



Home Office

# Country Policy and Information Note

## Iran: Women fearing domestic abuse

Version 2.0

September 2018

# Preface

## Purpose

This note provides country of origin information (COI) and analysis of COI for use by Home Office decision makers handling particular types of protection and human rights claims (as set out in [the basis of claim](#) section). It is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of a particular subject or theme.

It is split into two main sections: (1) analysis of COI; and (2) COI. These are explained in more detail below.

## Analysis

This section analyses the evidence relevant to this note – i.e. the COI section; refugee/human rights laws and policies; and applicable caselaw – by describing this and its inter-relationships, and provides an assessment on whether, **in general**:

- A person is reasonably likely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm
- A person is able to obtain protection from the state (or quasi state bodies)
- A person is reasonably able to relocate within a country or territory
- Claims are likely to justify granting asylum, humanitarian protection or other form of leave, and
- If a claim is refused, it is likely or unlikely to be certifiable as ‘clearly unfounded’ under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

Decision makers **must**, however, still consider all claims on an individual basis, taking into account each case’s specific facts.

## Country of origin information

The country information in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), dated April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation’s (ACCORD), [Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual, 2013](#). Namely, taking into account the COI’s relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

The structure and content of the country information section follows a [terms of reference](#) which sets out the general and specific topics relevant to this note.

All information included in the note was published or made publicly available on or before the ‘cut-off’ date in the country information section. Any event taking place or report/article published after this date is not included.

All information is publicly accessible or can be made publicly available, and is from generally reliable sources. Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion.

Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

- the motivation, purpose, knowledge and experience of the source
- how the information was obtained, including specific methodologies used
- the currency and detail of information, and
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources.

Multiple sourcing is used to ensure that the information is accurate, balanced and corroborated, so that a comprehensive and up-to-date picture at the time of publication is provided of the issues relevant to this note.

Information is compared and contrasted, whenever possible, to provide a range of views and opinions. The inclusion of a source, however, is not an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a brief footnote; full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the [bibliography](#).

## Feedback

Our goal is to continuously improve our material. Therefore, if you would like to comment on this note, please email [the Country Policy and Information Team](#).

## Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

The [Independent Advisory Group on Country Information](#) (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to support him in reviewing the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of approach of COI produced by the Home Office.

The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office's COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy. The IAGCI may be contacted at:

### **Independent Advisory Group on Country Information**

Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration

5th Floor

Globe House

89 Eccleston Square

London, SW1V 1PN

Email: [chiefinspector@icibi.gov.uk](mailto:chiefinspector@icibi.gov.uk)

Information about the IAGCI's work and a list of the documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's pages of the [gov.uk website](#).

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# Analysis

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Basis of claim

- 1.1.1 That a woman fears domestic abuse.

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### 1.2 Points to note

- 1.2.1 Domestic abuse is not just about physical violence. It covers any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality. It can include psychological, physical, sexual, economic or emotional abuse. Children can also be victims of, or witnesses to, domestic abuse. Anyone can experience domestic abuse, regardless of background, age, gender, sexuality, race or culture. However, to establish a claim for protection under the refugee convention or humanitarian protection rules, that abuse needs to reach a minimum level of severity to constitute persecution or serious harm.
- 1.2.2 Domestic abuse may include so-called 'honour'-based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage. However, this note does not cover these. Decision makers can consult the Iranian country policy information notes on [honour crimes against women](#) and [forced marriage](#).
- 1.2.3 For further information and guidance on assessing gender issues, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#) and [Gender issues in the asylum claim](#).

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## 2. Consideration of issues

### 2.1 Credibility

- 2.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).
- 2.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).
- 2.1.3 Decision makers should also consider the need to conduct language analysis testing (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

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### 2.2 Exclusion

- 2.2.1 If it is accepted that the person has been involved in serious human rights abuses, decision makers must consider whether one (or more) of the

exclusion clauses is applicable. Each case must nevertheless be considered on its individual facts and merits.

- 2.2.2 For further guidance on the exclusion clauses and restricted leave, see the [Asylum Instruction on Exclusion: Article 1F of the Refugee Convention](#) and the [Asylum Instruction on Restricted Leave](#).

