



Australian Government

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade



# DFAT COUNTRY INFORMATION REPORT IRAN

24 JULY 2023

# MAP



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# ACRONYMS

AUD	Australian Dollar
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRGC	Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and/or Intersex
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ONOCR	Office for the National Organisation for Civil Registration
PWD	People with disability
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
US	United States
USD	US Dollar
VPN	Virtual Private Network

## GLOSSARY

<i>Amayesh</i>	Registration system for refugees, may also refer to an identity card issued under that system
<i>Farsi</i>	The official language of Iran
<i>Hijab</i>	A head covering worn by women
<i>Kolbar</i>	Border courier/porter
<i>Laissez-passer</i>	Temporary travel document
<i>Majlis</i>	Islamic Consultative Assembly (Iran's unicameral parliament)
<i>Mujtahid</i>	A cleric with an authoritative knowledge of Islamic law
<i>Persian</i>	The majority ethnic group in Iran
<i>Rial</i>	Currency of Iran
<i>Sharia</i>	Islamic law
<i>Shenasnameh</i>	Birth certificate
<i>Ta'zir crimes</i>	Crimes for which the Quran does not specify a punishment, and for which punishments are at the discretion of a judge
<i>Velayat-e faqih</i>	'Guardianship of the jurist' (the political philosophy of the Islamic Republic)

## Terms used in this report

high risk	DFAT is aware of a strong pattern of incidents
moderate risk	DFAT is aware of sufficient incidents to suggest a pattern of behaviour
low risk	DFAT is aware of incidents but has insufficient evidence to conclude they form a pattern

### official discrimination

1. legal or regulatory measures applying to a particular group that impede access to state protection or services that are available to other sections of the population (examples might include but are not limited to difficulties in obtaining personal registrations or identity papers, difficulties in having papers recognised, arbitrary arrest and detention)
2. behaviour by state employees towards a particular group that impedes access to state protection or services otherwise available, including by failure to implement legislative or administrative measures

### societal discrimination

1. behaviour by members of society (including family members, employers or service providers) that impedes access by a particular group to goods or services normally available to other sections of society (examples could include but are not limited to refusal to rent property, refusal to sell goods or services, or employment discrimination)
2. ostracism or exclusion by members of society (including family, acquaintances, employers, colleagues or service providers)

## PURPOSE AND SCOPE

1.1 This Country Information Report has been prepared by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) for protection status determination purposes only. It provides DFAT's best judgement and assessment at time of writing and is distinct from Australian Government policy with respect to Iran.

1.2 The report provides a general, rather than an exhaustive, country overview. It has been prepared with regard to the current caseload for decision makers in Australia without reference to individual applications for protection visas. The report does not contain policy guidance for decision makers.

1.3 Ministerial Direction 84 of 24 June 2019, issued under section 499 of the *Migration Act* (1958), states that:

Where the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has prepared [a] country information assessment expressly for protection status determination purposes, and that assessment is available to the decision maker, the decision maker must take into account that assessment, where relevant, in making their decision. The decision maker is not precluded from considering other relevant information about the country.

1.4 This report is informed by DFAT's on-the-ground knowledge and discussions with a range of sources in Iran and elsewhere. It takes into account relevant and credible open source reports, including those produced by: the United Nations and its agencies; the US Department of State; the UK Home Office; the World Bank; the International Monetary Fund; leading human rights organisations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Freedom House; and reputable news sources. Where DFAT does not refer to a specific source of a report or allegation, this may be to protect the source.

1.5 This updated Country Information Report replaces the previous DFAT report on Iran released on 14 April 2020.

## 2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### RECENT HISTORY

2.1 Iran, formerly Persia, is an Islamic republic situated between the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf in the Middle East. One of the world's oldest continuous nation-states, Iran maintains a distinct cultural identity among the Muslim countries of the Middle East — most Iranians are ethnic Persian, speak Farsi and adhere to the Shi'a branch of Islam.

2.2 Iran has an ancient history of monarchical rule by various dynasties. The final dynasty, the Pahlavi, faced controversy over attempts to modernise and alleged foreign interference. The ruling Shah (king), Mohammad Reza, was intolerant of political opposition and marginalised opponents through widespread arbitrary arrests, imprisonment, exile, torture and execution. Popular dissatisfaction with perceived Western influence and harsh limits on civil rights and political opposition led to the 1979 revolution led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. This saw the end of the monarchy, the establishment of the theocratic Islamic Republic, and the execution of hundreds of the Shah's supporters, including military officers and high-ranking officials and other political adversaries. (See also [Political System](#).)

2.3 In September 1980, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein ordered the invasion of Iran, leading to a war which ended in stalemate in 1988, cost approximately one million lives, and devastated the Iranian economy. Following Khomeini's death in June 1989, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was appointed as Supreme Leader and remained so as at the time of publication. In 2009, the 'Green Movement' protests followed widespread allegations of election fraud during the 2009 Presidential elections. Millions took to the streets in Tehran and other cities. However, the protests were harshly suppressed on 14 February 2010, with leaders systematically arrested in the aftermath.

2.4 Serious protest movements have continued to emerge in Iran since the Green Movement and persist as at the time of publication (see [Mahsa Amini Protests](#)). Of note, during protests across Iran in November 2019, Iranian authorities killed up to 1,500 protesters.

2.5 From 2006, following the discovery of a covert uranium enrichment program, the UN Security Council (UNSC) imposed increasingly strict economic and political sanctions on Iran. In July 2015, then President Hassan Rouhani negotiated the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) to limit Iran's nuclear activities in exchange for sanctions relief. The United States withdrew from the deal in 2018 and Iran began ignoring limitations on its nuclear program a year later. Discussions continue between Iran and JCPOA signatories, however the restoration of sanctions caused significant economic harm to Iran.

### DEMOGRAPHY

2.6 According to the CIA World Factbook, the population of Iran is approximately 87 million people and is predominately concentrated in the north, northwest and west of the country. Much of the central, southern, and eastern parts of the country are desert. Iran is one of the most urbanised countries in the world;



approximately 77 per cent of the population lives in urban areas. The capital Tehran has a population over 9 million people.

2.7 Today, Iran has one of the youngest societies in the world, with 60 per cent of the population aged 30 or under. In contrast, only 8 per cent of the population is aged over 65. Increased use of modern contraception and the availability of state-run family planning services have contributed to a significant decline in Iran's total fertility rate, from a peak of 6.5 children per woman in the mid-1980s to 1.7 today. Family size is currently below replacement rate, and Iran's population is projected to decline by 2050.

2.8 Iran is ethnically and linguistically diverse, see [Race/Nationality](#) and [Religion](#).

## ECONOMIC OVERVIEW

2.9 Iran has been reclassified as a lower middle-income country. According to the World Bank, the dominant industries are hydrocarbon, agriculture and services, along with state-owned manufacturing and financial services industries. Iran exports natural gas and oil, and oil prices have a significant impact on the economy.

2.10 Iran's economy is dominated by a large state-owned sector. The private sector in Iran is relatively small, occupying approximately 20 per cent of the economy. Many private banks and industries were nationalised after the 1979 revolution. Isolation from the global economy – partly self-imposed by its political leaders, and partly externally imposed by Western sanctions over Iran's support of terrorism and nuclear proliferation – creates further barriers to economic growth. Sanctions prevent the export of oil and petroleum products which traditionally account for 80 per cent of Iran's export revenues. Following the restoration of sanctions in 2018, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimated Iran's economy contracted by 9.5 per cent in 2019, following a 4.8 per cent decline in 2018.

2.11 According to 2021 World Bank and ILO estimates, unemployment is relatively high at approximately 11.5 per cent. However, in the absence of reliable official figures, and significant under-employment, some analysts consider this an underestimate. The size of the informal employment market is also unclear, academic estimates indicate it could be around 30 per cent of the economy. The COVID-19 pandemic caused billions of dollars in damage to the economy, with agriculture, tourism, healthcare, private manufacturing and the service sectors all significantly affected.

2.12 Cost of living pressures, including removal of subsidies for staple foodstuffs, have been the subject of protests. According to the World Bank, the inflation rate was 40 per cent in 2019, and in May 2023, the Financial Times reported it may be up to 50 per cent, exceeding the previous peak of 49 per cent reached in 1995. Reuters reported in 2022 that inflation may be as high as 300 per cent for some staple foods. Wages have not kept up with inflation. People in professions such as teaching and nursing, as well as those working in industry and blue-collar workers, joined protests in 2022 against unaffordable food, stagnant wages and falling standards of living. Many employed Iranians struggle to afford basic needs. Sources also report under-investment by the central government in provinces with majority non-Persian populations.

2.13 Because of currency instability, many more affluent Iranians invest in illiquid assets such as property or motor vehicles and others in gold or hard currency. This has further fuelled inflation. Younger Iranians have also invested in cryptocurrency.

2.14 Iran has an extensive welfare system; approximately a third of the population receives some kind of payment from the government, equivalent to AUD10 a month, depending on the number of dependants in a household. Families of men killed or injured during the Iran-Iraq War are entitled to government welfare, education subsidies and, in some cases, guaranteed employment. Spiralling inflation is reducing purchasing

power, hitting the middle class and unemployed. Large religious charities and foundations (*bonyads*) play a large role in providing support to the vulnerable and poor.

2.15 DFAT assesses that economic hardship was the primary driver of countrywide protests in December 2017, January 2018, and November 2019 (see [Protests](#)). Local sources told DFAT that economic conditions, particularly following the reimposition of US sanctions, make emigration strongly desirable for many Iranians. DFAT assesses that current economic conditions in Iran are challenging, and economic incentives act as a key ‘push factor’ for emigration for most Iranians.

## Corruption

2.16 Corruption is widespread and a major barrier to economic activity. Iran is a State Party to the UN Convention against Corruption, and Article 3 of the Iranian Constitution commits the government to fighting all forms of corruption. While Iran has a range of anti-corruption laws and agencies, ultimately these have little effect in a system structured around transferring large amounts of wealth to Iran’s elite including the Supreme Leader himself. Iran ranked 147<sup>th</sup> out of 180 countries in Transparency International’s 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index. GAN Integrity notes a high risk of corruption in the [judiciary](#), [police](#), public services (acquiring licences, utilities), land administration, tax and customs, public procurement and the natural resources industry. Corruption takes the form of irregular payments, cronyism and embezzlement. Officials may expect bribes to conduct routine services.

## Health

2.17 The government is the main provider of primary health care services and healthcare is a key government priority. Government spending on health has increased significantly over the last decade and is currently about 8.7 per cent of GDP according to the United Nations Development Programme.

2.18 All Iranian citizens are entitled to free healthcare, however quality and availability of services can be variable, especially in poorer rural areas. A survey by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 2020 found that 98 per cent of Iranian children aged 24–35 months and 90 percent of non-Iranian children aged 24–35 months had received all necessary childhood vaccinations. According to the World Bank, in 2014, the last year for which data is available, 99 per cent of births were attended by skilled health staff. In rural areas, healthcare is accessed at primary healthcare centres known as ‘Health Houses’. Major cities are well serviced with large public hospitals and health centres. Urban dwellers may have the option of private healthcare, but it can be expensive. NGOs may also provide specialist (for example, cancer) care.

2.19 As at the time of publication, the COVID-19 pandemic had resulted in at least 144,000 deaths, however accurate and reliable numbers are difficult to obtain. Despite initial import refusal of British or American-made vaccines, international WHO approved vaccines are now available. The government also developed and produced domestic vaccines however DFAT is unable to comment on their effectiveness.

## Disability

2.20 There are no official statistics on the number of people with disability (PWD). In 2012, unofficial sources estimate that as many as 12 per cent of Iranians are living with a disability. The State Welfare Organisation (SWO) has primary responsibility for the provision of services to PWD. A number of other state agencies – such as the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour and Social Welfare and the Committee for the Affairs of War Veterans – provide services to PWD, including in rural areas. NGOs are also active. According to the

Iranian Government, 662 NGOs provide services to PWD in cooperation with the SWO and other state agencies.

2.21 Societal understanding of the needs of PWD is generally low. Locals report PWD face social stigma and encounter obstacles in accessing housing, employment and public transportation. According to foreign NGOs, children with disabilities, particularly girls and those living with intellectual disabilities and/or developmental disorders including autism spectrum disorder, face barriers in accessing education and, in some cases, receive no education at all. Government-funded buildings built before 2018 are largely inaccessible to PWD and building accessibility for PWD remains a problem. Discrimination against PWD is not outlawed explicitly and those with visual, hearing or speech disabilities are barred from registering as candidates for parliament. Provision of support services differs between different categories of disability: PWD resulting from war service receive tailored insurance coverage, others find this difficult to obtain. Vocational education centres for PWD exist but are concentrated in urban areas.

