



Home Office

# Country Policy and Information Note

## Iran: Smugglers

Version 4.0

February 2022

# Preface

## Purpose

This note provides country of origin information (COI) and analysis of COI for use by Home Office decision makers handling particular types of protection and human rights claims (as set out in the [Introduction](#) section). It is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of a particular subject or theme.

It is split into 2 parts: (1) an assessment of COI and other evidence; and (2) COI. These are explained in more detail below.

## Assessment

This section analyses the evidence relevant to this note - that is information in the COI section; refugee/human rights laws and policies; and applicable caselaw - by describing this and its inter-relationships, and provides an assessment of, in general, whether one or more of the following applies:

- a person is reasonably likely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm
- that the general humanitarian situation is so severe that there are substantial grounds for believing that there is a real risk of serious harm because conditions amount to inhuman or degrading treatment as within [paragraphs 339C and 339CA\(iii\) of the Immigration Rules](#)/Article 3 of the [European Convention on Human Rights \(ECHR\)](#)
- that the security situation is such that there are substantial grounds for believing there is a real risk of serious harm because there exists a serious and individual threat to a civilian's life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence in a situation of international or internal armed conflict as within [paragraphs 339C and 339CA\(iv\) of the Immigration Rules](#)
- a person is able to obtain protection from the state (or quasi state bodies)
- a person is reasonably able to relocate within a country or territory
- a claim is likely to justify granting asylum, humanitarian protection or other form of leave, and
- if a claim is refused, it is likely or unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under [section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002](#).

Decision makers **must**, however, still consider all claims on an individual basis, taking into account each case's specific facts.

## Country of origin information

The country information in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation's (ACCORD), [Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual](#), 2013. Namely, taking into account the COI's relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

The structure and content of the country information section follows a [terms of reference](#) which sets out the general and specific topics relevant to this note.

All information included in the note was published or made publicly available on or before the 'cut-off' date(s) in the country information section. Any event taking place or report/article published after these date(s) is not included.

All information is publicly accessible or can be made publicly available. Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion. Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

- the motivation, purpose, knowledge and experience of the source
- how the information was obtained, including specific methodologies used
- the currency and detail of information
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources.

Multiple sourcing is used to ensure that the information is accurate and balanced, which is compared and contrasted where appropriate so that a comprehensive and up-to-date picture is provided of the issues relevant to this note at the time of publication.

The inclusion of a source is not, however, an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a footnote. Full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the bibliography.

### **Feedback**

Our goal is to provide accurate, reliable and up-to-date COI and clear guidance. We welcome feedback on how to improve our products. If you would like to comment on this note, please email the Country Policy and Information Team.

### **Independent Advisory Group on Country Information**

The [Independent Advisory Group on Country Information](#) (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to support him in reviewing the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of approach of COI produced by the Home Office.

The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office's COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy. The IAGCI may be contacted at:

**Independent Advisory Group on Country Information**  
Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration  
5th Floor  
Globe House  
89 Eccleston Square  
London, SW1V 1PN  
Email: [chiefinspector@icibi.gov.uk](mailto:chiefinspector@icibi.gov.uk)

Information about the IAGCI's work and a list of the documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's pages of the [gov.uk website](#).

# Contents

<b>Assessment</b> .....	<b>5</b>
1. Introduction .....	5
1.1 Basis of claim .....	5
1.2 Points to note .....	5
2. Consideration of issues .....	5
2.1 Credibility.....	5
2.2 Exclusion .....	6
2.3 Convention reason(s).....	6
2.4 Risk.....	7
2.5 Protection .....	9
2.6 Internal relocation.....	9
2.7 Certification .....	9
<b>Country information</b> .....	<b>10</b>
3. Background.....	10
3.1 Kolbars .....	10
3.2 Operation and prevalence .....	11
3.3 Commodities and contraband.....	13
4. Legal context .....	14
4.1 Legislation .....	14
4.2 Penalties and prosecution .....	15
4.3 Permits .....	19
5. Law enforcement .....	20
5.1 Border control.....	20
5.2 Maps .....	22
5.3 Anti-smuggling operations .....	23
5.4 Arrest and detention.....	24
5.5 Excessive use of force .....	25
<b>Terms of Reference</b> .....	<b>28</b>
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<b>29</b>
Sources cited .....	29
Sources consulted but not cited .....	31
<b>Version control</b> .....	<b>33</b>

# Assessment

Updated: 18 February 2022

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Basis of claim

1.1.1 Fear of persecution and/or serious harm by the state because of the person's activities as a smuggler.

### 1.2 Points to note

1.2.1 The note focuses primarily on the smuggling of goods across the Iran-Iraq border by Kurdish couriers known as kolbars (also referred to as 'kulbar', 'koolbar' or 'kolbaran'). In Kurdish 'Kol' or 'Kul' means a person's back and 'Bar' means 'carry' or 'delivery' (literally 'those who carry on their back').

[Back to Contents](#)

## 2. Consideration of issues

### 2.1 Credibility

2.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

2.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).

2.1.3 In cases where there are doubts surrounding an person's claimed place of origin, decision makers should also consider the need to conduct language analysis testing (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

---

### **Official – sensitive: Start of section**

2.1.4 The information in this section has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use only.

The information in this section has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use only.

The information in this section has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use only.

---

**Official – sensitive: End of section**

[Back to Contents](#)

**2.2 Exclusion**

- 2.2.1 Decision makers must consider whether there are serious reasons for considering whether one (or more) of the exclusion clauses is applicable. Each case must be considered on its individual facts and merits.
- 2.2.2 If the person is excluded from the Refugee Convention, they will also be excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection (which has a wider range of exclusions than refugee status).
- 2.2.3 For further guidance on the exclusion clauses and restricted leave, see the Asylum Instruction on [Exclusion under Articles 1F and 33\(2\) of the Refugee Convention](#), [Humanitarian Protection](#) and the instruction on [Restricted Leave](#).

---

**Official – sensitive: Start of section**

The information in this section has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use only.

---

**Official – sensitive: End of section**

[Back to Contents](#)

**2.3 Convention reason(s)**

- 2.3.1 In general, Kurdish smugglers (kolbars) do not fall within the scope of one of the 5 Refugee Convention grounds. However, the grounds of race and/or actual or imputed political opinion may apply depending on the circumstances of the case.
- 2.3.2 Smugglers in Iran are not considered to form a particular social group (PSG) within the meaning of the Refugee Convention. This is because they do not share an innate characteristic, or a common background that cannot be changed, or share a characteristic or belief that is so fundamental to identity or conscience that a person should not be forced to renounce it and they do not have a distinct identity in Iran because they are not perceived as being different by the surrounding society.
- 2.3.3 Establishing a Refugee Convention reason alone is not sufficient to be recognised as a refugee. The question to be addressed is whether the person has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of an actual or imputed Refugee Convention reason. Those who face prosecution for a criminal offence which would be a criminal offence if committed in the UK, will not qualify as refugees solely because they face prosecution on return unless the prosecution or punishment is discriminatory or disproportionately applied for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

- 2.3.4 In the absence of a link to one of the 5 Refugee Convention grounds necessary for the grant of refugee status, the question is whether the particular person will face a real risk of serious harm sufficient to qualify for Humanitarian Protection (HP).
- 2.3.5 For further guidance on the 5 Refugee Convention reasons see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

## 2.4 Risk

### a. State treatment

- 2.4.1 Exacerbated by limited employment opportunities and international sanctions, up to 170,000 Kurds make their living as kolbars by smuggling everyday goods, which include cigarettes, mobile phones, clothes, housewares, foodstuffs and livestock, using informal crossing routes across the mostly mountainous Iran-Iraq border in Kurdistan. Smuggling across this border has been prevalent for decades by locals living in the border areas and is widely viewed locally as a form of trade in essential items. Some smuggling operations are run by organised criminal networks. Tighter US sanctions introduced in 2018 has brought people from big cities to the borders to work as kolbars. The majority of kolbars are men but also include women and children (see [Kolbars, Operation and prevalence](#), [Commodities and contraband](#) and [Border control](#)).
- 2.4.2 Although there is no explicit state law criminalising kolbars and, at times, permits have been issued, the practice is considered smuggling and subject to prosecution (see [Legal context](#)). However, border officials, including the Revolutionary Guards (IRGC), have been known to ignore smuggling operations and are reported to be complicit and/or reliant on smuggled goods, not always illegal items themselves, but which international sanctions are making increasingly difficult for people to obtain or afford (see [Border control](#) and [Anti-smuggling operations](#)). Illegal commodities such as alcohol, weapons and illicit drugs, are also smuggled across the border making their movement a more dangerous, criminal activity. Evidence on the smuggling of political material is limited (see [Commodities and contraband](#)).
- 2.4.3 Actual numbers of arrests of kolbars is limited, but reports indicate that the number of detentions are numerous, with one report suggesting ‘thousands each year’ (see [Arrest and detention](#)). There are frequent reports of border officials beating, or shooting kolbars with impunity and without warning, causing deaths and injuries. Between 2020 and 2021, an estimated 370 kolbars were kill or injured by border officials. These reports should be seen in the context of up to 170,000 kolbars regularly working the Iraq-Iran border. Injuries and deaths are often caused by the hazardous terrain on the steep sides of mountains along with poor weather conditions (see [Kolbars, Excessive use of force](#)).
- 2.4.4 Though not specifically addressing the situation for kolbars or smuggling (and the evidence on the smuggling of political material is limited), in the country guidance case of [HB \(Kurds\) Iran CG \[2018\] UKUT 430 \(IAC\)](#) (heard 20 to 22 February and 25 May 2018 and promulgated 12 December 2018), the Upper Tribunal found:

‘Since 2016 the Iranian authorities have become increasingly suspicious of, and sensitive to, Kurdish political activity. Those of Kurdish ethnicity are thus regarded with even greater suspicion than hitherto and are reasonably likely to be subjected to heightened scrutiny on return to Iran.

