



Home Office

Country Policy and Information Note

Iran: Illegal exit

Version 6.0

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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

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

Contents	4
Assessment	5
1. Introduction	5
1.1 Basis of claim	5
2. Consideration of issues	5
2.1 Credibility.....	5
2.2 Exclusion	6
2.3 Convention reason(s).....	6
2.4 Risk.....	6
2.5 Protection	8
2.6 Internal relocation.....	8
2.7 Certification	8
Country information	9
3. Exit via official ports.....	9
3.1 Passports.....	9
3.2 Exit permits.....	9
3.3 Travel bans and restrictions.....	11
3.4 Women	13
3.5 Border security	15
3.6 Bribery of border officials	15
3.7 Use of fraudulent documents to facilitate exit	16
4. Exit via unofficial routes.....	17
4.1 Border crossings	17
5. Treatment of returnees	18
5.1 Laws relating to illegal exit.....	18
5.2 Returnees in general.....	19
5.3 Failed asylum seekers	19
Terms of Reference	21
Bibliography	22
Sources cited	22
Sources consulted but not cited	23
Version control	25

Assessment

Updated: 19 April 2022

1. Introduction

1.1 Basis of claim

- 1.1.1 Fear of persecution and/or serious harm by the state because the person exited the country illegally.

[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 a 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](#)).

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[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](#).

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[Back to Contents](#)

2.3 Convention reason(s)

- 2.3.1 Leaving Iran illegally does not, in itself, engage the Refugee Convention. Consideration must be given to other reasons which might. Absent one of those reasons, consideration must be given to whether a person would face a real risk of serious harm on the basis of having left the country illegally and be eligible for a grant of [Humanitarian Protection](#).
- 2.3.2 For further guidance on the 5 Refugee Convention grounds see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

2.4 Risk

- 2.4.1 Reports differ as to whether the exit permits for foreign travel are required for all citizens. The US Department of State reports exit permits are required for all Iranians, whilst Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and a legal source in Iran (cited by Landinfo) state they are required for those employed in fields considered sensitive or parts of the security forces, those studying abroad, and all males aged 18 to 30 who are yet to complete military service and have no military service exemption. To obtain an exit permit, individuals must pay a bond that is retrievable upon return (see [Exit permits](#)).
- 2.4.2 Travel bans may be imposed in some circumstances, for example in civil or criminal cases at the behest of the relevant judicial authorities. Reasons for a travel ban can include debt, national security and political grounds, when a defendant is under investigation or trial, or against persons sentenced for a criminal act in absentia. In practice the security forces can prevent anyone from leaving the country even without an official court decision. Numerous journalists, academics, opposition politicians, human rights activists and

artists remain subject to foreign travel bans and have had their passports confiscated. Individuals subject to travel bans are registered on a court-issued list of people who cannot leave the country, which appears in the computer system used by airport personnel. Intelligence services are reported to maintain their own list of those prevented from leaving the country, separate to those issued by the judiciary (see [Travel bans and restrictions](#)).

- 2.4.3 Married women require their husband's permission to obtain a passport and travel abroad, whereas unmarried and divorced women do not, although fathers of unmarried women can request travel bans (see [Status for women](#)).
- 2.4.4 Border security, especially at airports, is strict, with multiple layers of physical security and document checking (see [Border security](#)). The ability to bribe officials or use fraudulent documents to leave the country is reported to be difficult (see [Bribery of border officials](#) and [Use of fraudulent documents to facilitate exit](#)).
- 2.4.5 Leaving the country without a valid passport can be punished with a fine, a prison sentence or both. In practice, if a person left Iran illegally and is not wanted by the authorities for any other reason, only a fine is issued (see [Treatment of returnees](#)).
- 2.4.6 In the country guidance case of [SSH and HR \(illegal exit: failed asylum seeker\) Iran \(CG\) \[2016\] UKUT 308 \(IAC\)](#), heard on 10 May 2016 and promulgated on 29 June 2016, the Upper Tribunal (UT) held that:
- 'An Iranian male whom it is sought to return to Iran, who does not possess a passport, will be returnable on a laissez passer, which he can obtain from the Iranian Embassy on proof of identity and nationality.
- 'An Iranian male in respect of whom no adverse interest has previously been manifested by the Iranian State does not face a real risk of persecution/breach of his Article 3 rights on return to Iran on account of having left Iran illegally and/or being a failed asylum seeker. No such risk exists at the time of questioning on return to Iran nor after the facts (i.e. of illegal exit and being a failed asylum seeker) have been established. In particular, there is not a real risk of prosecution leading to imprisonment' (paragraphs 33 (a) and (b)).
- 2.4.7 Referring to cases in which persons, on return to Iran, had been prosecuted for other offences and also for illegal departure, the UT found that '... people found guilty of another offence may in addition receive a prison sentence for illegal exit, but they do not show that people are sentenced to imprisonment for illegal exit per se. Indeed, the evidence suggests that there is no appetite to prosecute for illegal exit alone, but if there is another offence, illegal exit will be added on' (paragraph 31).
- 2.4.8 In the country guidance case, [XX \(PJAK – sur place activities - Facebook\) Iran CG \[2022\] UKUT 23 \(IAC\)](#), heard 8 to 10 June 2021 and promulgated on 20 January 2022, the UT held that '[SSH and HR...](#) continue[s] accurately to reflect the situation for returnees to Iran' (paragraph 120).