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## 2.3 Convention reason(s)

- 2.3.1 Women in Iran form a (PSG) within the meaning of the Refugee Convention. This is because they share an immutable (or innate) characteristic, their sex, have a distinct identity in Iran which is perceived as being different by the surrounding society, and are generally discriminated against and unprotected by the state.
- 2.3.2 Establishing a Convention reason alone is not sufficient to be recognised as a refugee. The question to be addressed in each case is whether the particular person will face a real risk of persecution on account of their actual or imputed convention reason.
- 2.3.3 For further guidance on particular social groups, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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## 2.4 Assessment of risk

- 2.4.1 There are few available statistics on domestic abuse in Iran, but those that are published report a prevalence of around 66% nationally with some regional variations (see [Prevalence of domestic abuse](#)).
- 2.4.2 Women face considerable barriers to their full participation in society and if a wife refuses to obey her husband without a 'reasonable excuse', she can lose certain rights, including the right to maintenance and spousal support. The law obliges wives to fulfil the sexual needs of their husbands at all times, it does not recognise rape within marriage as a crime and there is no specific law penalising domestic violence. A man is allowed by the Islamic Penal Code to kill his wife if she is caught committing adultery (see [Legal context](#) and [State response](#)).
- 2.4.3 However, not all women will be at real risk of domestic violence and it will depend on the facts of her case. The onus is on the woman to demonstrate that she is likely to be at risk of domestic abuse on return to Iran that will meet the high threshold required to constitute persecution or serious harm.
- 2.4.4 For further information and guidance on assessing risk, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#)

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## 2.5 Protection

- 2.5.1 There is no specific law in Iran which criminalises domestic violence or abuse. Victims who wish to report domestic violence are required to file a complaint under the criminal provisions relating to bodily assault. This includes meeting the difficult evidentiary requirements of providing two adult

male witnesses to the assault. Police and judges are sometimes reluctant to act in domestic violence cases, viewing them as family problems. Instead of filing charges, police typically responded by encouraging the parties to reconcile and to return the victims to their abuser(s) (see [State response to domestic abuse](#)).

- 2.5.2 Where claims of domestic violence are proven the sentence tends to be a fine unless the offence committed is found to have disrupted public order, in which case the punishment is 2 to 5 years imprisonment (see [Avenues of redress](#)).
- 2.5.3 Obtaining a divorce to escape an abusive marriage may also be difficult for a woman. She must prove a threat to her life and safety. This will be made more difficult by new family law ('Bill 315') which provides judges with bonuses for the number of divorce cases that result in 'reconciliation' (see [Laws enabling domestic abuse](#)).
- 2.5.4 Information from the UN in 2015 claimed there were no support services such as shelters, although the evidence shows that there are. However, there are few shelters, they are mainly located in big cities, are poorly resourced and focus on reconciling victims of violence with their abusive husbands. NGO shelters are mainly designed for drug users and prostitutes (see [State and non-state support groups and shelters](#)).
- 2.5.5 Effective state protection is in general unlikely to be available. However, decision makers must assess whether effective protection is available considering the person's circumstances.
- 2.5.6 For further information on the effectiveness of law enforcement in Iran see the country policy and information note, [Iran: Background Information, including actors of protection and internal relocation](#)).
- 2.5.7 For further guidance on assessing the availability of state protection, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#)

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## 2.6 Internal relocation

- 2.6.1 Women can face difficulties in Iran travelling alone and can face official and societal discrimination when doing so in rural areas. Men are able to restrict their wives' movements outside of the home (see the country policy and information note, [Iran: Background Information, including actors of protection and internal relocation](#)).
- 2.6.2 Internal relocation is likely to be unreasonable for many women. However, decision makers must carefully consider each case on its facts, with regard to the availability of state support, employment and family members or friends in other parts of the country. Decision makers should consult the country policy and information note, [Iran: Background Information, including actors of protection and internal relocation](#).
- 2.6.3 For further guidance on assessing the availability of state protection, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#)

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## 2.7 Certification

- 2.7.1 Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.
- 2.7.2 For further guidance on certification, see [Certification of Protection and Human Rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 \(clearly unfounded claims\)](#).