‘However, the mere fact of being a returnee of Kurdish ethnicity with or without a valid passport, and even if combined with illegal exit, does not create a risk of persecution or Article 3 ill-treatment.

‘Kurdish ethnicity is nevertheless a risk factor which, when combined with other factors, may create a real risk of persecution or Article 3 ill-treatment. Being a risk factor it means that Kurdish ethnicity is a factor of particular significance when assessing risk’ (paragraph 98 (3) to (5)).

2.4.5 The Upper Tribunal in [HB](#) found that:

‘Activities that can be perceived to be political by the Iranian authorities include social welfare and charitable activities on behalf of Kurds. Indeed, involvement with any organised activity on behalf of or in support of Kurds can be perceived as political and thus involve a risk of adverse attention by the Iranian authorities with the consequent risk of persecution or Article 3 ill-treatment.

‘Even “low-level” political activity, or activity that is perceived to be political, such as, by way of example only, mere possession of leaflets espousing or supporting Kurdish rights, if discovered, involves the same risk of persecution or Article 3 ill-treatment. Each case however, depends on its own facts and an assessment will need to be made as to the nature of the material possessed and how it would be likely to be viewed by the Iranian authorities in the context of the foregoing guidance.

‘The Iranian authorities demonstrate what could be described as a “hair-trigger” approach to those suspected of or perceived to be involved in Kurdish political activities or support for Kurdish rights. By “hair-trigger” it means that the threshold for suspicion is low and the reaction of the authorities is reasonably likely to be extreme’ (paragraphs 98 (8) to (10)) .

2.4.6 Evidence continues to support the findings in [HB](#) in that a person will not be at real risk of persecution or serious harm based on their Kurdish ethnicity alone, though when combined with other factors, such as involvement in smuggling, may create a real risk of persecution or Article 3 ill-treatment. Each case must be considered on its facts and decision makers must take into account additional factors, such as actual or perceived political activity, when assessing risk.

2.4.7 Persons who have been involved solely in smuggling are likely to face prosecution. It is lawful for the authorities to prosecute those engaged in smuggling illegal items, or goods which would be subject to import tariffs. However, those prosecuted for such crimes may face a trial which does not meet international standards of fairness. Smuggling can incur a range of penalties, from fines to flogging, or the death penalty (see [Penalties and prosecution](#)).

2.4.8 See also the Country Policy and Information Note on [Iran: Actors of protection](#).

2.4.9 For further information on the treatment of Kurds in general, and those involved in political parties, including the risk of arrest and detention, see the Country Policy and Information Note on [Iran: Kurds and Kurdish political groups](#).

2.4.10 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

## 2.5 Protection

2.5.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from the state they will not, in general, be able to obtain protection from the authorities.

2.5.2 See also the Country Policy and Information Note on [Iran: Actors of protection](#).

2.5.3 For further guidance on assessing the availability of state protection, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

## 2.6 Internal relocation

2.6.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from the state, they are unlikely to be able to relocate to escape that risk.

2.6.2 For further guidance on internal relocation see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

## 2.7 Certification

2.7.1 Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

2.7.2 For further guidance on certification, see [Certification of Protection and Human Rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 \(clearly unfounded claims\)](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

# Country information

Section 3 updated: 18 February 2022

## 3. Background

### 3.1 Kolbars

3.1.1 Persian – kolbar, Kurdish – kolber<sup>1 2</sup>.

3.1.2 The Kurdistan Human Rights Network (KHRN), a non-governmental organisation (NGO) documenting human rights violations in Kurdistan/Iran, noted in its 2015 Annual report on violation of human rights of Kolber workers in Iran, dated January 2016:

‘Kolber is a Kurdish name for workers and tradespersons, who for a small sum of money risk their lives to transport packs of various foreign items on their own back or on the back of horses to transfer them from and to Iranian border territories from border areas of neighboring Kurdish regions in Iraq and Turkey. The word “Kolber” is composed of two Kurdish words: “Kol”, meaning a person’s “back”, and “ber, which means “delivery”... However, the Iranian government describes them as “smugglers”...’<sup>3</sup>

3.1.3 A December 2020 article in Peace for Asia, a research-based collective documenting human rights abuses<sup>4</sup>, noted:

‘The word Kolbar is derived from the Kurdish words, “kol” (back) and “bar” (load) and translates into “one who carries load”. Kolbars make their living through the smuggling of untaxed goods, which include cigarettes, mobile phones, clothes, housewares, tea and alcohol across the perilous terrain of the Iran-Iraq border. The goods often weigh somewhere between 25 to 75 kilograms and are transported by foot through the mountainous border region for a meagre wage. This profession has become a dominant mode of employment for Rojhelat [Eastern (Iranian) Kurdistan<sup>5</sup>] Kurds over the last decade, with individuals increasingly forced to take up this profession due to limited employment opportunities available to them.’<sup>6</sup>

3.1.4 A February 2020 article by IranWire (a joint venture of a group of Iranian journalists in the Diaspora<sup>7</sup>) noted ‘A kulbar is a person who bypasses customs to carry goods and belongings to Iranian tradesmen from the border areas in Iraqi Kurdistan to Iran; they are paid depending on the weight and the type of goods that they carry.’<sup>8</sup>

3.1.5 The American magazine, Outside, published an article in October 2021 by author and journalist Alex Perry, who travelled to Iraqi Kurdistan to investigate the smuggling trade. Referring to Iranian kolbars he noted that they worked in hazardous terrain ‘leading to dozens more deaths and

---

<sup>1</sup> Medya News, ‘[The plight of Kurdish “kolbars” in Iran](#)’, 2 September 2020

<sup>2</sup> Nawext, ‘[Between Iran and Iraq: Kolbars do not bend](#)’, 17 January 2020

<sup>3</sup> KHRN, ‘[2015 Annual report on violation of human rights of Kolber workers in Iran](#)’, 25 January 2016

<sup>4</sup> Peace for Asia, ‘[About us](#)’, no date

<sup>5</sup> Kurdistan Institute, ‘[Rojhelat \(Eastern Kurdistan\)](#)’, no date

<sup>6</sup> Peace for Asia, ‘[One who carries the load: The Kolbars of Iran](#)’, 7 December 2020

<sup>7</sup> IranWire, ‘[About Us](#)’, no date

<sup>8</sup> IranWire, ‘[Who are the Kulbars? Why are they Systematically Targeted...](#)’, 12 February 2020

hundreds more injuries as they fall from steep paths or drown under loads or step on land mines or perish in snowstorms, such as the five young Kurdish Iranians buried by an avalanche this past January.<sup>9</sup>

- 3.1.6 Whilst the majority are men, women and children also work as kolbars<sup>10 11 12</sup>.

[Back to Contents](#)

## 3.2 Operation and prevalence

- 3.2.1 An April 2019 report published by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GIATOC) on smuggling between the Iraq-Iran border noted:

‘Smuggling of goods across this border has been happening for decades. Over time, this illicit trade has become consolidated, and operated by well-organized criminal networks consisting primarily of businessmen on either side of the border, who deploy smugglers or delivery drivers who transfer goods to collection points in the mountainous border regions, and couriers who carry the goods by foot or on horseback along the last stretch of the route across the border into Iran. Smugglers and couriers are exclusively Kurdish, either of Iranian or Iraqi origin.

‘Many of the couriers have been plying their trade across this border for decades, and some have passed on their knowledge of the routes and systems to their children, and work as family units.’<sup>13</sup>

- 3.2.2 The same report noted that smuggling thrived between 1979 and 2016 when sanctions were imposed on Iran and continued to a lesser extent when sanctions were eased in early 2016. When US sanctions were restored in August 2018, smuggling increased<sup>14</sup>.

- 3.2.3 According to IranWire, ‘Most kulbars are active in the three provinces of West Azerbaijan, Kurdistan and Kermanshah, all of which border Iraqi Kurdistan.’<sup>15</sup>

- 3.2.4 High unemployment pushes Iranian Kurds into smuggling, sources reported<sup>16 17</sup>. As noted in the GIATOC report:

‘The couriers are poverty-stricken Kurds, who say they have been pushed into this work by a lack of formal work opportunities in Iran. Nevertheless, the courier work is both poorly paid and extremely dangerous. Foot couriers earn a pittance of around US\$25 [GBP£18<sup>18</sup>] per trip or occasionally up to US\$60 [GBP£44] for particularly heavy or valuable loads; horse couriers earn \$30 [GBP£22] for each horse laden with goods. The couriers are paid by smugglers they work for on the Iranian side, usually the next person up in

---

<sup>9</sup> Outside, ‘[The World’s Most Dangerous Mountains](#)’, 18 October 2021

<sup>10</sup> IKHRW, ‘[A shocking report from the mountains of Kurdistan: How Kolbar women...](#)’, March 2021

<sup>11</sup> IranWire, ‘[An Anthropologist’s Take on the Kolbari Phenomenon](#)’, 9 February 2021

<sup>12</sup> UNHRC, ‘[Report of the Secretary General...](#)’ (paragraph 13), 14 May 2021

<sup>13</sup> GIATOC, ‘[Sanctions and smuggling – Iraqi Kurdistan and Iran’s border...](#)’ (pages 1 to 2), April 2019

<sup>14</sup> GIATOC, ‘[Sanctions and smuggling – Iraqi Kurdistan and Iran’s border...](#)’ (page 2), April 2019

<sup>15</sup> IranWire, ‘[Who are the Kulbars? Why are they Systematically Targeted...](#)’, 12 February 2020

<sup>16</sup> IranWire, ‘[Who are the Kulbars? Why are they Systematically Targeted...](#)’, 12 February 2020

<sup>17</sup> AI Monitor, ‘[High unemployment forces Iranian Kurds into smuggling...](#)’, 16 September 2020

<sup>18</sup> Xe.com, ‘[Currency converter](#)’, as at 14 January 2022

the network, who receives the goods and arranges for their onward transportation in Iran.<sup>19</sup>