## Mental Health

2.22 Mental health services are provided as part of the mainstream health services available to all Iranians. However, according to a 2021 study published in the Iranian Journal of Psychiatry, the Iranian Mental Health Survey indicated almost one in four people had one or more psychiatric disorders (23.6 per cent); two-thirds of patients did not benefit from health interventions; and many provided services were inadequate and imposed a high burden on Iranian families. As in many countries, stigma is a significant barrier to seeking treatment. While mental illness has, to date, not been considered a legitimate medical condition, and people living with mental illness have been expected to 'tough it out', there are signs that this is changing – at least in the more progressive parts of Iran. Stigma can include difficulties in relationships, prejudicial attitudes including social discrimination, or societal acceptance and approval of such discrimination. Families will typically hide the fact that a member is living with a mental illness and will isolate them socially; families may also physically restrain the individual. Private services are available, especially in Tehran, but are expensive.

2.23 A 2023 study published in the BMC Psychiatry Journal exploring the prevalence of violence and its association with mental health among the Iranian population one year after the outbreak of COVID-19 found prevalence of violence had increased. The study reported overall prevalence of domestic and social violence was 11.4 per cent and 5.5 per cent, respectively, and verbal violence was the most common type; with 61.8 per cent and 66.8 per cent for domestic and social violence, respectively. The study found suspected mental disorder, female gender, being younger than 25 years, living together, unemployment, low education, and history of COVID-19 infection presented a significant association with domestic and social violence. (See also [Women](#)).

## Drugs and Alcohol

2.24 Substance abuse is a major health problem in Iran. According to UN sources, about 4 million people in Iran (likely both Iranians and Afghans) have a serious addiction to drugs. A 2020 study of a cross-section of 36,000 people across Iran published by the Iranian Journal of Public Health found that 4.6 per cent of participants tested positive for opiates, 6.1 per cent used 'sedatives' (described as 'Diazepam, Lorazepam etc'), 1.9 per cent used alcohol (illegal in Iran) and under 1 per cent used cannabis or stimulants. Sources report methamphetamine is easily obtained.

2.25 Countering narcotic use and trafficking is a government priority. The country shares a border with Afghanistan, the world's leading producer of opium poppies, and Iran is a major transit route for heroin. According to UN sources, Afghanistan is now also a major producer of methamphetamine which is the source of Iran's supplies. Drug trafficking carries the death penalty (see [Death Penalty](#)).

2.26 Drug addiction may be treated as a medical rather than criminal problem. Treatment or harm reduction services (needle exchange and opioid substitution therapy) and residential addiction treatment facilities are available free of charge in all provinces and most large cities for both men and women. There are reports that authorities have pressured several harm reduction centres to close, in the belief that they inadvertently drive further drug abuse. Drug use is heavily stigmatised and people may feel ashamed of their drug use and not receive treatment as a result. Women may experience more stigma than men and have access to far fewer support services.

2.27 Alcohol is illegal in Iran. Exceptions exist for religious minorities, who may use alcohol sacramentally. Alcohol is available on the black market but may be manufactured by bootleggers and may be dangerous; DFAT is aware of reports of alcohol and methanol poisoning related to black market alcohol. Police may make enquiries of those taken to hospital with alcohol-related illnesses. Alcohol use can be punished by 80 lashes and, upon multiple convictions, death. Amnesty International reported that a man from Mashhad was executed for repeated alcohol convictions in July 2020. DFAT understands that prosecutions for alcohol consumption are not common and are often resolved with the payment of a fine (or a bribe).

## Education

2.28 Most Iranians have access to education, although schools and facilities may be of substandard quality in poor rural areas. The literacy rate is above 85 per cent and both boys and girls receive a mean 10 years of schooling, according to UNDP data. According to the same UNDP source, only 36 per cent of high schools have access to the internet. Bertelsmann Stiftung, in its BTI 2022 Country Report on Iran, notes bureaucratic challenges and 'religious dogma over rational decision-making' in education. However, overall DFAT assesses that adequate education is available for free. In 2015, the Supreme Leader issued a directive that Afghan children living in Iran should receive free education, although in practice this depends on the availability and capacity of schools.

## POLITICAL SYSTEM

2.29 Iran is a theocratic republic, established under the principle of *Velayat-e faqih* ('guardianship of the jurist'). Under this principle, an Islamic jurist (the Supreme Leader) makes final policy decisions. While the President is technically the head of state, the Supreme Leader is the highest power in the land, and the commander of its armed forces. The Supreme Leader is responsible for setting overall state policy and has significant influence over foreign policy and national security. The Supreme Leader appoints the head of the judiciary, half the members of the Guardian Council and all members of the Expediency Council (see below). The Supreme Leader can annul any bill passed by parliament and must approve any constitutional changes. The current Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, assumed the role in 1989, following the death of the Islamic Republic's founder, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

2.30 Iran's political system is a combination of elected and unelected institutions. Elections are held regularly for president, parliament, local councils and the Assembly of Experts. The Supreme Leader and members of the Guardian Council and the Expediency Council, where most power is concentrated, are not popularly elected.

2.31 The Assembly of Experts, comprising 88 clerics, is elected for eight-year terms by popular vote. It selects the Supreme Leader and has the constitutional power to remove them from office should they be unable to perform their duties. In practice, the Assembly of Experts has never challenged the Supreme Leader's authority.



2.32 The Council of Guardians of the Constitution ('Guardian Council') reviews all bills passed by parliament to determine whether they comply with *sharia* (Islamic law) and the constitution. It vets all candidates for election to the presidency, parliament and Assembly of Experts, including on the basis of a candidate's allegiance to Shi'a Islam and to the Islamic Republic. Disqualification of reform-minded candidates, or candidates considered insufficiently loyal to the clerical establishment, is common. The Guardian Council comprises 12 clerics, half of whom are appointed directly by the Supreme Leader for phased six-year terms. The head of the judiciary (appointed by the Supreme Leader) nominates the other six, who are then approved by parliament.

2.33 The Council for the Discernment of Expediency ('Expediency Council') resolves impasses between parliament and the Guardian Council. It also acts as an advisory body for the Supreme Leader. The Expediency Council comprises the president, the speaker of parliament, the chief of the Supreme Court, the chief-of-staff of the armed forces, the secretary of the Supreme National Security Council (the body responsible for directing national security policy), four Guardian Council jurisprudents and 38 members appointed to five-year terms by the Supreme Leader.

2.34 The Islamic Consultative Assembly (commonly referred to as the *Majlis*) is Iran's unicameral parliament. It comprises 290 members elected for four-year terms by popular vote (the most recent parliamentary election took place in February 2020). Deputies represent 208 constituencies. Constituencies with large populations have multiple seats (for example, Tehran, the largest constituency, has 30 seats). Five seats are reserved for deputies from recognised religious minorities, and women serve in the parliament (though in small numbers, currently there are 16 women compared to 268 men). Parliament has the power to initiate bills, but they must be approved by the Guardian Council to become law. Overall, the parliament is not as powerful as unelected committees such as the Guardian Council or the Expediency Council, however plays an important role as an outlet for public debate and challenges to political power. While all members are vetted, reformist and moderate members do sit in the Parliament but currently comprise less than seven per cent of all members.

2.35 The most recent Presidential election in June 2021 was won by conservative cleric Ebrahim Raisi. The election was characterised by poor voter turnout amid allegations of rigging – many potential rivals were disqualified by the Guardian Council. Raisi, a former judicial head, is subject to US sanctions for human rights abuses including judicial execution of children, his role in crackdowns on protests, and in a commission that ordered thousands of executions of political opponents in 1988.

## HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK

2.36 The constitution provides for freedom of expression, association, opinion, assembly and religion, if those rights do not violate certain principles, including Islam. In practice, these rights are not typically upheld by authorities. See [Religion](#), [Political Opinion \(Actual or Imputed\)](#) and [Groups of Interest](#).

2.37 Iran does not have a single national human rights institution. A number of official bodies are tasked with promoting human rights. The High Council for Human Rights is the peak body and a commission set up under article 90 of the constitution (the Article 90 Commission) legally empowered to investigate and report on complaints received by the public on any branch of government. In practice, it would be unusual for complaints made to these bodies to lead to a prosecution.

2.38 Of the core international human rights instruments, Iran is not a party to: the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; Optional Protocol of the Convention against Torture; Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights aiming to the abolition of the death penalty; Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance; Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; International Convention on the

Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families; or the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

## SECURITY SITUATION

2.39 Security forces exert tight and effective control over most of Iran's territory, except for some border areas (see [State Protection](#)). A large and conspicuous official security presence in most parts of the country means large-scale security-related incidents are rare, and Iran is peaceful and safe by regional standards.

2.40 Iran's border area with Afghanistan is unstable and the relationship between the two states can be tense. The border is porous, mostly mountainous and is a major drug and other contraband smuggling route, attracting organised crime. Since the Taliban assumed control in August 2021, Iranian and Taliban soldiers have engaged in armed fighting along their shared border. Iranian news agencies with links to the government claimed that the fighting was either with the Taliban or with drug smugglers.

2.41 The Iranian-Pakistan border area is unsafe. **Baluchi** people live on both sides of the border and cross-border families exist. A long-running Baluchi separatist insurgency is present on both sides of the border. The area is known for cross-border oil smuggling, in contravention of international sanctions. While the area is patrolled, DFAT understands border guards on both sides regularly receive bribes to facilitate trade. The city of Zahedan in Sistan and Baluchestan Province has been central to ongoing protests since the death of Mahsa Amini. Security forces used extreme force in trying to bring the situation under control. The death toll is unclear, but Amnesty International suggest around 100 people were killed in a single day.

2.42 Terrorism is a threat in Iran. Sunni Islamist groups have successfully carried out mass casualty attacks on public events and places. In October 2022, a terrorist attack at a shrine in Shiraz left 15 dead and 19 wounded. A knife-wielding terrorist attacked worshippers at a shrine in Mashhad in April 2022 with one reported death and two seriously injured. At least 27 people were killed in a suicide bombing attack on a bus carrying security forces in February 2019.

2.43 Official statistics on crime are not readily available. Local sources report Iran's economic difficulties, including following the reimposition of US sanctions from August 2018 onwards, led to a rise in petty crime in Tehran. Local sources also report Iran has a relatively low rate of violent crime. Much of the violent crime that does occur is drug-related and is subject to severe punishment, including in some instances, the death penalty. Nearly half of all executions in 2022 were for drug offences.

# REFUGEE CONVENTION CLAIMS

## RACE/NATIONALITY

2.44 Iran is majority Persian and the official, dominant language is Farsi. Exact ethnic demography statistics are unavailable. Minority Rights Group International estimates approximately: 61 per cent of Iranians are Persian, 16 per cent are Azeris, 10 per cent are Kurds, 6 per cent are Lur, 2 per cent Baluch, 2 per cent Arab and 2 per cent Turkic.

2.45 The law generally does not curtail ethnic identity. The constitution guarantees equal rights regardless of race or language. Article 19 of the constitution bans ethnic discrimination between Iranians. Article 15 stipulates that while Farsi is the official language that must be used in official documents and signage, regional and tribal languages may also be used in the press or in education, alongside Farsi. In practice, education is only in Farsi.

2.46 Ethnic minorities (Arab, Azeri, Baluch, Bakhtiari, Lar, and Kurdish) tend to be located in regions close to Iran's borders and share cross-border fraternal ties. According to Bertelsmann Stiftung's BTI 2022 Country Report on Iran, most Iranians have a 'strong sense of nationality' and consider themselves as Iranian, regardless of ethnicity, with the exception of Kurds, who consider themselves as Kurdish first. The report also states there is sensitivity in relation to ethnic groups, a prevailing government narrative that sees those who do not share that view as secessionist, and that most Iranians are in favour of the territorial integrity of their country.

2.47 Ethnic minorities report political and socioeconomic discrimination, particularly in relation to their ability to access economic aid, business licences, university admissions, job opportunities, permission to publish books in their languages, and housing and land rights. In-country sources report the Government suppresses minorities by permitting only Farsi and Shi'a Islam within their communities. DFAT is aware of reports that several minority groups have had the traditional names of their villages changed, land requisitioned, and community members forced to relocate. Ethnic minorities are rarely awarded senior government or military positions. DFAT assesses that members of ethnic minority groups face a moderate risk of official and societal discrimination, particularly where they are in the minority in the geographic area in which they reside. Discrimination may take the form of denial of access to employment and housing, however, is unlikely to include violence on the grounds of ethnicity alone.

### Arabs

2.48 According to Minority Rights Group International, there are around two million Arabs living in Iran, although estimates vary. Most ethnic Arabs live along the west of the Persian Gulf coast in Khuzestan province, bordering Iraq. The capital of Khuzestan province is Ahvaz and Arab Iranians may be referred to as 'Ahvazis'. In-country sources told DFAT Arab cultural activities, clothing styles and language are tolerated by authorities across Iran. Although most Arabs are Shi'a, some are Sunni, or have converted to Sunni Islam, however DFAT understands such conversions are not widespread.

