



> Return address: PO Box 16275 | 2500 BG | The Hague

To  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
Directorate for Sub-Saharan Africa  
Country of Origin Information Unit (08.D.)  
Attn.  
PO Box 20061  
2500 EB The Hague

Date 19 January 2023  
Subject Terms of Reference for the general country of origin information report on  
Iran

Dear,

I hereby send to you, with reference to the agreements hereon between the Ministry of Justice and Security and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, an overview of items for consideration that, with a view to policymaking by the State Secretary of Justice and Security and the implementation practice of the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) and the Repatriation and Departure Service (DT&V) require discussion in the country of origin information report to be issued by you with regard to the general situation in Iran. The information required on an asylum seeker's country of origin are as follows:

Section 1 Political and security situation provides information to enable an assessment under Article 15C of the Qualification Directive. In doing so, it is particularly important to clarify the impact on the security situation and human rights. Section 2 Identity, documents and nationality is designed to facilitate efforts to determine identity and nationality, also with a view to possible return and to assess whether a person might be eligible for a no-fault residence permit (a residence permit for people who cannot leave through no fault of their own). Section 3 Human rights deals with issues which are relevant to assess whether a person qualifies as a refugee or whether there is a realistic risk of violation of Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). Section 4 Refugees and displaced persons is primarily important to assess whether there is an alternative as regards residence or settlement. Section 5 Return looks at issues relating to this topic.

Under current policy, group persecution within the meaning of Article 1A of the Refugee Convention is assumed for the following groups:

- Christians who play an active role in 'new churches' or who evangelise;
- members of house churches who attend gatherings.

Current policy also identifies the following as high-risk groups:

- followers of the Bahá'í faith;
- Gonabadi Sufis;

**Services Directorate**

Expertise Department  
Research and Expertise Team  
for Country and Language

Turfmarkt 147  
2511 DP The Hague  
PO Box 16275  
2500 BG The Hague  
Infoline 088 - 0430 430

[www.ind.nl](http://www.ind.nl)

**Contact**

Secretariat

T

**Date**

19 January 2023

**Our reference**

**Appendices**

--

- people who are actively involved in politics, journalism, human rights or any other area of society (especially women's rights and ethnic minority rights) in ways which are critical of the authorities, and which the authorities therefore regard as oppositional;
- apostates of the Islamic faith who actively propagate their apostasy; and
- people who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB).

NB Transgender persons are not identified as a high-risk group in the current policy.

With regard to the adequate reception of unaccompanied minor foreign nationals, current policy states that adequate reception within the meaning of Section B8/6 of the Aliens Act Implementation Guidelines is available in Iran.

I ask you to address the issues below and to explicitly mention in your country of origin information report any relevant reports (general or specific) on Iran which you have previously written.

This letter was drafted with input from civil society organisations.

**Services Directorate**  
Expertise Department

Research and Expertise Team  
for Country and Language

**Date**  
19 January 2023

**Our reference**

## **1. Political and security situation**

### *1.1. Security situation*

- 1.1.1. Is there indiscriminate or systematic/targeted violence? If violence is targeted, against which groups is the violence directed? If the violence is indiscriminate, can you indicate the scale of fighting and its impact on the civilian population?
- 1.1.2. Were incidents widespread or concentrated in a particular region/city?
- 1.1.3. Which groups/ factions/ individuals/ commanders are involved or responsible for the violence?
- 1.1.4. Can you give an account of the protests since September 2022?

### *1.2. Political and/or administrative developments*

- 1.2.1. Could you provide a brief description of the main political developments in Iran since the previous general country of origin information report on Iran published in May 2022 and update the information contained in that report?

## **2. Identity, nationality and documents**

### *2.1. Duty to provide proof of identity and identifying documents*

- 2.1.1. Can you indicate the extent to which the information given on this topic in the previous Iran information report is still up to date?
- 2.1.2. The marriage certificate (*aghdnameh*) is traditionally held by the wife's family. Is it possible for the husband to obtain a copy of the marriage certificate and if so, from whom/which authority?
- 2.1.3. What birth-related documents can a non-Iranian child born in Iran obtain? By whom/which authority are these documents issued?

### *2.2. Nationality*

- 2.2.1. Can you indicate the extent to which the information given on this topic in the previous Iran information report is still up to date?

### **3. Human rights**

#### **3.1. Position of specific groups**

##### **3.1.1. Ethnic groups**

3.1.1.1. Do politically and culturally active Ahwazi encounter problems in relation to activities on behalf of their ethnic group? Does this also apply to relatively marginal activities such as attending a demonstration?

3.1.1.1.1. Are the political activities of Ahwazi abroad actively monitored by the Iranian authorities and, if so, in what way? Does this also apply to standing up for cultural and ethnic rights?

3.1.1.2. Do politically and culturally active Kurds encounter problems in relation to activities on behalf of their ethnic group? Does this also apply to relatively marginal activities such as attending a demonstration?

3.1.1.2.1. Are the political activities of Kurds abroad actively monitored by the Iranian authorities and, if so, in what way? Does this also apply to standing up for cultural and ethnic rights?

3.1.1.3. Do politically and culturally active Azeris encounter problems in relation to activities on behalf of their ethnic group? Does this also apply to relatively marginal activities such as attending a demonstration?

3.1.1.3.1. Are the political activities of Azeris abroad actively monitored by the Iranian authorities and, if so, in what way? Does this also apply to standing up for cultural and ethnic rights?

3.1.1.4. Do politically and culturally active Baluchi people encounter problems in relation to activities on behalf of their ethnic group? Does this also apply to relatively marginal activities such as attending a demonstration?

3.1.1.4.1. Are the political activities of Baluchi people abroad actively monitored by the Iranian authorities and, if so, in what way? Does this also apply to standing up for cultural and ethnic rights?

##### **3.1.2. Members of opposition parties / political activists**

3.1.2.1. Are opponents abroad monitored by the Iranian authorities, and if so, how and on what scale is this done?

3.1.2.2. Are the family members and relatives of political opponents regarded as problematic by the Iranian authorities? If so, what form does this take?

##### **3.1.3. Draft evaders and deserters**

3.1.3.1. Please describe the system of military service and provide an update on the information on national service in the May 2022 information report.

3.1.3.2. Does a military court issue documents upon conviction? Can these documents be viewed in the Sana system?

3.1.3.3. To what extent can a person exempted from military service due to their sexual orientation (which can be inferred from the exemption card) encounter difficulties from the authorities at a later date due to the grounds for their exemption?

3.1.3.4. If a conscript living outside Iran stays in Iran for more than three months, does he still have to serve in the military or is paying the fine the equivalent of buying off conscription?

**Services Directorate**

Expertise Department

Research and Expertise Team  
for Country and Language

**Date**

19 January 2023

**Our reference**

### 3.1.4. LGBTIQ+

Please address the different subcategories, and at the very least always provide a separate outline of the position of transgender people insofar as this is possible, including regional differences.

- 3.1.4.1. Is male and female homosexual orientation in itself punishable by law and/or is it the committing of homosexual acts that is formally and legally punishable? If so, what does the statutory penalty consist of?
- 3.1.4.2. Do the authorities pursue an active policy of criminal prosecution against LGBTIQ+ persons? If so, can you give an indication of the scale on which this occurs? Can you indicate what form the police investigation and criminal investigation take and how they are conducted?
- 3.1.4.3. Can you indicate what penalties are imposed in practice?
- 3.1.4.4. In practice, can knowledge of a person's (attributed) LGBTIQ+ behaviour or orientation lead to disproportionate or discriminatory punishment or enforcement of a sentence imposed by (criminal) prosecution for committing an offence under general criminal law?
- 3.1.4.5. Please address possible serious cases of discrimination against LGBTIQ+ persons by the authorities and/or by fellow citizens. If LGBTIQ+ persons face serious difficulties from fellow citizens, with the consequences referred to here, do the authorities provide effective protection against this treatment?
- 3.1.4.6. Do civil society organisations exist which advocate for the rights of LGBTIQ+ persons and if so, what are they and what is the nature of their activities?
- 3.1.4.7. Do the family or relatives of LGBTIQ+ persons experience problems at the hands of the Iranian authorities because they have an LGBTIQ+ in their family?

### 3.1.5. Women

Please outline the position of women in Iranian society, with particular reference to the following questions:

- 3.1.5.1. To what extent are women represented in positions and senior positions in society?
- 3.1.5.2. To what extent do women participate in political activities and what is their role in these activities?
- 3.1.5.3. To what extent are women subject to special codes of behaviour and dress that do not apply to men?
- 3.1.5.4. Do women require permission to leave the country?
- 3.1.5.5. Can you comment on the position of westernised women?<sup>1</sup>
- 3.1.5.6. Are women regarded as legally competent?
- 3.1.5.7. Is it possible for women to report violence and sexual violence by third parties or by government officials to the authorities and to obtain protection?

**Services Directorate**

Expertise Department

Research and Expertise Team  
for Country and Language

**Date**

19 January 2023

**Our reference**

---

<sup>1</sup> For the definition, see the Administrative Jurisdiction Division ruling of 21 November 2018, <https://www.raadvanstate.nl/@111690/201701423-1-v2/>. This has been incorporated into a working instruction: [https://ind.nl/Documents/WI\\_2019-1.pdf](https://ind.nl/Documents/WI_2019-1.pdf).

- 3.1.5.7.1. If so, is this possibility generally available in practice?
- 3.1.5.7.2. Does it also apply if the perpetrator is the husband?
- 3.1.5.7.3. If not, do women normally have the option of moving in with relatives elsewhere in the country in order to escape violence?
- 3.1.5.7.4. In such case, what position does the woman then have?
- 3.1.5.8. Is there any other way to obtain protection?
- 3.1.5.9. Are there shelter facilities available (through government channels or private institutions) for women who want to escape violence?
- 3.1.5.10. What is the status of the bill *Protection, dignity and security of women against violence*?

**Services Directorate**

Expertise Department

Research and Expertise Team  
for Country and Language

**Date**

19 January 2023

**Our reference**

### 3.1.6. Minors (including unaccompanied minors)

- 3.1.6.1. Please provide a brief outline of the position of minors, including an update on the May 2022 information report on Iran. Can you indicate whether there are differences in the treatment of minors of Persian ethnicity as opposed to minors of Kurdish, Arab, Azeri or Baluch ethnicity?
- 3.1.6.2. Where and by whom are minors normally cared for when they no longer have parental care (for instance because their parents have died)?
  - 3.1.6.2.1. Are there legal arrangements to regulate who should provide care or who acquires guardianship in cases where the parents are no longer in the picture?
  - 3.1.6.2.2. Are there shelters for minors available? If so, please specify.
  - 3.1.6.2.3. Are there separate shelters for boys and girls?
  - 3.1.6.2.4. Until what age are children permitted to stay in a shelter? Is this the same for boys and girls?
  - 3.1.6.2.5. For which categories of minors are these shelters intended?
  - 3.1.6.2.6. In general, are there enough places available?
  - 3.1.6.2.7. If shelters do exist, can you provide information on facilities such as being able to attend education, availability and quality of medical care, quality of food, availability of a night shelter, clothing and availability of sanitation; all as evaluated by local standards.
  - 3.1.6.2.8. How plausible is it – given the social structure of Iranian society – that a minor would not be given shelter with one of these persons and/or institutions?
  - 3.1.6.2.9. How is the (legal) supervision of shelters regulated?
  - 3.1.6.2.10. Are there government institutions which are charged with the reception of unaccompanied minors in general and the reception of repatriated minors in particular?
  - 3.1.6.2.11. Which NGOs play an active role in the reception of unaccompanied minors and what is the nature of their activities?

### 3.2. *Compliance and violations*

- 3.2.1. Freedom of expression
  - 3.2.1.1. What changes have taken place regarding freedom of expression in relation to democratic values and the defence of civil rights (notably in relation to demonstrations)?
  - 3.2.1.2. Human rights activists
    - 3.2.1.2.1. Can you provide an update on the freedom of expression information from the May 2022 information report on Iran? In your update, please cover the following areas: human rights

activists, women's rights activists, environmentalists, journalists, and critical citizens.

3.2.1.3. Demonstrators

- 3.2.1.3.1. To what extent do participants in demonstrations who are injured and taken to hospital run the risk of being arrested in hospital?
- 3.2.1.3.2. To what extent do participants in demonstrations in Iran face criminal prosecution when they return from abroad, even if no criminal charges were initially brought?
- 3.2.1.3.3. Are all demonstrators under equally intense surveillance by the authorities, or does this depend on their level of participation in the demonstrations?
- 3.2.1.4. Do the authorities attempt to monitor the content of weblogs, Facebook pages, Twitter pages, Instagram, TikTok and internet discussion groups, and if so, what approaches do they take? On what scale does this occur?
- 3.2.1.5. Are there any cases of persons being convicted for the content of their weblog, Facebook pages, Twitter pages, Instagram or TikTok? If so, on what kind of content is the conviction based and under which article(s) of which law(s)?
- 3.2.1.6. Do the Iranian authorities use facial recognition technology to track individuals? If so, in what circumstances and on what scale? If so, do they do this both in Iran and abroad?

3.2.2. Freedom of assembly and association

- 3.2.2.1. What changes have taken place in the area of democracy and defence of civil rights regarding freedom of assembly (most notably in relation to demonstrations)?

3.2.3. Freedom of religion and belief

Christianity

- 3.2.3.1. Can you provide information on the position of Christians in Iran, both for members of the 'old' and 'new' churches? Since the account given in the May 2022 information report, have there been any changes in the position of Christians? What opportunities exist for Christians in the broadest sense of the word to practice their faith without fear of reprisals?
- 3.2.3.2. Are the relatives of apostates or converts (who are not apostates or converts themselves) subject to pressure from the Iranian authorities because of their relative's apostasy or conversion?
- 3.2.3.3. Do people with visible Christian tattoos encounter problems in Iran?
- 3.2.3.4. Do the Iranian authorities operate an active policy of detection regarding converts to Christianity attending house churches?
- 3.2.3.5. Does every visit (known to the authorities) to a house church by a convert to Christianity automatically lead to criminal prosecution? On criminal charges: what punishment can someone attending a house church usually expect to receive?

Apostates

- 3.2.3.6. Given the current political and social unrest in Iran, is there any evidence that apostates or non-practising Muslims are being treated differently by the Iranian authorities, and if so, in what ways?

**Services Directorate**  
Expertise Department

Research and Expertise Team  
for Country and Language

**Date**  
19 January 2023

**Our reference**

- 3.2.3.7. With regard to apostates, can you describe specifically how apostasy affects their position? In doing so, please address the matter of what is considered to be apostasy.
- 3.2.3.8. From Divisional ruling ECLI:NL:RVS:2022:93 of 19 January 2022, finding 23.2, it follows that if a foreign national has invoked apostasy as grounds for seeking asylum and this is known to the Iranian authorities, they must be able to prove that they are not an apostate. Is this correct? How can anyone prove that they are not an apostate?
- 3.2.3.9. Are apostates still at risk of persecution if they do not declare their apostasy? Is there any evidence/are there any examples of legislation being applied to individuals simply for not being a practising Muslim (and which therefore may or may not be attributed to apostasy)? Or is the legislation only applied to those who actively express their apostasy?

#### Other religions

- 3.2.3.10. Do Bahá'í encounter problems in daily life because of their religious beliefs?
- 3.2.3.11. Do Jews experience problems in everyday life because of their religious beliefs?
- 3.2.3.12. Do Zoroastrians experience problems in everyday life because of their religious beliefs?
- 3.2.3.13. Do Gonabadi Sufis experience problems in daily life because of their religious beliefs?

#### Questions and comments

- 3.2.3.14. What is the situation for persons, including officials, who do not wish to participate in the religious activities/adhere to the religious prescriptions of Islam?
- 3.2.3.15. Does non-participation in religious practices lead to the imputation of apostasy or the assumption that a person has turned away from Islam? In the event of non-participation, which activities or deviating from which norms carries a risk?
- 3.2.3.16. In which circumstances is a citizen officially obliged to declare their religion to the government? What choices do people have in those circumstances and what are the consequences if someone indicates that they do not adhere to a religion?
- 3.2.3.16.1. Page 72 of the May 2022 information report on Iran: "In addition, during criminal court hearings or in the offices of the public prosecutors (*dadsara*), suspects are asked about their religion during questioning on the basis of a form." Who completes this form? If a person is prosecuted for conversion and the form states that the person is Muslim, will they be believed or not, and will they encounter no further problems afterwards? What are the consequences of refusing to sign the form? Will these individuals be blacklisted and/or monitored?

### 3.3. Supervision and legal protection

- 3.3.1. What are the options for reporting a crime to the police?
- 3.3.1.1. Is the report made verbally and/or in writing?
- 3.3.1.2. Are reports then processed?
- 3.3.1.2.1. What factors does this depend on?

**Services Directorate**  
Expertise Department

Research and Expertise Team  
for Country and Language

**Date**  
19 January 2023

**Our reference**

- 3.3.1.3. Are reports usually processed with sufficient effectiveness?
  - 3.3.1.3.1. What factors does this depend on?
- 3.3.1.4. Are people usually given written confirmation of the report they have made?
- 3.3.1.5. If the police fail to act adequately, is there another, possibly higher authority to which people can apply for protection?
- 3.3.1.6. In practice, does it make sense to seek the protection of these authorities?
  - 3.3.1.6.1. What factors does this depend on?
- 3.3.1.7. To what extent can NGOs or international organisations be helpful in obtaining protection?

**Services Directorate**  
Expertise Department

Research and Expertise Team  
for Country and Language

**Date**  
19 January 2023

**Our reference**

### 3.3.2. Legislation

- 3.3.2.1. Is it legally and practically possible to send documents such as identity documents and legal documents abroad from Iran? Is the postal service controlled by the authorities and, if so, to what extent? In what circumstances can sending documents result in negative scrutiny of the sender by the Iranian authorities?
- 3.3.2.2. If a woman's first marriage is a sigheh marriage, does a divorce after a sigheh marriage have the same status as a divorce after a permanent marriage? If so, after a sigheh divorce, is the woman formally regarded as a divorcee and does this mean that in the event of a first permanent marriage following the sigheh divorce she no longer needs her father's consent?
- 3.3.2.3. What changes have taken place in the area of democracy/defence of civil rights regarding freedom of movement (notably in relation to the demonstrations)?

### 3.3.3. Judicial process

- 3.3.3.1. What changes have taken place in the area of democracy/defence of civil rights regarding a fair trial and the right of protection against torture (notably in relation to the demonstrations)?
- 3.3.3.2. Is a suspect granted access to a lawyer? If so, how is this arranged?
- 3.3.3.3. Does Iran respect the principle of ne bis in idem? If so, does Iran do this for all categories of punishment in the Iranian Penal Code (*hudud, qiyas, diyat, ta'ziraat*)? If not, which category or categories are excluded?
- 3.3.3.4. Are there any new developments with regard to the Sana system (access in Iran, access from abroad, type of document that can be viewed)?
- 3.3.3.5. Can the application for a travel ban submitted to the court by the prosecutor be viewed by the person concerned in the Sana system?
- 3.3.3.6. Do charges have to be filed before a house search takes place? If so, can these charges be viewed in the Sana system?
- 3.3.3.7. From the Netherlands, can a lawyer in Iran only be authorised through the Iranian embassy in the Netherlands?
- 3.3.3.8. Page 91 of the May 2022 information report on Iran: "If a plaintiff or defendant has to appear in court, that person will receive a text message notifying them of this requirement." Does this also apply if someone does not have a Sana account?
- 3.3.3.9. Is it only the defendant themselves who is permitted to access documents from a criminal file in Iran? Is the same permission not

- given to a family member who has been issued with a summons to give a statement about the suspect?
- 3.3.3.10. If a defendant has been sentenced to lashing, is a substitute sentence possible once the sentence has become final?
- 3.3.3.11. Does a detainee who is permitted leave issued with a document to this effect? Does bail have to be paid in the event of leave?
- 3.3.3.12. Can a lawyer in Iran with a power of attorney from a brother or other relative obtain documents relating to the criminal case against a defendant from a court in Iran?
- 3.3.3.13. Are there any appeals possible against rulings by revolutionary courts?
- 3.3.3.14. Is it possible to be convicted in absentia for activities carried out abroad?
- 3.3.3.15. If someone has left Iran with a passport but does not have an exit stamp, is this also considered an illegal exit that is subject to an official sanction? What sanctions are imposed for this in practice?
- 3.3.3.16. Arrests, custody and detention
- 3.3.3.16.1. Can you provide an update on developments regarding these issues since the May 2022 information report on Iran?
- 3.3.3.17. The death penalty
- 3.3.3.17.1. How often is the death penalty imposed and for what crimes?
- 3.3.3.17.2. Are executions also carried out?
- 3.3.3.17.3. Is there any possibility of a pardon for prisoners who are sentenced to death? If so, is a pardon granted?
- 3.3.4. Honour-based violence
- 3.3.4.1. Can the relatives of victims of honour-based violence obtain protection from the Iranian authorities?
- 3.3.5. Abuse and torture
- 3.3.5.1. Can you provide an update on developments regarding this issue since the May 2022 information report on Iran?
- 3.3.6. Are perpetrators/suspects generally prosecuted and punished for acts such as torture, aggravated assault and rape? If not, what reason does the government have for not prosecuting and/or punishing them for these offences? Offenders/suspects in this context refers to government officials or persons belonging to a group that *de facto* constitutes the government in a given area (i.e. not private persons).
- 3.3.7. Disappearances and abductions
- 3.3.7.1. Can you provide an update on developments regarding this issue since the May 2022 information report on Iran?

#### **4. Refugees**

In answering the following questions, please bear in mind the difference between the term 'refugee' as it is used in everyday conversation and the legal definition of the word.

- 4.1. Can you provide a factual description of the flow of displaced persons and/or refugees in and out of the country of origin and the residency issues of refugees in Iran?

**Services Directorate**  
Expertise Department

Research and Expertise Team  
for Country and Language

**Date**  
19 January 2023

**Our reference**

- 4.2. Are there any areas in Iran where internally displaced persons are housed? If so, what is the situation on the ground in these areas?
- 4.3. What requirements do the Iranian authorities make of non-Iranians before they can travel out of Iran (e.g. for family reunification to the Netherlands)? What documents can they use to leave Iran? Is a laissez-passer sufficient for this purpose? Do these requirements differ according to nationality? Does they differ per region/border/airport?
- 4.4. Does a non-Iranian incur exit penalties when leaving Iran if they have stayed in Iran without an official status?

**Services Directorate**  
Expertise Department

Research and Expertise Team  
for Country and Language

**Date**  
19 January 2023

**Our reference**

## **5. Return**

- 5.1.1. Are there any known cases of migrants who return (or are forcibly returned) encountering problems with the authorities on arrival?
  - 5.1.1.1. If so, how were they treated (on arrival at the airport)? Can you detail the specific nature of these problems? For example, are they pressured into talking about what they did abroad?
  - 5.1.1.2. In terms of how they are treated, does it matter what type of document a person has with them on their return?
  - 5.1.1.3. Does ethnic or religious background play a role in how they are treated?
  - 5.1.1.4. Does sexual orientation (or ascribed sexual orientation) play a role in how they are treated?
  - 5.1.1.5. Does being a single woman play a role in how they are treated?
  - 5.1.1.6. Does the person's reason for leaving Iran play a role in how they are treated (e.g. if they left with the purpose of seeking asylum)?
  - 5.1.1.7. Given the current political and social unrest, is there any indication that asylum seekers who have exhausted all legal remedies are being treated differently by the Iranian authorities, and if so, in what way?
  - 5.1.1.8. Does the matter of whether a person left Iran legally or illegally play a role in how they are treated?
  - 5.1.1.9. Does the length of time that someone has been away from Iran play a role in how they are treated? See the Divisional Ruling of 19 January 2022; ECLI:NL:RVS:2022:93; finding 23.2.
  - 5.1.1.10. Upon their return (voluntary or forcible), is the returnee required to sign a document or declaration confirming that they still adhere to Islam? How is this declaration worded? Do the Iranian authorities ask whether a person has fabricated a motive in order to qualify for asylum? Or does the person only have to declare/confirm that they are Muslim?
  - 5.1.1.11. What value do the Iranian authorities attach to this statement? Is a person believed without question or is the foreign national subject to further investigation by the Iranian authorities and if so, to what extent and in what form?
  - 5.1.1.12. From the information that led to the Divisional Ruling of 19 January 2022 (UK Upper Tribunal Country Guidance, PS (Christianity - risk) Iran CG [2020] UKUT 00046 (IAC), paragraph 115), it appears that a person with a disingenuous asylum motive may be monitored for some time after signing the declaration that they are a Muslim to check whether or not they are engaged in Christian activities. Is this the case, and if so on what scale does it occur? Does this apply both to persons whose conversion to Christianity is regarded as implausible and persons whose apostasy is regarded as implausible?

- 5.1.1.12.1. If someone is monitored after returning to Iran, is it known for how long this continues? Does it continue for two weeks, two months or two years, for example? How intensively is a person monitored? Does it take the form of physical surveillance and/or online or telephone surveillance? Are there any indications that during surveillance, a person might be accused of conversion to Christianity on the basis of something innocuous, and that this might then lead to prosecution?
- 5.1.1.13. What happens if a person refuses to sign this declaration on arrival or to otherwise declare that they are still Muslim?
- 5.1.1.14. If the Iranian authorities are aware of a returnee's asylum application, how do they obtain this information? Do they question people about this matter, or do they go through the social media accounts of every Iranian national returning from the West, for example?
- 5.1.1.15. Do persons arrested on their return have to sign a statement before being released? If so, what is the general nature of this statement?
- 5.1.1.16. When persons return (or are forcibly returned), do the authorities carry out additional baggage checks or confiscate their baggage on arrival?
- 5.1.1.17. Are there any reports that persons who return (or are forcibly returned) have had problems reoccupying their home, getting property back or gaining access to education, employment or food?
- 5.1.1.18. Are there known cases of persons being detained on their return (forcible or otherwise) and is it known what profile these persons had?
- 5.1.1.19. Is there an active policy of detection for returnees?
- 5.1.1.20. Are returning asylum seekers at risk of being monitored by the Iranian authorities?
- 5.1.1.21. Cases are known in which Iranians from the diaspora are asked to provide the passwords of their social media accounts on their arrival at an Iranian airport. Is it known whether they have the option to refuse to provide their passwords? Can a person be obliged to give their passwords and what form does this obligation take?
- 5.1.2. Can you travel freely in Iran? If not, why not?

**Services Directorate**  
Expertise Department  
Research and Expertise Team  
for Country and Language

**Date**  
19 January 2023

**Our reference**

If you have any questions about the points for consideration listed above, please contact the Research and Expertise Team for Country and Language.

The State Secretary of Justice and Security  
On whose behalf,



Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND)  
*Ministry of Justice and Security*

> Return address: PO Box 16275 | 2500 BG | The Hague

To  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs Directorate for  
Sub-Saharan Africa  
Country of Origin Information Unit (08.D.)  
attn. [REDACTED]  
PO Box 20061  
2500 EB The Hague

**Services Directorate**  
Expertise Department  
Research and Expertise Team  
for Country and Language

Turfmarkt 147  
**2511** DP The Hague  
PO Box 16275  
2500 BG The Hague Info  
line 088 - 0430 430

[www.ind.nl](http://www.ind.nl)

**Contact**  
Secretariat

T [REDACTED]

Date 23 February 2023  
Concerns additional questions, Terms of Reference for general country of origin information  
report for Iran

**Date**  
23 February 2023

**Our reference**  
[REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]

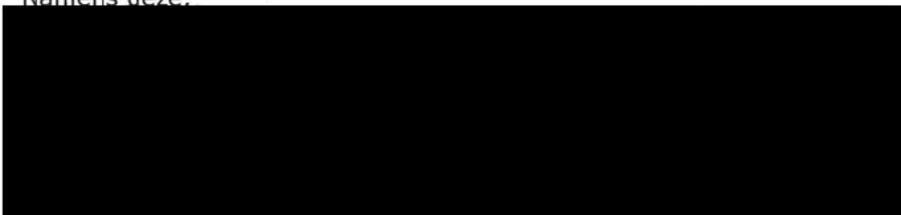
**Appendices**

In addition to the TOR Iran dated 19 January 2023, our reference [REDACTED], I am sending  
you the questions below regarding the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC, Sepah-e  
Pasdaran-e Enqelab-e Eslami, or Sepah-e Pasdaran or Sepah or Pasdaran for short) in Iran.

1. What are the tasks of the IRGC (both in terms of internal security, external  
defence and protection of the Islamic regime, and its part within the economy  
and industry (military and otherwise))?
2. Which parts of the IRGC are engaged in these tasks?
3. In what ways do the IRGC air force, land force and navy differ from the regular  
Artesh army?
4. Specifically, what does this entail when doing military service?

If you have any questions about the points for consideration listed above, please contact the  
Research and Expertise Team for Country and Language.

The State Secretary of Justice and Security  
**Namens deze**, [REDACTED]





## General Country of Origin Information Report on Iran

Datum      September 2023

## Publication details

Town/city                      The Hague  
Drawn up by                  Country of Origin Information Unit

### Disclaimer

The Dutch version of this report is leading. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands cannot be held accountable for misinterpretations based on the English version of the report.

This translation has been co-funded by the European Union.



## Contents

1	Political and security situation .....	6
<b>1.1</b>	<b>Political situation.....</b>	<b>6</b>
1.1.1	Islamic Republic .....	6
1.1.2	Criminal justice system .....	7
1.1.3	Revolutionary Guard .....	7
<b>1.2</b>	<b>Security situation .....</b>	<b>12</b>
1.2.1	Domestic security situation .....	12
1.2.2	Large-scale protests in 2022 .....	12
1.2.3	Attacks at Shah Cheragh shrine.....	18
1.2.4	Drone attack on a military factory .....	19
1.2.5	School poisonings.....	19
1.2.6	Kurdistan, Kermanshah and West Azerbaijan .....	20
1.2.7	Khuzestan .....	21
1.2.8	Sistan-Baluchistan .....	22
2	Identity, documents and nationality .....	25
<b>2.1</b>	<b>Compulsory identification, ID and travel documents .....</b>	<b>25</b>
2.1.1	Birth certificate .....	25
2.1.2	National ID card .....	25
2.1.3	Passport .....	25
2.1.4	Marriage certificate .....	25
2.1.5	Birth certificates for non-Iranian children.....	25
2.1.6	Sending documents abroad.....	26
<b>2.2</b>	<b>Nationality.....</b>	<b>26</b>
3	Human rights .....	27
<b>3.1</b>	<b>Position of specific groups.....</b>	<b>27</b>
3.1.1	Ethnic groups.....	27
3.1.2	Members of opposition parties and political activists.....	36
3.1.3	Military service.....	40
3.1.4	LGBTIQ+ .....	42
3.1.5	Women .....	46
3.1.6	Minors (including unaccompanied minors) .....	54
<b>3.2</b>	<b>Compliance and violations .....</b>	<b>56</b>
3.2.1	Freedom of expression .....	56
3.2.2	Freedom of assembly and association .....	71
3.2.3	Freedom of religion and belief.....	71
3.2.4	Freedom of movement .....	89
<b>3.3</b>	<b>Supervision and legal protection .....</b>	<b>90</b>
3.3.1	Reporting a crime .....	90
3.3.2	Judicial process .....	91
3.3.3	Arrests, custody and detention.....	95
3.3.4	The death penalty.....	97
3.3.5	Honour-based violence.....	100

3.3.6	Maltreatment and torture .....	101
3.3.7	Disappearances and abductions.....	102
4	Refugees and displaced persons .....	104
<b>4.1</b>	<b>Refugees in Iran .....</b>	<b>104</b>
4.1.1	Influx of Afghans .....	104
4.1.2	Reception of Afghans .....	104
4.1.3	Registered Afghans.....	105
4.1.4	Afghan passport holders.....	105
4.1.5	Undocumented Afghans.....	106
4.1.6	Census.....	106
4.1.7	Voluntary return by Afghans .....	107
4.1.8	Discrimination of Afghans .....	107
4.1.9	Iraqi refugees .....	107
<b>4.2</b>	<b>Reception of internally displaced persons in Iran.....</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>4.3</b>	<b>Leaving the country as a non-Iranian .....</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>4.4</b>	<b>Fines for illegal residence .....</b>	<b>108</b>
5	Return .....	109
<b>5.1</b>	<b>Iranian diaspora .....</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>5.2</b>	<b>Problems on return.....</b>	<b>109</b>
5.2.1	Factors when returning .....	109
5.2.2	Declaration about Islam .....	111
5.2.3	Monitoring returnees.....	111
5.2.4	Information about an asylum application .....	112
5.2.5	Statement on release.....	112
5.2.6	Luggage checks on returnees.....	112
5.2.7	Recovering property .....	112
5.2.8	Arrest after return .....	112
5.2.9	Social media passwords.....	113
6	Appendices .....	115
<b>6.1</b>	<b>List of abbreviations used.....</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>6.2</b>	<b>Glossary .....</b>	<b>116</b>
<b>6.3</b>	<b>Reports and publications .....</b>	<b>117</b>
<b>6.4</b>	<b>Websites.....</b>	<b>123</b>
<b>6.5</b>	<b>News sources .....</b>	<b>125</b>
<b>6.6</b>	<b>Legislation.....</b>	<b>126</b>
<b>6.7</b>	<b>Map of Iran.....</b>	<b>127</b>

## Introduction

This country of origin information report was drawn up on the basis of the questions asked and points for consideration mentioned in the Terms of Reference (ToR) compiled by the Dutch Ministry of Justice and Security. The ToR for this information report were adopted on 19 January 2023, with a supplementary ToR on 23 February 2023. Both the ToR and the supplement, together with the report, are available on the website of the Dutch Government.

This general country of origin information report describes the situation in Iran insofar as this affects the assessment of asylum applications from persons originating from this country, and for decision-making regarding the repatriation of rejected Iranian asylum seekers. It is an update of the General Country of Origin Information Report of May 2022.<sup>1</sup> The reporting period covers the period from April 2022 up to and including August 2023. This report is a factual, neutral and objective representation of the findings that were made during the period under consideration. It is not a policy document, nor does it reflect the Dutch government's vision or policy in relation to any given country or region. The report does not contain any conclusions concerning immigration policy.

This country of origin information report has been compiled on the basis of public and confidential sources, using carefully selected, analysed and verified information. In the compilation of this report, use was made of information from various sources, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), specialist literature, media reporting, and relevant government agencies. Except where the facts are generally undisputed or unless stated otherwise, the content in this report is based on multiple sources. The public sources that were consulted are listed in Section 6 of this report.

This country of origin information report also draws on information obtained through the diplomatic representation of the Netherlands in Iran, in addition to confidential conversations and correspondence. A visit to Iran was also made. The information gleaned in this way was mainly used to support and augment passages founded on publicly available information. The sources are indicated as 'confidential source' in the footnotes and are accompanied by a date.

Section 1 addresses the political and security situation. Section 2 explores documentation and legislation on nationality. Section 3 addresses the human rights situation in Iran. Section 4 discusses the situation of refugees and internally displaced persons. The country of origin information report concludes with a section on Iranians returning to their country of origin.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/ambtsberichten/2022/05/31/algemeen-ambtsbericht-iran-van-mei-2022>

# 1 Political and security situation

## 1.1 Political situation

### 1.1.1 *Islamic Republic*

The Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) has a hybrid political system with both theocratic-authoritarian and democratic-republican elements.<sup>2</sup> At its head is the supreme leader: a Shia cleric with far-reaching powers. These include the role of commander-in-chief of the armed forces. He appoints the head of the judiciary, the commander of the regular army, the clerics who lead Friday prayer in the provinces and the head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting Corporation (IRIB), among others. A number of prominent Islamic charitable foundations are also under his authority.<sup>3</sup> Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, born in 1939, was appointed supreme leader by the Assembly of Experts in 1989. The Assembly of Experts is a council charged with the task of supervising the supreme leader and choosing a successor after his death. Chaired by Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, this council meets twice a year. The 88 clerics who currently make up the Assembly of Experts were elected for an eight-year term in a general election held in 2016.<sup>4</sup>

In 2021, Ebrahim Raisi was elected president in a general election.<sup>5</sup> Iran has a directly elected parliament of 290 seats. Parliamentary elections are held every four years, most recently in 2020.<sup>6</sup> Parliament sets the annual budget and passes legislation. Parliament can also propose a motion of no confidence against a minister. On 30 April 2023, for example, parliament dismissed the Minister of Industry, Mining and Trade.<sup>7</sup> In May 2023, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf began his fourth term as parliamentary speaker.<sup>8</sup> All parliamentary decisions have to be approved by the Guardian Council. The aforementioned Ayatollah Jannati is the secretary of this council, which consists of twelve members. Six are clerics appointed by the supreme leader. In addition, the head of the judiciary nominates six lawyers to this council, whose appointment is subsequently approved by parliament.<sup>9</sup> If a law is rejected by the Guardian Council, parliament can submit it a second time in revised form. If a dispute between the Guardian Council and parliament about certain legislation remains unresolved, the Expediency Council

<sup>2</sup> IISS, *Woman, life, freedom in Iran*, 29 November 2022; CRS, *Iran: Background and U.S. policy*, 23 March 2023, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> On 12 December 2022, the Council of the European Union added IRIB to the EU sanctions list; LTO, *Staatsorganisationsrecht des Iran: Ein Wächterrat voller Macht*, 26 October 2022; BBC News, *Iran country profile*, 6 January 2023; Die Zeit, *Wie Staat und Religion im Iran miteinander verwoben sind*, 19 January 2023; Freedom House, *Freedom in the world 2023. Country report Iran*, 9 March 2023, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Tasnim News, *Periodic meeting of Iran's Assembly of Experts opens in Tehran*, 6 September 2022; The Economist, *The succession*, 25 May 2023.

<sup>5</sup> BBCM, *Analysis: Iranian president Ebrahim Raisi's first year in office*, 4 August 2022; BBC News, *Iran country profile*, 6 January 2023.

<sup>6</sup> Iran International, *Iran speaker wins re-election as Khamenei calls for less infighting*, 26 May 2022; BBCM, *Iran MPs approve amendments in parliamentary election law*, 29 January 2023.

<sup>7</sup> Die Zeit, *Wie Staat und Religion im Iran miteinander verwoben sind*, 19 January 2023; BBCM, *Iran's industry minister impeached by parliament*, 30 April 2023; AP News, *Iran's parliament sacks minister over alleged mismanagement*, 30 April 2023.

<sup>8</sup> Iran International, *Iran speaker wins re-election as Khamenei calls for less infighting*, 26 May 2022; BBCM, *Iran parliament speaker re-elected for another year*, 23 May 2023.

<sup>9</sup> Iran International, *Top Iran judge wants swift 'justice' for protestors*, 19 December 2022; BBCM, *Iran's government submits 'legal rallies' bill to parliament*, 6 May 2023; USDoS, *Iran 2022 international religious freedom report*, 15 May 2023, p. 10; BBCM, *Senior cleric re-elected head of Iran's powerful constitutional watchdog*, 19 July 2023; IranWire, *97-year-old cleric Jannati re-elected as Guardian Council chief*, 20 July 2023.

decides the fate of the law. The members of the Expediency Council are appointed by the supreme leader.<sup>10</sup>

### 1.1.2 *Criminal justice system*

The law is extensively codified in all legislative areas, including criminal law. The resulting legal texts are largely based on the tenets of Twelver Shi'ism.<sup>11</sup> The criminal justice system has two pillars: the regular courts, which have general jurisdiction, and the revolutionary courts, which handle cases considered a threat to national security.<sup>12</sup> These cases may include charges under Article 279 (*moharebeh* or enmity against God) of the Islamic Penal Code (hereinafter: Penal Code), Article 286 of the Penal Code (*efsad-fil-arz*, spreading corruption on earth),<sup>13</sup> Article 287 of the Penal Code (*baghy*, armed rebellion), Article 501 of the Penal Code (espionage), Article 514 of the Penal Code (insulting the founder or the supreme leader of the IRI) and the Opium Act.<sup>14</sup>

The legal system operates under the direct responsibility of the head of the judiciary. Since 1 July 2021, this position has been filled by Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei.<sup>15</sup> Several sources regard the judiciary as not independent, biased and susceptible to influence.<sup>16</sup> Verdicts depend on the context (personal or otherwise), the domestic and global political situation, and the social standing of the accused. In addition, the judiciary, especially in the revolutionary courts, is not transparent.<sup>17</sup> In criminal trials, human rights defenders often have poor access to independent legal assistance. Convictions of human rights defenders mainly take place in the revolutionary courts (see Section 3.3.2).<sup>18</sup> As a whole, these aspects make Iran's legal system arbitrary and unpredictable.<sup>19</sup>

### 1.1.3 *Revolutionary Guard*

The Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) was established in 1979 to protect Iran's Islamic system from domestic and foreign threats.<sup>20</sup> The official name of this military organisation is the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (*Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enqelab-e Eslami*). The Revolutionary Guard plays an important role in politics, the armed forces and the economy. Numerous institutions and companies are associated

<sup>10</sup> Khamenei.ir, *Leader appointed members of Expediency Council for the new term*, 20 September 2022; LTO, *Ein Wächterrat voller Macht*, 26 October 2022; IFP, *Iran's former security chief becomes leader's political adviser, member of expediency council*, 22 May 2023.

<sup>11</sup> The Iran Primer, *The Islamic judiciary*, 1 August 2015; LTO, *Ein Wächterrat voller Macht*, 26 October 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Die Zeit, *Wie Staat und Religion im Iran miteinander verwoben sind*, 19 January 2023; Iran Best Lawyer, *Criminal defense in Iran*, <https://www.iranbestlawyer.com/criminal-defense-in-iran/>, accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>13</sup> According to Article 286 of the Penal Code, corruption on Earth covers the following: a crime committed on a large scale and directed against the physical integrity of others or the internal or external security of the country, the spreading of lies, disrupting the nation's economic system, committing arson and destruction, spreading toxic, microbiological or dangerous substances, establishing centres of debauchery and prostitution or assisting in their establishment.

<sup>14</sup> Article 303 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CCP).

<sup>15</sup> RSF, *New head of Iran's judicial system has journalists' blood on his hands*, 13 July 2021; Iran International, *Top Iran judge wants swift 'justice' for protestors*, 19 December 2022.

<sup>16</sup> The Economist, *Shirin Ebadi on the legal obstacles Iran's protesters face*, 16 November 2022; Amnesty International, *Amnesty International report 2022/23. The state of the world's human rights*, 28 March 2023, p. 198; IHRNGO & ECPM, *Annual report on the death penalty in Iran 2022*, 13 April 2023, p. 36.

<sup>17</sup> The Washington Post, *At the heart of Iran's crackdown, a small group of judges sentences protesters to hang*, 25 January 2023; IHRNGO, *At least 55 people executed in 26 days; List of protesters at risk of death penalty*, 27 January 2023; IHRNGO & ECPM, *Annual report on the death penalty in Iran 2022*, 13 April 2023, p. 39; confidential source, January 2023.

<sup>18</sup> The Conversation, *Iran executions: the role of the 'revolutionary courts' in breaching human rights*, 13 January 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>19</sup> De Standaard, *Van uitzichtloos naar uitzichtlozer: veertig jaar cel voor Belg in Iran*, 11 January 2023; Die Welt am Sonntag, *Im Land der Willkür*, 4 February 2023; confidential source, January 2023.

<sup>20</sup> In 2010, the Council of the European Union added the Revolutionary Guard to the WMD sanctions list; DIA, *Iran military power. Ensuring regime survival and securing regional dominance*, 19 November 2019, p. 25; IranWire, *The IRGC security and intelligence agencies*, 9 April 2019; VOA, *What is Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard?*, 3 January 2020.

with this organisation.<sup>21</sup> The Revolutionary Guard has many influential representatives in various institutions, such as the government, parliament, the Expediency Council and several executive organisations. This means that the Revolutionary Guard fulfils more than just a military role; the wide scope of the organisation gives it a major impact on daily life in Iran.<sup>22</sup>

In terms of its organisation, the Revolutionary Guard is accountable to the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran.<sup>23</sup> The commander-in-chief of the Revolutionary Guard is Major General Hossein Salami. He was appointed by the supreme leader on 21 April 2019.<sup>24</sup> Estimates of the number of active personnel range between 150,000 and 200,000. This does not include members of the paramilitary organisation Basij (see Section 1.1.3.5).<sup>25</sup> According to the CIA World Factbook, conscripts are thought to account for more than half of the Revolutionary Guard's personnel.<sup>26</sup>

#### 1.1.3.1 Quds Force

The Revolutionary Guard is made up of several sections. One of these is the Quds Force. This is the Revolutionary Guard's special unit for operations abroad.<sup>27</sup> Since 3 January 2020, Brigadier General Esmail Qaani has been commander of the Quds Force.<sup>28</sup> The Quds Force's field of operations covers several areas in which its members provide training, supplies and/or engage in military operations. These areas include Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen.<sup>29</sup>

#### 1.1.3.2 Navy

The Revolutionary Guard has its own navy. Its naval assets include missile-armed vessels, speedboats, helicopters, drones and landing craft.<sup>30</sup> The Revolutionary Guard's navy is estimated to have around 20,000 personnel.<sup>31</sup> Its main naval base is

<sup>21</sup> IranWire, *The IRGC security and intelligence agencies*, 9 April 2019; CFR, *Iran's revolutionary guards*, 20 April 2023.

<sup>22</sup> BBC News, *Profile: Iran's Revolutionary Guards*, 3 January 2020; Radio Farda, *Iran's Majles: A parliament of IRGC commanders*, 2 June 2020; Reuters, *Factbox: Iran's revolutionary guards: from military operations to business empire*, 19 January 2023; Chatham House, *Iran's generational leadership change*, 17 May 2023; The Economist, *The succession*, 25 May 2023.

<sup>23</sup> Saied Golkar, *Captive society: The Basij militia and social control in Iran*, Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Columbia University Press, 2015, p. 31; WINEP, *Who is Iran's new armed forces chief of staff?*, 5 July 2016; Tehran Times, *IRGC has special place in people's hearts: top commander*, 12 February 2023.

<sup>24</sup> Radio Farda, *Why Khamenei changed the guards' commander and what it means*, 22 April 2019; Iran International, *Iranian lawyers to file case against IRGC commander*, 27 March 2023.

<sup>25</sup> Australian Government, *DFAT country information report Iran*, 24 July 2023, p. 37; CIA, *The world factbook, Iran, Military and Security, Military and security service personnel strengths*, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/iran/#military-and-security>, accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>26</sup> CIA, *The world factbook, Iran, Military and Security, Military service age and obligation*.

<sup>27</sup> In 2011, the Council of the European Union added the Quds Force to the EU sanctions list; RFE/RL, *A look at three decades of Iran's secretive Quds force*, 8 January 2020; WINEP, *The evolution of Iran's Quds force since 1979*, 3 June 2021; Iran International, *Israeli media reveals new unit of Iran's IRGC Quds Force*, 7 June 2023.

<sup>28</sup> Reuters, *Iran names deputy Quds Force commander to replace Soleimani after killing*, 3 January 2020; Iran International, *IRGC Quds commander threatens region, insults women*, 21 December 2022.

<sup>29</sup> Iran International, *Iran's presence in Syria directly ordered by Khamenei: Insider*, 4 January 2023; Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, *Making the case for the UK to proscribe Iran's IRGC*, 17 January 2023; Reuters, *Factbox: Iran's revolutionary guards: from military operations to business empire*, 19 January 2023; CRS, *Iran: Background and U.S. policy*, 23 March 2023, pp. 5 and 8; CFR, *Iran's revolutionary guards*, 20 April 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>30</sup> WINEP, *New Iranian warship signals longer maritime reach, more aggressive strategy*, 16 September 2022; Tehran Times, *IRGC navy to get two new vessels*, 9 October 2022; BBCM, *Iran's IRGC adds large support ship, new fast boats to navy fleet*, 9 March 2023; BBCM, *Iran IRGC conducts 'close surveillance' on US warship*, 20 May 2023.

<sup>31</sup> DIA, *Iran military power*, 19 November 2019, p. 11; RFE/RL, *Persian might: How strong is Iran's military?*, 9 January 2020; CIA, *The world factbook, Iran, Military and security, Military and security service personnel strengths*.

in the city of Bandar Abbas in Hormozgan province.<sup>32</sup> Since 23 August 2018, this navy has been under the command of Commodore Alireza Tangsiri.<sup>33</sup> The navy of the Revolutionary Guard operates primarily in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz.<sup>34</sup>

The navy of the Revolutionary Guard is distinct from the regular navy: it has different types of units, possesses different weaponry and employs different tactics. For instance, Iran's regular naval fleet includes frigates, corvettes, submarines, helicopters and supply ships. It is estimated to have around 18,000 personnel in total, including marines, naval air service personnel and fleet personnel.<sup>35</sup> The regular navy is responsible for the deeper waters of the Caspian Sea, the Strait of Hormuz, the Gulf of Oman and the Indian Ocean. It carries out anti-piracy operations and visits foreign ports.<sup>36</sup>

#### 1.1.3.3 Aerospace force

The Revolutionary Guard has its own aerospace force. The arsenal of this force includes fighter aircraft, helicopters, drones and missiles. One of its sections is the Al-Ghadir missile command.<sup>37</sup> Since 2009, the Revolutionary Guard aerospace force has been under the command of Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajizadeh.<sup>38</sup> It is estimated to have around 15,000 personnel.<sup>39</sup> This aerospace force has four main tasks: strategic deterrence, aerial warfare, air defence and space warfare. To these ends, the deployment and/or presence of ballistic and cruise missiles are an important part of its programme.<sup>40</sup>

As with its navy, the Revolutionary Guard aerospace force has different types of units, possesses different weaponry and employs different tactics from the regular air force. For instance, Iran's regular air force includes fighter aircraft, transport aircraft, helicopters and tanker aircraft. Estimates of the number of active military personnel in the regular air force range between 37,000 and 40,000. The regular air force focuses primarily on defending Iranian airspace.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>32</sup> IranWire, *The IRGC navy*, 9 April 2019; MEI, *The IRGC and the Persian Gulf region in a period of contested deterrence*, 3 November 2021, p. 16; Iran International, *China finally opens consulate in Iran's Persian Gulf port*, 22 December 2022.

<sup>33</sup> Radio Farda, *Khamenei appoints a new IRGC navy commander*, 24 August 2018; WINEP, *New Iranian warship signals longer maritime reach, more aggressive strategy*, 16 September 2022; BBCM, *Iran IRGC conducts 'close surveillance' on US warship*, 20 May 2023.

<sup>34</sup> DIA, *Iran military power*, 19 November 2019, p. 48; BBCM, *IRGC navy discovers 3m litres of smuggled fuel in south Iran*, 13 May 2023.

<sup>35</sup> DIA, *Iran military power*, 19 November 2019, p. 11; IISS, *The military balance 2021*, 25 February 2021, p. 337; Tehran Times, *New Fateh-class submarines to join Iranian navy fleet*, 26 April 2023; CIA, *The world factbook, Iran, Military and Security, Military and security service personnel strengths*.

<sup>36</sup> DIA, *Iran military power*, 19 November 2019, pp. 48-49; Fars News, *Iranian navy's 86th fleet docks at Cape Town Post in South Africa*, 1 April 2023; BBCM, *Iranian naval squadron returns after round-the-world tour*, 17 May 2023; BBCM, *Iran officially welcomes flotilla after journey around the world*, 21 May 2023.

<sup>37</sup> IranWire, *The IRGC aerospace force*, 9 April 2019; USDoS, *Report to congress on identification of, and immigration restrictions on, senior officials of the government of Iran and their family members*, 18 March 2022; BBCM, *Iran's IRGC develops new cruise missile with 1,650km range*, 24 February 2023.

<sup>38</sup> MEE, *Amir Ali Hajizadeh: Iran's drone mastermind known as 'the new Soleimani'*, 2 September 2021; VOA, *Iranian general acknowledges over 300 dead in unrest*, 29 November 2022.

<sup>39</sup> DIA, *Iran military power*, 19 November 2019, p. 11; CIA, *The world factbook, Iran, Military and Security, Military and security service personnel strengths*.

<sup>40</sup> BBC News, *Video shows 2020 Iranian missile attack on US forces at Iraqi base*, 2 March 2021; BBCM, *IRGC unveils Iran's first 'hypersonic' missile*, 6 June 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>41</sup> DIA, *Iran military power*, 19 November 2019, p. 64; IISS, *The military balance 2021*, 25 February 2021, p. 337; Mehr News, *Iran air force to fly 40 different fighter jets on Army Day*, 16 April 2023; BBCM, *Iranian army starts annual air drills in central province*, 23 July 2023; CIA, *The world factbook, Iran, Military and Security, Military and security service personnel strengths*.

#### 1.1.3.4 Army

The Revolutionary Guard has its own army, which includes special forces, tanks and armoured vehicles. Estimates of the number of active military personnel range between 100,000 and 150,000.<sup>42</sup> Since about 2009, Brigadier General Mohammad Pakpour has been commander of this ground force.<sup>43</sup> The Revolutionary Guard army has a unit in each province, and two in Tehran province. The units are stationed at different bases. In addition to defending Iran's territory from external threats, the Revolutionary Guard's army also focuses on domestic threats.<sup>44</sup>

As with its navy and aerospace force, the Revolutionary Guard army has different types of units, different weaponry and employs different tactics from Iran's regular army. For instance, the regular army includes infantry units, special forces, artillery vehicles, helicopters and drones. It has an estimated 350,000 military personnel, of which 130,000 are professional soldiers and 220,000 conscripts. The regular army is primarily responsible for defending Iran's territory in the event of an invasion.<sup>45</sup>

#### 1.1.3.5 Basij

The Basij is a paramilitary organisation, controlled by the Revolutionary Guard. The word *basij* is Persian for 'mobilisation'. Its full name is *Sazman-e Basij-e Mostazafan*, which translates as Organisation for the Mobilisation of the Oppressed.<sup>46</sup> Since 2 July 2019, Brigadier General Gholamreza Soleimani has been commander of the Basij.<sup>47</sup> This militia has many branches within Iranian society and is represented at universities, in various economic sectors, and other fields.<sup>48</sup> The Basij's activities include controlling protests and other forms of domestic unrest. One way in which the Basij achieves this is through local offices that monitor events in the neighbourhoods.<sup>49</sup> It was mainly local Basij units, led by the provincial units of the Revolutionary Guard, that played a crucial role in the crackdown on anti-government protests following the death of Mahsa Amini in autumn 2022 (see Section 1.2.2).<sup>50</sup> On 17 October 2022, the Council of the European Union added Basij to the EU sanctions list. The Council also added the Student Basij Organisation (SBO) to this list on 22 May 2023, due to its role in quashing protests on university campuses.<sup>51</sup>

#### 1.1.3.6 Intelligence service

The Revolutionary Guard has its own intelligence service. Its activities largely overlap with those of the Ministry of Intelligence (MOIS). The MOIS also competes

<sup>42</sup> DIA, *Iran military power*, 19 November 2019, p. 11; CIA, *The world factbook, Iran, Military and Security, Military and security service personnel strengths*.

<sup>43</sup> IranWire, *The IRGC ground forces*, 9 April 2019; Radio Farda, *Who are the 8 guards commanders sanctioned by U.S.*, 25 June 2019; Mehr News, *Enemies hybrid war against Iran subject to failure: cmdr.*, 11 July 2023.

<sup>44</sup> IranWire, *The IRGC provincial corps*, 9 April 2019; Radio Farda, *Regional headquarters of the IRGC: Tasked with asymmetrical warfare; crushing dissent*, 28 March 2020; IranWire, *IRGC commanders in Kurdistan, western Azerbaijan replaced*, 30 June 2023.

<sup>45</sup> IISS, *The military balance 2021*, 25 February 2021, p. 338; CRS, *Iran: Background and U.S. policy*, 23 March 2023, p. 5; CIA, *The world factbook, Iran, Military and Security, Military and security service personnel strengths*.

<sup>46</sup> Golkar, *Captive society*, 2015, pp. 13 and 31; ABC News, *What we know about the Basij, the paramilitary volunteer group cracking down on protesters in Iran*, 13 October 2022; CFR, *Iran's revolutionary guards*, 20 April 2023.

<sup>47</sup> Tasnim News, *Ayatollah Khamenei appoints new commander of Basij*, 2 July 2019; BBC News, *Iran protests: How countries are punishing the morality police*, 26 October 2022.

<sup>48</sup> Golkar, *Captive society*, 2015, pp. 137 and 160; Council of the European Union, *Iran: five individuals and two entities targeted by EU's eighth package of sanctions for human rights violations*, 22 May 2023.

<sup>49</sup> Iran International, *Iran aims to set up Basij paramilitary bases in 11,000 neighbourhood*, 7 January 2022; CRS, *Iran: Background and U.S. policy*, 23 March 2023, p. 5.

<sup>50</sup> Radio Zamaneh, *The Revolutionary Guard threatens Iranian protesters with a crackdown that is already happening; tens of protesters killed*, 23 September 2022; BBC News, *Iran protests: How countries are punishing the morality police*, 26 October 2022; de Volkskrant, *Hoeder van de revolutie, maar vooral van zichzelf*, 7 January 2023; Al-Monitor, *The takeaway: Can sanctions curb Iran's protest crackdown?*, 25 January 2023.

<sup>51</sup> Council of the European Union, *Iran: five individuals and two entities targeted by EU's eighth package of sanctions for human rights violations*, 22 May 2023; BBCM, *Iran's student Basij Protests 'biased' coverage of unrest in France*, 4 July 2023.

with the Revolutionary Guard intelligence service. One difference between the two organisations is that MOIS employees are civilians, while those of the Revolutionary Guard intelligence service are military personnel.<sup>52</sup> Since 23 June 2022, this service has been under the command of Brigadier General Mohammad Kazemi.<sup>53</sup>

#### 1.1.3.7 Counter intelligence

The Revolutionary Guard's counter-intelligence service focuses on combating infiltration throughout the Iranian military, and on preventing counter-espionage and leaks of classified information. Since 27 June 2022, this service has been under the command of Brigadier General Majid Khademi.<sup>54</sup>

#### 1.1.3.8 Security service

The Revolutionary Guard's security force focuses on protecting key strategic targets such as airports, national events and high-profile figures. Since 20 April 2019, this service has been under the command of Brigadier General Fathollah Jomeiri.<sup>55</sup> Staffing the Thar-Allah crisis coordination centre, which focuses on the security situation in Tehran, is also central to the role of this service.<sup>56</sup>

#### 1.1.3.9 Cyber Defense Command

Iran's Cyber Defense Command (CDC) focuses on Iran's online defence. One part of this organisation is the Center for Investigating Organized Cybercrime (CIOC). This organisation is concerned with monitoring online activities and filtering online content.<sup>57</sup> In November 2020, Brigadier General Mohammadreza Yazdi announced that the IRGC has 144 cyber battalions to monitor internet traffic. However, the size of each cyber battalion is not known.<sup>58</sup>

#### 1.1.3.10 The Revolutionary Guard's economic activities

The Revolutionary Guard also plays a part in Iran's economy. However, the extent of the economic activities under the direct or indirect control of the Revolutionary Guard is not known.<sup>59</sup> The Revolutionary Guard's economic activities are largely channelled through two entities: the *Khatam al-Anbiya* construction company and the Cooperative Foundation (*Bonyad Taavon Sepah*, BTS).<sup>60</sup> On 24 April 2023, the

<sup>52</sup> Landinfo, CGRS & SEM, *Iran: Criminal procedures and documents*, 1 December 2021, p. 24; Tehran Times, *IRGC Intelligence Organisation: Zahedan murders will not go unpunished*, 3 October 2022; Tasnim News, *Iran's intelligence ministry, IRGC intelligence organization highlight role of foreign spy agencies in recent riots*, 29 October 2022; Iran International, *Islamic Republic creating yet another parallel intel agency*, 13 December 2022; The Iran Primer, *Explainer: Tactics of Iranian intelligence*, 17 February 2023.

<sup>53</sup> Iran International, *Iran's IRGC intelligence chief removed in major move*, 23 June 2022; Al Jazeera, *Iran appoints new IRGC spy chief as Israel tensions rise*, 23 June 2022; RFE/RL, *In major security shake-up, Iran replaces IRGC intelligence chief*, 24 June 2022; MEI, *Hossein Taeb's removal was not only about Israel*, 30 June 2022.

<sup>54</sup> Iran International, *IRGC chief admits its counter-intelligence was targeted*, 30 June 2022; Iran International, *Iran's leader appoints new IRGC counter-intelligence chief*, 27 June 2022; The Iran Primer, *Profiles: Iran's intelligence agencies*, 5 April 2023.

<sup>55</sup> IranWire, *The IRGC security and intelligence agencies*, 9 April 2019; Radio Farda, *IRGC appoints new close protection unit commander*, 21 April 2019; Council of the European Union, *Council implementing regulation (EU) 2023/379 of 20 February 2023 implementing Regulation (EU) No 359/2011 concerning restrictive measures directed against certain persons, entities and bodies in view of the situation in Iran*, 20 February 2023, p. 13.

<sup>56</sup> Iran International, *IEGC chief praises Tehran Sarallah HQ for maintaining security*, 20 June 2022; MEI, *Hossein Taeb's removal was not only about Israel*, 30 June 2022; The Telegraph, *Iranian Revolutionary Guards commander mysteriously 'shot dead on doorstep'*, 4 January 2023.

<sup>57</sup> IranWire, *The IRGC security and intelligence agencies*, 9 April 2019; Landinfo et al., *Iran: Criminal procedures and documents*, 1 December 2021, p. 24; The Iran Primer, *Profiles: Iran's intelligence agencies*, 5 April 2023.

<sup>58</sup> Iran International, *Iran commander says he has 144 active cyber-battalions*, 17 November 2020; IranWire, *Islamic Republic's cyber army: Cheerleaders, zombies and trolls*, 5 June 2023.

<sup>59</sup> Al-Monitor, *The real footprint of the IRGC in Iran's economy*, 9 August 2017; CSIS, *The Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) from an Iraqi view – a lost role or a bright future?*, 30 July 2020; Reuters, *Factbox: Iran's revolutionary guards from military operations to business empire*, 19 January 2023.

<sup>60</sup> RFE/RL, *Radio Farda exposé on IRGC corruption, infighting raises ire of Iranian authorities*, 18 February 2022; Radio Zamaneh, *Khatam Al-Anbiya, central headquarters: a representation of the IRGC's political ambitions and economic pursuits*, 14 June 2022; BBCM, *Iran appoints new commander of IRGC's economic arm*, 1 May 2023; VOA, *EU sanctions Iran revolutionary guards' investment wing*, 22 May 2023; confidential source, February 2021.

Council of the European Union added BTS to the EU sanctions list.<sup>61</sup> Both entities are active in a range of economic sectors, including infrastructure, petrochemicals, ports, transport, telecommunications and information technology, industry, mining, real estate, agriculture, healthcare, engineering, procurement, the cultural sector and poverty relief.<sup>62</sup> Bank Sepah is one of the institutions affiliated with the Revolutionary Guard.<sup>63</sup> The aviation company Mahan Air also has links with the Revolutionary Guard.<sup>64</sup> Some media are also linked to the Revolutionary Guard, including the daily newspaper *Javan* and the news weekly *Sobh-e Sadegh*.<sup>65</sup> This is also true of a number of news agencies, such as *Tasnim News* and *Fars News*.<sup>66</sup> The Revolutionary Guard also controls some major educational and medical institutions.<sup>67</sup>

## 1.2 Security situation

### 1.2.1 Domestic security situation

The domestic security situation in Iran is highly regionalised (see Sections 1.2.6, 1.2.7 and 1.2.8). Small-scale demonstrations take place almost daily in Iran. Following the death of Mahsa Amini on 16 September 2022, large-scale demonstrations took place across the country for several months. These large-scale demonstrations have since disappeared from the streets (see Section 1.2.2). Armed clashes occurred in the border areas with Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq. Terrorist attacks also took place during the reporting period (see Section 1.2.3). The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs' travel advice on Iran has been on code red since 7 October 2022. People are advised not to travel to Iran and to leave the country if it is possible to do so safely.<sup>68</sup>

### 1.2.2 Large-scale protests in 2022

In recent years, Iran has seen small-scale protests on an almost daily basis, as well as several waves of large-scale protests, from the Green Movement in 2009 and the anti-government protests in late 2017 and early 2018, to the 2019 petrol protests and the 2021 water protests.<sup>69</sup> In September 2022, a new wave of protest and civil unrest emerged. The death on 16 September 2022 of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, also

<sup>61</sup> Council of the European Union, *Iran: Council sanctions eight additional individuals and one entity over human rights violations*, 24 April 2023.

