
Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Stakeholder Submissions

The rights of members belonging to minorities

**SUBMISSION TO THE
UNITED NATIONS UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW OF THE
ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN**

Impact Iran
Kurdistan Human Rights Network
Kurdpa Human Rights Organization
Balochistan Human Rights Group
Rasank
Ahwaz Human Rights Organization
Kurdistan Human Rights Association - Geneva
All Human Rights for All in Iran

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IMPACT IRAN



About the Submitting NGOs

Impact Iran is a coalition of human rights organizations and activists dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights in Iran. We work towards this goal through strategic advocacy, campaigns, and partnerships with international bodies and governments. Our methodology emphasizes evidence-based research, strategic media engagement, and working with international accountability mechanisms and other stakeholders to hold the Iranian government accountable for human rights abuses. Through our collaborative efforts, we aim to amplify the voices of those affected by human rights violations in Iran and raise awareness about critical issues. Our ultimate goal is to bring about tangible improvements in the human rights situation in Iran through sustained pressure and advocacy.

IMPACT IRAN

The **Kurdistan Human Rights Network** is an independent, non-profit, and nonpartisan organisation registered in France since 2014. They focus on education and promotion of human rights principles and values, as well as reporting and documenting human rights violations in Kurdistan/Iran.



Kurdpa is a human rights organization and independent news agency, and is a leading source for the latest information on Kurdistan in Iran, with daily coverage in three languages. Founded in 2011, Kurdpa's on-the-ground reporting highlights human rights concerns affecting the Iranian Kurdish community.



Balochistan Human Rights Group (BHRG) is an independent and non-profit human rights organization that works to fill the information gaps which exist due to lack of access to Balochistan and it relies on strong research tools and documents and effective communication methods. BHRG provides relevant, verified and up-to-date information regarding the human rights situation in Western (Iranian) Balochistan.



Rasank is an independent, analysis-driven media organization, created and developed in collaboration with Baloch civil and human rights activists. Rasank provides news and analysis on the Baluchistan region and Iran, with a focus on human rights.



Ahwaz Human Rights Organization (AHRO) is an international human rights advocacy organization, who supports and advocates for the Ahwazi Arabs – a national and linguistic minority, and an oppressed and persecuted ethnic group in the Southwestern Iranian province of Khuzestan (also called Al-Ahwaz or Arabistan).



Kurdistan Human Rights Association-Geneva (KMMK-G) aims to promote democracy, respect for human rights and social development in and beyond Kurdistan of Iran. To that purpose, the Association commits itself to struggle against any form of discrimination towards ethnic and religious minorities within the region, defend political prisoners, fight for the abolition of the death penalty, and promote women's and children's rights. In addition, KMMK-G intends to increase public awareness of the situation of human rights in all Kurdish regions and to promote the rights and the integration of the Kurds wherever they live.



The non-governmental organization **All Human Rights for All in Iran** was established in 2017. The history of this organization goes back to 2010 when a group of human rights defenders gathered in Geneva during the first Cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the Islamic Republic of Iran. We then began a project with the non-governmental Austrian organization Verein Südwind Entwicklungspolitik, participating in the Human Rights Council, delivering statements and organizing parallel events on human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran through Südwind's support. This project, which had the financial support of the European Union and the Austrian Development Agency from 2012 to 2015, developed into our establishment as an organization. Working with our partners, we strive to improve the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran by drawing attention to the situation and its causes, at the local, regional, national, and international levels.



1. Introduction

1. In the 2019 report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review (“UPR”) on the Islamic Republic of Iran (3rd cycle), Member States issued **21 recommendations relating to the rights of individuals belonging to minorities**. The Islamic Republic of Iran **supported only 4 of them**.
2. Showcasing a shared concern among UN State Members, these recommendations call on the Islamic Republic of Iran to take measures to guarantee the rights of people belonging to minorities in law and in practice, including ethnic and religious minorities,ⁱ and to eliminate or amendⁱⁱ the legal norms, policies and practices that discriminate and/or have a discriminatory impact against members of these groups. The Government did not support any of these recommendations. However, it supported other recommendations that urged the Government to “take measures to protect religious and ethnic minorities”ⁱⁱⁱ and “protect the rights of Christians and other minorities”^{iv}, and to “continue”^v initiatives and “further efforts”^{vi} aimed to promote and protect the rights of minorities. The drafters of this submission assess that the recommendations the Government had supported and otherwise, have all not been implemented since 2019.
3. Members of ethnic and religious minorities face layers of intersectional discrimination on the grounds of their ethnicity, religion, gender, and socio-economic status. Rights monitors have documented the routine targeting of Iranians belonging to religion or belief and ethnic minorities throughout the country and a continuous pattern of targeted discrimination of these communities, in law and in practice, based on their religious affiliation or ethnic identity. Members of minorities are routinely subjected to major human rights violations enabled by law and deliberately facilitated through state policies and practices, including arbitrary arrest and detention, extrajudicial killings, torture, and ill-treatment but also a range of violations of economic, social, and cultural rights, linked to discrimination, including through the denial of access to schools and universities, expropriation of land as well as a denial of employment opportunities. Over the years, the State has failed to pursue any form of accountability for the countless violations extensively documented and actively targeted those seeking justice and families of victims through intimidation, harassment, and arrests, indicating a deliberate state policy. As put by the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran (“FFMI”) “Ethnic and religious minorities are caught in a perpetual cycle of State violence whereby structural and deep-rooted discrimination facilitates severe forms of violations of their rights in the first place while also further obstructing any forms of redress and justice or them.”^{vii}

