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Responses to Information Requests

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10 March 2020

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Iran: Exit and entry procedures at airports and land borders, particularly at the Imam Khomeini International Airport; whether authorities alert border officials of individuals they are looking for; incidence of bribery of Iranian border officials to facilitate departure; the punishment for border officers caught taking bribes (2017–February 2020)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

1. Entry and Exit Procedures

1.1 Entry and Exit Requirements

Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) describes Iranian passports as follows:

Iranian passports are burgundy, with the Iranian [c]oat of [a]rms emblazoned on the top of the front cover. Passports serve as proof of Iranian citizenship. All Iranian passports have been biometric since February 2011. Iranian passports include the following data: holder's signature, country of residence, place of issue, name and position of issuing authority, passport type, country code, passport number, national ID number, holder's name, father's name, date and place of birth, sex, date of issue, and date of expiry. Applicants for passports are required to

provide their original Iranian [b]irth [c]ertificate (*shenasnameh*), photocopies of all of the pages of the [b]irth [c]ertificate containing an ID photograph, the original and a copy of their [r]esidence [p]ermit, and three passport photographs taken within the past three months. (Australia 7 June 2018, para. 5.31, italics in original)

Sources report that, according to article 18 of Iran's passport law, married women require their husband's permission to travel abroad (CHRI 18 July 2017; Human Rights Watch 25 May 2017, 33) or to get a passport (Human Rights Watch 25 May 2017, 33). Additionally, the same sources report that in special cases women may instead apply for permission to travel from a prosecutor (CHRI 18 July 2017; Human Rights Watch 25 May 2017, 33). The Center for Human Rights in Iran (CHRI), a non-partisan NGO based in New York (CHRI n.d.), further reports that a member of Iran's Bar Association was aware of "only one case of a local prosecutor granting permission to a wife to travel abroad without her husband's consent" and that Iranian authorities had intervened in two cases, in 2015 and in 2017, to allow women to travel to participate in international sporting events against their husband's wishes (CHRI 18 July 2017). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The US Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2018* for Iran states that exit permits are required by Iran for all foreign travel by its citizens (US 13 Mar. 2019, 29). In contrast, Australia's DFAT reports that "[t]he government does not generally require citizens to possess an exit permit for foreign travel. However, in some cases citizens do require special permission to obtain a passport" (Australia 7 June 2018, para. 5.20). According to the same source, those who require special permission include

minors under the age of 18, who require the permission of their father/custodian; males of any age who have not completed their military service, who must present authorities with their military service exemption or the written permission of the Public Military Service Department; married women, who require their husband's permission. Once in possession of a passport, this group are free to leave the country without obtaining an exit permit to do so. (Australia 7 June 2018, para. 5.20)

Australia's DFAT further reports that certain individuals "whose skills are in particular demand (such as staff at the Iranian Atomic Energy Organisation) and/or who were educated at government expense are reported required to post bond to obtain an exit permit" (Australia 7 June 2018, para. 5.20). Similarly, US *Country Reports 2018* indicates that

[c]itizens who were educated at government expense or received scholarships had to either repay the scholarship or receive a temporary permit to exit the country. The government restricted the foreign travel of some religious leaders, members of religious minorities, and scientists in sensitive fields. (US 13 Mar. 2019, 29)

According to Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, citizens with a "credible residence abroad" and who "are not under obligation of [m]ilitary service" may apply for a multiple exit permit (Iran n.d.). The same source also states the following: "PLEASE NOTE: As of 1/9/1386 (22/11/2007), entry and departure stamps are no longer imprinted in passports. Iranian[s], whose passports state that their location of residence is not Irani, may have multiple trips to Iran, under the condition that their [s]tay does not exceed one year" (Iran n.d.). Sources report that Iran has raised its departure taxes in recent years, which also increase for subsequent trips in the same year (*Financial Tribune* 9 Dec. 2019; RFE/RL 13 Dec. 2017); the rates for 2019 for the first, second and subsequent trips were set at 2.64 million, 3.96 million and 5.28 million rials (IRR) ([US]\$20, \$30, and \$40) (*Financial Tribune* 9 Dec. 2019). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