2.49 Khuzestan is oil-rich; however the region is underdeveloped, which is a source of tension between Arabs and the Iranian Government occasionally leading to protests. Protests in 2021 led to mass arrests and at least nine deaths of what Human Rights Watch alleges were peaceful protesters who demanded greater access to water in the midst of an historic drought. (See [Protests](#))

2.50 In October 2018, the authorities launched a major security sweep in Khuzestan Province following a deadly terrorist attack on a military parade in Ahwaz which killed 29 people. Freedom House claims up to 800 people were arrested in relation to the attack, some of whom were reportedly executed. DFAT is unable to verify these claims. DFAT understands some of those arrested were subsequently released.

2.51 DFAT understands most Iranian Arabs do not harbour strong separatist tendencies. For example, the 2021 protests in the region involved other ethnic groups in Khuzestan. Nonetheless, some separatist groups do exist, and such groups were blamed for the 2018 terrorist attack. The government maintains a strong security presence to oppose separatism. Arabs who hold separatist tendencies would face a high risk of arrest and imprisonment.

2.52 DFAT assesses that Arabs are not specifically targeted for official discrimination based on their ethnicity, including access to government services, and are afforded the same state protections as other ethnic minorities. However, since the September 2018 terrorist attack, closer scrutiny has been applied to Arabs and Arabs who are politically engaged are likely to be watched closely (see Political Opinion (Actual or Imputed)). Furthermore, Arabs were among Iran's ethnic minorities who joined protests following the death of Mahsa Jina Amini. DFAT assesses that those who advocate for greater rights and autonomy, or self-determination face a high risk of official harassment, monitoring, imprisonment and mistreatment.

## Kurds

2.53 Ethnic Kurds are predominantly Sunni Muslim and most Iranians are Shi'a Muslim. Some linguistic and cultural diversity exists between different Kurdish groups. Kurds mostly live in the north-western provinces of Kurdistan, Kermanshah, Ilam and West Azerbaijan, including in areas that border Kurdish areas of Iraq and Turkey. Kurdish separatist groups have demanded a separate Kurdish state for some decades. Kurdish-majority areas tend to be relatively underdeveloped. High levels of unemployment have forced many Kurds to undertake smuggling work between Iran and Iraq. The work is dangerous, the terrain is mountainous, smugglers are subject to arrest, and the area is mined.

2.54 Various groups are involved in armed separatist insurgency. Groups including the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan, Kurdistan Free Life Party (KFLP), Komala and Kurdistan Freedom Party. Although all groups fight for a separate Kurdistan, their activities can be diverse. For example, some fight in Iraq or were involved in the fight against Islamic State. Other groups have no such affiliation but may be separately recognised as terrorist groups, including the KFLP which is designated by the United States (but not by Australia) as a terrorist group. Some groups that advocate for Kurdish separatism are non-violent. In-country sources told DFAT most Kurds accept that a separate Kurdish state within Iran is not a realistic goal and that most Kurds are not involved in armed separatism.

2.55 Some Kurdish groups complain they are unable to express their ethnic identity. This includes an inability to use the Kurdish language in schools, inability (or unwillingness) of officials to register births officially and restrictions on Kurdish language media. Arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance and unfair trials, including those that have resulted in the death penalty, have also been alleged. According to the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Iran, Javaid Rehman's January 2022 report, close to 500 Kurds, including teachers, border couriers, artists, and human rights and environmental activists were arrested and detained between January and October 2021. At least 140 were charged with national security-related crimes. Over 50 Kurds were executed, and 11 died in unclear circumstances in prison in 2021, according to the same report.



2.56 The death of [Mahsa Amini](#), a 22-year old from Kurdistan Province, sparked nation-wide protests in September 2022. The protests in Kurdistan were the most intense and raised issues of Kurdish nationalism and the government's treatment of minorities. (See [Protests](#)).

2.57 While DFAT assesses there is enough evidence to conclude a pattern of arbitrary arrest, detention and/or killing of Kurds, many Kurdish fighters are involved in an armed insurgency and terrorism and thus individual circumstances of each case can be difficult to assess. DFAT assesses that Kurds face a high risk of official discrimination and violence, however that may also be because they are perpetrators of violence. Those not involved in insurgent activity are far less likely to come to the attention of authorities, however the arrest and detention of innocent people is a low risk. Because Kurds tend to live in Kurdish areas, DFAT assesses the risk of societal discrimination is low.

## Faili Kurds

2.58 The Faili (also spelled Feyli, and commonly known as 'Iraqi') Kurds are a sub-group of the larger Kurdish population. Most, but not all, Faili Kurds originate from the Zagros mountain range that straddles the Iran-Iraq border. Some have lived in modern-day Iran for centuries and are citizens, and some have family on both sides of the border. Many had land and documents seized in the 1960s by the then-Ba'athist government in Iraq, which considered the Faili Kurds Iranian, and refugees from that time still live in Iran.

2.59 Faili Kurds are distinguishable from other Iranian Kurds by their religion (most Faili Kurds are Shi'a and most other Kurds are Sunni), their location and their distinctive dialect. Some are Iranian citizens, however others are registered or unregistered refugees from Iraq. Accurate population estimates for citizens and refugees are not available, however DFAT understands they are not a significant proportion of the population. Those who are registered as refugees may be able to access some services (health, education, legal services) either through the Iranian government or services provided by the UNHCR, however this should not be assumed, and individual circumstances may vary greatly. Those Faili Kurds registered as refugees, like all other registered refugees, are entitled to government services and other rights under the *Amayesh* system. In contrast, undocumented Faili Kurds are not legally entitled to work, access government services or obtain birth, death and marriage certificates. Some Faili Kurd refugees returned to Iraq following the fall of Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist government, although many remain in camps in Iran. According to a June 2021 article by Aljazeera, refugees who make it to the Kurdish Autonomous Region in Iraq face harsh conditions, including a lack of suitable accommodation, joblessness and threats of deportation back to Iran.

2.60 Access to Iranian citizenship, even for those with Iranian ancestry, should not be assumed. In-country sources told DFAT in 2019 that Faili Kurd refugees with paternal Iranian ancestry are eligible for Iranian citizenship. Reports suggest that, while many Faili Kurd refugees have applied, only a small number have succeeded in obtaining Iranian citizenship, due to the lengthy and complicated process and the high costs involved (this is also true for applications for Iranian citizenship from other groups, including those who have married Iranians or resided in-country for generations). Other Faili Kurds have not applied for naturalisation because they do not have the required family members in Iran to prove their Iranian ancestry. Faili Kurds who are citizens of Iran enjoy the same rights as other Iranians.

2.61 DFAT assesses that Faili Kurds in Iran may experience a high level of official discrimination in the form of statelessness and may live in poor conditions in Iran. DFAT cannot confirm societal discrimination or violence against Faili Kurds.

## RELIGION

2.62 The CIA World Factbook estimates that 99.6 per cent of Iranians are Muslim, of whom 90 to 95 per cent are Shi'a and 5 to 10 per cent are Sunni. Small religious minority communities including Christian, Zoroastrian, Jewish, Baha'i and Sabeen-Mandaeen communities make up the remainder.

2.63 Iran is a theocracy with little tolerance for non-Shi'a Islamic confessions. The extent of religious faith and secularism and other matters of religious demography are disputed – see [Atheists and Secular or Non-Practising Muslims](#). Attempts by non-Muslims to convert others attract the death penalty and apostasy is illegal. Christians, Zoroastrians and Jews may practise their faith, unless they are converts from Islam.

2.64 Iran's constitution recognises Christians, Zoroastrians and Jews as religious minorities (and no other groups); however, such recognition does not necessarily equate to tolerance. Most members of religious minorities are indistinguishable by appearance alone. For example, in accordance with Iranian law, Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian women must also wear headscarves in public. It may be possible to distinguish some religious minority adherents from their surnames.

2.65 Apostasy is not specifically codified as a crime in Iran, however, is nonetheless a crime under Sharia law, which is enforceable under the constitution. Both *moharebeh* or 'enmity against God' and *fisad fil-arz* (corruption on earth) are codified in law and can include apostasy, according to the 2021 US Department of State Human Rights Report. According to the Iran Human Rights Documentation Centre, person can be found guilty of the crime of apostasy based on the testimony of two male witnesses, the knowledge of a judge or a confession. The death penalty is a potential punishment but very rare in practice.

2.66 Blasphemy or 'swearing at the Prophet' is similarly an offence that attracts the death penalty. Blasphemy can be against the Prophet Mohammad, Islam's founding prophet, or his successors or daughter, Fatima. The death penalty is a potential outcome, although can be reduced to whipping if the defendant admits the blasphemy and says that it was a result of drunkenness, anger or quoting someone else.

## Sunni Muslims

2.67 Five to 10 per cent of Iranians are Sunni Muslim. Most Sunnis come from ethnic minority groups such as Turkmen, [Arab](#), [Baluch](#) or [Kurdish](#). Article 12 of the Constitution accords full respect to other schools of thought within Islam and affords adherents freedom to practise religious rites and follow their own jurisprudence in matters of religious education and personal affairs, such as marriage, divorce, inheritance and wills. Article 12 also stipulates that, in regions where non-Shi'a Muslims comprise most of the population, local regulations are to conform to the relevant school of Islam, without infringing upon the rights of other schools. Sunnis can serve as judges in the general courts (but not in the Revolutionary Courts) and, as Muslims, can contest parliamentary elections (there were 21 Sunni members (of 290) in the parliament as at February 2021). According to the Iranian Government, there are more than 10,000 Sunni mosques and more than 3,000 Sunni religious schools in the country.

2.68 Some Sunni groups have constitutional recognition. The Iranian Constitution recognises the Hanafi, Shafi, Maliki and Hanbali schools of jurisprudence as 'deserving of total respect'. This in theory allows them to practise their religion in accordance with their own jurisprudence for marriage, divorce, inheritance, and education. However, the Sunni religious leadership, including the Imam, is chosen by the government.

2.69 Some Sunnis accuse authorities of suppressing their religious rights. This includes limitations in performing Friday prayers and religious celebrations in Tehran and other major cities, detention and harassment of clerics, and bans on Sunni teachings in public schools. Sunnis claim they are denied permission to build mosques in major cities, including Tehran. Those who protest in favour of their religious rights face

arrest – for example the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation for human rights in Iran, Javaid Rehman, reported in January 2022 of 10 Baluchi Sunni Muslims being arrested for participating in a rally to prevent the destruction of an area reserved for Sunni prayer. A 2019 report by Rehman found that, in the two years preceding his report, more than 53 Sunnis, including clerics, had reportedly been arrested and charged with national-security related charges including ‘propaganda against the state’ and ‘membership in Salafist groups’ (see also [Race/Nationality](#) and [Security Situation](#)).

2.70 Sunni Muslims tend to be economically and socially disadvantaged, often with bleak job prospects, however the cause of this disadvantage is not always easily distinguished. Most Sunnis live in areas which have less access to government services and infrastructure. Most Sunnis are members of ethnic minorities and religious and ethnic discrimination could overlap.

2.71 DFAT assesses that Sunnis face a moderate risk of official discrimination in that the structure of the Islamic Republic favours the Shi’a Muslim majority to the exclusion of others. Most Sunni Muslims live in Sunni Muslim communities and ethnic areas, limiting their exposure to societal discrimination and violence. Those living in Tehran and other non-Sunni areas may experience discrimination, but DFAT is not aware of a clear pattern of incidents.

## Sufis (Dervishes)

2.72 Sufis, known in Iran as Dervishes, practise a mystical form of Islam that emphasises peace, tolerance and introspection and uses asceticism as well as ritual music, art and dance as part of their beliefs. Because Sufism is not recognised by the government there are not any official statistics of their numbers, however the US Department of State estimates there may be up to several million Sufis.

2.73 Sufi websites are censored by the government and Sufi practice (such as gatherings) is not generally tolerated in public. The government and some Shi’a publicly disparage Sufism in worship services and in government propaganda.

2.74 The largest Sufi order is the Gonabadi Dervishes. According to UN Special Rapporteur Rehman’s 2019 report, their places of worship have been demolished and adherents have been detained and arrested, including after protesting the arrest of their fellow-religionists. Over 300 Gonabadi Dervishes were arrested in 2018 after a protest against the detention of a Sufi leader. Police claimed that five officers died but protesters claim that they were brutalised by police.

2.75 DFAT assesses that Sufis face a moderate risk of official and societal discrimination as they cannot worship freely and must misrepresent themselves on official documents, including to access education and employment. There is a moderate risk of societal discrimination that may be borne out of anti-Sufi propaganda by the state.

## Yarsanis

2.76 Yarsanis (or the ‘Yarsan community’) consider themselves to be a distinct faith but are sometimes considered to be a Sufi order, including by the Iranian Government. They are predominantly a Kurdish sect and mostly live in Kurdish areas. There are no statistics available, however a BBC article published in November 2019 estimated 3 million followers, with another 120,000 to 150,000 followers over the border in Iraq. Many Yarsani men are easily distinguished by their large moustaches.

