



# Iran:

*Return following  
Sur Place Activities  
2025*



## Iran: Return following Sur Place Activities 2025

This thematic COI report is not, and does not purport to be, a detailed or comprehensive survey of all aspects of the issues addressed. It should thus be weighed against other country of origin information available on the topic.

The thematic COI report at hand does not include any policy recommendations. The information does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Danish Immigration Service.

Furthermore, this thematic COI report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

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## Executive summary

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Iranian intelligence agencies identify and monitor individuals both domestically and abroad whom they consider possible threats to the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI).

Iranian authorities follow European media, including Iranian media broadcasting from Europe, to gather information and understand diaspora movements.

Government-affiliated institutions monitor social media for intelligence gathering and influence operations. Online surveillance is prioritised based on the individual's audience size (number of followers), as large audiences entail the power to impact others.

The IRI engages in proxy punishment, i.e.—the abuse of relatives in Iran—as a means to manipulate and subjugate dissidents abroad, especially those with a public profile. However, sources generally had not heard of family members of low-profile Iranians (without political records) facing reprisals.

Legal action against rejected asylum seekers who have converted to Christianity is rare, and prosecution is uncommon without concrete evidence of conversion. The authorities focus mainly on preventing the spread of Christianity rather than targeting individual converts, who, when prosecuted, are typically charged under vague national security laws.

Seeking asylum abroad is not considered a crime in Iran. Rejected asylum applicants are generally treated like other passengers upon arrival in Iran. Iranian authorities are generally unaware of asylum applications submitted in other countries.

Additional scrutiny may occur if a person's departure was linked to other issues, such as affiliation with opposition groups, actions against national security, irregular exit, or pending or past legal cases. If an individual has a pending legal case, authorities would instantly be aware, and the person risks arrest at the airport.

There is, however, an element of arbitrariness with regards to targeted individuals that sources deemed to be a part of the Iranian authorities' strategy.

All Iranians returning with a laissez-passer undergo additional questioning, though this process is administrative rather than an interrogation.

Leaving Iran without proper documentation is a criminal offense, which can lead to imprisonment, fines, etc. Courts may show leniency if the person has avoided political or criminal activity abroad.

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## Introduction

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This thematic COI report focuses on circumstances and activities occurring after an Iranian citizen has left Iran, which may entail repercussions upon return to Iran. The legal term for this is *sur place*.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the report at hand exclusively examines circumstances and cases concerning protesters, critics of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) and converts or promoters of Christianity abroad, who return to IRI after having their asylum application rejected.

The purpose of the report is to collect updated information for use in the processing of cases concerning Iranians who lodge asylum applications, partly or completely based on sur place activities.

The terms of reference (ToR) for this thematic report were prepared in collaboration with the Asylum Division of the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) and the Secretariat of the Refugee Appeals Board. The terms of reference covered by this report are not exhaustive given the broad scope of the subject. Therefore, the report should be read in conjunction with other available publications such as: Landinfo's *Mottagelse og behandling av returnerte asylsøkere*<sup>2</sup> and *Forhold for kristne konvertitter - en oppdatering*.<sup>3</sup>

In general, there is limited information on the situation of returned asylum applicants to Iran.<sup>4</sup> This is mainly due to the fact that returns to Iran are not monitored by international organisations, combined with a general lack of access to sources and independent human rights observers inside the country. Likewise, it is difficult to obtain clear information on whether, and if so how, the Iranian authorities monitor Iranian asylum applicants abroad.

Under these conditions, the only viable approach to obtain information has been to consult experts with in-depth knowledge of Iran, who can assess the most likely scenarios, based on their professional experience and understanding of the country context.

However, it should be noted that not all statements provided by the sources have been included in the report. The inclusion of information has been based on an assessment of the degree of uncertainty expressed by the sources regarding the topic in question. The hypothetical assessments reflect the absence of direct and independently verifiable data. Nevertheless, the

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission, *Refugee sur place*, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>2</sup> Landinfo, *Iran: Mottagelse og behandling av returnerte asylsøkere [Iran: Reception and treatment of returned asylum seekers]*, 22 November 2024, [url](#)

<sup>3</sup> Landinfo, *Iran Forhold for kristne konvertitter - en oppdatering [Iran Conditions for Christian Converts – an update]*, 28 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>4</sup> Landinfo, *Iran: Mottagelse og behandling av returnerte asylsøkere [Iran: Reception and treatment of returned asylum seekers]*, 22 November 2024, [url](#), <https://landinfo.no/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Iran-temanot-Mottagelse-og-behandling-av-returnerte-asylosokere-22112024.pdf> p. 6

reader can find the full statements of the sources in the meeting minutes in [Annex 1](#), including those that were not incorporated into the main text of the report.

It is additionally relevant to note that the consulted sources often found it difficult to distinguish clearly between *sur place* activities and activities carried out while individuals were still residing in Iran. Moreover, some sources used the terms 'migrant' and 'asylum applicant' interchangeably.

During the research process, six sources were consulted. The sources were informed about the purpose of the interviews, and that their statements would be included in a publicly available thematic report. The interview minutes were sent to the sources afterwards for approval, giving them the opportunity to correct, amend or comment their own statements. For the sake of transparency, accuracy and reader-friendliness, the paragraphs in the minutes of the interviews in Annex 1 have consecutive numbers, which are used in the footnotes when referring to the statements of the sources. The sources were also consulted on how they preferred to be referred to in the report. All six interviewed sources were, in accordance to their request, granted anonymity for reasons of discretion as well as personal safety.

The report is a synthesis of the information obtained from oral and written sources and does not include all details and nuances provided by the sources. In the report, care has been taken to present the views of the sources as accurately and transparently as possible. The individual sources should not be held accountable for the content of the report.

The report does not contain policy recommendations and therefore cannot be taken as an expression of a particular view on what the practice should be. The terminology used in the report should not be regarded as a reflection of any specific legal position. The report has been prepared in accordance with the [EUAA guidelines for the production of COI products](#).

The research and editing of the report were finalised in December 2025.

The thematic report is available on the website of [us.dk/CDE](#), thus available to all stakeholders in the refugee status determination process as well as to the public.

## Abbreviations

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<b>COI</b>	Country of Origin Information
<b>DIS</b>	Danish Immigration Service
<b>EUAA</b>	European Union Agency for Asylum
<b>IKA</b>	Imam Khomeini Airport
<b>IRGC</b>	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps
<b>IRI</b>	Islamic Republic of Iran
<b>MoFA</b>	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
<b>ToR</b>	Terms of Reference

# 1. Monitoring of and reactions towards protesters and critics

Western intelligence agencies have established that the Iranian leadership does identify and monitor individuals residing both domestically and abroad whom they deem as possible threats to the IRI.<sup>5</sup> In Europe, IRI's primary concern is individuals whom the Iranian authorities regard as being involved in violent resistance to the state, as well as certain journalists and prominent critics.<sup>6</sup> In 2022, Iranian authorities classified the Persian-speaking media outlets BBC Persian, Iran International, Radio Zamaneh and Radio Farda, as terrorist groups.<sup>7</sup>

## 1.1. Monitoring of European media by Iranian embassies

According to an expert on civil society, the Iranian authorities do follow European media, including Iranian media broadcasting from Europe. It is a standard procedure for Iranian embassies. They do this partly to understand movements within the diaspora in each country and to collect information on them.<sup>8</sup>

An expert on Iranian law opined that the authorities monitor Persian-speaking broadcasting channels abroad, such as BBC Persian. In doing so, the authorities might not survey a certain person abroad, but if an individual appears on BBC Persian while insulting the Supreme Leader, they are likely to be noticed by the authorities, as this is a criminal act.<sup>9</sup> A scholar with knowledge on Iran added that in general, the Iranian embassies keep an eye on cases of rejected asylum applicants if they appear in main stream media. The source, however could not provide any concrete examples of such cases.<sup>10</sup>

