

[Home](#) → [Country of Origin Information](#) → Responses to Information Requests

# Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) are research reports on country conditions. They are requested by IRB decision makers.

The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIR. Earlier RIR may be found on the [UNHCR's Refworld website](#).

Please note that some RIR have attachments which are not electronically accessible here. To obtain a copy of an attachment, [please e-mail us](#).

## Related Links

- [Advanced search help](#)

9 March 2020

### IRN200133.E

Iran: Treatment by Iranian authorities of failed refugee claimants and family members of persons who have left Iran and claimed refugee status (2017-February 2020)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

## 1. Treatment of Failed Refugee Claimants by Iranian Authorities

According to a 13 March 2019 article on the website InfoMigrants [1] on Iranian asylum-seekers in Germany, the German government stated, in a reply to a query on the subject by a group of German parliamentarians, that in "2016-18, 1,120 Iranians decided to return to Iran voluntarily, with the help of the return program REAG/GARP [Reintegration and Emigration Program for Asylum-Seekers in Germany and Government Assisted Repatriation Program] [2]. The government says that as far as they know, those who return have not had any significant problems" (InfoMigrants 13 Mar. 2019).

However, a representative of the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) [3] in Iraq, speaking on his own behalf, provided the following information, based on communication with personal contacts who have knowledge of Iran:

If an Iranian who had sought asylum or left the country for good sought to return, I am told that the family would need to contact the authorities prior to her/his return and negotiate terms of return. There is no guarantee that the authorities would not take punitive action [against] the returnee. All indications suggest that persons who are perceived to have left the country for any reason other than simply to work abroad have no guarantee of safety upon their return to Iran. (Representative 16 Feb. 2020)

Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) indicates that

[a]ccording to international observers, Iranian authorities pay little attention to failed asylum seekers on their return to Iran. .... International observers report that Iranian authorities have little interest in prosecuting failed asylum seekers for activities conducted outside Iran, including in relation to protection claims. This includes posting social media comments critical of the government—heavy internet filtering means most Iranians will never see them—converting to Christianity, or engaging in LGBTI activities. In such cases the risk profile for the individual will be the same as for any other person in Iran within that category. Those with an existing high profile may face a higher risk of coming to official attention on return to Iran, particularly political activists. (Australia 7 June 2018, para. 5.25)

The JRS representative stated that Iranian opposition activists abroad can face imprisonment and "harsh treatment" upon their return to Iran, "possibly" including the death penalty, but that returnees who are not regarded as a "potential threat" and are not thought to possess information potentially helpful to the government "are not further harassed" (Representative 16 Feb. 2020). Similarly, a professor of sociology at York University who has written about gender in Iran and the Muslim diaspora stated, in correspondence with the Research Directorate, indicated that "[u]nofficially, and via social media, we hear of cases where the person involved is jailed," but "for how long and under what conditions, we don't know," and that the likelihood of being imprisoned depends on "how harmful to the regime's reputation the authorities judge his activities have been" (Professor of sociology 31 Jan. 2020).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a representative of the International Railroad for Queer Refugees (IRQR), an advocacy organization for Middle Eastern sexual minority refugees based in Toronto, gave information on the case of a failed Iranian gay refugee claimant who was deported from the UK in 2017 and arrested on his return to Iran "due to claiming asylum" and subsequently the charges of "homosexuality and promoting immoral behaviours" were added (IRQR 15 Feb. 2020). In another correspondence, the representative added that the man, whose name has not been made public, was not put on "formal trial" (IRQR 20 Feb. 2020). He was released on bail after approximately six months (IRQR 12 Feb. 2020). The man "managed to escape" to Turkey, where he was recognized as

a refugee by the UNHCR in Ankara (IRQR 15 Feb. 2020). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to Ahwaz Monitor [4], on 3 March 2017, an Iranian, who was denied refugee status in the Netherlands and returned to Iran, was sentenced to six years in prison for offences that included membership of the Arab Struggle Liberation Movement for Ahwaz (ASMLA), which "has been proscribed by Tehran"; "acting against national security"; and "spreading false propaganda" against the Iranian regime (Ahwaz Monitor 4 Mar. 2017). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a representative of the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC), a US-based non-profit organization founded by human rights scholars and lawyers that aims to establish a historical record of the human rights situation in Iran (IHRDC n.d.), indicated that he was aware of the case of one failed refugee claimant who was deported from Turkey to Iran, where he was arrested in early 2019 and sentenced to three years in prison on charges of "insulting the Supreme Leader and propaganda against the Islamic Republic" (IHRDC 17 Feb. 2020). The same source also reported that "he had been previously arrested in the summer of 2017 on the charges of acting against national security and propaganda against the Islamic Republic" (IHRDC 17 Feb. 2020). The website Iran Human Rights Monitor (Iran HRM) [5], without mentioning the circumstances of his arrest, reported, however, that the "civil rights activist and football referee" had been imprisoned since 2018, and was one of two "political prisoners" being held in Evin prison in Iran who had begun a hunger strike on 20 September 2019 (Iran HRM 23 Sept. 2019).

