



Home Office

Country Policy and Information Note

Iran: Ahwazis and Ahwazi political groups

Version 2.0

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Preface

Purpose

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

It is split into two main sections: (1) analysis and 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 – i.e. the COI section; refugee/human rights laws and policies; and applicable caselaw – by describing this and its inter-relationships, and provides an assessment on whether, **in general**:

- A person is reasonably likely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm
- 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
- Claims are 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 \(COI\)](#), dated 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, and is from generally reliable sources. 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, and
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources.

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

Information is compared and contrasted, whenever possible, to provide a range of views and opinions. The inclusion of a source, however, is not an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a brief footnote; full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the [bibliography](#).

Feedback

Our goal is to continuously improve our material. Therefore, if you would like to comment on this note, please email [the Country Policy and Information Team](#).

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

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

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

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration

5th Floor

Globe House

89 Eccleston Square

London, SW1V 1PN

Email: chiefinspector@icibi.gov.uk

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

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Analysis

Updated: 6 June 2018

1. Introduction

1.1 Basis of claim

- 1.1.1 Fear of serious harm or persecution because of the person's Arab ethnicity; they are an 'Ahwazi Arab' and/or have participated in Ahwazi political activity.

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1.2 Points to note

- 1.2.1 Although small numbers of Arabs inhabit areas along the west of Iran's Persian Gulf coast, most ethnic Arabs in Iran live in Ahwaz in the Khuzestan province (aka Arabistan or Al-Ahwaz) in south-west Iran, and ethnic Arabs generally are often referred to as 'Ahwazis' (or 'Ahvazis') (see [Demography](#)). This note therefore applies to ethnic Arabs in Iran generally.

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2. Consideration of issues

2.1 Credibility

- 2.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the [Asylum 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 Ahwazi militant groups may have been responsible for human rights abuses (see [Ahwazi political groups](#)).
- 2.2.2 If there are serious reasons for considering that the person has been involved with such a group then decision makers must consider whether any of the exclusion clauses are applicable.
- 2.2.3 If the person is excluded from the Refugee Convention, they will also be excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection.
- 2.2.4 For further guidance on the exclusion clauses and restricted leave, see the Asylum Instructions on [Exclusion under Articles 1F and 33\(2\) of the Refugee Convention](#), [Humanitarian Protection](#) and the instruction on [Restricted Leave](#).

2.3 Assessment of risk

2.3.1 Ethnic Arabs in Iran ('Ahwazi Arabs') number between 2-3 million, although one estimate suggests it could be as high as 7 million, and constitute 2.4-8.5% of Iran's population. They are called 'Ahwazi' because they are from Ahwaz in Khuzestan province in the south-west of Iran (see [Demography](#)).

a. State treatment based on Arab ethnicity

2.3.2 Arab ethnicity and language are constitutionally protected (see [Legal/constitutional rights](#)). However, Ahwazis are politically unrepresented and their language, housing, employment, land and education rights are restricted. Although Khuzestan is one of the oil-richest parts of Iran the income derived from oil production is diverted away from the area. The government has deliberately underdeveloped and environmentally degraded Khuzestan, and many Ahwazis are relatively poor (see [Cultural and political discrimination](#) and [Economic discrimination](#)).

2.3.3 In the Country Guidance (CG) case, [SA \(Iranian Arabs-no general risk\) Iran CG \[2011\] UKUT 41 \(IAC\)](#), promulgated on 27 July 2010, the Upper Tribunal (UT) of the Immigration and Asylum Chamber (IAC) found:

'We do not accept that an Iranian from the Arab areas would risk persecution for that reason alone in the event of his return. Although there is considerable evidence in the background material to show that the authorities [in] Iran lose no opportunity to show their power in the Arab areas, it is going too far to say that every Iranian Arab risks persecution...

'The authorities are suspicious of Iranian Arabs. Such people might be interrogated more vigorously or generally attract more attention than Iranian who are not Arabs – and in that sense being an Ahwazi Arab may enhance the risks on return – but a person who was not otherwise at risk would not be at risk just because of his Arab ethnicity' (paragraph 48).

2.3.4 The Court of Appeal (CoA), in the case of [SG \(Iraq\) v Secretary of State for the Home Department \[2012\] EWCA Civ 940 \(13 July 2012\)](#), heard on 20-21 June 2012, stated that 'decision makers and tribunal judges are required to take Country Guidance determination into account, and to follow them unless very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence, are adduced justifying their not doing so' (paragraph 47). The Home Office does not assess that there are very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence to depart from these findings in [SA](#). Decision makers must, however, consider each case on its facts.

b. State treatment based on Ahwazi political activity

2.3.5 Some Ahwazis may belong to political groups advocating the separation of Khuzestan province from the Iranian state (see [Ahwazi groups](#)).

2.3.6 Some of these groups use or support violence to achieve that end. However, the available information about such groups is limited and dated, and mostly comes from one source, a leaked Wikileaks cable. The information says that the Arab Ahwaz Renaissance Party was the only armed Ahwazi separatist group. This suggests that Ahwazi militant separatism appears generally

inactive. Khuzestan is securely under the control of the Iranian state (see [Armed groups](#) and [State response to Ahwazi militant activity](#)).

- 2.3.7 The regime considers violent Ahwazi separatists as national security threats and has executed some of them (see [State response to Ahwazi militant activity](#)).
- 2.3.8 A person who is an active member of a militant Ahwazi group is likely to be at real risk of serious harm or persecution. Decision makers must consider each case on its facts, noting the scale of active groups in Iran (see [Ahwazi political groups – Armed groups](#) and [Armed activities](#)).
- 2.3.9 Ahwazis may also be involved in non-violent activities which are perceived as political (see [Cultural and political discrimination](#)).
- 2.3.10 In 2005, Government interference in the ethnic composition of Khuzestan triggered Ahwazi protests known as the ‘intifazeh’. This has been observed every year, to which the state responds by maintaining a security presence in the province. There are reports that Ahwazis have been arrested, mistreated (including tortured) in detention, monitored by intelligence services, and denied due process (see [Arrests and detention](#) and [Physical mistreatment](#)).
- 2.3.11 Decision makers must consider each case on its facts. Simply supporting or being perceived to support separatism is not sufficient, in itself, to establish a real risk of persecution or serious harm. However, decision makers must consider whether the person:
- has changed religious sect from Shia to Sunni
 - has openly defended Arab culture and/or civil rights, such as promoting the use of the Arabic language
 - has participated in anti-government demonstrations
- as these factors may attract the adverse attention of the Iranian authorities.
- 2.3.12 The UT in [SA](#) found: ‘We have not found any background evidence suggesting that modest support for separatist activities in the United Kingdom is reasonably likely to lead to execution in Iran’ (paragraph 58).
- 2.3.13 Regarding ‘sur place’ political activities of Ahwazi Arabs, decision makers must also consider that the UT in [SA](#) found that:
- ‘Low level support in the United Kingdom for separatist activities is a feature that increases the risk of persecution. Even if a person was not particularly sincere or particularly well-informed, links with separatist groups could easily provoke ill-treatment of the kind that this appellant received before he left Iran’ (paragraph 49)
 - ‘...the evidence that the authorities in Iran believe the Arab separatist cause to be particularly well organised in London and we accept the evidence that there is heightened suspicion towards anyone coming from London because of the activities in opposition to the present regime that were said to be encouraged by the United Kingdom at the time of the election [2009]. These are all factors which heightened risk on return to a

regime that, on the evidence before us, does oppress political opponents and does abuse human rights' (paragraph 54).