The European scholar specialised in Iranian history had the impression that the Iranian embassy in Denmark has staff hired to monitor Danish media. The source believes they have an archive over highly profiled individuals who often appear in the media.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Federal Intelligence Service, *Switzerland's security*, 26 June 2023, [url](#), p. 66; Politiets Efterretningstjeneste, *Vurdering af spionagetruslen mod Danmark, Færøerne og Grønland* [Assessment of the Espionage Threat Against Denmark, the Faroe Islands, and Greenland], May 2023, [url](#), p. 20; Säkerhetspolisen, 2024-2025, [url](#), p. 29; The Guardian, *Australia foils Iran surveillance plot and vows to bring foreign interference 'into the light'*, 14 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>6</sup> Politiets Efterretningstjeneste, *Vurdering af spionagetruslen mod Danmark, Færøerne og Grønland*, May 2023, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>7</sup> UN HRC, *Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran\**, 14 March 2025, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>8</sup> An expert civil society: 17; An expert on Iranian law: 7

<sup>9</sup> An expert on Iranian law: 7, 9

<sup>10</sup> A scholar with academic knowledge on Iranian culture: 4

<sup>11</sup> A European scholar specialised in Iranian history: 1

## 1.2. Monitoring of participation in protests abroad

The Iranian authorities' reactions towards rejected asylum applicants who have criticised the authorities through protests while residing abroad depends on different matters such as their level of engagement in protest activities, their affiliation to opposition political groups, form of protests such as armed protest, use of violence, etc.<sup>12</sup>

### 1.2.1. *Protests and their coverage in media outside Iran*

There are no longer established Iranian political opposition parties in exile. Political activism abroad is often initiated by individuals rather than organised movements. Even small groups can stage protests or other forms of protest with minimal resources. Because there are no parties nor list of names in such gatherings, it makes it more difficult to determine who is in fact an authentic protester and who is not.<sup>13</sup> A consulted European scholar specialised in Iranian history noted that some Iranians have a fear of surveillance and espionage. According to the source, sometimes the fear is well-founded, other times it might be based on acute suspicion, because surveillance has been part of the political culture in Iran for a long time.<sup>14</sup>

After the 12-day war with Israel, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran noted an increasing trend of transnational repression, in which Iranian authorities intimidate, monitor and threaten dissidents living abroad.<sup>15</sup>

Since the *Woman, Life, Freedom* protests in Iran in 2022, the exiled Persian-speaking media feel more compelled to cover protests in different parts of Europe. These media outlets have been under scrutiny from the diaspora communities for not covering opposition activism outside of Iran.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, it has become normal to see short footages on BBC Persian or the London-based Iranian TV channel, Iran International, of activists in European cities protesting, even though the protests might consist of only a group of few protesters.<sup>17</sup>

### 1.2.2. *Monitoring of protests and gatherings in front of Iranian embassies*

According to the European scholar specialised in Iranian history, the Iranian authorities monitor Iranian protesters in influential Western European countries, such as Germany, France and the

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<sup>12</sup> International organisation: 16

<sup>13</sup> A European scholar specialised in Iranian history: 12

<sup>14</sup> A European scholar specialised in Iranian history: 13

<sup>15</sup> OHCHR, *Iran: UN expert warns of escalating repression and record executions after June attacks*, 31 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>16</sup> A European scholar specialised in Iranian history: 3

<sup>17</sup> A European scholar specialised in Iranian history: 4

UK. They also to some extent monitor protests in smaller countries such as Denmark and Sweden.<sup>18</sup> Three source consulted did not know which criteria IRI adheres to when monitoring political activists abroad.<sup>19</sup> One source assessed that the embassies are aware that asylum applicants could be part of the protesting crowds.<sup>20</sup>

An expert on Iranian law stated that it is unknown, whether Iranian embassies use face recognition systems when protests break out in front of their buildings, or to what extent embassies send their people to join crowds under false pretences to collect information.<sup>21</sup> Three sources assessed that the Iranian authorities most likely would take photos and film Iranians protesting in front of an Iranian embassy abroad<sup>22</sup> if they have the human resources and capacities to do so.<sup>23</sup>

On the other hand, according to an expert on civil society, a large number of Iranian citizens holding a residence permit, who have participated in at least one protest abroad, have returned to Iran without experiencing problems.<sup>24</sup> However, if an individual is considered a troublemaker - such as high-profile activists, outspoken critics or people associated with networks and institutions abroad that the government takes an interest in - the authorities are likely to focus on such an individual.<sup>25</sup> In the end, there is an element of arbitrariness with regards to targeted individuals, which according to two sources is a part of the Iranian authorities' strategy.<sup>26</sup>

### 1.3. Monitoring of online activism

According to a cyber security specialist, several different institutions contracted by or associated with the Iranian government departments are engaged in various activities; from monitoring for the purposes of intelligence gathering to influence operations. The source further noted that evidence suggests there are numerous groups or contractors affiliated with the state that operate across social media with different aims of monitoring.<sup>27</sup>

There is also, according to the source, evidence of individuals being identified for taking part in anti-IRI protests. The purpose of this appears to be partly to document the protests, and partly

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<sup>18</sup> A European scholar specialised in Iranian history: 7

<sup>19</sup> A European scholar specialised in Iranian history: 14; A scholar with academic knowledge on Iranian culture: 7; An expert on Iranian law: 7

<sup>20</sup> A European scholar specialised in Iranian history: 14

<sup>21</sup> An expert on Iranian law: 15

<sup>22</sup> Cedoca, *IRAN - Treatment by the authorities of family members of dissidents residing abroad*, 16 October 2024, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>23</sup> A European scholar specialised in Iranian history: 8; An expert on civil society: 16

<sup>24</sup> An expert on civil society: 12-13

<sup>25</sup> An expert on civil society: 13; A European scholar specialised in Iranian history: 9

<sup>26</sup> An expert on civil society: 3, 15; Cedoca, *IRAN - Treatment by the authorities of family members of dissidents residing abroad*, 16 October 2024, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>27</sup> An expert on cyber security: 1

to monitor individual expressions - especially if their language and intent is perceived as a significant threat.<sup>28</sup> Iranian authorities apparently prioritise online surveillance based on the size of social media audiences (i.e. number of followers) that an individual has. This is because large audiences entail the power to impact others.<sup>29</sup> One source assessed that protesters who vocally criticise IRI on social media risk attracting attention from Iran's embassy and being subject to surveillance.<sup>30</sup>

In a report from 2024, the Belgian COI unit stated that dissidents who have a notable public profile or those who speak out publicly – addressing audiences inside Iran or international human rights organisations and foreign policymakers, including on social media - risk being targeted with proxy punishment, i.e. harassment or physical confinement, or harm inflicted on their relatives or associates.<sup>31</sup>

The consulted expert on Iranian law noted that viewed from a legal perspective, it is irrelevant if an individual has 10 or 100.000 followers on platforms such as Instagram or Clubhouse. If a person, for instance, criticises the Supreme Leader, they are committing a criminal act according to Iranian law. Even though that individual is not followed by a community on social media, the act itself is still considered illegal.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to having a solid cyber surveillance capability, the IRI has the capability to hack,<sup>33</sup> intimidate and spread disinformation.<sup>34</sup> Targeted hacking may not always be aimed at a specific individual, but rather at a broader network of individuals, such as family members of a person of interest. Low-profile individuals, who are not publicly prominent but hold sensitive professions may also be at risk of hacking and surveillance. Sensitive professions include individuals who work for the UN, human rights organisations or lesser-known journalists outside of Iran.<sup>35</sup>

## **1.4. Targeting of family members of low-profile dissidents abroad**

Iranian authorities increasingly target activists, journalists, and dissidents abroad through co-ordinated threats, surveillance, and pressure on their families inside Iran.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> An expert on cyber security: 2

<sup>29</sup> An expert on cyber security: 2; An expert on Iranian law: 8; A European scholar specialised in Iranian history: 1, 15

<sup>30</sup> A European scholar specialised in Iranian history: 9

<sup>31</sup> Cedoca, *IRAN - Treatment by the authorities of family members of dissidents residing abroad*, 16 October 2024, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>32</sup> An expert on Iranian law: 9

<sup>33</sup> A European scholar specialised in Iranian history: 2; An expert on Iranian law: 10

<sup>34</sup> A European scholar specialised in Iranian history: 2

<sup>35</sup> An expert on Iranian law: 10-11

<sup>36</sup> UNHRC, *Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran\**, 14 March 2025, [url](#), p. 16; UNGA, *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 26 August 2025, [url](#), p. 13