- 2.4.9 The available country information continues to support the findings in [SSH and HR](#) that a person will not be at real risk of persecution or serious harm based on their illegal exit alone.
- 2.4.10 Each case must be considered on its facts and, when assessing risk, decision makers must take account of other factors which, when combined with illegal exit, have previously brought or may bring the person to the adverse attention of the authorities, such as their actual or perceived political activity, religion or ethnicity (paying particular attention to the situation for Kurds), and sexual orientation, gender identity or expression (see the relevant [Country Policy and Information Notes](#)).
- 2.4.11 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 state protection see the Asylum 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 considering internal relocation and factors to be taken into account see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

2.7 Certification

- 2.7.1 Where a claim is refused on the basis of illegal exit alone, it is likely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002. This is because any punishment of illegal exit would not generally amount to persecution.
- 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: 19 April 2022

3. Exit via official ports

3.1 Passports

- 3.1.1 For general information on passports, including the application process, see the January 2021 report by Landinfo (the Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre), '[Iran: Passports, ID and civil status documents](#)'.
- 3.1.2 The Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), providing DFAT's best judgement and assessment 'informed by DFAT's on-the-ground knowledge and discussions with a range of sources in Iran, [taking]... into account relevant and credible open source reports', noted in its April 2020 report 'In some cases, citizens require special permission to obtain a passport. This includes minors under the age of 18, who require the permission of their father/custodian; males who have not completed their military service, who must present authorities with their military service exemption or the written permission of the Public Military Service Department; and married women, who require their husband's permission.'¹
- 3.1.3 According to Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, which listed the documents and permissions required when making a first application for a passport, individuals who have illegally exited Iran were also required to complete a form '... for investigation of illegal exit.'²

See also [Use of fraudulent documents to facilitate exit](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

3.2 Exit permits

- 3.2.1 The US Department of State (USSD) indicated in its human rights reports for the years 2018³, 2019⁴ and 2020⁵ that exit permits were required by all Iranian citizens for foreign travel.
- 3.2.2 DFAT noted in its June 2018 report on Iran that, 'The government does not generally require citizens to possess an exit permit for foreign travel.'⁶ However, the April 2020 DFAT report stated that exit permits were required for certain categories, noting, 'An exit permit for foreign travel is required for Iranians employed in fields considered sensitive (e.g. employees of the Iranian Atomic Energy Organisation); those studying abroad (whether on government scholarships or privately-funded); and all males aged 18-30 who are yet to complete military service (principally those who have deferred military service to undertake tertiary studies).'⁷

¹ DFAT, '[Country Information Report Iran](#)' (paragraph 5.23), 14 April 2020

² Iran Ministry of Foreign Affairs, '[Issuing First Passport](#)', no date

³ USSD, '[2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iran](#)' (section 2d), 13 March 2019

⁴ USSD, '[2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iran](#)' (section 2d), 11 March 2020

⁵ USSD, '[2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iran](#)' (section 2d), 30 March 2021

⁶ DFAT, '[Country Information Report Iran](#)' (paragraph 5.20), 7 June 2018

⁷ DFAT, '[Country Information Report Iran](#)' (paragraph 5.22), 14 April 2020

- 3.2.3 A 2014 report by Steven Ditto, an independent Middle East researcher⁸, published by The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, described the process for Iranian male students wishing to travel abroad:
- ‘... any time an Iranian male with no military exemption seeks to leave Iran, a letter from his university must be obtained and an “exit security” (known as a vasishe) paid in order to obtain an exit permit (khoruj az kishvar). The cost of this deposit varies based on the type of trip – and, while the deposit is returned on the individual’s return to Iran, the cost is always excessive and adds to the hardship and worry students face. In most cases, the sum is too great, and instead of a cash deposit, students must even relinquish the deed to their family’s house or car.’⁹
- 3.2.4 The January 2021 report by Landinfo noted other groups who met the requirement for needing an exit permit, which included, according to a legal source in Iran, ‘... employees of the Iranian Atomic Energy Organisation, military officers, employees of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards [IGRC] and the intelligence services.’¹⁰
- 3.2.5 The April 2020 DFAT report noted:
- ‘To obtain an exit permit, one must provide proof of their status (e.g. a letter from their university confirming their enrolment) and pay a bond (the bond is retrievable on return). Iranian nationals resident in Iran who require an exit permit must obtain one each time they leave the country (multiple exit permits are not available for Iranian nationals resident in Iran). Application for, and issuance of, an exit permit, where it is required, is done electronically.’¹¹
- 3.2.6 According to Iran’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, citizens with a ‘credible residence abroad’ and who are ‘under no Military service obligation’ may apply for a multiple exit permit¹².
- 3.2.7 The same source added a note stating, ‘As of 1/9/1386 (22/11/2007), entry and departure stamps are no longer imprinted in passports. Iranian, whose passports state that their location of residence is not Irani, may have multiple trips to Iran, under the condition that their stay does not exceed one year.’¹³
- 3.2.8 For more information on military conscription, see the Country Policy and Information Note on [Iran: Military service](#).
- 3.2.9 All Iranian nationals leaving the country are required to pay departure tax¹⁴. See also [Treatment of returnees](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

