

**Shadow Report on the Status of Women in Iran,
30 Years after the Beijing Conference**

Prepared by

Stop “Honor” Killings Campaign

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Introduction

This shadow report is submitted to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW69) to provide an independent assessment of the status of Iranian women, analyzed through the lens of the twelve critical areas of concern outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action. Thirty years after the historic Beijing Conference, the challenges and systemic barriers faced by women in Iran remain deeply entrenched, reflecting significant gaps in achieving gender equality and empowering women.

Iranian women have endured decades of discrimination embedded in legal, cultural, and social structures that systematically undermine their rights and opportunities. While women in Iran have consistently demonstrated resilience, agency, and leadership across various sectors, they continue to encounter severe restrictions on fundamental freedoms, including access to education, employment, healthcare, and participation in political and public life.

This report highlights key developments, setbacks, and violations within the framework of the twelve axes of concern including women and poverty, education and training, health, violence against women, economic inequality, political participation, institutional mechanisms, and human rights. It underscores the impact of state policies, international sanctions, and sociopolitical crises, all of which have exacerbated the vulnerabilities of Iranian women and hinder progress toward fulfilling the commitments of the Beijing Declaration.

By documenting lived experiences, legal constraints, and policy deficiencies, this shadow report aims to draw attention to the urgent need for comprehensive reforms and international support to advance the rights of Iranian women. It provides evidence-based recommendations for stakeholders, urging the CSW and the global community to hold the Iranian government accountable for its obligations under international conventions and to amplify the voices of Iranian women striving for equality and justice.

This pivotal moment—three decades after the Beijing Declaration—offers a chance to reflect, re-evaluate, and reaffirm global commitments to gender equality, particularly in addressing the persistent challenges faced by women in Iran.

Beijing Conference Achievements in Iran

The Beijing Conference (1995) marked a pivotal moment in advancing gender equality on a global scale. Its outcomes, particularly the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action provided a comprehensive framework for empowering women and promoting gender equality. However, in Iran, the implementation of these principles has faced substantial challenges stemming from religious, political, social, and cultural barriers.

Since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, women's rights activists in Iran have faced persistent challenges. While the conference was attended by a government delegation and a limited number of social activists, its influence on advancing gender equality within the country remained constrained.

Following the conference, bureaus for women's affairs were established within several Iranian ministries. However, these bureaus were largely influenced by traditional patriarchal perspectives. Their focus remained on managing the daily affairs of female personnel within the ministries and addressing women's issues within limited programmatic frameworks broader structural issues and the systemic inequalities impacting gender equality were largely ignored.

Key Impacts of the Beijing Conference on Iranian Women:

Following an opening of the political climate for social participation during the Reform period under the presidency of Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005), numerous non-governmental organizations for women's affairs were created, supported by the government and by the Center for Women's Participation affiliated with the president's office. Although gender equality issues received inadequate attention at these organizations, this eight-year period saw a relative increase awareness and discourse on gender equality. The press played a notable role in fostering this discourse and awareness. The government executed joint projects with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) for improving reproductive rights as well as enhancing women's social, economic, and political empowerment.

In 2003, a bill to join the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was approved by Majlis (the parliament) with the "the right of inquiry" or "the right to investigate.", but was vetoed by the Guardian Council.¹ Also in 2003, women's rights activists challenged family law at Majlis, and won maternal custody rights for children under the age of seven. Another accomplishment was increased maternity leave for female employees, although this somewhat negatively impacted female employment. As a result of efforts by women's rights activists on the issue of violence against women and capacity-building among reformist statesmen, in the final year of the Khatami administration, the government's fourth Five-Year Development Plan stipulated legal measures for fighting domestic violence, but these measures were never implemented.

¹ It is an appointed and constitutionally mandated 12-member council that wields considerable power and influence in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

During the Reform era, women's affairs bureaus at ministries and governorships attracted many women and appropriated funds for several projects. There is no data to evaluate the correlation between this funding and its impact on women's lives. This period saw a small increase in women's entry into management positions, including city councils, parliament, and mid-level governmental management, but top state positions such as ministerial posts and the presidency were not granted to women. Even women at mid-level managerial positions did not have full executive authority in decision-making, and in many cases, were not concerned about women's rights issues or had a traditional outlook on the role of women.

When Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's conservative administration came to power in 2005, the Center for Women's Participation was abruptly renamed "Center for Women and Family Affairs." Organizations working in women's affairs came up against managers who, despite being female themselves, advocated patriarchal views and traditional models for what they considered to be "family preservation," including the promotion of polygamy. Concurrently, the Ahmadinejad era has witnessed a widespread clampdown on women's rights activists and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working for women's empowerment and gender equality, with many activists arrested, convicted, and imprisoned and many NGOs shut down. In the workplace, women were subjected to discriminatory regulations. Upon Zohreh Tabibzadeh's appointment as the head of the Center for Women and Family Affairs, she officially announced that the center is not committed to any international conventions and conferences on women. For three years, no Iranian representative was sent to the Commission on the Status of Women.

In summary, the impact of the Beijing Conference from the perspective of women's activism in society can be expressed as follows:

Raising Gender Awareness:

- The Beijing document introduced concepts such as gender equality, women's empowerment, and the elimination of discrimination, which served as a framework for Iranian activists to shape their demands and strategies.
- Topics like violence against women, political participation, and gender justice became more prominent in Iranian women's discourse.

Building International Networks:

- The conference provided an opportunity for Iranian women's rights activists to connect with international networks and learn from the experiences of other countries.
- These connections facilitated the exchange of knowledge and strengthened solidarity between women's movements.

Strengthening the Women's Movement:

- Post-conference, efforts to strengthen women's organizations in Iran gained momentum. Despite legal restrictions and political suppression, women utilized various tools to pursue their goals.

Focusing on Legal Issues:

- One of the key outcomes of the conference was the focus on the need to reform discriminatory laws. Inspired by the Beijing Platform, Iranian women pushed for changes in family, labor, and civil rights laws.

Limited Institutional Change

- Although some efforts were made to include women's concerns in government agendas, the patriarchal structure of the regime restricted meaningful progress. Policies often reflected traditional values rather than aligning with the Platform for Action's emphasis on equal rights, education, and opportunities for women.

During the administrations of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Ebrahim Raisi, stricter and more repressive policies were adopted, creating significant barriers to the advancement of women's rights. These policies not only weakened decades of efforts to promote women's rights but also fueled increased discrimination and violence against women.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) focusing on women's rights faced heightened restrictions, with many being forced to shut down or operate covertly. Initiatives such as emphasizing women's roles within the family rather than in social and economic spheres led to a decline in women's participation in public life. Violent crackdowns on women's rights activists and widespread arrests became a hallmark of these governments. These actions have fostered an atmosphere of fear and repression, severely limiting the progress of gender equality advocacy.

Limits on Present Report

Despite these achievements, women's activism in Iran has consistently faced political, religious, and legal constraints. The Iranian government did not fully adopt the Beijing Platform for Action, arguing that some of its provisions were incompatible with Islamic law. This stance limited but did not stop the progress of women's advocacy efforts.

While NGOs and women's rights activists in most countries around the world engage in critical discourse on women's issues and conduct nationwide research in their countries to measure achievements since the Beijing Platform for Action in the past 30 years, researchers and activists in Iran have been hindered by a lack of opportunity and access to resources for data collection, and have at times faced court and prison for their activities. Therefore, it has proven difficult for NGOs to conduct broad surveys and nationwide studies. Meanwhile, government statistics are often unreliable and typically lack gender-specific data.

In addition, Iranian women face significant limits and challenges in presenting reports to the 69th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) due to a combination of political, legal, and social restrictions. These challenges stem from the Iranian government's policies, structural barriers, and the repressive environment for women's rights advocacy. Below are some of the primary constraints:

1. Repressive Political Environment

- **Surveillance and Intimidation:** Women activists and organizations attempting to engage with international bodies, including the CSW, are often subjected to surveillance, harassment, and intimidation by Iranian authorities.
- **Criminalization of Advocacy:** Many forms of activism, including reporting to international bodies, are labeled as acts against national security, exposing activists to arrests and imprisonment.
- **Restrictions on Travel:** Activists who aim to participate in the CSW sessions in person often face travel bans, which prevent them from attending international forums.

2. Government-Driven Reports

- The Iranian government often submits its own reports to the CSW that fail to reflect the lived realities of women, instead portraying a sanitized version of the country's status on gender equality.
- Independent reports by civil society are frequently discredited or dismissed by the state.

3. Censorship and Lack of Access

- **Censorship of Data:** Access to accurate data on women's rights issues, such as domestic violence, employment disparities, and health inequities, is often restricted, making it difficult for NGOs to produce detailed and evidence-based reports.

- **Media Censorship:** Women's rights organizations face restrictions on using domestic and international media platforms to highlight their findings.

4. Limited Civil Society Space

Many women's rights organizations in Iran operate under severe constraints or have been forced to shut down due to legal and political pressures.

Activists often have to work underground, limiting their ability to collaborate and submit comprehensive reports to international bodies like the CSW.

5. Lack of International Support

- Activists and NGOs often lack sufficient resources or legal protection to engage effectively with the CSW.
- The international community's limited leverage over Iran's government makes it difficult to ensure accountability for violations of women's rights.

Women's Challenges

The core challenges facing women in Iran, as in many countries, are deeply rooted in patriarchal customs and laws that permeate every sphere of life, from family issues to political, economic, cultural, and social participation. For centuries, Iranian society has been overshadowed by a systemic denial of the existence and severity of problems such as domestic violence. Statesmen and lawmakers have often dismissed or ignored these issues, further entrenching gender inequality. Additionally, women have been consistently excluded from meaningful participation in decision-making processes and politics.

Iran's short-lived Reform Period (1997–2005) offered a glimpse of hope, allowing the expansion of activism and struggles for women's rights. However, despite heightened advocacy efforts during that time, no major legal or structural changes were achieved. The Reform Period's promises for gender equality remained largely unfulfilled, leaving deep-seated patriarchal norms intact.

A major challenge facing women in Iran is domestic violence, which is supported by discriminatory laws as well as cultural and economic factors. While the Iranian government denies the existence of domestic violence, a field study conducted in 2004 found that 66 percent of women are subjected to violence at least once during their conjugal life. In a qualitative study conducted to identify women's problems, women in group discussions maintained that they are discriminated against in the home, workplace, and society. They also complained of physical and psychological violence. Many women expressed distress at their husband's polygamous permanent and temporary marriages. All of these cases are supported by Iranian law, which contributes to the sense of inequality and helplessness in women who have suffered from these discriminatory laws. In the study's group discussions, women expressed a belief that depression is rampant among women but that most cases are undiagnosed and not recorded in statistics. They noted the high rates of suicide among women resulting from domestic abuse, for which law and society offer no sanctuary.