3.2.5 The same source described the smuggling system, noting that goods were stored in private warehouses on Iraq side of the border, where they were collected directly, during the night, by Iranian couriers, who were paid when the goods reached the other side of the border<sup>20</sup>. A documentary by the European Culture Channel, ARTE, also showed Iranian kolbars arriving at night in Iraq to collect goods from warehouses and carry them back across the border<sup>21</sup>. According to IranWire, ‘Kulbars take routes that are not used by the armed members of Kurdish opposition parties because these routes are under close observation by the Iranian border guards.’<sup>22</sup>

3.2.6 IranWire noted, ‘... goods a kulbar carries belong to businessmen in Iranian cities...’, who order merchandise and have it imported into Iraq<sup>23</sup>. The report added:

‘According to Amini [an Iranian businessman], this is where the work of the middlemen, a crucial link in the legal and illegal commerce in the border areas of Iraqi Kurdistan, starts. “These middlemen have offices and storehouses on both sides of the border to store and manage the goods and work with a collection of drivers who carry smuggled merchandise, and agents who are their intermediaries to kulbars and the owners of pack animals,” he says.’<sup>24</sup>

3.2.7 The GIATOC report added:

‘Once in Iran, the couriers deliver their loads to border points or villages, where they receive payment. From there, the goods are transferred by drivers to towns and cities across Iran. “When the goods reach Iran, they are transported to three main cities – Mahabad, Marivan and Bukan,” explained Khalid. The goods are amassed in these cities in preparation for onward transport to other towns and cities across Iran, he said, alleging that much of the trafficking processes, along with most of the smuggling trade in general, was overseen and organized by the IRGC.’<sup>25</sup>

3.2.8 In regard to numbers of smugglers, the GIATOC report cited:

‘Iranian Kurdish MP for the Mahabad region, Jalal Mahmudzadeh, estimated in April 2018 that there were 80,000 couriers plying the Iran–Iraqi Kurdistan border. However, couriers, smugglers and local people say this is a conservative estimate, and claim the actual number of Iranian couriers operating along this border stretch is around 100,000. Smugglers say that areas of passable terrain could have up to 3,000 couriers transporting goods...’<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> GIATOC, ‘[Sanctions and smuggling – Iraqi Kurdistan and Iran’s...](#)’ (pages 18, 19), April 2019

<sup>20</sup> GIATOC, ‘[Sanctions and smuggling – Iraqi Kurdistan and Iran’s border...](#)’ (page 17), April 2019

<sup>21</sup> ARTE, ‘[Iraq: The Forbidden Frontier](#)’, 7 May 2021

<sup>22</sup> IranWire, ‘[Who are the Kulbars? Why are they Systematically Targeted...](#)’, 12 February 2020

<sup>23</sup> IranWire, ‘[Who are the Kulbars? Why are they Systematically Targeted...](#)’, 12 February 2020

<sup>24</sup> IranWire, ‘[Who are the Kulbars? Why are they Systematically Targeted...](#)’, 12 February 2020

<sup>25</sup> GIATOC, ‘[Sanctions and smuggling – Iraqi Kurdistan and Iran’s border...](#)’ (page 18), April 2019

<sup>26</sup> GIATOC, ‘[Sanctions and smuggling – Iraqi Kurdistan and Iran’s border...](#)’ (page 9), April 2019

- 3.2.9 IranWire noted ‘In December 2019, the official Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) reported that, according to official statistics, the number of kulbars in Iran active on mountainous routes up to 15 kilometers long is between 80,000 and 170,000, whereas in July 2019, the Iranian Labour News Agency (ILNA), affiliated with the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, had put the number at 80,000 [Persian links].’<sup>27</sup>
- 3.2.10 A March 2020 article by Al Monitor cited Rabin Rahmani, a member of the KHRN, who said “In previous years, only locals from the border areas were working as kolbars, either formally or informally, but with the tightening of US sanctions on Iran in 2018, more people from big cities — more than 150 kilometers [93 miles] from the Kurdistan region’s borders — have had to work as kolbars”.<sup>28</sup>
- 3.2.11 Smuggling also occurred through official borders, according to an article by Radio Farda, dated 14 May 2020, which cited a report disclosed to the Iranian parliament that claimed 95% of smuggling into Iran took place through legal ports of entry, but only 1% of goods were discovered<sup>29</sup>. The Radio Farda article stated, ‘The report explicitly referred to three IRGC [Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps]-controlled wharves in Chabahar, Khor Zangi, and Hormozgan, and several other piers run by the security forces. Mehdi Karroubi, the speaker of the sixth parliament, who is currently under house arrest, also spoke about the existence of 41 illegal wharves.’<sup>30</sup> Customs officials consistently denied such allegations<sup>31 32</sup>.

See also [Border control](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

### 3.3 Commodities and contraband

- 3.3.1 The GIATOC report of April 2019 stated, ‘Smugglers say that anything and everything that Iran can no longer import legally is now smuggled across this border, mainly carried on foot or by horseback. Most of the goods now being transported this way are not illegal commodities in Iran – they are just no longer available to ordinary citizens, or at least not at prices they can afford.’<sup>33</sup>
- 3.3.2 Smuggled items included clothes, footwear, cigarettes, foodstuffs, tyres and car parts, white goods and other electrical products<sup>34 35</sup>. According to Iran wire, ‘As a rule, kulbars do not transport alcoholic beverages even though they bring in a high price because they are illegal in the Islamic Republic, transporting them is difficult and can lead to heavy fines and even prison.’<sup>36</sup>

<sup>27</sup> IranWire, ‘[Who are the Kulbars? Why are they Systematically Targeted...](#)’, 12 February 2020

<sup>28</sup> Al Monitor, ‘[Mountain couriers brave bullets along Iran-Iraq border](#)’, 3 March 2020

<sup>29</sup> Radio Farda, ‘[Almost All Smuggled Goods Into Iran Come Through Legal Ports](#)’, 14 May 2020

<sup>30</sup> Radio Farda, ‘[Almost All Smuggled Goods Into Iran Come Through Legal Ports](#)’, 14 May 2020

<sup>31</sup> Radio Farda, ‘[Almost All Smuggled Goods Into Iran Come Through Legal Ports](#)’, 14 May 2020

<sup>32</sup> Radio Farda, ‘[Two-Thirds Of Appliances And Home Electronics Sold In Iran...](#)’, 23 January 2020

<sup>33</sup> GIATOC, ‘[Sanctions and smuggling – Iraqi Kurdistan and Iran’s border...](#)’ (page 11), April 2019

<sup>34</sup> GIATOC, ‘[Sanctions and smuggling – Iraqi Kurdistan and Iran’s...](#)’ (pages 2, 7, 13), April 2019

<sup>35</sup> Outside, ‘[The World’s Most Dangerous Mountains](#)’, 18 October 2021

<sup>36</sup> IranWire, ‘[Who are the Kulbars? Why are they Systematically Targeted...](#)’, 12 February 2020

3.3.3 In regard to carrying political material produced by Kurdish political parties, a 2013 report by the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) and Danish Refugee Council (DRC) cited a representative of Komala SKHKI, who said the thriving border trade ‘... makes the difficult task of transporting political materials into Iran easier,’ though added that such material was also sent electronically<sup>37</sup>. The same report cited representatives from the Kurdistan Democratic Party - Iran (KDP-I) and Komala KZK, who said that flyers were produced in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), then sent electronically to Iran and distributed by members or sympathisers of the party<sup>38</sup>.

3.3.4 For further information on Kurdish political parties, see the Country Policy and Information Note on [Iran: Kurds and Kurdish political groups](#).

3.3.5 The GIATOC report stated that:

‘Although the organized smuggling network behind the flow of foodstuffs and other legal goods is technically a criminal operation, it is widely viewed locally as a form of trade in essential items. However, alongside this “trade” there is a parallel smuggling operation across this border, involving explicitly criminal commodities, notably alcohol, weapons and illicit drugs. These goods are illegal in Iran and not authorized by government, making their smuggling a more criminal, and more dangerous, operation.’<sup>39</sup>

See also [Penalties and prosecution](#) and [Anti-smuggling operations](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

Section 4 updated: 18 February 2022

## 4. Legal context

### 4.1 Legislation

4.1.1 There are no state laws that explicitly criminalise kolbars<sup>40 41</sup>. However, as noted in a January 2020 article published in Nawext (a multimedia and multilingual project launched in 2016<sup>42</sup>), ‘Kolbars cross the border illegally and are at the risk of prosecution.’<sup>43</sup> The act of smuggling may be criminalised, depending on the items concerned, and can be subject to various penalties (see [Penalties and prosecution](#)).

4.1.2 A 2008 paper on illegal trade in Iran, by Mohammad Reza Farzanegan from the Center for Near and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Marburg, cited the laws relating to smuggling goods:

‘The main relevant rules and regulations in Iran about smuggling are “Penal codes on smuggling” (1933), “Custom rule” (1971), and “Governmental discretionary punishments rule” (1994). The 1933 punishment rule for smuggling identified different kinds of smuggling. This classification covers the following groups: (1) the smuggling of legal products; (2) the import

---

<sup>37</sup> DIS and DRC, ‘[Iranian Kurds](#)’ (page 41), September 2013

<sup>38</sup> DIS and DRC, ‘[Iranian Kurds](#)’ (pages 36, 45), September 2013

<sup>39</sup> GIATOC, ‘[Sanctions and smuggling – Iraqi Kurdistan and Iran’s border...](#)’ (page 13), April 2019

<sup>40</sup> Peace for Asia, ‘[One who carries the load: The Kolbars of Iran](#)’, 7 December 2020

<sup>41</sup> IranWire, ‘[An Anthropologist’s Take on the Kolbari Phenomenon](#)’, 9 February 2021

<sup>42</sup> Nawext, ‘[About Us](#)’, no date

<sup>43</sup> Nawext, ‘[Between Iran and Iraq: Kolbars do not bend](#)’, 17 January 2020

smuggling of illegal products; (3) the export smuggling of illegal products; (4) the smuggling of monopoly products; and (5) special activities.<sup>144</sup>

#### 4.1.3 The paper defined the classifications:

- Legal products (categorised into 2 groups):

‘First are those goods which do not need the permission of relevant governmental organizations for importing or exporting. These groups of goods will be determined by the Ministry of Commerce in annual import and export regulations at the beginning of each year. After the approval of the Council of Ministers, the list of these goods will be announced to national customs.

