



COI QUERY

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Title	Human rights situation
Reference period	January 2023 to 7 October 2024
Topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Treatment of certain profiles 1.1. Protesters 1.2. Activists 1.3. Ethnic minorities 1.4. Religious minorities 1.5. Women and girls 1.6. Restrictions on artists 1.7. Criminal activities including trafficking in human beings (THB) 2. Return to Iran 2.1. Potential legal restrictions to travel back to Iran 2.2. Treatment upon return for political activities abroad 3. Armed actors 3.1. Deserters from the armed forces 3.2. State actors involved in human rights violations 3.3. Basij and child recruitment
	Annex I: Chronology
	BIBLIOGRAPHY
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It was produced in response to COI information requests received from the EUAA Country Guidance drafting team in the development of country guidance on Iran.

All sources used are referenced and cited in the bibliography section. A quality review has been performed in line with the above mentioned COI methodology. This document does not claim to be exhaustive or conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to international protection. If a certain event, person or organisation is not mentioned in the report, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organisation does not exist. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

Regarding the time reference, this query complements the information provided in the EUAA COI Country Focus report on Iran, published in June 2024. However, its main focus is to present developments following the end of the reference period of that report, up until the publication date of this query. For further background information on specific profiles and topics covered in this query, please refer to the [EUAA COI Country Focus report on Iran, published in June 2024](#).

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For information on major political, security and humanitarian developments for the period between 18 April and 7 October 2024, please refer to the [EUAA COI Query update on major political, security and humanitarian developments in Iran](#), published on 18 October 2024.

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COI QUERY RESPONSE – Iran

Human rights situation

1. Treatment of certain profiles

1.1 Protesters

Between 1978 and 2024, various protests took place in Iran, including:

- The 1978-1979 protests against the rule of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi which began in January 1978 and led to the Islamic Revolution in 1979, resulting in the deaths of 2 000 to 3 000 protesters.¹ The protests began as public ‘mourning ceremonies’ for slain protesters but grew into a nationwide uprising against the Pahlavi regime.² Tensions escalated after the deadly Cinema Rex fire in August 1978, which caused over 400 deaths, leading to a violent suppression on demonstrators by government forces on 8 September 1978, which is known as ‘Black Friday’.³ This event was reported to mark a crucial turning point in the revolution that ultimately resulted in the monarchy's downfall.⁴
- The 1999 student protests for press freedom which led to the deaths of over 4 protesters⁵ and the detention of over a thousand protesters.⁶ The protest began in July 1999 and was triggered by the closure of Salaam newspaper.⁷
- The 2009 ‘Green Movement’ which erupted following disputed election results and led to the deaths of 100 protesters and the detention of about 4 000 protesters.⁸ After the initial presidential election results were announced on 13 June 2009, protests erupted in Tehran and other major cities over allegations of electoral fraud.⁹ The demonstrations peaked with a massive silent march on June 15 and continued until February 2010.¹⁰

¹ USIP, Fact Sheet: protests in 1979 and 2023, 30 May 2023, [url](#)

² University of Chicago, Library, Visualising a revolution, 15 October 2021, [url](#)

³ University of Chicago, Library, Visualising a revolution, 15 October 2021, [url](#)

⁴ University of Chicago, Library, Visualising a revolution, 15 October 2021, [url](#)

⁵ RFE/RL, Face Of Iran's Bloody 1999 Student Protests Says Repression Even Worse Today, 9 July 2024, [url](#); USIP, Fact Sheet: protests in 1979 and 2023, 30 May 2023, [url](#)

⁶ Iran International, Iranians Mark 24th Anniversary Of Student Protests, Amid New Repression, 10 July 2024, [url](#); USIP, Fact Sheet: protests in 1979 and 2023, 30 May 2023, [url](#)

⁷ IranWire, Did You Know? Timeline of Violent Suppression of Protests in Iran, 28 November 2022, [url](#)

⁸ USIP, Fact Sheet: protests in 1979 and 2023, 30 May 2023, [url](#)

⁹ IranWire, Did You Know? Timeline of Violent Suppression of Protests in Iran, 28 November 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰ IranWire, Did You Know? Timeline of Violent Suppression of Protests in Iran, 28 November 2022, [url](#)

- The 2017-2018 protests which erupted in December 2017, a few months after Hassan Rouhani's 2017 presidential victory, over economic policies, and spread to over 140 cities, leading to the deaths of 22 protesters and the detention of 3 700 protesters.¹¹
- The 2019 protests which erupted due to a fuel price increase, leading to the deaths of over 300 protesters and the detention of 7 000 individuals.¹² The protests rapidly expanded in more than 100 cities throughout the country.¹³ Lasting a week, the protests were violently repressed, with the government implementing a near-total internet shutdown from 15 to 19 November.¹⁴ According to the UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission (UN IFFM) of August 2024 on Iran, during the 2019 fuel price protests, Khuzestan province, home to the Ahwazi Arab minority, experienced a 'particularly militarized response', with security forces deploying tanks, armoured vehicles, and military-grade weapons, resulting in the highest number of deaths across the country.¹⁵
- The 2020 protests which broke out after the government shot down a Ukrainian airplane.¹⁶ Following the protests, Iran's Revolutionary Courts have sentenced 20 individuals involved in the demonstrations to over 23 years in prison collectively.¹⁷ However, none of those responsible for the incident have been identified or prosecuted.¹⁸
- The 2021 protests which erupted in Ahvaz, and spread across Khuzestan province, over a severe water crisis, accusing the government of mismanagements for the drought.¹⁹ The state's security forces responded violently, reportedly including using live ammunition and metal pellets, which resulted in the deaths and injuries of the protesters.²⁰
- The 2022 'Woman, Life, Freedom' protests which erupted across Iran following the death in morality police custody of Mahsa Amini, an Iranian-Kurdish young woman who

¹¹ USIP, Fact Sheet: protests in 1979 and 2023, 30 May 2023, [url](#)

¹² USIP, Fact Sheet: protests in 1979 and 2023, 30 May 2023, [url](#)

¹³ HRW, Iran: no justice for bloody 2019 crackdown, 17 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴ HRW, Iran: no justice for bloody 2019 crackdown, 17 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵ UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Fact-finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: "They have dehumanized us": Minority rights violations during the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 5 August 2024, [url](#), p. 8

¹⁶ USIP, Fact Sheet: protests in 1979 and 2023, 30 May 2023, [url](#)

¹⁷ Radio Farda, Iran Jails 20 Protesting Downing Of Ukrainian Plane, None Sentenced From Military, 25 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸ Radio Farda, Iran Jails 20 Protesting Downing Of Ukrainian Plane, None Sentenced From Military, 25 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹ IranWire, A Year On From the 2021 Water Protests, Has Anything Changed in Khuzestan?, 25 July 2022, [url](#)

²⁰ UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Fact-finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: "They have dehumanized us": Minority rights violations during the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 5 August 2024, [url](#), p. 8; IranWire, A Year On From the 2021 Water Protests, Has Anything Changed in Khuzestan?, 25 July 2022, [url](#)

was arrested for not complying with mandatory *hijab* dress code in September 2022.²¹ These protests resulted in the deaths of hundreds of protesters²² and the detention of about 20 000 protesters.²³ Protesters, including children, were reported to face ill-treatment and torture, as well as various forms of sexual and gender-based violence, by the security forces.²⁴ According to the UN FFM of August 2024 on Iran, women from ethnic and religious minorities were particularly targeted.²⁵

- In August 2024, protests and strikes by nurses and medical staff escalated in Iran, spreading in several cities and medical centres.²⁶ Several nurses were reportedly summoned and arrested by the authorities for taking part in the demonstrations.²⁷

Article 27 of the Iranian Constitution stipulates that ‘Public gatherings and marches may be freely held, provided arms are not carried and that they are not detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam’.²⁸ In an interview with the EUAA, Iranian lawyer and human rights advocate, Leila Alikarami noted that on the basis of Article 27 of the Iranian Constitution, people are allowed to protest. Authorities do not arrest every protester, partly due to a lack of sufficient personnel, and partly because it's not in their interest to detain everyone.²⁹ However, according to the same source, during large-scale protests, authorities often arrest large numbers of people to create an atmosphere of fear, though some detainees may be released later.³⁰ The response to a protest largely depends on its scale and agenda.³¹

During the period between 6 April 2024 and 27 September 2024, Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) recorded 1 603 protests in Iran, including 207 in Tehran, 187 in Khuzestan, 129 in Isfahan, 75 in Bushehr, 72 in Kermanshah and 68 in Sistan and Baluchistan.

²¹ HRW, Iran – Events of 2023, 11 January 2024, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 7 February 2023, [url](#), p. 6

²² UN OHCHR, Independent international fact-finding mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: Update on the situation of women and girls in the context of the September 2022 protests and the ‘Woman, Life, Freedom’ movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 13 September 2024, [url](#), p. 2

²³ HRANA, An Increase in Women’s Activism alongside Rising Government Hostility in Iran – “They can imprison our bodies, but they will never imprison our fight for justice.”, 9 September 2024, [url](#)

²⁴ UN OHCHR, Independent international fact-finding mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: Update on the situation of women and girls in the context of the September 2022 protests and the ‘Woman, Life, Freedom’ movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 13 September 2024, [url](#), p. 2; HRW, Iran – Events of 2023, 11 January 2024, [url](#)

²⁵ UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Fact-finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: “They have dehumanized us”: Minority rights violations during the “Woman, Life, Freedom” movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 5 August 2024, [url](#), p. 14

²⁶ CHRI, Nurses’ Strikes Escalate Across Iran as Authorities Intensify Repression, 28 August 2024, [url](#); INU, Nurses’ protests escalate across Iran amidst arrests and unfulfilled promises, 25 August 2024, [url](#)

²⁷ CHRI, Nurses’ Strikes Escalate Across Iran as Authorities Intensify Repression, 28 August 2024, [url](#); INU, Nurses’ protests escalate across Iran amidst arrests and unfulfilled promises, 25 August 2024, [url](#)

²⁸ Iran, Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, n.d., [url](#)