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## 3. Prevalence of domestic abuse

- 3.1.1 Amnesty International noted in their annual report for 2017/18 that: ‘Acts of violence against women and girls, including domestic violence...[were] widespread’.<sup>1</sup> The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), in their report on Iran dated June 2018 (‘the 2018 DFAT report’), commented that ‘according to domestic interlocutors, [domestic violence] occurs frequently across Iranian society.’<sup>2</sup>
- 3.1.2 Amnesty International’s report ‘You shall procreate - Attacks on women’s sexual and reproductive rights in Iran’, dated March 2015, cited evidence from the Presidential Centre for Participation of Women and the Ministry of Science between 2001 and 2003 (however, it noted that the report was now ‘missing’). Based on a survey of 12,596 women in the capitals of 28 provinces across the country:
- 37.8% of respondents had suffered acts of physical abuse such as slapping, kicking, hitting, and beating from the beginning of their marital relationship
  - 52.7% had suffered psychological abuse such as intimidation, swearing, repeated belittlement and humiliation
  - more than 27% reported having experienced “restrictions on their social, intellectual and educational growth” which included controlling or limiting contacts with friends and family and preventing them from pursuing employment, education and participation in public affairs
  - 10.2% of women reported having experienced sexual violence (the real figure is believed to be much higher given the laws on “submission” (tamkin), which require women to satisfy the sexual needs of their husbands at all times).<sup>3</sup>
- 3.1.3 More recent data is available. The Finnish Immigration Service (FIS)’s report of June 2015 cited data from the state published in 2005 that 8,000 cases of domestic violence from around the country was reported to the authorities in the space of six months, amounting to 44 cases a day. The paper also noted: ‘There are no proper statistics available on domestic violence in Iran. Information provided by the state is very sporadic and limited.’<sup>4</sup> The USSD’s 2016 report on human rights practices stated: ‘The Census Bureau, the government agency responsible for data collection, does not permit international organizations to study domestic violence in the country.’<sup>5</sup> Amnesty International’s report ‘You shall procreate - Attacks on women’s

<sup>1</sup> Amnesty International, ‘Iran 2017/2018’, February 2018, [url](#)

<sup>2</sup> DFAT report, Iran, June 2018 (p. 33), [url](#)

<sup>3</sup> Amnesty International, ‘You shall procreate’ (p. 32), March 2015, [url](#)

<sup>4</sup> Suuntaus Project, ‘Violence against women’ (p. 5), June 2015, [url](#)

<sup>5</sup> USSD human rights report 2016, March 2017 (Section 6), [url](#)

sexual and reproductive rights in Iran', dated March 2015, stated that: 'Iran's authorities not only fail to systematically collect, analyze and disseminate data on violence against women, but also appear to suppress the production and dissemination of such data, in violation of their international obligation to collect data on all forms of violence against women.'<sup>6</sup>

3.1.4 The UN General Assembly report on the situation of human rights in Iran, dated August 2014, cited 2009 data from Payvand Iran News that '[s]ome 66 per cent of Iranian women have reportedly experienced domestic violence.'<sup>7</sup>

3.1.5 The Iranian Red Crescent Medical Journal, in June 2016, also arrived at this figure of approximately 66%, although not from the same data as it gathered its data from 31 articles (representing a sample size of 15,514 people) published between 2000 and 2014 in Iranian and international databases. Domestic violence was most prevalent in the west (75%) and least in the centre (59%) of the country. The Journal's definition of violence and domestic violence was:

'Violence is a behavioral model that is imposed on close friends and family members through intimidation, threats, and annoying, harmful behaviors aimed at controlling and manipulating a person. Instances of violence can comprise sexual, physical, and economic abuse, as well as verbal threats and divorce. Domestic violence is a serious social and mental health problem that takes the form of violence against women and children or the mistreatment of senior citizens and other vulnerable individuals. The most common form of domestic violence is violence, whether physical or mental, against women by their life partner.'<sup>8</sup>

3.1.6 The USSD 2017 human rights report stated:

'An August [2017] report by the CHRI [Center for Human Rights in Iran] referenced a study presented at the nongovernmental Imam Ali Foundation's May conference in Tehran on violence against women in the country, according to which 32 percent of women in urban areas and 63 percent in rural areas had been victims of domestic violence. In March a government official was quoted saying that 11,000 cases of domestic abuse had been registered by the National Welfare Organization.'<sup>9</sup>

