her of her safety.

Also in February, *Rokna* reported the father of 16-year-old Ariana Lashkari shot her to death with a hunting rifle in Fars Province, allegedly for laughing with a boy in a park.

Sexual Harassment: The law prohibits physical contact between unrelated men and women. There were no reliable data on the extent of sexual harassment, but women’s and human rights observers reported that sexual harassment was the norm in many workplaces.

In April according to media reports, hundreds of women working in the country’s film industry, including celebrities Niki Karimi, Hedieh Tehrani, Sahar Dolatshahi and Taraneh Alidousti, signed a statement of protest decrying “sexual abuse, violence and harassment against women in the film industry.” The statement was inspired by Somayeh Mirshamsi, a well-known woman assistant director, who alleged in interviews with foreign-based Persian-language media that actor Farhad Aslani sexually harassed her on set. The statement listed numerous other problems women faced at work, including “sexual violence and threatening the victim’s job.” By May signatories of the letter had reached 800. Initially Kazem Gharibabadi, the secretary of the High Council for Human Rights, expressed support for the women, saying the judiciary was prepared to act on any complaints in the artist’s file. In July, however, *IranWire* reported that an actress who signed the letter, Nazanin Bahrami, was arrested, along with several of her colleagues, shortly after she signed the statement. In December actress Taraneh Alidousti was arrested and taken to Evin Prison for a social media post calling international attention to the swift execution of a protester, Mohsen Shekari.

Reproductive Rights: There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities. The government did not provide access to sexual and reproductive health services for survivors of sexual violence. Emergency contraception was not available as part of the clinical management of rape. It is illegal for a single woman to access contraception, although most single women had access to contraception, particularly in urban areas.

Government health care previously included full free access to contraception and family planning for married couples. In 2012, on the supreme leader’s orders, the government ended the Family and Population Planning Program. In January 2021, according to a report by *Iran International*, the Ministry of Health banned health centers in nomadic tribal areas from providing contraceptives to women. In November 2021, President Raisi signed into law the “rejuvenation of the population and support of the family” bill, which directs authorities to prioritize population growth. These policies include measures such as outlawing voluntary sterilization and banning the free distribution of contraceptives by the public health-care system. The law also stipulates that content on family planning in university textbooks should be replaced with materials on an “Islamic-Iranian lifestyle,” with a framework drawn up in cooperation with religious seminaries and the Islamic Propaganda Organization.

Discrimination: The constitution provides for equal protection for women under the law in conformity with its interpretation of Islam. The government did not enforce the law, and provisions in the law, particularly sections dealing with family and property law, discriminate against women. Judicial harassment, intimidation, detention, and smear campaigns significantly hindered the ability of civil society organizations to fight for and protect women’s rights.

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

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

A woman may divorce only if her husband: signs a contract granting her that right; cannot provide for his family; violates the terms of the marriage contract; or is a drug addict, insane, or impotent. A man may divorce his wife without providing any reason. The law recognizes a divorced woman's right to part of shared property and to alimony. These laws were not always enforced.

The law provides divorced women preference in custody for children up to age seven, but fathers maintain legal guardianship rights over the child and must agree on many legal aspects of the child's life (such as issuing travel documents, enrolling in school, or filing a police report). After the child reaches age seven, the father gains custody unless he is proven unfit to care for the child.

Women sometimes received disproportionate punishment for crimes such as adultery, including death sentences. The judiciary's interpretation and application of Islamic law retains provisions that equate a woman's testimony in a court of law to one-half that of a man's and value a woman's life as one-half that of a man's life. The amount paid in "blood money" for the intentional or unintentional physical harm to a woman is one-half that paid for harm to a man, but since 2019 a publicly funded trust pays the difference. Automobile accident insurance pays the same for the death of a man or a woman.

Women have access to primary and advanced education. Quotas and other restrictions nonetheless limited women's admissions to certain fields and degree programs.

According to HRW, citing official statistics, the unemployment rate for women is almost twice as high as for men. The organization also reports that more than 177,000 women left the job market during the COVID-19 pandemic, exacerbating an already low participation rate. Women reportedly earned significantly less than men for the same work.