<sup>62</sup> IranWire, *The IRGC commercial and financial institutions: (Bonyad-e Ta'avon-e Sepah)*, 9 April 2019; Iran International, *Commander of IRGC contracting arm replaced only after two years*, 1 May 2023; confidential source, February 2021.

<sup>63</sup> Radio Farda, *Crisis leads Iranian armed forces banks to be merged into Bank Sepah*, 3 March 2019; Iran International, *Exclusive: IRGC runs Iran's money laundering network in Iraq*, 1 February 2023.

<sup>64</sup> RFE/RL, *Argentina seizes Venezuelan plane linked to Iran*, 12 June 2022; Iran International, *Despite bans, Mahan Air transferring arms to Iran's regional proxies*, 15 December 2022.

<sup>65</sup> IranWire, *"Rancid": Iranian newspaper close to IRGC lashes out at South Korean ambassador*, 3 November 2021; Iran International, *Newspaper linked to Iran's IRGC slams Raisi's economic record*, 17 April 2022; MEI, *Iran's rising generation Z at the forefront of protests*, 5 October 2022; Iran International, *Hardliners appeal to reformists to help save Islamic Republic*, 24 November 2022.

<sup>66</sup> Iran International, *IRGC agency official's arrest confirms authenticity of leaked files*, 6 December 2022; BBCM, *Iran IRGC website says military advisor killed in Syria*, 31 March 2023.

<sup>67</sup> IranWire, *The IRGC's social, cultural, scientific and educational institutions*, 9 April 2019; IRNA, *Iran's IRGC opens major hospital in impoverished southeast*, 10 May 2023; Al Jazeera, *Who is Ali Akbar Ahmadian, Iran's new security chief?*, 22 May 2023.

<sup>68</sup> NOS, *Nederland verscherpt reisadvies voor Iran, rood reisadvies voor het hele land*, 7 October 2022; Nederland Wereldwijd, *Reisadvies Iran*, <https://www.nederlandwereldwijd.nl/reisadvies/iran>, accessed on 12 September 2023.

<sup>69</sup> WINEP, *How Iran's protests differ from past movements*, 28 September 2022; ACLED, *Anti-government demonstrations in Iran. A long-term challenge for the Islamic Republic*, 12 April 2023.

known by her Kurdish name Jina, was the prelude to the longest and fiercest series of protests and civil unrest since the establishment of the Islamic Republic.<sup>70</sup>

Mahsa Amini was a Sunni Kurdish woman, but the anti-government protests following her death were not limited to her ethnic group. These protests ran through all ethnic and religious groups, regions, age groups, genders and socio-economic groups.<sup>71</sup> The protests were wide in scope: not limited to a few dozen cities, but spread right across the country.<sup>72</sup> According to the US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA), the protests quickly spread across all 31 Iranian provinces, including in 160 cities and 143 universities.<sup>73</sup> This means that demonstrations took place in cities where the population is almost entirely Persian, in the religious city of Qom, in Mashhad and in 'military' cities such as Arak and Bushehr.<sup>74</sup> These protests also rallied many young women and schoolchildren, an age group sometimes referred to as 'Generation Z'. Despite frequent disruptions to internet services and reductions in the speed of online connections, the internet allowed these young people in particular to interact widely with each other and the outside world online.<sup>75</sup> When the authorities imposed new restrictions, it was this generation who appeared to find creative ways to circumvent them.<sup>76</sup>

Female protesters often took to the streets without wearing headscarves.<sup>77</sup> Some of them made victory gestures, chanted slogans, burned their headscarves, danced in the streets and/or cut off pieces of their hair.<sup>78</sup> In addition, some protesters destroyed propaganda material displayed by the authorities, such as government banners and posters, or they made insulting gestures to pictures of the supreme leader or founder of the Islamic Republic, for example. Some painted anti-government graffiti on the walls.<sup>79</sup> Others attempted to disrupt Iranian state

<sup>70</sup> Mahsa was her official Persian name. Her parents called her Jina, but as this is a Kurdish name, it was not allowed to be included in the register of births. On 13 September 2022, the morality police (*Gasht-e Ershad*) detained her for not complying with the dress code. The authorities say she suffered a heart attack while in police custody and then fell into a coma. Others say she was mistreated. She died in hospital on 16 September 2022; The Guardian, *Protests in Iran at death of Kurdish woman after arrest by morality police*, 17 September 2022; Al Jazeera, *Clashes as thousands attend Mahsa Amini memorial in Iran's Saqqez*, 26 October 2022.

<sup>71</sup> Brian Currin, *Mahsa Amini – The seismic tragedy that is triggering a tsunami that should not be ignored*, 10 February 2023, p. 7; ACLED, *Anti-government demonstrations in Iran*, 12 April 2023; confidential source, October 2022.

<sup>72</sup> The Guardian, *Iranians hold large rallies in defiance of warning by Revolutionary Guards head*, 30 October 2022; BBC News, *Iran protests: University students stage sit-down strikes*, 1 November 2022; DIS, *Iran. Protests 2022-2023*, 1 March 2023, pp. 1 and 8.

<sup>73</sup> HRANA, *A comprehensive report of the first 82 days of nationwide protests in Iran*, 8 December 2022, p. 1.

<sup>74</sup> Iran International, *Iran's oil, petrochemical workers begin strikes, protests*, 10 October 2022; The Guardian, *'This generation is really brave': Iranians on the protests over Mahsa Amini's death*, 27 October 2022; The Guardian, *Mapping Iran's unrest: how Mahsa Amini's death led to nationwide protests*, 31 October 2022; confidential source, October 2022.

<sup>75</sup> BBC News, *Iran protests: Iran's Gen Z 'realise life can be lived differently'*, 14 October 2022; FP, *Meet Iran's Gen Z: the driving force behind the protests*, 1 November 2022; WINEP, *Iranian counterculture and Gen Z*, 4 January 2023; BBCM, *Analysis: Iran's theocracy faces legitimacy questions 44 years on*, 9 February 2023.

<sup>76</sup> MEI, *Iran's rising generation Z at the forefront of protests*, 5 October 2022; CBC News, *Meet Iran's dissident rapper helping youth circumvent regime internet crackdown*, 28 October 2022.

<sup>77</sup> BBC News, *Iran schoolgirls remove hijabs in protests against government*, 4 October 2022; RFE/RL, *'This revolution is still alive': A growing number of Iranian women defy the hijab law after months of protests*, 8 March 2023.

<sup>78</sup> HRW, *In Iran, schoolgirls leading protests for freedom*, 12 October 2022; NRC, *Over de opstandige vrouw in de Iraanse geschiedenis*, 6 February 2023.

<sup>79</sup> The Telegraph, *Iranian schoolgirls give clerical leaders the finger as they join uprising against the regime*, 4 October 2022; Iran International, *Schools to remove Khamenei's portraits as students tear them down*, 15 October 2022; BBCM, *Iran police arrest two for burning pro-establishment banners in north-east*, 3 February 2023; BBCM, *Iran arrests five for burning revolution anniversary banners*, 8 February 2023; de Volkskrant, *Alleen met ijzere vuist kan een nieuwe revolutie worden tegengehouden. Nog wel*, 11 February 2023; Iran International, *Iranians hold acts of protests calling for regime ouster*, 16 February 2023; Die Zeit, *"Nachts kehren wir zurück und beschreiben die Wände"*, 18 February 2023; Iran International, *Iranians chant overnight slogans, set Khamenei banner ablaze*, 20 February 2023; IranWire, *Violence reported as Iranians mark new year with more protests*, 21 March 2023; BBCM, *Intelligence forces in Iran arrest man for 'desecration'*, 22 June 2023; confidential source, October 2022.

television broadcasts. On 8 October 2022, for instance, Iran's six-o'clock news was hacked with an appeal calling on Iranians to join the demonstrations.<sup>80</sup> During the Revolution Day celebrations on 11 February 2023, the online broadcast of President Raisi's speech was also hacked.<sup>81</sup> In addition, Iranians who were opposed to their leaders continued to find creative ways to express their discontent. For example, in early October 2022, several fountains in Tehran were filled with red water.<sup>82</sup> An image of Mahsa Amini's face was also projected on a building in Tehran.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, the longest street in Tehran, Valiasr Street, was renamed Pahlavi Street on Google Maps in early December 2022. This was the street name before the Iranian revolution. The name could also be seen as a reference to Reza Pahlavi, the son of the last shah, seen by his supporters as the potential leader of an interim government.<sup>84</sup>

Apart from people taking to the streets in large numbers to protest, there was also widespread solidarity among the population. People afraid to take to the streets expressed their support in other ways, such as closing their shops, not using their bank cards for a few days or chanting protest slogans from balconies.<sup>85</sup> One slogan often heard was 'Woman, life, freedom', borrowed from a Kurdish liberation movement. Another common slogan was 'Death to the dictator'.<sup>86</sup>

#### 1.2.2.1 Economic malaise

The protests that arose in the wake of Mahsa Amini's death quickly turned into broad anti-government protests also expressing anger and frustration at the ongoing economic malaise, partly a result of US sectoral sanctions, poor economic policy, the war in Ukraine and widespread corruption. Iran suffers from high inflation and high unemployment, especially among the younger generation.<sup>87</sup> High inflation is hitting the entire population hard and the growing numbers of poor people disproportionately hard. For some time, this has led to a shrinking middle class.<sup>88</sup> The value of the national currency, the rial, declined sharply. Since protests began in September 2022, the value of the rial has halved. On 27 February 2023, one euro was worth 619,100 rial on the free market, compared to 296,700 rial on 27 February 2022.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>80</sup> BBC News, *Protests in Iran: State-run live TV hacked by protesters*, 9 October 2022; RFE/RL, *Iranian state TV hack puts Supreme Leader in crosshairs, shows slain protesters*, 10 October 2022.

<sup>81</sup> Iran International, *Hackers interrupt Raisi's revolution day speech on state TV*, 11 February 2023; CNN, *Hackers interrupt Iran president's TV speech on anniversary of revolution*, 12 February 2023.

<sup>82</sup> MEE, *Mahsa Amini: Tehran fountains dyed red to reflect bloody crackdown*, 7 October 2022; VOA, *Artist turns Iran fountains red to reflect bloody crackdown*, 7 October 2022.

<sup>83</sup> France 24, *The bold tactics that have kept Iran protests going*, 20 October 2022; The Guardian, *Mapping Iran's unrest: how Mahsa Amini's death led to nationwide protests*, 31 October 2022.

<sup>84</sup> Iran International, *Google Maps gives Tehran streets pre-revolution names*, 1 December 2022; bne IntelliNews, *Tehran's main street reverts to pre-revolutionary name on Google Maps*, 2 December 2022.

<sup>85</sup> VOA, *Iran's protesters chant from buildings amid crackdown*, 29 September 2022; DW, *Iran: Businesses go on strike amid regime crackdown*, 5 December 2022; Time, *The hidden role ordinary Iranians have played in the protests*, 4 May 2023; Rudaw, *Strikes in Saqqez against arrest of protesters*, 14 June 2023; confidential source, October 2022; confidential source, November 2022.

<sup>86</sup> In Persian respectively: "Zan, zendegi, azadi" and "Marg ba setamgar"; IranWire, "Bi-Sharaf!": A guide to the slogans heard at protests in Iran, 22 September 2022; Rudaw, *Kurdish slogan on women, freedom unites Iranians*, 3 October 2022; BBC News, *Protests against regime in Iran's Zahedan*, 8 January 2023.

<sup>87</sup> Financial Tribune, *Iran inflation scales new heights*, 22 February 2023; BBCM, *Briefing: Iran's Raisi orders action amid 'hyperinflation' worries*, 6 May 2023; Iran International, *Inflation in Iran remains as high as 60%*, 12 June 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>88</sup> Atlantic Council, *Iran's middle class has been eroding for some time. Now it's only getting worse*, 30 June 2022; Iran International, *Poverty doubled in Iran in one year – welfare ministry*, 2 January 2023; Al Jazeera, *Free-falling rial leaves Iranians worried about financial future*, 2 March 2023; confidential source, March 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>89</sup> BBCM, *Tehran police arrest 5 currency brokers as Iranian rial hits record low*, 22 January 2023; Al Jazeera, *Iran's currency hits record low amid tensions with the West*, 22 January 2023; Het Financieele Dagblad, *Iraanse munt daalt naar het laagste niveau ooit*, 21 February 2023; Bonbast, *Historical rates*, <https://www.bonbast.com/archive>, accessed 12 September 2023.

## 1.2.2.2 Action by the authorities

At first, security forces exercised restraint during this wave of protests. Using warnings and conventional repressive methods, the authorities initially seemed unable to get a firm grip on the situation, especially on the large numbers of young people who had taken to the streets.<sup>90</sup> These young people often behaved fearlessly.<sup>91</sup> Compared to previous waves of protests, there seemed to be less respect for the authorities.<sup>92</sup> This followed partly from videos circulating on social media in early November 2022, which showed people knocking the turbans from the heads of passing clerics.<sup>93</sup> On 17 November 2022, the birthplace of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini was also targeted: it was set on fire.<sup>94</sup> Multiple warnings from the supreme leader and Revolutionary Guard commander Major General Hossein Salami were ignored.<sup>95</sup> At the same time, these anti-government protests were not the mass, nationwide demonstrations with millions of participants that took place in 2009. They were smaller in scale. These protests also lacked clear leadership. They were more fragmented and decentralised in nature than previous protests. As a result, security forces were unable to act as centrally or as harshly, as a more widespread deployment of security forces was needed. Because fragmentation made protests difficult to deal with, they were able to continue for a relatively long time.<sup>96</sup>

## 1.2.2.3 Growing repression

In speeches, the supreme leader hinted that no mercy would be shown to the protest movement. He described the protests as street riots and the protesters as traitors to their country.<sup>97</sup> As these anti-government protests progressed, the authorities increasingly deployed conventional means of repression. This repression was a combination of the use of (lethal) force and more sophisticated methods, such as restricting the internet, completely shutting down the network, spreading fake news and broadcasting (forced) confessions on state television. These methods proved to be effective.<sup>98</sup> Although these anti-government protests caused a great deal of social unrest, this did not lead to major power shifts or changes in the approach of the authorities.<sup>99</sup>

The lethal violence on the part of the authorities included shooting at protesters with small firearms, shotguns and machine guns.<sup>100</sup> For example, security forces shot

<sup>90</sup> Reuters, *Analysis: Iran leaders in 'disarray' struggle to close ranks over protests*, 30 September 2022; confidential source, October 2022; confidential source, October 2022; confidential source, October 2022.

<sup>91</sup> MEI, *Iran's rising generation Z at the forefront of protests*, 5 October 2022; confidential source, October 2022.

<sup>92</sup> BBC News, *Iran protester: 'They said if we didn't keep quiet, they would rape us'*, 27 September 2022; The Guardian, *Iranian security forces fire teargas as girls clash with staff at Tehran school*, 24 October 2022.

<sup>93</sup> BBCM, *Iran arrests man for 'desecrating' cleric's attire*, 9 November 2022; CBS News, *As Iran's clerics face a "turban tossing" trend, army warns it's ready to quash protests*, 10 November 2022; RFE/RL, *In new tactic, young Iranian protesters knock off clerics' turbans on the street*, 11 November 2022.

<sup>94</sup> The Guardian, *Iranian protesters set fire to Ayatollah Khomeini's ancestral home*, 18 November 2022; France 24, *Iran protesters set fire to Ayatollah Khomeini's ancestral home*, 18 November 2022.

<sup>95</sup> The Guardian, *Iran: Revolutionary Guards chief tells protesters today is last day on streets*, 29 October 2022; confidential source, October 2022; confidential source, November 2022.

<sup>96</sup> France 24, *Lack of leadership is both a strength and weakness of Iran's protest movement*, 16 December 2022; confidential source, October 2022.

<sup>97</sup> BBCM, *Leader says Iran dealing 'seriously, fairly' with 'street riots'*, 9 January 2023; MEMO, *Iran's supreme leader calls anti-regime protesters 'traitors'*, 10 January 2023; BBCM, *Iran leader blames West for 'riots', slams 'hooligans, traitors'*, 4 June 2023.

<sup>98</sup> BBC News, *Iran police force says it is investigating protester beating and shooting video*, 2 November 2022; The New York Times, *A chilling crackdown at a Tehran apartment complex*, 2 November 2022; FAZ, *Verhaftungswelle erstickt die Proteste in Iran*, 19 December 2022; confidential source, October 2022; confidential source, October 2022; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>99</sup> CRS, *Iran: Background and U.S. policy*, 23 March 2023, p. 3; ACLED, *Anti-government demonstrations in Iran*, 12 April 2023; confidential source, October 2022; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>100</sup> *Spreading justice, Iran protests weapons analysis: Officials fail to use non-violent means before resorting to the use of force of firearms*, 17 October 2022; The Guardian, *Parents of Iranian woman killed during protests 'harassed by security forces'*, 2 November 2022; AP News, *Activists: Iranian forces unleash heavy fire on protesters*, 21 November 2022; UNGA, *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (A/HRC/52/67)*, 7 February 2023, p. 6.

dead four protesters in the city of Mahabad in West Azerbaijan province between 17 and 19 November 2022. In turn, their funerals and memorial services forty days after their deaths led to more protests. On 20 November 2022, the Revolutionary Guard intervened with military force to quell protests in Mahabad.<sup>101</sup> Security forces also acted with (lethal) force during peaceful protests, and peaceful protesters were also arrested.<sup>102</sup>

According to several human rights organisations, at least 530 protesters were killed in the demonstrations. Because many young people were at the forefront of the protests, a relatively large number of the victims were young.<sup>103</sup> More than half of the reported fatalities were Baluchi people from Sistan-Baluchistan province in the south-east of the country, or Kurdish people from the north-western provinces.<sup>104</sup> Since by no means all the information was released, the actual number of fatalities is thought to be many times higher.<sup>105</sup>

In addition to live ammunition, security forces sometimes fired targeted and short-range shots at protesters using rubber bullets, buckshot, tear gas grenades or paintball bullets.<sup>106</sup> According to the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights Iran, female protesters in particular were brutally attacked by firing scattershot at their faces and genitals.<sup>107</sup> Thousands of protesters, bystanders and passers-by were injured, in some cases seriously. Several hundred people lost one or both eyes, or died in these attacks.<sup>108</sup> Judging by the number of reports, sexual violence towards protesters was widespread (see also Section 3.3.3).<sup>109</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Hengaw, *Four citizens from Mahabad were killed by government forces*, 19 November 2022; Rudaw, *Human rights groups warn of impending massacre in Kurdish city in western Iran*, 20 November 2022; Iran International, *Islamic Republic deploys military to quash protests in Kurdish city*, 20 November 2022; France 24, *Activists fear major Iran crackdown in Kurdish-populated town*, 20 November 2022; Reuters, *Iran intensifies crackdown in Kurdish area; rights group says four killed*, 20 November 2022; DW, *Iran: Rights groups warn of crackdown in Kurdish Mahabad*, 21 November 2022; NOS, *Iran stuurt extra troepen naar Koerdische regio om protest te onderdrukken*, 21 November 2022.

<sup>102</sup> OCHCR, *Iran: Crackdown on peaceful protests since death of Jina Mahsa Amini needs independent international investigation, say UN experts*, 26 October 2022; OHCHR, *Iran: Stop sentencing peaceful protesters to death, say UN experts*, 11 November 2022; USDoS, *Iran 2022 international religious freedom report*, 15 May 2023, p. 3; OCHCR, *Iran must end crackdown against protesters and uphold rights of all Iranians, especially women and girls, fact-finding mission says*, 5 July 2023.

<sup>103</sup> According to HRANA, at least 530 protesters were killed between 17 September 2022 and 20 February 2023, including 71 children. In addition, 70 members of the security forces died. According to IHRNGO, at least 537 people were killed, including 48 women and 68 children; IHRNGO & ECPM, *Annual report on the death penalty in Iran 2022*, 13 April 2023, p. 50; HRANA English, *Daily statistics on Iran protests*, 21 February 2023, [https://twitter.com/HRANA\\_English/status/1627809833293344769?lang=en](https://twitter.com/HRANA_English/status/1627809833293344769?lang=en), accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>104</sup> Iran International, *Security forces killing in Kurdish, Baloch cities but dancing in Tehran*, 25 November 2022; The Jerusalem Post, *After striking Kurdistan, Iran aims to pacify Sistan-Baluchistan – analysis*, 27 November 2022; UNGA, *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (A/HRC/52/67)*, 7 February 2023, p. 8; Amnesty International, *Amnesty International report 2022/23*, 28 March 2023, p. 197.

<sup>105</sup> Iran International, *New data suggest more people died in Iran during protests*, 24 January 2023; confidential source, October 2022; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>106</sup> The New York Times, *Hundreds of protesters in Iran blinded by metal pellets and rubber bullets*, 19 November 2022; Iran International, *Doctors say Iran's use of 'birdshots' blinded hundreds of people*, 26 November 2022; IranWire, *Tehran billboards claim protesters shot in eyes are "liars"*, 8 May 2023; BBCM, *Briefing: Outrage on social media after death of Iranian teenage protester*, 28 May 2023.

<sup>107</sup> UNGA, *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (A/HRC/52/67)*, 7 February 2023, p. 9.

<sup>108</sup> Amnesty International, *Iran: At least 82 Baluchi protesters and bystanders killed in bloody crackdown*, 6 October 2022; IranWire, *Iranian university student recalls smile of police who shot her in the face*, 23 November 2022; The Guardian, *Iranian forces shooting at faces and genitals of female protesters, medics say*, 8 December 2022; IranWire, *Blinding as a weapon of war*, 19 January 2023; de Volkskrant, *Iraanse troepen mikken bewust op gezicht van vrouwelijke demonstranten: 'Ik mis mijn mooie ogen'*, 23 January 2023; The Guardian, *British health worker shot multiple times in Iran protests, injuries show*, 4 March 2023; BBC News, *Iran protests: Victims shot in eyes hold on to hopes*, 5 April 2023; IHRDC, *Unleashed violence: Repression of protests in Kurdish areas of Iran*, 8 July 2023; p. 68.

<sup>109</sup> BBCM, *Iran judiciary official rejects protester raped, dead*, 29 October 2022; CNN, *How Iran's security forces use rape to quell protests*, 21 November 2022; RFE/RL, *Iranian Sunni cleric says he had received reports of sexual assaults on female prisoners*, 6 December 2022; The New York Times, *Iran uses rape to enforce women's modesty*, 17 December 2022.

In addition to the many peaceful demonstrations, there were also more violent protests compared to previous waves of protests, including protesters using Molotov cocktails and picking up weapons to attack members of the security forces. This resulted in deaths and injuries on the side of the security forces too.<sup>110</sup> The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) recorded over 400 violent protests between 16 September 2022 and 31 December 2022 out of a total of over 1,600 demonstrations.<sup>111</sup>

The authorities arrested protesters on a large scale (see also Section 3.2.1.9). They raided boarding schools, university campuses, secondary schools, primary schools and other institutions, where they mistreated and/or arrested students and pupils who were protesting there (see also Section 3.2.1.7).<sup>112</sup> Sources reported thousands of arrests. According to an estimate by HRANA on 21 February 2023, nearly 20,000 people were arrested between 17 September 2022 and 20 February 2023.<sup>113</sup> On 5 October 2022, the Revolutionary Guard deputy commander stated that the average age of the arrested protesters was fifteen.<sup>114</sup>

In October 2022, the head of the judiciary, Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei, called for swift convictions of those arrested to date for involvement in the demonstrations. He instructed the judges to show no mercy and hand out severe penalties.<sup>115</sup>

According to the judiciary, more than 2,400 people were convicted for participating in the protests by the end of November 2022. In addition, more than 1,100 people were reportedly charged.<sup>116</sup> On 26 December 2022, the head of Tehran province's judicial department stated that 83% of those arrested in connection with the demonstrations in the province had been released on bail.<sup>117</sup> However, these figures cannot be independently verified. They may be lower due to underreporting.

#### 1.2.2.4 Decline in anti-government protests

The anti-government protests sparked by the death of Mahsa Amini seemed to have peaked in November 2022. Afterwards, the number of protests declined, although they persisted fairly consistently for several weeks.<sup>118</sup> From the end of December 2022, these anti-government protests lost momentum and were less visible on the streets, with the exception of the Kurdish region and Sistan-Baluchistan, where unrest continued on a weekly basis (see Sections 1.2.6 and 1.2.8). Protesting since

<sup>110</sup> VOA, *Iran's Khamenei praises Basij forces for confronting 'rioters'*, 26 November 2022; Reuters, *Iran state body reports 200 dead in protests, Raisi hails 'freedom'*, 3 December 2022; The Washington Post, *How Iranian protesters began to fight back in Mahsa Amini's hometown*, 19 February 2023; confidential source, 6 November 2022.

<sup>111</sup> ACLED collects information on the dates, actors, locations, fatalities and types of all reported political violence and protest events around the world; ACLED, *Anti-government demonstrations in Iran*, 12 April 2023.

<sup>112</sup> Al Jazeera, *Riot police raid Iran's Sharif University after student protest*, 3 October 2022; Iran International, *Students in Iranian universities taking the brunt of state terror*, 30 October 2022; The Independent, *Iran's security forces step up efforts to crush protests*, 1 November 2022; The Guardian, *Dozens arrested as Iranian security forces attack university campuses*, 4 November 2022; The New York Times, *Stymied by protests, Iran unleashes its wrath on its youth*, 14 November 2022; confidential source, October 2022.

<sup>113</sup> Trouw, *Geen contact met Nederlandse gevangene in Iran*, 24 November 2022; HRANA, *Daily statistics on Iran protests*, 21 February 2023.

<sup>114</sup> Al-Monitor, *Iran says average age of arrested protesters is 15*, 5 October 2022; UNGA, *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (A/HRC/52/67)*, 7 February 2023, p. 10.

<sup>115</sup> Al Jazeera, *Iran top judge orders harsh sentences for 'main riot elements'*, 13 October 2022; Iran International, *Top Iran judge wants swift 'justice' for protestors*, 19 December 2022; confidential source, October 2022.

<sup>116</sup> RFE/RL, *Iran's judiciary says more than 2,400 convicted during protests so far*, 22 November 2022; Iran International, *Iran issues indictment for over 1,100 protesters*, 22 November 2022.

<sup>117</sup> BBCM, *Judiciary official says 83% of protest prisoners in Tehran freed*, 26 December 2022; MEMO, *Iranian official says 83% of people arrested during Tehran protests were released*, 27 December 2022.

<sup>118</sup> BBCM, *Iran monthly protests report: December 2022*, 5 January 2023; BBCM, *Iran monthly protests report: January 2023*, 2 February 2023.

that time has mainly been limited to chanting slogans from windows, balconies and rooftops. In 2023, despite increased repression and enforcement, a relatively large number of women and girls continued to take to the streets without headscarves (see also Section 3.1.5.4).<sup>119</sup> Protest rallies still occurred sporadically in some parts of the country in 2023. These included gatherings to mourn the death of a protester, forty days after the day on which they died. These sometimes resulted in large local protests.<sup>120</sup>

#### 1.2.2.5 Pardon

On 5 February 2023, Ayatollah Khamenei announced a pardon and reduction in prison sentences for tens of thousands of prisoners to mark the 44th anniversary of the Iranian revolution.<sup>121</sup> The supreme leader said one of the purposes of this pardon was to forgive the thousands of young protesters for their 'naive mistakes, as a father forgives his children'.<sup>122</sup> According to the head of the judiciary, more than 82,000 people were granted amnesty or reduced sentences, including 22,000 people arrested for protest-related cases.<sup>123</sup> However, it is not clear whether these prisoners were actually released. These figures cannot be independently verified.<sup>124</sup> According to various sources, some prisoners were released on bail. The authorities rearrested a number of them some time later for a similar offence.<sup>125</sup>

#### 1.2.3 Attacks at Shah Cheragh shrine

On 26 October 2022, the fortieth day after Mahsa Amini's death, an attack took place at the Shah Cheragh shrine in the city of Shiraz. At least 13 people were killed and dozens injured in the attack. The culprit was detained and died of his injuries a few days later. The authorities said they made 42 arrests in connection with this attack.<sup>126</sup> Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility, but many Iranians doubted this claim and suspected the authorities were using this attack to divert attention from anti-government protests.<sup>127</sup> On 18 March 2023, a revolutionary court in Shiraz sentenced two non-Iranians to death for their involvement in this attack. The Supreme Court upheld this conviction on 6 July 2023. On 8 July 2023, the two were

<sup>119</sup> The New York Times, *Flaunting hair, Iranian women defy hijab law*, 26 February 2023; Al Jazeera, *Iranian women post images without hijabs despite crackdown*, 11 April 2023; AD, *'10 procent van de Iraanse vrouwen bedekt het haar niet op de correcte wijze' - zij lopen risico*, 21 July 2023.

<sup>120</sup> BBC News, *Hadis Najafi: Iran police fire on mourners for female protester – witnesses*, 3 November 2022; Al-Monitor, *Iranian killed at memorial for slain protesters: rights group*, 31 December 2022; BBCM, *Briefing: Iranians express defiance at slain protesters' gravesides*, 5 January 2023; IranWire, *Arrests made as police disperse Tehran ceremony for protest crackdown victim*, 9 January 2023; BBCM, *Iran mourners renew anti-government protests at memorials*, 19 January 2023; BBCM, *Scattered protests held in Iran to commemorate victims*, 16 February 2023; The Independent, *Protests erupt across Iran during 'Red Wednesday'*, 16 March 2023.

<sup>121</sup> The Guardian, *Iran's supreme leader to pardon some detained anti-government protesters*, 5 February 2023; Trouw, *Amnestie voor 'tienduizenden' Iraanse gevangenen*, 6 February 2023.

<sup>122</sup> BBCM, *Briefing: Iranian leader's pardon of prisoners attracts mixed reactions*, 6 February 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>123</sup> BBCM, *Iran says over 80,000 pardoned after leader's amnesty*, 6 March 2023; Sky News, *Iran protests: Pardons issued for 22,000 people arrested in demonstrations after Mahsa Amini's death*, 13 March 2023.

<sup>124</sup> Confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>125</sup> HRANA, *Abbas Sharifi arrested in Behshahr*, 14 April 2023; HRANA, *Former political prisoner Reza Mohammad Hoseini arrested*, 2 May 2023; HRANA, *Hamideh Zeraie re-arrested by security forces*, 30 May 2023; UNHRC, *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Advanced unedited version (A/HRC/53/23)*, 15 June 2023, p. 7; IranWire, *Khamenei's "great amnesty" joke: "pardoned" journalists are prosecuted again*, 28 June 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>126</sup> The Independent, *Gunman who attacked holy shrine in Iran dies from injuries*, 29 October 2022; UNGA, *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (A/HRC/52/67)*, 7 February 2023, p. 18; BBCM, *Iran says 42 detained over deadly October shrine shooting*, 14 February 2023; BBCM, *Iran arrests 'Islamic State member' in south*, 15 May 2023.

<sup>127</sup> Reuters, *Islamic State claims Iran shrine attack, Iran vows response*, 27 October 2022; WINEP, *The Islamic State attacks the Islamic Republic*, 31 October 2022; confidential source, October 2022.

publicly hanged in Shiraz.<sup>128</sup> On 13 August 2023, another attack took place at the shrine. This left two dead and several injured.<sup>129</sup>

#### 1.2.4 *Drone attack on a military factory*

According to Iranian authorities, a drone attack on a military factory near Isfahan took place on the night of 28-29 January 2023. Authorities took down three drones. One of these drones crashed into the roof of the factory. According to Iran, Israel was behind this attack.<sup>130</sup>

#### 1.2.5 *School poisonings*

In late 2022, an increasing number of reports appeared of schoolgirls and college students ending up in hospital with symptoms of poisoning. These incidents mainly involved state-run all-girls' schools in poorer neighbourhoods across the country. The first known incident occurred on 30 November 2022 in the city of Qom.<sup>131</sup> In early March 2023, a member of parliament investigating the incidents stated that more than 5,000 girls in 230 schools had fallen ill in 25 of Iran's 31 provinces.<sup>132</sup> There were no clear indications as to who was responsible for the poisonings, what substances had been used or why the girls had been poisoned. One reason for this was that the authorities did not provide information on the medical records and did not involve organisations such as WHO or UNICEF in their investigations.<sup>133</sup> Some say the poisonings were an act of revenge for the role played by young women during the anti-government protests in response to Mahsa Amini's death.<sup>134</sup> By mid-March 2023, the authorities reported that more than 118 arrests had been made in connection with the suspected poisonings.<sup>135</sup> Despite these arrests, reports of school poisonings persisted until schools closed for the summer holidays in June 2023.<sup>136</sup> UN experts say there were deliberate poisonings and targeted chemical attacks on

<sup>128</sup> BBCM, *Iran to execute two over 2022 terror attack on shrine*, 18 March 2023; Rudaw, *Iran sentences 2 to death in connection with Shiraz attack*, 18 March 2023; IHRNGO, *Iranian authorities' terrorising campaign continues; Two Afghan nationals at grave risk of public execution*, 21 May 2023; BBCM, *Iran to publicly execute two for 2022 shrine attack*, 21 May 2023; Iran International, *Iran preparing for public execution of two men over shrine attack*, 22 May 2023; BBCM, *Iran hangs two in public over alleged role in Shiraz shrine attack*, 8 July 2023; NOS, *Twee Afghanen opgehangen in Iran voor aanslag op heiligdom*, 8 July 2023; RFE/RL, *Iran hangs two Afghan citizens for shrine attack amid outcry from rights group*, 8 July 2023.

<sup>129</sup> BBC News, *Iran attack: Shiraz shrine shooting leaves at least one dead*, 13 August 2023; Al Jazeera, *Iran's Shiraz shrine comes under second deadly attack in months*, 13 August 2023; The Independent, *Gunman in southern Iran opens fire at prominent Shiite shrine, killing 1 and wounding 8 others*, 13 August 2023; BBCM, *Death toll of Iran shrine attack reaches two, several suspects arrested*, 14 August 2023.

<sup>130</sup> BBCM, *Iran releases footage of destroyed drones after 'thwarted' attack*, 29 January 2023; The Independent, *Satellite photos: Damage at Iran military site hit by drones*, 3 February 2023; NOS, *Iran stelt Israël verantwoordelijk voor droneaanval op Isfahan*, 2 February 2023; BBCM, *Iran says Isfahan drone attack 'culprits' detained*, 10 February 2023.

<sup>131</sup> Iran International, *Two more university dorms in Iran attacked by chemicals*, 7 March 2023; BBCM, *Briefing: New spate of Iranian schoolgirl 'poisonings' as holidays end*, 5 April 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>132</sup> Iran Wire, *Iranian teachers, parents protest over school poisonings*, 7 March 2023; The Independent, *More than 5,000 cases of children being poisoned, Iran official says amid arrests*, 8 March 2023.

<sup>133</sup> OHCHR, *Iran: Deliberate poisoning of schoolgirls further evidence of continuous violence against women and girls*, 16 March 2023; Iran International, *Iranian group says nerve agent was used in attacks on schoolgirls*, 2 June 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>134</sup> The Guardian, *Iranian authorities investigate the poisoning of schoolgirls, said to be 'revenge' for hijab protests*, 27 February 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>135</sup> The Guardian, *Iran makes first arrests over suspected schoolgirl poisonings*, 7 March 2023; BBCM, *Briefing: Arrests made over Iran schoolgirl 'poisonings' amid protests*, 7 March 2023; BBCM, *Man arrested in north-east Iran over suspected school poisonings*, 8 March 2023; BBCM, *Iran Interior Ministry says more than 100 arrested in 'serial poisonings'*, 11 March 2023; VOA, *Iran: More than 100 arrested over school poisonings*, 12 March 2023; BBCM, *Iran police arrest more than 100 over school 'poisoning' incidents*, 15 March 2023.

<sup>136</sup> BBCM, *Briefing: Protests erupt as two Iranian cities suffer school 'poisonings'*, 15 April 2023; VOA, *More school poisonings reported in Iran*, 19 April 2023; The Washington Post, *Panic spreads in Iran after new suspected poison attacks on girls schools*, 26 April 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

girls' schools.<sup>137</sup> However, the MOIS stated that no traces of toxic substances had been found and that the incidents were the result of mass hysteria.<sup>138</sup>

#### 1.2.6 *Kurdistan, Kermanshah and West Azerbaijan*

As in the previous reporting period, security forces maintained a strong presence in the provinces of Kurdistan, Kermanshah and West Azerbaijan. In autumn 2022, the epicentre of anti-government protests following the death of Mahsa Amini (see Section 1.2.2) was in this north-western Kurdish region, particularly in the cities of Sanandaj, Saqqez (Kurdistan province), Kermanshah, Javanrud (Kermanshah province) and Mahabad (West Azerbaijan province).<sup>139</sup> However, little information is available on events in this region due to the limited presence of journalists, civil society and human rights activists. There were also constant internet disruptions, which severely limited the supply of news from these provinces.<sup>140</sup> The authorities shut down the internet in the city of Sanandaj in Kurdistan province several times, for example.<sup>141</sup> In the Kurdish region, the anti-government protests continued into 2023.<sup>142</sup>

The death toll in the anti-government protests following Mahsa Amini's death was relatively high in the Kurdish region. According to the French-based NGO Kurdistan Human Rights Network (KHRN), at least 123 Kurds were killed in these protests in 2022, including 11 children. Most of the deaths, 49, occurred in West Azerbaijan province.<sup>143</sup> For example, on 16 November 2022, security forces in this province shot dead three people in the city of Bukan.<sup>144</sup>

During the reporting period, some armed clashes also took place in the Kurdish region of Iran between Iranian security personnel and members of Kurdish parties with bases in northern Iraq. This sometimes resulted in deaths and injuries on both sides.<sup>145</sup> The Iranian authorities claimed that support for the anti-government protests also came from northern Iraq. In an apparent response, the Revolutionary Guard carried out multiple shelling, missile and drone attacks on bases and members of Kurdish parties in northern Iraq (see also Section 3.1.1.2).<sup>146</sup>

<sup>137</sup> OHCHR, *Iran: Deliberate poisoning of schoolgirls further evidence of continuous violence against women and girls*, 16 March 2023.

<sup>138</sup> Reuters, *Iran says there were no school poisonings, blames foreign 'enemies'*, 28 April 2023; Tehran Times, *No signs of toxic substances discovered in schools: Intelligence Ministry*, 29 April 2023.

<sup>139</sup> RFE/RL, *Iran's Kurdish region becomes epicentre of protests, deadly government crackdown*, 13 October 2022; NOS, *Iran stuurt extra troepen naar Koerdische regio om protest te onderdrukken*, 21 November 2022; Trouw, *Juist in de Koerdische regio treedt het regime hard op*, 22 November 2022; BBC News, *Iran protests: BBC identifies many more people killed in demonstrations after Mahsa Amini's death*, 6 December 2022. DIS, *Iran. Protests 2022-2023*, 1 March 2023, p. 17.

<sup>140</sup> Iran International, *Iran disrupts internet as it steps up attacks on Kurdish cities*, 21 November 2022; confidential source, January 2023.

<sup>141</sup> NetBlocks, *Internet disrupted in Iran amid protests over death of Mahsa Amini*, 19 September 2022; The Guardian, *Iranian security forces intensify crackdown in Kurdistan*, 11 October 2022.

<sup>142</sup> Rudaw, *Dawn raids, economic blockade, military parades; all to subdue a Kurdish town in Iran*, 10 January 2023; PBS, *Iranians protesting regime refuse to back down despite threats of arrest and execution*, 12 January 2023; IranWire, *Protests in Iran's Kurdish areas with violence amid Nowruz holiday*, 21 March 2023; BBCM, *Iran monthly protests report: June 2023*, 3 July 2023.

<sup>143</sup> KHRN, *Details of 121 Kurdish people killed during Mahsa (Jina) Amini protests in Iran*, December 2022, p. 2; KHRN, *Annual report Mar 2022 – Mar 2023*, 27 April 2023.

<sup>144</sup> Hengaw, *Four citizens were killed by IRI forces during the Bukan popular resistance*, 17 November 2022; Rudaw, *Iranian security forces kill three more Kurdish protesters*, 17 November 2022.

<sup>145</sup> Iran International, *Four IRGC forces killed in clashes with Kurdish group in Northwestern Iran*, 8 July 2022; Rudaw, *Iranian border guards killed in clashes with armed group*, 20 July 2022; BBCM, *IRGC says it targeted Kurdish groups in western Iran*, 14 June 2023; BBCM, *IRGC member killed in Iran's western Kurdistan province*, 17 June 2023; Rudaw, *PJAK kills IRGC soldier in Kurdistan clashes*, 17 June 2023; IranWire, *Why Revolutionary Guards are shelling Kurdistan province*, 26 June 2023.

<sup>146</sup> Iran International, *Iran Guards attack Kurdish groups in Iraq for 'backing protests'*, 26 September 2022; BBC News, *Thirteen killed in Iraq as Iran attacks Kurdish groups blamed for protests*, 28 September 2022; Reuters, *Thirteen reported killed as Iran Revolutionary Guards target dissident sites in Iraq*, 28 September 2022; France

Due to the poor economic situation and high unemployment in the western border provinces, a relatively large number of Kurds are involved in smuggling goods to and from northern Iraq. During the reporting period, several smugglers (*kolbars*) and traders involved in the (illegal) trade between the Kurdish regions of Iran and Iraq were killed.<sup>147</sup> According to HRANA, at least 22 *kolbars* were killed in 2022 when they were fired on by Iranian security personnel with live ammunition. At least another 134 *kolbars* were injured in similar incidents.<sup>148</sup> According to the KHRN, between March 2022 and March 2023, at least 24 *kolbars* were killed and at least 132 *kolbars* suffered gunshot wounds inflicted by Iranian security personnel.<sup>149</sup>

### 1.2.7

#### *Khuzestan*

The western province of Khuzestan suffers from air pollution and chronic water scarcity, among other problems, including irrigation issues and a lack of clean drinking water.<sup>150</sup> In May 2022, the authorities shut down the internet in some cities after protests broke out over rising bread prices, a result of the war in Ukraine and changes in Iran's subsidy system.<sup>151</sup> Anti-government protests also broke out in several cities, including in Ahvaz, Izeh and Dezful, from the autumn of 2022 onwards, following the death of Mahsa Amini (see Section 1.2.2).<sup>152</sup>

In Khuzestan, a number of clashes between civilians and Iranian security personnel took place during the reporting period, resulting in fatalities and injuries.<sup>153</sup> On 16 November 2022, for example, a small group of motorbike riders opened fire at a crowd in the city of Izeh in Khuzestan province with automatic weapons. Seven people were killed in the attack, including a nine-year-old boy who was in a car with his family at the time.<sup>154</sup> The authorities say they were victims of a terrorist attack.<sup>155</sup> According to authorities, a raid in connection with the case took place near the small town of Ghaleh Tal on 20 December 2022. Two people were killed in the raid and two arrests were made.<sup>156</sup> On 19 March 2023, the judiciary announced that

*24, Iran launches deadly missile, drone strikes on Kurdish groups in Iraq, 14 November 2022; The New York Times, In Iraq's mountains, Iranian opposition fighters feel the squeeze, 20 November 2022; Kurdistan 24, Iran again carries out attacks on Iranian Kurdish opposition parties in Kurdistan Region, 21 November 2022; BBCM, Iran Guards relaunched attack on Kurdish positions inside Iraq, 22 November 2022; BBCM, Iran commander says 24 dissidents killed in strikes on Iraqi Kurdistan, 19 June 2023; IranWire, Iranian-Kurdish political activists killed, wounded in attack in Northern Iraq, 7 July 2023; confidential source, October 2022.*

<sup>147</sup> KHRN, *Iran border forces continue targeting kolbars in Baneh*, 2 September 2022; Hengaw, *The systematic killing of kolbars; the injury of 16 kolbars in 5 days*, 8 September 2022; KHRN, *Iran border forces kill, injure two kolbars in Baneh*, 12 September 2022; KHRN, *Border guards kill two kolbars in Iran's western Baneh*, 22 September 2022; KHRN, *Iran border forces kill two in Piranshahr, Baneh border areas*, 3 October 2022; KHRN, *Iran border guards shoot dead Kurdish tradesman in Baneh*, 20 April 2023; confidential source, May 2023.

<sup>148</sup> HRANA, *Five cross-border fuel carrier (sookhtbar) killed by IRGC forces*, 8 February 2023.

<sup>149</sup> KHRN, *Annual report Mar 2022 – Mar 2023*, 27 April 2023.

<sup>150</sup> The Iran Primer, *Iran's troubled provinces: Khuzestan*, 3 February 2021; Al-Monitor, *Iranian oil province suffers from pollution, water scarcity*, 18 September 2022.

<sup>151</sup> Iran International, *Reports indicate bread price protests in Southwestern Iran*, 6 May 2022; UNGA, *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (A/77/181)*, 18 July 2022, p. 20.

<sup>152</sup> Euronews, *Students clash with police as Iran protests enter sixth week*, 24 October 2022; Iran International, *Wednesday protests in Iran: Strikes, deaths, and dance*, 17 November 2022; MEE, *Iran protests: Iranian-Arab women's rights activists dying in Khuzestan crackdown*, 2 December 2022; Le Monde, *Protests hit multiple Iran cities for first time in weeks*, 17 February 2023.

<sup>153</sup> UNGA, *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (A/77/181)*, 18 July 2022, p. 20; Iran International, *Iran's security forces attack people celebrating US soccer win*, 30 November 2022.

<sup>154</sup> The Guardian, *Iran protests: family of boy, 9, killed in night of violence blame attack on security forces*, 17 November 2022; The Washington Post, *The killing of a 9-year-old boy further ignites Iran's anti-government protests*, 18 November 2022; Iran International, *Ten-year-old victim's mother forced to deny criticism of Iran's leader*, 19 November 2022.

<sup>155</sup> Tehran Times, *7 killed in terror attack in Izeh in southwest Iran*, 16 November 2022; RFE/RL, *Iran says seven killed in 'terrorist attack' in Izeh amid protests*, 17 November 2022; BBCM, *Briefing: Iran media publish 'confessions' of Izeh shooter*, 26 December 2022.

<sup>156</sup> BBCM, *Two dead as Iran makes arrests over November shooting in Khuzestan*, 20 December 2022; IFP, *IRGC: Iran's security forces dealt blow to terror ring involved in Izeh bloodshed*, 21 December 2022; AP News, *Iran*

one of those arrested had confessed to his involvement. On 7 April 2023, a revolutionary court in Ahvaz sentenced him to death.<sup>157</sup>

### 1.2.8

#### *Sistan-Baluchistan*

Sistan-Baluchistan is a province with a large Baluchi community in south-east Iran. The Baluchi people are Sunni Muslims (see Section 3.1.1.4). During the reporting period, the situation in this border province was very unsettled. This partly manifested itself in the ongoing anti-government protests following the death of Mahsa Amini, a number of water protests, the relatively high number of executions of Baluchi people and violent clashes with Sunni militant groups. Sistan-Baluchistan is one of Iran's poorest provinces. The province is facing extreme drought. The infrastructure is very poor. For instance, there are very limited medical facilities and employment opportunities are extremely limited. The number of child marriages is high. The smuggling of people, drugs and weapons occurs, and Sunni militant groups are active. At the same time, Sistan-Baluchistan is dealing with a high influx of Afghans, which puts further pressure on its already limited physical and social infrastructure.<sup>158</sup>

As in the Kurdish region, anti-government protests persisted in Sistan-Baluchistan during 2023. These demonstrations took place weekly during the reporting period, particularly after Friday prayers.<sup>159</sup> Little information is available on events in this province, due to the limited presence of journalists, civil society and human rights activists. Internet disruptions also occurred every Friday during the reporting period, which meant news could not always reach the outside world.<sup>160</sup>

One of the events that further fuelled anti-government protests in Sistan-Baluchistan following Mahsa Amini's death was a report of the rape of a fifteen-year-old girl of Baluchi origin by the police chief in the town of Chabahar. This was seen as another example of a situation where women's rights were trampled on by the authorities. During the Friday sermon in the provincial capital Zahedan on 23 September 2022, (Hanafite) Sunni cleric *molavi*<sup>161</sup> Abdolhamid Esmailzahi referred to the incident, without mentioning names or details.<sup>162</sup> On 27 September 2022, an imam from the town of Rask confirmed the incident.<sup>163</sup> This led to protests breaking

*security forces kill 2, arrest 2 over deadly attack*, 21 December 2022; Iran International, *Internet, phone cut off in defiant Iranian town after IRGC attack*, 23 December 2022.

<sup>157</sup> BBCM, *Iran says man 'confessed' to killing boy during recent protests*, 19 March 2023; IHRNGO, *Protester Mojahed Kourkour sentenced to death as cover-up for Kian Pirfalak's state killing*, 7 April 2023; BBCM, *Iran sentences man to death over fatal November shooting*, 7 April 2023; Iran International, *Iran sentences rebel to death by forced confession to child murder*, 7 April 2023.

<sup>158</sup> BBCM, *Police dismantle arms smuggling gang in south-eastern Iran*, 20 April 2023; BBCM, *Police seize weapons in Iran's Sistan-Baluchistan province*, 26 April 2023; Iran International, *Islamic Republic renews wave of Baluch executions*, 4 May 2023; Radio Zamaneh, *Poverty and exploitation: Looking at Baluchestan and the sukhtbar masses*, 5 May 2023; The New York Times, *As drought chokes Iran, some chase the last drops of water*, 22 June 2023; BBCM, *Iran detains two members of Sunni militant group in Sistan-Baluchestan*, 12 August 2023; confidential source, May 2023.

<sup>159</sup> BBCM, *Briefing: Protests break out in south-east Iran despite security clampdown*, 24 February 2023; BBCM, *Renewed protests break out in south-east Iran*, 17 March 2023; BBCM, *Iran social media report Sunni protests in south-east*, 16 June 2023; BBCM, *Briefing: Clashes follow protests in south-east Iran*, 23 June 2023; Iran International, *Iranians hold antiregime protests in Sunni-majority cities*, 23 June 2023; BBCM, *Iran users report crowd chanting anti-establishment slogans in Sunni city*, 7 July 2023; BBCM, *Briefing: Protests in south-east Iran after cleric's arrest*, 25 August 2023.

<sup>160</sup> IranWire, *Activists say internet shutdowns in Baluchistan must stop*, 4 May 2023; confidential source, January 2023; confidential source, June 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>161</sup> A title given to an Islamic legal scholar; MEE, *Meet Molavi Abdolhamid, Iran's anti-establishment Sunni cleric*, 28 December 2022; Wilson Center, *Iran's dissident Sunni cleric*, 29 March 2023.

<sup>162</sup> Iran International, *Iran's Sunni leader confirms rape of 15-year-old girl by police commander*, 24 September 2022; MEMRI, *Iran's security services target Baloch women*, 16 February 2023.

<sup>163</sup> IranWire, *Friday imam confirms rape of a 15-year-old girl by police chief*, 27 September 2022; RFE/RL, *Sunni cleric who reported alleged rape of girl by police commander summoned to Iranian court*, 12 December 2022.

out in Chabahar.<sup>164</sup> During the Friday sermon on 30 September 2022, *molavi* Abdolhamid referred to the incident again. He argued that people's demands should not go unanswered and the matter should be seriously investigated.<sup>165</sup> After prayers ended, an angry crowd gathered around the Great Mosalla prayer ground and the Makki Mosque, the city's main Sunni mosque. In response, the security forces opened fire on the crowd from rooftops with live ammunition.<sup>166</sup> The exact number of fatalities is unknown, but is estimated at between eighty to ninety.<sup>167</sup> This event came to be known as Zahedan's "Bloody Friday".<sup>168</sup> According to Iranian media, the Sunni militant group Army of Justice (*Jaish al-Adl*) was responsible for the massacre. Iranian authorities consider this group to be a terrorist organisation.<sup>169</sup>

On 28 October 2022, security forces in Zahedan opened fire on protesters again after Friday prayers. At least six people were killed and at least fifty injured, including bystanders and worshippers at the mosque.<sup>170</sup>

In addition, security forces on rooftops near a Sunni mosque opened fire with live ammunition on protesters in the city of Khash after Friday prayers on 4 November 2022. According to various sources, at least sixteen people were killed, two of them children, and several people were injured.<sup>171</sup>

In addition to military force, the authorities took other measures to stop the anti-government protests. *Haalvsh*, a website which publishes on events in Sistan-Baluchistan, reported that the authorities arrested at least 185 people in and around the city of Zahedan in January 2023.<sup>172</sup> Furthermore, at least 110 Baluchi people

<sup>164</sup> IranWire, *Protesters clash with law enforcement in Chabahar over news of teenager's rape by police chief*, 27 September 2022; BBCM, *Briefing: Iranians protest in Chabahar over Baluch girl 'rape' by police chief*, 27 September 2022.

<sup>165</sup> RFE/RL, *Iran's Baluchistan under lockdown, blackout in wake of 'Bloody Friday'*, 14 October 2022; The Independent, *Elderly cleric speaks out for young protesters in Iran*, 12 November 2022; RFE/RL, *Sunni cleric who reported alleged rape of girl by police commander summoned to Iranian court*, 12 December 2022; MEE, *Meet Molavi Abdolhamid, Iran's anti-establishment Sunni cleric*, 28 December 2022; Wilson Center, *Iran's dissident Sunni cleric*, 29 March 2023; Chatham House, *The Mahsa Jina Amini case: security and ethnic dimensions*, 5 May 2023.

<sup>166</sup> RFE/RL, *Teen worker killed 'holding his prayer mat' in Iran's protest crackdown*, 27 October 2022; MEE, *Meet Molavi Abdolhamid, Iran's anti-establishment Sunni cleric*, 28 December 2022.

<sup>167</sup> According to Amnesty International, at least 82 people were killed and several hundred injured. Most of the victims belonged to the Baluchi ethnic group. According to IranWire, 92 civilians were killed, including twelve children. Amnesty International traced the details of 66 fatalities, including ten children. According to authorities, four members of the security forces were also killed; BBCM, *Several security officials killed in south-eastern Iran*, 1 October 2022; RFE/RL, *Iran's Baluchistan under lockdown, blackout in wake of 'Bloody Friday'*, 14 October 2022; IranWire, *Zahedan police officials sacked over 'Black Friday' killings*, 28 October 2022; Trouw, *In Zahedan blijven inwoners het Iraanse regime trotseren*, 29 October 2022; DIS, *Iran. Protests 2022-2023*, 1 March 2023, p. 9.

<sup>168</sup> CNN, *Iranians mark 'Bloody Friday' as thousands protest in southeast flashpoint*, 12 November 2022; HRW, *Iran: 'Bloody Friday' crackdown this year's deadliest*, 22 December 2022.

<sup>169</sup> Fars News, *20 killed in terror attacks in southeast Iran, security forces keep control of strategic city*, 1 October 2022; Iran International, *Iran's security forces killed more than 80 on 'Bloody Friday' in Zahedan*, 6 October 2022; IFP, *Governor: Sept. 30 terror attacks left 35 dead in Iran's Zahedan*, 10 December 2022; BBCM, *IRGC arrests members of arms smuggling gangs in south-east Iran*, 20 April 2023.

<sup>170</sup> CNN, *Protesters in Iran's Zahedan encounter gunfire following Friday prayers*, 28 October 2022; The Guardian, *Iran: deaths reported as security forces open fire on protesters in Zahedan*, 28 October 2022; BBC News, *Iran protests: Fresh clashes in Zahedan*, 28 October 2022; The Independent, *Zahedan violence: Iran regime forces fatally shoot worshippers after prayers as protests widen*, 28 October 2022; BBCM, *Police chief of Iranian city of Zahedan sacked after deadly clash*, 28 October 2022; The Independent, *Iranian forces fatally shoot worshippers leaving prayers*, 29 October 2022.

<sup>171</sup> Iran International, *The Bloody Friday protests in Iran continued overnight*, 5 November 2022; CNN, *Children among 10 feared dead in Iran crackdown, Amnesty says*, 5 November 2022; IHRNGO, *Iran protests: At least 304 including 41 children killed/At least 16 people killed in another "Bloody Friday" in Baluchistan*, 5 November 2022; Iran International, *Four dead as soldier opens fire on police personnel in Iran*, 6 November 2022; Amnesty International, *Iran: Urgent international action needed to stop mass killings of Baluchi protesters*, 10 November 2022.

<sup>172</sup> Iran International, *Iranian regime forces arrest 40 in Sunni city of Zahedan*, 3 January 2023; IranWire, *Islamic Republic imposed "military rule" in flagship city of Zahedan*, 6 January 2023; RFE/RL, *Rights group says at least 185 arrested in Iran's Zahedan in past month*, 2 February 2023.

were executed in the first four months of 2023, according to several human rights organisations. These included the hanging of nineteen Baluchi people, including two women, within five days. According to several human rights organisations, this wave of executions was intended to deter protesters.<sup>173</sup>

In the reporting period, the authorities deployed greater resources to enable more rapid intervention in Sistan-Baluchistan.<sup>174</sup> From 23 June 2023, the authorities strengthened their security presence in Zahedan and the rest of the province. In addition, the authorities set up dozens of security checkpoints in the city. They also disrupted the city's internet services. This was presumably done in an effort to disrupt attempts to organise demonstrations. The heightened security measures came amid ongoing protests in Zahedan, where hundreds of people are thought to have taken part in anti-government demonstrations on 23 June 2023. According to reports, protests also took place in other places that day, including the city of Iranshahr.<sup>175</sup>

Several clashes between members of drug gangs, militants, civilians and security personnel took place in Sistan-Baluchistan during the reporting period, resulting in deaths and injuries.<sup>176</sup> In the border region with Pakistan and Afghanistan, the smuggling of people, drugs, fuel and other goods was also widespread. Clashes between Iranian security personnel and fuel smugglers (*sokhtbars*) also resulted in deaths and injuries.<sup>177</sup> According to HRANA, at least nine sokhtbars were killed in 2022 when they were fired on by Iranian security personnel with live ammunition. At least twelve sokhtbars were injured in similar shootings.<sup>178</sup> In addition, regular skirmishes between Afghan and Iranian forces took place in the border region with Afghanistan.<sup>179</sup>

<sup>173</sup> Al-Monitor, *Iran on 'execution spree' of Kurdish, Baluchi minorities, Amnesty says*, 3 March 2023; Iran International, *Islamic Republic renews wave of Baluch executions*, 4 May 2023.

<sup>174</sup> Mehr News, *IRGC sets up base for helicopters, drones in southeast Iran*, 10 May 2023; BBCM, *Iran opens new IRGC airbase in restive south-eastern province*, 10 May 2023.

<sup>175</sup> Crisis24, *Iran: Increased security likely in Zahedan and other major cities in Sistan va Baluchestan through late June amid ongoing civil unrest*, 23 June 2023; Iran International, *Iranians hold anti-regime protests in Sunni-majority cities*, 23 June 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>176</sup> IranWire, *One killed, six injured in incidents involving police in Baluchistan*, 26 April 2023; BBCM, *Criminal police chief killed in south-eastern Iran*, 30 April 2023; BBCM, *Three 'terrorists' arrested over killing of police chief in south-eastern Iran*, 2 May 2023; Radio Zamaneh, *Poverty and exploitation: Looking at Baluchestan and the sukhtbar masses*, 5 May 2023; BBCM, *Iranian border guard killed by 'smugglers' near Afghan border*, 17 May 2023; BBCM, *Six Iranian border guards killed in Pakistan border clash*, 21 May 2023; BBCM, *Iran's IRGC dismantles 'armed team' in Sistan-Baluchestan*, 24 May 2023; Mehr News, *Terrorist team dismantled in SE Iran*, 24 May 2023; BBCM, *Six killed in attack on police station in restive Iran province*, 8 July 2023.

<sup>177</sup> Global Voices, *Iran's latest surge in executions heavily targets Baloch minority*, 6 July 2022; HRANA, *Five cross-border fuel carrier (sokhtbar) killed by IRGC forces*, 8 February 2023; IranWire, *"Life for bread" Twitter campaign puts killing of Baluch fuel carriers under spotlight*, 17 April 2023; BHRG, *The death of a Baloch fuel carrier (shookhtbar) in Iranshahr*, 16 May 2023.

<sup>178</sup> HRANA, *Five cross-border fuel carrier (sokhtbar) killed by IRGC forces*, 8 February 2023.

<sup>179</sup> VOA, *Iran says border guards clashed with Afghan Taliban*, 31 July 2022; IFP, *Iranian forces, Taliban clash again on Iran-Afghanistan border*, 5 March 2023; The New York Times, *At least three are killed in clashes on Iranian-Afghan border*, 28 May 2023; Al Jazeera, *What caused deadly Afghan-Iran border clashes? What happens next?*, 30 May 2023.

## 2 Identity, documents and nationality

### 2.1 Compulsory identification, ID and travel documents

#### 2.1.1 *Birth certificate*

For information on the birth certificate (*shenasnameh*), see Section 2.1.1 of the General Country of Origin Information Report on Iran of May 2022.

#### 2.1.2 *National ID card*

For information on the national ID card (*kart-e melli*), see Section 2.1.2 of the General Country of Origin Information Report on Iran of May 2022.

#### 2.1.3 *Passport*

For information on the Iranian passport, see Section 2.1.3 of the General Country of Origin Information Report on Iran of May 2022.

#### 2.1.4 *Marriage certificate*

A marriage is performed in the presence of witnesses by a registry office (*mahzar*) authorised by the National Organization for Civil Registration (NOCR) as the legal body for registering marriages. As part of the ceremony, the registrar issues an official marriage certificate (*aghdnameh*).<sup>180</sup> This marriage certificate can be kept by the bride, the groom or members of their families. On request and payment of a fee, both the bride and the groom can obtain a copy of the original document from the registry office.<sup>181</sup>

#### 2.1.5 *Birth certificates for non-Iranian children*

According to various sources, foreign parents have to register the birth of their non-Iranian child born in Iran with the NOCR. This requires a declaration of childbirth drawn up by an authorised doctor or midwife, as well as valid ID documents for the parents, such as a passport or residence permit. If these conditions are met, the NOCR will issue a special foreign birth certificate for the child.<sup>182</sup> According to one source, this also requires the approval of the police intelligence service. If the parents do not hold a valid residence permit, permission is required from the police Immigration Department.<sup>183</sup>

According to various sources, in practice, hospitals are reluctant to issue declarations of childbirth to foreigners who do not hold a valid residence permit, such as an *amayesh* card.<sup>184</sup>

According to the UNHCR, the parents of a newborn non-Iranian child can apply to register the birth through the Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants' Affairs (BAFIA). This requires a declaration of childbirth and a residence permit that was valid at the time of the child's birth.<sup>185</sup>

<sup>180</sup> Landinfo Report, *Iran: Passports, ID and civil status documents*, 5 January 2021, p. 35; confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>181</sup> Confidential source, March 2023; confidential source, April 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>182</sup> UNSD, *An introduction to the Civil Registration System in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 18 September 2015, p. 5; Landinfo, *Report Iran: Passports, ID and civil status documents*, 5 January 2021, p. 16; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>183</sup> Confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>184</sup> A card for Afghan refugees registered in Iran; confidential source, June 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>185</sup> UNHCR, *Help Iran. Birth registration*, <https://help.unhcr.org/iran/en/what-are-the-main-services-for-asylum-seekers-and-refugees-in-iran/birth-registration/>, accessed on 12 September 2023.