A consulted expert on civil society assessed that the authorities in Iran would not target family members of low-profile Iranians with no political records, who have protested in front of Iranian embassies. Nor has the source heard of instances in which family members of Iranian asylum applicants without a public profile faced reprisals from the authorities.<sup>37</sup>

When it comes to surveillance of family members of dissidents abroad, it is impossible to monitor millions of Iranians across many platforms.<sup>38</sup> According to a Belgian COI report about the treatment by the authorities of family members of dissidents residing abroad, the IRI engages in proxy punishment.<sup>39</sup> The report examines cases of family members being abused in Iran as a means to manipulate and subjugate dissidents abroad. The Iranian authorities frequently use this method against dissidents with a public profile.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> An expert on civil society: 18-19

<sup>38</sup> An expert on Iranian law: 8

<sup>39</sup> Defined in the report as “the abuse of family members at home as a means to manipulate and subjugate dissidents abroad”, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>40</sup> Cedoca, *IRAN - Treatment by the authorities of family members of dissidents residing abroad*, 16 October 2024, [url](#), p. 2

## 2. Conversion to Christianity abroad

Article 12 of Iran's constitution designates Islam and the Twelver Ja'fari school as the official state religion. The constitution's Article 13 recognises only Zoroastrians, Jews and Christians as religious minorities. Recognised minorities apply to individuals whose Christian heritage either predates Islam or the 1979 revolution. Since converting from Islam is prohibited, Christian converts are not officially recognised in Iran.<sup>41</sup>

According to the Iranian state's interpretation of Sharia, converting from Islam is regarded as apostasy, which can be punished by death. While apostasy is not explicitly defined in the penal code, judges are instructed to base their rulings on the constitution and religious fatwas in such cases.<sup>42</sup> Though apostasy is not explicitly criminalised in the penal code, consequences can follow, especially if the individual is publicly open about their faith or involved in evangelism.<sup>43</sup>

According to an expert on Iranian law, death sentences for apostasy are rarely enforced.<sup>44</sup> Instead, Christian converts are often charged under vague national security laws, such as 'acting against national security' or 'propaganda against the state'.<sup>45</sup> In 2021, Iran adopted stricter provisions in its penal code related to national security. The law is frequently used against religious converts. The maximum penalty has been increased to up to ten years' imprisonment, and the authorities also apply confiscation of property and vehicles.<sup>46</sup>

### 2.1. IRI's view on Christian missionary activities

Based on the conversion cases in Iran, the security apparatus does not target individual converts themselves, but rather the practises in house churches. The main focus of the authorities is on the collective activities and the gatherings themselves,<sup>47</sup> as the primary goal is to stop the spread of Christianity in Iran. Therefore, the authorities tend to target organisers of house churches and missionaries who spread the Christian message.<sup>48</sup> According to the annual reports

<sup>41</sup> EUAA, *IRAN - Freedom of movement and right of employment for converts from Islam to Christianity, including for returnees*, 9 August 2024, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>42</sup> An expert on Iranian law: 16-17; International organisation: 8-10; USDOS, *2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iran*, 26 June 2024, [url](#)

<sup>43</sup> An expert on Iranian law: 17

<sup>44</sup> An expert on Iranian law: 17

<sup>45</sup> An expert on Iranian law: 17; Landinfo, *Iran Forhold for kristne konvertitter - en oppdatering [Iran Conditions for Christian Converts – an update]*, 28 July 2025, [url](#), p. 14; USDOS, *US Department of State: 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iran*, 26 June 2024, [url](#); IranWire, *Christian Converts in Court on National Security Charges*, 4 August 2021, [url](#)

<sup>46</sup> Landinfo, *Iran Forhold for kristne konvertitter - en oppdatering [Iran Conditions for Christian Converts – an update]*, 28 July 2025, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>47</sup> An expert on Iranian law: 19; Landinfo, *Iran Forhold for kristne konvertitter - en oppdatering [Iran Conditions for Christian Converts – an update]*, 28 July 2025, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>48</sup> Landinfo, *Iran - Forhold for kristne konvertitter - en oppdatering [Iran – Conditions for Christian converts – an update]*, 28 July 2025, [url](#), p. 16

published by Article 18 and Christian activist organisations, the number of convicted Christians inside Iran has varied from a few dozen since 2020 to hundred cases in 2024.<sup>49</sup>

According to a scholar specialised in Iranian history, there are multiple reasons why the IRI fears missionary activities. For one, missionary networks and activities are linked to the international community and Western powers outside of Iran. The IRI fears that missionaries can spread what they consider to be disinformation on opposition activities, as they have Persian-language TV-stations at their disposal. Generally, all opposition activities through media are always deemed as a threat.<sup>50</sup>

The IRI views the evangelical missionary activities as an extension of American influence and foreign powers' conspiracy against Iran.<sup>51</sup>

## 2.2. Consequences of converting to and promoting Christianity abroad

Conversion from Islam to another religion is prohibited under Sharia law.<sup>52</sup> Contrary to what is outlined above, two sources noted that individuals who have converted — regardless of whether they are asylum applicants or not — may face punishment if their conversion becomes known to the authorities. However, the sources note that legal action against rejected asylum applicants rarely occurs, and it is not common practice to prosecute or interrogate returnees for converting to Christianity.<sup>53</sup> Prosecution only takes place if there is concrete evidence for the conversion. In an example mentioned by the consulted international organisation, a person shared a photo of himself in front of a church on his social media while abroad, which was perceived by the Iranian authorities as evidence of his conversion to Christianity. The person was arrested upon return, interrogated and detained for a couple of weeks before being released.<sup>54</sup>

In a 2023 report published by the Dutch MoFA, an anonymous source assessed that if the authorities are aware that a returnee has converted to Christianity, especially if the conversion was used as grounds for an asylum claim, they may in some cases question the individual. Another anonymous source stated that in other cases, authorities are aware of the conversion but choose not to act on it.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Landinfo, *Iran - Forhold for kristne konvertitter - en oppdatering [Iran – Conditions for Christian converts – an update]*, 28 July 2025, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>50</sup> A European scholar specialised in Iranian history: 5

<sup>51</sup> A European scholar specialised in Iranian history: 6

<sup>52</sup> International organisation: 6; USDOs, *US Department of State: 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iran*, 26 June 2024, [url](#)

<sup>53</sup> International organisation: 6, 15; Dutch MoFA, *Algemeen ambtsbericht Iran [General Country of Origin Information Report on Iran]*, September 2023, [url](#), p. 115

<sup>54</sup> International organisation: 15

<sup>55</sup> Dutch MoFA, *Algemeen ambtsbericht Iran [General Country of Origin Information Report on Iran]*, September 2023, [url](#), p. 115

The expert on civil society had not heard about recent cases of converts being questioned upon return to Tehran. The source considered the likelihood of repercussions for low-profile converts who share their faith on social media to be highly hypothetical - depending on different factors; e.g. the asylum claim, possession of a valid passport upon return, the mode of exit and return to Iran. If a person left Iran irregularly, the authorities would want to know their background and question them in order to identify the network that helped them leave the country. The source however assesses that the authorities would deal differently with a person who is vocal about their conversion; boasts about it; tries to convert others or organises groups or congregations, compared to a person who keeps it private.<sup>56</sup> However, the authorities do not have the human resources to target every single person.<sup>57</sup>

According to Article 18, a Christian organisation based in London, which advocates on behalf of persecuted Christians, a Christian convert was sentenced to prison for two years for “acting against national security by connecting with Zionist Christian organisations” in March 2024. The individual had been baptised in Malaysia while applying for asylum, but returned voluntarily to Iran in 2017. After returning, she had reportedly been summoned for interrogation repeatedly by the Iranian intelligence services. During interrogations, videos and photos of her Christian activities and baptism in Malaysia were presented as evidence.<sup>58</sup> Article 18 wrote that in May 2025, she was released conditionally from prison.<sup>59</sup>

### 2.3. Targeting of family members to Christian converts abroad

Two sources reported that Iranian authorities harassed and questioned families of Iranian Christians active abroad.<sup>60</sup> In 2022, six expatriate Iranian Christians reported that their family members in Iran were summoned and harassed in an attempt to pressure them into returning to Iran with promises of reduced sentences for their Christian activities.<sup>61</sup>

