



A Report to  
**CSW70**



# Gender-Based Discrimination Under Iranian Law

## Structural Inequality and State-Sanctioned Oppression of Women

A publication of the NCRI Women's Committee

March 2026



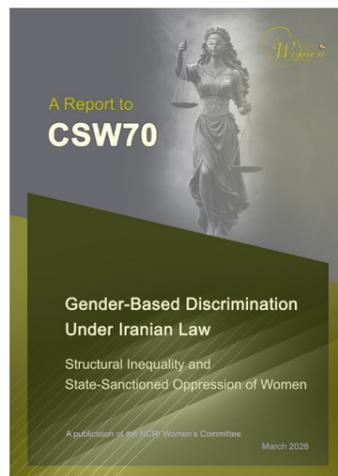
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## Gender-Based Discrimination under Iranian Law

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**A publication of the Women's Committee of the National Council of Resistance of Iran  
March 2026**

ISBN: 978-2-35822-049-1

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SEXUAL APARTHEID IN THE LAWS OF IRAN'S CLERICAL REGIME



SEXUAL APARTHEID IN THE MEDIEVAL LAWS OF THE CLERICAL REGIME

At a time when the world is moving toward the abolition of the death penalty, and when the number of women executed in other countries remains in the single digits, the religious dictatorship ruling Iran set a new record of brutality in 2025 by executing 65 women.

The fundamental question is why the fate of these women ends at the gallows.

The answer cannot be found solely in the solitary confinement cells of Qarchak or Evin prisons, nor in the psychological condition of the victims themselves. Rather, it must be sought in legal texts that define "woman" not as a free human being, but as the property of men and a matter of so-called religious expediency. Every knot tightened on the noose of an Iranian woman was first woven into the most foundational laws of this regime.

In this booklet, prepared for CSW70, the NCRI Women's Committee demonstrates, through a meticulous examination of the clerical regime's laws, how the mullahs have systematically sealed off access to justice for Iranian women through layers upon layers of misogynistic legislation.

Introduction

The religious dictatorship ruling Iran is one of the few political systems in the world to have institutionalized discrimination against women systematically across all levels of its legislative framework.

The execution of 65 women in 2025 is the logical outcome of a structure in which "being a woman" is not recognized as a human identity but rather treated as an existence subordinate to men.

The constitution of the religious dictatorship blocked the path to equality from the very outset. The Civil Code sidelines women by cutting their economic worth and legal credibility in half. Family law endorses child marriage and enforces dead-end divorce regulations to keep women dependent, while the Penal Code, monstrous in nature, takes revenge on women who challenge these barriers, condemning the weakest and most isolated among them to death.

To substantiate this argument, we will examine step by step the obstacles embedded in the clerical regime's laws that prevent women from accessing justice.

The Constitution of the Religious Dictatorship



Clerical Islamic law stands above all the laws of the country. Therefore, under this system, the passage of any bill or law in defense of women's rights cannot guarantee justice.

Article 4

Equality in legal protection is conditional upon "observance of Islamic criteria" (read: clerical Sharia).

Article 20

Article 21 The guarantee of women's rights is also subject to "observance of Islamic criteria." From the regime's perspective, "Islamic criteria" means "clerical Sharia," which amounts to the institutionalization of misogyny in both law and practice.

Article 115&163 Women are barred from entering the hierarchy of power, decision-making, and the issuance of judgments. Under the regime's laws, a woman cannot become president — or even serve as a judge.



## Step 1: The Ideological Foundation

### *The Constitution: Discrimination Embedded in the Structure of Power and Governance*

The Constitution of the mullahs’ regime is a document that transforms “discrimination” into a state duty. This body of laws forms the foundation and architecture of structural discrimination against women.

Principle 4 places the unfounded dogmas of clerical Sharia above all other laws, declaring: “All laws and regulations ... must be based on Islamic criteria (i.e. the mullahs’ Sharia laws). This principle governs all principles of the Constitution, as well as all other laws and regulations.”

As a result, any effort toward gender equality is rendered futile from the outset, since the interpretation of “Islamic criteria” is monopolized by clerics appointed to the Guardian Council, all of whom are directly selected by Khamenei.

This layer of turbaned fossils has consistently used every platform to promote their most misogynistic, outdated beliefs—such as legitimizing child marriage and enforcing compulsory hijab—under the pretext of “Sharia.”

Consequently, the passage of any bill or law in defense of women’s rights, even if it occurs, would, in practice and under this regime, open no real avenue for women to access justice. Within the same Constitution, Principle 20 conditions legal equality on “observance of Islamic criteria (i.e. the mullahs’ Sharia laws),” while Principle 21, which ostensibly obliges the state to guarantee women’s rights, is immediately nullified by the caveat “in accordance with Islamic criteria,” effectively wielding the clerical stick to override any protections.

The phrase “observance of Islamic criteria” effectively means that equality exists only so far as it does not step even one inch beyond laws from 1,400 years ago among primitive Arabs, whose origins are sometimes only loosely connected to Islam itself. Although the 1,400-year-old laws codified by the Prophet, such as granting women inheritance and testimony rights or prescribing “an eye for an eye” in retaliation, were originally intended to prevent women from being buried alive and to curb tribal massacres, in their time they represented significant steps toward equality, peace, and security.

Principles 115 and 163 of the regime’s Constitution prevent women from entering the hierarchy of power, decision-making positions, and the judiciary. The Guardian Council has consistently interpreted the term “*rejal*” to mean “men.”

Recently, the regime’s Judiciary Chief, mullah Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejeii, reaffirmed this exclusivity regarding the presidency and the judiciary, stating: “According to our jurists, a judge cannot be a woman and cannot issue rulings in any case or at any level.” (Mizan News Agency, December 22, 2025) Thus, at all high levels of government and the judiciary, it is men who make decisions and issue rulings, a ruthless, male-dominated system in which women have no effective voice whatsoever.



## Step 2: Red Lines in Everyday Life

### *Civil Code and Family Law: Women Under Guardianship from Birth to Death*

**The Civil Code**  
From birth until death, a woman is placed under guardianship.

- Articles 907, 913 & 946**: A woman's right to inheritance is half that of a man. A woman has no financial independence and remains in constant dependence on the men of her family.
- Article 976**: Iranian nationality is recognized only through paternal bloodline. As a result, thousands of children are left without birth certificates and are denied all basic rights.
- Article 987**: An Iranian woman who marries a foreign national is deprived of civil and property rights.

through the father’s bloodline. Moreover, an Iranian woman who marries a foreign national faces severe restrictions on maintaining her civil and property rights. This provision has left thousands of Iranian children stateless, depriving them of all basic rights due to the lack of official identification. Under the regime’s laws, access to justice for these women and their children is effectively stamped as zero. In the culture of the ruling clerics, blatant discrimination against women is always wrapped in the guise of “family” and placed squarely on their shoulders. In recent years, policies aimed at increasing and “rejuvenating” the population have only added to this burden of oppression.

After sealing off the higher-level principles, the clerical lawmakers block the next lines of access to justice for women by embedding discrimination into everyday life. Articles 907, 913, and 946 of the Civil Code grant women only half the inheritance of men. This deprives women of financial independence, keeping them in perpetual dependence on male family members. The long-term

result under this regime has been widespread “female poverty,” which even state-controlled media openly acknowledge. Discrimination in the transmission of nationality is another barrier the clerical regime imposes on women in daily life. Articles 976 and 987 of the Civil Code recognize the transfer of Iranian nationality to children, except in rare and difficult cases, only

According to Article 1041 of the Civil Code, “The marriage of a girl under the age of 13 and a boy under the age of 15 is contingent upon the permission of their guardian.” In practice, this means that the marriage of 13-year-old girls is legally sanctioned, and fathers or grandfathers can easily force even younger girls into the violence and abuse of child marriage.



This law is the root cause of most women’s executions in Iran. A girl forced into marriage at 13 or younger is, in effect, a victim of legally sanctioned sexual slavery. Many of the 65 women executed in 2025, and dozens of others in previous years, were child brides who, after years of torture, abuse, or exploitation by their so-called spouses or some male relative, and denied access to justice or divorce, ultimately committed acts deemed criminal in moments of extreme desperation. Denied fair adjudication, they are repeatedly victimized, as under the prevailing laws, the right to divorce is unilaterally reserved for men. Article 1133 of the clerical Civil Code states: “A man may, in accordance with the conditions stipulated in this law, request a divorce from his wife through the court,” with no requirement to provide any reason. By contrast, under Article 1130, a woman seeking a divorce must prove ‘hardship and unbearable difficulty’ in court, and the testimony of a female witness carries no legal weight in the regime’s courts. Women seeking to escape violent marriages must endure months or even years before misogynist judges, struggling to prove that life with their

### Marriage and Divorce

**Article 1041** The marriage of a girl before the age of 13 is permitted with the consent of her legal guardian. This means that marriage of 13-year-old girls is legal, and fathers and grandfathers can easily force even younger girls into marriage.