2.77 As with the Sufis, Yarsanis claim they are excluded by government policy from civil service jobs and higher education. Some Yarsani men claim they have been forced to shave off their moustaches, which they

consider an important part of their religious and cultural identity. Yarsanis generally avoid public displays of faith or proselytisation for fear of arrest.

2.78 DFAT assesses that Yarsanis face a moderate risk of official discrimination, including a lack of legal recognition. Societal discrimination is possible, particularly for men who are visibly distinguishable by their facial hair. DFAT is not aware of a strong pattern of incidents but assesses such discrimination is possible.

## Christians

2.79 There are a small number of recognised Christians in Iran: 117,700 according to government figures quoted in the US Department of State's 2021 Religious Freedom Report, and up to a million according to Christian groups. The majority of Christians are ethnic Armenian and Assyrian. Chaldean and Roman Catholic communities also exist in small numbers.

2.80 Protestant (including Evangelical) and Pentecostal churches, which some asylum seekers join while they are in Western countries like Australia, are not legal. Conversions that took place after 1979 or conversions that take place outside Iran are not recognised by the government. A person who claims to be Christian, however cannot prove that their family was Christian before 1979, would be considered Muslim by the government and thus subject to apostasy laws.

2.81 The activities of recognised Christian communities are closely regulated, to guard against proselytisation. Recognised Christian groups refuse to proselytise as a result, and in-country sources told DFAT this resolve is tested regularly by authorities. All Christians and Christian churches must be registered with the authorities, and only recognised Christians can attend church. Security officials closely monitor registered churches to verify that services are not conducted in Farsi (they must be performed in the traditional language of the Church and not the vernacular) and perform regular identity checks on worshippers to confirm that non-Christians or converts do not participate in services. Churches that do not comply face closure.

2.82 Community leaders associated with registered churches report authorities respect their religious rights, and their communities can act freely in their own spaces without government interference (including holding mixed-gender gatherings, using alcohol for ceremonial purposes and allowing women to uncover their heads). However, in-country sources report that the government restricts their community members from senior management roles in public and private organisations due to an Iranian law that prohibits non-Muslims from holding positions of authority over Muslims. This means that the heads of Christian schools Shi'a Muslims appointed by the government.

2.83 Iranian Christians who are not members of recognised churches generally practise in underground 'house churches'. House churches are usually Evangelical Protestant and are found throughout the country, but especially in more affluent and cosmopolitan areas. Numbers of house church adherents are not known because these churches are secret and illegal. The Joshua Project, an Evangelical ministry from the United States that publishes information for missionaries, estimates 0.52 per cent of the population is Evangelical Christian. In 2019, UN Special Rapporteur Rehman estimated that there were between 300,000 and 350,000 Muslim converts to Christianity. In-country sources told DFAT in 2019 that the number of underground Christians was growing, and Christians may travel to Turkey (with which Iran has visa-free arrangements) to be baptised then continue to practise their religion in secret. Reasons for conversion vary, but local sources told DFAT that it may be an earnest desire to explore their own spirituality, or it may be a subtle form of protest against the government. DFAT has been unable to source more recent figures on Christian conversions.

2.84 House churches vary in size, style and structure. Most are small and informal, and consist of close family and friends gathering on a regular or semi-regular basis to pray, worship, read the Bible and/or watch Farsi Christian television programs broadcast via satellite or discs smuggled from abroad. Foreign Christian



missionaries, to which asylum seekers may have links, may participate in Iranian Christianity through house 'internet pastors' who preach and conduct services remotely via the internet. Local Christian leaders and adherents may be foreign trained while overseas.

2.85 Authorities interpret the growth in house churches as a threat to national security and periodically carry out raids against them. Congregants regularly change houses to avoid detection. Raids focus particularly on house churches that actively proselytise or seek out new members. Sources told DFAT authorities do not actively look for house churches. Rather, raids – where they occur – are usually the result of tip-offs by Muslim neighbours. Other sources say the government sends people posing as converts to infiltrate house churches.

2.86 Prison or the death penalty are possible outcomes for Christians meeting in house churches, both leaders and everyday adherents. DFAT understands that while not a common punishment, prison or the death penalty for apostasy is possible. Years or even decades-long prison sentences are also possible. Changes were made to the Islamic Penal Code in February 2021 that mean that those guilty of 'deviant psychological manipulation' or 'propaganda contrary to Islam' could be found to be members of a 'sect', which can lead to imprisonment, fines, flogging or the death penalty. According to international or media reports, three Christians in the city of Karaj, near Tehran, were sentenced to total of nine years in prison under the new offences in August 2021.

2.87 In-country sources told DFAT that returnees who have not had a profile previously (for example through political activism in country) are unlikely to come to attention of authorities if they keep a low profile, and that this is not affected by social media posts about their conversion that they may have made while they were in a Western country like Australia.

2.88 DFAT assesses that Muslim converts to Christianity risk arrest and detention if their conversion is revealed. Christians found to be proselytising face a high risk of arrest, prosecution and imprisonment. DFAT assesses Christian converts face a high risk of societal discrimination in the event their conversion becomes widely known, particularly if they are from more religiously-minded Muslim family backgrounds. This may involve ostracism from one's family and discrimination in employment. DFAT further assesses that, while their congregations are monitored and they are subject to restrictions, Christians from recognised churches are permitted to practise their faith. DFAT assesses that, except for their exclusion from senior government, military, intelligence and judicial positions, recognised Christians who do not engage in proselytisation activities face a low risk of official discrimination. DFAT assesses that those who convert while outside of Iran and who intend to continue to practise their Christian religion would face a high level of official discrimination and could be subject to the death penalty.

## Zoroastrians

2.89 Zoroastrianism is an ancient faith founded in then-Persia in the 6th century BCE or possibly earlier. It has perhaps 25,000 followers in Iran, but estimates vary. The vast majority of Zoroastrians left the country after significant maltreatment as part of the 1979 revolution. Those who remain live in the provinces of Kerman, Yazd, and East Azerbaijan, and the cities of Shiraz and Tehran. The religion was founded by its prophet, Zoroaster (or Zarathustra) and includes belief in one god, known as Ahura Mazda. Zoroastrians pray several times a day, worship in temples known as Agiary or Atashgah (Fire Temples, which contain 'sacred fires' that are used ritually and are never extinguished) and their holy book is known as the Avesta. Zoroastrians do not generally proselytise. This may be due to fear of legal repercussions for this illegal act and due to conservative attitudes about outsiders and conversion.

2.90 Like other constitutionally recognised religious minorities, Zoroastrians face official discrimination on the basis that Iran's laws and regulations are based on Shi'a Islam, and Zoroastrians are disqualified from senior

government, military, intelligence and judicial positions. DFAT assesses that Zoroastrians, so long as they do not seek to convert others, can practise their faith and face a low risk of discrimination on religious grounds.

## Baha'is

2.91 There are approximately 300,000 Baha'is in Iran. The Baha'i faith grew out of the Babi faith founded in 1844 in Shiraz, one of Iran's largest cities. Baha'i beliefs originated in the Twelver Shi'a Islamic faith (the majority faith in Iran) who believe in the forthcoming return of the 12th imam (the 12th successor to the Prophet Mohammad). The new religion spread rapidly and was immediately controversial with its founder, sometimes known as the 'Bab', executed in 1850.

2.92 The Baha'i faith is illegal in Iran and its adherents are considered infidels. The government actively seeks out Baha'is including through activities such as coordinated raids. There are hundreds of Baha'is imprisoned for practising their faith. Baha'i schools are illegal. Charges laid against them are vague, however might include 'gathering and colluding in order to disrupt the security of the country' or 'propaganda against the state'. Three Baha'i community leaders were arrested and charged with national security offences in the first half of 2023. Baha'i land may be seized based on being 'illegitimate'. Baha'is are not entitled to government employment (the government is the largest employer by far in Iran) or social security. Employers may refuse to hire Baha'is and universities refuse to admit them for study (which may be as a result of either government pressure or societal discrimination, or both).

2.93 DFAT assesses that Baha'is face a high risk of official and societal discrimination based on their non-recognised status, the hostile rhetoric used against them in official statements and the limits imposed on their employment, education and family law status. Baha'is who are open about their faith and who advocate for the community's rights face a particularly high risk of arrest and imprisonment.

## Jews

2.94 Iran is home to one of the world's oldest Jewish communities dating back to the sixth century BCE. In more recent times, Iranian Jews played an important role in economic, social, and cultural life under the Pahlavi dynasty in the 20th century. Following the ensuing upheaval of the revolution in 1979, most of Iran's 80,000 Jews left and today the country currently hosts about 20,000 Jews, according to one in-country estimate although only around 9,000 feel comfortable identifying themselves as such in government surveys. Iran's Jewish population is generally free to practise their faith and are entitled to one representative in parliament. Jews can maintain youth organisations, kosher facilities and four Jewish schools. However, in-country sources told DFAT the Jewish community could only bury their deceased in a designated area several hours outside of the city.

2.95 Jews are in theory free to travel in and out of the country, however the government places restrictions on Jews attempting to emigrate, including restrictions on selling their property and belongings, and transferring money out of the country. Travel to Israel is illegal for all Iranians but this is particularly difficult for Iranian Jews. It is also illegal to discuss Israel or talk to Israelis.

2.96 Jews are prohibited from serving in the security services or the judiciary or from obtaining senior managerial positions in both public and private institutions. Jewish businesses struggle to win public contracts and tenders with any regime affiliated entity. This makes doing business difficult given the number of state-owned enterprises in Iran. In-country sources report discrimination against Jews occurring in Iranian courts, most frequently in disputes involving property and large financial transactions. Iranian Jews are paid minimal, if any, compensation for the appropriation of their property by the regime. For example, one Jewish

community member was reportedly only offered one-hundredth of the value of his property after the government appropriated it to commence construction work.

2.97 Antisemitism and incitement against Jews in Iran remain a serious issue. Intolerance against Jews is displayed by the Iranian Government which regularly invokes antisemitic tropes, engages in Holocaust denial, and seeks to delegitimise the State of Israel. Ayatollah Khamenei has previously tweeted that the Holocaust is an uncertainty and Zionism is plague ‘for the world’ and ‘especially for the world of Islam’. School textbooks in Iran teach hateful messages about Jewish people, frame Zionist Jews as enemies of Islam, and claim Israel is an illegitimate entity which should be destroyed. The distribution of non-religious Hebrew texts is limited by the Iranian Government, making the language difficult to teach for Iran’s Jewish community. Treatment of Jews in Iran is closely tied to the broader Israel-Iran relationship; the community faces heightened scrutiny during periods of increased tension between Israel and Iran.

2.98 DFAT assesses that while Jews enjoy the limited freedoms that are afforded to other constitutionally recognised minorities (including Christians and Zoroastrians), they also face similar official discrimination as these groups. DFAT assesses the Iranian government makes it difficult for Jews to leave Iran. Treatment of Jews is worsened by the Iranian Government’s hostile anti-Israel stance and its continued propagation of antisemitic rhetoric.

## Atheists and Secular or Non-Practising Muslims

2.99 In-country sources told DFAT many younger and wealthier Iranians, particularly in the major cities, are secular; a majority of the population does not attend mosque. Alcohol consumption is common among the youth. Official sources told DFAT that, despite government laws, religion was a private matter —beyond the expectation that people do not eat in public during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan or hold parties during the mourning months of Muharram and Safar - how one wished to observe Islam was an individual choice and was not a matter for the state. DFAT understands many Iranians do not observe Ramadan strictly, including by eating, drinking liquids and smoking at home. Most restaurants are closed during the day in Ramadan, although many (especially in Tehran) reportedly serve food discreetly. Those caught eating in public during Ramadan run the risk of arrest and prosecution.

2.100 A 2020 study from Utrecht and Tilburg Universities found that atheism was quite common; about 20 per cent of people do not believe in God. The study itself points to Iranians being uncomfortable speaking about religion; discussions about it are not tolerated in Iranian society. Figures about the number of atheists in Iran are, therefore, difficult to verify.

2.101 Those who publicly renounce Islam face apostasy charges (see [Atheists](#)). According to local sources, atheists are discreet about their non-belief beyond their close family and friends. Unless they widely publicise their non-belief, atheists are unlikely to come to the attention of the authorities. Atheists from conservative families might face familial pressure and potential ostracism if their atheism were revealed, however would generally not be subjected to physical harm. Sources told DFAT that atheists from more liberal families and parts of the country, like north Tehran, would face no such pressure.

2.102 DFAT assesses that non-practising Iranian Muslims face a low risk of official and societal discrimination, particularly in the major cities. DFAT assesses that atheists who are open about their non-belief face a moderate level of official and societal discrimination.

## POLITICAL OPINION (ACTUAL OR IMPUTED)

2.103 The constitution protects freedom of belief for all Iranians at article 23, freedom for the media at article 24, freedom of association at Article 26 and freedom of assembly at Article 27. These freedoms are conditioned by the requirement that they are not 'detrimental to the principles of Islam'. Topics deemed sensitive by the government include women's rights, LGBTI rights, criticism of the regime, relations with the United States and Israel.