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## 4. Legal context

### 4.1 Criminal status of domestic abuse

4.1.1 The US State Department's Country Report on Human Practices for Iran for 2017 ('the USSD 2017 human rights report'), published in April 2018, stated: 'The law does not prohibit domestic violence.'<sup>10</sup> The UN General Assembly's report on the 'Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic Iran' dated 31

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<sup>6</sup> Amnesty International, 'You shall procreate' (p. 31), March 2015, [url](#)

<sup>7</sup> UN General Assembly, 'Situation of human rights in Iran' (para 18), 27 August 2014, [url](#)

<sup>8</sup> Iranian Red Crescent Medical Journal, Systematic Review of Domestic Violence, June 2016, [url](#)

<sup>9</sup> USSD human rights report 2017, April 2018 (section 6), [url](#)

<sup>10</sup> USSD human rights report 2017, April 2018 (section 6), [url](#)

August 2015 stated that: 'The Islamic Republic of Iran has no specific law criminalizing domestic violence.'<sup>11</sup> Amnesty International noted in their annual report for 2017/18: 'The authorities failed to criminalize gender-based violence; a draft bill remained pending since 2012.'<sup>12</sup>

- 4.1.2 The USSD 2017 human rights report, published in April 2018, noted: 'The law considers sex within marriage consensual by definition and, therefore, does not address spousal rape, including in cases of forced marriage.'<sup>13</sup>
- 4.1.3 The 2018 DFAT report commented: 'Women enjoy considerable legal protections in many areas, including personal safety...'. However, the report continued: 'While the law prescribes severe penalties (including the death penalty) for rape, it does not recognise rape within marriage as a crime. Likewise, there is no specific law penalising domestic violence...'<sup>14</sup>
- 4.1.4 The UN General Assembly's report on the 'Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran', dated 30 September 2016, stated: 'Recommendations urging the Government to...criminalize domestic violence, including marital rape, were rejected. In its response, the Government notes that the law allows women to place conditions on marriages that are not contrary to marriage contract requirements.'<sup>15</sup>
- 4.1.5 The March 2017 report by the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran found that 'the Iranian legal framework fails to adequately protect women from violence and to criminalize marital rape.'<sup>16</sup>

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## 4.2 Laws enabling domestic abuse

- 4.2.1 In August 2014, the UN General Assembly stated that: 'The legislative framework remains insufficient to combat [domestic violence]. For example, laws continue to explicitly allow for non-consensual sexual relations in marriage... [In response] the Government maintained that domestic violence was a capital offence and noted that draft legislation to legally define all forms of domestic violence was currently being considered.'<sup>17</sup>
- 4.2.2 The UN General Assembly's report on the 'Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic Iran' dated 31 August 2015 stated that 'The Islamic Penal Code gives husbands significant control over the lives of their wives and children. Article 630 allows a husband to kill his wife if she is caught committing adultery.'<sup>18</sup>
- 4.2.3 In the same report, the Secretary-General '... [found] it regrettable that the proposed comprehensive population and exaltation of family bill (No. 315),

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<sup>11</sup> UN General Assembly, 'Situation of human rights in Iran' (para 32), 31 August 2015, [url](#)

<sup>12</sup> Amnesty International, 'Iran 2017/2018', February 2018, [url](#)

<sup>13</sup> USSD human rights report 2017, April 2018 (section 6), [url](#)

<sup>14</sup> DFAT report, Iran, June 2018 (p. 32), [url](#)

<sup>15</sup> UN General Assembly, 'Situation of human rights in Iran' (para 59), September 2016, [url](#)

<sup>16</sup> UN Human Rights Council 'Report of the Special Rapporteur' (para 72), 6 March 2017, [url](#)

<sup>17</sup> UN General Assembly, 'Situation of human rights in Iran' (paras 18-20), 27 August 2014, [url](#)

<sup>18</sup> UN General Assembly, 'Situation of human rights in Iran' (para 32), 31 August 2015, [url](#)

[then] under discussion by the parliamentary cultural affairs committee, could potentially expose women to increased risks of domestic violence. In the bill, bonuses are proposed for judges on the basis of the number of divorce cases before them that result in reconciliation rather than divorce.<sup>19</sup> Bill 315 was passed by Iran's Islamic Consultative Assembly in November 2015<sup>20</sup>.