**Article 1133** A man may request a divorce without providing any reason.

**Article 1130** A woman must prove that continuation of the marriage has become intolerable in order to request a divorce. The inability to prove violence before misogynistic judges, combined with the lack of the right to self-defense, has for many women ended in execution.

**Article 1169** Custody rights are granted to the mother only for children under the age of seven. Many women endure violence for a lifetime in order to protect their children.

“husband” is intolerable. A significant number of the women who ultimately end up on the gallows had, in desperation, repeatedly approached the clerical courts to request a divorce, only to have the courts side with the men and force them back into the home. Under Articles 1105 and 1108, the man is inherently the head of the household, and “if a wife refuses to fulfill her marital duties (sexual and general obedience),” the husband may beat her and even withhold financial support for her and the home in which she works from morning to night.

Even if a woman succeeds in obtaining a divorce, she is effectively forced to endure the psychological torment of having her children remain with a violent or addicted father, as Article 1169 grants custody to the mother only until the child reaches seven years of age. Consequently, many women in Iran endure a lifetime of violence and abuse out of fear of losing their children, sacrificing their own lives for their protection.

### Step 3: The Penal Code, the Judicial Machinery of Repression

The judicial system of the religious dictatorship is designed not to deliver justice, but to reproduce violence against women.

Seeking justice for women through an institution that values their lives as worth half that of men is nothing more than a bitter irony. Under Articles 170 and 290 of the clerical Penal Code, the punishment for intentional murder is qisas al-nafs (execution).

In Iran’s legal system, murder is not considered a crime against society, but rather a “private right” of the wali al-dam, that is, the victim’s father, who may demand execution or grant forgiveness in exchange for blood money (diya). The mullahs’ religious dictatorship that intrudes into the most private details of people’s lives through enforced hijab laws and pervasive security and internet controls, here assumes the role of executor of the victim’s family’s will. In this way, it attempts to evade examining the underlying causes of the crime and to pursue criminal executions, which in reality serve as its instrument for spreading fear and terror throughout society, particularly among women.

In this system, concepts such as self-defense, a history of domestic violence, or psychological conditions that led to the incident are rarely accepted as mitigating factors against execution.

As a result, women who kill their abusive husbands in self-defense find virtually no path to justice. Proving “legitimate self-defense” in Iran’s courts is almost impossible for women, given the inequality in the value of testimony, because alongside the devaluation of a woman’s life, women’s testimony is considered worth half that of a man’s, and in some cases is deemed to have no value at all by criminal judges.

By contrast, when a woman is killed, the perpetrator is rarely sentenced to qisas, because under Article 550 of this law, the value of a woman’s blood is considered half that of a man’s. This means that if a man kills a woman and her family seeks qisas, they must pay the “difference in blood money” (tafazol-e diya), half the diya of the man, to his family in order for the execution to be carried out.

This degrading outlook permeates the conduct of judges and the judicial system as a whole. Yet Iranian women and girls, whose lives and testimony are valued at half that of men, are nevertheless deemed fully accountable in the judicial reckoning from early childhood.

Article 147 of the clerical Penal Code, based on the so-called religious age of puberty previously enshrined in the Civil Code, defines the age of criminal responsibility for girls at nine, while setting it at fifteen for boys.

In other words, a nine-year-old girl, who is not allowed to decide on her own marriage or divorce and does not enjoy equal inheritance rights, is suddenly deemed “an adult” by the regime’s misogynistic judges, held more accountable than a man, and may even be sentenced to death.

She may then spend years, until reaching the age of eighteen, waking every night to the nightmare of execution, since the regime claims it does not carry out executions before the age of eighteen, a claim that has been repeatedly contradicted in practice.

This is the same girl whose life and blood are legally owned by her father, and under Articles 301 and 612, if that “father” or paternal grandfather takes her life, it is of little consequence. Even if such fathers are brought before the law, the maximum sentence prescribed is ten years in prison, often reduced in practice to as little as two years.





## Violence Labeled as "Justice" in the Penal Code



Articles 170 & 290

The punishment for intentional murder is execution.

Articles 550

The value of a woman's blood money is half that of a man. If a man kills a woman, he is executed only if the victim's family pays half of his blood money.

Articles 147

The age of criminal responsibility for girls is only nine. (A girl whose marriage is decided by others, and whose inheritance and legal testimony are worth half of a man's, is held criminally responsible six years earlier than a boy.)

Articles 301 & 612

If a father or grandfather kills a child, there is no ground for prosecution. (This is a legal green light for the killing of girls and women under the so-called concept of "honor killings.")

Articles 716

Abortion is prohibited. If a mother aborts a four-month-old fetus and the fetus is male; she must pay double her own blood money.

Articles 630

"If a man witnesses his wife committing adultery, he may kill them both." In such a case, the man simultaneously acts as the complainant, the witness, the judge, and the executor of the death sentence.

This law effectively grants a license for so-called "honor killings." It reveals that the true purpose of legislation written by the religious dictatorship is not "justice," but the preservation and reinforcement of "male dominance," thinly disguised under the alias of "family." Naturally, the mother has no such rights. According to Article 716, even if she aborts a four-month-old fetus, she is subject to punishment, and if the fetus is male, she must pay twice the diya (blood money) of the child. The Penal Code has institutionalized the right to kill women not only for fathers and paternal grandfathers, but also for husbands. Article 630 states: "If a man catches his wife committing adultery with another man with her consent, he may kill both of them on the spot, and in this case, he is exempt from qisas (retribution) and ta'zir (judicial punishment)." These laws allow a man to simultaneously act as the "complainant," the "judge," and the "executor" of death, without the need for a court or even proof of the accusation he has made against his wife. It is no coincidence that cases of women being killed in Iran continue to rise every year. Another factor that makes the state-sanctioned killing of women permissible is drug-related offenses. The regime uses execution for drug crimes as a tool for social control. In these cases, the "right to a fair trial" is virtually nonexistent. Women executed under this pretext are mostly from extremely poor backgrounds and often heads of households, trapped in cycles of poverty and deprivation, and have become victims of large networks connected to government institutions.

These women are executed as "low-level scapegoats," and it is rarely acknowledged that they were acting under pressure or threats from their husbands, brothers, or fathers to carry drugs. Meanwhile, the leaders of drug networks, who are mostly linked to the government, are almost never brought to justice. It is also important to note that if women belong to ethnic or religious minorities, particularly the oppressed and marginalized communities of Baluchistan and Kurdistan, or are staunch political opponents of the regime, these injustices are significantly intensified.

### Step 4: Legal Gaps

#### What Is Deliberately Overlooked

The Iranian regime not only harms women through its "existing" laws, but by "refusing to enact protective legislation," it creates a safe space for crimes against women. It should be emphasized, however, that given what has been outlined so far, under the rule of this misogynistic religious dictatorship and the presence of these overarching laws, even if bills or supplementary laws aimed at protecting women were somehow approved, they would, in practice, never be enforced.



## Step 5: Enacting New Unjust Laws and Bills

*New laws on dowry and compulsory hijab, adding further obstacles to women's access to justice*

### 5-1. Amendment of the Dowry Law: Reproducing Legal Inequality Against Women

On December 2, 2025, the regime's parliament hastily approved a bill titled "Amendment of the Dowry Law."

According to this resolution:

"If the dowry at the time of marriage is up to 14 Bahar Azadi gold coins or their equivalent, its collection shall be subject to the provisions of Article (2) of the Law on the Enforcement of Exemptions from Financial Convictions. If the dowry exceeds this amount, payment of the excess shall be based solely on the husband's financial ability."

It further states: "The term imprisonment in this law includes both 'keeping a person in prison' and 'restricting a person through the use of electronic monitoring systems.'"

(Asr-e Iran, December 4, 5, and 7, 2025)

This means, first of all, that a husband will not be subject to judicial proceedings for failing to pay more than 14 gold coins. If the dowry exceeds 14 coins, the woman must prove the husband's financial ability in order to claim the excess amount.

