



Home Office

Country Policy and Information Note

Iran: Kurds and Kurdish political groups

Version 4.0

May 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:

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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](#).

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Assessment

Updated: 27 April 2022

1. Introduction

1.1 Basis of claim

1.1.1 Fear of persecution or serious harm by the Iranian authorities because the person is Kurdish and/or because of their perceived or actual affiliation to a Kurdish political group.

1.2 Points to note

1.2.1 The country information in this note focuses primarily on a person's activities in Iran. For country information on sur place activities, see the Country Policy and Information Note on [Iran: social media, surveillance and sur place activities](#).

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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 Decision makers should also consider the need to conduct language analysis testing (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

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2.2 Exclusion

- 2.2.1 Some Kurdish political parties have launched armed campaigns against Iran. 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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2.3 Convention reason(s)

- 2.3.1 Race and / or actual or imputed political opinion.
- 2.3.2 Establishing a convention reason is not sufficient to be recognised as a refugee. The question is whether the person has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of an actual or imputed Refugee Convention reason.

2.3.3 For further guidance on the 5 Refugee Convention grounds see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.4 Risk

a. Kurdish ethnicity

2.4.1 There are an estimated 10 to 12 million Kurds in Iran, approximately 12% to 15% of the total population of Iran. Around half a million Iranian Kurds reside in the capital, Tehran, but they mostly live in the north-west of the country in an area referred to by ethnic Kurds as Rojhelat (Eastern Kurdistan) (see [Demography](#) and [Map](#)).

2.4.2 Although the constitution provides for equal rights for ‘all people of Iran’, in practice this is not extended to ethnic minorities. Kurds in Iran face systematic discrimination and barriers which affects their access to basic services such as housing, political office, employment and education. The provinces in which Iranian Kurds are concentrated have some of the highest unemployment rates in Iran. Instruction of the Kurdish language is not taught in state schools although can be provided privately by teachers who have a permit (see [Treatment by the state](#), [Education](#) and [Employment](#)).

2.4.3 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 (UT) found: ‘Kurds in Iran face discrimination. However, the evidence does not support a contention that such discrimination is, in general, at such a level as to amount to persecution or Article 3 ill-treatment.’ (paragraph 98 (2)).

2.4.4 In [HB](#), the UT also 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 See also [Returnees](#) and the [Country Policy and Information Note on Iran: illegal exit](#).

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, although when combined with other factors, 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 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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b. [Kurdish political activity and perceived political activity](#)

2.4.8 The headquarters of Kurdish political parties are based in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) as they are illegal in Iran, so their presence and level of activity in the country is limited. Members in Iran generally meet in secret to discuss politics and, alongside supporters (sometimes referred to as sympathisers), are encouraged, often via Kurdish and social media to take part in peaceful propaganda activities such as protests, general strikes, distributing leaflets (under cover of night), slogan writing, or more symbolic actions such as wearing traditional Kurdish clothing, or promoting Kurdish language and culture. Party members and supporters are often organised in small 'cells' and tend not to disclose their political affiliation to others (see [Political parties](#) and [Political activities in Iran](#)).

2.4.9 Intelligence services and the military operating in Kurdish regions monitor the activities of persons deemed to oppose the Iranian government. Kurds asserting their ethnic and religious identity, engaging in or associated with civil or political activities, or promoting or perceived to be promoting separatism, may face arbitrary arrest, detention, be charged with national security-related offences and face lengthy prison sentences, and in some cases the death penalty. In 2020, over 500 Kurdish citizens were arrested and many charged in relation to their civic and political activities. Nearly 500 Kurds, including human rights defenders, were reported to have been arrested and detained for politically motivated reasons between 1 January and 25 October 2021 (see [Treatment by the state](#) and [Treatment of Kurdish political activists](#))

2.4.10 Iranian authorities arbitrarily target actual or perceived affiliates to Kurdish political parties who carry out activities such as participating in protests, strikes or leaflet distribution. The scale and extent of targeting by the state for these types of activities is difficult to quantify, although human rights groups frequently report on arrests of Kurds for actions deemed by the state as political. Additional profiles or activities that may be perceived as political and as a threat to the state include students, environmentalists, musicians, attending Nowruz celebrations and other cultural activities. The profile and activity of a person, or evidence of political affiliation, may increase the likelihood of arrest and severity of punishment. However, the majority of those arrested are not party members, but are party supporters or people who are not affiliated with a political party. Almost half of all political prisoners in Iran are Kurds and most are charged with crimes against national security. In the absence of evidence, torture, which is reported to be widespread, may be used to extract confessions (see [Political activities in Iran](#), [Targeting of political activists](#), [Target profiles](#), [Arrests, convictions and imprisonment](#) and [Allegations of torture](#)).

2.4.11 Iranian intelligence services operate in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) and spy on the activities of the Iranian Kurdish political parties, political and human rights activists and journalists (see [Monitoring in the KRI](#)).

2.4.12 In [HB](#) the UT found factors, which when combined with Kurdish ethnicity, may create a real risk of persecution or Article 3 ill-treatment (paragraph 98 (5)). These factors include:

‘A period of residence in the KRI by a Kurdish returnee is reasonably likely to result in additional questioning by the authorities on return. However, this is a factor that will be highly fact-specific and the degree of interest that such residence will excite will depend, non-exhaustively, on matters such as the length of residence in the KRI, what the person concerned was doing there and why they left.

‘Kurds involved in Kurdish political groups or activity are at risk of arrest, prolonged detention and physical abuse by the Iranian authorities. Even Kurds expressing peaceful dissent or who speak out about Kurdish rights also face a real risk of persecution or Article 3 ill-treatment.

‘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.’ (paragraph 98 (6) to (10)).

2.4.13 Family members of persons affiliated to Kurdish political parties, even if that affiliate is abroad, may be put under surveillance and at risk of arrest and detention and put under pressure to reveal the whereabouts and activities of their relative. Parents of party members based in KRI have also been pressured to bring their children home, though face no consequences if they fail in this task. Families of more high profile party members are likely to face greater pressure to succeed in this request (see [Targeting of activists’ family members](#)).

2.4.14 Evidence continues to support the findings in [HB](#) in that a person of Kurdish ethnicity found to be engaged in activities that are, or are perceived to be, political and against the state of Iran, which may include promoting Kurdish rights, are at a real risk of persecution or serious harm. Each case must be considered on its facts with the onus on the person to show that the activity engaged in is likely to be viewed as a Kurdish political activity or support for Kurdish rights by the Iranian authorities.

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

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c. Sur place activity

2.4.16 In the Country Guidance case of [BA \(Demonstrators in Britain – risk on return\) Iran CG \[2011\] UKUT 36 \(IAC\)](#), heard on 5 and 6 October 2010 and promulgated on 10 February 2011, the UT held that:

‘Given the large numbers of those who demonstrate here and the publicity which demonstrators receive, for example on Facebook, combined with the inability of the Iranian Government to monitor all returnees who have been involved in demonstrations here, regard must be had to the level of involvement of the individual here as well as any political activity which the individual might have been involved in Iran before seeking asylum in Britain.

‘Iranians returning to Iran are screened on arrival. A returnee who meets the profile of an activist may be detained while searches of documentation are made. Students, particularly those who have known political profiles are likely to be questioned as well as those who have exited illegally.

‘There is not a real risk of persecution for those who have exited Iran illegally or are merely returning from Britain. The conclusions of the Tribunal in the country guidance case of [SB \(risk on return -illegal exit\) Iran CG \[2009\] UKAIT 00053](#) are followed and endorsed.

‘There is no evidence of the use of facial recognition technology at the Imam Khomeini International airport, but there are a number of officials who may be able to recognize up to 200 faces at any one time. The procedures used by security at the airport are haphazard. It is therefore possible that those whom the regime might wish to question would not come to the attention of the regime on arrival. If, however, information is known about their activities abroad, they might well be picked up for questioning and/or transferred to a special court near the airport in Tehran after they have returned home.

‘It is important to consider the level of political involvement before considering the likelihood of the individual coming to the attention of the authorities and the priority that the Iranian regime would give to tracing him. It is only after considering those factors that the issue of whether or not there is a real risk of his facing persecution on return can be assessed’ (headnotes 1 to 3).

2.4.17 The UT in [BA](#) also held that:

‘The following are relevant factors to be considered when assessing risk on return having regard to sur place activities:

‘(i) Nature of sur place activity

- Theme of demonstrations – what do the demonstrators want (e.g. reform of the regime through to its violent overthrow); how will they be characterised by the regime?
- Role in demonstrations and political profile – can the person be described as a leader; mobiliser (e.g. addressing the crowd), organiser (e.g. leading

the chanting); or simply a member of the crowd; if the latter is he active or passive (e.g. does he carry a banner); what is his motive, and is this relevant to the profile he will have in the eyes of the regime?

- Extent of participation – has the person attended one or two demonstrations or is he a regular participant?
- Publicity attracted – has a demonstration attracted media coverage in the United Kingdom or the home country; nature of that publicity (quality of images; outlets where stories appear etc)?

‘(ii) Identification risk

- Surveillance of demonstrators – assuming the regime aims to identify demonstrators against it, how does it do so, through filming them, having agents who mingle in the crowd, reviewing images/recordings of demonstrations etc?
- Regime’s capacity to identify individuals – does the regime have advanced technology (e.g. for facial recognition); does it allocate human resources to fit names to faces in the crowd?

‘(iii) Factors triggering inquiry/action on return

- Profile – is the person known as a committed opponent or someone with a significant political profile; does he fall within a category which the regime regards as especially objectionable?
- Immigration history – how did the person leave the country (illegally; type of visa); where has the person been when abroad; is the timing and method of return more likely to lead to inquiry and/or being detained for more than a short period and ill-treated (overstayer; forced return)?

‘(iv) Consequences of identification

- Is there differentiation between demonstrators depending on the level of their political profile adverse to the regime?

‘(v) Identification risk on return

- Matching identification to person – if a person is identified is that information systematically stored and used; are border posts geared to the task?’ (headnote 4)

2.4.18 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 Upper Tribunal held that:

‘The cases of [BA \(Demonstrators in Britain – risk on return\) Iran CG \[2011\] UKUT 36 \(IAC\)](#); [SSH and HR \(illegal exit: failed asylum seeker\) Iran CG \[2016\] UKUT 00308 \(IAC\)](#); and [HB \(Kurds\) Iran CG \[2018\] UKUT 00430](#) continue accurately to reflect the situation for returnees to Iran. That guidance is hereby supplemented on the issue of risk on return arising from a person’s social media use (in particular, Facebook) and surveillance of that person by the authorities in Iran’ (paragraph 120).

2.4.19 Regarding surveillance by the Iranian authorities, in the country guidance case [XX](#) the UT held that:

- Surveillance

‘There is a disparity between, on the one hand, the Iranian state’s claims as to what it has been, or is, able to do to control or access the electronic data of its citizens who are in Iran or outside it; and on the other, its actual capabilities and extent of its actions. There is a stark gap in the evidence, beyond assertions by the Iranian government that Facebook accounts have been hacked and are being monitored. The evidence fails to show it is reasonably likely that the Iranian authorities are able to monitor, on a large scale, Facebook accounts. More focussed, ad hoc searches will necessarily be more labour-intensive and are therefore confined to individuals who are of significant adverse interest. The risk that an individual is targeted will be a nuanced one. Whose Facebook accounts will be targeted, before they are deleted, will depend on a person’s existing profile and where they fit onto a “social graph;” and the extent to which they or their social network may have their Facebook material accessed.

‘The likelihood of Facebook material being available to the Iranian authorities is affected by whether the person is or has been at any material time a person of significant interest, because if so, they are, in general, reasonably likely to have been the subject of targeted Facebook surveillance. In the case of such a person, this would mean that any additional risks that have arisen by creating a Facebook account containing material critical of, or otherwise inimical to, the Iranian authorities would not be mitigated by the closure of that account, as there is a real risk that the person would already have been the subject of targeted on-line surveillance, which is likely to have made the material known.

‘Where an Iranian national of any age returns to Iran, the fact of them not having a Facebook account, or having deleted an account, will not as such raise suspicions or concerns on the part of Iranian authorities.

‘A returnee from the UK to Iran who requires a laissez-passer or an emergency travel document (ETD) needs to complete an application form and submit it to the Iranian embassy in London. They are required to provide their address and telephone number, but not an email address or details of a social media account. While social media details are not asked for, the point of applying for an ETD is likely to be the first potential “pinch point,” referred to in [AB and Others \(internet activity - state of evidence\) Iran \[2015\] UKUT 257 \(IAC\)](#). It is not realistic to assume that internet searches will not be carried out until a person’s arrival in Iran. Those applicants for ETDs provide an obvious pool of people, in respect of whom basic searches (such as open internet searches) are likely to be carried out’ (paragraphs 121 to 124)

2.4.20 For further information and guidance on Facebook and social media use see the Country Policy and Information Note on [Iran: social media, surveillance and sur place activities](#).

2.4.21 The UT in [XX](#) accepted that ‘... the Iranian state targets dissident groups, including religious and ethnic minorities, such as those of Kurdish ethnic origin’ (paragraph 85).

2.4.22 In respect of the finding that a person of significant interest is, in general, reasonably likely to have been the subject of targeted Facebook surveillance, the UT in [XX](#) added:

‘We refer to the level of political involvement of an individual, as in [BA](#) and [HB](#); and the nature of “real-world” sur place activity, which would prompt such surveillance. By way of summary, relevant factors include: the theme of any demonstrations attended, for example, Kurdish political activism; the person’s role in demonstrations and political profile; the extent of their participation (including regularity of attendance); the publicity which a demonstration attracts; the likelihood of surveillance of particular demonstrations; and whether the person is a committed opponent’ (paragraph 92).

2.4.23 In [XX](#) the Upper Tribunal also found, ‘Discovery of material critical of the Iranian regime on Facebook, even if contrived, may make a material difference to the risk faced by someone returning to Iran. The extent of the risk they may face will continue to be fact sensitive. For example, an Iranian person of Kurdish ethnic origin may face a higher risk than the wider population’ (paragraph 103).

2.4.24 In the reported case of [AB and Others](#) the UT also made reference to the opportunistic use of material deemed critical of the Iranian regime and held that:

‘We do not find it at all relevant if a person had used the internet in an opportunistic way. We are aware of examples in some countries where there is clear evidence that the authorities are scornful of people who try to create a claim by being rude overseas. There is no evidence remotely similar to that in this case. The touchiness of the Iranian authorities does not seem to be in the least concerned with the motives of the person making a claim but if it is interested it makes the situation worse, not better because seeking asylum is being rude about the government of Iran and whilst that may not of itself be sufficient to lead to persecution it is a point in that direction’ (paragraph 464)

2.4.25 The factors cited in [XX](#), that is, Kurdish political activism and Kurdish ethnic origin (paragraphs 92 and 103), and in [AB and Others](#) regarding the opportunistic use of material critical of the Iranian regime (paragraph 464), should be taken into account when assessing risk of directed Facebook surveillance, in view of the findings in [HB](#), in that:

‘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’ (paragraph 98 (9)).

2.4.26 For further information on sur place activities, see the Country Policy and Information Note on [Iran: social media, surveillance and sur place activities](#).

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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](#).

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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](#).

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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 \(clearly unfounded claims\)](#).

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Country information

Section 3 updated: 27 April 2022

3. Background

3.1 History

- 3.1.1 For a brief history see the BBC News '[Who are the Kurds](#)' and the Kurdish Institute of Paris (Institut Kurde de Paris) '[A brief survey of The History of the Kurds](#)'.

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3.2 Demography

- 3.2.1 Kurds in Iran are estimated to number between 10 to 12 million, around 12% to 15% of the total population of Iran¹, which was estimated to be over 86.7 million in 2022².
- 3.2.2 Iranian Kurds mostly live in the north-west of the country in an area referred to by ethnic Kurds as Rojhelat (Iranian / Eastern Kurdistan³), meaning 'the place where the sun rises', which, as noted by Sardar Saadi, in an article published in 2020 by the Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP), 'refers to the eastern portion of Kurdistan – the Kurdish homeland that stretches across four countries.'⁴ Saadi added, 'The name [Rojhelat] reflects the understanding that the Kurdish region of western and northwestern Iran is part of a broader set of Kurdish lands, societies and economies that includes Rojava (northern and northeastern Syria), Bakur (eastern and southeastern Turkey) and Başur (northern Iraq).'⁵
- 3.2.3 According to The Kurdish Project, the Kurdish region of Iran '... includes parts of three Iranian provinces; the Kordestan [Kurdistan] Province, the Kermanshah Province, and the West Azerbaijan Province.'⁶ In a review of the January 2019 Country Policy and Information Note (CPIN) on Kurds and Kurdish political groups for the Independent Advisory Group for Country Information (IAGCI), under the purview of the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration (ICIBI), the reviewer (Anon.) also noted 'Iranian Kurds live in the provinces of Kurdistan, West Azerbaijan, Ilam, Lorestan, North Khorasan, and Razavi Khorasan.'⁷
- 3.2.4 The Kurdish Institute of Paris (Institut Kurde de Paris), described as 'an independent, non-political, secular organisation, embracing Kurdish intellectuals and artists from different horizons as well as Western specialists on Kurdish Studies'⁸, indicated in an undated article on the Kurdish

¹ Saadi S, '[The New Wave of Politics in the Struggle for Self-Determination in Rojhelat](#)', 2020

² CIA World Factbook, '[Iran](#)' (People and society), 27 April 2022

³ Stansfield G and Hassaniyan A, '[Kurdish insurgency in Rojhelat: from Rasan...](#)', 2021

⁴ Saadi S, '[The New Wave of Politics in the Struggle for Self-Determination in Rojhelat](#)', 2020

⁵ Saadi S, '[The New Wave of Politics in the Struggle for Self-Determination in Rojhelat](#)', 2020

⁶ Kurdish Project, '[Iran \(Rojhelat or Eastern Kurdistan\)](#)', no date

⁷ ICIBI, '[Inspection Report on Country of Origin Information...](#)' (page 68), January 2022

⁸ Kurdish Institute, '[Who is the Kurdish Institute?](#)', no date

population that there were around half a million Kurds living in Tehran⁹, which has a total population of about 9.3 million (2022 estimate)¹⁰.