⁸ Washington Institute, ‘[Steven Ditto](#)’, no date

⁹ Ditto, S, ‘[Red Tape, Iron Nerve: The Iranian Quest for U.S...](#)’ (pages 30 to 31), 12 February 2014

¹⁰ Landinfo, ‘[Iran: Passports, ID and civil status documents](#)’ (page 28), 5 January 2021

¹¹ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Iran](#)’ (paragraph 5.22), 14 April 2020

¹² Iran Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ‘[Multiple Exit Stamp](#)’, no date

¹³ Iran Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ‘[Multiple Exit Stamp](#)’, no date

¹⁴ Imam Khomeini Airport City, ‘[Departure Tax](#)’, no date

3.3 Travel bans and restrictions

- 3.3.1 A joint report by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and Danish Immigration Service (DIS), based on interviews in Tehran and London conducted in September and October 2017 (2017 DRC and DIS report), indicated that travel bans were not automatically issued after a civil or criminal sentence, but that cases involving debt, national security and ‘political cases’, as well as cases where ‘there is no access to the accused person’ will trigger a travel ban. An automatic travel ban applies to persons sentenced in absentia in ‘serious criminal cases.’ Persons summoned to court may travel abroad unless the judge issues a travel ban¹⁵.
- 3.3.2 A joint report on Iran’s criminal procedures based on a range of sources, dated December 2021, by Landinfo, the Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRS – Belgium) and the Swiss State Secretariat for Migration (SEM), noted, ‘Within a criminal context, judicial and governmental authorities can issue travel bans against the following persons:
- ‘A defendant during the investigation or trial procedure
 - ‘A convicted person who has not presented himself for the implementation of the sentence or has not served his sentence entirely
 - ‘Tax debtors & other debtors including to banks.’¹⁶
- 3.3.3 The 2017 DRC and DIS report stated that the prosecutor's office has a border authority-linked database of individuals on the travel ban list, adding that, according to one source ‘... when judges issue travel bans, these are received by other authorities without delays/in “real time”. Furthermore, exiting the country legally when a travel ban has been issued is next to impossible. According to the source, the security at the border is very strict; additionally, the borders are highly controlled by the military. At the same time, it would be very costly to arrange an illegal departure, as it would require a high degree of complicity.’¹⁷
- 3.3.4 The joint Landinfo, CGRS and SEM report noted:
- ‘A travel ban (qarār-e mamnū’iyat-e khorūj az keshvar or simply qarār-e man’-e khorūj) prohibits a person from leaving the country. Within criminal proceedings, only judicial authorities (Prosecutor’s Offices and courts) can issue travel bans. Law enforcement agencies, in contrast, do not have this power. However, governmental authorities such as tax authorities or land registry offices, and even banks can request judicial authorities to issue a travel ban. The Judicial authorities can issue a travel ban at different stages of a criminal procedure. According to articles 188 & 247 CCP [Criminal Code of Procedure], the Prosecutor’s Office can issue a travel ban for a defendant either if it does not have access to her/him, or in addition to a bail arrangement.’¹⁸

¹⁵ DRC/DIS, ‘[Judicial issues](#)’ (page 8), February 2018

¹⁶ Landinfo and others, ‘[Iran: Criminal procedures and documents](#)’ (page 71), December 2021

¹⁷ DRC/DIS, ‘[Judicial issues](#)’ (page 9), February 2018

¹⁸ Landinfo and others, ‘[Iran: Criminal procedures and documents](#)’ (page 70 to 71), December 2021

3.3.5 The same report noted:

‘According to article 292 CCP, judicial authorities have to inform the attorney-general of the issuance of a travel ban so that he can inform the relevant authorities, particularly the passport police and border control forces. Banks have to ask the Attorney-General through a request to the Central Bank of Iran. Governmental agencies such as tax authorities and the land registry offices can directly ask the passport police (polīs-e gozarnāmeḥ) to ban a person from travelling abroad. The passport police is effectively responsible for implementing travel bans.

‘Despite not having the legal power to order a travel ban, security forces in practice might simply confiscate the passport of a person and thus prevent her/him from travelling abroad. The intelligence services are said to maintain their own lists of people prevented from leaving the country, independent from the judiciary-approved lists.’¹⁹

3.3.6 Travel bans were generally valid for 6 months and expired automatically unless they were extended. Bans may also be cancelled by the relevant judicial authority, or appealed²⁰.