As a result, if a woman, whose testimony, in the view of the clerical judiciary, is considered worth half that of a man, is unable to prove that her husband has the ability to pay more than 14 coins, the remainder of the dowry is effectively nullified altogether.

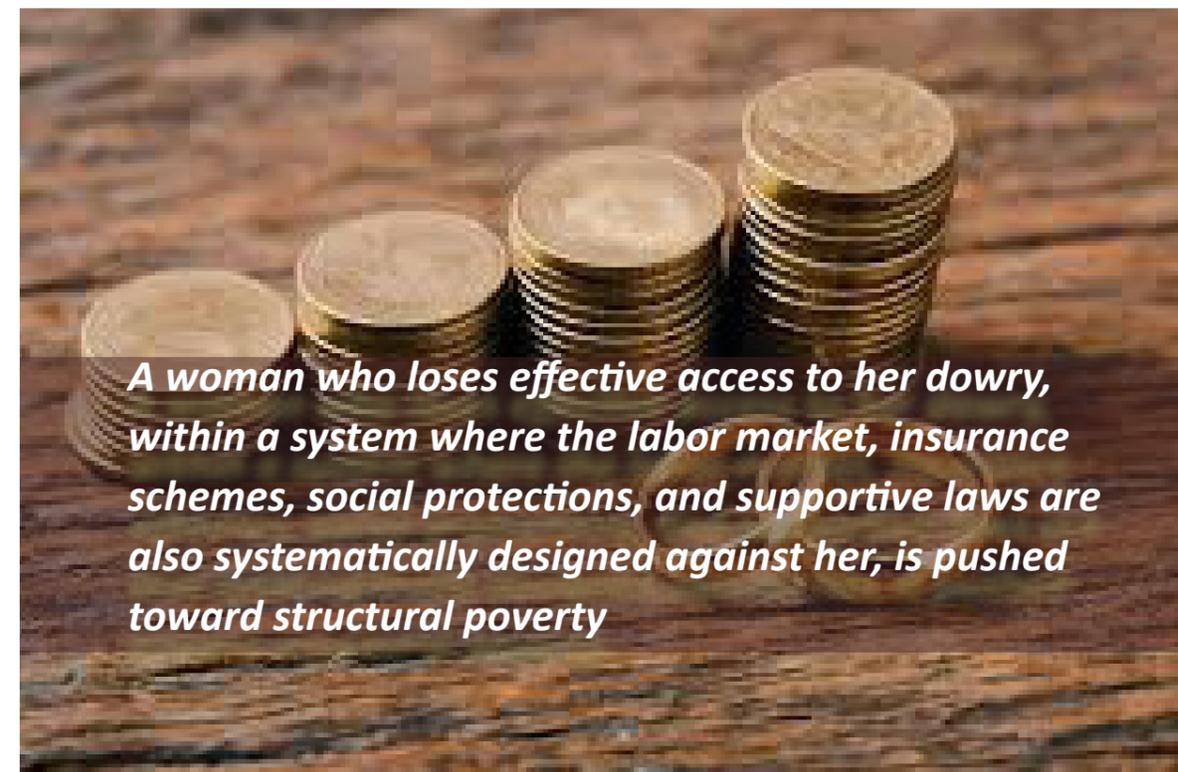
Prior to this law, if a man's claim of financial incapacity was accepted, the court would set the dowry in installments, and the man was obligated to pay it gradually.

This law also stipulates provisions regarding the right to divorce: if the spouses have lived separately for at least two consecutive years and the court establishes the woman's severe aversion to the man, the woman may obtain the right to divorce by relinquishing her dowry. (Asr-e Iran, December 4, 2025)

Previously, under the clerics' Civil Code, a woman seeking divorce had to prove that continuing life with the man in question was harmful to her; now, she must also forgive her dowry. This means she will have no financial guarantee or means to support an independent life.

This is happening in a context where, as noted earlier, the headship of the family is considered an inherent right of the man, and rights such as divorce, child custody, the authority to prevent a woman's employment or education, restrictions on her leaving the country, determination of the place of residence, inheritance rights, and even certain medical decisions are all legally vested in the man. Now, dowry, previously the only effective tool available to women to secure a minimum level of financial security, has also been targeted by the clerics.

A woman who loses effective access to her dowry, within a system where the labor market, insurance schemes, social protections, and supportive laws are also systematically designed against her, is pushed toward structural poverty.



*A woman who loses effective access to her dowry, within a system where the labor market, insurance schemes, social protections, and supportive laws are also systematically designed against her, is pushed toward structural poverty*

This situation, especially for housewives or women without independent income, amounts to a total descent into economic marginalization.

This law, by sending a message of legal insecurity to women, increases the risks of marriage for them and will lead to other social crises, aggravating violence against women in the family and social insecurity for divorced women.

Registering such a law represents a step backward even compared to the very Sharia that the clerics claim to uphold. This is because even in clerical Sharia law, no ceiling has ever been set on dowry, and its amount has been purely a mutual contractual agreement between the spouses.

For the first time under the clerical regime, a limit on dowry was introduced in March 2013, with the passage of the Family Protection Law, which set a maximum amount of 110 gold coins for the husband's criminal liability in paying the dowry. (ILNA, December 5, 2025) In the meantime, in Article 1080 of the regime's Civil Code, "the amount of dowry depends on mutual agreement of the spouses." Therefore, the adoption of the bill to decrease the dowry is an illegal measure.



### 5–2. The “Chastity and Hijab” Law: Stripping Women of the Right to Freedom of Dress Through Forced Repression

#### *The “Chastity and Hijab Law 2025”: A Legal Framework for Repression*

From October 2025, the clerical regime once again began seriously signaling an intensification of the repression of women under the pretext of enforcing compulsory hijab. What is now being promoted as the “Chastity and Hijab Law 2025” is the very same law that was approved by parliament and confirmed by the Guardian Council last year, but whose implementation was halted by the regime’s Supreme National Security Council out of fear of social unrest and popular uprisings. The regime is now attempting to enforce that same law simply by changing the date. (ILNA, November 11, 2025)

This law criminalizes “unveiling” in public spaces, vehicles, and cyberspace, subjecting women to heavy financial fines, suspension of administrative services, travel bans, and social deprivations. The broad and vague definition of “public space” effectively extends repression into all areas of women’s lives, functioning as a punitive and surveillance-based mechanism for exerting structural pressure on women.

#### *From the Morality Police to “Enforcers of Virtue”: Social Mobilization to Control Women*

Alongside repressive legislation, the regime is moving toward a control-oriented social mobilization.

On October 15, 2025, Ruhollah Momen-Nasab, Secretary of Tehran Province’s Headquarters for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, announced the launch of a “Chastity and Hijab Situation Room” and the activation of 80,000 “enforcers of virtue.” This is an effort to replace the formal morality police with a decentralized, unaccountable, and pervasive network.

Momen-Nasab did not specify the exact duties of these 80,000 forces. What is clear, however, is that their role extends beyond monitoring and reporting to include social pressure and direct interference in people’s everyday lives. Such an approach fuels the spread of psychological insecurity, especially for women who still carry the memory of acid attacks and brutal beatings carried out under the pretext of enforcing hijab.

#### *Securitizing Hijab: From “Improper Veiling” to “Corruption Networks”*

In a speech on November 4, 2025, Ali Khamenei stated: “The issue of hijab must be regarded as a religious and Islamic matter.” Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei, head of the regime’s judiciary, has likewise emphasized—using security-oriented rhetoric during provincial visits—the enforcement of existing laws to impose hijab.

### The Morality Police, operating under the name “Enforcers of Virtue”

The mobilization of 80,000 forces who, without any official governmental status, pursue repression under the pretext of enforcing hijab. This is in addition to 28 state institutions that are tasked with implementing compulsory hijab.



The repeated use of concepts such as “organized networks of corruption and prostitution,” “foreign enemies,” and “soft war” is a clear attempt to encourage and legitimize regime loyalists tasked with enforcing compulsory hijab. Similarly, Ali Salehi, Tehran’s prosecutor, noted that 28 executive bodies have specific legal duties in the area of “hijab and chastity,” and claimed that “some organized networks of corruption and prostitution, supported by foreign enemies,” are active. He called for decisive and swift action by law-enforcement and security forces to identify and confront these groups. (IRNA, November 18, 2025)

This securitization has paved the way for arrests, extrajudicial actions, and intensified repression against women, even though there is no clear legal basis for such a level of security intervention. Within the regime, contradictory statements are made regarding the suspension or enforcement of the hijab law—disputes that both factions raise out of fear of public outrage and potential social uprisings. Yet what is observed on the ground is threat, repression, and a complete lack of security for women.