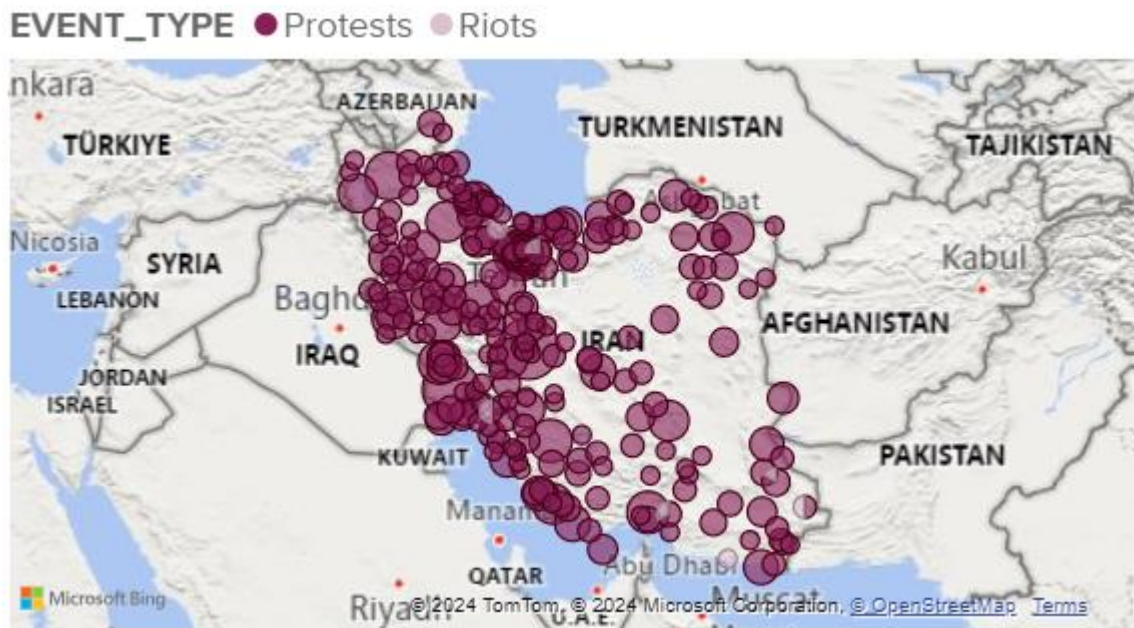
²⁹ Alikarami, L, Interview with EUAA, 24 September 2024

³⁰ Alikarami, L, Interview with EUAA, 24 September 2024

³¹ Alikarami, L, Interview with EUAA, 24 September 2024

During the same period, ACLED recorded 7 riots in Iran, including 3 in Sistan and Baluchistan one in Hormozgan, one in Khuzestan, one in Qazvin and one in Tehran.³²

Figure 1. Events by geographical positions, 6 April 2024 – 27 September 2024 (ACLED)



Source: EUAA chart based on ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Iran, data covering the period from 6 April 2024 to 27 September 2024, as of 7 October 2024, [url](#)

Concerning the state response to the protesters, Iranian authorities consider anti-government protests as ‘riots’ and individuals who protest can be at times accused of being the organisers.³³ The Iranian authorities were reported to employ internet restrictions, such as completely shutting down the network, as a method for the repression of protests.³⁴ Protesters that used state-controlled technologies, such as internet service providers or mobile data companies, could be easily identified and targeted.³⁵

Furthermore, in an interview with the EUAA, Leila Alikarami, noted that ‘the government has the ability to identify protesters through their phones, particularly smartphones’.³⁶ For example, ‘during court hearings, prosecutors may request that police provide the names of protesters present in a specific area, indicating authorities’ capacity to track and identify

³² EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Iran, data covering 6 April 2024 to 27 September 2024, as of 06 October 2024, [url](#)

³³ Iran International, Iran imposes harsh punishments on ‘protest leaders’, 5 March 2024, [url](#)

³⁴ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, General Country of Origin Information on Iran, September 2023, [url](#), p. 15

³⁵ CSIS, ‘Protest, social media, and censorship in Iran’, 18 October 2022, [url](#), p. 5

³⁶ Alikarami, L, Interview with EUAA, 24 September 2024

individuals’.³⁷ In Iran, every individual is registered with an ID card, and activities such as registering for a phone SIM card, vehicle registration, purchasing a phone, or booking a flight can all be tracked by the authorities. These actions are traceable and may remain under government surveillance.³⁸

According to the UN FFM update of 13 September 2024 on Iran, the Iranian government has attempted to clamp down on women and girls involved in the ‘Women, Life, Freedom’ movement by increasing its online surveillance of their activities.³⁹ On 23 April 2024, Kyomars Aziti, the Law Enforcement Command of the Islamic Republic of Iran (FARAJA) commander of western Tehran province, disclosed that the police had shut down 21 Instagram accounts, with significant followers, for posting ‘inappropriate content’ and violating societal norms.⁴⁰ According to the same source, mobile services of 12 women from Tehran, Karaj, Arak, and Tabriz were cut off after they publicly criticised the morality police and the *hijab* on social media.⁴¹

Citing independent experts, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) stated on 27 June 2024 that Iranian officials warned that individuals who protest the compulsory *hijab* may be charged with national security charges.⁴²

The UN FFM update of August 2024 on Iran indicated that authorities responded disproportionately to the 2022 protests involving ethnic and religious minorities, particularly Kurds, Baluches, Azerbaijani Turks, and Ahwazi Arabs, who are mostly Sunni Muslims.⁴³

The US Department of State (USDOS) in its annual report on human rights practices in Iran covering 2023, noted that the government frequently detained activists’ family members as a means of intimidation and reprisal.⁴⁴ In addition, on 10 September 2024, Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that Iranian authorities have falsely accused, threatened, and harassed the family members of dozens of individuals who were killed, executed, or imprisoned during the

³⁷ Alikarami, L, Interview with EUAA, 24 September 2024

³⁸ Alikarami, L, Interview with EUAA, 24 September 2024

³⁹ UN OHCHR, Independent international fact-finding mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: Update on the situation of women and girls in the context of the September 2022 protests and the ‘Woman, Life, Freedom’ movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 13 September 2024, [url](#), p. 9

⁴⁰ UN OHCHR, Independent international fact-finding mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: Update on the situation of women and girls in the context of the September 2022 protests and the ‘Woman, Life, Freedom’ movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 13 September 2024, [url](#), p. 9

⁴¹ UN OHCHR, Independent international fact-finding mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: Update on the situation of women and girls in the context of the September 2022 protests and the ‘Woman, Life, Freedom’ movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 13 September 2024, [url](#), p. 9

⁴² UN OHCHR, Iran must end harassment of Narges Mohammadi and release all women human rights defenders: independent experts, 27 June 2024, [url](#)

⁴³ UN Human Rights Council, independent international fact-finding mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran, minorities rights violations during the ‘woman, life, freedom movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 5 August 2024, [url](#)

⁴⁴ USDOS, 2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Iran, 23 April 2024, [url](#), p. 29

protests of the last two years.⁴⁵ According to the same source, since the 2022 ‘Woman, Life, Freedom’ demonstrations, the government continued to ‘silence and punish family members who seek justice and accountability for the violations committed against their family members’.⁴⁶ The UN FFM update of 13 September 2024 on Iran indicated that between July and September 2024, the Iranian government increased the arrests of family members of protesters killed during the ‘Woman, Life, Freedom’ movement.⁴⁷

1.2 Activists

Sources reported that activists and human rights defenders were targeted by Iranian authorities, including through arrests, prosecutions, convictions, imprisonment,⁴⁸ faced ‘repression’⁴⁹ and were targeted by the state authorities,⁵⁰ while they also experienced societal pressure.⁵¹ Arrests and detention of converts were also reported.⁵²

According to the UN FFM update of August 2024 on Iran, authorities cracked down on civic space in minority populated regions, labelling advocacy within the ‘Woman, Life, Freedom’ movement as a national security threat.⁵³ Minority human rights women activists, especially labour leaders, were disproportionately targeted with prosecutions and severe punishments, including death sentences, for alleged national security-related violations.⁵⁴ This highlights a broader effort to suppress dissent, particularly among women advocating for equality and human rights, according to the UN FFM.⁵⁵

⁴⁵ HRW, Iran: arrests of family members of protesters, 10 September 2024, [url](#)

⁴⁶ HRW, Iran: arrests of family members of protesters, 10 September 2024, [url](#)

⁴⁷ UN OHCHR, Independent international fact-finding mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: Update on the situation of women and girls in the context of the September 2022 protests and the ‘Woman, Life, Freedom’ movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 13 September 2024, [url](#), p. 1

⁴⁸ USDOS, 2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Iran, 23 April 2024, [url](#), pp. 20, 21, 60 – 61, 65, 88 – 89; HRW, Iran – Events of 2023, 11 January 2024, [url](#); Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023, Iran, 2024, [url](#)

⁴⁹ IranWire, Religious Minorities Overlooked in Iran’s Presidential Campaigns, 28 June 2024, [url](#); UN General Assembly, Note by the Secretary-General: Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, A/78/326, 24 August 2023, [url](#), para. 36

⁵⁰ USDOS, 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iran, 26 June 2024, [url](#), pp. 3, 33; Article18, ‘Faceless Victims: Rights Violations Against Christians in Iran’, February 2024, [url](#), pp. 3, 5

⁵¹ USDOS, 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iran, 26 June 2024, [url](#), p. 5; Article18, ‘Faceless Victims: Rights Violations Against Christians in Iran’, February 2024, [url](#), p. 5

⁵² Article18, Article18 submits joint report ahead of Iran’s next UN review, 18 July 2024, [url](#); USDOS, 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iran, 26 June 2024, [url](#), p. 33

⁵³ UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Fact-finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: “They have dehumanized us”: Minority rights violations during the “Woman, Life, Freedom” movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 5 August 2024, [url](#), p. 16

⁵⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Fact-finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: “They have dehumanized us”: Minority rights violations during the “Woman, Life, Freedom” movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 5 August 2024, [url](#), p. 16

⁵⁵ UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Fact-finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: “They have dehumanized us”: Minority rights violations during the “Woman, Life, Freedom” movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 5 August 2024, [url](#), p. 16

In July 2024, Pakhshan Azizi, a Kurdish activist who has been in prison for almost one year, has been sentenced to death by the Islamic Revolutionary Court in Tehran. She was convicted on charges of ‘armed rebellion’ (*baghi*) through membership of the Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK).⁵⁶ According to the UN FFM update of August 2024, court documents revealed that Pakhshan Azizi’s sentencing was partly based on her involvement in organising protests and visiting the families of slain protesters.⁵⁷ Similarly, Sharifeh Mohammadi, a labour activist, was sentenced to death in July 2024 for ‘armed rebellion’ due to alleged ties with an opposition group, despite of reportedly halting her involvement in a labour union years earlier.⁵⁸ She was reportedly tortured, held in solitary confinement, and denied her legal rights during detention.⁵⁹

According to the UN FFM update of 13 September 2024 on Iran, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Narges Mohammadi continued her activism, alongside other women prisoners in Evin prison, advocating for justice and for halting executions for individuals involved in the protests.⁶⁰ According to the same source, this has led to reprisals, including denial of visitation and reports of torture and mistreatment by prison authorities.⁶¹

1.3 Ethnic minorities

In August 2024, the UN FFM update on Iran indicated that state-sponsored media frequently disseminates stigmatising and defamatory narratives targeting ethnic and religious minorities, which sometimes includes incitement to violence against these groups.⁶² The same source further noted that this involves using terms such as ‘separatists,’ ‘terrorists,’ and ‘foreign