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

The law provides that a woman who appears in public without appropriate attire, such as a cloth scarf over the head (*hijab*) and a long jacket (*manteau*), or a large full-length cloth covering (*chador*), may be sentenced to flogging and fines. Absent a clear legal definition of "appropriate attire" or of the related punishment, women were subjected to the opinions of various disciplinary and security force members, police, and judges.

Authorities continued to arrest women for violating the dress code, and courts applied harsh sentences. Before the high-profile death of Mahsa Amini in July, 28-year-old Sepideh Rashnu was arrested after she was filmed arguing over the forced hijab policy. After two weeks in detention, Rashnu appeared on state television giving what human rights NGOs widely judged to be a forced confession, with signs of likely beatings visible on her face. According to *IranWire*, on August 20, Rashnu was charged with "propaganda against the regime" and "promoting corruption and prostitution." She was released on August 30 pending trial. In late December, Radio Farda reported that Rashnu's brother said the court found Rashnu guilty of charges of "gathering and colluding against the country's security," "propaganda activity against the government," and "appearing without a hijab in public."

Widespread protests that started in September following Amini's death and continued through year's end did not lead to changes in the dress code. Several prominent women arrested and tried for protesting the dress code remained in prison. By year's end, Yasaman Aryani, her mother Monireh Arabshahi, and Mojgan Keshavarz were serving sentences of five and a half years' for "spreading propaganda against the system" and "inciting corruption and prostitution." These convictions pertain to their posting a video for International Women's Day in 2019 in which they walked without headscarves through a Tehran metro train. Activist Saba Kord Afshari was serving a five-year sentence after being arrested in 2018 for walking without a hijab and opposing the dress code, and her mother, Raheleh Ahmadi, is serving two and a half years for advocating on behalf of her daughter, having been arrested in 2019.

In March, according to HRW, authorities blocked dozens of women from entering a football stadium in Mashhad to watch a World Cup qualifying match, saying they could not accommodate the women "due to a lack of preparation." On August 25, following pressure from International Federation of Association Football, the government allowed women to attend a soccer game at Tehran's Azadi Stadium, allocating 500 seats for women. According to RFE/RL, many of the women used the opportunity to pay tribute to Sahar Khodayari, a fan who set herself afire in 2019 to protest the ban on women spectators after being arrested for trying to enter the soccer stadium dressed as a man. In August Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi stated that women were not banned from entering stadiums, but they would have to sit in separate sections.

Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination

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

Human rights organizations observed that the government's application of the death penalty disproportionately affected ethnic minorities (see section 1.a.). Authorities reportedly subjected members of minority ethnicities and religious groups in pretrial detention to more severe physical punishment, including torture, than other prisoners, regardless of the crime of which they were accused. These ethnic minority groups reported political and socioeconomic discrimination, particularly in their access to economic aid, business licenses, university admissions, job opportunities, permission to publish books, and housing and land rights. In a July report, the UNSR expressed particular concern that minorities, specifically those from the Kurdish minority, were disproportionately affected by arbitrary detention. The UNSR also noted that a disproportionate number of persons executed based on drug-related charges belonged to minority communities, especially the Baluch community.

Kurdish, Azeri Turk, and Baluch regions experienced especially harsh government actions during the crackdown on protests that began in September. HRW and numerous human rights NGOs reported that on September 30 in the Sunni Baluch region of Sistan and Baluchistan, authorities killed several dozen individuals in response to protests that erupted after Friday prayers. On November 16, according to *Iran International* and other media outlets, security forces killed Aylar Haqqi, a 23-year-old medical student in Tabriz, a predominantly Azerbaijani area, while she attended a protest. Subsequently forces reportedly attacked mourners attending her funeral who were chanting pro-Azerbaijani slogans. In late November, human rights groups reported intense crackdowns on protesters in the Kurdish city of Mahabad, in which authorities sent in military helicopters and armed IRGC members to suppress protests.

According to a December report compiled by civil society, an estimated 1,700 protesters were detained in Tabriz alone in the first two weeks of the protests. The report confirmed the identities of at least 110 Azeri Turks who were killed during demonstrations or died from subsequent abuse from security forces.

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

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

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

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

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

Ethnic Azeri Turks, who number more than 18 million, or approximately 24 percent of the population, were more integrated into government and society than other ethnic minority groups. Supreme Leader Khomeini is an ethnic Azeri Turk. Azeri Turks reported the government discriminated against them by harassing Azeri Turk activists or organizers and changing Azeri Turkish geographic names.

