

Rights of the Child in Iran

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Alternative Report on the Implementation of the Convention
on the Rights of the Child in the Islamic Republic of Iran

Iran Human Rights Documentation Center

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Executive Summary

This alternative report is submitted to assist the Committee on the Rights of the Child (“the Committee”) in its review of the Islamic Republic of Iran’s compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (“CRC” or “the Convention”). Prepared by the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (“IHRDC”), this submission provides an independent assessment of persistent and emerging child rights concerns, based on an analysis of the State party’s official periodic report as well as IHRDC’s own documentation and observations.

The issues addressed are organized according to the thematic clusters established under the CRC. Through this structure, the report identifies significant gaps between the State party’s legal obligations and the lived realities of children in Iran.

Although Iran ratified the CRC in 1994, it maintains a sweeping reservation that subordinates its implementation to Islamic law. This reservation, coupled with systemic legislative and institutional shortcomings, continues to undermine the Convention’s core protections. Iran has not yet established an independent National Human Rights Institution (“NHRI”) in accordance with the Paris Principles and has failed to ratify the Third Optional Protocol on a Communications Procedure, thereby denying children access to international redress mechanisms.

Despite certain positive developments—such as expanded access to education, improved child health indicators, and the adoption of the 2020 Child and Adolescent Protection Act—the overall legal and institutional framework remains misaligned with the CRC. The following thematic areas highlight key discrepancies between Iran’s obligations and current practices:

1. General Measures of Implementation

- The CRC’s domestic applicability remains limited by Iran’s reservation and inconsistent application across legal codes.
- The Ministry of Justice, serving as the National Body for the Convention on the Rights of the Child (“NBCRC”), lacks the requisite independence, investigatory powers, and enforcement authority necessary to effectively coordinate and monitor the implementation of the CRC at the national level.
- No independent ombudsperson or NHRI exists to address child rights violations.

1. Definition of the Child

- Iranian law defines the age of majority based on puberty: 9 lunar years (~8.7 solar years) for girls and 15 for boys.
- This permits early child marriage, criminal liability, and corporal punishment, in direct violation of the CRC’s definition of a child as any person under 18.

2. General Principles

- Iran’s legal and policy framework continues to allow serious violations of children’s rights to life and security, particularly in cases of so-called “honor killings.”
- Discrimination based on gender, birth status, and sexual orientation remains entrenched.

- The principle of the “best interests of the child” is not consistently applied in judicial or administrative decisions.
- Children’s right to be heard in legal proceedings is largely unrecognized and unsupported.

3. Civil Rights and Freedoms

- Children in Iran face sweeping restrictions on their rights to freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly, and access to information, as evidenced during the nationwide protests in November 2019 and 2022.
- Vaguely defined offenses such as “membership in an illegal organization,” “participation in an illegal gathering,” “propaganda against the state,” “insulting Islam,” “espionage,” and “cooperation with hostile countries” carry severe penalties—including imprisonment, flogging, and the death penalty—for children who have reached the legal age of criminal responsibility.

4. Family Environment and Alternative Care

- Fathers or paternal grandfathers retain dominant legal authority over children, including in custody and guardianship matters.
- Children born out of wedlock face legal and bureaucratic barriers to birth registration.
- Although the 2020 Child Protection Act expanded state intervention powers, it failed to prohibit corporal punishment or address family-based violence, which remain legal under Article 1179 of the Civil Code.

5. Basic Health and Welfare

- Children in Iran continue to suffer deaths, injuries, and long-term disabilities from landmines and unexploded ordnance in the western border provinces, despite clearance efforts.
- Children born to undocumented parents or outside of marriage face barriers to healthcare.
- Female genital mutilation (FGM), though not widespread across the country, persists in specific provinces; while the Islamic Penal Code criminalizes all forms of harm and injury to female sexual organs, it provides for only half the full amount of *diya* (blood money) awarded to male victims in cases involving the cutting or destruction of sexual organs.

6. Education, Leisure, and Cultural Activities

- Constitutional guarantees of free education are undermined by discriminatory policies excluding married girls, undocumented children, and linguistic minorities.
- Mother-tongue instruction for major ethnic groups like Kurds and Azeris remains unavailable, and community-led efforts to offer such programs have been met with state repression, including closures and arrests.
- Politically sensitive child protection topics are excluded from the national curriculum, and reproductive health education remains highly restricted.

7. Special Protection Measures

a. Child Marriage

- Legal minimum age: 13 for girls and 15 for boys (lunar years), with judicial discretion to permit even younger marriages.
- Tens of thousands of underage marriages are registered annually, often leading to school dropout and early motherhood.
- Legislative reform efforts remain blocked by the Guardian Council despite broad societal concern.

b. Juvenile Justice

- Minimum age of criminal responsibility remains 9 for girls and 15 for boys.
- Capital punishment continues to be imposed for serious offenses committed by children, often following unfair trials and allegations of torture.
- Although some provisions for life imprisonment of juveniles have been removed, the sentence remains applicable for crimes such as *moharebeh* (waging war against God) and third-time theft.
- Article 91 of the 2013 Islamic Penal Code grants judges discretion to reduce sentences for minors, but its application is inconsistent and lacks transparency.
- Juvenile courts do not have jurisdiction over serious or sexual crimes, which are tried in general courts. Neither system consistently upholds the best interests of the child or mandates sentence mitigation. Access to legal counsel is frequently delayed or denied, especially in serious cases. While boys are generally held separately in major cities, girls outside Tehran are often detained alongside adults. Detention centers operate more like prisons than rehabilitative facilities.

c. Child Labor

- The legal employment age is 15, but enforcement is weak, and many younger children work in hazardous, informal sectors.
- Exemptions for small businesses undermine labor protections, while poverty and lack of schooling drive child labor rates.

d. Protection from Torture and Abuse

- Torture and ill-treatment of children, particularly in detention, are widespread and documented, including beatings and sexual abuse.
- Iran has not ratified the Convention Against Torture (“CAT”).
- Existing laws, such as Article 301 the Islamic Penal Code, continue to grant impunity for family-based violence, including lethal abuse by fathers or guardians.

Key Recommendations

In accordance with Iran’s obligations under the CRC, and in light of persistent legal, institutional, and operational gaps, IHRDC respectfully urges the Committee to recommend that the Islamic Republic of Iran:

- Withdraw the general reservation to the CRC to ensure full and unrestricted implementation of the Convention's provisions;
- Raise the minimum legal age of marriage and criminal responsibility to 18 years, without exception, in line with international standards;
- Prohibit the death penalty and all forms of corporal punishment for children, including in judicial proceedings, the home, schools, and alternative care settings;
- Amend Article 301 of the Islamic Penal Code to ensure equal protection for all children from violence, regardless of the perpetrator's relationship to the child;
- Ratify the Convention Against Torture and adopt comprehensive legislation to prohibit all forms of torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment;
- Ensure inclusive and non-discriminatory access to education for all children, including married, undocumented, refugee, asylum-seeking, and disabled children;
- Expand and adequately fund national child protection systems, ensuring clear mandates, inter-agency coordination, and effective enforcement mechanisms;
- Establish an independent Child Rights Ombudsperson with statutory authority to receive complaints, investigate violations, and ensure accountability;
- Institutionalize inter-agency coordination across child-related sectors to enhance integrated planning, service delivery, and oversight;
- Implement unified and standardized data collection systems, and ensure regular data sharing to support evidence-based policy and programming;
- Build the capacity of local authorities and frontline workers through ongoing training in child rights, case management, and regulatory compliance;
- Integrate community engagement in all phases of child-focused programming, and establish effective and accessible grievance mechanisms;
- Mainstream disaster risk reduction strategies across all child-related interventions and adopt regularly updated emergency preparedness and response plans;
- Secure sustainable and diversified financing for child rights initiatives, including through public funding, international cooperation, and private sector partnerships;
- Establish robust monitoring and evaluation systems, aligned with national standards and subject to regular independent audits and public reporting to ensure transparency and accountability.