3.3.7 The USSD human rights reports for 2018, 2019 and 2020 repeatedly reported that ‘Numerous journalists, academics, opposition politicians, human and women’s rights activists, and artists remained subject to foreign travel bans and had their passports confiscated during the year. Married women were not allowed to travel outside the country without prior permission from their husbands.’^{21 22 23} The same reports also noted ‘The government issued travel bans on some former political prisoners...’^{24 25 26}

3.3.8 The April 2020 DFAT report noted that travel bans were imposed on some citizens:

‘Reasons for a travel ban can include security concerns, financial debts, outstanding taxes and outstanding sentences awaiting enforcement. Citizens with ongoing charges or outstanding court matters and those released on bail or parole are subjected to travel bans. Civil and political activists may be subjected to travel bans. In some cases, individuals must obtain the permission of others to leave the country: the husbands of married women and fathers of unmarried women and underage children can request travel bans against their dependents. MOIS [Ministry of Intelligence and Security] and the IRGC have the power to impose travel bans without recourse to the judiciary. Iranians under travel bans are often unaware of their status until they reach passport control at the airport and are turned back. The presence of security organisations in all Iranian airports, particularly those with border

¹⁹ Landinfo and others, ‘[Iran: Criminal procedures and documents](#)’ (page 71), December 2021

²⁰ Landinfo and others, ‘[Iran: Criminal procedures and documents](#)’ (pages 71, 72), December 2021

²¹ USSD, ‘[2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iran](#)’ (section 2d), 13 March 2019

²² USSD, ‘[2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iran](#)’ (section 2d), 11 March 2020

²³ USSD, ‘[2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iran](#)’ (section 2d), 30 March 2021

²⁴ USSD, ‘[2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iran](#)’ (section 1e), 13 March 2019

²⁵ USSD, ‘[2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iran](#)’ (section 1e), 11 March 2020

²⁶ USSD, ‘[2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iran](#)’ (section 1e), 30 March 2021

checkpoints, enables authorities to determine whether any Iranian citizen can leave the country by air.²⁷

See also [Status for women](#).

- 3.3.9 The DRC and DIS report noted, in regard to persons released on bail, that: ‘Exiting the country legally when released on bail depends on whether a travel ban has been issued or not, according to two sources. Director of the Judiciary for International Affairs informed the delegation that bail does not automatically lead to a travel ban. The judge will consider a travel ban if the prosecutor requests it. In contrast, Middle East Consultancy Services stated that if a person is imposed a bail, he/she would not be able to leave the country legally. An anonymous analyst noted that if a person who is out on bail leave the country, the person or his/her family will lose the surety provided.’²⁸
- 3.3.10 In correspondence with the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) in February 2020, a professor emeritus of political science at the College of Coastal Georgia with a research interest in Iranian state intelligence referred to the existence of ‘watchlists’ and stated: ‘As far as I am aware, there are two watchlists, one maintained by the Intelligence Ministry and one maintained by the Revolutionary Guard. Visitors are checked against both lists. The lists are updated, but because of security concern[s] respecting electronic communication, sometimes the lists are updated by courier. Iran also apparently uses old-style spotters (people who memorize facial features of wanted persons). Presumably commercial facial recognition technology will continue to be developed.’²⁹

[Back to Contents](#)

3.4 Women

- 3.4.1 The IRB noted in a response on Iran’s exit and entry procedures, citing a range of sources, dated March 2020, that: ‘... according to article 18 of Iran's passport law, married women require their husband's permission to travel abroad (CHRI 18 July 2017; Human Rights Watch 25 May 2017, 33) or to get a passport (Human Rights Watch 25 May 2017, 33). Additionally, the same sources report that in special cases women may instead apply for permission to travel from a prosecutor (CHRI 18 July 2017; Human Rights Watch 25 May 2017, 33). The Center for Human Rights in Iran (CHRI), a non-partisan NGO based in New York (CHRI n.d.), further reports that a member of Iran's Bar Association was aware of “only one case of a local prosecutor granting permission to a wife to travel abroad without her husband’s consent” and that Iranian authorities had intervened in two cases, in 2015 and in 2017, to allow women to travel to participate in international sporting events against their husband's wishes (CHRI 18 July 2017)...’³⁰

²⁷ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Iran](#)’ (paragraph 5.24), 14 April 2020

²⁸ DRC/DIS, ‘[Judicial issues](#)’ (page 9), February 2018

²⁹ IRB, ‘[Iran: Exit and entry procedures at airports and land borders...](#)’, 10 March 2020

³⁰ IRB, ‘[Iran: Exit and entry procedures at airports and land borders...](#)’, 10 March 2020