3.3 Map

3.3.1 Maps showing areas with a Kurdish majority population^{11 12}



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⁹ Kurdish Institute, '[The Kurdish population](#)', no date

¹⁰ CIA World Factbook, '[Iran](#)' (People and society), updated 19 April 2022

¹¹ Encyclopedia Britannica, '[Kurdish settlements in Southwest Asia](#)', 2008

¹² Kurdish Institute, '[Administrative Units of Contemporary Kurdistan](#)', no date

3.4 Religion and faith

- 3.4.1 According to the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) profile on Iranian Kurdistan, dated November 2017, 'Iranian Kurdistan has a mixed population of Shi'a and Sunni, as well as followers of the pre-Islamic Kurdish religion of Yarsan. Religion does not form the basis of Kurdish national identity.'¹³ Most Kurds were Muslim (approximately 66% Sunni and 27% Shi'a)^{14 15}.
- 3.4.2 Followers of the Yari faith, the Yaresan (Yarsan^{16 17}) in Iran were most commonly known as Ahl-e Haqq (People of the Truth¹⁸), noted a report by the Danish Immigration Service, dated April 2017, which was based on a range of sources¹⁹. The report added 'The group often call themselves a "tayefe" (meaning tribe or group) or "Yaresan". Other appellations employed for followers of Yari faith are "Aliullahi" or "Ali-Ilahi" (one who believes that Ali is God).'²⁰
- 3.4.3 According to sources consulted by the Danish Immigration Service, cited in an April 2017 report:
- '... the Yaresan of Iran are divided into two main groups which differ both in their religious outlook and their relationship with the Iranian authorities. These two groups are labelled by these sources as "modernist"/"reformed" and "traditionalist" branches of Yaresan. Whilst the "modernist" branch, who are mainly city-centered well-educated Yaresan, consider their faith as a version of Shia Islam, the "traditionalist" Yaresan who are mostly from the country-side of Kermanshah province perceive Yari faith as a non-muslim religion.'²¹
- 3.4.4 The same report noted that, in public, 'traditionalist' Yaresan present themselves as Muslims, and when interacting with the state they register as Muslims '... in connection with registration for official documents or in connection with education and application for jobs.'²²
- 3.4.5 For more details of the 'modernist' and 'traditionalist' groups, see the [Danish Immigration Service](#) report.
- 3.4.6 The Danish Immigration Service report noted in regard to demography of the Yaresan:
- 'In Iran, the Yaresan are mainly concentrated in the province of Kermanshah with estimates of approximately half a million Yaresanis. Groups of Yaresan also live in other areas of Iran, including West Azarbaijan, Lorestan, Tehran, Hamadan, Kelardasht, Karaj and Saveh. There are no accurate estimates of

¹³ UNPO, '[Iranian Kurdistan](#)' (page 2), November 2017

¹⁴ DFAT, '[Country Information Report Iran](#)' (paragraph 3.18), 14 April 2020

¹⁵ KMMK-G, '[Interim Annual Report...](#)' (page 3), October 2021

¹⁶ UNPO, '[Iranian Kurdistan](#)' (page 2), November 2017

¹⁷ BBC News, '[In pictures: Inside Iran's secretive Yarsan faith](#)', 13 November 2019

¹⁸ BBC News, '[In pictures: Inside Iran's secretive Yarsan faith](#)', 13 November 2019

¹⁹ Danish Immigration Service, '[Iran: The Yaresan](#)' (page 4), 6 April 2017

²⁰ Danish Immigration Service, '[Iran: The Yaresan](#)' (page 4), 6 April 2017

²¹ Danish Immigration Service, '[Iran: The Yaresan](#)' (page 4), 6 April 2017

²² Danish Immigration Service, '[Iran: The Yaresan](#)' (page 7), 6 April 2017

the size of the Yaresan community in Iran, and numbers range from one to four million.

'The area of Guran [also spelled Goran...] in the western part of Kermanshah, where the Yari faith has its origins and where many of sites considered holy to the Yaresan are located, has the "most dense concentration" of Yaresan. In the eastern part of Kermanshah, in the town of Sahneh and its surrounding villages, another Yaresan community is found.'²³

- 3.4.7 Faili Kurds follow Shi'a Islam^{24 25}, and reside in the southern part of Iranian Kurdistan²⁶, '... either close to the Iraqi border, including in Khuzestan, Lorestan, Kermanshah and Ilam provinces, or in major cities', according to the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) April 2020 report on Iran, which was informed by DFAT's on-the-ground knowledge and discussions with a range of sources in Iran, as well as relevant and credible open source reports, including those produced by: the United Nations and its agencies, the US Department of State, the UK Home Office, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, leading human rights organisations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Freedom House, and reputable news sources²⁷.

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3.5 Language

- 3.5.1 Article 15 of Iran's Constitution states 'The official language and script of Iran, the lingua franca of its people, is Persian. Official documents, correspondence, and texts, as well as textbooks, must be in this language and script. However, the use of regional and tribal languages in the press and mass media, as well as for teaching of their literature in schools, is allowed in addition to Persian.'²⁸
- 3.5.2 However, according to Ethnologue's Languages of the World, 'In practice, the use of Kurdish in general education in local situations has been limited.'²⁹ The US Department of State (USSD) noted in its 2021 human rights report that the use of minority languages as a language of instruction in schools were 'consistently barred' by the government³⁰, and Amnesty International noted that 'Persian remained the sole language of instruction in primary and secondary education.'³¹ The UN Special Rapporteur noted in his report on human rights in Iran, dated July 2019, that '... the Kurdish language is taught only by civil society groups, not in official schools.'³² See also [Access to Kurdish education](#).

²³ Danish Immigration Service, '[Iran: The Yaresan](#)' (page 6), 6 April 2017

²⁴ MRGI, '[Faili Kurds](#)', November 2017

²⁵ DFAT, '[Country Information Report Iran](#)' (paragraph 3.23), 14 April 2020

²⁶ ICIBI, '[Inspection Report on Country of Origin Information...](#)' (page 68), January 2022

²⁷ DFAT, '[Country Information Report Iran](#)' (paragraph 3.23), 14 April 2020

²⁸ Constitute, '[Iran \(Islamic Republic of\)'s Constitution](#)' (Article 15), 1979, revised 1989

²⁹ Eberhard, David M, and others, '[Ethnologue](#)' (Iran, Northern Kurdish), 2021

³⁰ USSD, '[2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iran](#)' (Section 6), 12 April 2022

³¹ Amnesty International, '[Iran 2021](#)' (Discrimination – Ethnic minorities), 29 March 2022

³² UNHRC, '[Report of the Special Rapporteur...](#)' (paragraph 86), 18 July 2019

- 3.5.3 A 2014 paper by Professor Geoffrey Haig and Dr Ergin Öpengin (both renowned linguists in Kurdish and Iranian languages³³), referred to 5 language groups of Kurdish language: Northern Kurdish (Kurmanji), Central Kurdish (Sorani), Southern Kurdish, Gorani, and Zazaki³⁴.
- 3.5.4 Northern Kurdish (Kurmanji) was classed as a language of Turkey by Ethnologue, but had around 485,000 users in Iran, mainly in ‘North Khorasan province: Quchan and Bojnurd towns; Mazandaran province: Kalardast region; West Azerbaijan, Golestan, Razavi Khorasan, and Qazvin provinces; east of the Caspian Sea, north and west of Lake Urmia (Khorasani Kurmanji dialect).’³⁵
- 3.5.5 Whilst Central Kurdish (Sorani) was classed as a language of Iraq by Ethnologue, it had 557,000 users in Iran in the following areas: ‘West Azerbaijan and Kordestan provinces; also Hamadan, Kermanshah, and Zanjan provinces; Mahabad area (Mukri dialect); Sanandaj (Sine) area (Sanandaji dialect).’³⁶
- 3.5.6 Southern Kurdish had, according to Ethnologue, 3,730,000 users in ‘Hamadan, Ilam, Lorestan, Kermanshah, Khuzestan, and Kordestan provinces; Sistan and Baluchestan province: southeast small area.’ Ethnologue noted that Southern Kurdish language was used at ‘Home’ and it was common for the language to be learned by all the children within its user community. Southern Kurdish speakers also spoke Persian³⁷.
- 3.5.7 There were around 180,000 Gorani (Gurani) speakers in Iran in ‘Kermanshah province; Kordestan province: Iraq border area, Hewraman’, and, according to Ethnologue, users also spoke Central and Southern Kurdish, and Persian³⁸.
- 3.5.8 Zazaki (Northern and Southern) were listed as languages of Turkey and Ethnologue did not refer to its usage in Iran³⁹.
- 3.5.9 A map of language varieties spoken by Kurds was published in the Haig and Öpengin paper⁴⁰:

³³ ICIBI, [‘Inspection Report on Country of Origin Information...’](#) (page 69), January 2022

³⁴ Haig G and Öpengin E, [‘Kurdish: A critical research overview’](#) (page 109), 28 September 2014

³⁵ Eberhard, David M, and others, [‘Ethnologue’](#) (Iran, Northern Kurdish), 2021

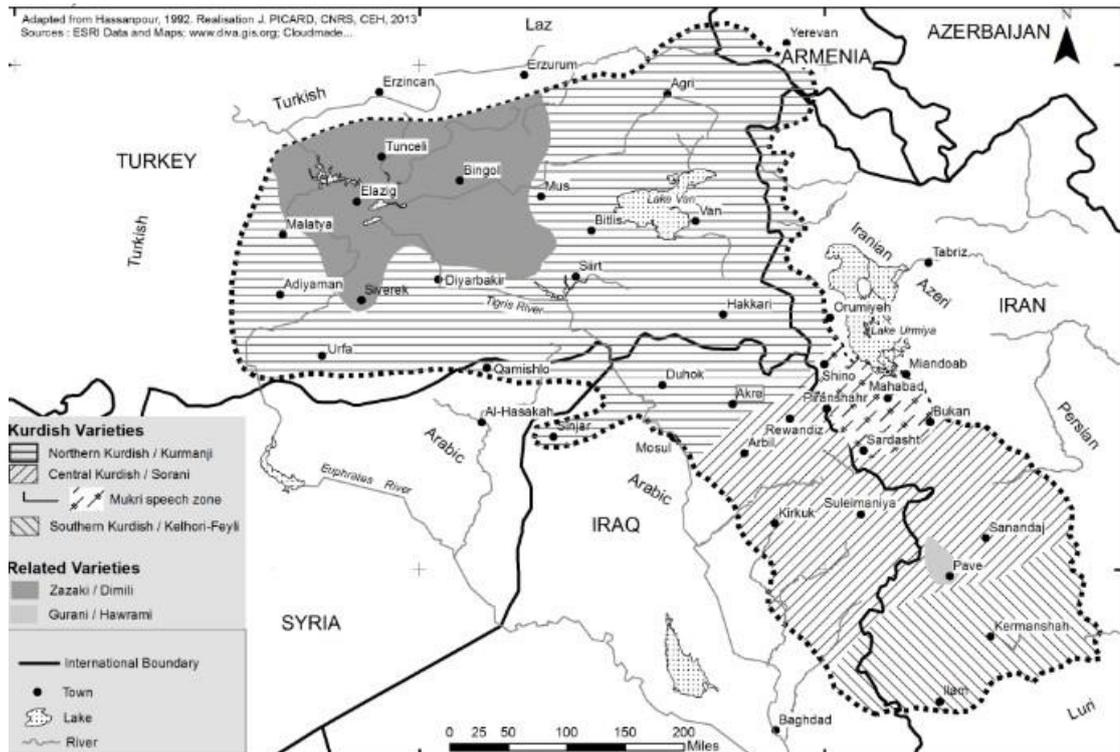
³⁶ Eberhard, David M, and others, [‘Ethnologue’](#) (Iran, Central Kurdish), 2021

³⁷ Eberhard, David M, and others, [‘Ethnologue’](#) (Iran, Southern Kurdish), 2021

³⁸ Eberhard, David M, and others, [‘Ethnologue’](#) (Iran, Gorani), 2021

³⁹ Eberhard, David M, and others, [‘Ethnologue’](#) (Turkey, Southern Zazaki and Northern Zazaki), 2021

⁴⁰ Haig G and Öpengin E, [‘Kurdish: A critical research overview’](#) (page 111), 28 September 2014



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Section 4 updated: 27 April 2022

4. Education

4.1 Access to Kurdish education

4.1.1 The UN Special Rapporteur noted in his report on the situation of human rights in Iran, dated July 2019, that:

‘The Special Rapporteur was informed that State schools do not offer education in Kurdish, which is available only to students through private classes, reducing the accessibility and affordability of Kurdish education. The Government has also placed restrictions by making it a requirement that teachers obtain State permits to teach the Kurdish language. The Special Rapporteur is also concerned about the reported persecution of Kurdish language teachers, including one young female teacher, Zara Mohammadi, who was arrested and detained by the Iranian authorities on 23 May 2019 for organizing private tuition without a permit in Sanandaj.’⁴¹

⁴¹ UNHRC, ‘[Report of the Special Rapporteur...](#)’ (paragraph 90), 18 July 2019

- 4.1.2 The UN Secretary General referred to Zara Mohammadi, noting ‘In February 2021, Ms. Mohammadi’s sentencing to imprisonment was upheld, but reduced to five years.’ The same source also referred to Anisa Jafari-Mehr, arrested by security forces in November 2020, for teaching the Kurdish language⁴².

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Section 5 updated: 27 April 2022

5. Employment

5.1 Employment rates

- 5.1.1 The April 2020 DFAT report noted:

‘The provinces in which Iranian Kurds are concentrated are relatively under-developed economically and have some of the highest rates of unemployment in the country. In April 2019, Kermanshah Province had the highest unemployment rate in Iran (20.9 per cent), with Kurdistan Province recording the second highest (19.6 per cent). West Azerbaijan and Ilam provinces recorded unemployment rates of 15.5 per cent and 10.3 per cent, respectively, in the same period. Many Kurdish men work as kolbars (border couriers) transporting goods between Iran and Iraq, although the Iranian authorities have clamped down on this activity in recent years... Kurds are not represented in senior military roles, and there are no senior Kurdish government officials.’⁴³

- 5.1.2 As noted in the UN Secretary General’s report on human rights in Iran, dated 14 May 2021, covering the period 1 June 2020 to 17 March 2021, ‘Reports estimate that around 70,000 Iranians, mostly of the Kurdish minority, depend on being a kolbar for sustenance, including women, many of them women heads of household.’⁴⁴

- 5.1.3 For further information on Kurds involved in smuggling, see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Iran: Smugglers](#).

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Section 6 updated: 27 April 2022

6. Military service

- 6.1.1 Military service is compulsory for all males aged between 18 and 49⁴⁵ ⁴⁶. For further information on military conscription see the Country Policy and Information Note on [Iran: Military service](#).

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⁴² UNHRC, ‘[Report of the Secretary General...](#)’ (paragraph 41), 14 May 2021

⁴³ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Iran](#)’ (paragraph 3.18), 14 April 2020

⁴⁴ UNHRC, ‘[Report of the Secretary General...](#)’ (paragraph 13), 14 May 2021

⁴⁵ CIA World Factbook, ‘[Iran](#)’ (Military and security), 19 April 2022

⁴⁶ Global Security, ‘[Iran – Military Conscription](#)’, 20 July 2019

7. Treatment by the state

7.1 Legal rights

7.1.1 Article 19 of Iran's Constitution states, 'All people of Iran, whatever the ethnic group or tribe to which they belong, enjoy equal rights; and color, race, language, and the like, do not bestow any privilege.'⁴⁷

7.1.2 Articles 12 and 13 refer to religion:

'Article 12: The official religion of Iran is Islam and the Twelver Ja'farî school [in usual al-Dîn and fiqh], and this principle will remain eternally immutable. Other Islamic schools, including the Hanafî, Shafi'î, Malikî, Hanbalî, and Zaydî, are to be accorded full respect, and their followers are free to act in accordance with their own jurisprudence in performing their religious rites. These schools enjoy official status in matters pertaining to religious education, affairs of personal status (marriage, divorce, inheritance, and wills) and related litigation in courts of law. In regions of the country where Muslims following any one of these schools of fiqh constitute the majority, local regulations, within the bounds of the jurisdiction of local councils, are to be in accordance with the respective school of fiqh, without infringing upon the rights of the followers of other schools.

'Article 13: Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian Iranians are the only recognized religious minorities, who, within the limits of the law, are free to perform their religious rites and ceremonies, and to act according to their own canon in matters of personal affairs and religious education.'⁴⁸

7.1.3 The USSD human rights report for 2021, published 12 April 2022, stated that, 'The constitution grants equal rights to all ethnic minorities, allowing minority languages to be used in media. The law grants the right of citizens to learn, use, and teach their own languages and dialects. Nonetheless, the government discriminated against minorities.'⁴⁹

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7.2 Discrimination

7.2.1 The USSD human rights report for 2021 noted that minority groups, including Kurds, reported, '... political and socioeconomic discrimination, particularly in their access to economic aid, business licenses, university admissions, job opportunities, permission to publish books, and housing and land rights.'⁵⁰ Furthermore, 'The government reportedly banned Kurdish-language newspapers, journals, and books and punished publishers, journalists, and writers for opposing and criticizing government policies. Authorities suppressed legitimate activities of Kurdish NGOs by denying them registration permits or bringing security charges against persons working with such organizations.'⁵¹

⁴⁷ Constitute, '[Iran \(Islamic Republic of\)'s Constitution](#)' (Article 19), 1979, revised 1989

⁴⁸ Constitute, '[Iran \(Islamic Republic of\)'s Constitution](#)' (Articles 12 and 13), 1979, revised 1989

⁴⁹ USSD, '[2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iran](#)' (Section 6), 12 April 2022

⁵⁰ USSD, '[2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iran](#)' (Section 6), 12 April 2022

⁵¹ USSD, '[2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iran](#)' (Section 6), 12 April 2022

- 7.2.2 In its annual report for 2021, Amnesty International echoed the prejudice faced by Kurds, as well as other minorities, stating that they ‘... faced discrimination, curtailing their access to education, employment and political office. Despite repeated calls for linguistic diversity, Persian remained the sole language of instruction in primary and secondary education.’⁵²
- 7.2.3 Bertelsmann Stiftung’s Transformation Index (BTI) for 2020, covering 1 February 2017 to 31 January 2019, considered that Kurds and other ethnic and religious minorities in Iran were ‘systematically discriminated against’ as they were not considered ‘loyal citizens’, and that they were ‘excluded from positions in public services and access to universities.’⁵³
- See also [Language](#) and [Access to Kurdish education](#).
- 7.2.4 The USSD report noted, ‘The law, which requires religious screening and allegiance to the concept of “governance by the jurist,” not found in Sunni Islam, impaired the ability of Sunni Muslims (many of whom are also Baluch, Ahwazi, or Kurdish) to integrate into civic life and to work in certain fields.’⁵⁴
- 7.2.5 In its annual interim report covering the period 1 January to 25 October 2021, the Kurdistan Human Rights Association-Geneva (KMMK-G) noted that the region of Iranian Kurdistan has ‘... a high level of unemployment and [people face] discriminatory policies of “the gozinesh”, religious monitoring based on one specific sect of Islam. According to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Iranian 1995 Selection Law based on Religious and Ethical Standards known as the “gozinesh” “impairs the equality of opportunity or treatment in employment for persons belonging to ethnic and religious minorities.’⁵⁵

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7.3 Target profiles

- 7.3.1 A joint report by the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) and Danish Refugee Council (DRC), on Kurds and Ahwazi Arabs, published February 2018, stated:

‘The Iranian authorities have [a] military presence in the Kurdish areas. The military presence is not always visible. Sometimes the military does not appear as ordinary military but in plain clothes ... Kurds asserting their ethnic and religious identity are a target, as well as Kurds engaging in or associated with political activities. Further, Kurds promoting or perceived to be promoting separatism are also a target.