2.104 Opposition political parties can exist in theory. In practice, they must be licenced and only parties which hold views consistent with the government's theocratic ideology will be granted a licence. The 2020 legislative election and the 2021 Presidential elections both saw mass disqualification of opposition candidates by the Guardian Council. According to the US Department of State's 2021 Human Rights Report on Iran, opposition political parties do exist, however tend not to have wide reach and may be centred around an individual. Political parties which comply with the system and do not offend the government's ideology generally operate without interference. However, members of political groups whose ideology opposes the state can be subject to arrest, intimidation and bureaucratic harassment.

## Protests

2.105 Protests are relatively common in Iran and can be violent. Up until September 2022, protests were largely driven by economic issues (see [Economic Overview](#)) – low-income earners and working-class people demonstrating against cost-of-living pressures. Most protest action in recent years, including those driven by economic factors, has had an anti-government and anti-regime theme. Sources suggested environmental protests, including protests over water supply issues, also provoke a strong reaction from the regime. Protests can be met with lethal force.

### Mahsa Amini Protests

2.106 On 16 September 2022, a significant protest movement began following the death of 22-year-old Kurdish-Iranian woman, Mahsa Amini, while in the custody of Iran's morality police. Amini was arrested in Tehran for breaching the strict Islamic dress code by allegedly not wearing the hijab appropriately. The protests, initially led by women and girls, took place across the country. Over the succeeding weeks, the protests garnered broad support, particularly among young people and students, and a range of celebrities and public figures. They have evolved into broader protests against the regime.

2.107 The government response to protest action has been harsh. Iran Human Rights Group estimated that, as at 3 April 2023, at least 537 people including 68 children and 48 women, died during the protests. While the death toll and the causes of death cannot be verified, reports indicate that the vast majority of deaths have been at the hands of security forces either by firearms or beatings. The government has imposed severe sentences on those arrested, including significant jail time, and in some instances, the death penalty. The response by security forces has been particularly harsh in majority Kurdish and Baluch regions.

2.108 While the exact number of death sentences imposed on protesters is difficult to determine, as at 13 January 2023, Iran Human Rights Group estimated at least 109 protesters were at risk of execution. DFAT understands at least 15 death sentences have been confirmed – two of which were carried out in early December 2022, with a further two in early January 2023 and three in May 2023.

2.109 While there are no official figures, as at 10 January 2023, reliable sources indicated around 20,000 people had been arrested since the protests began. Many have been released either without charge, or pending court hearings. DFAT is aware of harsh sentences being handed to many protesters, including long jail sentences. As at 19 December 2022, DFAT understood 400 protesters had been sentenced to jail, 160 of whom



were sentenced to between five and 10 years in prison, 80 sentenced to two to five years, and 160 people to up to two years. Trials have occurred quickly without due process and in secret. DFAT has been told that many of those prosecuted have either had no legal representation or ineffective court-appointed lawyers. As at the time of publication, the government's harsh response had significantly curtailed, but not stopped, protest activity. Social media activity reflects ongoing anger against the regime. These are the biggest and longest-running protests in the history of the Islamic Republic. They differ from previous protests in their overt call for social change and the overthrow of the regime.

### Protests prior to September 2022

2.110 In late December 2017, a small protest in Mashhad (Razavi Khorasan Province) rapidly escalated and by 2018 had spread to more than 50 other cities and towns across Iran, involving an estimated 40,000 protesters. The protests spanned ethnic and religious lines and focused on economic hardship with anti-government and anti-regime themes. Many protesters conducted themselves peacefully, however there were reports of violence. According to Human Rights Watch, 4,900 people were arrested during the protests, and at least 21 people were killed, including members of the security forces. A large number of protesters (DFAT is not aware of how many) were released soon after arrest however DFAT understands some were given long prison sentences. DFAT is not aware of continued arrests in relation to these specific protests, however assesses that leaders of the protests who have not yet been arrested, if any, could still face arrest.

2.111 Further protests occurred in November 2019 after petrol subsidies were reduced. According to international media reporting, the protests spread to dozens of cities and towns across Iran and about 1,500 people were killed. According to then-UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, 7,000 people were arrested. As with the 2017 protest, DFAT understands most people arrested were subsequently released.

2.112 Protests again occurred in January 2020 after Iran admitted it had mistakenly shot down a Ukrainian civilian airliner. The plane crashed with 176 people on board, most of whom were Iranian and all of whom died. Protesters demanded the resignation of the Supreme Leader over the incident and subsequent cover-up. Online footage appeared to show security forces using tear gas, rubber bullets and live ammunition to disperse protesters in Tehran. Dozens of arrests were reported. DFAT is not aware of ongoing arrests.

2.113 Smaller protests continued to occur in 2021 and 2022. Most such protests (prior to those in response to Mahsa Amini's death) were in response to water and electricity shortages, cost of living pressures and rampant inflation. At times, authorities tolerated the protests, however on other occasions they have violently suppressed protest activity. These protests began in Khuzestan (see [Arabs](#)) in July 2021 and have continued for many months. New protests can occur at any time over different issues and may be seen as a continuation of existing protests. For example, mass anti-government protests occurred in May 2022 in Khuzestan after a building collapsed, killing dozens. The situation is volatile, and arrests and fatalities are possible. Most protests comprise several hundred people. Independent sources of information are not always available and what does exist is difficult to verify.

2.114 DFAT assesses that economic hardship was the primary driver of most protests from 2017 to 2022. In the current climate, DFAT assesses that ordinary protesters face a moderate risk of arrest and official violence but a low risk of on-going official harassment and discrimination.

### 'Green Movement' Activists

2.115 Iranian authorities cracked down on the protest movement known as the Green Movement in 2009 to 2010. The protests were about the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as President. The movement was

violently suppressed by authorities. Some high-profile participants went into exile and continued to promote anti-regime political views, but the movement did not last beyond 2010.

2.116 The Green Movement has little or no profile in Iran today. Neither the movement nor its supporter base played a significant role in the 2017-2022 protests, even if the tactics, demands and government responses may be similar. Local sources told DFAT ordinary participants in the Green Movement are not of interest to the authorities. There have been extensive protests since the Green Movement and authorities are more likely to be interested in those protest movements than historic examples. Continued monitoring of high-profile participants or their families is possible. Those who acquired criminal records because of their involvement in the Green Movement may face discrimination when applying for government employment, particularly if they played prominent, high-profile roles in the movement. DFAT assesses that ordinary participants who avoided arrest face a low risk of official discrimination. DFAT is unable to confirm whether those who fled the country will face harassment or discrimination upon their return.

## GROUPS OF INTEREST

### Artists and Musicians

2.117 Iran has a closely monitored cultural scene including performing, visual and musical arts. Art is subject to censorship and is banned or modified where it is perceived to be against Islamic values or anti-regime. Public performances require official permission through the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance.

2.118 DFAT assesses that artists and musicians in Iran face are unable to freely express themselves openly. Authorities may prevent performances by solo female artists and musicians. DFAT assesses that artists who cross 'red lines' as defined by the authorities would likely attract adverse attention from the authorities. This may include harassment, arrest and prosecution. Artists and musicians who spoke publicly over the death of Mahsa Amini have been forced into confessions or had their works cancelled.

### Civil Society Activists/Human Rights Defenders

2.119 By regional standards, Iran has a highly developed civil society with religious and secular NGOs working across a wide range of fields. NGOs and civil society exist in Iran, for example women's rights and child protection NGOs operate across the country. NGOs must register with, and be approved by, the government. According to local interlocutors in 2019, NGOs that work on non-political issues such as poverty operate relatively freely. In contrast, the ability of NGOs to work and advocate on human rights-related issues is severely restricted. NGOs are closely monitored by the authorities and official harassment is not unusual.

2.120 NGOs must navigate a changing political climate, which analysts observe has become more conservative following the 2021 Presidential election and against the backdrop of rising protests. What the government considers sensitive can change; the 2021 US Department of State Human Rights Report notes that environmental NGOs have become sensitive in recent times. Civil society organisations have been arbitrarily closed, according to media and human rights reports, and high-profile activists, if they criticise the government or are involved in organisations that the government considers sensitive, face arrest. Sources report such NGOs may apply for re-registration but that it is a cumbersome process.

2.121 Human rights defenders face an ongoing risk of arbitrary arrest, detention and prosecution. The risk is particularly acute for prominent human rights lawyers and/or lawyers advocating for their clients in sensitive

cases, a number of whom have recently been handed long prison sentences. For example, in April 2023, Iranian activist Golrokh Ebrahimi Iraei was sentenced to seven years in prison and banned from leaving the country for two years on charges of ‘gathering and collusion’ and ‘propaganda against the regime.’

2.122 Those activists who are arrested typically face charges such as ‘propaganda against the regime’, ‘insulting the Supreme Leader’ or ‘disrupting national security’. Each of these offences is very serious and long prison sentences or the death penalty may result. Iran Human Rights (IHRNGO, a non-profit human rights organisation) reported over 100 Iranian human rights defenders were arrested, imprisoned, tortured or killed in 2021, more than twice as many as in 2020.

2.123 International sources report that authorities have prevented some civil society activists and human rights defenders from travelling abroad; that human rights activists have reported receiving intimidating phone calls, threats of blackmail, online hacking attempts and property damage from unidentified security officials; and that these officials have sometimes harassed or arrested family members of human rights activists.

2.124 DFAT assesses that civil society activists and lawyers who work in areas connected to the promotion of human rights, certain social trends or policies, and the environment face a high risk of official discrimination. This may include arrest, monitoring, harassment and travel bans. DFAT assesses that civil society activists and lawyers who challenge the status quo and are perceived to cross ‘red lines’ as defined by the authorities, are critical of the Islamic Republic, its institutions and policies, and who publicise human rights violations, including against ethnic and religious minorities, face a high risk of arrest, prosecution and imprisonment, including on national security grounds. Those individuals or groups with perceived links to the US, the UK or other Western countries often face a higher risk of attracting adverse attention from the authorities.

## Media

2.125 All broadcast media is controlled by the state. However, some non-state press exists, and various opinions are published online. The constitution requires radio and television to be state run and mandates that mass media, including television and radio ‘diffuse’ Islamic culture and promotes the goals of the state. Independent media and social media do exist and provide alternative viewpoints, however these are likely to be blocked by the state if they are critical of the government. Journalists who write for independent sources typically practise self-censorship for fear of arrest. In its 2022 Press Freedom Index, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) ranked Iran 178th out of 180 countries, above only Eritrea and North Korea. RSF found ‘at least 1,000 journalists and citizen-journalists have been arrested, detained, murdered, disappeared or executed by the Iranian regime since 1979.’ In May 2022, US-based NGO, Committee to Protect Journalists, reported on the arrest of several female journalists and documentary-makers in 2022 against the backdrop of widespread protests.

2.126 Use of the internet is common in Iran. Iran employs one of the most extensive Internet filtering regimes in the world, with all Internet flows travelling through a state-controlled backbone. Use of social media is widespread, however censored. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram are all widely popular despite being officially blocked. Iranian internet users routinely use virtual private networks (VPNs) to access blocked content. Iranians also use encrypted messaging apps like Signal or WhatsApp, despite these being officially blocked.

2.127 The authorities monitor online content, including social media. Individuals repeatedly posting content that is openly critical of the government, its institutions and policies or deemed to be pushing moral boundaries may attract adverse attention, especially if the content goes viral. This includes individuals based abroad. In 2019, sources told DFAT that Iranians with links to Iran-based foreigners are more likely to have their social media accounts monitored. To avoid detection, persons critical of the Islamic Republic on permitted social media platforms may use aliases to conceal their identity.

2.128 Given the high volume of social media interaction, most of which is unlikely to be of interest to authorities, it is unlikely that every social media user in Iran has their social media comprehensively monitored. Users with a public profile (including with large social media followings, particularly on Instagram) or who are politically active and post about politically sensitive topics (such as minority rights or about topics that are critical of the government) are more likely to be monitored. Iranians with a public profile in Australia may also have their social media presence tracked by the Iranian government. DFAT assesses that journalists, both print and online, who report on protests, sensitive topics or other criticism of the government face a moderate risk of arrest.

## Women

2.129 Wearing the hijab is compulsory. By law, women must have their entire body covered except for face, hands and feet. Some women wear the scarf around their neck or use another form of head covering (for example, a hat). Such women risk arrest, particularly during periodic crackdowns. Younger women are more likely to wear their headscarves in this way. Morality police patrols in public places increased in 2022. Following the protests and outcry sparked by the death of [Mahsa Amini](#) at the hands of the morality police, they withdrew from the streets. The morality police have been disbanded but there is little sign that enforcement of hijab laws has ceased, with authorities using denial of services in banks and shops and airports as one way to ensure compliance.

