

Iran



Population: 77,891,220 (July 2011 est.)
Population Growth Rate 1.248% (2011 est.)
Birth Rate: 18.55 births/1,000 population (2011 est.)
Life Expectancy: total population: 70.06 years
male: 68.58 years
female: 71.61 years (2010 est.)
Literacy Rate: total population: 77%
Male: 83.5%
Female: 70.4% (2002 est.)
Net Migration Rate: -0.13 migrant(s)/1,000 population (2011 est.)
Unemployment Rate: 14.6% (2010 est.)
Gross Domestic Product per Capita: \$11,200 (2010 est.)
Religions: Muslim 98% (Shi'a 89%, Sunni 9%, other (includes Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian, and Baha'i) 2%)
Languages: Persian and Persian dialects 58%, Turkic and Turkic dialects 26%, Kurdish 9%, Luri 2%, Balochi 1%, Arabic 1%, Turkish 1%, other 2%
Ethnic Groups: Persian 51%, Azeri 24%, Gilaki and Mazandarani 8%, Kurd 7%, Arab 3%, Lur 2%, Baloch 2%, Turkmen 2%, other 1%
Capital: Tehran¹

Trafficking Routes

Iran is a country of origin, transit, and destination for trafficking in persons. Victims originating in Iran are known to be trafficked to Afghanistan,² the United Arab Emirates,³ Britain, France, Pakistan, and Turkey.⁴ Additionally, Iranian victims are frequently trafficked to Europe by air with faked passports.⁵ Meanwhile, those who are trafficked into Iran generally come from Central and Southeast Asian countries, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.⁶ Iran serves as a transit country for Afghanistan,⁷ Pakistan,⁸ the United Arab Emirates,⁹ Greece, Turkey,¹⁰

¹ CIA, WORLD FACTBOOK, IRAN. Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html> (last visited Mar. 8, 2011).

² INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION, TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS IN AFGHANISTAN FIELD SURVEY REPORT, (June 2008), available at: http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/shared/shared/mainsite/activities/countries/docs/afghanistan/iom_report_trafficking_afghanistan.pdf.

³ Lina Abirafeh, *Dubai: a City of Hope?*, FORCED MIGRATION REVIEW, Issue 28, July 2007, Pg: 56-67, available at: <http://www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR28/32.pdf>.

⁴ *Girls in Iran being sold in Pakistan on Daily Basis*, IRAN FOCUS, (Mar. 2, 2005), available at: http://www.iranfocus.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1617.

⁵ Sunil K. Vaidya, *Iran Battles Human Trafficking to Gulf*, THE GULF NEWS, Feb. 12, 2008, available at: <http://www.gulfnews.com/News/Gulf/oman/10187959.html>.

⁶ *Supra*, note 3.

⁷ *Supra*, note 4.

⁸ *Id.*

Oman,¹¹ Muscat¹² and other European and Persian Gulf countries.¹³ Victims are often trafficked to and from Iran through towns along the Iran-Pakistan border.¹⁴

Factors That Contribute to the Trafficking Infrastructure

Women and girls in Iran are vulnerable to trafficking due to poverty and strict government laws.¹⁵ 60 percent of students in Iranian universities are women; but only 15 percent of the workforce is made up of females,¹⁶ and only 2 percent of administrative jobs are held by women.¹⁷ Women's unemployment rate is 28 percent for those 15-29 years of age and 43 percent for the 15-20 age groups.¹⁸ An estimated 8 million women live below the poverty line.¹⁹

The traditional patriarchal nature of society is also thought to contribute to the trafficking infrastructure. For example, in Iran, a woman's value is less than half that of a man.²⁰ The age of legal responsibility also reaffirms this; a female is supposedly legal at the tender age of nine, but for a male it's almost double at fifteen.²¹ Fathers and husbands are able to control most aspects of a woman's life, including when and whom she will marry or if she is allowed to work outside the home.²²

Also, Iran has one of the highest records of runaway girls and women in the world,²³ and for most girls running away does not ensure safety. It is believed that an average of 45 girls run away from their homes in Iran each day,²⁴ with approximately 90 percent of them working as prostitutes. In 2005, an Iranian government official reported that most runaway girls in the country are raped within the first 24 hours of their departure;²⁵ and the runaway girls, along with the 25,000 other street children in Tehran, are easy pickings for traffickers in the country.²⁶

⁹ Shafi Baloch, *Human Trafficking on the Rise in Pakistan*. THE NATION, June 13, 2008, p.2, available at: <http://www.nation.com.pk/pakistan-news-newspaper-daily-english-online/Regional/Karachi/13-Jun-2008/Human-trafficking-on-the-rise-in-Pakistan>.