⁵⁶ KHRN, Iran court sentences Kurdish activist Pakhshan Azizi to death, 24 July 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁷ UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Fact-finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: “They have dehumanized us”: Minority rights violations during the “Woman, Life, Freedom” movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 5 August 2024, [url](#), p. 16

⁵⁸ UN OHCHR, Independent international fact-finding mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: Update on the situation of women and girls in the context of the September 2022 protests and the ‘Woman, Life, Freedom’ movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 13 September 2024, [url](#), p. 3

⁵⁹ UN OHCHR, Independent international fact-finding mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: Update on the situation of women and girls in the context of the September 2022 protests and the ‘Woman, Life, Freedom’ movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 13 September 2024, [url](#), pp. 3, 4; RFE/RL, Iran Sentences Labor Activist To Death Amid Rights Groups’ Outcry, 10 July 2024, [url](#)

⁶⁰ UN OHCHR, Independent international fact-finding mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: Update on the situation of women and girls in the context of the September 2022 protests and the ‘Woman, Life, Freedom’ movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 13 September 2024, [url](#), p. 4

⁶¹ UN OHCHR, Independent international fact-finding mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: Update on the situation of women and girls in the context of the September 2022 protests and the ‘Woman, Life, Freedom’ movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 13 September 2024, [url](#), p. 4

⁶² UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Fact-finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: “They have dehumanized us”: Minority rights violations during the “Woman, Life, Freedom” movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 5 August 2024, [url](#), p. 7

agents' to refer to Kurds, Baluch, and Ahwazi Arab minorities.⁶³ In an interview with EUAA, an expert on the Kurdish population and regions in Iran, who preferred to remain anonymous for security reasons, noted that 'when it comes to activities that are considered or deemed to be detrimental to the national security of the state, then average Kurds are targeted harshly by the state. Members or sympathisers of opposition groups such as the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) are automatically targeted and detained'.⁶⁴

Kolbars and Sokhtbars

The term *kolbar* refers to workers that transport goods through routes along Iran's northwestern borders,⁶⁵ and across the Iran, Iraq, Syria and Türkiye borders.⁶⁶

According to the UN FFM update of August 2024 on Iran, high number of unemployment and poverty in regions such as Kurdistan, Kermanshah, Sistan and Baluchistan, and West Azerbaijan, have driven many residents to engage in perilous cross-border carriage, known as *kolbar* in Kurdistan and *sokhtbar* in Sistan and Baluchistan.⁶⁷ In an email correspondence with EUAA, an expert on the Kurdish population and regions in Iran also noted that 'the state has neglected the Kurdish and Baluch areas for decades in terms of investment and the authorities know that the Kurds and the Baluch people have no option but to resort to work such as *kolbars* or *sokhtbars* (fuel carries) to make a living and provide for their families'.⁶⁸

In an interview with the EUAA, Leila Alikarami noted that 'the 2005 law on border exchanges categorises *kolbars* into two groups. The first holds a valid *kolbar* card, enabling lawful passage through official borders under certain conditions, aligning their activities with the law and legitimising their contracts with goods owners. The second group undertakes *kolbar* activities through unofficial borders without settling duties and customs, considered illegal under the 2013 Law on Combating Smuggling of Goods and Currency'.⁶⁹

Leila Alikarami further noted that '*kolbar* is an activity shaped by season: the numbers of those involved rises significantly during winter months, when there are fewer opportunities for paid employment, and declines during other seasons, when there are, for example, agricultural,

⁶³ UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Fact-finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: "They have dehumanized us": Minority rights violations during the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 5 August 2024, [url](#), p. 7

⁶⁴ Expert on Kurdish population and regions in Iran, email correspondence with EUAA, 27 September 2024

⁶⁵ UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Fact-finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: "They have dehumanized us": Minority rights violations during the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 5 August 2024, [url](#), p. 8

⁶⁶ Iran International, Deadly Toll Rises For Kolbars In Iran's Western Border Regions, 24 March 2024, [url](#)

⁶⁷ UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Fact-finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: "They have dehumanized us": Minority rights violations during the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 5 August 2024, [url](#), p. 8

⁶⁸ Expert on Kurdish population and regions in Iran, email correspondence with EUAA, 27 September 2024

⁶⁹ Alikarami, L, Interview with EUAA, 24 September 2024

small manufacturing and building opportunities'.⁷⁰ According to the same source, most of the *kolbars* only started this job due to the lack of other opportunities in the area, and for many it represents the sole lifeline for generating income'.⁷¹

Sources reported that *kolbars* are frequently exposed to threats, including violence and fatalities, often at the hands of security forces patrolling these areas.⁷² In correspondence with EUAA, an expert on the Kurdish population and regions in Iran noted that '*kolbars* are targeted because they cross the border illegally and carry goods that are not taxed. The state security forces do not target *kolbars* or *sokhtbars* because they are Kurds or Baluch'.⁷³ In an interview with the EUAA, Leila Alikarami also noted that 'violence against *kolbars* often stems from suspicions of smuggling. However, many *kolbars* are involved in legal cross-border trade and not illicit activities, yet they still face harsh and sometimes deadly actions from border security forces'.⁷⁴

In an interview with the EUAA, Leila Alikarami noted that each year, security forces, primarily conscripted border guards, kill or injure numerous *kolbars*, often justifying their actions by labelling these individuals as potential militants or dangerous smugglers.⁷⁵ In correspondence with EUAA, an expert on the Kurdish population and regions in Iran noted that state security forces frequently target *kolbars* and *sokhtbars* because they belong to marginalised minority groups from the country's peripheral regions. With no political influence in Tehran, these communities are vulnerable to systematic and regular targeting by the state.⁷⁶

Kolbars, in their routine cross-border activities, frequently encounter harsh treatment from border guards, who often resort to excessive force. This force can manifest in various forms, including physical beatings, assaults, and in extreme cases, shootings.⁷⁷ In correspondence with EUAA, an expert on the Kurdish population and regions in Iran noted that that 'the border routes used by *kolbars* and *sokhtbars* to transport goods or fuel are well-known to security forces, as they often travel in large numbers, sometimes in the hundreds or thousands. As a result, state security forces deliberately and knowingly target these individuals'.⁷⁸

As of August 2024, reporting of *kolbars* being killed continued, mostly as a result of direct gunshot by Iranian armed forces.⁷⁹ Kolbarnews, an Iranian pro-Kurdish online platform and

⁷⁰ Alikarami, L, Interview with EUAA, 24 September 2024

⁷¹ Alikarami, L, Interview with EUAA, 24 September 2024

⁷² UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Fact-finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: "They have dehumanized us": Minority rights violations during the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 5 August 2024, [url](#), p. 8; Iran International, Deadly Toll Rises For Kolbars In Iran's Western Border Regions, 24 March 2024, [url](#)

⁷³ Expert on Kurdish population and regions in Iran, email correspondence with EUAA, 27 September 2024

⁷⁴ Alikarami, L, Interview with EUAA, 24 September 2024

⁷⁵ Alikarami, L, Interview with EUAA, 24 September 2024

⁷⁶ Expert on Kurdish population and regions in Iran, email correspondence with EUAA, 27 September 2024

⁷⁷ Hengaw, August 2024: 15 Kurdish kolbars killed and injured at the borders of Iran, 31 August 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁸ Expert on Kurdish population and regions in Iran, email correspondence with EUAA, 27 September 2024

⁷⁹ Hengaw, August 2024: 15 Kurdish kolbars killed and injured at the borders of Iran, 31 August 2024, [url](#)

movement reporting on statistics and news related to *kolbars* and *sokhtbars*, between March 2023 and March 2024, recorded 444 deaths and injured among *kolbars* in the border regions and interprovincial routes of West Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, and Kermanshah provinces. Of these, 84 % were killed or injured with direct gunshot by the military forces while others were frozen to death, stepped on landmines or fell from mountains and heights.⁸⁰ On 29 August 2024, Iranian border guards fatally shot Asaad Espandar, a 24-year-old *kolbar* from Sardasht, West Azerbaijan, near Baneh in Kurdistan Province.⁸¹

Similarly, *sokhtbar* are among the ‘less privileged people living in border areas in Balochistan’, who, driven by unemployment and poverty take on dangerous jobs like cross-border fuel transport.⁸² This work involves people of all ages, including children and elderly people. *Sokhtbars* face constant threats, including indiscriminate and direct firing from Iranian security forces, vehicle accidents, and fatal fires, which resulted in deaths and injuries.⁸³ According to Kolbarnews reporting, during the first half of 2024, 133 Baluch *sokhtbars* were killed and over 80 more, including children, were injured due to shootings by military forces, traffic accidents, and vehicle fires.⁸⁴ On 20 August 2024, military forces in BandarAbbas pursued and shot at a vehicle driven by *sokhtbar*, who died after his vehicle crashed and caught fire.⁸⁵

Faili Kurds

Faili Kurds, who are Shia Muslims,⁸⁶ mainly inhabit the border areas inside Iran in Azna and Jahrom camps.⁸⁷ Since their displacement from Iraq to Iran 43 years ago, Faili Kurds have yet to regain their Iraqi nationality, while Iranian authorities have ‘avoided integrating them as Iranians’.⁸⁸ According to a December 2023 publication by the *Centre français de recherche sur l’Irak* (CFRI), a France-based non-profit association, 73 families reportedly hold only a ‘White Card’ as their sole form of documentation, which must be surrendered to the Iraqi government if they wish to return to Iraq.⁸⁹ No further information on the treatment of Faili Kurds in Iran in the timeframe of this query could be found among the sources consulted by the EUAA.