1.2 Entry and Exit Procedures at the Imam Khomeini International Airport

The Imam Khomeini International Airport (IKA) is located 30 kilometres southwest of Tehran and is accessible by road and public transportation (metro) (Apochi n.d.; WTG n.d.).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a professor emeritus of political science at the College of Coastal Georgia with a research interest in Iranian state intelligence indicated the following:

It appears there are roughly four checkpoints for departures. The airport is hypothetically under control of the Iran Airports Company, but in practice it is run by the Revolutionary Guard. A fair amount of arms go in and out of the airport and there is a specific branch of the Guard (Unit 190) involved in such transfers. The IRGC Intelligence Protection Organization (Sazman-e Hefazat-e Sepah) also has an Aviation Protection Unit available for the airport. There are theoretically Immigration Police, but again they are functionally under the authority of the Guard. (Professor Emeritus 21 Feb. 2020)

Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

For further information on entry and exit procedures at the Imam Khomeini International Airport, see Response to Information Request IRN104624 of October 2013.

2. Whether Authorities Alert Border Officials of Individuals They Are Looking For

A report by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and Danish Immigration Service (DIS), based on interviews in Tehran and London conducted in September and October 2017, indicates that Iran will not automatically issue a travel ban after a civil or criminal sentence, but that cases involving debt, national security and "political cases," along with cases where "there is no access to the accused person," will trigger a travel ban (DRC and DIS of Denmark Feb. 2018, 8). The same source also states that the prosecutor's office has a border authority-linked database of individuals on the travel ban list, and reports the following:

One source added that when judges issue travel bans, these are received by other authorities without delays/in "real time". Furthermore, exiting the country legally when a travel ban has been issued is next to impossible. According to the source, the security at the border is very strict; additionally, the borders are highly controlled by the military. At the same time, it would be very costly to arrange an illegal departure ... (DRC and DIS of Denmark Feb. 2018, 8-9)

Australia's DFAT reports that

[a]uthorities routinely impose travel bans on citizens. Reasons for a travel ban can include security concerns, financial debts, outstanding taxes, crimes committed abroad, and outstanding sentences awaiting enforcement. Civil and political activists are particularly likely to face travel bans. ... MOIS [Ministry of Intelligence and Security] and the IRGC [Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps] have the power to impose travel bans without recourse to the judiciary. Iranians under travel bans are often unaware of their status until they reach passport control at the airport and are prohibited from leaving the country. The presence of security organisations in all Iranian airports, particularly those with border checkpoints, enables authorities to determine whether or not any Iranian citizen can leave the country by air. (Australia 7 June 2018, para. 5.21)

US Country Reports 2018 indicates that "[s]everal journalists, academics, opposition politicians, human and women's rights activists, and artists remained subject to foreign travel bans and had their passports confiscated during the year" (US 13 Mar. 2019, 29).

The Professor Emeritus stated the following:

As far as I am aware, there are two watchlists, one maintained by the Intelligence Ministry and one maintained by the Revolutionary Guard. Visitors are checked against both lists. The lists are updated, but because of security concern[s] respecting electronic communication, sometimes the lists are updated by courier. Iran also apparently uses old-style spotters (people who memorize facial features of wanted persons). Presumably commercial facial recognition technology will continue to be developed. (Professor Emeritus 21 Feb. 2020)

Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3. Incidence of Bribery of Iranian Border Officials to Facilitate Departure

Information on bribery of Iranian border officials was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. According to the US Department of State's 2019 *Trafficking in Persons Report*, Iranian "[g]overnment officials continued to perpetrate or condone trafficking crimes with impunity both in Iran and overseas and failed to report law enforcement efforts to address the crime" and "[t]here was no evidence the government held complicit officials accountable [in 2018] for trafficking offenses, despite continued reports that officials were widely involved in trafficking crimes" (US 20 June 2019, 244).