- 'In an age when a significant portion of the population permanently carries with it a camera as an accessory to a mobile phone, we consider it likely that a regime as nervous as that which is in power in Iran would routinely photograph those who demonstrated against it. It is less easy to see how such people would be identified. The evidence is of people who may know being asked to look at large numbers of still and moving pictures and asked to identify someone. We are confident that the more frequently a person draws attention to himself, and the more effectively he draws attention to himself, the more likely it would be that someone might identify him. If, as seems to be the case, the authorities rely on people who, for whatever reason, are willing to name names when shown a photograph, it is possible that a person who took a very minor part in only one demonstration could be named' (paragraph 61).

The Home Office does not assess that there are very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence to depart from these findings in [SA](#).

c. Non-state treatment

- 2.3.14 There is no available evidence to find that an Ahwazi Arab will be at risk of serious harm or persecution from non-state or societal actors (see [Societal treatment](#)). Where a real risk arises, it appears to come from the state only. If a person claims they will be such a risk, the onus will be on the person to demonstrate that they are at real risk of serious harm or persecution from non-state or societal actors.
- 2.3.15 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.4 Protection

- 2.4.1 As the person's fear is of persecution and/or serious harm by the state, they will not be able to avail themselves of the protection of the authorities.
- 2.4.2 For further guidance on assessing the availability of state protection, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.5 Internal relocation

- 2.5.1 As the person's fear is of persecution and/or serious harm by the state, they will not be able to relocate to escape that risk.
- 2.5.2 For further guidance on internal relocation and the factors to be considered, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.6 Certification

- 2.6.1 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.

2.6.2 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

Updated: 21 May 2018

3. Background

3.1 Numbers

- 3.1.1 Ethnic Arabs in Iran are known as Ahwazi (or Ahvazi) Arabs because they are from an area known as Al-Ahwaz (Khuzestan) in the south-west of Iran¹. There are several estimates of the population of Ahwazis in Iran: the Congressional Research Service (CRS)² and the US State Department (USSD)³ put the number at 2-3 million, although the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation (UNPO) estimate it as 5-7 million⁴. The UNPO noted that Ahwazi Arabs are 'one of the largest minority groups living in Iran'.⁵ They constitute approximately 2.4-8.5% of Iran's population (82 million⁶).
- 3.1.2 There are pockets of other Arab communities along the western coast of Iran. However, most Arabs in Iran are Ahwazi⁷.

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3.2 Language

- 3.2.1 Ahwazi Arabs speak Arabic⁸.
- 3.2.2 The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and Danish Immigration Service (DIS) undertook a fact-finding mission (FFM) to Iran, Turkey and the UK in September and October 2017, interviewing several sources. In their report ('the Danish 2017 FFM report'), published in February 2018, they noted:
- 'Language skills were addressed by several sources. It might occur that Ahwazi Arabs who have not completed an education or have not attended an elementary school lack Persian language skills. The same applies for Ahwazi Arabs living in the countryside.
- 'Amnesty International noted that the official language in Iran is Persian, and if Ahwazi Arabs do have contact with the authorities it must be in Persian. Furthermore, a person who does not speak Persian would not have access to the job market, and a whole host of other opportunities within the public sector.
- 'It is not uncommon to see Ahwazi Arabs who speak Persian, but do not read or write the Persian language. Usually, it is Ahwazi Arab women who lack Persian language skills. Typically, the men have more contact with the

¹ CRS, 'Iran' (p.15), 8 February 2018, [url](#)

² CRS, 'Iran' (p.15), 8 February 2018, [url](#)

³ USSD, Human Rights report, Section 6, April 2018, [url](#)

⁴ UNPO, Ahwazi, 9 November 2017, [url](#)

⁵ UNPO, Ahwazi, 9 November 2017, [url](#)

⁶ CIA, World Factbook, 14 March 2018, [url](#)

⁷ MRGI, 'Rights Denied' (p.9), March 2018, [url](#)

⁸ UNPO, Ahwazi, 9 November 2017, [url](#)

state institutions, and have served in the military, and need to speak Persian, one source said.

'An associate professor stated that Ahwazi Arabs returning to Iran will have to do some paperwork, but they will not be met with any requests related to language tests or similar; if the paperwork can be done, there will be not be any administrative reason to reject them, the source assumed.'⁹

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3.3 Religion

3.3.1 Ahwazi Arabs are approximately:

- 70% Shia Muslims
- 24% Sunni Muslims
- 1% other religious groups, including Christians and Jews¹⁰

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3.4 Location

3.4.1 Ahwazi Arabs are predominantly settled in the Al-Ahwaz province. Al-Ahwaz, also known as Arabistan or Khuzestan, is situated in the south-western part of Iran. It borders the Basra province, Iraq in the west, the Gulf, the Shat al-Arab waterway and the mountains of Lurestan and Kurdistan in the north and east respectively. Its capital is the city of Ahwaz¹¹.

3.4.2 The map below shows the location of Al-Ahwaz province in Iran:

Map showing the location of Ahwazi Arabs within Iran



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⁹ Danish FFM report (p.11), February 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰ UNPO, Ahwazi, 9 November 2017, [url](#)

¹¹ UNPO, Ahwazi, 9 November 2017, [url](#)

¹² MEE, 'The Iranian government is killing Ahwaz's environment', 3 July 2017, [url](#)

3.5 History

- 3.5.1 For a detailed history of the Ahwazis, refer to reports by the [Iran Human Rights Documentation Center \(IHRDC\)](#)¹³ and the [Pakistan Defence blog](#)¹⁴.