## **2. Treatment of Family Members of Refugee Claimants by Authorities**

Information on the treatment of family members of refugee claimants by authorities was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The professor of sociology indicated, in response to a question about the treatment of the relatives of Iranians who have claimed refugee status abroad, that the "relatives of such persons are normally not persecuted or harassed by the authorities, except in high-profile cases" (Professor of sociology 31 Jan. 2020).

According to sources, family members of Iranian refugee claimants may receive "intimidating" (Representative 16 Feb. 2020) or "threatening" phone calls from Iranian authorities (IHRDC 17 Feb. 2020). The JRS representative provided the following information:

I am told that the government does not seem to do anything directly to the families but, every month, the family is summoned to the Intelligence Office of their town or city, or is called by phone, and intimidated. In a number of cases, it would seem that families are given false information—such as that their son has been arrested and that he would be returned to Iran and executed. The level of intimidation seems to vary from one location to another depending on the officers in charge. Families whose sons or daughters have left for Europe report intimidating phone calls. Others receive periodic calls to convince their son/daughter to return and promising that they would be given a job with the government and that their relative would not be prosecuted. It seems that the latter is hard to believe. (Representative 16 Feb. 2020)

### **3. Return and Resettlement Resources Available for Returning Iranians**

Sources stated that they are not aware of any resettlement resources available for returning Iranians (Professor of sociology 31 Jan. 2020; IHRDC 17 Feb. 2020; JRS 16 Feb. 2020). The IRQR representative indicated that there are no such resources available for returning Iranians (IRQR 12 Feb. 2020). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a professor of political science at the University of South Alabama, whose research interests include the Middle East, defense and foreign policies, said that "[t]here are no formal resources that are available to the returning refugees. The relatives of the returning refugees are generally asked to try to reintegrate the refugees into the broader society" (Professor of political science 28 Jan. 2020).

#### **3.1. Voluntary Return Programs**

Australia's DFAT indicates that the International Organization for Migration (IOM) runs a program to assist voluntary returnees to Iran, in cooperation with the country from which they are returning. Iranian authorities cooperate with the IOM in this regard. In cases where an Iranian diplomatic mission has issued temporary travel documents, authorities will be forewarned of the person's imminent return. Authorities will usually question a voluntary returnee on return only if they have already come to official attention, such as by committing a crime in Iran before departing. DFAT is not aware of any legislative or social barriers to voluntary returnees finding work or shelter in Iran, nor any specific barriers to prevent voluntary returnees from returning to their home region. (Australia 7 June 2018, para. 5.24)

According to an IOM report, 1,510 Iranians took part in a program in 2018, and 2,144 did in 2017 (UN 2019, 19).

According to the IOM and Germany's Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, BAMF), in Germany, the REAG/GARP program, which offers services that can include, depending on the nationality of the claimant, travel costs, financial travel assistance, medical cost and one-time financial start-up assistance, has been supplemented with the StarthilfePlus programme since 2017 (UN and Germany n.d.a). The StarthilfePlus program was supposed, starting in January 2020, to offer to Iranian participants who received financial start-up assistance an "additional reintegration assistance in housing" (UN and Germany n.d.b). However, the information page of the program for Iran indicates that IOM "is currently unable to transfer funds to Iran to maintain operations. As of August 2019 and until further notice, disbursing financial and in-kind reintegration assistance in the frame of the reintegration programme StarthilfePlus will therefore come to a halt" (UN and Germany n.d.c).

A similar project, RESTART II – Reintegration Assistance for Voluntary Returnees to Afghanistan and Iran, was run in Austria by the IOM and the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior from January 2017 to December 2019 and offered "travel organization, assistance upon departure and, if required, reception assistance, temporary accommodation as well as organization of the onward journey in the country of origin" (UN and Austria 31 Dec. 2018). In 2018, 33 persons participated in the program, and in 2017, 88 persons did (UN and Austria 31 Dec. 2018).

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.

## Notes

[1] "InfoMigrants is a collaboration led by three major European media sources: France Médias Monde (France 24, Radio France International[e], Monte Carlo Doualiya), the German public broadcaster Deutsche Welle, and the Italian press agency ANSA. InfoMigrants is co-financed by the European Union" (InfoMigrants n.d.).

[2] The International Organization for Migration (IOM) Germany states that

[t]he REAG/GARP [Reintegration and Emigration Program for Asylum-Seekers in Germany and Government Assisted Repatriation Program]-program is a humanitarian program assisting with financial and operational support the voluntary return and migration to third countries. It offers start-up assistance for defined nationalities and serves as a steering instrument for migration movements. The migrants eligible to benefit from the program are asylum-seekers,

rejected asylum-seekers and recognized refugees[,] as well as war and civil-war refugees, victims of forced prostitution or trafficking and other foreigners ... as well as migrants who have been granted residence due to humanitarian or political reasons. (UN n.d.)