Introduction

Despite having ratified the CRC in 1994, Iran maintains a sweeping reservation that the Convention's provisions will not apply when deemed incompatible with Islamic law. This broad exception fundamentally undermines the CRC's core protections and has enabled the preservation of laws and practices that contradict its principles—particularly in areas such as child marriage, juvenile justice, and corporal punishment. The CRC's legal status within Iran's domestic framework remains unclear, with its implementation often subordinated to Islamic criteria as interpreted by unelected bodies, including the Guardian Council.

Iran's dual commitments to international and regional human rights frameworks further complicate its obligations under the CRC. As a member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Iran continues to endorse the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam and the OIC Covenant on the Rights of the Child in Islam—documents that emphasize religious principles over universal human rights norms. These frameworks often diverge significantly from the standards set forth in the CRC, particularly with regard to non-discrimination, equality before the law, and the best interests of the child.

This alternative report critically examines the legal, institutional, and practical dimensions of children's rights in Iran. It is based on a combination of primary and secondary sources, including legal documents, government publications, and the findings of both international and domestic human rights organizations. The analysis draws extensively from the periodic reviews and Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, offering authoritative insights into Iran's compliance with its obligations. Additionally, research and documentation by NGOs such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and IHRDC provide invaluable accounts of the lived experiences of children in Iran, illustrating the gap between Iran's legal commitments and practical realities.

Furthermore, a review of recent domestic legal reforms, along with the broader socio-political climate, provides essential context for understanding the ongoing challenges to advancing children's rights in a system where religious and political considerations heavily shape legal and policy outcomes.

Key concerns addressed in this report include:

- **Discriminatory legal definitions of childhood**, including the minimum age of criminal responsibility set at 9 lunar years for girls and 15 for boys.
- **The continued use of capital and corporal punishment** for offenses committed by children, in violation of Article 37 of the CRC.
- **Lack of an independent national human rights institution**, and the limited role and capacity of the National Body for the CRC under the Ministry of Justice.
- **Persistent violations**, such as child marriage, child labor, and the inadequate protection of vulnerable groups including street children, Afghan refugee minors, and unaccompanied children.
- **Denial of civil and political rights**, including restrictions on freedom of expression, religion, access to information, and the right of the child to be heard under Article 12.

- **Credible reports of torture, ill-treatment, and excessive use of force**, including lethal violence against children during 2022 protests.

I. General Measures of Implementation

A. Status of the Convention in Domestic Law

Under Article 9 of Iran’s Civil Code, international treaties ratified by the Islamic Consultative Assembly, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, are deemed to have the force of law and are theoretically binding on domestic courts and public institutions.¹ However, upon ratifying the CRC in 1994, the Islamic Republic of Iran entered a sweeping reservation stating that it “reserves the right not to apply any provisions or articles of the Convention that are incompatible with Islamic laws and the internal legislation in effect.”²

This reservation is explicitly reflected in the domestic enabling legislation, which adopts the Convention only insofar as its content does not contradict national laws or Islamic standards.³ As a result, the CRC is not granted normative supremacy over conflicting domestic provisions and is applied selectively, subject to uncodified and variably interpreted religious criteria.

In practice, this reservation severely restricts the enforceability of the CRC in Iran’s legal system. Judges frequently decline to apply CRC provisions when national laws provide otherwise. Consequently, key principles of the Convention—such as non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, and the prohibition of cruel and inhuman punishment—are routinely undermined in judicial decision-making.

The scope and vagueness of Iran’s reservation have drawn repeated concern from the Committee and other UN bodies. The reservation fails to meet the standard of specificity and compatibility required under Article 51 of the Convention and Article 19 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties.⁴ Its blanket nature undermines the object and purpose of the CRC. Despite recommendations from the Committee in previous reviews, the Islamic Republic of Iran has not taken steps to withdraw or narrow the reservation. As such, the State continues to fall short of its obligations under Article 4 of the CRC, which requires States Parties to undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative, and other measures for the realization of the rights recognized in the Convention.

B. National Human Rights Institution

Iran currently lacks an independent National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) that meets the standards set out in the Paris Principles.⁵ The High Council for Human Rights, often mistakenly

¹ CIVIL CODE OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN, art. 9 (1981, amended 1991 & 2006), <https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/1928/en/102142> [hereinafter CIV. CODE].

² Reservation of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Jul. 13, 1994), <http://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/unts/volume%201788/volume-1788-a-27531-english.pdf>.

³ LAW ALLOWING ACCESSION OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN TO THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD (Feb. 20, 1994), <http://rc.majlis.ir/fa/law/show/92374>.

⁴ Convention on the Rights of the Child, art. 51, Nov. 20, 1989, 1577 U.N.T.S. 3 [hereinafter CRC Convention]; Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, art. 19, May 23, 1969, 1155 U.N.T.S. 331.

⁵ G.A. Res. 48/134, U.N. GAOR, 48th Sess., Supp. No. 49, at 208, U.N. Doc. A/48/49 (Dec. 20, 1993).

identified as an NHRI, is in fact a governmental body operating under the judiciary.⁶ It does not possess the legal authority or structural independence required to investigate individual complaints—particularly those submitted by or on behalf of children—and its primary function is to represent the State’s position in international human rights fora.

The absence of an independent NHRI significantly impairs children’s access to remedies for rights violations and limits the domestic oversight of Iran’s compliance with its CRC obligations.

C. National Body on the CRC

In 2012, the government of Iran established the National Body on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (“NBCRC”). The NBCRC is mandated to coordinate among government agencies, review draft legislation, monitor child rights violations, and promote public awareness of the CRC. It operates under the supervision of the Ministry of Justice.⁷

While the NBCRC’s establishment is a positive institutional development, the body lacks independence, investigatory authority, and the power to compel legal or policy reform. Its role is primarily advisory and its impact on legislative or judicial processes remains limited.⁸ The NBCRC is therefore unable to function as an effective implementation or accountability mechanism in line with Article 4 of the CRC.

D. Access to International Complaints Mechanisms

Children in Iran do not currently have access to international complaint mechanisms. The Islamic Republic of Iran has not ratified the Third Optional Protocol to the CRC on a Communications Procedure, nor has it accepted individual complaint mechanisms under other core human rights treaties to which it is a party. As a result, no international body is empowered to receive or adjudicate individual complaints involving children’s rights violations committed by the State.⁹

This absence of access to international remedies significantly weakens accountability and undermines the ability of children in Iran to seek justice for violations of their rights under the CRC.

II. Definition of the Child

The definition of a “child” under Iranian law diverges significantly from the standard set forth in Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which defines a child as any person under the age of 18.¹⁰ Iran’s Civil and Penal Codes instead rely on puberty-based definitions rooted in Islamic jurisprudence, which result in significantly lower thresholds for legal adulthood.

⁶ *Kazemi Outlined the Latest Actions and Achievements of the National Body for the Rights of the Child*, MIZAN (Mar. 5, 2025), <https://www.mizanonline.ir/fa/amp/news/4824158>.

⁷ BYLAW FOR THE NATIONAL BODY ON THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD, arts. 1, 2, 4 (Jan. 10, 2012), <http://rc.majlis.ir/fa/law/show/808437>.

⁸ *Id.* art. 1(p). See also MIZAN, *supra* note 6.

⁹ U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Status of Ratifications Interactive Dashboard*, <http://indicators.ohchr.org> (last visited June 30, 2025).

¹⁰ CRC Convention, art. 1.

According to Note 1 of Article 1210 of Iran’s Civil Code (1981), the age of maturity is defined as fifteen lunar years for boys and nine lunar years for girls.¹¹ Article 147 of the 2013 Islamic Penal Code reiterates this distinction, stating that the age of criminal responsibility aligns with the onset of puberty—nine lunar years for girls and fifteen lunar years for boys.¹² Article 146 provides that minors do not bear criminal responsibility; however, given the puberty-based standard, this protection ceases once a child reaches the prescribed age of maturity.¹³

Because lunar years are approximately 11 to 12 days shorter than solar years, the actual age at which a child may be deemed legally responsible is even younger when calculated by the solar calendar commonly used in Iran for most civil matters. Consequently, girls may be held criminally liable from as early as eight and a half solar years, and boys from just under fifteen solar years.