- 4.2.4 Iran Human Rights Documentation Centre (IHRDC)'s March 2013 report 'Gender Inequality and Discrimination: The Case of Iranian Women' said 'A wife's disobedience can...create legal grounds for...violence (wife battery).'<sup>21</sup>
- 4.2.5 The March 2017 report by the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran found that 'certain provisions might even condone sexual abuse, such as article 1108 which obliges wives to fulfill the sexual needs of their husbands at all times.'<sup>22</sup>
- 4.2.6 Amnesty International noted in their annual report for 2016/17 that 'In September [2016], Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei issued national family policies promoting early marriage, repeated childbearing, fewer divorces and greater compliance to "traditional" roles of women as housewives and men as breadwinners. The policies raised concern that women victims of domestic violence may face further marginalization and increased pressure to "reconcile" with abusers and remain in abusive marital relationships.'<sup>23</sup>
- 4.2.7 Amnesty International noted in their report 'You shall procreate- Attacks on women's sexual and reproductive rights in Iran' dated March 2015 that:
- 'Discriminatory provisions exposing women to violence extend beyond the Islamic Penal Code. According to the Civil Code, the husband is the head of the family (Article 1105) and consequently a woman is obliged to obey her husband. If a woman refuses to comply with the "duties of marriage" without a legitimate reason, she is not entitled to spousal maintenance (Article 1108). Refusal to "submit" (tamkin) can include a wide range of conduct such as "refusal to have sex" and "going out of the house without permission". Moreover, under the Civil Code, men have the exclusive right to determine their wives' place of residence (Article 1114). A wife will be considered "disobedient" (nashezeh) and not entitled to alimony if she leaves her husband's place of residence (Articles 1005 and 1108). A woman can be given permission to leave the marital house only if she can prove to a court of law a risk to her body or "honour". A woman denied such permission risks finding herself with no choice but to endure domestic violence or lose her right to alimony.'<sup>24</sup>
- 4.2.8 Also see: an English translation of [Books One, Two and Five of the Iranian Penal Code](#)<sup>25</sup>, and the [Civil Code of the Islamic Republic of Iran](#)<sup>26</sup>

<sup>19</sup> UN General Assembly, 'Situation of human rights in Iran' (para 32), 31 August 2015, [url](#)

<sup>20</sup> Open Democracy 50.50, 'Women's bodies have become a battleground ...', 29 August 2018, [url](#)

<sup>21</sup> IHRDC, 'Gender Inequality and Discrimination', March 2013, [url](#)

<sup>22</sup> UN Human Rights Council 'Report of the Special Rapporteur' (para 72), 6 March 2017, [url](#)

<sup>23</sup> Amnesty International, 'Iran 2016/2017', February 2017, [url](#)

<sup>24</sup> Amnesty International, 'You shall procreate ...', March 2015, [url](#).

<sup>25</sup> IHRDC, Iranian Codes, [url](#)

<sup>26</sup> Civil Code, [url](#)

## 5. State response to domestic abuse

### 5.1 Attitudes

- 5.1.1 The UN General Assembly's report on the 'Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic Iran' dated 31 August 2015 stated that 'police intervention in family disputes is discouraged.'<sup>27</sup>
- 5.1.2 The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and the Danish Immigration Service (DIS), in February 2018, published a joint report based on interviews with several sources in Tehran, Ankara and London in September and October 2017 (the Danish 2018 report). They interviewed the Middle East Consultancy Service (MECS), who noted that the 'the attitude of the police and local judges might affect the chance of protection.'<sup>28</sup>
- 5.1.3 The USSD 2017 human rights report stated: 'Authorities considered abuse in the family a private matter and seldom discussed it publicly.'<sup>29</sup>