## Step 6: Refraining from Enacting Protective Laws in Favor of Women

### *The Anti-Violence Bill: A Plaything in the Hands of the Mullahs*

The clerical regime has not only institutionalized numerous barriers within its laws that prevent women from accessing justice, but by refusing to enact protective legislation, it has in practice fueled the ongoing cycle of violence against women.

It must, of course, be emphasized from the outset, based on what has already been discussed, that in Iran under this dictatorship, and given the existence of overarching discriminatory laws, even if a bill or supplementary legislation aimed at safeguarding women were somehow to gain approval, it would not be implemented in practice.

Nevertheless, examining the process of the bill to prevent violence against women and the mullahs' 14-year political game with it remains highly significant.

### *Playing Games with Women's Safety*

The only bill that, throughout the mullahs' rule, was claimed by regime officials to be intended in favor of women is the bill to prevent violence against women—a bill that has now been passed back and forth among regime institutions for 14 years.

Every time a crime against women sparks public outrage, this bill resurfaces in state-controlled media. The parliament, the government, or the judiciary then claim to prioritize its review, but in practice they strip away parts of its preventive content, pass it on to another body, and ultimately consign it to deliberate oblivion.

The original text of this bill, titled “The Bill to Ensure the Security of Women Against Violence,” was drafted in 2011 and consisted of 81 articles. In 2013, the number of articles were increased to 92. However, it has since been reduced to just 30 articles.

Even a brief look at the changes in the bill's title over the years is enough to reveal the lack of any genuine will to ensure women's safety.

- 2011: The Bill to Ensure the Security of Women Against Violence
- 2019: The Bill for Protection, Dignity and Security of Women Against Violence
- 2020: The Bill of Protection of Dignity and Protection of Women Against Violence
- 2022: The Bill on Preventing Women from Harm and Improving Their Security Against Abuse
- 2025: The Bill to Preserve Dignity and Support Women and the Family (VokalaPress.ir, June 7, 2025)

In this way, the most essential substantive terms, “security” and “violence” have effectively been erased from both the title and the text of the bill.

Instead of supporting women against violence, the bill's content has shifted toward strengthening the family based on the “inherent authority of men,” along with the inclusion of regulations on dress codes for employees of various organizations and ministries.

## The Anti-Violence Bill: A Plaything in the Hands of the Mullahs

After 14 years of being passed back and forth among regime institutions, the bill to prevent violence against women was ultimately withdrawn.

**1** The terms “security” and “violence” were removed from both the title and the text of the bill.

**2** Provisions from the compulsory hijab bill were inserted into the so-called anti-violence bill; for example, women were required to seek medical care only from female doctors.

**3** Acting against one's husband was criminalized.

**4** The clause prioritizing “the brave way of men's life” in a bill meant to prevent violence against women itself incites men to commit violence.

**5** The main objective of the bill is to reduce family rifts and prevent women from leaving the family — even if that home is a place of killing and torture for them.

**6** Encouraging people not to form a family was criminalized.



- Ashraf Geramizadegan, a former legal and parliamentary advisor to the Directorate on Family and Women’s Affairs, says on this matter: “Over all these years, we have seen parts of this bill being cut from both ends under the pretext of ‘protecting the sanctity of the family.’ In my view, this shows that there have always been mindsets that want us women to remain behind and unable to claim our rights.” (Fararu, November 28, 2024)
- Azam Ghadiri, the sister of Mansoureh Ghadiri, an IRNA journalist who was killed by her husband in 2024, says: “It means that when people hear a woman screaming in her own home, they don’t allow themselves to call the police. This is the normalization of violence.” (Fararu, November 28, 2024)
- Mohsen Borhani, a jurist and a professor expelled from Tehran University, states: “At present, the bill has no concern about violence against women. It has largely turned into a kind of moral or disciplinary outlook toward women, rather than eliminating the factors that produce violence against them. In the 2025 law, actions against the husband are also included as crimes. “Where is violence against women, and where is criminalization in favor of men? Many of the criminal provisions that existed in the original bill to eliminate violence are removed in the final version.” He adds: “The legislator presents the existence of this law as a favor to women, while in reality the presence or absence of this law makes no difference at all.” (Vokalapres.ir, June 7, 2025)



- In June 2025, the Pezeshkian government fearing intense social backlash similar to the 2021 uprising, withdrew this heavily mutilated bill from parliament. Zahra Behrouz-Azar, the head of the Directorate for Family and Women’s Affairs, stated: “The bill to support women against violence was withdrawn by the cabinet because serious substantive changes had been made to it.” (Fararu, August 26, 2025)
- Majid Ansari, deputy to the regime’s president in legal affairs, also described the bill as having been “distorted” or “hollowed out.” (Fararu, June 11, 2025)
- Five months after the withdrawal of the violence bill, in May 2025, media outlets reported that sections of the Hijab and Chastity Law had been appended to the bill purportedly aimed at supporting women. (Iscanews, October 21, 2025)



- When misogynistic members of parliament lost hope of enforcing the Hijab and Chastity Law, they resorted to every possible tactic to insert their desired repressive provisions, previously suspended by a decision of the regime’s Supreme National Security Council, into the framework of the bill to prevent violence against women. This maneuver took place despite the government’s explicit request to withdraw the bill. (Entekhab, October 12, 2025)
- Ahmad Fatemi, a member of the parliamentary Social Affairs Commission, openly admitted: “Provisions related to women-only universities and special women’s centers from the Hijab and Chastity Law have been incorporated into the bill to support women.” (Student News Club, Iscanews, October 21, 2025)
- Moreover, phrases such as “the priority of men’s chaste and honor-based way of life” in the bill on preventing violence against women have been imported from the Hijab and Chastity Law. This encourages men to commit violence against women, because gheyrat (male “honor”) in a patriarchal culture means the complete commodification of women as the property of the men in their families. (Khabarfoori, October 18, 2025)
- Zohreh Lajevardi, the daughter of Assadollah Lajevardi, the notorious Butcher of Evin Prison, who heads the Women and Family subcommittee in the Social Commission of the mullahs’ parliament, openly showed indifference toward the killing of and violence against women. She said: “Our main objective in this bill is to reduce family gaps and prevent the spread of social harms.”

She added: “The family must not be turned into an arena for judicial conflict.” She also spoke of “preventing the creation of conditions that lead women to flee the family and to situations that pave the way for infidelity within the family environment.” (Khabar Online, October 22, 2025)

- Maryam Baghi, a legal expert and civil rights activist, explains: “The bill includes criminalization of forming, encouraging, and even mandating the non-formation of a family. In other words, if a woman speaks about choosing to remain single, it is considered encouragement of celibacy which has been criminalized.” She adds: “The bill on preventing violence also contains directives on women’s dress codes; for example, regulations governing the clothing of female medical staff and women who visit medical centers. The requirement that female patients be treated by female doctors and male patients by male doctors is another provision imported into this text from the Hijab and Chastity Law.” (Entekhab, October 12, 2025)
- Zahra Behrouz Azar once again told reporters: “If the government’s proposed amendments are not applied to the text and the bill does not move toward achieving its objectives, it will be definitively withdrawn.” (ILNA, January 3, 2026)

**And the gamble with women’s lives and safety continues...**



### VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN IRAN

Under the clerical rule in Iran, violence has a completely different nature compared to other countries. The instigator, the perpetrator, the facilitator, and the encourager of violence is the government itself, whether through executions and torture under the banner of “justice,” beatings and deprivation under the guise of religion and culture, or medieval laws that incite the most backward cultural layers of society and grant them legal protection.

This policy is part of a broader strategy of instilling fear and terror, a policy of “hungry wolves”, designed to keep the population, especially women, constantly restrained, so that a misogynist dictator can continue his illegitimate rule. Under this policy, real statistics are concealed, classified, and covered up, so much that unfortunately there is no clear picture of the true scale of violence against women in Iran. Academic articles have reported the annual number of murdered women and girls to be between 375 and 450 cases. (Eghtesad 24, November 4, 2025)

Zahra Behrouz Azar, head of the directorate on family and women's affairs, has admitted: “Do not think at all that violence is limited to deprived areas or specific ethnic groups. Unfortunately, violence against women and various forms of domestic violence are observed in cities, modern spaces, and among educated segments of society as well.” She added, “The fact that these statistics have been kept confidential has meant that when we push the bill on violence against women in parliament, we are told: ‘No—where does violence against women even exist?’” (Vokalapress.ir, June 8, 2025)

### State-Sanctioned Killing of Women

While the world is moving toward the abolition of the death penalty, in Iran alone, **65 women** were executed in 2025. The execution of women is embedded line by line in the laws designed by the religious dictatorship.