2. Religion or belief minorities

A. Legal restrictions on the free exercise of freedom of religion or belief

4. The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran names the Twelver Ja'fari School of Shi'a Islam as the state religion, although it calls for the Sunni schools of Islam to be treated with respect and allows their implementation in Sunni-majority areas. Article 19 of the Constitution guarantees that all people in Iran enjoy equal rights, "regardless of the tribe or ethnic group to which they belong" and that "color, race, language, and other such considerations shall not be grounds for special privileges". However, the constitution omits religious or belief identity as an impermissible ground for discrimination. Furthermore, Article 13 of the Iranian Constitution declares that Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians are the only religious minority groups recognized under Iranian law. Because there are no laws safeguarding the right of religious minorities to worship, maintain places of worship, or assemble, the structural exclusion of other religious minorities leaves them without legal protection to manifest and practice their religion or belief.
5. Furthermore, Iran's Constitution allows restrictions on freedom of expression on the basis of vague qualifications, such as being 'detrimental to the principles of Islam or the rights of the public'.^{viii} The Islamic Penal Code contains numerous provisions imposing undue restriction on expression and criminalizing dissent; namely, provisions criminalizing 'insulting the prophet of Islam' (punishable by the death penalty),^{ix} 'any type of propaganda against the [State] or in support of opposition groups and associations',^x 'insulting Islamic sanctities',^{xi} 'insulting Imam Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic, and/or the Supreme Leader',^{xii} 'insulting' public officials such as the heads of the judiciary, parliament and the President,^{xiii} 'publicly committing the religiously forbidden',^{xiv} the 'failure to abide by the Islamic hijab',^{xv} 'spreading lies with the aim of disturbing the public opinion',^{xvi} and 'satire'.^{xvii} These provisions and other legislation have resulted in countless cases of arbitrary arrest and detention, imprisonment, and flogging over the past decades.
6. Many other elements of Iran's domestic legal framework discriminate between Shia Muslims, Muslim, and non-Muslim minorities. The Islamic Penal Code (IPC) also prescribes different penalties depending on the religion of the perpetrator and/or the victim of a number of crimes. For example, in cases of murder, the IPC sanctions the practice of qisas (retaliation in kind), which allows the family of the

murder victim to opt for the execution of the murderer. However, this practice is applied discriminatorily under the IPC on the basis of religion and belief. If a Muslim or member of a recognized minority kills a follower of an unrecognized religion, the family of the victim has no resort to qisas.

7. Iran's Constitution reserves five parliamentary seats for adherents of recognized religions (one seat for Zoroastrians, one for Jews, one for Chaldo-Assyrian Christians, and two for Armenian Christians.) However, these seats are both a floor and ceiling, and members of recognized religious minorities are not allowed to run for other seats in parliament. According to the Constitution, candidates for the positions of President, Supreme Leader, members of the Guardian Council, of the Assembly of Experts, and of the Expediency Council must be adherents of the official religion of the country, which excludes Sunnis and religious or belief minorities from holding these positions. Although there is no explicit ban on Sunnis serving as ministers or provincial governors, in practice the Iranian government does not appoint any Sunnis to these posts.
8. The lack of legal safeguards enables the Iranian authorities to criminalize peaceful activities such as attending a house church or being part of religious conferences as criminal acts on the basis that they can threaten the existence of the Islamic Republic and thus constitute a national security threat. The Iranian judiciary reportedly routinely relies on articles such as 498 and 499 ("membership in/establishing a group against the state") and 500 ("propaganda against the state") of the Iranian Penal Code to criminalize, prosecute, and sentence minority faith adherents for belonging to a religion or belief minority or for the mere expression of their faith.
9. Similarly, In January 2021, the Parliament added two supplementary provisions to the Islamic Penal Code criminalizing "insulting legally-recognized religions, Islamic branches, and Iranian ethnicities" and, inter alia, "deviant educational or proselytizing activity that contradicts or interferes with the sacred religion of Islam". These supplementary Articles further restrict free expression and religion or belief in Iran and aggravate an already extremely restrictive legal framework that authorities rely on to silence dissent and minority rights activism. The enactment of these amendments has raised significant concerns among human rights monitors, as they further extend the reach of state surveillance and control over personal beliefs and cultural expressions. Critics argue that rather than promoting tolerance and protection, these amendments provide new tools for authorities to target dissidents and the already persecuted minority communities under the pretext of preserving national harmony.^{xviii}

B. Judicial targeting of religious minorities

10. Members of religious or belief minorities, including Christian converts, Baha'is and Gonabadi Dervishes, Yarsan, and other minority religions or beliefs are routinely prosecuted and imprisoned on national security charges, in connection with a range of peaceful activities, including simply expressing their faith, participating in religious, belief or cultural activities, or for merely belonging to a minority faith group, resulting in long prison and flogging sentences. Iranian court documents show that, in government prosecutions of Baha'i members, judicial authorities regularly refer to the Baha'i faith as a "deviant cult" and the religious community as an "illegal group."
11. Rights monitors have documented that members of religion or beliefs and ethnic minorities come under increased pressure during and after periods of protests, suggesting that the authorities use the protests to intensify the targeting of members of these communities. For instance, in the context of the 2022 protests, Sunni clerics who spoke out against the State's violence against peaceful protesters and/or highlighted the deep-rooted and systemic discrimination against religion or beliefs and ethnic minorities were targeted with summons, arrest, detention, restrictions imposed on their freedom of movement, prosecution, imprisonment, and the death penalty.

C. Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights

12. While Iranian law theoretically forbids the investigation of individual beliefs, discrimination in access to employment is institutionalized through the practice of *gozinesh*, a mandatory screening process set forth in the Selection Law based on Religious and Ethical Standard of 1995, applied in the public sector. Not only is *gozinesh* in contradiction of Article 23 of the Constitution, it also bars religious or belief minorities or anyone who are unable or unwilling to accept these requirements from seeking employment in the public sector.
13. In May 2019, Iran's Social Welfare Organization issued a directive banning the employment of religious minorities in kindergartens in all capacities, except in kindergartens exclusively serving minority children. Although the policy was later modified slightly, it still applies to certain positions of instruction.
14. Iran's military law bans the employment of non-Muslims in the military despite the fact that non-Muslims are not exempt from Iran's mandatory military service.
15. Further, discrimination against members of the Baha'i community is official state policy. Several state policy memorandums and government documents

remaining in effect stipulate that being a member of the Baha'i faith is qualifying grounds for exclusion from employment and educational opportunities in Iran, as well as justification for the state's denial of pensions and confiscation of property.

16. The Iranian government continues to bar Baha'is from Iran's state-run university system. Baha'is are either not allowed to enroll or are expelled subsequent to registration. In fact, Iran's Court of Administrative Justice has ruled that a 1991 memorandum by the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution prohibits admission of Baha'is to Iran's universities.

3. Ethnic minorities

A. The right to life

The death penalty

17. International monitors report that ethnic minorities in Iran are disproportionately sentenced to death and executed.^{xx} According to KMMK-G data, from 1 January to 29 May 2024, authorities executed at least 285 individuals, including 82 Kurds and 36 Baluch.^{xx} In 2023, although Baluch individuals made up only an estimated 2% of Iran's population, they accounted for 20% of at least 830 executions,^{xxi} a disproportionate rate also reported in previous years. Human rights organizations also consistently report that Ahwazi Arabs are more likely to receive death sentences compared to members of the Persian communities.
18. In Iran, most executions of ethnic minorities are related to drug offenses, which do not amount to "the most serious crimes", defined under international law as crimes resulting directly and intentionally in death.^{xxii} Impoverished and marginalized communities are disproportionately represented among those sentenced to death for such crimes.^{xxiii} Authorities rarely announce these executions publicly and often carry them out in secrecy, making reporting difficult and in turn severely hindering accountability.
19. Political dissidents from these communities also face heightened risk as the state often resorts to the death penalty to quash dissent and maintain control. A significant proportion of those executed for their political beliefs or group affiliations belong to ethnic minorities. According to the IHRNGO and Ensemble Contre la Peine de Mort ("ECPM"), between 2010 and 2023, 154 individuals were executed on political and national security charges. Of these, 49% were Kurdish, 45% were Baluchies, and 24% were Ahwazi Arab.^{xxiv} In 2019, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Iran highlighted that Kurdish political prisoners

charged with national security offenses constitute nearly half of the total number of political prisoners in the country and faced disproportionately high rates of death sentences and executions.^{xxv}

20. Rights monitors have identified recurring patterns of the use of the death penalty disproportionately and systematically targeting ethnic minorities, particularly following periods of protests in minority-populated provinces. These judicial proceedings often ignore basic due process and fair trial standards. Reports over the years have documented the State's failure to take accountability measures and its efforts to prevent independent reporting of executions while silencing justice-seeking families. The domestic legal framework fails to protect ethnic minorities, and institutionalized discrimination and historic impunity suggest a deliberate effort by the Government to intimidate and repress these communities through the death penalty. The political climate, which views ethnic minorities as threats to national unity, perpetuates policies favoring the majority, further marginalizing minority communities and reinforcing existing power dynamics.

Extrajudicial killings of fuel and border couriers

21. According to the Kurdistan Human Rights Association - Geneva (KMMK-G), at least 42 Kulbar (border couriers) were killed between January and May 2024. Kurdistan Human Rights Network (KHRN) reported 184 injuries among Kulbaran caused by security officers during the same period. Over the past 12 years (2011-2023), KURDPA reported that at least 74% of Kulbars who died while working were either killed or wounded by direct fire from the border security forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran.
22. Civil society organizations consistently report that Iranian border guards deliberately shoot to kill border couriers, based on first-hand accounts and detailed reports of fatal injuries sustained by victims.^{xxvi} Many report that security forces frequently fire live ammunition at border couriers in the Kurdish and Baluch-populated regions, resulting in numerous deaths and severe injuries.^{xxvii}
23. Iranian legislation governing the use of firearms by state officials and law enforcement, the 1995 Law on the Use of Firearms by Armed Forces in Necessary Instances, is permissive in its language and fails to promote restraint or prevent the abusive use of lethal force, enabling border guards to use lethal force against border couriers and effectively shielding them and other state agents from prosecution when they unlawfully use lethal force.^{xxviii}

Patterns of state violence targeting specifically members of ethnic minorities participating in protests