‘Second are conditional legal products. These are legal products, which because of a special situation in the domestic economy and general socio-political policies, need prior permissions by governmental organizations. For example, the import of special machinery products or medicines may require permission from the Ministry of Industry and Mines and Ministry of Health, respectively.

- Import and export of illegal products:

‘Custom rule has determined these products. Some examples of imported illegal goods are military weapons, drugs and anti-religious or materials printed which are opposed to social norms (books, magazines and so on)... In general, export smuggling of illegal goods refers to the export of those products that are prohibited based on religious or governmental rules.

- Monopoly products:

‘Monopoly products are those goods which based on monopoly regulations (such as the monopoly of tobacco rule, 1931) can be traded only by the government. Thus, trading such products without having the legal representation of the government is referred to as trading smuggled goods.

- Special activities:

‘... special activities which are not smuggling in theory but based on the perspective of the authorities will be treated as smuggling in practice. For example, Article 48 of Jungles Protection and Maintenance rule of 1985 declares that “transport of woods and gained coals from trees out of cities without licence from the Forestry Organization will be punished like a smuggling act”. Another example is Article 1 of “Penal codes of sellers of anti-religious or anti-public decency textiles”. The economic agents who import, produce, or sell such textiles are offenders and these textiles are treated as smuggled goods.<sup>145</sup>

[Back to Contents](#)

## 4.2 Penalties and prosecution

### 4.2.1 According Iranian regulations cited in Farzanegan’s paper ‘... the penalty for smuggled goods depends on the value of goods and these fall into two

---

<sup>44</sup> Farzanegan M R, ‘[Illegal Trade in the Iranian Economy: Evidence...](#)’ (page 4), September 2008

<sup>45</sup> Farzanegan M R, ‘[Illegal Trade in the Iranian Economy: Evidence...](#)’ (pages 4, 5), September 2008

groups: (1) products with the value of equal to or less than 10 million rials [GBP£172.50<sup>46</sup>], and (2) products with a value beyond 10 million rials.<sup>47</sup>

#### 4.2.2 The paper defined the 2 groups and the actions taken upon their discovery:

- Product value equal to or less than 10 million rials:

‘Upon the detection of this group of products by the relevant governmental bodies (customs or police), they can seize the goods and inform the government revenues recipients’ offices. In this case, related official bodies without extra monetary penalties will seize the detected consignment. Based on articles 12 and 20 of executives’ guidelines of governmental discretionary punishments, the governmental revenues recipients’ offices must transfer the seized smuggled goods to “possessory goods seller organization” [a government affiliated company whose main functions are the gathering, managing and selling of abandoned governmental and non-governmental as well as confirmed smuggled products<sup>48</sup>].

- Product value of over 10 million rials:

‘... according to the governmental discretionary punishments rule (approved in 1994) governmental revenues recipients’ offices, besides seizing the smuggled consignment, [offenders] will also receive the cash penalty. The cash penalty is twice the value of smuggled products. In this case, the offender may accept or reject to pay the fines. In the former case, upon payment of the penalty, the offender will receive an official fine receipt and will be free of any other judicial prosecution. In the latter case, the case will be sent to court within 5 days upon detection. In the case of confirmation of a smuggling offence, the offender will be sentenced to imprisonment besides seizing the smuggled products or foreign exchange. Furthermore, they must pay the amount of monetary penalty, which will not be lower than twice the value of smuggled products.<sup>49</sup>

#### 4.2.3 According to the January 2020 article published in Nawext, ‘Iranian law has ... determined regulations based on the value of the goods transported by Kolbars: terms ranging from a few months to five years’ imprisonment. In reality, these penalties are rarely applied. Almost every week, Kolbars are killed by the bullets of border guards who do not hesitate to open fire.<sup>50</sup>

#### 4.2.4 An April 2020 submission by the organization Kurdistan Human Rights – Geneva (KMMK-G) to the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Iran, noted in relation to penalties for smuggling:

‘An obvious disproportionate disparity between crime and punishment has been repeatedly observed in relation to Kurdish Kolbaran who have often been targeted even before they were proven guilty. The key point is that even if a Kolbar committed a crime, the proportionate act would not be to take his life and kill him. The decision regarding the punishment meted out to an individual who is seen to have broken a law should only be taken in the

---

<sup>46</sup> Xe.com, ‘[Currency converter](#)’, as at 14 January 2022

<sup>47</sup> Farzanegan M R, ‘[Illegal Trade in the Iranian Economy: Evidence...](#)’ (page 5), September 2008

<sup>48</sup> Farzanegan M R, ‘[Illegal Trade in the Iranian Economy: Evidence...](#)’ (footnote 4), September 2008

<sup>49</sup> Farzanegan M R, ‘[Illegal Trade in the Iranian Economy: Evidence...](#)’ (pages 5, 6), September 2008

<sup>50</sup> Nawext, ‘[Between Iran and Iraq: Kolbars do not bend](#)’, 17 January 2020

courts of law. It is especially important for institutional bodies and government sponsored forces to observe this fact.<sup>51</sup>

4.2.5 In an article published by IranWire in February 2020 it was observed that:

‘According to Article 18 of the Law to Fight Smuggling of Goods and Currency, breaking this law is punishable by confiscation of the goods and/or the currency, and by cash fines, depending on the type of the goods... However, what happens on the ground is that kulbaris are shot at by border guards and security forces, a response that has no legal justification, even according to existing laws in the Islamic Republic.’<sup>52</sup>

See also [Excessive use of force](#).

4.2.6 Specific penalties were prescribed in the Penal Code for offences relating to alcohol:

‘Article 702- Anyone who produces or buys or sells or proposes to sell or carries or keeps alcoholic beverages or provides to a third person, shall be sentenced to six months to one year of imprisonment and up to 74 lashes and a fine five times as much as the usual (commercial) value of the aforementioned object.

‘Article 703- Importing alcoholic beverages into the country shall be considered as smuggling and the importer, regardless of the amount (of the beverages), shall be sentenced to six months to five years’ imprisonment and up to 74 lashes and a fine ten times as much as the usual (commercial) value of the aforementioned object. This crime can be tried in the General Courts.

‘Note 1- In respect to articles 702 and 703, when the discovered alcoholic beverages are more than twenty liters, the vehicle used for its transport, if its owner is aware of the matter, shall be confiscated in favor of the government; otherwise the offender shall be sentenced (to a fine) equal to the value of the vehicle. Tools and equipments used for producing or facilitating the crimes mentioned in the said articles, as well as the money gained through the transactions, shall be confiscated in favor of the government.

‘Note 2- When civil servants or employees of governmental companies or companies or institutes dependant to government, councils, municipalities or Islamic revolutionary bodies, and basically all the three powers and also members of armed forces and public service officials, commit, or participate, or aid and abet in the crimes mentioned in articles 702 and 703, in addition to the punishments provided, they shall be sentenced to one to five years’ temporary suspension from civil service.

‘Note 3- The court, under no circumstances, shall suspend the execution of the punishment provided in articles 702 and 703.’<sup>53</sup>

4.2.7 In a November 2017 amendment to the Anti-Narcotics Law, Iran raised the amount of drugs in possession that triggers the death penalty from 30 grams

---

<sup>51</sup> KMMK-G, ‘[Periodic Summary Report for the Attention of the OHCHR...](#)’ (page 26), April 2020

<sup>52</sup> IranWire, ‘[Who are the Kulbars? Why are they Systematically Targeted...](#)’, 12 February 2020

<sup>53</sup> IHRDC, ‘[Islamic Penal Code of the Islamic Republic of Iran – Book Five](#)’, 22 May 1996

of heroin, morphine, cocaine or their chemical derivatives to more than 2kg, and 5kg of bhang, cannabis and opium to more than 50kg<sup>54 55</sup>.

- 4.2.8 According to the amendments, cited by Iran Human Rights (IHR) and ECPM (Together Against the Death Penalty) 2020 annual report on the death penalty in Iran:

‘The punishment for those already sentenced to death or life in prison for drug-related offences should be commuted to up to 30 years in prison and a fine. Death sentences should be restricted to those convicted of carrying (not only using) weapons, acting as the ringleader, providing financial support, or using minors below the age of 18 or the mentally ill in a drug crime, and to those previously sentenced to death, life imprisonment, or imprisonment for more than 15 years for related crimes.’<sup>56</sup>

- 4.2.9 The IHR and ECPM report added ‘The implementation of the 2017 amendment has led to a significant decrease in the total number of executions. However, the number of executions for drug-related charges remains high.’<sup>57</sup>

- 4.2.10 A joint report published in June 2020 by the Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights and Minority Rights Group International (MRG) noted in relation to the penalties for smuggling that:

‘... couriers can expect to face charges relating to the illegal importation of the goods in question, with varying, additional charges, depending on the item and whether it may be, itself, illegal in Iran. As Iran’s judicial system routinely falls short of international fair trial standards, some caught may face torture or ill treatment, including forced confession, unfair trial in which they may be denied legal representation or other requirements of due process. Punishment for smuggling, depending on the items, ranges from fines to flogging or, in the case of proscribed drugs, the death penalty.