⁸⁰ Kolbar News, Annual Report of Kolbarnews for the Year 1402 – 444 Kolbars Killed and Injured in the Past Year, 10 April 2024, [url](#)

⁸¹ KHRN, Young kolbar shot dead by Iran border forces in Baneh, 31 August 2024, [url](#)

⁸² BHRG, Annual report, 2023, 5 January 2024, [url](#), p. 4

⁸³ BHRG, Annual report, 2023, 5 January 2024, [url](#), p. 4

⁸⁴ Kolbar News, BandarAbbas: A Sukhtbar Killed Following Military Forces’ Pursuit and Shooting, 21 August 2024, [url](#)

⁸⁵ Kolbar News, BandarAbbas: A Sukhtbar Killed Following Military Forces’ Pursuit and Shooting, 21 August 2024, [url](#)

⁸⁶ Expert on Kurdish population and regions in Iran, email correspondence with EUAA, 27 September 2024

⁸⁷ CFRI, The Feyli Kurds in Iraq: A Geopolitical Crisis with Complex Identity Consequences, 1 December 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁸ Expert on Kurdish population and regions in Iran, email correspondence with EUAA, 27 September 2024

⁸⁹ CFRI, The Feyli Kurds in Iraq: A Geopolitical Crisis with Complex Identity Consequences, 1 December 2023, [url](#)

1.4 Religious minorities

According to the UN FFM update of August 2024 on Iran, religious freedom of Muslims and adherents of three recognised religions including Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism continue to face restrictions in the country.⁹⁰ Additionally, Baha'is, Yarsan, and atheists are not granted legal recognition or protection under the law.⁹¹ According to the United States Commission on Religious Freedom report of August 2024, Iranian state-affiliated media were disseminated misinformation and false accusations against Jews, Sunnis, and Christian converts from Islam.⁹² In correspondence with EUAA, an expert on the Kurdish population and regions in Iran noted that 'Yarsan Kurds like other Kurds are discriminated but being a Yarsan does not mean you would be targeted by the security forces even though the discrimination is inherent in the system against ethnic and religious minorities such as the Kurds'.⁹³

Sources reported that Christian converts in Iran faced 'repression'⁹⁴ and were targeted by the state authorities,⁹⁵ while they also experienced societal pressure.⁹⁶ Arrests and detention of converts were also reported.⁹⁷

Baha'is

Followers of the Baha'i faith are banned from publicly practicing their religion, including the establishment of their places of worship.⁹⁸ Moreover, Baha'is were barred from pursuing

⁹⁰ UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Fact-finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: "They have dehumanized us": Minority rights violations during the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 5 August 2024, [url](#), p. 5; USDOS, 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iran, 26 June 2024, [url](#), pp. 10 – 12

⁹¹ UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Fact-finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: "They have dehumanized us": Minority rights violations during the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 5 August 2024, [url](#), p. 5

⁹² USCIRF, Misinformation and Disinformation: Implications for Freedom of Religion or Belief, 8 August 2024, [url](#), p. 3

⁹³ Expert on Kurdish population and regions in Iran, email correspondence with EUAA, 27 September 2024

⁹⁴ IranWire, Religious Minorities Overlooked in Iran's Presidential Campaigns, 28 June 2024, [url](#); UN General Assembly, Note by the Secretary-General: Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, A/78/326, 24 August 2023, [url](#), para. 36

⁹⁵ USDOS, 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iran, 26 June 2024, [url](#), pp. 3, 33; Article18, 'Faceless Victims: Rights Violations Against Christians in Iran', February 2024, [url](#), pp. 3, 5

⁹⁶ USDOS, 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iran, 26 June 2024, [url](#), p. 5; Article18, 'Faceless Victims: Rights Violations Against Christians in Iran', February 2024, [url](#), p. 5

⁹⁷ Article18, Article18 submits joint report ahead of Iran's next UN review, 18 July 2024, [url](#); USDOS, 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iran, 26 June 2024, [url](#), p. 33

⁹⁸ UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Fact-finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: "They have dehumanized us": Minority rights violations during the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 5 August 2024, [url](#), p. 6; USDOS, 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iran, 26 June 2024, [url](#), pp. 21, 46 – 47

higher education and working in the public sector.⁹⁹ They also faced limitations in the private sector, including closures of their businesses.¹⁰⁰ Since students are required to disclose their religion at school, it has resulted in Baha'i children being dismissed or even expelled.¹⁰¹ Additionally, state media disseminated extensive misinformation about Baha'is, labelling them as a 'disloyal cult' and alleging they are trying to exert inappropriate influence over Iran's economy.¹⁰²

The UN FFM update on Iran further indicated that authorities have reportedly accused the Baha'i community of instigating the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' movement, which led to increased arrests, home raids, and hate speech against them.¹⁰³ Arbitrary detentions of Baha'i women increased during the September 2022 protests.¹⁰⁴ On 23 October 2023, Iranian security forces in Isfahan arrested ten Baha'i women, as reported by Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA).¹⁰⁵ Prominent Baha'i leaders Mahvash Sabet and Fariba Kamalabadi, after previously serving 10 years in prison, were re-arrested in July 2022 and sentenced to another 10 years of imprisonment in December 2023 on 'spying charges'.¹⁰⁶ On 23 September 2024, a Baha'i couple from Gorgan was arrested by security forces and taken to an undisclosed location.¹⁰⁷

Sunni Muslims

⁹⁹ UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Fact-finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: "They have dehumanized us": Minority rights violations during the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 5 August 2024, [url](#), p. 6; USDOS, 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iran, 26 June 2024, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁰⁰ UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Fact-finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: "They have dehumanized us": Minority rights violations during the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 5 August 2024, [url](#), pp. 6, 7; USDOS, 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iran, 26 June 2024, [url](#), pp. 3, 17, 18

¹⁰¹ UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Fact-finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: "They have dehumanized us": Minority rights violations during the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 5 August 2024, [url](#), p. 15

¹⁰² USCIRF, Misinformation and Disinformation: Implications for Freedom of Religion or Belief, 8 August 2024, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁰³ UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Fact-finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: "They have dehumanized us": Minority rights violations during the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 5 August 2024, [url](#), p. 18

¹⁰⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Fact-finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: "They have dehumanized us": Minority rights violations during the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 5 August 2024, [url](#), pp. 18 – 19

¹⁰⁵ HRANA, Arrest of 10 Baha'i Women in Isfahan Sparks Concern, 23 October 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶ UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Fact-finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: "They have dehumanized us": Minority rights violations during the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 5 August 2024, [url](#), p. 18

¹⁰⁷ Hengaw, Iran Arrests Baha'i Couple Shahin Mavaddat and Soudabeh Mahdinejad in Gorgan, 25 September 2024, [url](#)

In Iran, most Kurds, Baluches, and Ahwazi Arabs are Sunni Muslims, while Azerbaijani Turks are Shia Muslims.¹⁰⁸ In correspondence with EUAA, an expert on the Kurdish population and regions in Iran noted that ‘the state harbours a general distrust of Kurds, but this is particularly pronounced with Sunni Kurds. In terms of employment and interactions with government institutions, Sunni Kurds and other religious minorities face systemic disadvantages, as the state’s bureaucracy is largely structured to cater to Shia Muslims’.¹⁰⁹

Sunni Muslims continue facing restrictions on their freedom to worship,¹¹⁰ while Sunni mosques and religious schools have been reportedly demolished and/or seized in recent years, including most recently in June 2024.¹¹¹ In the context of the ‘Woman, Life, Freedom’ protests, Sunni leaders were increasingly targeted by authorities, including being summoned, arrested, detained, and prosecuted¹¹², with one case resulting in a death sentence.¹¹³ In August 2024, Iranian President, Masoud Pezeshkian appointed Abdelkarim Hosseinzadeh, a politician from the Sunni minority, as vice president for rural development.¹¹⁴

1.5 Women and girls

On 27 June 2024, a group of independent experts in a press release by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed their concern on ‘the extreme discrimination and violence against women and girls’ in Iran. They further underlined the lack of ‘rules-based justice system that is gender-responsive and accessible to women’.¹¹⁵ In August 2024, 23 cases of femicide in Iran were reported,¹¹⁶ as well as honour-related killings.¹¹⁷

¹⁰⁸ UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Fact-finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: “They have dehumanized us”: Minority rights violations during the “Woman, Life, Freedom” movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 5 August 2024, [url](#), pp. 3, 23

¹⁰⁹ Expert on Kurdish population and regions in Iran, email correspondence with EUAA, 27 September 2024

¹¹⁰ UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Fact-finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: “They have dehumanized us”: Minority rights violations during the “Woman, Life, Freedom” movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 5 August 2024, [url](#), p. 6; HRW, Iran – Events of 2023, 11 January 2024, [url](#)

¹¹¹ UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Fact-finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: “They have dehumanized us”: Minority rights violations during the “Woman, Life, Freedom” movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 5 August 2024, [url](#), p. 6

¹¹² UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Fact-finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: “They have dehumanized us”: Minority rights violations during the “Woman, Life, Freedom” movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 5 August 2024, [url](#), p. 17; CHRI, Special Report: Sunni Clerics in the Crosshairs of Islamic Republic Repression, 15 August 2023, [url](#)

¹¹³ UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Fact-finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: “They have dehumanized us”: Minority rights violations during the “Woman, Life, Freedom” movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 5 August 2024, [url](#), p. 17

¹¹⁴ VoA, Iran president makes rare appointment of Sunni to senior post, 26 August 2024, [url](#)

¹¹⁵ UN OHCHR, Iran must end harassment of Narges Mohammadi and release all women human rights defenders: independent experts, 27 June 2024, [url](#)

¹¹⁶ Hengaw, Hengaw’s monthly report on women’s rights violations in Iran, August 2024, 5 September 2024, [url](#)

¹¹⁷ HANA, ‘A 17-year-old girl was killed by her father for honor motive’, 27 August 2024, [url](#)

On 18 September 2024, the head of Iran's legal and judicial commission announced that the Guardian Council has approved the Chastity and Mandatory *Hijab* bill, requiring all state institutions to enforce it without obstruction.¹¹⁸ However, as of 21 September 2023 it was not yet officially enacted.¹¹⁹ The bill includes identifying unveiled women through video surveillance and imposing stricter penalties, such as higher fines, social service restrictions, and property confiscation.¹²⁰

In an interview with the EUAA, Leila Alikarami noted that 'the Chastity and *Hijab* bill is set to be enforced despite earlier promises from the new president to halt the morality police. The finalised provisions of this law, which are now poised for implementation, raise serious concerns. Additionally, this law mandates that lawyers must observe the 'Islamic dress code' when entering courtrooms and other judicial spaces, without clearly defining what this dress code entails. This ambiguity is likely to cause significant issues for legal professionals, particularly female attorneys, subjecting them to undue harassment and challenges in their work'.¹²¹

According to the UN FFM update of 13 September 2024 on Iran, on 6 August 2024, two girls were violently apprehended and assaulted by female 'morality police' officers in Tehran for not wearing the compulsory *hijab*.¹²² The following day, FARAJA announced an investigation into the incident, whereas the mother of one of the girls reportedly received threats not to file a complaint regarding the beating of her 14-year-old daughter.¹²³ Additionally, on 21 August 2024, one morality police officer filled a judicial case against one of the girls in juvenile court claiming that the girl had caused her a finger injury during the incident.¹²⁴

On 20 September 2024, the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, has reportedly approved the pardon of 2 887 prisoners including women.¹²⁵ The recent pardon order by the Supreme Leader led to the release of jailed Faezeh Hashemi, a political activist, and Sharvin Hajipoor, the singer of the song *Baraye*, which became the anthem of the 'Women, Life, Freedom'

¹¹⁸ INU, Iranian Parliament approves controversial chastity and mandatory hijab bill, 21 September 2024, [url](#); IranWire, Iran's Guardian Council approves "hijab Chastity bill", 18 September 2024, [url](#)