The Iranian regime holds the grim record for the execution of women worldwide, with horrifying statistics that reflect the fear and desperation of a regime which, when faced with widespread protests and uprisings, sees no option but to intensify killings and spread terror.

The past year has been the darkest on the regime's record since the mass executions of political prisoners in the 1980s. In 2025, the clerical regime executed 2,270 prisoners, including the shocking figures of 19 political prisoners and 13 public executions. Among the victims of this killing machine, at least 65 women were put to death, a figure that represents an 91 percent increase compared to the previous year.

The clerical regime sentenced to death **Zahra Shahbaz Tabari**, a 67-year-old electrical engineer and a senior specialist in the field of sustainable energy. She was tried in a ten-minute online “trial,” without access to a lawyer of her choosing. The only evidence presented against her was a piece of cloth bearing the slogan “Woman, Resistance, Freedom” and a voice message. Her main charge was “supporting the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran,” which is considered the gravest threat to the security of the clerical dictatorship.



During the January 2026 uprising, numerous videos have been released showing government agents firing live ammunition and automatic rifles directly at women, children and men in different cities across Iran. These images further demonstrate that demands for freedom, equality, and a minimum standard of living with dignity are met with the harshest forms of state violence, and an organized massacre. Several thousand people were killed, tens of thousands were wounded, and more than 50,000 protesters were arrested and detained, while the perpetrators of these crimes enjoy complete impunity.



## The Regime's Killing Machine Devours the Most Defenseless Victims of Violence and Poverty

Many women sentenced to death have spent years trapped in cycles of violence and utter vulnerability. They are victims of discriminatory laws, domestic abuse, poverty, and corrupt structures that provide them with no legal protection whatsoever. The prosecutors and criminal judges of the clerical regime never consider the suffocating conditions they themselves have imposed on women in Iran when passing sentence. Most of these women committed homicide solely in self-defense, at a point when they had no remaining means to protect their lives or their dignity. Had they had access to

divorce, judicial protection, and safe shelters, they would never have been pushed to such extremes.

Another group of victims are executed for drug-related offenses—women suffering from extreme poverty, forced into this cycle by their husbands or a male relative in the family, or driven to transport small quantities of narcotics simply to secure the bare minimum needed to feed their children. Meanwhile, the main drug-trafficking networks are controlled by gangs and drug cartels linked to the Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), which reap enormous profits and enjoy complete impunity.

## Being a Woman: The Heaviest Weight on the Scales of Clerical Injustice

Consider just a few of these shocking, all-too-typical cases:

- Marzieh Esmaili, 39, the mother of a young daughter, was executed on April 14, 2025, for transporting 600 grams of drugs, for the paltry sum of 10 million tomans (about \$100).
- Mina Saddoughi, the mother of three children aged 7, 9, and 11, was executed on November 25, 2025, at the same time as her husband, without her family being informed and without even a final meeting with her children.
- Rana Faraj-Oghli was forced at the age of 16 by her family to marry a man 19 years her senior, because the groom had bought her father a truck.

After years of enduring torture and abuse by her husband, she was brought before the regime's court on charges of murdering him.

She told the court that prison days felt like freedom to her compared to a "life that was itself a form of death." Rana was hanged on December 3, 2025 in Tabriz Central Prison.

- Mahsa Akbari was also forced into marriage at the age of 16.

She was a direct victim of the regime's misogynistic laws, including compulsory marital obedience. The judiciary sent this young woman to the gallows on August 20, 2025 on a murder charge, even though the killing occurred during a robbery in which her husband had forced Mahsa to take part.

## A Legal Green Light for the Killing of Women

Under the misogynistic clerical regime, Iranian women are safe nowhere, at no time. If they manage to survive encounters with repressive forces in the streets, they may be killed at home—on the pretext of a so-called "honor suspicion," for opposing forced marriage, for requesting a divorce, or even for attempting to defend their most basic rights. The term "structural impunity" for perpetrators is used in the recent [report of the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission](#) to describe the position of women's killers in the misogynistic clerical system.

While women are sentenced to lengthy prison terms for "removing their headscarves" or protesting discrimination, men who murder their wives face, at most, a few years in prison. Many of these killers are even able to buy their way out of incarceration and return to society. Statistics on femicide are among the data the regime actively suppresses. Occasionally, amid factional infighting, some figures appear in the media—but these represent only the tip of the iceberg of violence against Iranian women.

This reality is neither speculation nor propaganda by the opposition that seeks to overthrow the regime; it is the direct consequence of the laws reviewed in the first chapter of this booklet, and the social reflection of the humiliation, repression, and violence that the state itself inflicts on women.

- Shirin Ahmadnia, head of the Iranian Sociological Association, states: "This issue (the killing of women) has deep structural roots, and at the same time we are witnessing silence and neglect in the face of these incidents... The accumulated inequalities and injustices in society ultimately lead to the physical elimination of a woman. Violence that takes

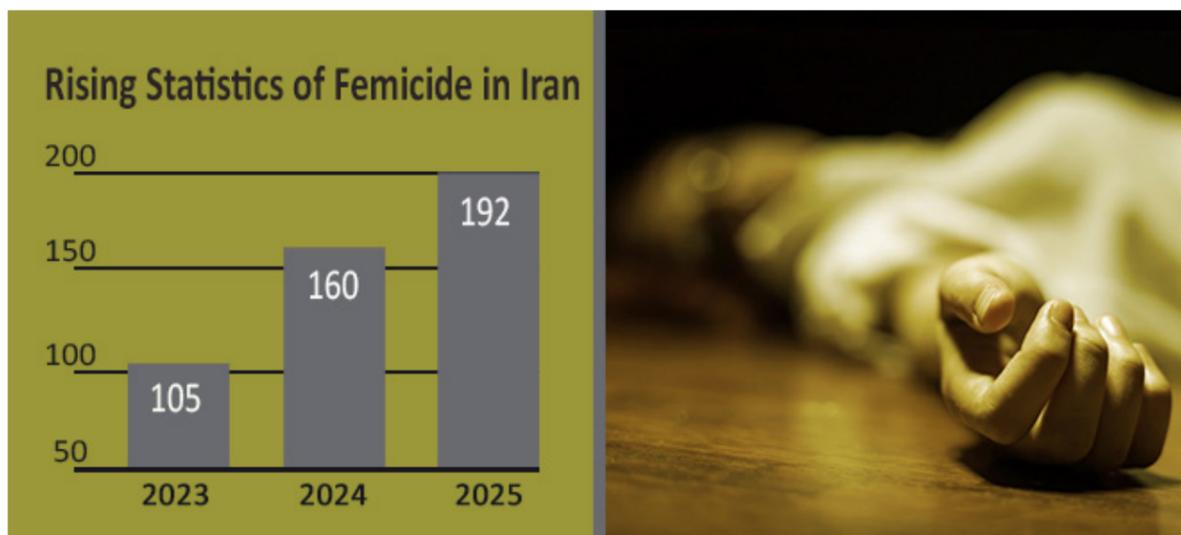
shape within the home is a direct reflection of what exists at the macro level of society in the form of unequal policies." (Ham-Mihan Daily, October 26, 2025)

- Zahra Eftekharzadeh, founder of the Atena Safe House in Tehran, says: "We are facing an increase in domestic violence, but the absence of scientific, nationwide statistics has prevented us from having an accurate picture of reality. No official institution in Iran has taken responsibility for collecting precise data in this field, nor have comprehensive studies been conducted." (Shargh Daily, October 11, 2025)

She adds elsewhere: "Every day we are witnessing a rise in the number of women being killed in Iran. Even though there are no precise statistics, we see that one woman is killed every two days, which is an extremely high figure. In this country, there is no institution that considers itself obliged to provide statistics in this area." (Ham-Mihan Daily, October 26, 2025)

Data collected over the past three years by the Women's Committee of the National Council of Resistance of Iran indicate a rising trend in the number of femicides under the misogynistic clerical rule in Iran. These figures have been compiled entirely from documented reports published by state-run media and other sources. According to this data, 105 Iranian women were killed in 2023, 160 in 2024, and at least 192 women in 2025, bearing in mind the grim reality that many killings are never reported at all.