24. Documented patterns of state repression of dissent, in particular in the context of successive protests that have engulfed the country over the past few years, reveal that authorities disproportionately use unnecessary and unlawful force, including lethal force, to suppress protests and dissent in provinces with significant ethnic minority populations, such as Kurdistan, Kermanshah, West Azerbaijan, East Azerbaijan, Sistan and Baluchistan, and Khuzestan. The state's unlawful use of lethal force, including firearms such as military grade assault rifles and metal pellets during protests has resulted in the killing of minorities, including minority children as well as severe, painful, and irreversible injuries - including permanent disabilities such as the total loss of vision. Recent notable incidents include:
25. **November 2019:** On 14 November 2019, the Government announced a 50% increase in subsidized fuel prices and its rationing, leading to nationwide protests amid economic hardship. The state responded with unnecessary, disproportionate, and unlawful use of force, including lethal force, disproportionately affecting minority provinces.^{xxxix} The UN Special Rapporteur on Iran expressed concern over “the Government’s excessive use of force,” reporting high death tolls in Khuzestan and Kermanshah Provinces. Numerous activists from ethnic minorities, including Kurds and Azerbaijani-Turks, were reportedly arrested following the protests.^{xxx}
26. **July 2021:**^{xxxi} On 15 July 2021, protests erupted in at least 26 cities in Khuzestan province, predominantly populated by Ahwazi Arabs, over water shortages and grievances regarding basic human rights and governance. The protests, known as “the Uprising of the Thirsty,” spread nationwide and were met with unlawful use of force, including lethal force.^{xxxii} Similarly, the UN Special Rapporteur on Iran reported widespread use of unlawful force against protesters, many of whom belong to the Ahwazi Arab minority.^{xxxiii} The UN Special Rapporteur on Iran reported unlawful use of force against protesters, many of whom were Ahwazi Arabs.
27. **May 2022:** In early May 2022, protests over rising food prices began in Khuzestan province and spread to Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari province in southwestern Iran. Additional protests occurred between 23 and 31 May in Abadan, Khuzestan, following a deadly collapse of a building. Iran's security forces used unlawful force, including live ammunition, birdshot, tear gas, and water cannons, to suppress the protests. Authorities also imposed localized internet shutdowns and mobile network disruptions. This violent repression resulted in at least four deaths and more injuries.^{xxxiv}

28. **September 2022:** On 16 September 2022, 22-year-old Kurdish woman Jina Amini, known as Mahsa Amini, died in custody after being arrested by Iran’s “morality police” for allegedly not wearing the “proper” hijab. Authorities labeled protesters in ethnic regions as separatists, justifying military force and violent repression. The Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Iran (FFMI) referred to a credible figure of at least 551 deaths, including 68 children, and thousands of arrests since September 2022, predominantly affecting minority groups like Baluch and Kurds. Nearly half of all protester deaths occurred in minority-populated regions. The violent crackdown by state forces peaked during the “Bloody Friday” on 30 September 2022, in Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan where security forces killed between 82 to 103 people, including at least 13 children, and injured approximately 350 protesters and bystanders.^{xxxv} The FFMI found that security forces used military-grade weapons more frequently in minority regions compared to other areas. They used AK-47s, automatic and semi-automatic weapons, heavy machine guns, armored vehicles, and helicopters. Assault rifles were routinely fired on semi-automatic or automatic rounds, rapidly firing multiple bullets. Security forces targeted individuals not protesting apparently to create a general atmosphere of fear in minority-populated cities that became protest epicenters.

B. Disproportionate representation of members of ethnic minorities in arrests and detention statistics

29. The systemic discrimination against ethnic minorities in Iran results in over-policing, ethnic profiling, and biased sentencing, leading to high incarceration rates and disproportionate representation among those sentenced to death. As of June 2024, the Iran Prison Atlas database, managed by the NGO United for Iran, documented 1,306 verified cases of political prisoners in Iran. Among them, at least 42% (561) were Kurdish and 16% (219) were Baluch.^{[1]xxxvi} Given that Kurds and Baluch are estimated to comprise 10% and 2% of the Iranian population respectively, this data highlights the disproportionate detention rates for these ethnic minorities related to protests and free expression.

30. The Kurdistan Human Rights Association - Geneva (KMMK-G) reported the arrests of at least 329 Kurdish individuals between January and May 2024.^{xxxvii} Many of these ethnic minority members faced charges and convictions for national security-related offenses, such as “propaganda against the system,” “insulting the Supreme Leader,” leading “illegal gatherings,” and affiliation with opposition groups or activities tied to ethnic cultural expressions, including Nowruz celebrations.^{xxxviii}

C. Administration of Justice

31. For decades, human rights organizations and UN experts have documented and reported a crisis of grossly unfair trials and due process violations in Iran. Ethnic minorities are at risk of further violations within the justice system due to institutionalized and pervasive discrimination based on their ethnic and religious identities. The disproportionate execution rates of ethnic minorities are emblematic of the systemic discrimination they face within the judiciary.
32. Members of ethnic minorities are disproportionately targeted with national security-related charges for peacefully exercising their freedom of expression and association. Under Iranian law, individuals facing such charges must select their legal counsel from a limited list approved by the Head of the Judiciary,^{xxxix} meaning they are deprived of the right to access an independent lawyer of their choice during the investigations. Moreover, national security offenses fall under the jurisdiction of Revolutionary Courts. As human rights organizations and UN experts and bodies have persistently highlighted, fair trial violations are further exacerbated during proceedings before Revolutionary Courts^{xi} given the application of procedures pertaining to national security offenses including additional restrictions regarding access to a lawyer, casefile material, and written copies of judgments.^{xii} Revolutionary Courts are disproportionately used to try human rights defenders, as well as members of ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities.^{xiii} In 2023, more than 500 death sentences were issued by Revolutionary Courts.^{xliii}
33. Ethnic minorities are not only disproportionately at risk of being caught in the State's machinery of repression but, in a landscape of structural and historic impunity, have a further diminished chance of access to truth, justice, and reparation. In its March 2024 report, the FFMI noted that "[t]he lack of accountability for human rights violations in minority-populated areas has been the norm rather than the exception."^{xliv} It further found that state authorities systematically denied killings committed by their security forces, particularly in minority-populated regions, attributing them to "opposition groups," "terrorists," and "unknown elements."^{xlv}

