



## **Iran – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 11 January 2013**

### **Information on the enforcement of dress codes by the Iranian authorities.**

An Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada response to a request for information on the enforcement of dress codes in Iran states:

“According to the Islamic Penal Code of Iran (1991), ‘women who appear in public without a proper hijab should be imprisoned from ten days to two months or pay a fine of 50,000 to 500,000 Ryal’ [500,000 Iranian rials (IRR) = C\$47 (XE 20 Dec. 2011a)] The law is reportedly applicable to all Iranian women regardless of their religion. However, sources state that there is no clear legal definition of what constitutes a proper hijab, and Freedom House indicates that ‘there has never been a consensus among the ulema [Islamic clerics] on the meaning and extent of Islamic hijab’. The United States (US) Department of State reports that given the lack of a clearly defined dress code, women are ‘subject to the opinions of disciplinary forces or judges’ “ (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (20 December 2011)  
*IRN103920.E – Iran: The enforcement of dress codes*)

This response also states:

“In practice, women are required to cover their hair and the contours of their body in public. Sources note that loose-fitting headscarves, tight overcoats and short trousers that expose the skin are prohibited. Freedom House also reports that women have been punished for ‘showing part of one’s hair, using cosmetics, wearing sunglasses, wearing a tight or short manteau (coat or gown), showing skin above the wrist or ankle, showing neckline, and wearing boots over (rather than under) trousers’ . Men are reportedly prohibited from wearing shorts and ‘tight, low-slung jeans’ “(ibid)

A Freedom House report, in a section titled “Nondiscrimination and Access to Justice” states:

“Head and body coverings for women are mandatory under Article 638 of the penal code, which stipulates that those who fail to comply with hijab sharèe (Shari'a-based veiling) face 10 days to two months in prison or fines between 50,000 and 500,000 rials (US\$5 to US\$50). The law lacks specificity on what constitutes a violation, but in practice, women have been punished for all of the following: showing part of one's hair, using cosmetics, wearing sunglasses, wearing a tight or short manteau (coat or gown), showing skin above the wrist or ankle, showing neckline, and wearing boots over (rather than under) trousers. No private plaintiff is necessary for prosecution, as it is the state's prerogative to monitor and control women's apparel. Harsher enforcement has increased the number of arbitrary arrests and detentions in recent years. Immediately following the revolution, observance of head coverings and modest dress for women was enforced by a special police

service in all public places, and women were harassed, arrested, fined, and detained for violations. During the reform era under President Khatami (1997-2005), this enforcement was relaxed considerably although not eliminated. However, since 2006, male and female officers have stopped, verbally scolded, physically attacked, arrested, or temporarily detained thousands of women and some young men for wearing insufficiently modest clothing, or 'bad hijab.'" (Freedom House (3 March 2010) *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa 2010 – Iran*)

The 2012 US Commission on International Religious Freedom report states:

"During the reporting period, Iranian authorities heightened their enforcement of the strict Islamic dress code for women. By law, Iranian women, regardless of their religious affiliation or belief, must be covered from head to foot while in public. Social interaction between unrelated men and women is banned. Iran's 'morality police' increased their presence in the streets throughout the country and more frequently stopped cars with young men and women inside to question their relationship." (US Commission on International Religious Freedom (20 March 2012) *USCIRF Annual Report 2012 - Countries of Particular Concern: Iran*)

A UN General Assembly report, in a section titled "Women's rights" (paragraph 23), states:

"The Iranian authorities note that, according to Islamic rules and regulation, women are required to observe Islamic dress code in public places. On 9 May 2011, the commander of morality police forces disclosed that thousands of morality personnel had been deployed across the country to implement the moral security plan. He warned that the police would strictly monitor all public places, including vehicles, and take legal action against all those who breach morality codes. Furthermore, female students are reportedly banned from wearing bright clothes, having long nails or tattoos and also from wearing caps or hats without scarves, or tight or short jeans. The new code also bans male students from dyeing their hair, plucking eyebrows, wearing tight clothes, shirts with 'very short sleeves' and jewellery." (UN General Assembly (15 September 2011) *The situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, pp.9-10)

An Amnesty International report, in a section titled "Laws and Policies Restricting Freedom of Expression", states:

"In addition to the new restrictions on freedom of expression outlined above, when appearing in public women and men in Iran continue to have to adhere to a mandatory dress code that is enforced in law. The authorities have stepped up efforts in recent years to enforce the 2005 Law on Promoting the Culture of Chastity and Modesty, which has led some universities to threaten students who do not comply with the dress code with a ban on completing their studies. The dress code, however, has never been fully defined, and while many women wear traditional forms of dress, others have also chosen to interpret this code in other ways. This leaves them at risk of harassment from police or other security forces, including the Basij militia, particularly during summer crackdowns, which have increased since 2005." (Amnesty International (28 February 2012) *'We are ordered to crush you' Expanding Repression of Dissent in Iran*, p.15)

An Amnesty International report, in a section titled "Imposition of Dress Code", refers to the situation for clothing shops in Iran as follows:

"Clothing shops in Iran must also ensure that the way they dress mannequins does not 'offend public decency.' Shopkeepers who fail to do that can receive guidance notes, warnings, threats and even risk fines, flogging and loss of their business licence." (Amnesty International (21 September 2011) *Iran: Submission to the Human Rights Committee for the 103rd session of the Human Rights Committee, 17 October – 4 November 2011*, pp.11-12)

See also Associated Press report which states:

"Police closed dozens of clothing stores and hairdressers and stopped cars and pedestrians in a crackdown on women who do not abide by Iran's strict Islamic dress code and men wearing fashions seen as too Western, Iranian media reported Monday." (Associated Press (16 June 2008) *Iranian police crack down on dress code violations*)

This report also states:

"But the closure of shops appeared to be a new step, aimed at stopping the sale of shorter coats and lighter headscarves. The pro-reform daily Kargozaran reported Monday that police were questioning women and men where they bought their clothes or had their hair done, then targeting the shops. Police spokesman Mehdi Ahmadi said 32 clothing shops and hairdressers in Tehran were shut down so far, according to the semi-official Fars news agency. He also said 21 vehicles had been stopped because passengers were breaking dress rules. There was no word on whether anyone had been arrested. Police official Nader Sarkari defended the actions, saying 'people in inappropriate clothes and those who sell these clothes are aware of their violations since they have often been given warning.' "(ibid)

A Reuters report states:

"Men with Western-style haircuts were confronted by police and also barber shops that gave them such haircuts were sealed off on Sunday,' said the daily. Some women, testing the boundaries of the law by wearing tight clothes were also confronted by morality police, located mainly at the affluent northern Tehran squares. 'Police also swept through popular shopping centers, where such outfits are sold and some of those shops were sealed off,' the daily said." (Reuters (16 June 2008) *Iran police start wider crackdown on un-Islamic dress*)

A report originally from the Vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran Esfahan Provincial TV states:

"As part of efforts to halt clothing shops from obviously displaying immorality [i.e. clothes that do not conform to Islamic dress code], eight shops have been sealed in Esfahan over the past two days and warnings have been issued to another 120 businesses over relevant violations." (Vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran Esfahan Provincial TV, (21 June 2011) *Clothing shops shut down in Iran's Esfahan for "displaying immorality"* (translated from Persian))

A report from the Washington-based Iran Times International states:

“The Tehran police have decided to go to the source of the problem and last Thursday raided and shut down 70 wholesale shops dealing in 'obscene' and 'outlandish' women's clothing. Until now, it had not been considered illegal to sell any kind of clothing, since women can wear what they choose in the privacy of their own homes. The law has restricted what women could wear in public and what shop owners could display openly in their display windows. Tehran Police Chief General Hossain Sajedi-nia announced the latest raids in an interview with the Iranian Students News Agency (ISNA). But he failed to explain under what authority he could close a wholesaler for selling clothes of which the general did not approve.” (Iran Times International (15 July 2011) *'Obscene' clothing shops hit*)

A Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty report states:

“Tehran Police Chief Hossein Sajedinia says a new campaign to crack down on dress code violations has been launched in the Iranian capital. Sajedinia was quoted by Iranian news agencies as saying that police will go after clothing manufacturers and companies that import dresses deemed inappropriate. He said authorities also will pursue individuals who wear the clothing.” (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (27 April 2012) *New Hijab Crackdown Launched in Tehran*)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research and Information Unit within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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