Accordingly, any child who has reached these puberty thresholds is considered an adult under Iranian law and no longer benefits from the special protections afforded to children under domestic legislation. This definition creates a significant gap between Iran’s obligations under the CRC and the practical legal safeguards available to persons under the age of 18. The result is that children, especially girls, may be subject to criminal prosecution, corporal punishment, and even capital punishment despite the protections guaranteed under international law.

While the Civil and Penal Codes dictate foundational legal concepts regarding childhood and adulthood, other areas of Iranian law apply inconsistent age thresholds for access to rights and responsibilities. For instance:

- The legal age to obtain a passport and to own property is 18;¹⁴
- The voting age is 18;¹⁵
- The minimum legal age for marriage is 15 for boys and 13 for girls, though judges may authorize earlier marriages;¹⁶
- The National Body on the Convention on the Rights of the Child defines its jurisdiction as applying to individuals under the age of 18, in line with the CRC.¹⁷

These inconsistencies contribute to legal ambiguity and discriminatory application of rights and protections. The use of differing legal standards across sectors weakens the coherence of child protection mechanisms and undermines Iran’s ability to implement a unified child rights framework as required under the Convention.

¹¹ CIV. CODE, art. 1210 n.1.

¹² ISLAMIC PENAL CODE OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN, art. 147 (2013), <https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/1991/fa/115464> [hereinafter CRIM. CODE].

¹³ *Id.* art. 146.

¹⁴ IRAN’S PASSPORT LAW, art. 18(1), (1973, amended 1979 and 1983), <https://rc.majlis.ir/fa/law/show/96904>. See also *What is the Legal Age for Registering Property Ownership?*, ILNA (May 28, 2022), [سن قانونی برای سند زدن ملک از چند سالگی است؟](https://www.ilna.com/سن قانونی برای سند زدن ملک از چند سالگی است؟)

¹⁵ *Country Election Headquarters Announcement No. 25: The Voting Age Must be Eighteen Full Years*, IRNA (Mr. 2, 2024), <https://www.irna.ir/news/85403436>.

¹⁶ CIV. CODE, art. 1041.

¹⁷ LAW ALLOWING ACCESSION OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN TO THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD, art. 1.

III. General Principles

A. Article 6 – Right to Life: Juvenile Executions

Iran’s legal and policy framework fails to uphold the child’s inherent right to life, as guaranteed under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. One of the most serious and ongoing human rights concerns in Iran is the execution of juvenile offenders—individuals sentenced to death for crimes committed while under the age of 18. This practice constitutes a clear violation of both Article 6 and Article 37(a) of the CRC, which explicitly prohibit the use of capital punishment against children.¹⁸ It also breaches Article 6(5) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (“ICCPR”), to which Iran is a state party without reservation.¹⁹

1. Domestic Legal Framework and International Obligations

Iran’s legal justification for imposing capital punishment on juveniles stems from its interpretation of maturity under Islamic law. The Islamic Penal Code sets the age of criminal responsibility at 15 lunar years (approximately 14.6 solar years) for boys and 9 lunar years (approximately 8.7 solar years) for girls. This standard, codified in Articles 146 and 147 of the 2013 Islamic Penal Code, allows full criminal liability—including capital punishment—for children well below the age of 18, directly contradicting Article 1 of the CRC.²⁰

When ratifying the CRC in 1994, Iran entered a sweeping reservation stating that the Convention would not apply in cases where its provisions conflict with Islamic law. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has repeatedly criticized this reservation for undermining the Convention’s purpose and leaving core rights unenforceable. Furthermore, while Iran has made this reservation to the CRC, it made no such reservation to the ICCPR—creating a legal inconsistency that highlights Iran’s non-compliance with binding international law.

2. Documented Cases and Ongoing Violations

In Iran, the death penalty continues to be imposed on individuals for offenses committed while they were under the age of 18. Data from various human rights organizations confirm the persistence of this practice:

- In 2024, Hengaw documented five additional executions of juvenile offenders in cities such as Miandoab, Shiraz, Kermanshah, Zahedan, and Yazd.²¹
- Amnesty International’s 2023 report confirmed that at least five juvenile offenders were executed, including one who was arrested at 16 and executed within seven months after

¹⁸ CRC Convention, arts. 6, 37(a).

¹⁹ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights art. 6, para. 5, opened for signature Dec. 16, 1966, 999 U.N.T.S. 171 [hereinafter ICCPR].

²⁰ CRIM. CODE, arts. 146, 147.

²¹ *Hengaw’s Statistical Report: 909 Executions in Iran in 2024*, HENGAW (Feb. 16, 2025), [Hengaw’s Statistical Report: 909 Executions in Iran in 2024](#).

a rushed trial. Iranian media misrepresented his age as 18 to obscure the violation of international law.²²

- HRANA reported that between October 2023 and October 2024, at least four more juvenile offenders were executed for crimes committed as minors.²³
- Amnesty International confirmed that in 2018, two juvenile offenders both aged 17 were flogged and secretly executed in Shiraz prison without their families being notified.²⁴

These documented cases clearly disprove repeated official denials by Iranian authorities that juveniles are executed. The continued implementation of death sentences against minors contradicts Iran's international obligations and shows a deliberate disregard for the protections enshrined in the CRC and ICCPR.

3. Judicial Discretion and Ineffective Reforms

Iran's 2013 Penal Code introduced Article 91, which allows judges to assess the "mental maturity" of a juvenile offender at the time of the offense. If the court finds that the individual did not comprehend the nature of the crime or its consequences, an alternative sentence may be applied in lieu of the death penalty.²⁵ While this provision appeared to be a step toward compliance, its implementation has been ineffective. In practice:

- Forensic psychiatric evaluations ordered by the courts frequently conclude that the juvenile was "mature," thereby justifying the death penalty.²⁶
- Judges continue to impose capital punishment, even when Article 91 provides grounds for exemption.²⁷
- In some cases, retrials prompted by age-related concerns have resulted in resentencing juveniles to death, undermining the purpose of the reform.²⁸
- The executions of two boys in 2019 occurred after Article 91 had come into force, highlighting the judiciary's failure to apply discretion meaningfully.²⁹

Different human rights organizations have reported that executions of juvenile offenders have continued steadily, despite this supposed reform.

²² *Iran Executes 853 People in Eight-Year High amid Relentless Repression and Renewed "War on Drugs,"* AMNESTY INT'L (Apr. 4, 2024), [Iran executes 853 people in eight-year high amid repression, 'war on drugs'](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/04/iran-executes-853-people-in-eight-year-high-amid-repression-war-on-drugs/).

²³ *On the Occasion of the World Day Against the Death Penalty; One-Year Report on Executions in Iran 2023–2024*, HRANA (Oct. 8, 2024), <https://www.hra-news.org/periodical/a-174/>.

²⁴ *Iran: Two 17-year-old Boys Flogged and Secretly Executed in Abhorrent Violation of International Law*, AMNESTY INT'L (Apr. 29, 2019), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2019/04/iran-two-17-year-old-boys-flogged-and-secretly-executed-in-abhorrent-violation-of-international-law/>.

²⁵ CRIM. CODE, art. 91.

²⁶ *Iran: 2 Child Offenders Executed; 17-Year-Olds Were 15 When Arrested*, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (May 1, 2019), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/05/01/iran-2-child-offenders-executed>.

²⁷ *Juvenile Executions in Iran; 2020*, IRAN HUMAN RIGHTS (May 3, 2021), <https://iranhr.net/en/articles/4727/>.