A researcher on transnational repression interviewed by the Belgian CEDOCA in 2024 was not aware of cases where Iran-based relatives had been targeted for the activities of Christian converts abroad. The same source found it possible that Iranians who openly declare and discuss their conversion may face reprisals.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> An expert on civil society: 9-10

<sup>57</sup> An expert on civil society: 9

<sup>58</sup> Article 18, *Christian convert baptised in Malaysia given prison sentence on return to Iran*, 26 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>59</sup> Article 18, *Former asylum-seeker released after 15 months in Evin Prison*, 4 June 2025, [url](#)

<sup>60</sup> Article 18 et. Al, *2023 Annual Report: Rights Violations Against Christians in Iran*, 19 February 2023, [url](#), p. 10; Migrationsverket, *Iran Situationen för konvertiter och regimens övervakning av internet och sociala medier*, 8 June 2020, [url](#), p. 25-26

<sup>61</sup> Article 18 et. Al, *2023 Annual Report: Rights Violations Against Christians in Iran*, 19 February 2023, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>62</sup> Cedoca, *IRAN - Treatment by the authorities of family members of dissidents residing abroad*, 16 October 2024, [url](#), p. 20

### 3. The return of rejected asylum applicants to Iran

Sources consulted by DIS pointed out that there is a certain level of arbitrariness in how Iranian authorities treat returned rejected asylum applicants.<sup>63</sup> An expert on civil society explained that this arbitrariness appears to be deliberate and forms part of a broader strategy of strategic ambiguity, whereby the authorities intentionally alter or apply the rules inconsistently. This approach serves to create uncertainty and confusion among Iranians about which groups or behaviors may attract state attention, thereby reinforcing a general sense of insecurity and control.<sup>64</sup> As such, it is difficult to find patterns in how rejected asylum applicants are received upon return to Iran.<sup>65</sup>

According to one source, there have been some cases of returnees who have experienced arrest and prosecution following their political activities. The source did not have information on the reasons and consequence, but added that in general not all protestors are at risk of prosecution or serious punishment. It depends on the form of protests and level of engagement.<sup>66</sup>

#### 3.1. Iranian authorities' knowledge of asylum applicants outside of Iran

According to an international organisation, seeking asylum abroad is not considered a crime in Iran and Iranian authorities are usually not aware of it upon return to Iran. The sources added that since information about asylum cases is considered confidential by host countries, the authorities in Iran are generally not aware of an asylum application submitted by a person in another country unless such information is disclosed or somehow leaked.<sup>67</sup>

On the one hand, a 2023 Australian COI report states that Iranian authorities pay little attention to rejected asylum applicants upon return to Iran.<sup>68</sup> On the other hand, one source informed the Dutch MoFA that the authorities will question almost anyone known to have applied for asylum in order to investigate the reason for the asylum application and possible engagement in political or religious activities.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>63</sup> An expert on Iranian law: 3, 14; An expert on civil society: 15

<sup>64</sup> An expert on civil society: 3

<sup>65</sup> An expert on civil society: 6; An expert on Iranian law: 14

<sup>66</sup> International organisation: 16

<sup>67</sup> International organisation: 1-2; A scholar with academic knowledge on Iranian culture: 6

<sup>68</sup> DFAT, *DFAT COUNTRY INFORMATION REPORT IRAN*, 24 July 2023 (Version 2)\*, [url](#), p. 40

<sup>69</sup> Dutch MoFA, *Algemeen ambtsbericht Iran [General Country of Origin Information Report on Iran]*, September 2023, [url](#), p. 116

### 3.2. Return procedures for rejected asylum applicants

The available information on the reception of rejected asylum applicants at Imam Khomeini Airport (IKA) presents a nuanced picture.

Several police and security services are present at Iranian airports, including the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the narcotics police and the passport and border police. In practice, security responsibility lies with the IRGC, and the passport and border police are subordinate to their authority. The Presidency Office is located immediately after passport control. Staff from this office may, in some cases, stop individuals arriving from abroad after passport control and question them. According to an airport employee in Tehran, it is also this office that conducts questioning and screening of individuals returning on a laissez-passer.<sup>70</sup>

According to a Western diplomat in Tehran, the passports of all travellers are scanned at passport control upon entry. Through this process, passport control officers verify that the passport is genuine and that the information displayed on the screen, including the photograph, matches the person being checked.<sup>71</sup>

According to Landinfo, all entries and exits are recorded in the data system, and an alert will appear if a person has outstanding cases with the authorities or the courts.<sup>72</sup>

An employee at Tehran airport working for a foreign airline stated that the Presidency Office occasionally requests passenger lists from airlines, though this is not done systematically. Sometimes airlines are asked whether specific names appear on the passenger lists. Airlines are obliged to respond to such inquiries and to provide passenger lists when requested.<sup>73</sup>

Applying for asylum abroad is not a criminal offence under Iranian law,<sup>74</sup> and three sources found no specific indications that returnees have experienced prosecution or otherwise faced repercussions solely for having applied for asylum abroad.<sup>75</sup> According to an international organisation, rejected asylum applicants are generally treated like other passengers upon arrival in Iran.<sup>76</sup> However, additional scrutiny may occur if a person's departure from Iran was con-

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<sup>70</sup> Landinfo, *Iran - Mottagelse og behandling av returnerte asylsøkere [Iran – Reception and treatment of returned asylum seekers]*, 22 November 2024, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>71</sup> Landinfo, *Iran - Mottagelse og behandling av returnerte asylsøkere [Iran – Reception and treatment of returned asylum seekers]*, 22 November 2024, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>72</sup> Landinfo, *Iran - Mottagelse og behandling av returnerte asylsøkere [Iran – Reception and treatment of returned asylum seekers]*, 22 November 2024, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>73</sup> Landinfo, *Iran - Mottagelse og behandling av returnerte asylsøkere [Iran – Reception and treatment of returned asylum seekers]*, 22 November 2024, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>74</sup> CGRS, *Treatment of returnees by their national authorities*, 30 March 2020, [url](#); International organisation: 2

<sup>75</sup> An expert on Iranian law: 4; An expert on civil society: 5; International organisation: 1; Landinfo, *Iran - Mottagelse og behandling av returnerte asylsøkere [Iran – Reception and treatment of returned asylum seekers]*, 22 November 2024, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>76</sup> International organisation: 1

nected to other issues, such as affiliation with political activism, actions against national security, irregular exit, the use of counterfeit documents, or pending or past legal cases in Iran or abroad, including criminal cases.<sup>77</sup>

The international organisation stated that Iranian authorities generally do not examine electronic devices of rejected asylum applicants upon return, unless there is a specific reason to do so. However, examination of electronic devices has so far not been reported by returnees.<sup>78</sup> In contrast, IranWire reported that the IRI has intensified pressure on members of the Iranian diaspora who participated in protests abroad during the Woman, Life, Freedom movement in 2022. In 2024, the outlet interviewed 17 people who said their passports and electronic devices were seized at different airports in Iran.<sup>79</sup> The outlet does not describe whether the devices were examined.

### *3.2.1. Returning on a laissez-passer*

The international organisation informed DIS that all Iranians returning with a laissez-passer have to go through additional questioning,<sup>80</sup> which serves an administrative purpose rather than an interrogation.<sup>81</sup> Many irregular migrants lose their passports during their migration journey, and thus return with a laissez-passer and consequently are questioned at the airport. The source added that this has led to the misconception that former asylum seekers/migrants are stopped for further questioning.<sup>82</sup>

### *3.2.2. Returning during a pending legal case*

Individuals who have been under the authorities' scrutiny before departing Iran can face reactions upon return. According to Landinfo, the information that authorities have on a person's activities prior to their departure from Iran will likely influence their treatment upon return, regardless of how long they have been outside the country.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> International organisation: 1, 4; An expert on Iranian law: 1, 4; An expert on civil society: 5; Landinfo, *Iran - Mottagelse og behandling av returnerte asylsøkere [Iran – Reception and treatment of returned asylum seekers]*, 22 November 2024, [url](#), p. 9, 12

<sup>78</sup> International organisation: 3

<sup>79</sup> IranWire, *Crackdown on Diaspora Dissenters: Surge in Passport Seizures at Iranian Airports*, 20 February 2024, [url](#)

<sup>80</sup> International organisation: 1; DFAT, *DFAT COUNTRY INFORMATION REPORT IRAN*, 24 July 2023 (Version 2)\*, [url](#), p. 40

<sup>81</sup> International organisation: 1

<sup>82</sup> International organisation: 1

<sup>83</sup> Landinfo, *Iran - Mottagelse og behandling av returnerte asylsøkere [Iran – Reception and treatment of returned asylum seekers]*, 22 November 2024, [url](#), p. 21

According to an international organisation, if a returnee has committed an act against the rules and regulations of IRI, they are held legally responsible. The organisation had seen cases of Iranians who were arrested and prosecuted following their return.<sup>84</sup> It is unclear whether these cases involved Iranians who had applied for asylum abroad.