[3] The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) is an "international Catholic organisation with a mission to accompany, serve, and advocate on behalf of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons" that runs programs in 56 countries, including "pastoral care and psychosocial support programmes in detention centres and refugee camps, and ... humanitarian relief in emergency displacement situations" (JRS n.d.).

[4] Ahwaz Monitor is "a not-for-profit online information hub, publishing news, articles and information updates to raise awareness of the plight of the Ahwazi Arab people in the Ahwaz region of southwest Iran, also known as Khuzestan province" (Ahwaz Monitor n.d.).

[5] The Iran Human Rights Monitor (Iran HRM) website

is dedicated to support the Iranian people's struggle for human rights and amplifies their voices on the international stage.


Its purpose is to cover executions, arbitrary arrests, torture and amputation, prison conditions, women, social, ethnic and religious minorities oppression news in Iran and [to] fill the gaps in information and knowledge caused by lack of access and freedom to Iran.

The information provided by Iran Human Rights Monitor [is] in collaboration with the NCRI (National Council of Resistance of Iran). (Iran HRM n.d.)

## References

Ahwaz Monitor. 4 March 2017. "Ahwazi Activist, Denied Asylum in Netherlands, Gets Six Year Sentence upon His Return to Iran." [Accessed 17 Feb. 2020]

Ahwaz Monitor. N.d. "About Us." [Accessed 17 Feb. 2020]

Australia. 7 June 2018. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).  DFAT Country Information Report: Iran. [Accessed 19 Feb. 2020]

InfoMigrants. 13 March 2019. Emma Wallis. "Are Iranian Asylum Seekers Being Unfairly Dealt with in Germany?" [Accessed 30 Jan. 2020]

InfoMigrants. N.d. "About." [Accessed 10 Feb. 2020]

International Railroad for Queer Refugees (IRQR). 20 February 2020. Correspondence from a representative to the Research Directorate.

International Railroad for Queer Refugees (IRQR). 15 February 2020. Correspondence from a representative to the Research Directorate.

International Railroad for Queer Refugees (IRQR). 12 February 2020. Telephone interview with the Research Directorate.

Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC). 17 February 2020. Correspondence from a representative to the Research Directorate.


Iran Human Rights Documentation Centre (IHRDC). N.d. "Mission." [Accessed 19 Feb. 2020]

Iran Human Rights Monitor (Iran HRM). 23 September 2019. "Political Prisoners Embark on Hunger Strike in Iran's Evin Prison." [Accessed 19 Feb. 2020]

Iran Human Rights Monitor (Iran HRM). N.d. "About Us." [Accessed 19 Feb. 2020]

Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Iraq. 16 February 2020. Correspondence from a representative to the Research Directorate.

Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS). N.d. "About Us." [Accessed 6 Mar. 2020]

United Nations (UN). 2019. International Organization for Migration (IOM).  2018 Return and Reintegration Key Highlights. [Accessed 10 Feb. 2020]

United Nations (UN). N.d. International Organization for Migration (IOM) Germany. "REAG/GARP." [Accessed 10 Feb. 2020]

United Nations (UN), International Organization for Migration (IOM) Austria and Austria, Federal Ministry of the Interior. 31 December 2018. RESTART II - Reintegration Assistance for Voluntary Returnees to Afghanistan and Iran: 2 Years of Project Implementation - Results. [Accessed 10 Feb. 2020]

United Nations (UN), International Organization for Migration (IOM) and Germany, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF). N.d.a. "REAG/GARP." [Accessed 10 Feb. 2020]

United Nations (UN), International Organization for Migration (IOM) and Germany, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF). N.d.b. "StarthilfePlus - Supplementary Reintegration Support in the Destination Country." [Accessed 10 Feb. 2020]

United Nations (UN), International Organization for Migration (IOM) and Germany, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF). N.d.c. "Iran (the Islamic Republic of)." [Accessed 10 Feb. 2020]

Professor of political science, University of South Alabama. 28 January 2020. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

Professor of sociology, York University. 31 January 2020. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

## Additional Sources Consulted

**Oral sources:** Amnesty International; Canadian Council for Refugees; Human Rights Watch; International Crisis Group; Iranian human rights lawyer; Jesuit Refugee Service – Canada; lawyer and activist for human rights in Iran; lawyer and professor of international law who has worked on human-rights issues involving Iran; Ligue de défense des droits de l'homme en Iran; professor who has published on women's issues in Iran and the Islamic world; professor whose research interests include gender and development in the Islamic world and elsewhere; tutor in law who has practiced in Iran and written about Islamic law and international law; UN – International Organization for Migration; US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants.

**Internet sites, including:** Amnesty International; Austrian Red Cross; Belgium – Commissariat général aux réfugiés et aux apatrides; Center for Human Rights in Iran; Denmark – Danish Immigration Service; ecoi.net; EU – European Asylum Support Office; France – Office français de protection des réfugiés et apatrides; Human Rights Watch; The Jamestown Foundation; Middle East Consultancy Services; Swiss Refugee Council; UK – Home Office; UN – Refworld; United States Institute of Peace.

**Date modified:**

2018-06-25