‘A Western embassy noted that there is no persecution of Kurds solely because of their ethnicity in Iran. Another Western embassy mentioned that according to the Iranian laws, Kurds in Iran enjoy the same rights as other Iranian citizens; even though both embassies said that Kurds may be oppressed. Middle East Consultancy Services added that arbitrary detainment occurs.

⁵² Amnesty International, ‘[Iran 2021](#)’ (Discrimination – Ethnic minorities), 29 March 2022

⁵³ Bertelsmann Stiftung ‘[BTI 2020 Country Report Iran](#)’ (pages 13 and 36), 2020

⁵⁴ USSD, ‘[2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iran](#)’ (Section 6), 12 April 2022

⁵⁵ KMMK-G, ‘[Interim Annual Report...](#)’ (pages 3 to 4), October 2021

'The authorities may interfere in cultural activities conducted in the Kurdish areas, but it is difficult to point out when the red line is crossed and why the authorities intervene. An associate professor explained that it depends on time and event. Further, activities framed as Kurdish are regarded with suspicion. Middle East Consultancy Services stated that Iranian Kurds are free to celebrate cultural occasions such as Norooz. However, cultural events becoming political are an issue Middle East Consultancy Services mentioned as examples shouting political statements or carrying political iconography during the celebrations.

'Other activities that may trigger the attention of the authorities are gatherings of more than a few people. The authorities might interrogate the gathered people and arrest or question them without further prosecution, or with subsequent prosecution.'⁵⁶

7.3.2 The Danish Immigration Service report on Iranian Kurds, published February 2020, based on a range of sources, noted that 'The Kurdish area is militarized; there is about 1,800 checkpoints, a number of military compounds and a high security presence. The authorities monitor the population through these checkpoints and arrest individuals that are suspected of being politically affiliated.'⁵⁷

7.3.3 The same report noted:

'In Iran, any sort of political or civic activism that falls outside the purview of the Government creates suspicion. In particular in the Kurdish region, any activity is seen through a security lens; even civil and cultural activities are often interpreted as political. Therefore, individuals conducting civil or cultural activities are suppressed.

'Many organisations and NGOs are active in the Kurdish region of Iran. These activities include organising support for women's and children's rights, environmental associations and literary associations. The authorities consider this type of activity as potentially being against Iran's national security.'⁵⁸

7.3.4 According to a journalist cited in the Danish Immigration Service report, spies and informants working for the Ministry of Intelligence or Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) intelligence services operate in Kurdish cities to monitor the activities of persons deemed to oppose the Iranian government⁵⁹.

7.3.5 A joint letter by 36 civil society and human rights organizations, dated 3 February 2021, stated 'According to Kurdish human rights groups, in 2020, over 500 people from Iran's Kurdish minority, including human rights defenders, were arrested for politically motivated reasons and charged with broad and vaguely worded national security-related offenses. At least 159 of them were subsequently sentenced to prison terms ranging from one month to 17 years and four received the death penalty.'⁶⁰

⁵⁶ DIS and DRC, '[Iran: Issues concerning persons of ethnic...](#)' (pages 5 to 6), 23 February 2018

⁵⁷ Danish Immigration Service, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (page 21), February 2020

⁵⁸ Danish Immigration Service, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (page 19), February 2020

⁵⁹ Danish Immigration Service, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (page 21), February 2020

⁶⁰ HRW, '[Joint Letter: Urgent International Action Needed to Secure Release...](#)', 3 February 2021

- 7.3.6 Referring to the arrests of various activists since 6 January 2021, the letter noted, ‘... while a few of those arrested in the recent upsurge of repression are activists with a public profile and a prior record of involvement with environmental associations and cultural initiatives, the majority appear to be young men and women in their 20s who have pursued their nascent activism through informal circles focused on the civic and political empowerment of Iran’s Kurdish minority.’⁶¹

See also [Arbitrary arrest and detention](#) and [Targeting of political activists](#).

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7.4 Arbitrary arrest and detention

- 7.4.1 The UN Special Rapporteur noted in his January 2019 report that discrimination in the justice system presented itself by the disproportionate number of arrests of members of minority groups, including Kurds⁶².
- 7.4.2 According to the Kurdish Human Rights Network (KHRN), ‘At least 2,000 Iranian Kurdish civilians and activists were arrested from 21 March 2019 to 21 March 2020, in the provinces of Kurdistan, West Azerbaijan, Ilam and Kermanshah.’⁶³ At least 1,000 of these arrests took place in November 2019 during nationwide protests over the rise in fuel prices⁶⁴.
- 7.4.3 According to Kurdish human rights groups over 500 Kurdish citizens were arrested in 2020 and many charged with civic and political activities⁶⁵ (see [Target profiles](#)).
- 7.4.4 The Danish Immigration Service report of February 2020 were told by various sources that:
- ‘The majority of the arrested people are not party members, but rather supporters or people who are not affiliated with a political party. Several sources noted that people without affiliation to the political parties who conduct activities which the government perceives as being against its interests, may still arbitrarily be subject to arrest. However, the likelihood of getting arrested generally increases on the basis of the level of involvement for members as well as supporters.
- ‘The authorities assume that every active Kurdish individual is connected to a political party. People who are arrested are therefore often accused of membership of such. Many individuals, who are accused of having ties with Kurdish political parties, can in fact be innocent.
- ‘A source stressed that people get arrested for many different reasons, including being a family member of someone who is in prison, or being in support of an idea that goes against the ideology of the Iranian government. The same source gave an example of a young man who had no political affiliation. The young man walked by a demonstration without participating, but he was subsequently arrested for one month and was tortured during this time. After his release, he was given a paper by the authorities stating that

⁶¹ HRW, ‘[Joint Letter: Urgent International Action Needed to Secure Release...](#)’, 3 February 2021

⁶² UNHRC, ‘[Report of the Special Rapporteur...](#)’ (paragraph 14), 30 January 2019

⁶³ KHRN, ‘[At least 2,000 Iranian Kurdish civilians and activists were arrested...](#)’, 20 April 2020

⁶⁴ KHRN, ‘[At least 2,000 Iranian Kurdish civilians and activists were arrested...](#)’, 20 April 2020

⁶⁵ HRW, ‘[Joint Letter: Urgent International Action Needed to Secure Release...](#)’, 3 February 2021

he was arrested, because he was a member of the terrorist organisation Islamic State.’⁶⁶

7.4.5 An August 2020 report by the UN Secretary General noted:

‘Discrimination and violence against members of ethnic and religious minorities have resulted in deaths, injuries, arrests and sentencing, as well as long-term imprisonment and death on national security-related charges. On 3 February 2020, Branch 41 of the Supreme Court upheld the death sentence against seven members of the Kurdish minority for attending religious meetings and distributing religious material, following a process and trial that fell short of international human rights standards. All seven individuals have been sentenced to more than 10 years’ imprisonment and reportedly been subjected to torture and other inhumane and degrading treatment.’⁶⁷

7.4.6 A joint letter by 36 civil society and human rights organizations, dated February 2021, reported on the arrest and detention of numerous Iranian Kurds:

‘According to information gathered from informed sources, since 6 January 2021, at least 96 individuals (88 men and 8 women) from Iran’s Kurdish minority, including civil society activists, labor rights activists, environmentalists, writers, university students and formerly imprisoned political activists as well as individuals with no known history of activism, have been arrested by the intelligence unit of Iran’s Revolutionary Guards or ministry of intelligence agents, at times in a violent manner.

‘As of 2 February 2021, seven of those arrested had been released (in three cases on bail and in four cases unconditionally), but the rest remain in detention without access to their families and lawyers, and there are widespread fears that the wave of arbitrary arrests is continuing.’⁶⁸

7.4.7 Global Voices interviewed Taimoor Aliassi, co-founder and executive director of KMMK-G, who said in regard to the recent arrests that, ‘The detainees are members of civil society and they include students, environmentalists, cultural activists, musicians, and academics. For instance, five of the female detainees are all members of a Kurdish female musical group from the city of Kermanshah called “Gelaris”.’⁶⁹

7.4.8 On 23 March 2022, the KHRN reported that, ‘Iranian security forces have arrested dozens of Kurdish civilians and activists during and after the annual Newroz (also Nowruz in Persian) celebrations in Kurdistan in the past few weeks. The security agencies of the Islamic Republic of Iran have summoned and interrogated dozens and warned them against holding Newroz celebrations in public.’⁷⁰

7.4.9 See also [Targeting of political activists](#) and [Arrests, convictions and imprisonment](#) in the section on Treatment of Kurdish political activists.

⁶⁶ Danish Immigration Service, ‘[Iranian Kurds](#)’ (page 22), February 2020

⁶⁷ UNHRC, ‘[Report of the Secretary General...](#)’ (paragraph 39), 5 August 2020

⁶⁸ HRW, ‘[Joint Letter: Urgent International Action Needed to Secure Release...](#)’, 3 February 2021

⁶⁹ Global Voices, ‘[Nearly a hundred Kurdish activists detained by Iran’s security...](#)’, 3 February 2021

⁷⁰ KHRN, ‘[Newroz: Iran security forces detain dozens in Kurdistan over celebrations](#)’, 23 March 2022

7.5 Fair trial

- 7.5.1 Amnesty International stated in its report covering 2020 that in regard to trials generally, ‘Authorities continued to systematically deny individuals facing national security-related charges access to a lawyer at the investigation stage. In some cases, access was even denied at trial. Some defendants were tried in their absence because authorities failed either to notify them of their trial dates or transfer them from prison to court.’⁷¹
- 7.5.2 The KMMK-G noted in its annual report for 2020 that ‘Kurdish prisoners face unfair trials and are often convicted in proceedings marked by a pattern of abuses including the use of confessions made under torture and the denial of access to a lawyer.’⁷²
- 7.5.3 The UN Special Rapporteur indicated, in his July 2019 report, the disadvantages faced by Kurdish arrestees due to language barriers:
‘Given that Kurdish is not recognized as an official language for administrative purposes, official documents, interrogations and proceedings are all in Persian and simultaneous interpretation is reportedly not permitted. While Kurdish lawyers can assist in these language issues, individuals who are arrested often do not have access to lawyers during the interrogation stage and those charged with national security-related offences are made to choose a lawyer from a list vetted by the judiciary.’⁷³
- 7.5.4 The UN Secretary General’s 2021 report noted that:
‘Long pretrial detention is common. Under article 242 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, pretrial detention for up to two years in certain cases...
‘Lack of effective legal representation remains a due process concern. Lawyers’ ability to provide defence is often hindered, including through non-provision of essential documents and information about court dates, limitations to client visits and harassment. Under article 48 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, the right of those accused of crimes against national security to freely choose their lawyer is restricted to a list of lawyers pre-approved by the judiciary. In practice, individuals arrested on national security charges are often denied any access to a lawyer during the investigation phase...’⁷⁴

8. Iranian Kurdish political parties – overview

8.1 Political parties

- 8.1.1 Transliterations of names may vary, according to sources. For example, Hizbi (Hizb-i) (meaning ‘the party of’) is Kurdish, while Hezbe (Hezb-e) is

⁷¹ Amnesty International, ‘[Iran 2020](#)’ (Unfair trials), 7 April 2021

⁷² KMMK-G, ‘[Annual Report on the Situation of Human Rights...](#)’ (page 6), February 2021

⁷³ UNHRC, ‘[Report of the Special Rapporteur...](#)’ (paragraph 89), 18 July 2019

⁷⁴ UNHRC, ‘[Report of the Secretary General...](#)’ (paragraph 26), 14 May 2021

- [Kurdistan Freedom Party \(PAK\)](#) (Hizbi Azadi Kurdistan)⁹⁸ (Parti Azadi Kurdistan)⁹⁹.
- [Kurdistan Free Life Party \(PJAK\)](#) (Hezb-e Hayat-e Azad-e Kurdistan-e Iran)^{100 101} or Free Life Party of Kurdistan¹⁰². PJAK is divided by its military wing, the East Kurdistan Defense Forces (YRK), and its political wing, the East Kurdistan Democratic and Free Society (KODAR)^{103 104}.

8.1.4 The IAGCI reviewer explained that:

‘All these parties’ leaderships, military wings, publications, broadcasting centres and camps are based in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). Except for SKHKI, KDP[-Iran], and Khabat which have considerably less military presence in Iranian Kurdistan and want to be more committed to the Kurdish Government’s border policies, others, especially DPIK [PDKI], Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan and PJAK, carry out more active excursions into Iranian Kurdistan. The parties use their bases in Iraqi Kurdistan to manage their organisations in Iranian Kurdistan and supply them with political materials.’¹⁰⁵

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8.2 Political activities in Iran

8.2.1 According to sources consulted by the Danish Immigration Service for its report on Iranian Kurds, dated February 2020, when referring to the activities of members and supporters of Iranian Kurdish parties:

‘The level of civil political activities conducted by the Iranian Kurdish opposition parties, specifically KDPI [PDKI] and Komala in Iran is generally limited due to the scrutiny they are faced with. When the parties do conduct civil political activities, this is done in secrecy to prevent the authorities clamping down on them. However, the parties support the activities of others, such as organisations that focus on environmental issues as well as social issues.

‘The Kurdish political parties are conducting propaganda activities to create awareness regarding the Iranian government’s policies, encouraging people to protest by various peaceful and resolution oriented methods, such as demonstrations, general strikes and symbolic means, like wearing Kurdish clothes on special occasions.

‘Most activities carried out by the Kurdish parties take place in public spaces, including schools. For instance, when the anniversary of the assassination of KDPI [PDKI] leader Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou occurs or the anniversary of the foundation of Kurdistan Republic in Iran, letters are hung on government buildings to inform people of these anniversaries. The parties usually

⁹⁸ The Iran Primer (USIP), ‘[Iran’s Troubled Provinces: Kurdistan](#)’, updated 3 February 2021

⁹⁹ Danish Immigration Service, ‘[Iranian Kurds](#)’ (page 8), February 2020

¹⁰⁰ The Iran Primer (USIP), ‘[Iran’s Troubled Provinces: Kurdistan](#)’, updated 3 February 2021

¹⁰¹ Danish Immigration Service, ‘[Iranian Kurds](#)’ (pages 12 and 86), February 2020

¹⁰² PJAK, ‘[Policy](#)’, no date

¹⁰³ Jamestown Foundation, ‘[Party for Free Life in Kurdistan...](#)’, 15 January 2018

¹⁰⁴ The Iran Primer (USIP), ‘[Iran’s Troubled Provinces: Kurdistan](#)’, updated 3 February 2021

¹⁰⁵ ICIBI, ‘[Inspection Report on Country of Origin Information...](#)’ (page 70), January 2022

encourage their members, supporters and the public to undertake actions through social media, TV, and radio channels.¹⁰⁶

8.2.2 The DFAT report of April 2020 noted:

‘More than most other ethnic minorities, the Kurds have traditionally harboured separatist tendencies (Kurdish militants attempted unsuccessfully to break away from the Islamic Republic after the 1979 revolution). A number of militant groups – including the Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK), the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) and the Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan continue to promote Kurdish self-determination and occasionally engage in armed clashes with Iranian security forces, who maintain a large presence in Kurdish areas. Overall, Kurdish separatist activity in Iran has mostly been at a lower level than that in neighbouring countries, partly due to the fact that Iranian Kurds’ living standards tend to be higher than those of neighbouring Kurds. A local Kurdish source told DFAT that, while there is a perception among Kurds that the state deliberately holds them back, there is an acceptance that independence from Iran is not a viable option. Most Kurds, therefore, are committed to working within the Iranian political system to strengthen their rights as citizens and improve economic conditions in Kurdish-majority areas.’¹⁰⁷

8.2.3 As well as citing Persian-language sources, the IAGCI reviewer provided their view on Kurdish cultural and political activism, indicating that Kurdish political parties did not consider themselves separatists:

‘Ethnic minorities in Iran have historically been in tension with the central government. However, the Kurds have, in various ways, pursued their cultural and political rights more actively than others. The Iranian state accuses the Kurds of having separatist tendencies, which they have continuously denied. The Kurdish political parties do not call themselves separatists. Following the 1979 Revolution, the Kurdish region of Iran, especially the central areas where a revived Kurdish movement was present, was militarised by the new regime’s military forces. This ended a short-lived quasi-autonomy of the Kurds and led to a prolonged military conflict between the Kurdish political parties and the state which went on vigorously throughout the entire 1980s.

‘However, the intensity of the armed conflict receded in the 1990s. Since 2000, there have been sporadic clashes in Iranian Kurdistan, although not in the same intensity as before. The lower level of Kurdish armed activities is due to the emergence of many forms of civil society movements in Iranian Kurdistan, the restrictions imposed by the Kurdish government in northern Iraq, and the heavy military presence of Iran in the region.’¹⁰⁸

For more information on political activities see the relevant section under individual parties – PDKI – [Member or supporter activities and roles](#), KDP-I – [Member or supporter activities](#), [Komala activities](#).