- 3.4.2 A March 2020 report based on a range of sources on the treatment of returnees, by Cedoca, the Documentation and Research Department of the Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRS March 2020 report), Belgium, noted in regard to women:
- ‘Married women always require permission from their husband to leave Iran, even if they are in possession of a valid passport. Section 18 of the Passport Law, 1973 states that married women travelling abroad must submit signed permission from their husband to the Official Documents Registry. Another source states that it is also possible to include the condition that a woman can and may travel freely and frequently without permission from the husband in a marriage contract. [An] article in IranWire of November 2019 does state, however, that a woman still needs her husband's permission to renew her passport, which shows that women have to be specific about what kinds of conditions they want to include in their marriage contract. Unmarried and divorced women and widows do not require permission from their father or a male guardian. In February 2013, a legislative proposal was submitted, stating that unmarried women also need official permission from a male guardian or the father if they want to travel abroad. This proposal was abandoned after much criticism.’³¹
- 3.4.3 The January 2021 Landinfo report noted that, according to a June 2019 email from the Norwegian Embassy in Tehran, ‘Unmarried women over the age of 18 do not need permission from their father or another guardian to get issued with passports or to travel abroad... However, some sources have stated the opposite. This misunderstanding seems to originate in a bill that was discussed in parliament in 2012, which would imply that unmarried, adult women had to obtain permission from the male guardian. The bill, however, was not adopted...’³²
- 3.4.4 A blog dated 8 December 2020 on Iranian laws on women, published in The Iran Primer, a project of the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), referred to travel for women and how the law was, or could be, applied in practice:
- ‘... Husbands could choose to provide blanket permission for his wife’s travel or require her to ask for permission for each trip abroad. Single women over the age of 18 could obtain a passport without permission but still required their guardian’s approval to leave the country. Women arriving at airports would sometimes find their permission to travel abroad had been revoked by their husband or male guardian and were prevented from boarding flights. In rare circumstances, authorities would intervene to allow female athletes to compete abroad over a husband’s objections.’³³
- 3.4.5 See also the [Country Policy and Information Note on Iran: Women fearing ‘honour’-based violence](#) for information on the general position of women in society.

[Back to Contents](#)

³¹ CRGS, ‘[Iran: Treatment of returnees by their national authorities](#)’ (page 8), 30 March 2020

³² Landinfo, ‘[Iran: Passports, ID and civil status documents](#)’ (page 29), 5 January 2021

³³ The Iran Primer, ‘[Part 3: Iranian Laws on Women](#)’, 8 December 2020

3.5 Border security

- 3.5.1 In 2019, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) indicated that law enforcement officials providing airport border security included: the Anti-Narcotics Police (ANP), Airport Police, Immigration and Passport Police, Ministry of Interior and Customs Administration of the Islamic Republic of Iran³⁴.
- 3.5.2 The Logistics Capacity Assessment (LCA), which contains baseline information about the logistics capacity of countries relevant for humanitarian emergency preparedness and response, hosted by the World Food Programme (WFP)³⁵, noted in its profile on Iran that, of the 54 major airports in Iran, 8 were international³⁶, adding, 'Security wise all airports of Iran are under the control of Sepah (Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps) military forces and are fully secured.'³⁷
- 3.5.3 The IRB cited the professor emeritus who stated, in regard to the Imam Khomeini International Airport (IKA), that:
- 'It appears there are roughly four checkpoints for departures. The airport is hypothetically under control of the Iran Airports Company, but in practice it is run by the Revolutionary Guard. A fair amount of arms go in and out of the airport and there is a specific branch of the Guard (Unit 190) involved in such transfers. The IRGC Intelligence Protection Organization (Sazman-e Hefazat-e Sepah) also has an Aviation Protection Unit available for the airport. There are theoretically Immigration Police, but again they are functionally under the authority of the Guard...'³⁸
- 3.5.4 The April 2020 DFAT report noted, 'Security procedures at Imam Khomeini International Airport in Tehran are robust. They include computerised cross-checking and multiple layers of physical security and document checking. Immigration officials are considered highly competent. A source told DFAT that it was "next to impossible" to bypass security procedures at Imam Khomeini International Airport.'³⁹

[Back to Contents](#)

3.6 Bribery of border officials

- 3.6.1 Information on bribery of border officials was limited amongst sources consulted by CPIT, although some sources indicated that corrupt practices occurred at ports (see [Bibliography](#)).
- 3.6.2 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, noted the involvement of the IRGC in smuggling at legal ports⁴⁰. 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, 'According to the

³⁴ UNODC, '[UNODC In Iran Increased Air Border Security Capacity Of Iranian...](#)', 13 November 2019

³⁵ LCA, ([website](#)), no date

³⁶ LCA, '[Iran, Islamic Republic of](#)' (section 2.2), January 2021 to January 2022

³⁷ LCA, '[Iran, Islamic Republic of](#)' (section 2.2.1), January 2021 to January 2022

³⁸ IRB, '[Iran: Exit and entry procedures at airports and land borders...](#)', 10 March 2020

³⁹ DFAT, '[Country Information Report Iran](#)' (paragraph 5.45), 14 April 2020

⁴⁰ Farzanegan M R, '[Illegal Trade in the Iranian Economy: Evidence...](#)' (page 10), September 2008

report, contrary to the statements of Customs authorities, 95% of smuggling into Iran is carried out through “official ports of entry and procedures”.⁴¹