Equal opportunity for education is an issue that after years of struggle by women's rights activists was once more taken away from women, as new laws limited higher education for women. Because women are deemed second-class citizens in Iran and must prove their identity and capability by virtue of educational opportunities afforded to them by their families, are motivated to study and earn equal opportunities through education. In 2006, women succeeded in achieving a 65 percent entry rate from the total admissions into universities. Although inhibitive misogynistic laws and prevalent social traditions continue to reduce the graduation rate for women beneath this figure, statesmen could not stand this superior performance by women and instated gender-based quotas for entry to higher education institutes. These quotas are in place in many academic majors, and alongside regional quotas, continue to bar many women from education opportunities, despite outperforming their male counterparts on the national university entrance examination.

Under the Islamic Republic, discrimination against women has persisted, with legal frameworks continuing to enforce inequality. Civil laws heavily favor men in areas such as marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance, sparking decades of discourse on legal

discrimination. This ongoing inequality has fueled numerous demonstrations and protests led by women demanding change and justice.

Despite their courage, these protests have often been met with severe crackdowns. Demonstrations have ended in violence, with many women arrested, detained, and prosecuted for their activism. The state's harsh response highlights its resistance to change and its effort to silence voices advocating for gender equality.

In recent years, movements such as "**Woman, Life, Freedom**" have emerged as powerful symbols of resistance, uniting women and allies across Iran and beyond in their struggle against systemic oppression. These movements underscore the enduring resilience of Iranian women, who continue to challenge the structural and cultural barriers to their rights, despite the significant risks involved.

The path forward for women in Iran requires both domestic reforms and international support to address legal inequalities, dismantle patriarchal norms, and ensure women's full participation in all aspects of life.

However, the most significant and fundamental challenge women face with the Islamic regime is Article 4 of the Constitution. This article states that all laws, regulations, and directives must be based on Islamic Sharia. This principle serves as a major obstacle to implementing any changes aimed at advancing women's rights. And other laws that restrict or violate women's rights are also consequences of this principle. Some of these are highlighted below.

- According to the current marital law, girls are marriageable at age 13 and women of any age cannot marry without consent of their father or paternal grandfather. Both these conditions contribute to the duration of forced marriages.
- According to civil law, a husband is the head of the family, and in permanent marriages, a husband is responsible for his wife's living expenses, but he can withhold payment if she declines sexual intercourse—a law that encourages various kinds of domestic violence. By law, a wife must live at a residence determined by her husband.
- According to civil law, a husband can prevent his wife from working in a profession or field that he deems damaging to his or her reputation or their family's interests—a factor that impedes the financial independence of women.
- According to travel law, a wife must receive her husband's permission to obtain a passport.
- According to civil law, a man can divorce his wife at any time by paying her pre-nuptial financial endowment [*mehriyeh*], without having to provide grounds for divorce in court. But a woman can obtain divorce only by providing evidence that she is unable to live with him on grounds such as addiction, abandonment, non-payment of living expenses, terminal illness, prison sentences exceeding five years, etc. Generally, providing such circumstances in court is quite difficult.

- According to civil law, a father and paternal grandfather have guardianship rights over their children, and according to the Islamic Penal Code, a father or paternal grandfather who kills his child is exempt from punishment for murder –a law that lends itself to honor killings by fathers or by the paternal family.
- According to the Islamic Penal Code, if a man discovers his wife in the act of adultery with another man, he can murder them both on the spot.
- A mother’s custody rights after divorce only extend up to seven years of age, after which the father’s custody rights are prioritized.
- According to the Islamic Penal Code, a woman’s ‘blood money’ –an amount paid to victims inflicted with grievous bodily harm –is worth half of that of a man’s.
- According to judicial law, women are barred from bearing witness in some cases, and in all other cases a women’s testimony is worth half of that of a man’s.
- According to the Islamic Penal Code, the Islamic dress code [*hijab*] is mandatory in public and non-observance is punishable by imprisonment or fines.

Women's status in Iran

Article 1: Women and Poverty

The issue of women and poverty in Iranian society is a complex and multidimensional challenge influenced by social, economic, cultural, and political factors. Women's poverty in Iran is exacerbated by various reasons, such as gender discrimination, lack of adequate access to job opportunities, and legal and social restrictions. Below are some aspects of this issue:

Economic Factors

Legal Limitations on Employment: According to the laws of the Islamic Republic of Iran, men are considered the "head of the household," and a woman's economic activity or employment must be authorized by her husband. If the husband denies permission, the woman cannot be employed. This legal restriction is a fundamental reason for women's economic dependency and, consequently, their poverty.

Unemployment and Underemployment: Iranian women, particularly in rural and underprivileged areas, face limited job opportunities. In many cases, women work in informal, low-income jobs that not only lack job security but also exclude them from benefits such as insurance and pensions.

Wage Inequality: Even in cases where women have access to formal jobs, they often earn less than men for the same work. This wage disparity further contributes to their economic vulnerability.

Unsupportive Employment Laws: Labor and employment laws in Iran are not adequately designed to support women. Many professions are structured with a male-oriented perspective, offering insufficient facilities or support for balancing work and family life. This creates gender disparities in employment competition, limiting women's opportunities for economic participation. Additionally, in many industries and sectors, the gender pay gap prevents women from earning as much as men, even when they join the workforce.

Low Economic Participation Rates: According to Iran's Statistical Center, in the spring of 2024, the economic participation rate for women was 14.3%, significantly lower than men's participation rate (approximately one-fifth of men's rate). Among various age groups, women aged 25 to 29 had the highest participation rate, at 26.4% during this period. Women's employment in Iran lags far behind the global average. In 2023, women's employment in Iran was about 14%, compared to a global female labor force participation rate of nearly 50%. This is despite a significant increase in the percentage of educated Iranian women in recent years. Global comparisons show that Iranian women have one of the lowest labor force participation rates in the world.

Social and Cultural Factors

Patriarchal Labor Market: Despite societal changes, Iran's labor market remains patriarchal, and women's employment is heavily influenced by traditional perspectives. These social views emphasize women's roles within the family, limiting their presence in the workforce.

Traditional Gender Roles: In many families, women are primarily responsible for household chores and childcare. These traditional roles hinder their active participation in the labor market.

Cultural and Social Restrictions: Some women are barred from pursuing education or employment due to societal pressures and traditional views about their roles in society.

Legal Factors

Discriminatory Laws: Laws related to inheritance, child custody, employment, and divorce are often designed in favor of men, making women more financially vulnerable.

Lack of Legal Protections: Women who are heads of households or those separated from their families frequently face significant legal and financial challenges.

Women as Heads of Households

Women as heads of households in Iran have been on the rise due to various socio-economic challenges, including the loss of male breadwinners through death, divorce, or disability. According to the Statistical Center of Iran, the number of female heads of households supported by organizations like the Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation and the Welfare Organization has seen an increase, from over 1.5 million in 2017 to more than 1.5 million in 2023² These women face significant social and economic difficulties, and many initiatives have been put in place to support them, such as entrepreneurship funds and sustainable business development programs. These efforts aim to empower women and improve their socio-economic status through education, training, and access to employment opportunities.³

Rising Numbers: The number of female heads of households in Iran is increasing. According to official statistics, in 2020, there were over 4 million female heads of households in Iran, and this trend continues to grow.⁴

Lack of Social Support: These women often face severe poverty due to insufficient social support and limited access to economic resources. The government provides minimal financial aid to some female heads of households through institutions such as the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee and the State Welfare Organization.

To address poverty among women in Iran, comprehensive strategies that address both immediate needs and long-term empowerment are necessary. Below are some proposed recommendations

1. Establish skill development and vocational training programs tailored for women, particularly in rural and underserved areas.
2. Promote women's entrepreneurship through microfinance initiatives and access to startup grants.

² <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/508239/Welfare-relief-entities-support-more-women-heads-of-household>, Welfare, relief entities support more women heads of household

³ "Iran: Added Number of Households Headed by Women," Women's National Committee of Iran (WNCRI), December 6, 2016, <https://wncri.org/2016/12/06/iran-added-number-of-households-headed-by-women/>.

⁴ ⁴ <https://www.irna.ir/news/85136315/زن-سرپرست-خانوار-اشتغال-و-مسائل-مهم-تر-از-آن>

3. Implement affirmative action policies to increase women's participation in various industries.
4. Ensure equal pay for equal work by enforcing anti-discrimination laws in employment.
5. Expand social welfare programs, including health insurance, childcare support, and housing assistance, targeting women-led households.
6. Amend discriminatory laws that restrict women's financial independence or inheritance rights.
7. Promote legal reforms to facilitate women's participation in the labor force without requiring spousal or family consent.

Article 2: Education and Training of Women

In the first generation of human rights, the right to education has been raised and its importance has been defined. In the second generation of human rights, the duties of governments and social issues related to the right to education are discussed, and the realization of the third generation of human rights depends on the implementation of education. According to the Universal declaration of Human Rights and its subsequent human rights instruments, the right to education, which is considered as a cultural and social right, must be provided by states without any discrimination in terms of race, sex, and religion, and the obligation of states to realize it is of the type of obligation by means. Governments are obliged to provide the content of right to all people equally and without any discrimination by using the relevant means and facilities. Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms without distinction as to race, gender, language or religion is one of the supreme goals of the Charter of the United Nations as the constitution of the international community. In Iran, this right to education, especially in the field of women's educational rights, is violated in many cases. One of the most important educational issues in Iran is the dropout of children at different educational stages. The Parliamentary Research Centre announced the number of school dropouts in the academic year 2022-2023 at 911,272. Accordingly, the number of school dropouts in the current academic year has increased by about 2 percent compared to the previous year.

Girls' education in Iran faces numerous challenges and problems that can affect the accessibility and quality of their education. Some of these problems:

- a. Cultural and social barriers, Traditional attitudes in some areas, traditional attitudes toward the role of women and girls can prevent them from continuing their education. Some families may prefer that girls do housework or get married instead of studying. Girls; education is seen as a lower priority than boys.
- b. Access to schools and educational space In rural and remote areas, the long distance from schools and the lack of educational facilities can prevent girls from accessing education. Many rural areas of Iran lack basic education facilities. In areas where there are not enough girls's schools, girls are forced to go to co-

educational schools. This may not be acceptable for some families and they do not send girls to school.

