



**WOMAN**



**LIFE**



**FREEDOM**

# FACT SHEET

## WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN IRAN

March 2024

### ● Nationwide Movement

Sparked in September 2022 by killing in state custody of Mahsa Jina Amini, 22, after her arrest for alleged hijab violations

### ● Women at Forefront of Protests

Calls for women's rights and freedoms in cities across Iran, schoolgirls and university students dominant amongst protesters

### ● Violent State Repression

Women and children among the 500+ killed by state forces, countless injured, hundreds blinded, tens of thousands arrested

### ● Draconian New Legislation

Government responds with harsh punishments for refusal to wear hijab

### ● Fact-Finding Mission

Established by UN Human Rights Council in November 2022 to investigate state atrocities since outbreak of protests

### ● Civil Disobedience

Despite severe persecution women across Iran continue to refuse mandatory hijab

**Faces of Courage**

Many women and girls paid with their lives



**Nika Shakarami, 16**



**Sarina Esmailzadeh, 16**



**Hadis Najafi, 22**

# Women are unequal under the law...

## Personal status

Unequal and highly limited rights to divorce

After divorce, children placed in father's care after age 7

Inheritance rights half that of men's

Cannot travel outside Iran without husband's permission

## Crime and punishment

Age of criminal responsibility: 9 for girls; 15 for boys

Woman's court testimony worth half that of a man's

Compensation to women for death/injury half that of men (state pays difference)

Flogging/death sentences for adultery disproportionately affect women; only men can claim "temporary marriages"

## ...and in practice

### Workplace discrimination

Can be forbidden to work by husband

#### Hiring bias:

Women's 15.5% unemployment rate is twice that of men's  
*World Bank 2022*

Most hired under temporary contracts

Sexual harassment unaddressed in law and practice

14% labor participation rate, one of world's lowest  
*World Bank 2022*

### Political discrimination

Under-represented in political life

Cannot be judges, members of Guardian Council or Supreme Leader

Mass disqualifications of women MP candidates

Few women serve as cabinet members, deputy ministers, or other high-level governmental positions

### Public sphere discrimination

Must conceal hair and body in public or face punishments that include fines and imprisonment up to 10 years, and new pending legislation requires denial of essential services to women not wearing the hijab

Banned from attending or participating in certain public events and performances

# Violence

Women and girls are unprotected



## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Violence by family members is “family matter”

Woman can't leave marital home without proof she's endangered

If a woman leaves marital home, she forfeits financial maintenance

No orders of protection

Shelters for abused women absent in one-third of country

32% urban women/63% rural women experience domestic violence

Honor killings persist; lenient punishments for fathers and husbands

Services and shelters inaccessible to women with disabilities

Criminalization of same-sex relations means LGBTQ women can't press charges

## SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Limited legal definition of rape

Arduous burden of proof

Weak investigation/punishment by police/judiciary

Insufficient services to victims

Wife required to meet husband's sexual needs

Criminalization of sexual relations outside marriage prevents women from reporting assaults

## LEGISLATION

New laws on physical/sexual violence stalled for years

## GIRLS LACK CRITICAL PROTECTIONS

Girls can be married at age 13; younger with consent of father and judge

New child protection bill:  
Does not protect girls over age 9 from sexual abuse  
Does not address execution of juvenile offenders  
Does not address child marriage

# Peaceful advocacy of women's rights criminalized



## Nasrin Sotoudeh

A human rights lawyer imprisoned in 2018, Sotoudeh was issued a 38-year sentence for her defense of women activists. Granted medical furlough in 2021, she is at risk of re-imprisonment at any time.

## Narges Mohammadi

Recipient of the 2023 Nobel Peace Prize, Mohammadi has been imprisoned in 1998, 2010, 2012, 2016-2020, and since May 2021 for her human rights advocacy and opposition to the death penalty.

## Sepideh Qolliyan

Serving a five-year sentence since 2018 for supporting a peaceful labor strike, Qolliyan was briefly released in 2023, but re-imprisoned shortly thereafter for speaking out against the government.

## Access to reproductive health declining

**State hospitals/clinics no longer provide free contraceptives**

**Access to family planning information/services now more restrictive**

## International treaties and standards ignored

Growing international movement to recognize the systematic oppression of women and girls in Iran and Afghanistan as gender apartheid

Has not signed UN Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women or addressed recommendations on gender in UN's Universal Periodic Review

Ignores gender equality obligations in International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR); and International Labour Organization (ILO)

Iran scores near bottom of global rankings on women's equality  
**Ranked 143rd out of 146 countries**

*World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report 2023*