If a person left Iran to avoid serving a prison sentence and then applied for asylum abroad, the authorities would become aware if this individual returned to Iran.<sup>85</sup> If a person has a case against them, even one dating back 20 years, the authorities would instantly become aware of it.<sup>86</sup> If the case is still active, the person will be arrested at the airport<sup>87</sup> or later.<sup>88</sup>

### *3.2.2.1. Impact of illegal exit*

The international organisation assessed that a rejected asylum applicant would face issues upon return if they exited Iran illegally. If there is no record of their exit, they would immediately be identified at the point of entry.<sup>89</sup>

Under Iranian law, leaving the country without proper documentation, such as a passport or exit permit, or crossing borders through unofficial routes, is considered a criminal offence, which can lead to imprisonment, fines, suspended sentences or probation. If someone left Iran illegally and later returned voluntarily, courts may consider leniency, as long as the person in question has not been involved in political or criminal activities abroad. If that person, on the other hand, is engaged in political activities abroad against the IRI, then interrogation or prosecution is more likely upon return, according to the expert on Iranian law.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> International organisation: 2

<sup>85</sup> An expert on civil society: 4; International organisation: 19

<sup>86</sup> An expert on civil society: 4

<sup>87</sup> International organisation: 18

<sup>88</sup> International organisation: 19

<sup>89</sup> International organisation: 5

<sup>90</sup> An expert on Iranian law: 6

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## Annex 1: Meeting minutes

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### Meeting with an expert on civil society

The source has more than 10 years of experience working on Iran. The interview was conducted on 28 May 2025.

#### Return procedures

1. The source had indirectly heard of two cases of rejected asylum applicants who returned to Iran with passports. In one of the cases, the person was not questioned upon return. In the other case, the person was asked why they had applied for asylum. The source cannot unequivocally confirm these cases.
2. The situation upon return depends on the individual in question. The source assessed that usually, the situation would be easier if a person applied for asylum for reasons such as improvement of their economy – rather than participation in high-profile political activities.
3. The Iranian state has a strategic ambiguity, which is not due to a dysfunctional system or inconsistency. The state likes to disrupt and change the rules to confuse people in regards to which categories and classes are targeted. They do that on purpose.
4. If a person left Iran to avoid serving a sentence and applied for asylum abroad, the authorities would be aware if this individual returned to Iran. If a person has a case against them, even from 20 years ago, the authorities would instantly realise that there is a case.
5. Asked if applying for asylum could lead to sanctions upon return, the source assessed that an ordinary person with no political or organized activity that deems sensitive to the authorities, who left Iran through official, legal routes with a valid passport and visa, who also gives an apology for applying for asylum, and admits that they chose asylum option for non-political reasons, should not experience problems upon return. However, if anything raises suspicion, there would at least be a level of questioning. After questioning, the case would depend on multiple factors, such as which organisation did the questioning. This is due to the fact that different organisations have different approaches. Another factor is the province from which the person is from, as the dossier could be handled at a local level. However, it may vary.
6. As such, it is difficult to find any patterns in this matter. However, the chances of a smoother entrance are much higher for an ordinary citizen, with no political or organized activity, with a valid passport, who travelled via a legal route.

#### Christian converts

7. The source had indirectly heard about people who have applied for asylum based on religion, such as converts to Christianity. To be able to return to Iran, they signed a document (*toubeh nameh*) stating that they regret their actions and that they falsified their convictions only to benefit from asylum. They were then reportedly able to return.
8. The source knows of at least three Iranians that were granted religious asylum in USA. Once they received their Green Card, they were able to travel back to Iran to visit their families on a regular basis. These persons are, however, not politically active, but part of the Iranian literati.
9. Asked about recent cases of converts being questioned upon return, the source said that they had not seen any examples. The source assessed that the authorities would deal differently with a person that is very loud about their conversion, boasts about it, tries to convert others or organises groups or congregations, compared to a person who keeps quiet about their conversion. However, the authorities do not have the human resources to go after every single person.
10. Asked if a non-profiled person who converts to Christianity and shares posts about the conversion on their social media would face repercussions upon return to Iran, the source said that it is very hypothetical and depends on different factors. For instance, how they claimed asylum; if they have a valid passport; how they left the country and how they returned to the country. If it is a person that left Iran irregularly, the authorities would want to know their background and question them to understand the network that helped them get of the country. The source added that irregular exit would raise suspicion for every government.
11. The first place of questioning in such a case could be at the airport in Iran, or at the embassy in the country where the person applied for asylum - e.g. when they have to facilitate their return to Iran. It could also take place after the person has left the airport in Tehran.

#### **Participation in protests**

12. The source had not heard of cases in which ordinary citizens who participated in protests abroad or had publicly written something negative about the authorities were arrested or interrogated upon return. The cases that the source knows of are related to profiled individuals with a strong public image, such as a former VoA journalist.
13. Hundreds, if not thousands, of people who have participated in at least one protest abroad while having a residence permit have returned to Iran without problems. However, if an individual is considered a troublemaker, such as high-profile activists, or is associated with networks and institutions aboard that government is curious about, the authorities would focus on such an individual.

14. The source assessed that a person who prior to leaving the country was not politically active, who applied for asylum and participated in gatherings abroad, and who had their asylum case rejected, could be questioned about their itinerary, and secondly their participation in protests. The authorities could be interested in information about other groups; how they connected and met up. However, if the authorities do not have other information regarding the person in question, it could be that nothing else would happen. It always depends on the specific person and the circumstances.
15. In the end, there is a level of arbitrariness, which is a part of the authorities' strategy.
16. According to the source, the Iranian authorities would most likely take photos of and film Iranians demonstrating in front of an Iranian embassy abroad. This has become standard procedure for foreign embassies, also Iranian embassies, as long as they have the human resources and capacities for it.

#### **Monitoring of European media**

17. The Iranian authorities certainly follow European media. Following local news and media platforms is something that the authorities picked up from the time of the Shah (prior to 1979), which is standard procedure for embassies. They do this partly to understand movements of the diaspora in each country and to collect information on them. They may have specific groups assigned in order to monitor them.

#### **Family members in Iran**

18. The source had not heard of instances where family members of ordinary Iranian asylum applicants faced reprisals from the authorities.
19. The source assessed that the authorities would not target family members of low-profile Iranians with no political history, who for instance protested in front of the Iranian embassy. There is a possibility that the authorities would reach out to a family member in Iran, if the person was beginning to become of interest to them.

### **Meeting with a scholar with academic knowledge on Iranian culture**

The source has more than 30 years of academic experience at a European university. The interview was conducted on 9 July 2025.

#### **Monitoring of European media**

1. The Iranian authorities do monitor European media, but it is difficult to say to what degree. The source mentioned a personal example: Whenever the source has appeared on TV or radio in their country of residence to comment on issues that are deemed controversial in

the view of the Iranian authorities, such as death sentences or executions of political prisoners in Iran, the Iranian embassy has sent their cultural attaché to have a meeting with the source.

2. During the meeting, the cultural attaché would normally start by confirming that everything the source has said in the main stream media is correct, but would then add that some information has been left out, and the cultural attaché explains which issues the source has misunderstood about Iran.
3. Within the last 15 years, the source has received about five visits from a cultural attaché sent by the Iranian embassy in the country they reside in Europe, under the pretences of “cultural exchange”. The source has not received a visit by the cultural attaché since the Woman, Life, Freedom protests in 2022.
4. The source assessed that in general, the Iranian embassies would keep an eye on cases of rejected asylum applicants if they appear in main stream media. The source did not present a specific example. Rejected asylum cases are relevant seen from the perspective of the Iranian authorities, because these cases display a controversial side of the Islamic Republic, which differs from the narrative the authorities express in the media. Cases that tell the stories of torture and executions in Iran are not in favour of the Iranian authorities.
5. The source knows of two individual cases, in which two Iranian scholars based in Europe were visited unannounced at their private addresses by an individual representing the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Iranian scholars in these two cases were not asylum applicants. They were in Europe on a work-related visa and they were both visited within the last five years. In both cases, the individual representing the Iranian authorities tried to persuade the two academics to return to Iran.
6. The source does not believe that the Iranian authorities know in a systematic way, whether Iranian citizens apply for asylum abroad.