- c. Economic Issues and Poverty - One of the main reasons for girls not getting an education is economic poverty. Families may force their daughters to work or marry instead of continuing their education due to financial problems. Tuition-related expenses, including the cost of books, clothing, and transportation, are heavy for low-income families.
- d. Lack of physical and psychological security in schools - Concerns about the safety of girls on the way to school and in the community, as well as the schools themselves, can also be a significant factor preventing them from continuing their education. The issue of chain poisonings in girls; schools in Iran created a large wave of social anxiety. The attacks, which took place three months after the start of the movement of Jina started and targeted girls' schools, and thousands of students faced the physical and psychological complications of inhaling toxic gases. The government's inability to control this situation and the systematic suppression of student protests in Iran is an example of a violation of human rights and the right to education.
- e. Student suicides - Since 2021, the tables related to the frequency of age and gender of suicides in Iran have been removed from the website of the Forensic Medicine Organization, but researchers active in the field of health and suicide prevention and NGOs report high unofficial statistics in this regard. Just last week, two teenage girls committed suicide due to threats and insults from the school principal and fear of expulsion. Creating an atmosphere of intimidation and shattering the personality of students is a violation of their human rights. The causes of these suicides are also significant. Statistics published in the media indicate that the causes of student suicide include poverty (8%), educational problems and the attitude of the educational staff (26%), conflict with the family (28%), failure in emotional relationships (5%), rape (8%), and 20% of suicides were due to forced marriage of female students.
- f. Shortage of female teachers - In some parts of Iran, the shortage of female teachers can affect the quality of girls' education. Girls' families may prefer that their children be trained by female teachers. The difficult process of admission to the field of teaching for girls has always caused the problem of a shortage of female teachers in Iran.
- g. Gender discrimination in the field of sports in educational environments against girls - The traditional view of girls' sports and the underestimation of the importance of girls' physical education have caused them to be in the lower rungs of access to sports facilities. Gender stereotypes in Iran's educational structure, compulsory clothing during sports, and threats and intimidation of girls have blocked the way for girls' upbringing. 8 Discrimination against women in the selection of academic majors for the past five years, more than half of those admitted to the university are women. Gender quotas in the choice of academic majors are a blatant discrimination against women. For example, since 2011, women's quotas in 77 fields and 36 universities have been zero, and many girls

have been openly banned from studying in this field. Disciplines that, from the point of view of male domination, are opposed to the feminine and maternal roles of women, and in fact, reproduce the same gender stereotypes. We can add the other facts and statistics can be added to these cases, but what is clear is the continuation of the policies of oppression and discrimination against women in the field of education.

Article 3: Violence against women

Violence against women is one of the most persistent and widespread social problems in Iran. Over the past decades, particularly after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, this issue has grown more complex and pervasive. This violence includes various forms of systemic discrimination and legal and cultural oppression created or exacerbated by the Islamic regime. This report explores significant instances of violence against women in Iran and analyzes the role of the Islamic regime in perpetuating these abuses. Violence against women in Iran, particularly honor killings, is alarmingly on the rise, directly influenced by the misogynistic policies of the Islamic Republic. Laws that impose lenient punishments for honor killings have fostered a culture of impunity among perpetrators, devaluing women's lives in society. Additionally, the government's promotion of patriarchal and controlling values, coupled with the suppression of women's freedoms and efforts to achieve equal rights, has created an environment where violence against women, including honor killings, is legitimized as a tool to preserve traditional structures and male dominance. This situation not only victimizes women but also reflects the regime's disregard for human rights and the dignity of women. To grasp the severity of the tragedy of honor killings, it is enough to know that in the first nine months of 2024, the Stop Honor Killings Campaign has accurately documented and analyzed 136 cases of honor killings.⁵ The total number of honor killings documented in 2024 on the Stop Honor Killings website was 186.⁶

Among the psychological impacts of honor killings on women subjected to family violence are chronic stress, anxiety, and constant fear of being killed. These women live in terror, afraid they might be the next victim, and as a result, they endure the abuse, losing their courage, self-confidence, and self-esteem. This cycle of fear and suppression prevents them from escaping or seeking help, leaving them trapped in a state of perpetual vulnerability.

Laws should deter violence, but some laws in the Islamic Republic of Iran promote violence against women. For example, under Article 1105 of the Civil Procedure Code, a woman is legally obligated to obey her husband, and if she refuses, the husband is permitted to withhold financial support. Furthermore, Article 630 of the Islamic Penal Code allows a man who catches his wife with another man and has proof of her consent to kill both individuals. This legal provision not only legitimizes violence but also exacerbates the prevalence of honor killings in Iran by providing legal justification for such acts.

In Iran, there is a significant shortage of safe houses for women, which has left many vulnerable individuals without a proper place to turn for protection, especially victims of domestic violence or those fleeing abusive situations. According to available reports, as of recent years, there are only 26 safe houses in total across the country—eight are government-run, while the other 18 are operated by non-governmental organizations. For every two million Iranian women over the age of ten, there is only one space available in safe houses for women who are victims of violence. This stark statistic highlights the critical shortage of resources dedicated to protecting and supporting vulnerable women in Iran. Given the limited

⁵-Moghaddam, R. (2024). *Third Quarter Report 2024: At least 136 honor killings in nine months*. Retrieved December 12, 2024, from <https://stophonorkillings.org/en/2024/11/28/the-tragedy-of-honor-killings-third-quarter-report-2024-at-least-136-honor-killings-in-nine-months/>

⁶ Fourth Quarterly Report on "Honor Killings" in 2024 (186 Cases in a Year) By Rezvan Moghaddam <https://stophonorkillings.org/en/2025/01/03/fourth-quarterly-report-on-honor-killings-in-2024186-case-in-a-year/>

capacity of safe houses, many women are unable to access the necessary support when they need it most.⁷

Mandatory Hijab: A Tool for Controlling Women's Bodies

One of the most prominent symbols of violence against women in Iran is the mandatory hijab law, implemented in 1980. This law requires women to wear a headscarf and clothing that adheres to government-imposed standards. Noncompliance with this law can result in consequences such as arrest, fines, flogging, and even threats of death.

The mandatory hijab violates women's fundamental rights to choose their clothing and serves as a tool for the regime to control women's bodies and behavior. This law provides a pretext for constant interference by security forces and the morality police in women's daily lives, creating an atmosphere of fear and restriction.

With the rise of Pezeshkian's administration, the opposing faction seized the opportunity to pass the "Chastity and Hijab Law," commonly known as the Hijab Bill. After extensive debates, it was enacted in December 2024, comprising 74 articles and five chapters⁸. This law imposes various penalties for non-compliance with hijab rules and improper attire among women and girls, emphasizing the promotion of chastity and hijab culture in society⁹. With pressure from women's rights activists and a request from Pezeshkian, the implementation of the law has been temporarily suspended.

Restricted Access to Contraceptives

Following a shift in population policies after 2013, access to contraceptives became limited. This policy, justified under the banner of "population growth," has effectively curtailed women's rights to make decisions about family planning, exposing them to unwanted pregnancies.

This decision has had particularly severe consequences for women in marginalized and rural areas. Limited access to contraception has increased the risks of high-risk pregnancies and maternal mortality, posing serious threats to women's health.

Ban on Abortion

Abortion is largely illegal in Iran, except in limited circumstances. Women who seek to terminate pregnancies for medical, economic, or social reasons are often forced to resort to unsafe and clandestine methods. This prohibition exposes women to severe physical and psychological risks and deprives them of the right to make decisions about their bodies.

Through such laws, the Islamic regime has reduced women to tools for achieving its demographic and ideological goals, disregarding their health and lives.

The Hijab and Chastity Bill: A Law to Institutionalize Discrimination and Violence

⁷ <https://www.bbc.com/persian/iran-57914394>

⁸ متن کامل لایحه حجاب و عفاف
www.alef.ir/news/4030911111.html

⁹ <https://www.vakilzoom.com/everything-chastity-hijab-bill/>

The “Hijab and Chastity Bill,” which has been under discussion in recent years, exemplifies discriminatory laws against women. This bill not only enforces the mandatory hijab but also imposes severe penalties for “improper hijab,” such as deprivation of social rights, denial of access to government services, and even dismissal from workplaces.

The implementation of this bill has further exposed women to structural violence and restricted their roles in society. In addition to social control, this law has served as a pretext for intensified suppression of women’s rights activists and political dissidents.

Other Forms of Systemic Violence against Women

Beyond the aforementioned issues, other forms of violence against women in Iran stem from the laws and policies of the Islamic regime:

1. **Discriminatory Laws in Marriage and Divorce:** Rights to divorce, child custody, and even travel are predominantly granted to men, placing women in unequal and vulnerable positions.
2. **Child Marriage:** Child marriage, which is legal in Iran, has severe physical and psychological consequences, particularly for young girls.
3. **Domestic Violence and Lack of Legal Protection:** Domestic violence is widely reported in Iran, yet no comprehensive law exists to protect victims. In some cases, Islamic laws even justify men’s violence against women.

The Role of the Islamic Regime in Perpetuating Violence

The Islamic regime, through its restrictive interpretations of Sharia law and its gendered ideology, has institutionalized violence against women as an official policy. By using discriminatory laws and cultural controls, the regime has relegated women to second-class citizens, depriving them of fundamental human rights and freedoms.

Additionally, the regime’s policies, including the suppression of women’s rights activists, have further constrained efforts to combat this violence. Many activists have been arrested, imprisoned, or forced into exile for their attempts to change this reality.

Violence against women in Iran, particularly honor killings, is alarmingly on the rise, directly influenced by the misogynistic policies of the Islamic Republic. Laws that impose lenient punishments for honor killings have fostered a culture of impunity among perpetrators, devaluing women's lives in society. Additionally, the government’s promotion of patriarchal and controlling values, coupled with the suppression of women’s freedoms and efforts to achieve equal rights, has created an environment where violence against women, including honor killings, is legitimized as a tool to preserve traditional structures and male dominance. This situation not only victimizes women but also reflects the regime's disregard for human rights and the dignity of women.

To change this situation, the following actions are necessary:

- 1) Government institutions should get rid of all the laws, policies, and approaches that facilitate or aggravate violence against women.

- 2) Women must receive education on violence against women, how to identify its various types, and solutions for stopping it.
- 3) Any policy making, legislation, or course of action that may directly or indirectly result in violence against women, be it through provoking wars or armed conflicts, creating war-like or unsafe states for women, displacing women from their homes/ havens or residential places as a result, increasing the dangers of military/atomic/chemical/ missile/guerilla/or recurring attacks, or through any other action that endangers women's physical or psychological health and hygiene, or those which may result in women's and children's being raped should be stopped as soon as possible.
- 4) Penal codes should be set by legislators, with the assistance of civil society institutions, for violence against women within family, society, and work environment, and also for violence against children, especially young girls.
- 5) Safe homes should be provided by women NGOs, while financially supported by the government, for married or single women who are the victims of violence.
- 6) Government institutions, the media, civil society, and the private sector should provide cultural educational programs and preventative measures against violence for men, women, families, and students at different levels of education.
- 7) The civil society and governmental institutions should eliminate the causes of women's self-immolation, and provide the possibility of psychotherapy and protection for affected women and girls.
- 8) Government institutions, civil society and the private sector are obliged to prevent all the causing factors in women's and girls' rape, especially the rape of working children. Also, the law should prohibit children's labor, especially girl's labor.
- 9) The law should earnestly try to eliminate the basis of children's sexual abuse by family members, especially of girls and young girls, and they should also fight against the culture of hiding sexual abuse cases for the fear of disgracing the family, which causes these cases' recurrence.
- 10) The government civil society institutions, and the media should fight against any direct or indirect promotion or act of violence within families (insult, humiliation, lack of right to work or education, forced marriage, etc.).
- 11) Government institutions should act against any form of violence toward women by law enforcement officers, which is done under the cover of fighting against women's different types of clothing (coverage of their bodies) in public and official places.
- 12) The law should consider penal codes for ignoring, disrespecting, and violence against elderly people, especially women.
- 13) Government institutions should provide a safe transportation network for women, especially younger women, and they should eliminate all sources of insecurity in public places.
- 14) Government institutions and the private sector are obliged to guarantee the safety of the work environment for women and eliminate conditions that cause violence against women.
- 15) Government organizations are obliged to establish counseling offices or units to offer free services to women in order to increase their level of awareness and state of psychological health.
- 16) The media should report all forms of violence and assault toward women within families or in public, and they should promote and encourage different ways of fighting against them. The government must repeal all laws related to mandatory hijab and recognize women's freedom and equality.
- 17) The expansion of safe houses should be prioritized based on the specific needs of each region, especially in cities where honor killings and violence against women are prevalent. Establishing such facilities in these high-risk areas would provide essential refuge for women facing threats, offering them safety, legal assistance, and psychological support. Tailored regional assessments are crucial to

ensure resources are allocated effectively, addressing the unique socio-cultural and economic factors that contribute to violence in each locality. This targeted approach would play a significant role in reducing violence and empowering women to escape cycles of abuse.

