Zagros Human Rights Center

Report on the Situation of National, Ethnic and Religious Minorities in Iran



November 2026

Table of Contents

Introduction 3

Legal framework, language, religion and political participation 3

Iranian Arabs and Baloch 4

Kurds and Azerbaijani Turks in Iran 4

Religious minorities and other ethnic groups 5

Repression, the death penalty and intersecting discrimination 6

Conclusion and recommendations for the Iranian authorities 7

Recommendations for states and regional organizations 8

Sources: 10

Introduction

Public data do not provide a reliable breakdown of Iran's population by ethnic origin or mother tongue. Figures reported for Persians, Azerbaijani Turks, Kurds, Baloch, Arabs and other groups are therefore estimates. Without comparable data on employment, education or criminal justice, differences between communities are also difficult to measure. [10]

This report focuses primarily on Iranian Arabs, Baloch, Kurds and Azerbaijani Turks in Iran. The term "minorities" is used here for groups with distinct circumstances, without presuming a shared political identity. Ethnicity and religious affiliation do not coincide: most Azerbaijani Turks are Shia, many Baloch are Sunni, and Iranian Kurds and Arabs have diverse religious affiliations. [10]

Legal framework, language, religion and political participation

Article 19 of Iran's Constitution proclaims the equality of citizens regardless of their ethnic origin or language. Article 15 makes Persian the language of official documents and school textbooks; it permits regional languages in the press and media and the teaching of their literature in schools alongside Persian. It does not, however, provide for general schooling in those languages. [1]

Persian remains the language of public education. Publications, media outlets, university courses and cultural events in other languages exist, but they do not amount to a guarantee of comprehensive public education in a child's mother tongue. [1]

The Constitution also distinguishes between religions. Article 12 establishes Twelver Jaʿfari Shia Islam as the official religion and recognizes several Sunni schools of jurisprudence. Article 13 recognizes only Zoroastrians, Jews and Christians as religious minorities. Bahá'ís and Yarsanis do not have this status, despite the protection of beliefs proclaimed in Article 23. [1]

Five seats in the Majlis are reserved for recognized religious minorities: two for Armenians and one each for Assyrian-Chaldeans, Jews and Zoroastrians. No seats are reserved for ethnolinguistic groups. Eligibility for the highest state offices also depends on religious criteria that disadvantage Sunnis and unrecognized communities. [1][10]

Membership of a minority does not, in itself, determine a person's position within the state: Shia Azerbaijani Turks hold institutional positions. ArcDH nonetheless reports prosecutions of Azerbaijani activists engaged in linguistic and civic issues. Those cases do not measure the representation of the community as a whole. [6]

Unemployment figures published by Tasnim for the Iranian summer of 1404 (2025) show rates of 10.6% in Khuzestan and 10.3% in Sistan and Baluchestan, compared with 7.4% nationwide; the rate in West Azerbaijan was 4.1%. These figures cover entire provinces whose residents do not all belong to the same community. On their own, they do not establish ethnic discrimination. [11]

Iranian Arabs and Baloch

Iranian Arabs live in Khuzestan, among other places; Persians, Lors, Bakhtiari and other populations also live in the province. Some Ahwazi groups use “Ahwaz” or “Al-Ahwaz” in a broader historical or political sense. The terms “Iranian Arabs” and “Ahwazi Arabs” are used here without endorsing any territorial claim. The Alahwazi Organization for Human Rights reports grievances concerning language, employment, the environment and prosecutions of cultural activists. [7]

The Alahwazi Organization for Human Rights describes arrests of Arab activists and prosecutions on national-security charges. Its assessments of state intentions and socioeconomic estimates require corroboration. Iran Human Rights has separately documented the execution of Arab prisoners. [7][14]

Iran Human Rights reports that six Ahwazi Arab prisoners were executed in Ahvaz on 4 October 2025. It cites allegations of torture and coerced confessions, as well as concerns about the fairness of their trials. [14]

On 16 November 2026, the Alahwazi Organization for Human Rights reported the nighttime arrests of at least nine Arab residents of Qaleh Chenan in Karun County. It said that their places of detention and the reasons for their arrests were then unknown. [8]

In Khuzestan, oil production, pollution, water-supply problems and unemployment overlap. The Alahwazi Organization for Human Rights regards some water-transfer policies and unequal access to employment as discrimination against Arabs. Available provincial statistics cannot isolate the effects of these policies on that population alone. [7][11]

Sistan and Baluchestan faces economic hardship and a tense border environment. Its unemployment rate was 10.3% in summer 2025, against 7.4% nationwide. The provincial figure covers all residents, not only Baloch people. [11]

Lack of identity documents exposes some people to administrative and employment difficulties. [5]

In Zahedan, HalVash reports that undocumented Baloch workers gathered to seek daily work were beaten and arrested by security forces in February 2026. The organization said that their exact number and place of detention were then unknown. [5]

Iran Human Rights notes that, in four provinces including Sistan and Baluchestan, more than 92% of executions recorded in 2025 had not been officially announced. Baloch people may also be executed elsewhere, and prisoners’ ethnic origins are not always known. Provincial figures therefore cannot be used to calculate an execution rate for this group. [2]