2.1.6 *Sending documents abroad*

According to one source, sending ID and legal documents abroad from Iran is prohibited. However, some travel agents do offer these services unofficially.<sup>186</sup> Post office employees or staff at international courier companies check the items before they are sent. They do not accept documents such as passports for sending.<sup>187</sup>

According to one source, sending documents can result in the sender being targeted if the authorities already have a file on that person.<sup>188</sup> Individuals under surveillance by the security services are always at risk that anything they send by post will be inspected by the authorities.<sup>189</sup>

**2.2 Nationality**

As far as could be ascertained, no changes were made to Iran's nationality laws during the reporting period.<sup>190</sup> See Section 2.2 of the General Country of Origin Information Report on Iran of May 2022 for more information on Iranian nationality laws.

<sup>186</sup> Confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>187</sup> Confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>188</sup> Confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>189</sup> Confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>190</sup> Confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, April 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

## 3 Human rights

### 3.1 Position of specific groups

#### 3.1.1 Ethnic groups

According to the latest estimates, between 84 and 88 million people live in Iran.<sup>191</sup> Persians form the largest ethnic group. Estimates of the size of this group range from just under half to over 60% of the population.<sup>192</sup> This section explores the position of the Azeri, Kurd, Arab and Baluchi peoples. The authorities restrict the cultural and political rights of these ethnic groups. This means that Persian is the only official language in schools and universities, in courts, in contacts with the police and the municipality, and on official occasions. Children from the above-mentioned ethnic groups are not taught in their mother tongue in schools.<sup>193</sup>

During the reporting period, some activists in Iran who stood up for the interests of these ethnic groups faced problems, as the authorities were quick to regard this as political activism aimed at undermining national security and domestic stability.<sup>194</sup>

Activists who stood up for the interests of these ethnic groups abroad could be subject to surveillance and intimidation. There are indications of active surveillance of the Iranian diaspora by the Iranian government.<sup>195</sup> For instance, the AIVD, MIVD and NCTV refer to a range of intelligence and influencing activities, including the targeting of the Iranian diaspora in the Netherlands. This can lead to self-censorship, openly propagating the Iranian government's position or active cooperation with intelligence agencies.<sup>196</sup> According to several sources, the political activities of people abroad who have certain links to Iran are monitored, because the Iranian authorities see them as a security risk. This policy applies no matter which ethnic group a person belongs to.<sup>197</sup> This may also affect family or friends still living in Iran.<sup>198</sup>

<sup>191</sup> MEI, *What Iran's emerging demographic "tsunami" means for Tehran*, 25 August 2022; CRS, *Iran: Background and U.S. policy*, 23 March 2023, p. 2; USDoS, *Iran 2022 international religious freedom report*, 15 May 2023, p. 5; The World Bank, *Population, total – Iran, Islamic Rep*, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=IR>, accessed on 12 September 2023.

<sup>192</sup> MRGI, *World directory of minorities and indigenous peoples – Iran*, December 2017; FDD, *Iran is more than Persia. Ethnic politics in the Islamic Republic*, April 2021, p. 10; FP, *How Iran's ethnic divisions are fuelling the revolt*, 19 October 2022.

<sup>193</sup> Rudaw, *The mother tongue: The struggle for Kurdish education in Rojhelat*, 7 May 2022; FP, *How Iran's ethnic divisions are fuelling the revolt*, 19 October 2022; confidential source, March 2023; confidential source, April 2023; confidential source, May 2023.

<sup>194</sup> FP, *How Iran's ethnic divisions are fuelling the revolt*, 19 October 2022; Kurdistan 24, *Renowned Kurdish language activist freed in Iran*, 11 February 2023; VOA, *Iranian Azerbaijani rights activist in Iran released from prison, flouts court-ordered 'internal exile'*, 2 March 2023; Freedom House, *Freedom in the world 2023. Country report Iran*, 9 March 2023, p. 16; HLN, *Twee Iraniërs die deelnamen aan betoging in Brussel getuigen: "Onze moeder in Iran werd maandagnacht aangepakt door de Iraanse geheime dienst"*, 29 June 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>195</sup> NRC, *Wij kunnen niet stilzitten, zolang zij lijden*, 15 April 2023; USCIRF, *Annual report 2023*, 1 May 2023, p. 71; BBCM, *Iran claims to arrest foreign-based individual accused of fanning protests*, 18 July 2023; CGRS, *Iran. Surveillance van de diaspora door de Iraanse autoriteiten*, 10 May 2023, p. 21; New Zealand Security Intelligence Service, *New Zealand's security threat environment 2023. An assessment by the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service*, 11 August 2023, p. 30; confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, May 2023.

<sup>196</sup> AIVD, MIVD and NCTV, *Dreigingsbeeld statelijke actoren 2*, 28 November 2022, p. 20.

<sup>197</sup> Confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>198</sup> Hengaw, *Two family members of the Baloch activist, were arrested by Iranian government forces in Iranshahr*, 21 June 2023; The New Arab, *To curb activists and journalists aboard, authorities arrest family members in Iran*, 3 July 2023.

## 3.1.1.1 Azeris

Azeris are the second-largest ethnic group in Iran. There are no recent official figures on the exact number of Azeris in the country. One reason is that the Iranian authorities did not publish statistics on ethnicity or language during the reporting period.<sup>199</sup> Estimates of the number of Azeris in Iran vary widely, from 12 million to 30 million.<sup>200</sup> They mainly live in the capital Tehran and in the north-western provinces of East Azerbaijan, West Azerbaijan, Ardabil and Zanjan. They speak a Turkic language. Most Azeris are Shia Muslims.<sup>201</sup> They are generally well integrated into Iranian society. A number of people from Iran's political and spiritual elite, including the supreme leader, have an Azeri background.<sup>202</sup> This is also emphasised to promote the idea and image of national unity.<sup>203</sup>

Some politically and culturally active Azeris encountered problems in Iran when they engaged in activities on behalf of their ethnic group, especially when these activities had not been permitted or licensed by the authorities. The authorities were quick to regard such activities as political action aimed at undermining national security and domestic stability, and as a first step towards secession.<sup>204</sup> In the case of Azeris, this was influenced by tensions between Iran and Azerbaijan during the reporting period.<sup>205</sup> There were several incidents on both sides, including a lethal attack on the Azerbaijan embassy in Tehran on 27 January 2023. An Azerbaijani diplomat was killed in the attack and two security guards were injured. The motive behind the attack remains unknown.<sup>206</sup> Azerbaijan blamed it on Iran's 'hate campaign' against the country.<sup>207</sup> Other incidents that caused tensions included Iran's military exercises on its border with Azerbaijan in October 2022 and the expulsion of diplomats.<sup>208</sup> In addition, there were allegations that Azerbaijan was cooperating with Israel against Iran's wishes.<sup>209</sup>

<sup>199</sup> VOA, *Azerbaijani Turks in Iran demand 'freedom, justice, national government'*, 11 November 2022; Turan, *Report on repressions against Azerbaijani Turks in Iran*, 5 December 2022.

<sup>200</sup> The Iran Primer, *Iran minorities 2: Ethnic diversity*, 3 September 2013; News.az, *Ahmad Obali: Rights of over 30 million southern Azerbaijanis in Iran trampled on*, 5 December 2022; I24 News, *Tehran's 'new old fear': Southern Azerbaijan wants independence*, 2 March 2023; EU Reporter, *Iran's recurring fear: Southern Azerbaijan protesting again*, 23 March 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>201</sup> VOA, *Azerbaijani Turks in Iran demand 'freedom, justice, national government'*, 11 November 2022; Muhammad Asim, 'Iranian constitution under pro-center dogmatic authoritarianism and pro-Persian cosmopolitanism, and its impacts on ethno-sectarian and ethno-linguistic minorities', in: S. Behnaz Hosseini (ed.), *Ethnic religious minorities in Iran*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2023, pp. 13-44, footnote 56; APA, *Urmia: beating heart of Azerbaijanism*, 3 March 2023.

<sup>202</sup> Khamenei.ir, *My mother was one of the most inspiring people in my life: Imam Khamenei*, 8 March 2018; Atlantic Council, *The 'Balkanization' of Iran is a fantasy. Here's why*, 2 August 2021; AsiaNews, *Tehran and Baku on a collision course*, 28 November 2022; USDoS, *Iran 2022 human rights report*, 20 March 2023, p. 61.

<sup>203</sup> Confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>204</sup> HRANA, *Azerbaijani Turk activist Abbas Lesani sentenced to eight years*, 8 June 2022; VOA, *Azerbaijani Turks in Iran demand 'freedom, justice, national government'*, 11 November 2022; MRGI, *Protests, discrimination and the future of minorities in Iran*, 25 November 2022, p. 7; EU Reporter, *Iran's recurring fear: Southern Azerbaijan protesting again*, 23 March 2023; IranWire, *Azeri activist Razizadeh handed two-year prison term*, 26 July 2023; confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, March 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>205</sup> MEI, *From the streets to the border: Iran's growing paranoia towards Azerbaijan*, 26 January 2023; Al Jazeera, *Azerbaijan expels four Iranian diplomats amid rising tensions*, 6 April 2023; IranWire, *Yusifova: An Azerbaijani woman's misery in Iranian dungeons*, 4 July 2023.

<sup>206</sup> The Independent, *Gunman kills security chief at Azerbaijan embassy in Iran*, 27 January 2023; BBCM, *Iran, Azeri prosecutors discuss Tehran embassy attack*, 14 February 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>207</sup> RFE/RL, *Baku summons Iranian ambassador over protest note related to alleged anti-Iranian media reports*, 4 April 2023; AzerNews, *Iran's another hostile campaign against Azerbaijan*, 3 June 2023.

<sup>208</sup> Caspian News, *Azerbaijan, Iran call for resolving issues through diplomatic ways*, 17 November 2022; Iran International, *Can tensions between Azerbaijan and Iran end in war?*, 15 April 2023; Reuters, *Azerbaijan expels four Iranian diplomats for 'provocative actions'*, 6 April 2023.

<sup>209</sup> Eurasianet, *Further strain in Azerbaijan-Iran relations*, 15 March 2023; Al Jazeera, *Analysis: Will Azerbaijan-Iran tensions lead to war*, 8 April 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

Some politically and culturally active Azeris who attended demonstrations could also face problems, especially if they attended anti-government protests.<sup>210</sup> During the reporting period, several Azeri activists were arrested and/or detained.<sup>211</sup> Several examples of Azeri activists who faced criminal prosecution are given below. This overview is by no means exhaustive.

In June 2022, a revolutionary court in Ardabil sentenced an Azeri activist to eight years in prison and internal exile to the city of Yazd for two years. He had previously been convicted in another case in 2019. He was released in February 2023, after which police escorted him to Yazd. He had reportedly been released under a pardon (see Section 1.2.2.5).<sup>212</sup>

The authorities arrested another activist in Tehran on 11 December 2022. In mid-July 2023, a revolutionary court sentenced him to five years' imprisonment under Section 499 of the Penal Code (membership of an illegal organisation), one year under Section 500 of the Penal Code (propaganda against the IRI), five years under Section 512 of the Penal Code (incitement to civil war) and five years under Section 610 of the Penal Code (threatening national security). Additional punishments included a two-year travel ban and a two-year ban on membership of any social or political group. On appeal, the conviction under section 512 of the Penal Code was overturned.<sup>213</sup>

The question of whether the Iranian authorities actively monitor the political activities of Azeris abroad could not be answered unequivocally. Here too, reference can be made to the above-mentioned finding by the AIVD, MIVD and NCTV that a range of intelligence and influencing activities are carried out, which also target the Iranian diaspora in the Netherlands.<sup>214</sup> It is not known whether Azeris are monitored more intensively than other groups within the diaspora.

### 3.1.1.2

#### Kurds

Since the twentieth century, the Kurdish people have lived mainly scattered across Iran, Iraq, Türkiye and Syria. In Iran, they have traditionally lived in the north-western provinces of Kurdistan, West Azerbaijan, Kermanshah, Hamedan and Ilam.<sup>215</sup> In Iran, they form the third-largest ethnic group. An estimated 8 to 10 million Kurds live in Iran.<sup>216</sup> In religious terms, the Kurds are not uniform. Most Kurds are Sunni Muslims (Shafiite), but there are also Shiite Kurds (twelvers) and

<sup>210</sup> VOA, *Student death fuels protests among Iran's Azerbaijani Turks*, 21 November 2022; HRANA, *Iran protests: Ramin Alinia Tazeh Kand sentenced to six years in prison*, 12 May 2023.

<sup>211</sup> HRANA, *Azerbaijani Turk activist Yashar Piri arrested in Tabriz*, 19 August 2022; HRANA, *Azerbaijani Turk activist Rahim Panahian arrested in Tabriz*, 29 August 2022; HRANA, *Azerbaijani Turk activists Asgar Akbarzadeh and Saeed Sadeghifar arrested*, 22 September 2022; HRANA, *Azerbaijani Turk activists Meysam and Mohammad Julani arrested*, 23 September 2022; HRANA, *Five Azerbaijani (Turk) activists arrested in Tabriz*, 19 May 2023.

<sup>212</sup> HRANA, *Imprisoned Azerbaijani Turk activist Abbas Lessani dispatched to medical clinic*, 22 October 2021; HRANA, *Report on mass release of prisoners in the past 24 hours*, 22 February 2023; HRANA, *Azerbaijani Turk activist Abbas Lesani sentenced to eight years*, 8 June 2022; VOA, *Iranian Azerbaijani rights activistin Iran released from prison, flouts court-ordered 'internal exile'*, 2 March 2023; United for Iran, *Abbas Lesani*, <https://ipa.united4iran.org/en/prisoner/2082/>, accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>213</sup> HRANA, *Azerbaijani (Turk) activist Mahmood Ojaghlu indicted on new charges*, 20 April 2023; IranWire, *Civil rights activist sentenced to 16 years in prison*, 13 July 2023; HRANA, *Azerbaijani (Turk) activist Mahmood Ojaghlu sentenced to 16 years in prison*, 13 July 2023; Hengaw, *Azerbaijani-Turkish activist, Mahmoud Ojagjlu sentenced to 16 years in prison and additional punishment*, 13 July 2023; HRANA, *Azerbaijani-Turk activist Mahmood Ojaghlu sentenced to 11 years following appeal*, 29 August 2023; United for Iran, *Mahmoud Ojaghluo*, <https://ipa.united4iran.org/en/prisoner/8527/>, accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>214</sup> AIVD, MIVD and NCTV, *Dreigingsbeeld statelijke actoren 2*, 28 November 2022, p. 20.

<sup>215</sup> Asim, *Iranian constitution under pro-center dogmatic authoritarianism*, 2023, footnote 59; Australian Government, *DFAT country information report Iran*, 24 July 2023, p. 16; confidential source, May 2023.

<sup>216</sup> The Iran Primer, *Iran's troubled provinces: Kurdistan*, 3 February 2021; USDoS, *Iran 2022 human rights report*, 20 March 2023, p. 60; confidential source, May 2023.

yarsanis.<sup>217</sup> Most Iranian Kurds speak Sorani, but other Kurdish languages are also spoken.<sup>218</sup>

Some politically and culturally active Kurds encountered problems in Iran when they engaged in activities on behalf of their ethnic group, especially when these activities had not been permitted or licensed. The authorities were quick to regard these activities as political action aimed at undermining national security and domestic stability, and as a first step towards secession.<sup>219</sup> Another factor specific to the Kurds is that during the reporting period, a number of the Kurdish political parties engaged in activities had their bases in the Kurdish region of Iraq. All of these parties are illegal in Iran. The authorities consider all Kurdish parties to be terrorist organisations. Kurds associated with any of those parties can face lengthy prison sentences and in some cases even the death penalty.<sup>220</sup>

A number of these Kurdish parties are listed below. This overview is by no means exhaustive.

- the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI) This party is working for Kurdish autonomy in a federal and democratic Iran.<sup>221</sup>
- the Free Life Party of Kurdistan (PJAK). PJAK has ideological ties with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). This party seeks self-governance for Kurds in Syria, Iraq, Türkiye and Iran.<sup>222</sup>
- the Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan (Komala-PIK). Like the PDKI, this party is working for a federal and democratic Iran.<sup>223</sup>
- the Komala Communist Party of Iran (Komala-CPI). This party consists of a faction led by Ibrahim Alizadeh and a smaller faction led by Salah Mazoji.<sup>224</sup>

<sup>217</sup> Asim, Iranian constitution under pro-center dogmatic authoritarianism, 2023, footnote 53; confidential source, May 2023.

<sup>218</sup> Rudaw, *Wikimedia launches Sorani edition of online dictionary*, 31 March 2023; confidential source, May 2023.

<sup>219</sup> Iran International, *Iran says busted 'Mossad-linked' sabotage team are Kurdish separatists*, 27 July 2022; MRGI, *Protests, discrimination and the future of minorities in Iran*, 25 November 2022, p. 7; KHRN, *Iran court sentences Kurdish political activist to four months in jail*, 27 January 2023; Hengaw, *Omid Moshir Panahi, a Kurdish language teacher, was summoned and arrested*, 25 February 2023; IranWire, *Milad Abdi: A student persecuted for speaking out against discrimination*, 14 July 2023; confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, May 2023.

<sup>220</sup> KMMK, *The Iranian government's scenario for 4 Kurd political activists is a failed and repeated project*, 4 August 2022; Hengaw, *The death sentence of Sarkawt Ahmadi, a Kurdish political prisoner, was executed secretly*, 22 February 2023; Al-Monitor, *Iran on 'execution spree' of Kurdish, Baluchi minorities, Amnesty says*, 3 March 2023; VOA, *Rights groups: Iran executed Kurdish 'political prisoner'*, 17 March 2023; Hengaw, *Nayeb Askari, a Kurdish political prisoner from Urmia, has been sentenced to death*, 16 April 2023; Hengaw, *Houshmand Alipour, a Kurdish political prisoner, started a hunger strike*, 25 June 2023; confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>221</sup> In August 2022, the Kurdistan Democratic Party – Iran (KDP-I) united with the PDKI; Iran International, *Turkey kills senior Kurdish commander in Syria with Iran's help*, 12 August 2022; Kurdistan 24, *Iranian Kurdish parties unite after 16 years split*, 22 August 2022; The New York Times, *In Iraq's mountains, Iranian opposition fighters feel the squeeze*, 20 November 2022; Iran International, *Iran regime assassinates another Kurdish opponent near Erbil*, 13 July 2023; PDKI, *About*, <https://pdki.org/english/about/>, accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>222</sup> Rudaw, *Fate of PJAK member remains unknown a year after disappearance*, 26 July 2022; Iran International, *Turkey kills senior Kurdish commander in Syria with Iran's help*, 12 August 2022; BasNews, *Details of PJAK co-leader's mysterious killing revealed*, 17 August 2022; AA, *Terror group PKK seeking to exploit Iranian protests for own self-interest, warns expert*, 26 September 2022.

<sup>223</sup> In November 2022, the Komala Party of Kurdistan (Komala-TPK) reunited with Komala-PIK; Iran International, *Iran says busted 'Mossad-linked' sabotage team are Kurdish separatists*, 27 July 2022; Washington Kurdish Institute, *We congratulate the Komala party on their reunification*, 20 November 2022; The New York Times, *In Iraq's mountains, Iranian opposition fighters feel the squeeze*, 20 November 2022; ACCORD, *Iran: Informationen zu den Parteien PDKI, KDP-I, Komala PIK, Komala KTP, Komalah-CPI, Komala-CPI, WCPI, WP-Hekmatist, WPI-Hekmatist (Khat Rasmi) [a-11979]*, 24 November 2022, p. 18; IranWire, *Iranian Kurdish parties and the "Mahsa Charter"*, 29 March 2023; Amwaj, *Inside story: Iran's Kurdish opposition struggles to achieve unity*, 4 May 2023; AA, *2 killed in clashes between Iranian Kurdish separatist groups in northern Iraq*, 22 June 2023; Kurdistan 24, *Two killed in Iranian-Kurdish opposition parties' feud in Sulaimani*, 22 June 2023; Komala, *Read-About*, <https://www.komalainternational.org/read-about>, accessed 12 September 2023; confidential source, May 2023.

<sup>224</sup> ACCORD, *Iran: Informationen zu den Parteien*, 24 November 2022, pp. 19–21; IranWire, *Iranian Kurdish parties and the "Mahsa Charter"*, 29 March 2023; confidential source, May 2023.

- the Kurdistan Freedom Party (PAK). This party is working for a large, independent Kurdistan.<sup>225</sup>

Some politically and culturally active Kurds who attended demonstrations could also face problems, especially if they attended anti-government protests.<sup>226</sup>

In autumn 2022, the epicentre of the anti-government protests following the death of Mahsa Amini was in the Kurdish region (see Section 1.2.2). This resulted, among other measures, in a large number of arrests among people of Kurdish origin. According to KHRN, thousands of Kurdish civilians and activists were arrested and detained between March 2022 and March 2023. KHRN was able to find out the names of 1,761 of those arrested.<sup>227</sup> According to the Norway-based Kurdish human rights organisation Hengaw, at least 96 Kurds were arrested in the first fifteen days of 2023 alone; they included 13 children, 5 students, 4 teachers and 5 women.<sup>228</sup> Several cases of people of Kurdish origin who faced arrest and criminal prosecution are described below. This overview is by no means exhaustive.

The authorities arrested a language teacher from the city of Sanandaj on 23 May 2019 for teaching in Kurdish without a licence. She was the co-founder of the cultural association Nozhin. This organisation focuses on Kurdish language and literature, among other things. On 14 July 2020, a revolutionary court sentenced her to ten years' imprisonment under Section 498 of the Penal Code (founding or leading an illegal organisation). In February 2021, a review court reduced her sentence to five years. Her sentence began on 8 January 2022. She was released on 10 February 2023. She had reportedly been released under a pardon (see Section 1.2.2.5).<sup>229</sup> Other members of Nozhin also faced reprisals.<sup>230</sup> For example, on 18 January 2023, the authorities arrested another language teacher from the city of Sanandaj.<sup>231</sup> They went on to arrest the teacher's sister on 29 January 2023. This sister was also active in Nozhin.<sup>232</sup> On 13 February 2023, both were released on bail.<sup>233</sup>

On 17 May 2020, a revolutionary court in Tehran sentenced an activist from the city of Quchan in Razavi Khorasan province to five years' imprisonment under Section

<sup>225</sup> The Irish Times, 'We are only 1,000, but we fight like 10,000,' says leader of Kurdistan Freedom Party, 26 December 2019; VOA, *Iran conducts missile attacks in Kurdistan region of Iraq*, 29 September 2022; The New York Times, *In Iraq's mountains, Iranian opposition fighters feel the squeeze*, 20 November 2022.

<sup>226</sup> KHRN, *Kurdish protester accused of 'enmity against God' taken to Evin prison*, 12 April 2023; KHRN, *Iran court sentences Kurdish protester to 15 years in prison*, 21 June 2023; confidential source, May 2023.

<sup>227</sup> KHRN, *Annual report Mar 2022 – Mar 2023*, 27 April 2023.

<sup>228</sup> Iran International, *Nearly 100 Kurdish citizens arrested in Iran in two weeks: Rights group*, 17 January 2023; IranWire, *Dozens of Iranian Kurds arrested since year's start, group says*, 17 January 2023.

<sup>229</sup> Rudaw, *Kurdish language teacher turns herself in to Iranian authorities*, 8 January 2022; HRANA, *Update on Zahra Mohammadi's condition*, 22 June 2022; IranWire, *Kurdish women prisoners launch hunger strike*, 25 September 2022; Rudaw, *Kurdish language teacher freed from Iranian jail*, 11 February 2023; Kurdistan 24, *Renowned Kurdish language activist freed in Iran*, 11 February 2023.

<sup>230</sup> Hengaw, *Sayvan Ebrahimi, a Kurdish language teacher, and Zara Mohammadi's husband was arrested by the Iranian government.*, 4 January 2023; HRANA, *Omid Moshir Panahi arrested in Sanandaj*, 24 February 2023; Rudaw, *Cultural association says teacher detained in Iran for speaking Kurdish*, 24 February 2023; KHRN, *Sanandaj court sentences Kurdish activist to prison, exile, lashes*, 24 August 2023.

<sup>231</sup> KHRN, *Kurdish language teacher detained in Iran's Sanandaj*, 18 January 2023; KHRN, *Iran re-arrests Kurdish teacher days after release on bail*, 18 January 2023; Hengaw, *Soma Pourmohammadi, a Kurdish civil activist and a member of the board of directors of the Nozhin Association, was arrested*, 18 January 2023; Hengaw, *Two Kurdish language teachers and board members of the Nozhin Association were arrested*, 18 January 2023; Hengaw, *The fate of two sisters held at the correction and rehabilitation center remains unknown*, 7 February 2023.

<sup>232</sup> Hengaw, *Sirveh Pourmohammadi, one of the active members of the Nozhin Association, was arrested*, 29 January 2023; Hengaw, *The fate of two sisters held at the correction and rehabilitation center remains unknown*, 7 February 2023.

<sup>233</sup> KHRN, *Sanandaj court sentences Kurdish activist to prison, exile, lashes*, 24 August 2023; United for Iran, *Seyvan Ebrahimi*, <https://ipa.united4iran.org/en/prisoner/8534/>, accessed 12 September 2023.

499 of the Penal Code (membership of an illegal organisation). Following a pardon, she was released on 11 February 2023 (see Section 1.2.2.5). On 7 March 2023, the authorities rearrested her in Tehran. Four days later, she was released. On 4 April 2023, the intelligence service of the Revolutionary Guard intelligence arrested her again in the city of Mashhad in Razavi Khorasan province. On 8 May 2023, she was told that she had been charged under Section 499 of the Penal Code (membership of an illegal organisation), Section 500 of the Penal Code (propaganda against the IRI) and Section 514 of the Penal Code (insulting the supreme leader).<sup>234</sup>

On 13 April 2022, an activist from the city of Bukan in West Azerbaijan province was released after five months. He was convicted of producing propaganda for the PDKI. On 1 October 2022, the authorities arrested him during a demonstration. On 17 October 2022, he was released on bail. He was rearrested on 23 November 2022. Three weeks later, he was transferred to a hospital in Bukan. After spending five days in a coma, he died on 19 December 2022. According to several human rights organisations, he had been tortured.<sup>235</sup>

In mid-December 2022, the authorities arrested the imam of the Sunni Khatam al-Anbiya mosque in the town of Javanrud in Kermanshah province. During this arrest, the authorities maltreated his wife. As a result, she broke her hand. In late January 2023, the special court for clerics in the city of Hamedan sentenced the imam to six years' imprisonment under Section 499 of the Penal Code (membership of an illegal organisation), fifteen months under Section 500 of the Penal Code (propaganda against the IRI), six years under Section 512 of the Penal Code (incitement to civil war), 2.5 years under Section 514 (insulting the supreme leader) and fifteen months under Section 618 of the Penal Code (disturbing public order). As additional punishments, he received 74 lashes, a ban from working as an imam and two years of internal exile to Ardabil.<sup>236</sup>

A number of executions, for example of political prisoners belonging to the Kurdish ethnic group, were also carried out in 2023 and sent a clear message. Several sources, including Amnesty International, suggested that the Iranian authorities intended these executions to be a warning to the Kurdish population that calm should return to the Kurdish region.<sup>237</sup> On 22 February 2023, for instance, 29-year-old Arash Ahmadi was executed in a prison in Kermanshah. Many Iranian Kurds saw him as a political prisoner. According to the Iranian authorities, he was a member of Komala. He was convicted of murdering an Iranian policeman; videos are circulating in which he appears to make a forced confession. The execution appeared to be a

<sup>234</sup> KHRN, *Kurdish political prisoner released under amnesty in Iran's Mashhad*, 16 February 2023; HRANA, *Sakineh Parvaneh and Sadegh Samerehei arrested*, 8 March 2023; Hengaw, *Sakineh Parvaneh, a Kurdish political prisoner, was arrested again three weeks after her release*, 9 March 2023; Hengaw, *Sakineh Parvaneh, a former political prisoner, was arrested again*, 6 April 2023; KHRN, *Former Kurdish political prisoner indicted in Mashhad*, 9 May 2023; KHRN, *Detention of former Kurdish political prisoner extended for second time*, 19 May 2023; United for Iran, *Sakineh Parvaneh*, <https://ipa.united4iran.org/en/prisoner/5862/>, accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>235</sup> Hengaw, *Kurdish citizen, Mohammad Haji Rasulpour, goes into a coma due to torture in Bukan prison*, 15 December 2022; RFE/RL, *Rights group says tortured Iranian protester dies in hospital*, 19 December 2022; Hengaw, *Former political prisoner Mohammad Haji Rasulpour died as a result of torture*, 19 December 2022; KHRN, *Released protester dies at hospital after torture under detention*, 19 December 2022.

<sup>236</sup> Hengaw, *Strong security atmosphere prevailed in Javanrud following the kidnapping of mullah Saifullah Hosseini by Iranian government forces*, 13 December 2022; Iran International, *Sunni youths in Iran call for protests on Friday*, 29 December 2022; KHRN, *Iran court sentences Kurdish Sunni cleric to 17 years in jail*, 26 January 2023; Hengaw, *Mullah Saifullah Hosseini received a harsh 17-year prison sentence*, 26 January 2023; BBCM, *Briefing: Iran clamps down on outspoken Sunni clerics*, 1 February 2023; Iran International, *Kurdish teachers in Iran call for release of Sunni clerics*, 11 February 2023; KHRN, *Iran: Prison officials continue to hold Kurdish cleric in solitary*, 24 February 2023; United for Iran, *Seyfollah Hosseini*, <https://ipa.united4iran.org/en/prisoner/8612/>, accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>237</sup> Amnesty International, *Death sentences and executions 2022*, 15 May 2023, p. 30; confidential source, March 2023.

message to the protesters who were taking to the streets in the Kurdish region at the time.<sup>238</sup>

In 2018, a revolutionary court in the city of Orumiyeh in West Azerbaijan province sentenced Mohyeddin Ebrahimi from the town of Oshnaviyeh to death for armed insurrection. He had been arrested in the border region in late 2017 after first being shot by border forces. According to the Iranian authorities, he was involved in the PDKI, but his lawyers insist he only worked as a *kolbar* (see Section 1.2.6). Iran's Supreme Court then referred the case back to the revolutionary court, which once again imposed the death sentence in January 2020. The Supreme Court upheld this verdict. Several human rights organisations argued that his confession had been obtained through torture and that he had not received a fair trial. His execution in Orumiyeh prison followed on 17 March 2023.<sup>239</sup>

The question of whether the political activities of Kurds abroad are actively monitored by the Iranian authorities could not be answered unequivocally. Here too, reference can be made to the above-mentioned finding by the AIVD, MIVD and NCTV that a range of intelligence and influencing activities are carried out, which also target the Iranian diaspora in the Netherlands.<sup>240</sup> It is not known whether Kurds are monitored more intensively than other groups within the diaspora.

### 3.1.1.3 Arabs

Estimates of the number of Arabs in Iran vary widely, from 1.6 million to 4 million.<sup>241</sup> Most Iranian Arabs live in the western part of Khuzestan, a province in southwestern Iran. The Arabic name of the provincial capital Ahwaz is al-Ahwaz. For this reason, Arabs from Khuzestan also call themselves Ahwazis.<sup>242</sup> There are both Shia and Sunni Ahwaz Arabs.<sup>243</sup>

Some politically and culturally active Arabs encountered problems in Iran when they engaged in activities on behalf of their ethnic group, especially when these activities had not been permitted or licensed by the authorities. The authorities were quick to regard such activities as political action aimed at undermining national security and domestic stability, and as a first step towards secession.<sup>244</sup> In the case of Arabs, this was influenced by the fact that some Arab protest movements were active during the reporting period. One of the active Arab protest movements is the Arab Struggle Movement for the Liberation of al-Ahwaz (ASMLA). This movement aims to achieve an independent Arab state. The Iranian authorities treat the ASMLA separatist movement as a terrorist group. Arabs linked to the ASMLA can face severe penalties.<sup>245</sup> On 6 March 2023, for instance, a revolutionary court in the city of

<sup>238</sup> Hengaw, *The death sentence of Sarkawt Ahmadi, a Kurdish political prisoner, was executed secretly*, 22 February 2023; Rudaw, *Iran executes Kurdish, Arab political prisoners*, 23 February 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>239</sup> KHRN, *Iran intelligence ministry returns Kurdish political prisoner to jail*, 25 November 2021; IHRNGO, *Kurdish political prisoner Mohiyedin Ebrahimi executed in Urmia*, 17 March 2023; Rudaw, *Iran executes Kurd after five years in prison*, 17 March 2023; HRANA, *Political prisoner Mohyeddin Ebrahimi executed in Urmia prison*, 17 March 2023; KHRN, *Special report: Mohyeddin Ebrahimi's arrest, trial, execution*, 17 March 2023.

<sup>240</sup> AIVD, MIVD and NCTV, *Dreigingsbeeld statelijke actoren 2*, 28 November 2022, p. 20.

<sup>241</sup> MRGI, *World directory of minorities and indigenous peoples – Iran – Arabs*, December 2017; MEE, *One Ahwazi man's mission to preserve Arab cultural identity in Iran*, 14 June 2021; Reuters, *Factbox: Ethnic groups swept up in Iran's nationwide protests*, 17 October 2022.

<sup>242</sup> MEE, *Iran protests: Iranian-Arab women's rights activists dying in Khuzestan crackdown*, 2 December 2022; Asim, *Iranian constitution under pro-center dogmatic authoritarianism*, 2023, p. 31.

<sup>243</sup> Australian Government, *DFAT country information report Iran*, 24 July 2023, p. 15.

<sup>244</sup> MRGI, *Protests, discrimination and the future of minorities in Iran*, 25 November 2022, p. 7; IranWire, *Majid Khademi: The ordeals of an activist handed lengthy prison term*, 3 July 2023; confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>245</sup> In 2017, a prominent member of the ASMLA was killed in The Hague. And on 27 October 2021, Rotterdam District Court sentenced an ASMLA member to a four-year jail term for participating in an organisation whose aim was to prepare, finance and commit terrorist offences; NOS, *Voor Iran was de in Den Haag doodgeschoten Nissi een*

Ahvaz sentenced six alleged members of the ASMLA to death under Section 287 of the Penal Code (armed rebellion). According to the authorities, they were involved in the killings of two members of the Basij, a policeman and a soldier.<sup>246</sup>

Some politically and culturally active Arabs who attended demonstrations could also face problems, especially if they attended anti-government protests.<sup>247</sup>

In 2023, a number of executions were carried out in what appeared to be a message to the population. These included the killing of political prisoners belonging to the Arab ethnic group. The Iranian authorities apparently intended these executions to be a warning to the Arab population that calm should return to the Khuzestan province.<sup>248</sup> For instance, Hassan Abyat was hanged at Sepidar prison in the city of Ahvaz on 20 February 2023. Abyat had been detained for about ten years and had been sentenced to death in 2012 on charges including membership of an illegal group. There are indications that his confession at the time was the result of torture. The sudden execution of this political prisoner appeared to be a warning to anyone who was considering taking part in a protest.<sup>249</sup>

The question of whether the political activities of Arabs from Iran abroad are actively monitored by the Iranian authorities could not be answered unequivocally. Here too, reference can be made to the above-mentioned finding by the AIVD, MIVD and NCTV that a range of intelligence and influencing activities are carried out, which also target the Iranian diaspora in the Netherlands.<sup>250</sup> It is not known whether Arabs from Iran are monitored more intensively than other groups within the diaspora.

#### 3.1.1.4 Baluchi

There are an estimated 1.5 to 2 million Baluchi people in Iran. Most Baluchi are Sunni Muslims and live in the south-eastern province of Sistan-Baluchistan.<sup>251</sup> Golestan province is also home to a relatively large section of the Baluchi population.<sup>252</sup>

Sistan-Baluchistan province borders on Pakistan and Afghanistan. It is considered to be one of the poorest provinces in Iran. Many Baluchi people are involved in smuggling because of their poor living conditions (see Section 1.2.8). A large number of Baluchi people do not have a birth certificate.<sup>253</sup>

*terrorist*, 9 November 2017; VPRO, *Saoedisch geld voor anti-Iraanse 'terreurzender' en demonstraties in Nederland*, 8 February 2022.

<sup>246</sup> BBCM, *Iran sentences to death six members of Arab dissident group*, 6 March 2023; Radio Zamanah, *The Islamic Republic sentenced six Arab political prisoners to death*, 7 March 2023; Hengaw, *Hengaw warns about the imminent execution of six Arab political prisoners in the Shibani prison of Ahwaz*, 6 May 2023; IHRNGO, *6 Arab political prisoners at imminent risk of execution*, 7 May 2023; Amnesty International, *Six Ahwazi Arabs at grave risk of execution*, 12 May 2023; IranWire, *Six ethnic Arabs face imminent execution in Iran*, 12 May 2023; United for Iran, *Habib Deris*, <https://ipa.united4iran.org/en/prisoner/8557/>, accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>247</sup> HRANA, *At least ten citizens arrested during protests in Khuzestan*, 10 May 2022; MEE, *Iran protests: Iranian-Arab women's rights activists dying in Khuzestan crackdown*, 2 December 2022; HRANA, *Eight people sentenced to combined 48 years in Ahvaz*, 17 July 2023; confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>248</sup> Amnesty International, *Death sentences and executions 2022*, 15 May 2023, p. 30; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>249</sup> HRANA, *Hassan Abyat executed in Ahvaz*, 22 February 2023; United for Iran, *Hassan Abyat*, <https://ipa.united4iran.org/en/prisoner/1580/>, accessed on 12 September 2023.

<sup>250</sup> AIVD, MIVD and NCTV, *Dreigingsbeeld statelijke actoren 2*, 28 November 2022, p. 20.

<sup>251</sup> The Iran Primer, *Iran's troubled provinces: Baluchistan*, 24 February 2021; USDoS, *Iran 2022 human rights report*, 20 March 2023, p. 61; Iran International, *Islamic Republic renews wave of Baluch executions*, 4 May 2023.

<sup>252</sup> Tehran Times, *Home to various tribes, Golestan is a symbol of unity: governor-general*, 13 November 2022; The New Arab, *Crackdown intensifies on Sunni clerics and ethnic leaders in Iran*, 30 January 2023.

<sup>253</sup> The Baluchi people were traditionally nomads; their nomadic lifestyle led them to travel around Iran and Pakistan, and meant that they had little contact with the authorities; IranWire, *No ID? No school: Why 400,000 Iranian*

Sistan-Baluchistan was the only province where unrest remained persistent on a weekly basis during 2023. There was also increased deployment of security forces in the province in 2023. Partly as a result of this, the incidence of arrests, convictions and death sentences was higher among people of Baluchi origin than other groups. During the reporting period, members of the Baluchi population accounted for a relatively high number of death row inmates.<sup>254</sup> In 2022, the authorities executed at least 109 people in Sistan-Baluchistan, according to the annual report of Oslo-based human rights organisation Iran Human Rights (IHRNGO) and the French-based *Ensemble contre la peine de mort* (ECPM). Many of these prisoners were convicted of drug offences or crimes against national security.<sup>255</sup>

The supreme leader repeatedly emphasised national unity with references to Sistan-Baluchistan. On 13 November 2023, he dispatched his representative to this province to highlight this message.<sup>256</sup>

Some politically and culturally active Baluchi people encountered problems in Iran when they engaged in activities on behalf of their ethnic group, especially when these activities had not been permitted or licensed by the authorities. The authorities were quick to regard such activities as political action aimed at undermining national security and domestic stability, and as a first step towards secession.<sup>257</sup> Another factor specific to the Baluchi is that during the reporting period, a number of Sunni militant groups were active. One of these groups is the Army of Justice (*Jaish al-Adl*). The Iranian authorities treat this group as a terrorist organisation.<sup>258</sup> Baluchi people associated with this group can face lengthy prison sentences and in some cases even the death penalty.<sup>259</sup>

Some politically and culturally active Baluchi people who attended demonstrations could also face problems, especially if they attended anti-government protests.<sup>260</sup> Several Baluchi activists were arrested and detained during the reporting period. Several cases of Baluchi activists who faced criminal prosecution are described below. This overview is by no means exhaustive.

In late September 2022, the Revolutionary Guard arrested two Baluchi men in Chabahar. At the start of January 2023, a revolutionary court sentenced them to death. In late February 2023, the Supreme Court overturned this ruling and referred the case back to a revolutionary court. According to several human rights organisations, the men had not received a fair trial and torture had been used to

*children are locked out of education*, 25 August 2022; BHRG, *Conference at Amnesty International human rights organisation in Stockholm*, 10 February 2023; Kayhan Life, *Opinion: Discussions about a new Iran must include ethnic minorities*, 9 March 2023; UNHRC, *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Advanced unedited version (A/HRC/53/23)*, 15 June 2023, p. 13.

<sup>254</sup> Iran International, *Iran's top Sunni cleric again slams government in fiery sermon*, 6 January 2023; IranWire, *Baluch citizen hours away from possible execution*, 28 April 2023; Iran International, *Islamic Republic renews wave of Baluch executions*, 4 May 2023.

<sup>255</sup> IHRNGO & ECPM, *Annual report on the death penalty in Iran 2022*, 13 April 2023, p. 70.

<sup>256</sup> IranWire, *Khamenei calls for unity and end to discrimination – but is he sincere?*, 7 September 2017; BBCM, *Briefing: Iran's leader sends delegation to south-east after bloody crackdown*, 13 November 2022; Iran International, *Prominent Sunni cleric criticized for meeting with Khamenei envoy*, 14 November 2022; IranWire, *Iran's plans for pacifying restive Sistan and Baluchistan province*, 28 December 2022.

<sup>257</sup> MRGI, *Protests, discrimination and the future of minorities in Iran*, 25 November 2022, p. 7; confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>258</sup> IFP, *Iran arrests several Jaish al-Adl terrorists*, 20 April 2023; Rudaw, *Clashes in southeast Iran kill five border guards*, 21 May 2023; Iran International, *Iran's hardline media threaten Sunni cleric after Zahedan attack*, 9 July 2023.

<sup>259</sup> France 24, *Iran cities strike in solidarity with 'Bloody Friday' dead*, 9 November 2022; Arab News, *Iran executes two men convicted over 2016 police killings*, 9 November 2022.

<sup>260</sup> RFE/RL, *Rights group says at least 185 arrested in Iran's Zahedan in past month*, 2 February 2023; confidential source, February 2023.

obtain their confessions.<sup>261</sup> A revolutionary court ruling had not been announced by the end of the reporting period.

In another case, MOIS personnel arrested an eighteen-year-old protester in Zahedan in late September/early October 2022. On 19 December 2022, a revolutionary court sentenced him to death under Section 286 of the Penal Code (spreading corruption on earth). According to several human rights organisations, the protester had not received a fair trial and had been tortured.<sup>262</sup>

The question of whether the political activities of Baluchi people abroad are actively monitored by the Iranian authorities could not be answered unequivocally. Here too, reference can be made to the above-mentioned finding by the AIVD, MIVD and NCTV that a range of intelligence and influencing activities are carried out, which also target the Iranian diaspora in the Netherlands.<sup>263</sup> It is not known whether Baluchi people from Iran are monitored more intensively than other groups within the diaspora.

### 3.1.2 *Members of opposition parties and political activists*

During the reporting period, political activists and several members of opposition parties faced harassment, arrests and convictions.<sup>264</sup> They could face lengthy prison sentences and in some cases even the death penalty (see Sections 3.1.1.2, 3.1.1.3 and 3.1.2.1). Several cases of political activists who faced arrest and detention in the reporting period are described below. This overview is by no means exhaustive.

On 15 March 2023, a political activist was released from prison after more than four years, having served her sentence. She had been convicted in 2018 for allegedly being involved in a strike. A few hours after her release, the authorities took her into custody again.<sup>265</sup> In Iran, it is not uncommon for activists to be rearrested shortly after their release.<sup>266</sup> A revolutionary court in Tehran sentenced her to two years in prison under Section 514 of the Penal Code (insulting the supreme leader) in May 2023. As additional penalties, she was banned from membership of any social or

<sup>261</sup> BHRG, *Mansour Hoot and Nizamuddin Hoot, two detained Baloch citizens, are at risk of issuing heavy sentences*, 23 December 2022; Hengaw, *Two Baloch protesters were sentenced to death*, 20 February 2023; Amnesty International, *Four young Baluchi men at risk of execution*, 7 March 2023; United for Iran, *Mansour Hoot*, <https://ipa.united4iran.org/en/prisoner/7544/>, accessed 12 September 2023; United for Iran, *Nezamoddin Hoot*, <https://ipa.united4iran.org/en/prisoner/7568/>, accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>262</sup> BHRG, *Issuance of death sentence for Shoaib Mirbalochzahi, a Baloch orphan, arrested in Zahedan*, 23 December 2022; IranWire, *Iran's rulers step up use of death penalty against Baluchis*, 13 January 2023; Hengaw, *Two Baloch protesters were sentenced to death*, 20 February 2023; Amnesty International, *Four young Baluchi men at risk of execution*, 7 March 2023; Iran International, *At least seven more protesters at grave risk of execution in Iran*, 24 May 2023.

<sup>263</sup> AIVD, MIVD and NCTV, *Dreigingsbeeld statelijke actoren 2*, 28 November 2022, p. 20

<sup>264</sup> VOA, *Iran arrests activist on state security charges, state media says*, 9 July 2022; HRANA, *Political activist Mohammad Ghadami sentenced to ten years*, 15 November 2022; Hengaw, *Samaneh Norouzmoradi, a political activist arrested in Tehran*, 25 April 2023; HRANA, *Political activist Alireza Beheshti Shirazi arrested*, 26 April 2023; IranWire, *Iranian dissident Tabarzadi sentenced to 45 years in prison*, 26 May 2023; Hengaw, *Political activist, Farshid Jahantab, arrested serve his prison sentence in Behbahan*, 24 June 2023; HRANA, *Political activist Abolfazl Ghadyani receives ten-month sentence*, 1 July 2023; HRANA, *Political activist Fatemeh Hassani arrested in Mashhad*, 6 July 2023.

<sup>265</sup> BBC News, *Iran protests: Jailed activist Sepideh Qolian describes brutality in letter*, 11 January 2023; BBCM, *Iranian activist leaves prison chanting anti-Khamenei slogans*, 15 March 2023; Iran International, *Iranian activist re-arrested hours after release from jail*, 16 March 2023; BBCM, *Iranian activist re-arrested for chanting anti-Khamenei slogans upon release*, 20 March 2023.

<sup>266</sup> KHRN, *Released protester dies at hospital after torture under detention*, 19 December 2022; Hengaw, *Sakineh Parvaneh, a former political prisoner, was arrested again*, 6 April 2023; HRANA, *Abbas Sharifi arrested in Behshahr*, 14 April 2023; VOA, *Iran re-arrests dissident journalist, family says*, 25 April 2023; HRANA, *Former political prisoner Reza Mohammad Hoseini arrested*, 2 May 2023; HRANA, *Hamideh Zeraie re-arrested by security forces*, 30 May 2023.

political group for two years, banned from using a mobile phone for two years and received a two-year ban on settling in Tehran and the neighbouring provinces.<sup>267</sup>

On 21 September 2022, the authorities arrested a political activist who had criticised the state of the country in an open letter and called on the supreme leader to resign. In late February 2023, a revolutionary court in Mashhad sentenced her to one year in prison under Section 500 of the Penal Code (propaganda against the IRI), ten years under Section 508 of the Penal Code (collaborating with a hostile government), two years under Section 514 of the Penal Code (insulting the supreme leader) and five years under Section 610 of the Penal Code (threatening national security).<sup>268</sup>

On 27 September 2022, the authorities arrested the daughter of former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (president of Iran from 1989 to 1997) on charges of encouraging rioters. This included criticising the Revolutionary Guard on the app Clubhouse and expressing support for the protesters. In February 2023, her lawyer reported that she had been sentenced to five years in prison. This was reportedly under Section 610 of the Penal Code (threatening national security).<sup>269</sup>

On 27 April 2023, the authorities arrested a political activist who had participated in the online public conference 'Dialogue to Save Iran' held on the Clubhouse app on 21 April 2023. On 30 April 2023, he was released on bail.<sup>270</sup>

### 3.1.2.1

#### People's Mujahedin

The National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) presents itself as an alternative Iranian 'parliament in exile'. This political party operates outside Iran and is affiliated with the People's Mujahedin (*Mojahedin-e Khalq*, MEK/MKO).<sup>271</sup> In the reporting period, these organisations were led by Maryam Rajavi.<sup>272</sup> For several years, some members of the People's Mujahedin have been staying at the Ashraf 3

<sup>267</sup> HRANA, *Two-year imprisonment against Sepideh Gholian upheld on appeal*, 11 July 2023; BBCM, *Appeal court upholds two-year prison sentence for Iranian activist*, 12 July 2023; United for Iran, *Sepideh Gholian*, <https://ipa.united4iran.org/en/prisoner/3279/>, accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>268</sup> RFE/RL, *Activist handed 18 years in prison after calling for Iran's supreme leader to resign*, 22 February 2023; IranWire, *Iranian political activist Sepehri sentenced to 18 years*, 22 February 2023; Kayhan Life, *Iranian rights activist Fatemeh Sepehri leads her own defense from prison*, 27 February 2023; BBCM, *Prominent Iranian activist sentenced to 18 years, her brother says*, 24 March 2023; HRANA, *Civil rights activist Fatemeh Sepehri sentenced to 18 years in prison*, 24 March 2023; United for Iran, *Fatemeh Sepehri*, <https://ipa.united4iran.org/en/prisoner/5182/>, accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>269</sup> RFE/RL, *Former Iranian president's daughter arrested for supporting protests triggered by death of woman in custody over hijab*, 28 September 2022; IranWire, *Activist daughter of former Iranian president handed prison term*, 10 January 2023; BBC News, *Iran protests: Ex-president's daughter jailed for five years - lawyer*, 10 January 2023; Iran International, *Daughter of Iran's ex-president sentenced to five years in prison*, 10 January 2023; IranWire, *IranWire exclusive: Faezeh Hashemi on her incarceration, protests and the opposition*, 7 April 2023; United for Iran, *Faezeh Hashemi Rafsanjani*, <https://ipa.united4iran.org/en/prisoner/7927/>, accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>270</sup> BBCM, *Iranian security forces target opposition activists*, 26 April 2023; Iran International, *Prominent political activist arrested at his home in Tehran*, 27 April 2023; BBCM, *Briefing: Iran targets opposition figures after virtual seminar*, 27 April 2023; RFE/RL, *Iran arrests activists after 'Clubhouse' meeting calls for new political system*, 28 April 2023; BBCM, *Iran frees prominent political activist on bail*, 30 April 2023; RFE/RL, *The Farda briefing: Iran goes after big businesses for alleged hijab violations*, 3 May 2023.

<sup>271</sup> De Volkskrant, *'België moet niet toegeven aan gijzeldiplomatie. Dan zal Iran onschuldigen blijven oppakken'*, 8 May 2023; NOS, *Oud-premiers en presidenten in brief aan EU: zet Iraanse garde op terreurlijst*, 25 May 2023; De Standaard, *Frankrijk bant bijeenkomst wegens terreurdreiging na vrijlating Assadi*, 21 June 2023.

<sup>272</sup> Iran International, *Ex-vice president Pence visits controversial Iranian group in Albania*, 24 June 2022; Reuters, *Opposition groups rally in France demanding EU list Iran's Guards as terrorist group*, 12 February 2023.

camp in Albania.<sup>273</sup> On 1 July 2023, the People's Mujahedin held its annual meeting near Paris.<sup>274</sup>

Iranian authorities consider the People's Mujahedin to be a terrorist organisation.<sup>275</sup> They regularly accuse the People's Mujahedin of all kinds of incidents in Iran.<sup>276</sup> In the reporting period, the authorities reported several arrests of individuals and the winding up of networks allegedly linked to the People's Mujahedin.<sup>277</sup> People accused of links to the People's Mujahedin usually face severe sentences.<sup>278</sup> On 7 March 2021, for example, a revolutionary court in Tehran sentenced a political activist to five years in prison for membership of the People's Mujahedin. She was released on 13 February 2023. She was reportedly released under a pardon (see Section 1.2.2.5).<sup>279</sup> On 21 August 2023, she was rearrested. The charges had not been made known by the end of the reporting period.<sup>280</sup>

On 25 April 2022, a revolutionary court in Tehran sentenced two students to ten years' imprisonment under Section 687 of the Penal Code (arson or destruction of public property), five years under Section 610 (threatening national security) and one year under Section 500 (propaganda against the IRI). They were accused by the authorities of having family links to the People's Mujahedin, among other things.<sup>281</sup>

<sup>273</sup> BBCM, *Briefing: Iran welcomes Albanian raid on exiled opposition camp*, 21 June 2023; Al Jazeera, *Why was this Iran dissident group raided in Europe?*, 21 June 2023; Euractiv, *Iranian opposition investigation continues with police, resident violence probe*, 23 June 2023; Euractiv, *Albanian police tighten security, conduct checks at the Iranian opposition compound*, 30 June 2023; BBCM, *Iran given access to Albanian-based opposition group's hard drives, says agency*, 3 July 2023.

<sup>274</sup> NCRI, *Free Iran World Summit 2023, onward to a democratic republic*, 1 July 2023; VOA, *Iran slams France for hosting opposition group meeting*, 3 July 2023.

<sup>275</sup> Al Jazeera, *Iran blacklists US officials for supporting 'terrorist' group MEK*, 16 July 2022; BBCM, *Iran's IRGC vows harsh response to foreign-based media, opposition*, 28 December 2022; Tehran Times, *Release of diplomat is major blow for MKO: official*, 28 May 2023.

<sup>276</sup> BBCM, *Officials say nitrogen gas-laced poison likely cause of school poisonings*, 1 March 2023; Tehran Times, *Three convicted of terrorist attack in Isfahan executed*, 19 May 2023; BBCM, *Iran agency says exiled group helped IS with 2017 parliament attack*, 7 June 2023.

<sup>277</sup> BBCM, *Iran reports arrest of 'largest riot and sabotage group' active in Tehran*, 22 December 2022; BBCM, *Iran busts 'largest' financial network linked to exiled opposition*, 2 January 2023; BBCM, *Iran arrests two teams linked to exiled opposition in northern city*, 2 January 2023; BBCM, *Iran intelligence forces arrest 'terrorist teams' ahead of bonfire festival*, 13 March 2023; BBCM, *Iran's IRGC dismantles opposition affiliated 'insurgent' team*, 16 April 2023; BBCM, *Iran arrests foreign-based opposition group member in central province*, 19 April 2023; Pars Today, *IRGC ground force disbands terror cells, captures terrorists in Sistan and Baluchestan province*, 20 April 2023; BBCM, *Iran dismantles online network allegedly linked to exiled opposition*, 1 May 2023; BBCM, *Briefing: Iran pledges to hunt down exiled group in overseas operations*, 2 July 2023; BBCM, *Iran arrests members of 'terrorist' team linked to exiled opposition group*, 23 July 2023.

<sup>278</sup> HRANA, *Update on political prisoner Ayoub Porkar's condition*, 22 June 2022; HRANA, *Concern over prisoner Mohammad-Ali Mansouri's health*, 24 June 2022; HRANA, *Azar Karoondi Musazadeh sentenced to five years' imprisonment*, 5 September 2022; The Independent, *'Vileness and brutality': Mother in Iran jail for 13 years shares letter from inside 'hell' prison*, 1 January 2023; BBCM, *Iran sentences three to death over attack on security forces*, 9 January 2023; IranWire, *IranWire exclusive: Faezeh Hashemi on her incarceration, protests and the opposition*, 7 April 2023; HRANA, *Majid Khademi sentenced to over ten years and additional punishments*, 10 April 2023; HRANA, *Fatemeh Mosanna and Hassan Sadeghi released after eight years of imprisonment*, 14 July 2023.

<sup>279</sup> HRANA, *Forough Taghipour denied medical care in prison*, 31 August 2022; HRANA, *Report on the release of prisoners in the last 24 hours*, 14 February 2023; United for Iran, *Forough Taghipour*, <https://ipa.united4iran.org/en/prisoner/5926/>, accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>280</sup> HRANA, *Former political prisoners Forough Taghipour & Marzieh Farsi detained in Tehran*, 22 August 2023.

<sup>281</sup> Amnesty International, *Tortured students jailed unjustly*, 4 August 2022; BBCM, *Iran TV airs 'confessions' on 'terror attacks' during protests*, 12 March 2023; HRANA, *Students Ali Younesi and Amir Hossein Moradi sentenced each to sixteen years in prison*, 25 April 2022; Tehran Times, *Iranian court sentences two anti-Iran terrorists to 16-year jails*, 25 April 2022; United for Iran, *Ali Younesi*, <https://ipa.united4iran.org/en/prisoner/5922/>, accessed 12 September 2023.

## 3.1.2.2 Monitoring in other countries

Several sources indicate that the Iranian authorities monitor political activists abroad.<sup>282</sup> It is not possible to specify exactly who they are monitoring and on what scale. However, there are indications that the Iranian intelligence services monitor opposition activities through social media and through individuals who work with them outside Iran.<sup>283</sup> This can be concluded from the threats that Iranian political activists and journalists abroad receive by phone, email and/or on social media. These include threats to incarcerate members of the activist's family in Iran in Tehran's Evin prison unless they stop their activities.<sup>284</sup>

One of the women's rights advocates active abroad is US-based Masih Alinejad. In January 2023, the United States prosecuted three men. They were suspected of being members of an Eastern European mafia organisation who were hired to kill Alinejad in July 2022.<sup>285</sup> On a visit to London in May 2023, she was given round-the-clock protection because she had received death threats.<sup>286</sup>

A number of political activists and journalists abroad have been the target of cyber attacks.<sup>287</sup> There are indications that their phone calls with their relatives in Iran are tapped.<sup>288</sup> Iran has the technological capability to monitor the content of mobile phone communications. According to media outlet *The Intercept*, the Communications Regulatory Authority (CRA) provided extensive help in monitoring mobile phones. This organisation tracks and monitors the mobile phones of protesters and political opponents using a system called SIAM. The authorities can use this system in several ways, including tracking, collecting metadata and slowing down internet speed.<sup>289</sup>

<sup>282</sup> ABC News, *How the Iranian regime is intimidating and surveilling its former citizens in Australia*, 4 November 2022; CBC, *Iranian dissidents in Canada say they're being watched and under threat from the regime in Iran*, 26 November 2022; Reuters, *Germany sees increase in Iranian spying since protests, Welt am Sonntag reports*, 11 February 2023; Al Jazeera, *Australia warns of foreign surveillance operations, names Iran*, 14 February 2023; The Guardian, *Australia foils Iran surveillance plot and vows to bring foreign interference 'into the light'*, 14 February 2023; Euractiv, *German intelligence services point to increased hybrid security threats*, 22 June 2023; HLN, *Twee Iraniërs die deelnamen aan betoging in Brussel getuigen: "Onze moeder in Iran werd maandagnacht aangepakt door de Iraanse geheime dienst"*, 29 June 2023; confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>283</sup> NOS, *Gefilmd worden, echo op je mobiel: Iraanse NL'ers vrezen lange arm Teheran*, 25 October 2022; CBC, *Iranian dissidents in Canada say they're being watched and under threat from the regime in Iran*, 26 November 2022; The Washington Post, *Rise in Iranian assassination, kidnapping plots alarms Western officials*, 1 December 2022; Iran International, *Iranian regime agents threaten dissident expats in Europe*, 7 January 2023; The Washington Post, *Hells Angels, a synagogue shooting and Iran's shady hand in Germany*, 6 March 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>284</sup> CBC, *Spy agency investigating 'credible' death threats from Iran against individuals in Canada*, 18 November 2022; NOS, *Iraanse Nederlanders krijgen doodsb bedreigingen, maar stoppen hun protest niet*, 7 January 2023; Iran International, *Iranian regime agents threaten dissident expats in Europe*, 7 January 2023; The Independent, *Voices: "Yes, I am threatening you": Iran's regime quietly spreads chaos in an unprepared West*, 12 February 2023; CNN, *These Iranian activists fled for freedom. The regime still managed to find them*, 21 April 2023; IranWire, *My brother is jailed because I'm a journalist*, 25 May 2023; IranWire, *Indirect censorship: The Iranian government's methods for suppressing dissent abroad*, 4 July 2023; confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>285</sup> Politico, *US says Iran hired 3 members of Eastern European mafia to murder dissident*, 27 January 2023; VOA, *3 gang members indicted in 2nd plot to kill Iranian American journalist*, 27 January 2023.

<sup>286</sup> The Guardian, *Iranian dissident put under 24-hour police protection in UK after threats to life*, 11 May 2023; Iran International, *Alinejad given police protection on UK visit after renewed threats*, 11 May 2023.

<sup>287</sup> CNN, *Hackers actively supporting Iran's domestic and foreign spying efforts, researchers warn*, 7 September 2022; HRW, *Iran: State-backed hacking of activists, journalists, politicians*, 5 December 2022; L'Orient-Le Jour, *Le bras répressif de l'Iran frappe au-delà de ses frontières*, 15 December 2022; confidential source, March 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>288</sup> BBC News, *Why reporting on Iran comes at a heavy price*, 12 January 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>289</sup> The Intercept, *Hacked documents: How Iran can track and control protesters' phones*, 28 October 2022; MEMO, *Iran uses spyware to track and control citizens' phones at protests - leaked documents*, 3 November 2022; Iran International, *UK, Canada, Russia-based firms helping Iran spy on mobile phones*, 1 March 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

### 3.1.2.3 Family members of political opponents

According to several sources, the authorities regularly put pressure on the family members of political opponents because of their family relationship. There have been several reports of the authorities calling in family members of political activists for questioning and subjecting them to intimidating interrogations. During these interrogations, the authorities asked them to put pressure on their family members to stop their activities.<sup>290</sup> In addition to intimidation, the family members of activists have also been mistreated by the authorities, arrested and/or sentenced to prison terms.<sup>291</sup> Family members of political opponents experienced telephone threats or were intimidated by intelligence or security service personnel who came to their home. In some cases, family members lost their job or were made to abandon their studies. Sometimes they were given a travel ban or had their passport application refused.<sup>292</sup> Nor did the authorities shy away from intimidating the family members of protesters, even those who had died.<sup>293</sup> For example, in May 2023, relatives of one of the executed protesters reported that the authorities also put pressure on them, including arresting his brothers and sister, having his sister fired and revoking his father's pension.<sup>294</sup>

### 3.1.3 Military service

In principle, all male Iranians over the age of eighteen are required to do military service. There is no military service for women.<sup>295</sup> Iranian men are not called up individually, but are required to register with the police's conscription department, the NAJA Public Conscription Organization.<sup>296</sup>

Military service starts with basic training. After that, a conscript is placed with a unit of the armed forces.<sup>297</sup> Depending on someone's location and personal circumstances, conscription can last anything between 18 months and two years.<sup>298</sup> At the end of their military service, a conscript receives a discharge card. Iranian men need to provide this card when they apply for a job or if they want to travel abroad. Some government services, such as applying for a passport or driving

<sup>290</sup> The Guardian, *AFP urges Iranians in Australia to report harassment by Tehran authorities as anti-government protests escalate*, 21 December 2022; Die Welt, *Geheimdienste; Deutschland muss iranische Aktivisten ernst nehmen und besser schützen*, 9 January 2023; confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, March 2023; confidential source, June 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>291</sup> HRANA, *17-year-old political prisoner's daughter arrested*, 1 February 2023; ABC News, *Activists say Iran regime targeting families of Australia protesters*, 4 February 2023; confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>292</sup> The Independent, *Voices: "Yes, I am threatening you": Iran's regime quietly spreads chaos in an unprepared West*, 12 February 2023; confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>293</sup> Al Jazeera, *Iran protests continue as UN 'concerned' at detainees' treatment*, 28 October 2022; Article 19, *Iran: Families forced to remain silent as second man executed*, 16 December 2022; Die Zeit, *"Zurück an der Uni war er ein anderer Mensch. Sein Blick war leer"*, 19 December 2022; Iran International, *Iran arrests families of protest victims during commemoration*, 10 June 2023; HRANA, *Escalating intimidation targets families of 2022 protest victims in Iran*, 21 June 2023; KHRN, *Iran court sentences father of slain protester to prison, lashes*, 4 July 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>294</sup> VOA, *Iran arrests relatives of man executed over anti-government protests*, 21 May 2023; Hengaw, *Three family members of Majid Kazemi, the executed protester, have been detained*, 21 May 2023; RFE/RL, *Families of executed Iranian protesters say the government continues to pressure them*, 29 May 2023.