### 5.2 Avenues of redress

- 5.2.1 Amnesty International noted in their annual report for 2017/18 that: 'Acts of violence against women and girls, including domestic violence...[were] committed with impunity.'<sup>30</sup>
- 5.2.2 In August 2014, the UN General Assembly stated that 'inadequate social service provisions challenge the State's ability to provide safety and redress for [domestic violence] victims.'<sup>31</sup>
- 5.2.3 Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML), in their report 'Iran: Gender Discrimination at Its Worst', dated October- November 2014, stated that:  
'[...] claims of domestic violence, even when proven, are not often adequately punished. The sentence tends to be a fine unless the offence committed is found to have disrupted public order and caused social insecurity in which case a prison sentence of two to five years may be imposed (article 614 of the Islamic Penal Code). WLUML is concerned that judicial authorities rarely make such factual findings considering that they expect women to reconcile with their husbands and accept violence as an "incidental" fact of family life.'<sup>32</sup>
- 5.2.4 Amnesty International's report 'You shall procreate - Attacks on women's sexual and reproductive rights in Iran', dated March 2015, stated that:  
'Currently, women must file a complaint of domestic violence under the provisions of the Penal Code relating to bodily assault, and meet a range of evidentiary requirements. These include the presence of two adult male witnesses to the assault, which makes domestic violence difficult if not

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<sup>27</sup> UN General Assembly, 'Situation of human rights in Iran' (para 32), 31 August 2015, [url](#)

<sup>28</sup> Danish report (p. 28), February 2018, [url](#)

<sup>29</sup> USSD human rights report 2017, April 2018 (section 6), [url](#)

<sup>30</sup> Amnesty International, 'Iran 2017/2018', February 2018, [url](#)

<sup>31</sup> UN General Assembly, 'Situation of human rights in Iran' (para 18), 27 August 2014, [url](#)

<sup>32</sup> WLUML, 'IRAN: Gender Discrimination at Its Worst', October-November 2014, Available on request

impossible to prove (Articles 160-200). Even if such claims are proven, the sentence will typically be the payment of diyah [financial compensation], which will be granted only upon the request of the victim (Article 401). In some cases, an additional punishment of two to five years in prison may be imposed if the offence is found to have disrupted public order or the security of society and raised fears that the offender or others may again commit assault (Article 614).<sup>33</sup>

- 5.2.5 The UN General Assembly's report on the 'Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic Iran' dated 31 August 2015 stated that:

'Women who experience violence must file a complaint under the provisions of the Islamic Penal Code governing bodily assault and satisfy the evidentiary requirements, which include producing two adult male witnesses. [...] Women face numerous obstacles when seeking a divorce. Women wishing to leave their husband must prove a significant risk of bodily harm or a threat to their life and safety. Similarly, to obtain a divorce under the Civil Code as a result of domestic violence, women must prove that the abuse was intolerable. In commenting on the present report, the authorities argued that women could file for divorce if they faced violence [...]'<sup>34</sup>

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## 6. Societal attitudes towards domestic abuse

- 6.1.1 In a March 2015, an Iran Wire article titled 'TV Star sparks national debate on domestic violence', cited 'women's rights activist' Asieh Amini: "There are many cases of domestic violence in Iranian courts...Iranian culture has always chosen to cover up domestic violence and hide it away. We not only respond to domestic violence with silence — we also promote this silence. For example, families often say that whatever happens between man and wife is their own affair and not the neighbors' business."<sup>35</sup>

- 6.1.2 The article also stated:

'In a survey conducted this week [in March 2015], more than 57 percent of Iran Wire's Persian-language readers — most of whom live in Iran — said that domestic violence was a public matter and must be given media coverage. A quarter of those polled said media coverage and appropriate punishment for such crimes would help prevent repeat offences. Overall, over 83 percent of those polled said publicizing domestic violence stories was crucial, suggesting it is an issue that affects a large number of women in Iran.'<sup>36</sup>

- 6.1.3 The FIS project 2015 report stated that:

'...[a] survey [conducted in 2012] on domestic violence, conducted by Zahra Tizro [currently a senior lecturer at the School of Psychological and Social Sciences at York St John University] in Gilan in northern Iran, identified several different reasons behind domestic violence against women, including

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<sup>33</sup> Amnesty International, 'You shall procreate', March 2015, [url](#)

<sup>34</sup> UN General Assembly, 'Situation of human rights in Iran' (para 32), 31 August 2015, [url](#)

<sup>35</sup> Iran Wire, 'TV Star sparks national debate on domestic violence', 27 March 2015, [url](#)