²⁸ *Child Offenders Executed in Iran in 2024*, IRAN HUMAN RIGHTS (Feb. 21, 2025), <https://www.iranhr.net/en/articles/7359/>.

²⁹ AMNESTY INT'L, *supra* note 24.

4. Official Denial and Mischaracterization of Responsibility

High-ranking Iranian officials, including the former Head of the Judiciary, have repeatedly claimed that Iran does not execute “children,” insisting that executions only occur after the individual reaches 18. This semantic defense has been explicitly rejected by the CRC Committee and other human rights bodies. Under international law, it is the age at the time of the offense that determines the legality of a death sentence—not the age at execution. Additionally, Iranian authorities claim that in *qisas* (retributive) cases, the execution is not a state decision but a matter of private justice exercised by the victim’s family. However, this defense is legally unconvincing. While the family may choose to forgive or accept *diya* (blood money), the death sentence is issued by the judiciary and carried out by state prison authorities. The responsibility for these executions, therefore, remains with the State.

Iran remains one of the last countries in the world to carry out such executions, placing it in clear violation of international and regional legal standards.

The Committee is urged to recommend that the Islamic Republic of Iran:

Unconditionally abolish the use of the death penalty for all offenses committed by persons under the age of 18, without exception or delay;

Amend Articles 146, 147, and 91 of the Islamic Penal Code to align the definition of childhood and criminal responsibility with the CRC standard of under 18;

Establish an immediate moratorium on all pending executions of juvenile offenders;

Withdraw its broad reservation to the CRC, which undermines the core protections of the Convention;

Ensure transparent judicial oversight, including independent review of all death penalty cases involving alleged juvenile offenders; and

Strengthen protections for due process, including access to legal counsel, forensic assessments free of bias, and mechanisms for clemency or commutation.

B. Article 6 – Right to Life: Domestic Violence and “Honor” Crimes

1. Qisas and Impunity in Cases of Domestic and “Honor” Killings

Iranian criminal law is rooted in the principle of *qisas* (retributive justice), under which violent offenses, including homicide, are treated as private matters. The right to pursue punishment or grant forgiveness lies with the victim’s family—specifically, the closest male relatives. While this system reflects traditional conceptions of justice under Islamic jurisprudence, it creates severe accountability gaps when the perpetrator is a family member, particularly in cases of so-called “honor” killings.

Girls are disproportionately targeted in such cases, often killed by fathers, brothers, or husbands under the pretext of restoring familial “honor.” In many instances, the family either refuses to file a complaint or formally forgives the perpetrator, thereby extinguishing the possibility of *qisas* and reducing or eliminating the criminal penalty.

Of particular concern is Article 301 of the Islamic Penal Code, which exempts fathers and paternal grandfathers from *qisas* if they kill their children.³⁰ Instead, these offenders face only discretionary *ta'zir* punishments, typically three to ten years of imprisonment—often further reduced in practice.³¹ This provision institutionalizes legal leniency for filicide, violating the principles of equal protection, non-discrimination, and the child’s right to life under Articles 2 and 6 of the CRC.³²

Two high-profile cases underscore the consequences of this legal framework:

- In May 2020, a 14-year-old girl was murdered by her father in an “honor” killing in Gilan Province. She had run away with a 28-year-old man who had groomed her. Despite her explicit warnings that she feared her father, authorities returned her to the family home. Shortly afterward, her father beheaded her with a sickle while she slept. He received a sentence of just nine years in prison, the maximum under Article 301. Reports indicate that he was fully aware he would not face capital punishment due to his legal status as her guardian. The case sparked national outrage and highlighted the state’s failure to protect children at risk, particularly girls in patriarchal households.³³
- In February 2022, a 17-year-old girl from Khuzestan Province was beheaded by her husband, to whom she had been married at the age of 12. He then paraded her severed head in public—a crime that was captured on video and widely circulated. The victim had endured years of domestic violence and was ultimately murdered while attempting to escape. Her husband was later sentenced to seven and a half years in prison.³⁴

These cases are not isolated incidents but emblematic of structural failures in Iran’s legal system. They illustrate how laws rooted in patriarchal interpretations of Islamic jurisprudence enable and legitimize gender-based violence, particularly against girls and young women.

2. Inadequate Implementation of Protective Legislation

The 2003 Law on the Protection of Children and Adolescents authorizes state authorities to act as plaintiffs in cases where the perpetrator of violence is a family member.³⁵ However, in practice, this law remains largely unenforced. According to official judicial sources, no cases

³⁰ CRIM. CODE, art. 301.

³¹ CRIM. CODE, arts. 301, 612.

³² CRC Convention, arts. 2, 6.

³³ Patrick Wintour, *Outcry in Iran at Nine-year Sentence for Man Who Beheaded Daughter*, THE GUARDIAN (Aug. 28, 2020), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/aug/28/outcry-in-iran-at-nine-year-sentence-for-man-who-beheaded-daughter>.

³⁴ *Beheading of Mona Heydari by Her Husband; the Primary Defendant Was Sentenced to Seven and a Half Years in Prison*, BBC PERSIAN (Jan. 18, 2023), <https://www.bbc.com/persian/news/iran-61844444>; *قتل مونا حیدری توسط همسرش؛ متهم اول به ۷ سال زندان محکوم شد* - BBC News فارسی.

³⁵ LAW ON THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS (2003), <https://rc.majlis.ir/fa/law/show/93849>.

have been successfully prosecuted under this provision, leaving children—especially those facing abuse within the home—without meaningful state protection.³⁶

3. Procedural Barriers for Child Victims of Abuse

Legal barriers further impede access to justice for child victims of domestic abuse. Under Iranian law, children under the age of 15 or those who have not reached puberty are not permitted to file criminal complaints independently. In such cases, only the legal guardian—often the very person committing the abuse—may act as plaintiff. This procedural structure prevents many child victims from reporting violence and reinforces systemic impunity for perpetrators within the family. This framework violates core principles of the CRC, including the right to be heard (Article 12), the right to protection from violence (Article 19), and the right to equal access to justice.³⁷

The Committee is urged to recommend that the Islamic Republic of Iran:

Repeal all laws that allow impunity or reduced sentences for intra-family violence, including so-called “honor” crimes;

Ensure full criminal accountability for all perpetrators of violence against children, regardless of familial relationship;

Eliminate discriminatory provisions that grant lesser penalties for crimes such as filicide by fathers or grandfathers;

Revise or withdraw the State’s reservation to the CRC, which undermines protections under Article 6; and

Train judicial and law enforcement officials on upholding children’s right to life and equal protection under the law.

C. Article 6 – Right to Life: Exposure to Landmines

Children in Iran’s western provinces—particularly in border regions of Kurdistan, Kermanshah, and Khuzestan—remain at risk of death or serious injury due to the widespread presence of uncleared landmines.³⁸ This ongoing threat highlights the State’s failure to uphold its obligation under Article 6(2) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child to ensure the survival and development of every child.³⁹

³⁶ *The Law on the Protection of Children and Adolescents Has Been Left Unimplemented Due to Lack of Allocated Funding and Bylaws*, ILNA (Apr. 29, 2024), [قانون حمایت از اطفال و نوجوانان به دلیل عدم تخصیص اعتبار و عدم نگارش آیین نامه معطل مانده است](#).

³⁷ CRC Convention, arts. 12, 19.

³⁸ *Hengaw’s 2023 Report: 27 Individual Casualties from Mine Explosions*, HENGAW (Jan. 9, 2024), <https://hengaw.net/en/news/archive/63786>. See also *Hengaw releases statistical report on 57 mine victims in Iran in 2024*, HENGAW (Apr. 4, 2025), <https://hengaw.net/en/reports-and-statistics-1/2025/04/article-4>.

³⁹ CRC Convention, arts. 6, (2).