- 18) The minimum age of marriage should be set at 18 years.
- 19) Domestic violence must be criminalized.
- 20) All laws that support honor killings, such as Articles 630, 612, 301, and 302, must be abolished, and legislation should be based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Article 4: Women and Health

Women's public health is one of the most critical aspects of societal well-being. In Iran, the status of women's public health over the past 30 years has been influenced by the governing social, economic, and cultural policies. This report examines the Iranian government's performance in women's public health over the last three decades, critiquing policies, programs, and challenges in this area. Utilizing credible statistics and evidence, the report analyzes various dimensions of women's public health in Iran.

The Status of Women's Public Health in Iran

Access to healthcare services is a key factor in improving women's public health. According to Iran's Ministry of Health, in 2020, approximately 30% of women in rural areas lacked access to healthcare services. This lack of access, especially during pregnancy and childbirth, can have serious consequences for maternal and child health. Despite efforts by Iran's healthcare system to improve service availability, reports indicate that in 2020, 15% of women in rural areas still lacked access to healthcare. This reflects existing inequalities in healthcare access. The status of women's public health in Iran over the past 30 years has been shaped by various social, economic, and cultural factors. Despite progress in some areas, significant challenges remain, including gender inequalities, financial constraints, and cultural and social barriers. Addressing these issues requires targeted policies and programs to strengthen women's rights and improve their access to healthcare services.¹⁰

Reproductive and Maternal Health

Reproductive health in Iran has seen progress in recent years but continues to face challenges. According to the Ministry of Health, the maternal mortality rate during childbirth in 2020 was estimated at 21 per 100,000 live births. This highlights the need for improved healthcare services in this area.

Fertility rates, a key indicator of women's public health, have declined significantly. In 2020, Iran's total fertility rate fell to 1.7 children per woman, reflecting cultural, economic, and social changes. Although 92% of pregnant women received prenatal care in 2020, limited access to healthcare services in rural and marginalized areas remains a challenge. Maternal mortality, another critical public health indicator, was reported at 25 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2020.

Studies by the Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies reveal that only 25% of women in Iran have access to sexual education, leading to higher risks of sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancies. Additionally, access to contraceptives has been

¹⁰ References: Ministry of Health, Treatment, and Medical Education. (2020). Health and Medical Statistics Ministry of Health, Treatment, and Medical Education. (2020). Health and Medical Statistics.
UN Women. (2020). The Status of Women in Iran.
World Bank. (2020). Health Financing in Iran.
World Health Organization. (2021). Health and Sanitation in Iran.
Iranian Statistics Center. (2020). Annual Reports.

restricted in recent years. Screening programs have been declared contrary to religious law and prohibited, while abortion is banned, leading to unsafe abortion practices.

Preventative Programs

Preventative programs play a significant role in improving women's public health. Recent years have seen increased vaccination and infectious disease prevention efforts. For instance, 95% of pregnant women received tetanus and diphtheria vaccines in 2020.

While prenatal care coverage improved to 92% by 2021, access remains significantly lower in rural areas. Although 76% of married women used some form of contraception in 2019, rural areas still face limited access to these services.

Critique of Governance Performance

Health Policies: Iran's health policies over the past three decades have generally aimed to improve women's public health. However, significant challenges persist. For example, healthcare programs in rural areas have been inadequately implemented, exacerbating health inequalities.

Gender Inequalities: Gender inequalities remain a major challenge in women's public health. According to UN Women (2020), women in Iran, particularly in rural areas, face greater economic and social challenges, affecting their access to healthcare services. Gender disparities in access to prenatal and childbirth services continue to exist and require more focused attention.

Financial Constraints: Financial constraints also pose a major obstacle to improving women's public health. According to the World Bank (2020), healthcare costs in Iran have risen in recent years, but the increased expenditure has not adequately addressed women's health needs. This has led to reduced quality of services and increased pressure on women, especially in underprivileged areas.

Existing Challenges

Cultural and Social Barriers: Cultural and social barriers are among the main obstacles to improving women's public health in Iran. Traditional attitudes and societal restrictions often deter women from seeking healthcare services, exacerbating health issues (UN Women, 2021). **Impact of Sanctions:** Economic sanctions have had a significant impact on women's public health. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021), sanctions have reduced access to medicines and medical equipment, disproportionately affecting women.

Spread of Infectious Diseases: Infectious diseases also present serious challenges. In 2020, diseases such as influenza and COVID-19 significantly impacted public health, raising concerns about women's health (Ministry of Health, 2020).

Successful and Unsuccessful Programs

Successful Programs: Some government programs have been successful, such as vaccination campaigns and disease prevention initiatives. For example, infant mortality rates declined from 27 per 1,000 live births in 2011 to 12 per 1,000 in 2020 (Ministry of Health, 2020).

Unsuccessful Programs: However, some programs have failed. Healthcare initiatives in rural areas have not been adequately implemented, increasing health disparities. According to the Iranian Statistics Center (2020), 40% of women in rural areas lacked access to healthcare in 2020.

To improve the situation of women's health the following actions are necessary:

- a) Free or inexpensive fitness and exercise facilities should be provided for and accessible to all social groups.
- b) In order to fight the depressions resulting from the pressures of life, the government, civil society institutions and private sectors should provide for educational, cultural, sport, and entertainment centers for women and girls in all the urban and rural neighborhoods, especially in the deprived regions.
- c) Public sport and fitness centers and their hours of operation for men and women should be equally shared, in a way that is convenient for women to use.
- d) The government should recognize women's reproductive rights, and provide free access to different methods of birth control as well as the possibility of a safe abortion in times of unwanted or endangering pregnancies for women.
- e) The government and the civil society institutions should provide for mobile and accessible health centers that are suited to the lifestyles of women in nomadic tribes so that they maintain the health of pregnant women, provide a safe childbirth environment, and prevent infectious diseases in mothers and their children.
- f) The government, private sectors, and the civil society institutions should pay attention to the women's health in large and industrial cities that are dealing with pollution of air, water, and soil, and they should think of possible solutions for the sources of environmental pollutions including traffic.
- g) The government and the private sectors should provide the conditions of a healthy work environment for women, especially in industrial environments and factories.
- h) The public and private sectors should plan and provide for programs related to women's health and exercise during work hours without deducting anything from their pay or benefits.
- i) The government should provide for inexpensive medical care as well as special care for disabilities, old age, incurable diseases and the like for all women and especially the ones with low income.
- j) The government should provide for women's psychological health, especially housewives, who because of their daily involvement in family problems and pressures without having the possibilities of overcoming them are susceptible to many psychological effects like depression, anxiety, and stress.

- k) The government, civil society institutions, and the media should increase the coverage of women's health issues like reproductive health, menstruation, overweightness, osteoporosis, Iron deficiency, breast and uterus cancer, and so on.
- l) To prevent the consequences of early marriages and pregnancies (under the age of 18) and unwanted pregnancies, the government and civil society institutions should set up centers where women are treated freely.
- m) The government should provide free medical facilities for women's special diseases.
- n) The government, the civil society institutions and the media should design encouraging and entertaining programs by the mass media to motivate more physical activities in women and to increase their vivacity.
- o) Elderly women should be covered by economic, medical, and personal service care, and their social activities and relations should be promoted.
- p) The gender separation of majors related to women's health, hygiene, and sports in universities and other educational health centers should be abolished.
- q) The existing discriminations in women's sport championships and clubs, and sport majors should be eliminated.

Article5: Women and the Economy

Women's economic participation is an essential factor in achieving gender equality and fostering sustainable economic development. In Iran, however, women face significant barriers to entering and thriving in the workforce. This report analyzes women's economic participation in Iran, the causes of their high unemployment rates, and strategies to promote economic equality within the country.

Current Status

According to the Statistical Center of Iran (2022)¹¹, women's economic participation rate is approximately 14.1%, compared to 68.5% for men. This disparity reflects deeply entrenched gender gaps. While women constitute more than 60% of university graduates, their representation in the formal labor market remains disproportionately low (Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, 2021).

Women in Iran are predominantly employed in education, healthcare, and administrative sectors. Their presence in high-income professions, STEM fields, and leadership positions remains limited due to systemic discrimination and cultural norms.

Women's Unemployment in Iran

The unemployment rate for women in Iran is consistently higher than for men. As of 2022, the unemployment rate for women stood at approximately 17.2%, compared to 9.8% for men (Statistical Center of Iran, 2022). Young women (ages 20–34) experience the highest levels of unemployment, despite high educational attainment.

Causes of Women's Unemployment

Cultural and Social Barriers: Traditional gender roles prioritize domestic responsibilities for women, reducing their ability to participate in the workforce. In conservative regions, restrictions on women's mobility and interactions limit job opportunities (UN Women, 2021)¹².

labor Market Discrimination: Employers often prefer male candidates due to assumptions about women's productivity and family obligations. Legal requirements, such as mandatory hijab, create additional barriers for women seeking employment.

Educational-Employment Gap: Despite the high number of educated women, the Iranian labor market fails to create sufficient jobs matching their qualifications (Statistical Center of Iran, 2021).

¹¹ Statistical Center of Iran. (2022). Labor Force Participation and Employment Statistics.

¹² UN Women. (2021). Gender Equality in Employment in the Middle East

Economic Policies: Structural challenges such as inflation, sanctions, and stagnant job creation disproportionately affect women, especially in the private sector.

Strategies for Achieving Economic Equality

Legal and Policy Reforms

Equal Employment Opportunities:

Enact and enforce anti-discrimination laws in hiring, wages, and workplace treatment.

Mandate equal pay for equal work across all sectors.

Family-Friendly Workplace Policies: Expand maternity leave and paternity leave policies.