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

The UNSR’s report released in June noted that excessive force was routinely used against border couriers from the Kurdish and Baluch minorities, including the killing of 19 persons and 114 injuries in the first half of the year.

Children

Birth Registration: Children born to Iranian fathers automatically have citizenship under the law, while Iranian mothers must apply for citizenship for children born to fathers without Iranian citizenship (see section 2.g., Stateless Persons, and section 6, Women). The law also includes a stipulation of obtaining a security clearance from the security agencies prior to receiving approval. Birth within the country’s borders does not confer citizenship, except when a child is born to unknown parents. The law requires that all births be registered within 15 days.

Education: Although primary schooling until age 11 is free and compulsory for all, media and other sources reported lower enrollment in rural areas, especially for girls. Girls were also exempt from fulfilling their educational requirements if they were married, which can happen with parental consent at age nine. According to HRW, the child protection law passed in 2020 sets out financial penalties for parents or guardians who fail to provide for their child’s access to education through secondary level. Secondary education is free. Children without state-issued identification cards are denied the right to education.

The government consistently barred use of minority languages in school for instruction.

Child Abuse: There was little information available on how the government dealt with child abuse. The law states, “Any form of abuse of children and juveniles that causes physical, psychological, or moral harm and threatens their physical or mental health is prohibited,” and such crimes carry a maximum sentence of three months in confinement. It defines a set of punishments, which include imprisonment and “blood money,” for negligence by anyone, including parents, that results in death, disability, bodily harm, and sexual harassment. The law requires the State Welfare Organization to investigate the situation of children in “extreme danger” of abuse, exploitation, or being out of school, among other concerns. The state also has the authority to remove children from a household and put them under state supervision until the prosecutor takes on the case. The law also applies to all citizens younger than age 18, despite the earlier age of maturity.

HRANA reported that at least 69 juveniles were killed by security forces during the protests that began in September. In mid-October, Asra Panahi Khanghah reportedly died after being beaten when security forces raided her school amidst reports of demonstrations on school grounds across the country. Authorities claimed she had a heart problem. On November 16, according to multiple international and diaspora media outlets, nine-year-old Kian Pirlalak was killed in the southwestern city of Izeh. Authorities claimed he was killed in a terrorist attack, but his mother told media that security forces killed him when they shot at the family’s car. Pirlalak’s father was injured in the attack.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: The legal minimum age of marriage for girls is 13, but girls as young as age nine may be married with permission from a court and their fathers. According to HRW, the child protection law does not criminalize child marriage.

IranWire reported in May that child marriage had been rising for two years. In April the National Organization for Civil Registration released its annual report for 2021, which showed the number of marriages of girls younger than 18 increased by 9,000 compared to 2020. Child marriages made up 21.15 percent of all new marriages, the highest proportion since 2014. In some areas of the country, the percentage was significantly higher; in Ardebil Province, 55 percent of all marriages involved underage girls, and high rates of child marriage were recorded in Zaveh, Razavi Khorasan, and Bostan Abad in East Azerbaijan. According to the Department of Registry of Sistan and Baluchestan Province in January, the province registered 18 marriages of girls between five and nine years old since March 2021 and 2,405 marriages of girls between 10 and 14 years old.

According to human rights organizations, the increase in child marriage was due in part to a government “marriage loan” program providing financial relief to poor families who want to marry off their girls. The result was likely adversely affecting the quality of health care for such girls and increasing maternal mortality rates.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The legal age requirements for consensual sex are the same as those for marriage, as sex outside of marriage is illegal. There are no specific laws regarding child sexual exploitation, with such crimes either falling under the category of child abuse or sexual crimes of adultery. The law does not directly address sexual molestation nor provide a punishment for it.

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

Displaced Children: There were reports of thousands of Afghan refugee children in the country, many of whom were born in Iran but could not obtain identity documents. These children were often unable to attend schools or access basic government services and were vulnerable to labor exploitation and trafficking.