Government efforts to support and rehabilitate child victims of landmines remain inadequate, as no comprehensive plan or central coordinating body exists to oversee assistance for all landmine victims. Under current law, only those recognized as “veterans” by a special commission are eligible for meaningful state support. Others may receive minimal allowances from governmental charities, but only with the commission’s approval. The process lacks an appeals mechanism, leaving victims without any recourse against unilateral decisions.

Furthermore, children disabled by landmines face significant challenges, including high medical costs and limited access to necessary treatments such as physical, psychological, and other therapies. The prolonged investigation process leaves victims without financial support to cover medical or other costs while awaiting a decision. Even if the decision is favourable, assistance is not retroactive, and costs incurred before the ruling are not reimbursed.

Post-conflict safety measures are essential to restore and protect the rights of children in affected areas, particularly where landmines still pose a threat to their safety. There must be investment in the complete clearance of landmines and cluster bombs to safeguard children’s well-being and ensure they can access the care they need.

D. Article 12 – Right to Be Heard

Several Iranian laws and policies restrict children’s right to be heard, in contradiction to the standards set forth in the Committee’s General Comment No. 12 on Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.⁴⁰ Children in Iran face significant limitations on their right to free expression, and in practice, they are deprived of independent access to courts and judicial proceedings. These restrictions undermine the ability of children to meaningfully participate in decisions affecting their lives, including in legal, administrative, and educational settings.

E. Article 2 – Non-Discrimination

1. Systemic Gender Discrimination

Gender-based discrimination remains entrenched across Iran’s legal and institutional frameworks, affecting virtually all aspects of children’s lives—particularly those of girls. Iran’s laws and policies violate Article 2 of the CRC, which guarantees non-discrimination on the basis of sex, and systematically deny girls equal rights in areas such as education, criminal justice, health, family law, and civil status.⁴¹

A key example is the discriminatory legal definition of childhood. Under the Islamic Penal Code and Civil Code, the age of maturity is set at 9 lunar years for girls and 15 lunar years for boys, resulting in girls losing access to protective legal frameworks far earlier than boys. This disparity exposes girls to early marriage, criminal prosecution, and other adult obligations—contravening Article 1 of the CRC and its commitment to equal childhood protections for all individuals under 18.⁴²

⁴⁰ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 12: The Right of the Child to Be Heard, CRC/C/GC/12 (Jul. 1, 2009), <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/AdvanceVersions/CRC-C-GC-12.pdf>.

⁴¹ CRC Convention, art. 2.

⁴² *Id.* art. 1.

Although Articles 20 and 21 of Iran’s Constitution guarantee equal rights for men and women, these rights are conditioned upon compliance with “Islamic criteria.”⁴³ This clause has served as the legal basis for the continuation of gender-discriminatory laws.

2. Inequality in Family and Criminal Law

Under Article 907 of the Civil Code, daughters inherit half the share of sons. Article 911 reinforces this bias by applying the same logic to grandchildren, leading to consistent gender-based inequities across generations.⁴⁴

Article 550 of the Penal Code provides that the *diya* (blood money) for murdering a woman is half that of a man.⁴⁵ Although a state compensation fund may supplement the disparity in death cases, it does not apply to non-lethal injury, and the financial burden is shifted to the state rather than the perpetrator.

With criminal liability beginning at 9 lunar years for girls and 15 for boys, girls are subject to harsher sentences, including flogging or capital punishment, at a younger age. This violates Articles 2 and 37 of the CRC, which prohibit discrimination and cruel or degrading punishment.

3. Discrimination Against Children Born Outside Recognized Marriages or Religions

Children born outside of legally recognized marriages, or to parents whose religion is not acknowledged under Iranian law, are subjected to legal and institutional discrimination. They may be denied equal protection under *qisas* provisions in criminal cases, especially in matters of inheritance or *diya* (blood money). These children are often labeled as “illegitimate” and face limited legal standing in court, including in cases involving violent crimes or family law disputes.⁴⁶

This discrimination disproportionately affects children born to unrecognized religious minorities, such as Bahá’ís, whose faith is excluded from the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. As a result, these children are excluded from legal protections afforded to those from constitutionally recognized faiths (Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism), particularly in the justice system.⁴⁷

These practices violate the non-discrimination guarantee of Article 2 and the right to life and legal protection under Article 6 of the CRC.⁴⁸ By making a child’s rights contingent upon their parentage or religious classification, Iran maintains a two-tiered system that is inconsistent with international child rights standards.

⁴³ CONSTITUTION OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN, arts. 20, 21 (1979, amended 1989).

⁴⁴ CIV. CODE, arts. 907, 911.

⁴⁵ CRIM. CODE, art. 550.

⁴⁶ CIV. CODE, art. 1167. *See also* Sarbas Nazari, *Iran: The Painful Choices of Being Pregnant and Unmarried*, BBC (Oct. 23, 2021), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-58957045>.

⁴⁷ *The Boot on My Neck; Iranian Authorities’ Crime of Persecution Against Baha’is in Iran*, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (Apr. 1, 2024), “The Boot on My Neck”: Iranian Authorities’ Crime of Persecution Against Baha’is in Iran | HRW.

⁴⁸ CRC Convention, arts. 2, 6.

Additionally, the “best interests of the child” is not recognized as a guiding or primary legal principle in Iranian family or criminal law, despite its centrality in Article 3 of the CRC.⁴⁹ Legal frameworks often prioritize paternal authority or religious criteria over the welfare and autonomy of the child.

4. Discrimination Against LGBTQ+ Children in Iran

LGBTQ+ children in Iran face widespread and intersecting forms of discrimination under criminal law, in education, media, and at home. The Penal Code criminalizes same-sex conduct, with punishments ranging from lashes to the death penalty, and fails to distinguish between consensual and non-consensual acts—placing LGBTQ+ youth, including survivors of assault, at severe risk.⁵⁰

Due to Iran’s low age of criminal responsibility (9 for girls, 15 for boys), minors may face capital punishment or flogging for same-sex conduct. At least two child executions related to such charges have been documented.⁵¹

Article 302(a) of the Penal Code further enables impunity for homophobic murders, allowing reduced sentences if the victim is accused of engaging in same-sex acts.⁵² Simultaneously, state censorship restricts access to accurate information about sexual orientation and gender identity, in violation of Article 17 of the CRC.⁵³

LGBTQ+ youth also endure domestic and school-based abuse, often unreported due to fear of legal reprisals. Reports reveal that teachers and administrators may participate in or ignore violence, and victims are frequently denied protection or support. These conditions violate Articles 19, 34, and 39 of the CRC, which guarantee protection from violence, abuse, and neglect, and the right to recovery and reintegration.⁵⁴

The Committee is urged to recommend that the Islamic Republic of Iran:

Revise the Civil and Penal Codes to eliminate all gender-based and status-based legal distinctions, in line with Articles 1, 2, 3, and 6 of the CRC;

Abolish the legal classification of “illegitimacy” and ensure equal legal protections for all children, regardless of parentage or religious affiliation;

Decriminalize same-sex relations and gender nonconformity, and protect LGBTQ+ children from violence, prosecution, and institutional discrimination;

Repeal Article 302(a) and all legal provisions that allow or justify impunity for gender- or sexuality-based violence;

⁴⁹ *Id.* art. 3

⁵⁰ CRIM. CODE, arts. 233, 235, 237, 239.

⁵¹ AMNESTY INT’L, *supra* note 24.

⁵² CRIM. CODE, art. 302(a).

⁵³ CRC Convention, art. 17.

⁵⁴ *Id.* arts. 19, 34, 29.

Guarantee equal access to information about sexual orientation, gender identity, and bodily autonomy under Article 17 of the CRC; and

Train educators, legal professionals, and law enforcement to respond appropriately to violence and discrimination based on gender, religion, or sexual orientation.

IV. Civil Rights and Freedoms

A. Article 17 - Restrictions on Access to Information

Children and adolescents in Iran face serious obstacles in accessing accurate, diverse, and age-appropriate information, in violation of Article 17 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which affirms their right to receive information from a variety of national and international sources.