¹¹⁹ INU, Iranian Parliament approves controversial chastity and mandatory hijab bill, 21 September 2024, [url](#); IranWire, Iran's Guardian Council approves "hijab Chastity bill", 18 September 2024, [url](#)

¹²⁰ INU, Iranian Parliament approves controversial chastity and mandatory hijab bill, 21 September 2024, [url](#); IranWire, Iran's Guardian Council approves "hijab Chastity bill", 18 September 2024, [url](#)

¹²¹ Alikarami, L, Interview with EUAA, 24 September 2024

¹²² UN OHCHR, Independent international fact-finding mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: Update on the situation of women and girls in the context of the September 2022 protests and the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 13 September 2024, [url](#), p. 7

¹²³ UN OHCHR, Independent international fact-finding mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: Update on the situation of women and girls in the context of the September 2022 protests and the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 13 September 2024, [url](#), p. 7

¹²⁴ UN OHCHR, Independent international fact-finding mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran: Update on the situation of women and girls in the context of the September 2022 protests and the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 13 September 2024, [url](#), p. 7

¹²⁵ AP, Iran's top leader pardons prisoners, including foreigners and people accused of anti-state crimes, 20 September 2024, [url](#)

movement.¹²⁶ This move appears to be an attempt to improve the political climate, particularly in response to external perceptions, and present a more positive image, according to Leila Alikarami.¹²⁷

Travel restrictions for women

According to sources, in Iran, a married woman requires her husband's written consent to obtain a passport or travel abroad.¹²⁸ Single women over 18 could obtain a passport without permission, however, they still require their guardian's consent to travel abroad.¹²⁹ Occasionally, women arriving at airports discovered that their travel authorisation had been cancelled by their husband or male guardian, which could stop them from boarding their flights.¹³⁰ In exceptional cases, authorities might intervene to allow female athletes to compete internationally despite their husband's objections.¹³¹ Additionally, according to the United States Institute for Peace, a husband can determine where the couple lives and can prevent his wife from taking certain jobs that he considered contrary to 'family values'.¹³²

1.6 Restrictions on artists

In an interview with EUAA, Leila Alikarami noted that:

'art is not forbidden in Iran, and concerts, theatre performances, and shows, including those featuring women dancing in groups, are permitted. However, a recent controversy arose involving an actress who danced in a movie, leading to legal action against her. The Iranian Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance closely monitors films and series, approving them only if they comply with the country's Islamic guidelines. When publishing a book in Iran, writing about many subjects including women can lead to censorship, with authors often required to make changes before approval. Women are allowed to participate in sports, provided they adhere to Islamic guidelines, particularly regarding dress code. However, these criteria are vague and open to interpretation, leading to inconsistent enforcement'.¹³³

¹²⁶ Alikarami, L, Interview with EUAA, 24 September 2024

¹²⁷ Alikarami, L, Interview with EUAA, 24 September 2024

¹²⁸ USIP, Part 3: Iranian laws on women, 13 August 2023, [url](#); Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023, Iran, 2024, [url](#)

¹²⁹ USIP, Part 3: Iranian laws on women, 13 August 2023, [url](#)

¹³⁰ USIP, Part 3: Iranian laws on women, 13 August 2023, [url](#)

¹³¹ USIP, Part 3: Iranian laws on women, 13 August 2023, [url](#)

¹³² USIP, Part 3: Iranian laws on women, 13 August 2023, [url](#)

¹³³ Alikarami, L, Interview with EUAA, 24 September 2024

Sources reported that artists who publicly supported the ‘Women, Life, Freedom’ protest movement faced reprisals including intimidation, arrest, convictions and travel bans.¹³⁴ Nearly two months after the onset of the ‘Women, Life, Freedom’ protest in 2022, approximately 100 artists reportedly faced punishments or restrictions on their ability to work and travel, primarily due to their public support for the protests and their defiance of mandatory *hijab* laws.¹³⁵

Furthermore, according to a report by Artistic Freedom Initiative¹³⁶ and Voices Unbound¹³⁷ following the September 2022 protests, Iranian authorities have intensified its crackdown on artistic freedom, which is led by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance including tighter censorship, enhanced online monitoring, work bans, the formation of special task forces targeting high-profile artists, as well as legal threats.¹³⁸ The same source noted that the most frequently invoked laws against artists who have expressed support for the ‘Woman, Life, Freedom movement’ was reported to be Article 500 of the Iranian Penal Code,¹³⁹ which stipulates that ‘Anyone who engages in any type of propaganda against the Islamic Republic of Iran or in support of opposition groups and associations shall be sentenced to three months to one year of imprisonment’.¹⁴⁰ In March 2024, Iranian authorities have sentenced singer Shervin Hajipour, a supporter of the ‘Woman, Life, Freedom movement’, to three years and eight months in prison for ‘propaganda activities against the Islamic Republic’ and ‘inciting people to riot’.¹⁴¹

1.7 Criminal activities including trafficking in human beings (THB)

According to the US Department of States trafficking in persons report, Iranian legislation does not classify all forms of trafficking as criminal offenses.¹⁴² A law enacted in 2004 specifically criminalises human trafficking involving threats, the use of force, coercion, exploitation of power, or taking advantage of a victim's vulnerable situation for purposes such as prostitution, slavery, or forced marriage.¹⁴³ The same source further indicated that trafficking

¹³⁴ USDOS, 2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Iran, 23 April 2024, [url](#), pp. 20, 41, 48; HRW, Iran – Events of 2023, 11 January 2024, [url](#); Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, General Country of Origin Information on Iran, September 2023, [url](#), p. 61

¹³⁵ Atlantic Council, The high price of dissident art in Iran: Silence or exile, 10 June 2024, [url](#)

¹³⁶ Artistic Freedom Initiative (AFI) is a US-based group of human rights activists, lawyers, academics and artists aiming to ‘to advance and promote artistic freedom’ and facilitating ‘pro bono immigration representation and resettlement assistance for international artists who are persecuted or censored’. AFI (Artistic Freedom Initiative), About, n.d., [url](#)

¹³⁷ Voices Unbound is a US-based group of human rights defenders, journalists, and activists with the goal ‘to provide safe haven and support for journalists and activists at risk’. Voices Unbound, About us, n.d., [url](#)

¹³⁸ AFI & Voices Unbound, I create; I resist, Iranian artists at the frontline of change, 3 September 2024, [url](#), p. 18

¹³⁹ AFI & Voices Bound, I create; I resist, Iranian artists at the frontline of change, 3 September 2024, [url](#), pp. 64, 65

¹⁴⁰ IHRDC, Islamic Penal Code of the Islamic Republic of Iran – Book Five, 15 July 2013, [url](#)

¹⁴¹ IranWire, Grammy-winning Iranian Protest Singer Sentenced to Jail, 1 March 2024, [url](#); AFI & Voices Bound, I create; I resist, Iranian artists at the frontline of change, 3 September 2024, [url](#), p. 66

¹⁴² USDOS, 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Iran, 2 July 2024, [url](#)

¹⁴³ USDOS, 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Iran, 2 July 2024, [url](#)

in human beings in Iran is prevalent in various forms including forced labour, where individuals, including children, are subjected to coercive work conditions, trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation, particularly affecting women and girls, the recruitment of child soldiers by the government for military tasks, especially to quell protests, domestic servitude, where women and girls endure exploitation in household work, and forced marriage, wherein minors are coerced into marriages against their will.¹⁴⁴ According to Global Organised Crime Index (GOCI), in Iran, trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation of young women occurs within the country.¹⁴⁵ In an interview with EUAA, Leila Alikarami noted that ‘some gangs exploit girls by trafficking them to Iraqi Kurdistan for sexual exploitation.’¹⁴⁶ While the numbers are not large, the situation for Iranian girls in Iranian Kurdistan remains concerning’.¹⁴⁷

In addition, Iran reported to be a hub for illegal organ trafficking, largely due to the high prevalence of kidney disease in the country.¹⁴⁸ According to Leila Alikarami, trafficking of human organs and blood in criminal markets is reportedly taking place in major cities like Tehran, Shiraz, and Tabriz.¹⁴⁹ She also noted that ‘there are reports of criminal gangs in Iran involved in smuggling, trafficking in human beings, and organ trade, particularly targeting vulnerable groups such as the poor people. These gangs traffic organs, including kidneys’.¹⁵⁰ Criminal groups increasingly exploit vulnerable individuals through social media platforms, which have seen a rise in usage among the Iranian population.¹⁵¹

In 2023, Iranian authorities, revealed the identification and dismantling of 94 active trafficking rings.¹⁵² In addition, in 2023, the police in Sistan and Baluchistan has reportedly dismantled two drug smuggling gangs and the intelligence operations uncovered plans by armed gangs to transport drugs from northern and southern cities to central Iran.¹⁵³ In several operations, police clashed with smugglers, leading to the arrest of six gang members and the confiscation of eight vehicles.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁴ USDOS, 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Iran, 2 July 2024, [url](#)

¹⁴⁵ GOCl, Iran, 2023, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁴⁶ Alikarami, L, Interview with EUAA, 24 September 2024

¹⁴⁷ Alikarami, L, Interview with EUAA, 24 September 2024

¹⁴⁸ Asia News, Arrest unveils a network of organ traffickers between Kerala and Tehran, 22 May 2024, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹ GOCl, Iran, 2023, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁵⁰ Alikarami, L, Interview with EUAA, 24 September 2024

¹⁵¹ GOCl, Iran, 2023, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁵² IranWire, Human Trafficking in Iran: Dearth of Transparent Data, Compensation, 15 March 2024, [url](#)

¹⁵³ IRNA, Police dismantles two drug smuggling gangs, 8 August 2023, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴ IRNA, Police dismantles two drug smuggling gangs, 8 August 2023, [url](#)

2. Return to Iran

2.1 Potential legal restrictions to travel back to Iran

According to Article 4 of the Iranian passport law [informal translation]

‘Entry into the country or exit from it is only permitted through points designated and announced based on the proposal of the Ministry of Interior and the approval of the Cabinet.’ Article 5 stipulates that ‘the inspection of passports and travel documents, as well as the review of them at the borders, is the responsibility of the National Police in the country, and in areas without police presence, it falls to the National Gendarmerie. Relevant officials are obligated to prevent the entry of individuals lacking passports or necessary documents for entering Iran’. In its note, it further stipulates that ‘in cases where individuals without passports or travel documents wish to return to Iran, if their Iranian nationality or identity is confirmed, the relevant officials may grant them permission to enter Iran. The regulations for determining the Iranian nationality of such individuals will be established by the executive regulations of this law’.¹⁵⁵

Official English version of the legislation could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA.

In an interview with the EUAA, Leila Alikarami stated that every Iranian citizen has the right to return to the country, even without a passport.¹⁵⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) of Iran indicated on its website that [informal translation] ‘compatriots residing abroad who, for some reason, do not possess a valid passport and wish to return to the country, provided they left Iran legally, can re-enter the Islamic Republic of Iran using a *barg-e oboor* (travel permit)’.¹⁵⁷ The official English version of the information could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA.