Establish workplace childcare facilities to support working mothers.

Promoting Women's Entrepreneurship: Provide financial incentives such as low-interest loans and grants to women entrepreneurs.

Create vocational training programs tailored to women, particularly in rural and underserved areas.

Addressing Cultural Barriers:

Launch public awareness campaigns to promote the economic and social benefits of women's participation in the workforce.

Partner with local leaders to challenge restrictive cultural norms that limit women's employment.

Supporting Women in Rural Areas: Implement targeted employment programs for women in rural regions where access to formal job markets is limited.

Develop infrastructure projects that create jobs for women in agriculture, handicrafts, and tourism.

To improve women's economic status and eliminating discrimination against them, the following actions are necessary:

- a) The government and civil society institutions as well as the private sectors should support the employment of women by officially recognizing them as one of the breadwinners of the family. It is necessary that these institutions make policies that support women's equal access to financial resources (credits, insurance, money),

- human resources (educational programs, vocational training opportunities)), and social resources (supporting active women in unions, chambers, associations,).
- b) The government, trade unions, and the private sector should facilitate women's employment by providing free public childcare centers as well as centers to take care of adults, whom the responsibility of providing care for is totally on women now.
 - c) Employment selection choices that are based on ideological beliefs, religion, ethnicity, or personal tastes should be abolished. Also, gender discrimination in government organizations before or after employment, and cases like in giving promotions or priorities to men for being sent on outside city or country missions should be eliminated.
 - d) Discrimination between male and female workers in factories should be eliminated, and equal pay should be paid for equal work.
 - e) Sexual harassment and abuse of women in the work environment should be given a criminal code.
 - f) Employment conditions like being married, or any other that is discriminatory should be abolished.
 - g) Gender segregation in the work environment, which results in marginalizing women in the work environment, in factories, and in offices should be canceled.
 - h) The government should act against feminization of poverty by providing social insurance for women working at different levels in private sectors, by providing financial support for elderly women and women who are the head of the household, and by providing retirement insurance for housewives.
 - i) The government, unions, and private sectors should consider affirmative action (positive discrimination) for women by providing loans for their self-employment or repair/ building of stores or workshops, or by supplying production equipment since these have an important role in ensuring women's employment.
 - j) The government and civil institutions should support rural women's economic activities by increasing new vocational trainings for women and girls, increasing their access to credit resources, and supporting women's production cooperatives in rural areas.
 - k) The government and the private sector should pay attention to the situation of those female farmers who work in very hard conditions with overwhelming climate changes, and therefore, provide insurance for them. The above-mentioned organizations should also guarantee the equal pay for men and women, and by providing welfare facilities like daycares and clinics right beside large agricultural sections, create the proper situation for working women.
 - l) The government should officially recognize and calculate the economic value of women's unofficial jobs and other economic activities and their contribution to the family's income, especially in times of divorce or the death of husbands.
 - m) Necessary laws should be passed in order to calculate housewives' share in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) considering the added value of housekeeping.

Article 6: Women and Armed Conflicts

Women play a vital role in ending armed violence worldwide, and the global community must equip them with all necessary tools to combat violence in homes, communities, and across the world. Over twenty years ago, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1325, the first in a series of resolutions recognizing women's significant role in promoting peace and security. Today, we understand better than ever how gender shapes individual experiences of conflicts and violence, particularly during armed confrontations. Moreover, we now have a clearer understanding of the underlying forces working to silence women and exclude them from participation in peacebuilding, peacekeeping, and conflict prevention efforts.

The Islamic Republic's War against Women in Iran

Statistics reveal the systematic and deliberate targeting of women during Iran's nationwide protests in 2022.¹³ An analysis of eye injuries sustained during the suppression of protests compared to the list of fatalities shows that security forces disproportionately targeted women's faces, eyes, and genital areas. A report by the Iran Human Rights Organization (September 22, 2023) highlights this disturbing trend.

Nationwide, while women comprised approximately 9% of the fatalities, they represented 28% of those who suffered eye injuries. In Mahabad, a Kurdish city in West Azerbaijan Province, women accounted for only 15% of the deaths but made up 56% of those with eye injuries. Numerous reports in the past year document cases of protesters sustaining eye injuries during the protests. Many victims have shared their accounts publicly, especially those who managed to leave Iran, while others have provided their stories and medical records confidentially to human rights organizations.¹⁴ Yet, many remain silent due to threats from security forces.

In November 2022, The New York Times¹⁵ reported that within two months of the protests, more than 500 people with severe eye injuries were treated at just three major hospitals in Tehran—Farabi, Rasoul Akram, and Labafi-Nejad. However, the actual number of eye injuries across the country is undoubtedly far higher than reported by human rights organizations or the media. Among the documented cases are eight children (four boys and four girls), the youngest being a five-year-old girl.

The Iran Human Rights Organization also confirmed the deaths of 551 protesters, including 68 children and 49 women. Additionally, 22 protesters, including four children and eight women, reportedly died by suicide or under suspicious circumstances.

¹³ U.N. Report on Oppression of Women in Iran

<https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2024/sep/16/un-report-oppression-women-iran>

Update on the situation of women and girls in the context of the September 2022 protests and the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran (13 September 2024) [EN/FA]

<https://reliefweb.int/report/iran-islamic-republic/update-situation-women-and-girls-context-september-2022-protests-and-woman-life-freedom-movement-islamic-republic-iran-13-september-2024-enfa>

¹⁴ <https://www.iranhr.net/fa/articles/6205/>, دستکم ۱۳۸ مجروح چشمی در اعتراضات سراسری؛ شلیک هدفمند به چشم زنان

¹⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/19/world/asia/iran-protesters-eye-injuries.html>

Data indicates that security forces began targeting protesters' eyes on the very first day of the protests¹⁶ and these attacks continued across various cities until late November. Eye injuries were primarily caused by metal or plastic pellets, with some victims losing one or both eyes. Other injuries resulted from direct hits with paintball rounds, tear gas canisters, shattered glass, sound bombs, or blunt force trauma.¹⁷

The proportion of women with eye injuries 3.7 times the percentage of women killed suggests a deliberate strategy by security forces.¹⁸ This supports the hypothesis that security forces often aimed to blind female protesters rather than fatally shooting them. This calculated tactic underscores the regime's intent to silence and incapacitate women without making them 'martyrs'.

Any policy, legislation, or action that may directly or indirectly lead to violence against women, whether through inciting war or armed conflict, creating war-like or unsafe conditions for women, displacing women from their homes/shelters/residential areas due to increased risks of military/nuclear/chemical/missile/guerrilla attacks or frequent attacks, or through any other actions that endanger women's physical health, mental health, or well-being, or that may lead to sexual violence against women and children, must be stopped immediately.

¹⁶ Amnesty International. "Iran: Deadly Crackdown on Protests Against Mahsa Amini's Death in Custody Needs Urgent Global Action." Amnesty International News, September 2022. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/09/iran-deadly-crackdown-on-protests-against-mahsa-aminis-death-in-custody-needs-urgent-global-action/>.

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch. "Iran: Security Forces Fire On and Kill Protesters." Human Rights Watch News, October 5, 2022. International pressure is needed to end the excessive and lethal use of force. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/10/05/iran-security-forces-fire-kill-protesters>.

¹⁸ Rayan World, "Iran Human Rights: Spotlight on Eye Targeting of Protesters," October 4, 2024. Available at: <https://rayanworld.com/20241004095409001/Iran-Human-Rights-Spotlight-on-Eye-Targeting-of-Protesters>.

Article7: Women and decision-making

Women's share of civil society institutions, power, and decision-making in Iran is minimal. Despite the fact that based on the constitution women are eligible to become a president, personal interpretations of article 113 of the constitution have practically taken away that right away from women. Also, women do not have any share in the decision-making institutions. Women have not had any positions in the Assembly of Experts of the Leadership, The Expediency Discernment Council of the Regime, Supreme Judicial Council, the Supreme National Security Council, or any other policy-making Higher Councils. Women have never been assigned as the head of any ministries or any of the three governing branches of the regime.

Women in Iran encounter systematic discrimination that severely restricts their participation in decision-making processes across both public and private sectors. This discrimination is evident in various dimensions, including barriers to employment, education, cultural activities (such as sports and music), legal rights, and personal freedoms.

Women in numerous professions face challenges in achieving managerial positions due to discriminatory hiring practices and laws. The World Economic Forum's 2024 Global Gender Gap Report ranked 143 out of 146, for gender rank¹⁹. Iranian legislation predominantly favors men in matters related to inheritance, child custody, divorce, and legal testimony. Under Iranian civil law, although legal framework disproportionately affects girls, who naturally reach puberty around the age of ten, whereas boys reach it around the age of fourteen or fifteen. Additionally, state regulations impose stringent controls on women's freedoms, including dress codes and mobility restrictions. For instance, women are required to obtain permission from their husbands to leave the country or to pursue employment and education, further exacerbating gender disparities in daily life²⁰.

Child marriage continues to persist, condoned by Shari'a laws reflected in the Civil Code, reinforced by cultural, familial, and state influences. Furthermore, hundreds of Iranian women fall victim to honor killings each year.

Despite being highly educated, Iranian women are underrepresented in the workforce, particularly in high-ranking positions, and are often restricted from entering certain fields. Quotas and various obstacles hinder women's educational advancement and professional development.

Although women possess the right to vote and run for office, they encounter systemic barriers that prevent them from attaining high-ranking roles, such as the presidency. Representation in Parliament remains very limited, with only 17 women among the 279 members in the present Parliament. Iran is also one of five countries that has neither ratified

¹⁹ World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report 2024, p.12. Available at: https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2024.pdf.

²⁰ World Economic Forum, 18 Countries Where Women Need Their Husband's Permission to Get a Job, November 2015. Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2015/11/18-countries-where-women-need-their-husbands-permission-to-get-a-job/>.

nor signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women²¹.

In mid-November 2018, the United Nations General Assembly's Human Rights Committee passed a resolution condemning the Iranian government's persistent discrimination against women and the restriction of freedom of thought.

It is essential to acknowledge that Iran continues to be a nation where, as stated by the UN, “women’s dignity and fundamental human rights” are routinely violated and undermined.²² The restriction of women in decision-making processes not only adversely impacts individual lives and family dynamics, but also prevents broader social and economic development. When women occupy leadership positions, they contribute diverse perspectives that reflect the needs and experiences of the entire population. Such inclusion can lead to the formulation of more comprehensive and effective policies that benefit society as a whole.

The Commission on the Status of Women underscores that all individuals have an equal right to participate in their government through public office and informal leadership. Addressing the inequality between men and women in sharing power is imperative, and ensuring women’s full participation in decision-making, both in the public and private sectors, is a critical strategy for achieving gender equity.²³

Addressing these systemic issues is vital for fostering gender equality and promoting sustainable development in Iran. The Commission should devise a strategy to engage with the Iranian government to encourage adherence to international human rights laws, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The empowerment of women is significantly contingent upon their active involvement in decision-making processes, thereby contributing to the establishment of a more equitable and prosperous society.