Access to digital communication platforms is limited. In addition to nationwide internet shutdowns—notably during the protests of November 2019 and 2022, and again during the conflict with Israel in 2025—Iranian Internet service providers are required to artificially limit bandwidth unless specifically authorized by the government. As a result, Iran consistently ranks among countries with the slowest internet speeds in the region, significantly impeding children’s access to online education, information, and platforms for expression or social engagement.

Censorship in mainstream media further restricts access. Content is tightly controlled by the state and filtered through ideological criteria, curtailing open discussion of political, social, and human rights issues. Journalists and media professionals, both within and outside the country, are subject to government intimidation and surveillance, further narrowing the space for independent reporting. These practices collectively deepen the information vacuum faced by Iranian children and adolescents, limiting their development and civic participation in contravention of their rights under the CRC.

B. Multiple Articles - Corporal Punishment

Iran’s Penal Code authorizes flogging for numerous offenses, including alcohol consumption, consensual sexual activity, theft, and insulting public officials—constituting a violation of Articles 19 and 37(a) of the CRC, which prohibit torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.⁵⁵

Under Iran’s legal definition of criminal responsibility—9 lunar years for girls and 15 for boys—children may be subjected to flogging. Although the 2013 Penal Code introduced limited judicial discretion to mitigate such sentences, the extent of its implementation remains unclear.

Flogging is also imposed for expression-related offenses, such as “insulting authorities” or “wearing un-Islamic clothing,” further violating children’s rights under the CRC.⁵⁶ While prohibited in detention centers, corporal punishment remains legal in homes, schools, and care

⁵⁵ CRIM. CODE, art. 265, 221-236.

⁵⁶ *Id.* arts. 513, 514, 609.

settings, in contravention of the Committee’s General Comment No. 8 and Iran’s obligation to protect children from all forms of violence.

C. Multiple Articles - Targeted Attacks on Girls’ Education

Between late 2022 and 2023, girls in Iran faced a coordinated wave of attacks aimed at undermining their access to education. In over a hundred reported incidents, schoolgirls experienced symptoms of chemical exposure—including nausea, respiratory distress, and fainting—due to toxic substances released in school environments. The attacks affected dozens of cities and hundreds of students. By February 2023, at least one child, 11-year-old Fatemeh Rezaie, had died under suspicious circumstances, and others were hospitalized in critical condition.⁵⁷

Only in late February 2023 did the Iranian government begin to acknowledge these attacks, when the then Deputy Health Minister publicly admitted they were intentional.⁵⁸ However, state authorities failed to act decisively to identify or prosecute those responsible, and reports emerged of victims’ families being pressured into silence or forced to accept state-aligned narratives. In some cases, families were coerced into denying a link between their children’s deaths and the school attacks. These events triggered widespread public outrage and condemnation by UNICEF and other international organizations.

This campaign of violence against schoolgirls represents a gross violation of Article 28 of the CRC, which guarantees every child the right to education, and Article 19, which obliges states to protect children from all forms of violence. The targeting of girls’ schools—along with the state’s failure to investigate or prevent such acts—also raises concerns under Article 2, prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex.⁵⁹

D. Multiple Articles - Suppression of Student Protest and School Militarization

During the Woman, Life, Freedom movement in 2022, schools became flashpoints of civil unrest as teenage students, especially girls, participated in peaceful acts of protest. These included removing headscarves, chanting slogans, and refusing to comply with state-imposed dress codes. In response, Iranian security forces raided schools, detained students, and in some cases, used excessive force.

By October 2022, at least 23 children had been killed during protest crackdowns.⁶⁰ By the end of the year, many more deaths were reported, the majority caused by live ammunition and metal pellets. School staff were also reportedly coerced into participating in state repression, with cases of teachers and administrators physically abusing students under government pressure.

⁵⁷ *Iran: Millions of schoolgirls at risk of poisoning*, AMNESTY INT’L (Apr. 19, 2023), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/6696/2023/en/>.

⁵⁸ *Iran Deputy Minister Says Poisoning of Schoolgirls ‘Intentional’*, IRAN INT’L (Feb. 26, 2023), <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202302269708>.

⁵⁹ CRC Convention, arts. 2, 19, 28.

⁶⁰ *Iran: At Least 23 Children Killed with Impunity During Brutal Crackdown on Youthful Protests*, AMNESTY INT’L (Oct. 13, 2022), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/10/iran-at-least-23-children-killed-with-impunity-during-brutal-crackdown-on-youthful-protests/>.

These incidents constitute serious violations of Article 15 of the CRC (freedom of association), Article 13 (freedom of expression), and Article 37 (protection from torture, cruel treatment, and unlawful detention).⁶¹ The use of educational institutions as sites of repression directly contradicts the principles of a safe and inclusive learning environment.

E. Multiple Articles - Enforced Disappearance and Arbitrary Detention of Children

Children detained during the Woman, Life, Freedom movement were also subjected to enforced disappearance and arbitrary detention, in violation of several provisions of the CRC. According to documentation by the IHRDC, at least 73 children were killed in connection with the 2022 protests. An open-source investigation by researchers at the University of California, Los Angeles verified 135 child victims who were killed, disappeared or detained and specifically identified eight cases of enforced disappearance of children in the first two months of the uprising.⁶²

In many of these cases, security forces refused to disclose the location of detained minors, denied them access to legal counsel, and prevented family contact—violating Articles 37(b), 37(c), and 37(d) of the CRC.⁶³ Families of victims were often intimidated into remaining silent or pressured into echoing state-sanctioned explanations of the deaths.⁶⁴ The UN Fact-Finding Mission on Iran (“FFMI”) confirmed that the incommunicado detention of children amounted to acts of enforced disappearance, and noted the gender-based nature of the persecution, including against child victims.⁶⁵

These enforced disappearances and killings were often linked to violations of Articles 8, 9, 16, and 37(a) of the CRC, concerning identity, family separation, privacy, and protection from torture and unlawful detention.⁶⁶

While Iran maintains a record of investment in education infrastructure, the recent events underscore a fundamental contradiction: children’s access to education and protection is undermined by state violence and ideological repression. Girls, minority children, and politically active students remain especially vulnerable to targeted attacks, abuse in detention, and denial of legal safeguards.

The Committee is urged to recommend that the Islamic Republic of Iran:

Conduct an independent, transparent investigation into the chemical attacks on girls’ schools and ensure accountability for all perpetrators;

⁶¹ CRC Convention, arts. 13, 15, 37.

⁶² *Disappearances, Deaths, and Denials: An Open Source Investigation into Violations Against Children During the Woman, Life, Freedom Movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, THE DIGITAL INVESTIGATIONS LAB OF UCLA SCH. OF L. (Jan. 2025), <https://humanrights.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/FINAL-Disappearances-Deaths-and-Denials.pdf>.

⁶³ CRC Convention, art. 37.

⁶⁴ THE DIGITAL INVESTIGATIONS LAB OF UCLA SCH. OF L., *supra* note 49.

⁶⁵ Independent Int’l Fact-Finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran, A/HRC/55/67, ¶¶ 47–48 (Mar. 2024), https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4039538?utm_source=chatgpt.com&v=pdf.

⁶⁶ CRC Convention, arts. 8, 9, 16, 37(a).

Ensure that schools are protected environments, free from state or non-state violence, ideological coercion, or militarization;

End the arbitrary detention of minors and guarantee full compliance with Article 37 of the CRC, including the rights to family contact, legal assistance, and protection from torture and ill-treatment;

Explicitly prohibit enforced disappearance of children in law and practice, and hold accountable those responsible for such acts;

Guarantee children’s rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly, and refrain from criminalizing student protest; and

Provide redress and rehabilitation for all child victims of violence, arbitrary detention, or state coercion during the Woman, Life, Freedom movement.