<sup>36</sup> Iran Wire, 'TV Star sparks national debate on domestic violence', 27 March 2015, [url](#)

financial difficulties, cultural and educational differences (including regional differences and ethnicity), sex segregation, exercise of psychological control, conflict between religious conceptions, the modern world and social reality, the Iranian culture of manliness and the economy of emotions. Based on Tizro's findings, it appears that Iranian women have a high tolerance for violence. According to Tizro, many women only classify exceptionally severe beatings as violence and consider less forceful hitting or psychological abuse normal behaviour. The respondents felt that hitting a wife could be justified if, for example, dinner was not ready when the husband returned from work. In addition to male family members, violence can also be inflicted or instigated by women: a typical example of this is mothers-in-law using violence against their daughters-in-law in order to reinforce their status in the family and make the newcomer obey their rules.<sup>37</sup>

- 6.1.4 Also see the [country policy and information on Iran: Background information, including actors of protection and internal relocation](#), specifically the section on 'Women'

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## 7. State and non-state support groups and shelters

### 7.1 State support groups

- 7.1.1 In August 2014, the UN General Assembly stated that 'there are insufficient safe houses for women in need of refuge.'<sup>38</sup>

- 7.1.2 The FIS report of 2015 report stated:

'Iran has shelters run by both the state and non-governmental organisations. According to the UN, there are nevertheless not enough shelters and they do not provide long-term support through employment and housing for women trapped in abusive situations. The Iranian State Welfare Organisation (Sazman-e Behzisti) has maintained a network of approximately 30 'health houses' for unmarried girls who have run away from home since the beginning of the 21st century. These institutions provide temporary housing, professional counselling and skills development for runaway girls. However, reports indicate that girls have also been sexually abused by the authorities in at least one of these institutions. In any case, the shelters built on the initiative of the Cabinet of the reformist President Khatami have been said to be a failure, as they are not widely used or run properly.

'It was also reported in 2015 that 18 new shelters for women escaping abusive relationships would be opened across the country. In addition to the above, there are almost 180 crisis centres that provide advice for couples who are having problems. The locations of shelters are kept secret to protect their customers. According to the Head of the State Welfare Organisation's Department of Social Problems, who oversees the operation of the shelters, the shelters are open 24 hours a day and provide therapy for victims of domestic violence free of charge. Based on the information released by the State Welfare Organisation, temporary shelters in different provinces helped

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<sup>37</sup> Suuntaus Project, 'Violence against women' (pp. 6-7), June 2015, [url](#)

<sup>38</sup> UN General Assembly, 'Situation of human rights in Iran' (para 19), 27 August 2014, [url](#)

a total of 2 000 victims of domestic violence last year. The victims came to the shelters either on their own initiative or were referred there by social services, police or courts. There is also a special helpline (Seda-ye Yara) for victims of violence against women. Public sector health care services and services provided by non-governmental organisations also include rehabilitation programmes for prostitutes.<sup>39</sup>

- 7.1.3 According to the UN General Assembly report on the situation of human rights in Iran dated August 2015: ‘There are no support services such as shelters, legal and psychological counselling, specialized assistance or rehabilitation.’ In commenting on this report the authorities stated that: ‘[...] various mechanisms existed to support victims of domestic violence, including intervention and rehabilitation centres, a social emergency telephone line, rehabilitation centres for affected women and girls, 31 health houses and specialized social assistance.’<sup>40</sup>
- 7.1.4 The UN General Assembly’s report on the ‘Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran’, dated 30 September 2016, stated that the Government ‘referred to the establishment of 24 “rehabilitation centres” and 31 “health centres” throughout the country for women and girls who have been subjected to domestic violence.’<sup>41</sup>
- 7.1.5 The Danish report of February 2018 cited the Middle East Consultancy Service, who noted that ‘shelters for women, who are victims of domestic abuse, are limited, and the existing protection centres are unable to provide long-term support. The shelters are called Health Houses. Temporary housing or health houses, including other development programs, are provided by sazman-e behzisti (the State Welfare Organisation). Some women have reported sexual assaults by authorities inside the health houses.’<sup>42</sup>
- 7.1.6 The 2018 DFAT report noted: ‘While state and NGO shelters [also see 7.2 below] for abused women exist, they are only in major cities, are poorly resourced and advertised, and tend to focus on reconciling women with their abusive husbands.’<sup>43</sup>