<sup>295</sup> Amwaj, *Calls for end to conscription draw ire of Iran's military*, 17 June 2021; Iran International, *Iran doubles pay for conscripts amid crackdown on popular protests*, 21 May 2022; IRNA, *Iranian conscripts with 3 children exempted from military service*, 30 April 2023; CIA, *The world factbook, Iran, Military and Security, Military service age and obligation*.

<sup>296</sup> SFH, *Iran: Zugang zur Liste mit Wehrdienstleistenden und Sperrung des Bankkontos nach Desertion*, 17 May 2022, pp. 4-5; Auswärtiges Amt (Germany), *Iran: Reise- und Sicherheitshinweise (Reisewarnung)*, 25 May 2023.

<sup>297</sup> Confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>298</sup> The Washington Post, *They dream of reaching America. Their forced service in Iran's Revolutionary Guard locks them out*, 27 February 2021; The Intercept, *Designated terrorists. Conscription into revolutionary guards haunts Iranian dual nationals decades later*, 6 April 2022; ImmigraTrust, *Iranian IRGC or Sepah immigration ban*, 27 February 2023; CIA, *The world factbook, Military and Security, Military service age and obligation*.

licence, require a discharge card, exemption card or proof of deferment of military service.<sup>299</sup>

### 3.1.3.1 Military service in the Revolutionary Guard

In principle, conscripts have no say in where or how they spend their military service. The conscription organisation determines the barracks or unit to which a conscript is assigned. This could be the regular army, the Revolutionary Guard or the police.<sup>300</sup> Only people with the right connections can influence the conscription department's assignment process.<sup>301</sup>

According to various sources, the selection process barely considers the profile of conscripts and does not look into whether or not someone is a staunch supporter of the government. This would be at odds with the blind faith that everyone is expected to have in the Islamic Republic. A conscript who is not a supporter of the government may therefore have the misfortune of being assigned to the Revolutionary Guard.<sup>302</sup>

According to several sources, conditions for conscripts are better in the Revolutionary Guard than in the national army, with more opportunities for relaxation, for example.<sup>303</sup>

### 3.1.3.2 Exemption

It is possible to obtain an exemption from military service. There are a range of medical and non-medical grounds for an exemption.<sup>304</sup> Transgender persons, homosexual and bisexual men can be exempted on medical grounds if their sexual orientation or identity is classified as a medical condition.<sup>305</sup> In such cases, they are exempted under an article of law related to neurological and mental illness. The exemption cards state this article and the corresponding section under which the exemption was granted.<sup>306</sup> This statement on the exemption card exposes homosexual men and transgender people to greater risk of physical abuse and

<sup>299</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Iran*, February 2021, p. 44; Iran International, *Iran to allow buy-out of military service, for the rich*, 30 January 2022; AP News, *Former Iran conscripts say unfairly blocked from US travel*, 26 June 2022; Iran International, *Police cracks down on protest against Iran's compulsory military service*, 27 August 2022; CBC News, *This Saskatoon family has been separated from their loved one for 3 years. Their wait may stretch another 12*, 5 December 2022.

<sup>300</sup> The Washington Post, *They dream of reaching America. Their forced service in Iran's Revolutionary Guard locks them out*, 27 February 2021; Atlantic Council, *I was once conscripted into the Iranian armed forces. Here's why the IRGC designation is punishing conscripts*, 11 March 2022; RFE/RL, *'We've become hostages': U.S. blacklisting of Revolutionary Guards splits Iranian families*, 10 May 2022; Iran International, *Iran doubles pay for conscripts amid crackdown on popular protests*, 21 May 2022; Iran International, *Police cracks down on protest against Iran's compulsory military service*, 27 August 2022; ImmigraTrust, *Iranian IRGC or Sepah immigration ban: What you should know if you have completed mandatory military service in IRGC or Sepah*, 27 February 2023; Australian Government, *DFAT country information report Iran*, 24 July 2023, p. 31; Confidential source June 2023.

<sup>301</sup> Iran International, *Iran doubles pay for conscripts amid crackdown on popular protests*, 21 May 2022; Iran International, *Police cracks down on protest against Iran's compulsory military service*, 27 August 2022; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>302</sup> Confidential source, June 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>303</sup> Iran International, *Iran doubles pay for conscripts amid crackdown on popular protests*, 21 May 2022; Iran International, *Police cracks down on protest against Iran's compulsory military service*, 27 August 2022; confidential source, March 2023; confidential source, May 2023.

<sup>304</sup> Tehran Times, *Sports minister calls for Iran football players to be exempted from military service*, 14 July 2018; Atlantic Council, *I was once conscripted into the Iranian armed forces. Here's why the IRGC designation is punishing conscripts*, 11 March 2022; Iran International, *Police cracks down on protest against Iran's compulsory military service*, 27 August 2022; IRNA, *Iranian conscripts with 3 children exempted from military service*, 30 April 2023.

<sup>305</sup> RFE/RL, *Horrific killing of young gay man puts plight of Iran's LGBT community in spotlight*, 11 May 2021; QPASTT, *Meet Saina from Third Queer Culture*, 25 May 2023; confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>306</sup> RFE/RL, *Horrific killing of young gay man puts plight of Iran's LGBT community in spotlight*, 11 May 2021; confidential source, April 2023.

discrimination in everyday life.<sup>307</sup> According to one source, an exemption under this section of the law that deals with neurological and mental illness could make it more difficult to find employment or make a career, especially in the government. It can also make starting a business more difficult, as this requires government permission.<sup>308</sup> According to other sources, a person exempted for medical reasons is not eligible for certain occupations.<sup>309</sup>

#### 3.1.3.3 Conscripts in the diaspora

According to various sources, a conscript who has legally resided outside Iran for at least three years and has a country other than Iran listed as country of residence in his Iranian passport can visit Iran up to twice a year (according to the solar calendar) for a maximum of three months at a time without having to join the armed forces. If someone eligible for military service subsequently stays in Iran for more than three months without permission, he must first complete his military service before receiving an exit stamp.<sup>310</sup>

According to several sources, during the reporting period, there was a scheme that allowed Iranian men living abroad to purchase an exemption for military service.<sup>311</sup>

For more information about compulsory military service, see Section 3.1.2 of the General Country of Origin Information Report on Iran of May 2022.

#### 3.1.4 LGBTIQ+

Information on the various aspects of being LGBTIQ+ is not available in detail. Sources do not always differentiate between the various subcategories, which means they could not all be discussed.

According to one source, the position of LGBTIQ+ persons in Iran did not change during the reporting period. The position of LGBTIQ+ persons remained equally difficult.<sup>312</sup>

For most people in Iranian society, homosexuality is a major taboo and a very sensitive issue. The prevalent view of homosexuality in Iran is as a disorder for which a person can be treated.<sup>313</sup> Therapists, doctors, religious institutions and parents often advocate conversion therapy in order to 'change' a person's sexual orientation.<sup>314</sup> There is immense social pressure on people who are homosexual or transgender to undergo gender reassignment surgery. In the eyes of some Iranians, this would allow homosexual relationships to become heterosexual.<sup>315</sup> The social

<sup>307</sup> 6Rang, *Murder of a young Ahwazi gay man after the revelation of his sexual orientation through a military exemption card*, 10 May 2021; USDoS, *Iran 2022 human rights report*, 20 March 2023, p. 66.

<sup>308</sup> Confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>309</sup> Confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>310</sup> Australian Government, *DFAT country information report Iran*, 24 July 2023, p. 32; Persian Citizen Services, *Applying for an exit permit*, <https://persian.net.au/services/other-services>, accessed 12 September 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>311</sup> LiT, *Buying Iran military service*, 25 June 2023; confidential source, June 2023; confidential source, August 2023.

<sup>312</sup> Confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>313</sup> RFE/RL, *UN expert raises alarm over reports of LGBT child 'torture' in Iran*, 15 February 2021; HRANA, *State-sponsored discrimination against Iranian LGBTIQ+ communities ramps up amidst a growing and more vocal activist community*, 22 June 2022.

<sup>314</sup> RFE/RL, *UN expert raises alarm over reports of LGBT child 'torture' in Iran*, 15 February 2021; Amir Kabir & Irwin Nazareth, *Conversion therapy: a violation of human rights in Iranian gay men*, *The Lancet Psychiatry* 9(4), April 2022; USDoS, *Iran 2022 human rights report*, 20 March 2023, p. 67; Amnesty International, *Report 2022/23*, 28 March 2023, p. 199.

<sup>315</sup> Pink News, *Thousands of gay people are being forced to undergo gender reassignment surgery in Iran for a vile reason*, 22 February 2020; USDoS, *Iran 2022 human rights report*, 20 March 2023, p. 67.

pressure on LGBTIQ+ persons to conform to the heterosexual norm and get married is strong. Many cases involve forced marriages.<sup>316</sup>

The authorities depict homosexuality as a phenomenon promoted by the West and contrary to traditional Iranian values.<sup>317</sup> For instance, in a speech on 1 March 2022, the supreme leader called homosexuality 'shameful' and an example of 'moral vulgarity and moral chaos' and 'sexual chaos'.<sup>318</sup> In a speech on 11 February 2023, President Raisi stated that Western countries were not in a position to 'set standards for the world as they are pushing humanity to the brink of extinction by promoting immoral behaviour such as homosexuality'.<sup>319</sup>

#### 3.1.4.1 Criminalisation of homosexual acts

In Iran, being homosexual as such is not punishable by law.<sup>320</sup> However, engaging in sexual acts with someone of the same sex is punishable. This can incur a penalty of flogging, imprisonment or even death. This is laid down in Book 2, Chapter 2 of the Penal Code (Sections 233-241).<sup>321</sup> In addition, criminal prosecution against LGBTIQ+ can also be initiated on other grounds, such as male-on-male rape (*lavat-e be-onf*).<sup>322</sup> LGBTIQ+ persons can also be convicted of spreading corruption on earth (Section 286 of the Penal Code). This charge can be applied in cases where someone discusses homosexuality online or has an openly homosexual relationship.<sup>323</sup> Criminal proceedings can also be initiated against an LGBTIQ+ person for an offence against public morality and standards (Section 638 of the Penal Code).<sup>324</sup> These penalties can also be applied to children under eighteen years of age. Section 147 of the Penal Code states that girls can be held criminally liable from the age of nine lunar years (eight years and nine months) and boys from fifteen lunar years (fourteen years and seven months), which means they can also be subject to adult criminal law from that age.<sup>325</sup>

See Section 3.1.5.1 of the General Country of Origin Information Report on Iran of February 2021 for more information on the criminalisation of homosexual acts.

#### 3.1.4.2 Criminal prosecution of LGBTIQ+ persons

Criminal prosecutions of LGBTIQ+ persons occurred in the reporting period. No exact figures are known. Due to the great taboo surrounding LGBTIQ+ issues, there

<sup>316</sup> Politico, *Living in fear: Iranian LGBTQ+ activist in Turkey*, 28 November 2022; USDoS, *Iran 2022 human rights report*, 20 March 2023, p. 66; Rudaw, 'At war with my own body: Iran's transgender community still at risk', 27 June 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>317</sup> BBC News, 'I want to see the rainbow flag raised in Iran', 11 September 2022; 6Rang, *Silencing protests: Official hate speech against LGBT people as a tool of suppression*, March 2023, pp. 7-8; RFE/RL, *In Uganda, Iranian president attacks west on LGBT rights*, 12 July 2023.

<sup>318</sup> Reuters, *Iran's Khamenei says homosexuality example of West's immorality*, 1 March 2022; Article 19, *Iran: Death sentences for LGBTIQI activists must be immediately overturned*, 8 September 2022; OMER, *The intersection of LGBT identity and the protest movement in Iran*, 1 March 2023; BBC News, 'I want to see the rainbow flag raised in Iran', 11 September 2022.

<sup>319</sup> Al Jazeera, *Iran's Raisi takes aim at 'enemies' on revolution anniversary*, 11 February 2023; BBC News, *Iran protests: LGBTQ community rises up*, 19 April 2023.

<sup>320</sup> Confidential source, April 2023; confidential source, April 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>321</sup> USDoS, *Iran 2022 human rights report*, 20 March 2023, p. 65; Lilit Magazine, *De revolutie in Iran is ook queer*, 17 May 2023.

<sup>322</sup> IHRNGO, *Farid Mohammadi and Mehrdad Karimpour executed on charges of "sodomy by force"*, 31 January 2022; Pink News, *Iran brutally executes gay man over 'sodomy' charges*, 4 July 2022; IranWire, *Man executed on 'sodomy' charges in Rajaei Shahr prison*, 8 July 2022.

<sup>323</sup> BBC News, *Iran sentences two LGBT activists to death*, 6 September 2022; The Guardian, *Iran condemns two women to death for 'corruption' over LGBTQ+ media links*, 8 September 2022.

<sup>324</sup> This carries a fine, a maximum of 74 lashes or a prison term between ten days and two months; Amnesty International, *Iran: Murder of 20-year-old gay man highlights urgent need to protect LGBTI rights*, 17 May 2021, p. 4; CHRI, *Fact sheet LGBTQ rights in Iran*, August 2021, p. 4; BBCM, *Briefing: Iran arrests five trans women over 'repulsive' hijab*, 25 June 2023.

<sup>325</sup> 6Rang, *The situation of LGBT children in Iran*, 2015, p. 1; UNGA, *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (A/77/181)*, 18 July 2022, p. 7.

is probably underreporting in this area. Nevertheless, several sources report that active criminal prosecution of LGBTIQ+ persons in Iran on the basis of orientation alone seemed to be limited.<sup>326</sup> Another source indicated that the many anti-government protests in response to Mahsa Amini's death shifted the focus from LGBTIQ+ issues towards the protesters during the reporting period.<sup>327</sup> That said, LGBTIQ+ persons were sometimes visibly present during these protests.<sup>328</sup> According to another source, the police were not actively investigating LGBTIQ+ cases.<sup>329</sup>

According to LGBTIQ+ activists, the authorities often use charges such as rape or incest as pretexts to be able to sentence an LGBTIQ+ person to death.<sup>330</sup> On 30 January 2022, for example, the authorities executed two men in Maragheh prison in East Azerbaijan province for male-on-male rape. Some sources say it was in fact a consensual homosexual act.<sup>331</sup> On 29 June 2022, the authorities executed a man accused of rape at Rajai Shahr prison in Karaj. Some sources say the man was homosexual.<sup>332</sup>

According to one source, discriminatory punishments of LGBTIQ+ persons by the authorities are a well-known phenomenon.<sup>333</sup> Other sources say someone is at greater risk of maltreatment and torture in prison if the authorities arrest them for another reason and they turn out to be LGBTIQ+. For example, they threaten transgender people with confinement in a cell along with dangerous male prisoners. Because they are transgender, they will experience harassment and greater difficulties in prison.<sup>334</sup>

#### 3.1.4.3 Discrimination of LGBTIQ+ persons

In Iran, LGBTIQ+ persons face a great deal of discrimination. This discrimination may be accompanied by intimidation, violence and harassment from family members, colleagues, clerics, school leaders and prominent figures in the local community.<sup>335</sup> Compared to heterosexuals, LGBTIQ+ are disproportionately at risk of reprisals from family members, friends and others, for example because homosexuality is viewed as an affront to the family's honour. This may involve social exclusion, but also, in some cases, maltreatment or even honour-related violence.<sup>336</sup>

<sup>326</sup> Confidential source, April 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>327</sup> Confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>328</sup> OSME, *Iranian gay rights protesters openly take to the streets amid uprising: 'Violent and yet exciting'*, 28 November 2022; Gal-dem, *LGBTQI+ people are at the forefront of Iran's revolution – they should not be forgotten*, 23 December 2022; BBC News, *Iran protests: LGBTQ community rises up*, 19 April 2023.

<sup>329</sup> Confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>330</sup> OSME, *A letter to Ryan Murphy, from a gay man in Iran*, 21 January 2023; USDoS, *Iran 2022 human rights report*, 20 March 2023, p. 65; confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>331</sup> Pink News, *Two gay men executed by Iran's cruel regime for the 'crime of sodomy'*, 31 January 2022; AP News, *Rights group: Iran executes 2 gay men over sodomy charges*, 1 February 2022; HRANA, *Two inmates executed in Maragheh central prison*, 3 February 2022; UNGA, *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (A/77/181)*, 18 July 2022, p. 7.

<sup>332</sup> HRANA, *Ten inmates executed in Rajai Shahr prison*, 30 June 2022; The Jerusalem Post, *Iran executes a gay man under label of sodomy, says expert*, 1 July 2022; Pink News, *Iran brutally executes gay man over 'sodomy' charges*, 4 July 2022; LGBTQ Nation, *Iran just executed a gay man. He may be the third so far this year*, 5 July 2022; OSME, *Iran executes another gay man under 'sodomy' charges, human rights groups report*, 8 July 2022; IranWire, *Man executed on 'sodomy' charges in Rajaei Shahr prison*, 8 July 2022.

<sup>333</sup> Confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>334</sup> Radio Zamaneh, *The Iranian prisons are brutal for queer and trans individual: Five eyewitness accounts*, 30 July 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>335</sup> HRANA, *Iranian LGBTQIA activists asked for ending discrimination against gender minorities in medical centers*, 1 April 2022; USDoS, *Iran 2022 human rights report*, 20 March 2023, p. 66; Amnesty International, *Report 2022/23*, 28 March 2023, p. 199; BBCM, *Briefing: Iran arrests five trans women over 'repulsive' hijab*, 25 June 2023; DFAT, *DFAT country information report Iran*, 24 July 2023, p. 31.

<sup>336</sup> Them, *Iranian activists protest decry "honor killing" of gay man by wearing pride flags*, 19 May 2021; CHRI, *Fact sheet LGBTQ rights in Iran*, August 2021, p. 3; Bijan Pirnia & Kambiz Pirnia, *Sex reassignment surgery in Iran*,

LGBTIQ+ generally receive no support or protection from the authorities if they encounter serious problems with fellow citizens.<sup>337</sup> For example, HRANA reported that police in Tehran refused to register a report made by a transgender woman. She had wanted to report an attack by two people.<sup>338</sup> There are no known figures on the frequency of such incidents. Nor is it known whether all cases are reported. Due to the risk of criminal prosecution that LGBTIQ+ persons face and the great taboo surrounding homosexuality, there is probably underreporting in this area.<sup>339</sup>

LGBTIQ+ persons may also face discrimination, humiliation and violence from the authorities, for example during interrogations or in detention.<sup>340</sup>

#### 3.1.4.4 Transgender people

The position of transgender persons differs from that of other LGBTIQ+ persons because they have legal status in Iran. This allows them to move a little more freely in Iranian society. This relatively good position stems from the policy of 'restoring the male-female relationship'. As a result, proceeding with gender reassignment surgery is in some cases subject to a high degree of external pressure or even coercion.<sup>341</sup>

Based on a fatwa from the 1980s, gender reassignment in the public records is possible for both men and women in Iran. This requires that the person in question is diagnosed with gender dysphoria (GD) and has undergone gender reassignment surgery.<sup>342</sup> Having undergone surgery and completed their transition as male or female, transgender people can be issued with a new birth certificate, identity card and passport based on their new name and gender.<sup>343</sup>

Despite legal recognition of transgender people who have undergone a full transition, discrimination against transgender people by fellow citizens is common, especially in the immediate community. They encounter many social challenges. Transgender people are often rejected by their family and friends, and mocked in public. They find it hard to find a job and encounter considerable abuse.<sup>344</sup> According to one source, the authorities offer transgender people no protection

re-birth or human rights violations against transgender people?, *Iranian Journal of Public Health* 51(11), November 2022, pp. 2632-2633, 2633; LGBTQ Nation, *The secret gay neighbourhood inside Tehran*, 30 November 2022.

<sup>337</sup> Article 19, *Iran: Death sentences for LGBTQI activists must be immediately overturned*, 8 September 2022; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>338</sup> HRANA, *Police refuse to record transgender individual's complaint*, 31 August 2022.

<sup>339</sup> Freedom House, *Freedom in the world 2023: Country report Iran*, 9 March 2023, p. 16.

<sup>340</sup> IranWire, *Trans people cut off from medication in Iranian prisons*, 14 June 2021; CHRI, *Gharchak prison in Iran: A cauldron of abuse and violations*, 5 August 2022; Article 19, *Iran: Death sentences for LGBTQI activists must be immediately overturned*, 8 September 2022; IranWire, *Gay Iranian protester recounts "scenes of humiliation" during arrest*, 16 December 2022.

<sup>341</sup> Thiiird Magazine, *Forced gender reassignment on LGBTQIA community in Iran: Interview with Fariba Sahraei*, 18 June 2022; HRANA, *Police refuse to record transgender individual's complaint*, 31 August 2022; Australian Government, *DFAT country information report Iran*, 24 July 2023, p. 31.

<sup>342</sup> DW, *How transgender people navigate Iran*, 16 May 2021; Thiiird Magazine, *Forced gender reassignment on LGBTQIA community in Iran*, 18 June 2022; Iran Treatments, *Everything about gender reassignment in Iran* 2023, 16 May 2023.

<sup>343</sup> The New Arab, *Transgender people in Iran face discrimination despite fatwa*, 21 May 2018; IranWire, *Government loans for gender reassignment surgery betray lack of understanding*, 4 March 2021; Politico, *Living in fear: Iranian LGBTQ+ activists in Turkey*, 28 November 2022.

<sup>344</sup> Pink News, *Powerful film denounced by religious extremists spotlights complex lives of trans people in Iran*, 18 March 2022; IranWire, *Trans, gay and married in Iran: How two women's love endured*, 27 April 2022; The New Arab, *Iranian actor Maziar Lorestani comes out as transgender man*, 19 July 2022; Gal-dem, *LGBTQI+ people are at the forefront of Iran's revolution – they should not be forgotten*, 23 December 2022; Rudaw, *'At war with my own body: Iran's transgender community still at risk*, 27 June 2023; confidential source, March 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

against discrimination by fellow citizens.<sup>345</sup> Because of their disadvantaged social position and the lack of social and financial support from their families, some lead an existence on the fringes of Iranian society, for example in prostitution.<sup>346</sup>

#### 3.1.4.5 Civil society organisations

Due to the hostile and risky environment for LGBTIQ+ persons in Iran, there are no large-scale or visible LGBTIQ+ movements in the country.<sup>347</sup> According to one source, there are a number of underground organisations which are trying to help people in private.<sup>348</sup>

#### 3.1.4.6 Family members of LGBTIQ+ persons

According to one source, the family of LGBTIQ+ do not experience problems at the hands of the Iranian authorities because a family member is LGBTIQ+.<sup>349</sup> According to another source, however, this may be grounds for discriminatory punishment if the authorities see cause for this due to other offences.<sup>350</sup>

#### 3.1.5 Women

In the reporting period there was evidence of a further deterioration in the position of women and girls. The deteriorating economic situation in Iran contributed to a worsening of the social and financial-economic position of women and girls, who tend to be hit harder by these problems than men.<sup>351</sup> This could be seen, for example, in a rise in child marriages, as parents ran out of money to support their children and/or parents needed the material benefits of a dowry (see Section 3.1.6.2).<sup>352</sup>

The implementation of the Youthful Population and Protection of the Family Law in 2022 also worsened the position of women. This law is a response to the authorities' concern about the sharply declining birth rate in Iran. Under this law, for example, contraceptives are no longer available free of charge at public health facilities and doctors who perform abortions without religious consent risk fines or imprisonment.<sup>353</sup> Among other issues, this led to an increase in the number of illegal abortions taking place outside medical institutions.<sup>354</sup> In the reporting period, it became increasingly common to find newborn babies in rubbish bins.<sup>355</sup> In April 2023, President Raisi announced that as part of this law, families can expect to

<sup>345</sup> Confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>346</sup> AP News, *Iran's transgender people face discrimination despite fatwa*, 21 May 2018; Azar Nematollahi, Safoora Gharibzadeh, Maryam Damghanian, Saeid Gholamzadeh & Farnaz Farnam, Sexual behaviours and vulnerability to sexually transmitted infections among transgender women in Iran, *BMC Women's Health* 22, 170, 14 May 2022, p. 2; USDoS, *2023 trafficking in persons report: Iran*, 15 June 2023, p. 8; Rudaw, 'At war with my own body: Iran's transgender community still at risk', 27 June 2023.

<sup>347</sup> Ladan Rahbari, *Queering Iran, digitally: Implicit activism and LGBTIQ+ dating on Telegram*, *Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies* 25(2), 2022, pp. 141-157, 146; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>348</sup> Confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>349</sup> Confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>350</sup> Confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>351</sup> Carnegie Europe, *Rethinking the EU's approach to women's rights in Iran*, 25 April 2023; Kayhan Life, *Gender inequality in Iran worsens; Female unemployment on the rise*, 24 July 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>352</sup> Carnegie Europe, *Rethinking the EU's approach to women's rights in Iran*, 25 April 2023; Kayhan Life, *Thousands of child marriages are celebrated in Iran each year*, 25 May 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>353</sup> IranWire, *With abortion already banned, Iran begins to criminalize doctors*, 24 June 2022; Los Angeles Times, *Iran is urging people to have babies – and making life hard for those who don't want to*, 14 September 2022; UNGA, *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (A/77/525)*, 14 October 2022, pp. 12-13; USDoS, *Iran 2022 human rights report*, 20 March 2023, p. 56; Iran International, *Iran shuts down clinic after establishing 'anti-abortion watch'*, 10 May 2023; confidential source, March 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>354</sup> IranWire, *Iranian health officials report "catastrophic" rise in illegal abortions*, 17 April 2023; RFE/RL, *Illegal abortions in Iran rising 'significantly' in wake of restrictions*, 22 April 2023; BBCM, *Iran seizes assets of midwife over performing 'illegal' abortions*, 1 August 2023.

<sup>355</sup> Latin Times, *Garbage man shocked to find newborn baby alive in Iran dumpster*, 25 May 2022; confidential source, March 2023.

receive a tax break for the birth of a third child. In addition, families can count on land and free housing if they have several children.<sup>356</sup>

The changing situation as regards the dress code also contributed to a deterioration in the position of women and girls. There was an increase in repression, monitoring and enforcement in this area. This put women at greater risk from individuals who see themselves in the role of judge, with or without encouragement from the authorities. For instance, on 1 April 2023, President Raisi stressed that women should cover themselves because it was a religious necessity (see further Section 3.1.5.4).<sup>357</sup>

The number of reports of sexual violence by the authorities also increased (see Section 3.1.5.9 for further details).<sup>358</sup>

#### 3.1.5.1 Legal status

In Iran, the legal status of women is very weak. Under Iranian law, women are not equal to men. For example, in certain crimes, such as adultery, a man's testimony in a court of law can only be refuted by the testimony of two women. In certain crimes, such as homosexual acts and organised prostitution, women cannot act as witnesses. In addition, a man has the right to divorce a woman, while a woman, in principle, does not have the right to divorce a man. Women's inheritance rights have also been curtailed so that they always inherit less than male heirs.<sup>359</sup> From the age of nine, girls are expected to wear a headscarf. This means that they may be confronted with the morality police (*Gasht-e Ershad*), the authority responsible for the arrest of Mahsa Amini, from an early age. The morality police are charged with ensuring compliance with the dress code. For a wide range of legal offences, the 'adult' age for girls is nine lunar years (eight years and nine months) and older, while for boys it is fifteen lunar years (fourteen years and seven months).<sup>360</sup>

#### 3.1.5.2 Social position

Women and girls experience discrimination on a daily basis.<sup>361</sup> There are many traditional patterns and social norms present in Iranian society that negatively affect the economic, social and cultural position of women. This was also reflected in the protests that followed the death of Mahsa Amini. Within Iran's patriarchal society, a traditional view of relations between women and men prevails.<sup>362</sup> During his election campaign, President Raisi placed great emphasis on traditional family values and the importance of the hijab.<sup>363</sup> However, basic assumptions about the roles of men and women no longer reflect the reality of life in many Iranian families. The increase in rates of literacy and labour force participation (especially female), rural depopulation, labour migration and the gradual dissolution of large family groups are causing shifts in the perception of ideal social roles. For instance, almost as many

<sup>356</sup> Tehran Times, *Family support law: a matter of national willpower*, 19 May 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>357</sup> Al Jazeera, *Iran's Raisi says hijab is the law as women face 'yoghurt attack'*, 1 April 2023; BBC News, *Two Iranian women arrested for not covering hair after man attacks them with yoghurt*, 1 April 2023; The Guardian, *Students barred from Iranian universities for refusing to wear a hijab*, 10 July 2023.

<sup>358</sup> CNN, *How Iran's security forces use rape to quell protests*, 21 November 2022; The Guardian, *"They used our hijabs to gag us": Iran protesters tell of rapes, beatings and torture by police*, 6 February 2023.

<sup>359</sup> Freedom House, *Freedom in the world 2023. Country report Iran*, 9 March 2023, pp. 15 and 17; IHRNGO & ECPM, *Annual report on the death penalty in Iran 2022*, 13 April 2023, p. 41; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>360</sup> UNGA, *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (A/77/181)*, 18 July 2022, p. 7; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>361</sup> Carnegie Europe, *Rethinking the EU's approach to women's rights in Iran*, 25 April 2023; confidential source, March 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>362</sup> Claudia Yaghoobi, *Temporary marriage in Iran. Gender and body politics in modern Iranian film and literature*, Cambridge University Press, 2022, p. 4; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>363</sup> The word *hijab* refers to a veil or covering. Islamic clerics often link this concept to chastity and morality. In Iran, for example, this takes the form of the dress code such as women being instructed to cover their hair; The Iran Primer, *Raisi: Profile of president-elect*, 20 July 2021; confidential source, April 2023.

women as men now study at Iranian universities. As a result, more and more highly educated women are entering the labour market. For example, women are working as university professors, schoolteachers, hospital doctors and company managers.<sup>364</sup> However, one of the most important conditions is that they observe the dress code and codes of social behaviour at all times.<sup>365</sup>

Due to the poor state of the economy in Iran, women's contribution to the upkeep of the family is becoming increasingly indispensable. This is having a lasting effect on the structure and composition of the family. As a result, the traditional image of a working husband and an obedient wife is slowly being undermined. Despite this shift, the rate of employment for women remained low during the reporting period.<sup>366</sup> In the Global Gender Gap Index 2022, Iran is ranked 143. By comparison, Afghanistan is at the bottom of this index, ranked 146.<sup>367</sup> According to figures compiled by the International Labour Organization (ILO), the employment rate for men in 2020 was 68% and for women 13.9%.<sup>368</sup> According to the Statistical Centre of Iran (SCI), women's wages were an estimated 41% lower than men's.<sup>369</sup>

#### 3.1.5.3 Political activities

In the highest-ranking positions in politics and government, women are almost entirely absent.<sup>370</sup> There is only one woman in the Iranian government: Ensiyeh Khazali. Since 1 September 2021, she has held the office of Vice President for Women and Family Affairs.<sup>371</sup> Only sixteen of the 290 members of Iran's parliament are women.<sup>372</sup>

#### 3.1.5.4 Dress code

Violating the dress code is punishable under Section 638 of the Penal Code. Offenders can be sentenced to a jail term of between ten days and two months, or a fine.<sup>373</sup> Alternative punishments are also possible, and can include exile, a travel ban, community service, correctional therapy, suspension of an employment contract, a ban on joining organisations, temporary closure of a business or confiscation of property, such as a mobile phone or a car.<sup>374</sup>

<sup>364</sup> BBCM, *Iran president criticises Western approach towards women*, 19 January 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>365</sup> Carnegie, *Hijab in Iran: From religious to political symbol*, 13 October 2022; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>366</sup> Kayhan Life, *Gender inequality in Iran worsens; Female unemployment on the rise*, 24 July 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>367</sup> World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2022*, 13 July 2022, p. 10.

<sup>368</sup> ILO, *Statistics in Asia and the Pacific*, <https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/asia-and-the-pacific/>, accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>369</sup> UNGA, *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (A/77/525)*, 14 October 2022, p. 12.

<sup>370</sup> Freedom House, *Freedom in the world 2023. Country report Iran*, 9 March 2023, p. 6; confidential source, March 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>371</sup> Iran International, *Iranian vice president denies son's immigration to Canada*, 9 September 2022; Tehran Times, *West's portrayal of Iranian women is far from reality*, 25 February 2023.

<sup>372</sup> IranWire, *Fact check: The Islamic Republic really empowered Iranian women?*, 20 January 2023; IPU, *Islamic parliament of Iran*, [https://data.ipu.org/node/79/data-on-women?chamber\\_id=13421](https://data.ipu.org/node/79/data-on-women?chamber_id=13421), accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>373</sup> Time, *Iran is about to make its hijab laws even stricter*, 17 August 2023.

<sup>374</sup> BBCM, *Iranian judiciary official calls for 'firm' enforcement of hijab laws*, 10 January 2023; HRANA, *Maryam Bani-Razi sentenced to imprisonment and flogging for breaking hijab rules*, 1 April 2023; BBC News, *Iran signals determination to enforce hijab rules*, 2 April 2023; HRANA, *Woman receives prison sentence and travel ban for violating hijab requirement*, 11 July 2023; IranWire, *Iranian woman sentenced for having "no-hijab infectious disease"*, 12 July 2023; IranWire, *Iranian woman doctor sentenced to cleaning work for flouting hijab laws*, 13 July 2023; BBCM, *Iran says 825 people sentenced in hijab cases since late March*, 2 August 2023; confidential source, March 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

During the reporting period, the authorities tightened enforcement.<sup>375</sup> The morality police admonished women on the street more often and there was an increase in violent incidents involving the morality police. On 12 July 2022, the authorities celebrated the National Day of Hijab and Chastity. In response to this, videos appeared on social media of women leaving home without wearing a headscarf. There were also calls for protests.<sup>376</sup> On 19 July 2022, there was an outcry on social media prompted by a video of a mother almost being run over by a morality police van while begging for her daughter's release.<sup>377</sup> Further controversy erupted in late July 2022 after Iranian television broadcast what appeared to be a forced confession by a female writer. She had been arrested on 16 July 2022 after a video circulated on social media in which she was shown on a bus raising objections to the dress code. In the television broadcast, she expressed regret over the incident. On 30 August 2022, she was released on bail. In December 2022, a court gave her a five-year suspended sentence under Section 500 of the Penal Code (propaganda against the IRI), Section 610 of the Penal Code (threatening national security) and Section 638 of the Penal Code (appearing in public without a hijab).<sup>378</sup>

After the death of Mahsa Amini, the series of protests and the civil unrest that occurred were the longest and fiercest since the foundation of the Islamic Republic (see Section 1.2.2). In the process, a large number of women dared to remove their headscarves in public and even to burn them. There were also women who demonstratively cut off a piece of their hair. Images and footage of such statements were also shared on social media, as well as photographs of women without headscarves.<sup>379</sup>

After the outbreak of anti-government protests following the death of Mahsa Amini in September 2022, the unmarked vans used by the morality police appeared to vanish from the streets. Enforcement seemed to be less widespread for a time due to the large numbers of women who did not comply with the dress code.<sup>380</sup> However, from February 2023, the morality police vans appeared to steadily return to the streets. A van of this kind parked in a public place has a very threatening effect on all women in Iran.<sup>381</sup> On 16 July 2023, a police spokesperson announced the return of street patrols by the morality police.<sup>382</sup>

<sup>375</sup> BBCM, *Iranian judiciary official calls for 'firm' enforcement of hijab laws*, 10 January 2023; BBCM, *Analysis: What message lies behind Iran's tightening of hijab rules?*, 12 January 2023; BBCM, *Iran to 'deal with' police officer for not enforcing hijab*, 10 February 2023.

<sup>376</sup> RFE/RL, *Women protest Iran's hijab and chastity day by removing their veils in public*, 12 July 2022; Iran International, *Women removing hijab in Iran as civil disobedience on July 12*, 12 July 2022.

<sup>377</sup> Iran International, *Hijab incidents continue in Iran as some deny police action*, 20 July 2022; BBCM, *Briefing: Anger on Iranian social media over hijab police van incident*, 20 July 2022.

<sup>378</sup> RFE/RL, *Video of Iranian activists protesting woman's arrest over hijab goes viral*, 17 August 2022; Iran International, *Iranians condemn TV for airing hijab protester's 'forced confessions'*, 2 August 2022; The Guardian, *Arrests and TV confessions as Iran cracks down on women's 'improper' clothing*, 23 August 2022; CHRI, *Sepideh Rashno: Latest target of Raisi government's campaign of repression*, 23 August 2022; HRANA, *Sepideh Rashno sentenced to five years of suspended imprisonment*, 28 December 2022; IFP, *Iranian woman arrested for protesting hijab in video receives 5-year suspended sentence*, 28 December 2022.

<sup>379</sup> BBC News, *Iran unrest: Women burn headscarves at anti-hijab protests*, 21 September 2022; VOA, *Iran's Rekabi latest female athlete to be at risk in her home country*, 22 October 2022; DW, *Chess star Sara Khadem flees Iran over headscarf rule*, 8 January 2023; Al Jazeera, *Iranian women post images without hijabs despite crackdown*, 11 April 2023.

<sup>380</sup> Financial Times, *Iran's morality police disappear from streets after dozens killed in protests*, 28 September 2022; BBCM, *Briefing: Iran's hijab policing is not going anywhere*, 6 December 2022; RFE/RL, *In Iran, more and more photos show women ditching the hijab*, 27 December 2022; The New York Times, *Flaunting hair, Iranian women defy hijab law*, 26 February 2023; Al Jazeera, *Iranian women post images without hijabs despite crackdown*, 11 April 2023; IranWire, *Talking a walk in central Tehran without hijab amid "morality" patrols*, 19 July 2023; NOS, *Iraanse vrouwen moeten weer vreezen voor moraalpolitie en strenge sancties*, 6 August 2023.

<sup>381</sup> BBCM, *Iran arrests women who 'beat lady in hijab'*, 27 March 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>382</sup> BBCM, *Iran commander announces return of 'morality police'*, 16 July 2023; NRC, *Na tien maanden is Iraanse zedenpolitie terug op straat*, 17 July 2023; AD, *'10 procent van de Iraanse vrouwen bedekt het haar niet op de correcte wijze' - zij lopen risico*, 21 July 2023.

On 15 April 2023, the police launched an enforcement campaign, including the use of face-recognition cameras in public places and at the roadside, carrying out checks on businesses and searching online for offenders.<sup>383</sup> The police reported after the first day that they had texted 3,500 warnings to business owners. The police also reported that they had temporarily closed down 137 shops and 18 restaurants for failing to adequately remind their female customers and/or staff to comply with the dress code.<sup>384</sup> On 25 April 2023, for example, the authorities closed the Opal shopping centre in Tehran for five days on these grounds.<sup>385</sup> Various sources confirm that the sending of warning messages was common.<sup>386</sup> On 14 June 2023, a police spokesperson reported that, since the start of the campaign in April 2023, they had texted over 991,000 warnings to women caught on camera not wearing a headscarf in their car. Many of them received a notification that they were temporarily banned from using their cars. In addition, the police seized 2,000 cars.<sup>387</sup>

There were also reports of courts imposing degrading punishments on women for appearing in public without their headscarf. For example, in addition to paying a fine, one woman was given the alternative punishment of washing bodies in a Tehran mortuary.<sup>388</sup> Another woman was given a 270-hour community service sentence that required her to clean the buildings of the interior ministry in Tehran.<sup>389</sup> In July 2023, a Tehran court declared three actresses mentally ill. They had also failed to comply with the dress code. One of them was given a two-year suspended prison sentence and a number of additional punishments, including a two-year travel ban. Another actress was sentenced to six months in prison and a number of additional penalties, including a two-year ban on carrying out her profession. The third actress was banned from using her mobile phone for six months and ordered to disable all her social media accounts.<sup>390</sup>

There were also examples of citizens taking matters into their own hands by acting against non-compliance with the dress code. For example, women were denied access to a number of tourist attractions. On 31 March 2023, a video circulated on

<sup>383</sup> BBCM, *Iran installs smart cameras to enforce veiling laws*, 8 April 2023; De Standaard, *Iran spoort vrouwen zonder hoofddoek op met speciale camera's*, 15 April 2023; BBCM, *Briefing: Iran police launches 'smart programme' to confront hijab violations*, 15 April 2023; NRC, *Hoofddoekplicht. Politie Iran speurt met camera's naar overtreders*, 17 April 2023.

<sup>384</sup> RFE/RL, *Iranian pharmacist, cleric square off over hijab, authorities close her shop*, 30 January 2023; BBCM, *Briefing: Controversies over imposing hijab rules continue in Iran*, 19 February 2023; BBCM, *Briefing: Iran ministries not to give services to girls flouting hijab rules*, 3 April 2023; BBCM, *Briefing: Iran's latest hijab enforcement push begins amid continued defiance*, 16 April 2023; MEE, *Iranian women taunt hardline police chief over latest attempt at hijab enforcement*, 22 April 2023; The New York Times, *Businesses caught in crossfire as Iran enforces hijab law*, 5 May 2023.

<sup>385</sup> IFP, *Tehran shopping mall shut down over improper hijab*, 25 April 2023; Iran International, *More shops sealed in Iran over hijab rule*, 30 April 2023; RFE/RL, *The Farda Briefing: Iran goes after big businesses for alleged hijab violations*, 3 May 2023.

<sup>386</sup> FAZ, *Die Augen des Regimes*, 22 May 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>387</sup> The National, *Iran texts warnings to women for not wearing hijab in a car in new surveillance operation*, 14 June 2023; BBCM, *Police chief in north Iran warns women over removing hijab in cars*, 16 June 2023; Amnesty International, *Iran: International community must stand with women and girls suffering intensifying oppression*, 26 July 2023.

<sup>388</sup> Iran International, *Wash corpses if you refuse to wear hijab, Iran court says*, 16 July 2023; IranWire, *Iranian who defied hijab rules offered to wash dead bodies as alternative sentence*, 20 July 2023.

<sup>389</sup> RFE/RL, *Iranian judge orders woman to clean public spaces as punishment for breaking hijab law*, 20 June 2023; Time, *What the return of the 'morality police' means for Iran's women*, 17 July 2023.

<sup>390</sup> HRANA, *Actress Afsaneh Bayegan receives suspended sentence and travel ban*, 19 July 2023; RFE/RL, *Iranian court sparks controversy by diagnosing hijab protesters with mental illness*, 22 July 2023.

social media showing a man pouring yoghurt on two women at a shop in Mashhad for not wearing a veil.<sup>391</sup>

On 30 July 2023, parliament's legislative committee announced a bill related to the hijab. This seventy-section bill contains provisions on intensified monitoring, severe penalties, high fines, measures against companies, segregation of the sexes in all kinds of government and public spaces, involvement of security forces in the implementation of the law and specific punishments for individuals with a high public profile. In addition to imprisonment, fines and flogging, which were already possible under current legislation, the bill formalises the imposition of penalties such as confiscation of passports and driving licences, denial of internet access, closure of businesses and suspension of employment.<sup>392</sup> On 13 August 2023, members of parliament announced that the bill would be debated in closed session.<sup>393</sup> At the end of the reporting period, this bill had not yet been formally passed. The main reason for this was that hardliners were calling for an even stricter law.<sup>394</sup>

#### 3.1.5.5 Segregation of the sexes

In public spaces, such as school classrooms and public transport, gender segregation is mostly in place.<sup>395</sup> Women are also generally not allowed to attend matches in football stadiums. Nevertheless, there were occasional exceptions during the reporting period in which women were given access to stadiums. On 23 March 2023, for example, a limited number of women were permitted to attend an international match against the Russian Federation.<sup>396</sup> Parties and sports activities in which both men and women participate are not allowed by law. During the reporting period, police raided private parties where men and women were present and where in some cases alcohol was served. Anyone attending such a party risked a fine or punishment by flogging.<sup>397</sup> Male and female musicians are permitted to perform together, but women are prohibited from singing solo and/or dancing solo in front of a mixed audience. Doing so might result in them losing their job.<sup>398</sup>

<sup>391</sup> De Standaard, *Man gooit pot yoghurt over twee Iraanse vrouwen zonder hoofddoek*, 2 April 2023; RFE/RL, *Iranians express anger after man allegedly attacks unveiled women with yogurt*, 3 April 2023; IranWire, *Iranian government to be blamed for "yoghurt attack" on unveiled women*, 3 April 2023; RFE/RL, *Iranian woman dies after confrontation escalates over hijab*, 28 April 2023; BBCM, *Briefing: Iran media underline hijab rules after man fatally stabbed*, 1 May 2023.

<sup>392</sup> BBC News, *Iran signals determination to enforce hijab rules*, 2 April 2023; BBCM, *Explainer: Iran MPs decide against fast-tracking hijab bill discussion*, 14 June 2023; CNN, *Iran proposes long jail terms, AI surveillance and crackdown on influencers in harsh new hijab law*, 2 August 2023; Article 19, *Iran: Tech-enabled 'hijab and chastity' law will further punish women*, 22 August 2023; confidential source, April 2023; confidential source, August 2023.

<sup>393</sup> BBC News, *Iran's politicians to debate hijab law in secret*, 13 August 2023.

<sup>394</sup> Iran International, *Hardliners in Iran attack new hijab bill as too lenient*, 25 May 2023; RFE/RL, *Iran's hard-liners blast tougher proposed hijab legislation -- as too lenient*, 26 May 2023; Iran International, *Hardliners in Iran dismiss government hijab bill, demand harsher approach*, 30 May 2023; Mehr News, *Top officials stress fast approval of chastity & hijab bill*, 1 July 2023.

<sup>395</sup> Iran International, *Iran morality official calls for gender segregation in universities*, 1 September 2022; Vice, *'They can't arrest us all': How Tehran's metro became an underground protest site*, 8 November 2022; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>396</sup> Al Jazeera, *Iranian women allowed to watch football match after FIFA pressure*, 25 August 2022; CNN, *Iranian women allowed to attend domestic football match for first time in over 40 years*, 26 August 2022; NBC News, *Barred from stadiums at home, Iran women travel to world cup*, 21 November 2022; BBCM, *Explainer: Iran gives women limited space to watch Russia football friendly*, 23 March 2023; BBCM, *Briefing: Iran top security body endorses women's access to stadiums*, 30 June 2023.

<sup>397</sup> Iran International, *Iran arrests nature tourists for flouting hijab, partying in forest*, 20 June 2022; RFE/RL, *Iranian soccer players reportedly arrested at mixed-gender party*, 1 January 2023; BBCM, *Iran arrests footballers at 'mixed night party'*, 1 January 2023; Freedom House, *Freedom in the world 2023. Country report Iran*, 9 March 2023, p. 18; BBCM, *Iran arrests 11 on suspicion of engaging in 'satanic rituals'*, 20 August 2023.

<sup>398</sup> RFE/RL, *Iranian restaurant shut down after woman sings at opening*, 31 January 2023; Die Welt, *Junge Frauen ohne Kopftuch trotz dem Tanzverbot*, 9 March 2023; Financial Times, *Female Iranian artists offer subtle subversion*, 12 May 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

#### 3.1.5.6 *Sigheh* marriage

A *sigheh* marriage is a legally valid commitment between a man and a woman for a predetermined period of time, which allows them to have a sexual relationship. This arrangement includes agreements on payment, the nature of the sexual relationship and its duration. A *sigheh* marriage can last for one hour, a few days, a few months, a few years or for a number of sexual acts.<sup>399</sup>

When an NOCR-authorized registry office records a *sigheh* marriage, this is noted on the birth certificate (*shenasnameh*). When the *sigheh* marriage is terminated, this also has to be noted on the birth certificate. In that case, the woman is formally considered to be divorced. This means that to enter into a first permanent marriage after the termination of a *sigheh* marriage, she no longer needs her father's consent.<sup>400</sup> If a *sigheh* marriage is not officially registered, there is no need to record it on the birth certificate. In that case, it ends at an agreed time or may be terminated early by annulling or waiving the remaining term.<sup>401</sup>

There have been reports of forced *sigheh* marriages in prisons in cases where a woman had no relatives who could assist her financially.<sup>402</sup>

#### 3.1.5.7 Westernised women

According to one source, many Iranian women, especially in Tehran, lead a lifestyle that could be described as 'Western'. This could lead to problems with certain employers, such as the government, as such women might be considered insufficiently devout Muslims. This could affect their chances of promotion, for example. This source had not heard of women being labelled as westernised.<sup>403</sup>

#### 3.1.5.8 Legal competence of women

In Iran, women's legal competence is actively restricted by the authorities. For instance, married women need permission from their husband to travel, even within the country. Under Section 18 of the Passport Act, a married woman needs the written consent of her husband to apply for a passport. Their sexual and reproductive health rights are also restricted. In most areas of public life, the sexes are segregated (see Section 3.1.5.5). Women are permitted to apply for a job, open a bank account or buy a car. However, they face a variety of constraints in doing so.<sup>404</sup> For instance, according to one source, the contract of sale of a property must be co-signed by a father or a brother.<sup>405</sup> From the age of nine lunar years (eight years and nine months according to the solar calendar), girls can be considered legally competent.<sup>406</sup>

#### 3.1.5.9 Violence against women

In Iran, there are no laws that criminalise violence (including domestic violence) against women. Iran is not a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).<sup>407</sup> Following its crackdown on the

<sup>399</sup> MEI, *Temporary marriage in Iran and women's rights*, 13 January 2021; Yaghoobi, *Temporary marriage in Iran*, 2022, p. 10; USDoS, *2023 trafficking in persons report: Iran*, 15 June 2023, p. 8; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>400</sup> Confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>401</sup> MEI, *Temporary marriage in Iran and women's rights*, 13 January 2021; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>402</sup> Kayhan Life, *Jailed Iranian activist alleges rampant abuse at Bushehr central prison*, 14 September 2021; The Washington Post, *A 26-year-old woman is exposing abuse in Iranian prisons*, 14 October 2021; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>403</sup> Confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>404</sup> Confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>405</sup> Confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>406</sup> Section 1210, first note, Civil Code.

<sup>407</sup> Iran International, *Father shoots young daughter to death in Iran 'honor killing'*, 2 July 2022; USDoS, *Iran 2022 human rights report*, 20 March 2023, p. 54; IHRNGO & ECPM, *Annual report on the death penalty in Iran 2022*, 13 April 2023, p. 25; confidential source, March 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

anti-government protests over the death of Mahsa Amini, Iran was removed from the UN Commission on the Status of Women by a resolution on 14 December 2022.<sup>408</sup>

Since the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (who was president from 2005 to 2013), a Bill on the Protection, Dignity and Security of Women from Violence has been pending.<sup>409</sup> In April 2023, parliament approved some parts of this bill, but at the end of this reporting period, the bill had not yet been passed by parliament. Before the bill can become law, it still requires the approval of the Guardian Council.<sup>410</sup>

Legally, women have the opportunity to report violence and sexual violence by third parties, i.e. people outside their own family or household.<sup>411</sup> The number of incidents of sexual violence reported increased in the reporting period. These reports led to a small number of very harrowing criminal cases, which rarely had a positive outcome for the woman involved.<sup>412</sup> Charges of this nature require two female witnesses to refute one man's testimony. This requirement is problematic in the context of domestic violence and domestic sexual violence. In this regard, not only do the technicalities of the legal system favour men, but from a normative perspective male judges are very unlikely to decide in favour of a woman. In practice, this means that sexual violence hardly ever results in a criminal prosecution. If this does happen, a woman who was a victim of sexual assault or rape risks being prosecuted for adultery. Women seldom dare to report such crimes because the stigma attached to sexual violence runs very deep in the Iranian context.<sup>413</sup> When women do report such an incident, they are often told by police that it was their own fault, for example because of the way they were dressed.<sup>414</sup>

Women have few opportunities to escape violence or domestic violence. In some cases they can turn to their parents or other immediate family members.<sup>415</sup> However, according to one source, it is rare for women to be able to settle with relatives elsewhere in Iran to escape violence or domestic violence.<sup>416</sup> In a traditional context, the woman in question will often be forced by her family to return to her husband.<sup>417</sup>

#### 3.1.5.10 Shelter options for women

A system of shelters for women fleeing domestic violence is almost completely absent.<sup>418</sup> There are only a few small-scale shelters to which they can turn. In 2017, the English-language Iranian newspaper *Tehran Times* reported that there are fifteen shelters across Iran run by private individuals and seven run by the State

<sup>408</sup> UNGA, *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (A/HRC/52/67)*, 7 February 2023; CRS, *Iran: Background and U.S. policy*, 23 March 2023, p. 4.

<sup>409</sup> HRW, *Iran: Adopt draft law to protect women*, 4 December 2020; Al Jazeera, *'Protecting dignity': Iran's push to fight violence against women*, 28 February 2021.

<sup>410</sup> BBCM, *Iran Majlis approves generalities of women protection bill*, 9 April 2023; RFE/RL, *Draft law to toughen penalties for violence against women advances in Iranian parliament*, 11 April 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>411</sup> Confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>412</sup> The Guardian, *Iranian prosecutors concealed rape by Revolutionary Guards, document shows*, 8 February 2023; confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>413</sup> USDoS, *2023 trafficking in persons report: Iran*, 15 June 2023, p. 5; confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>414</sup> Confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>415</sup> Confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>416</sup> Confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>417</sup> Confidential source, March 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>418</sup> Confidential source, April 2023.

Welfare Organisation (SWO).<sup>419</sup> The private shelters are funded by donations. According to one source, benefactors and foundations in Iran are generally not allowed to engage in such activities unless the institutions operate under the supervision of the SWO. The activities of some charities and individuals aimed at helping women who were the victim of violence have been discontinued because they were not aligned with the government.<sup>420</sup>

According to the same source, the SWO's guidelines specify that an abused woman can stay in a shelter for two to four months. If a specialist team determines that conditions are not conducive for the woman to return home and she is still physically and mentally vulnerable, this period will be extended. The SWO's website states that a woman is allowed to stay in a shelter for two periods of four months, subject to a judge's ruling. A woman affected by domestic violence is first introduced to shelter through the emergency social services, the police or the judiciary. She is then examined by a medical officer. Her condition is then assessed by a social worker, a psychologist, a doctor and a legal advisor in an interview. According to this source, this process is not always carried out correctly. It is therefore difficult to determine how the police or the courts perform their duties in this area.<sup>421</sup>

#### 3.1.6 *Minors (including unaccompanied minors)*

In general, there are no differences in the way minors of Persian ethnicity are treated in Iran, as opposed to minors of Kurdish, Arab, Azeri or Baluchi ethnicity.<sup>422</sup> All Iranian children without parental care are equal before the law and can benefit from the minimum of care and protection required by law. However, the same quality of care is not available throughout the country. This differs from province to province and city to city, depending on the standard of local facilities.<sup>423</sup>

##### 3.1.6.1 Child protection

The SWO is responsible for protecting children without parental care. Several programmes exist for these children. For parents who are unable to provide the required care and protection, the SWO has an empowerment programme to help them do so. This programme takes into account the best interests of the child. If, for whatever reason, parental empowerment is not possible, the SWO will place the child in the care of immediate family members, for instance the child's paternal grandfather or an uncle. In cases where neither intervention is feasible, the SWO may place the child in a foster care programme. As part of this process, the SWO advises on who is permitted to be a foster parent to the child. Another option, usually preferred if the two previous interventions are not feasible, is for a judge to decide that the care of the child should lie with a family qualified to do so or with a woman recommended for that purpose by the SWO. If none of this is possible, the child will be placed in a care home.<sup>424</sup>

By law, the court first looks to the paternal grandfather when determining custody in cases where the parents are no longer in the picture. If the father or paternal grandfather are no longer alive, custody usually goes to an uncle, the father's brother. If no suitable person is available on the father's side, custody can go to the

<sup>419</sup> Financial Tribune, *More shelters for victims of domestic violence*, 12 July 2017; Tehran Times, *22 safe houses for women running in Iran*, 25 July 2017; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>420</sup> Confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>421</sup> Confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>422</sup> Confidential source, March 2023; confidential source, 20 April 2023.

<sup>423</sup> Confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>424</sup> Confidential source, June 2023.

mother's side. If no further family members are available, custody goes to the SWO.<sup>425</sup>

There are a number of care homes for minors in every province in Iran.<sup>426</sup> Examples include the Ameneh and Shobeir children's homes in Tehran.<sup>427</sup> According to the SCI, there were 661 care homes for children without parental authority in 2021.<sup>428</sup> The SWO runs a large number of homes for minors.<sup>429</sup> There are also some small-scale private homes. These are registered and approved by the SWO. They also operate under SWO supervision.<sup>430</sup> According to one source, children are admitted to these private homes through the SWO.<sup>431</sup>

There are three categories of care homes for minors. The first consists of care homes for infants and toddlers up to three years of age and pre-school children aged between three and six. The second category is made up of homes for children aged six to twelve. The third category takes care of adolescents aged twelve to eighteen.<sup>432</sup> In these care homes, boys and girls are separated from the age of six.<sup>433</sup> Legally, the SWO is responsible for the children until they turn eighteen. This is the same for boys and girls. When they turn eighteen, they have to leave the children's home.<sup>434</sup> According to one source, the SWO may extend a child's stay beyond the age of eighteen under exceptional circumstances.<sup>435</sup>

The children who stay in the children's homes come from a wide range of backgrounds. They could be foundlings, orphans, children with disabilities, children of divorced parents or children who lack adequate care, for example because their parents have a drug addiction.<sup>436</sup>

There is not enough information available to answer the question of whether, in general, there are enough places available in children's homes. Under national protocols and policy in Iran, children in institutional care must have access to education, medical care and food. However, there is no national evaluation of care homes and the quality of the services they provide. There is not enough information available to answer the question on the quality of facilities in children's homes.<sup>437</sup>

By law, all children without parental care in Iran must be given care and protection. In some cases, professionals who are insufficiently aware of this law may fail to provide services to non-Iranian children.<sup>438</sup> There are no official figures on the number of children in Iran who do not receive care from relatives, foster parents or institutions. In major cities, street children are a visible presence. In most cases, these children are Afghan.<sup>439</sup>

<sup>425</sup> Tehran Times, *13,000 orphans supported by Iranian charities abroad*, 21 January 2022; SWO, *Special cooperation between government and judiciary to facilitate adoption process*, 5 April 2023; confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, April 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>426</sup> Confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, March 2023; confidential source, April 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>427</sup> Tehran Times, *Largest nursery in Iran inaugurated*, 20 December 2019; SWO, *UNICEF delegation paid a visit from Shobeir nursery*, 14 April 2022; SWO, *The wives of some ambassadors paid a visit from Ameneh nursery*, 9 May 2023.

<sup>428</sup> SCI, *Iran statistical yearbook 2020-2021 (1399)*, undated, p. 587.

<sup>429</sup> SWO, *Orphaned children are children of Islamic Iran and future makers of country*, 5 April 2022.

<sup>430</sup> Confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>431</sup> Confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>432</sup> Confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>433</sup> Confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, March 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>434</sup> Confidential source, March 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>435</sup> Confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>436</sup> Confidential source, March 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>437</sup> Confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>438</sup> Confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>439</sup> IranWire, *The unseen tragedy of Iran's scavenger children*, 13 July 2022; confidential source, March 2023.

The SWO is legally responsible for the care of unaccompanied children returning to Iran from abroad.<sup>440</sup>

#### 3.1.6.2

##### Child marriages

Iran is a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). This convention defines everyone under the age of eighteen as a child. By this token, any marriage involving someone under the age of eighteen is considered to be a child marriage. In Iran, the minimum age for marriage is fifteen for boys and thirteen for girls. Under Section 1041 of the Civil Code, marriage at a younger age is possible with the consent of the parent with whom parental authority resides, and subject to the approval of the court.<sup>441</sup> In April 2022, the London-based news website *IranWire* reported that more than a fifth of all marriages in Iran were child marriages.<sup>442</sup> According to various sources, the number of child marriages increased during the reporting period. Child marriages are particularly common in the poorer parts of Iran, but they also take place in Tehran.<sup>443</sup> On 7 April 2023, SCI reported that between April 2022 and January 2023, more than 20,000 girls were married under the age of fifteen.<sup>444</sup> This is thought to be substantially underreported, as many such marriages are consummated before girls reach the age of thirteen and are not registered with the court until later.<sup>445</sup>

## 3.2 Compliance and violations

### 3.2.1

#### *Freedom of expression*

As regards freedom of expression, a deterioration was evident during the reporting period. The rights to freedom of expression, internet freedom and independent journalism were under severe pressure in Iran and deteriorated still further since the anti-government protests that erupted in September 2022 in response to the death of Mahsa Amini.<sup>446</sup>

#### 3.2.1.1

##### Human rights activists

Human rights defenders came under severe pressure, regardless of which type of rights they sought to defend.<sup>447</sup> In the reporting period, these pressures increased. Authorities increasingly viewed activities geared towards issues such as climate, water and the economy as political activism. In many cases, human rights activists and critical voices from the cultural sector, for example, encountered harassment, maltreatment, arrest, travel bans or convictions. Arrests were often accompanied by violence and temporary disappearances, before individuals were brought before a court, in many cases a revolutionary court. Convictions usually cited Section 498 or 499 of the Penal Code (founding, leading or membership of an illegal organisation) or Section 500 of the Penal Code (propaganda against the IRI). Such sentences could range from short jail terms to decades of imprisonment, fines (often in

<sup>440</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Iran*, May 2022, p. 54; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>441</sup> *IranWire*, *A tale of two child marriages*, 9 May 2022.

<sup>442</sup> *IranWire*, *Official statistics: One fifth of all marriages in Iran are child marriages*, 1 April 2022.

<sup>443</sup> *Kayhan Life*, *Thousands of child marriages are celebrated in Iran each year*, 25 May 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>444</sup> *IranWire*, *More than 20,000 Iranian girls under 15 got married over nine-months*, 7 April 2023.

<sup>445</sup> Confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>446</sup> Confidential source, April 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>447</sup> FIDH, *Iran: Five human rights defenders sentenced to prison for denouncing COVID-19 mismanagement*, 24 June 2022; HRANA, *Lawyer and human rights defender Amirsalar Davoudi imprisoned*, 27 June 2022; *IranWire*, *Iranian lawyers under threat after defending protesters' rights*, 12 May 2023.

addition to other penalties), flogging, exile, travel bans, community service in military units or even the death penalty.<sup>448</sup> In several cases, human rights activists faced new charges towards the end of their incarceration, leading to an extension of their detention period. Others were rearrested and convicted shortly after their release.<sup>449</sup>

### 3.2.1.2

#### Lawyers

Some members of the legal profession also came under heavy pressure.<sup>450</sup> A number of lawyers who provided legal assistance to protesters and human rights defenders faced intimidation, arrests, travel bans and convictions.<sup>451</sup> In November 2022, IHRNGO reported that at least fifty lawyers had been arrested since the start of anti-government protests following the death of Mahsa Amini.<sup>452</sup> In addition, several international media reported in December 2022 that since the start of these protests, at least 44 lawyers had been arrested after providing legal assistance to protesters. About half of them were subsequently released on bail.<sup>453</sup> For instance, in March 2023, the authorities sued the lawyer who represented Mahsa Amini's family under Section 500 of the Penal Code (propaganda against the IRI).<sup>454</sup>

### 3.2.1.3

#### Women's rights activists

In many cases, activists campaigning for women's rights faced harassment, maltreatment, arrests, travel bans and convictions.<sup>455</sup> Women's rights are a sensitive issue in Iran. As became clear during the anti-government protests following the death of Mahsa Amini, the dress code is a central theme in this area. The debate surrounding the hijab flared up continuously during the reporting period (see Section 3.1.5.4). This makes it the most visible expression of the restrictions on women's rights in Iran. Dozens of women's rights activists faced arrest and conviction over their actions against the dress code.<sup>456</sup>

<sup>448</sup> OHCHR, *Iran must immediately release critically ill human rights defender Arash Sadeghi: UN experts*, 2 December 2022; IranWire, *Well-known Iranian activist Iraei sentenced to seven years in prison*, 13 April 2023; confidential source, April 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>449</sup> RFE/RL, *Iranian rights defender Karimbeigi arrested after raid on mother's home*, 14 June 2022; Frontline Defenders, *Woman human rights defender Maryam Karimbeigi on travel ban*, 19 August 2022; BBCM, *Jailed Iranian activist released on bail*, 22 January 2023; BBCM, *Iranian rights activist sentenced to over five years in prison*, 25 January 2023; Frontline Defenders, *Arash Sadeghi sentenced to five years in prison for his advocacy work during the ongoing protests*, 27 January 2023; HRANA, *Iran protests: Samaneh Asghari sentenced to over 18 years*, 9 March 2023; BBCM, *Iran court sentences former political prisoner to seven years in jail*, 13 April 2023; BBCM, *Iran re-arrests veteran journalist over 'ties' with opposition*, 20 April 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>450</sup> HRANA, *Lawyer Saeed Sheykh sentenced to three years in prison*, 28 December 2022; RFE/RL, *The Farda Briefing: Iran intensifies pressure on independent lawyers*, 17 May 2023; IranWire, *Iran's judiciary uses legal tricks to prosecute human rights lawyer*, 28 July 2023.