According to Alikarami, these permits are being issued by the Iranian embassies abroad.¹⁵⁸ Iranians who are eligible for military service are not permitted to travel abroad.¹⁵⁹ According to the Iranian MoFA, ‘Iranians that are not under obligation of military service, and who possess a credible residence abroad, can apply for the issuance of a Multiple exiting permit’.¹⁶⁰ On 9 August 2021, Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei, the head of the judiciary, claimed, during a meeting of the Supreme Judicial Council, that [informal translation] ‘no one is banned from

¹⁵⁵ Iran, Majlis, Islamic Parliament Research Center (IPRC), قانون گذرنامه [Passport law], 1 March 1973, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶ Alikarami, L, Interview with EUAA, 24 September 2024

¹⁵⁷ Iran, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, صدور برگ عبور [issuance of travel permit], n.d., [url](#)

¹⁵⁸ Alikarami, L, Interview with EUAA, 24 September 2024

¹⁵⁹ Alikarami, L, Interview with EUAA, 24 September 2024

¹⁶⁰ Iran, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Multiple exit stamp, n.d., [url](#)

entering the country'.¹⁶¹ He stated that no Iranian national living abroad is barred from returning to the country. He further stated that [informal translation] 'individuals who were previously banned from leaving the country and no longer have an arrest warrant can return without fear of detention, including those who had travel bans lasting several years, such as 4, 5, or even 10 years'. He called on Iranians abroad to reach out to the prosecutors prior to their return to facilitate their return'.¹⁶² On 18 August 2021, Kianoosh Sanjari, a journalist and human rights activist, reported that, after his return to Iran, he was put in jail and tortured.¹⁶³ Information of similar nature was not found among the sources consulted by the EUAA.

In an interview with EUAA, Leila Alikarami noted that 'some [human smugglers] assist Iranians in illegally leaving or returning to the country, often for those afraid to travel with their passports'.¹⁶⁴

2.2 Treatment upon return for political activities abroad

According to Arash Azizi, professor at Clemson University, Iranians abroad have not managed to establish considerable or enduring opposition organisations, despite an estimated 6 to 8 million Iranians who live abroad.¹⁶⁵ However, few Iranian political organisations operate outside the country, including the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (MKO, also known by its Persian acronym MEK), which is based in Albania, but has little significant influence in Iran.¹⁶⁶ The MEK was classified as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) by the US due to its alleged involvement in the killing of American personnel during the 1970s and its association with Saddam Hussein. It was removed from the list in 2012 after renouncing violence.¹⁶⁷ However, Iranian authorities still regard the MEK as a terrorist group.¹⁶⁸ The MEK engaged in armed hostilities with the Islamic Republic, which included bombings and assassinations.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶¹ Mehr News, No Iranian nationals banned from entering homeland: judiciary, 9 August 2021, [url](#); Factnameh, هیچ کس ممنوع ورود نیست [no one is banned from returning], 15 August 2024, [url](#)

¹⁶² Mehr News, No Iranian is banned from entering homeland: judiciary, 9 August 2021, [url](#); Factnameh, هیچ کس ممنوع ورود نیست [no one is banned from returning], 15 August 2024, [url](#); IranWire, Journalist Kianoosh Sanjari: Instead of Being Welcomed I Was Imprisoned and Tortured, 18 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶³ IranWire, Journalist Kianoosh Sanjari: Instead of Being Welcomed I Was Imprisoned and Tortured, 18 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴ Alikarami, L, Interview with EUAA, 24 September 2024

¹⁶⁵ Arash Azizi, Opposition politics of the Iranian diaspora: out of many, one – but not just yet, available at Clingendael, 27 October 2023, [url](#)

¹⁶⁶ Arash Azizi, Opposition politics of the Iranian diaspora: out of many, one – but not just yet, available at Clingendael, 27 October 2023, [url](#)

¹⁶⁷ CFR, Mujahadeen-e-Khalq (MEK), 28 July 2014, [url](#)

¹⁶⁸ Al Jazeera, Why was the Iran dissent group raided in Europe?, 21 June 2023, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹ Al Jazeera, Why was the Iran dissent group raided in Europe?, 21 June 2023, [url](#)

There has been the Worker-Communist Party of Iran (WPI)¹⁷⁰ with the latest gathering in Cologne in 2023, the Constitutional Party of Iran,¹⁷¹ a monarchist party based in Los Angeles, and the New Iran Party (NIP) created in 2018 by a number of right oriented young Iranian political activists.¹⁷²

According to Manisha Ganguly, investigations correspondent and the open-source lead for the Guardian, 'Iran and its agents appear to be orchestrating a Europe-wide campaign of harassment, surveillance, kidnap plots and death threats targeting political activists who are protesting against the regime'.¹⁷³ Check Point Research (CPR), which disseminates information on cyber threat intelligence, 'unravelling [in September 2020] surveillance operation by Iranian entities that has been targeting Iranian expats and dissidents for years'.¹⁷⁴

In an interview with the EUAA, Leila Alikarami noted that:

'authorities do not systematically monitor every Iranian national abroad. However, high-profile activists, journalists, and human rights defenders may be monitored outside the country and arrested upon their return. Typically, the passport police or the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) maintain lists of Iranian citizens who have active cases. If an individual's name appears on the passport police list, their passport will be confiscated by immigration authorities during the immigration process. If their name is on the IRGC list, they can be identified even after passing through immigration by IRGC officers present at the airport. Ordinary Iranians are not systematically monitored unless they post sensitive content on social media, which could attract state interest. Not everyone is rigorously controlled at the airport. However, if an Iranian is arrested there for any reason, authorities will conduct an in-depth search of their computer and phone to review their online activities. Some Iranian activists have travelled to the country without being identified or arrested upon arrival at the airport. However, incidents have occurred where individuals posted something online while inside the country, revealing their presence and subsequently attracting attention from the authorities'.¹⁷⁵

3. Armed actors

3.1 Deserters from the armed forces

¹⁷⁰ WPIRAN, Worker-communist party of Iran, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁷¹ CPI, A party for the present and future of Iran, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁷² Arash Azizi, Opposition politics of the Iranian diaspora: out of many, one – but not just yet, available at Clingendael, 27 October 2023, [url](#)

¹⁷³ Guardian (The), Iranian activists across Europe are targets of threat and harassments, 22 September 2023, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴ CPR, Rampant kitten – an Iranian espionage campaign, 18 September 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵ Alikarami, L, interview with EUAA, 24 September 2024

Military service became mandatory by issuance of a bill in 1925, which has been modified in 1980 during the war with Iraq.¹⁷⁶ The bill stipulates ‘that it’s the duty of ‘all Iranians’ to defend Iran’s independence and territorial integrity’.¹⁷⁷ Members of IRGC are required to do a two-year mandatory military service.¹⁷⁸ According to Atlantic Council, ‘[a]ny Iranian man who fails to provide documentation about the status of his military service cannot obtain a passport or conduct legal businesses’.¹⁷⁹ Iran International stated that any Iranian man that leaves the military service prior to its completion can be punished for ‘desertion’ under the law.¹⁸⁰

Article 56 of the Iranian law on punishments related to crimes committed by the armed forces, which has been published on the Islamic Parliament Research Centre (IPRC) website, stipulates that [informal translation] ‘if permanent members of the armed forces are absent for more than fifteen consecutive days during peacetime without a valid excuse, they will be considered deserters and will be sentenced to the following punishments:

- if they voluntarily return, they will be sentenced to imprisonment for two to six months or denial of promotion for three to six months;
- if they are arrested, they will face imprisonment for six months to two years or denial of promotion for six months to two years’.¹⁸¹

Article 61 of the mentioned law concerns punishments for desertion during war and armed conflicts and it stipulates that [informal translation]:

- ‘Permanent members of the armed forces who are absent for more than five consecutive days during wartime without a valid excuse will be considered deserters. Upon arrest, they will be sentenced from one to five years of imprisonment. If the desertion occurs at the frontline, they will be considered deserters from the moment of absence and will be sentenced from three to fifteen years of imprisonment’.

According to Article 1 of the mentioned law, [informal translation] ‘military courts shall address crimes related to specific military and law enforcement duties committed by the following individuals, collectively referred to in this law as military personnel:

- personnel of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran and affiliated organisations;
- personnel of the Islamic Republic of Iran Army and its affiliated organisations;
- personnel of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its affiliated organisations, as well as members of the IRGC *Basij*;

¹⁷⁶ Atlantic Council, I was once conscripted into the Iranian armed forces. Here’s why the IRGC designation is punishing conscripts., 11 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷ Atlantic Council, I was once conscripted into the Iranian armed forces. Here’s why the IRGC designation is punishing conscripts., 11 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸ FP, Conscription is not an excuse for Iran’s Revolutionary Guard, 30 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹ Atlantic Council, I was once conscripted into the Iranian armed forces. Here’s why the IRGC designation is punishing conscripts., 11 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰ Iran International, Iran introduces salary and service reform, 11 July 2023, [url](#)

¹⁸¹ Iran, Majlis, IPRC, قانون مجازات جرائم نیروهای مسلح [law on punishments of crimes by the armed forces], 30 December 2003, [url](#)

- personnel of the Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics and its affiliated organisations;
- personnel subject to the Law of the Law Enforcement Force of the Islamic Republic of Iran;
- conscripts, from the start to the end of their service;
- cadets—under the military personnel employment laws—of military and law enforcement training centres inside and outside the country, as well as the training centres of the Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics;
- individuals temporarily serving in the armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran who, during this period, are considered part of the armed forces under the military personnel employment laws'.¹⁸²

General Taghi Mehri, head of Iran's General Military Service Organisation, has reportedly announced new regulations for conscripts and deserters in 2024, including:

- 'Exemption for Deserters: deserters who have been absent for more than 8 years (calculated until 2016) and have not resumed service are eligible for exemption from military service. This aims to ease their financial and social burdens and grant them the same benefits as those who completed their service. Deserters with less than 8 years of absence can finish their service in intervals based on personal circumstances;
- Medical Exemption for Deserters: Deserters absent for more than two months who developed physical or mental health issues post-desertion may qualify for a medical exemption after paying a fine. The process requires reporting to the last unit served, followed by legal proceedings and payment of fines. Upon approval by a medical board, they may receive a medical exemption at no extra cost;
- Caregiving Exemption (*Kefalat*): deserters can apply for caregiving exemptions (for parents, siblings, etc.) only if they had no unjustified absence before conscription. After completing military court procedures and paying fines, their exemption can be confirmed, allowing them to return to their unit;
- Veteran Exemption: deserters whose fathers were not previously recognised for wartime service or disability can now qualify for veteran-based exemptions. After desertion, once documents proving the father's service or disability are submitted, deserters can return to their unit, settle legal matters, and apply for service reductions or a permanent exemption via the police service'.¹⁸³

According to Article 11 of the General Military Service Law of Iran, [informal translation] 'in times of war and general mobilisation, if required, individuals who were exempted from mandatory military service during peacetime may also be summoned to serve. They will receive the same rights and benefits as others in the same reserve category'. Article 4 of the mentioned law

¹⁸² Iran, Majlis, IPRC, قانون مجازات جرائم نیروهای مسلح [law on punishments of crimes by the armed forces], 30 December 2003, [url](#)

¹⁸³ Eghtesadonline, قانون جدید نحوه معافیت سربازان فراری چیست؟ [What is the new law on exemption for military deserters?], 12 May 2024, [url](#)

stipulates that ‘The period of compulsory military service is 30 years, and it is divided into the following stages for all eligible individuals:

- the compulsory service period is two years. [...];
- the reserve period (first stage) is 8 years;
- the first reserve period is 10 years;
- the second reserve period is 10 years.’