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4. Legal/constitutional rights

- 4.1.1 **Article 16** of [the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran](#) says: ‘Since the language of the Qur’an and Islamic texts and teachings is Arabic, and since Persian literature is thoroughly permeated by this language, it must be taught after elementary level, in all classes of secondary school and in all areas of study.’¹⁵

- 4.1.2 **Article 19** of the Constitution says: ‘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.’¹⁶

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5. State treatment

5.1 Cultural and political discrimination

- 5.1.1 The US State Department (USSD), in their 2016 human rights report on Iran, noted: ‘Ethnolinguistic minorities [including Ahwazis] are not free to name their children; the country’s civil registry maintains a list of acceptable names, and individuals who wish to choose a name not on this list (in their own language) cannot register the birth of their child.’¹⁷ Amnesty International reported in its August 2017 report on Iran’s human rights defenders that: ‘Disadvantaged ethnic minorities, including Ahwazi Arabs...also face entrenched discrimination, curtailing...the exercise of their cultural [and]...civil and political rights.’¹⁸

- 5.1.2 Several sources, for example Minority Rights Group International (MRGI)¹⁹, the Iran Human Rights Documentation Centre (IHRDC)²⁰ and the Congressional Research Service (CRS)²¹ observed that Ahwazis experience cultural discrimination.

- 5.1.3 Examples of discrimination include:

- Sunni Arabs not allowed to practice their faith publicly or construct Sunni mosques²²
- a prohibition on speaking or studying Arabic²³

¹³ IHRDC, ‘A Framework of Violence’, 25 September 2014, [url](#)

¹⁴ Pakistan Defence (blog), ‘Ahwaz’, 26 August 2012, [url](#)

¹⁵ Iranian Constitution, 1979, [url](#). Persian (Farsi) is the official language of Iran (Article 15 of the Constitution).

¹⁶ Iranian Constitution, [url](#)

¹⁷ USSD, Human Rights report, Section 6, March 2017, [url](#)

¹⁸ AI, ‘Caught in a web of repression’ (p.44), 2 August 2017, [url](#)

¹⁹ MRGI, ‘Iran- Arabs’, December 2017, [url](#)

²⁰ IHRDC, ‘A Framework of Violence’, 25 September 2014, [url](#)

²¹ CRS, ‘Iran’ (p.15), 8 February 2018, [url](#)

²² MRGI, ‘Iran- Arabs’, December 2017, [url](#)

²³ CRS, ‘Iran’ (p.15), 8 February 2018, [url](#)

5.1.4 Middle East Eye (MEE), in an article dated February 2015, stated:

‘The perceived crackdown on the Arab identity of the region is leading a growing number of Ahwazi youth to switch to the Sunni branch of the faith, which some of them view as closer to their Arab roots. Iran itself had been predominantly Sunni until Shah Ismail of the Safavid dynasty launched a forced conversion policy in the 16th century.

‘However, those Ahwazis who are converting to Sunni Islam may be giving the authorities another cause to land them in prison, even though there is no official law that bans changing your sect or religion.

‘[London-based Iranian Ahwazi writers and campaigners] [Ramadan] Alsaedi, [Yousef] Azizi and [Amir] Saedi argue that any identity or belief that falls outside what the ruling class has envisioned for Iran would be severely suppressed, with elastic charges that could be tailored to fit any form of perceived dissent. And to top that, Ahwazis don't have many friends at the top.’²⁴

5.1.5 The IHRDC, in a 2014 report, commented on Shia to Sunni conversion:

‘The authorities have treated suspected converts from the official religion of Twelver Shi'a Islam, the majority religion in Iran to Sunni Islam, the religion of the majority of the Arab world, with notable brutality. Traditionalist schools of Sunni Islam are sanctioned by the IRI [Islamic Republic of Iran] Constitution, so it should be noted that many of the Ahwazi Arabs arrested on suspicions of conversion are ultimately charged with adhering to Wahhabism. Although the charge is religious, much of the discourse on the topic within Iran highlights that the state's fear is primarily political in nature. As with arrests of cultural and political activists, the IRI appears to rely heavily on forced confessions in these matters.’²⁵

5.1.6 The IHRDC, in a summary dated 2014, noted:

‘In April 2005, the tensions between Ahwazi Arabs and the central government in Iran boiled to a head with the alleged leak of a memorandum from the office of the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) that set forth a policy aimed at changing the ethnic makeup of Khuzestan province. Ahwazi Arab demonstrators took to the streets of Ahvaz to protest the memorandum. Over the course of the next two weeks, the protests quickly spread through major cities and towns in the rest of the province and the Iranian government responded with brute force. According to multiple sources, dozens of protesters were killed and hundreds arrested. As a result of the violence, the Iranian government has maintained a strong security presence in the province up until this day.

‘Since then, every April, Ahwazi Arabs have staged protests to commemorate the April 2005 protests, or what they refer to as the intifazeh. This year [2014], according to reports received by the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, Iranian security forces took pre-emptive action in advance of the expected protests...’²⁶

²⁴ MEE, ‘Iran's Ahwazi Arab minority’, 28 February 2015, [url](#)

²⁵ IHRDC, ‘A Framework of Violence’ (section 2.3.2.4), 25 September 2014, [url](#)

²⁶ IHRDC, ‘Ahwazi Arabs Subjected to Discrimination’, 2014, [url](#)

See also: [Arrests and detention](#)

5.1.7 The Danish FFM 2017 report noted:

‘Two sources explained that the Iranian government accepts the Ahwazi Arabs’ culture. Based on anecdotal evidence, an associate professor informed the delegation that different activities including cultural, social and political are accepted for all ages, but it depends on how they are framed. Some of the local tribal leaders in Khuzestan and other places where Ahwazi Arabs live have been successfully elected to the local councils, and they have even been much outspoken.’²⁷

5.1.8 Amnesty International, in its August 2017 report, reported that Mohammad Ali Amouri and Rahman Asakereh, founding members of Al-Hiwar (‘Dialogue’ in Arabic), an Arabic ‘cultural rights group’, were on death row and serving a 20-year prison sentence respectively, for ‘their peaceful activities...which included promoting Arabic culture and identity through poetry events, language classes and reading sessions, voicing demands for newspapers in the Arabic language, and conducting community education to reform traditional practices among Arab clans which are harmful toward women and girls.’²⁸

5.1.9 MRGI, in a March 2018 report, observed that the ‘underrepresentation of minorities remains the dominant trend at the provincial and local government levels. In September 2017, protests erupted in Ahwaz after the results of municipal elections showed that only three out of 13 seats on the municipal council had been won by Arab candidates, which many suspected was the result of fraud.’²⁹

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5.2 Economic discrimination

5.2.1 Several sources, such as Amnesty International³⁰ and the USSD³¹, noted that ethnic minorities, including Ahwazis, experienced economic discrimination. These sources grouped together Ahwazis with other minorities such as Kurds and Baluchis. Examples of discrimination included restricted access to:

- employment
- housing³²
- economic aid
- business licences
- job opportunities

²⁷ Danish FFM report (p.10), February 2018, [url](#)