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¹⁰⁶ Danish Immigration Service, ‘[Iranian Kurds](#)’ (page 16), February 2020

¹⁰⁷ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Iran](#)’ (paragraph 3.19), 14 April 2020

¹⁰⁸ ICIBI, ‘[Inspection Report on Country of Origin Information...](#)’ (page 71), January 2022

8.3 Kurdish military activity in Iran

- 8.3.1 A February 2017 query response by Landinfo on Kurdish military activity in Iran, based on a range of sources, but with a caution that access to sources reporting on the situation was often limited to the parties involved – that is Kurdish political parties and the Iranian state – noted:

‘In the past few years, there has been a gradual increase of military activity among some Iranian-Kurdish parties in Iran’s north-western provinces West Azerbaijan, Kurdistan and Kermanshah. From May to September 2016, armed conflicts between Kurdish guerrilla forces and Iranian security forces were reported almost weekly (Bucala & Enferadi 2016). In the past decade, it was mainly the Kurdish party PJAK that had military operations in north-western Iran. But since May 2016, the parties KDPI, KDP-I and PAK have also participated in military operations against Iranian security forces. All of these parties operate from military bases and camps in Northern Iraq. The Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has also strengthened its presence in the region in the same period and has attacked Kurdish villages on both the Iranian and Iraqi sides of the north-western border of the country.’¹⁰⁹

- 8.3.2 An April 2020 report on the PDKI by Landinfo, the Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre, which was based on a range of sources, including an information gathering trip to northern Iraq in October and November 2019, noted (all excerpts from this report were translated by [The Big Word](#) unless otherwise stated):

‘A new and relatively unknown armed group called the Zagros Eagles has been operating in Iranian Kurdistan since 2015. The group's actions are characterized by the fact that they have a more offensive character than actions carried out in PDKI's name. PDKI's spokesman for international relations, Loghman Ahmadi, has informed Landinfo that Zagros Eagles has no connections to PDKI. However, a reputable Kurdish journalist claimed to Landinfo that Zagros Eagles is part of PDKI. The group has allegedly been established as a separate group, to prevent PDKI's relations with Kurdish autonomous authorities in northern Iraq from being harmed by military activity in Iran .. The Iranian-Kurdish human rights organization Hengaw also writes that Zagros Eagles is affiliated with PDKI (Hengaw Organization for Human Rights 2018).

‘PDKI has posted a number of messages about actions in Zagros Eagles' name on the party's website and twitter account, most recently in December 2018 (Landinfo 2017, p. 6-7; PDKI 2018c; PDKI 2018d).’¹¹⁰

- 8.3.3 For more detailed information on the Zagros Eagles, see the Landinfo query response: [Iran: Increased Kurdish military activity in Iran](#).

- 8.3.4 Gareth Stansfield & Allan Hassaniyan of the University of Exeter’s Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies wrote in a research article dated 2021 that:

‘Since 2017, the PJAK has been involved in intense military clashes with Iranian forces, though the PJAK justifies attacks on Iranian military bases in

¹⁰⁹ Landinfo, ‘[Iran: Increased Kurdish military activity in Iran](#)’ (page 1), 13 February 2017

¹¹⁰ Landinfo, ‘[PDKI – Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan](#)’ (page 13, section 3.4), 2 April 2020

border areas more as a matter of retaliation rather than a distinct strategy of its struggle against the Iranian government. For instance, the PJAK attacked an IRGC base near Mariwan, killing eleven local members of the force in retaliation for the IRGC's murder of human rights activist Iqbal Moradi in Iraqi Kurdistan in July 2018.¹¹¹

8.3.5 Reporting on armed clashes in 2020, Hengaw cited its statistics, noting:

'Nearly 50 people have been killed and wounded during 2020 in war and clashes between the armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Kurdish parties.

'According to statistics recorded by the Statistics Center of Hengaw Human Rights Organization, at least 23 armed conflicts took place in Iranian Kurdistan during 2020, which is 10 cases less than 2019.

'According to Hengaw's statistics, 17 members of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards, police and Basij were killed during the clashes, while 11 members of Kurdish parties and a secret member of these parties were killed.'¹¹²

8.3.6 Hengaw continued to report on armed clashes in Kurdish regions of Iran between the IRGC forces and Kurdish party peshmergas [military forces] during 2021¹¹³.

8.3.7 Voice of America (VoA) reported on 23 September 2021 that 'Since the beginning of September, Iran's forces have been carrying out attacks using artillery and drone strikes on border villages accused of harboring Iranian Kurdish rebels. Tehran said it aims to dismantle the militant groups, which are accused of staging attacks on Iranian territory.'¹¹⁴

8.3.8 Iran's Penal Code refers to persons involved in armed activities:

'Article 287 – Any group that wages armed rebellion against the state of the Islamic Republic of Iran, shall be regarded as moharebs, and if they use [their] weapon, its members shall be sentenced to the death penalty.

'Article 288 – When members of the rebel group are arrested before any conflict occurs or a weapon is used, if the organization or core of that group exists, they shall be sentenced to a ta'zir imprisonment of the third degree, and if the organization or core of that group ceases to exist, they shall be sentenced to a ta'zir imprisonment of the fifth degree.'¹¹⁵

8.3.9 A mohareb is a person who commits moharebeh¹¹⁶. Article 279 of the Penal Code defines moharebeh as 'drawing a weapon on the life, property or chastity of people or to cause terror as it creates the atmosphere of insecurity.'¹¹⁷ Article 19 describes the 8 degrees of Ta'zir punishments¹¹⁸.

¹¹¹ Stansfield G and Hassaniyan A, '[Kurdish insurgency in Rojhelat: from Rasan...](#)', 2021

¹¹² Hengaw, '[War in Kurdistan: Hengaw's statistical report on casualties...](#)', 28 December 2020

¹¹³ Hengaw, '[War in Kurdistan](#)', various dates

¹¹⁴ VoA, '[Iran Ups Pressure on Kurdish Rebels](#)', 23 September 2021

¹¹⁵ IHRDC, '[English Translation of Books I & II...](#)' (Articles 287 and 288), 4 April 2014

¹¹⁶ ICIBI, '[Inspection Report on Country of Origin Information...](#)' (page 67), January 2022

¹¹⁷ IHRDC, '[English Translation of Books I & II...](#)' (Article 279), 4 April 2014

¹¹⁸ IHRDC, '[English Translation of Books I & II...](#)' (Article 19), 4 April 2014

9. Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI/KDPI/DKPI)

9.1 Background

- 9.1.1 The PDKI was established on 16 August 1945 in the city of Mahabad, Iranian Kurdistan, and described itself as a social democratic party, with an aim to ‘to attain Kurdish national rights within a federal and democratic Iran.’¹¹⁹ Mustafa Hijri is the leader of the party¹²⁰. According to its website, the PDKI’s international office is based in Paris¹²¹.
- 9.1.2 In its English summary of its April 2020 report on the PDKI, Landinfo noted: ‘The party head quarter[s] and a substantial part of its organizational bodies and members are based in exile in Northern Iraq. PDKI observed a truce between 1996 and 2015 but has since resumed limited military activity inside Iran. However, the main focus of the party is on civil activities, such as support to civil society in Iranian Kurdistan, and calls for protests and strikes. Membership or affiliation to the party might lead to the death penalty or to long prison sentences in Iran.’¹²²
- 9.1.3 Although a 2015 report published by the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior indicated that the PDKI had lost influence amongst the Kurdish population¹²³, according to the IAGCI reviewer, the PDKI has maintained popular appeal¹²⁴.

9.2 PDKI membership and recruitment

- 9.2.1 A Danish Immigration Service (DIS) and Danish Refugee Council (DRC) undertook a joint fact-finding mission to Erbil and Sulaimania, Iraq, in 2013, and interviews with a PDKI representative in Paris and an Iran scholar in November 2012¹²⁵. The subsequent report noted, ‘Regarding recruitment of new members to KDPI, Mohamed Sahebi [Central Committee member] informed the delegation that the minimum age for becoming a KDPI member is 18, and if a person is under below [sic] 18, he or she can become member of Lawan (Youth Organisation of KDPI). According to Mohamed Sahebi, if a person in Iran wishes to become member of KDPI, he may contact the local party cell and ask for it.’¹²⁶
- 9.2.2 According to Foad Khagi Beigi, General Secretary of Lawan, cited in the DIS and DRC report, ‘... anybody between the age of 13 and 30 in Iran, KRI, Europe or elsewhere can become member of Lawan. The requirements for

¹¹⁹ PDKI, ‘[About](#)’, no date

¹²⁰ PDKI, ‘[A Brief Biography of Mustafa Hijri](#)’, no date

¹²¹ PDKI, ‘[Contact](#)’, no date

¹²² Landinfo, ‘[PDKI – Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan](#)’ (page 4), 2 April 2020

¹²³ Austria: Federal Ministry of the Interior, ‘[The Kurds...](#)’ (page 170), November 2015

¹²⁴ ICIBI, ‘[Inspection Report on Country of Origin Information...](#)’ (page 72), January 2022

¹²⁵ DIS and DRC, ‘[Iranian Kurds](#)’ (page 7), September 2013

¹²⁶ DIS and DRC, ‘[Iranian Kurds](#)’ (page 32), September 2013

membership are that two members must be well-acquainted with and recommend the person, he must not be addicted to drugs and he must believe in democracy and freedom.¹²⁷

9.2.3 Landinfo also referred to the PDKI's youth group in its April 2020 report on the PDKI, 'The party has its own youth organization, Lawan, for members between the ages of 15 and 35. Lawan has offices in the Azadi camp [northern Iraq], and works both in KRI and inside Iran. The youth organization also has offices in various European countries...'¹²⁸

9.2.4 The DIS and DRC report referred to member profiles:

'Asked about the profile of persons admitted as members of the KDPI, Mohammad Nazif Qadiri [member of the Political Bureau] explained that individuals who believe in and call for the rights of the Kurds, and believe that the Kurds in Iran are suppressed, can become members. About the procedure for becoming a member, Mohammad Nazif Qadiri further explained that there is a six months' probation period. During this period, the person is investigated to make sure that he or she is a pacifist and has a pure belief about Kurdish rights. A part of the inquiry will be that the party members in Iran will carry out a secret investigation of the person. The individual also undergoes physical tests and participates in social events. After having passed these tests, the person is admitted as a member.'¹²⁹

9.2.5 The Danish Immigration Service report on Iranian Kurds, dated February 2020, cited the Kurdistan Human Rights Association – Geneva (KMMK-G), an independent non-affiliated association, who said in regard to recruiting PDKI members in Iran that training for new members is conducted in Koya and Qandil (Iran/Iraq border)¹³⁰.

9.2.6 According to the KMMK-G:

'The training course takes 3 months. It includes the teaching of Kurdish language, Kurdish history, the political party's history takes and geopolitics. Then according to the new comers' educational background, s/he will be sent to different departments. For instance, if the new comer is a journalist, s/he will be sent to KDPIs media department.

'The newcomers come voluntarily due to the fact that the level of repression is very high in Iranian Kurdistan and they have lost hope in reforms within the system; in addition to the repression, they suffer also discrimination because of the "Gozinesh" law [mandatory pre-employment screening that assesses adherence to Islam and loyalty to the Islamic Republic¹³¹]. KDPI generally encourage people, especially highly educated volunteers, to stay in Iran to work for KDPI in order to reinforce the party's presence in the villages and towns. It is also costly and requires space to house recruits in the bases in Iraqi Kurdistan.'¹³²

¹²⁷ DIS and DRC, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (page 32), September 2013

¹²⁸ Landinfo, '[PDKI – Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan](#)' (page 15, section 4.3), 2 April 2020

¹²⁹ DIS and DRC, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (pages 30 to 31), September 2013

¹³⁰ Danish Immigration Service, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (page 51, paragraph 24), February 2020

¹³¹ MRGI, '[Rights Denied: Violations against ethnic and religious minorities...](#)' (page 34), March 2018

¹³² Danish Immigration Service, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (page 51, paragraphs 24 and 25), February 2020

- 9.2.7 Sources in the Landinfo report on the PDKI indicated that new members in Iran were usually recruited on recommendation, that background checks were made, and they were monitored for a period of time before acceptance into the party:

‘Recruitment inside Iran usually takes place via acquaintances. Those who want to join the party need recommendations from other members to be approved. There is no fixed trial period before you are admitted as a member. Those who are eligible for membership are often monitored over a period of time, and a background check is performed before being accepted as a member of a secret cell (PDKI-medlem, interview October 2013). An Iranian-Kurdish journalist who became a member of a secret PDKI cell while living in Iran, explained that he was contacted by acquaintances and asked if he wanted to join the party. He taught Kurdish privately at the time and was well known among well-educated Kurds in the area. He also explained that those who were eligible for membership were usually observed over a period of time and that a background check was done to try to prevent Iranian intelligence from infiltrating the cells (Iranian-Kurdish journalist living in KRI, interview October 2019).’¹³³

- 9.2.8 According the PDKI representative in Paris, cited in the DIS and DRC 2013 report, if a party member’s identity is revealed to the Iranian authorities, they would be told to leave the country for security reasons. Mohammad Nazif Qadiri said that whilst the PDKI strives to keep members in Iran, if they face a ‘life threatening’ situation, they would be forced to leave. If a person is revealed as a sympathiser, they must also leave the country, said the PDKI Paris representative¹³⁴.

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9.3 PDKI membership structure

- 9.3.1 The DIS and DRC 2013 fact-finding mission noted that both Mohamed Sahebi, Member of the PDKI Central Committee and a PDKI representative in Paris referred to 3 groups of persons affiliated with the party: members, sympathisers and ‘friends’. Members have several responsibilities and work closely with the PDKI, sympathisers had fewer responsibilities than members, and friends of the PDKI did not have any direct responsibilities, but may participate in organised demonstrations alongside sympathisers. Friends could also undertake other supportive activities such as closing their shops during strikes, writing articles on the situation of Kurds in Iran, or offering financial support. Sympathisers and friends may be non-Kurdish, but generally only Kurds can be PDKI members, though there have been exceptions¹³⁵.
- 9.3.2 The Landinfo report also referred to affiliates of the party, citing an October 2019 interview with PDKI representatives of the party leadership, who said ‘... a distinction is made between members and supporters of the party. In

¹³³ Landinfo, ‘[PDKI – Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan](#)’ (page 19, section 6.1), 2 April 2020

¹³⁴ DIS and DRC, ‘[Iranian Kurds](#)’ (page 27), September 2013

¹³⁵ DIS and DRC, ‘[Iranian Kurds](#)’ (pages 24, 26 and 27), September 2013

some contexts, the term sympathizer is also used, but this is about the same as a supporter.¹³⁶

9.3.3 Sources affiliated to the PDKI, cited in the DIS and DRC report, indicated that members were organised into cells ('Hasteh' in Persian), consisting of between one and 11 members¹³⁷. Sympathisers were connected to and active within the party cell in their area, though their identity would only be known by their respective local cell¹³⁸. Political Bureau member, Mohammad Nazif Qadiri, told the DIS and DRC delegation that 'The organization of the party cells and the sympathizers takes place in accordance with the specific situation in the local area, and the number of sympathizers in a party cell depends on that situation. The party cells and sympathizers act according to instructions from the higher levels in the party organization.'¹³⁹

9.3.4 Citing an interview with the PDKI in October 2019, Landinfo noted in its April 2020 report:

'Despite many years of exile in northern Iraq, PDKI has a network of members and sympathizers inside Iran. According to PDKI representatives, the members inside Iran are organized in secret cell structures, and a number of security measures have been established to prevent them from being detected by Iranian intelligence. In each city there is a separate organizational structure. The members of the cells should not know other members outside the cell and only get the information they need to perform their tasks'¹⁴⁰

9.3.5 The same source stated:

'The organizational structure in Iran is completely separate from the organizational structure in northern Iraq and the two should not be confused. The party leadership in northern Iraq observes their work from a distance. As far as possible, they give the members inside Iran instructions on how to carry out their work. Occasionally, members of Iran cross the border into northern Iraq to receive instructions and conduct training, but in many cases it is difficult and risky for them to cross the border. Most often, they are advised not to come to northern Iraq unless absolutely necessary. Instead, it is the party's armed units that usually hand over instructions to the secret cells inside Iran in connection with their cross-border activities.'¹⁴¹

9.3.6 Describing PDKI cell structures, Landinfo referred to an October 2019 interview:

'An Iranian-Kurdish journalist who was previously part of a secret PDKI cell in Iran, explained that there were seven members in his cell. The cells had different tasks. His cell was responsible for security and gathered information about the Revolutionary Guards' movements in the area. Other cells had tasks related to recruiting new members or propaganda/information dissemination. The cells had between three and nine members at the time,

¹³⁶ Landinfo, '[PDKI – Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan](#)' (page 18, section 6), 2 April 2020

¹³⁷ DIS and DRC, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (page 26), September 2013

¹³⁸ DIS and DRC, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (pages 26 to 27), September 2013

¹³⁹ DIS and DRC, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (page 26), September 2013

¹⁴⁰ Landinfo, '[PDKI – Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan](#)' (page 16, section 5), 2 April 2020

¹⁴¹ Landinfo, '[PDKI – Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan](#)' (page 16, section 5), 2 April 2020

but today consist of one, three or five members. Each cell had its own rules for how they should carry out their work and ensure their safety. In his cell, there were three who maintained direct contact with the leadership of Koye [also known as Koya, Koy Sanjak or Koy Sinjak¹⁴², location of PDKI headquarters¹⁴³] in northern Iraq.¹⁴⁴

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9.4 Membership cards and registration

9.4.1 As noted in the DIS and DRC report of September 2013:

‘Mohammad Nazif Qadiri (KDPI) stated that KDPI normally does not issue ID cards and certainly not to members in Iran. ID cards will be issued only in special cases by the party’s headquarter in Khoysanjak [Koye] Camp in KRI, for instance when a member moves from one city to another and the holder of the card may need to be identified as a KDPI member. However, the party demands that the ID card must be returned to the KDPI office in KRI when the holder for instance, travels to Europe. However, this is not always done and the card holders have sometimes kept the card (which is against the KDPI rules). Consequently, ID cards are only issued in exceptional cases after a long and controlled process.’¹⁴⁵

9.4.2 The Landinfo April 2020 report also indicated that persons who leave or were excluded from the party, or who left KRI, must hand back their membership cards¹⁴⁶.