Antisemitism

The law recognizes Jews as a religious minority and provides for their representation in parliament. According to the Tehran Jewish Committee, the population includes an estimated 9,000 Jews. Members of the Iranian Jewish community were reportedly subjected to government restrictions and discrimination. Government officials, including the supreme leader, president, and other top officials, routinely engaged in egregious antisemitic rhetoric and Holocaust denial and distortion. In January Iran was the only country to object to a UN resolution condemning denial and distortion of the Holocaust. In a September interview with *60 Minutes*, President Raisi stated there “are some signs” that the Holocaust happened, but that “they should allow it to be investigated and researched,” a clear example of Holocaust distortion and denial. Supreme Leader Khomeini’s social media accounts repeatedly contained antisemitic attacks and tropes. State-run media routinely claimed “Zionists” influenced Western nations on topics affecting Iran and blamed “Zionists,” among others, for widespread protests following the death of Mahsa Amini in September. The Jewish community in Tehran warned persons on Telegram not to visit synagogues during the high holidays “due to the dangerous situation.”

According to media reports, officials and media propagated conspiracy theories blaming Jews and Israel for the spread of COVID-19. According to NGO reports, school textbooks contained content that incited hatred against Jews as part of the state curricula for history, religion, and social studies.

Trafficking in Persons

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

Organ Harvesting

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

Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity or Expression, or Sex Characteristics

Criminalization: The law criminalizes consensual same-sex sexual activity, which is punishable by death, flogging, or a lesser punishment. The law does not distinguish between consensual and nonconsensual same-sex intercourse, and NGOs reported this lack of clarity led to both the survivor and the perpetrator being held criminally liable under the law in cases of assault. Hate-crime laws or other criminal justice mechanisms do not exist to aid in the prosecution of bias-motivated crimes.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) activists expressed concern that the government executed LGBTQI+ individuals under the pretext of more severe, and possibly specious, criminal charges such as rape and incest. Those accused of “sodomy” often faced summary trials, and evidentiary standards were not always met. The Iranian Lesbian and Transgender Network (6Rang) noted that individuals arrested under such conditions were traditionally subjected to forced anal examinations – which the United Nations and World Health Organization stated may constitute torture – and other degrading treatment and sexual insults.

In February HRANA reported the execution of Mehrdad Karimpour and Farid Mohammadi, allegedly sentenced on charges of “sexual intercourse between two men” after spending six years on death row. In September a court reportedly sentenced Zahra Seddiqi Hamedani and Elham Choubdar, active members of the LGBTQI+ community, to death after finding them guilty of “corruption on earth” and trafficking. On September 28, UN experts called for a stay of execution, condemning the sentences and expressing concern that they were prosecuted on the discriminatory basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.” The judiciary later stated the sentences were connected to human trafficking, a charge 6Rang and others vehemently deny.

Violence against LGBTQI+ Persons: LGBTQI+ persons were often subjected to violence. A 2020 report by 6Rang found that at least 42 percent of LGBTQI+ individuals had been survivors of sexual violence in public spaces, 68 percent of whom said they “rarely” or “never” have or would seek assistance from the judiciary; 19 percent of respondents said they had been victims of violence and abuse by the policy or judiciary.

Discrimination: The law does not prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics and does not recognize LGBTQI+ individuals, couples, or their families. The law classifies gay men and transgender women as having mental disorders and, on those grounds, exempts them from the otherwise mandatory service for male citizens. Military identity cards list the subsection of the law dictating the exemption. According to 6Rang, this practice identified gay or transgender individuals and put them at risk of physical abuse and discrimination in everyday life – including risk of arrest. Lesbian and bisexual women are denied full rights as women, and for lesbians these vulnerabilities can be greater and can include forced marriage. Although the government does not collect official data on discrimination against LGBTQI+ individuals, NGOs report members of the LGBTQI+ community experience widespread discrimination in education, employment, healthcare, personal safety, and within their own families.

Availability of Legal Gender Recognition: No information was available on whether individuals were able to change their gender identify markers on government-issued identification cards.

Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices Specifically Targeting LGBTQI+ Individuals: According to the most recent report in 2020 by 6Rang, the number of private and semigovernmental psychological and psychiatric clinics allegedly engaging in “corrective treatment” or reparative therapies of LGBTQI+ persons was increasing. The NGO reported the increased use at such clinics of electric shock therapy to the hands and genitals of LGBTQI+ persons, prescription of psychoactive medication, hypnosis, and coercive masturbation to pictures of persons of the opposite sex. One such institution called the Anonymous Sex Addicts Association of Iran had branches in 18 provinces. The prevalence of conversion therapy practices was also documented by Outright International and public health scholars.