²⁸ AI, ‘Caught in a web of repression’ (p.49), 2 August 2017, [url](#)

²⁹ MRGI, ‘Rights Denied’ (p. 28), March 2018, [url](#)

³⁰ AI Annual Report – Iran, February 2018, [url](#)

³¹ USSD, Human Rights report, Section 6, March 2017, [url](#)

³² AI Annual Report – Iran, February 2018, [url](#)

- land and housing rights³³
- 5.2.2 The USSD report noted: ‘The law, which requires religious screening and allegiance to the concept of “velayat-e faqih” not found in Sunni Islam, impaired the ability of Sunni (many of whom are also Baluch, Ahvazi, or Kurdish) to integrate into civic life and to work in certain fields.’³⁴
- 5.2.3 More specifically, the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC)³⁵, the USSD³⁶ and the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran³⁷ noted that the Ahwazis experienced state discrimination. Examples of this discrimination included:
- the confiscation of land and the establishment of settlements³⁸
 - not being compensated for loss of land
 - restrictions on participation in government
 - restrictions on access to education³⁹
 - deportation
 - the destruction of property⁴⁰
- 5.2.4 Khuzestan is the site of 90% of Iran’s oil⁴¹. However, sources noted that Khuzestan has:
- had its natural resources diverted to other parts of Iran⁴²
 - the highest rate of poverty in Iran⁴³
 - been deliberately neglected and underdeveloped by the government^{44 45}
 - the most polluted city in the world (Ahwaz), as ranked in 2016 by the World Health Organisation^{46 47}
- 5.2.5 MRGI, in a March 2018 report, stated: ‘Research by the Ahwaz Human Rights Organization found that in Khuzestan, the source of most of Iran’s oil wealth, very large numbers of Arabs live in informal housing settlements,

³³ USSD, Human Rights report, Section 6, March 2017, [url](#)

³⁴ USSD, Human Rights report, Section 6, March 2017, [url](#)

³⁵ IHRDC, ‘A Framework of Violence’, 25 September 2014, [url](#)

³⁶ USSD, Human Rights report, Section 6, March 2017, [url](#)

³⁷ UN General Assembly, ‘Situation of human rights in Iran’, para 100, 14 August 2017, [url](#)

³⁸ Also noted by the USSD, who added that ‘Ahwazi rights activists claim that the government confiscated Ahwazi property by refusing to recognise paper deeds from the pre-revolutionary era’, US State Department (USSD), Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2016 – Iran, Section 6. Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons, [url](#)

³⁹ UN General Assembly, ‘Situation of human rights in Iran’, 14 August 2017, [url](#)

⁴⁰ UNPO, ‘Ahwazi Arabs’, November 2017, [url](#)

⁴¹ MRGI, ‘Iran- Arabs’, December 2017, [url](#)

⁴² UNPO, ‘Ahwazi Arabs’, November 2017, [url](#)

⁴³ MRGI, ‘Iran- Arabs’, December 2017, [url](#)

⁴⁴ MRGI, ‘Iran- Arabs’, December 2017, [url](#)

⁴⁵ MEE, ‘The Iranian government is killing Ahwaz’s environment’, 3 July 2017, [url](#)

⁴⁶ IHRDC, ‘Ahwazi Arabs Subjected to Discrimination’, 2014, [url](#)

⁴⁷ MEE, ‘The Iranian government is killing Ahwaz’s environment’, 3 July 2017, [url](#)

often as a result of displacement, lacking functioning sewage systems, electricity, clinics, schools and other basic services.¹⁴⁸

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5.3 Arrests, detention and fair trial

- 5.3.1 Several sources, such as the USSD⁴⁹, Amnesty International⁵⁰ and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child⁵¹, noted reports of arrests and detention of ethnic minorities. These sources grouped several peoples together as ‘ethnic minorities’, rather than describing Ahwazis specifically.
- 5.3.2 The USSD described the arrests as ‘arbitrary’ and the detention as ‘prolonged’, and that minority groups were ‘disproportionately targeted’⁵². The UN Convention in the Rights of the Child described arrests as ‘targeted’⁵³. Amnesty reported: ‘Members of minorities who spoke out against violations of their political, cultural and linguistic rights faced arbitrary arrest [and]...grossly unfair trials, [and] imprisonment.’⁵⁴
- 5.3.3 More specifically, the UN General Assembly, in a report on the situation of human rights in Iran, dated August 2017, stated: ‘In order to silence opposition, Iranian authorities try to intimidate the Ahwazi Arabs by using all kinds of violence [including]...arbitrary arrests.’⁵⁵
- 5.3.4 Amnesty International and HRW reported that ‘Iran’s intelligence and security forces have rounded up and detained scores of Ahwazi Arabs, including several children, in what appears to be an escalating crackdown in Iran’s Khuzestan province’. The article by HRW, dated April 2015, reported:
- ‘According to activists and family members, many arrests took place in the lead-up to the tenth anniversary of mass anti-government demonstrations that gripped the Arab-populated province in April 2005. Family members said the arrests have been carried out without warrants by groups of armed masked men affiliated with Iran’s security and intelligence services, usually following home raids of Ahwazi Arab activists during the late evening or early morning hours. The human rights organizations expressed concern that people may have been arrested merely in connection with their perceived political opinions, for peacefully expressing dissent or for openly exhibiting their Arab identity and culture...
- ‘Ahwazi Arab activists outside Iran told Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch that security forces have arrested at least 78 people, and possibly more than 100, since mid-March 2015 in the city of Ahvaz, the Khuzestan provincial capital, and surrounding towns and villages following largely peaceful protests. They said those arrested include people suspected of playing leadership roles in mobilizing local protests. Iranian authorities

⁴⁸ MRGI, ‘Rights Denied’ (p. 30), March 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁹ USSD, ‘Human Rights Report’ (section 6), 7 March 2017, [url](#)

⁵⁰ AI Annual Report – Iran, February 2018, [url](#)

⁵¹ UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ‘Concluding observations’ (para 83), 14 March 2016, [url](#)

⁵² USSD, ‘Human Rights Report’ (section 6), 7 March 2017, [url](#)

⁵³ UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ‘Concluding observations’ (para 83), 14 March 2016, [url](#)

⁵⁴ AI Annual Report – Iran, February 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁵ UNPO, Ahwazi Arabs, 9 November 2017, [url](#).

have not given a reason for the arrests or revealed the status and whereabouts of the detainees, placing them at increased risk of torture and other ill-treatment, the human rights organizations said...