‘On account of their identity or social origin, couriers may face politically motivated trials. As Kurds, the authorities may charge them with national security-related offences, including in relation to civic activism or membership of a Kurdish political party. As a result, socially vulnerable couriers may have faced execution for alleged national security offences applied in a discriminatory fashion...’<sup>58</sup>

- 4.2.11 The independent media network, Rudaw, reporting in November 2021, noted, ‘Iranian state media (IRNA) in April said a plan was presented in parliament regarding amending laws and punishments for kolbars. Authorities are making efforts to legalize the profession to “strengthen the economy and deprived people,” added IRNA.’<sup>59</sup>

[Back to Contents](#)

---

<sup>54</sup> Amnesty International, ‘[Iran must not squander opportunity to end executions...](#)’, 28 July 2017

<sup>55</sup> IHR and ECPM, ‘[Annual Report on the Death Penalty- 2020](#)’ (page 30), 30 March 2021

<sup>56</sup> IHR and ECPM, ‘[Annual Report on the Death Penalty- 2020](#)’ (page 30), 30 March 2021

<sup>57</sup> IHR and ECPM, ‘[Annual Report on the Death Penalty- 2020](#)’ (page 30), 30 March 2021

<sup>58</sup> MRG, ‘[In the Name of Security: Human rights violations under Iran’s...](#)’ (pages 24 to 25), June 2020

<sup>59</sup> Rudaw, ‘[Kurdish MP in Iran: “Why don’t you stop killing and injuring kolbars?”](#)’, 17 November 2021

### 4.3 Permits

4.3.1 According to a journalist in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), cited by the Danish Immigration Service in its report on Iranian Kurds, dated February 2020, 'The Iranian government legalized the kolbars from 2015 till 2017 and it allowed the people of the border regions to work as kolbars. However, in 2017 using prevention of smuggling as an excuse, it closed the border for kolbars.'<sup>60</sup>

4.3.2 In January 2018 Rudaw reported that, according to governor of Iran's West Azerbaijan province, kolbars would be issued with smart cards (in replace of the kolbar licence introduced in 2016). The report noted 'Smart card owners will have a quota on what they export and will be levied lower customs fees. There are about 70,000 individuals registered as kolbars in the provinces of West Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, and Kermanshah.'<sup>61</sup>

4.3.3 According to the April 2019 GIATOC report:

'Some couriers transporting legal commodities have permission papers, effectively a sort of permit, issued by the Iranian authorities. In this way, aspects of smuggling have become "legalized", or at least officially sanctioned. Permits, Ahmed [an Iranian expatriate who is very familiar with the smuggling trade and border regions<sup>62</sup>] said, were not easy to obtain, however, and, with many people keen to get their hands on them, there is a long wait. The document, theoretically, allows a courier to transport certain "approved" goods for a certain period, usually six months. The authors were not able to speak to any courier who had such a permit, and its actual value and impact remain unclear, especially as large groups of couriers cross the mountains, making it difficult for Iranian border guards to establish from a distance who is actually in possession of such permits.'<sup>63</sup>

4.3.4 AI Monitor noted in a March 2020 article that 'From 2011 to September 2017, Tehran permitted local people from border areas to work as kolbars to reduce the supply problems and other burdens of US and Western sanctions.'<sup>64</sup> An April 2020 report by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) noted 'Many kolbars transport goods illegally, without an official permit (the Iranian authorities began issuing permits in 2016; only heads of families who have completed military service and live within 15km of the Iran-Iraq border are eligible).'<sup>65</sup>

4.3.5 An article by the Iranian Kurdistan Human Rights Watch (IKHRW), dated around January 2021, referred to Hossein, an Iranian Kurdish kolbar who held a 'kolbar card', which allowed him to legally transport goods across the border. The report noted:

'Iranian law was amended two decades ago with exemptions for people living less than 20 kilometers from the border. These people enjoy customs exemptions that other Iranians don't. This is because, according to the

---

<sup>60</sup> Danish Immigration Service, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (page 36), February 2020

<sup>61</sup> Rudaw, '[Iran introducing smart cards to regulate kolbars: Governor](#)', 9 January 2018

<sup>62</sup> GIATOC, '[Sanctions and smuggling – Iraqi Kurdistan and Iran's border...](#)' (page 4), April 2019

<sup>63</sup> GIATOC, '[Sanctions and smuggling – Iraqi Kurdistan and Iran's border...](#)' (page 12), April 2019

<sup>64</sup> AI Monitor, '[Mountain couriers brave bullets along Iran-Iraq border](#)', 3 March 2020

<sup>65</sup> DFAT, '[Country Information Report Iran](#)' (paragraph 4.2), 14 April 2020

Iranian government, due to some family and ethnic ties with the border residents of neighboring countries, they cross the border more than other citizens and move goods on both sides of the border to meet their needs. This card gives unconditional, free access to border crossings, where other Iranians would have to pay customs fees.<sup>66</sup>

[Back to Contents](#)

Section 5 updated: 18 February 2022

## 5. Law enforcement

### 5.1 Border control

- 5.1.1 According to the April 2019 GIATOC report, 'Iran shares a 1458-kilometre-long border with Iraq, of which some 500 kilometres pass through the Kurdistan region.'<sup>67</sup> The Danish Immigration Service report on Iranian Kurds, published February 2020, based on a range of sources, noted 'The border, between Iran and the Iraqi Kurdish areas, is mostly mountainous. Despite the Iranian border guards' stringent control, it is still possible to cross the border illegally. However, great caution is advised for safety reasons. One must travel with a person who is very familiar with the area.'<sup>68</sup>
- 5.1.2 A July 2021 report by Harith Hasan, non-resident Senior Research Fellow at the Lebanon-based Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center, which provides analysis of issues in the Middle East, stated, '... there are six formal and five informal border crossings (opened by militias and smugglers) along the 1,458-kilometer Iraq-Iran border'<sup>69</sup>, although some smugglers, cited in the GIATOC report, said '... on some comparatively short stretches of border, there could be as many as 25 illegal crossing points.'<sup>70</sup>
- 5.1.3 Some official borders between Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan were closed in early 2020 due to COVID-19, though reopened in April 2020, according to the Iranian economic daily, Financial Tribune<sup>71</sup>.
- 5.1.4 An October 2020 report by the GIATOC on illicit economies in Iran noted, 'While the Border Guard Command of the Islamic Republic's Police Force (NAJA) technically controls the country's borders, the IRGC's heavy involvement in border control is open knowledge... As reported by Iranian news agencies, the IRGC and Iranian Border Guard continue to collaborate extensively in border-control operation.'<sup>72</sup>
- 5.1.5 This was confirmed in a joint report, dated December 2021, by the Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre (Landinfo), the Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRS – Belgium) and the Swiss State Secretariat for Migration (SEM), which noted an overlap in the duties of some law enforcement agencies, 'Whilst the police [Border Guard Command (farmāndehī-ye marzbānī)]<sup>73</sup> are formally

<sup>66</sup> IKHRW, '[Kurdish smugglers and the Iranian-Iraqi border trade full of dangers](#)', January 2021

<sup>67</sup> GIATOC, '[Sanctions and smuggling – Iraqi Kurdistan and Iran's border...](#)' (pages 1 to 2), April 2019

<sup>68</sup> Danish Immigration Service, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (page 36), February 2020

<sup>69</sup> Hasan H, '[Border Crossings, Roads, and Regional Politics in Iraq](#)', 6 July 2021

<sup>70</sup> GIATOC, '[Sanctions and smuggling – Iraqi Kurdistan and Iran's border...](#)' (page 9), April 2019

<sup>71</sup> Financial Tribune, '[Two Iranian Border Crossings Resume Trade With Iraqi...](#)', 29 April 2020

<sup>72</sup> GIATOC, '[Under the shadows: Illicit economies in Iran](#)' (page 25), October 2020

<sup>73</sup> Landinfo and others, '[Iran: Criminal procedures and documents](#)' (page 21), December 2021

tasked with protecting the country's borders, the IRGC similarly deals with border control issues.<sup>74</sup>

- 5.1.6 According to sources cited in the Danish Immigration Service of February 2020, 'Over the last three to four years, the Iranian military have been guarding the border more intensely. More military checkpoints have been built in the mountains in places where they were difficult to build. There are mines in the border area stemming from earlier periods of hostility as well as new mines that were recently planted.'<sup>75</sup>
- 5.1.7 The October 2020 GIATOC report noted the investments made in enhancing border-enforcement in the east of Iran along the Afghanistan and Pakistan borders, but added 'Details of border enhancements along Iran's western border are much scarcer, as the predominant focus is on the east in both official narratives and data released from the Iranian government and DCHQ [Iranian Drug Control Headquarters].'<sup>76</sup>
- 5.1.8 The April 2019 GIATOC report noted 'The complicity of local border guards is clearly motivated by financial incentives, but appears to receive unofficial sanction on both sides of the border. In Iran, smugglers claim that the IRGC organizes and oversees smuggling routes, violently policing the involvement of Iranian Kurdish couriers who do not operate within their organized criminal system.'<sup>77</sup>
- 5.1.9 The August 2021 Report of the Secretary-General on the situation of human rights in Iran noted, 'The Government underlined the challenging security situation at the borders and noted its efforts to support stable job opportunities for border couriers, including through the creation of 3,500 entrepreneurships and 11,000 jobs created for couriers in 2020.'<sup>78</sup> The Government also promised 15,000 new jobs for couriers by the end of March 2022<sup>79</sup>.
- 5.1.10 The 2008 paper by Farzanegan noted the involvement of the IRGC in smuggling at legal ports<sup>80</sup>. A report disclosed to the Iranian parliament, cited by Radio Farda in May 2020, also indicated that the IRGC were complicit in smuggling operations through official ports of entry, which customs officials denied<sup>81</sup>. According to the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), a Paris-based opposition group, 'The IRGC controls 114 ports and 25 airports...'<sup>82</sup>

[Back to Contents](#)

---

<sup>74</sup> Landinfo and others, '[Iran: Criminal procedures and documents](#)' (pages 18, 23), December 2021

<sup>75</sup> Danish Immigration Service, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (page 36), February 2020

<sup>76</sup> GIATOC, '[Under the shadows: Illicit economies in Iran](#)' (page 38), October 2020

<sup>77</sup> GIATOC, '[Sanctions and smuggling – Iraqi Kurdistan and Iran's border...](#)' (page 22), April 2019

<sup>78</sup> UN General Assembly, '[Situation of human rights...](#)' A/76/268 (paragraph 11), 4 August 2021

<sup>79</sup> UN General Assembly, '[Situation of human rights...](#)' A/76/160 (paragraph 13), 16 July 2021