9.4.3 Mohammad Nazif Qadiri (KDPI) told the DIS and DRC delegation that membership cards have no fixed format, though the report added, ‘When asked about the appearance of the ID card, KDPI’s representative in Paris described it to be 5 cm x 8 cm in size with a stamp of the KDPI political and military council on its background.’¹⁴⁷

9.4.4 The Landinfo April 2020 report stated in regard to membership cards that:

‘PDKI issues its own membership cards to members and to some followers. This is administered by the party’s organizing committee (Organization Board). The following groups can be issued a membership card (PDKI, interview October 2019):

- Those who work at the Azadi base in Koye or at other bases.
- Members living in the civilian refugee camps in northern Iraq outside the bases and their family members. For security reasons, they are issued cards stating that they are followers.
- Children born in KRI who are not registered with a residence permit by the Kurdish self-government authorities due to their parents’ situation. The party’s social committee will occasionally assist these children and

¹⁴² Mapcarta, ‘[Koya](#)’, no date

¹⁴³ Al Jazeera, ‘[Rockets hit Iranian Kurdish opposition offices in Iraq’s Koya](#)’, 8 September 2018

¹⁴⁴ Landinfo, ‘[PDKI – Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan](#)’ (page 16, section 5), 2 April 2020

¹⁴⁵ DIS and DRC, ‘[Iranian Kurds](#)’ (page 32), September 2013

¹⁴⁶ Landinfo, ‘[PDKI – Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan](#)’ (page 21, section 7), 2 April 2020

¹⁴⁷ DIS and DRC, ‘[Iranian Kurds](#)’ (page 32), September 2013

issue membership cards to them. These membership cards have a different design than the ordinary cards issued to party members.

'Members and supporters operating inside Iran will not be issued a membership card. This is due to security concerns and the danger of being discovered by Iranian intelligence (PDKI, interview October 2019).'¹⁴⁸

9.4.5 The Landinfo report also stated:

'The party has a separate register of all members of the party. This works much like an ordinary population register, and marriages, divorces and deaths are registered (PDKI, interview October 2019). Many of the members of northern Iraq who live at the party's bases are not formally registered with residence permits issued by the Kurdish autonomous authorities in Iraq. They can therefore not register their marriages with official Iraqi authorities. Instead, this is taken care of by the party's social committee, which registers all marriages between party members and issues a separate marriage certificate. Party members who marry Iraqi citizens do not need this service and can register their marriages in official courts in KRI (PDKI, interview October 2013).'¹⁴⁹

9.4.6 In regard to forged cards, the DIS and DRC report said that according to Mohammad Nazif Qadiri of PDKI, '... it is very easy to make a fraudulent copy of the membership card.' The same report added, 'According to KDPI's representative in Paris, many forged ID cards have been delivered to the authorities in Europe by the asylum seekers claiming to be KDPI members.'¹⁵⁰

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9.5 Confirmation of membership

9.5.1 The DIS and DRC report noted, 'Regarding letters of recommendation, KDPI's representative in Paris informed the delegation that when the representation in Paris is requested to verify whether a person is a party member or sympathizer, it will ask the party's headquarters in Khoysanjak Camp in KRI to investigate the case. Upon receiving the answer from Khoysanjak, the representation in Paris will issue a letter of recommendation.'¹⁵¹

9.5.2 Also referring to authenticating PDKI membership, the Landinfo report said that as well as issuing confirmation of membership, follower's may receive letters of confirmation albeit with different wording:

'The party can issue confirmations of membership. Earlier, such confirmations were issued at the party's office in Paris. As of 15 May 2019, this will be done exclusively from the Azadi base in Koye. This is administered by the party's Executive Office, which will conduct surveys, verify membership and approve all confirmations before they are issued. The confirmations are sent only from one specific email address or a specific fax

¹⁴⁸ Landinfo, '[PDKI – Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan](#)' (page 21, section 7), 2 April 2020

¹⁴⁹ Landinfo, '[PDKI – Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan](#)' (page 19, section 6), 2 April 2020

¹⁵⁰ DIS and DRC, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (page 32), September 2013

¹⁵¹ DIS and DRC, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (page 32), September 2013

number belonging to the party (PDKI, email September 2019; PDKI, interview October 2019).¹⁵²

- 9.5.3 Family members of PDKI martyrs living in the KRI's civilian camps may also be issued confirmation letters, stating they are supporters of the party, noted the Landinfo report¹⁵³. The report added:

'The party leadership states that they never issue confirmations to people who have not participated in any of the party's activities. They are sometimes contacted by people who have no affiliation with the party, and even by Kurds from other parts of Kurdistan. The party is also occasionally contacted by persons who work as informants for Iranian intelligence, but who try to pretend to be affiliated with the PDKI. The party does not issue confirmations to any of these categories (PDKI, interview October 2019).'¹⁵⁴

- 9.5.4 Both the DIS and DRC report and the Landinfo report indicated that membership confirmation letters were not sent directly to persons seeking asylum abroad. Instead, such letters would be sent to the relevant asylum authorities or the person's lawyer^{155 156}. Some verification letters were known to be fraudulent¹⁵⁷.

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9.6 Member or supporter activities and roles

- 9.6.1 The DIS and DRC report stated:

'Asked if there are different types of memberships within KDPI, Mohammad Nazif Qadiri (KDPI) explained that once a member is admitted to the party, he or she will receive a training course and will be assigned different duties in different sections according to his or her qualifications. This could be political work, NGO, media, administration, women's rights etc. In KDPI all members have the same rights but their responsibilities are different. Members of the KDPI start as fourth degree cadres, and will typically be promoted to third degree cadres after three years of training and different activities. A third degree cadre member can take on responsibilities in different commissions. After another three years and several courses, the member is promoted to second degree cadre. When having stayed for many years in the camp it is possible to be promoted as a first degree member. First degree members can be elected as a member of the central committee and re-elected after four years. Members of the party's Political Bureau, which is the highest organ of the party, are chosen among the members of the central committee. People who are only supportive of KDPI do not have a specific degree, but can be active in one of the KDPI's NGOs such as the women's union, the student union, youth union and Center for Education of Children.'¹⁵⁸

- 9.6.2 The DIS and DRC report also noted that:

¹⁵² Landinfo, '[PDKI – Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan](#)' (page 21, section 8), 2 April 2020

¹⁵³ Landinfo, '[PDKI – Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan](#)' (page 21, section 8), 2 April 2020

¹⁵⁴ Landinfo, '[PDKI – Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan](#)' (page 22, section 8), 2 April 2020

¹⁵⁵ DIS and DRC, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (pages 32 to 33), September 2013

¹⁵⁶ Landinfo, '[PDKI – Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan](#)' (page 22, section 8), 2 April 2020

¹⁵⁷ DIS and DRC, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (page 33), September 2013

¹⁵⁸ DIS and DRC, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (page 31), September 2013

'According to KDPI's representative in Paris, KDPI in Iran mainly carries out awareness raising activities. These activities include calling for civil disobedience as well as encouraging Iranian Kurds to participate in political protests and manifestations such as demonstrations and strikes. For instance, when a strike is to be set in motion, it requires approximately two months of preparation most of which is to prepare the public opinion and encourage people to participate in that strike.'¹⁵⁹

- 9.6.3 Similarly, the Landinfo report of April 2020 and Danish Immigration Service February 2020 report stated that an important part of the work of the PDKI in Iran was to mobilise the population to partake in organised protests, or in strike action^{160 161}. Actions were encouraged via Kurdish media (radio and television) and social media outlets¹⁶². The 2013 DIS and DRC report, the Danish Immigration Service February 2020 report and the Landinfo April 2020 report also indicated that commemorations were encouraged, for example, the anniversary of the assassination of PDKI leader Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou (Qassimlu), though it was the decision of the party cell in Iran if or how an event took place^{163 164 165}.
- 9.6.4 Other awareness-raising activities included distributing leaflets (produced by party cells under the instruction of leaders in the KRI, and circulated by party sympathisers or friends¹⁶⁶), writing slogans on walls, hanging Kurdish flags on government buildings or wearing traditional Kurdish clothing^{167 168}.
- 9.6.5 According to sources cited in the DIS and DRC 2013 report, some PDKI members underwent peshmerga (military force) training (both theoretical and practical), prior to which they had to take introductory training on party discipline called 'Paziresh' (reception in Kurdish). Training took place in the KRI¹⁶⁹.
- 9.6.6 Both an Iran scholar and the PDKI Paris representative said in 2012 that the party did not undertake any military activities in Iran, although some groups or individuals may still possess weapons¹⁷⁰. However, the February 2020 Danish Immigration Service stated 'In February 2016, the KDPI leader, Mostafa Hijri announced that the party would re-launch their armed operations after two decades of silence. Other Iranian Kurdish opposition parties followed and also sent their forces to the border area.'¹⁷¹

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¹⁵⁹ DIS and DRC, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (page 27), September 2013

¹⁶⁰ Landinfo, '[PDKI – Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan](#)' (page 17, section 5.2), 2 April 2020

¹⁶¹ Danish Immigration Service, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (page 16), February 2020

¹⁶² Danish Immigration Service, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (page 16), February 2020

¹⁶³ DIS and DRC, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (page 28), September 2013

¹⁶⁴ Landinfo, '[PDKI – Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan](#)' (page 17, section 5.2), 2 April 2020

¹⁶⁵ Danish Immigration Service, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (page 16), February 2020

¹⁶⁶ DIS and DRC, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (pages 29 and 30), September 2013

¹⁶⁷ Landinfo, '[PDKI – Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan](#)' (page 17, section 5.2), 2 April 2020

¹⁶⁸ Danish Immigration Service, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (page 16 and page 50, paragraph 20), February 2020

¹⁶⁹ DIS and DRC, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (pages 33 to 35), September 2013

¹⁷⁰ DIS and DRC, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (page 27), September 2013

¹⁷¹ Danish Immigration Service, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (page 17), February 2020

10. Kurdish Democratic Party – Iran (KDP-I)

10.1 Background

10.1.1 A Landinfo report on the KDP-I (all excerpts from this report were translated by [The Big Word](#) unless otherwise stated), dated 19 May 2020, which was based on a range of sources, including an information gathering trip to northern Iraq in October and November 2019, noted in its English summary:

‘Kurdistan Democratic Party - Iran (KDP-I) is an Iranian Kurdish opposition party that split from the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI) in 2006. The party head quarter and a substantial part of its organizational bodies and members are based in exile in Northern Iraq. KDP-I observed a truce between 1996 and 2015 but has since resumed limited military activity inside Iran. However, the main focus of the party is on civil activities, such as support to civil society in Iranian Kurdistan, and calls for protests and strikes. Membership or affiliation to the party might lead to the death penalty or to long prison sentences in Iran.’¹⁷²

10.1.2 Referring to the party split, the same report added, ‘Despite the split, the two parties have formed a new cooperation forum which, in addition to PDKI and KDP-I, consists of two other Iranian-Kurdish parties. These are the two factions of the left-wing party Komala led by Omar Ilkhanizade and Abdullah Muhtadi respectively (KDP-I, interview November 2019; PDKI, interview October 2019).’¹⁷³

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10.2 KDP-I membership and recruitment

10.2.1 The DIS and DRC joint report on Iranian Kurds, dated 2013, noted:

‘According to Mustafa Moloudi (KDP-Iran), the requirements for people who want to become members of the party are first of all that they adhere to the goals and principles of the party, secondly that they have reached the age of 18, thirdly that they are of Iranian Kurdish origin, fourthly that they are recommended by two party members and finally that they must pay a monthly membership fee paid by all members...

‘Mustafa Moloudi (KDP-Iran) explained the process of recruitment of new members in Iran by saying that potential recruits are watched by the party members for a while. If a person is assessed to be a qualified and trustworthy candidate, then he will be approached by the party member watching him and asked if he is interested to join the party. If the candidate accepts to join the party and if the party finds it necessary, he will be sent to KRI to receive training. The source emphasized that recruitment of new members in Iran is not an easy task, and the involved party members will face a number of difficulties in this process, particularly due to the difficult security situation in Iran. Regarding the profile of the recruited, the source stated that the party focuses on recruitment of young people, particularly university students and educated men and women. The source stressed that

¹⁷² Landinfo, ‘[Kurdistan Democratic Party – Iran \(KDP-I\)](#)’ (page 4), 19 May 2020

¹⁷³ Landinfo, ‘[Kurdistan Democratic Party – Iran \(KDP-I\)](#)’ (page 8, section 2.1), 19 May 2020

the procedure for being recruited to the party is the same for men and women.¹⁷⁴

- 10.2.2 The DIS and DRC 2013 report noted that, according to Mustafa Moloudi (KDP-I), ‘... there are two types of membership of KDP-Iran: ordinary members and professional or full time members. A person who wants to become a party member must go through two months of training in the party’s training center in KRI. During these two months, aspirants are being taught about the party program and ideology and they also receive practical military training. During the whole period they will go through physical training.’¹⁷⁵
- 10.2.3 However, the report cited the same source as saying it was only sometimes that new members were trained in the KRI, ‘... persons who want to become member of the party in Iran... do not need to go to the party training center in KRI as they are trained by people from the party organization inside Iran.’¹⁷⁶
- 10.2.4 The Landinfo report on the KDP-I stated:
‘Some are recruited to secret cells inside Iran without going through training in northern Iraq. Recruitment takes place via acquaintances, or by interested parties contacting the party via social media and the party’s website. Those who want to join the party will be subject to a thorough background check (KDP-I’s youth organization, interview November 2019). In addition, they need recommendations from at least two members of the party to be approved (KDP-I, interview October 2013). Many of those who are part of the party’s secret cells in Iran are not formal members, but only supporters (KDP-I, interview March 2016; KDP-I, interview November 2019).’¹⁷⁷
- 10.2.5 The Landinfo report noted there was no fixed process for recruitment in Iran and went on to describe the method cited by an Iranian-Kurdish journalist who was recruited to the PDKI prior to the party split, whereby he was introduced to the party by acquaintances, adding that eligible members were observed for a period of time and had background checks¹⁷⁸ (see also [PDKI member profile and recruitment](#)). The Landinfo report also described the process for another KDP-I member, ‘A member of the KDP-I explained that she traveled from Iran to northern Iraq to visit her brother who was already a peshmerga for the party. She became a member and then returned to Iran where she worked for the party in secret for a while, before returning again to northern Iraq and settled at one of the party’s bases there (KDP-I, interview October 2013).’¹⁷⁹

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10.3 KDP-I membership structure

- 10.3.1 Similar to the PDKI, KDP-I members in Iran were organised into secret cells, according to sources cited in the Landinfo report,¹ which stated, ‘Despite many years of exile in northern Iraq, the KDP-I has a network of members

¹⁷⁴ DIS and DRC, ‘[Iranian Kurds](#)’ (pages 36 to 37), September 2013

¹⁷⁵ DIS and DRC, ‘[Iranian Kurds](#)’ (page 36), September 2013

¹⁷⁶ DIS and DRC, ‘[Iranian Kurds](#)’ (page 37), September 2013

¹⁷⁷ Landinfo, ‘[Kurdistan Democratic Party – Iran \(KDP-I\)](#)’ (page 19, section 7.1), 19 May 2020

¹⁷⁸ Landinfo, ‘[Kurdistan Democratic Party – Iran \(KDP-I\)](#)’ (page 19, section 7.1), 19 May 2020

¹⁷⁹ Landinfo, ‘[Kurdistan Democratic Party – Iran \(KDP-I\)](#)’ (page 19, section 7.1), 19 May 2020

and sympathizers inside Iran. These are organized into secret cell structures. One of the tasks of these cells is to assist the party's peshmerga soldiers as they cross the border into Iran (KDP-I, interview November 2019).¹⁸⁰

10.3.2 According to the DIS and DRC report, most KDP-I members in Iran were ordinary members, although there were processes in place whereby an ordinary member could rise to higher cadres, which followed a series of promotions over a period of time¹⁸¹.

10.3.3 Citing a November 2019 interview with the KDP-I, the Landinfo report referred to the party's departments:

'The party also has a number of departments with specific areas of responsibility (KDP-I, interview November 2019):

- Media department with responsibility for a weekly magazine, a radio station and a TV channel
- Organizing committee
- Budget department (financial commission)
- Social committee with responsibility for education, health, protection of children, legal matters and matters concerning martyrs and their families
- Women's organization
- Youth organization
- Student union
- Committee for political prisoners
- Committee responsible for training peshmerga [military forces]
- Security department
- Department of party members abroad.¹⁸²

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10.4 Membership cards

10.4.1 The 2013 DIS and DRC report indicated that membership cards were only issued to members in the KRI, but not in Iran:

'Mustafa Moloudi (KDP-Iran) informed the delegation that all party members in KRI are holders of a membership card. The membership card is of the size of a credit card and it has text on both sides. The membership cards issued to the full time professional members is of a pale blue color while the membership card issued to the ordinary members is of a pale yellow color. The party members living outside the party camp have the same pale yellow ID card as the ordinary members. The party's peshmargas are also issued the pale yellow ID card for up to one year and after that they will hold the same cards as the high level professional members. Secret members living

¹⁸⁰ Landinfo, '[Kurdistan Democratic Party – Iran \(KDP-I\)](#)' (page 13, section 5), 19 May 2020

¹⁸¹ DIS and DRC, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (pages 35 and 37), September 2013

¹⁸² Landinfo, '[Kurdistan Democratic Party – Iran \(KDP-I\)](#)' (page 12, section 4), 19 May 2020

in Iran do not hold a membership card for security reasons. Within the party camp, there is a social committee that issues marriage certificates and birth certificates since the local government in KRI does not issue these documents to Iranian Kurds.¹⁸³

- 10.4.2 The Landinfo report also referred to membership cards, which appeared to relate to members based in the KRI:

‘The party issues its own membership cards to the party members. For the peshmerga who live and work at the party’s bases, the membership cards do not have an expiration date. For members living in civilian refugee camps outside the party’s bases, membership cards are issued that are only valid for six months or one year. Membership cards are not issued to supporters of the party, only to members (KDP-I, interview November 2019).