'The 2005 crackdown led to a cycle of violence throughout Khuzestan province, including several fatal bomb attacks in June and October 2005 and in January 2006 that killed 12 people. In response, the Iranian government imprisoned large numbers of activists it claimed were Arab separatists responsible for terrorist attacks against civilians...'⁵⁶

5.3.5 The IHRDC, in its 2014 report, further noted:

'Ahwazi Arab journalists, who are discouraged or barred from writing in Arabic, work under the threat of arrest and imprisonment.

'The use of the Arabic language, holiday celebrations, clothing, and religious identity are especially sensitive for the IRI. Consequently, the IRI conflates mere cultural activity with political activism and views expressions of Ahwazi Arab cultural activism as threats to national security. At its most extreme, this can result in violent reprisals and death sentences for Ahwazi Arabs attempting to promote their literature and customs. Most commonly, however, the suspicions aroused by the simple expression of Ahwazi Arab cultural difference lead to arbitrary arrest and detention.

'As with the treatment of those primarily concerned with preserving and promoting Ahwazi Arab cultural heritage, the treatment of Ahwazi Arab political activists has grown especially harsh since April 2005—again, the most common manifestation is the arrest and detention of Ahwazi Arab political activists for long periods before charges are brought. Some are released without ever being charged.'⁵⁷

5.3.6 The USSD 2016 report noted: 'HRANA [Human Rights Activists News Agency] reported intelligence forces arrested 16 Ahvazi civilians and raided their houses in Shahrak-e-Hamzeh in Dezfool, Khuzestan, on August 23 [2015]. Their whereabouts remained unknown at year's end.'⁵⁸

5.3.7 The UN General Assembly, in a report on the situation of human rights in Iran, dated August 2017, reported:

'Information about 45 cases involving the arrest and detention of Ahwazi Arabs was transmitted during the reporting period [January-June 2017]. Most of the cases seem to have taken place after participation in cultural and traditional events or protests against environmental degradation. Ali Kaab Omeir, 17 years old, was reportedly arrested in February in the Keyan Abbad neighbourhood of Ahwaz, Khuzestan Province, and remains detained incommunicado for his participation in a protest against a policy aimed at diverting water from Ahwaz to other provinces. In May, three Arab ethnic rights activists, Issa Damni, Mojahed Zargani and Hossein Heydar, were sentenced to a year in prison by branch 4 of the

⁵⁶ HRW, 'Sweeping Arrests', 29 April 2015, [url](#)

⁵⁷ IHRDC, 'A Framework of Violence', 25 September 2014, [url](#)

⁵⁸ USSD, 'Human Rights Report' (section 6), 7 March 2017, [url](#)

revolutionary court in Ahwaz for organizing Arabic-language classes and promoting ethnic rights.⁵⁹

5.3.8 MRGI, in a March 2018 report, noted: ‘Mass arrests of minority activists continued unabated throughout 2017. For example, on 25 June 2017, 13 people were arrested in Ahwaz, including Arab activists and poets. Those arrested had apparently recited poetry and chanted in support of political prisoners at a religious celebration the night before a planned demonstration for Arab rights.’⁶⁰

5.3.9 The same report stated:

‘The authorities have also reportedly attempted to crack down on Shi’a Muslims who have converted to the Sunni branch of Islam, especially in Khuzestan. According to an advocacy group chronicling violations against Sunnis, in February 2014 more than 20 Sunni converts were arrested at a Qur’an and Arabic language study group in Ahwaz city, while in July 2014 10 Sunni converts were arrested for either preaching Sunni teachings or holding congregational evening prayers during Ramadan. In November 2014, a further 16 converts were arrested, again during a Qur’an class in Ahwaz.’⁶¹

5.3.10 The Danish FFM 2017 report noted:

‘Ahwazi Arab journalists may be in the authorities’ spotlight, as well as activists advocating for Ahwazi Arabs’ minority rights. Further, Ahwazi Arabs conducting activities perceived as political may be on the authorities’ radar. Shiite Ahwazi converting to Sunni-Islam may also attract the authorities’ attention.

‘Ahwazi academics, activists working with Ahwazi history and authors writing in Arabic are under surveillance, a source said. According to another source, the Arabic language is welcome in the Iranian establishment; as an example, the source highlighted the use of Arabic in the call to prayer. Further, most clerics and top leaders have Arabic language skills.’⁶²

5.3.11 The IHRDC noted in its 2014 report:

‘Without exception, those [Ahwazi Arab activists and citizens] interviewed state that they were not formally informed of the charges against them within 24 hours, and that their detention and interrogation continued for weeks before charges were brought.

‘Most witnesses were detained for days, weeks, or months under color of law before being charged with a crime. The Revolutionary Courts, where many Ahwazi Arab activists are prosecuted, systematically deprive these defendants of due process rights during the course of trial and sentencing. The denial of the right to counsel, limitations on the meetings between counsel and accused, limitations on defense counsel’s access to evidence, the use of torture to extract confessions and singular reliance on reports from the security services as evidence at trial have all occurred with disturbing regularity in Khuzestan, particularly over the past decade. Legal

⁵⁹ UN General Assembly, ‘Situation of human rights in Iran’, 14 August 2017, [url](#)

⁶⁰ MRGI, ‘Rights Denied’ (p.16), March 2018, [url](#)

⁶¹ MRGI, ‘Rights Denied’ (p.24), March 2018, [url](#)

⁶² Danish FFM report (pp.9-10), February 2018, [url](#)

proceedings are conducted exclusively in Persian, a second language to most Ahwazi Arabs. When they cannot understand the language, many recalled that no translators were provided. Consequently those individuals have no understanding of the proceedings and no ability to defend themselves.⁶³

5.3.12 Regarding family members of former or current Ahwazi activists being targeted by the authorities, the Danish report noted that

‘...a source said it is complicated; not all Ahwazi tribes are Arab nationalists and some are ethnically mixed. The targets will often be high profiled persons who are Ahwazi Arab ethnic activists.

‘Ahwazi Arabs act within the extended family group, one source explained. The leader of the family group advises and leads. Activities conducted by Ahwazi Arabs are accepted, as long as they are kept within the community. Infiltration of the community by the authorities might be difficult, as the members of the community know each other. With that said, the source added, it can occur that a group becomes infiltrated by an internal person that has switched side and now works for the authorities.’⁶⁴

5.3.13 For more information, see the [Ahwaz Monitor Information Center](#), a non-profit online resource that aims to ‘raise awareness of the plight of the Ahwaz people’, which documents alleged violations against the Ahwazi people⁶⁵.