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

Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly: Security forces harassed, arrested, and detained individuals they suspected or perceived as being LGBTQI+. In some cases, security forces raided houses and monitored internet sites for information on LGBTQI+ persons.

The government censored all materials related to LGBTQI+ status or conduct. Authorities blocked websites or content within sites that discussed LGBTQI+ topics, including *Wikipedia* pages defining LGBTQI+ and other related topics.

Persons with Disabilities

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

According to HRW, the law for the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities increases pensions and extends insurance coverage to disability-related health-care services, but it does not explicitly prohibit discrimination. According to CHRI, the government did not allocate a budget to enforce the disability law, and according to the November resolution regarding human rights in Iran adopted by the UNGA Third Committee, it remains unimplemented. According to existing law in force, persons with vision, hearing, or speech disabilities are prohibited from running for seats in parliament. While the law provides for government-funded vocational education for persons with disabilities, domestic news reports noted vocational centers were located only in urban areas and were largely unable to meet the needs of the entire population.

There were reports of abuses against persons with disabilities, including those housed at care centers. Journalist Negin Hosseini told *IranWire* in July that low standards and staffing and hiring unqualified caretakers led to abuses at care centers. In July the Iranian Campaign to Support the Rights of People with Disabilities shared a video reportedly showing abuse at a center for persons with serious disabilities in Khuzestan Province. The footage showed a woman restrained on a bathroom floor, staff ignoring a man apparently having a seizure, and emaciated individuals on cots in an overcrowded room. The welfare organization reported that previously two persons with Down Syndrome died from infections stemming from bedsores, despite not being bedridden.

In 2019 HRW and CHRI reported persons with disabilities remained cut off from society, a major obstacle being a mandatory government medical test that may exclude children with disabilities from the public school system. Based on government figures, during the 2018-19 school year, 150,000 children of school age with disabilities were enrolled in school, and more were in “special schools” that segregated them from other students. Estimates put the total number of school-age children with disabilities at 1.5 million. They continued to face stigma and discrimination from government social workers, health-care workers, and others. Subsequently, many persons with disabilities remained unable to participate in society on an equal basis.

In late 2021, IRNA reported the chairman of Tehran City Council’s Transportation Commission acknowledged the city had not taken measures necessary to “solve even the most basic problems of the disability community” in Tehran.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

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

The Baha’i community remained a target of systematic government repression, escalating in the summer with increased raids, confiscation of property, and arrests (see section 1.e., Property Seizure and Restitution). According to the Baha’i National Center, as of September, 1,000 Baha’i were being held at some stage of the criminal justice system, more than double the previous recorded peak of 443 in 2014. In December the government announced the sentencing of Mahvash Sabet and Fariba Kamalabadi to 10 years in prison on “national security” charges, working to “undermine Islam”, and “furthering the interests of dominant foreign countries.” Sabet and Kamalabadi were members of the seven-member, informal leadership group of the Baha’is of Iran until their incarceration in 2008 and the dissolution of their group. According to the Baha’i National Center, the government also escalated its campaign of disinformation against the Baha’i community. The theme of the second National Graphics Art Fair in January was “Baha’ism:

Assembly of Treason.” Authorities encouraged artists to produce works for the fair highlighting the “destruction of Islamic-Iranian culture” and “moral deviances.” See the Department of State’s *International Religious Freedom Report* at www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The constitution provides for freedom of association but does not provide for the right of workers to form and join trade unions. The law states that workers may establish an Islamic labor council or a guild at any workplace, but the rights and responsibilities of these organizations fell significantly short of international standards for trade unions. In workplaces where workers established an Islamic labor council, authorities did not permit any other form of worker representation. The law requires prior authorization for organizing and concluding collective agreements. Strikes are prohibited in all sectors, although private-sector workers may conduct “peaceful” campaigns within the workplace. The law does not apply to establishments with fewer than 10 employees.