V. Family Environment and Alternative Care

A. Article 3 -Best Interest of Child

While recent reforms to Iran’s child custody laws have moved closer to alignment with Article 3(1) of the CRC, guardianship laws continue to fall short of the best interests principle. Under Article 1169 of the Civil Code, custody is granted to the mother only until the child reaches seven years of age, after which it automatically transfers to the father.⁶⁷ Legal amendments in 2003 introduced judicial discretion to resolve custody disputes based on the child’s best interests.

When children reach the age of legal maturity—9 lunar years for girls and 15 for boys—courts are required to consider their preferences in custody decisions. However, under Iranian law, custody and guardianship are distinct. Even when mothers are awarded custody, guardianship remains with the father or paternal grandfather, unless exceptional circumstances justify its transfer. In most cases, mothers can only obtain guardianship in the absence of male relatives.⁶⁸

This framework fails to prioritize the best interests of the child, particularly in guardianship decisions. Guardians hold significant authority over legal and financial matters, including travel, contract signing, and court access—especially for girls and unmarried women. As such, current laws undermine the child’s autonomy and deviate from the core obligations under Article 3 of the CRC.⁶⁹

VI. Basic Health and Welfare

Iran has made significant progress in reducing child and maternal mortality. The under-five mortality rate declined from 60 per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 12 in 2023, largely due to investments in primary healthcare and the rural “health house” system.⁷⁰ Vaccination coverage

⁶⁷ CIV. CODE, art. 1169.

⁶⁸ *Id.* arts. 1180, 1181, 1183.

⁶⁹ CRC Convention, art.3.

⁷⁰ UNICEF, Iran – Country Profile, <https://data.unicef.org/country/irn/> (last visited June 30, 2025).

for DTP3 and measles exceeds 99%, and polio has been eradicated since the early 2000s.⁷¹ Maternal mortality has also decreased, supported by expanded hospital deliveries and greater access to skilled birth attendants.⁷²

Despite these national achievements, stark disparities in healthcare access persist. Provinces such as Sistan-Baluchestan, Hormozgan, and Kurdistan continue to face severe shortages of medical personnel, facilities, and infrastructure. Although the “Salamat” public insurance scheme has broadened coverage, it historically excluded undocumented and low-income children. Economic sanctions—despite formal exemptions for humanitarian goods—have disrupted medical imports due to banking restrictions, limiting access to essential medications and equipment for children with serious illnesses. Internal mismanagement and corruption have reportedly compounded these challenges.

Malnutrition remains a pressing concern. Nationally, 12% of children under five are acutely malnourished, while 18% of school-aged children are overweight, reflecting a double burden of under- and over-nutrition. In Sistan-Baluchestan Province, widespread food insecurity and inadequate sanitation contribute to high rates of child wasting.⁷³

Children in ethnic minority regions, including Khuzestan and West Azarbaijan provinces, face poorer health outcomes due to long-standing infrastructural neglect and insufficient access to clean water and sanitation. Environmental disasters, such as floods, have further exacerbated these risks.

VII. Education, Leisure, and Cultural Activities

Education is a constitutional right in Iran, with the government mandated to provide free schooling up to the secondary level.⁷⁴ However, significant barriers remain, especially for marginalized groups in rural and ethnic minority areas like Sistan-Baluchestan and Kurdistan provinces.

Key factors contributing to school dropouts include child labor, early marriage, and financial hardship. Early marriage, particularly among girls, is a major cause of dropout rates, as married girls are often excluded from regular schooling and have limited access through night classes or independent exams. In ethnic minority regions, such as Khuzestan and West Azarbaijan provinces, poor infrastructure and limited secondary education opportunities further deepen educational inequalities.

Iran also hosts a large Afghan refugee population. Although a 2015 policy allowed all children, regardless of legal status, to attend school, many undocumented children remain out of school due to fears of deportation and bureaucratic challenges.

While Iran has made strides in literacy and primary school enrolment, the quality of education is influenced by state ideology. Gender segregation is enforced, and girls must wear the *hijab*. The curriculum has been criticized for prioritizing religious and political indoctrination over critical thinking, with limited exposure to diverse perspectives.

⁷¹ *Id.*

⁷² *Id.*

⁷³ *Id.*

⁷⁴ CONSTITUTION OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN, art. 30.

Additionally, indirect costs like transportation and school supplies create further obstacles for low-income families. Although social assistance programs exist, their inconsistent implementation, especially in rural areas like Sistan-Baluchestan Province, hampers access to education and contributes to higher dropout rates.

Children from linguistic minority communities, such as Azari-Turks, Kurds, Arabs, and Balochis, are effectively deprived of the opportunity to learn their mother tongues. Although Article 15 of the Iranian Constitution allows regional and tribal languages in the press, media, and schools, Persian is the only official language of instruction.⁷⁵ No schools offer education in minority languages like Azari-Turkish or Kurdish, and these languages are not used in teaching subjects like literature. Official education materials are exclusively in Persian. While classical Arabic is taught as a religious language, the lack of instruction in the mother tongue is linked to high dropout rates and poor academic performance among children from linguistic minorities.

VIII. Special Protection Measure

B. Child Marriage

Child marriage remains a persistent issue in Iran, with severe implications for the health, education, and overall well-being of girls. Under Iran's Civil Code, the minimum legal age of marriage is set at 13 lunar years for girls and 15 for boys. However, exceptions exist: girls younger than 13 and boys younger than 15 can still marry with judicial consent and the approval of a legal guardian, typically the father. This creates a legal loophole, allowing marriages involving girls as young as 10 or 11.⁷⁶

These provisions are a regression from pre-1979 law, which set the marriage age at 18 for women and 20 for men, later amended to 15 for girls and 18 for boys. Following the 1979 revolution, the legal age was initially reduced to 9 for girls and 15 for boys, later adjusted to 13 and 15, respectively. This shift reflects a reassertion of patriarchal and religious authority over children's rights, particularly girls.

Between March 2017 and March 2018 alone, approximately 35,000 marriages involving girls aged 10–14 were recorded, along with 217 marriages involving girls under 10.⁷⁷ It is believed that these numbers are underreported, particularly in rural areas where informal marriages are common. UNICEF estimates that 17% of Iranian girls are married before the age of 18, with 3% married before 15, often to much older men.⁷⁸

Early marriage is more prevalent in economically disadvantaged and culturally conservative regions, including Sistan-Baluchestan, Khuzestan, and West Azarbaijan provinces. Contributing factors include poverty, lack of education, patriarchal norms, and the legal authority granted to fathers over daughters. Early marriage is often viewed as a financial solution, providing protection or securing household stability.

⁷⁵ CONSTITUTION OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN, art. 15.

⁷⁶ CIV. CODE, art. 1041.

⁷⁷ UNICEF, Iran – Country Profile, <https://data.unicef.org/country/irn/> (last visited June 30, 2025).

⁷⁸ *Id.*

Child marriage has severe consequences for girls, including educational dropout, complications from early pregnancy, and psychological and physical abuse. The Committee on the Rights of the Child highlights these serious consequences, which violate Article 24(3) of the CRC, protecting children's well-being.

Despite limited reforms, Iran's legal framework still permits child marriage. The 2000 amendment to Article 1041 set the minimum marriage age for girls at 13, but judicial consent allows marriages below this age. Efforts to raise the minimum marriage age have been blocked by conservative bodies, despite public recognition of the harms caused by child marriage. Religious and cultural norms often justify the practice, with some clerics claiming that early marriage aligns with Islamic traditions.

Iran's laws conflict with international human rights standards. The CRC mandates a minimum marriage age of 18, with exceptions only in rare circumstances. Iran's continued legal allowances for child marriage violate the CRC and other international rules.

C. Juvenile Justice

Access to justice for children in Iran faces significant legal barriers despite constitutional guarantees. Article 34 of Iran's Constitution ensures access to courts for all citizens, but children under the age of 15 must rely on legal guardians to initiate proceedings.⁷⁹ This creates a challenge, as guardians may have conflicting interests with the child. Legal aid, although guaranteed by Article 35, is not prioritized for children, and there is no specialized system to support children in legal cases.⁸⁰ Furthermore, children under 18 often face significant limitations in accessing legal representation, particularly in pre-trial phases, which can hinder their right to a fair trial.