<sup>451</sup> The Economist, *Shirin Ebadi on the legal obstacles Iran's protesters face*, 16 November 2022; Die Zeit, *Anwalt von inhaftierten Journalistinnen im Iran festgenommen*, 17 December 2022; Iran International, *At least 43 lawyers arrested during Iran protests: Activists*, 22 December 2022; HRANA, *Lawyer Negin Kiani sentenced to one year in prison*, 22 December 2022; BBCM, *Iran releases prominent lawyer on bail*, 9 January 2023; RFE/RL, *The Farda Briefing: Iran intensifies pressure on independent lawyers*, 17 May 2023; HRANA, *Report highlights 129 instances of security and judicial encounters with attorneys in the last ten months*, 24 May 2023; UNHRC, *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Advanced unedited version (A/HRC/53/23)*, 15 June 2023, p. 13.

<sup>452</sup> IHRNGO, *Targeted crackdown on human rights defenders*, 30 November 2022.

<sup>453</sup> RFE/RL, *More than 40 Iranian lawyers detained so far during protests*, 22 December 2022; VOA, *At least 44 lawyers arrested in Iran*, 24 December 2022; CHRI, *Iran protests: At least 44 defense attorneys arrested since September*, 10 January 2023.

<sup>454</sup> RFE/RL, *Lawyer for Amini family summoned to Tehran prosecutor's office for 'propaganda'*, 14 March 2023; Iran International, *Mahsa Amini's lawyer charged with 'propaganda against state'*, 14 March 2023; RFE/RL, *Lawyer for Mahsa's family faces 'propaganda against the system' trial in Tehran*, 30 August 2023.

<sup>455</sup> Hengaw, *Iranian government has implemented a barbaric flogging against a female activist*, 28 July 2023; RFE/RL, *Iranian activists detained in Gilan reportedly being pressured to make confessions*, 30 August 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>456</sup> HRANA, *Women's rights activist Nooshin Keshavarznia arrested in Tehran*, 27 April 2022; BBCM, *Iranian anti-hijab protester handed five-year suspended sentence*, 27 December 2022; UNGA, *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (A/HRC/52/67)*, 7 February 2023, p. 12; BBCM, *Iranian women activists freed from*

#### 3.2.1.4 Environmental activists

In many cases, environmental activists faced harassment, maltreatment, arrests, travel bans and convictions.<sup>457</sup> The Iranian authorities often consider issues concerning the environment and climate to be sensitive topics. This was highlighted by the water protests in Khuzestan province and the city of Isfahan in 2021. In the eyes of the authorities, activities relating to these topics could potentially threaten state security and the stability of the country. The authorities are therefore quick to characterise the activities of environmentalists as political and a threat to national security.<sup>458</sup> During the reporting period, for example, seven members of the former Persian Wildlife Heritage Foundation (PWHF) were detained on charges of spying for the United States and Israel (Article 501 of the Penal Code). They had been arrested in 2018 for using infrared cameras to film Asian cheetahs in a nature reserve at night.<sup>459</sup>

#### 3.2.1.5 Journalists

Pressure on journalists has increased since the anti-government protests following the death of Mahsa Amini. In the eyes of the Iranian authorities, it was the reporting of Mahsa Amini's death that triggered the wave of mass protests.<sup>460</sup>

In the World Press Freedom Index 2023 compiled by international press freedom NGO Reporters without Borders (RSF), Iran was ranked 177 with a score of 24.81. The ranking lists 180 countries. Only Vietnam, China and North Korea scored worse on freedom of the press than Iran. In the World Press Freedom Index 2021, Iran was ranked 174 with a score of 27.30.<sup>461</sup>

Iranian media are under strict government control. Some media are owned by government agencies. Censorship and self-censorship is widespread.<sup>462</sup> Article 24 of the Iranian constitution 'guarantees' freedom of the press in Iran, but press laws passed in 1986 (and amended in 2000 and 2009) allow the authorities to ensure that journalists do not 'pose a danger to the Islamic Republic', 'do not insult the clergy and supreme leader' and do not 'spread false information'. These restrictions give Iran a great deal of scope to take measures if faced with what it sees as 'undesirable' reporting. As a result, there is no independent journalism within the country.<sup>463</sup>

Journalists, opposition media and critical voices operating from abroad are under heavy pressure. In some cases, their relatives still living in Iran are harassed or

*prison*, 9 February 2023; Amnesty International, *Goed nieuws: Yasaman en Monireh vrijgelaten in Iran*, 17 February 2023; CNN, *Husband of prominent Iranian human rights lawyer summoned by judiciary*, 15 February 2023; HRANA, *Women's rights activist Raoofeh Mirbagheri sentenced to imprisonment and additional punishments*, 20 March 2023; Hengaw, *Shilan Kurdestani, a women's rights activist, was sentenced to 40 months in prison*, 25 March 2023.

<sup>457</sup> KHRN, *IRGC abducts three activists fighting wildfires in Mount Kusalán*, 26 June 2023; IranWire, *IRGC arrests three Kurdish environmental activists*, 26 June 2023; KHRN, *IRGC continues to detain three activists without legal representation*, 10 July 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>458</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Iran*, May 2022, p. 57; confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>459</sup> The Guardian, *Morad Tahbaz has been freed from jail in Iran on electronic tag, UK says*, 27 July 2022; Iran International, *Despite amnesty claim by Iran, environmental activists still in prison*, 13 February 2023; IranWire, *Iranian ecologist Rajabi granted furlough after five years in prison*, 16 February 2023; BBC News, *Aras Amiri highlights jailed Iran environmentalists' plight*, 1 June 2023.

<sup>460</sup> Iran International, *Iran intel services accuse CIA, foreigners of organizing protests*, 28 October 2022; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>461</sup> RSF, 2023 World Press Freedom Index, <https://rsf.org/en/index>, accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>462</sup> USCIRF, *Religious propaganda in Iran*, 22 July 20 22, p. 4; Freedom House, *Freedom in the world 2023. Country report Iran*, 9 March 2023, p. 8; BBCM, *Briefing: Iran TV mutes stadium chants supporting dissident player*, 1 June 2023; Australian Government, *DFAT country information report Iran*, 24 July 2023, p. 27.

<sup>463</sup> BBC News, *Iran protests: Female journalists targeted in spate of arrests*, 16 February 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

threatened. Nor does Iran shy away from more extreme measures; the family members of activists abroad are sometimes sentenced to long prison terms.<sup>464</sup> For example, the Iranian authorities declared the online news platform Iran International to be a terrorist organisation.<sup>465</sup> Due to these pressures, political activists and media activists are under extra scrutiny, especially those who work for mass media such as *BBC Persia* and *Iran International*.<sup>466</sup> Due to credible death threats against London-based Iran International, its office was closed temporarily. In February 2023, this media outlet announced that it had moved its office to Washington.<sup>467</sup>

Iranians in touch with foreign media outlets could also face problems.<sup>468</sup> A number of examples are given below. This overview is by no means exhaustive.

On 10 November 2022, authorities arrested the sister of a well-known wrestler who had been executed on 12 September 2020. They accused her of passing information to Iran International and having a large amount of foreign currency in her possession. On 20 December 2022, a revolutionary court in the city of Shiraz sentenced her to five years' imprisonment, a two-year travel ban and a two-year ban on participating in online social activities under Section 610 of the Penal Code (threat to national security). On 12 March 2023, she was fitted with an electronic tag and placed under house arrest.<sup>469</sup>

In April 2023, the authorities arrested a woman in the city of Qazvin on suspicion of sending photos and videos of the school poisonings to media outlets abroad.<sup>470</sup> It is not known whether she was subsequently convicted.

The scope allowed for criticising the authorities is very limited. The moderate news media that are still active have to walk a very fine line.<sup>471</sup> Some more moderate newspapers, which are nominally independent but subject to strict censorship, were temporarily closed down during the reporting period after publishing on sensitive

<sup>464</sup> Iran International, *Iranian dissident journalist kidnapped in Turkey*, 5 June 2022; FAZ, *Iran bedroht Mitarbeiter der Deutschen Welle*, 28 November 2022; RFE/RL, *Exclusive: Iranian dissident journalist who disappeared in Turkey ends up in custody of Iran's revolutionary guards*, 29 November 2022; Al-Monitor, *Iranian dissident who disappeared in Turkey resurfaces in Evin prison*, 9 December 2022; confidential source, April 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>465</sup> Iran International, *Iran' intelligence chief issues veiled threat against UK*, 9 November 2022; UNGA, *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (A/HRC/52/67)*, 7 February 2023, p. 13; BBCM, *Iran arrests another person over 'links' to foreign-based TV*, 11 May 2023.

<sup>466</sup> BBC News, *Iran protests: Armed Met Police guard Iranian journalists facing death threats*, 25 November 2022; BBC News, *Why reporting on Iran comes at a heavy price*, 12 January 2023; ND, *Iraanse tv-zender weg uit VK om bedreigingen*, 20 February 2023; Financial Times, *Iran behind 15 credible threats against people in UK, says minister*, 20 February 2023; IFJ, *UK: IFJ and NUJ call for swift action to protect UK-based journalists threatened by Iranian regime*, 22 February 2023.

<sup>467</sup> Daily Sabah, *Two released in Iranian espionage trial in Türkiye*, 14 October 2022; The Guardian, *Foreign Office asks Iran to explain alleged death threats to UK-based reporters*, 11 November 2022; BBC News, *Iran organised 10 kidnap and death plots, MIS says*, 16 November 2022; The Guardian, *Armed police guard Iranian TV studios in London after Tehran threats*, 19 November 2022; The Guardian, *UK-based Iranian TV channel moves to US after threats from Tehran*, 18 February 2023; Article 19, *UK: Islamic Republic's oppression beyond borders risks journalists' lives*, 21 February 2023.

<sup>468</sup> HRANA, *Iran protests: Citizens arrested in Kermanshah*, 31 March 2023; BBCM, *Iran arrests individual 'linked to expatriate TV'*, 4 May 2023.

<sup>469</sup> Al Jazeera, *Iran arrests woman accused of links to UK-based TV channel*, 10 November 2022; HRANA, *Iran protests: Elham Afkari sentenced to five years in prison*, 20 December 2022; BBCM, *Iranian woman released from prison but electronically tagged*, 12 March 2023; United for Iran, *Elham Afkari Sangari*, <https://ipa.united4iran.org/en/prisoner/7724/>, accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>470</sup> AA, *Woman arrested in Iran for sending photos of poisoned students to 'hostile media'*, 20 April 2023; BBCM, *Iran arrests woman for sending videos of school 'poisonings' to 'hostile media'*, 20 April 2023.

<sup>471</sup> Confidential source, June 2023.

issues. In the view of the authorities, these publications had crossed a line.<sup>472</sup> For example, on 21 November 2022, the authorities suspended the financial daily *Jahan-e Sanat* after publishing an opinion piece that referred to the violent death of a nine-year-old boy (see Section 1.2.7). On 4 December 2022, a court decision lifted the suspension, but this was then reversed on 7 December 2022. The suspension was eventually lifted by a court on 28 December 2022.<sup>473</sup> On 20 February 2023, the authorities suspended *Sazandegi*, a daily newspaper, after it published an article on rising beef prices. On 1 March 2023, a court lifted this suspension.<sup>474</sup>

During the reporting period, several journalists, bloggers and social media activists faced harassment, dismissals, arrests and convictions.<sup>475</sup> For example, they had touched on sensitive issues in their coverage, such as the anti-government protests following the death of Mahsa Amini (see Section 1.2.2), the situation of relatives of protesters sentenced to death (see Section 3.2.1.9), poisonings in schools (see Section 1.2.4) and government corruption.<sup>476</sup> According to one source, once it became clear that the protests after Amini's death were becoming difficult to control, Iran not only detained journalists who had already expressed moderate or critical views about the protests but also arrested journalists they feared might write something about the protests.<sup>477</sup> During the protests, the Iranian authorities repeatedly claimed that critical journalists were saboteurs, working on the orders of foreign intelligence agencies.<sup>478</sup>

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reported in February 2023 that at least 95 journalists had been arrested since the start of anti-government protests following Mahsa Amini's death. At least 46 of them were subsequently released on bail.<sup>479</sup> Almost all of them were charged under Section 500 of the Penal Code (propaganda against the IRI) and Section 610 of the Penal Code (threatening national security).<sup>480</sup> At least 5 journalists were sentenced to jail terms above the legal maximum. The convicted journalists were also subject to other punishments,

<sup>472</sup> USCIRF, *Religious propaganda in Iran*, 22 July 2022, p. 4; RFE/RL, *Tehran prosecutor summons newspaper editor over reports of increased sales of body parts*, 10 May 2023; Iran International, *Newspaper prosecuted for report on rise of body organ sales in Iran*, 11 May 2023; BBCM, *Iran paper faces legal action on reporting of violence against women*, 11 July 2023.

<sup>473</sup> MEE, *Iranian press review: Taking off headscarf is akin to 'prostitution', says Mashhad imam*, 24 November 2022; BBCM, *Iran lifts suspension of paper over reporting on child killed in protests*, 28 December 2022.

<sup>474</sup> RFE/RL, *'Meat rebellion': Price hike triggers public anger in Iran*, 22 February 2023; BBCM, *Pro-reform newspaper resumes publication after Iran court lifts ban*, 4 March 2023.

<sup>475</sup> Die Zeit, *Nur Regimetreue können noch arbeiten*, 18 November 2022; BBCM, *Iran arrests reformist daily journalist*, 1 January 2023; Die Zeit, *Bekannter iranischer Dissident vorzeitig aus der Haft entlassen*, 2 January 2023; IranWire, *Iranian sports journalist handed 18-year prison sentence, wife says*, 10 January 2023; IranWire, *Iranian journalist Sultan Beygi arrested at Tehran airport, mother says*, 12 January 2023; BBCM, *Iran frees two journalists on bail*, 16 January 2023; BBCM, *Iran frees two political activists on bail*, 22 May 2023; The Guardian, *'You will be killed': Iran's female journalists speak out on brutal crackdown*, 30 May 2023; CPJ, *Iranian cartoonist Atena Farghadani detained on undisclosed charges*, 8 June 2023; RFE/RL, *Iranian journalist fined, sentenced to internal exile for reposting criticism of ex-lawmaker*, 25 July 2023.

<sup>476</sup> CPJ, *Iranian journalist Mansour Iranpour serving 1-year sentence in Kerman central prison*, 14 September 2022; BBCM, *Iran releases activist, photojournalist arrested during protests*, 20 December 2022; DW, *Iran: Journalist employed by reformist newspaper arrested*, 6 January 2023; BBCM, *Politics editor of Iran reformist daily reportedly arrested*, 6 January 2023; BBCM, *Iran arrests editor of moderate news website*, 7 January 2023; BBC News, *Iran protests: Death row reporter Mehdi Beik arrested*, 7 January 2023; Die Zeit, *Langjährige Bewährungsstrafe für renommierte iranische Fotografin*, 7 January 2023; VOA, *Reports: Iran arrests three female journalists amid protests*, 23 January 2023; Die Welt, *Schwester einer bekannten Journalistin festgenommen – Oppositionspolitiker fordert neue Verfassung*, 5 February 2023; BBCM, *Iran arrests female journalist covering unrest*, 5 February 2023; IranWire, *Convicted Iranian sports journalist Pirbornash released from detention*, 8 February 2023; BBCM, *Female journalist covering Iran unrest released on bail*, 12 February 2023; BBCM, *Iran arrests journalist covering school poisonings*, 5 March 2023; Freedom House, *Freedom in the world 2023. Country report Iran*, 9 March 2023, p. 7.

<sup>477</sup> Confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>478</sup> Iran International, *Iran intel services accuse CIA, foreigners of organizing protests*, 28 October 2022; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>479</sup> CPJ, *Iran's seizure of detained journalists' devices raises fears of fresh arrests, convictions*, 16 February 2023.

<sup>480</sup> Confidential source, June 2023.

such as flogging, fines, temporary bans on exercising their profession, bans on using certain means of communication, travel bans or community service. Pressure was also put on critical journalists through their family members.<sup>481</sup> Here are some examples of journalists who faced reprisals. This overview is by no means exhaustive.

One example concerns the journalist who was the first to report on the death of Mahsa Amini. On 16 September 2022, she took a picture of Mahsa Amini's father and grandmother hugging each other at the hospital and posted it on Twitter. Her arrest reportedly took place on 22 September 2022. Another example was a journalist who published an article on Mahsa Amini's funeral in the city of Saqqez. She was reportedly arrested on 29 September 2022. In late October 2022, the accusations levelled at both journalists by the authorities included colluding with the hostile US government and propaganda against the IRI.<sup>482</sup>

Another example concerns an Iranian blogger and former Voice of America (VOA) journalist. He had been arrested after returning to Iran from the United States in October 2016. He was subsequently sentenced to five years' imprisonment, partly on the grounds of Section 499 of the Penal Code (membership of an illegal organisation). On 21 March 2022, after serving his sentence, he left Iran. A few months later, he returned to the country and was arrested again on 13 November 2022. He said that his arrest was for spreading propaganda against the IRI. On 16 November 2022, he was released on bail. He received a pardon in February 2023 (see Section 1.2.2.5).<sup>483</sup>

#### 3.2.1.6 Artists and sportspeople

During the reporting period, artists and sportspeople who criticised the Iranian authorities faced reprisals including intimidation, arrest, travel bans and convictions.<sup>484</sup> A number of examples are given below. This overview is by no means exhaustive.

Since 11 July 2022, the well-known film director Jafar Panahi had been serving a six-year sentence in Evin prison, for offences including propaganda against the IRI.

<sup>481</sup> CPJ, *Number of jailed journalists spikes to new global record*, 14 December 2022; CPJ, *Names of journalists arrested in Iran's anti-state protests*, 9 January 2023; CPJ, *Iranian journalists face long prison terms, lashes, and harsh restrictions over protest coverage*, 11 January 2023; Hengaw, *Nazila Maroufian received a prison term, a fine, and a travel ban*, 29 January 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>482</sup> The Guardian, *Iran accuses journalists who reported Mahsa Amini's death of spying for CIA*, 29 October 2022; BBCM, *Iran sends detained journalists' cases to revolution court*, 26 April 2023; BBC News, *The journalists imprisoned for reporting the death that shook Iran*, 5 May 2023; The Guardian, *Supporters of jailed Iranian journalists call for trials to be held in public*, 26 May 2023; Al Jazeera, *Iran journalist faces trial over charges tied to Amini protests*, 29 May 2023; BBC News, *Iran tries female journalists who reported on Mahsa Amini's death*, 30 May 2023; The Guardian, *Iran begins trial of journalist who covered Mahsa Amini's death*, 30 May 2023.

<sup>483</sup> IranWire, *Journalist Kianoosh Sanjari: Instead of being welcomed I was imprisoned and tortured*, 18 August 2021; IranWire, *Exclusive: Journalist Kianoosh Sanjari on returning to Iran – and six years of hell*, 23 March 2022; VOA, *US sanctions Iranian broadcast officials for airing forced confessions*, 16 November 2022; CPJ, *Names of journalists arrested in Iran's anti-state protests*, 1 December 2022; RSF, *Iran's conditional pardons for journalists not real clemency, says RSF*, 15 March 2023; United for Iran, *Kianoush Sanjari*, <https://ipa.united4iran.org/en/prisoner/3231/>, accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>484</sup> The Guardian, *Top Iran footballer arrested at club for 'spreading propaganda against the state'*, 24 November 2022; The Independent, *Iran confiscates filmmaker's passport and bars him from participating in Indian film festival, report says*, 28 November 2022; Kayhan Life, *Why Iran's regime is cracking down on celebrities now*, 21 December 2022; BBCM, *Iranian authorities force footballer's family out of plane bound for Dubai*, 26 December 2022; BBCM, *Female Iranian comedian to serve two-year jail term*, 12 February 2023; BBCM, *Renowned Iranian filmmaker freed while on medical leave*, 13 February 2023; BBCM, *Iran to crack down on 'fake news' about suspected school poisonings*, 7 March 2023; BBCM, *Iran opens case against singer over song criticising mandatory hijab*, 27 August 2023.

On 15 October 2022, the Supreme Court overturned his conviction. On 3 February 2023, he was released on bail. He was given back his passport in April 2023.<sup>485</sup>

In October 2022, authorities arrested painter and writer Mehdi Bahman in Tehran after he gave an interview to Israeli television channel Channel 13. At the end of December 2022, a revolutionary court in Tehran sentenced him to death for espionage.<sup>486</sup>

Top climber Elnaz Rekabi competed without a headscarf at the Asian Championships in South Korea in October 2022. One of the reprisals she subsequently faced was the destruction of her parental home.<sup>487</sup>

In December 2022, authorities accused former professional footballer Amir Nasr Azadani of involvement in the deaths of members of the security forces during anti-government protests following the death of Mahsa Amini. In early January 2023, a court sentenced him to sixteen years' imprisonment under Section 279 of the Penal Code (enmity against God), five years under Section 499 of the Penal Code (membership of an illegal organisation) and five years under Section 610 of the Penal Code (threatening national security).<sup>488</sup>

#### 3.2.1.7

##### Students and academics

Professors and students active during the anti-government protests following the death of Mahsa Amini were temporarily, and in some cases permanently, expelled from universities. Some professors were forced to take early retirement. These measures therefore became part of the Iranian authorities' range of repressive tools. Less outspoken students had to sign statements expressing regret before being allowed to return to classes.<sup>489</sup> According to a group of academics, numerous female students were required to attend 'hijab training'.<sup>490</sup> Other students and academics faced arrests and convictions.<sup>491</sup>

#### 3.2.1.8

##### Critical citizens

According to one source, living in Iranian society involves constantly testing the boundaries of what can and cannot be said; rules of conduct are shifting and

<sup>485</sup> Trouw, *Terwijl Panahi's film de wereld over gaat, zit hij zelf in de gevangenis*, 26 January 2023; BBCM, *Dissident Iranian film director released on bail*, 3 February 2023; The Guardian, *Iranian film-maker Jafar Panahi released on bail after hunger strike*, 3 February 2023; NOS, *Prijswinnende Iraanse regisseur Jafar Panahi vrijgelaten uit gevangenis*, 4 February 2023; The Guardian, *Film-maker Jafar Panahi leaves Iran for first time in 14 years as travel ban lifted*, 26 April 2023; Die Welt, *Jafar Panahi reist wieder*, 27 April 2023.

<sup>486</sup> HRANA, *Painter and writer Mehdi Bahman arrested*, 14 October 2022; RFE/RL, *Iranian illustrator reportedly sentenced to death on unknown charges*, 30 December 2022; VOA, *Iranian writer sentenced to death*, 31 December 2022; Article 18, *Artist and champion of inter-religious dialogue 'sentenced to death'*, 5 January 2023; Trouw, *Mehdi Bahman vreest de doodstraf*, 12 January 2023; United for Iran, *Mehdi Bahman*, <https://ipa.united4iran.org/en/prisoner/8176/>, accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>487</sup> BBC News, *Elnaz Rekabi: Family home of Iranian climber demolished*, 3 December 2022; De Standaard, *'Ouderlijk huis Iraanse klimster zonder hoofddoek vernield'*, 5 December 2022; DW, *Sports climber Elnaz Rekabi prevented from leaving Iran*, 6 April 2023.

<sup>488</sup> IranWire, *Footballer Amir Nasr-Azadani in danger of execution*, 11 December 2022; Tehran Times, *"Iranian footballer sentenced to death: what Western media headlines 'forgot' to mention*, 25 December 2022; CHRI, *Iranian athletes killed, tortured, sentenced to death for supporting protests*, 4 January 2023; Het Parool, *Geen doodstraf, wel 16 jaar cel voor Iraanse profvoetballer Amir Nasr Azadani (26)*, 9 January 2023; Rudaw, *Iran sentences footballer to 16 years in prison*, 9 January 2023; BBCM, *Iran sentences three to death over attack on security forces*, 9 January 2023.

<sup>489</sup> RFE/RL, *Iranian students say they've been banned from campuses after protesting suspected poisonings*, 13 March 2023; Iran International, *Nearly 150 students denied right to study during Iranian uprising*, 1 August 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>490</sup> RFE/RL, *Iran forces female students to attend sessions on wearing hijab*, 27 February 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>491</sup> Iran International, *Prominent Iranian sociologist arrested after being barred from going to Yale*, 17 May 2022; IranWire, *Mass arrest of Iran's protesting students*, 2 October 2022; CHRI, *Students arrested and banished, professors fired in latest state crackdown in Iran*, 1 June 2023.

ambiguous; in addition, the social position of the person who makes critical comments is a factor of importance. The scope allowed for criticising the authorities is very limited, and virtually non-existent as regards the supreme leader.<sup>492</sup> During the reporting period, a number of critical citizens faced harassment, dismissal, interrogation, arrest, travel bans and conviction.<sup>493</sup>

### 3.2.1.9 Demonstrators

During the reporting period, demonstrations took place almost daily. In some cases, they were also violent (see also Section 3.2.2.1).<sup>494</sup> In September 2022, protests in response to the death of Mahsa Amini became large-scale (see Section 1.2.2). An unknown number of people were killed or injured in clashes with the security forces. Since by no means all the information was released, this is thought to be substantially underreported (see Section 1.2.2.2). Protesters faced intimidation, dismissal, interrogation, arrest, maltreatment, torture and conviction.<sup>495</sup> Nor did the authorities shy away from intimidating the family members of protesters, even those who had died.<sup>496</sup>

People who were injured in protests that ended violently often did not dare to seek medical attention, for fear of being arrested.<sup>497</sup> There were many examples of injured protesters being arrested in hospital and taken into custody. Medical staff were also arrested and convicted for treating injured protesters without informing the police or intelligence services.<sup>498</sup> According to one source, authorities also closed medical institutions for this reason.<sup>499</sup>

On 20 February 2023, HRANA reported that at least 799 protesters had been convicted up to that time.<sup>500</sup> In Tehran alone, around 400 people had been sentenced to prison terms of between two and ten years.<sup>501</sup> Some were given longer prison sentences. On 18 April 2023, for example, a revolutionary court sentenced eleven people to prison terms ranging from three to fifteen years in connection with the death of a Basij member in the town of Karaj in Alborz province. The heaviest sentence was for a doctor who said he provided medical assistance when he

<sup>492</sup> Confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>493</sup> BBCM, *Briefing: Iranian actor accused of 'treachery' after attacking Khamenei*, 22 December 2022; BBCM, *Adviser to outspoken Sunni cleric arrested in Iran's south-east*, 30 January 2023; Al Arabiya, *Aide to Sunni cleric arrested in Iran's Zahedan for 'manipulating' public opinion*, 31 January 2023; BBCM, *Briefing: Protests break out in Sunni regions of Iran amid cleric arrests*, 3 February 2023.

<sup>494</sup> Australian Government, *DFAT country information report Iran*, 24 July 2023, p. 24.

<sup>495</sup> BBCM, *Iran says 50 protesters given alternative sentences to avoid jail time*, 30 January 2023; De Standaard, *Folterpraktijken ontmoedigen verzet*, 2 February 2023; IranWire, *Iran protest crackdown: Teachers hit by dismissals, prosecutions, deaths*, 12 December 2022; IranWire, *The risky journey of a Baluch woman towards freedom*, 24 May 2023; KHRN, *Iran court sentences 16-year-old protester to two years in jail*, 10 July 2023.

<sup>496</sup> Al Jazeera, *Iran protests continue as UN 'concerned' at detainees' treatment*, 28 October 2022; Article 19, *Iran: Families forced to remain silent as second man executed*, 16 December 2022; Die Zeit, *"Zurück an der Uni war er ein anderer Mensch. Sein Blick war leer"*, 19 December 2022; HRANA, *Escalating intimidation targets families of 2022 protest victims in Iran*, 21 June 2023; KHRN, *Iran court sentences father of slain protester to prison, lashes*, 4 July 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>497</sup> Iran International, *Wounded Iran protesters avoid hospitalization in fear of arrest*, 11 October 2022; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>498</sup> CHRI, *Iran protests: Doctors treating wounded protesters face deadly state violence*, 31 October 2022; The Economist, *Shirin Ebadi on the legal obstacles Iran's protesters face*, 16 November 2022; The Guardian, *Iranian forces shooting at faces and genitals of female protesters, medics say*, 8 December 2022; France 24, *Iranian medical staff face death threats, arrest and interrogation for treating injured protesters*, 18 January 2023; de Volkskrant, *Iraanse troepen mikken bewust op gezicht van vrouwelijke demonstranten: 'Ik mis mijn mooie ogen'*, 23 January 2023; Rudaw, *Iran sentences Kurdish paramedic to 90 months in prison: Monitor*, 7 May 2023; confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>499</sup> Confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>500</sup> DIS, *Iran. Protests 2022-2023*, 1 March 2023, p. 12.

<sup>501</sup> CNBC, *Iran issues first known death sentence linked to recent protests*, 14 November 2022; Die Zeit, *400 Demonstrierende müssen für mehrere Jahre in Haft*, 13 December 2022; BBCM, *Iran hands five-year sentence to woman for protest calls*, 20 December 2022; United for Iran, *Somayeh Khamseh*, <https://ipa.united4iran.org/en/prisoner/8742/>, accessed 12 September 2023.

encountered an injured member of the Basij.<sup>502</sup> In October 2022, the head of the judiciary, Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei, called for swift convictions of those arrested to date for involvement in the demonstrations. He instructed the judges to show no mercy and hand out severe penalties.<sup>503</sup>

In countering the anti-government protests in response to the death of Mahsa Amini, the authorities are using the death penalty as a tool of repression, ostensibly to instil fear.<sup>504</sup> On 10 January 2023, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights commented on this situation: 'The weaponisation of criminal procedures to punish people for exercising their basic rights – such as those participating in or organising demonstrations – amounts to state-sanctioned killing.'<sup>505</sup> Since mid-November 2022, the authorities sentenced at least 25 protesters to death under Section 279 of the Penal Code (enmity against God), Section 286 of the Penal Code (spreading corruption on earth) or Section 287 of the Penal Code (armed rebellion). The authorities held them responsible for offences such as arson, vandalism and murder.<sup>506</sup> Some of them were convicted by the authorities for allegedly taking a leading role in the protests. The threshold for this judgement appeared to be very low and could even be based on having videos and photographs of the protests on their mobile phones or forwarding a call to demonstrate on social media.<sup>507</sup> According to various sources, those convicted were not given a fair trial and confessions were obtained under duress.<sup>508</sup> In December 2022, IHRNGO reported that at least one hundred protesters faced the death penalty.<sup>509</sup> According to one source, at least 75 protesters were at risk of execution. This group consisted of 73 men and 2 women. Five of them were minors. The average age was around 25.<sup>510</sup>

The Supreme Court referred at least ten cases back to the lower courts which had issued the death sentences.<sup>511</sup> On 29 March 2023, the lawyer representing Sahand

<sup>502</sup> BBCM, *Iran issues prison sentences over killing of militiaman*, 18 April 2023; Iran International, *Iran issues heavy sentences to protesters accused of killing agent*, 18 April 2023; Iran International, *An Iranian doctor and his wife receive long sentences for protesting*, 23 April 2023; BBCM, *Iran pardons two, sentences several to banishment in case of slain militiaman*, 21 August 2023; AP News, *Iran sentences 8 to prison over paramilitary's death during last year's nationwide protests*, 23 August 2023.

<sup>503</sup> Al Jazeera, *Iran top judge orders harsh sentences for 'main riot elements'*, 13 October 2022; Iran International, *Top Iran judge wants swift 'justice' for protestors*, 19 December 2022; confidential source, October 2022.

<sup>504</sup> Euronews, *'Killing machine': Iran ramps up executions to 'instil fear'*, 13 April 2023; CNN, *Iran executions up 75% as Tehran seeks to 'instill fear' in protesters, rights groups say*, 14 April 2023; OHCHR, *Iran: UN experts condemn recent executions, urge moratorium on death penalty*, 9 May 2023; confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>505</sup> UN News, *Iran: UN rights chief Türk warns against further 'state-sanctioned killing'*, 10 January 2023.

<sup>506</sup> The Guardian, *Iran issues first death sentence over protests*, 14 November 2022; BBCM, *Analysis: The charges Iran uses to hang protesters*, 14 December 2022; BBC News, *Who are the protesters facing execution in Iran?*, 15 December 2022; HRANA, *58 citizens sentenced to death or under the impending threat of death sentence*, 21 December 2022; RFE/RL, *Iranian actor Mohammadi among five handed death sentences*, 21 December 2022; BBCM, *Iran, Luxembourg ministers speak as grand duchy resident faces execution*, 22 December 2022; BBCM, *Court overturns death sentence for Iranian doctor, says sister*, 28 December 2022; The Guardian, *Actor, doctor, engineer: stories of Iranians sentenced to death over killing at protest*, 30 December 2022; BBCM, *Iran upholds two death sentences over militiaman's death*, 3 January 2023; BBCM, *Iran sentences two teenage protesters to death*, 3 January 2023; BBCM, *Iran sentences another teenager to death over protests*, 5 January 2023; Trouw, *Wie zijn de Iraanse jongeren die de doodstraf boven het hoofd hangt*, 7 January 2023; BBC News, *Iran protests: 15 minutes to defend yourself against the death penalty*, 18 January 2023; HRANA, *Update on legal status of death-row protesters ten months after the 2022 nationwide protests*, 31 May 2023.

<sup>507</sup> IranWire, *Teen protester on death row "severely beaten" in Zahedan prison*, 5 June 2023; confidential source, January 2023.

<sup>508</sup> Article 19, *Iran: Families forced to remain silent as second man executed*, 16 December 2022; Iran International, *Iran protester on death row 'confessed under torture': Attorney*, 19 December 2022.

<sup>509</sup> Amnesty International, *Iran: List of individuals at risk of execution in connection with nationwide protests*, 16 December 2022; IHRNGO, *At least 100 protesters facing execution, death penalty charges or sentences; at least 476 protesters killed*, 27 December 2022; IranWire, *Crowd gather at Iranian prison to protest "imminent executions"*, 9 January 2023.

<sup>510</sup> Confidential source, January 2023.

<sup>511</sup> The Guardian, *Iran's supreme court accepts protester's appeal against death sentence*, 31 December 2022; IFP, *Iran Supreme Court rejects death sentences in Rouhollah Ajamian case for "faulty investigation"*, 3 January 2023;

Noor Mohammadzadeh stated that a revolutionary court had commuted the death sentence to five years' imprisonment under Section 610 of the Penal Code (threatening public order), one year's imprisonment under Section 618 of the Penal Code (disturbing public order) and ten years' internal exile to Kerman province.<sup>512</sup>

The first execution related to the protests took place in Tehran on 8 December 2022. The man convicted was 22-year-old Mohsen Shekari. A revolutionary court in Tehran had sentenced him to death on 20 November 2022 under Section 279 of the Penal Code (enmity against God). The charges against him included pulling a knife and blocking a main road.<sup>513</sup> The second execution in relation to the protests was on 12 December 2022 in the city of Mashhad in Razavi Khorasan province. The case involved 23-year-old Majidreza Rahnavard, who was publicly hanged from a construction crane. He had been arrested on 19 November 2022 and subsequently convicted under Section 286 of the Penal Code (spreading corruption on earth). The charges against him included stabbing to death two members of the Basij on 17 November 2022.<sup>514</sup> Two more protest-related executions took place on 7 January 2023, those of 21-year-old Mohammad Mehdi Karami and 39-year-old Seyyed Mohammad Hosseini. A revolutionary court in Karaj had sentenced both of them to death on 5 December 2022 for spreading corruption on earth and enmity against God. The charges against them included involvement in the death of a member of the Basij on 3 November 2022 in Karaj.<sup>515</sup> On 19 May 2023, the judiciary reported three other protest-related executions. Three protesters, aged 30, 36 and 37 respectively, were executed; the authorities said they had been involved in the deaths of a police officer and two members of the Basij.<sup>516</sup>

Since the outbreak of anti-government protests in September 2022, a number of protesters have fled to other countries such as Iraq or Türkiye.<sup>517</sup> According to various sources, the matter of whether participants in demonstrations in Iran are still subject to criminal prosecution when they return from abroad if no criminal charges were initially filed varies on a case-by-case basis. Factors that can increase the risk of prosecution include the ethnicity of the demonstrator, the number of times someone took part in demonstrations, whether someone called on others to demonstrate or whether someone has videos of demonstrations on their phone.<sup>518</sup>

NOS, *Doodstraf Iraanse arts geschrap, 'maar we zijn pas opgelucht als hij vrij is'*, 4 January 2023; HRANA, *Update on legal status of death-row protesters ten months after the 2022 nationwide protests*, 31 May 2023.

<sup>512</sup> IranWire, *Iranian protester's death sentence overturned, replaced by imprisonment*, 30 March 2023; BBCM, *Iran court overturns protester's death sentence*, 30 March 2023; United for Iran, *Sahand Nour Mohammadzadeh*, <https://ipa.united4iran.org/en/prisoner/7629/>, accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>513</sup> BBC News, *Mohsen Shekari: Iran carries out first execution over protests*, 8 December 2022; Al Jazeera, *Iran conducts first protest-related execution*, 8 December 2022; IranWire, *Iran carries out first execution related to protests*, 8 December 2022; United for Iran, *Mohsen Shekari*, <https://ipa.united4iran.org/en/prisoner/7833/>, accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>514</sup> Iran International, *Iran hangs second protester in public, in less than a week*, 12 December 2022; BBC News, *Majidreza Rahnavard: Iran carries out second execution over protests*, 12 December 2022; The Guardian, *Iran carries out second execution linked to nationwide protests*, 12 December 2022; MEE, *Iran publicly executes second protester after 'a show trial'*, 12 December 2022.

<sup>515</sup> Iran International, *Iran protester on death row 'confessed under torture': Attorney*, 19 December 2022; CNN, *Iran executes karate champion and volunteer children's coach amid crackdown on protests*, 7 January 2023; BBCM, *Iran carries out more executions over protests*, 7 January 2023; Hengaw, *The death sentences of Mohammad Mehdi Karami and Seyed Mohammad Hosseini were carried out*, 7 January 2023; de Volkskrant, *Iran executeert opnieuw betogers vanwege 'corruptie op aarde'*, Hoekstra ontbiedt ambassadeur, 9 January 2023; The Independent, *Iran's death row victims from barista to karate champion as brutal executions continue*, 14 January 2023.

<sup>516</sup> The Guardian, *Iran expected to execute three protesters over killing of police officers*, 12 May 2023; Iran International, *Protests and condemnation ahead of Esfahan house executions*, 15 May 2023; BBCM, *Iran executes three protesters for allegedly killing militiamen*, 19 May 2023; The Independent, *Iran executes 3 men over violence during last year's anti-government protests*, 19 May 2023; The Independent, *Iran says it executed head of human trafficking network as alarm over other executions continue*, 20 May 2023.

<sup>517</sup> The Guardian, *Escape from Iran: protesters regroup in Iraq after perilous journey*, 19 December 2022; Iran International, *Canada eying new ways to help Iranians fleeing from regime*, 27 February 2023.

<sup>518</sup> Confidential source, June 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

Another factor is whether someone committed an offence during a demonstration, such as picking up a weapon or committing an act of vandalism.<sup>519</sup> Other sources say there is an increased risk of arrest on returning to Iran if the authorities identified someone prior to them leaving the country.<sup>520</sup> If someone helped organise demonstrations or promoted them continuously on social media, they run a higher risk of arrest and standing trial.<sup>521</sup>

### 3.2.1.10 Internet freedom

Internet freedom came under further pressure during the reporting period due to an increase in restrictions on the internet and intensified monitoring by the authorities. The authorities sought to tighten their grip on internet traffic through temporary and permanent internet restrictions, especially after the outbreak of the anti-government protests in response to the death of Mahsa Amini. In order to achieve this, they shut down or slowed internet access for shorter or longer periods in parts of the country.<sup>522</sup> In addition, fewer international websites and applications were accessible since these protests erupted. For instance, the authorities blocked access to Instagram and WhatsApp from 21 September 2022.<sup>523</sup> Other social media platforms remained blocked, including Facebook, Signal, Telegram, X (formerly known as Twitter) and YouTube.<sup>524</sup> Since October 2022, the Iranian authorities also appeared to be increasingly sophisticated in blocking virtual private networks (VPNs), making it increasingly difficult to circumvent internet restrictions.<sup>525</sup> The Internet User Protection Bill, which can further restrict the internet and criminalise certain activities, such as the use of VPNs, had yet to be put to a parliamentary vote by the end of the reporting period.<sup>526</sup> However, many parts of this bill had already been implemented by the Supreme Council of Cyberspace (SCC).<sup>527</sup>

In addition to the internet restrictions, the authorities are widely deploying trolls and bots to disrupt the flow of information about the anti-government protests in response to Mahsa Amini's death.<sup>528</sup> Iran also took rapid steps towards setting up its own National Information Network (NIN), an Iranian intranet system based on the Chinese model. The aim is for this system to function separately from the worldwide web.<sup>529</sup> In April 2023, the Minister of Information and Communication Technology announced that the NIN was 60% ready.<sup>530</sup>

<sup>519</sup> Confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>520</sup> Confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>521</sup> CGRS, *Iran. Surveillance van de diaspora door de Iraanse autoriteiten*, 10 May 2023, p. 36; confidential source, March 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>522</sup> Trouw, *Stiekem wordt Elon Musks Starlink Iran ingesmokkeld*, 28 December 2022; Die Zeit, *Iran schränkt Internetzugang ein*, 19 January 2023.

<sup>523</sup> Reuters, *As unrest grows, Iran restricts access to Instagram, WhatsApp*, 21 September 2022; BBCM, *Iran's president 'deactivates' his Instagram account*, 5 January 2023; Die Zeit, *WhatsApp-Nutzer sollen Sperren umgehen können*, 6 January 2023.

<sup>524</sup> RFE/RL, *Users say Iranian authorities blocking verification codes on cell phones*, 18 August 2022; WINEP, *Social media in Iran's protests: A new public sphere?*, 6 October 2022; Amnesty International, *Report 2022/23*, 28 March 2023, p. 197.

<sup>525</sup> Article 19, *Iran: New tactics for digital repression as protests continue*, 17 November 2022; confidential source, April 2023; confidential source, June 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>526</sup> IranWire, *Are these the dying days of Iran's open internet*, 5 January 2022; Atlantic Council, *The internet has no place in Khamenei's vision for Iran's future*, 25 July 2022; Article 19, *Iran: Cyberspace authorities 'silently' usher in draconian internet bill*, 9 September 2022; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>527</sup> Iran International, *Iran further limiting access to western social media*, 20 August 2022; Article 19, *Iran: Cyberspace authorities 'silently' usher in draconian internet bill*, 9 September 2022; RFE/RL, *Iran accused of secretly implementing controversial draft internet bill*, 9 September 2022.

<sup>528</sup> Vox, *Why the protests in Iran are so hard to understand*, 12 December 2022; Wired, *The scorched-earth tactics of Iran's cyber army*, 21 March 2023.

<sup>529</sup> RFE/RL, *Iran to work with China to create National Internet System*, 4 September 2020; IranWire, *Iranians in protest zones can't get online. This is what they see instead*, 16 May 2022; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>530</sup> ISW, *Iran update, April 19, 2023*, 19 April 2023; France 24, *As net tightens, Iranians pushed to take up homegrown apps*, 14 May 2023.

The authorities intensively monitor online activities in Iran. According to various sources, the authorities are attempting to monitor social media in a variety of ways, for example by using spy software to track activity on Telegram, Clubhouse, Instagram, X (formerly known as Twitter) and TikTok (see also Section 3.1.2.2).<sup>531</sup> This was evident during the anti-government protests in response to Mahsa Amini's death, when large numbers of threatening messages were sent to Instagram pages, for example telling the users to stop posting photographs of the demonstrations. Other posts told users that they had to provide their password to access a private page.<sup>532</sup>

One government agency that has been monitoring internet and social media since 2011 is the cyber police (FATA).<sup>533</sup> According to the authorities, FATA's capacity was greatly expanded during the reporting period.<sup>534</sup> In addition, the CIOC (see Section 1.1.3.9) monitors social media on a systematic and ongoing basis. This organisation employs large numbers of people to monitor activists on social media. The capacity of the security services to monitor internet traffic has increased. Ownership of the internet infrastructure is largely in the hands of the Revolutionary Guard. Private internet service providers are subject to the approval of the Telecommunication Company of Iran (TCI) and all data traffic passes through its filters. Ownership of TCI is largely in the hands of the Revolutionary Guard. A similar construction applies to telephone communication.<sup>535</sup>

It is believed that the more active a person is on social media, the more likely the Revolutionary Guard is to have a file on them. According to many political prisoners who have been released, most of the content activists publish on social media is screened, stored and used in interrogations. The monitoring of activists on social media depends on their reach. This includes factors such as the content they produce, how many followers they have, how many people view their posts, and their political and social prominence.<sup>536</sup>

### 3.2.1.11 Criminal prosecution for online activities

Convictions based on statements made on social media are commonplace. During the reporting period, several people were arrested and convicted for their activities on social media.<sup>537</sup> This included posting images and messages criticising the Islamic Republic of Iran, its supreme leader and the repressive measures during the anti-

<sup>531</sup> BBCM, *Police arrest 'slogan-writing team' in southern Iran*, 10 January 2023; Article 18, *Christians among minority groups targeted with spyware*, 5 May 2023; BBCM, *Jailed Iranian activist released on bail*, 21 May 2023; confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>532</sup> Confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>533</sup> FATA is the Iranian abbreviation of *Fazayeh toolid va Tabadol Etela'at* (literally: Sphere for the Production and Exchange of Information); The Iran Primer, *Profiles: Iran's intelligence agencies*, 5 April 2023; Iran International, *Iran cyber-police threatens beauty salons, gyms over hijab*, 16 May 2023.

<sup>534</sup> Landinfo et al., *Iran: Criminal procedures and documents*, 1 December 2021, p. 20; Iran International, *Iran allocates 2% of bank transaction fees to Cyber Police*, 7 March 2022; Iran International, *Iran cyber-police threatens beauty salons, gyms over hijab*, 16 May 2023; confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>535</sup> MEI, *Mahsa Amini and the future of internet repression in Iran*, 24 January 2023; Iran International, *UK, Canada, Russia-based firms helping Iran spy on mobile phones*, 1 March 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>536</sup> The Intercept, *Hacked documents: How Iran can track and control protesters' phones*, 28 October 2022; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>537</sup> HRANA, *Dance coach jailed for publishing pictures of dancers*, 11 July 2022; The Washington Post, *Iran's protests pose a challenge for Washington and Silicon Valley*, 12 October 2022; HRANA, *Amir-Emad Mirmirani sentenced to six years*, 26 December 2022; RFE/RL, *Leading Iranian digital rights activist says he's been sentenced to six years in prison*, 26 December 2022; BBCM, *Iran arrests two for links with 'hostile networks on social media'*, 23 March 2023; USDoS, *Iran 2022 international religious freedom report*, 15 May 2023, p. 25; BBCM, *Iran police arrest members of Instagram 'fashion network'*, 24 May 2023; IranWire, *The ordeal of an Instagram page admin in Iranian dungeons*, 1 June 2023; BBCM, *Briefing: Iran actor forcefully detained after chiding hijab police*, 16 July 2023; The Guardian, *Iranian academic will appeal against prison sentence for criticising government*, 16 July 2023; HRANA, *Tehran resident Leila Ziafar arrested for opposing compulsory hijab*, 20 July 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

government protests in response to the death of Mahsa Amini.<sup>538</sup> Criminal prosecution in connection with online activities can take place under many sections of the Penal Code including Section 262 (insulting the Prophet), Section 286 (spreading corruption on earth), Section 500 (propaganda against the IRI), Section 513 (insulting the sanctities of Islam), Section 514 (insulting the supreme leader), Section 610 (threatening national security), Section 618 (disturbing public order), Section 639 (encouraging debauchery) and Section 640 (publishing or distributing material that violates public morality). Penalties for these offences include fines, flogging, imprisonment and, in some cases, even the death penalty.<sup>539</sup>

During the reporting period, the Iranian authorities worked on legislation that would allow extra-high penalties to be imposed on individuals with more than 400,000 followers on social media. This is stipulated in a bill that covers expressing opinions on social media platforms. That bill provides for prison sentences of up to fifteen years and heavy fines.<sup>540</sup>

Examples of individuals who faced arrests and/or convictions for online activities are given below. This overview is by no means exhaustive.

Since it was posted on Instagram on 28 September 2022, Shervin Hajipour's song *Baraye* ('For ...') became the anthem of the protests. MOIS staff arrested Hajipour within 48 hours of him posting the song on Instagram. On 4 October 2022, he was released on bail. As part of that process, he was given a travel ban. On 5 February 2023, he won a Grammy Award.<sup>541</sup>

Around 1 November 2022, the authorities arrested two bloggers after their video went viral on social media. The video showed them dancing in front of the Freedom Tower in Tehran. Designed by an architect who was also responsible for some of the buildings at the Bahá'í World Centre (see Section 3.2.3.12), this tower dates from 1971. In the 1970s, it was known as the Shahyad Tower, the 'tower in memory of the Shah'. The video was accompanied by the song *Chetori mishe* (in English: How is it possible?) by rapper Amir Tataloo. Both the setting and the song had political connotations. In addition, women are not permitted to dance in public, with or without a man. Moreover, the woman in the video was not wearing a headscarf and was therefore in violation of the dress code. Iranian activists saw this video as a symbol of the anti-government protests. The authorities accused the two bloggers of encouraging the protests on Instagram. A revolutionary court in Tehran reportedly sentenced them to a total of ten years and six months in prison, a two-year travel ban and a two-year ban on posting videos on social media.<sup>542</sup>

<sup>538</sup> BBCM, *Iran arrests four over 'disturbing the public mind' on social media*, 7 January 2023. DIS, *Iran. Protests 2022-2023*, 1 March 2023, p. 13; confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>539</sup> IHRNGO, *Two men sentenced to death for "insulting the Prophet" in Iran*, 22 April 2021; IranWire, *Anger mounts as arrests for online activity continue to rise*, 4 November 2021; IHRNGO, *Iran Human Rights warns of imminent risk of protester executions/ At least 3 children facing death penalty charges*, 30 November 2022; BBCM, *Iran arrests one over 'desecration of sanctions'*, 27 June 2023.

<sup>540</sup> Iran International, *New law in Iran to criminalize critical public comments*, 27 January 2023; IranWire, *Islamic Republic of Iran to criminalize comments on social networks*, 31 January 2023; MEMO, *Iran may criminalise social media comments*, 1 February 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>541</sup> RFE/RL, *Iranian singer accused of spreading anti-government propaganda*, 11 October 2022; de Volkskrant, *Shervin Hajipour schreef 'Baraye', het lijklied van de tegenstanders van het ayatollah-regime in Iran; en werd daarom opgepakt*, 12 October 2022; The New York Times, *'Baraye', the anthem of Iran's protest movement, wins a grammy*, 5 February 2023; The Independent, *Iran singer who faces prison wins Grammy for protest anthem*, 6 February 2023; Euronews, *Iran protest song 'Baraye' wins new Grammy Award for sparking social change*, 7 February 2023; RFE/RL, *Iran's protest anthem played at White House Norouz celebration*, 20 March 2023.

<sup>542</sup> IranWire, *Iranian couple handed long-term prison sentences for posting dance video*, 30 January 2023; The Guardian, *Iranian couple filmed dancing in Tehran are jailed for 10 years*, 31 January 2023; HRANA, *Two Instagram bloggers sentenced to a total of 21 years in prison*, 31 January 2023; NOS, *Iraans stel moet ruim 10*

Furthermore, on 30 October 2022, the authorities arrested rapper Toomaj Salehi after he posted videos on Instagram that showed him taking part in a demonstration. The authorities placed him in solitary confinement for months. According to his relatives, he was not given medical treatment for the injuries he sustained during his arrest. On 27 November 2022, the authorities convicted him on charges including Section 286 of the Penal Code (spreading corruption on earth), an offence that can carry the death penalty. On 2 July 2023, the final hearing took place in a closed session at the court in Isfahan. One of his lawyers announced on 10 July 2023 that he had been sentenced to six years and three months in prison, a two-year travel ban, a two-year ban on producing music or singing, and attendance at a two-year behavioural course.<sup>543</sup>

On 9 November 2022, well-known actress Taraneh Alidoosti posted a picture of herself without a headscarf on Instagram. She also displayed a sign that read 'Women, life, freedom'. Following the execution of a protester, she also posted a critical statement on Instagram. Her arrest followed on 17 December 2022. According to Iranian media, she was arrested for 'spreading false information and publishing provocative material'. On 4 January 2023, she was released on bail.<sup>544</sup>

On 26 November 2022, officers in plain clothes arrested an Assyrian woman in her home. She had posted messages on Instagram expressing her support for the anti-government protests in response to the death of Mahsa Amini. The authorities charged her under Section 500 of the Penal Code (propaganda against the IRI). On 31 December 2022, she was released on bail for the sum of 500 million toman (about 9,400 euros).<sup>545</sup> It is not known whether she was subsequently convicted.

On 4 January 2023, authorities arrested the celebrity chef Navab Ebrahimi. According to some, his arrest was linked to an Instagram video he posted on 3 January 2023, in which he made an Iranian minced meat dish. The name of this dish (*kotlet*) is used by some Iranians as a joking reference to the body of General Qassem Soleimani, who was killed in a drone attack on 3 January 2020. Every year on his death anniversary, *#Kotlet* goes viral on social media.<sup>546</sup> On 17 January 2023, the chef was released on bail.<sup>547</sup>

*jaar de cel in voor dansen op straat*, 31 January 2023; BBCM, *Iran judiciary outlet denies couple sentenced to 10 years after public dancing*, 1 February 2023; CNN, *Iranian couple handed prison sentence for dancing in the streets*, 1 February 2023; Al Arabiya, *Iran confirms prison sentence for couple filmed dancing in Tehran*, 2 February 2023.

<sup>543</sup> Iran International, *Hearing session of Iranian dissident rapper held in Esfahan*, 3 July 2023; RFE/RL, *Iran sentences rapper Salehi to lengthy prison sentence for supporting protests*, 10 July 2023; HRANA, *Protest singer Toomaj Salehi sentenced to six years and three months, faces harsh restrictions*, 10 July 2023.

<sup>544</sup> The Independent, *Taraneh Alidoosti: Top Iranian actress poses without headscarf*, 10 November 2022; The Independent, *Iranian actors arrested for removing their headscarves*, 22 November 2022; BBC News, *Taraneh Alidoosti: Top Iran actress who supported protests arrested*, 17 December 2022; de Volkskrant, *Haar misdaad: een Instagram-post over een executie*, 22 December 2022; BBCM, *Iran releases dissident actress on bail*, 4 January 2023; Trouw, *Iran laat actrice op borgtocht vrij*, 5 January 2023; de Volkskrant, *Op het tweede gezicht*, 7 January 2023.

<sup>545</sup> API, *API concerned by reports of arrest of Assyrian woman in Iran*, 29 December 2022; Syriac Press, *Assyrian activist Bianka Zaia released by Iranian authorities after five-week detention*, 3 January 2023; Article 18, *Iranian-Assyrian woman protester released on bail after month in prison*, 6 January 2023; Bonbast, *Iranian rial exchange rates*, [www.bonbast.com](http://www.bonbast.com), accessed 12 September 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>546</sup> The Guardian, *Iran arrests celebrity chef in crackdown on protests*, 5 January 2023; The Independent, *Navab Ebrahimi: Iran arrests celebrity chef for 'something to do with his Instagram story'*, 6 January 2023; The National, *Iran jails celebrity chef who posted cutlets video on Soleimani anniversary*, 6 January 2023; Euronews, *Iran: Why are protesters risking jail to tweet about meat patties*, 6 January 2023.

<sup>547</sup> RFE/RL, *Iranian celebrity chef released on bail, charges against him still not known*, 17 January 2023; Kurdistan 24, *Iran releases celebrity chef held in crackdown: activists*, 17 January 2023.

Five teenage girls in Tehran recorded a dance video on International Women’s Day on 8 March 2023 in which they were not wearing headscarves. This video quickly went viral on TikTok and other social media. The authorities arrested the girls and detained them for 48 hours. At the location where they had shot the dance video, they were made to record another video apologising for their action.<sup>548</sup>

On 9 March 2023, the authorities arrested a blogger from the town of Orumiyyeh in West Azerbaijan province, who had posted on Instagram about the school poisonings. No information about the charges is known.<sup>549</sup>

On 25 April 2023, the cyber police reported that it had arrested forty Instagram page administrators in Tehran for posting lewd photos of women. No information about the charges is known.<sup>550</sup>

### 3.2.1.12 Facial recognition technology

The authorities appeared to make increasing use of facial recognition technology to identify individuals, for example during demonstrations.<sup>551</sup> Iranian police also used this technology on the roads to check whether female occupants were wearing a headscarf in the car. Since 2020, police have been sending text messages to warn road users who do not comply with the dress code.<sup>552</sup> After an initial warning, a fine may be imposed. As part of this process, someone’s national identity card may be withheld or blocked until the fine is paid. This prevents the cardholder from making use of all kinds of social services. After the third text message, the police can impound the owner’s car, a measure which often has far-reaching economic consequences for those involved.<sup>553</sup>

Iran also appeared to adopt facial recognition technology on a larger scale since the morality police became less active on the streets in September 2022.<sup>554</sup> Since the death of Mahsa Amini and the subsequent protests, the country began pursuing a policy of less visible enforcement. In December 2022, the United States imposed sanctions on a Chinese company for selling surveillance systems and facial recognition software to the Revolutionary Guard.<sup>555</sup> No reports that the Iranian authorities are also using facial recognition technology abroad are known.

<sup>548</sup> RFE/RL, *Viral Iran dance video inspires imitators to defy regime*, 14 March 2023; Insider, *Teenagers in Iran danced to a Selena Gomez song in a viral TikTok. They were detained and forced to record an apology video in the same spot*, 14 March 2023; ND, *Dansen voor Iraanse meisjes na arrestatie*, 18 March 2023.

<sup>549</sup> IranWire, *Iranian blogger arrested over comments on school poisonings*, 10 March 2023; BBCM, *Iran arrests influencer over ‘poisonings’ ‘rumours’*, 10 March 2023; RFE/RL, *Iranian blogger arrested for protest content on Instagram account*, 10 March 2023.

<sup>550</sup> HRANA, *Forty administrators of Instagram pages arrested in Tehran*, 25 April 2023; BBCM, *Briefing: Iran intensifies hijab crackdown with arrests, threats*, 25 April 2023.

<sup>551</sup> CBC, *Iranian government’s digital control tactics are a sophisticated form of repression, says researcher*, 10 February 2023; OHCHR, *Iran must end crackdown against protesters and uphold rights of all Iranians, especially women and girls, fact-finding mission says*, 5 July 2023; confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>552</sup> Trouw, *Politie begint weer met controle op hoofddoek in auto*, 3 January 2023; BBCM, *Iran interior minister signals support for dress code text messages*, 6 January 2023; BBCM, *Iran police confirm resumption of Islamic dress code warnings*, 28 January 2023.

<sup>553</sup> DIS, *Iran. Protests 2022-2023*, 1 March 2023, p. 20; FAZ, *Die Augen des Regimes*, 22 May 2023; The Independent, *Headscarf crackdown in Iran sees women sacked and their cars confiscated*, 26 July 2023.

<sup>554</sup> Context, *Mahsa Amini: facial recognition to hunt down hijab rebels in Iran*, 23 September 2022; Data News, *Iran gebruikt gezichtsherkenning om ‘hoofddoekrebellen’ op te sporen*, 23 September 2022; The Guardian, *Iranian police plan to use smart cameras to identify ‘violators of hijab law’*, 8 April 2023.

<sup>555</sup> NBC News, *Chinese firm selling surveillance tech to Iran comes under scrutiny*, 1 December 2022; NBC News, *U.S. sanctions Chinese firm selling video surveillance tech to Iran*, 15 December 2022; Iran International, *US sanctions Chinese video surveillance firm supplying Iran*, 16 December 2022.

### 3.2.2 *Freedom of assembly and association*

#### 3.2.2.1 Freedom of association

Although freedom of association and the right to demonstrate are enshrined in the Constitution, demonstrations are only allowed if the participants are unarmed and do not violate the fundamental principles of Islam or if, for example, they are not considered offensive by the supreme leader. In practice, a system has developed whereby the authorities are required to give prior permission for any demonstration.<sup>556</sup>

During the reporting period, there were almost daily strikes or demonstrations in various economic sectors, in addition to education, agriculture, petrochemicals and public transport. These demonstrations were linked to issues such as the poor economic situation, water shortages, working conditions and delayed payment or even non-payment of salaries.<sup>557</sup> These were mainly socio-economic in nature, but sometimes took on a more political character. The authorities provided space for strikes and peaceful demonstrations unless these gained wider traction whereby various groups in society appeared to unite and explicitly oppose the Islamic Republic and/or its supreme leader. In such cases, the authorities often intervened violently.<sup>558</sup> This happened, for example, in demonstrations in Khuzestan province between 23 and 31 May 2022, following the collapse of a building in the city of Abadan.<sup>559</sup> The authorities also intervened harshly in anti-government protests following the death of Mahsa Amini (see Section 1.2.2.2).

#### 3.2.2.2 Freedom of assembly

Freedom of assembly is also enshrined in the Constitution. Political parties, associations and religious organisations are permitted, provided that they do not violate the principles of freedom, sovereignty, national unity or Islamic criteria, and do not challenge Iran's Islamic system.<sup>560</sup> The Iranian authorities are arbitrary and opportunistic in their application of these principles. In practice, there are no independent political parties or trade unions.<sup>561</sup> The authorities are quick to characterise organised activities as political and a threat to national security. This applies, for example, to language lessons in Kurdish (see Section 3.1.1.2) and to environmental protection (see Section 3.2.1.4).

### 3.2.3 *Freedom of religion and belief*

In Iran, the Twelver Shia school of law (*jafari*) is dominant. In addition, Iran respects the four major Sunni schools of law (*hanafi*, *shafi'i*, *maliki* and *hanbali*) and the Zaidite Shia school of law. The Constitution also recognises Christianity (see Section 3.2.3.2), Judaism (see Section 3.2.3.18) and Zoroastrianism (see Section 3.2.3.19).<sup>562</sup>

<sup>556</sup> Freedom House, *Freedom in the world 2023. Country report Iran*, 9 March 2023, p. 11; LTO, *Ein Wächterrat voller Macht*, 26 October 2022; USDoS, *Iran 2022 human rights report*, 20 March 2023, p. 39; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>557</sup> BBCM, *Iran retirees hold rallies as livelihood grievances rise*, 26 February 2023; BBCM, *Iran retirees renew protests over economic hardships*, 1 March 2023; BBCM, *Iran's telecom retirees protest at economic conditions*, 6 March 2023.

<sup>558</sup> Confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>559</sup> CBS News, *Iran official faces angry protests as building collapse death toll climbs*, 31 May 2022; Amnesty International, *"They are shooting brazenly." Iran's militarized response to May 2022 protests*, 3 August 2022, pp. 18-19.