D. Participation in political and public life

34. Although ethnic minorities comprise a substantial portion of the population in various regions, their participation in political processes, where citizens influence government actions, decisions, and the distribution of power, remains extremely limited.

35. Underrepresentation of ethnic minorities in Iran is pronounced at the provincial level, particularly in regions like Kurdish, and Baluch-populated provinces. Centralized control and the appointment of provincial governors by the central government often result in a mismatch between the demographic composition of the provinces and their political representation. In 2021, less than 1% of the 324 counties across Iran's 31 provinces were represented by individuals from ethnic minority communities. This limited representation reflects broader systemic issues hindering minority participation in local governance.
36. Minorities face significant challenges in accessing public life, even at more local levels. They remain underrepresented across the 1,800 to 2,700 districts comprising the country's provinces. Although these municipalities are positioned to address specific community needs, systemic discrimination, and policy constraints often undermine minority representation.
37. Ethnic minorities are also underrepresented in national institutions, including the 290-seat Iranian Parliament (Majlis). Parliamentary election laws ban candidates affiliated with illegal parties or those convicted of actions against the Islamic Republic, often targeting ethnic minority advocates. The legislative framework restricts political opportunities for ethnic minorities, requiring adherence to Shi'a Islam and the principle of the "absolute rule of the Islamic jurist" for high-ranking positions. Consequently, predominantly Sunni minorities, like Kurds, Turkmen, and Baluch, are barred from key roles such as President or Supreme Leader.
38. The government prevents ethnic minorities from forming political parties or advocacy groups, frequently harassing minority rights activists. The vetting process, or Gozinesh, excludes individuals based on religious and political beliefs, further marginalizing ethnic minorities. The Guardian Council routinely disqualifies ethnic minority candidates, perpetuating systemic inequities and undermining the democratic process.
39. Socioeconomic disparities in minority-populated provinces, including economic hardship, high illiteracy, poor healthcare, and limited native language services, also hinder political participation. These barriers deepen marginalization, preventing ethnic minorities from gaining political influence and achieving fair representation.
40. State surveillance and restrictions further limit minority participation in public life. NGOs and community groups face a challenging registration process and constant surveillance. Legislation requires permits for public meetings, restricting these groups' ability to operate freely. Government control extends to cultural expressions, with festivals and local initiatives facing bureaucratic hurdles or bans

if perceived to promote ethnic identity over national unity. This limits minorities' ability to express and preserve their unique cultural heritage openly.

E. Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights

Poverty and persistent structural discrimination and marginalization of ethnic minorities as human rights issues

41. The Islamic Republic of Iran received **4 recommendations relating to making, strengthening and deepening efforts to address poverty** and the development of rural and less developed areas.^{xlvi} While supporting three of these recommendations, **the Government rejected the recommendation referring explicitly to poverty alleviation in provinces populated by persons belonging to ethnic minorities.**^{xlvii} Reports have demonstrated a general underinvestment in minority-populated regions exacerbating poverty and marginalization experienced by the populations living there.
42. Minority groups in Iran are generally among the poorest. Compared to the general population, they experience higher poverty levels and have less access to education, employment, healthcare, and basic services. They often live in inadequate housing and rely on poorly resourced schools, health facilities, and public goods. Systemic discrimination creates a complex web of human rights violations affecting almost all aspects of their lives, with intergenerational impacts resulting in long-lasting debilitating effects.
43. The World Bank noted in April 2024 that despite a general decline in poverty across Iran, significant regional disparities persist, particularly in rural and southeastern areas.^{xlviii} Minority-populated provinces in Iran, such as Sistan and Baluchistan, Khuzestan, Kurdistan, Ilam, Kermanshah, and West Azerbaijan, endure the highest poverty rates, far above the national average. While the national poverty average rate is estimated at 30%, it is reported to be higher than 50% in Sistan and Baluchistan.^{xlix} According to the UN Special Rapporteur on Iran, Sistan and Baluchistan is the most underdeveloped areas, with the highest rates of poverty, infant and child mortality, and the lowest life expectancy and literacy rates.ⁱ An estimated two-thirds of the province lacks access to clean water. The southeastern provinces, especially Sistan and Baluchistan, face severe poverty, with rates significantly above the national average.ⁱⁱ In 2020, 32% of poor households in Iran were in the southeastern and northwestern regions, which house only 20% of the total population. Conversely, only 24% of the poor live in the Tehran metro area and the central region, which accommodates 40% of the population.