The Professor Emeritus provided the following information:

Bribery at the point of entry or exit is difficult. However, Iran is also a major narcotics transshipment country and has a large addict population of its own. Drug trafficking organizations have illicit relations with the Revolutionary Guard that controls much of the economy, so bribery exists but it is happening further up the pipeline than the official entry and exit points in the country (of which there are nearly a hundred). The NAJA (Law Enforcement Forces) are primarily corrupted by the opium trade. You are more likely to find corruption and bribery at the actual entry exit point in the Baluchistan Sistan areas which are rife with foreign special operators, criminals, and smuggling.

The Immigration and Passport Police are a subsidiary of NAJA[.]

It is noteworthy that Iran is a Tier III country for human trafficking [1], which by definition includes illegal border crossings at some level, particularly in borders and frontiers with Iranian Kurdistan and Afghanistan. Kurdistan includes a well-worn smuggling route for narcotics and other contraband into Turkey. Human trafficking is especially problematic at the Afghan border. (Professor Emeritus 21 Feb. 2020)

Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

4. Punishment for Border Officers Caught Taking Bribes

Iran's Act on Punishment of Smugglers of People Amending Certain Articles of the Passport Act and the Act on Entry and Residence of Foreigns [*sic*] in Iran (1988) states the following:

Article 1- Commission of smuggling persons from the borders of Iran or aiding and abetting in such smuggling shall be punished as follows:

- a. If the smuggler disturbs security of the country, s/he shall be imprisoned from two to ten years, should the act committed does not amount to fighting against the regime.
- b. If the smuggled person is forbidden to leave the country or to enter it or the smuggled person is also a smuggler, s/he shall be punished by imprisonment from 2 to 8 years and by payment of a fine amounting from Rials 2,500,000 to 10,000,000 [C\$80-320].
- c. If the smuggled person is convicted or accused of committing a crime which is in the jurisdiction of the First Degree Penal Courts, then the smuggler shall be imprisoned from 2 to 4 years.
- d. If the smuggled person is under age, the smuggler shall be imprisoned from 3 to 5 years.
- e. If the committed crime can not be considered as amounting to any of the above crimes, the smuggler shall be imprisoned from 1 to 3 years.

Note 1- If the smuggler is a government employee or works for entities affiliated to the government and has committed the crime by taking advantage of his/her position, further to the above punishments s/he shall be condemned to perpetual dismissal from public services.

Note 2- Further to the above punishments, all the property acquired through the above crimes shall be subject to Article 5(3) of the Islamic Penal Act and the Act on the Manner of Implementation of Article 49 of the Constitution. (Iran 1998, italics and bold characters in original)

Information on incidents of punishment of border officers caught accepting bribes could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Note

[1] The US Department of State's *2019 Trafficking in Persons Report* lists Iran as a Tier 3 country and defines this tier as "[c]ountries whose governments do not fully meet the [Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, TVPA]'s minimum standards and are not making significant efforts to do so" (US 20 June 2019, 37, 48).

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Apochi; Emirates; European Council on Refugees and Exiles; Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime; HiPersia; Human Rights Activists News Agency; Imam Khomeini International Airport; Info Park; IranAir; Iran – Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Airports and Air Navigation Company; Iranian Refugees' Alliance; *The Jerusalem Post*; Mahan Air; UN – International Organization for Migration.

Internet sites, including: Against the Compass; AIN (Aviation International News) Publications; The Arab Weekly; Deutsche Welle; *Forced Migration Review*; *Foreign Policy*; GardaWorld; Institute for War and Peace Reporting; International Air Transport Association; International Crisis Group; The Jamestown Foundation; Middle East Eye; Philipps-Universität Marburg – Center for Near and Middle Eastern Studies; UN – UNHCR.

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