2.130 Sources told DFAT in 2019 that enforcement of Islamic dress codes fluctuates, with checks on dress code violations increasing during holy periods (such as Muharram and Ramadan) and the summer season (when many women tend to adhere to dress codes more loosely due to the heat). In 2019 and more recently, authorities closed a number of restaurants and cafes due to non-observance of the Islamic dress code since and police reportedly monitor women for wearing their *hijabs* inappropriately or not at all while travelling in vehicles. Where a female is detected with 'bad *hijab*' inside a vehicle, the owner of the vehicle receives an automated text message instructing them to report to a police station and sign a declaration undertaking not to wear or tolerate 'bad *hijab*' again. According to local sources, repeat offenders incur a fine and, concurrently, are requested to settle any outstanding traffic infringements. A failure to do so can result in the impounding of one's car and potential suspension of licence until all outstanding fines are settled.

2.131 The UN reported in 2019 that three women were arrested after appearing in an online video protesting against the compulsory *hijab* law on International Women's Day, including by removing their headscarves. They were subsequently convicted of assembly and collusion in acts against national security, propaganda against the state, and encouraging moral corruption and prostitution. Two of the women received sentences of 16 years' imprisonment. The third woman was additionally convicted of 'insulting the sacred', and received a prison sentence of 23 years and six months.

2.132 Men exert considerable control over women in marriage. For example, women can legally be prevented from leaving the country without permission from their husbands. Husbands can prevent their wives from working if their chosen work is incompatible with the husband's 'dignity'. Girls can be married as young as 13 (15 for boys) but marriage is possible at any age with the permission of a judge and the father of the child. DFAT understands several thousand girls under 14 are married, several hundred of whom have children of their own. Human rights organisations have reported an increase in the number of girls as young as nine years old marrying, which they assess may be a consequence of increased economic hardship among rural and poor families.

2.133 For a woman to get a divorce she needs permission from her husband, or evidence he breached the marriage contract, is addicted to drugs, is 'insane' or impotent. Men do not need a reason for divorce. Men can have up to four wives, however women can only have one husband.



2.134 At least several hundred women a year are killed in so-called ‘honour’ killings, in which a husband, brother, male cousin or other male relative murders a woman for a perceived insult to the family’s ‘honour’. Perceived insults to honour might include a woman being a victim of rape, having consensual sex outside marriage or getting divorced. The Penal Code does not specifically criminalise honour crimes and, in line with *sharia* principles, provides for reduced sentences for those who commit them. For example, Article 630 includes provisions on the husband’s right to kill his wife and her lover if they are caught in the act, while Article 303 states that judges cannot issue a ‘retribution crime’ punishment against fathers or grandfathers who kill their children. In cases where authorities have attempted to stop the phenomenon of honour killings by sentencing some perpetrators to long prison terms (as has reportedly occurred in Khuzestan Province), new strategies have quickly evolved to circumvent these punishments, including through hiring third parties to commit the murder. In cases of honour killings, it is extremely unlikely for the head of the victim’s family to demand punishment. Most perpetrators of honour killings therefore serve only a short prison sentence or avoid punishment altogether.

2.135 Some Iranians have their marriages arranged by parents. Many other young Iranians organise romances and marriages through dating, including online. Some upper-class women will cohabit with their partner with a temporary marriage licence.

2.136 Forced marriages occur (as do ‘honour’ killing for refusing a forced marriage). Whether a woman is at risk of such a marriage or violence depends on her family and how traditional they are. A decision to marry a foreigner (for example while overseas) has the potential to cause discord with family at home.

2.137 In November 2021 the Youthful Population and Protection of the Family Law came into force. The law is designed to increase the population against the background of a falling birth rate. The law provides incentives for marriage (such as concessional loans) and compels television stations to make programs that discourage being single. Under the law, contraceptives are not freely provided, voluntary sterilisation is banned, and abortions are restricted. Some antenatal screening that could inform a decision about abortion is restricted and a committee of Islamic jurists, lawmakers and doctors was introduced as part of the new law to make judgements as to whether an abortion can proceed.

2.138 Reforms to Iran’s citizenship laws in 2019 allow for Iranian women who have children with non-Iranian men to pass Iranian nationality onto their children (as occurs with Iranian men married to non-Iranian women). However, the new right (which can be exercised once the child turns 18) is subject to security approvals and sources suggest it is currently ‘theoretical’.

2.139 Women and unrelated men cannot socialise by law. However, in larger cities such as Tehran, Tabriz and Shiraz, this is not enforced and it is common to see mixed gender groups exercising or socialising in public. Media and human rights reports note that verbal, physical or online sexual harassment is very common, for example in workplaces and in the street. Such harassment is illegal, however women report that sexual harassment laws are not enforced.

2.140 DFAT is aware of cases where women who have tried to hold workshops to teach women about their rights have been arrested and sentenced to multi-year prison terms. NGOs that attempt to help women risk being shut down. (See [Political Opinion](#) )

2.141 DFAT understands gender-based violence, in the form of family violence is common, however is not a crime and generally considered a ‘private matter’. Authorities may be unable or unwilling to provide adequate protection. Some government-run shelters exist for victims. DFAT understands there are several hundred such shelters across the country, as well as a hotline that can arrange social and medical support to women and girls who have experienced family violence. DFAT understands that, as in other countries, family violence worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic and related lockdowns. Spousal rape is not criminalised.

2.142 Rape attracts the death penalty, although victims seldom report sexual assault. A conviction requires a group of witnesses that comprises four Muslim men or a combination of three men and two women or two men and four women. False accusations attract significant penalties and victims fear charges of false accusation or morality offences. A draft bill to address violence against women, approved by the government in January 2021, is reportedly no longer under consideration.

2.143 The Penal Code criminalises Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). In practice, FGM continues to occur, particularly in the southern province of Hormozgan and the western provinces of Kurdistan, Kermanshah and West Azerbaijan. FGM is practised mostly among Sunni communities. FGM is usually practised by traditional mid-wives.

2.144 Women in Iran have diverse experiences and an assessment of discrimination and violence depends on the individual circumstances of each woman. DFAT assesses most Iranian women face moderate societal discrimination and threat of gender-based violence, including ‘honour’ crimes and street violence. Women perceived by the authorities to be pushing Iran’s moral and religious boundaries face a high risk of official discrimination in the form of arrest, punishment and violence.

## Tattoos and People with ‘Western’ Appearance

2.145 Having tattoos (including large tattoos that cover the entire arm (‘sleeves’)), ripped jeans, plucked eyebrows, jewellery (for example ear piercings), and Western-styled hair is common among young men in Tehran and other large cities. Women are subject to much stricter dress codes and are required to have most of their bodies covered (though may still wear western fashions). Tattoos are popular with young women.

2.146 DFAT is not aware of men who have Western style appearance being targeted by authorities. Nor is DFAT aware of women who have a Western style appearance being targeted (with the exception of not wearing a hijab, see [Women](#)). DFAT is similarly not aware of tattooists being targeted. Some people in conservative communities or who have conservative parents may experience low-level discrimination, but this depends on the family.

## Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

2.147 Sexual intercourse between males is illegal and can attract the death penalty. The death penalty is carried out against men who have consensual sex with men. DFAT is aware of reports of executions in February 2022, for example. Gay men may be pressured to undergo sex-reassignment surgery to avoid legal and social discrimination. Gay men may also face homophobic violence, including members, from family members and others. (See also [Military Objectors](#)).

2.148 Lesbians are largely invisible in society and there is not a lot of information about their experiences. A 2016 report by Outright International situates discrimination and violence against lesbians and other diverse women in the context of problems faced by women generally. Lesbian identity is not widely recognised, and many lesbians are, as a matter of culture and societal expectation, forced into non-consensual heterosexual marriages. The report also notes examples of lesbians being raped and bullied because of their gender identity. DFAT is aware of reports of the arrest of a 28-year-old lesbian who gave an interview to the BBC about the plight of LGBTI people in December 2021.

2.149 In September 2022, two Iranian LGBTI activists were sentenced to death for offences including ‘corruption on earth through the promotion of homosexuality’ as well as trafficking, though observers said that this charge related to assisting people at risk to leave Iranian territory.

2.150 Transgender, intersex and gender diverse people are considered to be mentally ill by the government. Transgender people may be able to receive subsidised gender reassignment surgery and lesbian, gay or bisexual people who are not transgender or intersex may be required to undergo sex reassignment surgery. Activists claim the process to be approved for surgery is invasive and does not respect the privacy of the individual. It may take several years of public court hearings, virginity tests and mandatory counselling in which attempts may be made to 'convert' the patient. According to 6rang, an LGBTI rights organisation who spoke to DW, the German state broadcaster, the procedure is often undertaken by underqualified doctors and the surgery is sometimes botched. Transgender people report severe social ostracism including exclusion in the workplace, shunning by families, gender-based violence (family violence and abuse in the street), particularly during the transition phase when the transgender person is less likely to be able to escape public scrutiny.

2.151 LGBTI people may use social networking apps like Grindr, Bumble and Tinder to communicate. These services are accessed illegally through virtual private networks. There are no public gathering places for LGBTI people, for example gay bars, in Iran.

2.152 In-country sources told DFAT younger Iranians, particularly in more progressive parts of major cities, are increasingly more tolerant, but on balance, homosexuality is not openly discussed, and gay people face severe discrimination. Discrimination can include harassment and violence and harassment from family members, work colleagues, religious figures, and school and community leaders. Ostracism from family is common, particularly in the case of conservative families. DFAT understands gay men and lesbians face considerable societal pressure to enter a heterosexual marriage and produce children.

2.153 DFAT assesses that LGBTI people face a high risk of official discrimination and violence that may amount to risk of death. DFAT applies this assessment to all LGBTI identities. DFAT further assesses that LGBTI people of any sexuality or gender identity or expression face a high risk of societal discrimination.

## Military Objectors

2.154 Iran has compulsory military service of 18 to 24 months for men aged between 18 and 40. Conscripts do not get a choice of the type of service they undertake or the location. Conditions can be very harsh, especially in remote areas but the experience of conscripts differs depending on where they are deployed and what kind of work they do.

2.155 Conscientious objection is not possible; service is compulsory. Gay men and transgender people are exempt from military service, which activists claim can lead to societal discrimination and gender-based violence in the form of family violence against them, meaning that LGBTI men may not claim such an exemption. Such men are reportedly issued with a military exemption card stating the reason for their exemption which has led some gay men to be found out by their families and harmed as a consequence. A commonly granted exemption is for Iranian men who are the only son of a divorced couple. Religious minorities are not exempt from service, and in general cannot occupy positions of authority; they cannot be career officers.

2.156 In the past, schemes existed in which a person could pay to avoid service. A scheme to pay for exemption was announced in January 2022 but quickly withdrawn after a public backlash where the scheme was seen as allowing the rich to avoid service. In the past people could pay fines for absence from service, which allowed wealthy people to evade service. Exemptions could be 'purchased' legally until 2019, through payment of an absence fine. This practice was common among wealthier Iranians. Now, wealthy Iranians, particularly those with teenage sons, may attempt migration to avoid drafting. It is common for wealthier Iranians to pay a bribe of about USD 10,000 to avoid military service. Men with a Masters degree are usually given office jobs.

2.157 Those who avoid service but are unable to legally seek an exemption may be punished. Those who leave the country and return before reaching 40 years of age will be drafted. Those older than 40 will likely receive a fine. Criminal penalties include fines or prison time or having their drivers' licence, passport or permission to leave the country revoked. They may also be prevented from accessing public sector jobs (the government is the largest employer in Iran by far) or higher education. Local sources report that men who return to Iran and are seeking to avoid conscription will stay less than three months on each visit.

## Refugees and Undocumented Afghans

2.158 Iran has one of the largest refugee populations in the world, primarily from Afghanistan, with the government stating it is hosting over five million Afghans. The number of Afghan refugees arriving in the eastern provinces is rising following the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in 2021. The UN estimates 4,000 Afghans are arriving daily. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 2022, there were about 800,000 registered refugees in Iran, of whom 780,000 were Afghan and 20,000 Iraqi; there were also 2.6 million undocumented Afghans and some 600,000 Afghan passport holders. A more recent estimate by the UN suggests there may be as many as 4.5 million Afghans of all kinds in Iran. The situation is fluid with large numbers of Afghans fleeing across the border. These new arrivals often have no documents and are not recognised by the Iranian Government as refugees. The UN reports that the latest arrivals, in early to mid-2023, are increasingly female-headed households and more individuals with chronic and complex health needs.

2.159 Iran has been deporting Afghan asylum seekers back across the border; in-country sources estimate that it is deporting 40 per cent of all Afghans upon arrival. The International Organization for Migration estimated that hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers had been returned to Afghanistan in 2021 and DFAT understands hundreds of thousands more were returned in 2022.