44. These conditions have triggered protests in Iran since at least 2017, highlighting severe economic and environmental crises that disproportionately impact peripheral regions and marginalized communities. Demonstrations often focus on acute water shortages, unemployment, and poor living conditions. Despite the peaceful nature of many protests, demands for change by minority communities are met with extensive state violence and repression. Security forces frequently respond with unlawful force, including live ammunition, birdshot and other metal pellets, tear gas, as well as mass arrests. The government's harsh crackdown seeks to silence dissent and maintain control, yet it also underscores the deep-rooted grievances driving minority communities to demand their rights and seek justice.

The right to employment

45. Minority-populated provinces in Iran experience significantly higher unemployment and corresponding poverty rates compared to the national average of 8.2% in 2024. For instance, in early 2024, the unemployment rate was 13.5% in Sistan and Baluchistan, with unemployment rates in some parts of the province reaching a staggering 60%.ⁱⁱⁱ In Kurdistan, the unemployment rate was documented to be 9.7% in early 2024, reflecting deeper structural issues within the region.ⁱⁱⁱⁱⁱ Khuzestan, predominantly inhabited by Ahwazi Arabs, stands as another glaring example. Despite contributing approximately 15% of the country's gross domestic product^{liv} and possessing a significant portion of Iran's oil and gas reserves (80% and 60%, respectively), Khuzestan has one of the highest unemployment rates.^{lv} The disproportionate unemployment among Ahwazi Arabs starkly contrasts with the region's resource wealth. This skewed distribution underscores systemic inequalities in employment opportunities for ethnic minorities.^{lvi}

46. Members of ethnic minorities are disproportionately affected by economic fluctuations and corresponding employment rates due to laws, policies, and practices that directly and indirectly hinder their access to employment, including *gozinesh* practices. Furthermore, ethnic minorities often encounter inferior working conditions and workplace discrimination. Numerous cases documented by Baloch Campaign Activists highlight Baluch Iranians enduring low wages, unsafe or unsanitary working conditions, delayed salary payments, lack of insurance and benefits, and threats or dismissals related to union activities and participation in protests against work conditions.^{lvii}

The right to education

47. Governmental policies significantly impact minority groups' education and cultural expression by restricting access to mother tongue language education

and promoting cultural languages. Despite Iran's ethnic diversity, the state limits non-Persian languages in education and public spheres.

48. In 2021, Zahra Mohammadi, a Kurdish language teacher, received a 10-year prison sentence for her cultural activities, highlighting state repression. Though released in 2023, her colleagues continue to face judicial harassment, with four sentenced to 10 years in April 2024 for promoting socio-cultural rights through the Nozhin association.
49. Under Article 15 of Iran's Constitution, Persian is the sole official language, and while regional languages are permitted in the press and media, they are limited to literature classes in education. Minority languages like Turkish, Baluchi, and Kurdish are excluded from public school curricula, with the Ministry of Education forbidding their use in schools. Private classes require state licenses and face surveillance and prosecution, making them inaccessible to many and exacerbating educational inequality.
50. Access to education in mother-tongue languages is crucial for improving educational outcomes for students from minority communities.^{lviii} Conversely, the lack of mother-tongue education can lead to higher dropout rates and lower academic achievement among minority students. In some minority provinces, literacy rates are well below reported estimates of the national average.^{lix} The exclusion of minority languages from education impacts long-term educational and professional prospects, perpetuating socio-economic marginalization and making it harder to escape poverty and underrepresentation.
51. In May 2019, Iran's Ministry of Education announced that five- and six-year-old children must take proficiency tests in Persian. Children who fail would be barred from regular schools and placed in special education schools, labeled as "slow learners", or hard of hearing. This policy has faced criticism for equating language proficiency with cognitive ability, risking the stigmatization and marginalization of students who may not speak Persian as their first language, and denying them equal access to quality education. Opponents argue that placing these children in special education based solely on Persian proficiency undermines their academic potential and institutionalizes discrimination against minority language speakers.^{lx}
52. The Government has enforced the exclusive use of Persian across public institutions. A 2020 court ruling mandated the production of textbooks for ethnic language literature, but there is no evidence of implementation. The Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance in 2022 emphasized using police forces to preserve language and literature.

53. State measures often criminalize using non-Persian languages in public and some private spaces, suppress cultural heritage celebrations and censor minority language publications. Between 2023 and 2024, authorities denied publishing books in Turkish and seized books from Turkish-Azerbaijani publishers.
54. Cultural festivals, performances, and literary events face administrative obstacles and bans. One cultural event for Turkish-Farsi books was canceled due to a Turkish word on its banner. This censorship suppresses the cultural and linguistic expressions of the Azerbaijani community, denying their rights to freedom of expression and cultural preservation.
55. Policies restricting radio and television programs in minority languages further diminish these languages' public presence, impeding the transmission of cultural narratives and depriving minority communities of a platform to express and preserve their heritage.