To gain the social and political rights of women, the following actions are necessary:

- Women should have equal opportunities as men do to participate in and be part of the highest levels of government positions that have a role in coming up with solutions and making decisions, including the three branches of the governing system, supreme councils, and ministries.
- Women should get a 30-50% election quota to have members in the parliament and to get government positions at the micro or macro levels.

²¹ Wikipedia contributors, Women's rights in Iran, Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_rights_in_Iran.

²² U.S.-Iran Relations, Media Guide: The Rouhani Administration - A Look Back, June 22, 2021. Available at: <https://www.us-iran.org/resources/2021/6/22/media-guide-the-rouhani-administration-a-look-back>. <https://www.us-iran.org/resources/2021/6/22/media-guide-the-rouhani-administration-a-look-back>

²³ UN Women, CSW65 Draft Document Presented by the Bureau, 2021. Available at: https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/65/CSW65_AC_draft%20presented_by_the_Bureau.pdf.

- Laws should be passed to allow the free establishment of women NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations), and to prohibit the dissolution of such organizations except in cases of a jury's decision and the eligible court's final verdict for such dissolution.
- The obstacles to and restrictions on assemblies should be removed, and based on article 27 of the constitution; they should not be considered a crime.
- To attend to women's issues, there should be a permanent office for that purpose in the offices of all local officials, like the city and village councils', the mayor's, the governor's, the district governor's,...
- Government and civil society institutions and the media should take measures to further the presence of women in positions of power so that the clichés regarding women in politics changes and the public culture can look at and accept women's presence in managerial positions as natural.
- Women should have a role in the administration of their cities and life environments. The presence of women in urban management fields and the related decision-making positions provides the ground for echoing their requirements and rights in the way a city is run. The effective participation of women should be guaranteed in all the local organizations like the Assisting City Councils and Local Centers.
- Rural women should have the right to be part of the decision-making institutions in the traditional societies.
- The obstacles to the promotion of women to managerial or higher level positions should be removed.
- The establishment of unions for women workers, employees, and professionals should be facilitated so that women from different social classes can defend their just rights in their work environment.
- In the arena of politics, there should be an organization or institution, with members from Non-Governmental Organizations, which would function as the custodian and defender of women's rights, and would support changes in favor of women and take measures to realize those changes.

Article 8: Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women in Iran

Limited Institutional Support

In Iran, institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women have been shaped by a patriarchal framework that often conflicts with the principles of gender equality. While the Iranian government has established bureaus for women's affairs in several ministries, these institutions primarily focus on issues like family welfare, reproductive health, and traditional roles for women rather than broader gender equality initiatives. For example, the Vice Presidency for Women and Family Affairs oversees policies affecting women, but its scope remains limited due to systemic legal and cultural constraints. According to a 2024 report by the World Economic Forum²⁴, Iran ranked 143rd out of 146 countries on the Global Gender Gap Index, highlighting the country's significant gender disparities International Norms.

Iran's rejection of global frameworks like the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development further complicates institutional efforts for gender equality. The government argues that these frameworks contradict Islamic principles, as outlined in the Iranian Constitution's Article 4, which mandates that all laws must align with Sharia. This legal foundation restricts the establishment of laws or institutions that promote equal rights for women in areas such as employment, inheritance, and family law. A report by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights in Iran (2023)²⁵ noted that women face institutionalized discrimination in accessing leadership positions and decision-making roles.

Women's rights activists in Iran have faced significant barriers, including imprisonment and persecution, for advocating gender equality. Despite these challenges, grassroots movements, such as the "One Million Signatures" campaign and the Stop Honor Killings Campaign, continue to demand reforms in discriminatory laws. To create meaningful change, international pressure and local advocacy must work in tandem to establish independent organizations and revise discriminatory legislation. Strengthening civil society, ensuring women's representation in policymaking, and fostering international partnerships could help bridge the gap in gender equality. These steps are essential for aligning Iran's institutional mechanisms with global norms.

Solutions to Address Institutional Challenges for Women's Advancement in Iran

Legal Reforms: Amendment of Religious-Based Laws: It is essential to revise laws like Article 4 of the Iranian Constitution, which mandates that all legislation comply with Islamic Sharia. This amendment should align with international human rights standards and gender equality principles.

Adoption of Protective Laws: Introducing legislation to ensure equal rights for women and men in areas such as employment opportunities, education, and political participation.

²⁴World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report 2022, 2022. Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2022>.

²⁵United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Iran, Report on the Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2023. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-iran>.

Establishing and Strengthening Independent Institutions: Creation of Independent Women's Rights Organizations: Establish independent organizations that operate free from government interference to monitor the implementation of gender equality laws and policies.

Collaboration with International Organization, Build connections with international human rights bodies to leverage expertise, financial support, and technical assistance.

Enhancing Public Awareness and Cultural Change: Public Education Campaigns: Implement nationwide educational programs to promote gender equality and dismantle entrenched gender stereotypes.

Focus on Marginalized Areas: Pay special attention to border regions and underprivileged areas, where women face more severe discrimination.

Support for Women's Rights Activists

Elimination of Security Pressures: End the persecution of women's rights activists and ensure legal protections for their activities.

Building Support Networks: Establish domestic and international networks to provide solidarity and support for women and their advocates.

Transparent and Targeted Policy-Making

Developing Sustainable Development Programs: Create policies that directly address improving women's status and increasing their economic, social, and political participation.

Promoting Women in Leadership: Introduce quotas or affirmative action policies to ensure greater representation of women in leadership and decision-making roles.

Final Challenge and Solution

Iran requires fundamental changes in policies and institutional structures to achieve gender equality. These changes must be pursued through domestic reform efforts, supported by international advocacy and pressure, to ensure comprehensive and lasting improvements.

Article 9: Human Rights and Citizen's Rights

The laws, culture, and customs in the Islamic Republic of Iran consider women as second-class citizens. Based on the laws, cultural norms, and social practices, women's employment, travel, marriage, and similar activities require the permission of their male guardian or husband. In cultural and social contexts, women are often treated as equals to minors, mentally disabled individuals, or as the property of men. These concepts are particularly prevalent for women in areas closer to the borders, young girls, women married to men with non-Iranian citizenship and divorced or widowed women.

This systemic discrimination is grounded in the Islamic Republic's interpretation of Sharia law, which places women in a subordinate position in relation to men in nearly all spheres of life.

To ensure comprehensive citizen's rights for women, the following actions are necessary:

- a. Women's right to their type of clothing and coverage of their bodies, no matter what religion or ethnicity they are from, should be recognized in Iran, and the restrictions, laws and policies that force them to specific types of coverage of their heads or bodies should be abolished.
- b. All the rules, regulations and policies that directly or indirectly considers women as second hand citizens, and considers the recognition of their citizenship rights conditional should be abolished.
- c. The political obstacles facing human rights activists and defenders should be removed.
- d. The cultural obstacles to and restricting regulations against women and girls' traveling alone inside or outside the country should be removed.
- e. The need for a husband's permission to get a passport, to travel outside the country, to work, and., should be abolished.
- f. The laws and the customs regarding the inheritance from properties, buying/selling/exchanging women/girls/or their children for something, 'Enough Blood',^{26*}, honor killing, female circumcision, and the like that are done in some regions, and which are against human rights and citizenship rights of women, should be considered as crimes and should be fought against.
- g. The government should issue ID cards for, and officially recognize the identity and citizenship rights of those Iranian or non-Iranian immigrant women who because of

²⁶ A custom based on which the family or tribe of the one who has killed someone offer one of their daughters to be married to a single man in the family of the man who was killed.

not having an ID card are deprived of all the legal rights like alimony, inheritance, or all other marriage-related rights.

- h. Women should have the right to gain, change or maintain their citizenship, and to transfer it to their children.
- i. The restriction on Iranian women's marriage to non-Muslim and non-Iranian men should be removed.
- j. The instruction of "women's citizenship rights & human rights" should be integrated into the educational curricula at all levels and all over the country.
- k. Strengthen the enforcement of international human rights conventions to which Iran is a signatory, ensuring that women's rights are recognized and respected.
- l. These steps are vital to move toward true gender equality and to rectify the historical injustices that have relegated women to second-class citizenship in Iran.

Article10: Media and women

Over the past three decades, there has been a notable increase in women's participation in journalism within Iran, primarily attributable to enhanced access to higher education for women. Women constitute approximately fifty percent of editorial teams and journalists across various publications. Many women journalists leverage the skills they have cultivated to assert their capabilities and enhance their negotiation power in the quest for gender justice. Furthermore, women activists have effectively employed social media as an essential platform to raise awareness regarding the oppression experienced by women in Iran. The growing presence of women bloggers has infused the Iranian women's movement with innovative ideas, critical enthusiasm, and a sense of freshness. The online presence and digital activism have significantly contributed to amplifying women's voices, enabling the Iranian women's movement to establish extensive connections with the international women's movement and to disseminate information regarding oppression and discrimination against women in Iran on a broader scale, thereby expanding their outreach from local to global audiences.²⁷

The initial website addressing women's issues was "Women of Iran," which was launched in 2002. Shortly thereafter, the "Feminist Tribune of Iran" was founded, serving as the official platform of the Women's Cultural Center. This organization introduced the online publication "Zanestan," recognized as the first online magazine dedicated to women's issues. Subsequently, significant campaigns within the women's movement, such as the "One Million Signatures to Change Discriminatory Laws" campaign and the "No Stoning" campaign, each developed their respective websites, which became crucial tools for activists to engage with their audiences and recruit supporters. Another notable women's website was the "Iranian Women's Center," where several female journalists, who were concerned about women's issues, were actively involved. This diversity of women's online media is further complemented by other platforms, including the "Feminist School," the "Iranian Women's Solidarity Network," and the "Women's Commission of the Office for Strengthening Unity," among others.²⁸

The activities of women journalists, as well as the broader presence of women in online spaces, have been subject to significant suppression by the regime. Numerous feminist websites and blogs have consistently encountered filtering and blocking, while many activists affiliated with the women's movement have faced arrest, imprisonment, or prohibitions on their online engagements and writings. Several activists have been summoned, detained, prosecuted, and have received prison sentences due to their content on internet platforms.²⁹

Furthermore, since the establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran in 1979, a considerable number of women-led publishing companies have been closed. Many journalists have been compelled to seek exile or have chosen to resign in response to the mounting pressures. Also,

²⁷. King's College London, How Iranian Women Use Social Media to Narrate Their Struggle to the World, 2021. Available at: <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/how-iranian-women-use-social-media-to-narrate-their-struggle-to-the-world>.

²⁸. BBC Persian, Superpower Women on the Internet, 2010. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/persian/science/2010/03/100305_superpower_women_internet.