2.160 The border area can be unsafe. In February 2021, an explosion at an International Organization for Migration (IOM) reception centre was caused by small arms fire hitting fuel tanks. Border skirmishes between Taliban and Iranian guards and violent crime were also reported by international media sources. A video published by Radio Free Europe shows a gang of Iranian men beating an Afghan asylum seeker in April 2022, but this video and others like it cannot be verified. DFAT is aware of reports that Iranian border guards have mistreated asylum seekers, including beatings and drownings.

2.161 DFAT understands the majority of Afghans live in Tehran or in central provinces such as Isfahan, Kerman, Yazd and Mashhad. Some live in regional areas and work as seasonal workers. Afghans are subject to border restrictions and 'no go areas' and must seek permission to leave their province.

2.162 Afghans may experience discrimination. Economic issues that face all residents of Iran can lead to difficulty in gaining employment or affording basic goods and services. This can lead to resentment of new arrivals. New Afghan arrivals may also be resented by longer-term Afghan residents; they may also perceive that new arrivals are subject to preferential treatment by Western governments.

2.163 Afghans may hold a card known as a *Amayesh* (whereas Iraqi refugees will be offered a card known as a *Hoviat* card). It provides some access to basic healthcare, work rights and education, however DFAT understands that this access is limited in practice. Holders must seek permission to leave their place of residence and must renew their cards annually. Many cannot afford the fees to renew their *Amayesh* cards. In 2022, sources report that *Amayesh* cards may still be issued but only rarely and temporarily. According to IOM, the Bureau of Alien and Foreign Immigrants Affairs (BAFIA) provides a letter to every Afghan, regardless of their immigration status, to go to school, while they apply separately to UNHCR for what is known as *salamat* (health) insurance. The IOM further reports that Iran has decided to grant citizenship to the Iranian-born children of Afghan women and Iranian men; citizenship is very rarely granted otherwise.



2.164 In 2017, the Government of Iran issued slips to more than 804,000 undocumented individuals (mostly Afghans) who participated in a ‘headcount exercise,’ targeting certain categories of individuals residing in Iran without a valid Amayesh card or an Iranian visa and national passport. In mid-2022, the Iranian government undertook a second ‘headcount’ exercise. Undocumented migrants who have been issued headcount slips as a part of this process have some access to primary healthcare, education and work.

2.165 The combination of Iran’s economic downturn and the continued inflow of Afghans means that Iran’s ability to continue to provide for even the basic needs of refugees is diminishing. Iran’s health and education services are being overwhelmed particularly in border regions which were already the most impoverished areas in Iran. 700,000 Afghan children had been granted access to education services, but the education system is becoming overloaded. Class sizes have increased significantly, and many Afghan children are being turned away.

## Child Soldiers

2.166 In a 2017 report, Human Rights Watch alleged Iran had recruited child soldiers, mostly Afghans, as young as 13 to fight with state-sponsored militants in Syria. Those who refuse recruitment may be deported. Some human rights observers have also alleged that Iran has sent child soldiers to fight with Houthi rebels in Yemen.

## Victims of Trafficking

2.167 The US Department of State considers Iran to be a Tier 3 country for trafficking in persons, alongside other countries in Asia and Africa with the highest prevalence of trafficking. Afghans who are returned to Afghanistan are particularly vulnerable to trafficking and some such people are trafficked from Afghanistan to Iran. Women and girls are also vulnerable to sex trafficking. Some Afghan girls have been forced to marry Iranian men.

2.168 Risk of trafficking is exacerbated by difficult economic conditions in the country; victims are recruited with the promise of money and have few options because of poverty and the high cost of living and inflation. Victims may be promised migration outcomes but end up having their documents taken and being forced into sex slavery. According to the US Department of State’s 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report, the Iranian Government did not identify victims or prosecute offenders.

## COMPLEMENTARY PROTECTION CLAIMS

### ARBITRARY DEPRIVATION OF LIFE

#### Extrajudicial Killings

2.169 Border couriers, known as *kolbars*, who sell goods across the borders with Iraq and Pakistan on the black market, have been subject to alleged extrajudicial killings by Iranian border guards and anti-smuggling officials. The Iranian government claims the *kolbars* traffic illegal goods, including narcotics. According to UN Special Rapporteur Rehman's January 2022 report, at least some examples of these killings have not been investigated by authorities. Some human rights groups have claimed that dozens of such killings happened in 2021. Hundreds of protestors were also killed by security forces in 2022-3 during demonstrations (see [Protests](#)).

#### Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances

2.170 According to the 2021 US Department of State Human Rights Report, plain-clothed officials seized lawyers, journalists, and activists without warning, denied they were in custody, and refused to provide information to the families of victims. According to the report, the government does not make any efforts to prevent, investigate or punish disappearances. UN Special Rapporteur Rehman reported in January 2022 of the enforced disappearance of [Kurdish](#) activists. Reporting from 2020 also noted disappearance of [Baha'i](#) and [Yarsani](#) activists.

#### Deaths in Custody

2.171 Iran does not publish official statistics on deaths in custody. Local media and human rights groups occasionally report deaths that may result from poor [prison conditions](#), prisoner-on-prisoner violence or beatings by guards. In 2020, Amnesty International reported guards had opened fire with live ammunition and tear gas on prison rioters for fear of spread of COVID-19 in prisons, leading to dozens of deaths.

### DEATH PENALTY

2.172 Iran does not publish official statistics on executions, and accurate figures are difficult to obtain. However, international sources estimate that Iran implements the death penalty at one of the highest rates in the world, both in actual numbers and per capita. DFAT understands that more than 200 people were executed in 2020, as an example, and that number included juveniles who were executed when they reached the age of majority (18). According to a joint report by Norway-based Iran Human Rights (IHR) and France's Together Against the Death Penalty (ECPM), at least 333 people were executed in 2021, a 25 per cent increase from 267

in 2020. IHR indicated that Iran executed more than 500 people in 2022, and 317 in 2023 as at 9 June 2023. Women and juveniles were among those executed.

2.173 A wide range of offences are punishable by death, including murder, rape, drug possession and moral crimes that include adultery and same-sex sexual intercourse. Vaguely defined offences such as ‘insulting the prophet’, ‘enmity against God’ and ‘spreading corruption on earth’ (which can include blasphemy and heresy) (see [Religion](#) and [Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity](#)) also attract the death penalty. According to Amnesty International, drug-related executions reached about 40 per cent of the total in 2021, a five-fold increase from the previous year. International media reports suggest 109 protestors in 2022-3 were sentenced to death, with seven actually executed at the time of publication.

2.174 ‘Reconciliation committees’, made up of members of state-run NGOs, the government and religious leaders, can work with victims’ families to get them to forgive a person sentenced to death, which can lead to the overturning of the death penalty.

2.175 According to the US Department of State’s 2021 Human Rights Report, the Supreme Court is required to review and validate all death penalty sentences, but in practice this rarely happens.

## TORTURE

2.176 Article 38 of the constitution prohibits all forms of torture for the purpose of extracting confessions or acquiring information. Article 169 of the Penal Code stipulates that a confession obtained under coercion, force, torture, or mental and physical abuses shall not be given any validity and weight.

2.177 Despite these legal protections, international human rights organisations report that torture and other mistreatment of detainees occurs in Iranian detention facilities, especially as a means to extract information. The US Department of State 2021 Human Rights Report notes torture is especially practised in pre-trial detention and can include threats of execution or rape, forced vaginal and anal examinations, sleep deprivation, suspension, forced ingestion of chemical substances, deliberate lack of medical care, electric shock (including to the genitals), burnings, use of pressure positions and severe and repeated beatings.

2.178 Political prisoners are at particular risk of torture, especially those held in pre-trial detention, as torture may be used to extract confessions. Prisons, including unofficial secret prisons, may also be the site of torture, according to human rights groups. People who violate dress codes or drink alcohol face a low risk of torture.

2.179 DFAT assesses that the authorities use violence or other pressure tactics to extract confessions from defendants, including those charged with security-related offences.

## CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT

2.180 Article 39 of the constitution prohibits all affronts to the dignity and reputation of detained persons. The law allows for Sharia law punishments that include amputation, flogging, blinding and stoning and the Government does not consider these to breach constitutional provisions.

2.181 More than 100 offences attract the punishment of flogging, including dress code violations, same-sex sexual activity and alcohol consumption. Flogging has been used in political cases where offences are often vaguely worded, such as ‘propaganda’, ‘defamation’ or ‘rebellion’. Amputations, of the fingers or hands for example, may be applied for property offences such as theft.

2.182 Blindings have been used as retribution, for example where an offender has blinded a victim the punishment is to be blinded. DFAT understands blinding is rare; compensation money followed by forgiveness is more common.

2.183 Stoning is uncommon but can be applied as a punishment for adultery and same-sex sexual intercourse. The method of execution may be changed to hanging instead of stoning for these offences. DFAT understands some hard-line judges still impose the punishment on offenders but is not aware of recent examples.

2.184 In November 2022, international media reported female protesters arrested as part of anti-government protests (see [Mahsa Amini protests](#)) were raped while in detention.

## Arbitrary Arrest and Detention

2.185 Article 32 of the constitution stipulates no one may be arrested 'except by the order and in accordance with the procedure set down by law'. Authorities must communicate the charges to the arrested person in writing without delay, and forward a provisional dossier to the competent judicial authorities within 24 hours. Article 36 states that only a competent court may pass and execute a sentence, and it must be in accordance with the law. Article 37 guarantees the presumption of innocence.

2.186 Despite these constitutional protections, human rights groups allege that arbitrary arrest is common, particularly against ethnic and religious minorities, activists, [journalists](#) and their lawyers and families. The arbitrary nature of arrests makes it difficult to conclude a pattern. For further information please see the relevant section of the report about [minorities](#) or [political activists](#).



## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

### STATE PROTECTION

#### Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC)

2.187 The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) is Iran's most powerful security and military organisation, responsible for the protection and survival of the Islamic Republic. The IRGC was established as a guardian of the 1979 revolution's values and played a key role in the early days of the Republic. It is now Iran's preeminent internal and external security force with an army, navy and air force, which it operates separately from the regular military, and also has cyber and intelligence wings. The IRGC's associated companies in the banking, communications, construction, shipping and other sectors play a significant role in the economy. There are around 150,000 to 200,000 members of the IRGC across various divisions.

2.188 The IRGC helped to suppress the [Green Movement](#) demonstrations in 2009 and, together with other parts of the security apparatus, played a role in responding to the December 2017, January 2018 and November 2019 protests. International media reports and leaked documents point to IRGC involvement in more recent protests and planning to crack down on protests before price rises took effect in 2022, for example. Following the election of President Raisi, the IRGC is playing an ever-increasing role in politics, including many former IRGC officers now holding senior political appointments.

#### Basij Resistance Force

2.189 The Basij Resistance Force ('the Basij') is a volunteer paramilitary force under the command of the IRGC. The Basij is one of the primary enforcers of internal security and moral codes, including in relation to Islamic dress. The Basij has a countrywide presence with branches in virtually every city and town. Not all members are uniformed and their presence on the street may not be obvious. Members include both men and women who may receive privileges for their membership, including university admission, government jobs or bank loans. The Basij arrange and provide security and dress code enforcement for religious events and festivals, and do not accept conscripts. The Basij play an informal role in the ideological vetting of candidates for professional armed service roles (especially the morality police and the IRGC).

2.190 The Basij has been used for anti-protest policing in the past, including during 2021 protests, and human rights groups allege that they have been involved in torture, forced disappearance and violence against protesters. DFAT also understands the Basij Cyber Council monitors online activity. (See also [Media](#)).

#### Police

2.191 The national police force of Iran are described as a 'disciplinary force' and may be known by their abbreviation, 'NAJA'. They are distinct from the now-disbanded morality police, known as the Gasht-e Ershad,

who enforced religious rules on hijabs, alcohol and showing affection in public. NAJA is responsible for internal security, although receives support from the IRGC and the Basij in quelling large-scale protests. NAJA have an obvious street presence, particularly in the major cities. NAJA is highly organised, including in responding to crime. The level of violent crime in Iran is low relative to other countries in the region (see [Security Situation](#)).

## Judiciary

2.192 The constitution establishes an independent judiciary. In practice, the head of the judiciary is appointed by the Supreme Leader and the judiciary leadership is under control of conservative hardliners. The Chief Justice must be a cleric and specialist in Shi'a law (a *mujtahid*). The Courts follow the Civil Law system (similar to Europe, however unlike Australia's adversarial Common Law system). The Supreme Court is the highest court and under it are civil, family, criminal and military courts. Among criminal courts are first- and second-class courts; the latter have three judges and the former a single judge.

2.193 Revolutionary Courts have jurisdiction over national security matters, terrorism, and offences of insulting the Supreme Leader and drug smuggling and other such crimes. According to the 2021 US Department of State Human Rights Report, most important political cases are referred to a small number of branches of the revolutionary courts, whose judges often have negligible legal training and are not independent. NGOs report revolutionary courts of first instance have issued at least 12 protest-related death sentences, with expected legal protections lacking. For example, Majid Reza Rahnavard was found guilty of enmity against God for the alleged killing of two security officers. He was executed in December 2022 just 13 days after his trial began and just 23 days after his arrest.