‘The party’s women’s organization issues its own membership cards to its members. They are different from the ordinary membership cards. Members of the women’s organization can have membership cards both from the party and from the women’s organization (KDP-I, interview November 2019).¹⁸⁴

- 10.4.3 The Landinfo report also noted that ‘At the party’s headquarters, there is a register of all members of the party in Iran, but not of the supporters. The register is strictly guarded, and only a few trusted employees have access (KDP-I, interview November 2019).¹⁸⁵

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10.5 Confirmation of membership

- 10.5.1 The DIS and DRC 2013 report stated:

‘Mustafa Moloudi, (KDP-Iran) informed the delegation that the headquarters of the party in Khoysanjac, KRI issues letters of recommendation to members going abroad to seek asylum. Since all members have their names listed in the headquarters, it is possible to identify each one of them. The party issues letters of recommendation, but the source emphasized that letters of recommendation are not delivered to asylum seekers and they will only be issued directly to the asylum authorities or the asylum seekers’ lawyers in Europe. Every member has a written file within the headquarters which forms the basis of the description of the situation of the asylum seeker in the letter of recommendation. If a party member for instance goes to Denmark to seek asylum, he or she must address the local party committee that will then ask the headquarters to issue a letter of recommendation. The party’s sympathizers can also get a letter of recommendation if the KDP-Iran is certain that the person asking for the letter had to flee due to political activism. In such case it will be stated in the letter that he or she is a party sympathizer and not a member.¹⁸⁶

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¹⁸³ DIS and DRC, ‘[Iranian Kurds](#)’ (page 38), September 2013

¹⁸⁴ Landinfo, ‘[Kurdistan Democratic Party – Iran \(KDP-I\)](#)’ (page 17, section 6.1), 19 May 2020

¹⁸⁵ Landinfo, ‘[Kurdistan Democratic Party – Iran \(KDP-I\)](#)’ (page 17, section 6), 19 May 2020

¹⁸⁶ DIS and DRC, ‘[Iranian Kurds](#)’ (page 38), September 2013

10.6 Member or supporter activities

- 10.6.1 The DIS and DRC report noted that ‘According to Mustafa Moloudi (KDP-Iran), the party has secret members in Iran who carry out whatever mission they are asked to undertake by the party and report the result to the party. Sometimes they deliver political messages from the party’s headquarters in Iraq to Iran or secretly publish flyers and newspapers in Iran on different occasions and distribute them during the night.’¹⁸⁷ Flyers were produced in the KRI, then sent electronically to Iran and distributed by members or sympathisers of the party¹⁸⁸.
- 10.6.2 Landinfo stated in its report on the KDP-I that:
‘Like other Iranian-Kurdish parties, the KDP-I urges the Kurdish people of northwestern Iran to strike or take part in protests in connection with anniversaries, such as the anniversary of the assassination of party leader Qassimlu in 1989. Party members and sympathizers in Iran assist in organizing such activities. For example, they organized demonstrations after the Iranian missile attack on the headquarters in Koye in September 2018, which very many people joined (KDP-I, interview November 2019; Nawzad 2018).’¹⁸⁹
- 10.6.3 Similar to the PDKI, KDP-I members and sympathisers in Iran engage in activities such as writing slogans on house walls, and are encouraged to take part in civil society promoting Kurdish language, culture and literature, and raising awareness of human rights issues, especially amongst students¹⁹⁰. Sources indicated to Landinfo that members and supporters did not disclose their party affiliation or activities to others¹⁹¹.

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11. Kurdistan Freedom Party (PAK)

11.1 Background

- 11.1.1 The Iran Primer noted in February 2021, ‘Founded in 1991 by Said Yazdanpanah, the Kurdistan Freedom Party (PAK) is an Iranian Kurdish separatist movement that is engaged in both political and military activities. It is based in northern Iraq. The PAK is committed to an independent Kurdish state that would bring together territory from Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey.’¹⁹² According to sources, the PAK has close ties with the PDKI^{193 194}. Like other Kurdish parties, the PAK operates from the KRI¹⁹⁵.
- 11.1.2 The Iran Primer article stated ‘In 2016, the PAK militia kicked off a new offensive with an attack on an Iranian military parade near Sanandaj; it

¹⁸⁷ DIS and DRC, ‘[Iranian Kurds](#)’ (page 35), September 2013

¹⁸⁸ DIS and DRC, ‘[Iranian Kurds](#)’ (page 36), September 2013

¹⁸⁹ Landinfo, ‘[Kurdistan Democratic Party – Iran \(KDP-I\)](#)’ (page 14, section 5.2), 19 May 2020

¹⁹⁰ Landinfo, ‘[Kurdistan Democratic Party – Iran \(KDP-I\)](#)’ (page 15, section 5.2), 19 May 2020

¹⁹¹ Landinfo, ‘[Kurdistan Democratic Party – Iran \(KDP-I\)](#)’ (page 15, section 5.2), 19 May 2020

¹⁹² The Iran Primer (USIP), ‘[Iran’s Troubled Provinces: Kurdistan](#)’, updated 3 February 2021

¹⁹³ The Iran Primer (USIP), ‘[Iran’s Troubled Provinces: Kurdistan](#)’, updated 3 February 2021

¹⁹⁴ Milburn F, ‘[Iranian Kurdish Militias: Terrorist-Insurgents, Ethno Freedom Fighters...](#)’, May 2017

¹⁹⁵ Danish Immigration Service, ‘[Iranian Kurds](#)’ (page 18), February 2020

claimed to kill two Iranian forces. “We are only 1,000 [fighters], but we fight like 10,000,” Yazdanpanah [PAK leader] said in 2019. In May 2020, the PAK united its Peshmerga divisions into the “Kurdistan National Army” and called on other Kurdish parties to join forces.¹⁹⁶ According to another source cited in an article dated May 2017 by Franc Milburn, a political risk analyst specialised on Iraq, the PAK was estimated to have a few hundred fighters¹⁹⁷.

- 11.1.3 A query response by Landinfo dated February 2017 that the PAK’s guerrilla forces were referred to as The Kurdistan Freedom Eagles for East Kurdistan (HAK-R)¹⁹⁸.

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11.2 Membership

- 11.2.1 CPIT was not able to find relevant information on membership and recruitment to the PAK in the sources consulted (see [Bibliography](#)).

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12. Komala

12.1 Party names

- 12.1.1 Komala (meaning society in Kurdish¹⁹⁹) party names vary according to sources. There are a number of groups that claim the name Komala due to party splits^{200 201}. This note refers to 3 Komala parties using their English names and abbreviations as recommended by the IAGCI reviewer or, where available, as indicated on the parties English-language website: the Kurdistan Organisation of the Communist Party of Iran (Komala SKHKI), The Organisation of the Toilers of Kurdistan (Komala KZK), and Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan^{202 203}.

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12.2 Background

- 12.2.1 The Danish Immigration Service noted in its February 2020 report that, ‘The Komala Party was established in 1969. Its members at the time consisted of Kurdish leftist students and intellectuals mainly from Tehran but also from other Kurdish towns. Founded on socialist values, Komala fights for Kurdish rights and a democratic, secular and pluralist federal Iran. Komala consists

¹⁹⁶ The Iran Primer (USIP), ‘[Iran’s Troubled Provinces: Kurdistan](#)’, updated 3 February 2021

¹⁹⁷ Milburn F, ‘[Iranian Kurdish Militias: Terrorist-Insurgents, Ethno Freedom Fighters...](#)’, May 2017

¹⁹⁸ Landinfo, ‘[Iran: Increased Kurdish military activity in Iran](#)’ (page 8), 13 February 2017

¹⁹⁹ Austria: Federal Ministry of the Interior, ‘[The Kurds...](#)’ (page 171), November 2015

²⁰⁰ Austria: Federal Ministry of the Interior, ‘[The Kurds...](#)’ (pages 171 to 172), November 2015

²⁰¹ ACCORD, ‘[Iran: COI Compilation](#)’ (page 47), July 2018

²⁰² ICIBI, ‘[Inspection Report on Country of Origin Information...](#)’ (page 70), January 2022

²⁰³ Komala, ‘[About – Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan](#)’, no date

of three or more separate parties.²⁰⁴ Komala parties are based in the KRI as they are banned in Iran^{205 206}.

12.2.2 Although a 2015 report published by the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior indicated that Komala had 'become a shadow of its former self'²⁰⁷, according to the IAGCI reviewer, Komala has maintained popular appeal²⁰⁸.

12.2.3 The Danish Immigration Service report noted 'In late April 2017, one of the Komala parties, 'Komala-Party of Iranian Kurdistan' resumed its armed resistance against Iran and deployed their forces in the border area between KRI and Iran.'²⁰⁹

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12.3 Komala membership and recruitment

12.3.1 Recruitment into all Komala parties follow similar methodologies, as noted by the Danish Immigration Service February 2020 report, which said 'People in the Kurdish region of Iran can become members of the political parties through the secret networks of these parties, or they can themselves contact members of the party in KRI and become members. Those who want to join the party's ranks directly, have to approach these parties' centres in KRI.'²¹⁰ Background checks are made against persons wishing to join and members may undergo a period of training^{211 212}.

12.3.2 For further information on the recruitment process, see the Danish Refugee Council and Danish Immigration Service report: [Iranian Kurds On Conditions for Iranian Kurdish Parties in Iran and \[Kurdish Region of Iraq\] 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](#)²¹³.

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12.4 Membership cards and confirmation letters

Komala SKHKI

12.4.1 Referring to the Komala SKHKI, the DIS and DRC 2013 report noted:

'Ebrahim Alizadeh (Komala, SKHKI) informed the delegation that the party issues three types of membership cards. For people living in the camp on a permanent basis, a blue card of a credit card size is issued. On the card is stated father's name, paternal grandfather's name, mother's name, gender, date of birth and place of birth. For people living in the camp on a temporary basis a beige card that is one and a half time bigger than a credit card is being issued. Finally, the party issues a special card for the peshmarga. The

²⁰⁴ Danish Immigration Service, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (page 12), February 2020

²⁰⁵ Austria: Federal Ministry of the Interior, '[The Kurds...](#)' (page 173), November 2015

²⁰⁶ Landinfo, '[Iran: Komala-CPI](#)' (English summary, page 4), 3 February 2021

²⁰⁷ Austria: Federal Ministry of the Interior, '[The Kurds...](#)' (page 170), November 2015

²⁰⁸ ICIBI, '[Inspection Report on Country of Origin Information...](#)' (page 72), January 2022

²⁰⁹ Danish Immigration Service, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (page 17), February 2020

²¹⁰ Danish Immigration Service, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (page 16), February 2020

²¹¹ DIS and DRC, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (pages 44, 46 and 48), September 2013

²¹² Danish Immigration Service, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (page 17), February 2020

²¹³ DIS and DRC, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (pages 43, 46 and 48), September 2013

source further stated that if a member goes abroad, he or she must leave the membership card behind which they do not always do.²¹⁴

- 12.4.2 A February 2021 report by Landinfo on the Komala SKHKI, which it referred to as the Komala – Communist Party of Iran (Komala-CPI), based on a range of sources, including a fact-finding mission to northern Iraq in October and November 2019, noted (all excerpts from this report were translated by [The Big Word](#) unless otherwise stated):

‘The party issues membership cards to members and sympathizers in northern Iraq. One type of membership card is issued to members (andam) and another to sympathizers (layanger). In 2013, the party leadership also stated that peshmerga who had not yet achieved full membership were issued their own peshmerga ID by the party (Komala-CPI interview 2013). Those who live outside the camp are issued membership cards for sympathizers. This applies to the sympathizers, but also those who are members, but who for various reasons live outside the party headquarters (Komala-CPI interview 2019).

‘Members inside Iran will not be issued a membership card. Members in Europe do not have membership cards either, but the latter group can be issued a separate document without a picture but with their personal details and information about how long they have been members (Komala-CPI interview 2019).

‘Many of the party members who live at the base, and the sympathizers who live in civilian areas, lack a formal residence permit in KRI. As part of the agreement between the party and the authorities in KRI, membership cards issued by the party are accepted as ID when passing checkpoints (Komala-CPI interview 2013; Komala-CPI interview 2019).²¹⁵

- 12.4.3 The DIS and DRC 2013 report added detail on the issuance of recommendation letters:

‘Ebrahim Alizadeh (Komala, SKHKI) stated that Komala issues letters of recommendation which are sent from the party’s official e-mail address directly to the asylum authorities. According to the same source, neither a party ID-card nor a letter of recommendation handed over by an asylum applicant is proof of his or her membership of Komala. Only letters of recommendation received directly from the party by the asylum authorities can be considered as valid proof of membership. The party also issues letters of recommendation for its sympathizers. The letters will be made on the basis of an investigation into the sympathizer’s past activities. The source emphasized that the letter will only be issued for people who the party considers to be under threat.²¹⁶

- 12.4.4 The Landinfo report also referred to letters confirming membership, which it noted were issued at the request of the member or sympathiser. In regard to persons seeking asylum in Europe, the report stated:

²¹⁴ DIS and DRC, ‘[Iranian Kurds](#)’ (page 43), September 2013

²¹⁵ Landinfo, ‘[Iran: Komala-CPI](#)’ (pages 14 to 15, section 6.2), 3 February 2021

²¹⁶ DIS and DRC, ‘[Iranian Kurds](#)’ (page 43), September 2013

'The confirmations [of membership] are not handed out directly to the person concerned but are sent to the person's lawyer or to the immigration authorities in the relevant European country.

'Confirmations can be issued to both members and sympathizers who have been active in Iran or in KRI. Investigations are always carried out around those who ask for confirmations, among other things with a view to avoiding that confirmations are issued incorrectly or to persons who have worked for Iranian intelligence. The party's secret cells in Iran can assist in investigating the background of those requesting confirmations (Komala-CPI interview 2019).

'Confirmations can also be issued to those who become members of the party after traveling to Europe. In such cases, a minimum of two members of the party must confirm that the person is a member (Komala-CPI interview 2019).

'All confirmations issued to asylum seekers in Europe must be approved by a committee in Sweden consisting of three members. Since the last congress in 2017, all confirmations must be signed by committee member Adel Eliasi who lives in Stockholm. Before the last congress, the confirmations were signed by Ahmad Aziz Por (Komala-CPI interview 2019).'²¹⁷

Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan

12.4.5 The DIS and DRC 2013 report noted, 'Siamak Modarresi, Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan, informed the delegation that peshmergas and people working in the camp have membership cards. Besides, the party issues membership cards to its members in Iran. However, it was added that members in Iran may not carry their membership cards due to security reasons. The party has a copy of all membership cards in its archive.'²¹⁸

12.4.6 The same report noted in regard to issuing letters verifying membership, that:

'Siamak Modarresi, Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan, stated that party members who wish to seek asylum can go to the party representation in the country to which they have fled and ask the local secretary of the party for a letter of recommendation. The secretary will then address the party representation abroad, which is in Canada, who will ask the party camp in KRI to investigate the background of this person. If the asylum seeker is known to the party, the representation in Canada will issue the letter of recommendation and send it to the lawyer or the asylum court in the country in question. In some cases, a letter of recommendation can be issued directly from the camp. In the past, these letters were handed to the party member. This practice was however halted when it turned out that some letters of recommendation were fabricated. Today, the party does not hand over letters of recommendations directly to the asylum seeker. The source emphasized that if an asylum seeker delivers a letter of recommendation to

²¹⁷ Landinfo, '[Iran: Komala-CPI](#)' (page 15, section 6.3), 3 February 2021

²¹⁸ DIS and DRC, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (page 48), September 2013

the asylum authorities in Europe, the letter should be considered as fabricated.²¹⁹

Komala KZK

- 12.4.7 Although the DIS and DRC 2013 report did not indicate whether membership cards were issued by Komala KZK, it noted that ‘Omar Elkhanizade (Komala, KZK) mentioned that Komala, KZK, issues letters of recommendation to both members and sympathizers to support them in the asylum procedure. However, he stressed that these letters are sent directly to the immigration authorities.’²²⁰ According to the source, if a person has spent time in the Komala camp in KRI, they will be assessed whether they will face a risk on return to Iran and letters would only be issued if the person concerned was found to be under threat²²¹.

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12.5 Komala activities

- 12.5.1 Members of Komala parties may partake in secret meetings. Members or sympathisers in Iran may take part in demonstrations or distribute leaflets, sometimes at the behest of the party leadership in KRI, but other times on their own initiative^{222 223}.
- 12.5.2 See also [Targeting of political activists](#) for information on the difference in the way members and supporters of Kurdish parties are treated.
- 12.5.3 For further information on the member activities and leaflet distribution, see the Danish Refugee Council and Danish Immigration Service report: [Iranian Kurds On Conditions for Iranian Kurdish Parties in Iran and \[Kurdish Region of Iraq\] 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](#)²²⁴.

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Section 13 updated: 27 April 2022

13. Kurdistan Free Life Party / Free Life Party of Kurdistan (PJAK)

13.1 Background

- 13.1.1 The Danish Immigration Service noted in its February 2020 report noted that PJAK was founded in the late 1990s²²⁵, whilst other sources indicated that the PJAK was founded in 2004^{226 227}.
- 13.1.2 The Danish Immigration Service report noted the PJAK originated ‘... as an independent student-based human rights movement aiming to build a Kurdish national identity. The group is based in the Qandil Mountains in the border area of Iran, Iraq and Turkey. As opposed to Komala and KDPI,

²¹⁹ DIS and DRC, ‘[Iranian Kurds](#)’ (page 48), September 2013

²²⁰ DIS and DRC, ‘[Iranian Kurds](#)’ (page 46), September 2013

²²¹ DIS and DRC, ‘[Iranian Kurds](#)’ (page 46), September 2013

²²² DIS and DRC, ‘[Iranian Kurds](#)’ (pages 42, 45 to 47), September 2013

²²³ Danish Immigration Service, ‘[Iranian Kurds](#)’ (page 16), February 2020

²²⁴ DIS and DRC, ‘[Iranian Kurds](#)’ (pages 40 to 42 and 45 to 47), September 2013

²²⁵ Danish Immigration Service, ‘[Iranian Kurds](#)’ (page 12), February 2020

²²⁶ Landinfo, ‘[Iran: Det iransk-kurdiske partiet PJAK](#)’ (English summary, page 4), 18 December 2020

²²⁷ The Iran Primer (USIP), ‘[Iran’s Troubled Provinces: Kurdistan](#)’, updated 3 February 2021

PJAK does not rely on the support of Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).²²⁸

13.1.3 Unlike other Kurdish parties, the PJAK does not have any formalised presence or designated camps in the KRI^{229 230}.

13.1.4 In its December 2020 report on the PJAK (all excerpts from this report were translated by [The Big Word](#) unless otherwise stated), based on a range of sources, including an information gathering trip to northern Iraq in October and November 2019, Landinfo noted in its English summary that:

‘There are close ties between Turkish-Kurdish PKK and PJAK, and Abdullah Öcalan is PJAK's ideological inspirer. PJAK's goal is primarily increased autonomy for the Kurdish minority in Iran, but they also have a stated goal of regime change in the country. Like several other Kurdish parties, PJAK operates from northern Iraq.