²⁹. *ibid*

the Iranian women activists abroad constantly received threats from the Iranian security officials. The Islamic regime has subjected numerous female journalists to harassment within detention facilities, demonstrating a profound lack of accountability to societal norms and international organizations.³⁰

According to Reporters Without Borders, at least 860 journalists were imprisoned between 1979 and 2019, a significant number of whom were women.³¹ Reporters Without Borders has repeatedly raised concerns about media freedom in Iran, classifying the Islamic Republic as "one of the most repressive governments in the world." In their 2024 report, Iran ranked 176th out of 180 countries regarding media freedom, with only North Korea, Afghanistan, Syria, and Eritrea faring worse.³²

The slogan "Women, Life, Freedom" has become a prominent symbol of the ongoing struggle for gender equality and human rights in Iran, particularly following the tragic death of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Iranian Kurdish woman, in September 2022. Amini's death occurred while she was in the custody of the morality police due to her alleged non-compliance with the Islamic regime's dress code, which sparked widespread protests across the nation and underscored deep-seated grievances regarding the oppressive policies of the Islamic Republic, especially those affecting women. These demonstrations have been predominantly spearheaded by women advocating not only for the repeal of gender-discriminatory laws but also for significant political and social reforms.

The movement has illuminated the interconnected challenges faced by women, encompassing issues such as violence, legal inequalities, and restrictions on personal freedoms, including the imposition of compulsory veiling. In response to the ongoing protests, the Iranian government has escalated its efforts to suppress dissent, particularly targeting journalists and activists who document these events. The media environment in Iran is heavily regulated by the state, with independent newspapers and journals subjected to strict censorship. Women employed by state television or radio face limitations in their programming responsibilities and must adhere to stringent regulations regarding compulsory veiling, with the threat of expulsion for non-compliance. Journalists experience considerable restrictions in their coverage of protests and the funerals of those who have lost their lives during the demonstrations. Although Article 24 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran guarantees freedom of expression, amendments made in 1986 enable authorities to scrutinize the press to ensure that journalists do not "endanger the Islamic Republic" or "offend the clergy and the Supreme Leader."³³

Numerous individuals have faced harassment, imprisonment, or more severe repercussions as the regime endeavors to suppress any form of dissent. Among the first female journalists detained for their coverage of Mahsa Amini's death were Elahe Mohammadi, employed by Hammihan Newspaper, and Niloufar Hamed, associated with Sharq Newspaper. One year following their arrest, the court rendered its verdicts. Mohammadi received a six-year prison

30. <https://www.radiozameh.com/739058/> آنلاین: تا آزار امنیتی از پروندهسازی امنیتی تا آزار آنلاین

31. <https://www.radiozameh.com/739058/>

32. Iran International, Iran Remains Second Largest Jailer of Writers Worldwide, Available at: <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202405043787>.

33. BBC News, Iran's Security Forces Crack Down on Protests Following Death of Mahsa Amini, Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-64584265>

sentence based on charges of "collaborating with the United States government," five years for alleged gathering and conspiracy to commit acts against national security, and an additional year for engaging in propaganda activities against the Islamic Republic of Iran. Hamedei was sentenced to one year more than Mohammadi on similar charges. Both women have denied the allegations and have filed appeals, which are currently pending a decision from the court.³⁴

These charges and substantial prison sentences imposed by the Iranian regime reflect a broader strategy aimed at suppressing dissent and silencing activists. In addition to imprisonment, the regime employs various punitive measures against these individuals, such as the confiscation of passports, prohibition from participating in civil activities, and termination of employment. Both Mohammadi and Hamedei have faced additional restrictions; they are prohibited from "membership in political parties, groups, factions, and engagement in cyberspace, media, and the press" for two years as part of their sentencing.³⁵

Elnaz Mohammadi, the twin sister of Elaheh Mohammadi who works for the same newspaper was also arrested. A week before her arrest, three other female journalists Melika Hashemi, Saideh Shafie, and Mehrnoosh Zareie were arrested. Moreover, Nazila Maroofian, who was the first journalist to publish her interview with Mahsa Amini's father, was arrested and convicted to two years in prison, paying a significant amount of fine, and banned from leaving the country for two years.³⁶ Since the uprising, at least 98 journalists and bloggers have been arrested, half of whom were women. According to an interview with Yeganeh Rezaian, a researcher, with the Washington-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ): Even in small towns and local newspapers women were reporting on the women-led protests that were taking place: "more female journalists covering the uprising, even in small cities and local newspapers reported this women-led protest".³⁷

In addition to these threats, the regime employs various forms of physical repression, including torture, flogging, and even lethal violence.³⁸ Reports indicate that protesters have been shot directly in the eyes. According to the Human Rights Center at UC Berkeley, 120 people, including many young women, have lost partial or total sight due to "Iranian security agents firing shotguns, paintball guns, and even tear gas canisters during the crackdown on women's rights protests that erupted in late 2022."³⁹ Besides eyes, the Iranian police intentionally shot the breasts or genitals of women protestors. Hadis Nafisi, a 20-year-old woman, who was a digital activist (on Tik Tok), died after being shot in the chest, face, hand, and neck.⁴⁰

34. BBC Persian, صدور احكام سنگين عليه الهه محمدی و نیلوفر حامدی (Severe Sentences Issued Against Elaheh Mohammadi and Niloofar Hamedei), Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/persian/67186171>.

35. BBC Persian, Iranian Government Approves New Security Measures Following Protests, Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/persian/67186171>.

36. . BBC News, Iran to execute two protesters as the death toll from unrest rises, Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-64584265>.

37. Ibid.

38. Iran International, RSF Index: Iran Among World's 'Most Repressive' for Press Freedom, Available at: <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202405038337>.

39. Berkeley News, More Than 120 Protesters Blinded by Iranian Agents, Probe Confirms, Available at:

<https://news.berkeley.edu/2024/03/21/more-than-120-protesters-blinded-by-iranian-agents-probe-confirms/>

40. Mirror, Woman, 20, Dies After Being Shot in Eye by Iranian Authorities During Protests, Available at: <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/woman-20-dies-after-being-28086020>.

Beyond the direct targeting of dissents including journalists through arrests, imprisonments, and shootings, the regime employs a range of tactics aimed at instilling fear not only in the activists themselves but also in their families and the broader community. By targeting the loved ones of journalists, the regime seeks to leverage emotional and psychological pressure, making it clear that dissenting voices will have repercussions for their families.

Despite the ongoing repression, the movement's resilience is remarkably strong, with individuals continuing to unite under the principles of "Women, Life, Freedom." They advocate for a future in which their rights are acknowledged and safeguarded. The protests have garnered unprecedented support from diverse sectors of Iranian society, transcending ethnic and social divides. Many men have joined women in solidarity, recognizing that the fight for women's rights is integral to the larger quest for human rights and democracy in Iran. This collective action effectively challenges long-standing patriarchal norms.

Article11: Women and the Environment

The ecological crisis in Iran, similar to those faced by many other countries, represents one of the most urgent challenges confronting society today, with women disproportionately affected by its consequences. As a patriarchal society grappling with various environmental issues, Iran serves as a unique case for ecofeminism, which highlights the important and distinctive role of women in environmental matters. Research conducted in Tehran indicates that women are more attuned to environmental crises and more actively involved in tackling these challenges. A 2016 study across 29 districts of Tehran established a strong connection between gender, knowledge, and engagement in environmental issues, revealing that schoolgirls tend to be more active, curious, and practical in their approach to learning about environmental topics.⁴¹

Many women activists in contemporary Iran have emerged as dedicated environmental advocates. Through their publications and artistic expressions, these individuals illuminate a whole range of complex environmental problems, including air pollution resulting from vehicle emissions, industrial activities, and refineries; water scarcity stemming from drought and unregulated construction; deforestation precipitated by excessive cutting of trees and extensive urbanization projects, as well as soil degradation caused by poor agricultural management, thereby threatening food security. These activists also critique the expansion of car production that exceeds urban capacity, the lack of modernization of refineries, and the burning of mazut in factories due to fuel shortages, all of which intensify air pollution.

The 1990s marked a period during which non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and discourse on feminism and the environment became increasingly prevalent in Iran, leading to the establishment of several environmental NGOs with substantial female participation. During this time, the term ecofeminism—originally introduced by French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974 began to gain momentum in Iran. Public concern surrounding environmental issues increased, rendering ecofeminism a compelling movement that links women's oppression with environmental degradation. These subjects began to receive greater visibility in artistic projects, literary works, and NGO publications.

Among the most significant Iranian female environmental activists was Mahlaqa Malla (1917-2021), who founded the influential environmental NGO, the “Women’s Society for Fighting Environmental Pollution”, in 1994. She could extend her NGO activities to 16 provinces in Iran. She also served as the head of the editorial board for the environmental journal titled *Cry of the Earth* and is affectionately regarded as the "Mother of the Iranian Environment" in recognition of her contributions.⁴²

Another prominent NGO currently active in Iran that focuses on the intersectionality of women, families, and environmental issues is “Southern Women's Initiative Organization”. This organization works to empower women by raising awareness about environmental

⁴¹ <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/404027/>

⁴² [مادر محیط‌زیست-ایران-درگذشت](https://www.irna.ir/news/84533527/مادر-محیط‌زیست-ایران-درگذشت)

1. IRNA News Agency: *Mother of Iran's Environment Passed Away*. Retrieved from <https://www.irna.ir/news/84533527>
2. Wikipedia: Meh'lqa Malah. Retrieved from https://fa.wikipedia.org/wiki/مَلَقَا_مَلّاح

challenges and advocating for sustainable practices that benefit both communities and the environment.