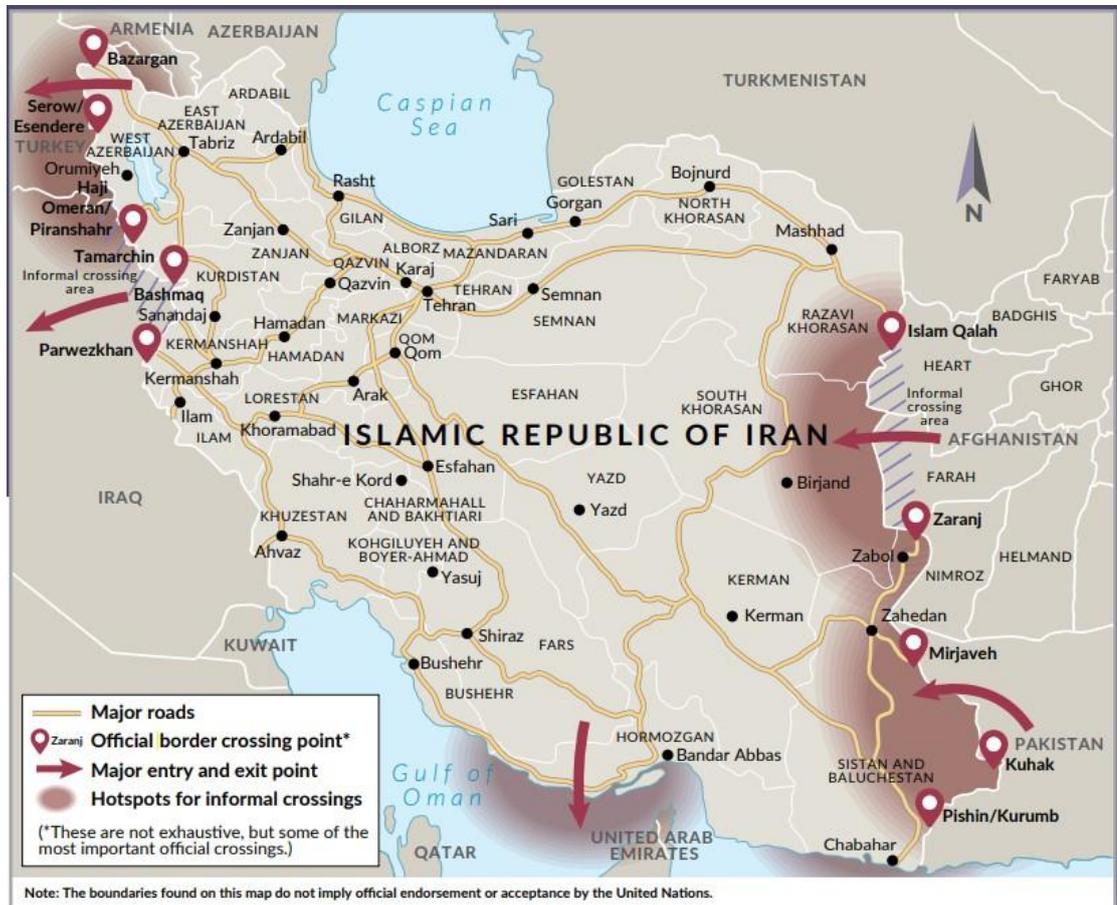
<sup>80</sup> Farzanegan M R, '[Illegal Trade in the Iranian Economy: Evidence...](#)' (page 10), September 2008

<sup>81</sup> Radio Farda, '[Almost All Smuggled Goods Into Iran Come Through Legal Ports](#)', 14 May 2020

<sup>82</sup> NCRI, '[Iran's Regime Organized Smuggling Network](#)', 14 May 2021

## 5.2 Maps

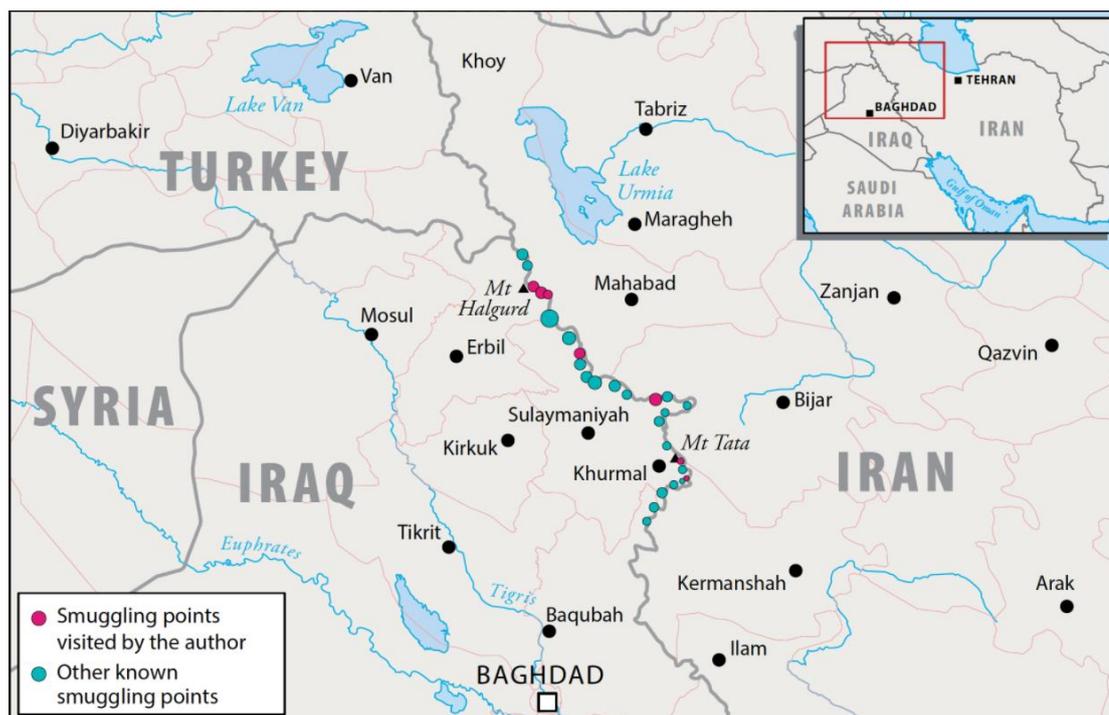
- 5.2.1 Map produced in the October 2020 GIATOC report of the Iran-Iraq border, showing official border crossings, major points of entry and exit, and hotspots for informal crossings<sup>83</sup>:



- 5.2.2 Map produced in the April 2019 GIATOC report showing smuggling points visited by the report's author and other known smuggling points along the Iran-Iraq Kurdistan border<sup>84</sup>:

<sup>83</sup> GIATOC, '[Under the shadows: Illicit economies in Iran](#)' (page 37), October 2020

<sup>84</sup> GIATOC, '[Sanctions and smuggling – Iraqi Kurdistan and Iran's border...](#)' (page 8), April 2019



[Back to Contents](#)

### 5.3 Anti-smuggling operations

#### 5.3.1 The April 2019 GIATOC report noted:

‘Iran’s border security forces, part of its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), release occasional statements highlighting successful anti-smuggling operations they have conducted in various border areas. Typically, these list types and amounts of goods confiscated and numbers of couriers captured. In these reports, goods are mostly listed as mobile phones, cigarettes, cars, motorbikes, make-up, ladies’ clothes and, occasionally, dollars.

‘Such reports rarely mention some of the essential goods that the authors witnessed being transported in large quantities across the shared border between Iraqi Kurdistan and Iran, notably foodstuffs, white goods and electrical products, and alcohol. With the exception of alcohol, the commodities not mentioned in the reports are everyday items that Iranians need, and they are increasingly reliant on the smugglers and couriers to obtain them. This suggests that such reports are designed to promote a media message that the IRGC is working to stop smuggling, while concealing the true extent of smuggling operations and the nature of the products.’<sup>85</sup>

#### 5.3.2 However, the GIATOC report also noted that some smuggling operations were routinely ignored due to their large scale:

‘Smuggling operations from Iraqi Kurdistan to Iran are extensive and span large areas of the shared border. Although the movement of goods continues to be viewed as trade on the Iraqi Kurdistan side of the border, the main resistance to this criminal activity remains the Iranian border guard.

<sup>85</sup> GIATOC, ‘[Sanctions and smuggling – Iraqi Kurdistan and Iran’s border...](#)’ (page 13), April 2019

'However, the sheer scale of smuggling operations across well-trodden routes means Iranian security is either routinely turning a blind eye to it, or the smuggling levels have become unmanageable. Iranians in general – be they government entities or officials, businessmen or local citizens – are the recipients and beneficiaries of the smuggled goods. The renewed sanctions mean Iran is likely to become more heavily reliant on goods brought into the country in this way, and therefore it would not seem to be in Iran's interests to crack down on smuggling beyond moderate arrests and seizures of goods...