3.6.3 For further information on smuggling, see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Iran: Smugglers](#).

3.6.4 The IRB cited the professor emeritus who gave the following information in February 2020:

‘Bribery at the point of entry or exit is difficult. However, Iran is also a major narcotics transshipment country and has a large addict population of its own. Drug trafficking organizations have illicit relations with the Revolutionary Guard that controls much of the economy, so bribery exists but it is happening further up the pipeline than the official entry and exit points in the country (of which there are nearly a hundred). The NAJA (Law Enforcement Forces) are primarily corrupted by the opium trade. You are more likely to find corruption and bribery at the actual entry exit point in the Baluchistan Sistan areas which are rife with foreign special operators, criminals, and smuggling.

‘The Immigration and Passport Police are a subsidiary of NAJA.’⁴²

3.6.5 The USSD 2021 Trafficking in Persons report on Iran, covering the period April 2020 to March 2021, noted that, ‘Government officials continued to perpetrate and condone trafficking crimes with impunity’ and ‘corruption and official complicity in trafficking crimes remained significant concerns...’⁴³

[Back to Contents](#)

3.7 Use of fraudulent documents to facilitate exit

3.7.1 The January 2021 report by Landinfo (the Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre) noted that, ‘Iranian ID documents have advanced security features: The passport is biometric, the kart-e melli [national ID card issued to citizens aged over 15⁴⁴] contains computer chip and biometrics, while the shenasnameh [ID booklet issued at birth⁴⁵] is of passport quality, where changes should be entered using an inkjet printer. Because of these features, fake documents will be easy to reveal.’⁴⁶ The same report added, ‘As the old versions of shenasnameh and kart-e melli are still in use and are far easier to manipulate, we must also consider that there may be counterfeit versions of these documents in circulation.’⁴⁷

3.7.2 For more information on the passport application process see the Landinfo report ‘[Iran: Passports, ID and civil status documents](#)’.

3.7.3 According to the April 2020 DFAT report, ‘Iranian identity documents include sophisticated security features and are difficult to manufacture for fraudulent use.’⁴⁸ The same source added:

⁴¹ Radio Farda, ‘[Almost All Smuggled Goods Into Iran Come Through Legal Ports](#)’, 14 May 2020

⁴² IRB, ‘[Iran: Exit and entry procedures at airports and land borders...](#)’, 10 March 2020

⁴³ USSD, ‘[2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Iran](#)’, 1 July 2021

⁴⁴ Landinfo, ‘[Iran: Passports, ID and civil status documents](#)’ (page 21), 5 January 2021

⁴⁵ Landinfo, ‘[Iran: Passports, ID and civil status documents](#)’ (page 8), 5 January 2021

⁴⁶ Landinfo, ‘[Iran: Passports, ID and civil status documents](#)’ (page 43), 5 January 2021

⁴⁷ Landinfo, ‘[Iran: Passports, ID and civil status documents](#)’ (page 43), 5 January 2021

⁴⁸ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Iran](#)’ (paragraph 5.41), 14 April 2020

'Local sources told DFAT that document fraud is "extremely difficult" for primary forms of documentation like passports, national identity cards, shenasnameh and driver's licences. Obtaining these documents is considered beyond the technical and financial means of most Iranians. Passports and national identity cards have advanced security features, including chips with the bearer's biometric data, making them difficult to forge. These features also make fraudulent passports and national identity documents easy to detect. Secondary forms of documentation like military exemption cards are technically more vulnerable to fraud, as they have less robust security features, but are expensive to obtain.'⁴⁹

- 3.7.4 Article 525 of the Iranian Penal Code (IPC), translated into English by the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC), states that anyone using a forged stamp or seal of a governmental department can be subject to one to ten years of imprisonment⁵⁰.

[Back to Contents](#)

Section 4 updated: 19 April 2022

4. Exit via unofficial routes

4.1 Border crossings

- 4.1.1 Iran shares land borders with Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Armenia to the north, Pakistan and Afghanistan to the east, and Iraq and Turkey to the west⁵¹.
- 4.1.2 Al Jazeera reported in July 2021 that 'The crossings along the mountainous 540km (335 mile)-border between Turkey and Iran are protected by a concrete wall, a barbed-wire-topped barrier that stretches for 140km (87 miles).'⁵² Despite this, 'According to the Turkish Ministry of Interior General Directorate of Migration Management, some 53,176 migrants have been stopped so far this year [2021] until 16 June. The figure is half of the 122,302 registered last year and a major drop from the 454,662 migrants stopped in 2019.'⁵³ Al Jazeera indicated that most migrants attempting to cross the border were from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran⁵⁴.
- 4.1.3 The Daily Sabah reported in October 2021 that, 'Irregular migrants who want to cross into Turkey through the border, which is kept under constant surveillance with unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and optical towers, are apprehended and handed over to the Provincial Immigration Administration Removal Center.'⁵⁵
- 4.1.4 For information on border control along the Iran-Iraq border, see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Iran: Smugglers](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