The right to a healthy environment

56. The environmental crisis in Iran disproportionately affects poor, vulnerable, and marginalized groups, particularly in minority-populated provinces such as Sistan and Baluchistan, and Khuzestan.
57. In provinces like Sistan and Baluchistan and Khuzestan, a severe environmental and water crisis exacerbates already challenging socio-economic conditions. Experts attribute land degradation, air pollution, and water scarcity in these regions to detrimental government policies, including drainage network extensions, water redirection, and dam construction.^{lxix} In January 2022, a group of UN Special Procedures raised concerns about the significant impacts of the water crisis in Khuzestan on ecosystems and biodiversity resulting from altered river flows due to dam operations. This situation has led to inadequate access to safe drinking water and sanitation. Additionally, toxic emissions from petrochemical industries have further degraded air quality.^{lxxii}
58. The deterioration of environmental conditions represents a violation of the right to a healthy environment and threatens the rights to life, health, water, and food. The expansion of oil extraction, agro-farming such as sugar cane cultivation, and water diversion projects have dried the once wetland-rich regions of Khuzestan, contributing to frequent dust storms. Ahvaz, the provincial capital, suffers from alarmingly high levels of air pollution. In 2013, the annual concentration of particulate matter (PM2.5) in Ahvaz reached 197,061 µg/m³, significantly surpassing

the WHO's recommended maximum of 5 µg/m³. This extreme pollution has direct adverse effects on respiratory health.^{lxiii}

59. Decades of dam construction and water diversion have resulted in severe water shortages in Khuzestan, impacting health, agriculture, livelihoods, and biodiversity. Approximately 700 villages lack access to tap water and depend on tanker deliveries.^{lxiv} In Sistan and Baluchistan, residents are often forced to collect water from unsafe pits, leading to tragic drownings, including among children. These water diversion projects have devastated many Ahwazi Arab farmers and fishermen, deepening economic hardships and poverty.^{lxv}

60. The dire environmental situation in Khuzestan, and Sistan and Baluchistan has triggered protests against government water policies and broader socio-economic neglect of minority-populated provinces.^{lxvi} These protests are heavily repressed. In July 2021, protests in Khuzestan over water access were met with unlawful and excessive use of force by security forces, who reportedly fired live ammunition and metal pellets, killing and injuring several people. Protests over government mismanagement, environmental, and water issues have been regular in the region since the 2000s and are consistently met with the use of unlawful and sometimes lethal force by the authorities and security forces and disregard from State officials.^{lxvii}

ⁱ 26.302, 26.296, 26.297, 26.312, 26.307

ⁱⁱ 26.299, 26.304, 26.316, 26.305, 26.320, 26.298, 26.311, 26.315, 26.306, 26.317, 26.179

ⁱⁱⁱ 26.318

^{iv} 26.310

^v 26.308

^{vi} 36.314

^{vii} A/HRC/55/CRP.1, Para. 1119

^{viii} The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Article 24.

^{ix} The Islamic Penal Code, Article 262.

^x The Islamic Penal Code, Article 500.

^{xi} The Islamic Penal Code, Article 513.

^{xii} The Islamic Penal Code, Article 514.

^{xiii} The Islamic Penal Code, Article 609.

^{xiv} The Islamic Penal Code, Article 638.

^{xv} The Islamic Penal Code, Note to Article 638.

^{xvi} The Islamic Penal Code, Article 698.

^{xvii} The Islamic Penal Code, Article 700.

^{xviii} Article 19, "[Iran: New Penal Code provisions as tools for further attacks on the rights to freedom of expression, religion, and belief](#)", 6 July 2022.

^{xix} OHCHR, "[UN experts urge Iran to respect international law and stop horrific executions of protesters](#)," 23 January 2024; OHCHR, "[UN experts urge Iran to stop "horrific wave" of executions](#)," 19 May 2023; OHCHR, "[Iran: UN experts alarmed over execution of Baloch minority prisoners](#)," 04 February 2021.

^{xx} The Association with Human Rights in Kurdistan - Geneva (KMMK-G) [details death](#) penalty sentences and executions targeting members of ethnic minorities.