<sup>560</sup> Freedom House, *Freedom in the world 2023. Country report Iran*, 9 March 2023, p. 5; USDoS, *Iran 2022 human rights report*, 20 March 2023, p. 40.

<sup>561</sup> Freedom House, *Freedom in the world 2023. Country report Iran*, 9 March 2023, p. 12; Amnesty International, *Report 2022/23*, 28 March 2023, p. 197.

<sup>562</sup> Manfred Hutter, *Religious and ethnic minorities in Iran: An introduction*, in: S. Behnaz Hosseini (ed.), *Ethnic religious minorities in Iran*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2023, pp. 1-12, 2; Article 18, *Open Doors*, MEC & CSW, *Annual*

In practice, only Shia Muslims enjoy their full civil and political rights, within the limits of Iranian law. The situation of other faith communities has given cause for concern for some time. Pressure on religious minorities seemed to have been gradually increasing since President Raisi took office in 2021. Members of the recognised religious communities can perform their rituals and come together in a very limited framework, provided that the authorities do not regard their activities as 'directed against the Islamic Republic' and they do not convert others. The Iranian authorities are arbitrary and opportunistic in their application of these principles. The activities of the recognised religious communities are structurally monitored by the Iranian authorities. Non-recognised religious communities – especially groups that evangelise – are under even greater pressure and do not have any protection. They are closely monitored, pressurised and in some cases subject to criminal prosecution. Monitoring, intimidation, arrest and infiltration appeared to be commonplace during the reporting period.<sup>563</sup>

Iranian law includes clauses which affect these three recognised religious communities, as well as some non-recognised religious communities. As a result, these communities face institutional discrimination, which in turn can lead to discriminatory or arbitrary punishments. One example of this is marriage. According to Section 1059 of the Civil Code, while a Muslim man is permitted to marry a non-Muslim woman, a non-Muslim man is not permitted to marry a Muslim woman. In practice, this leads to children of mixed marriages being automatically classified as Muslim. Another example is adoption. Members of non-Muslim religious communities are not allowed to adopt a child born to Muslim parents. Inheritance law is yet another example. Section 881 of the Civil Code states that a non-Muslim may not inherit from a Muslim. There are also distinctions when it comes to holding important political or military positions. For instance, members of non-Muslim religious communities are barred from the office of president, membership of the Council of Experts and membership of the Guardian Council.<sup>564</sup>

### 3.2.3.1 Stating one's religion

Under Iranian law, non-adherence to a religion is not possible. There are a number of situations in which Iranians are required to make their religion known to the authorities.<sup>565</sup> For example, enrolling a child in school and enrolling at a university entail answering questions about religion. In some cases, employers, banks or government agencies also ask about religion, for example when someone applies for a driver's licence, national identity card or postponement of military service. The form for the national university entrance exam also asks about the candidate's religion.<sup>566</sup> On that form, the applicant can tick one of the four religions recognised in Iran.<sup>567</sup> If someone indicates on a form that they do not adhere to any religion or any of the religions indicated, or if someone who was born Muslim ticks Christian, this could have various consequences including not being allowed to take the

*report 2023. Rights violations against Christians in Iran*, 19 February 2023, p. 5; USCIRF, *2023 annual report*, 1 May 2023, p. 27; USDoS, *Iran 2022 international religious freedom report*, 15 May 2023, p. 8.

<sup>563</sup> OHCHR, *Iran: UN experts alarmed by escalating religious persecution*, 22 August 2022; IranWire, *Iran's religious freedom worsened last year: An IranWire special report*, 27 February 2023; USCIRF, *2023 annual report*, 1 May 2023, p. 26; confidential source, April 2023; confidential source, July 2023.

<sup>564</sup> USDoS, *Iran 2022 international religious freedom report*, 15 May 2023, p. 10; Al-Monitor, *Iran's Zoroastrians keep ancient, sacred flame burning*, 23 July 2023; confidential source, July 2023.

<sup>565</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Iran*, May 2022, p. 72.

<sup>566</sup> Archives of Bahá'í persecution in Iran, *Question about religion of student and his/her parents in middle and high school registration form*, undated; confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, April 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>567</sup> Radio Farda, *Iran eliminates 'other option' of religious affiliation for citizens' IDs*, 24 January 2020; confidential source, April 2023.

university entrance exam, expulsion from university and loss of employment.<sup>568</sup> A person's religion is not stated in their passport or on their national identity card.<sup>569</sup>

According to one source, judges and prosecutors fill out a form at criminal court hearings or in the offices of the public prosecutors. This form contains the defendant's personal details such as first name, surname, father's first name, religion, address, national identity number and educational background. On completion, this form is presented to the defendant for signature. If the defendant refuses to sign the form, the judge or prosecutor notes this on the form.<sup>570</sup>

### 3.2.3.2 Christians

There are no precise figures for the number of Christians in Iran. Most estimates range from 300,000 to 800,000. One estimate even puts the figure at over 1.2 million. These estimates include all converts.<sup>571</sup>

The impression that emerges from the sources consulted is that the position of Christians has deteriorated since the country of origin information report dated May 2022. For instance, the number of arrests increased during the reporting period. The NGOs Article 18, Open Doors, Middle East Concern (MEC) and Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) stated in their 2022 annual report that at least 134 Christians had been arrested because of their religious beliefs that year. In 2021, that figure was at least 59. At least 30 Christians were serving prison sentences in 2022 or were in internal exile. This figure is thought to include both recognised and non-recognised Christians.<sup>572</sup> In Iran, there was a further hardening of the position taken towards both recognised and non-recognised religious communities. Greater pressure was exerted on leaders and members of Christian communities. Control and monitoring also increased.<sup>573</sup>

### 3.2.3.3 Recognised Christians

Only a minority of Iranian Christians are thought to belong to one of the constitutionally recognised religious groups. These groups are made up of people who are born Christian and who mostly belong to one of the ethnic churches. These include Armenians, Chaldeans and Assyrians.<sup>574</sup> In addition, Iran recognises Christians who can prove that their families were Christian before the 1979 Iranian revolution.<sup>575</sup> They mostly belong to recognised and traditional churches in Iran which have no ethnic association, are Persian-speaking and/or evangelical. The recognised churches include the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Assyrian Orthodox Church, the Armenian Catholic Church, the Chaldean Catholic Church, the Roman

<sup>568</sup> Article 18, *Iranian Christian activist kicked out of university*, 23 December 2019; Article 18, *Reflections on the start of the school year for those deprived of education*, 5 October 2020; IranWire, *Baha'i students barred from university in latest intake as crackdown intensifies*, 4 August 2022; Iran International, *At least 90 Iranians of Baha'i faith denied university this year*, 20 August 2022; HRW, *World report 2023 - Iran*, 12 January 2023; confidential source, April 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>569</sup> Australian Government, *DFAT country information report Iran*, 24 July 2023, p. 42; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>570</sup> Confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>571</sup> Article 18, *Survey supports claims of 1 million Christian converts in Iran*, 27 August 2020; AA, *Religious minorities in Iran worship freely*, 16 January 2022; Open Doors International, *World Watch Research. Iran: Full country dossier*, January 2023, p. 15; USDoS, *Iran 2022 international religious freedom report*, 15 May 2023, p. 6.

<sup>572</sup> Article 18 et al., *Annual report 2023*, 19 February 2023, p. 23; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>573</sup> Asia News, *Catholics in today's Iran: the testimony of a Chaldean bishop*, 16 February 2022; IranWire, *Iran's religious freedom worsened last year: An IranWire special report*, 27 February 2023; confidential source, July 2023.

<sup>574</sup> RFE/RL, *No place for converts: Iran's persecuted Christians struggle to keep the faith*, 5 May 2022; Article 18, *Iran: Country profile*, <https://articleeighteen.com/country-profile/>, accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>575</sup> Article 18, *Meet Iran's latest Christian prisoners of conscience*, 8 September 2022; USDoS, *Iran 2022 international religious freedom report*, 15 May 2023, p. 8; Article 18, *10 years since forced closure of Iran's largest Persian-speaking church*, 19 May 2023.

Catholic Church and the Anglican Church.<sup>576</sup> Estimates of the number of recognised Christians in Iran vary widely. The English-language Iranian state-run newspaper *Tehran Times* puts the number at 150,000.<sup>577</sup> Estimates of the number of Armenians range from 40,000 to 100,000.<sup>578</sup> The estimated number of Assyrians ranges from 20,000 to 50,000.<sup>579</sup> In addition, about 2,000 people belong to the Roman Catholic Church in Iran.<sup>580</sup>

Recognised Christians encounter all kinds of pressures in Iran. Within a very limited context, they are permitted to gather and perform their rituals, such as celebrating Christmas. This is permitted as long as the authorities do not consider their activities to be 'directed against the Islamic Republic' and provided that recognised Christians do not spread their beliefs or convert people. Evangelising or allowing converts to attend their religious services is forbidden. This means that recognised Christians can only practise their faith under strict conditions. Their compliance with these conditions is actively monitored and controlled by the authorities.<sup>581</sup> The entrances and exits of church buildings are under camera surveillance.<sup>582</sup> The authorities summon church leaders for questioning and, for example, to warn them not to admit converts.<sup>583</sup> Recognised churches also have to submit lists of their church members to the authorities. The ethnic churches are not permitted to conduct the liturgy in Persian; this must be done in one of the other languages, such as Armenian or Assyrian.<sup>584</sup> Nor are ethnic churches allowed to possess religious works in Persian.<sup>585</sup>

In Iran, there was a further gradual hardening of the position taken towards both recognised and non-recognised religious minorities. This was partly evidenced by the closure of Persian-speaking churches. In the recent past, only four recognised small-scale Persian-speaking churches were left in Iran. All of these churches belonged to the Anglican faith. In total, they had no more than seventy members. These churches were not allowed to receive visitors or accept new converts into their communities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, these churches were closed. Subsequently, they did not reopen.<sup>586</sup> Another example of this hardening of position

<sup>576</sup> Article 18, *Iran's catholics welcome new archbishop after six-year hiatus*, 26 February 2021; CNA, 'Offer the light of the Gospel': *Tehran's new Catholic archbishop is ordained*, 18 February 2021; Article 18, *Iran: Country profile*.

<sup>577</sup> *Tehran Times*, *Christmas celebrations being held in Iran*, 25 December 2022; *Tehran Times*, *Bethlehem Church in Isfahan hosts Christmas celebrations*, 7 January 2023.

<sup>578</sup> Article 18, *Iran's Assyrian Christians warned against further involvement in protests*, 10 November 2022; USDoS, *Iran 2022 international religious freedom report*, 15 May 2023, p. 6; Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, *Iran*, <http://diaspora.gov.am/en/pages/44/iran>, accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>579</sup> Article 18, *Iran's Assyrian Christians warned against further involvement in protests*, 10 November 2022; API, *Iran*, <https://www.assyrianpolicy.org/iran>, accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>580</sup> CNA, 'Offering the light of the Gospel': *Tehran's new Catholic archbishop is ordained*, 18 February 2021; confidential source, July 2023.

<sup>581</sup> Mehr News, *Christmas and New Year celebration in Iran*, 1 January 2023; Article 18, *Iran's most famous church cancels New Year celebrations*, 4 January 2023; Article 18, 'Many Iranians don't even know recognised religious communities are repressed', 8 February 2023; UNHRC, *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Advanced unedited version (A/HRC/53/23)*, 15 June 2023, p. 13; Australian Government, *DFAT country information report Iran*, 24 July 2023, p. 20; confidential source, June 2023; confidential source, July 2023.

<sup>582</sup> Article 18, 'I didn't know worshipping and praying in Jesus' name was illegal', 12 June 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>583</sup> Article 18, *Iranian-Assyrian woman protester released on bail after month in prison*, 6 January 2023; Article 18, 'I didn't know worshipping and praying in Jesus' name was illegal', 12 June 2023; confidential source, April 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>584</sup> IranWire, *The Islamic Republic's intolerance to Christian converts, explained*, 25 August 2021; Article 18, *Iran: Country profile*; Article 18, *10 years since forced closure of Iran's largest Persian-speaking church*, 19 May 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>585</sup> RFE/RL, *No place for converts: Iran's persecuted Christians struggle to keep the faith*, 5 May 2022; Article 18 et al., *Annual report 2023*, 19 February 2023, p. 5.

<sup>586</sup> Article 18, *Tehran church forced to close by Revolutionary Guards*, 19 June 2012; Article 18 et al., *Annual report 2023*, 19 February 2023, p. 3; Article 18, *10 years since forced closure of Iran's largest Persian-speaking church*, 19 May 2023; Article 18, *Persian-speaking Iranian Christians have no place where they can worship collectively*, <https://articleeighteen.com/place2worship/>, accessed 12 September 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

was the authorities' refusal to allow additional priests.<sup>587</sup> In addition, recognised Christians faced many difficulties in registering and holding onto their property.<sup>588</sup> In March 2023, the Execution Organisation of Imam Khomeini's Order (EIKO), which is state-affiliated and manages a large number of properties in Iran, put the Assemblies of God church in the city of Gorgan in Golestan province up for sale. The building had been standing empty for more than 25 years. If a church is vacant or subject to an administrative error, EIKO can proceed with forced closure, confiscation and gradual appropriation. It was difficult for the faith communities to challenge these actions by EIKO. In addition, title deeds had been transferred in the past to pay the bail of Christians who had been indicted.<sup>589</sup>

In 2022, Armenian and Assyrian church leaders and their representatives in the Iranian parliament called on their fellow believers to refrain from anti-government protests following the death of Mahsa Amini. They also expressed their support for the authorities on several occasions.<sup>590</sup> Furthermore, the Armenian Vank Cathedral in Isfahan cancelled its Christmas and New Year celebrations in December 2022. A banner stated that the celebrations had been cancelled due to repair work. According to some, however, this was related to the protests.<sup>591</sup> There were cases of ethnic Christians being arrested for their involvement in the protests.<sup>592</sup> According to one source, the authorities see participation in the protests as problematic regardless of the protester's religious orientation. This same source also observed that certain religious orientations can lead to discriminatory and arbitrary punishments.<sup>593</sup>

#### 3.2.3.4 Non-recognised Christians

Most Christians in Iran are thought to belong to a Christian minority that is not recognised by the constitution. These non-recognised Christians mostly belong to one of the new Persian-speaking churches. They generally converted from Islam to Christianity after the Iranian revolution. Non-recognised religious communities are under great pressure and do not have any protection. They are closely monitored, pressurised and in some cases subject to criminal prosecution. Consequently, many Christian converts do not outwardly express their religious beliefs for fear of criminal persecution.<sup>594</sup>

Christian converts are not allowed to attend religious services in recognised Christian churches. Moreover, these services are not held in Persian. If converts were to attend services in recognised Christian churches, there could be far-reaching consequences for these churches and/or their pastors. The churches would risk closure and the pastors would risk having their work permit revoked and being

<sup>587</sup> AsiaNews, *Catholics in today's Iran: the testimony of a Chaldean bishop*, 16 February 2022; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>588</sup> Article 18, *Iran ministry of intelligence and EIKO closes Assyrian Presbyterian church*, 17 July 2019; Article 18, *Confiscated church-owned retreat centre set to be repurposed*, 28 June 2022; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>589</sup> Article 18, *Church Haik Hovsepian founded set to be sold by Iranian state*, 14 March 2023; confidential source, July 2023.

<sup>590</sup> Article 18, *Iran's Assyrian Christians warned against further involvement in protests*, 10 November 2022; Article 18, *Church statements the latest use of Iran's Assyrian, Armenian Christians as regime propaganda*, 2 December 2022; Article 18 et al., *Annual report 2023*, 19 February 2023, p. 1; confidential source, November 2022.

<sup>591</sup> Article 18, *Iran's most famous church cancels New Year celebrations*, 4 January 2023; Article 18 et al., *Annual report 2023*, 19 February 2023, p. 2.

<sup>592</sup> Assyrian Policy Institute, *API concerned by reports of arrest of Assyrian woman in Iran*, 29 December 2022; Syriac Press, *Assyrian activist Bianka Zaia released by Iranian authorities after five-week detention*, 3 January 2023; Article 18, *Iranian-Assyrian woman protester released on bail after month in prison*, 6 January 2023; IranWire, *Called a "whore" and "infidel:" The story of an Iranian Christian woman abused in custody*, 2 February 2023; Article 18 et al., *Annual report 2023*, 19 February 2023, p. 1.

<sup>593</sup> Confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>594</sup> Article 18 et al., *Annual report 2023*, 19 February 2023, p. 5; confidential source, July 2023.

expelled from Iran.<sup>595</sup> Converts therefore gather in their own homes to pray and worship together, to engage in Bible study or to celebrate Christian holidays. These house churches are closely monitored by the Iranian authorities. If house churches go too far in their eyes, attendance at these gatherings can result in interrogation, threats, arrest and/or criminal conviction.<sup>596</sup>

### 3.2.3.5 Criminal prosecution of Christians and other faith communities

The members of religious communities, both recognised and non-recognised, can face criminal charges in Iran. The penalties for these charges vary. The possible penalties include a fine, between three months and ten years in prison, denial of certain civil rights, internal exile, denial of access to certain means of communication and, in some cases, the death penalty.<sup>597</sup>

In the case of evangelising Muslims and preaching evangelical Christianity, converts may face criminal charges, although there is no law prohibiting the use of Persian in a church or the possession of a Persian-language Bible.<sup>598</sup> The authorities usually punish such offences on the grounds of propaganda against the IRI through the promotion of evangelical Zionist Christianity (Section 500 of the Penal Code).<sup>599</sup> A charge under Section 500 of the Penal Code can be punishable by three months or up to a year in prison. Converts themselves also risk fines, imprisonment and/or flogging. According to one source, there is a high risk of criminal prosecution for religious groups that are closely monitored by the authorities.<sup>600</sup> In addition to Section 500 of the Penal Code, punishment can also take place on any of the following grounds:

- Founding or leading an illegal organisation (Section 498 of the Penal Code). This is punishable by two to ten years in prison.
- Membership of an illegal organisation (Section 499 of the Penal Code). This is punishable by three months to five years in prison.
- Insulting ethnic groups, religions or Islamic schools of law (Section 499b of the Penal Code). This carries a maximum jail term of five years or a fine. In cases involving financial or organisational assistance from abroad, the maximum jail term is ten years.
- Propaganda that educates in a deviant way contrary to Islam, through mind-control or psychological indoctrination, or making false claims (Section 500b of the Penal Code). This is punishable by two to five years' imprisonment and/or a fine and/or the denial of certain civil rights, such as the right to vote and practise certain professions, for up to fifteen years. In cases involving financial or organisational assistance from abroad, the maximum jail term is ten years.
- Insulting the sanctities of Islam (Section 513 of the Penal Code). This is punishable by one to five years in prison or the death penalty.

<sup>595</sup> RFE/RL, *No place for converts: Iran's persecuted Christians struggle to keep the faith*, 5 May 2022; Article 18, *10 years since forced closure of Iran's largest Persian-speaking church*, 19 May 2023; confidential source, July 2023.

<sup>596</sup> RFE/RL, *No place for converts: Iran's persecuted Christians struggle to keep the faith*, 5 May 2022; Article 18, *Grandfather with cancer among four Christians arrested in Neyshabur*, 19 July 2022; Article 18, *Christian convert arrested, detained in Karaj on unknown charges*, 5 August 2022; Article 18 et al., *Annual report 2023*, 19 February 2023, p. 5; Iran International, *Cleric says some Iranian Muslims converting to other religions*, 11 March 2023; Article 18, *Malihe Nazari, Joseph Shahbazian and Mina Khajavi*, 24 April 2023; Article 18, *'I didn't know worshipping and praying in Jesus' name was illegal'*, 12 June 2023; confidential source, April 2023; confidential source, July 2023.

<sup>597</sup> Article 18, *30 years since Iranian Christian convert hanged for 'apostasy'*, 3 December 2020; confidential source, July 2023.

<sup>598</sup> Article 18, *Christian woman convert begins two-year prison sentence*, 16 April 2022; confidential source, July 2023.

<sup>599</sup> RFE/RL, *No place for converts: Iran's persecuted Christians struggle to keep the faith*, 5 May 2022; Article 18, *'Many Iranians don't even know recognised religious communities are repressed'*, 8 February 2023; Article 18 et al., *Annual report 2023*, 19 February 2023, p. 5.

<sup>600</sup> Confidential source, April 2023.

- Threatening national security (Section 610 of the Penal Code). This is punishable by two to five years in prison.<sup>601</sup>

Christians charged under Section 610 of the Penal Code are often released on bail pending sentencing, although they are often remanded in custody for longer than legally prescribed and the amounts demanded in bail are high.<sup>602</sup>

Dozens of Christians were arrested and/or detained during the reporting period.<sup>603</sup> Several cases of Christians – both from recognised and non-recognised faiths – who were involved in house church meetings and faced arrest and prosecution in the reporting period are described below. This overview is by no means exhaustive.

In November 2020, a court sentenced a man to two years and his wife to eleven years in prison for their activities in connection with a house church. Their sentences also included additional punishments: a two-year travel ban, a two-year ban on membership of a social or political group and six months of community service. On appeal, the woman's prison sentence was reduced to eight years. The man suffered from Parkinson's disease. In April 2023, the Supreme Court granted a review petition by this couple. On 9 May 2023, both of them were acquitted.<sup>604</sup>

On 9 April 2022, a revolutionary court in Rasht, Gilan province, sentenced three local converts of the evangelical Church of Iran to five years in prison and a fine of eighteen million toman (approx. 339 euros) on the grounds of deviant educational or proselytising activity that contradicts Islam (Section 500b of the Penal Code). In June 2022, the review court upheld the conviction.<sup>605</sup>

On 11 April 2022, a revolutionary court sentenced a member of a house church to ten years in prison and a ten-year restriction on the number of professions he is permitted to practise on his release, under Section 498 (founding or leading an illegal organisation) and Section 500b of the Penal Code (deviant educational or proselytising activity that contradicts Islam). Two other members of the same house church were also given a ten-year ban on working in certain professions. In addition, they were fined fifty million toman (approx. 940 euros), given a two-year travel ban, barred from membership of any political or social group for two years, and banned from settling in Tehran province or any of its neighbouring provinces for two years. On appeal, the ban on working in certain professions was dropped and the fine was reduced to six million toman (approx. 113 euros). In August 2022, the Supreme Court upheld the conviction.<sup>606</sup>

Furthermore, on 18 April 2022, MOIS personnel arrested a convert at his home in the town of Bandar Anzali in Gilan province. In the process, they confiscated several Bibles and other belongings. On 21 May 2022, a court sentenced him under Section

<sup>601</sup> Article 18, *10-year sentence for Iranian-Armenian for 'disturbing' Christian teaching*, 5 May 2022; Article 18 et al., *Annual report 2023*, 19 February 2023, p. 7.

<sup>602</sup> Article 18 et al., *Annual report 2023*, 19 February 2023, p. 3; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>603</sup> Article 18, *Over 50 Christians in five cities arrested in new crackdown*, 18 July 2023; Article 18, *At least 10 still detained as numbers of arrests and affected cities rise*, 10 August 2023.

<sup>604</sup> Article 18, *Supreme Court orders retrial of Christian couple serving combined 10-year sentence*, 11 April 2023; Article 18, *Parkinson's sufferer and wife acquitted, released from prison*, 10 May 2023; Morning Star News, *Unusual ruling frees Christian couple from prison in Iran*, 17 May 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>605</sup> Article 18, *Converts given five-year sentences for 'deviant propaganda'*, 11 April 2022; HRANA, *Four Christian converts arrested by IRGC intelligence agents*, 9 May 2022; Article 18, *Converts' five-year prison sentences for 'deviant beliefs' upheld*, 27 June 2022; Article 18, *Ahmad Sarparast, Morteza Mashoodkari and Ayoob Poor-Rezazadeh*, 9 November 2022; United for Iran, *Ahmad Sarparast*, <https://ipa.united4iran.org/en/prisoner/6809/>, accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>606</sup> Article 18, *10-year sentence for Iranian-Armenian for 'disturbing' Christian teaching*, 5 May 2022; Article 18, *House-church leader loses appeal as seven other Christians await verdict*, 2 June 2022; Article 18, *Supreme Court denies Christians retrial*, 3 August 2022.

500b of the Penal Code (deviant educational or proselytising activity that contradicts Islam) to a fine of six million toman (approx. 113 euros), a suspended fine of eighteen million toman (approx. 339 euros) and a restriction on the number of professions he was allowed to practise for five years.<sup>607</sup>

On 7 June 2022, a revolutionary court in Tehran sentenced an Armenian pastor under Section 498 of the Penal Code (founding or leading an illegal organisation) to ten years in prison, a two-year internal exile, a two-year travel ban and a two-year ban on membership of any social or political group. On 17 August 2022, the review court upheld the conviction. In a ruling on 25 February 2023, the Supreme Court referred the case back to a lower court for review. On 24 May 2023, the review court reduced the jail term to two years.<sup>608</sup>

On 3 January 2023, the authorities arrested the wife of a Church of Iran pastor in the town of Rasht in Gilan province under Section 500 of the Penal Code (propaganda against the IRI) and Section 610 of the Penal Code (threatening national security). On 28 January 2023, she was released on bail.<sup>609</sup>

In February and March 2023, a number of converts were released as part of a pardon scheme (see Section 1.2.2.5).<sup>610</sup>

#### 3.2.3.6 Family members of apostates or converts

The annual report of Article 18 et al. states that some people in Iran who have Christian family members operating outside the country experienced problems at the hands of the Iranian authorities. They were questioned about their family member's activities abroad.<sup>611</sup> According to another source, in some cases the authorities try to use family members to increase the pressure on Christians who have been arrested. This depends on the case and the city where the case is taking place.<sup>612</sup>

#### 3.2.3.7 Christian tattoos and attributes

In Iran, it is not a punishable offence to have a tattoo. There is no law that explicitly prohibits tattoos or classifies them as prohibited under Islamic law (*haram*). Nevertheless, the authorities consider tattoos to be a Western phenomenon and, as such, detrimental to Iranian values.<sup>613</sup> According to one source, a court can treat visible Christian tattoos as part of the burden of proof in connection with a conversion. The same applies to items confiscated when a convert is arrested, such as jewellery in the shape of a cross or paintings on Christian themes. This practice can differ from case to case.<sup>614</sup>

<sup>607</sup> Article 18, *Christian convert arrested in Anzali, family in distress*, 21 April 2022; HRANA, *Christian convert Rahmat Rostampour arrested in Bandar Anzali*, 22 April 2022; Article 18, *Convert fined and deprived of social rights for teaching others about Christianity*, 8 July 2022.

<sup>608</sup> Article 18, *Seven Iranian Christians sentenced to total of 32 years in prison*, 7 June 2022; Article 18, *Supreme Court agrees to retrial of Iranian-Armenian pastor serving 10-year sentence*, 15 March 2023; Church in Chains, *Joseph Shahbazian*, 27 April 2023; Article 18, *Decade-long prison sentence for Iranian Christian reduced to two years*, 30 May 2023.

<sup>609</sup> CSW, *Four Christians arrested in Gilan province*, 4 January 2023; MEC, *Iran: Christian converts arrested*, 5 January 2023; CSW, *Wife of imprisoned church leader released on bail*, 3 February 2023; Article 18, *Wife of imprisoned pastor charged with 'disturbing public opinion'*, 3 February 2023.

<sup>610</sup> Article 18, *#Place2Worship campaigner released after nearly five years in prison*, 9 February 2023; Article 18, *Second convert released as part of Islamic Republic anniversary celebrations*, 20 February 2023; CSW, *Pastor Nadarkhani released as part of national amnesty*, 28 February 2023; Article 18, *Fifth convert released amid mass pardoning of political prisoners*, 6 March 2023.

<sup>611</sup> Article 18 et al., *Annual report 2023*, 19 February 2023, pp. 10-11.

<sup>612</sup> Confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>613</sup> Al Jazeera, *Young Iranians defy tattoo taboo*, 8 March 2021; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>614</sup> Confidential source, April 2023.

### 3.2.3.8 Attending house churches

According to several sources, Iranian authorities pursue an active policy of detection regarding attendance of house churches by Christian converts.<sup>615</sup> The intelligence agencies monitor the activities of a range of religious groups in Iran, including Christians. As part of this monitoring, MOIS personnel seek to infiltrate churches. They may infiltrate directly or use informants. This policy is used regardless of the type of Christianity under surveillance.<sup>616</sup> Article 18 et al. report increased involvement by the Revolutionary Guard in raids on house churches and subsequent arrests and interrogations during the reporting period, instead of MOIS personnel.<sup>617</sup> According to the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs, the raids mainly targeted house churches actively engaged in converting or seeking new members.<sup>618</sup> Several sources say that some Christians were warned and forced to sign statements that they would refrain from further contact (including online contact) with other Christians and from searching for Christian material online.<sup>619</sup> It is not possible to be more specific about how frequently house churches were broken up during the reporting period, as much of this information is not in the public domain.<sup>620</sup>

The authorities can consider attending a house church to be an activity that is 'directed against the Islamic Republic'.<sup>621</sup> The question of whether every visit (known to the authorities) to a house church by a Christian convert automatically leads to criminal prosecution was impossible to answer.<sup>622</sup> According to Open Doors International, the leaders of groups of converted Christians in particular have been subject to criminal prosecution in the past. However, an increasing number of converts who did not fulfil a leading role also faced criminal prosecution.<sup>623</sup>

### 3.2.3.9 Apostates

There is no official statement as to what the Iranian authorities mean by apostasy. This concept is not included as such in the Islamic Penal Code. There is no agreement among clerics and Islamic scholars on the definition of apostasy, and whether or how it should be punished. Section 167 of the Iranian constitution states that when a law does not provide for a particular issue, a judge can turn to Islamic jurisprudence as a basis for his own verdict. This enables a judge to punish a person for apostasy based on his own interpretation of Islamic legal sources and fatwas. In practice, however, it is rare for someone to be charged with apostasy.<sup>624</sup>

One of the few examples from the reporting period is the case of a 35-year-old protester from the city of Nowshahr in Mazandaran province. A court sentenced him to death on 3 January 2023 under Section 279 of the Penal Code (enmity against God), Section 286 of the Penal Code (spreading corruption on earth) and apostasy. According to the court, the man and two others had set fire to a traffic police station in Nowshahr during a demonstration. In the process, a Quran was also burnt.

<sup>615</sup> Confidential source, June 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>616</sup> Church in Chains, *Joseph Shahbazian*, 27 April 2023; Australian Government, *DFAT country information report Iran*, 24 July 2023, p. 21; confidential source, April 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>617</sup> Article 18, *Converts' five-year prison sentences for 'deviant beliefs' upheld*, 27 June 2022; Article 18 et al., *Annual report 2023*, 19 February 2023, p. 8.

<sup>618</sup> Australian Government, *DFAT country information report Iran*, 24 July 2023, p. 21.

<sup>619</sup> Open Doors International, *World Watch Research. Iran: Full country dossier*, January 2023, p. 23; Article 18, *At least 10 still detained as numbers of arrests and affected cities rise*, 10 August 2023.

<sup>620</sup> Confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>621</sup> IranWire, *Two Christian converts summoned to prison*, 17 February 2022; Article 18, *Persian-speaking Iranian Christians have no place where they can worship collectively*.

<sup>622</sup> Confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>623</sup> Open Doors International, *World Watch Research. Iran: Full country dossier*, January 2023, p. 29.

<sup>624</sup> Article 18, *Apostasy never codified in Iranian law 'due to international pressure'*, 17 January 2023; USDoS, *Iran 2022 human rights report*, 20 March 2023, p. 19; IHRNGO & ECPM, *Annual report on the death penalty in Iran 2022*, 13 April 2023, p. 28; United for Iran, *Javad Rouhi*, <https://ipa.united4iran.org/en/prisoner/8530/>, accessed 12 September 2023.

According to his lawyer, who had been assigned on appeal, the man was unaware that a Quran had been burnt. He also claimed to have had no part in the arson. His family members said he was suffering from a mental disorder and had been under treatment at the time of his arrest on 21 September 2022. A human rights organisation said that the man made a forced confession.<sup>625</sup> On 23 May 2023, it was announced that the Supreme Court had referred his case to a lower court for review.<sup>626</sup> On 31 August 2023, Iran's *Mizan* news agency reported that the man had died in hospital after suffering a stroke in his cell.<sup>627</sup>

Insufficient information was available to answer the question of whether, in cases where an asylum seeker has invoked apostasy as a motive for asylum and this is known to the Iranian authorities, that person has to be able to prove that they are not an apostate and how the person might then go about proving this.<sup>628</sup> However, according to one source, apostasy can be used as a contributory factor leading to a harsher punishment for committing another offence.<sup>629</sup>

### 3.2.3.10 Secularisation

Iranian society is becoming more secular.<sup>630</sup> In June 2020, the Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in Iran (GAMAAN) carried out a survey on Iranians' attitudes towards religion. One of the items on the questionnaire was which religion or belief system was closest to the respondent's own faith and beliefs. Although the vast majority of the population is officially listed as Shia Muslim, it was striking that in this survey only 32.2% identified themselves as such. Of the respondents, 8.8% said they were atheist and 22.2% said they had no faith at all.<sup>631</sup> In February 2022, the same group also conducted a survey on Iranians' attitudes towards political systems. It emerged that 22.4% wanted an Islamic republic, 33.6% a secular republic and 19.1% a constitutional monarchy.<sup>632</sup> Based in part on these findings, combined with the opposition to the dress code and the large number of Iranians who do not practise Islam, some people conclude that Iranian society is beginning to show increasing signs of secularism.<sup>633</sup> This conclusion is reinforced by an observation made by a member of the Council of Experts. On 1 June 2023, Iranian media quoted him as saying that approximately two-thirds of all mosques in Iran – 50,000 out of 75,000 – were closed due to a lack of attendance. This remarkable statement was relatively quickly refuted by several pro-state media outlets. On 11 June 2023, Iran's IRNA news agency reported that these mosques were not closed, but that no prayer gatherings could be held there due to a lack of clerics.<sup>634</sup>

The trend towards secularisation in Iran means that a person is not necessarily in trouble for having turned away from Islam. Iranian society does not compel citizens to engage in religious rituals, such as ritual prayer. The main act of religious observance concerns the rules governing Ramadan, when no eating, drinking or

<sup>625</sup> The Guardian, *Iran to execute mentally ill man for allegedly burning Qur'an during protest*, 19 January 2023; HRW, *Accounts of torture and summary trial of Javad Rouhi*, 1 February 2023.

<sup>626</sup> BBCM, *Iran's court to reconsider death sentence for protester*, 23 May 2023; HRANA, *Iranian Supreme Court overturns death sentence of protestor Javad Rouhi*, 23 May 2023; HRANA, *Update on legal status of death-row protesters ten months after the 2022 nationwide protests*, 31 May 2023.

<sup>627</sup> BBC News, *Javad Rouhi: Iranian protester dies in jail after avoiding death sentence*, 31 August 2023.

<sup>628</sup> Confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>629</sup> Confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>630</sup> Amwaj, *Inside story: How Iran's religious classes are turning increasingly secular*, 22 February 2023; confidential source, July 2023.

<sup>631</sup> GAMAAN, *Iranians' attitudes toward religion: A 2020 survey report*, 25 August 2020, p. 6.

<sup>632</sup> GAMAAN, *Iranians' attitudes toward political systems: A 2022 survey report*, 31 March 2022, p. 6.

<sup>633</sup> Dina Nayeri, *Why is Iran's secular shift so hard to believe?*, 21 October 2022; Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, *Protests and polling insights from the streets of Iran: How removal of the hijab became a symbol of regime change*, 22 November 2022.

<sup>634</sup> Iran International, *Senior cleric claims religion in Iran weak, 50,000 mosques closed*, 2 June 2023; BBCM, *Briefing: Iran media reject official's claim on closure of two-thirds of mosques*, 11 June 2023.

smoking is permitted in public during the hours of daylight, although observance is less strict in many urban areas.<sup>635</sup> According to various sources, as a rule someone who does not practise Islam will not encounter difficulties for this reason.<sup>636</sup>

No one is likely to ask a direct question about whether someone is an apostate. In practice, therefore, a person can privately reject Islam and refrain from religious expression in word and deed.<sup>637</sup> In itself, a person's apostasy has no impact on their social and legal position, as they are still considered Muslim. Ultimately, the deciding factor is how someone expresses their own beliefs and whether they evangelise for another faith or maintain a low profile by keeping their alternative beliefs or their atheism to themselves. Nevertheless, it cannot be ruled out that apostates are at risk of criminal prosecution even if they do not express their apostasy. That will depend on the individual circumstances of a case.<sup>638</sup>

Non-believers may experience difficulties finding employment, obtaining a licence to start a business or getting an education.<sup>639</sup> According to one source, there are no signs that apostates or non-practising Muslims are being treated differently by the Iranian authorities in light of the political and social unrest in Iran since September 2022.<sup>640</sup>

#### 3.2.3.11 Religious activities and rules

In some cases, failure to participate in religious activities and not adhering to rules are punishable. This applies, for example, to people who eat or drink in public during Ramadan and to women who do not follow the dress code. In such cases, an individual may face criminal prosecution.<sup>641</sup> People who do not participate in religious activities or fail to observe the rules may also face all kinds of restrictions in public life. For example, during the reporting period, women who did not comply with the dress code were sometimes denied access to public places, such as restaurants, parks, museums, libraries and the metro, or were sent away from the university campus or denied service at banks.<sup>642</sup>

Members of the civil service have been specifically selected on the basis of their loyalty to the authorities and their piety in religious matters. If a civil servant does not participate in religious activities or observe religious rules, this can be grounds for dismissal or being refused a promotion. This depends on how strictly such rules are applied at the office or organisation where a civil servant works.<sup>643</sup>

<sup>635</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Iran*, May 2022, p. 68; Australian Government, *DFAT country information report Iran*, 24 July 2023, p. 23; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>636</sup> Australian Government, *DFAT country information report Iran*, 24 July 2023, p. 23; confidential source, April 2023; confidential source, June 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>637</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Iran*, May 2022, p. 68; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>638</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Iran*, May 2022, p. 68.

<sup>639</sup> IranWire, *Iran's religious freedom worsened last year: An IranWire special report*, 27 February 2023.

<sup>640</sup> Confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>641</sup> CNN, *Iranian security forces arrest a woman for eating at restaurant in public without her hijab, family says*, 30 September 2022; Iran International, *Iran police warn about breaking Islamic rules during Ramadan*, 23 March 2023; confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>642</sup> IranWire, *No more schooling for hijab rule violators in Iran*, 3 April 2023; The Guardian, *Women not wearing hijab to be banned from Tehran metro – reports*, 10 April 2023; De Standaard, *Iraanse vrouwen zonder hidjab mogen niet meer op metro*, 11 April 2023; BBCM, *Briefing: Iranian museums to bar women without proper hijab*, 24 April 2023; BBCM, *Iran monthly protests report: April 2023*, 1 May 2023; Iran International, *Banks in Iran urged to avoid serving women without hijab*, 4 June 2023; RFE/RL, *Iranian students say authorities ratcheting up pressure on campus over dress code*, 6 June 2023; Iran International, *Tehran university bans several women from dorms over hijab*, 11 June 2023; The Independent, *Headscarf crackdown in Iran sees women sacked and their cars confiscated*, 26 July 2023.

<sup>643</sup> RFE/RL, *Iranian president signs decree further restricting how women can dress*, 15 August 2022; USDoS, *Iran 2022 international religious freedom report*, 15 May 2023, p. 13; confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

According to one source, a person who does not participate in religious activities or comply with religious rules does not risk being accused of apostasy.<sup>644</sup> Other sources say many people in Iran do not participate in religious activities, such as fasting during Ramadan. As long as eating or drinking during Ramadan is not done in public, this will not lead to problems.<sup>645</sup>

### 3.2.3.12 Bahá'ís

The exact number of Bahá'ís in Iran is not known. Various sources give an estimate of at least 300,000.<sup>646</sup> The Bahá'í faith is not recognised in Iran.<sup>647</sup> The authorities regard the Bahá'í community as a deviant sect of Islam.<sup>648</sup> They regularly refer to this religious community as a misguided sect, as a perverse cult or as Israeli spies, due to the fact that the Bahá'í World Centre is located in the Israeli city of Haifa.<sup>649</sup>

This was evident from 31 July 2022, when MOIS staff carried out raids at various locations, confiscating Bahá'í property and arresting at least thirty members of the Bahá'í community. The next day, MOIS denounced these Bahá'ís as spies who were trying to infiltrate the education sector, especially nurseries.<sup>650</sup> On 10 February 2023, a revolutionary court in the city of Karaj in Alborz province sentenced eleven members of this Bahá'í group to prison terms of between two and seven years. They were also subject to fines, a travel ban and social restrictions, including a ban on settling in Alborz province and a ban on educational and cultural activities.<sup>651</sup>

The Bahá'ís are the non-recognised faith community that faces the greatest oppression in Iran. During the reporting period, Bahá'ís experienced a great many problems in daily life due to their religious beliefs. They encountered discrimination, humiliation and violence.<sup>652</sup> According to a Bahá'í organisation in the United States, more than a thousand Bahá'ís faced criminal prosecution in October 2022.<sup>653</sup> The US-based NGO Human Rights Activists in Iran (HRAI) stated in its 2022 annual report that nearly 65% of all reports of human rights violations against religious groups in 2022 concerned violations of the rights of Bahá'ís.<sup>654</sup>

<sup>644</sup> Confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>645</sup> Iran International, *Iran police warn about breaking Islamic rules during Ramadan*, 23 March 2023; confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>646</sup> RFE/RL, *Dozens of Iranian activists condemn Islamic Republic's oppression of Baha'i community*, 9 August 2022; Iran International, *UN experts alarmed by Iran's escalation of religious persecution*, 24 August 2022; IranWire, *Jailed Baha'i pressured to admit "guilt" on TV*, 8 November 2022; HRANA, *Baha'i Mona Ghodrat arrested in Yazd*, 21 December 2022; USDoS, *Iran 2022 international religious freedom report*, 15 May 2023, p. 6.

<sup>647</sup> The New York Times, *Iran targets its Baha'i community with arrests and home demolitions*, 5 August 2022; IranWire, *Historian: Why the Iranian government insists the Baha'is are not a religion*, 12 August 2022; CHRI, *UN experts alarmed by escalating persecution of Baha'i faith in Iran*, 22 August 2022; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>648</sup> USCIRF, *Country update: Iran: Religious freedom in Iran in 2022*, July 2022, p. 1; Newsweek, *Targets of opportunity: Iran's Bahá'í community faces new repression*, 25 August 2022.

<sup>649</sup> USCIRF, *Country update: Iran: Religious freedom in Iran in 2022*, July 2022, p. 1; Reuters, *Iran arrested Baha'i citizens, accuses them of Israel links – state media*, 1 August 2022; France 24, *Iran says Bahai community members arrested for alleged espionage*, 1 August 2022; IranWire, *Intelligence ministry pushes conspiracy theories as mass arrests of Baha'is continue*, 2 August 2022; RFE/RL, *Dozens of Iranian activists condemn Islamic Republic's oppression of Baha'i community*, 9 August 2022; IranWire, *Reza Pahlavi visits Baha'i World Center in Israel*, 21 April 2023; BBCM, *Iran arrests Bahais 'spying' for Israel*, 25 July 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>650</sup> IranWire, *Baha'is expose 'propaganda ploy' to incriminate community with fake videos and hate speech*, 19 August 2022; Amnesty International, *Iran: Stop ruthless attacks on persecuted Baha'i religious minority*, 24 August 2022; IranWire, *The truth behind Iranian state TVs dramatic report on 'Baha'i kindergartens'*, 26 August 2022.

<sup>651</sup> Iran Press Watch, *Eleven Baha'i citizens sentenced to a total of 36 years in prison*, 10 February 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>652</sup> BIC, *Current situation*, January 2023; confidential source, July 2023.

<sup>653</sup> OHCHR, *Iran: UN experts alarmed by escalating religious persecution*, 22 August 2022; USDoS, *Iran 2022 international religious freedom report*, 15 May 2023, p. 23.

<sup>654</sup> HRAI, *Annual report 2022*, 26 December 2022, p. 18.

A memorandum dated 25 February 1991 on the issue of the Bahá'ís, approved by the supreme leader, contained thirteen recommendations aimed at blocking the progress and development of Bahá'ís.<sup>655</sup> On several occasions, the supreme leader labelled the Bahá'ís as a deviant and misguided sect. In doing so, he called on Iranians not to do business with Bahá'ís. This call took the form of a series of fatwas, most notably in 2013, 2016 and 2018.<sup>656</sup>

Sunni cleric and molavi Abdolhamid Esmailzahi from the city of Zahedan in Sistan-Baluchistan province addressed the plight of the Bahá'ís during his Friday sermon on 30 December 2022. He argued that human rights and humanity had to be respected and that Jews, Christians, Bahá'ís and others all had rights and were citizens of Iran. In doing so, he broke the taboo on talking about the rights of Bahá'ís. In response, articles appeared in the Iranian media arguing that the Bahá'ís had no civil rights.<sup>657</sup>

### 3.2.3.13 Bahá'ís in education

Bahá'ís can be denied access to higher education. They are not allowed to study and face widespread discrimination at primary and secondary schools.<sup>658</sup> According to various sources, at least a hundred Bahá'ís who passed the university entrance exam were denied access to higher education in 2022. The only notification given was a statement on the website of the Educational Assessment and Evaluation Organization that their application was incomplete.<sup>659</sup> If, during the course of their studies, it emerged that a student was Bahá'í, they were forced to discontinue their studies.<sup>660</sup> To meet their need for education despite these restrictions, Bahá'ís were able to study through an underground university: the Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education (BIHE).<sup>661</sup>

### 3.2.3.14 Bahá'ís and employment

Bahá'ís are excluded from many professions, including government posts.<sup>662</sup> Entrepreneurs who employed Bahá'ís can be pressurised into dismissing them.<sup>663</sup> Bahá'ís regularly faced legal action or closure of their businesses, often for prolonged periods.<sup>664</sup> Bahá'ís could also lose their jobs or pensions if their religious

<sup>655</sup> Archives of Bahá'í persecution in Iran, *Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council's secret memo on dealing with Baha'is*, 25 February 1991.

<sup>656</sup> AP News, *Top Iran leader issues edict on Baha'i faith*, 1 August 2013; Iran Press Watch, *Leader of the fatwa against Baha'is: No one has any objections to non-muslims*, 20 February 2015; Archives of Bahá'í persecution in Iran, *Fatwa of Ayatollah Khamenei about socialising with Baha'is*, 26 March 2018; VOA, *Iranian authorities arrest 12 Baha'i members in continuing crackdown on faith*, 4 September 2022.

<sup>657</sup> IranWire, *Iranian Sunni cleric says rights of Baha'is, other minorities must be respected*, 30 December 2022; Iran International, *Iran's Sunni cleric talks of love, unity and women's rights amid repression*, 30 December 2022; Wilson Center, *Iran's dissident Sunni cleric*, 29 March 2023; IranWire, *Iran's religious freedom worsened last year: An IranWire special report*, 27 February 2023.

<sup>658</sup> CHRI, *Baha'i youth expelled from secondary school for gifted students solely due to his faith*, 14 July 2020; The New York Times, *Iran targets its Baha'i community with arrests and home demolitions*, 5 August 2022; Iran International, *At least 90 Iranians of Baha'i faith denied university this year*, 20 August 2022.

<sup>659</sup> IranWire, *Baha'i students barred from university in latest intake as crackdown intensifies*, 4 August 2022; Iran International, *At least 90 Iranians of Baha'i faith denied university this year*, 20 August 2022; HRW, *World report 2023 – Iran*, 12 January 2023; BIC, *Current situation*, January 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>660</sup> IranWire, *Baha'i student expelled because of his faith*, 26 April 2021; USDoS, *Iran 2022 international religious freedom report*, 15 May 2023, p. 12.

<sup>661</sup> UNESCO, *Non-state actors in education in Iran: select issues and contributions*, 2022, p. 50; New Canadian Media, *L'Université secrète de Téhéran: Parcours d'un étudiant clandestin*, 10 August 2022; Iran Press Watch, *The 2022 award of a Spanish association went to the Iranian Baha'i Institute for Higher Education*, 31 October 2022.

<sup>662</sup> The New York Times, *Iran targets its Baha'i community with arrests and home demolitions*, 5 August 2022; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>663</sup> Iran International, *UN experts alarmed by Iran's escalation of religious persecution*, 24 August 2022; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>664</sup> IHRDC, *Blocked from progress; Persecution of Iran's Bahá'í community since 1979*, May 2022, p. 17; HRW, *World report 2023 – Iran*, 12 January 2023; USDoS, *Iran 2022 international religious freedom report*, 15 May 2023, p. 30; Iran Press Watch, *12 Baha'i-owned businesses shut down and sealed in Sari and Shahr-e-Kord*, 18 May

beliefs became known.<sup>665</sup> In addition, newly married Bahá'í couples faced problems registering their marriage and obtaining a loan for newlyweds.<sup>666</sup>

### 3.2.3.15 Bahá'ís and property

The authorities confiscated the private property of Bahá'ís during the reporting period.<sup>667</sup> In February 2022, for instance, a revolutionary court in Semnan approved the seizure and transfer of property of six Bahá'ís to the EIKO. On 25 June 2022, a review court in Tehran upheld this ruling, on the grounds that the owners were members of the perverse Bahá'í sect that engaged in illegal activities and foreign espionage.<sup>668</sup> On 2 August 2022, about two hundred members of the security and intelligence services closed the access road to the village of Roshankouh in Mazandaran province. They attacked the residents with pepper spray. They then used an excavator to destroy six homes belonging to Bahá'ís. They confiscated more than twenty hectares of farmland from Bahá'ís.<sup>669</sup>

### 3.2.3.16 Bahá'í cemeteries

The authorities prevented Bahá'ís from burying their dead in accordance with their own customs.<sup>670</sup> In April 2023, for example, the Bahá'í International Community (BIC) reported that an MOIS employee had buried the body of a Bahá'í in a section of the Khavaran cemetery near Tehran where there is a mass grave. This was done without informing the next of kin. The employee had demanded payment from the next of kin for a grave in the Bahá'í section of this cemetery.<sup>671</sup> In addition, Bahá'í cemeteries were subject to acts of vandalism. For example, on 27 April 2022, unknown persons destroyed structures at a Bahá'í cemetery in the city of Hamedan.<sup>672</sup> According to one source, the authorities also closed a Bahá'í cemetery during the reporting period and confiscated land belonging to a Bahá'í cemetery.<sup>673</sup>

### 3.2.3.17 Criminal prosecution of Bahá'ís

Every year, hundreds of Bahá'ís have their homes raided and are subject to searches, arrests, often lengthy interrogations, and convictions.<sup>674</sup> According to one

2023; BBCM, *Iran arrests nine Baha'is on charges of hoarding medicine*, 13 August 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>665</sup> BIC, *Current situation*, January 2023; USDoS, *Iran 2022 international religious freedom report*, 15 May 2023, p. 13.

<sup>666</sup> BIC, *News bulletin no. 12-22. Iran: 29 August-19 September 2022*, undated, p. 6; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>667</sup> Amnesty International, *Iran: Stop ruthless attacks on persecuted Baha'i religious minority*, 24 August 2022; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>668</sup> IranWire, *Khamenei-controlled EIKO behind increasing confiscations of Baha'i properties*, 16 February 2022; IranWire, *Revolutionary court order targets Baha'i properties in Semnan for confiscation*, 18 August 2022; CHRI, *Prejudiced courts aiding land grabs of Baha'i properties in Iran*, 29 August 2022.

<sup>669</sup> BIC, *Update: 200 Iranian government agents destroy Baha'i homes and confiscate 20 hectares of land*, 2 August 2022; Iran International, *Iran demolishes houses, farms of the Baha'i community*, 2 August 2022; IranWire, *Home destructions and arrests: How can Iranians help Baha'is*, 8 August 2022; Kayhan Life, *Iranian authorities demolish Bahai minority's houses, human rights groups say*, 9 August 2022.

<sup>670</sup> IranWire, *Updated: Fifth improper burial of a Baha'i by Iranian officials*, 4 May 2023; IranWire, *Another Baha'i buried improperly in Tehran cemetery*, 30 May 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>671</sup> BIC, *Oppressed in life and persecuted in death: Baha'is prevented from dignified burials in their own cemetery*, 3 April 2023; IranWire, *Updated: Baha'is prevented by Ministry of Intelligence agent from burials in their own cemetery*, 18 April 2023.

<sup>672</sup> HRANA, *Baha'is cemetery in Hamedan partly demolished*, 29 April 2022; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>673</sup> Confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>674</sup> IranWire, *Baha'i designer's mother 'disappeared' by security agents on answering court summons*, 13 April 2022; HRANA, *Baha'i citizen Saeedeh Khozui in detention eight days after arrest*, 19 April 2022; IranWire, *Alarm grows for Baha'i woman held in unknown location*, 27 April 2022; HRANA, *Baha'i citizen Saeedeh Khozui in detention 40 days after arrest*, 20 May 2022; HRANA, *Baha'i citizen Saeedeh Khozui released on bail after 43 days of detention*, 24 May 2022; HRANA, *Three Baha'i citizens arrested in Shiraz*, 27 June 2022; Iran International, *Iran arrests 14 more members of Baha'i religious minority*, 1 September 2022; RFE/RL, *Iranian security agents raid homes of dozens of Baha'is; 14 arrested*, 1 September 2022; Kayhan Life, *Press release: Baha'i youths arrested in Iran as the month-long crackdown total hits 245*, 4 September 2022; IranWire, *Jailed Baha'i pressured to admit*

source, at least 501 Bahá'ís experienced such treatment in 2022. In 106 cases, this resulted in an arrest and in 22 cases in interrogation. A total of 118 house searches took place and 16 businesses owned by Bahá'ís were also searched.<sup>675</sup> During the searches, authorities seized personal belongings and business assets, including mobile phones, laptops, computers, hard drives, books, photographs and documents. In some cases, they also confiscated cash and jewellery.<sup>676</sup> Bail for Bahá'ís who were arrested was set very high. This forced their families to hand over their title deeds or their business licences as sureties.<sup>677</sup>

Most convicted Bahá'ís were charged under Section 500 of the Penal Code (propaganda against the IRI) and Section 610 of the Penal Code (threatening national security).<sup>678</sup> In some cases, they were charged under other sections of the Penal Code, including Section 499 (membership of an illegal organisation), Article 500b (deviant educational or proselytising activity that contradicts Islam) or Section 514 (insulting the leader and founder of the IRI).<sup>679</sup> Several cases of Bahá'ís who faced arrest and detention in the reporting period are described below. This overview is by no means exhaustive.

On 8 June 2022, after a six-year trial, a revolutionary court in the city of Shiraz sentenced 26 Bahá'ís to between two and five years in prison under Section 610 of the Penal Code (threatening national security), in addition to a two-year travel ban, internal exile for the men and a two-year daily obligation to report to the authorities. On 30 August 2022, the review court upheld the conviction, apart from internal exile for the male Bahá'ís.<sup>680</sup>

On 31 July 2022, the authorities in Tehran arrested three former Bahá'í leaders of the ad hoc group Friends in Iran (*Yaran-i-Iran*). They were questioned and kept in solitary confinement for prolonged periods. On 11 December 2022, a revolutionary court in Tehran sentenced two of them to ten years in prison under Section 498 of the Penal Code (founding or leading an illegal organisation). They had been imprisoned before: from 2007 and 2008 until the end of 2017.<sup>681</sup> In February 2023,

*"guilt" on TV*, 8 November 2022; IranWire, *Another Baha'i arrested in Iran; Whereabouts unknown*, 22 November 2022; IranWire, *Two Baha'i women and prisoners of conscience sentenced to 10 more years in jail*, 10 December 2022; IranWire, *Sepehr Ziaei, a Baha'i in Evin, held despite deteriorating health*, 12 December 2022; HRANA, *Baha'i Bardia Basiri arrested*, 19 December 2022; HRANA, *Baha'i Mona Ghodrat arrested in Yazd*, 21 December 2022; IranWire, *Jailed Baha'i refuses to confess against himself for release*, 16 February 2023; IranWire, *Back to Evin: Baha'i children's activist prison leave ends*, 4 April 2023; Hengaw, *Enayatullah Naimi, a Baha'i citizen, was sentenced to 15 years in prison*, 15 May 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>675</sup> Confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>676</sup> IranWire, *Shock new wave of arrests and raids of Baha'is in developing crisis*, 1 August 2022; BIC, *News bulletin no. 12-22. Iran: 29 August-19 September 2022*, undated, p. 1; BIC, *News bulletin no. 14-22. Iran: 2 October-4 November 2022*, undated, p. 1-5; IranWire, *Iran using protests to further persecute Baha'is*, 20 November 2022; IranWire, *Another Baha'i arrested in Iran*, 11 December 2022; IranWire, *Iranian Baha'i arrested, whereabouts unknown amid crackdown on faith*, 5 January 2023; IranWire, *Iranian Baha'i violently arrested, taken to unknown location*, 10 January 2023; IranWire, *Wave of home searches against Kerman Baha'is*, 14 April 2023; Hengaw, *A Baha'i adherent sentenced to six years behind bars*, 22 June 2023; IranWire, *Two more Baha'is arrested in ongoing persecutions*, 22 August 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>677</sup> BIC, *Current situation*, January 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>678</sup> HRANA, *Baha'i citizen Haleh Gholami imprisoned*, 19 July 2022; Iran Press Watch, *Baha'i citizen Hooshidar Zarei sentenced to six years' imprisonment*, 30 June 2023; United for Iran, *Sahba Farnoush*, <https://ipa.united4iran.org/en/prisoner/2181/>, accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>679</sup> Iran Press Watch, *Baha'i citizen Sara Sabet Rasekh receives eight-year prison sentence*, 30 June 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>680</sup> Iran International, *Iran sentences 26 Baha'is to a total of 85 years in prison*, 12 June 2022; RFE/RL, *After six-year trial, 26 Baha'is sentenced to prison in Iran*, 13 June 2022; IranWire, *26 Baha'is sentenced to 85 years in prison and exile*, 14 June 2022; BIC, *News bulletin no. 12-22. Iran: 29 August-19 September 2022*, undated, pp. 4-5; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>681</sup> CHRI, *Freed Iranian Baha'i leader Mahvash Sabet describes unjust trial, prison conditions*, 26 September 2017; CHRI, *After 10 years in prison, faith leader Fariba Kamalabadi says Baha'is hope to serve Iran*, 5 November 2017; IranWire, *Former Baha'i leaders arrested again alongside others*, 31 July 2022; IranWire, *Historian: With*

a revolutionary court in the town of Karaj in Alborz province sentenced the third person to seven years in prison.<sup>682</sup>

### 3.2.3.18 Jews

The Jewish faith is a recognised minority religion with a deputy in parliament.<sup>683</sup> Among other things, this means that the Jewish community is permitted to perform its religious ceremonies and services in synagogues, and to provide its own religious education.<sup>684</sup> Iran respects them as long as they do not carry out activities that are seen as directed against the Islamic Republic of Iran.<sup>685</sup>

Estimates of the number of Jews in Iran range from 8,000 to 25,000.<sup>686</sup> This small community is mainly located in the cities of Tehran, Shiraz and Isfahan.<sup>687</sup> The authorities frequently employ an anti-Zionist, but not anti-Semitic narrative. Yet to a certain degree, the Jewish community in Iran feels intimidated by the authorities' denial of the Holocaust and its anti-Israel propaganda.<sup>688</sup> Representatives of the Jewish community in Iran therefore regularly distance themselves openly from Zionism and express their support for the authorities, for example during Jerusalem Day (*Ruz-e Quds*).<sup>689</sup> In September and October 2022, Tehran's Jewish Committee issued a warning on Telegram not to visit synagogues due to the unrest.<sup>690</sup> In late November 2022, the committee also condemned the anti-government protests in response to the death of Mahsa Amini.<sup>691</sup> In early December 2022, several foreign

*recent attacks, hardlines are trying to cleanse Iran of Baha'is*, 9 August 2022; BIC, *An unbelievable injustice: Mahvash Sabet and Fariba Kamalabadi sentenced to a second decade in prison in Iran*, 11 December 2022; HRANA, *Sentences of 20 years upheld for two Baha'i women*, 10 August 2023.

<sup>682</sup> HRANA, *Baha'i individual Afif Naimi in detention*, 5 August 2022; Iran Press Watch, *Eleven Baha'i citizens sentenced to a total of 36 years in prison*, 10 February 2023; BIC, *Iran issues more jail terms against Baha'is in Iran – including a third former leader*, 22 February 2023; Iran International, *Iran arrests another Baha'i community leader*, 30 April 2023.

<sup>683</sup> IranWire, *'No problems, except for the problems': Iran's Jewish MP gives nonsensical interview on minority rights*, 18 May 2021; IranWire, *Iran's religious freedom worsened last year: An IranWire special report*, 27 February 2023; The Jerusalem Post, *Iranians protest as over 1,000 schoolgirls poisoned in more than 50 schools*, 2 March 2023.

<sup>684</sup> Hassan Sarbakhshian, Lior B. Sternfeld & Parvaneh Vahidmanesh, *Jews of Iran. A photographic chronicle*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2022, p. 10; Israel National News, *Iran's rabbi speaks: 'No danger to Judaism in Iran*, 22 November 2022; USDoS, *Iran 2022 international religious freedom report*, 15 May 2023, p. 8; Australian Government, *DFAT country information report Iran*, 24 July 2023, p. 22.

<sup>685</sup> Article 18, *Iran: Country profile*; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>686</sup> MEE, *The curious case of the Israeli rabbi in Iran*, 9 March 2022; JTA, *He captured rare images of Jewish life in Iran. Then he fled, fearing for his safety*, 31 August 2022; Anash.org, *In the heart of Tehran, hundreds celebrate new Torah*, 1 September 2022; Time.news, *Rabbi Yehuda Garami, rabbi of Iran tells about the challenges and trials*, 21 November 2022; The Jerusalem Post, *At least five Jews arrested by Iran during protests against Islamic Republic*, 12 December 2022; The Jerusalem Post, *Are there still Jews in Iran? Not many – opinion*, 31 January 2023; Ali Hassannia, Zahra Fazeli & Mohammad Reza Fazeli, *Iranian Jews' tendency to religious visibility and adapted coexistence*, in: S. Behnaz Hosseini (ed.), *Ethnic religious minorities in Iran*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2023, pp. 109-146, 112.

<sup>687</sup> VOA, *Challenges facing Iran's Jewish minority attract scrutiny after rabbi's US visit*, 24 November 2021; Hassannia et al., *Iranian Jews' tendency towards religious visibility and adapted coexistence*, 2023, p. 112; The Jewish News of Northern California, *Upcoming USF event: Why 'we have to pay attention' to Jews of Iran*, 15 February 2023.

<sup>688</sup> Sarbakhshian et al., *Jews of Iran. A photographic chronicle*, 2022, p. 10; IranWire, *Khamenei's latest antisemitic Twitter rant prompts US special envoy to call for ban*, 29 July 2022; USCIRF, *Religious propaganda in Iran*, July 2022, p. 5; IranWire, *Iran's religious freedom worsened last year: An IranWire special report*, 27 February 2023; USCIRF, *Annual report*, 1 May 2023, p. 27; USDoS, *Iran 2022 international religious freedom report*, 15 May 2023, p. 2; confidential source, July 2023.

<sup>689</sup> Sarbakhshian et al., *Jews of Iran. A photographic chronicle*, 2022, pp. 12 and 55; IranWire, *Iran's religious freedom worsened last year: An IranWire special report*, 27 February 2023; Iran International, *Iran pressures Jewish community to participate in Quds Day*, 10 April 2023; Israel National News, *Jewish Iranian MP participates in anti-Israel demonstration*, 16 April 2023.

<sup>690</sup> The Jerusalem Post, *Iran Jews warned not to visit synagogues amid likely regime persecution*, 22 September 2022; The Times of Israel, *In unprecedented move, Tehran Jewish community calls to avoid synagogues amid unrest*, 23 September 2022; Iran International, *Iran pressures Jewish community to participate in Quds Day*, 10 April 2023; USDoS, *Iran 2022 international religious freedom report*, 15 May 2023, p. 35.