#### **Participation in protests**

7. The source did not have information of protest gatherings outside of Iran in which the Iranian authorities have monitored the participants.

#### **Meeting with an expert on Iranian law**

The interview was conducted on 27 May 2025.

#### **Return procedures for rejected asylum applicants**

1. An individual's return to Iran at the airport depends on whether they have a passport or not. If they return with a valid Iranian passport, and there are no former or ongoing legal cases against them, then they might go through the Imam Khomeini Airport without any problems.

2. If a person enters Iran with a laissez passer and has to clarify what happened to their passport, then they might additionally have to explain that they applied for asylum while abroad. At that point, the authorities might look the individual up to see if they have a politically active record or a criminal record, and then they might keep the person for questioning. The source, however, does not personally know any examples of such cases.
3. There is a level of arbitrariness in relation to who is held back and who is not, when a politically active person returns to Iran.
4. No real risk of imprisonment or mistreatment exists for leaving or claiming asylum—unless the person is known to authorities or involved in political activism. Unless there are security concerns related to political activism, the ordinary returnee is generally not detained.
5. If a person fled Iran to avoid a legal case or a sentence, there might be more questions and investigation upon return.
6. Under Iranian law, leaving the country without proper documentation (such as a passport or exit permit), or crossing borders through unofficial routes, is considered a criminal offense. According to Article 34 of the Iranian Passport Law:

“Anyone who leaves or attempts to leave the country without a passport or exit permit, or through forbidden border crossings, shall be sentenced to imprisonment from one to three years.”

Acts that qualify as illegal exit:

- Exiting Iran without a valid passport
- Crossing the border through unofficial or illegal routes (e.g., mountains, deserts)
- Using fake or forged travel documents

Imprisonment of 1 to 3 years is the official sentence. However, in practice, this may be reduced to a fine, suspended sentence, or probation depending on the case.

Return and Prosecution:

- If someone left Iran illegally and later voluntarily returns, courts may consider leniency, especially if the person has not been involved in political or criminal activities abroad.
- If the person engaged in political or anti-government activities during exile, interrogation or prosecution is more likely upon return.

Intent matters: If the person can prove that the illegal exit was due to necessity or lack of knowledge, judges may reduce the punishment.

Criticism of the authorities while residing abroad

7. The source does not know how the Iranian authorities monitor activists abroad, but knows that the authorities monitor Persian speaking broadcasting channels abroad, such as BBC Persian. In doing so, the authorities might not survey a certain person abroad, but if that individual turns up on BBC Persian while insulting the Supreme Leader, then they would be noticed by the authorities.
8. It is impossible to monitor millions of Iranians abroad across so many platforms. Iranian authorities prioritise online surveillance based on the number of followers/audiences an individual has. That is because large audiences entail the power to impact others.
9. Legally speaking it does not matter if an individual has 10 or 100.000 followers on apps such as Instagram or Clubhouse. If a person, for instance, criticises the Supreme Leader, they are committing a criminal act, according to Iranian law. Even though that individual is not followed by a community on social media, the act itself is still considered illegal.
10. Lately, there has been instances of the Iranian authorities committing targeted hacking, which tells us that certain surveillances are in place. Targeted hacking, however, might not be in place to target a specific individual, but rather because the Iranian authorities want to hack a network of individuals, such as family members to a person of interest.
11. Low-profile individuals who are not publicly prominent hold sensitive roles may also be at risk of hacking and surveillance. This group includes individuals who work for the UN or human rights organisations – or even lesser-known journalists based abroad. Their positions may grant them access to sensitive intelligence, making them potential targets. In some cases, their family members may also experience reactions from the authorities. Often, the authorities' primary interest is not the individual themselves, but rather the information or access they provide to sensitive intelligence.
12. The category of individuals mentioned above also includes persons who do not have public profiles, but might have high positions outside of Iran. Their close family members in Iran might also experience reprisals such as travel bans or pressure to collaborate with the intelligence authorities. In these cases, close family members are often parents, siblings or an uncle or aunt that they might be very close to.
13. As a consequence, in some cases, the family members lose trust in each other. Many Iranian Kurds, for instance, hesitate to travel to Iraq or Türkiye to visit family members because they do not feel safe.
14. The level of monitoring and reprisals that political activists may experience upon return to Iran is arbitrary, and differs on how and who is targeted - there does not seem to be a pattern.
15. It is unknown whether Iranian embassies use face recognition systems when protests break out in front of their buildings, or to what extent embassies send people to join a crowd under false pretences to collect information.

**Conversion to Christianity while abroad**

16. Logically, there is no way of knowing, if a rejected asylum applicant who returns to Iran has converted to Christianity while abroad. The same applies to political statements uttered abroad. Converting to Christianity is not criminalised in Iran. However, apostasy is. Apostasy is not spelled out in the penal code but is enforced via constitutional provisions referring to Sharia.
17. In Iran, while conversion from Islam to Christianity is not explicitly criminalized in the penal code, serious consequences can follow, especially if the individual is publicly open about their faith or involved in evangelism. Under Article 167 of the Iranian Constitution, judges may apply Islamic law (Sharia) when no written law exists, which considers apostasy punishable by death—though such sentences are rarely enforced. Converts are often charged under vague national security laws such as “acting against national security” or “propaganda against the regime,” leading to prison sentences. Notable cases like Pastor Yousef Nadarkhani, who was initially sentenced to death for apostasy, highlight these risks. Christian converts may also face surveillance, arrest, job loss, denial of civil rights, or pressure on their families, especially if they attend house churches or actively share their beliefs.
18. If an individual has 500 friends and family members on Facebook and openly announces that they have converted to Christianity, and decide to travel to Iran six months later – that person might not face security problems. However, there is always a risk that they could.
19. Based on the conversion cases in Iran, it is not the individuals themselves that the security apparatus is after, but rather the practises in house churches. The main focus of the authorities is on the collective activities and the aspect of gatherings.
20. There is a common perception among Iranians that anyone who appears as a guest on a Persian-speaking media outlet abroad, such as BBC Persian, while freely traveling back and forth to Iran, must be collaborating with the intelligence services.
21. Overall, sur place cases related to conversion to Christianity or political activism are at the core of the matter basically the same thing: they are all potential risks. But we do not know how big that risk is as it depends on the political contexts, current situation, Iran’s relation with that specific country, the individual in question, their network etc.
22. Ordinary dual citizens who live abroad also ask themselves the same questions when they consider visiting Iran for vacation: how big of a risk am I taking, considering all my activities? For instance, many Iranians who became politically active for the first time during Women, Life, Freedom protests (2022-2023) on social media, such as Clubhouse, are now afraid to travel to Iran even though they used to travel for vacation frequently.
23. However, if there is no public information available about a person’s position or activities that might be against the interests of the state, and if their travel documents are in order, then there should be no risks.

## Written interview with an International Organisation (IO)

The interview correspondence was conducted in writing in two parts by the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) on 13 March 2025 and 27 May 2025.

### Return procedures

1. **DIS:** *What are the return procedures at the Imam Khomeini International Airport for rejected asylum applicants, who return voluntarily?*

**IO:** They are treated like other passengers at the airport unless their migration is associated with other issues such as leaving the country irregularly or using counterfeiting documents.