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- ^{xxi} Iran Human Rights NGO (“IHRNGO”), Ensemble Contre la Peine de Mort (“ECPM”) [“Annual report on the death penalty in Iran”](#) 5 March 2024
- ^{xxii} [General comment No. 36](#) on article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, on the right to life, Para 39.
- ^{xxiii} Impact Iran members data: Abdorrahman Boroumand Center (ABC), Baloch Campaign Activists, Balochistan Human Rights Group (BHRG), Iran Human Rights NGO (IHR), Ensemble Contre la Peine de Mort (ECPM), The Association with Human Rights in Kurdistan - Geneva (KMMK-G), KURDPA. The Iranian Government does not publish official statistics of capital offenses carried out in various provinces of the country.
- ^{xxiv} Iran Human Rights NGO (“IHRNGO”), Ensemble Contre la Peine de Mort (“ECPM”) [“Annual report on the death penalty in Iran”](#) 17 March 2024
- ^{xxv} [A/74/188](#), para. 87
- ^{xxvi} Siamak Pourzand Foundation [“Direct shootings at Kolbaran; Death for a Bite of Bread”](#) 8 June 2024 (Farsi); Siamak Pourzand Foundation & Aron AmirAsgari, [“Examining the Factors of Systematic Discrimination and Exploitation of Kolbars in Kurdish Inhabited Areas of Iran”](#) 14 May 2024 (Farsi).
- ^{xxvii} Based on data collected by Impact Iran coalition members, Ahwaz Human Right Organization (AHRO), Baloch Campaign Activists, Balochistan Human Rights Group (BHRG), The Kurdistan Human Rights Association - Geneva (KMMK-G), Kurdistan Human Rights Network (KHRN), KURDPA, Rasank, Siamak Pourzand Foundation; See also [IRN 9/2021](#).
- ^{xxviii} Siamak Pourzand Foundation [“Direct shootings at Kolbaran; Death for a Bite of Bread”](#) 8 June 2024 (Persian).
- ^{xxix} Amnesty International [“IRAN: DETAILS OF 321 DEATHS IN CRACKDOWN ON NOVEMBER 2019 PROTESTS”](#) 29 July 2022.
- ^{xxx} [A/HRC/43/61](#)
- ^{xxxi} [IRN 37/2021](#)
- ^{xxxii} Article19, [“Iran: Bullets, detention and shutdowns: the authorities’ response to protests in Khuzestan”](#) 28 July 2021.
- ^{xxxiii} [A/HRC/49/75](#)
- ^{xxxiv} Amnesty International, [“Iran: They are shooting brazenly: Iran’s militarized response to May 2022 protests”](#) 3 August 2022.
- ^{xxxv} [A/HRC/55/CRP.1 para 1024](#) and Iran Human Rights Documentation Center [“Bloody Friday in Zahedan”](#) 19 October 2022
- ^{xxxvi} United 4 Iran, [Iran Prison Atlas](#).
- ^{xxxvii} The Association with Human Rights in Kurdistan - Geneva (KMMK-G) [details recent arrests, detention and sentences targeting members of ethnic minorities](#).
- ^{xxxviii} See also Kurdistan Human Rights Network (KHRN) [details of recent arrests, detention and sentences targeting members of ethnic minorities in January 2024, February 2024, March 2024, April 2024, May 2024, June 2024](#).
- ^{xxxix} Article 48 Code of Criminal Procedure, 2015.
- ^{xi} Human Rights Committee, Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of the Islamic Republic of Iran, CCPR/C/IRN/CO/4, 23 November 2023, Para 41; Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, A/HRC/49/75, 13 January 2022, paras 55 & 56.
- ^{xli} A/HRC/55/CRP.1, para 154-155; 170; 834.
- ^{xlii} See further, Impact Iran IRIX Database <https://impactiran.uwazi.io/en/entity/zx9ajn4ijz>, <https://impactiran.uwazi.io/en/entity/qpbjnwcvp?page=1>, <https://impactiran.uwazi.io/en/entity/lqfrl3giey?page=2>, <https://impactiran.uwazi.io/en/entity/nj61io20sq?page=3>, <https://impactiran.uwazi.io/en/entity/mjo3xkhv98?page=5>
- ^{xliii} Iran Human Rights (“IHRNGO”), [Ensemble Contre la Peine de Mort \(“ECPM”\), Annual Report on the Death Penalty in Iran 2023”](#).
- ^{xliv} A/HRC/55/CRP.1 para 1075
- ^{xlv} A/HRC/55/CRP.1 para 1076.
- ^{xlvi} 26.90, 26.189, 26.190, 26.191
- ^{xlvii} 26.190
- ^{xlviii} World Bank Group, [“Poverty and Equity Briefs”](#) Spring 2024 Edition.
- ^{xlix} Fardaye Eghtesad, [“Which are the most deprived provinces of Iran?”](#) January 2023.
- ⁱ [A/HRC/22/56](#).
- ⁱⁱ World Bank Group, [“Poverty and Equity Briefs”](#) Spring 2024 Edition.
- ⁱⁱⁱ [A/HRC/55/CRP.1](#) para 1005

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- ^{liii} [asriran.com/003zkr](https://www.asriran.com/003zkr) ; <https://www.rokna.net/fa/tiny/news-993067> ; <https://www.eghtesadnews.com/fa/tiny/news-635558> ; [asriran.com/003fuV](https://www.asriran.com/003fuV)
- ^{liiv} [Iran Statistical Yearbook 2021-2022](#) (1400), 29 April 2023, p. 850 (Persian).
- ^{liiv} Islamic Republic News Agency, "[82 per cent of country's oil and gas reserves are in Khuzestan](#)", 8 November 2022 (Persian).
- ^{livi} Ravinaft, "[Non-native employment and lack of local recruitment in Khuzestan oil industry](#)", November 2023 (Persian); Mehr News "[The non-native managers of Khuzestan brought 40 to 50 people with them](#)" October 2021
- ^{liivii} [Baloch Activists Campaign 2023 report](#).
- ^{liiii} [A/HRC/43/47](#) para. 50
- ^{liix} Hamshahri Online, "Provinces above average literacy," January 2021.
- ^{lix} Iranian Students' News Agency, "[The introduction of 'Persian Language Proficiency Test' to measure the health of new students is on the agenda](#)" 8 June 2018 (Persian).
- ^{lxi} [AL IRN 32/2021](#); [AL IRN 37/2021](#); Balochistan Human Rights Group, "[Water Crisis in Balochistan: A Human Rights Emergency](#)" 10 June 2024.
- ^{liixii} [IRN 37/2021](#).
- ^{liixiii} [WHO Air Quality Database](#) updated in April 2022.
- ^{liixiv} [Baloch Campaign Activists 2023 report](#).
- ^{liixv} Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) & Ahwaz Human Right Organization (AHRO) "[Ahwaz: UNPO and AHRO Submit Joint Report to UN on Ahwazi Water Protests and Iranian Dam Building Practices](#)" 1st December 2021.
- ^{liixvi} [IRN 32/2021](#); [IRN 37/2021](#).
- ^{liixvii} [Article19](#), "[Iran: Bullets, detention and shutdowns: the authorities' response to protests in Khuzestan](#)", 28 July 2021.