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5.4 Physical mistreatment

5.4.1 Amnesty International, in their 2016/17 report on Iran, reported: ‘Members of minorities who spoke out against violations of their political, cultural and linguistic rights faced...torture and other ill-treatment’.⁶⁶ The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, in a report dated March 2016, registered their ‘particular concern’ about ‘reports of...torture...of members of such [ethnic minority] groups by law enforcement and judicial authorities’.⁶⁷ The USSD 2016 report noted: ‘The government disproportionately targeted minority groups, including Kurds, Ahvazis, Azeris, and Baluchis, for...physical abuse...’⁶⁸

5.4.2 More specifically, Amnesty reported that ‘Ahwazi Arabs were imprisoned and subjected to torture and other human rights violations’.⁶⁹ The CRS noted that Arabs in Iran ‘encounter systematic oppression...including torture...’⁷⁰ The UN General Assembly, in a report on the situation of human rights in Iran, dated August 2017, stated: ‘In order to silence opposition, Iranian

⁶³ IHRDC, ‘A Framework of Violence’ (section 2.3), 25 September 2014, [url](#)

⁶⁴ Danish FFM report (p.10), February 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁵ Ahwaz Monitor Information Center, [url](#)

⁶⁶ AI Annual Report – Iran, February 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁷ UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ‘Concluding observations’, para 83, 14 March 2016, [url](#)

⁶⁸ USSD, ‘Human Rights Report’ (section 6), 7 March 2017, [url](#)

⁶⁹ AI Annual Report – Iran, February 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁰ CRS, ‘Iran’ (p. 15), 8 February 2018, [url](#)

authorities try to intimidate the Ahwazi Arabs by using all kinds of violence [including]...torture.⁷¹

- 5.4.3 Rahim Hamid, an Arab Ahwazi nationalist, wrote an article in The Telegraph in 2015, in which he claimed that he was among the 25,000 Arab human rights, cultural and political activists arrested after 2005. Hamid claimed he was tortured, and then monitored by the intelligence services following release. He said:

‘My story is not unusual. The Iranian authorities view me and all Ahwazi Arabs as sub-humans, subversives and criminals on account of our Arab ethnicity and desire for freedom. Ahwazi daily life is tainted by open racism and bigotry. It is encouraged by the Tehran regime, with Arabs being commonly being depicted as “uncivilized barbarians” and “barefoot nomadic peoples.” Any Arab requesting equality, freedom and dignity is regarded and treated as an enemy of the state.’⁷²

The claim that 25,000 Arabs have been arrested since 2005 could not be corroborated by other sources.

- 5.4.4 Amnesty International, in its August 2017 report, reported that Mohammad Ali Amouri and Rahman Asakereh, founding members of Al-Hiwar (‘Dialogue’ in Arabic), an Arabic ‘cultural rights group’, were arrested for their cultural activities and held in solitary confinement for several months in a secret detention centre in Ahvaz, where they were repeatedly tortured. The source noted:

‘The torture was aimed at extracting false “confessions” about the men’s involvement with an armed group intent on overthrowing the Islamic Republic. The exact name and profile of this armed group was never made clear by the authorities. In June 2012, Mohammad Ali Amouri and Rahman Asakereh stood trial before Branch Two of the Revolutionary Court in Ahvaz. The court dismissed the men’s allegations of torture without ordering an investigation, and relied on their forced “confessions” to convict them of “enmity against God” (moharebeh). Branch 32 of the Supreme Court upheld the sentence in December 2012.’⁷³

- 5.4.5 The IHRDC noted in its 2014 report:

‘According to Ahwazi Arab activists interviewed for this report, severe and prolonged physical violence and psychological abuse remains common practice for the authorities in Khuzestan. They maintain that physical violence and methods of psychological abuse are used as a means of extracting confessions from individuals in pre-trial detention, often during interrogations. With few exceptions, most of the activists interviewed for this report were arrested by MOIS [Ministry of Intelligence] agents and then detained, interrogated and physically and psychologically brutalized in MOIS detention centers; the MOIS facility in the Chaharshir neighborhood of Ahvaz is commonly mentioned. Detainees and former detainees held in the Chaharshir MOIS detention center from the 1980s to the present day detail systematic physical and psychological abuse in the presence of MOIS

⁷¹ UN General Assembly, ‘Situation of human rights in Iran’, 14 August 2017, [url](#)

⁷² The Telegraph, ‘Arab activists in Iran’, 1 December 2015, [url](#)

⁷³ AI, ‘Caught in a web of repression’ (p.49), 2 August 2017, [url](#)

interrogators. Physical and psychological abuse is also reportedly used as a punitive measure against political prisoners who have been convicted, sentenced, and sent to the IRI's regular prisons but who are perceived by the authorities to be continuing their activism from prison. In some cases simply describing prison conditions to the outside world placed a prisoner on the authorities' radar.'⁷⁴

- 5.4.6 For more information, see the [Ahwaz Monitor Information Center](#), a non-profit online resource that aims to 'raise awareness of the plight of the Ahwaz people', which documents alleged violations against the Ahwazi people⁷⁵.

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5.5 Executions

- 5.5.1 Amnesty International, in their 2016/17 report on Iran, reported: 'Members of minorities who spoke out against violations of their political, cultural and linguistic rights faced... in some cases the death penalty'.⁷⁶
- 5.5.2 A HRW article dated April 2015 stated: 'Since 2005, authorities have executed at least 37 Ahwazi Arabs following unfair trials, including at least two designated by Amnesty as prisoners of conscience, Hadi Rashedi and Hashem Shabani from Al-Hiwar Cultural Institute.'⁷⁷
- 5.5.3 The USSD 2016 report noted: 'The Iranian state-run news agency Young Journalists Club reported the execution of three ethnic Ahvazis, Ghais Obidawi, Ahmad Obidawi, and Sajjad Balawi on August 17 [2016]. Iran Human Rights reported that the three were sentenced to death without a fair trial.'⁷⁸
- 5.5.4 For more information, see the [Ahwaz Monitor Information Center](#), a non-profit online resource that aims to 'raise awareness of the plight of the Ahwaz people', which documents alleged violations against the Ahwazi people⁷⁹.

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6. Societal treatment

- 6.1.1 Information about the societal treatment of Ahwazi Arabs could not be found. Refer to the [bibliography](#) for the list of sources consulted.