¹⁰ *Supra*, note 5.

¹¹ *Supra*, note 5.

¹² 'Camel-Jockeys Trafficking': *Family Demands Inquiry Commission*, DAILY TIMES, Sept. 29, 2005, p.7, available at: http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=story_29-9-2005_pg7_16.

¹³ *Supra*, note 5.

¹⁴ *Report: Iran-Pakistan Border Most Active Point*, FARS NEWS, Dec. 22, 2008, available at: <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8710021656>.

¹⁴ *See supra*, note 4.

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *Iran's Women Fight for Rights 30 Years After Revolution*, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, Feb. 8, 2009, available at: <http://www.yemenpost.net/67/InternationalNews/20081.htm>.

¹⁷ Women's Forum Against Fundamentalism in Iran, E_ZAN: Voice of Women against Fundamentalism in Iran, (July 15, 2005), available at: <http://www.wfafi.org/E-ZanVol14.htm>.

¹⁸ Donna H. Hughes, *Iran's Sex Slaves Suffer Hideously Under Mullahs*, HUMAN RIGHTS & DEMOCRACY INTERNATIONAL MEDIA, (May 26, 2007), available at: http://www.iranfocus.com/en/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=6.

¹⁹ *Supra*, note 4.

²⁰ *Supra*, note 17.

²¹ *Supra*, note 16.

²² *Supra*, note 18.

²³ *Supra*, note 17.

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ *Most Runaway Girls in Iran Raped within First 24 Hours*, IRAN FOCUS, July 12, 2005, available at: http://www.iranfocus.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2827.

²⁶ *Supra*, note 17.

Forms of Trafficking

According to the head of Iran's Interpol bureau, the sex-slave trade is one of the most profitable activities in Iran today, at times conducted with the knowledge and participation of the ruling fundamentalists. Government officials themselves are involved in buying, selling, and sexually abusing women and young girls.²⁷ For example, General Reza Zarei, Tehran's chief of police, was jailed in 2008 for consorting in an underground brothel.²⁸ It is estimated that thousands of Iranians are sold into sex work every year. Tehran alone is believed to have 84,000 prostitutes and 250 brothels. Many brothels, also called "morality houses," use loopholes found in the Iranian law to avoid punishment and to stay in business; in these morality houses, clients can legally marry a prostitute for a short time and then divorce her after intercourse has occurred.²⁹

Shelters for runaways have also been known as a place to find prostitutes.³⁰ Traffickers prefer girls between the ages of 13 and 17; however, there have been reports of girls as young as ages 8 and 10 being sold into other Arab countries.³¹ Traffickers are often paid more than US\$4,600 or 50million rials per girl.³²

After the 2003 earthquake in Ban, traffickers abducted female orphans and brought them to Tehran, where they were sold to Iranians and foreigners. Runaways and street children are often sold to Persian Gulf countries for US\$11,000 106million rials. Girls from the province of Horasan, ages ranging from twelve- to twenty, are sold as "wives" to Pakistani men, and then they are taken to Pakistan by way of Afghanistan and sold to brothels called "Kharabat."³³ Many traffickers walk away with a small fine that adds up to only 6 percent of the total profit from the sale of one girl.³⁴

Sex trafficking is not the only type of trafficking that occurs in Iran; forced labor is also present. In one instance, men, women, and children were told they would be offered jobs in the Zarabad area in a banana orchard. They were promised paid jobs and traveling expenses, however that was not the truth, the victims were forced to work and were provided only food and water for over a year; they were never paid for the work they did.³⁵

Infant trafficking also occurs in Iran. In one case, 28 male and female doctors, hospital staff, and birth requisition clerks worked together for three years to sell 63 babies out of Tehran hospitals. In each instance, the traffickers told the parents their infant was stillborn and refused to return the body. The female traffickers then hid the babies under head-to-toe chadors and walked out of the hospital. Fake birth certificates were made, and the babies were sold to

²⁷ *Supra*, note 18.