<sup>691</sup> The Times of Israel, *Tehran Jewish community says it sides with regime amid Iran protests*, 24 November 2022; Tehran Times, *Tehran Jewish community condemns unrest, cautions of division*, 26 November 2022.

media reported the arrest of four Jews in Tehran and one in Shiraz in connection with these protests. One of those arrested was reportedly released after a week.<sup>692</sup> As in the previous reporting period, there were no indications that Jews faced many problems in their daily life due to their religious beliefs.<sup>693</sup>

### 3.2.3.19 Zoroastrians

Zoroastrianism is a recognised minority religion with a deputy in parliament.<sup>694</sup> Iran respects the Zoroastrians as long as they do not engage in activities that are seen as directed against the Islamic Republic of Iran.<sup>695</sup>

Traditionally, Zoroastrian communities lived in Yazd and Kerman provinces.<sup>696</sup> From the second half of the nineteenth century, many Zoroastrians moved to the big cities or to regions abroad, such as Western India or the US state of California.<sup>697</sup> Estimates of the number of Zoroastrians in Iran range from 11,000 to 25,000.<sup>698</sup> This small community is mainly located in Tehran, Yazd, Kerman, Isfahan and Shiraz.<sup>699</sup> The authorities are known to monitor Zoroastrian communities. However, they are viewed as less of a threat than other groups because Zoroastrianism is not evangelical. Zoroastrians have their own associations, fire temples and schools in Iran. As in the previous reporting period, there were no indications that Zoroastrians faced many problems in their daily life due to their religious beliefs.<sup>700</sup>

### 3.2.3.20 Gonabadi Sufis

During the reporting period, members of the Nematollahi Gonabadi order were under pressure.<sup>701</sup> This Sufi order is a branch of the Nematollahi order. The Nematollahi Gonabadi order is the largest Sufi order in Iran. However, it is not clear how many people in Iran belong to this order. Gonabadi Sufis consider themselves to be Shia Muslims.<sup>702</sup> Nevertheless, they may face problems in daily life because conservative clerics look down on Sufism and view it as a form of heresy and a movement that has strayed from Islam. This can lead to Gonabadi Sufis being

<sup>692</sup> Iran International, *Iran arrests five Jewish citizens amid protests: Exclusive*, 8 December 2022; The Times of Israel, *3 members of Iran's Jewish community arrested amid protests; 1 released*, 10 December 2022; The Jerusalem Post, *At least five Jews arrested by Iran during protests against Islamic Republic*, 12 December 2022.

<sup>693</sup> Israel National News, *Iran's rabbi speaks: 'No danger to Judaism in Iran'*, 22 November 2022.

<sup>694</sup> Tasnim News, *Spokesman congratulates Iranian Christians on Christmas*, 26 December 2022; Die Zeit, *Wie Staat und Religion im Iran miteinander verwoben sind*, 19 January 2023; IranWire, *Iran's zoroastrians hold annual festival in Yazd*, 31 January 2023; USDoS, *Iran 2022 international religious freedom report*, 15 May 2023, p. 8.

<sup>695</sup> Article 18, *Iran: Country profile*; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>696</sup> RFE/RL, *Iran lifts ban on Zoroastrian city council member*, 22 July 2018; Iran International, *Zoroastrian fest keeps fire of protests burning in Iran*, 31 January 2023; IranWire, *Iran's Zoroastrians hold annual festival in Yazd*, 31 January 2023; Paulina Niechcial, *The contemporary collective identity of Zoroastrians in Tehran: Between the strategies of dichotomization and complementarization*, in: S. Behnaz Hosseini (ed.), *Ethnic religious minorities in Iran*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2023, pp. 201-228, 201.

<sup>697</sup> PBS, *Ancient but small in number, Zoroastrians confront depletion of their faith*, 1 July 2022; Niechcial, *The contemporary collective identity of Zoroastrians in Tehran*, 2023, p. 202.

<sup>698</sup> Niechcial, *The contemporary collective identity of Zoroastrians in Tehran*, 2023, p. 202; USDoS, *Iran 2022 international religious freedom report*, 15 May 2023, p. 8; Australian Government, *DFAT country information report Iran*, 24 July 2023, p. 21.

<sup>699</sup> Tehran Times, *Zoroastrians celebrate fire and light in mid-winter festival*, 30 January 2023; Parsi Times, *Zoroastrians celebrate Jashn-e-Sadeh in Iran*, 4 February 2023; Niechcial, *The contemporary collective identity of Zoroastrians in Tehran*, 2023, p. 225; Australian Government, *DFAT country information report Iran*, 24 July 2023, p. 21.

<sup>700</sup> Confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, July 2023.

<sup>701</sup> Freedom House, *Freedom in the world 2023. Country report Iran*, 9 March 2023, p. 9; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>702</sup> IranWire, *Who are the Gonabadi Sufis?*, 13 February 2018; Al Jazeera, *Iran's Gonabadi dervishes: A 'long history' of persecution*, 27 February 2018; IranWire, *Iranian Gonabadi dervish freed after nearly five years in prison*, 25 January 2023; Australian Government, *DFAT country information report Iran*, 24 July 2023, p. 19.

denied government jobs because of their religious beliefs, experiencing problems during their studies, at work or in maintaining state benefits.<sup>703</sup>

Some Gonabadi Sufis imprisoned in connection with the incidents at *Golestan-e Haftom* on 19 February 2018, which involved clashes with security forces, were released in 2023, either because they had served out their sentence or because they were included in the February 2023 pardon (see Section 1.2.2.5).<sup>704</sup> Other Gonabadi Sufis remained in prison during the reporting period, sometimes even in solitary confinement.<sup>705</sup>

Some Gonabadi Sufis were also arrested and subject to criminal prosecution during the reporting period.<sup>706</sup> A number of examples are given below. This overview is by no means exhaustive.

In autumn 2022, the authorities arrested a Gonabadi Sufi for his participation in anti-government protests in response to the death of Mahsa Amini. In January 2023, a revolutionary court sentenced him to one year in prison under Section 500 of the Penal Code (propaganda against the IRI).<sup>707</sup>

In November 2022, HRANA reported the arrest of a Gonabadi Sufi in the town of Karaj in Alborz province. He had previously been arrested and imprisoned in connection with the events of 2018.<sup>708</sup> No information about the charges is known.

On 22 November 2022, the authorities arrested a Gonabadi Sufi in the city of Gorgan in Golestan province. She had previously been arrested and detained in 2017.<sup>709</sup> No information about the charges is known.

### 3.2.3.21 Erfan-e Halgheh

During the reporting period, members of the spiritual movement Erfan-e Halgheh came under pressure. The authorities regard Erfan-e Halgheh as a sect that has strayed from Islam.<sup>710</sup> On 11 August 2022, Iranian news agency IRIB News reported that the Revolutionary Guard in Yazd had arrested eight members of Erfan-e Halgheh.<sup>711</sup> And on 19 January 2023, IRIB News reported the arrest of nine members of Erfan-e Halgheh in the town of Tuyserkhan and the city of Hamedan,

<sup>703</sup> CHRI, *Formerly imprisoned lawyer and religious minority activist expelled from university without explanation*, 23 May 2017; RFE/RL, *Clashes highlight tensions between dervishes and Iran's establishment*, 20 February 2018; Australian Government, *DFAT country information report Iran*, 24 July 2023, p. 19.

<sup>704</sup> IranWire, *Iranian Gonabadi dervish freed after nearly five years in prison*, 25 January 2023; HRANA, *Report on the release of prisoners in the last 24 hours*, 14 February 2023; BBCM, *Iranian Sufi activist released from prison after five years*, 16 March 2023; United for Iran, *Kianoush Abbaszadeh*, <https://ipa.united4iran.org/en/prisoner/4265/>, accessed 12 September 2023; United for Iran, *Mostafa Abdi*, <https://ipa.united4iran.org/en/prisoner/1136/>, accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>705</sup> IranWire, *A family's agony as dervish journalist Kasra Nouri is 'disappeared' again*, 31 August 2022; Iran International, *Iranian regime continues arresting activists, issuing heavy sentences*, 22 January 2023; USCIRF, *Annual report*, 1 May 2023, p. 26; Frontline Defenders, *Kasra Nouri*, <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/profile/kasra-nouri>, accessed 12 September 2023; confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>706</sup> Iran International, *Iranian regime continues arresting activists, issuing heavy sentences*, 22 January 2023; IranWire, *Iran's religious freedom worsened last year: An IranWire special report*, 27 February 2023; United for Iran, *Mazaher Heydari*, <https://ipa.united4iran.org/en/prisoner/4584/>, accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>707</sup> HRANA, *Iran protests: Gonabadi dervish Mohsen sentenced to one year in prison*, 23 January 2023; United for Iran, *Mohsen Afrouz*, <https://ipa.united4iran.org/en/prisoner/7957/>, accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>708</sup> HRANA, *Two Gonabadi dervishes arrested in Karaj and Gorgan*, 22 November 2022; United for Iran, *Saeed Soltanpour*, <https://ipa.united4iran.org/en/prisoner/4271/>, accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>709</sup> HRANA, *Two Gonabadi dervishes arrested in Karaj and Gorgan*, 22 November 2022; IranWire, *"You are impure": Jailed Iranian student activist Abdipour subjected to violence, denied bail*, 2 December 2022; United for Iran, *Faezeh Abdipoor*, <https://ipa.united4iran.org/en/prisoner/8164/>, accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>710</sup> Radio Farda, *A member of 'Circle of Mysticism' arrested in Esfahan*, 15 August 2017.

<sup>711</sup> HRANA, *Eight members of Erfan-e-Halgheh association arrested*, 11 August 2022; BBCM, *Iran guards arrest members of 'mystic' group*, 11 August 2022.

both in Hamedan province, on charges that included insulting the sanctities of Islam (Section 513 of the Penal Code).<sup>712</sup> On 7 May 2023, Tasnim News reported that a number of Erfan-e Halgheh leaders had been arrested in Markazi province.<sup>713</sup>

### 3.2.4 Freedom of movement

#### 3.2.4.1 Travelling within Iran

In general, Iranians are free to travel within Iran.<sup>714</sup> In specific cases, the courts can impose internal exile as a punitive measure when someone is released from prison. This measure prohibits that person from travelling to other provinces or returning to their original place of residence.<sup>715</sup>

#### 3.2.4.2 Travelling outside Iran

According to one source, little changed as regards travelling abroad during the reporting period.<sup>716</sup> However, it did become more difficult to obtain a passport. Whereas previously it was possible to obtain a passport within a few working days, during the reporting period it took at least two months.<sup>717</sup> One source suspects that the anti-government protests in response to the death of Mahsa Amini have led the authorities to introduce stricter controls on exactly who enters and leaves the country.<sup>718</sup> For more information on permission to travel abroad, see Section 1.2.9.1 of the General Country of Origin Information Report on Iran of May 2022.

#### 3.2.4.3 Permission to travel abroad

Under Section 18 of the Passport Act, a married woman needs the written consent of her husband to apply for a passport. Unmarried girls under the age of eighteen need their father's consent.<sup>719</sup> Unmarried women over eighteen and divorced women do not need permission, although the fathers of unmarried women can request a travel ban. Under Section 19 of the Passport Act, a man can also request a travel ban for his wife, even if she has already been issued with a passport.<sup>720</sup> For information on the travel ban, see Section 3.3.4.2 of the General Country of Origin Information Report on Iran of May 2022.

#### 3.2.4.4 Exit stamp

At every border crossing, Iranians receive a stamp in their passport, both on leaving and entering the country. If an Iranian has left the country with a passport but does not have an exit stamp, they will be questioned on this matter when they return to Iran.<sup>721</sup> If it emerges that the person has left Iran illegally, this is punishable under Section 34 of the Passport Act. Unless this person is wanted by the authorities for other reasons, illegal exit under Section 34 of the Passport Act is usually punished by a fine.<sup>722</sup>

<sup>712</sup> BBCM, *Iran arrests nine members of spiritual group in west*, 19 January 2023.

<sup>713</sup> BBCM, *Mystical group's 'ringleaders' arrested in Iran's central province*, 7 May 2023.

<sup>714</sup> Confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>715</sup> Hengaw, *Mullah Saifullah Hosseini received a harsh 17-year prison sentence*, 26 January 2023; IranWire, *Iranian protester's death sentence overturned, replaced by imprisonment*, 30 March 2023.

<sup>716</sup> Confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>717</sup> Confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>718</sup> Confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>719</sup> IranWire, *Permission to travel – a nightmare for many Iranian women*, 2 November 2019; The Iran Primer, *Part 3: Iranian laws on women*, 8 December 2020; AP News, *Barred from travel by husband, Iran ski coach works remotely*, 18 February 2021; IRBC, *Iran: Exit and entry procedures at airports and land borders for women, including required documentation; mechanisms for a male spouse or relative to control and/or prohibit international travel of female spouse or relative and children, including access to identity documents; treatment of women and children who attempt to leave Iran without prior permission (2020–February 2022)*, 7 March 2022.

<sup>720</sup> IRBC, *Iran: Exit and entry procedures at airports and land borders for women*, 7 March 2022; UK Home Office, *Iran: Illegal exit*, May 2022, p. 7.

<sup>721</sup> Confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>722</sup> UK Home Office, *Iran: Illegal exit*, May 2022, p. 7; confidential source, April 2023.

### 3.3 Supervision and legal protection

#### 3.3.1 *Reporting a crime*

It follows from Section 69 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CCP) that crimes can be reported both verbally and in writing. A verbal declaration will then be written down. In both cases, the person making the report is required to sign the document or to authenticate it with a fingerprint.<sup>723</sup> Reports can be filed at the police station, at the public prosecutor's office or at an Office of Electronic Judicial Services (OEJS).<sup>724</sup> The person making a report can also do so by calling the police on 110 or the MOIS on 113.<sup>725</sup> According to one source, they still have to go to the police station the next day to file an official report. It is not possible to report a crime digitally, online or by using an app.<sup>726</sup>

According to one source, people who report a crime in person receive confirmation that their report has been registered.<sup>727</sup> According to another source, people who report a crime do not receive a copy of the report. The Sana system (see Section 3.3.2.4) sometimes shows a notification that a report has been made. However, the underlying document cannot be accessed. In cases where the registrar has not activated the relevant code, this notification does not appear.<sup>728</sup>

The police usually process reports of an offence under general criminal law. In other words, they complete the report and forward it to the public prosecutor's office.<sup>729</sup> It depends on the nature of the offence and the situation whether the report is then handled expeditiously.<sup>730</sup> According to one source, reports like these usually take between four and five months to process.<sup>731</sup>

It is possible to complain directly to the judiciary if the police do not respond adequately. Whether the complaint has any effect will depend on the official involved, the case and the person who raises the complaint.<sup>732</sup> According to one source, the SWO can also be consulted in cases involving children without parental care.<sup>733</sup> It is also possible to file a complaint against a member of the security apparatus by calling 197. This complaint should be accompanied by the member's name and relevant supporting documents.<sup>734</sup>

<sup>723</sup> Section 69 of the Penal Code; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>724</sup> Landinfo et al., *Iran. Criminal procedures and documents*, 1 December 2021, p. 53; BBCM, *Parents of boy killed in Iran protests 'invited' to file complaint*, 26 January 2023; confidential source, April 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>725</sup> BBCM, *Iran government sends text message to help identify Mossad agents*, 14 March 2023; confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>726</sup> Confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>727</sup> Confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>728</sup> Confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>729</sup> Confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, April 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>730</sup> Confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>731</sup> Confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>732</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Iran*, February 2021, pp. 98-99; Landinfo et al., *Iran: Criminal procedures and documents*, 1 December 2021, p. 53.

<sup>733</sup> Confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>734</sup> Landinfo et al., *Iran: Criminal procedures and documents*, 1 December 2021, pp. 44 and 53; confidential source, June 2023.

In practice, it is not possible for NGOs or international organisations to offer help in obtaining protection. This could even be counterproductive, as the applicant would risk being accused of having compromised national security.<sup>735</sup>

### 3.3.2 *Judicial process*

#### 3.3.2.1 The right to a fair trial

According to several sources, there is no due process in Iran, especially in political and security cases.<sup>736</sup> Cases of this kind are dealt with by the revolutionary courts (see also Section 1.1.2). In practice, the Iranian intelligence services and the Revolutionary Guard exert considerable influence over the proceedings in these courts.<sup>737</sup> In the revolutionary courts, there is practically no due process. In these courts, legal principles, such as access to a lawyer and formation of judgements, are regularly violated.<sup>738</sup> Revolutionary court sessions mostly take place behind closed doors.<sup>739</sup> Defendants are mostly given their conviction verbally. The verdicts of revolutionary courts are not usually registered in the Sana system (see Section 3.3.2.4).<sup>740</sup> According to one source, the revolutionary courts began to impose harsher punishments during the reporting period. For example, for offences where the courts usually gave a one-year prison term in the recent past, they were more likely to impose a sentence of four to five years. In addition, revolutionary courts classified some offences as more serious, for example by classifying an assault as an offence under Section 279 of the Penal Code (enmity against God).<sup>741</sup>

Ever since the Iranian revolution, the authorities have been undermining the independence of the Iranian Bar Association (IBA). Passing an IBA exam is one of the conditions a candidate needs to meet in order to work as a lawyer.<sup>742</sup> On 21 August 2023, parliament passed a law giving the Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade control over whether to issue licences to lawyers.<sup>743</sup> In addition, many lawyers who provided legal assistance to protesters and human rights defenders

<sup>735</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Iran*, May 2022, p. 79; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>736</sup> UNGA, *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (A/HRC/52/67)*, 7 February 2023, p. 14; Freedom House, *Freedom in the world 2023. Country report Iran*, 9 March 2023, p. 13; USDoS, *Iran 2022 human rights report*, 20 March 2023, pp. 18-19; confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>737</sup> IRBC, *Iran: The revolutionary court system, including procedures and documents issued by the courts (2017-March 2020)*, 12 March 2020; IranWire, *Injustice behind closed doors: Iran's special and revolutionary courts*, 9 September 2020; IHR, *Hacked documents: Islamic Republic's judiciary under command of IRGC*, 2 June 2023.

<sup>738</sup> Amnesty International, *Iran: Death penalty sought in sham trials*, 16 November 2022, pp. 1-2; The Conversation, *Iran executions: the role of the 'revolutionary courts' in breaching human rights*, 13 January 2023; UNGA, *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (A/HRC/52/67)*, 7 February 2023, p. 14; USDoS, *Iran 2022 human rights report*, 20 March 2023, pp. 5-6 and 19.

<sup>739</sup> The Conversation, *Iran executions: the role of the 'revolutionary courts' in breaching human rights*, 13 January 2023; BBC News, *Iran protests: 15 minutes to defend yourself against the death penalty*, 18 January 2023; VOA, *Iran sentences detained US-based opposition figure to death*, 21 February 2023; RFE/RL, *The Farda Briefing: Journalists who broke Mahsa Amini story stand trial behind closed doors*, 31 May 2023; RFE/RL, *Political sponsors say trial for Iranian rapper Salehi under way behind closed doors*, 23 June 2023; Iran International, *Many express concern over secret trial of Iranian dissident rapper*, 25 June 2023.

<sup>740</sup> Landinfo et al., *Iran. Criminal procedures and documents*, 1 December 2021, p. 76; Iran International, *Iran revolutionary court convicts two top science students*, 25 April 2022; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Iran*, May 2022, p. 86.

<sup>741</sup> Confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>742</sup> IHRDC, *Iranian bar associations: Struggle for independence*, 27 November 2012; JURIST, *Iran dispatch: government move to put bar association under judiciary threatens independence of lawyers amid wave of street protests*, 21 October 2022; CHRI, *Iran: State's "investigation" of bar association aims to crush dissent*, 28 June 2023.

<sup>743</sup> RFE/RL, *Iranian bar associations protest government moves they say will erode their power*, 25 August 2023; Iran International, *Iranian lawyers protest move to further limit bar associations*, 26 August 2023; VOA, *Iranian forces thwart judiciary lawyers' gathering at parliament*, 26 August 2023.

during the reporting period faced intimidation, arbitrary arrest, travel bans and convictions (see Section 3.2.1.2).<sup>744</sup>

### 3.3.2.2 Access to a lawyer

Under Article 35 of the Iranian constitution, suspects have the right to access a lawyer after their arrest. If they are unable to appoint a lawyer, they have to be assigned one.<sup>745</sup> According to a note to Section 48 of the Penal Code, a defendant charged in connection with organised crime or crimes against national and international security is only permitted to choose from a list of lawyers approved by the head of the judiciary in the investigative phase.<sup>746</sup> In practice, in political and national security cases heard in revolutionary courts, the accused is never completely free to choose their lawyer. In most cases, the court selects a lawyer from a list approved by the judiciary.<sup>747</sup> There are many reports of suspects in political and national security cases being denied access to a lawyer.<sup>748</sup> Lawyers increasingly complained about continuing reductions in access to their clients and the case files.<sup>749</sup> According to one source, lawyers in revolutionary courts and review courts were generally denied access to their clients. Only at the Supreme Court were they given this access.<sup>750</sup>

### 3.3.2.3 The double jeopardy principle

According to one source, Iran respects the principle of double jeopardy in the case of *ta'zir* punishments. These are punishments in the case of crimes for which the Sharia does not prescribe specific punishments. Such punishments are left to the judge's own discretion.<sup>751</sup> In certain circumstances, an accused may be prosecuted for the same crime twice. Section 14 of the Penal Code lists four categories of punishment.<sup>752</sup> In the case of *hudud*<sup>753</sup> and *qisas*<sup>754</sup>, double prosecution is possible.<sup>755</sup> According to one source, a court may impose a *ta'zir* punishment on a person, only for the prosecutor to argue afterwards that the punishment was

<sup>744</sup> IranWire, *Crackdown on lawyers brings to collapse Iran's judicial system*, 14 November 2022; HRANA, *Lawyer Negin Kiani sentenced to one year in prison*, 22 December 2022; Iran International, *Prison sentence upheld for Iranian lawyer defending protesters*, 17 March 2023; RFE/RL, *Iranian lawyers say courts issuing them dozens of summonses with no charges*, 26 May 2023.

<sup>745</sup> DIS, *Iran. Protests 2022-2023*, 1 March 2023, p. 23; IHRNGO & ECPM, *Annual report on the death penalty in Iran 2022*, 13 April 2023, pp. 36-37.

<sup>746</sup> UNGA, *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (A/HRC/52/67)*, 7 February 2023, p. 14; DIS, *Iran. Protests 2022-2023*, 1 March 2023, p. 23; IHRNGO & ECPM, *Annual report on the death penalty in Iran 2022*, 13 April 2023, p. 37; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>747</sup> IranWire, *Father of Iranian protester sentenced to death says designated lawyer doesn't answer phone calls*, 12 December 2022; NRC, *Marteling hoort bij Iraanse cel*, 12 January 2023; de Volkskrant, *Doodstraf? 15 minuten voor verweer*, 20 January 2023; Confidential source, 2023 February 2023.

<sup>748</sup> Iran International, *Jailed Iranian protesters not allowed to choose own lawyers*, 3 January 2023; The Independent, *UK-based family of teenage Iranian protester appeals for help to save his life*, 12 January 2023; IranWire, *Iran's rulers step up use of death penalty against Baluchis*, 13 January 2023; Amnesty International, *Four young Baluchi men at risk of execution*, 7 March 2023; Iran International, *Islamic Republic renews wave of Baluch executions*, 4 May 2023; Australian Government, *DFAT country information report Iran*, 24 July 2023, p. 38.

<sup>749</sup> RFE/RL, *Lawyer of jailed Iranian protester says he's been denied access to his client*, 16 December 2022; CHRI, *Iran: State's "investigation" of bar association aims to crush dissent*, 28 June 2023; confidential source, January 2023.

<sup>750</sup> Confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>751</sup> Confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>752</sup> These include punishments for serious crimes as stipulated under Sharia law (*hudud*), retribution (*qisas*), blood money (*diya*) and discretionary punishments (*ta'zir*); IranWire, *Iranian protesters are illegally sentenced to deaths, legal experts say*, 15 December 2022; IHRNGO & ECPM, *Annual report on the death penalty in Iran 2022*, 13 April 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>753</sup> A *hudud* punishment concerns a penalty for serious crimes which is prescribed by Sharia law.

<sup>754</sup> *Qisas* is a category of punishment for deliberate assaults on bodily integrity. These can be punished by retribution in kind, according to the principle 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth'.

<sup>755</sup> UK Home Office, *Iran: Fear of punishment for crimes committed in other countries ('double jeopardy' or re-prosecution)*, January 2018, p. 12; confidential source, April 2023.

incorrect and comes under *hudud*. In that case, a person can be convicted twice for the same offence. However, this rarely occurs in practice.<sup>756</sup>

#### 3.3.2.4 The Sana system

The Sana system is an electronic legal database used by the judiciary to register and track cases. A lawyer or their client can access the documents of a case through the Sana system. According to various sources, the revolutionary courts do not use the Sana system in all cases.<sup>757</sup>

According to one source, there were no significant developments with regard to the Sana system during the reporting period.<sup>758</sup> According to another source, some minor tweaks to the system were made. One of these allowed lawyers to upload their pleas directly through the system. Another tweak enables the Sana system to incorporate financial agreements between lawyers and their clients.<sup>759</sup>

According to one source, a prosecutor's request to the court for a travel ban cannot be viewed in the Sana system by the person to whom the ban applies.<sup>760</sup>

Legally, charges have to be filed and permission granted by the court before a house can be searched.<sup>761</sup> In political and national security cases, the security service has been known in practice to merely state that it obtained verbal consent for a search, without presenting a search warrant.<sup>762</sup> According to one source, the search warrant is not incorporated into the Sana system.<sup>763</sup>

From the Netherlands, lawyers in Iran can be authorised through the Iranian embassy in the Netherlands.<sup>764</sup> They can also be authorised through the Sana system.<sup>765</sup>

If someone has to appear in court, that person will receive a text message notifying them that they have a letter in the Sana system. If someone involved in a court case does not have a Sana account, a printed notification will be issued to them at home. It states that the addressee is required to register through the Sana system for the follow-up steps.<sup>766</sup>

If a case is to be heard by a revolutionary court, a defendant is not usually granted access to documents from the criminal case file.<sup>767</sup> In ordinary courts, a defendant and their lawyer are the only ones with access to the documents in the case file. A family member issued with a summons to give a statement about the suspect does

<sup>756</sup> Confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>757</sup> Landinfo et al., *Iran: Criminal procedures and documents*, 1 December 2021, p. 88; Radio Zamaneh, *Interrogation in the "sharia room" and telephone trials: A report from Qarchak prison*, 21 February 2023; confidential source, March 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>758</sup> Confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>759</sup> Confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>760</sup> Confidential source, June 2023.

Section 55 of the Penal Code.

<sup>762</sup> Landinfo et al., *Iran: Criminal proceedings and documents*, 1 December 2021, p. 61; confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>763</sup> Confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>764</sup> Iran Best Lawyer, *How you can grant a power of attorney to a lawyer in Iran?* <https://www.iranbestlawyer.com/how-you-can-grant-a-power-of-attorney-to-a-lawyer-in-iran/>, accessed 12 September 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>765</sup> Alemohamad Law Office, *Represent a lawyer in Iran without referring to Mikhak system*, 22 June 2021; Iran Best Lawyer, *How you can grant a power of attorney to a lawyer in Iran?*; confidential source, March 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>766</sup> Confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, April 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>767</sup> Landinfo et al., *Iran: Criminal proceedings and documents*, 1 December 2021, p. 89; confidential source, April 2023.

not have access to the file.<sup>768</sup> However, according to one source, family members can access criminal case file documents in general cases if they have access to the username and password for the defendant's Sana system profile.<sup>769</sup>

Military courts hold trials concerning crimes committed by members of the armed forces while performing their duties.<sup>770</sup> According to one source, lawyers in these courts are permitted to see or request all evidence in advance.<sup>771</sup> Anyone convicted by a military court is issued with documents when their sentence is imposed. By law, these documents must be accessible in the Sana system.<sup>772</sup> According to one source, it depends on the case as to whether a verdict is visible in the Sana system. On some sensitive issues, the courts may request that anyone authorised to do so comes to court in person to see the judgement.<sup>773</sup>

For more information about the Sana system, see Section 3.3.4.5 of the General Country of Origin Information Report on Iran of May 2022.

#### 3.3.2.5 Flogging

In Iran, flogging can be imposed as a punishment for more than a hundred different offences.<sup>774</sup> In some cases, a first offence for example, it may be possible to buy off a flogging.<sup>775</sup> If the case involves a *hudud* punishment, this is not possible. In the case of a *ta'zir* punishment, a judge may decide to impose an alternative punishment, such as a fine, when reviewing the initial verdict.<sup>776</sup> According to various sources, flogging cannot be replaced with another type of punishment once the sentence has become final. Cases are known in which this punishment is not carried out.<sup>777</sup>

#### 3.3.2.6 Prison leave

Prisoners can be granted prison leave, for example for medical treatment, to attend a funeral, to visit relatives during the holidays, or to serve out the remainder of the term in their own home.<sup>778</sup> On 16 January 2023, for instance, the Iranian news agency reported that 975 women prisoners had been released on bail and 6,000 other women prisoners had been granted leave to mark the birth of Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet.<sup>779</sup> According to one source, a prisoner who is granted leave will be issued with a document to this effect. The authorities decide whether bail also needs to be paid in such cases.<sup>780</sup>

<sup>768</sup> Confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>769</sup> Confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>770</sup> Landinfo et al., *Iran: Criminal procedures and documents*, 1 December 2021, p. 44.

<sup>771</sup> Confidential source, August 2023.

<sup>772</sup> Confidential source, April 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>773</sup> Confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>774</sup> UNGA, *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (A/77/181)*, 18 July 2022, p. 13; ABC, *Why document the flogging punishment?*, <https://www.iranrights.org/projects/flogging/detail>, accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>775</sup> BBC News, *Who, what, why: What can you be flogged for in Iran*, 23 May 2014; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Iran*, May 2022, p. 92.

<sup>776</sup> Confidential source, April 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>777</sup> Confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, June 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>778</sup> Article 18, *Christian convert given leave from prison*, 27 August 2021; Al Jazeera, *Siamak Namazi allowed to leave Iran prison for a week*, 2 October 2022; IranWire, *Back to Evin: Baha'i children's activist prison leave ends*, 4 April 2023.

<sup>779</sup> BBCM, *Iran frees over 900 female prisoners on parole*, 16 January 2023.

<sup>780</sup> Confidential source, June 2023.

- 3.3.2.7 **Power of attorney**  
According to various sources, a lawyer in Iran cannot use a power of attorney from a brother or another family member to obtain documents on a defendant in a criminal case from a court in Iran.<sup>781</sup>
- 3.3.2.8 **Appeals against revolutionary court rulings**  
It is possible to appeal against a ruling by a revolutionary court. The defendant can apply for a review in such cases. The review judgement can then be appealed in the Supreme Court.<sup>782</sup>
- 3.3.2.9 **Conviction in absentia**  
According to various sources, it is not uncommon in Iran for a person to be convicted in absentia for activities abroad. This happens, for example, if someone abroad posts critical texts on social media.<sup>783</sup> Several sources indicate that this has happened to well-known activists abroad. One example is Dubai-based former professional footballer Ali Karimi, who was convicted by the Iranian authorities after posting critical texts on his Instagram account in response to the death of Mahsa Amini.<sup>784</sup>
- 3.3.3 **Arrests, custody and detention**  
According to several sources, conditions in Iranian prisons were poor. Many of them were overcrowded.<sup>785</sup> Several sources indicated that there were many hygiene-related issues, such as lack of clean drinking water, poor sanitation and widespread vermin.<sup>786</sup> There were too few places to sleep and inadequate ventilation.<sup>787</sup> Prisoners were sometimes held in cramped cells and given too little food.<sup>788</sup> They were not given adequate access to medical care.<sup>789</sup>

There were examples of medical maltreatment, with prisoners being denied medical care or prescribed certain drugs (sometimes in excessive dosages).<sup>790</sup> There were

<sup>781</sup> Confidential source, April 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>782</sup> HRANA, *Golrokh Iraee's sentence reduced to five years on appeal*, July 3, 2023; confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, March 2023; confidential source, April 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>783</sup> IFEX, *Iran issues prison sentence to cartoonist in absentia*, 8 March 2017; CHRI, *Prominent lawyers: Judiciary ad announcing prison time for 10 Iranians in absentia unlawful*, 21 March 2017; The Guardian, *Iranian TV executive shot dead in Istanbul, Turkish media report*, 30 April 2017; CNN, *TV exec gunned down in Istanbul*, 1 May 2017; Al-Monitor, *Who killed exiled Iranian TV executive in Istanbul?*, 1 May 2017; BBCM, *Iran to hold trial in absentia for members of exiled opposition group*, 29 July 2023; confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, March 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>784</sup> IranWire, *Footballers tackle the regime*, 4 October 2022; RFE/RL, *Iran charges former Bayern Munich player Ali Karimi over support for protests*, 5 October 2022; confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>785</sup> CHRI, *Analysis: Khamenei's "pardon" is a public relations stunt that cedes no ground to the protesters*, 8 February 2023; Freedom House, *Freedom in the world 2023. Country report Iran*, 9 March 2023, p. 15; USDoS, *Iran 2022 human rights report*, 20 March 2023, p. 11.

<sup>786</sup> Iran International, *Iran inmates have to buy their drinking water to avoid hazardous material*, 22 May 2021; HRANA, *Prisoners' living conditions at Greater Tehran Central Penitentiary*, 1 June 2022; IranWire, *Inside Qarchak prison, a facility never meant for human beings*, 16 June 2022; CHRI, *Gharchak prison in Iran: A cauldron of abuse and violations*, 5 August 2022; DW, *A look inside Iran's notorious Evin prison*, 20 October 2022; USDoS, *Iran 2022 human rights report*, 20 March 2023, p. 11.

<sup>787</sup> IranWire, *Dire conditions in Iran's Evin prison*, 4 December 2022; Iran International, *Political detainees in Iran's Karaj prison in 'dire' conditions: Exclusive*, 5 January 2023.

<sup>788</sup> The Independent, *Locked up, stripped and tortured: Iran's protesters reveal the price they pay for defiance*, 19 January 2023; de Volkskrant, *Alleen met ijzeren vuist kan een nieuwe revolutie worden tegengehouden. Nog wel*, 11 February 2023.

<sup>789</sup> Amnesty International, *In death's waiting room. Deaths in custody following deliberate denial of medical care in Iran's prisons*, 12 April 2022; USDoS, *Iran 2022 human rights report*, 20 March 2023, p. 12; USDoS, *Iran 2022 international religious freedom report*, 15 May 2023, p. 3.

<sup>790</sup> France 24, *Iran: Protesters denied medical care and tortured to death in secret prisons*, 9 January 2023; IranWire, *"She suffered beyond belief:" 20-year-old Armita, a symbol of Iranian resistance*, 31 January 2023; Hengaw, *A prisoner dies due to lack of medical attention in Urmia prison*, 14 March 2023; IranWire, *Tortured Iranian rapper denied medical care in prison, family says*, 5 April 2023; Iran International, *Iranian political prisoner denied medical leave despite excessive bail*, 19 July 2023.

also examples of prisoners who were not allowed to contact family members or lawyers.<sup>791</sup> There were also reports of maltreatment and sexual violence. Female prisoners in particular were at high risk of sexual abuse.<sup>792</sup> In response to ongoing reports of sexual violence at the notorious Qarchak women's prison, the Council of the European Union added this prison to the EU sanctions list on 7 March 2023.<sup>793</sup>

It made a difference whether a prisoner was still being investigated by the intelligence services, for example, or if they had already been convicted and were serving their sentence. During the investigative phase, prisoners were often held in isolation or in a cell with a fellow prisoner, and mental pressure was exerted on them.<sup>794</sup> In such instances, the conditions for human rights defenders were often extra harsh. Maltreatment – including being held in isolation for extended periods (white torture) – was a widely known phenomenon.<sup>795</sup> According to Iran International, the authorities were known to gain access to prisoners' social media accounts in order to fabricate supporting evidence against them.<sup>796</sup> There were also reports of mock executions.<sup>797</sup>

After conviction, a prisoner usually ended up being detained in the general cell blocks. There, the situation could vary from one block to the next, as certain groups of prisoners were together.<sup>798</sup> Some prisoners were held a long way from their original place of residence, making it difficult logistically for their family members to visit them on a regular basis.<sup>799</sup> Cases are also known in which detainees were placed among violent prisoners.<sup>800</sup>

Several reports of the suspicious deaths of suspects on remand were published during the reporting period.<sup>801</sup> Family members and/or cellmates suspected that

<sup>791</sup> IranWire, *Beaten in jail, no lawyer: Two young men in the black holes of Iran's repressive system*, 13 December 2022; UN News, *Iran's detention of Belgian aid worker a 'flagrant violation of international law': UN rights experts*, 17 January 2023; IranWire, *Baha'i prisoner of conscience barred from receiving visitors for three weeks*, 15 May 2023; IranWire, *Jailed Baha'i denied family contacts and calls*, 12 June 2023; KHRN, *Iran court sentences 16-year-old protester to two years in jail*, 10 July 2023.

<sup>792</sup> IranWire, *Activist reports mass sexual abuse in Iran's detention centers*, 30 November 2022; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>793</sup> Council of the European Union, *Violence against women and girls: EU sanctions nine individuals and three entities under its Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime*, 7 March 2023.

<sup>794</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Iran*, May 2022, p. 95; Iran Press Watch, *From prison to prison; the story of Ardeshir Fanaian, a Baha'i citizen*, 5 May 2023.

<sup>795</sup> DW, *A look inside Iran's notorious Evin prison*, 20 October 2022; Narges Mohammadi, *White torture. Interviews with Iranian women prisoners*, Oneworld, 2022, pp. 6-9; Iran International, *Jailed rights activists recounts ordeal of women in Evin prison*, 20 January 2023; Iran International, *Islamic Republic uses different methods to torture protesters*, 25 January 2023; BBC News, *Iran prisoner spends 1,000 days in solitary confinement*, 2 June 2023.

<sup>796</sup> Iran International, *Iran regime uses social media accounts of detainees to incriminate them*, 19 December 2022; CNN, *Iran's government accesses the social media accounts of those it detains. Tech companies appear ill-equipped to stop it*, 19 December 2022.

<sup>797</sup> BBC News, *Iranian protester subjected to mock executions in prison – source*, 5 December 2022; IranWire, *Fake executions, beatings: Nine days of nightmare of 19-year-old protester in Iranian jail*, 13 February 2023; Amnesty International, *Iran: Executions of tortured protesters must trigger a robust reaction from the international community*, 19 May 2023; The Guardian, *Iran executes three men accused over anti-government protests*, 19 May 2023.

<sup>798</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Iran*, May 2022, p. 95; Kylie Moore-Gilbert, *The uncaged sky. My 804 days in an Iranian prison*, Ultimo Press, 2022, p. 322.

<sup>799</sup> RFE/RL, *Iranian political prisoner describes torture to UN human rights official*, 16 December 2022; USDoS, *Iran 2022 international religious freedom report*, 15 May 2023, p. 27; Article 18, *Pastor transferred to prison 1,000 miles from home and family*, 10 July 2023; BBCM, *Iran pardons two, sentences several to banishment in case of slain militiaman*, 21 August 2023.

<sup>800</sup> CHRI, *Gharchak prison in Iran: A cauldron of abuse and violations*, 5 August 2022; Article 2023, *Report on political prisoners' conditions in women's ward of Evin prison*, 6 March 2023.

<sup>801</sup> Amnesty International, *In death's waiting room. Deaths in custody following deliberate denial of medical care in Iran's prisons*, 12 April 2022, p. 32; UNGA, *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (A/77/181)*, 18 July 2022, pp. 10-11; USDoS, *Iran 2022 human rights report*, 20 March 2023, p. 4.

they had died as a result of torture.<sup>802</sup> At some executions and televised public confessions, signs of physical violence were visible.<sup>803</sup>

On the evening of 15 October 2022, fires and rioting broke out in Tehran's Evin prison. This unrest continued until the morning of 16 October 2022. Flames and smoke could be seen on video footage taken in the area. Gunshots, explosions and sirens could also be heard. The judiciary reported that 8 prisoners died and that 61 were injured.<sup>804</sup> On 18 October 2022, IranWire reported that the death toll had risen to 13, including 4 people who had died in hospital and 8 who had been shot dead.<sup>805</sup> The authorities stated that rioters were responsible for the fires, but Amnesty International expressed suspicions that the authorities had started the fires to cover up the violent crackdown on a prison riot.<sup>806</sup>

### 3.3.4 *The death penalty*

Under Iranian criminal law, a large number of offences carry the death penalty. These include murder, drug-related offences, repeated alcohol consumption, sexual offences, such as adultery and male sodomy, and political offences, such as armed insurrection and spying for foreign entities.<sup>807</sup>

Section 147 of the Penal Code states that girls can be held criminally liable from the age of nine lunar years (eight years and nine months) and boys from fifteen lunar years (fourteen years and seven months), which means they can also be subject to adult criminal law from that age. This means that persons who are under the age of eighteen when a crime is committed can also be sentenced to death.<sup>808</sup>

The Islamic Penal Code specifies four methods of execution: hanging, firing squad, crucifixion and stoning.<sup>809</sup> As far as could be ascertained, almost all prison executions took the form of hanging.<sup>810</sup> Some executions took place in public, using a crane.<sup>811</sup> The first public execution since 2020 took place on 23 July 2022 in the

<sup>802</sup> The Independent, *Teenage chef dubbed 'Jamie Oliver of Iran' dies in police custody after arrest at hijab protests*, 31 October 2022; BBC News, *Iran protests: Family finds signs of torture on man's exhumed body*, 19 December 2022; IranWire, *Iranian Kurdish "riot leader" arrested, slain and buried in less than a day*, 12 January 2023; RFE/RL, *Iranian protester dies in police custody soon after rearrest, group says*, 24 February 2023; Iran International, *Baluch protester dies as a result of police beating: Amnesty*, 25 February 2023; Iran International, *Photos prove Iranian political prisoner tortured to death*, 11 July 2023.

<sup>803</sup> Die Welt, *"Die Spuren von Missbrauch und Folter sind eindeutig"*, 11 December 2022; IHRNGO & ECPM, *Annual report on the death penalty in Iran 2022*, 13 April 2023, p. 44.

<sup>804</sup> BBC News, *Evin prison fire: Several dead after fire at Iran's notorious detention centre*, 16 October 2022; The Washington Post, *Evin on fire: What really happened inside Iran's most notorious prison*, 25 October 2022.

<sup>805</sup> IranWire, *Death toll rises to 13 following fire and riots at Evin prison*, 18 October 2022.

<sup>806</sup> Amnesty International, *Iran: Tortured prisoners at Evin prison are in urgent need of international protection*, 18 October 2022.

<sup>807</sup> NOS, *Iran executeert vier mannen om werk voor inlichtingendienst Israël*, 4 December 2022; The Independent, *Iran executes four accused of being spies for Mossad*, 5 December 2022; IHRNGO & ECPM, *Annual report on the death penalty in Iran 2022*, 13 April 2023, pp. 29-35.

<sup>808</sup> OHCHR, *Iran: UN experts say executions of child offenders must stop*, 25 November 2021; Amnesty International, *Iran is sentencing children and teenagers to death*, 16 August 2022; The Washington Post, *Minors in Iran could face death penalty on protest-related charges*, 1 December 2022.

<sup>809</sup> Iran International, *Iranian politician defends death by stoning 'as good Islamic law'*, 14 January 2023; IHRNGO & ECPM, *Annual report on the death penalty in Iran 2022*, 13 April 2023, p. 45.

<sup>810</sup> Die Zeit, *Aktivisten melden 94 Hinrichtungen im Iran seit Jahresbeginn*, 2 March 2023; HRW, *Iran: Alarming surge in executions*, 12 May 2023.

<sup>811</sup> AP News, *Iran execution: Man publicly hanged from crane amid protests*, 12 December 2022; IranWire, *Man executed in public for spreading "corruption and prostitution"*, 25 May 2023; BBCM, *Iran hangs alleged sex offender as execution drive accelerates*, 25 May 2023; The Independent, *Large crowd gathers to watch rare public execution in Iran condemned as 'medieval' by activists*, 26 May 2023; BBCM, *Iran executes 'murderer' of policemen in public in south-western city*, 18 June 2023; BBCM, *Iran publicly executes two men convicted in police officer's killing*, 13 July 2023.

city of Shiraz in Fars province. The person executed was a man convicted of murdering a police officer.<sup>812</sup>

#### 3.3.4.1 Number of executions carried out

The authorities do not provide transparency on the number of death sentences and executions, and no official figures are made known.<sup>813</sup> During the reporting period, there was a significant increase in the number of executions reported.<sup>814</sup> Several human rights organisations point out a link between the number of executions and periods of increasing civil unrest. During such periods, the authorities are thought to carry out more executions to instil fear in the population.<sup>815</sup>

According to the NGO Human Rights Activists in Iran (HRAI), at least 565 people were executed in 2022, including at least 11 women and 5 people who were under the age of eighteen when the crime was committed. Almost 49% of these executions were related to murder charges and almost 43% to drug-related charges. The highest number of executions took place in Sistan-Baluchistan province, accounting for almost 19% of the total.<sup>816</sup> According to estimates, this province is home to between two and four percent of Iran's population.<sup>817</sup>

According to Amnesty International, at least 576 people were executed in 2022, including 5 who were under eighteen when the crime was committed. In 2021, at least 314 people were executed.<sup>818</sup>

IHRNGO and ECPM reported that at least 582 people were executed in 2022. According to these two organisations, at least 333 people were executed in 2021 and at least 267 people in 2020. Most of the executions were in connection with murder (288 people) or drug-related offences (256 people).<sup>819</sup>

The number of executions continued to increase sharply in 2023. On 19 May 2023, some UN experts reported that at least 259 people had been executed since 1 January 2023.<sup>820</sup> IHRNGO reported on 12 September 2023 that 499 people had been executed since 1 January 2023.<sup>821</sup> These were unprecedented numbers for Iran. A relatively high number of the people executed belong to one of the marginalised ethnic groups, such as the Baluchi or the Kurdish peoples.<sup>822</sup>

<sup>812</sup> Iran International, *At least 45 Iranians were executed in past month, one in public*, 24 July 2022; Al Jazeera, *Iran publicly carries out second protest-related execution*, 12 December 2022; The New York Times, *A 2nd Iranian protester is executed, this time at a public hanging*, 13 December 2022; HRAI, *Annual report 2022*, 26 December 2022, p. 30; IHRNGO & ECPM, *Annual report on the death penalty in Iran 2022*, 13 April 2023, p. 67; confidential source, January 2023.

<sup>813</sup> UNGA, *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (A/HRC/52/67)*, 7 February 2023, p. 14; IHRNGO & ECPM, *Annual report on the death penalty in Iran 2022*, 13 April 2023, p. 17.

<sup>814</sup> The National, *Executions in Iran surged 75% in 2022, rights groups say*, 13 April 2023; confidential source, January 2023.

<sup>815</sup> IHRNGO & ECPM, *Annual report on the death penalty in Iran 2022*, 13 April 2023; Iran International, *Islamic Republic renews wave of Baluch executions*, 4 May 2023.

<sup>816</sup> HRAI, *Annual report 2022*, 26 December 2022, pp. 30 and 33.

<sup>817</sup> The Iran Primer, *Iran's troubled provinces: Baluchistan*, 24 February 2021; Iran International, *Majority in Iran's Sistan province in dire poverty, lawmaker says*, 5 April 2023.

<sup>818</sup> Amnesty International, *Death sentences and executions 2022*, 15 May 2023, pp. 28-30; Amnesty International, *Executions of persons who were children at the time of the offence: 1990-2022*, 15 May 2023, pp. 14-15.

<sup>819</sup> IHRNGO & ECPM, *Annual report on the death penalty in Iran 2022*, 13 April 2023, pp. 12 and 47.

<sup>820</sup> Die Zeit, *Aktivisten melden 94 Hinrichtungen im Iran seit Jahresbeginn*, 2 March 2023; UNHRC, *Statement by the independent international fact-finding mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran on the execution of protesters*, 19 May 2023.

<sup>821</sup> IHRNGO, *Total executions 2023*, <https://iranhr.net/en/>, accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>822</sup> Iran International, *Islamic Republic renews wave of Baluch executions*, 4 May 2023; HRANA, *Alarming surge in executions in Iran: At least 45 executions in seven days*, 5 May 2023; BBCM, *Briefing: Protests break out in south-east Iran after surge in executions*, 5 May 2023; BBCM, *Analysis: 'Fear' tactic in full swing as Iran steps up executions*, 15 May 2023.

Several protesters were sentenced to death and executed during the reporting period (see Section 3.2.1.9).

One execution given major coverage during the reporting period was that of Swedish-Iranian Habib Chaab, a prominent member of the ASMLA. In May 2020, he went missing in Türkiye. Some time later, it emerged that he was being detained in Iran. In December 2022, he stood trial at a revolutionary court in Tehran. On 12 March 2023, the Supreme Court announced that it had upheld his death sentence under Section 286 of the Penal Code (spreading corruption on earth). On 6 May 2023, the judiciary reported his execution.<sup>823</sup>

Death sentences for blasphemy are rare in Iran. One of the few examples during the reporting period occurred in June 2020, when the authorities arrested two men under Section 262 of the Penal Code (insulting the Prophet). Both operated online platforms, including a Telegram channel that hosted critical discussions on religion. It was alleged that one of the men also had a video on his mobile phone of a Quran being burned. In April 2021, a criminal court in the city of Arak in Markazi province sentenced both men to death. The Supreme Court upheld this conviction. On 8 May 2023, the judiciary reported their execution.<sup>824</sup> According to one source, the highly exceptional nature of this case could be interpreted as a message to the public from the authorities of the possible consequences of engaging in online activities of this kind.<sup>825</sup>

#### 3.3.4.2

##### Pardons

A convicted person has the opportunity to apply for a pardon. A person who has been sentenced to death also has the opportunity to show remorse and apply for a pardon. Under Section 11 of Article 110 of the Constitution, the supreme leader has the power to grant a pardon in cases that involve the death sentence. For this purpose, the head of the judiciary provides a list of names and accompanying recommendations.<sup>826</sup> Pardons are granted annually close to major holidays and official commemorations. Pardoned prisoners are released or can have their sentences commuted.<sup>827</sup> Shortly before the Revolution Day celebrations on 11 February 2023, the supreme leader announced a pardon for tens of thousands of prisoners. In March 2023, the head of the judiciary stated that over 82,000 prisoners had been pardoned up to that date. Over 22,000 of these prisoners had been detained in connection with participation in demonstrations.<sup>828</sup> However, it is not clear whether these prisoners were actually released.<sup>829</sup>

In cases of retributive justice (*qisas*), a pardon by the supreme leader is not possible because retribution is seen as the right of the victim's family. However, it is possible for the victim's family to reach a settlement with the offender's family in such cases.

<sup>823</sup> Al Jazeera, *Iran court upholds death sentence of Iranian-Swedish dissident*, 12 March 2023; RFE/RL, *Iran confirms death sentence against Swedish-Iranian dissident lured to Turkey*, 12 March 2023; Al Jazeera, *Iran executes Swedish-Iranian dual national*, 6 May 2023; Le Monde, *After hanging Habib Chaab, Iran threatens further executions of opponents*, 7 May 2023.

<sup>824</sup> BBCM, *Human rights site says two Iranians sentenced to death for blasphemy*, 24 April 2021; RFE/RL, *Iran hangs two men for blasphemy*, 8 May 2023; Al Jazeera, *Iran executes two 'Quran burners' for blasphemy*, 8 May 2023; NOS, *Iran executeert twee mannen voor godslastering*, 8 May 2023; BBCM, *Iran executes two over 'blasphemy', burning Quran'*, 8 May 2023.

<sup>825</sup> Confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>826</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Iran*, May 2022, p. 97; IranWire, *Iranian protesters are illegally sentenced to deaths, legal experts say*, 15 December 2022; The Iran Primer, *Supreme leader issues thousands of pardons*, 14 March 2023.

<sup>827</sup> IRNA, *3,000 inmates freed, 16 death penalty commuted in Gen Soleimani's commemoration*, 2 January 2023; BBCM, *Iran's leader pardons, commutes sentences of 1,760 prisoners*, 20 April 2023.

<sup>828</sup> BBCM, *Iran says over 80,000 pardoned after leader's amnesty*, 6 March 2023; BBCM, *Iran says over 22,000 protesters pardoned after leader's amnesty*, 13 March 2023.

<sup>829</sup> Confidential source, June 2023.

This involves the victim's family, possibly after payment of compensation ('blood money'), granting forgiveness to the perpetrator, thereby preventing further retribution.<sup>830</sup> If retribution is waived, the offender is released, unless the authorities decide that a discretionary *ta'zir* punishment applies, for example in the case of murder (Section 612 of the Penal Code) or bodily harm (Section 614 of the Penal Code).

### 3.3.5 Honour-based violence

Honour-based violence is prevalent in Iran, especially in economically disadvantaged and traditional rural areas, such as the Kurdish region in the northwest and Sistan-Baluchistan province in the southeast of the country.<sup>831</sup> There are no reliable and comprehensive figures about the scale on which this occurs. Some estimates put the total at approximately four hundred honour killings a year.<sup>832</sup>

Legal protection in such matters is very limited, as the 'blood owner' or person 'to whom the victim belongs', often a husband or father, fulfils a key role in the criminal prosecution.<sup>833</sup> This followed in part from a 2019 case in which the family of a woman murdered by her husband, the former mayor of Tehran, pardoned the perpetrator. This prevented retribution in the form of his execution. Following this pardon in August 2019, he still had to serve a prison sentence of 6.5 years. In April 2023, Iranian media reported that he had been pardoned and released.<sup>834</sup>

Usually, the Iranian media only reports cases of honour-related violence if they generate a significant amount of discussion on social media, for instance. One such example concerns the case of a seventeen-year-old woman in Khuzestan province beheaded by her husband on 5 February 2022. This led a number of people on social media to mention the beheading of a fourteen-year-old girl by her father, pointing out that the punishment for a man who beheads his daughter is an eight-year prison sentence, while a woman who speaks out against the dress code risks a 24-year prison sentence. In the Khuzestan case, the husband was sentenced to 7.5 years imprisonment in January 2023 for murder and six months for assault and disturbing public order, after the victim's family waived their right to retribution.<sup>835</sup>

According to several sources, family members of the victims of honour-based violence cannot obtain effective protection from the Iranian authorities.<sup>836</sup>

<sup>830</sup> BBCM, *Iran's Supreme Court suspends execution of protester*, 1 February 2023; IHRNGO & ECPM, *Annual report on the death penalty in Iran 2022*, 13 April 2023, p. 63; NOS, *Iran is executie-koploper, maar steeds meer moordenaars worden er vergeven*, 16 May 2023.

<sup>831</sup> Iran International, *Father shoots young daughter to death in Iran 'honor killing'*, 2 July 2022; IranWire, *15-year-old Iranian girl killed by father in latest "honor" killing*, 11 July 2023; Rudaw, *15-year-old child bride killed by parents in Iran: Monitor*, 16 July 2023; MEE, *Iranian press review: One honour killing happening every four days, says report*, 6 July 2023; confidential source, March 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>832</sup> BBCM, *Briefing: Fortnight of femicides in Iran as laws fail women*, 2 February 2023; Hengaw, *A woman was killed by her husband in Urmia*, 19 February 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>833</sup> Iran International, *Father shoots young daughter to death in Iran 'honor killing'*, 2 July 2022; BBC News, *Iranian man who beheaded 17-year-old wife jailed for eight years*, 18 January 2023; Iran International, *Iranian teenager murdered by brother in honor killing*, 5 June 2023.

<sup>834</sup> RFE/RL, *Ex-Tehran mayor 'forgiven' for wife's murder, avoids execution*, 14 August 2019; Radio Farda, *Former Tehran mayor pays \$650 thousand compensation for killing his wife*, 4 May 2020; Yaghoobi, *Temporary marriage in Iran*, 2022, p. 1; IFP, *Pardoned by wife's family, ex-mayor of Tehran freed permanently after leader's clemency*, 9 April 2023; confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>835</sup> CBS News, *Iran man who decapitated teen wife and paraded her head in public gets 8-year prison sentence*, 18 January 2023; BBC News, *Iranian man who beheaded 17-year-old wife jailed for eight years*, 18 January 2023; CNN, *He beheaded his wife in Iran. His prison sentence? Eight years and two months*, 19 January 2023.

<sup>836</sup> Confidential source, March 2023; confidential source, May 2023.

## 3.3.6

*Maltreatment and torture*

Iran has not ratified the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), but it has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).<sup>837</sup> Article 7 of the ICCPR prohibits torture. Under Article 38 of the Iranian constitution, torture is also prohibited. Nevertheless, many reports of maltreatment and torture of suspects were made during the reporting period. Such incidents primarily took place following their arrest and during the investigative phase to extract confessions.<sup>838</sup> According to several human rights organisations, the authorities confronted detainees with sexual violence and other forms of torture to extract false confessions. These practices were also used on children and adolescents.<sup>839</sup> Iranian state television regularly broadcast confessions on television. It is thought that these were mostly forced confessions.<sup>840</sup> In some cases, signs of physical torture were visible in these television broadcasts.<sup>841</sup> There were also reports of 'chemical torture'.<sup>842</sup>

Since the outbreak of anti-government protests in response to the death of Mahsa Amini in September 2022, reports of sexual violence against both men and women as a method of interrogation or repression by the Iranian authorities increased, both in public enforcement and in detention facilities. Many female protesters reported having been victims of sexual assault or rape. There were reports of women held in arbitrary detention for short periods, as well as women detained in prisons across the country. In addition, several doctors confirmed that, during the anti-government protests in response to the death of Mahsa Amini, women were admitted to hospital in need of treatment for internal bleeding as a result of rape.<sup>843</sup>

<sup>837</sup> The Conversation, *Iran executions: the role of the 'revolutionary courts' in violating human rights*, 13 January 2023; OHCHR, *UN treaty body database*, [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=81&Lang=EN](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=81&Lang=EN), accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>838</sup> UNGA, *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (A/77/525)*, 14 October 2022, p. 3; BBCM, *Briefings: Iran media interview doctor's 'family' to refute report of her killing*, 19 December 2022; BBC News, *Iran protests: Family finds signs of torture on man's exhumed body*, 19 December 2022; NOS, *Iraanse regime lijkt protestgolf ondanks 'scheurtjes' voorlopig te overleven*, 2 January 2023; NOS, *Gemarteld in de Iraanse gevangenis: 'Hij had blauwe plekken en afgebroken tanden'*, 6 January 2023; ABC News, *Sydney man campaigning to save cousin, Majid Kazemi, from death row after Iran protests*, 17 January 2023; BBCM, *Iran denies existence of protester on death row despite growing concerns*, 22 January 2023; Amnesty International, *Report 2022/23*, 28 March 2023, p. 198; IHRNGO & ECPM, *Annual report on the death penalty in Iran 2022*, 13 April 2023, p. 38.

<sup>839</sup> BBC News, *Iran protests: Jailed activist Sepideh Qolian describes brutality in letter*, 11 January 2023; Amnesty International, *Iran: Tortured protesters sentenced to death: Javad Rouhi, Mehdi Mohammadifard and Arshia Takdastan*, 27 January 2023; Amnesty International, *Iran: Quash death sentences of young protesters subjected to gruesome torture*, 27 January 2023; Die Zeit, *Aktivisten melden 94 Hinrichtungen im Iran seit Jahresbeginn*, 2 March 2023; Amnesty International, *Iran: Child detainees subjected to flogging, electric shocks and sexual violence in brutal protest crackdown*, 16 March 2023; The Independent, *Iranian security forces 'have killed and tortured children'*, 26 April 2023.

<sup>840</sup> HRANA, *Sepideh Rashno hospitalized prior to forced TV confession*, 5 August 2022; Le Monde, *Iran: «En sortant de prison, je ne pesais que 46kg»*, 3 December 2022; HRANA, *Four political prisoners coerced to make TV confession*, 7 December 2022; The Guardian, *British-Iranian man appears in heavily edited confession aired on Iranian TV*, 12 January 2023.

<sup>841</sup> Die Welt, *"Die Spuren von Missbrauch und Folter sind eindeutig"*, 11 December 2022; IHRNGO & ECPM, *Annual report on the death penalty in Iran 2022*, 13 April 2023, p. 44.

<sup>842</sup> Iran International, *Mysterious deaths of Iranian prisoners alarms families*, 5 January 2023; USDoS, *Iran 2022 human rights report*, 20 March 2023, p. 9; Iran International, *Jailed Iranian rapper alleges drug injection in psychiatric center*, 29 July 2023; confidential source, January 2023.

<sup>843</sup> BBCM, *Iran judiciary official rejects protester raped, dead*, 29 October 2022; CNN, *How Iran's security forces use rape to quell protests*, 21 November 2022; RFE/RL, *Iranian Sunni cleric says he had received reports of sexual assaults on female prisoners*, 6 December 2022; The New York Times, *Iran uses rape to enforce women's modesty*, 17 December 2022; BBC News, *Iran protests: Activist Narges Mohammadi details 'abuse' of detained women*, 24 December 2022; BBCM, *Iran denies activist's account of sexual abuse of female detainees*, 27 December 2022; Iran International, *Detained victims in Iran share harrowing stories of sexual assault*, 27 December 2022; BBCM, *Briefing: Iran denies reports of sexual assault of detained Baluch minors*, 29 December 2022; The Guardian, *'They used our hijabs to gag us': Iran protesters tell of rapes, beatings and torture by police*, 6 February 2023; BBCM, *Iran judiciary says reports about suicide of jailed teenager 'fabricated'*, 8 February 2023; The Guardian, *Iranian prosecutors concealed rape by Revolutionary Guards, document shows*, 8

According to several sources, the perpetrators of torture, severe maltreatment and rape remain unpunished in most cases.<sup>844</sup> According to one source, there are several reasons for this. One reason may be that the authorities attach no importance to the criminal prosecution of the perpetrators. Another reason is that people who have been arrested often have no idea who they are facing, and are therefore unable to identify the perpetrators of maltreatment, torture or rape. In addition, the legal status of those arrested is so weak that charging the perpetrators is almost impossible. Corruption is also widespread in Iran and criminal offences are denied by the authorities.<sup>845</sup>

### 3.3.7 *Disappearances and abductions*

In Iran, disappearances and abductions of lawyers, journalists, activists, protesters and people with lower profiles are commonplace.<sup>846</sup>

A widely reported case from the early days of the anti-government protests in response to Mahsa Amini's death was that of sixteen-year-old Nika Shakarami from Tehran. She disappeared on 20 September 2022. On 30 September 2022, her mother and brother were summoned to identify her body at the mortuary. Various explanations circulated about her death. According to the authorities, her body had been found in the courtyard of an abandoned building on 21 September 2022. A prosecutor stated that she had been thrown from the roof and that her death was not related to the protests. Some Iranian media reported that she had accidentally fallen to her death. Mizan news agency reported that a prosecutor had described her death as a suicide. However, her death certificate stated that she had died of multiple injuries inflicted by blows with a hard object. Footage taken on 20 September 2022 showed that she had been present at protests that evening. According to eyewitnesses, she had been seized by security forces that evening. On 6 October 2022, her family said they had learned through word of mouth that she had been abducted by the Revolutionary Guard, who had questioned her at length. She is also said to have been briefly held at Evin prison.<sup>847</sup>

Another widely reported victim was seventeen-year-old Iliad Rahmanipour from the city of Firouzabad in Fars province. He disappeared on 29 November 2022. Three days later, his family received word from the authorities that his body had been found surrounded by pills and empty glasses. His family said he had not committed suicide but was killed.<sup>848</sup>

Another case was the abduction on 8 December 2022 of a Sunni imam from the city of Khash. The next day, his lifeless body was found in the desert with gunshot

February 2023; Radio Zamaneh, *The sexual assault of at least 7 detainees in the central prison of Zahedan*, 7 March 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>844</sup> OHCHR, *Iran: Special Rapporteur calls for effective accountability for deaths in recent protests*, 26 October 2022; Amnesty International, *Report 2022/23*, March 2023, p. 200.