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⁷⁴ IHRDC, 'A Framework of Violence' (section 2.2), 25 September 2014, [url](#)

⁷⁵ Ahwaz Monitor Information Center, [url](#)

⁷⁶ AI Annual Report – Iran, February 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁷ HRW, 'Sweeping Arrests of Ahwazi Arab Activists', 29 April 2015, [url](#)

⁷⁸ USSD, 'Human Rights Report' (section 6), 7 March 2017, [url](#)

⁷⁹ Ahwaz Monitor Information Center, [url](#)

7. Ahwazi political groups

7.1 Overview

7.1.1 A classified US State Department cable released by 'Wikileaks' in 2006 summarised a 27 August 2006 meeting between the US Ambassador to Kuwait, Richard LeBaron, and Poloff Khalil Delavi, described as 'an Iranian Ahwazi (Arab) activist and member of the Democratic Solidarity Party of Al-Ahwaz (DSPA)'. It should be noted that this cable is twelve years old and repeats the testimony of one individual. The cable stated:

'According to Delavi, Ahwazi opposition groups fall into two categories: those that support a separate, independent Ahwazi state and those like the DSPA and its affiliates that support a largely self-governing Ahwazi province within a democratic, federalist Iran. When pressed, however, Delavi admitted that all Ahwazi opposition groups share the ultimate goal of an independent Ahwazi state, somewhat blurring his own distinction between the organizations. Delavi also reported that the Kuwaiti government (GOK) had taken a more active interest in Ahwazi issues and now regularly met with Ahwazi activists in Kuwait, including himself. (Note: Delavi claims Ahwazis account for "60-65% of the 50,000-60,000 Iranians living in Kuwait," the largest Ahwazi community outside Iran)...

'The groups differ, however, over whether violence should be used to achieve this objective. According to Delavi, the DSPA rejects using violent methods to create a federal government in Iran, but ultimately believes this federalist system will devolve into several independent states divided on ethnic lines. Asked what sort of timeframe he envisioned for this process to take place, Delavi responded, "Like Iraq today (which he believed was in the process of separating into three separate states)," suggesting a relatively short transition from federalism to full independence.'⁸⁰

7.1.2 The cable continued: 'Although he [Delavi] claims to have regular access to sources in Iran, most of Delavi's information seems to come from Iranian opposition websites', although added: 'Post was unable to independently verify the accuracy of Delavi's information on Ahwazi opposition groups. Nonetheless, open source reporting seems to corroborate -- or at least not contradict -- much of his information.'⁸¹

7.1.3 The cable noted that Delavi identified several organisations that supported or campaigned for the Ahwazi community. These were the:

- (Islamic) Al-Wefagh party
- National Liberation Movement of Ahwaz (based in Canada)
- Ahwazi Arab People's Popular Democratic Front (based in London)
- Democratic Solidarity Party of Al-Ahwaz (based in London)
- British Ahwaz Friendship Society (based in London)

⁸⁰ USSD (WikiLeaks), 'Ahwazi opposition groups' 30 August 2006, [url](#)

⁸¹ USSD (WikiLeaks), 'Ahwazi opposition groups' 30 August 2006, [url](#)

- Ahwaz Human Rights Organization (AHRO) (based in Virginia)
- Ahwaz Education and Human Rights Foundation (AEHRF)
- Ahwaz Study Center⁸²

- 7.1.4 The Wikileaks cable noted that Delavi said that the Arab Ahwaz Renaissance Party (Alt. Uprising Party) was a ‘militant separatist group based in Canada’ and, according to Delavi, ‘this is the “only (Ahwazi) separatist organization with a publicly announced armed faction.”⁸³
- 7.1.5 Al-Ahwaz National Resistance is described as an ‘umbrella’ movement for Arab separatist groups^{84 85}. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty noted that the group includes the Arab Struggle Movement for the Liberation of Al-Ahvaz, which has recently launched a television station in Europe⁸⁶.
- 7.1.6 The Terrorism Research and Analysis Consortium (TRAC), in an undated piece, described the Al-Ahwaz Arab Popular Democratic Front as ‘a separatist group fighting for the independence of Iran’s oil rich province Khuzestan with the goal of establishing an Marxist Arab state. After it was outlawed by the Iranian government, the group moved its headquarters to [London]’. It is also known as Al-Ahwaz Arab Popular Democratic Front, Arab People’s Democratic Front, Democratic Popular Front for the Arab People of Ahwaz, and is an ‘active’ group formed around 2005⁸⁷.
- 7.1.7 Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, in an article dated September 2018, quoted Professor Rasman Christian Elling of the University of Copenhagen, and author of a book of minorities in Iran:
- “Although several of the so-called Al-Ahwazi groups do not wish to appear to be funded by foreign governments, there are certain indications that groups such as ASMLA [the Arab Struggle Movement for the Liberation of Al-Ahvaz] are receiving support, either from private individuals or state institutions in Gulf countries. It would be interesting, for example, to know how they can afford to launch TV stations with brand new equipment in places such as the Netherlands and Denmark,”⁸⁸
- 7.1.8 The same article, observed: ‘Despite widespread discontent in the province [Khuzestan], analysts, including Elling, say that separatist groups don’t have much support among Khuzestani Arabs who see themselves as Iranians.’⁸⁹

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7.2 Armed activities

- 7.2.1 The CRS described militant ‘Ahwazi Arabs’ as ‘[r]elatively inactive over the past few years’.⁹⁰

⁸² USSD (WikiLeaks), ‘Ahwazi opposition groups’ 30 August 2006, [url](#)

⁸³ USSD (WikiLeaks), ‘Ahwazi opposition groups’ 30 August 2006, [url](#)

⁸⁴ AI, ‘Hundreds arrested’, 2 November 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁵ BBC News, ‘Iran arrests ‘22 people’ over Ahvaz attack’, 24 September 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁶ RFE/RL, ‘Poverty, Separatism, And Bloody Memories of War’, 28 September 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁷ TRAC, APDF, undated, [url](#)

⁸⁸ RFE/RL, ‘Poverty, Separatism, And Bloody Memories of War’, 28 September 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁹ RFE/RL, ‘Poverty, Separatism, And Bloody Memories of War’, 28 September 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁰ CRS, ‘Iran’, p. 14, 8 February 2018, [url](#)

7.2.2 Jane's by IHS Market, in April 2015, stated:

'Iran has accused Saudi Arabia of supporting Ahwazi Arab militants based in the oil-rich Khuzestan province, southwest Iran, although this claim has not been substantiated, and nor has Iran specified the extent of such support. The Arab Struggle Movement for the Liberation of Ahwaz (ASMLA) has carried out a series of successful attacks on Iran's oil and gas pipelines using improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in Khuzestan, with the most recent wave of such attacks occurring in 2012 and 2013. Although the long remote stretches of pipelines are potential targets for further IEDs, Iran has since enhanced pipeline security and there have been no successful attacks reported since 2013. The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) foiled a bomb plot on the Abadan-Mahashahr oil pipeline in November 2013, which the IRGC later claimed was by the ASMLA...