2.194 Human rights observers criticise the judiciary for its lack of independence and denial of due process to detainees, and for the failure of trials to meet international standards of fairness. Freedom House in its Freedom in the World 2022 report claims political dissidents and human rights and labour rights activists face 'arbitrary judgements' and that the 'security apparatus' influence over courts has grown in recent years'. UN Special Rapporteur Rehman in his January 2022 report described the judiciary as 'a repressive organ instead of an independent body towards which individuals can seek recourse'. The 2021 US Department of State Human Rights Report cites human rights activists who claim verdicts are decided in advance and that defendants frequently do not have an opportunity to appeal significant penalties or consult lawyers.

2.195 Access to lawyers is not guaranteed. Defendants, including political defendants may be given access to a lawyer appointed by the state or may have no access to a lawyer at all. Lawyers themselves, especially those who defend political prisoners, are often arrested or detained, which may reduce the number of people willing to defend those who are facing political charges.

2.196 Bribery of judges occurs, and rich Iranians and/or Iranians with political connections can influence judicial outcomes. The authorities have attempted to clamp down on judicial corruption, and there have been cases of judges suspected of corruption being dismissed and/or prosecuted (including five judges dismissed for alleged corruption on 13 October 2019). Corruption remains widespread.

## Double Jeopardy

2.197 The Penal Code allows for the re-prosecution of an Iranian national for an offence committed and punished in another country where it would also be an offence under Iranian law. However, crimes committed abroad punishable by *taz'ir* (including drug trafficking) are excluded from re-prosecution in Iran if the accused is not tried and acquitted in the place of the commission of the crime or, in the case of conviction, the punishment is not – wholly or partly – carried out against them. The Iranian legal system is difficult to

understand or predict and individual analysis of cases is complex. DFAT understands that those who serve their sentences and are released may later be made to serve further jail time for the same offence. DFAT is not aware of recent examples of double jeopardy of failed asylum seekers but understands that it is possible.

## Detention and Prison

2.198 Prison conditions are widely considered to be poor. In his February 2023 report on the situation of human reports in Iran, UN Special Rapporteur Rehman described conditions in one solitary cell as ‘inhumane’. He noted severe overcrowding, ill-treatment of prisoners including prison guards assaulting prisoners, long periods of solitary confinement that amount to torture and a lack of healthcare (including routine medical care and specialist care during the COVID-19 pandemic).

2.199 The US Department of State’s 2021 Human Rights Report called prison conditions ‘harsh and life threatening’ with food shortages, ‘gross overcrowding’, inadequate sanitary conditions and lack of medical care. The report quotes human rights organisations that note a lack of medical care (sometimes as a form of punishment), contaminated food and water, water shortages, rodent and insect infestations, shortage of bedding, ‘intolerable heat’ and poor ventilation.

2.200 Political prisoners by law should experience better conditions; for example, they do not have to wear prison uniforms, should not be held in solitary confinement unless a judge deems it necessary, and should have better access to the outside world through communication with friends and family, and access to newspapers, radio and television. In practice, this does not occur. DFAT understands political prisoners are at a greater risk of torture than are other prisoners, and in many cases have not been held separately from other prisoners, meaning that the conditions described above apply equally to political prisoners.

## INTERNAL RELOCATION

2.201 Article 33 of the constitution stipulates that no one can be banished from their place of residence, prevented from living in the place of their choice, or compelled to reside in a given locality, except in cases provided by law. In practice, the government has placed some restrictions on internal movement. Certain groups, including registered refugees and individuals subject to security monitoring, are prevented from travelling to select provinces without permission (see [Refugees and Undocumented Afghans](#)). The US Department of State also reports some offences, including for conversions to Christianity and other religions, are sentenced to internal exile. Other Iranians can and do relocate internally, particularly for economic reasons. It is common for Iranians from less-developed provincial areas to move to major cities in search of employment. The countrywide capacity of the centrally-organised state security forces means an individual facing adverse official attention is unlikely to escape attention by internal relocation.

## TREATMENT OF RETURNEES

2.202 The Iranian Government has a longstanding policy of not accepting involuntary returns. Voluntary returns are possible and are sometimes assisted by returning governments or the International Organization for Migration (IOM). In cases where an Iranian diplomatic mission has issued temporary travel documents, authorities will be forewarned of the person’s imminent return. DFAT is not aware of any legislative or social barriers to voluntary returnees finding work or shelter in Iran, nor any specific barriers to prevent voluntary returnees from returning to their home region.

2.203 In general, authorities pay little attention to failed asylum seekers on their return to Iran. DFAT understands their actions (including social media posts about *sur place* activities) are not routinely investigated by authorities. Iranians with a public profile in Australia (or elsewhere) may have activities visible on social media tracked by the Iranian government. (See also [Media](#).) Iranians have left the country in large numbers since the 1979 revolution, and authorities accept many will seek to live and work overseas for economic reasons. Those who return on a *laissez-passer* are questioned by the Immigration Police at Imam Khomeini International Airport in Tehran about the circumstances of their departure and why they are traveling on a *laissez-passer*. Questioning usually takes between 30 minutes and one hour, however may take longer if the returnee is considered evasive in their answers and/or immigration authorities suspect a criminal history on the part of the returnee. Arrest and mistreatment are not common during this process.

2.204 DFAT assesses that, unless they were the subject of adverse official attention prior to departing Iran (e.g. for their political activism), returnees are unlikely to attract attention from the authorities, and face a low risk of monitoring, mistreatment or other forms of official discrimination. Local sources told DFAT the greater challenges for returnees are finding work and economic considerations, which will differ from person to person depending on the location of return, family support and skills and experience.

## Exit and Entry Procedures

2.205 Millions of Iranians travel into and out of Iran each year without difficulty, including the large Iranian diaspora residing in North America, Europe, the United Arab Emirates and Australia. Iranian nationals must pay an exit tax each time they depart Iran, which increases with each outbound journey. Payments of exit taxes are made at the airport as one is departing Iran. An exit permit for foreign travel is required for Iranians employed in fields considered sensitive (e.g., employees of the Iranian Atomic Energy Organisation); those studying abroad (whether on government scholarships or privately-funded); and all males aged 18-30 who are yet to complete military service (principally those who have deferred military service to undertake tertiary studies). To obtain an exit permit, citizens must provide proof of their status (e.g., a letter from their university confirming their enrolment) and pay a bond (the bond is retrievable on return). Iranian nationals resident in Iran who require an exit permit must obtain one each time they leave the country (multiple exit permits are not available for Iranian nationals resident in Iran). Exit permits are issued electronically.

2.206 In some cases, citizens require special permission to obtain a passport (see also [Passports](#)). This includes minors under the age of 18, who require the permission of their father/custodian; males who have not completed their military service; and married women, who require their husband's permission. Beyond their passport and, where it is required, an exit permit, Iranians exiting Iran are not required to present any other documents.

2.207 Government authorities can impose travel bans on Iranian citizens. Reasons for a travel ban can include security concerns, financial debts, outstanding taxes and outstanding sentences awaiting enforcement. Citizens with ongoing charges or outstanding court matters and those released on bail or parole are subjected to travel bans. Civil and political activists may also be subjected to travel bans. Husbands of married women and fathers of unmarried women and underage children can request travel bans against their dependents. Intelligence and law enforcement services have the power to impose travel bans without judicial oversight. (See [Judiciary](#)) Iranians under travel bans are often unaware of their status until they reach passport control at the airport and are turned back. The presence of security organisations in all Iranian airports, particularly those with border checkpoints, enables authorities to determine whether any Iranian citizen can leave the country by air.

2.208 It is not possible to assess or profile travellers who will be successful in a border crossing attempt; chances of success depend on individual circumstances of the traveller and individual sanctions against them



by the government, which are not always clear. Sources report the government knows of those who have departed illegally, such as via an unauthorised border crossing, and that such people will face consequences such as the inability to get a passport in the future. Passengers undertaking domestic air travel are usually only required to present their ticket. Passengers may be asked for identification, however DFAT understands this practice is not consistent. Overland border crossing, including via rugged mountain areas, is more achievable for some Iranians than crossing at official crossing points. Such actions can be very dangerous because of the risk of violent crime.

2.209 Security procedures at Imam Khomeini International Airport in Tehran are robust. They include computerised cross-checking and multiple layers of physical security and document checking. Immigration officials are considered highly competent. A source told DFAT that it was 'next to impossible' to bypass security procedures at Imam Khomeini International Airport. DFAT assesses that the likelihood of an individual exiting Imam Khomeini International Airport with a fraudulent passport is extremely low. DFAT assesses that it is easier to depart Iran on a fraudulent passport at land border crossings, where immigration authorities deal with a greater volume of people and their capacity can be stretched.

## DOCUMENTATION

### Birth Certificates (*Shenasnameh*)

2.210 Birth registration is compulsory and must occur within 15 days of birth. Hospitals issue birth certificates for newborn children. The certificate includes the parents' national identity card and *shenasnameh* numbers, and, where the parents have settled on one, the newborn's name. Parents then submit the birth certificate along with their own national identity card or *shenasnameh* to the local Office for the National Organisation for Civil Registration (ONOCR), which then issues the child's *shenasnameh* (the ONOCR is the sole issuing authority for *shenasnameh*). Where a child is born at home, a doctor's note stating all of the particulars of the birth is required for a birth certificate and subsequent issuing of a *shenasnameh*.

2.211 The *shenasnameh* itself is a small passport-style book issued to all Iranians. The first page is the inside of the cover page and includes the bearer's fingerprint. The second page contains a photograph (for bearers over the age of 15), the names of the bearer's parents, the date and place of birth, the location where the *shenasnameh* was issued, the name of the issuing officer and a serial number. The third page contains information on the bearer's marriage(s), divorce(s) and children. The current style of *shenasnameh* was introduced in 2013.

2.212 To obtain a replacement *shenasnameh*, a person must attend the national ONOCR and produce an official identity document (such as a passport or national identity card) that confirms their identity. An affidavit of identity must also be presented. The replacement *shenasnameh* features a diagonal printing across the centre of all pages stating 'duplicate', and a new date of issuance.

2.213 To change a name or gender on a *shenasnameh*, the person needs to approach the ONOCR with his/her original *shenasnameh*. There is a form to be completed and a fee applies. Change of name request will then be submitted to a Board of Dispute Resolution (at the place of issue of *shenasnameh*) and a decision will be made in accordance with the relevant laws and regulations. If the decision is in favour of the applicant, a new birth certificate with the new name will be issued and if not, the applicant can take the decision to an appeal court. If the applicant resides outside Iran, they should approach the Iranian Embassy.

## National Identity Cards

2.214 Every permanent resident of Iran over the age of 15 (including non-citizens) must possess a national identity card. National identity cards are compulsory for a range of activities, including obtaining passports and driver's licences and using bank services. ONOCR initially issues applicants with temporary cards upon receipt of a completed application form, an original copy and photocopy of all pages of the applicant's *shenasnameh*, and two photographs. Applicants must present all of this documentation in person at either a local branch of the ONOCR or an Iranian diplomatic mission abroad. Applicants' fingerprints are also taken. The ONOCR then issues a permanent card with a 10-year validity. The front of the national identity card includes the bearer's photograph, national identity number, full name, date of birth and *shenasnameh* number. The reverse features the bearer's residential numerical code, validity date and the numerical identifier of the issuing office. National identity cards do not specify the bearer's religion.

2.215 Iranians are not required to carry identity cards in their day-to-day lives; they only need to carry them when necessary to prove their identity. Different offices require different forms of identification: banks require only a national identity card, while notary public offices require both a national identity card and *shenasnameh*.

## Passports

2.216 Passports demonstrate Iranian citizenship. Applicants are required to provide their original *shenasnameh*, photocopies of all of the pages of the *shenasnameh* containing an ID photograph, the original and a copy of their Residence Permit, and three passport photographs taken within the last three months. Applications can be lodged at police stations. As with driver's licences and other forms of identification, women must have a headscarf covering their hair completely in their passport photographs.

## PREVALENCE OF FRAUD

2.217 Iranian identity documents include sophisticated security features and are difficult to manufacture for fraudulent use. Those that are available are expensive and out of reach for most Iranians. Stiff penalties for use of fraudulent documents act a major deterrent. Fraudulent documents are generally easy for authorities to detect and security procedures at international airports are robust, but border crossing with fraudulent documents is easier at land border crossings. While it may be possible to obtain a genuine identification document with the intention of impersonating another person, DFAT assesses sophisticated border control procedures would make it difficult to use such a document in order to leave Iran.

2.218 Secondary forms of documentation, like military exemption cards, are technically more vulnerable to fraud, as they have less robust security features, but are expensive to obtain. Paper-based documents, including court documents, summonses, bank letters, real estate documents and tertiary certificates, are relatively easier to obtain through fraudulent means.