As noted earlier, academic articles estimate the annual number of murdered women and girls in Iran to be between 375 and 450 cases. (Eghtesad 24, November 4, 2025)



### Domestic Violence: A Catastrophe That Regime Authorities Treat as the “Nature” of the Family

Iranian society is a deeply wounded and traumatized one, suffering from political and economic inequalities, a society burdened by widespread livelihood crises, unemployment, and the absence of security.

For Iranian women, this heavy load is compounded by laws that promote violence, since under clerical laws they are required to remain dependent on men who themselves are unable to provide for their families.

The violence we witness against women in Iran is not the result of the backwardness of a number of men or the traditional or cultural beliefs; rather, it is the direct product of clerical oppression and misogyny institutionalized within the country's laws and policies.

● In 2020, Mohammad Reza Mahboobfar, a government social pathology expert, stated that Iran ranks first in domestic violence and acknowledged that no home in Iran is safe. (Jahan-e Sanat newspaper, November 19, 2020)

- Zahra Behrouz-Azar, head of the presidential Directorate on Family and Women's Affairs, admits that statistics on domestic violence are kept confidential. (Shargh newspaper, October 11, 2025)
- Zahra Eftekharezadeh, founder of the non-governmental safe house “Atena,” says: “We are witnessing an increase in domestic violence, but no official institution in Iran has taken responsibility for collecting accurate data on this issue, nor have comprehensive studies been conducted. As long as there are no national policymaking framework and no dedicated budget, it is impossible to obtain a realistic picture of domestic violence.” (Shargh newspaper, October 11, 2025)

On the other hand, as you read earlier, the clerics have been toying for 14 years with the bill titled “Ensuring Women's Security Against Violence” a maneuver that itself has become yet another blade cutting into the already scarred faces of Iranian women.

### Young Girls: The Most Vulnerable and Defenseless in the Face of Escalating Violence

Within the violence-expanding structure of the clerical regime, the most defenseless victims are young girls.

In this system, Iranian girls are dragged into the black hole of violence before their eyes have even opened to life.

Reports indicate that child abuse in Iran is a growing phenomenon and now ranks at the top of social harms.

In the years 2024 and 2025, state-run media and officials of the State Welfare Organization admitted to the upward and alarming trend of this phenomenon.

- Hassan Mousavi Chelak, deputy of the State Welfare Organization, says: “In just the past year alone, more than one million calls related to domestic violence were registered with the Social Emergency hotline, an alarming figure that reflects the unprecedented rise in violence and the desperation of families. Fifty-five percent of child abuse reports involve girls.” (Khabar Online, May 5, 2025)
- The director general of the Welfare Organization in Khorasan Razavi Province admits that “over an 11-month period in this single province alone, 3,714 cases of child abuse were reported to Social Emergency services.” (Tasnim News Agency, January 26, 2025)

But perhaps instead of relying on the regime's non-transparent statistics, it is better to cite two concrete cases that illustrate women's lack of access to justice:

- Nian Cheliani from Bukan was only seven years old. After her parents' divorce, custody was granted, under misogynistic custody laws, to a father who had for years beaten his wife and threatened her with a knife.

Nian's mother told the press that the father prevented her from seeing her daughter and that appeals to judicial and law-enforcement institutions provided no remedy. Under the custody of a violent father, little Nian endured five months of sexual abuse by her stepmother's brother. She was eventually transferred to the hospital with severe signs of beating, burns, and hemorrhaging, and died one day later. Nian never even had the chance to speak of the suffering she endured.

- In Zanjan, Ava Yargholi, a first-grade student, was brutally murdered by her drug-addicted father. Despite the mother's financial and moral fitness, the regime's misogynistic laws granted custody of the child to the father, thereby paving the way for this crime.



Nian Cheliani

Ava Yargholi



## Child Marriage: The Color of Torment Behind the White Veil

Child marriage, an early and forced form of marriage in Iran that is considered legal and commonplace, is a state-organized crime and one of the institutionalized forms of violence against young girls and adolescent girls. This crime is embedded in the clerical regime's misogynistic legal structure and forms part of the religious dictatorship's mechanism for suppressing women and controlling society. This social scourge has been expanding further alongside rising poverty and the deepening livelihood crisis in Iran. The result is a system that has legalized, institutionalized, and actively promotes child marriage.

- Since last year, the publication of statistics on the marriage and childbearing of young girls in Iran has been added to the list of classified information. However, based on available data, between 2016 and 2021 more than 131,000 girls under the age of 15 were forced into marriage. (Bahar, March 30, 2022)
- In 2021, the marriage of more than 32,000 girls under the age of 15 was officially registered. (Mardomsalari, December 29, 2022)
- In 2022, another 26,974 girls were subjected to the same fate. In that same year, 1,390 girls under the age of 15 became mothers. (Rokna, October 21, 2024)

With growing public pressure, the Iranian regime moved in 2024 to conceal the depth of the crisis in a society gripped by structural poverty, systemic corruption, and misogynistic laws, and halted the publication of statistics and information on child marriage and the number of children born to underage mothers in Iran. This comes despite the consensus among experts that officially recorded and published figures are significantly lower than the reality.

- Ali Kazemi, adviser to the deputy for legal affairs of the judiciary, admitted in 2018 that between 500,000 and 600,000 children are married each year in Iran, marriages that are officially registered, figures that do not include those married outside formal legal procedures. (Entekhab newspaper, March 4, 2019)
- Mohammad Reza Mahboubfar, a social-harms researcher, described the statistics released at the time by Iran's Statistical Center as "the tip of the iceberg" of child marriage data and estimated the real figure to be five to six times higher than the official numbers. He also stated: "Currently, every 24 hours, 100 marriages involving girls under the age of 15 are registered in the country." (Rokna, July 25, 2021; Arman-e Meli newspaper, July 27, 2021)



## The Silenced Cries of Several Child Marriage Victims



**Fatemeh Soleimani**, a 12-year-old girl from Kermanshah, was placed under family pressure to marry an elderly man. She cried and pleaded many times, but neither her family nor the law heard her voice. At the age of twelve, Fatemeh took her own life in complete isolation, seeking release from life under a system steeped in misogyny.

**Shima Rameshk**, a 14-year-old girl from southern Iran, committed suicide only a few months after her marriage. She had been coerced into marrying a man several decades older than herself.

**Fatemeh Moradpour**, a 15-year-old from Lorestan, was also forced by her family into marriage with a 40-year-old man. She, too, found death more bearable and ended her life by hanging.

**These suffocated cries, a few examples out of thousands, are the immediate outcome of a misogynistic dictatorship that sees its survival in the subjugation of women.**



## The State as a Promoter of Violence Against Women

- 1 The Iranian regime holds the world record for executing women
- 2 Female political prisoners are tortured and executed.
- 3 Widespread state violence is carried out under the pretext of enforcing the hijab.
- 4 Statistics on domestic violence are kept confidential.
- 5 Each year in Iran, 375 to 450 women are killed, with the number of femicides rising daily.
- 6 Women are murdered on the pretexts of a so-called "honor suspicion," refusal to marry, requesting a divorce, or even attempting to defend themselves.
- 7 Violence is observed in all cities and across all social classes.
- 8 There are only 28 safe houses across Iran's 31 provinces.
- 9 Women can access a safe house only with court approval and under police escort.

## Only 28 Safe Houses Across 25 Provinces for Women Survivors of Violence

It is only natural that such a regime has no real concern for establishing and sustaining safe houses for women. Its loud proclamations about "defending the family" are nothing more than a scheme to facilitate repression and keep half of society trapped and entangled. Because if women were to break free from enforced obedience to men, they would, far more than we already see in every popular uprising, emerge as the most courageous and radical anti-regime force.

It is therefore no coincidence that the number of safe houses, relative to the population of women exposed to violence in Iran, is negligible, and that access to and use of their services is extremely difficult. (Ham-Mihan, October 21, 2023)

Until 2014, there were essentially no safe houses in Iran. Beginning in that year, licenses were issued for the establishment of governmental and non-governmental safe houses, yet by 2017 only 28 had been launched, in only 25 provinces. This means that in six provinces of Iran, there is not even a single safe house. Moreover, from 2014 to 2025, a span of 11 years, the number of safe houses has not increased at all. It was announced in 2022 that only eight state-run safe houses were active nationwide, each with the capacity to accept only about five women. This means that in total only around 135 women can simultaneously benefit from these services. Consequently, not only is the number grossly disproportionate to the needs of Iranian society, but the admission conditions are also extremely harsh for abused and homeless women. (Fararu, October 21, 2023; Mehr, June 19, 2022)

In practice, these so-called safe houses do not

allow direct admission. A woman who feels that her life is in danger if she remains at home cannot directly seek refuge in a safe house. Instead, only after obtaining approval from the regime's misogynistic courts, and through coordination with judicial authorities and under police escort, may she be transferred to a safe house. (State Welfare Organization website, December 16, 2020)

But even setting aside the issue of safe houses themselves, given the conditions previously examined in the regime's legal framework, obtaining approval to be sent to a safe house is itself an exhausting ordeal that requires enduring continued violence at home.