The government severely restricted freedom of association and interfered in worker attempts to organize (see section 2.b., Freedom of Association), including the right to collective bargaining. The government did not effectively enforce all applicable laws. The law does not prohibit antiunion discrimination and does not require reinstatement of workers fired for union activity. Penalties for violations of law protecting freedom of association and the right to strike were less than those under other laws involving denials of civil rights. Labor activism is considered a national security offense for which conviction carries severe punishments up to and including the death penalty. The government harassed trade union leaders, labor rights activists, and journalists during crackdowns on widespread protests. According to NGO and media reports, as in previous years, several trade unionists, including members of teachers’ unions, were imprisoned or remained unjustly detained for their peaceful activism. Independent trade unionists were subjected to arbitrary arrests, tortured, and if convicted, subjected to harsh sentences, including the death penalty.

In April HRANA released a report concerning workers, reporting that harassment, detention, and interrogations of members of the Iran Teachers Trade Association (ITTA) had increased significantly as protests against low wages and erosions of labor protections increased. According to HRANA, on April 6, the revolutionary court in Lordegan, in Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province, summoned nine teachers who participated in December 2021 protests organized by the ITTA and charged them with “spreading lies on social media against the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran.” More arrests of teachers followed before, during, and after International Worker’s Day on May 1, which coincided with Teacher’s Week in the country. According to CHRI, at least 28 teachers were arrested in the four days leading up to May 1.

Many labor rights activists remain imprisoned, including Mehran Raoof. According to Amnesty International, IRGC intelligence agents arrested Raoof in 2020, along with several other labor rights activists throughout the country. In June 2021, Raoof was sentenced to 10 years and eight months and has been held in solitary confinement in Evin Prison, without legal counsel or contact with immediate family members.

The Interior Ministry, the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor, and Social Welfare, and the Islamic Information Organization determined labor council constitutions, operational rules, and election procedures. Administrative and judicial procedures were lengthy. The Workers’ House remained the only officially authorized national labor organization, and its leadership oversaw, granted permits to, and coordinated activities with Islamic labor councils in industrial, agricultural, and service organizations with more than 35 employees.

According to CHRI, the labor councils, which consisted of representatives of workers and a representative of management, were essentially management-run unions that undermined worker

efforts to maintain independent unions. The councils, nevertheless, sometimes could block layoffs and dismissals. There was no representative worker organization for noncitizen workers.

According to international media reports, security forces continued to respond to workers' attempts to organize or conduct strikes with arbitrary arrests and violence. As economic conditions deteriorated, strikes and worker protests continued across the country throughout the year, often prompting a heavy police response. In June according to RFE/RL, security forces routinely monitored major worksites. According to CHRI, workers went on strike in several cities. In June and again in November, truck drivers went on strike in Tehran, with their union leaders releasing a statement protesting lack of government responsiveness to their concerns, as well as expressing solidarity with the nationwide protests. Also in June, 300,000 stone factory workers in Isfahan walked off the job and remained on strike for days even after threats of retribution, including arrest on national security charges. Prior to the protests and strike in response to the death of Mahsa Amini, labor protests were largely in response to declining living standards, wage arrears, and a lack of insurance support. The union leader who announced the Isfahan strike was reportedly immediately arrested and forced to call for an end to the action.

CHRI reported that in November, at least 20 labor union strikes across 12 of the country's 31 provinces were recorded in solidarity with nation-wide protests and that at least 12 labor rights activists were arrested since the protests began in September.

Between December 5 and 7, widespread store closures and strikes took place in at least 40 cities across the country in solidarity with the protests that began in September. Social media and expatriate press reported shuttered stores, closed marketplaces, and, in some regions, school closures. In the Tehran bazaar, *IranWire* reported that security forces and IRGC members tried to prevent shop owners from closing their businesses, threatening them with permanent closure. Despite a massive presence of security forces, however, most shops within the bazaar reportedly closed. IRGC-linked *Fars News* reported on December 5 that the Nour shopping and restaurant mall in Tehran, owned by soccer legend Ali Daei, was closed by judicial order. On December 19, CHRI reported firefighters in Tabriz went on strike to demand higher wages and to protest the execution of protesters.