⁴⁹ DFAT, '[Country Information Report Iran](#)' (paragraph 5.42), 14 April 2020

⁵⁰ IHRDC, '[Islamic Penal Code of the Islamic Republic of Iran – Book Five](#)' (Article 525), 15 July 2015

⁵¹ LCA, '[Iran, Islamic Republic of](#)' (section 1), January 2021 to January 2022

⁵² Al Jazeera, '[Refugees make risky journeys from Iran across Turkey](#)', 6 July 2021

⁵³ Al Jazeera, '[Refugees make risky journeys from Iran across Turkey](#)', 6 July 2021

⁵⁴ Al Jazeera, '[Refugees make risky journeys from Iran across Turkey](#)', 6 July 2021

⁵⁵ Daily Sabah, '[20-km Turkish wall on Iran border to prevent migrant wave built](#)', 7 October 2021

5. Treatment of returnees

5.1 Laws relating to illegal exit

5.1.1 In a review of the August 2008 Country of Origin Information Report on Iran, commissioned by the then Advisory Panel on Country Information (APCI) under the Office of the Chief Inspector of the UK Border Agency, Dr Mohammad Kakhki of the Centre for Iranian Studies, Durham University, referred to illegal departure and stated:

‘According to Article 34 [of the Iranian Passport Law⁵⁶], any Iranian who leaves the country illegally, without a valid passport or similar travel documents, will be sentenced to between one and three years imprisonment, or will receive a fine between 100,000 and 500,000 Rials [approximately GBP £2 to £9 as of 23 March 2022⁵⁷]. In order to proceed the cases relating to illegal departure, a special court is located in Mehrabad Airport in Tehran... If an Iranian arrives in the country, without a passport or any valid travel documents, the official will arrest them and take them to this court. The court assesses the background of the individual, the date of their departure from the country, the reason for their illegal departure, their connection with any organisations or groups and any other circumstances. The judge will decide the severity of the punishment within the parameters of Article 34. This procedure also applies to people who are deported back to Iran, not in the possession of a passport containing an exit visa; in this case the Iranian Embassy will issue them with a document confirming their nationality.’⁵⁸

5.1.2 The April 2020 DFAT report also noted the above information⁵⁹.

5.1.3 The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, Department for Country of Origin Information Reports (CAB), stated in a March 2019 report on Iran (unofficial translation by [DeepL Translator](#)) that: ‘Illegal exit is punishable under Section 34 of the Passport Act [1973, amended 2001]. Leaving the country without a (valid/own) passport can be punished by a fine, a prison sentence of two to six months or both, depending on the circumstances. Leaving the country with a valid passport in your pocket, but without crossing a border post would, according to one source, lead to a prison sentence of one to three months.’⁶⁰

5.1.4 When referring to the possibility of a prison sentence for illegal exit, the CGRS March 2020 report stated that, ‘In actual practice, people are only given a fine for an illegal exit, as is evident from research by the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) [report on a fact-finding mission undertaken in 2008, which cited numerous sources who indicated that illegal exit generally incurred only a fine⁶¹]. If a person has left Iran illegally but was not wanted by the authorities, only a fine will be issued. If a person was wanted by the

⁵⁶ Upper Tribunal (IAC), ‘[SSH and HR \(illegal exit...\)](#)’ (Appendix 1, paragraph 5), 29 June 2016

⁵⁷ Xe.com, ‘[Currency converter](#)’, 23 March 2022

⁵⁸ APCI, ‘[APCI Eleventh Meeting 7 October 2008...](#)’ (page 76), 23 September 2008

⁵⁹ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Iran](#)’ (paragraph 5.44), 14 April 2020

⁶⁰ CAB, ‘[Algemeen ambtsbericht Iran](#)’ (page 15), 22 March 2019

⁶¹ DIS, ‘[Human Rights Situation for Minorities, Women and Converts....](#)’ (page 36), 30 April 2009

authorities, they will only be punished for the crime committed, but not for illegally leaving the country.⁶²

[Back to Contents](#)

5.2 Returnees in general

5.2.1 The CGRS March 2020 report stated that, 'On arrival at IKI Airport in Tehran, there are various waiting areas for foreigners and Iranians. The passports are inspected and it is also checked whether returning individuals have any pending court cases against them.'⁶³

5.2.2 The same report also cited a 2019 report by the Swiss Refugee Council (Schweizerische Flüchtlingshilfe) which said '... political activists are identified at the airport when returning from abroad by means of methods such as photographic screening and interrogation by the authorities on arrival.'⁶⁴ Similarly, the DFAT report of April 2020 indicated that 'Those with an existing high profile may face a higher risk of coming to official attention on return to Iran, particularly political activists.'⁶⁵

5.2.3 See also the [Country Policy and Information Note on Iran: Kurds and Kurdish political parties](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

5.3 Failed asylum seekers

5.3.1 The March 2020 CGRS report noted that, 'There is no law in Iranian legislation that makes applying for asylum abroad a punishable offence.'⁶⁶

5.3.2 The January 2021 Landinfo report noted the general requirements for passport applicants abroad, which included providing the 'date and reason for the last departure from Iran, as well as which border crossing was used.'⁶⁷ The same source stated that Iranians who reside abroad on the basis of their asylum status, and who apply for a passport at an Iranian consulate, must:

'... submit a written statement explaining how they departed Iran, how they were granted asylum, and what their current situation/status is. This is done in a separate form...