The ongoing art initiatives aimed at raising public awareness about air pollution include *Heritage of the Sky*. This project by engaging women is an ongoing Iranian artistic initiative designed to raise public awareness about dark skies and the effects of light pollution. This initiative highlights the consequences of light pollution through various media campaigns, emphasizing the importance of preserving the world's remaining natural night environments and night skies. Supported by the International Dark-Sky Association (IDA) and UNESCO-IAU's Astronomy and World Heritage Thematic Initiative, the project aims to promote and protect Iran's natural, cultural, and historical astronomical sites as part of its national heritage.⁴³

Other notable creative projects include "Tehran Monoxide" and "Dreams Before Extinction." The former, initiated in 2010 by an artist woman Negar Farajiani, serves as an ongoing critique of air pollution in Tehran, providing a platform for feminist and environmental discourse in contemporary Iranian art. This project encompasses a broad scope, including art exhibitions at schools, examining the effects of houseplants on air quality, selling plants on the street, creating a free garden of exhaust pipes in a treeless area, and educating schoolchildren while also learning from them.⁴⁴ The latter project, "Dreams Before Extinction," was a painting exhibition held in Tehran in 2013 by an artist woman Naeemeh Naeemaei, showcasing endangered species. The exhibition aimed to break the artificial barrier between human society and the natural world by presenting a series of twelve remarkable paintings of endangered species. In this project, Naeemaei seeks to bridge the divide between humans and nature, fostering emotional concern for both animals and the environment.⁴⁵

These activities have heightened public awareness regarding environmentally sensitive issues, particularly following the Women's Life of Freedom movement in September 2022. Environmental issues began to gain traction at the grassroots level, with many ordinary people incorporating these concerns into their demands. However, in recent years, the Iranian judiciary has frequently arrested environmental activists, imposing lengthy prison sentences on many. Among those affected are Anahita Dostdar, Nina Golestani, Rosita Rajaei, Anahita Hejazi, and Nagin Edaltakhah. Although these women activists were later released on bail from Lakan Prison in Rasht, the court subsequently issued long prison sentences for all of them. Each received a sentence of 3 years, 6 months, and one day in prison for "Assembly and Collusion," as well as an additional 7 months and 16 days for "Propaganda Against the Regime."⁴⁶

Additionally, two female environmental activists, Niloufar Bayani and Sepideh Kashani, were originally sentenced to lengthy prison terms—Bayani received a 10-year sentence, while Kashani was sentenced to 6 years. Niloufar Bayani is a biology graduate from McGill

⁴³ <https://www.iau-100.org/heritage-sky>

⁴⁴ <https://www.walmart.com/ip/Tehran-Monoxide-A-Project-by-Negar-Farajiani-Paperback-9781949743326/578846295>

⁴⁵ <https://www.amazon.com/Dreams-Before-Extinction-English-Persian/dp/0989561631>

⁴⁶ DW Persian: 20-Year Prison Sentence Issued for Five Environmental Activists from Gilan. Retrieved from <https://www.dw.com/fa-ir/صدر-محیطزیستی-فعال-بنج-یر-ای-زندان-سال-۲۰-حکم-a-69930061>

University and a former United Nations employee in Geneva. These unjust sentences were handed down on November 10, 2019, behind closed doors, without lawyers present, amid nationwide protests over rising gasoline prices and with internet lines down.⁴⁷ However, in April 2024, they with their male fellow activists, Hooman Jokar and Taher Ghadirian, were released after serving six years in prison.⁴⁸ Additionally, in November 2023 Zeinab Rahimi, an environmental journalist, announced that a case had been filed against her at the Culture and Media Prosecutor's Office on charges of "spreading lies and offending public decency."⁴⁹

States and international organizations can create a framework to support environmental activists in Iran, advocate for their rights, and seek justice for those who already have been wrongfully imprisoned. This all-inclusive strategy not only addresses immediate concerns but also contributes to long-term systemic change in how civil society is treated in Iran.

To avoid such situations, the following actions are necessary:

- a. Women should have access to clean water storages and the possibility of optimizing the water resources, especially in deprived areas and nomad areas with little water.
- b. Communications, energy, information, and digital resources should be equally accessible to men and women, and the discriminations in this regard should be eliminated.
- c. The government and the banks should provide for special housing loans and subsidies for women who are the head of the household.
- d. Women should have equal rights to farming lands and the security in its management and rental rights. Those women who live in the areas with conventional land laws should be supported specifically.
- e. The government should protect the environment and natural resources for the benefit of future generations and prevent the destruction of the environment in all regions across the country.
- f. The government, the media, the civil society institutions and the private sector should plan for the optimization of consumption patterns, avoidance of unhealthy and unsanitary consumptions, and nutrition suitable for the environmental and family health. The Civil Code of the Islamic Republic of Iran includes several provisions that sustain gender.

⁴⁷ WNCRI (Women's Network for Citizen and Refugee Initiatives): *Two Female Environmental Activists and Four Baha'i Women Sentenced to Three Years in Prison*. Retrieved from [https://wncri.org/fa/3-به-بهای-زن-چهار-وزنیست-محیط-فعال-زن-دو/](https://wncri.org/fa/3-به-بهای-زن-چهار-وزنیست-محیط-فعال-زن-دو)

⁴⁸ <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/iran-environment-activists-freed/32894665.html>

⁴⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/IHRDC/posts/zeinab-rahimi-an-environmental-journalist-has-announced-that-a-case-has-been-ope/635721895437198/>

Article 12: Girls' Status in Iran

Discrimination against girls in Iran is pervasive and institutionalized. For instance, Article 147 of the Iranian Penal Code establishes disparate standards for men and women regarding the age of criminal responsibility, blood money, retribution, and evidentiary requirements. A boy is deemed criminally responsible at the age of 15 (lunar years), while a girl reaches this threshold at the age of 9 lunar years. Consequently, both boys and girls may face adult punishments for offenses committed at these ages, rather than receiving preventive or rehabilitative measures.

The mandatory hijab laws in Iran impose significant limitations on young girls' participation in sports and physical activities, leading to widespread physical inactivity. A 2020 study highlights that cultural and religious requirements, such as wearing loose and heavy clothing, deter girls from engaging in outdoor sports, especially in hot weather. Additionally, the lack of female-only facilities or restricted access to spaces where girls can exercise freely worsens the situation⁵⁰.

Early Marriage

Before the Iranian Revolution in 1979, Article 1041 of the Civil Code set the minimum marriage age at 15 for girls and 18 for boys. However, in 1982, the provision was amended to allow girls as young as 9 and boys as young as 15 to marry. In 1983, the legal minimum age for girls was raised to 13, while it remained 15 for boys. Marriages involving girls under 13 or boys under 15 require guardian consent. This amendment has enabled the persistence of early and often coerced marriages, driven by cultural, familial, and systemic pressures.

Honor Killings

Honor killings continue to be a grave concern in Iran, with a significant number of women and girls falling victim annually. A 2019 report revealed that approximately 30% of all murder cases in Iran involve honor killings. Abbas Jafari Dowlatabadi, the former head of the Khuzestan judiciary, noted that local customs often facilitate these acts. Perpetrators frequently evade justice, and victims' families are often deterred from prosecuting offenders. Honor killings” are a severe form of femicide and one of the most violent expressions of gender-based violence. They typically involve a family member; often a woman or a transgender individual, being murdered by relatives who claim the victim has brought shame or dishonor upon the family, tribe, or community. These killings are often motivated by cultural, social, or religious beliefs that prioritize “family honor” over individual rights, including the fundamental right to life.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Justice for Iran. Thirty-five Years of Forced Hijab: The Widespread and Systematic Violation of Women's Rights in Iran. Available at: <https://justice4iran.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Hejab-Report-JFI-English.pdf>.

Amiri Farahani, L., et al. "Iranian Women's Perceptions and Experiences of Barriers to and Facilitators of Physical Activity." Shiraz E-Medical Journal, vol. 19, no. 8, 2018, pp. 1-7. Available at: https://applications.emro.who.int/imemrf/Shiraz_E_Med_J/Shiraz_E_Med_J_2018_19_8_1_7.pdf.

This study explores the individual, interpersonal, and societal factors influencing Iranian women's physical activity, including barriers such as cultural norms, time constraints, and limited access to appropriate facilities.

⁵¹ "Fourth Quarterly Report on 'Honor Killings' in 2024 (186 Cases in a Year)," by Rezvan Moghaddam. Available at: <https://stophonorkillings.org/en/2025/01/03/fourth-quarterly-report-on-honor-killings-in-2024186-case-in-a-year/>.

Mandatory Veiling and Gender Segregation

From the age of six, girls are required to wear compulsory veiling upon starting school. This mandate, coupled with prohibitions on inter-gender interaction, has resulted in systemic gender segregation within educational institutions. These regulations have reinforced gender disparities and significantly impacted societal structures.

Barriers to Education

Economic hardship, cultural biases, and a patriarchal system further restrict girls' access to education. Some families prohibit their daughters from attending school, often due to a lack of awareness about gender equality. Additionally, the scarcity of public educational facilities for girls exacerbates this issue.

Legal and Socio-Cultural Inequalities

Legal inequalities in Iran are rooted not only in legislative deficiencies but also in patriarchal traditions and social systems. Legislative reforms alone cannot address these issues unless accompanied by initiatives to transform socio-cultural structures. The government must safeguard women's human rights by employing education, media, and other tools to eliminate violent traditions and gender-based abuses.⁵²

Recommendations for Change

Legal Reform:

- Revise discriminatory provisions in the Iranian Penal Code and Civil Code.
- Criminalize practices such as child marriage and honor killings.
- Ensure legal protections against violence, including domestic violence and honor killings, with robust enforcement mechanisms.
- Campaign for changes to laws that discriminate against women and girls, such as child marriage laws, inheritance rights, and guardianship rules.
- Establish coalitions of gender studies experts, lawyers, and sociologists to raise public awareness about women's rights and the inadequacies of existing laws.
- Ensure legal protections against violence, including domestic violence and honor killings, with robust enforcement mechanisms.

Awareness and Advocacy:

- To pressure the Iranian government to reform its gender-discriminatory laws.

⁵² 1 Maryam Javaherian, "Women's Human Rights in Iran: What Can the International Human Rights System Do?" Santa Clara Law Review (2000). Available at: <https://juvenilejusticecentre.org/compulsory-hijab-law-threatens-children/>.

2 "Human Rights of Women in Iran: The Universalist Approach and Relativist Response," International Human Rights Law in the Middle East, available at: https://ihrl-me.weebly.com/uploads/1/7/7/0/17700825/human_rights_of_women_in_iran-_the_universalist_approach_and_relativist_response.pdf

- Partner with global organizations to amplify advocacy efforts and secure resources for programs supporting girls.
- Utilize international human rights frameworks to hold authorities accountable for gender-based discrimination
- Use media, social platforms, and educational programs to promote gender equality and empower girls to know and assert their rights.
- Promote women's economic independence by ensuring equal access to education and employment opportunities.
- Support vocational training and entrepreneurship programs tailored for girls to help them achieve financial independence.
- Collaborate with local organizations to create job opportunities and promote women-led businesses.

- Create support systems for victims of gender-based violence, including access to justice, counseling, and medical care.
- Improve access to reproductive health services and education for girls to ensure their well-being.
- Provide mental health resources to address issues like stress, trauma, and discrimination.

Conclusion

This report is grounded in independent investigations that explore twelve areas of the Beijing Platform, revealing a significant disparity in gender equality and women's empowerment in Iran. Women in the country face discrimination across multiple domains, including legal, cultural, and social structures. Despite these challenges, ordinary women and activists have tirelessly fought to uphold their rights at all levels. Although there were some advancements in women's legal and social status before the 1979 Iranian Revolution, many of those gains have been eroded over the past few decades. Currently, the situation for Iranian women falls far short of the objectives outlined in the Beijing Declaration. Activists advocating for women's rights in Iran face severe repression, as the government actively seeks to silence dissenting voices. Over the past thirty years, many women journalists, along with environmental and civil rights advocates, have faced harsh penalties, with many still imprisoned today. Furthermore, the patriarchal political system severely restricts women's representation in high-level decision-making roles.

Implementing the Beijing Declaration and its Platform for Action presents significant challenges due to various obstacles. The Iranian government has rejected the platform, asserting that its provisions conflict with Islamic law. It may be necessary for members of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) to apply pressure on the Iranian government to reassess its gender policies.