²⁸ Alexi Mostrous, *Iranian Vice Chief 'Caught in Brothel'*, TIMES ONLINE (LONDON), Apr. 15, 2008, available at: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/article3751598.ece>.

²⁹ Donna Hughes, *Islamic Fundamentalism and the Sex Slave Trade in Iran, Sex Slave Jihad*, FRONTPAGE MAGAZINE, Jan. 27, 2004, available at: http://www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/hughes/iran_sex_slave_trade.

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ *Id.*

³² Secretariat of the Foreign Affairs Committee, *Iran: Clerical Courts set Free Women Traffickers*, National Council of Resistance of Iran, Dec. 28, 2005, available at: <http://ncr-iran.org/content/view/783/69/>.

³³ *Supra*, note 28.

³⁴ *Supra*, note 28.

³⁵ M.H. Khan, *Human Trafficking Victims Return from Iran*, DAWN MEDIA, Mar. 9, 2008, available at: <http://www.dawn.com/2008/03/09/top15.htm>.

unaware couples for 30 million rials. Since the dismantlement of the operation, several of the infants have been returned to their birth parents.³⁶

Government Responses

The penal code³⁷ defines pimping as “bringing two individuals together or putting them in contact with each other for the purpose of fornication or homosexuality.”³⁸ For a man, pimping is punishable by 75 lashes and banishment for a period of three to 12 months;³⁹ a convicted woman can be sentenced to 75 lashes.⁴⁰ Additionally, the penal code forbids any unmarried man and woman to commit a crime against public morality (excluding adultery).⁴¹ Such a crime is punishable by flogging of 99 lashes.⁴² The code further prohibits managing “a property where activities against public morals take place,”⁴³ as well as encouraging people to violate public morals.⁴⁴ Both crimes are punishable with imprisonment from one to 10 years and, if applicable, the confiscation of the property in question.⁴⁵

The Labor Code of Iran⁴⁶ states that a worker cannot exceed eight work hours per day.⁴⁷ Additionally, “arduous, unhealthy, and underground work cannot exceed six hours per day or 36 hours per week.”⁴⁸ The code also states that employers must provide employees with one day of rest per week.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the labor code designates special rights with regard to the working conditions of women and young persons. In particular, women are granted 90 days of maternity leave.⁵⁰ The code also prohibits the employment of any person under the age of 15, and places those ages 15-18 in the category of “young workers.”⁵¹ Young workers are granted special care in the form of mandated medical examinations,⁵² shortened daily working time,⁵³ and prohibition from overtime work.⁵⁴

There have been several reports of the Iranian government punishing female victims of trafficking. For example in 2006, Amnesty International made an appeal to spare the life an Iranian woman who was sentenced to death by stoning for the crime of adultery. Despite the fact that the woman had been forced by her husband to work as a prostitute, she was convicted by the

³⁶ *Iran Arrests 28 in Baby-Trafficking Ring*, IRANMANIA, Aug. 12, 2005, available at:

<http://www.iranmania.com/News/ArticleView/Default.asp?NewsCode=34198&NewsKind=Current%20Affairs>.

³⁷ Islamic Penal Code, July 30, 1991, last ratified May 22, 1996, [Islamic Republic of Iran].

³⁸ Bk. 2, Part 4, Art. 135.

³⁹ Bk. 2, Part 4, Art. 138.

⁴⁰ *Id.*

⁴¹ Bk. 5, Ch. 18, Art. 637.

⁴² *Id.*

⁴³ Bk. 5, Ch. 18, Art. 639a.

⁴⁴ Bk. 5, Ch. 18, Art. 639b.

⁴⁵ Bk. 5, Ch. 18, Art. 639.

⁴⁶ Labour Code, [Islamic Republic of Iran] Nov. 20, 1990.