'Although Ahwazi Arabs are overwhelmingly Shia, the ASMLA dedicated the August 2013 attack on a gas pipeline to their Syrian 'brothers-in-arms', positioning the group's agenda against Iran as part of the larger regional conflict. Moreover, the head of the ASMLA met with Mohammad Riad al-Shaqfeh, head of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, in September 2012, indicating their potential co-operation. Nevertheless, the extent of Ahwazi Arab support for the ASMLA and militancy is unclear. Despite having economic grievances, Ahwazi Arabs sided with Iran during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988).'⁹¹

7.2.3 Jane's, in June 2017, reported that Daesh (aka Islamic State of Syria and Levant – ISIS) attacked Tehran on 7 June 2017, killing 12 and injuring 42 people. It noted: 'This was the first set of attacks by the Islamic State in Iran and came after the group called on Iranian Sunnis to conduct attacks in Iran in late March 2017, and show that the group has established at least a rudimentary support network within Iran.' The source continued:

'The Arabic-speaking attackers in the released video footage indicated at least some involvement by members of the Arab Ahwazi minority. The Islamic State is also likely to increasingly focus on providing organisational and logistical support to [ground including] Arab Ahwazi insurgents in the oil-rich Khuzestan province, given its proximity to Iraq's Diyala province. Notably, a previous shooting attack on a police station in Ahwaz Khuzestan on 15 May [2017] by Ahwazi Arabs, who had networks inside Iraq, probably served as a test of Iran's security procedures and vulnerabilities.'⁹²

7.2.4 The same source provided some further information about the 15 May 2017 attack:

'On 15 May, an unspecified number of armed militants shot and injured a police station guard in Ahwaz, in the oil-rich province of Khuzestan, following an exchange of fire during which two police officers were killed and four injured. No group claimed responsibility for the attack at the time of writing. However, a video was circulated on Arab Ahwazi separatist media channels following the attack, according to Saudi Arabia's al-Arabiya network's Farsi channel. This video showcased fighters of the Ahwaz Liberation Army,

⁹¹ Jane's, 'Iran's increasingly active involvement in the region's proxy wars', 21 April 2015, [url](#)

⁹² Jane's, 'Co-ordinated twin Islamic State attacks in Iran's capital', 8 June 2017, [url](#)

announcing their intent to carry out armed attacks at sites ranging from 'Revolution Alley' (an old neighbourhood in Ahwaz) to Tehran, Iran's capital.

'The 15 May attack that targeted a police station is more ambitious than previous attacks in Khuzestan, which comprised periodic improvised explosive device (IED) attacks or shooting attacks on softer targets.'⁹³

- 7.2.5 Sources referred to an attack on a military parade on the 22nd September⁹⁴. The BBC described it as 'the deadliest attack in Iran in almost a decade'⁹⁶; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty said that 'at least 25' people were killed⁹⁷. Several groups took responsibility for the attack, including the Al-Ahwaz National Resistance⁹⁸ ⁹⁹. However, a spokesman for the group told BBC Monitoring that they had not been involved¹⁰⁰. BBC Monitoring also noted that the Arab Struggle Movement for the Liberation of Al-Ahwaz (ASMLA), the Ahwazi Democratic Popular Front and the Patriotic Arab Democratic Movement in Ahwaz all separately denied involvement in the attack¹⁰¹. Iran's intelligence ministry reportedly says 22 people have been arrested in connection with the attack¹⁰².

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7.3 State response to Ahwazi militant activity

- 7.3.1 The CRS noted that 'the regime continues to execute members' of the 'Ahwazi Arab' militant organisation.'¹⁰³
- 7.3.2 The Danish FFM 2017 report noted: 'For Iranian authorities, the red line is crossed when activities conducted by Ahwazi Arabs are interpreted as separatist. A source added that long prison sentences will be issued in cases related to separatist activities.'¹⁰⁴
- 7.3.3 The Danish report also noted: 'The Revolutionary Guard as well as the Ministry of Intelligence are conducting activities in Khuzestan and other places where Ahwazi Arabs live. However, [contrasting the surveillance of Kurdish activists] the authorities' presence is lesser than in the Kurdish areas, two sources highlighted.'¹⁰⁵
- 7.3.4 The source added: 'A Western embassy noted that the Ahwazi community has many grievances towards the Iranian state, and it has been quite vocal about it, especially the groups in exile. However, these grievances are not alive in the Iranian society.'¹⁰⁶

⁹³ Jane's, 'Growing risk of low-capability attacks in border provinces', 19 May 2017, [url](#)

⁹⁴ AI, 'Hundreds arrested', 2 November 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁵ RFE/RL, 'Poverty, Separatism, And Bloody Memories of War', 28 September 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁶ BBC News, 'Iran arrests '22 people' over Ahvaz attack', 24 September 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁷ RFE/RL, 'Poverty, Separatism, And Bloody Memories of War', 28 September 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁸ AI, 'Hundreds arrested', 2 November 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁹ RFE/RL, 'Poverty, Separatism, And Bloody Memories of War', 28 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰ BBC Monitoring, 'who are the Ahvaz attackers?', 25 September 2018. Subscription only.

¹⁰¹ BBC Monitoring, 'Separatist groups deny role', 23 September 2018. Subscription only.

¹⁰² BBC News, 'Iran arrests '22 people' over Ahvaz attack', 24 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰³ CRS, 'Iran' (p. 14) 8 February 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴ Danish FFM report, February 2018 (pp. 9-10) [url](#)

¹⁰⁵ Danish FFM report, February 2018 (p. 9) [url](#)

¹⁰⁶ Danish FFM report, February 2018, (pp. 9-10) [url](#)

7.3.5 In response to the 22 September attack (see 7.2.5), the BBC noted that ‘the deputy head of the Revolutionary Guards accused Saudi Arabia, Israel and the US of masterminding the attack and promised they would face repercussions.’¹⁰⁷ Amnesty International noted that, in response to the attack, the Iranian authorities ‘waged a sweeping crackdown against the Ahwazi Arab ethnic minority’, arresting hundreds of people, including political and minority rights activists.’¹⁰⁸ Iran Human Rights (IHR) claimed they received unverified information about the execution of as many as 22 Ahwazi Arab activists following the attack¹⁰⁹.

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¹⁰⁷ BBC News, ‘Iran arrests ‘22 people’ over Ahvaz attack’, 24 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸ AI, ‘Hundreds arrested’, 2 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹ IHR, ‘Increasing Concern About Possible Mass Execution’, 11 November 2018, [url](#)

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 ToRs, 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
 - Demography
 - History
 - Language
 - Location
 - Key events/timeline
- Legal and constitutional rights
- Treatment by State
 - Discrimination
 - Treatment of Ahwazis generally
 - Treatment of Ahwazi political groups
 - Arrests and detention
- Treatment by society
- Ahwazi political groups
 - Main groups
 - Membership numbers
 - Aims/objectives
 - Political activities
 - Leadership/key figures
- State response to Ahwazi militant activity

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Version control

Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **2.0**
- valid from **December 2018**

Changes from last version of this note

Updated country information on Ahwazi groups

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