When a woman is legally forbidden to leave the home or live independently without her husband's permission, going to a safe house also becomes an "illegal" act. A woman who stands up to male violence and seeks to defend herself is deemed to have violated the clerics' obedience laws and is, from the outset, subject to the wrath of a misogynistic cleric-judge.

Even the testimony of other women carries no human value in the eyes of such judges. As a result, even the pretense of issuing permits for safe houses under this system is purely superficial, and even farcical.

This is why non-governmental safe houses face chronic budget shortages, security threats, and state pressure, leaving them constantly at risk of closure. The founder of the non-governmental safe house "Atena" says: "All these years, we have fought just to survive. We were forced to lower our profile so that the safe house would not be shut down. If we had raised our voices any louder, they would not have allowed us to continue our work from the very beginning." (Shargh, October 11, 2025)



### THE GENDER GAP IN IRAN AND DECISION-MAKING POSITIONS

**A**s discussed in earlier sections, Iranian women, under a religious dictatorship, are deprived of even the minimum rights required for a dignified and just life. The deep gender gap is itself a consequence of this very policy.

*The structure of power and the labor market in Iran is patriarchal. Employment policies are based on the assumption that men are the breadwinners, while women are expected to take care of household duties and childrearing. Hiring quotas, banking facilities, and even welfare policies are designed in a way that prioritizes men and pushes women to the margins. Labor and family laws effectively do not support women's economic independence, and women's employment is contingent upon their husband's permission.*

*Reports published in the media and by international bodies such as the World Bank and the World Economic Forum are based on official government data. Since the clerical regime lacks transparency in publishing statistics and manipulates data to serve its political interests, these reports cannot fully reflect the reality in Iran. Nevertheless, even these assessments point to a massive gender gap in the country.*

### Low Female Participation as Part of a Policy of Suppression

**W**orld Economic Forum Report 2025: Among 148 countries worldwide, the Islamic Republic of Iran ranks 145th in terms of gender inequalities and the effectiveness of national policies aimed at promoting gender equality. Iran's overall Gender Gap Index score is 0.583. The score for education is 0.977, health and survival stand at 0.964, political participation is 0.031, and economic participation is 0.343. Women's employment in Iran is lower than in both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. In global comparison, Iran's position in the economic equality sub-index is better only than Bangladesh and Sudan; however, in the labor force participation rate, Iran ranks dead last, with women's participation at just 20.1 percent. (Rouydad 24, 8 March 2025)

The clerical regime's propaganda about the widespread appointment of women managers relies on statistical manipulation and the placement of women in positions such as deputies, advisors, and similar roles—positions that lack real authority or the power to effect change. On March 11, 2024, the news website Khabar Online, quoting a sociologist, wrote: "The government has even counted 'female principals of girls' schools' as part of the statistics on women's participation in management." Katayoun Mesri stated on the social media platform Clubhouse: "The Directorate for Family and Women's Affairs has announced that '25 percent' of the country's managers are women, but it has not provided any 'classification of the levels of female deputy managers.' Based on my own estimates from social networks (as access to transparent statistical sources is difficult), only 6 percent

of members of parliament, 3 percent of senior and mid-level managers, 1.5 percent of members of city and village councils nationwide, and 12 percent of members of metropolitan city councils are women. In large private-sector organizations and holding companies as well, 'women's roles do not go beyond that of a passive member of the board of directors.'"

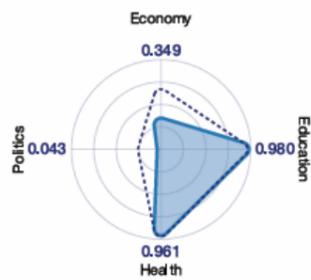
The sociologist emphasized: "The system is fundamentally based on inequality between women and men; it views women as belonging to the private sphere and men to the public sphere, and believes that for women, the roles of wifehood and motherhood are the most important. Within this discourse, gender boundaries—even when women enter the public sphere—assign them jobs and roles that closely resemble motherhood and wifehood, such as teaching, nursing, childcare, and the like. Thus, power and the public sphere remain firmly in the grip of a male symbolic order that does not allow women to enter it."

With this background in mind, we now turn to a more detailed examination of women's participation across different indices.



Economy Profile	Score (imparity = 0, parity = 1)	Rank (out of 148 countries)	Index Edition
<b>Islamic Republic of Iran</b>	<b>0.583</b>	<b>145th</b>	<b>2025</b>

Global Gender Gap Index 2025 Edition  
Islamic Republic of Iran score  
average score



Overview

Index and Subindex	2025		▼ 2024	
	Score	Rank	Score	Rank
Global Gender Gap Index	0.583	145th	0.579	143rd
Economic Participation and Opportunity	0.349	146th	0.343	144th
Educational Attainment	0.980	100th	0.977	102nd
Health and Survival	0.961	120th	0.964	116th
Political Empowerment	0.043	142nd	0.031	143rd

### Political Participation

The power pyramid of the religious dictatorship is structured so that its uppermost levels are entirely male and devoted to enforcing repressive and misogynistic policies.

At the apex stands the leader of the system, the primary decision-maker, who is a cleric holding this position for life. The regime's terrorist military force, the Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), operates under Khamenei's direct command and is responsible for preserving the rule of the velayat-e faqih. Today, it also dominates more than 80 percent of the country's economic and development sectors.

Below the Supreme Leader sits the entirely male Expediency Discernment Council, whose members are individually appointed by Khamenei and effectively serve as his think tank.

Alongside the Expediency Council is the Guardian Council. This body is tasked with safeguarding fundamentalism and the clerical regime's backward interpretation of Islamic law

within legislation and state policy. Its members are also entirely male and predominantly clerics.

Beneath these layers are the government and the three branches of power: the legislative, executive, and judiciary. The regime's constitution defines both the presidency and the judiciary as male positions, effectively barring women from leading these institutions. Likewise, throughout the 47-year lifespan of this system, the regime's parliament has never had a female speaker, nor does its composition or nature suggest such a possibility.

In the current cabinet, there is only one female minister, serving as Minister of Roads and Urban Development. She is now among the ministers whom the regime's parliament has moved to impeach. Aside from her, only the government spokesperson, the head of the presidential directorate for Family and Women's Affairs, and the head of the Environmental Protection Organization under President Pezeshkian are women. All three positions are largely symbolic and ceremonial, lacking real executive power.

On October 6, 2025, the state-affiliated

website Rooz No wrote about the presidential directorate for Family and Women's Affairs: "The presidential directorate for Family and Women's Affairs of the Presidency," which was supposed to be the voice of women in government and to pursue their needs and demands within the power structure, remains unknown to many women—even after 20 years since its establishment. Even those who are more educated or live in more privileged areas have little familiarity with this office and do not regard it as their voice or their representative. This directorate shifts its orientation toward women's demands depending on the political approach and expediencies of each government: at times adopting a rigid stance toward women's needs and demands, and at other times a nearly aligned but passive approach."

Mina Jafari, a lawyer, stated: "This directorate has so far taken no effective or lasting action in the field of women's issues. Parliament lags far behind society's demands. The hard core of power has no desire to change the status of women. For this reason, the impact of this vice presidency has been extremely limited." According to a report by the Mehr News Agency dated March 4, 2024, following the regime's most recent failed parliamentary elections, out of 260 elected representatives, only 17 are women.

This figure amounts to 6.53 percent that neither carries real power to represent women's interests nor reflects any genuine concern for their problems. Moreover, the presence of figures such as Zohreh Lajevardi, the daughter of the notorious Butcher of Evin Prison, Assadollah Lajevardi, makes clear what kind of women the Guardian Council deems qualified to run for parliament. Indeed, in Iran, anyone seeking candidacy for a government position must above all demonstrate absolute

ideological and practical loyalty to the Supreme Leader, Khamenei.