**DIS:** *Follow-up question: In a report, it is stated that: "Iranian failed asylum seekers who return to Iran are in most cases stopped after passport control for additional questioning. This applies to those who are forcibly returned as well as those who return voluntarily with a laissez-passer." Is this something you recognise?* <https://landinfo.no/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Iran-temanotat-Mottagelse-og-behandling-av-returnerte-asylsokere-22112024.pdf>

**IO:** Seeking asylum is not per se a crime and it is not usually something that Iranian authorities are aware of at the port of entry. Incoming passengers with a laissez-passer, whether being former asylum seekers/deportees or not, have to go through additional questioning which has a more administrative characteristic than interrogation. But since many of irregular migrants lose their passports during their migration journey, they have to return with a laissez-passer and consequently are questioned at the airport. Coincidence of these two facts has provoked this misconception that former asylum seekers/migrants are stopped for further questioning. However, if a returning migrant has an active case in a court of law, or is affiliated to opposition political groups, or has committed an action against national security, or other examples of such, the possibility of arrest and prosecution is not ruled out.

2. **DIS:** *Are the authorities aware that a person has applied for asylum in another country?*

**IO:** Usually, such information is considered confidential by host countries so in general the authorities in Iran are not aware of asylum application of a person in another country unless such information is disclosed by a migrant or it is somehow leaked.

**DIS:** *If yes, could this fact lead to consequences for such a person? If yes, what kind of consequences?*

**IO:** Applying for asylum per se is not a crime, but the ground for that might be concerning. So, in case a migrant has committed something against the rules and regulations of the country, they are held responsible for that through a legal procedure.

**DIS:** *Follow-up question: Have you seen examples of this?*

**IO:** Yes, there were some migrants who experienced arrest and prosecution following their return.

3. **DIS:** *To what extent do the authorities examine electronic devices belonging to rejected asylum applicants upon return to Iran?*

**IO:** In general it does not happen unless there is a justification for that as mentioned in previous question.

**DIS:** *Follow-up question: Have you seen examples of this?*

**IO:** Examination of electronic devices has not been reported by returnees so far but it is possible based on the foregoing reasons.

4. **DIS:** *Will a rejected asylum applicant be interrogated by the authorities upon return?*

**IO:** In general no unless their migration or return are associated with other issues.

**DIS:** *Follow-up question: Have you seen examples of this?*

**IO:** No we have not.

**DIS:** *If yes, who conducts such interrogations?*

**IO:** Authorities at the airport who could be police or Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp who are responsible for the security of the airport.

**DIS:** *What types of questions would be asked?*

**IO:** No info.

5. **DIS:** *Would a rejected asylum applicant face issues upon return if they exited Iran illegally?*

**IO:** Yes, they would. As there is no record of their exit, they will be immediately identified at the point of entry.

**DIS:** *If yes, could it lead to prosecution?*

**IO:** Yes, it leads to the prosecution but the punishment is usually not much serious.

### **Conversion to Christianity**

6. **DIS:** *What are the Iranian authorities' reactions towards rejected asylum applicants who have converted to Christianity while residing abroad?*

**IO:** Religious conversion is forbidden by Sharia, so regardless of whether a person is asylum seeker or not, they will have to face the punishment if it is disclosed to the government. 'Ir-tidaad' refers to apostasy, which means renouncing Islam and embracing disbelief (kufr). The concept of apostasy is a complex issue in Islamic jurisprudence, and different scholars may interpret it differently. It occurs when an individual denies one of the essential tenets of religion (God, prophethood, and the afterlife), also apostate can be a person who converted into another religion.

7. **IO:** Apostasy can be categorized into two types: innate 'fitri' (Someone who, at the time of conception, has at least one Muslim parent, and after reaching maturity, declares Islam, but later becomes an unbeliever) and 'meli' (Someone who was initially an unbeliever, then became a Muslim, and subsequently reverted to disbelief). According to the renowned Shia jurists, the punishment for a male innate apostate is execution. However, a female apostate has the opportunity to repent and return to the faith, and if they do not repent, they are put to death. On the other hand, female apostates, whether by birth or conversion, are not executed, but they remain imprisoned until they repent.
8. **DIS:** *Follow-up-question: Do you mean that there is a difference in the law and how it is implemented in practice when it comes to female apostates? So that in practice, female apostates are not executed if they do not repent?*  
**IO:** Yes, according to Sharia, men and women are differently treated when comes to apostacy.  
  
In the Islamic Penal Code of Iran, apostasy (renouncing Islam) is not explicitly mentioned as a crime, and no specific punishment is defined for it. However, some scholars consider it a crime based on Article 167 of the Iranian Constitution. This article states: "The judge is obligated to make every effort to issue a ruling based on the written laws; if not found, they should refer to credible Islamic sources or valid fatwas to issue the judgment of the case..."
9. **IO:** According to Article 220 of the Islamic Penal Code, the 'hadd' punishments that are not explicitly mentioned in this law are governed by Article 167 of the Iranian Constitution. Article 15 of the Islamic Penal Code defines 'hadd' as a punishment that is determined by the type, amount, and quality of its implementation according to religious law. Consequently, Article 220 of the Islamic Penal Code essentially asserts that crimes punishable under Iranian laws are not limited solely to those explicitly specified in the Islamic Penal Code. This article allows prosecutors and judges to accuse and convict individuals based on crimes that are not explicitly defined in any of Iran's laws or even mentioned. Article 8 of the Law on the 'Establishment of Public and Revolutionary Courts' also states that judges are obligated to handle lawsuits, complaints, and notifications in accordance with relevant laws and Article 167 of the Constitution, issuing judgments based on the case at hand.
10. **IO:** Article 64 of the Press Law also mentions apostasy without specifying a punishment: "Anyone who insults the Islamic religion and its sanctities through the media, and if it leads to apostasy, shall be sentenced to apostasy. If apostasy is not established, they will be dealt with according to the opinion of the religious authority based on the Penal Code."
11. **IO:** According to the Article 262 of the Islamic Penal Code, 'Anyone who insults or slanders the Prophet or any of the Divine Great Prophets is considered an apostate and is stipulated

to execution.' The law remains silent on this matter. Furthermore, the death penalty specified in this article pertains specifically to insulting and slandering the Prophet and the Great Prophets, and it cannot be extended to cover general cases of apostasy. Unless, by analogy, in certain instances and contexts of apostasy, this article could be applied more broadly.

12. **IO:** It is important to note that Proving Apostasy in Court is not easy and can be established in two ways: first, through the confession of the apostate, and second, by the testimony of two just(righteous) men confirming the apostasy.
13. **IO:** Moreover, based on the sharia the conditions of apostasy are: To be reasonable (not insane), maturity, intention, and free will. Based on these conditions, uttering blasphemous statements by someone who is insane or has not reached the age of maturity does not constitute apostasy. Likewise, someone who did not intentionally make blasphemous statements or was forced to do so is not considered an apostate.
14. **IO:** In conclusion, the term "apostasy" has been mentioned in the new Penal Code and press laws, albeit vaguely. However, in the current laws of the country, no specific punishment has been defined for apostasy. According to Article 2 of the Islamic Penal Code and Article 36 of the Constitution, legally, apostasy cannot be considered a crime for which a sentence can be issued and executed. Nevertheless, since we believe that apostasy is a religious offense, and in Islamic jurisprudence, severe punishments have been prescribed for it, we find ourselves compelled to acknowledge that judges, based on one of these legal provisions, may act in prosecuting cases of apostasy. The evident gaps in this area and the lack of explicit laws in this situation remain quite apparent.
15. **DIS:** *Has there been cases where rejected asylum applicants, who converted to Christianity while abroad, have been subjected to reactions upon return to Iran?*  
**IO:** This is not a common procedure to prosecute or interrogate returning migrants for this matter upon arrival. It may happen only when there is concrete evidence for that.  
**DIS:** *Follow-up question: Do you have any examples of this taking place?*  
**IO:** For example, there was a migrant who had shared a photo of himself in front a Church on his social media when he was abroad provoking that he had converted his religion. It was disclosed by someone to authorities and the migrant experienced arrest and interrogation for couple of weeks and was released accordingly.  
**DIS:** *If so, what kind of reactions?*  
**IO:** They undergo official legal procedure including arrest, prosecution and trial.  
**DIS:** *To what extent does this take place?*  
**IO:** Rarely.

### **Criticism of the authorities**

16. **DIS:** *What are the Iranian authorities' reactions towards rejected asylum applicants who have criticised the authorities through protests while residing abroad?*

**IO:** It depends on different matters such as the level of their engagement in such activities, their affiliation to opposition political groups, form of protest such as armed protest, use of violence, etc. Such cases also will undergo an official legal procedure to determine the punishment.