Esmail Abdi, a mathematics teacher and former ITTA secretary general, continued serving his six-year prison sentence for labor rights activism. In May he went on a hunger strike, which he ended after 14 days only after pleas from the ITTA. In June HRANA reported that Abdi was suffering from heavy stomach pain, lung irritation, chronic numbness of hands and feet, high blood pressure, and knee pain, for which the prison infirmary had confirmed a medical furlough for him. As of year's end, he remained in prison without adequate medical care.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits and criminalizes all forms of forced or compulsory labor, but the government did not effectively enforce the law and made no significant effort to address forced labor during the year. Conditions indicative of forced labor sometimes occurred in the construction, domestic labor, and agricultural sectors, primarily among adult Afghan men and boys younger than age 18. Family members and others forced children to work.

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

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

See the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings>.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The constitution bars discrimination based on race, gender, disability, language, and social status “in conformity with Islamic criteria,” but the government did not effectively enforce these prohibitions. According to the constitution, “everyone has the right to choose any occupation he wishes, if it is not contrary to Islam and the public interests and does not infringe on the rights of others.” Discrimination with respect to employment and occupation occurred in several categories, including gender, ethnicity, and disability. It was unclear whether penalties for violations were commensurate to or less than other laws on civil rights, such as election interference.

Despite this constitutional provision, the government made systematic efforts to limit women’s access to the workplace, and their participation in the job market remained as low as 14 percent according to available World Bank data. The unemployment rate among women was nearly twice as high as for men. Hiring practices often discriminated against women; the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor, and Social Welfare guidelines stated that men should be given preferential hiring status. An Interior Ministry directive requires all officials only hire secretaries of their own gender. The law restricts women from working in jobs deemed hazardous or arduous. Women remained banned from working in coffee houses and from performing music alongside men, with very limited exceptions made for traditional music. Women in many fields were restricted from working after 9:00 p.m.

Ethnic and religious minorities including Kurds, Ahwazis, Azeris, and Baluchis, as well as Baha’is, reported political and socioeconomic discrimination regarding their access to economic aid, business licenses, and job opportunities.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Wage and Hour Laws: The law does not provide for a national minimum wage for all sectors of the economy. In March the Supreme Labor Council, the government body charged with proposing labor regulations, agreed to raise the minimum monthly wage by 57 percent. Labor groups report that even with the increase, the minimum wage is just half of what would be required to reach the poverty line for a family. At the time of the announcement of the increase, officials claimed it outpaced inflation by 9 percent; however, after March the inflation rate increased, exceeding 50 percent over the summer.

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

Employers sometimes subjected migrant workers, most often Afghans, to abusive working conditions, including below-minimum-wage salaries, nonpayment of wages, compulsory overtime, and summary deportation. According to media reports, many workers continued to be employed on temporary contracts, under which they lacked protections available to full-time, noncontract workers. These workers were ineligible for benefits or insurance and could be dismissed at will. In April the *Iranian Labor News Agency* reported that 95 percent of migrant workers were on temporary contracts. Low wages, nonpayment of wages, and lack of job security due to contracting practices continued to contribute to strikes and protests, which occurred throughout the year. In May HRANA reported that at least 45,462 workers were owed backpay – up more than 10,000 over the previous year. Three-quarters of those delayed wages were in the public sector.

Occupational Safety and Health: Little information was available regarding labor inspection and related law enforcement activity. While the law provides for occupational safety and health

standards, the government did not effectively enforce these standards. The law states inspections may be done day or night, without prior notice. Inspections of Family businesses require written permission of the local prosecutor. The law does not provide workers the right to remove themselves from a hazardous workplace without jeopardizing their employment. Labor organizations reported that hazardous work environments resulted in the deaths of thousands of workers annually. HRANA reported that between May 2021 and May 2022, at least 10,707 persons were injured in work-related incidents. At least 811 died in work-related incidents, although the government acknowledged only 438.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement: The government did not effectively enforce minimum wage, overtime, and OSH laws. There are no reports of penalties being applied against violators. The Supreme Labor Council, which consists of representatives of workers, employers, and the Ministry of Labor, is responsible for setting minimum wages. Responsibility for identifying unsafe situations rests with the technical protection and occupational health committee of workplaces designated by the Ministry of Labor.

Informal Sector: The law does not provide for OSH standards for workers in the informal economy. Large numbers of workers were employed in small workplaces or in the informal economy. Workers lacked basic protections in construction, domestic labor, and agricultural sectors, primarily among adult Afghan men and boys younger than age 18.