‘A ceasefire was concluded between PJAK and the Iranian authorities in 2011. Up until the ceasefire, PJAK's military wing fought an armed struggle against the regime in Tehran. Iranian authorities responded by using military force, and several members have been arrested and sentenced to severe penalties, including the death penalty. The ceasefire still applies, but there are reports of constant breaches of the agreement.

‘PJAK is considered to be a pragmatic organization that uses a wide range of tools. In 2014, they established the grassroots movement KODAR, which is intended to mobilize the population, and especially the Kurds.’²³¹

13.1.5 An article in The Iran Primer noted that the PJAK:

‘...has both a militia and a political wing, the Free and Democratic Society of East Kurdistan (KODAR). Both are banned in Iran. PJAK was an offshoot of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), originally based in Turkey that later moved its operations to Iraq. PJAK has claimed that it is a separate organization, but some of its members were in the PKK and the two groups have similar ideologies. Its leader is Abdul Rahman Haji Ahmadi, who called them “brother parties” that share “the same core”.’²³²

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13.2 PJAK membership and recruitment

13.2.1 The DIS and DRC 2013 report stated:

‘Asked about recruitment of new members, Shamal Bishir (PJAK) explained that PJAK strives to recruit young men and women and to get them to come to the mountains and become professional members. In order to become a professional member of PJAK, one must have reached the age of 18 and be in good health. The source stressed that both men and women can become professional members. The source added that PJAK welcomes members of other ethnicities than Kurds. New members receive theoretical training that

²²⁸ Danish Immigration Service, ‘[Iranian Kurds](#)’ (page 12), February 2020

²²⁹ DIS and DRC, ‘[Iranian Kurds](#)’ (page 52), September 2013

²³⁰ Landinfo, ‘[Iran: Det iransk-kurdiske partiet PJAK](#)’ (page 21, section 6), 18 December 2020

²³¹ Landinfo, ‘[Iran: Det iransk-kurdiske partiet PJAK](#)’ (page 4), 18 December 2020

²³² The Iran Primer (USIP), ‘[Iran's Troubled Provinces: Kurdistan](#)’, updated 3 February 2021

includes the history of humanity, the history of Kurdistan, gender and the importance of women participation in the struggle, rhetoric, ecology and ecology awareness, military tactics and method. Besides theoretical training the member will practically go through military training too.²³³

13.2.2 The Landinfo report on the PJAK provided information on membership types, citing various sources:

‘Representatives of the PJAK explained in a meeting with Landinfo (October 2019) that there are different types of membership and different ways of being associated with the movement. They distinguish between three types of members:

1. Professional cadres. These are persons who have dedicated their lives to PJAK and are full-time warriors.
2. Regional cadres. These are persons who live primarily in Europe and Iran, but also in KRI.
3. “Support members”. These are members who do not dedicate their whole lives to the party, but who still want to make an effort.

‘There are similarities between regional cadres and support members. One difference, however, is that the regional cadres in Europe undergo a training program. Unlike professional cadres, regional cadres – both in Iran and Europe – can marry and have children (conversation October 2019).

‘Although PJAK’s membership does not consist exclusively of Iranian Kurds, PJAK is in reality, and in essence, an Iranian-Kurdish movement (Brandon 2018; PJAK 2020b).²³⁴

13.2.3 The Landinfo report noted in regard to KODAR:

‘According to representatives of PJAK (conversation, October 2019), the purpose of KODAR is for persons with different backgrounds to work together. There is no requirement for members of KODAR to share PJAK’s ideology, and it is possible to be affiliated with KODAR without being a member of PJAK. It was further pointed out that it is also possible to be a member of other political parties such as KDP-I or Komala, and at the same time be affiliated with KODAR. PJAK has invited all the Kurdish parties to participate in the attempts at mass mobilization, but this has been rejected.

‘KODAR organizes its own congresses, and according to PJAK’s website, the third congress was held in a mountain area in Kurdistan in May 2020.²³⁵

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13.3 PJAK membership structure and activities

13.3.1 Citing a range of sources, the Landinfo report on the PJAK stated, ‘Equality between women and men is a stated goal; both sexes must be equally represented at all levels in the organization, and they undergo the same

²³³ DIS and DRC, ‘[Iranian Kurds](#)’ (page 53), September 2013

²³⁴ Landinfo, ‘[Iran: Det iransk-kurdiske partiet PJAK](#)’ (page 18, section 5), 18 December 2020

²³⁵ Landinfo, ‘[Iran: Det iransk-kurdiske partiet PJAK](#)’ (pages 11 to 12, section 3.2), 18 December 2020

training program (conversation with PJAK, October 2019). It is estimated that up to half of the members are women...²³⁶

13.3.2 The report noted in regard to member numbers that:

‘The number of members in PJAK is uncertain. Different sources have different estimates. The question is also who is included, whether only the cadres, whether members of the cell structure are counted, and whether regional cadres and support members are included in the calculation.

‘According to Elling (2013, p. 69) PJAK had about 3,000 warriors in 2006. Analyst Thomas Renard estimated in 2008 that PJAK had between 2,000 and 3,000 women and men under arms (Renard 2008). Recent estimates suggest that the number may be somewhat lower. According to analyst James Brandon, PJAK has between 1,000 and 2,000 warriors (Brandon 2018). Academic and author Michael Gunter estimates the number of fighters in PJAK to be about 3,000, just under half (45 percent) are believed to be women. In addition, Gunter points out that PJAK allegedly have thousands of activists inside Iran (Gunter 2020, p. 64). This is in line with information provided by Bishir in 2012 – that PJAK had the main part of its organization and membership in Iran. Representatives of PJAK informed Landinfo in 2019 that they do not want to state the number of cadres.

‘The conflicting estimates of the number of cadres and activists illustrate how demanding it is to have access to reliable empirical evidence about a group that is referred to operate in secret.’²³⁷

13.3.3 Referring to PJAK’s presence in Iran, the Landinfo report noted:

‘PJAK is present in Iran, but all activity takes place underground, mainly in secret cells. Due to the Iranian authorities’ active intelligence activities against PJAK, the organization has become very cautious with regard to all forms of activity and meeting activities (PJAK, October 2019).

‘There is limited open and reliable information about cell structure, command lines and how many members there are in total. Representatives of PJAK are reluctant to share such information. It is in the nature of cell organization that this is about secret activity, and that the various cells should not have knowledge of other cells. The cells are largely autonomous and have developed their own methodology in the work. The cells develop their own, adapted precautions not to be revealed, for example how they store information material and which communication channels they use (PJAK, October 2019).

‘PJAK considers those associated with such cells to be “regional cadres”... According to PJAK itself, the regional cadres should not be about women and men under arms, but about raising people’s awareness on issues that PJAK considers important – spreading their ideas and worldview. Later, when the contact and trust is established, it may be relevant to go into PJAK’s ideology. In addition, the regional cadres report to the movement’s leadership in northern Iraq, including who has been wounded or killed in hostilities, information about arrests, and the situation of those in prison. If

²³⁶ Landinfo, ‘[Iran: Det iransk-kurdiske partiet PJAK](#)’ (page 10, section 3), 18 December 2020

²³⁷ Landinfo, ‘[Iran: Det iransk-kurdiske partiet PJAK](#)’ (pages 19 to 20, section 5.2), 18 December 2020

someone is engaged in armed clashes and is injured and arrested, the management will be informed of this (call, October 2019).²³⁸

13.3.4 The Landinfo report added:

‘In 2012, Bishir [Shamal Bishir, Head of Foreign Affairs, PJAK] said that PJAK has learned from its own and other organizations’ mistakes when it comes to cell structure. The lesson is that left-wing groups have organized themselves into oversized cells, which has resulted in the entire cell being revealed when one member was arrested. PJAK’s practice has therefore been that there should be smaller units, no more than five persons. As soon as there are more than five persons in a network, a new network is established. For the same reason, large meetings are not held. According to Bishir, the goal of PJAK’s activities in Iran was to create political and national awareness. Youth and women were especially given priority in this work, which was organized with small units that conducted underground at the local level in the cities (Bishir, conversation October 2012). Later, in 2014, KODAR was established with the purpose of mobilizing the population.²³⁹

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13.4 Membership cards and confirmation

13.4.1 Although a source in the 2013 DIS and DRC report indicated that the PJAK did not issue membership cards²⁴⁰, the Landinfo report, published in 2020 stated otherwise:

‘After going through the mandatory training, cadres can get a membership card. Not everyone is issued a membership certificate, nor is it a requirement on the part of PJAK. Some are only registered as cadres by the organization, without having a member ID (conversation, October 2019).

‘Like the other Kurdish parties, PJAK emphasized in a conversation with Landinfo (October 2019) that they always do background checks before issuing confirmations. They are aware that some state that they have been members, without it necessarily being correct. Therefore, they check whether the person has actually been a member of the party, and whether there are suspicions that the person in question works for Iranian intelligence. If the confirmation concerns a member who has worked in a secret cell inside Iran, or otherwise had to give support to the party in Iran, the party leadership will first verify what he has done for the party in Iran before issuing a confirmation.

‘PJAK has representatives in various European countries who can issue and sign confirmations, but only after receiving permission from the party leadership. There are several persons who have the authority to sign a confirmation letter. According to PJAK (October 2019), they do not give the confirmation letter directly to the member, but they send it to a lawyer in the case, or directly to the court or to the immigration authorities in the country in question.

²³⁸ Landinfo, ‘[Iran: Det iransk-kurdiske partiet PJAK](#)’ (page 24, section 7), 18 December 2020

²³⁹ Landinfo, ‘[Iran: Det iransk-kurdiske partiet PJAK](#)’ (pages 24 to 25, section 7), 18 December 2020

²⁴⁰ DIS and DRC, ‘[Iranian Kurds](#)’ (page 53), September 2013

'In 2012, Bishir explained that it happens that PJAK issues certificates to members who want to seek asylum outside Kurdistan, but only in rare cases. PJAK's policy is to encourage young people not to leave the country to seek asylum in Europe. Unlike other parties, Bishir explained, they want young people to stay in the country and mobilize against the Iranian regime. But there are exceptions; if a person has actually cooperated with PJAK, and there is evidence that he or she was forced to leave the country, for example an upcoming trial, confirmation of membership can be given. But it is the party that decides whether the person in question should go to Europe, and whether the asylum seeker becomes PJAK's representative in Europe (Bishir, call October 2012).'²⁴¹

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Section 14 updated: 27 April 2022

14. Treatment of Kurdish political activists

14.1 Targeting of political activists

14.1.1 Political activists were targeted by the state, as noted in the 2020 Danish Immigration Service report on Iranian Kurds, which stated:

'As Kurdish opposition parties are illegal in Iran, the Iranian government treats members and those, who support them, more harshly than civil activists in the Kurdish region and will be accused of severe violations. According to one source, even if they carry out simple activities, such as participating in an assembly of protesters or participating in a general strike, they will be accused of cooperating with opposition parties.'²⁴²

14.1.2 A joint report by the DIS, DRC and Landinfo, following a 2012 / 2013 fact-finding mission which, amongst other issues, explored the situation for persons of Kurdish origin, cited 2 human rights activists of Kurdish origin, who indicated that political party members distributed leaflets at night and noted, 'If an individual were caught with a leaflet, he would most likely be arrested and tortured as well as forced to confess to being a member of whatever group could have been behind such a publication. He or she would go through a five minute trial and the outcome [of] such a trial could vary from many years imprisonment to a mild sentence. It is impossible to say.'²⁴³

14.1.3 As to whether there was a difference in the way members and supporters of Kurdish parties were treated, the Danish Immigration Service report noted:

'A journalist in KRI... stated that most of the time the government of Iran does not differentiate between party members and supporters of the Kurdish political parties or even independent activists. One of the Komala parties, the Komala-Party of Iranian Kurdistan, informed Landinfo that if the Iranian authorities reveal that a person is a party member, s/he will be punished harder than [sic] other activists. Likewise, KDP-Iran informed Landinfo that those who are affiliated with the party will be punished harder by the Iranian authorities than those without affiliation.

²⁴¹ Landinfo, '[Iran: Det iransk-kurdiske partiet PJAK](#)' (page 20, section 5.3), 18 December 2020

²⁴² Danish Immigration Service, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (pages 19 to 20), February 2020

²⁴³ DIS, DRC and Landinfo, '[Iran: On Conversion to Christianity...](#)' (page 45), February 2013

'The targeting of individuals is arbitrary and varies from case to case. Whether or not the Iranian government makes a distinction between the targeting of party members and supporters depends, among other things, on the intelligence officer in charge.'²⁴⁴

14.1.4 The IAGCI reviewer commented on affiliates to Komala, saying that 'The distinction between a member and a sympathiser should not be interpreted in a way that reduces the role of a sympathiser in party activities and the danger they may face.'²⁴⁵

14.1.5 See also [Kurdish Democratic Party – Iran \(KDP-I\)](#) and [Komala](#)

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14.2 Monitoring in the KRI

14.2.1 The Danish Immigration Service report of February 2020 cited different sources who commented on Iranian state activity in the Kurdish Region of Iraq (KRI):

'The Ministry of Intelligence and the IRGC Intelligence Service are both active in KRI in different ways, and they spy on the activities of the Iranian Kurdish political parties, political and human rights activists and journalists. The IRGC international forces (the so-called 'Qods' forces) are also active in Iraq.

'The Iranian intelligence authorities threaten and target the political parties in KRI. As an example, a source pointed to the bombardments on 8 September 2018 of the KDPI camp Koya.'²⁴⁶

14.2.2 The same report also indicated that the IRGC used Iranian Kurds resident in the KRI as spies to report on the main Iranian Kurdish political parties and activists based in Erbil and Sulaimaniya²⁴⁷.

14.2.3 The report added, 'A political activist, who returns from KRI, will, according to one source, be sentenced to imprisonment upon return to Iran. For example, an Iranian Kurdish university teacher in Sulaimania, originally from Bukan, was arrested for affiliation with the Kurdish opposition parties...'²⁴⁸

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14.3 Arrests, convictions and imprisonment

14.3.1 In his July 2019 report, the UN Special Rapporteur noted that Kurdish political prisoners represented almost half of all political prisoners in the country. Most were charged with crimes against national security. Kurds also constituted a disproportionate share of those sentenced to death and executed²⁴⁹.

14.3.2 According to UN Special Rapporteur's report, 828 Kurds were arrested in 2018, and many of them were sentenced to long imprisonment for civil activism or membership in Kurdish political parties. In the first six months of

²⁴⁴ Danish Immigration Service, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (page 20), February 2020

²⁴⁵ ICIBI, '[Inspection Report on Country of Origin Information...](#)' (page 72), January 2022

²⁴⁶ Danish Immigration Service, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (page 29), February 2020

²⁴⁷ Danish Immigration Service, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (page 29), February 2020

²⁴⁸ Danish Immigration Service, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (page 34), February 2020

²⁴⁹ UNHRC, '[Report of the Special Rapporteur...](#)' (paragraph 87), 18 July 2019

2019, 199 Kurds were arrested, 115 of whom were charged in relation to membership of Kurdish political parties. Of the 199 Kurds arrested, 55 were sentenced to imprisonment for up to 15 years²⁵⁰. The Hengaw Organization for Human Rights recorded 142 cases against Kurds relating to political activism in the year 2019, resulting in 2 death sentences and a total of 658 years and 7 months in prison and 642 lashes²⁵¹.

- 14.3.3 The KMMK-G's annual report, covering 1 January to 31 December 2020, noted 72 Kurds were 'charged with the crime of cooperation and membership of Kurdish political parties.' Other charges cited by KMMK-G may also relate to political opposition, including participating in protests, 'acting against national security', and for 'moharebeh' or waging war against God²⁵². Hengaw noted that of the 437 Kurdish citizens it identified as arrested in 2020, most were held on charges of '... political activities and collaborating with Kurdish opposition parties.'²⁵³
- 14.3.4 The UN Secretary General's report relating to the period 1 June 2020 to 17 March 2021 noted that 'The Supreme Court upheld the death sentences for ten [10] Kurdish political prisoners on charges involving "acting against national security", efsad-e fel-arz, moharebeh and "membership of Salafi groups".'²⁵⁴
- 14.3.5 The KMMK-G interim report recorded the arrest and detention of 498 Kurds between 1 January and 25 October 2021, noting 'Without adherence to fundamental principles such as due process and fair trial, at least 139 of these detainees were charged with alleged "political and security"-related crimes, facing sentenced such as long years of imprisonment up to 40 years, lashes and heavy financial penalty and death penalty.'²⁵⁵
- 14.3.6 The Kurdistan Human Rights Network (KHRN) reported on hundreds of arrests and detentions of Kurds in its monthly reports published between January and October 2021. Data collated by CPIT from the KHRN January 2021 to March 2022 monthly reports indicated at least 67 Kurds received prison sentences for membership of or collaboration with Kurdish opposition parties, whilst numerous others were imprisoned on vague charges such as 'propaganda against the state'.²⁵⁶ In January 2021 alone, Hengaw reported that 102 Kurds were detained on charges pertaining to political activity and cooperation with Kurdish political parties, while 9 citizens were arrested on charges of civil activities and 4 citizens on charges of ideological and religious activities²⁵⁷. Throughout 2021 and into 2022, Hengaw reported on the arrests of Kurds on charges of political activity²⁵⁸.
- 14.3.7 The Landinfo report on the PJAK noted:

²⁵⁰ UNHRC, '[Report of the Special Rapporteur...](#)' (paragraph 88), 18 July 2019

²⁵¹ Hengaw, '[Issuing 3 executions sentences and more than seven centuries...](#)', 15 January 2020

²⁵² KMMK-G, '[Annual Report on the Situation of Human Rights...](#)' (page 22), February 2021

²⁵³ Hengaw, '[Statistical report on the human rights situation in Iranian...](#)', 31 December 2020

²⁵⁴ UNHRC, '[Report of the Secretary General...](#)' (paragraph 6), 14 May 2021

²⁵⁵ KMMK-G, '[Interim Report...](#)' (page 9), October 2021

²⁵⁶ KHRN, '[Monthly Reports](#)', January 2021 to March 2022

²⁵⁷ Hengaw, '[115 Kurdish citizens detained during January 2021](#)', 6 February 2021

²⁵⁸ Hengaw, '[Statistics](#)', various dates

'In October 2019, representatives of PJAK stated that they have several members in prison. Some have been sentenced to death, and some have been executed. Tips from informants can result in members of a cell being arrested. Landinfo's sources (conversations, October 2019) emphasized that the sentencing in the courts against Kurdish activists is associated with a significant degree of unpredictability. The same applies to which persons are sentenced to death. A representative of KDPI (interview, October 2019) claimed that the sentencing depends on the mood and daily form of the judge.