⁴⁷ Ch. 3, Div. 2, Sect. 51. Note 1 further explains that “Subject to the agreement of the workers concerned or of their legal representatives, an employer may reduce hours of work on some days of the week and increase them on other days of the week, provided that they do not exceed 44 hours in any week.”

⁴⁸ Ch. 3, Div. 2, Sect. 52.

⁴⁹ Ch. 3, Div. 3, Sect. 62, Note 1.

⁵⁰ Ch. 3, Div. 4, Sect. 76.

⁵¹ Ch. 3, Div. 5, Sect. 79.

⁵² Ch. 3, Div. 5, Sect. 81.

⁵³ Ch. 3, Div. 5, Sect. 82.

⁵⁴ Ch. 3, Div. 5, Sect. 83.

regional court and the sentence was upheld by Branch 32 of the Supreme Court in November 2005.⁵⁵

Another case in 2007 involved a young woman, “Leila,” who was forced into prostitution at the age of 9 by her family and later by her husband. After her arrest for this charge, her brothers confessed to having raped Leila. On account of these rapes, she was convicted of incest and sentenced to death by hanging.⁵⁶ Only with the help of a group of human rights activists who campaigned on her behalf was her life spared. The lawyer in charge of Leila’s case stated in an interview, “These male judges have not had any training about sexual charges. They all have a chauvinistic point of view, and see only the woman as guilty.”⁵⁷

Nongovernmental and International Organizations Responses

The Women’s Forum Against Fundamentalism in Iran is a nonprofit organization based in the United States that focuses on the challenges women face living under fundamentalist regimes, such as Iran. The group’s activities include raising public awareness, conducting research projects, and initiating outreach programs.⁵⁸ The organization believes the involvement of women in every area of “decision making will lead to desired social, political and economic equality.”⁵⁹

In 2007, following the arrest of several women protesting in front of the Revolutionary Court, officials shut down the offices of three nongovernmental organizations. The organizations were active in defending women’s rights and providing legal and operational council to civil society organizations.⁶⁰ Of these organizations, the Raahi Legal Center was the organization responsible for the acquiring the release of the incest victim “Leila” (mentioned above).

Multilateral Initiatives

Iran has long been a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, In 1997, Iran submitted the first report, and the second report 5 years later in 2002. That same year, Iran ratified the International Labor Convention No. 182 on the worst forms of child labor. Later, in 2007, Iran became a member to the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.⁶¹

Since 2002, the European Union has held four sessions of human rights dialogue with Iran, with the last occurring in June 2004; but after four rounds, Iran cancelled the fifth in

⁵⁵ AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, *Death Penalty/Stoning- Iran*, Sept. 28, 2006, available at: <http://www2.amnesty.se/uaonnet.nsf/senastezoep/20F6C39541922492C12571F8002E0E3D?opendocument>.

⁵⁶ Julia Rooke, *Iranian Child Victim of Prostitution*, BBC NEWS, Nov. 29, 2007, available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/crossing_continents/7107379.stm.

⁵⁷ *Id.*

⁵⁸ Women’s Forum Against Fundamentalism in Iran, available at: <http://www.wfafi.org/>.

⁵⁹ *Id.*

⁶⁰ Navid Ahmadi, *Three NGO’s Shut Down in One Day*. ROOZ, Apr. 3, 2007, available at: <http://www.roozonline.com/english/news3/newsitem/article/three-ngos-shut-down-in-one-day.html>.

⁶¹ ECPAT INTERNATIONAL, *Sex Trafficking of Children in the Middle East*. 2009 available at: www.ecpat.net/EI/Publications/Trafficking/Factsheet_Middle_East.pdf (accessed March 8, 2011).

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December 2006. The EU responded with a statement that the institution “deplores the fact that the human rights dialog with Iran has been frozen ... the EU remains committed to resuming the dialogue, provided that Iran confirms its willingness to seriously engage in the process.”⁶²

⁶² EUROPEAN COUNCIL, *EU Annual Report on Human Rights*, (EC) 14146/2/08 REV 2, of November 27, 2008, O.J. (105) 31, available at: [http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900sid/KERN-7PT8N6/\\$file/EU_nov2008.pdf?openelement](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900sid/KERN-7PT8N6/$file/EU_nov2008.pdf?openelement) .