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## 7.2 Non-Government Organisations (NGOs)

### 7.2.1 The FIS 2015 report stated:

‘Non-governmental organisations have played a major role in running shelters in Iran. However, these shelters are mostly designed for prostitutes and female drug addicts living on the streets. One example of a non-governmental organisation that promotes the rights of children is Iran’s Association of Children’s Rights (Anjoman-e Hemayat az Hoquq-e Kudakan), which runs a few shelters for homeless and ill-treated children

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<sup>39</sup> Suuntaus Project, ‘Violence against women’ (pp. 24-25), June 2015, [url](#)

<sup>40</sup> UN General Assembly, ‘Situation of human rights in Iran’ (para 32), 31 August 2015, [url](#)

<sup>41</sup> UN General Assembly, ‘Situation of human rights in Iran’ (para 59), September 2016, [url](#)

<sup>42</sup> Danish report (p. 28), February 2018, [url](#)

<sup>43</sup> DFAT report, Iran, June 2018 (p. 33), [url](#)



and teenagers. However, these shelters are not able to accommodate all those in need.<sup>44</sup>

- 7.2.2 The OMID Foundation was set up to help young women in Iran who are victims of sexual, physical or mental abuse. The OMID foundation webpage states that they started with:

‘[...] a small group of 15 women, OMID now caters to more than 200 women at any one time. OMID centers take the best teachers and psychologists in Tehran to provide therapy and education for over 200 girls at any one time. Close to 200 young women are enrolled in the three-year OMID program during the day time. After classes they return home. For those who have run away from abusive families or been abandoned, home is the OMID shelter, a local authority home or by themselves.’<sup>45</sup>

- 7.2.3 In an interview with the Danish Refugee Council and Danish Immigration Service, Middle East Consultancy Services noted: ‘Existing shelters are provided by NGOs and government bodies. Furthermore, they are rare in rural areas.’<sup>46</sup>

- 7.2.4 The Danish mission also interviewed a Western Embassy (unspecified), which noted:

‘There are some shelters for abused women in Tehran, but the source had no knowledge of shelters in the countryside. Most of them provide protection for prostitutes, drug victims and LGBTI [Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Intersex] persons who have been abused. These shelters are tolerated and sometimes even supported by the government, in the sense that police officers may bring girls belonging to one of the mentioned categories to the shelters, after picking them up in the street. It is not known if any of these centres are funded by the government, but there seems to be a kind of tacit agreement that police officers refer victims of crimes to the centres...

‘The facilities provided by such shelters would mainly be a bed and a warm meal. However, there are also some local organisations working with education and training of women in the shelters, to give them some skills before they are sent back into the streets.’<sup>47</sup>

- 7.2.5 The Danish 2018 report also noted: ‘Asked about shelters for women who need protection, the Dep. Director General [of the High Council for Human Rights and Judicial Cooperation, Iran] explained that there are welfare organizations under the municipalities which support women who are victims of violence.’<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Suuntaus Project, ‘Violence against women’ (p. 25), June 2015, [url](#)

<sup>45</sup> OMID Foundation, ‘About us’, undated, [url](#)

<sup>46</sup> Danish report (p. 28), February 2018, [url](#)

<sup>47</sup> Danish report (pp. 16-17), February 2018, [url](#)

<sup>48</sup> Danish report (p. 25), February 2018, [url](#)

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# Terms of reference

A 'Terms of Reference' (ToR) is a broad outline of what the CPIN seeks to cover. They form the basis for the [country information section](#). The Home Office's Country Policy and Information Team uses some standardised ToRs, depending on the subject, and these are then adapted depending on the country concerned.

For this particular CPIN, the following topics were identified prior to drafting as relevant and on which research was undertaken:

- Legislation and Government initiatives
  - Legislation
  - Government initiatives
- Prevalence of domestic violence
- State treatment
  - Attitudes
  - Protection
  - Avenues of redress
- Societal attitudes
- State and non-state support groups and shelters
  - State support groups
  - Non-Government Organisations (NGOs)

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# Version control

## Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **2.0**
- valid from **September 2018**

## Changes from last version of this note

Changes to the template; new standard paragraphs in the guidance; updated COI (post July 2017)

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