<sup>845</sup> Confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>846</sup> USDoS, *Iran 2022 human rights report*, 20 March 2023, p. 8; BBC News, *An Iranian's search for the truth about her missing father*, 4 May 2023; IranWire, *Tehran protester forcibly disappeared for over eight months*, 21 July 2023.

<sup>847</sup> The Guardian, *Mother of dead Iranian schoolgirl accuses authorities of murder*, 6 October 2022; BBC News, *Nika Shakarami: Videos show Iran teenager protesting before death*, 10 October 2022; CNN, *What really happened to Nika Shahkarami? Witnesses to her final hours cast doubt on Iran's story*, 27 October 2022.

<sup>848</sup> IranWire, *Killing cover-up: Family of dead teenage protester say he didn't commit suicide*, 6 December 2022; United for Iran, *Iliad Rahmanipour*, <https://ipa.united4iran.org/en/prisoner/8898/>, accessed 12 September 2023.

wounds to the head. The authorities described the killing as an act of terrorism.<sup>849</sup> On 13 December 2022, the MOIS reported that it had arrested three suspects.<sup>850</sup>

In another case, an imam from the city of Rask was summoned to appear before the special court for clerics in the city of Mashhad. He had confirmed reports of the rape of a Baluchi girl by a police commander (see Section 1.2.8). After leaving on a trip to Mashhad on 12 December 2022, he went missing. According to Iranian news agency IRNA, he had fled to a neighbouring country for fear that his 'contacts with foreign spies would be exposed'.<sup>851</sup>

In some cases, the authorities refused to provide information on the fate or whereabouts of people they had detained.<sup>852</sup> In other cases, the authorities kept people they had arrested in solitary confinement for long periods before informing their family about their whereabouts.<sup>853</sup> There were also instances when the authorities seized dead bodies or buried them anonymously.<sup>854</sup> The scale on which this occurred during the reporting period could not be ascertained.

<sup>849</sup> Iran International, *Sunni cleric kidnapped, killed in restive Sistan-Baluchestan*, 9 December 2022; IRNA, *Iran police probe into martyrdom of Sunni cleric*, 9 December 2022; Tehran Times, *Prominent Sunni Friday prayer imam found dead*, 9 December 2022.

<sup>850</sup> Mehr News, *Assassins behind senior Sunni cleric assassination detained*, 13 December 2022.

<sup>851</sup> BBCM, *People in south-east Iran protest over disappearance of Sunni cleric*, 23 December 2022; Tehran Times, *Key element behind Sistan-Baluchestan unrest has fled Iran*: IRNA, 1 March 2023; BBCM, *Hardline news outlet claims Iranian Sunni cleric absconded*, 1 March 2023; RFE/RL, *Missing Iranian cleric warns of his possible detention, death*, 29 March 2023; IranWire, *Sunni cleric's office: Fridays in Baluchistan are "bloodier" than in Jerusalem*, 14 April 2023.

<sup>852</sup> IranWire, *Where is Edris Faghighi? Family of missing Kurdish man kept in limbo for 11 months*, 27 June 2022; DW, *Families of Iran's detained protesters under pressure*, 4 November 2022; IranWire, *Another Baha'i arrested in Iran; Whereabouts unknown*, 22 November 2022; CHRI, *Iranian athletes killed, tortured, sentenced to death for supporting protests*, 4 January 2023.

<sup>853</sup> UNGA, *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (A/HRC/52/67)*, 7 February 2023, p. 15; IranWire, *Belgian jailed in Iran "forcibly disappeared, subjected to torture"*, 27 February 2023.

<sup>854</sup> RFE/RL, *Iranian authorities reportedly secretly bury RFE/RL journalist*, 30 October 2022; ABC News, *Iran accused of stealing bodies of slain protesters as families rush to reclaim loved ones*, 3 December 2022.

## 4 Refugees and displaced persons

### 4.1 Refugees in Iran

Afghans are by far the largest migrant community in Iran. The influx of large groups of Afghans into Iran began in 1979. When the Taliban seized power in August 2021, large numbers of Afghans entered Iran again. On 3 January 2023, the Iranian interior ministry stated that there were approximately 5 million Afghans residing in Iran, including 1.6 million who had entered the country after August 2021.<sup>855</sup> This figure was difficult to verify, as external parties had only limited access to the border regions. According to the UNHCR, an estimated 4.5 million Afghans were living in Iran. This means that, in absolute numbers, Iran hosts more refugees than any other country except for Türkiye.<sup>856</sup>

#### 4.1.1 *Influx of Afghans*

During the reporting period, Iran's borders remained closed to Afghans without valid passports and visas.<sup>857</sup> According to the UNHCR, most Afghans avoided official border crossings and entered Iran with the help of people smugglers. The UNHCR can only provide information on Afghans who contact the organisation on their arrival through its hotlines and offices. The UNHCR identified 56,757 Afghans from 13,553 households who entered Iran between 1 January 2021 and 31 December 2022.<sup>858</sup>

During the reporting period, the influx of Afghans continued. About 2,000 Afghans a day crossed the border into Iran, according to UNHCR estimates.<sup>859</sup> The Iranian authorities deport many of these new arrivals from the country.<sup>860</sup> Undocumented Afghans who refused to participate in the census (see Section 4.1.6) and persons who enter the country through irregular channels are at particular risk of forced deportation. The UNHCR estimates that the Iranian authorities deport approximately 65% of all new arrivals from Afghanistan.<sup>861</sup>

According to UNOCHA, approximately 762,900 Afghans returned to Afghanistan from Iran between January and November 2022.<sup>862</sup>

#### 4.1.2 *Reception of Afghans*

Iran has hosted several million Afghans for decades. Some of them have been living in Iran for a long time. Most of them live in the big cities, where informal care is often provided by local communities. In the past, both sides often benefited from this shelter and support. Local communities often needed a cheap source of labour

<sup>855</sup> BBCM, *Iranian official says five million Afghans residing in country*, 3 January 2023; RFE/RL, *How will I feed my family? Iranian province imposes new job restrictions on Afghan migrants*, 16 June 2023; Tehran Times, *Over 7,500 illegal Afghans deported*, 1 August 2023.

<sup>856</sup> UN, *Iran, the second largest refugee hosting country*, 26 July 2023; UNHCR, *Operational Data Portal, Iran*, [https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/irn#\\_ga=2.35569633.1958450366.1633848450-1851780278.1615983680](https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/irn#_ga=2.35569633.1958450366.1633848450-1851780278.1615983680), accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>857</sup> UNHCR, *Iran: New arrivals from Afghanistan – January to December 2022*, 31 January 2023; UNHCR, *Fact sheet – Iran (January-March 2023)*, 1 May 2023.

<sup>858</sup> UNHCR, *Iran: New arrivals from Afghanistan – January to December 2022*, 31 January 2023.

<sup>859</sup> UNHCR, *Fact sheet – Iran (January-March 2023)*, 1 May 2023.

<sup>860</sup> BBCM, *Iran expels 24,369 illegal Afghan emigrants*, 22 August 2023.

<sup>861</sup> UNHCR, *Operational Data Portal, Iran*.

<sup>862</sup> UNOCHA, *Afghanistan. Snapshot of population movements (January to November 2022)*, 23 November 2022.

and the Afghan refugees needed income and a place to stay. In the reporting period, however, Iran was in dire economic straits with no prospect of structural improvement, and the pattern of migration was no longer circular but focused on resettlement. According to one source, these conditions put increasing pressure on local communities, which appeared to have reached maximum absorption capacity. Iranians are increasingly aware of the enormous pressure this group is putting on social services that are already strained – often in Iran’s poorest provinces.<sup>863</sup>

#### 4.1.3 *Registered Afghans*

According to official Iranian government figures, there are approximately 750,000 registered Afghan refugees in Iran. They hold an *amayesh* card.<sup>864</sup> According to the UNHCR, approximately 99% of them live among the local communities in Iran’s urban areas. About 1% live in refugee camps. These twenty camps are spread across twelve provinces.<sup>865</sup>

In 2001 and 2003, the Iranian government issued *amayesh* cards to registered Afghans living in Iran. Since then, they and their descendants have had to renew the card each year, on payment of a fee. Technically, this makes the *amayesh* card a temporary residence permit.<sup>866</sup> During the reporting period, the seventeenth round of *amayesh* registration took place between 11 July 2022 and 17 December 2022. Afghans who fail to renew their card on time are no longer entitled to support and protection from the Iranian government. This means that they can be arrested and deported.<sup>867</sup>

The UNHCR is not permitted to carry out status determination in Iran. For a long time, the Iranian government has made no use of the system that exists within the country for that purpose. The Iranian government stopped issuing new *amayesh* cards from 2007.<sup>868</sup> According to the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs, new cards have rarely been issued since and only on a temporary basis.<sup>869</sup> According to the UNHCR, children whose parents both hold a valid *amayesh* card may be eligible for a new card.<sup>870</sup>

#### 4.1.4 *Afghan passport holders*

Alongside cardholders, there is also a group of passport holders. According to official Iranian government figures, this group includes 267,000 previously undocumented Afghans who registered with the authorities in 2010 and received an Afghan passport containing a visa. Since July 2012, the validity of this visa has been extended a number of times.<sup>871</sup> This group also includes 360,000 Afghans who hold an Afghan passport with a valid visa, for purposes such as study, pilgrimage or business.<sup>872</sup>

<sup>863</sup> Confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>864</sup> UNHCR, *Operational Data Portal, Iran*.

<sup>865</sup> UNHCR, *Fact sheet – Iran (January-March 2023)*, 1 May 2023.

<sup>866</sup> UNHCR, *Fact sheet – Iran (November-December 2022)*, 6 February 2023; NRC, *Renewing key documents brings hope to Afghans in Iran*, 1 June 2023.

<sup>867</sup> UNHCR, *Announcement on the launch of registration for Amayesh cards 17 and Hoviat cards 16*, 11 July 2022; UNHCR, *Announcement: For the attention of expired Amayesh/Hoviat cardholders*, 11 September 2022; UNHCR, *Last call for the Amayesh 17 plan*, 6 December 2022; EUAA, *Iran. Situation of Afghan refugees*, 11 January 2023, p. 20; UNHCR, *Fact sheet – Iran (November-December 2022)*, 6 February 2023.

<sup>868</sup> EUAA, *Iran. Situation of Afghan refugees*, 11 January 2023, p. 20; UNHCR, *Help Iran. How can I seek asylum in Iran?* <https://help.unhcr.org/iran/en/how-can-i-seek-asylum-in-iran/>, accessed 12 September 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>869</sup> Australian Government, *DFAT country information report Iran*, 24 July 2023, p. 32.

<sup>870</sup> UNHCR, *Are you a person that UNHCR Iran can support?* <https://help.unhcr.org/iran/en/how-can-i-seek-asylum-in-iran/are-you-a-person-that-unhcr-iran-can-support/>, accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>871</sup> EUAA, *Iran. Situation of Afghan refugees*, 11 January 2023, p. 18; UNHCR, *Announcement on the extension of expired visas*, 1 May 2023; UNHCR, *Fact sheet – Iran (January-March 2023)*, 1 May 2023.

<sup>872</sup> UNHCR, *Fact sheet – Iran (January-March 2023)*, 1 May 2023.

#### 4.1.5 *Undocumented Afghans*

In addition to cardholders and passport holders, there are at least 3.1 million undocumented Afghans in Iran.<sup>873</sup>

In this context, the designation 'undocumented' is used as a collective term for any Afghan who does not have legal residence in Iran. This is a highly diverse group. It can include Afghans whose Afghan passport has expired or whose visa is invalid, former amayesh cardholders, Afghans who only possess an Afghan identity document (*tazkera*), seasonal workers or Afghans who have no documents at all. Undocumented Afghans are not eligible for a temporary work permit to work legally in Iran. In practice, many of them work illegally in construction and agriculture. Undocumented Afghans do have access to basic healthcare. All Afghans have access to primary healthcare in Iran. Access to secondary and tertiary healthcare is guaranteed through a system of very low-cost insurance for Afghan citizens, regardless of their status.<sup>874</sup>

Since May 2015, all children in Iran, regardless of their document status, are granted access to state-funded primary and secondary education. It is estimated that between 700,000 and 1 million Afghan children use the Iranian education system.<sup>875</sup> This group consists of both documented and undocumented Afghans. The undocumented children are issued with an education support card from BAFIA. This blue card is valid for one year in the province where it is issued. This card prevents the child's parents from being evicted from Iran.<sup>876</sup>

#### 4.1.6 *Census*

In April 2022, Iran's interior ministry announced a census of all undocumented and newly arrived Afghans in Iran. The census ran until 30 June 2022. The ministry reported that approximately 2.6 million Afghans took part. It also stated that 500,000 undocumented Afghans did not participate in the census.<sup>877</sup>

Afghans who held a vaccination certificate could report to a *kefalat* centre for this census. The fee for this process was 310,000 rial (approximately 0.58 euros). In other cases, Afghans were able to report to a *pishkhan* centre, where the fee was 270,000 rial (approximately 0.51 euros).<sup>878</sup> Participants were issued with a headcount slip which effectively served as a provisional proof of residence and was valid for two months. Participation in the census protected Afghans from forced deportation and enabled them to apply for work permits. However, they were only allowed to stay in the province in which they were registered.<sup>879</sup> The headcount slip expired on 22 October 2022, but was subsequently extended to 20 January 2023 and then to 20 April 2023.<sup>880</sup>

<sup>873</sup> UNHCR, *Fact sheet – Iran (January-March 2023)*, 1 May 2023, p. 1.

<sup>874</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Iran*, May 2022, pp. 102-103; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>875</sup> BBCM, *Iranian official says five million Afghans residing in country*, 3 January 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>876</sup> UNHCR, *Announcement on enrollment of foreign student nationals without documents*, 14 August 2022; EUAA, *Iran. Situation of Afghan refugees*, 11 January 2023, p. 29.

<sup>877</sup> UNHCR, *Operational Data Portal, Iran*; UNHCR, *Refugees in Iran*, <https://www.unhcr.org/ir/refugees-in-iran/>, accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>878</sup> UNHCR, *Important*, 26 June 2022; UNHCR, *Headcount exercise*, <https://help.unhcr.org/iran/en/headcount-exercise/>, accessed 12 September 2023.

<sup>879</sup> UNHCR, *Afghanistan situation: Emergency preparedness and response in Iran*, 5 July 2022; EUAA, *Iran. Situation of Afghan refugees*, 11 January 2023, p. 29.

<sup>880</sup> UNHCR, *Frequently asked questions on headcount exercise*, 26 June 2022; UNHCR, *Headcount LPs extended for an additional 3 months*, 31 October 2022; BBCM, *Iranian official says five million Afghans residing in country*, 3 January 2023; UNHCR, *Iran: New arrivals from Afghanistan – January to December 2022*, 31 January 2023; UNHCR, *BAFIA announcement on the validity of the LPs issued in line with the "conditional protection preparation*

4.1.7 *Voluntary return by Afghans*

On 3 January 2023, Iran's interior ministry announced that 400,000 Afghans had returned to their homeland voluntarily in the previous nine months.<sup>881</sup>

The UNHCR supports Afghans in making their voluntary return. In 2022, at least 376 people returned. The majority were former amayesh cardholders who wanted to go back to Afghanistan in order to apply for an Iranian study visa.<sup>882</sup>

4.1.8 *Discrimination of Afghans*

Afghans encounter a significant amount of discrimination in Iran. For example, they generally have few job opportunities.<sup>883</sup>

During the reporting period, several violent incidents involving Afghans occurred in Iran, sparking a huge outcry among Afghans. These incidents were accompanied by video footage of Afghans being maltreated by Iranians.<sup>884</sup> On 11 March 2023, Iranian border police opened fire on a group of Afghan migrants near the border town of Saravan in Sistan-Baluchistan province. At least eleven Afghans were thought to be killed in this incident.<sup>885</sup>

4.1.9 *Iraqi refugees*

The second largest refugee population were Iraqi refugees. According to information released by the Iranian authorities in June 2023, there were 12,000 registered Iraqis in Iran who held a *hoviāt* card.<sup>886</sup>

**4.2 Reception of internally displaced persons in Iran**

Iran does not have a large-scale problem involving long-term internally displaced persons. However, people in Iran do become displaced, temporarily or permanently, by natural disasters.<sup>887</sup> For instance, earthquakes are a regular occurrence.<sup>888</sup> On 28 January 2023, for example, there was an earthquake which measured 5.9 on the Richter scale. This earthquake struck the city of Khoy in West Azerbaijan province. It left 3 people dead and 816 injured, according to the authorities. More than 3,500 houses were damaged.<sup>889</sup> Floods also occur each year, resulting in deaths.<sup>890</sup> As of mid-July 2022, for instance, 24 of Iran's 31 provinces had experienced flooding due to heavy rains. The worst affected were Tehran, Mazandaran, Lorestan and Kerman. At least 69 people died and more than 20,000 houses were damaged in the

*process*", 19 February 2023; UNHCR, *Iran: New arrivals from Afghanistan – since November 2021 to end January 2023*, 19 April 2023; confidential source, March 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>881</sup> BBCM, *Iranian official says five million Afghans residing in country*, 3 January 2023.

<sup>882</sup> UNHCR, *Fact sheet – Iran (November-December 2022)*, 6 February 2023, p. 2.

<sup>883</sup> Al Jazeera, *What does the future hold for Afghan refugees in Iran?*, 12 June 2022; RFE/RL, *How will I feed my family? Iranian province imposes new job restrictions on Afghan migrants*, 16 June 2023.

<sup>884</sup> TOLONews, *Kabul residents protest abuse of Afghans in Iran*, 11 April 2022; AA, *'Cruel' action on Afghan refugees in Iran sparks outrage*, 27 April 2022.

<sup>885</sup> IranWire, *Iran's border guards kill Afghan migrants in Sistan and Baluchistan*, 16 March 2023; Iran International, *Nearly a dozen Afghan youths killed by Iranian border guards*, 16 March 2023.

<sup>886</sup> A card issued to Iraqi refugees registered in Iran; UNHCR, *Operational Data Portal, Iran*.

<sup>887</sup> IDMC, *Iran, Islamic Republic of*, <https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/iran>, accessed 12 September 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>888</sup> Reliefweb, *Updated/IRCS responds to Hormozgan earthquake*, 2 July 2022; BBCM, *Earthquake injures 165 in north-west Iran*, 24 March 2023.

<sup>889</sup> BBCM, *North-western Iranian city hit by 5.4-magnitude earthquake*, 18 January 2023; BBCM, *North-western Iranian city hit by 5.9-magnitude earthquake*, 28 January 2023; IRNA, *3 dead, more than 800 people injured in Khoy earthquake; northwest Iran*, 29 January 2023; BBCM, *Briefing: Anger in Iran over humanitarian response to earthquake*, 31 January 2023.

<sup>890</sup> BBCM, *Two-thirds of Iran under alert as floods leave trail of deaths, destruction*, 8 June 2023; BBCM, *Floods in Iran claim seven lives, injure dozens*, 9 June 2023.

flooding.<sup>891</sup> There are no specific areas in Iran where internally displaced persons are housed. They are generally housed locally in makeshift facilities, such as tent camps, mosques and school buildings. The victims of a natural disaster depend on aid from the authorities. This aid is coordinated by the Iranian Red Crescent.<sup>892</sup>

#### **4.3 Leaving the country as a non-Iranian**

According to one source, a valid passport is the main requirement from the Iranian authorities for non-Iranians to leave the country. A person who does not have a passport or another travel document can also make use of a laissez-passer. However, this can lead to problems. To travel abroad, permission to leave the country must be obtained from the Immigration and Alien Police in Tehran. If permission is granted, the police will stamp the applicant's passport or laissez-passer. This procedure does not differ according to nationality or region. Without this stamp, it is not possible to travel abroad from Iran.<sup>893</sup>

#### **4.4 Fines for illegal residence**

A non-Iranian who had stayed in Iran illegally could, if they were granted permission to leave, receive a fine for each day they had been in Iran illegally. From the end of 2022, this was a set amount of two million rial (about 3.76 euros) per person per day.<sup>894</sup>

<sup>891</sup> Tasnim News, *At least 61 dead in Iran's week-long flooding*, 31 July 2022; ECHO, *Iran – Floods update*, 1 August 2022.

<sup>892</sup> Reliefweb, *Updated/IRCS responds to Hormozgan earthquake*, 2 July 2022; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>893</sup> Confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>894</sup> MEE, *Afghan refugees face harsh rules in Iran and Taliban persecution at home*, 12 March 2022; VOA, *Fleeing Taliban rule, journalists find themselves trapped in Iran*, 29 December 2022; confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

## 5 Return

### 5.1 Iranian diaspora

Some Iranian diaspora regularly return to Iran, for instance for a holiday or to visit their family. As a rule, most do not experience any problems in doing so.<sup>895</sup> In November 2022, the interior minister reiterated that his ministry had launched an online platform to enable Iranians residing abroad and considering returning to Iran to check whether there were any obstacles to them returning. No further information is available on exactly how this web portal works. Despite this online platform, the prospect of returning was viewed with considerable fear and mistrust among the diaspora, as in the background there was always a perceived threat from the intelligence services.<sup>896</sup>

### 5.2 Problems on return

According to several sources, returning migrants sometimes encountered problems with the authorities on arrival.<sup>897</sup> Among those affected were Iranians with dual nationality (see Section 5.2.8). When asked, a source was unable to provide specific numbers, but indicated that this had occurred in dozens of cases and perhaps more.<sup>898</sup> One source indicated that arbitrariness was an additional problem.<sup>899</sup> According to another source, some returnees are immediately detained on arrival. In most cases, they are later released on bail.<sup>900</sup> Another source cited the case of a couple with dual citizenship. On arrival, the authorities detained them and questioned them about their activities in their country of residence. After they were released on bail, they left Iran.<sup>901</sup> Sometimes the authorities also publicised such cases. On 4 April 2023, for instance, they announced that they had arrested a former member of the People's Mujahedin (*Mojahedin-e Khalq*) upon arrival in Iran. However, this could not be verified.<sup>902</sup> There were also instances of returnees being admitted to Iran on arriving at the airport and then being subject to criminal prosecution by the Iranian authorities (see Section 5.2.8).

#### 5.2.1 *Factors when returning*

In principle, it makes little difference what kind of document a person has with them on their return. However, it is unusual for a returnee to travel on a *laissez-passer*. In that case, there is a high risk that the authorities will question the returnee on arrival about their stay abroad.<sup>903</sup>

<sup>895</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Iran*, 31 May 2022, p. 105; Australian Government, *DFAT country information report Iran*, 24 July 2023, p. 40.

<sup>896</sup> FP, *Raisi's hollow ploy to stem Iran's brain drain*, 2 February 2022; Iran International, *Raisi tries to lure back expatriates to Iran with promises*, 17 March 2023; confidential source, March 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>897</sup> Confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, March 2023; confidential source, April 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>898</sup> Confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>899</sup> Confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>900</sup> Confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>901</sup> Confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>902</sup> BBCM, *Iran arrests former member of Albania-based dissident group*, 8 April 2023; IRNA, *'MKO member arrested while entering Iran'*, 8 April 2023.

<sup>903</sup> Australian Government, *DFAT country information report Iran*, 24 July 2023, p. 40; confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

The Iranian authorities do not question every Iranian who returns. According to one source, Iranians with dual citizenship were more at risk than others of being questioned on their return during the reporting period. It was not uncommon for the authorities to pick people who had been living outside Iran and/or had dual citizenship out of the queue at passport control and take them to a room. The returnees were then asked about their occupation and how much money they had. As part of this process, the content of their laptop, mobile phone and hard drive would be checked. People also had to provide their passwords. It is thought that this was not done randomly, but that the authorities knew in advance who to check. These rounds of questioning could sometimes last up to four hours. To avoid any problems upon their return, some Iranians only carried their Iranian passport when travelling to Iran and made no mention of having another nationality.<sup>904</sup>

According to one source, ethnicity as such does not play a role when someone returns.<sup>905</sup> According to another source, ethnicity may result in arbitrary or discriminatory punishment on return, if an offence has already been committed.<sup>906</sup>

In itself, religious background does not play a role on return, according to one source.<sup>907</sup> According to another source, religious background does not usually play a role because religion is not stated in a person's passport or on their national identity card, and the authorities at the airport tend not to ask about religious beliefs. This may come into play, however, if the authorities are aware that someone has changed religion while abroad.<sup>908</sup> According to yet another source, in some cases, the authorities ask questions of the returnee if they know that the person has converted to Christianity or if they know that the person has used conversion to Christianity as a motive for applying for asylum.<sup>909</sup> According to another source, the authorities may be aware of this without paying it any further attention.<sup>910</sup>

According to several sources, sexual orientation as such does not play a role on return.<sup>911</sup> According to another source, sexual orientation may result in arbitrary or discriminatory punishment on return, if an offence has already been committed.<sup>912</sup>

According to one source, being a single woman does not play a role on return.<sup>913</sup> According to another source, it does not matter if someone is a single woman who has permission from her father. The fact that she holds an Iranian passport can be seen as proof of paternal permission.<sup>914</sup>

A person's reason for leaving Iran, for example in order to seek asylum, may play a role when they return, according to one source. If the authorities are aware that the returnee applied for asylum and is returning because their application was unsuccessful, this can significantly increase the risk of encountering difficulties (see also Section 5.2.4). The authorities could then argue, for example, that the returnee applied for asylum because they had done something in Iran that was not allowed.

<sup>904</sup> Confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>905</sup> Confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>906</sup> Confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>907</sup> Confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>908</sup> Confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>909</sup> Confidential source, May 2023.

<sup>910</sup> Confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>911</sup> Confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>912</sup> Confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>913</sup> Confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>914</sup> Confidential source, March 2023.

According to the same source, this poses a greater risk than a person's religious background or sexual orientation, or whether they are a single woman.<sup>915</sup>

According to the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs, the authorities do not generally pay much attention to rejected asylum seekers on their return to Iran.<sup>916</sup> According to another source, the authorities will interview almost everyone they know has applied for asylum to find out the reason for their asylum application and whether they had engaged in political or religious activities.<sup>917</sup> The question of whether there are indications that asylum seekers who have exhausted all legal remedies are treated differently by the Iranian authorities given the political and social unrest could not be answered due to lack of information.

According to one source, whether a person left Iran legally or illegally may play a role on their return. If someone fled the country illegally, this can be seen as an aggravating factor (see also Section 3.2.4.4).<sup>918</sup>

How long a person has been away from Iran may play a role on their return. If someone has spent a long time abroad, it is noticed immediately and there is a high risk that they will be questioned about their stay on arrival.<sup>919</sup>

#### 5.2.2 *Declaration about Islam*

The question of whether, on their return, a returnee is required to sign a document or declaration to confirm that they still adhere to Islam could not be answered due to lack of information. None of the sources consulted could confirm or contradict this.<sup>920</sup>

According to one source, however, a returnee is obliged to sign another form. That form requires a returnee to indicate or declare that they still hold and respect Iranian citizenship.<sup>921</sup>

#### 5.2.3 *Monitoring returnees*

According to one source, returning asylum seekers are at risk of being monitored by the Iranian authorities.<sup>922</sup> If someone is monitored after returning to Iran, it is not known how long this lasts. Nor is it known how intensively someone is followed.<sup>923</sup> One source gave the example of British-Iranian Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, who was released on 16 March 2022 after serving a five-year prison sentence. From the moment she arrived at the airport in Iran, the authorities started following her. This surveillance operation lasted three months. This information emerged because footage of the operation was shown on a television show.<sup>924</sup>

It cannot be ruled out that if a convert is subject to surveillance for reasons other than conversion to Christianity after returning to Iran, they may still be accused of conversion to Christianity in the course of the surveillance.<sup>925</sup>

<sup>915</sup> Confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>916</sup> Australian Government, *DFAT country information report Iran*, 24 July 2023, p. 40.

<sup>917</sup> Confidential source, March 2023; confidential source, April 2023.

<sup>918</sup> Confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>919</sup> Confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>920</sup> Confidential source, March 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>921</sup> Confidential source, May 2023.

<sup>922</sup> Confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>923</sup> Confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>924</sup> Confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>925</sup> Confidential source, February 2023.

5.2.4 *Information about an asylum application*

If the Iranian authorities know about a returnee's asylum application, there are many ways in which they could find out, for example through friends or family, or by monitoring text messages or phone calls. The authorities could question someone about this matter on their return. They could also discover such information by looking through the social media accounts of the person in question and of others.<sup>926</sup>

5.2.5 *Statement on release*

In some cases, people who are arrested on their return have to sign a statement before being released. This is the case, for example, when they are released on bail, and when they are granted a pardon. Such a statement usually requires them to make a confession of guilt, express regret and state that they will not publicly share information about their case.<sup>927</sup>

5.2.6 *Luggage checks on returnees*

The luggage of returnees is always checked by the authorities on arrival at the airport. When leaving the airport, the luggage of everyone travelling into Iran (diplomats excepted), including Iranians returning to the country, is put through a scanner to make sure that they are not importing anything illegal. If the scanner appears to show anything suspicious, the authorities will order an additional check. Suspicious items could be anything from haram foodstuffs to certain books, for example. During this process, luggage can also be confiscated if the authorities do not trust the situation.<sup>928</sup>

5.2.7 *Recovering property*

According to one source, some returnees have experienced difficulties in recovering their property. This was especially prevalent among first-generation migrants after the Iranian revolution, as the houses of many migrants had been confiscated or registered in someone else's name. In some instances, houses were seized because they had been used as collateral to secure someone's release on bail, after which the person released had left the country.<sup>929</sup>

5.2.8 *Arrest after return*

Some cases are known of people being arrested after their return. One example is the case of British-Iranian Ali-Reza Akbari, a former politician. He held the post of deputy defence minister during Khatami's presidency (1997-2005). Mr Akbari was arrested after returning to Iran in 2019. It is thought that he was lured back to the country. He was subsequently sentenced to death on charges that included espionage for the UK. In mid-January 2023, he was executed.<sup>930</sup>

During the reporting period, a number of Iranians with dual citizenship were detained under various sections of the Penal Code, including Section 500 (propaganda against the IRI), Section 501 (espionage) and Section 610 (threatening

<sup>926</sup> Confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>927</sup> CHRI, *Analysis: Khamenei's "pardon" is a public relations stunt that cedes no ground to the protesters*, 8 February 2023; IranWire, *Khamenei's conditional "amnesty;" the great repentance*, 12 February 2023; DIS, *Iran. Protests 2022-2023*, 1 March 2023, p. 12; confidential source, February 2023, p. 12; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>928</sup> Confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>929</sup> Confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>930</sup> BBCM, *Iran upholds death sentence for ex-official accused of 'spying' for UK*, 11 January 2023; Kayhan Life, *Alireza Akbari: The British-Iranian executed by Tehran*, 15 January 2023; IranWire, *Alireza Akbari: A bloody score is settled in the Islamic Republic*, 15 January 2023; NRC, *Teheran executeert Brits-Iraanse politicus Akbari*, 16 January 2023; The New York Times, *Iranian insider and British spy: How a double life ended on the gallows*, 1 May 2023.

national security).<sup>931</sup> A number of Iranians with dual citizenship were released during the reporting period, including French-Iranian Fariba Adelhah, arrested in June 2019. She was released in February 2023.<sup>932</sup> According to several sources, Iranians with dual citizenship are more at risk than others because they may be of greater interest to the Iranian security services, for instance for the purposes of 'hostage diplomacy', a process whereby individuals are detained (sometimes arbitrarily) and used as leverage in relations with other countries. On returning to Iran, Iranians with dual citizenship face a higher risk of arrest, arbitrary detention and an unfair trial.<sup>933</sup>

According to one source, people who had been politically active in the West or were in structural contact with activists were also arrested and sentenced after their return.<sup>934</sup>

There are also instances of returnees being admitted to Iran on arriving at the airport and then being subject to criminal prosecution by the Iranian authorities. According to one source, the authorities do not usually arrest a returnee immediately on arrival at the airport due to visibility and the number of people who could film the arrest on a mobile phone. They will usually make an arrest in a controllable environment. At the airport, for example, the returnee will be told that there is an issue with their passport or that they have an unpaid traffic fine and should report to the authorities later at a certain place and time.<sup>935</sup>

Other sources mention instances where a returnee's passport is seized, a travel ban is imposed and they are required to come in repeatedly for questioning.<sup>936</sup> By way of illustration, one source described the case of a person with refugee status in a European country, who returned from Europe and was subsequently imprisoned for three months. After his release, he had to report to the authorities every month.<sup>937</sup> According to another source, returnees are sometimes pressurised into giving information about their activities abroad. This makes them an interesting source for the authorities.<sup>938</sup>

### 5.2.9 Social media passwords

An increasing number of reports have emerged of individuals being pressurised into providing the authorities with the passwords of their social media accounts. This gives the authorities access to social networks inside and outside Iran. In some cases, Iranians from the diaspora are asked to provide these passwords on arrival at

<sup>931</sup> AD, *Nederlander opgepakt in Iran vanwege protesten, zit al negen dagen vast*, 30 September 2022; RFI, *Two more French citizens held in Iran, bringing total to seven*, 12 November 2022; De Stentor, *Nog steeds geen contact met Nederlander in Iraanse gevangenis: 'Schrijnend'*, 23 November 2022; The Guardian, *Seven people with British links arrested in Iran over protests*, 25 December 2022; The Guardian, *MP urges Britons to leave Iran after arrest of 'British linked' suspects*, 26 December 2022; Al Jazeera, *Iran indicts two French nationals for spying*, 3 January 2023; De Standaard, *Olivier Vandecasteele 'werkte nationale veiligheid van Iran tegen'*, 4 January 2023 Trouw, *Zorgen om Frans-Ierse burger in hongerstaking*, 18 January 2023.

<sup>932</sup> BBC News, *Fariba Adelhah: French-Iranian academic released from Iran jail*, 10 February 2023; France 24, *French-Iranian academic Fariba Adelhah released from Tehran prison*, 10 February 2023.

<sup>933</sup> Amnesty International, *Iran: The crime of holding Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe hostage must not go unpunished*, 1 June 2022; Iran International, *Missing Iranian-Canadian's family say she is detained in Iran*, 3 September 2022; VRT, *Oproep Buitenlandse Zaken: "Verlaat Iran zo snel mogelijk, risico op willekeurige aanhouding"*, 18 December 2022; Euractiv, *Iran indicts Belgian citizen for espionage*, 5 January 2023; UNGA, *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (A/HRC/52/67)*, 7 February 2023, p. 17; IranWire, *Canadian couple "missing" in Iran for 18 months*, 9 March 2023; NRC, *Belg vrij na omstrede ruil met Iran*, 27 May 2023; confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>934</sup> Confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>935</sup> Confidential source, February 2023.

<sup>936</sup> Confidential source, March 2023; confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>937</sup> Confidential source, March 2023.

<sup>938</sup> Confidential source, February 2023.

an Iranian airport or on leaving Iran.<sup>939</sup> Although a person has the option of refusing to give the passwords, they will face the consequences of their refusal. From a formal and legal perspective, a person cannot be forced to give their password, but during questioning the authorities can make threats to someone who refuses and their family. In practice, this means that refusal is not an option.<sup>940</sup>

<sup>939</sup> DIS, *Iran. Protests 2022-2023*, March 2023, p. 26; CGRS, *Iran. Surveillance van de diaspora door de Iraanse autoriteiten*, 10 May 2023, pp. 28-29; confidential source, February 2023; confidential source, March 2023; confidential source, June 2023.

<sup>940</sup> CGRS, *Iran. Surveillance van de diaspora door de Iraanse autoriteiten*, 10 May 2023, p. 28; confidential source, February 2023.

## 6 Appendices

### 6.1 List of abbreviations used

API	Assyrian Policy Institute
ASMLA	Arab Struggle Movement for the Liberation of al-Ahwaz
BAFIA	Bureau for Aliens & Foreign Immigrants' Affairs
BIC	Bahá'í International Community
BIHE	Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education
BTS	Bonyad Taavon Sepah (the IRGC Cooperative Foundation)
CAT	Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
CCP	Code of Criminal Procedure
CDC	Cyber Defense Command
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CIOC	Center for Investigating Organized Cybercrime
CPJ	Committee to Protect Journalists
CRA	Communications Regulatory Authority
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSW	Christian Solidarity Worldwide
ECPM Penalty)	Ensemble contre la peine de mort (Together against the Death Penalty)
EIKO	Execution Organisation of Imam Khomeini's Order
FATA	Iran's Cyber Police
GAMAAN	Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in Iran
GD	Gender dysphoria
HRAI	Human Rights Activists in Iran
HRANA	Human Rights Activists News Agency
IBA	Iranian Bar Association (organisation for legal practitioners)
IHRNGO	Iran Human Rights
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IRGC	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps
IRI	Islamic Republic of Iran
IRIB	Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting Corporation
ISIS	Islamic State
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
KHRN	Kurdistan Human Rights Network
Komala-CPI	Komala Communist Party of Iran
Komala-PIK	Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and other diverse identities
MEC	Middle East Concern
MeK/MKO	People's Mujahedin
MOIS	Ministry of Intelligence
MRGI	Minority Rights Group International
NCRI	National Council of Resistance of Iran
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NIN	National Information Network (Iran's intranet)
NOCR	National Organization for Civil Registration
OEJS	Office of Electronic Judicial Services
PAK	Kurdistan Freedom Party

PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party
PJAK	Free Life Party of Kurdistan.
RSF	Reporters Without Borders
SBO	Student Basij Organisation
SCC	Supreme Council of Cyberspace
SCI	Statistical Centre of Iran
SWO	State Welfare Organisation
TCI	Telecommunication Company of Iran
UN	United Nations
VPN	Virtual Private Network

## 6.2 Glossary

<i>Aghdnameh</i>	A marriage certificate.
<i>Amayesh card</i>	A card for Afghan refugees registered in Iran.
<i>Baghy</i>	Armed rebellion (Section 287 of the Penal Code).
<i>Basij</i>	A paramilitary organisation.
<i>Diya</i>	Blood money. A financial compensation in retribution for injury or death.
<i>Efsad-fil-arz</i>	Spreading corruption on earth (Section 286 of the Penal Code).
<i>Fatwa</i>	A judgement on a point of Islamic law given by a religious authority.
<i>Gasht-e Ershad</i>	Morality police.
<i>Haram</i>	Prohibited by Islamic law.
<i>Hijab</i>	The word <i>hijab</i> refers to a veil or covering. Islamic clerics often link this concept to chastity and morality.
<i>Hoviat card</i>	A card issued to Iraqi refugees registered in Iran.
<i>Hudud</i>	A category of punishment for serious crimes which is prescribed by Sharia law.
<i>Kart-e melli</i>	A national identity card.
<i>Kolbar</i>	Someone employed to carry smuggled goods across the Iranian border.
<i>Kotlet</i>	An Iranian dish made with minced meat.
<i>Lavat</i>	Male-to-male anal intercourse.
<i>Lavat-e be-onf</i>	Forced male-to-male anal intercourse, male homosexual rape.
<i>Mahzar</i>	A registration office.
<i>Moharebeh</i>	Enmity against God (Sections 279-285 of the Penal Code).
<i>Molavi</i>	A title given to a scholar of Islamic law.
<i>Qisas</i>	Retributive justice. A category of punishment reserved for deliberate assaults on bodily integrity. These can be punished by retribution in kind, according to the principle 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth'.
<i>Rial</i>	Iran's standard currency.
<i>Ruz-e Quds</i>	Jerusalem Day.
<i>Shenasnameh</i>	A birth certificate/identity booklet.
<i>Sigheh</i>	A temporary marriage.
<i>Sokhtbar</i>	A fuel smuggler.
<i>Ta'zir</i>	A category of punishment for crimes for which Sharia law does not prescribe specific punishments. Such punishments are left to the judge's own discretion.
<i>Toman</i>	A unit of Iranian currency. One toman is ten rial.

*White torture* Placing a prisoner in solitary confinement for a long time.

### 6.3 Reports and publications

The Netherlands General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD), the Netherlands Military Intelligence and Security Service (MIVD) and the Netherlands National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (NCTV)

- *Dreigingsbeeld statelijke actoren 2*, 28 November 2022.

Amnesty International

- *Iran: Murder of 20-year-old gay man highlights urgent need to protect LGBTI rights*, 17 May 2021.
- *In death's waiting room. Deaths in custody following deliberate denial of medical care in Iran's prisons*, 12 April 2022.
- *"They are shooting brazenly." Iran's militarized response to May 2022 protests*, 3 August 2022.
- *Iran: Tortured prisoners at Evin prison are in urgent need of international protection*, 18 October 2022.
- *Iran: Urgent international action needed to stop mass killings of Baluchi protesters*, 10 November 2022.
- *Iran: List of individuals at risk of execution in connection with nationwide protests*, 16 December 2022.
- *Amnesty International report 2022/23. The state of the world's human rights*, 28 March 2023.
- *Death sentences and executions 2022*, 15 May 2023.

Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)

- *Anti-government demonstrations in Iran. A long-term challenge for the Islamic Republic*, 12 April 2023.

Article 18, Open Doors, Middle East Concern (MEC) & Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW)

- *Annual report 2023. Rights violations against Christians in Iran*, 19 February 2023.

Asim, Muhammad

- Iranian constitution under pro-center dogmatic authoritarianism and pro-Persian cosmopolitanism, and its impacts on ethno-sectarian and ethno-linguistic minorities, in: S. Behnaz Hosseini (ed.), *Ethnic religious minorities in Iran*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2023, pp. 13-44.

Australian Government – Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)

- *DFAT country information report Iran*, 24 July 2023.

Austrian Centre for Country of Origin & Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD)

- *Iran: Informationen zu den Parteien PDKI, KDP-I, Komala PIK, Komala KTP, Komalah-CPI, Komala-CPI, WCPI, WP-Hekmatist, WPI-Hekmatist (Khat Rasmi) [a-11979]*, 24 November 2022.

Bahá'í International Community (BIC)

- *Update: 200 Iranian government agents destroy Baha'i homes and confiscate 20 hectares of land*, 2 August 2022.
- *News bulletin no 12-22. Iran: 29 August-19 September 2022*, undated
- *News bulletin no. 14-22. Iran: 2 October-4 November 2022*, undated
- *An unbelievable injustice: Mahvash Sabet and Fariba Kamalabadi sentenced to a second decade in prison in Iran*, 11 December 2022.
- *Current situation*, January 2023.
- *Oppressed in life and persecuted in death: Baha'is prevented from dignified burials in their own cemetery*, 3 April 2023.

Carnegie

- *Hijab in Iran: From religious to political symbol*, 13 October 2022.

Carnegie Europe

- *Rethinking the EU's approach to women's rights in Iran*, 25 April 2023.

Chatham House

- *The Mahsa Jina Amini case: security and ethnic dimensions*, 5 May 2023.
- *Iran's generational leadership change*, 17 May 2023.

Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRS)

- *Iran: Surveillance van de diaspora door de Iraanse autoriteiten*, 10 May 2023.

Congressional Research Service (CRS)

- *Iran: Background and U.S. policy*, 23 March 2023.

Currin, Brian

- *Mahsa Amini – The seismic tragedy that is triggering a tsunami that should not be ignored*, 10 February 2023.

Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA)

- *Iran military power. Ensuring regime survival and securing regional dominance*, 19 November 2019.

Danish Immigration Service (DIS)

- *Iran: Protests 2022-2023*, 1 March 2023.

Oxford Middle East Review (OMER)

- *The intersection of LGBT identity and the protest movement in Iran*, 1 March 2023.

European Union Asylum Agency (EUAA)

- *Iran: Situation of Afghan refugees*, 11 January 2023.

Freedom House

- *Freedom in the world 2023. Country report Iran*, 9 March 2023.

Golkar, Saied

- *Captive society: The Basij militia and social control in Iran*, Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Columbia University Press, 2015.

Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in Iran (GAMAAN)

- *Iranians' attitudes towards religion: A 2020 survey report*, 25 August 2020.

- *Iranians' attitudes towards political systems: A 2022 survey report*, 31 March 2022.

Hassannia, Ali, Zahra Fazeli & Mohammad Reza Fazeli

- Iranian Jews' tendency to religious visibility and adapted coexistence, in: S. Behnaz Hosseini (ed.), *Ethnic religious minorities in Iran*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2023, pp. 109-146.

Human Rights Activists in Iran (HRAI)

- *Annual report 2022*, 26 December 2022.

Human Rights Watch (HRW)

- *In Iran, schoolgirls leading protests for freedom*, 12 October 2022.
- *Iran: State-backed hacking of activists, journalists, politicians*, 5 December 2022.
- *Iran: 'Bloody Friday' crackdown this year's deadliest*, 22 December 2022.
- *World report 2023 – Iran*, 12 January 2023.
- *Accounts of torture and summary trial of Javad Rouhi*, 1 February 2023.

Hutter, Manfred

- Religious and ethnic minorities in Iran: An introduction, in: S. Behnaz Hosseini (ed.), *Ethnic religious minorities in Iran*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2023, pp. 1-12.

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRBC)

- *Iran: Exit and entry procedures at airports and land borders for women, including required documentation; mechanisms for a male spouse or relative to control and/or prohibit international travel of female spouse or relative and children, including access to identity documents; treatment of women and children who attempt to leave Iran without prior permission (2020-February 2022)*, 7 March 2022.

International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS)

- *The military balance 2021*, 25 February 2021.
- *Woman, life, freedom in Iran*, 29 November 2022.

Iran Human Rights (IHRNGO)

- *Two men sentenced to death for "insulting the Prophet" in Iran*, 22 April 2021.
- *Iran protests: At least 304 including 41 children killed/At least 16 people killed in another "Bloody Friday" in Baluchistan*, 5 November 2022.
- *Targeted crackdown on human rights defenders*, 30 November 2022.
- *Iran Human Rights warns of imminent risk of protester executions/At least 3 children facing death penalty charges*, 30 November 2022.
- *At least 100 protesters facing execution, death penalty charges or sentences; at least 476 protesters killed*, 27 December 2022.
- *Kurdish political prisoner Mohiyedin Ebrahimi executed in Urmia*, 17 March 2023.
- *Protester Mojahed Kourkour sentenced to death as cover-up for Kian Pirkalal's state killing*, 7 April 2023.
- *Iranian authorities' terrorising campaign continues; Two Afghan nationals at grave risk of public execution*, 21 May 2023.

Iran Human Rights (IHRNGO) & Ensemble contre la peine de mort (ECPM)

- *Annual report on the death penalty in Iran 2022*, 13 April 2023.

Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC)

- *Blocked from progress; Persecution of Iran's Bahá'í community since 1979*, May 2022.
- *Unleashed violence: Repression of protests in Kurdish areas of Iran*, 8 July 2023.

Kabir, Amir & Irwin Nazareth

- *Conversion therapy: a violation of human rights in Iranian gay men*, *The Lancet Psychiatry* 9(4), April 2022.

Middle East Institute (MEI)

- *IRGC's role in Iran's economy growing with its engineering arm set to execute 40 mega-projects*, 7 May 2018.
- *Temporary marriage in Iran and women's rights*, 13 January 2021.
- *The IRGC and the Persian Gulf region in a period of contested deterrence*, 3 November 2021.
- *Hossein Taeb's removal was not only about Israel*, 30 June 2022.
- *What Iran's emerging demographic "tsunami" means for Tehran*, 25 August 2022.
- *Iran's rising generation Z at the forefront of protests*, 5 October 2022.
- *From the streets to the border: Iran's growing paranoia towards Azerbaijan*, 26 January 2023.

Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs

- *General Country of Origin Information Report on Iran*, February 2021.
- *General Country of Origin Information Report on Iran*, May 2022.

Moghadam, Mohammad Reza Shadmand Foumani

- *Obligatory military service in Iran: 21st-century slavery that harms the health of soldiers and society*, 15 March 2022.

Mohammadi, Narges

- *White torture. Interviews with Iranian women prisoners*, Oneworld, 2022.

Moore-Gilbert, Kylie

- *The uncaged sky. My 804 days in an Iranian prison*, Ultimo Press, 2022.

Nematollahi, Azar, Safoora Gharibzadeh, Maryam Damghanian, Saeid Gholamzadeh & Farnaz Farnam

- *Sexual behaviors and vulnerability to sexually transmitted infections among transgender women in Iran*, *BMC Women's Health* 22, 170, 14 May 2022.

New Zealand Security Intelligence Service

- *New Zealand's security threat environment 2023. An assessment by the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service*, 11 August 2023.

Niechcial, Paulina

- *The contemporary collective identity of Zoroastrians in Tehran: Between the strategies of dichotomization and complementarization*, in: S. Behnaz Hosseini (ed.), *Ethnic religious minorities in Iran*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2023, pp. 201-228.

Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre (Landinfo)

- *Report Iran: Passports, ID and civil status documents*, 5 January 2021.

Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre (Landinfo), Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRS) & State Secretariat for Migration (SEM)

- *Iran: Criminal procedures and documents*, 1 December 2021.

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

- *Iran: UN experts alarmed by escalating religious persecution*, 22 August 2022.
- *Iran: UN experts demand stay of execution for two women LGBT rights activists*, 28 September 2022.
- *Iran: Special Rapporteur calls for effective accountability for deaths in recent protests*, 26 October 2022.
- *Iran must immediately release critically ill human rights defender Arash Sadeghi: UN experts*, 2 December 2022.
- *Iran: Deliberate poisoning of schoolgirls further evidence of continuous violence against women and girls*, 16 March 2023.
- *Iran: "Frightening" number of executions as Türk calls for end to death penalty*, 9 May 2023.

Open Doors International

- *World Watch Research. Iran: Full country dossier*, January 2023.

Pirnia, Bijan & Kambiz Pirnia

- *Sex reassignment surgery in Iran, re-birth or human rights violations against transgender people?*, *Iranian Journal of Public Health* 51(11), November 2022, pp. 2632-2633.

Posch, Walter

- *The Mahsa Jina Amini case: security and ethnic dimensions*, 5 May 2023.

Sarbakhshian, Hassan, Lior B. Sternfeld & Parvaneh Vahidmanesh

- *Jews of Iran. A photographic chronicle*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2022.

Rahbari, Ladan

- *Queering Iran, digitally: Implicit activism and LGBTQI+ dating on Telegram*, *Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies* 25(2), 2022, pp. 141-157.

Schweizerische Flüchtlingshilfe (SFH)

- *Iran: Zugang zur Liste mit Wehrdienstleistenden und Sperrung des Bankkontos nach Desertion*, 17 May 2022.

Statistical Centre of Iran (SCI)

- *Iran statistical yearbook 2020-2021 (1399)*, undated

United Kingdom Home Office

- *Iran: Fear of punishment for crimes committed in other countries ('double jeopardy' or re-prosecution)*, January 2018.
- *Iran: Illegal exit*, May 2022.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

- *Non-state actors in education in Iran: select issues and contributions*, 2022.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

- *Afghanistan situation: Emergency preparedness and response in Iran*, 5 July 2022.
- *Iran: New arrivals from Afghanistan – January to December 2022*, 31 January 2023.
- *Fact sheet – Iran (November-December 2022)*, 6 February 2023.
- *Iran: New arrivals from Afghanistan – since November 2021 to end January 2023*, 19 April 2023.
- *Fact sheet – Iran (January-March 2023)*, 1 May 2023.

United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)

- *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Advanced unedited version (A/HRC/53/23)*, 15 June 2023.

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA)

- *Afghanistan. Snapshot of population movements (January to November 2022)*, 23 November 2022.

United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD)

- *An introduction to the Civil Registration System in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 18 September 2015.

United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)

- *Country update: Iran: Religious freedom in Iran in 2022*, July 2022.
- *Religious propaganda in Iran*, 22 July 2022.
- *2023 annual report*, 1 May 2023.

United States Department of State (USDoS)

- *Iran 2021 international religious freedom report*, 2 June 2022.
- *Iran 2022 human rights report*, 20 March 2023.
- *Iran 2022 international religious freedom report*, 15 May 2023.
- *2023 trafficking in persons report: Iran*, 15 June 2023.

United States Office of Naval Intelligence

- *Iranian naval forces. A tale of two navies*, February 2017.

United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)

- *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (A/77/181)*, 18 July 2022.
- *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (A/77/525)*, 14 October 2022.
- *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (A/HRC/52/67)*, 7 February 2023.

Wilson Center

- *Iran's dissident Sunni cleric*, 29 March 2023.

World Economic Forum

- *Global Gender Gap Report 2022*, 13 July 2022.

Yaghoobi, Claudia

- *Temporary marriage in Iran. Gender and body politics in modern Iranian film and literature*, Cambridge University Press, 2022.

## 6.4 Websites

- 6Rang, [www.6rang.org](http://www.6rang.org)
- Abdorrahman Boroumand Center (ABC), [www.iranrights.org](http://www.iranrights.org)
- Alemohamad Law Office, [www.alemohamadlaw.com](http://www.alemohamadlaw.com)
- Amwaj, [www.amwaj.media](http://www.amwaj.media)
- Anash.org, [www.anash.org](http://www.anash.org)
- Archives of Bahá'í persecution in Iran, [www.iranbahaipersecution.bic.org](http://www.iranbahaipersecution.bic.org)
- Article 18, [www.articleeighteen.com](http://www.articleeighteen.com)
- Article 19, [www.article19.org](http://www.article19.org)
- Assyrian Policy Institute, [www.assyrianpolicy.org](http://www.assyrianpolicy.org)
- Atlantic Council, [www.atlanticcouncil.org](http://www.atlanticcouncil.org)
- Auswärtiges Amt (Germany), [www.auswaertiges-amt.de](http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de)
- Balochistan Human Rights Group (BHRG), [www.bhrg.info](http://www.bhrg.info)
- Barnabas Aid, [www.barnabasaid.org](http://www.barnabasaid.org)
- bne IntelliNews, [www.intellinews.com](http://www.intellinews.com)
- Bonbast, [www.bonbast.com](http://www.bonbast.com)
- Catholic News Agency (CNA), [www.catholicnewsagency.com](http://www.catholicnewsagency.com)
- Center for Human Rights in Iran (CHRI), [www.iranhumanrights.org](http://www.iranhumanrights.org)
- Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), [www.csis.org](http://www.csis.org)
- Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), [www.cia.org](http://www.cia.org)
- Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), [www.csw.org](http://www.csw.org)
- Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), [www.cpj.org](http://www.cpj.org)
- Context, [www.context.news](http://www.context.news)
- Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), [www.cfr.org](http://www.cfr.org)
- Crisis24, [www.crisis24.garda.com](http://www.crisis24.garda.com)
- Data News, [www.datanews.knack.be](http://www.datanews.knack.be)
- Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI), [www.pdki.org](http://www.pdki.org)
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), [www.dfat.gov.au](http://www.dfat.gov.au)
- EU Reporter, [www.eureporter.co](http://www.eureporter.co)
- Euractiv, [www.euractiv.com](http://www.euractiv.com)
- Forbes, [www.forbes.com](http://www.forbes.com)
- Foreign Policy (FP), [www.foreignpolicy.com](http://www.foreignpolicy.com)
- Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI), [www.fpri.org](http://www.fpri.org)
- Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), [www.fdd.org](http://www.fdd.org)
- Frontline Defenders, [www.frontlinedefenders.org](http://www.frontlinedefenders.org)
- Gal-dem, [www.gal-dem.com](http://www.gal-dem.com)
- Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS), [www.giwps.georgetown.edu](http://www.giwps.georgetown.edu)
- Global Voices, [www.globalvoices.org](http://www.globalvoices.org)
- Hengaw, [www.hengaw.net](http://www.hengaw.net)
- Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA), [www.en-hrana.org](http://www.en-hrana.org)
- ImmigraTrust, [www.immigrastrust.com](http://www.immigrastrust.com)
- Insider, [www.insider.com](http://www.insider.com)
- Institute for National Strategic Studies (IISS), [www.iiss.org](http://www.iiss.org)
- Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP), [www.policyoptions.irpp.org](http://www.policyoptions.irpp.org)
- Institute for the Study of War (ISW), [www.understandingwar.org](http://www.understandingwar.org)
- International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), [www.fidh.org](http://www.fidh.org)
- International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), [www.ifj.org](http://www.ifj.org)
- International Labor Organisation (ILO), [www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org)
- Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), [www.ipu.org](http://www.ipu.org)
- Iran Best Lawyer, [www.iranbestlawyer.com](http://www.iranbestlawyer.com)
- Iran Front Page (IFP), [www.ifpnews.com](http://www.ifpnews.com)
- Iran Press Watch, [www.iranpresswatch.org](http://www.iranpresswatch.org)

- Iran Treatments, [www.iran-treatments.com](http://www.iran-treatments.com)
- Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA), [www.jta.org](http://www.jta.org)
- JURIST, [www.jurist.org](http://www.jurist.org)
- Kayhan Life, [www.kayhanlife.com](http://www.kayhanlife.com)
- Khamenei.ir, [www.khamenei.ir](http://www.khamenei.ir)
- Know About Iran, [www.knowaboutiran.com](http://www.knowaboutiran.com)
- Komala-PIK, [www.komalainternational.org](http://www.komalainternational.org)
- Kurdistan Human Rights Association (KMMK), [www.kmmk.info](http://www.kmmk.info)
- Kurdistan Human Rights Network (KHRN), [www.kurdistanhumanrights.org](http://www.kurdistanhumanrights.org)
- Legal Tribune Online (LTO), [www.lto.de](http://www.lto.de)
- LGBTQ Nation, [www.lgbtnation.com](http://www.lgbtnation.com)
- Lilith Magazine, [www.lilithmag.nl](http://www.lilithmag.nl)
- Living in Tehran (LiT), [www.livingintehran.com](http://www.livingintehran.com)
- Middle East Concern (MEC), [www.meconcern.org](http://www.meconcern.org)
- Middle East Eye (MEE), [www.middleeasteye.net](http://www.middleeasteye.net)
- Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), [www.memri.org](http://www.memri.org)
- Middle East Monitor (MEMO), [www.middleeastmonitor.com](http://www.middleeastmonitor.com)
- Minority Rights Group International (MRGI), [www.minorityrights.org](http://www.minorityrights.org)
- National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), [www.ncr-iran.org](http://www.ncr-iran.org)
- Nederland Wereldwijd, [www.nederlandwereldwijd.nl](http://www.nederlandwereldwijd.nl)
- NetBlocks, [www.netblocks.org](http://www.netblocks.org)
- New Canadian Media, [www.newcanadianmedia.ca](http://www.newcanadianmedia.ca)
- Newsweek, [www.newsweek.com](http://www.newsweek.com)
- Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), [www.nrc.no](http://www.nrc.no)
- Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, [www.diaspora.gov.am/en](http://www.diaspora.gov.am/en)
- Open Doors International, [www.opendoors.org](http://www.opendoors.org)
- Outspoken Middle East (OSME), [www.outspokenmiddleeast.com](http://www.outspokenmiddleeast.com)
- Persian Citizen Services, [www.persian.net.au](http://www.persian.net.au)
- Pink News, [www.pinknews.co.uk](http://www.pinknews.co.uk)
- Politico, [www.politico.com](http://www.politico.com)
- QPASTT, [www.qpastt.org.au](http://www.qpastt.org.au)
- Spreading Justice, [www.spreadingjustice.org](http://www.spreadingjustice.org)
- State Welfare Organization of Iran (SWO), [www.behzisti.ir](http://www.behzisti.ir)
- Statistic Centre of Iran (SCI), [www.amar.org.ir](http://www.amar.org.ir)
- Syriac Press, [www.syriacpress.com](http://www.syriacpress.com)
- The Brookings Institution, [www.brookings.edu](http://www.brookings.edu)
- The Conversation, [www.theconversation.com](http://www.theconversation.com)
- The Economist, [www.economist.com](http://www.economist.com)
- The Intercept, [www.theintercept.com](http://www.theintercept.com)
- The Iran Primer, [www.iranprimer.usip.org](http://www.iranprimer.usip.org)
- The Jewish News of Northern California, [www.jweekly.com](http://www.jweekly.com)
- The New Arab, [www.newarab.com](http://www.newarab.com)
- The Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP), [www.washingtoninstitute.org](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org)
- The World Bank, [www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org)
- Them, [www.them.us](http://www.them.us)
- Thiiird Magazine, [www.thiiirdmagazine.co.uk](http://www.thiiirdmagazine.co.uk)
- Time.news, [www.time.news](http://www.time.news)
- Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, [www.institute.global](http://www.institute.global)
- UCLA, [www.newsroom.ucla.edu](http://www.newsroom.ucla.edu)
- United for Iran, [www.ipa.united4iran.org](http://www.ipa.united4iran.org)
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)
- United Nations News, [www.news.un.org](http://www.news.un.org)

- United States Department of State (USDoS) – Bureau of Consular Affairs, [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov)
- Reporters Without Borders (RSF), [www.rsf.org](http://www.rsf.org)
- Vice, [www.vice.com](http://www.vice.com)
- Vox, [www.vox.com](http://www.vox.com)
- VPRO, [www.vpro.nl](http://www.vpro.nl)
- Washington Kurdish Institute, [www.dckurd.org](http://www.dckurd.org)
- Wired, [www.wired.com](http://www.wired.com)
- X (formerly Twitter), [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)

## 6.5 News sources

- ABC News
- Al Arabiya
- Al Jazeera
- Al-Monitor
- Algemeen Dagblad (AD)
- Anadolu Agency (AA)
- AP News
- APA
- AsiaNews
- AzerNews
- BasNews
- BBC Monitoring (BBCM)
- BBC News
- Caspian News
- CBC
- CBS News
- CNBC
- CNN
- Daily Sabah
- De Standaard
- De Stentor
- De Volkskrant
- Die Welt
- Die Welt am Sonntag
- Die Zeit
- DW
- Euractiv
- Eurasianet
- Euronews
- Fars News
- Financial Times
- Financial Tribune
- France 24
- Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ)
- Het Financieele Dagblad
- Het Parool
- HLN
- I24 News
- Iran International
- IranWire
- IRNA
- Kurdistan 24
- Latin Times
- Le Monde
- L'Orient-Le Jour
- Los Angeles Times
- Mehr News
- NBC News
- Nederlands Dagblad (ND)
- News.az
- NOS
- NRC
- Pars Today
- PBS
- Radio Farda
- Radio Zamaneh
- Reuters
- RFE/RL
- Rudaw
- SBS News
- Sky News
- Tasnim News
- Tehran Times
- The Guardian
- The Independent
- The Irish Times
- The Jerusalem Post
- The National
- The New York Times
- The Telegraph
- The Times of Israel
- The Washington Post
- TOLONews
- Trouw
- Turan
- US Today
- Voice of America (VOA)
- VRT

## 6.6 Legislation

Civil Code of the Islamic Republic of Iran. A translation in English can be found at: <https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/ir/ir009en.pdf>.

Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. A translation in English can be found at: [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Iran\\_1989.pdf](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Iran_1989.pdf).

Islamic Penal Code. For an English translation of Books 1 to 4, see: Mohsen Mir Mohammad Sadeghi, *Islamic Penal Code. The Islamic Republic of Iran*, Khorsandy Publication, 2016. An English translation of Books 1 and 2 is available at <https://iranhrdc.org/english-translation-of-books-i-ii-of-the-new-islamic-penal-code/>. An English translation of Book 5 is available at <https://iranhrdc.org/islamic-penal-code-of-the-islamic-republic-of-iran-book-five/>.

Code of Criminal Procedure (CCP). For an English translation, see: Mohammad Reza Matin Nejad, *Code of Criminal Procedure. The Islamic Republic of Iran*, Khorsandy Publication, 2017. English translations are also available at <https://iranhrdc.org/amendments-to-the-islamic-republic-of-irans-code-of-criminal-procedure-part-1/> and <https://iranhrdc.org/amendments-to-the-islamic-republic-of-irans-code-of-criminal-procedure-part-2>

## 6.7 Map of Iran

The boundaries and names on this map and the designations used should not be construed as an endorsement or acceptance thereof by the Kingdom of the Netherlands.



Source: [www.kaartenatlassen.nl](http://www.kaartenatlassen.nl)