In note 1 of the mentioned Article, it is stipulated that [informal translation] ‘The start and end date of service in the reserve and standby stages is calculated from the completion of the compulsory service period. In any case, the end date will not extend beyond the age of 50.’ In note 2 of the mentioned Article, it is indicated that ‘In times of necessity and general mobilisation, individuals subject to this law may be called upon for service until the age of 60’.¹⁸⁴

According to Sarbazmosaver, a Persian website providing information on military service in Iran, [informal translation] ‘the term *sarbaz-e farari* (deserter) has reportedly been a negative label assigned to deserters and remains with them for life. Even if someone returns to their unit after deserting, they will still be regarded as a deserter among other soldiers’.¹⁸⁵

On 23 June 2024, the Iranian Students’ News Agency (ISNA) news cited the head of the judicial institution of the armed forces in Kermanshah stating that [informal translation] ‘on the occasion of the celebrations of Eid al-Adha (Muslim celebration) and Ghadir Khumm (Islamic event), as well as the judiciary week, deserted soldiers who return voluntarily will be exempted from criminal charges’.¹⁸⁶

On 25 June 2024, Tasnim news, an Iranian local news agency, reported that [informal translation] ‘Amir Hussein Qazi Zadeh, presidential candidate, stated that there were 3.5 million military deserters in the country. The source further indicated that [informal translation] ‘these individuals are not deserters but rather conscripts who, for physical related issues or medical exemption validation or obtaining a smart card, were not present at military service. The source also indicated that there have been less than one million absent conscripts in the country’.¹⁸⁷ Corroborating information could not be found in the sources consulted by the EUAA.

¹⁸⁴ Iran, Majlis, IPRC, قانون خدمت وظیفه عمومی [General Military Service Law], 21 October 1984, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵ Sarbazmoshaver, ۱۴۰۳ فرار از خدمت و مجازات سرباز فراری [Desertion from service and punishment for desertion], 2024, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁸⁶ ISNA news, سربازان فراری بخشیده می‌شوند/ آمار جرائم بین نیروهای مسلح پایین است [deserted soldiers will be pardoned/number of crimes within the armed forces is low], 23 June 2024, [url](#)

¹⁸⁷ Tasnim news, آیا ۳.۵ میلیون «سرباز فراری» در کشور داریم؟ [Do we have 3.5 million deserters in the country?], 24 June 2024, [url](#)

3.2 State actors involved in human rights violations

On 17 October 2022, the Council of the European Union imposed sanctions against eleven individuals and four entities as perpetrators of serious human rights violations for their involvement in Mahsa Amini's death and the violent suppression of protests in Iran.¹⁸⁸ Those sanctioned include Iran's Morality Police, key officials Mohammad Rostami and Hajahmad Mirzaei, the Iranian Law Enforcement Forces (LEF) and its local chiefs, as well as Minister Issa Zarepour for the internet blackout.¹⁸⁹

Moreover, on 14 November 2022, the Council of the European Union adopted sanctions against four members of the squad who arbitrarily arrested Mahsa Amini, provincial heads of the Iranian Law Enforcement Forces (LEF) and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), Brigadier General Kiyumars Heidari of the Iranian Army's Ground Forces, Press TV for broadcasting forced confessions, Vahid Mohammad Naser Majid of the Iranian Cyber Police for arbitrary arrests over online criticism, and Iran's Minister of Interior Ahmad Vahidi, who oversees the LEF, who engaged in severe human rights abuses.¹⁹⁰

Additionally, the EU has implemented sanctions against Iran in response to its human rights violations, nuclear proliferation, and military support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine. As of 29 August 2024, the EU sanctioned 227 individuals including:

- 'members of the Iranian parliament
- the Minister of the Interior, Ahmad Vahidi
- the Minister of Information and Communications Technology, Issa Zarepour
- governors and local politicians
- members of the Iranian security forces
- members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)
- members of the Iranian Law Enforcement Forces (LEF)
- the squad that arbitrarily arrested Mahsa Amini
- high-ranking officials and military personnel
- commanders and other members of the police
- prison wardens and directors
- members of the judiciary
- members of the Supreme Council of Cyberspace.

The EU also sanctioned 42 entities including:

- the Iranian Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance

¹⁸⁸ Council of the European Union, Iran : EU sanctions perpetrators of serious human rights violations, 17 October 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹ Council of the European Union, Iran : EU sanctions perpetrators of serious human rights violations, 17 October 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰ Council of the European Union, Iran : EU adopts additional sanctions against perpetrators of serious human rights violations, 14 November 2022, [url](#)

- the Iranian Ministry of Education
- Iran's Morality Police
- the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)
- the Law Enforcement Forces (LEF)
- the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution
- the Supreme Council of Cyberspace
- prisons
- the state television broadcaster 'Press TV'
- news agencies
- mobile service providers'.¹⁹¹

The United States (US) have also sanctioned, the IRGC and its Qods Force, who have played a significant role in violence against political opposition, Iranian dissidents abroad, and in supporting international designated terrorist groups like Hamas, Hezbollah, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. The charges highlight how the Qods Force allegedly created a vast global network of front companies to launder Iranian oil through deceit, forgery, and threats.¹⁹² Additionally, the US sanctioned the four senior officials of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Intelligence Organization (IRGC-IO), which operates in the Evin Prison and is directly involved in targeting protests and arresting dissidents, including dual nationals.¹⁹³ The IRGC-IO has reportedly been involved in targeting Iranian dissident journalist Ruhollah Zam, who was known for his critical coverage of the regime's 2017 protest crackdown, from exile in Paris to Iraq, where he was abducted and taken to Tehran.¹⁹⁴ In December 2020, Rohullah Zam was executed by the Iranian regime after being convicted of 'corruption on earth'.¹⁹⁵

According to the Washington Post, the IRGC and Iran's Ministry of Intelligence (MOIS) have reportedly engaged in deadly operations and abductions by hiring criminal groups to carry out specific violent actions against targeted individuals including 'a former Iranian military officer living in Maryland, an exiled Iranian American journalist in Brooklyn, a women's rights activist in Switzerland, LGBTQ+ activists in Germany and at least five journalists at Iran International, as well as dissidents and regime critics in a half dozen other countries'.¹⁹⁶

3.3 Basij and child recruitment

¹⁹¹ Council of the European Union, EU sanctions against Iran, 29 August 2024, [url](#)

¹⁹² US DoJ, Office of public affairs, Justice Department Announces Terrorism and Sanctions-Evasion Charges and Seizures Linked to Illicit, Billion-Dollar Global Oil Trafficking Network That Finances Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and Its Malign Activities, 2 February 2024, [url](#)

¹⁹³ US DoT, Treasury Sanctions Officials of Iranian Intelligence Agency Responsible for Detention of U.S. Nationals in Iran, 27 April 2023, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴ UANI, Quds force, 18 January 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵ UANI, Quds force, 18 January 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶ Washington Post (The), Iran turns to Hell Angels and other criminal gangs to target critics, 12 September 2024, [url](#)

The *Basij*, established in April 1980 as a ‘people’s militia,’ played a crucial role during the Iran-Iraq war, including allegations of using children in ‘martyrdom operations’.¹⁹⁷ Its organisational structure divides cities into ‘resistance areas’ based on size and population.¹⁹⁸ These areas are broken down into resistance zones, then into resistance bases, which contain multiple groups.¹⁹⁹ Smaller towns and villages have ‘resistance cells’.²⁰⁰ The *Basij* militia, which is a volunteer militia, operates within thousands of positions within Iran’s institutions and is integrated with the IRGC’s provincial units at the regional level.²⁰¹ The *Basij* also maintains a presence in sensitive areas like army housing and specialised branches, including student *Basij* units.²⁰²

The *Basij* has been present in schools since its establishment, and in April 1996 the Iranian parliament officially passed a law allowing the government to establish *Basij* units specifically for schoolchildren.²⁰³ During the 1980 - 88 Iran and Iraq war, over 550 000 students were deployed to the frontline, amongst whom 36 000 schoolchildren were killed, 2 853 injured, and 2 433 taken prisoner.²⁰⁴ According to BBC, [informal translation] Mohammad Hossein Fahmideh, a 13-year-old child soldier, was killed on 8 November 1980, during the Iran-Iraq War. This date is currently recognised as ‘Youth Day’ and ‘Student Basij Day’ in Iran’s official calendar.²⁰⁵

The *Basij* statute defines its members into three categories including regular members, active and special members.²⁰⁶ Active members, who receive political indoctrination, numbered 12 700 as of September 2024, with 6 200 in Tehran, 1 300 in Isfahan, and 704 in Khorasan Razavi.²⁰⁷ Recruitment, particularly for special members who may serve as both *Basij* and IRGC ground forces, is conducted through local clerics and trusted community members, ensuring recruits are well-known within their communities. This process facilitates the targeting of young individuals for recruitment into *Basij*.²⁰⁸ Information on the number of children members of *Basij* within the timeframe of this query could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA.