'Most parties involved in the smuggling of contraband – the Iranian state, some Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish border guards, Iranian and Kurdish Iraqi businessmen, smugglers, the poverty-stricken Kurdish Iranian couriers and the local communities either side of the border – appear to be benefiting from the smuggling trade in this area. Under current conditions, it seems likely that smuggling networks and individuals will continue to move goods across Iraqi Kurdistan borders into Iran with relative impunity because a cessation or even reduction in smuggling in this region would appear to be in almost no one's interests.'<sup>86</sup>

[Back to Contents](#)

#### 5.4 Arrest and detention

- 5.4.1 The April 2019 GIATOC report noted, 'Couriers said border guards would often seize their goods and horses, letting the men go free or allowing them to buy back their horses at inflated prices, said to be between US\$300 and US\$600 [GBP£218 to £437<sup>87</sup>] per horse. However, some are arrested and imprisoned in Iran, especially when they are unable to pay the extortionate fines of up to US\$50,000 [GBP£36,000] they are handed by the courts...'<sup>88</sup>
- 5.4.2 A December 2020 article in Peace for Asia noted that, '... the incarceration of many [kolbars] without the opportunity of getting a fair trial represents a fundamental attack on their human rights.'<sup>89</sup>
- 5.4.3 The American magazine, Outside, published an article in October 2021 by author and journalist Alex Perry, who travelled to Iraqi Kurdistan to investigate the smuggling trade. The report noted 'Iran does not publish statistics on kolbar detentions, but the frequency with which kolbars report them suggests thousands each year.'<sup>90</sup>
- 5.4.4 The KMMK-G noted in its interim report for 2021, covering the period 1 January to 25 October 2021, that '... many kolbaran (tradesmen) were arrested and their goods were confiscated by the authorities thus far in 2021.'<sup>91</sup>

See also [Penalties and prosecutions](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

---

<sup>86</sup> GIATOC, '[Sanctions and smuggling – Iraqi Kurdistan and Iran's border...](#)' (page 22), April 2019

<sup>87</sup> Xe.com, '[Currency converter](#)', as at 14 January 2022

<sup>88</sup> GIATOC, '[Sanctions and smuggling – Iraqi Kurdistan and Iran's border...](#)' (page 21), April 2019

<sup>89</sup> Peace for Asia, '[One who carries the load: The Kolbars of Iran](#)', 7 December 2020

<sup>90</sup> Outside, '[The World's Most Dangerous Mountains](#)', 18 October 2021

<sup>91</sup> KMMK-G, '[Interim Annual Report on the Situation of Human Rights...](#)' (page 10), October 2021

## 5.5 Excessive use of force

- 5.5.1 The Danish Immigration Service report of February 2020 stated ‘In the Iranian Kurdish border area, the IRGC forces are given permission to kill anyone who crosses the border illegally.’<sup>92</sup> A Kurdish journalist told AI Monitor, “According to the law, Iranian border guards should caution kolbars three times to stop before shooting, but they often shoot the kolbars without warning and with the intent to kill”.<sup>93</sup> The KMMK-G cited the Iranian law relating to the use of lethal weapons, noting they should only be used in exceptional circumstances<sup>94</sup>.
- 5.5.2 An article by the IKHRW indicated that Kurdish opposition groups use the irregular border crossings, ‘... which is why the IRGC border guards regularly open fire at whoever is caught roaming elsewhere. Border guards justify the order to fire because they are afraid that groups like this will also transport weapons, drugs, or armed forces into the country.’<sup>95</sup>
- 5.5.3 A December 2020 article in Peace for Asia noted that despite the alleged involvement of the IRGC in smuggling networks:
- ‘... this has not prevented Border guards from punitively torturing and killing hundreds of Kolbars over the past ten years, with indiscriminate targeting of these porters increasing significantly over the past five years... Many of these deaths have been characterised by their brutality, often being targeted from close range and without any warning... This indifference and lack of action to prosecute the border guards has fostered a culture of impunity on part of the authorities.’<sup>96</sup>
- See also the Country Policy and Information Note on [Iran: Kurds and Kurdish political groups](#).
- 5.5.4 The KHRN reported that in 2020, 40 kolbars were shot dead by the Iranian military forces in the border areas of the provinces of West Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, and Kermanshah<sup>97</sup>. In the same year, 147 kolbars were wounded by shootings by either the Iranian or Turkish military<sup>98</sup>.
- 5.5.5 The Hengaw Organization for Human Rights (Hengaw), an NGO reporting on human rights violations in the Kurdish areas of west Iran, regularly reported on the deaths of kolbars caused by shootings on the Kurdistan border regions<sup>99</sup>, and reported 197 deaths and injuries by direct gunfire from Iranian and Turkish border forces in 2020<sup>100</sup>.
- 5.5.6 A November 2020 report by France 24 referred to sheep smuggling and included a video purported to be of border guards firing at a group of men, which was filmed in Dowlahtu, a village in the West Azerbaijan province in western Iran. The report noted ‘The men who look like shepherds are, in

---

<sup>92</sup> Danish Immigration Service, ‘[Iranian Kurds](#)’ (page 36), February 2020

<sup>93</sup> AI Monitor, ‘[Mountain couriers brave bullets along Iran-Iraq border](#)’, 3 March 2020

<sup>94</sup> KMMK-G, ‘[Periodic Summary Report for the Attention of the OHCHR...](#)’ (pages 24, 25), April 2020

<sup>95</sup> IKHRW, ‘[Kurdish smugglers and the Iranian-Iraqi border trade full of dangers](#)’, January 2021

<sup>96</sup> Peace for Asia, ‘[One who carries the load: The Kolbars of Iran](#)’, 7 December 2020

<sup>97</sup> KHRN, ‘[Annual report: 52 Kurdish kolbars died, 147 injured in 2020](#)’, 1 March 2021

<sup>98</sup> KHRN, ‘[Annual report: 52 Kurdish kolbars died, 147 injured in 2020](#)’, 1 March 2021

<sup>99</sup> Hengaw, ‘[Workers](#)’, various dates

<sup>100</sup> Hengaw, ‘[Statistical report on the human rights situation in Iranian...](#)’, 31 December 2020

actual fact, smugglers who are trying to transport these flocks over the mountains so they can sell them for a higher price across the border. None of the security forces or smugglers were injured during this incident.<sup>101</sup>

- 5.5.7 In July 2021, the Kurdistan Human Rights Network reported 5 kolbars were ‘tortured and severely beaten’ with sticks and buttstocks by Iranian border officials<sup>102</sup>.
- 5.5.8 The August 2021 Report of the Secretary-General noted with concern the deaths of kolbars as well as sookhtbar (fuel couriers predominantly from Baloch minorities) due to excessive force used by border officials<sup>103</sup>. The report stated:  
  
‘Between 1 January and 18 June 2021, at least 24 kolbar (border couriers) and sookhtbar (fuel couriers), predominantly from the Kurdish and Baloch minorities, were killed as a result of the excessive use of force. This includes the killing of 10 sookhtbar by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps on 22 February 2021. In 2020, approximately 60 kolbar, including children, were killed and more than 170 were injured as a result of the use of force by border officials.’<sup>104</sup>
- 5.5.9 In 2021, the KHRN recorded 17 kolbars were killed by Iranian forces, 74 were ‘shot and tortured’ by Iranian border forces and 3 were shot by the IRGC<sup>105</sup>. According to Hengaw ‘... at least 52 Kolbars were killed and 163 Kolbars were injured in the border regions of Iranian Kurdistan in 2021. 140 Kolbars, the majority, were injured or killed as a result of armed attacks by Iranian border guards, and in some cases by Turkish or Iraqi border guards.’<sup>106</sup> Hengaw also reported 15 cases of physical violence by border officials resulting in 3 deaths and 12 injured<sup>107</sup>.
- 5.5.10 The Report of the UN Special Rapporteur for Iran noted in his July 2021 report that the Iranian Government had said ‘... border officials did not shoot border couriers acting legally, and that judicial processes would be employed and punishments issued when use of force unintentionally caused injury or death.’<sup>108</sup> However, the UN Secretary General said, when referring to killings which occurred in 2020 and 2021, that, ‘None of those killings has been investigated by the authorities, leading to continued impunity for those crimes.’<sup>109</sup>
- 5.5.11 A number of sources highlighted that accountability for extrajudicial killings and excessive use of force against Kolbars is often absent. An article in Nawext in January 2020 stated that ‘Kolbars have no recourses. The courts do not deal with rare complaints lodged by the families of the victims since they do not want to put following pressure on the police.’<sup>110</sup>

---

<sup>101</sup> France 24, ‘[How sheep smuggling has become a lucrative yet dangerous...](#)’, 20 November 2020

<sup>102</sup> KHRN, ‘[Iran border forces torture Kurdish kolbars in Chaldoran](#)’, 19 July 2021

<sup>103</sup> UN General Assembly, ‘[Situation of human rights...](#)’ A/76/268 (paragraph 11), 4 August 2021

<sup>104</sup> UN General Assembly, ‘[Situation of human rights...](#)’ A/76/268 (paragraph 11), 4 August 2021

<sup>105</sup> KHRN, ‘[Annual Report 2021](#)’, 18 January 2022

<sup>106</sup> Hengaw, ‘[2021: Kolbars - A statistical report](#)’, 3 February 2022

<sup>107</sup> Hengaw, ‘[2021: Kolbars - A statistical report](#)’, 3 February 2022

<sup>108</sup> UN General Assembly, ‘[Situation of human rights...](#)’ A/76/160 (paragraph 13), 16 July 2021

<sup>109</sup> UN General Assembly, ‘[Situation of human rights...](#)’ A/76/268 (paragraph 11), 4 August 2021

<sup>110</sup> Nawext, ‘[Between Iran and Iraq: Kolbars do not bend](#)’, 17 January 2020

5.5.12 KMMK-G noted in their April 2020 submission to the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Iran:

‘The by-law of Note 5 to Article 3 of The Law [on the use of lethal weapon by armed forces in case of necessity], established a “Commission of Incidents” for the purpose of examining the implementation of the laws on the ground. Regrettably, most of the decisions rendered by the Commission were not in favour of Kulbaran [sic]. In most of its decisions, the Commission declares that Kulbaran put their own life at risk through their work, therefore, the Commission considers it just and fair to kill them through the use of arms...’<sup>111</sup>

5.5.13 Similarly, a February 2020 article in IranWire noted that:

‘According to Mozayan [a Tehran-based lawyer], it is possible to bring complaints against the agents, but in instances where cases related to the shooting of kulbars has gone to court, military prosecutors have not taken serious action against offending agents. Instead of using the report from the actual incident, they have offered, as expert opinion, the views of the Accidents Committee as specified by Article 5 of the law governing the use of arms by the armed forces [Persian link]. “They always write that the person who has been shot had put his own life in danger and [say] “we are not responsible for their lives.” In the end, these cases are generally thrown out or take a long time and eventually end in the payment of a small sum of compensation because they say that they have no budget for it...”<sup>112</sup>

5.5.14 According to the same report:

‘... the most significant and immediate danger kulbars face is being killed by Iranian border guards. This is such a serious problem that members of the Iranian parliament have introduced a bill to prevent guards from directly targeting the kulbars [Persian link]... in December 2019 a group of members of the parliament introduced a bill to amend the law regulating the use of firearms by the armed forces [Persian link]. This bill explicitly forbids shooting directly at kulbars. The bill is yet to come to the floor and it is not clear whether it will become the law or not.’<sup>113</sup>

[Back to Contents](#)

---

<sup>111</sup> KMMK-G, ‘[Periodic Summary Report for the Attention of the OHCHR...](#)’ (page 25), April 2020

<sup>112</sup> IranWire, ‘[Who are the Kulbars? Why are they Systematically Targeted...](#)’, 12 February 2020

<sup>113</sup> IranWire, ‘[Who are the Kulbars? Why are they Systematically Targeted...](#)’, 12 February 2020

# Terms of Reference

A 'Terms of Reference' (ToR) is a broad outline of what the CPIN seeks to cover. They form the basis for the [country information section](#). The Home Office's Country Policy and Information Team uses some standardised ToR, depending on the subject, and these are then adapted depending on the country concerned.