'It is not necessarily the case that those who are most profiled, or have the highest position, receive the death penalty. The main pattern, however, is that high profile and high activity increase the risk of severe punishment. Those who have waged an armed struggle, or are accused of it, are overrepresented among those who are sentenced to death (Danish Immigration Service 2020, p.10; KDPI, call October 2019).

'Foreign policy considerations may be the basis for a severe punishment or death sentence. For example, it could be about sending a message to, or trying to improve the relationship with, another country. Executing members of the PJAK can be seen as a signal to Turkey (Rojhelat 2019b).'²⁵⁹

14.3.8 Landinfo's report on the PDKI noted that persons who deny affiliation to a political party will receive lesser sentences than those who admit to membership, which may be due to pressure of interrogation²⁶⁰. According to a KDP-I representative, the length of sentencing was influenced by particular factors, such as:

- 'Those who are affiliated with a party receive long prison sentences. If you are also arrested in connection with military operations, you will be punished even more severely.'
- 'If no party affiliation can be proven, you often get a shorter prison sentence'
- 'Whether one admits guilt or not during interrogation affects the sentencing.'
- 'Some judges have a hostile attitude towards Kurds. The judge's personal attitude is important for the verdict.'
- 'The sections of the Penal Code that are used against the opposition are vague and have penalties ranging from a few months to thirty years in prison.'
- 'Sometimes the intelligence service and the prosecution just want to scare people from engaging in political activism. In other cases, they want to set examples and sentence persons who are not even affiliated to a party to long prison sentences.'²⁶¹

14.3.9 The Danish Immigration Service report stated:

²⁵⁹ Landinfo, '[Iran: Det iransk-kurdiske partiet PJAK](#)' (page 26, section 8.1), 18 December 2020

²⁶⁰ Landinfo, '[PDKI – Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan](#)' (page 24, section 9.1), 2 April 2020

²⁶¹ Landinfo, '[Kurdistan Democratic Party – Iran \(KDP-I\)](#)' (page 21, section 8.1), 19 May 2020

‘... according to sources, when someone, who is suspected of being a political activist or other kind of activist, is arrested, s/he will be detained for an unknown period. The sources estimated from 40 days to a year, and the person will be investigated and exposed to psychological and physical torture. If the detainee does not confess to the charges, the torture will be harsher. During the detention period, the prisoners are kept in a military intelligence facility without anyone knowing of their location.’²⁶²

14.3.10 The report added that a person facing political or security charges may be released on bail²⁶³.

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14.4 Allegations of torture

14.4.1 The UN Secretary General’s reports in 2019, 2020 and 2021 noted consistent reports of the use of torture to extract confessions^{264 265 266}. In his May 2021 report, it was noted:

‘The Secretary-General is alarmed at the number of documented cases of torture and ill-treatment of children, women and men. Testimonies, photos, audio files and forensic evidence show a pattern of physical and mental coercion to force a confession in the absence of other evidence. Between 2009 and 2019, State media broadcast forced confessions from at least 355 individuals. The heavy reliance of the justice system on confessions during investigations seems to be a major incentive for torture, reportedly undertaken by a range of actors, including the police, police intelligence, the Ministry of Intelligence, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps [IRGC] and security forces. While domestic law invalidates the use of forced confessions in courts, testimonies show that judges often refuse to investigate torture allegations and rely on forced confessions as evidence for conviction.’²⁶⁷

14.4.2 On 29 October 2021, the KHRN published a report on the conditions in secret detention centres identified in the Kurdish region of Iran, operated by the Ministry of Intelligence and the IRGC, and described by activists who had been detained there. Cells in the centres were described as small (varying from between 80cm x 2 metres, and 3 metres x 4 metres in size), unsanitary, sometimes multiple-occupancy, with limited ventilation or opportunity use the toilet or to exercise. Incidents of physical and psychological torture were also depicted by former inmates²⁶⁸.

14.4.3 Amnesty International noted in its annual report for 2021 that, ‘Torture and other ill-treatment remained widespread and systematic, especially during interrogation. Torture-tainted “confessions” were broadcast on state television and consistently used to issue convictions.’²⁶⁹

14.4.4 In September 2021, Amnesty International reported that:

²⁶² Danish Immigration Service, ‘[Iranian Kurds](#)’ (page 23), February 2020

²⁶³ Danish Immigration Service, ‘[Iranian Kurds](#)’ (page 23), February 2020

²⁶⁴ UNHRC, ‘[Report of the Secretary General...](#)’ (paragraph 12), 8 February 2019

²⁶⁵ UNHRC, ‘[Report of the Secretary General...](#)’ (paragraph 18), 5 August 2020

²⁶⁶ UNHRC, ‘[Report of the Secretary General...](#)’ (paragraph 22), 14 May 2021

²⁶⁷ UNHRC, ‘[Report of the Secretary General...](#)’ (paragraph 22), 14 May 2021

²⁶⁸ KHRN, ‘[A Report by Kurdistan Human Rights Network on Secret Detention...](#)’, 29 October 2021

²⁶⁹ Amnesty International, ‘[Iran 2021](#)’ (Discrimination – Ethnic minorities), 29 March 2022

'Iranian authorities have failed to provide accountability for at least 72 deaths in custody since January 2010, despite credible reports that they resulted from torture or other ill-treatment or the lethal use of firearms and tear gas by officials, said Amnesty International following yesterday's reports of yet another suspicious death in custody... In 46 of the deaths in custody cases, informed sources including the relatives and/or fellow inmates of the deceased reported that the death resulted from physical torture or other ill-treatment at the hands of intelligence and security agents or prison officials.'²⁷⁰

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14.5 Executions and extra-judicial killings

- 14.5.1 According to the 13th Annual Report on the Death Penalty in Iran, by Iran Human Rights (IHR) and Ensemble Contre la Peine de Mort (ECPM – Together Against the Death Penalty), which assesses and analyses trends in the death penalty, there were at least 69 Kurds executed in the period from 2010 to 2020 as a result of affiliation with prohibited political and militant groups²⁷¹. The same report also highlighted the over-representation of ethnic minorities among those who are executed²⁷².
- 14.5.2 The UN Secretary General cited the executions of 267 persons in 2020, 69 of whom were Kurds. Although the report did not indicate how many Kurds were executed due to political affiliation, it did say that at least 15 of the total 267 executions were for '... charges of moharebeh (taking up arms to take lives or property and to create fear in the public), efsad-e fel-arz (spreading corruption on Earth) and baghy (rebellion against the State)', similar to the death penalty charges that were upheld by the Supreme Court for 10 Kurdish political prisoners²⁷³ (see [Arrests, convictions and imprisonment](#)). Both the KMMK-G and Hengaw indicated that 4 Kurds were executed in 2020 for political reasons^{274 275}.
- 14.5.3 In its October 2020 report on the use of the death penalty in Iran, the International Federation for Human Rights (Fidh) cited numerous examples of the use of the death penalty against Kurds between 2013 and 2020, some of whom had been charged and convicted of membership of a Kurdish political party²⁷⁶.
- 14.5.4 The KMMK-G identified 56 Kurds executed between 1 January and 25 October 2021, noting that 11 of those were political prisoners killed 'in suspicious manners inside Iranian prisons often under torture and beatings according to their families and prison witnesses.'²⁷⁷
- 14.5.5 On 22 December 2021, the UN reported on the execution of Heidar Ghorbani after he was convicted, in what was described as an unfair trial and allegations of torture, of 'armed rebellion' and linked to the murder of 3

²⁷⁰ Amnesty International, '[Iran: A decade of deaths in custody unpunished...](#)', 15 September 2021

²⁷¹ IHR and ECPM, '[Annual Report on the death penalty in Iran 2020](#)' (page 87), 2021

²⁷² IHR and ECPM, '[Annual Report on the death penalty in Iran 2020](#)' (page 87), 2021

²⁷³ UNHRC, '[Report of the Secretary General...](#)' (paragraphs 5 and 6), 14 May 2021

²⁷⁴ KMMK-G, '[Annual Report on the Situation of Human Rights...](#)' (page 6), February 2021

²⁷⁵ Hengaw, '[Statistical report on the human rights situation in Iranian...](#)', 31 December 2020

²⁷⁶ Fidh, '[No one is spared: The widespread use of the death...](#)' (pages 30 to 32), October 2020

²⁷⁷ KMMK-G, '[Interim Annual Report...](#)' (pages 6 to 7), October 2021

men affiliated to the Basij paramilitary forces²⁷⁸. He was also ‘... found guilty of being a member of an exiled armed opposition group - the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI)’, reported BBC News²⁷⁹. Heidar denied all the charges^{280 281}.

14.5.6 The UN report stated:

‘UN human rights experts condemned in the strongest terms the arbitrary execution of Iranian Kurdish prisoner Mr. Heidar Ghorbani as a serious violation of Iran’s obligations under international human rights law.

‘Mr. Heidar Ghorbani, a Kurdish prisoner, was executed in secret in Sanandaj Central Prison at dawn on 19 December. His execution took place without prior notice to his family and lawyer, and his body was secretly buried by prison authorities.’²⁸²

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14.6 Targeting of activists’ family members

14.6.1 The KMMK-G Annual Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Kurdistan of Iran in 2020 noted ‘Revolutionary Guards and ministry of intelligence agents have subjected the families of detainees to threats and insults when they have sought information about their loved ones and warned them against speaking to the media or communicating with UN human rights bodies.’²⁸³

14.6.2 The Danish Immigration Service February 2020 report also indicated that family members of political activists or supporters may be at risk of being questioned, arrested and detained. The report noted that, according to various sources:

‘The Iranian government relies on extracting information from family members, in order for the family members to put pressure on the political party member or supporter. One source stated that if the authorities are aware that a person is a family member to a political party member, s/he is at risk of being subjected to torture.

‘Family members of anyone conducting social or political activities will be put under surveillance, which includes monitoring of phone calls and computer use as well as their movement.

‘The approach taken by the authorities towards the family can vary from case to case. In some cases a father is required to report to the intelligence authorities and pledge that he has not left the city or taken any other action to meet with his son/daughter. For example, two months ago, the father of a woman, who is a political activist living in camps inside KRI affiliated with one of the political parties, was arrested in the city of Marivan for visiting his daughter in KRI.

²⁷⁸ OHCHR, ‘[UN experts condemn secret execution of Kurdish prisoner in Iran](#)’, 22 December 2021

²⁷⁹ BBC News, ‘[Iran execution of Heidar Ghorbani sparks rare anti-government...](#)’, 19 December 2021

²⁸⁰ OHCHR, ‘[UN experts condemn secret execution of Kurdish prisoner in Iran](#)’, 22 December 2021

²⁸¹ BBC News, ‘[Iran execution of Heidar Ghorbani sparks rare anti-government...](#)’, 19 December 2021

²⁸² OHCHR, ‘[UN experts condemn secret execution of Kurdish prisoner in Iran](#)’, 22 December 2021

²⁸³ KMMK-G, ‘[Annual Report on the Situation of Human Rights...](#)’ (page 5), February 2021

'The punishment of the family members varies depending on the activity level of the activist. In some cases, the families have been arrested and charged.

'Close family members, such as spouses, children, parents, or siblings are more likely to be subject to arrest. In some cases, the authorities have arrested extended family members, because they were in touch with the politically active individual outside of the country.

'Family members of arrested or detained activists are threatened to keep the arrest secret. If the arrest is not kept secret, the torture against the arrestee will be harsher.

'Family members may also be denied jobs in the public sector in their home town and will have to move to another town to get a job.'²⁸⁴

14.6.3 The Landinfo report on the PJAK also referred to pressures faced by family members:

'It is reported that family members of Kurdish activists are exposed to various forms of pressure and surveillance. These may be siblings who lose their study place, or they may be excluded from the labour market because they do not receive security clearance. In other cases, property is reported to be confiscated. It is also reported that close family members are summoned for questioning and some are arrested and charged, and a duty to report or a travel ban is imposed. Parents who have visited their children in KRI have been arrested. Close family members of those engaged in social or political activities must also expect to be monitored. It can be about monitoring phone calls and computer use, or their physical movement patterns (Komala-PIK, October 2019; Komala Iranian - Communist Party, October 2019; PJAK, October 2019; KDP-Iran, November 2019).'²⁸⁵

14.6.4 In regard to the family members of political activists abroad, the February 2020 Danish Immigration Service report noted:

'A family, who has a civil or political activist family member outside of Iran, is monitored more and pressured harder. There are examples of family members being arrested or threatened to be killed, because one of their close relatives has conducted extensive political or human rights activities outside of the country. The Iranian authorities will gather information on the activist by continuing to call on the family to give information on where the fled person is living and what s/he is doing. The file of any social or political activist remains open with the intelligence authorities, and they may monitor and investigate the activists, as well as his/her family members.'²⁸⁶

14.6.5 According to sources consulted by Landinfo, it was common for the Iranian authorities to pressure parents to travel to the KRI and bring home their sons or daughters who had joined Kurdish political parties, although there were no consequences for parents who did not succeed^{287 288}. However, increased pressure was applied on families who were connected to party members in

²⁸⁴ Danish Immigration Service, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (pages 27 to 28), February 2020

²⁸⁵ Landinfo, '[Iran: Det iransk-kurdiske partiet PJAK](#)' (page 27, section 8.3), 18 December 2020

²⁸⁶ Danish Immigration Service, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (page 28), February 2020

²⁸⁷ Landinfo, '[Iran: Det iransk-kurdiske partiet PJAK](#)' (page 27, section 8.3), 18 December 2020

²⁸⁸ Landinfo, '[PDKI – Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan](#)' (page 25, section 9.3), 2 April 2020

leadership roles or with higher responsibilities – that is, the level of pressure on the family was proportionate to the level of party-member activity²⁸⁹.

- 14.6.6 An article first published on 19 July 2021 (republished 19 November 2021) by IranWire, a joint venture of a group of Iranian journalists in the Diaspora²⁹⁰, reported on the assassination of Iranian political activist, Behrouz ‘Rebin’ Rahimi, who was shot dead in the KRI and who had, according to his wife, ‘previously received death threats after rejecting an invitation to work with the Iranian Intelligence Ministry.’²⁹¹ IranWire gave examples of threats and intimidation of family members of Iranian Kurds living in exile and stated, ‘A new wave of pressure on the families of civil and human rights activists is also under way in the Iranian border provinces of Kurdistan, West Azerbaijan and Kermanshah. In recent weeks, the parents of Iranians living in Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan have been summoned by the security agencies and told to help lure their children back to Iran.’²⁹²

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14.7 Sur place activities

- 14.7.1 Refer to the Country Policy and Information Note on [Iran: social media, surveillance and sur place activities](#).

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14.8 Returnees

- 14.8.1 A March 2020 report 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), Belgium, 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.’²⁹³ 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.’²⁹⁴

- 14.8.2 The Danish Immigration Service report of February 2020 referred to persons accused of links to Kurdish political parties who returned to Iran, including from Western countries:

‘In general, a person, who has been accused of political affiliation with any of the Kurdish opposition parties, will not be able to return to an ordinary life in Iran. In many cases, the individual will keep his/her past political affiliation and activities secret, to avoid being subjected to monitoring by the Iranian authorities.

‘One source noted that a person returning to Iran from Europe will be subjected to a higher level of suspicion by the authorities, compared to

²⁸⁹ Landinfo, ‘[PDKI – Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan](#)’ (page 26, section 9.3), 2 April 2020

²⁹⁰ IranWire, ‘[About us](#)’, no date

²⁹¹ IranWire, ‘[Exiled Iranian Kurds’ Families Told: Bring Back Your Loved Ones...](#)’, 19 November 2021

²⁹² IranWire, ‘[Exiled Iranian Kurds’ Families Told: Bring Back Your Loved Ones...](#)’, 19 November 2021

²⁹³ Cedoca, ‘[Iran – Treatment of returnees by their national authorities](#)’ (page 14), 30 March 2020

²⁹⁴ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Iran](#)’ (paragraph 5.30), 14 April 2020

someone returning from the KRI. Some returnees are arrested and others are not.

‘Another source opined that an individual, who has applied for asylum in a foreign country, will face difficulties upon return to Iran. The authorities will subject her/him to questioning related to the reason for the asylum claim as well as what actions the individual has taken against the government of Iran.’²⁹⁵

- 14.8.3 The Danish Immigration Service were informed of cases dated between 2011 and 2018 where Iranian citizens who had applied for asylum in European countries were arrested upon return to Iran. Some returnees were reportedly interrogated and tortured in the custody of the authorities, including one person who was killed under torture. 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 was subsequently released²⁹⁶.

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²⁹⁵ Danish Immigration Service, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (pages 32 to 33), February 2020

²⁹⁶ Danish Immigration Service, '[Iranian Kurds](#)' (pages 33 to 34), 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
 - Brief history
 - Demography
 - Language – linguistic diversity of Kurdish populations in Iran, including geographical information (areas where each of the Kurdish dialects are spoken, areas where Iranian Kurds do not speak Farsi)
 - Religion – religious diversity of Kurdish populations in Iran
- Treatment by the state
 - Legal rights
 - Discrimination
 - Arbitrary arrest and detention
 - Fair trial
- Education – access to education, proportion of Iranian Kurds who do not attend Iranian schooling & where (geographical distribution).
- Employment – levels of employment amongst the Kurdish populus & the degree to which Kurds rely on 'illegitimate' forms of employment such as smuggling, due to lack of alternative options/opportunities.
- Kurdish political parties – Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (PDKI), Kurdish Democratic Party Iran (KDP -I), Komala (Komaleh/ Komalah) parties, Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK), Kurdistan Freedom Party (PAK), including information on:
 - Background
 - Recruitment to and member profile
 - Membership cards and verification
 - Member roles and activities
- Treatment of Kurdish political activists and family members

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Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **4.0**
- valid from **5 May 2022**

Official – sensitive: Start of section

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Official – sensitive: End of section

Changes from last version of this note

Updated country information following the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration (ICIBI) – Independent Advisory Group for Country Information (IAGCI)-commissioned review (November 2021), published 28 April 2022, and inclusion of the country guidance case [XX \(PJAK – sur place activities - Facebook\)](#) [Iran CG \[2022\] UKUT 23 \(IAC\)](#) in the assessment.

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