IranWire reported that [informal translation] ‘*Basij*-affiliated centres have been organising military training for children under 18 years old as part of their summer activities. These programs, which are supervised by the *Basij* in Imam Zaman Mosque in Khani Abad and

¹⁹⁷ USIP, The Basij resistance force, 6 October 2010, [url](#)

¹⁹⁸ USIP, The Basij resistance force, 6 October 2010, [url](#)

¹⁹⁹ USIP, The Basij resistance force, 6 October 2010, [url](#)

²⁰⁰ USIP, The Basij resistance force, 6 October 2010, [url](#)

²⁰¹ CRS, Iran’s foreign and defense policy, 11 January 2021, [url](#), pp. 13, 17

²⁰² USIP, The Basij resistance force, 6 October 2010, [url](#)

²⁰³ RFE/RL, How schoolchildren are brainwashed in Iran, 27 May 2010, [url](#)

²⁰⁴ RFE/RL, How schoolchildren are brainwashed in Iran, 27 May 2010, [url](#)

²⁰⁵ BBC, شبیهسازی عملیات والفجر-۸ در تهران با کودکان [Simulation of operation Valfajr-8 in Tehran with children], 26 September 2024, [url](#)

²⁰⁶ USIP, The Basij resistance force, 6 October 2010, [url](#)

²⁰⁷ Iran International, The eight million Iranians on the Islamic Republic’s payroll, 26 September 2024, [url](#)

²⁰⁸ USIP, The Basij resistance force, 6 October 2010, [url](#)

Tehran include military theory courses, war films, ideological texts, practical weapons training and familiarisation with concepts such as martyrdom. Children, ranging from third to eighth graders, are enrolled and later taken to shooting ranges for further instruction'. According to the same source, [informal translation] 'recent reports suggest *Basij* continues using children as soldiers, particularly during protests'.²⁰⁹ According to the US Department of States report of 2024 on trafficking in persons, the Iranian government has compelled or pressured children to enlist in security and anti-riot forces to help quell ongoing political protests.²¹⁰ Both the IRGC and the *Basij* have recruited and deployed child soldiers, according to the same source.²¹¹

According to the EU Council regulation 'concerning restrictive measures directed against certain persons, entities and bodies in view of the situation in Iran', Mohammad Saleh Jokar, former commander of the Student *Basij* Forces, played a key role in brainwashing children and young people to support the regime cracking down on free speech and dissent.²¹²

Annex I: Chronology

Date	Key events
1979	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reza Shah Pahlavi and his family were compelled to go into exile as the political situation worsened and, in February, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the Islamic clerical opposition leader, returned to Iran after 14 years of exile in Iraq and France.²¹³ In February, the army declared its neutrality, and the remaining elements of the Shah's government collapsed. Shapour Bakhtiar, who was appointed by the Shah as prime minister, left the country.²¹⁴ On 8 March 1979, women protested after Ayatollah Khomeini imposed the mandatory <i>hijab</i> for women.²¹⁵ Women who marched faced violence and were labelled as 'traitors' and 'counter-revolutionaries'.²¹⁶ In April, the Islamic Republic was established following a referendum.²¹⁷

²⁰⁹ IranWire, «برنامه تابستانه آموزش نظامی برای کودکان توسط بسیج با عنوان [Military training for children by Basij under the title of 'Summer Program']», 28 June 2023, [url](#)

²¹⁰ US DOS, 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Iran, 2 July 2024, [url](#)

²¹¹ US DOS, 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Iran, 2 July 2024, [url](#)

²¹² EU, Council Regulation concerning restrictive measures directed against certain persons, entities and bodies in view of the situation in Iran, 26 June 2024, [url](#), p. 19

²¹³ BBC, Iran profile – timeline, 6 January 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁴ Suzanne Maloney and Keian Razipour, The Iranian revolution - a timeline of events, available at BROOKINGS, 24 January 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁵ CBC, In 1979, Iranian women protested mandatory veiling – setting the stage for today, 5 October 2023, [url](#)

²¹⁶ CBC, In 1979, Iranian women protested mandatory veiling – setting the stage for today, 5 October 2023, [url](#)

²¹⁷ BBC, Iran profile – timeline, 6 January 2020, [url](#)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In November, Islamic militants took 52 American hostages inside the US embassy in Tehran.²¹⁸
1980	On 22 September began the war between Iran and Iraq that lasted eight years. ²¹⁹
1981	The MEK initiated an armed uprising against the Iranian government. During the 1980s, thousands of its members were arrested, tortured, and executed. ²²⁰ In 1988, the Iranian government carried out mass executions of political prisoners, many of whom were MEK members. ²²¹
1981-82	The Islamic Republic committed acts of massacre, which targeted a wide range of political opponents, including communists, socialists, liberals, and Baha'is. ²²²
1989	Ayatollah Khomeini, the Supreme Leader, passed away and was replaced by Ayatullah Ali Khamenei. ²²³
1995	On 3 April, Washington imposed a complete trade and financial embargo on Iran, citing accusations that the country was supporting terrorism. ²²⁴
1999	On 8 July, in the largest protests since the revolution, students at Tehran University rallied following the judiciary's closure of the reformist Salaam newspaper. The demonstrations lasted six days, and over 1 000 students were arrested during a government crackdown. ²²⁵
2000	The judiciary prohibited 16 reformist newspapers. ²²⁶
2002	On 15 August, the National Council of Resistance of Iran, an exiled opposition group that included the Mujahadeen-e Khalq, reported on Iran's construction of two secret nuclear sites: a uranium enrichment facility and research lab in Natanz, and a heavy water plant in Arak. President Khatami confirmed the existence of Natanz and other facilities, inviting the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to inspect them. ²²⁷
2003	Following the US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq, Syria and Iran strengthened their defense cooperation to counter US's increasing presence along their borders. ²²⁸ They also increased support for insurgent groups to bog down US-led forces in Iraq. ²²⁹
2004	The United States urges the implementation of international sanctions, in view of Iran's nuclear program increasing threat. ²³⁰

²¹⁸ BBC, Iran profile – timeline, 6 January 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁹ USIP, Iran timeline: Since the 1979 revolution, 1 January 2021, [url](#)

²²⁰ HRW, MOK, n.d., [url](#)

²²¹ HRW, MOK, n.d., [url](#)

²²² Iran International, Unveiling the darkness: the 1981 massacre in post-revolutionary Iran, 15 February 2024, [url](#)

²²³ BBC, Iran country profile, last updated 15 October 2024, [url](#)

²²⁴ The New Arab, Ten events that changed Iran since the Islamic revolution, 17 May 2017, [url](#)

²²⁵ USIP, Iran timeline: Since the 1979 revolution, 1 January 2021, [url](#)

²²⁶ USIP, Iran timeline: Since the 1979 revolution, 1 January 2021, [url](#)

²²⁷ USIP, Iran timeline: Since the 1979 revolution, 1 January 2021, [url](#)

²²⁸ USIP, Iran timeline: Since the 1979 revolution, 1 January 2021, [url](#)

²²⁹ USIP, Iran timeline: Since the 1979 revolution, 1 January 2021, [url](#)

²³⁰ BBC, Iran country profile, last updated 15 October 2024, [url](#)

2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, an ultra-conservative, is elected as president of Iran. During his presidency, Iran advances its uranium enrichment program.²³¹ • Arab group Al-Ahwaz Arab Liberation Front, that started its operations in 1997 and which was classified by Iranian government as a terrorist group, carried out its activity in 2005, when it took responsibility for four bombings in Khuzestan, resulting in eight deaths and over 70 injuries.²³²
2006	The Iranian government executed 11 individuals in Ahvaz, linked to the 2005 bombings in Khuzestan province. ²³³
2007	Iran executed three individuals for their role in deadly bombings in Khuzestan Province, which occurred in January 2006 in Ahvaz. ²³⁴
2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In April, an explosion took place at a mosque in Shiraz, where the Imam was known for condemning Baha'is and Salafis in his sermons.²³⁵ • During 2008, several members of Baha'is faith were arrested.²³⁶
2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On 12 June, Ahmadinejad was re-elected as the president.²³⁷ • On 13 June, the opposition 'Green Movement' began, launching widespread protests against the election results.²³⁸ • On 21 June, a video footage showing the shooting of 26-year-old student, Neda Agha Soltan, is shared worldwide, and becomes a symbol of the 'Green Movement'.²³⁹ • On 29 July, Mehdi Karroubi, one of the defeated presidential candidates, revealed cases of death, torture, and sexual abuse of protesters at Kahrizak Prison, leading to the facility's closure. One of the victims was the son of a senior Revolutionary Guards commander.²⁴⁰ • On 1 August, the judiciary starts televised trials of prominent reformers and former officials, including former Vice-President Mohammad Ali Abtahi, accusing them of inciting unrest.²⁴¹
2010	The UN Security Council enforces a fourth set of sanctions on Iran due to its nuclear program, which includes stricter financial restrictions and a broader arms embargo. ²⁴²

²³¹ The New Arab, Ten events that changed Iran since the Islamic revolution, 17 May 2017, [url](#)

²³² IranWire, The terrorist attack in Ahvaz, 22 September 2018, [url](#)

²³³ IranWire, The terrorist attack in Ahvaz, 22 September 2018, [url](#)

²³⁴ RFE/RL, Iran hangs three for 2006 bombings, 14 February 2007, [url](#)

²³⁵ USDOS, International Religious Freedom report 2008, Iran, n.d., [url](#)

²³⁶ USDOS, International Religious Freedom report 2008, Iran, n.d., [url](#)

²³⁷ USIP, Iran timeline: Since the 1979 revolution, 1 January 2021, [url](#)

²³⁸ USIP, Iran timeline: Since the 1979 revolution, 1 January 2021, [url](#)

²³⁹ USIP, Iran timeline: Since the 1979 revolution, 1 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁰ USIP, Iran timeline: Since the 1979 revolution, 1 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁴¹ USIP, Iran timeline: Since the 1979 revolution, 1 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁴² BBC, Iran profile – timeline, 6 January 2020, [url](#)

2012	The European Union's ban on Iranian oil exports officially takes effect. ²⁴³
2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In January, Iran arrested 11 journalists accused of collaborating with foreign Persian-language media, including the BBC.²⁴⁴ On 15 June, Hassan Rouhani won the presidential election.²⁴⁵ Between September and November, the government announced the release of 80 political prisoners, though only about half were freed by November.²⁴⁶
2016	Following the February 2016 elections of the Assembly of Experts and Parliament in Iran, over 100 Yarsan activists were arrested in Kermanshah and Kurdistan provinces by Iranian security forces. Security forces reportedly attacked a Yarsan temple in Kermanshah, while most temples were being closed. ²⁴⁷
2019	The US President, Donald Trump designates the IRGC as a foreign terrorist organisation. ²⁴⁸
2020	On 3 January, the US killed Qasem Soleimani, head of IRGC's Qods force, in a drone attack in Iraq. ²⁴⁹
2021	'Hardline' Ibrahim Raisi is elected as president. ²⁵⁰
2022	Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old woman, was apprehended by Iran's morality police in Tehran. She was physically assaulted and passed away three days later. ²⁵¹
2023	Iranian security forces used excessive force against protesters, including firing birdshots, rubber bullets, tear gas, and physically assaulting demonstrators, marking the anniversary of the 2022 'Bloody Friday' crackdown. ²⁵²
2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In April, there has been a surge in security patrols of morality police in public areas to enforce compulsory <i>hijab</i> rules, who were reportedly involved in car chases, mass vehicle confiscation, imprisonment, flogging, and other forms of punishment, including torture.²⁵³ In May, Ibrahim Raisi is killed in a helicopter crash, with Masoud Pezeshkian becoming subsequently the next president.²⁵⁴

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