For this particular CPIN, the following topics were identified prior to drafting as relevant and on which research was undertaken:

- Background on kolbars, prevalence and commodities
- Law enforcement
  - Border control - state approach to detecting, detaining, convicting & sentencing Kurdish kolbars.
  - Which policing body would normally carry out ambushes of smuggling routes and/or subsequent raids of premises relating to smuggling offences?
  - Excessive use of force
- Penalties - how differently are kolbars/smugglers treated according to the type of cargo they've carried, for example:
  - foodstuffs
  - drugs and alcohol
  - political cargo - leaflets/posters, supplies, for example medical/firearms

[Back to Contents](#)

# Bibliography

## Sources cited

AI Monitor,

[‘High unemployment forces Iranian Kurds into smuggling, with deadly consequences’](#), 16 September 2020. Last accessed: 14 January 2022

[‘Mountain couriers brave bullets along Iran-Iraq border’](#), 3 March 2020. Last accessed: 20 January 2022

Amnesty International, [‘Iran must not squander opportunity to end executions for drug-related offences’](#), 28 July 2017. Last accessed: 17 January 2022

ARTE, [‘Iraq: The Forbidden Frontier’](#), 7 May 2021. Last accessed: 25 January 2022

Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), [‘Country Information Report Iran’](#), 14 April 2020. Last accessed: 20 January 2022

Danish Immigration Service, [‘Iranian Kurds: Consequences of political activities in Iran and KRIs’](#), February 2020. Last accessed: 19 January 2022

Danish Immigration Service (DIS) and Danish Refugee Council (DRC), [‘Iranian Kurds: On Conditions for Iranian Kurdish Parties in Iran and KRI, Activities in the Kurdish Area of Iran, Conditions in Border Area and Situation of Returnees from KRI to Iran, 30 May to 9 June 2013’](#) (Joint fact-finding mission conducted by the Danish Immigration Service and The Danish Refugee Council), 30 September 2013. Last accessed: 21 January 2022

Farzanegan M R, [‘Illegal Trade in the Iranian Economy: Evidence from a Structural Model’](#), September 2008. Last accessed: 14 January 2022

Financial Tribune, [‘Two Iranian Border Crossings Resume Trade With Iraqi Kurdistan’](#), 29 April 2020. Last accessed: 19 January 2022

France 24, [‘How sheep smuggling has become a lucrative yet dangerous business on the Iran-Iraq border’](#), 20 November 2020. Last accessed: 24 January 2022

Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GIATOC),

[‘Sanctions and smuggling – Iraqi Kurdistan and Iran’s border economies’](#) (Westcott T and Ismaeli A), April 2019. Last accessed: 13 January 2022

[‘Under the shadows: Illicit economies in Iran’](#), October 2020. Last accessed: 13 January 2022

Hasan H, [‘Border Crossings, Roads, and Regional Politics in Iraq’](#), 6 July 2021. Last accessed: 17 January 2022

Hengaw Organization for Human Rights,

[‘2021: Kolbars - A statistical report’](#), 3 February 2022. Last accessed: 17 February 2022

[‘Statistical report on the human rights situation in Iranian Kurdistan during 2020’](#), 31 December 2020. Last accessed: 19 January 2022

[‘Workers’](#), various dates. Last accessed: 19 January 2022

Iran Human Rights (IHR) and ECPM (Together Against the Death Penalty),

[‘Annual Report on the Death Penalty in Iran- 2017’](#), 13 March 2018. Last accessed: 17 January 2022

[‘Annual Report on the Death Penalty- 2020’](#), 30 March 2021. Last accessed: 17 January 2022

Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC), [‘Islamic Penal Code of the Islamic Republic of Iran – Book Five’](#), 22 May 1996. Last accessed: 14 January 2022

IranWire,

[‘About Us’](#), no date. Last accessed: 21 January 2022

[‘An Anthropologist’s Take on the Kolbari Phenomenon’](#), 9 February 2021. Last accessed: 21 January 2022

[‘Who are the Kulbars? Why are they Systematically Targeted and Killed?’](#), 12 February 2020. Last accessed: 18 February 2022

Iranian Kurdistan Human Rights Watch (IKHRW),

[‘A shocking report from the mountains of Kurdistan: How Kolbar women suffer’](#), March 2021. Last accessed: 21 January 2022

[‘Kurdish smugglers and the Iranian-Iraqi border trade full of dangers’](#), January 2021. Last accessed: 24 January 2022

Kurdistan Human Rights – Geneva (KMMK-G),

[‘Interim Annual Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Kurdistan of Iran for the period: 1st January to October 25th 2021’](#), October 2021. Last accessed: 18 February 2022

[‘Periodic Summary Report for the Attention of the OHCHR Desk of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Iran’](#), April 2020. Last accessed: 18 February 2022

Kurdistan Human Rights Network (KHRN),

[‘2015 Annual report on violation of human rights of Kolbar workers in Iran’](#), 25 January 2016. Last accessed: 21 January 2022

[‘Annual report: 52 Kurdish kolbars died, 147 injured in 2020’](#), 1 March 2021. Last accessed: 19 January 2022

[‘Annual Report 2021’](#), 18 January 2022. Last accessed: 19 January 2022

[‘Iran border forces torture Kurdish kolbars in Chaldoran’](#), 19 July 2021. Last accessed: 17 February 2022

Kurdistan Institute of Brussels, [‘Rojhelat \(Eastern Kurdistan\)’](#), no date. Last accessed: 21 January 2022

Landinfo – Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre, CGRS-CEDOCA – Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (Belgium), COI unit, SEM – State Secretariat for Migration, [‘Iran; Criminal procedures and documents’](#), December 2021. Last accessed: 13 January 2022

Medya News, [‘The plight of Kurdish “kolbars” in Iran’](#), 2 September 2020. Last accessed: 21 January 2022

Minority Rights Groups International (MRG) and Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights, '[In the Name of Security: Human Rights Violations under Iran's National Security](#)', June 2020. Last accessed: 19 January 2022

National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), '[Iran's Regime Organized Smuggling Network](#)', 14 May 2021. Last accessed: 14 January 2022

Nawext,

['About Us](#)', no date. Last accessed: 21 January 2022

['Between Iran and Iraq: Kolbars do not bend](#)', 17 January 2020. Last accessed: 21 January 2022

Outside, '[The World's Most Dangerous Mountains](#)', 18 October 2021. Last accessed: 14 January 2022

Peace for Asia, '[One who carries the load: The Kolbars of Iran](#)', 7 December 2020. Last accessed: 21 January 2022

Radio Farda,

['Almost All Smuggled Goods Into Iran Come Through Legal Ports](#)', 14 May 2020. Last accessed: 14 January 2022

['Two-Thirds Of Appliances And Home Electronics Sold In Iran "Smuggled Goods", Official Says](#)', 23 January 2020. Last accessed: 14 January 2022

Rudaw,

['Iran introducing smart cards to regulate kolbars: Governor](#)', 9 January 2018. Last accessed: 19 January 2022

['Kurdish MP in Iran: "Why don't you stop killing and injuring kolbars?"](#)', 17 November 2021. Last accessed: 18 February 2022

UN General Assembly,

['Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran; Note by the Secretary-General; Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Javid Rehman](#)' [A/76/160], 16 July 2021. Last accessed: 19 January 2022

['Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran; Report of the Secretary-General](#)' [A/HRC/47/22], 14 May 2021. Last accessed: 21 January 2022

['Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran; Report of the Secretary-General](#)' [A/76/268], 4 August 2021. Last accessed: 19 January 2022

Xe.com, '[Currency converter](#)', as at 14 January 2022. Last accessed: 14 January 2022

[Back to Contents](#)

### Sources consulted but not cited

Aghazadeh A and others, '[Organized Smuggling of Goods in the Criminal Law of Iran and Turkey](#)', 2017. Last accessed: 14 January 2022

European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), [‘Methamphetamine developments in South Asia: the situation in Iran and the implications for the EU and its neighbours — EU4MD special report’](#), April 2021. Last accessed: 17 January 2022

Human Rights Watch (HRW), [‘World Report 2022’](#), 13 January 2022. Last accessed: 21 January 2022

Independent, [‘Kolbars: Quest for a livelihood on the Iran-Iraq border ends in tragedy’](#), 26 January 2021. Last accessed: 17 February 2022

OpenDemocracy, [‘No country for minorities: the inequality of state repression in Iran’](#), 1 June 2020. Last accessed: 17 February 2022

Rudaw, [‘Iran's kolbars: Two brothers' perilous journey to feed their family’](#), 30 January 2020. Last accessed: 21 January 2022

US Department of State, [‘2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Islamic Republic of Iran’](#), 30 March 2021. Last accessed: 21 January 2022

[Back to Contents](#)

# Version control

## Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **4.0**
- valid from **21 February 2022**

---

### **Official – sensitive: Start of section**

The information in this section has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use only.

---

### **Official – sensitive: End of section**

## Changes from last version of this note

Updated country information and assessment

[Back to Contents](#)