**DIS:** *Follow-up question: Have you come across an example of this? And can you describe the circumstances of the example?*

**IO:** Yes, there were some cases who experienced arrest and prosecution following their return because of political activities. Unfortunately, we do not have much details on the reasons and consequence but in general not all the former protestors are at risk of prosecution or serious punishment. As mentioned, it depends on the form of protests and level of engagement.

17. **DIS:** *Do the authorities monitor Iranian asylum applicants who participate in protests while residing abroad?*

**DIS:** *If so, to what extent?*

**DIS:** *If so, how do they monitor these protestors?*

**DIS:** *Has there been cases of Iranians who have protested against the authorities while abroad who have been subjected to arrest or other reprisals upon return to Iran?*

**DIS:** *If yes, which kind of reprisals?*

### **Avoiding serving sentence**

18. **DIS:** *What are the Iranian authorities' reactions towards rejected asylum applicants upon return, who initially fled to avoid serving a sentence issued by the Iranian authorities?*

**IO:** If the person is still under prosecution, they will be arrested and sent to the court of law for official legal procedure.

19. **DIS:** *If a person has fled a sentencing in Iran and later returns to the country, at what point are the authorities aware of the return?*

**IO:** Their return is registered at the airport so if the process of prosecution is still ongoing, they could be arrested at the airport or later after the arrival.

**DIS:** *How do the authorities react once the return of the individual is registered?*

**IO:** Same as above.

## **Written interview with an expert on cyber security (ECS)**

The interview was conducted on 25 June 2025.

### **Criticism of the authorities**

1. **DIS:** *Which type of profiles do the Iranian authorities monitor on social media among Iranian citizens living abroad?*

**DIS:** *What kind of criticism do the authorities pay attention to on social media?*

**DIS:** *At which point would any criticism attract the attention of the authorities?*

**ECS:** Firstly, in terms of Iranian "authorities" we know from various departments and especially budget classifications of various departments in Iran there are a lot of different institutions associated or contracted for government departments engaged in various activities - from monitoring for the purposes of intelligence gathering, or for influence operations. Evidence suggests there are numerous groups or contractors affiliated with the state that are operated across social media with these different aims of monitoring.

2. **ECS:** In terms of those who become targets by the authorities, there is evidence of identifying individuals partaking in things like anti-regime protests from documentation of such protests, to monitoring the expressions of individuals, especially if their language and intent is formed to be a significant threat or to have a lot of followers or impact on Persian media. There is particular sensitivity around those who have influence and followers in their anti-regime expression in Persian, or in mobilising people in protests and demonstrations both inside or outside of Iran in the diaspora.

3. **DIS:** *Do the authorities pay attention to which posts an individual likes or re-posts?*

**ECS:** I can't speak to the second point with a lot of knowledge.

### **Conversion to Christianity**

4. **DIS:** *When it comes to posts on social media belonging to Christian converts living abroad, are the authorities paying attention?*

**DIS:** *Do they pay attention to online conversion declarations?*

**ECS:** I do not know.

5. **DIS:** *Do they pay attention to individuals engaged in online proselytising activities?*

**ECS:** I do not know.

**DIS:** *Do you know of cases where rejected asylum applicants, who converted to Christianity while abroad have been subjected to reactions upon return to Iran?*

**ECS:** No.

### **Family members in Iran**

6. **DIS:** *What are the Iranian authorities' reactions towards Iranians who have politically active family members abroad? We are specifically thinking of activists who are not highly profiled.*

**ECS:** I personally have been active publicly and have a moderate profile (appeared in Persian and mainstream media) – I have discussed the need to mobilise and protest against the regime, and worked on things like proving the free expression merits of "death to Khamenei" chants on Meta. My family in Iran has not been impacted. If my following and platforms were wider, I think there would perhaps be a worry.

7. **DIS:** *Have you come across reaction from the Iranian authorities towards rejected asylum applicants whose protests have been covered in the media while residing abroad?*

**ECS:** No.

### **Meeting with a European scholar specialised in Iranian history**

The source has more than 20 years of academic experience at European universities. The interview was conducted on 18 august 2025.

#### **Monitoring European media**

1. The Iranian embassy in Denmark does read relevant publications in the Danish print media, but to what extent they monitor the press is difficult to say. It is the source's impression that the embassy has staff hired with the purpose of monitoring local media. The source imagines they have an archive over highly profiled individuals who often appear in the media.
2. The Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) has a solid cyber surveillance capability, including hacking, intimidation and spreading disinformation. Therefore, the source can imagine they monitor individuals on social media as well.
3. Since the Woman, Life, Freedom protests in 2022, the exiled Persian-speaking media feel more compelled to cover protests in different parts of Europe. These media outlets have been under scrutiny from the diaspora communities for not covering opposition activism outside of Iran.
4. It has become normal to see short footages on BBC Persian or Iran International of activists in European cities protesting. Even though the demonstrations in question might

consist of a group of only ten people. This makes it easier for possible asylum applicants among the protesting crowds to be recognised, because nowadays there are cameras everywhere.

### **Conversion to Christianity**

5. There are multiple reasons why IRI fears missionary activities. For one, missionary networks and activities are linked to the international community and Western powers outside of Iran. IRI fears missionaries can spread what they consider to be disinformation on opposition activities, as they have Persian-language TV-stations at their disposal. Generally, all opposition activities through media are always deemed as a threat.
6. IRI views the evangelical missionary activities as an extension of American influence and foreign powers' conspiracy against Iran. This is not entirely untrue given Iran's modern history and Western countries' intervention under the guise of protecting Christian minorities.

### **Monitoring protests**

7. The Iranian authorities do monitor Iranian protesters in the influential Western countries, such as Germany, France and the UK. They also monitor to some extent in smaller countries such as Denmark and Sweden. The source, however, cannot document that the authorities are specifically monitoring asylum applicants—nor that they have targeted rejected asylum applicants who return to Iran.
8. If members of the diaspora community gather to protest in front of Iran's embassy in Denmark, then there is a likelihood that they will be recorded on camera by the staff. The source, however, doubts IRI has the resources to archive footages in orderly fashion, or to cross-reference the exact identity of protest participants.
9. Protesters who are openly and loudly criticising IRI on social media put themselves in a vulnerable position with regards to attracting attention from Iran's embassy and risking surveillance. Those who are not politically active in the public eye may go under the radar.
10. Some activists cover their faces in front of the embassy, while others film each other and share those footages online. The source personally does not know of any asylum applicants who have protested in Denmark as activists.

11. The political modus operandi in activism and protests today is to stage your personal struggle as part of your political fight. An anonymous group of protesters does not get the same viral attention online as a single personal story would.
12. There are no longer established Iranian political opposition parties in exile. Anyone can be a political dissident on their own initiative. Two people, a flag, and a phone – and you have a demonstration. Because there are no parties nor list of names, it makes it more difficult to determine who is in fact an authentic protester and who is not. In addition to that, people change in life – and not just because their asylum claim has been rejected, but because they decide to become activists.
13. The scholar has met sources in their career who have either been asylum applicants or were at the time living in refugee camps, who expressed their fear of surveillance and espionage. Sometimes the fear is well-founded, other times it might be based on acute suspicion, because surveillance has been part of the political culture in Iran for a long time.
14. The source does not know which criteria IRI adheres to when they monitor political activists abroad. However, the source could imagine that the embassies are aware that asylum applicants could be part of the protesting crowds.
15. Certain groups have been subjected to extraterritorial suppression, such as journalists, members of ethnic separatist movements or political influencers on platforms such as Instagram and Telegram. The quantity of influence might be the defining reason that determines who IRI monitors.

## Annex 2: Terms of Reference (ToR)

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- Iranian authorities' reactions towards Iranian returnees who have criticised the authorities or promoted Christianity on social media while residing abroad
- Iranian authorities' reactions towards Iranian returnees who have converted to Christianity while residing abroad
- Iranian authorities' reactions towards Iranian returnees who have criticised the authorities through protests while residing abroad
- Iranian authorities' reactions towards Iranian returnees whose protests have been covered in the media while residing abroad
- Iranian authorities' reactions towards citizens, who have politically active family members abroad
- Iranian authorities' reactions towards Iranian returnees who have been sentenced previously by the authorities
- The general return procedures at the Imam Khomeini International Airport for rejected asylum seekers