'In the general application form, there is also a field where people who have applied for asylum, are required to give an apology. The person in question must tick off the following statement (Econsulate n.d.i):

'The undersigned: ... while regretting having applied for asylum in my country of residence, requests to receive consular services from the Representation of the Islamic Republic of Iran.'⁶⁸

5.3.3 According to the April 2020 DFAT report:

⁶² CGRS, '[Iran: Treatment of returnees by their national authorities](#)' (page 8), 30 March 2020

⁶³ CGRS, '[Iran: Treatment of returnees by their national authorities](#)' (page 8), 30 March 2020

⁶⁴ CGRS, '[Iran – Treatment of returnees by their national authorities](#)' (page 14), 30 March 2020

⁶⁵ DFAT, '[Country Information Report Iran](#)' (paragraph 5.30), 14 April 2020

⁶⁶ CGRS, '[Iran: Treatment of returnees by their national authorities](#)' (page 8), 30 March 2020

⁶⁷ Landinfo, '[Iran: Passports, ID and civil status documents](#)' (pages 30 to 31), 5 January 2021

⁶⁸ Landinfo, '[Iran: Passports, ID and civil status documents](#)' (page 33), 5 January 2021

'Authorities pay little attention to failed asylum seekers on their return to Iran. Iranians have left the country in large numbers since the 1979 revolution, and authorities accept that many will seek to live and work overseas for economic reasons. Those who return on a laissez-passer are questioned by the Immigration Police at Imam Khomeini International Airport in Tehran about the circumstances of their departure and why they are traveling on a laissez-passer. Questioning usually takes between 30 minutes and one hour, but may take longer where the returnee is considered evasive in their answers and/or immigration authorities suspect a criminal history on the part of the returnee. Arrest and mistreatment are not common during this process. A well-placed source was not aware of voluntary returnees being prosecuted for criticising the Islamic Republic, converting to Christianity or proselytising while abroad on their return to Iran.'⁶⁹

5.3.4 The same source noted:

'International observers report that Iranian authorities have little interest in prosecuting failed asylum seekers for activities conducted outside Iran, including in relation to protection claims. This includes posting social media comments critical of the government (heavy Internet filtering means most Iranians will never see them), protesting outside an Iranian diplomatic mission, converting to Christianity or engaging in LGBTI activities. In such cases, the risk profile for the individual will be the same as for any other person in Iran within that category. Those with an existing high profile may face a higher risk of coming to official attention on return to Iran, particularly political activists. The treatment of returnees, including failed asylum seekers, depends on the returnees' profile before departing Iran and their actions on return. According to local sources, the greatest challenge facing failed asylum seekers on return is reintegrating economically and finding meaningful employment.'⁷⁰

5.3.5 The Danish Immigration Service noted in a February 2020 report that they were informed of 5 cases dated between 2011 and 2018 where Iranian citizens who had applied for asylum in European countries, were arrested upon return to Iran. Not all returnees referred to were identified as Kurdish or politically affiliated. At least one arrest related to a charge not related to the asylum claim and another person, who had returned voluntarily from the UK, was subsequently released⁷¹.

5.3.6 According to UK Home Office statistics, between 1 January 2010 and 30 September 2021, 2,017 Iranians returned from the UK to Iran, 1,564 of whom were classed as voluntary returns⁷².

5.3.7 For more information on social media usage and sur place activities, Christian converts, Kurds, and LGBTI persons, see the relevant [Country Policy and Information Note on Iran](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

⁶⁹ DFAT, '[Country Information Report Iran](#)' (paragraph 5.29), 14 April 2020

⁷⁰ DFAT, '[Country Information Report Iran](#)' (paragraph 5.30), 14 April 2020

⁷¹ Danish Immigration Service, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (pages 33 to 34), February 2020

⁷² Home Office, '[Returns...](#)' (Returns Excel spreadsheet – Ret D02), last updated 24 February 2022

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:

- Exit procedures official ports
 - Exit procedures, including passports and exit permits
 - Travel bans or alerts
 - Women
 - Border security
 - Incidence of bribery to pass through immigration control
 - Use of fraudulent documents
- Treatment of returnees
 - who exited illegally
 - in general
 - asylum seekers

[Back to Contents](#)

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[Back to Contents](#)

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[Back to Contents](#)

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Changes from last version of this note

Updated country information and assessment.

[Back to Contents](#)