Women's status in Iran's provincial and municipal leadership is likewise negligible. The state-affiliated newspaper Etemad, in an article titled "Iranian Women's Zero-Percent Share of Governorships," writes that this bitter reality strikes the reader like a slap in the face. Despite the esteemed position of women in Iranian culture and civilization, their high levels of education and expertise, their growing capacities, and their 50 percent share of the country's population, not a single Iranian woman has ever been appointed as a provincial governor within the political structure of the Islamic Republic. (Etemad Newspaper, September 16, 2024)

Regarding female mayors, Sara Ghaedi, the mayor of District 1 of Shiraz, states: "In Iran, 1,456 cities are officially registered, yet only eight female mayors are currently serving across the country—amounting to less than 2 percent of all mayors." (Payam-e Khabar, January 16, 2026)

Recently, Zahra Behrouz Azar declared that the number female mayors had reached 16. (Nournews, February 11, 2026)

Previously, on January 25, 2022, the newspaper Hamshahri reported that out of 1,424 cities nationwide, only six had female mayors. If this figure is taken as the basis for the total number of cities, women would account for just 0.6 percent of all mayors.

Hamshahri also wrote about women's participation in city councils at the time: out of 405 seats in city councils in provincial capitals, only 35 seats were held by women. (Hamshahri Online, January 25, 2022)

While state media widely promote the supposed appointment of women managers, political analyst Javad Jamshidzahi notes: "At present, on average, less than 3 percent of managerial positions in our country are held by women." (Taftan-e Ma, December 11, 2024)



## Economic Participation and Presence in the Labor Market

The labor force participation rate of Iranian women has fallen to its lowest level in recent years. According to published statistical data, this rate dropped to 14.7 percent in the fall of 2024, marking the lowest level recorded in recent years.

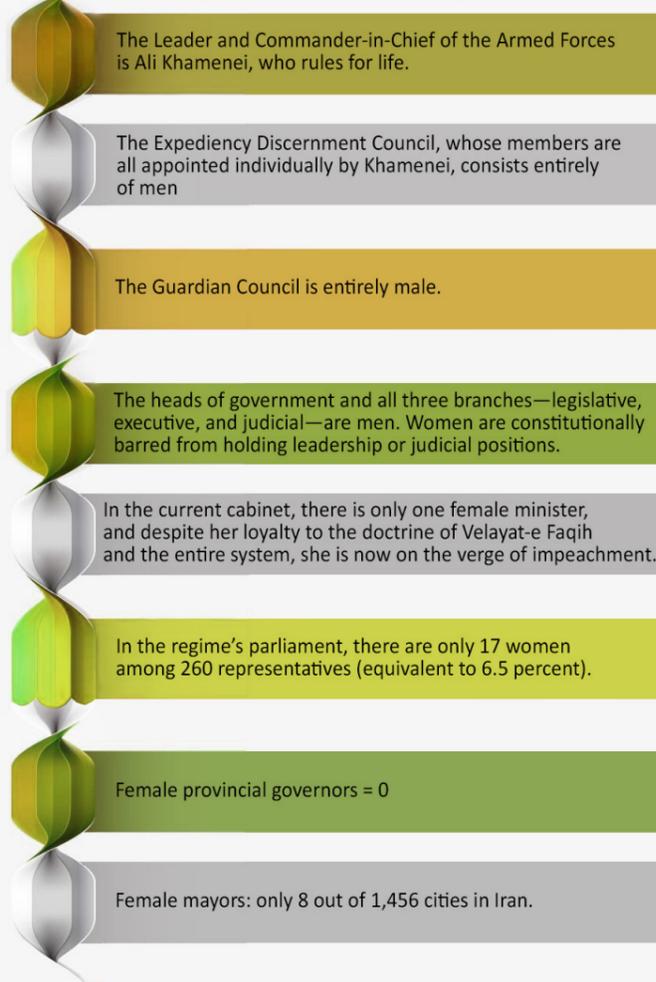
- Based on a report by the Statistical Center and research conducted by Tarbiat Modares University, the gender gap in Iran’s labor market is widening. In the 20–24 age group, this gap has reached 21.1 percent. In addition, the unemployment rate among women in this age group stands at 29.2 percent, compared to 18.9 percent for men.
- According to these figures, only 14.4 percent of Iranian women are considered part of the economically active population, while the global average for this indicator is 49 percent.
- According to the Statistical Center of Iran, out of 14 million employed individuals, only 2.2 million are women. (ISNA, November 12, 2025)
- Recent reviews of employment in Iran’s industrial sector indicate that in winter 2025, a total of 8,144,108 people were employed in this sector. Of these, 7,276,586 were men and 867,433 were women. During the same period, 133,453 jobs were created for men, while 82,965 women lost their jobs. (Mehr, April 14, 2025)
- A look at the unemployment rate among the 15–24 age group points to a deeper crisis. In the spring of 2025, the unemployment rate for this age group nationwide stood at 19.7 percent. The figure was reported at 30.9 percent for young women and 17.4 percent for young men, highlighting widespread gender discrimination in employment opportunities. (Eghtesad Online, 16 July 2025)
- The overall unemployment rate is 14.3 percent among women, compared to 6.2 percent for men. This deep gap shows that

### Gender Gap in Iran and the Male-Dominated Structure



In 2025, the World Economic Forum ranked the religious dictatorship 145th out of 148 countries in terms of gender inequality and the effectiveness of national policies aimed at promoting gender equality.

#### Hierarchy of the Mullahs’ Regime:



even among the limited number of women participating in the labor market, a smaller proportion succeed in finding jobs. (Tamin 24, December 25, 2025)  
Official government unemployment statistics include only those who are actively seeking

work. This means they exclude the large number of housewives, as well as those who have become discouraged from looking for jobs or who are prevented from working by male family members.

- Iranian women have borne the heavy cost of education through great effort and now make up more than 60 percent of the country’s university graduates. Nevertheless, their economic participation rate is only about 14 percent, while this figure reaches 68.4 percent for men. Even among economically active women, 7 out of every 10 unemployed women hold a university degree. (Shargh, November 12, 2025; Ecolran, February 21, 2025)
- Maryam Zendehtdel, a legal expert, explains: “Educated women, often holding master’s and doctoral degrees, are frequently employed in low-paid positions that are disproportionate to their expertise. This situation is the result of executive practices and the structural conditions of the labor market.” (Shargh, November 12, 2025)
- Zahra Karimi, an economist, also notes: “Although employment conditions are extremely difficult for all groups, in Iran women are excluded from many jobs. For example, in government offices, men are given priority when recruiting specialists, even though there is no difference in performance between male and female experts.” (Shargh, November 12, 2025)
- Maryam Zendehtdel continues: “In the public sector, women face stricter screening processes and are required to meet certain appearance standards that men are not subjected to. In the private sector, marriage and childbearing are major factors limiting women’s employment opportunities, leading to short-term contracts and their frequent termination. After marriage or childbirth, women are easily pushed out of the labor market.” (Shargh, November 12, 2025)

## The Way Forward

*Sharing a platform with the misogynistic religious dictatorship of the mullahs at international forums, and speaking of women’s access to justice in the presence of such a repressive and bloodstained regime, amounts to nothing less than a mockery of human rights, equality, and all the democratic values of the modern world. This regime not only holds the world record for executions, including the execution of women, but in the uprising of January 2026, it was responsible for the largest massacre of civilians since World War II.*

*From the ruthless opening of fire on women, men, the elderly, and children, to setting the Grand Bazaar of Rasht ablaze and burning alive those trapped inside, to administering coup de grâce shots to the wounded in the streets and even in hospitals—this unparalleled brutality was shocking even to the people of Iran, who have endured nearly half a century of oppression under this regime.*

*Yet for the free world, in the age of communications and in the face of countless videos, reports, and eyewitness testimonies, it is impossible to ignore and entails responsibility. The world must now stand on the right side of history—on the side of the people of Iran—by expelling this illegitimate regime from all international bodies, supporting Iranian women and youth in their longstanding struggle to overthrow it, and recognizing their legitimate right to resist.*

*In this context, any examination of access to justice for Iranian women will only be meaningful once the ruling misogynistic religious dictatorship is consigned to the dustbin of history and replaced by a democratic republic founded upon free elections, with the country’s laws drafted by a constituent assembly elected by the people. Iranian women must no longer be treated as second-class citizens, but recognized as a “force for change,” enjoying equal rights and freedoms at all political, economic, social, and cultural levels of society.*





# Gender-Based Discrimination Under Iranian

## Structural Inequality and State-Sanctioned Oppression of Women

A Report to  
**CSW70**

March 2026

A publication of the NCRI Women's Committee



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ISBN 978-2-35822-049-1



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