Iran has introduced a juvenile court system, but it does not adequately prioritize the best interests of the child.⁸¹ Children can still be prosecuted in adult courts for serious offenses, including capital crimes, and pretrial detention for minors is not limited. Reforms allowing children to request legal counsel during investigations are inconsistently applied. In some cases, minors, particularly those facing national security charges or serious offenses, are denied legal representation during trial.

Iran's legal system continues to impose harsh penalties on minors, including the death penalty, flogging, and life sentences without parole. Juvenile offenders are treated under the same legal framework as adults, and judges have discretion in sentencing but no formal mitigations based on age. The use of *qisas* (retributive justice) and *hudood* (Sharia penalties) for minors, including the death penalty, remains concerning. While some reforms, such as allowing judges to mitigate sentences based on mental maturity, have been introduced, they are inconsistently applied.

In addition to these legal challenges, child offenders in Iran are subjected to widespread violations of due process, including torture and coerced confessions. Regarding juvenile detention, while boys under 18 are generally detained separately from adults, there are significant gaps. Juvenile offenders in smaller cities are often transferred to larger cities for detention, but during investigations, children and adults can be jailed together, violating their

⁷⁹ CONSTITUTION OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN, art. 34.

⁸⁰ *Id.* art. 35.

⁸¹ Criminal Code of Procedure (2015), arts. 285, 286, 287, 408-417.

rights. Most of Iran's juvenile detention centers are designed like prisons, and detained girls are not consistently separated from adults. Allegations of torture and ill-treatment in detention centers, particularly in the police's Detective Unit, further exacerbate the situation.

Iran's juvenile justice system, while introducing some reforms, remains largely inconsistent with international standards. Access to justice, legal aid, and fair trials are severely restricted for minors, particularly in serious cases. The continued use of harsh punishments, arbitrary detentions, and the failure to separate children from adults in detention reflect Iran's ongoing failure to align its practices with its international human rights obligations.

D. Child Labor

Article 32 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child mandates the protection of children from economic exploitation, hazardous work, and any work that interferes with their education or development. Despite existing legal frameworks, significant gaps in Iran's child labor laws expose children to exploitation and harm.

Iran's labor law prohibits employment for children under 15 and allows juveniles aged 15-18 to work under conditions such as regular medical exams and restrictions on hazardous tasks.⁸² However, businesses with fewer than 10 employees are exempt from many labor regulations, including limits on working hours, overtime pay, and health and safety measures.⁸³ This exemption leaves many child laborers, particularly in the informal economy, unprotected.

Official data on child labor in Iran is scarce, but estimates suggest tens of thousands of children, including street children, are working. Street children are especially vulnerable, facing not only school dropouts but also severe health risks such as HIV, linked to abuse, drug use, and rape. It is estimated that around 200,000 street children live in Iran's urban centers.⁸⁴

While Iran's labor laws prohibit child labor for those under 15 and provide additional protections for 15-18-year-olds, enforcement is inconsistent. Loopholes, such as exemptions for small businesses, allow child labor to persist. The lack of reliable data and widespread non-compliance further exacerbate the issue.

Economic hardship remains the primary driver of child labor in Iran. High inflation and unemployment force many families to rely on their children for income. Although Iran's laws align with international standards on paper, weak enforcement and insufficient social safety nets leave children vulnerable to exploitation, particularly in agriculture, street vending, and domestic work.

Iran has introduced social programs for street children and conducted occasional crackdowns on child labor, but these efforts have been ineffective. Civil society organizations, critical to addressing child labor, face increasing repression. In 2022, the government dissolved the Imam

⁸² IRAN'S LABOR LAW (1990), arts. 79,80, 83.

⁸³ *Id.* art. 191.

⁸⁴ *Fact Sheet: Children in Iran Are Unprotected from Abuse and Severe Rights Violations*, CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRAN (Jul.16, 2019), [Fact Sheet: Children in Iran Are Unprotected from Abuse and Severe Rights Violations - Center for Human Rights in Iran.](#)

Ali Popular Society, a key NGO working on child labor, further hindering efforts to protect children.⁸⁵

Despite legal frameworks in line with international standards, child labor remains a significant problem in Iran. Economic pressures, weak enforcement, and gaps in legal protections continue to exploit vulnerable children. To effectively combat child labor, Iran must strengthen enforcement of labor laws, expand social safety nets, and develop comprehensive support systems to protect children's rights to education and development.

E. Protection from Torture and Abuse

Iran's legal system for child protection continues to show significant gaps despite recent reforms. While Iran's 2020 Protection of Children and Adolescents Law marks progress in criminalizing neglect and abuse, it still falls short in addressing key issues like child marriage, corporal punishment, and honor-based violence. The legal framework remains influenced by Sharia-based interpretations, which often prioritize patriarchal authority and family privacy over children's rights. Legal gaps persist, particularly with the continued exemption of fathers from retributive justice for killing their children.

In practice, children are often denied basic rights, including access to education, fair trials, and protection from violence. While the law criminalizes sexual harassment and exploitation, cultural taboos and social stigma prevent victims from reporting abuse, and there are few services available to help children who are victims of trafficking or sexual violence. Iran's failure to ratify the CAT exacerbates the situation, leaving children vulnerable to systemic abuse with little recourse.

The state's approach to child detention is also problematic. While juvenile detention centers exist, many are poorly equipped to support rehabilitation, and minors are often held in adult prisons or face long detention periods without adequate legal safeguards. Torture and coerced confessions remain a significant issue, with ongoing violations of due process.

The government's reluctance to fully reform the legal framework, combined with inconsistent enforcement, leaves children vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, and neglect. International bodies must continue to monitor Iran's practices, provide support for systemic reform, and hold the Iranian authorities accountable. Despite some limited positive steps, Iran's child protection system continues to fall short of its international obligations, and comprehensive reforms are urgently needed to safeguard the fundamental rights of children.

Conclusion

Despite Iran's formal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its declared commitment to improving children's welfare, its legal and institutional frameworks continue to violate key international standards. Issues such as the execution of minors, the legality of corporal punishment, gender-based discrepancies in legal definitions of childhood, and the systemic denial of due process for child detainees highlight serious breaches of Iran's obligations under the CRC and other core human rights treaties.

⁸⁵ Javad Abbasi Tavaloli, *Imam Ali Society Dissolution Ruling: Mounting Crackdown on NGO Activists*, IRAN HUMAN RIGHTS (June 3, 2022), [Iran Human Rights | Article: Imam Ali Society Dissolution Ruling: Mounting Crackdown on NGO Activists](#) |.

Iran's general reservation to the CRC, which subjects the Convention to interpretations of Islamic law, weakens the integrity of its commitments and impedes the enforceability of its obligations. The refusal to ratify the CAT, despite credible reports of torture—including against minors—further exacerbates Iran's failure to protect children from abuse and exploitation.

While legislative strides such as the 2020 Child Protection Law and the establishment of a National Body for the CRC show some progress, these measures remain insufficient. They fail to address entrenched legal provisions that perpetuate impunity for violence against children, gender inequality, and the disregard for the principle of the child's best interests.

To comply with its international obligations, Iran must enact comprehensive reforms, including abolishing the juvenile death penalty, prohibiting all forms of corporal punishment, withdrawing its reservation to the CRC, ratifying the CAT, and establishing a child-sensitive justice system that upholds procedural safeguards and treats all children equally, regardless of gender.

The international community, especially the Committee on the Rights of the Child, must continue to monitor Iran's compliance, support legislative reform, and hold the State accountable through diplomatic and legal mechanisms. Protecting the rights and dignity of children in Iran requires not just legal reform but a shift in governance—a shift that recognizes children as independent rights-holders deserving of full protection under international law.