Kurds and Azerbaijani Turks in Iran

Kurds live mainly in western and northwestern Iran, particularly in the provinces of Kordestan, Kermanshah, West Azerbaijan, Ilam and Hamadan. Long-established Kurdish communities also live in the northeast, notably in North Khorasan and Razavi Khorasan. [3]

These provinces are multiethnic. Kurds themselves include Sunnis, Shia and Yarsanis, as well as people with widely differing political views. [3][10]

In the first half of 2026, Kurdpa classified more than 1,430 incidents in Kurdish regions as serious human-rights violations. Its total includes arrests, convictions and other categories: it is neither a count of distinct victims nor an exhaustive record. [3]

Kurdpa also recorded at least 62 arrests of Kurdish citizens between 24 July and 24 August 2026. That figure alone does not establish the grounds in each case or whether the people concerned are prisoners of conscience. [12]

In Kurdish border areas, “kulbars” carry goods on foot and face risks including gunfire, falls and severe weather. Records compiled by local organizations are not a complete official count. Efforts to combat smuggling do not exempt security forces from the rules governing the use of force. [3]

Executions of Kurdish prisoners arise from both ordinary criminal cases and political or religious charges. In July 2026, Hengaw reported the execution of two prisoners convicted of “baghi” (“armed rebellion”). The safeguards afforded in each proceeding remain crucial to assessing its fairness. [2][4]

Kurdish women may encounter discrimination based on sex, ethnicity or religion, but the available national data do not show how often these factors coincide. [10]

Azerbaijani Turks, most of whom are Shia, participate in Iran’s institutions and economy. That does not negate activists’ demands for Azerbaijani-language education and freedom of association and expression. ArcDH reports restrictions affecting linguistic and cultural activists. [6]

ArcDH reports prosecutions and lengthy sentences against Azerbaijani activists, including national-security cases connected with civic or cultural activities. The report gives no overall count of these prosecutions. [6]

In September 2026, ArcDH denounced restrictions on cultural rights and prosecutions of Azerbaijani civic activists. [6]

The presence of Azerbaijani Turks in state institutions can coexist with restrictions on some linguistic activists. Public employment and investment data are not broken down by ethnicity, making the extent and causes of any disparities hard to assess. [6]

Religious minorities and other ethnic groups

Iranian Sunnis include Baloch, Kurds, Turkmen, Arabs and Persians. Article 12 of the Constitution recognizes several Sunni schools of jurisprudence but reserves official-religion status for Twelver Shia Islam. IranWire reports restrictions affecting some clerics and places of worship, without establishing their nationwide extent. [1][10]

The Bahá’í faith is not among the religions recognized under Article 13 of the Constitution. IranWire describes barriers to education and employment, as well as confiscations and prosecutions affecting members of the community. Religious affiliation is not evidence of espionage. [10]

IranWire also reports detentions and searches involving Bahá’ís in several provinces. Community figures cover different dates and use different methods, so they cannot be combined into a national total for a particular date. [10]

Constitutional recognition of Armenian and Assyrian-Chaldean churches does not extend to converts from Islam, including Persian-speaking evangelicals. Article18 recorded 254 arrests of Christians linked to their faith or religious activities in 2025, compared with 139 in 2024. It reports that 57 people served prison, exile or forced-labor sentences in 2025; at year-end, 43 were still serving sentences and at least 16 others were in pretrial detention. These are documented cases, not a comprehensive count. [9]

Article18 reports prosecutions under the amended Article 500 of the Penal Code and surveillance of evangelical networks, Bible distribution and meetings in private homes. Following the war with Israel in 2025, authorities linked some Christians to "Zionism" or foreign networks. Neither religious practice nor ties to churches abroad are, in themselves, proof of espionage. [9]

Yarsanis, who live particularly in western Iran, are not among the religious minorities recognized under Article 13. IranWire describes difficulties concerning recognition of their practices and access to certain rights. Information on Mandaeans is more limited and does not permit an estimate of the size of their community. [10]

Sufi orders, including the Gonabadi dervishes, are not among the religious minorities expressly recognized by Article 13 of the Constitution. [1]

Jews and Zoroastrians have constitutional recognition and reserved parliamentary seats. Jewish people may nonetheless face suspicion linked to the conflict with Israel; neither religion nor family ties, in themselves, establish culpability. [10]

Zoroastrians thus have a different legal status from Bahá'ís and Christian converts. Twelver Shia Islam nevertheless remains the official religion. The cited material gives no comparable prosecution figures for these communities. [1][10]

Turkmen, Lors, Qashqai, Gilaks, Mazandaranis and Talysh are also among Iran's linguistic or regional groups. The privileged position of Persian in administration and schools may prompt linguistic demands, but findings about one group cannot automatically be applied to the others. [1][10]

Repression, the death penalty and intersecting discrimination

Iran Human Rights recorded 163 executions in 2025 in West Azerbaijan, East Azerbaijan, Sistan and Baluchestan, and Kurdistan—approximately 10% of the total it documented that year. This figure relates to where executions took place, not to the ethnic origin of the prisoners: Kurds and Baloch are also executed elsewhere. On its own, it therefore cannot establish ethnic overrepresentation. [2]

According to Iran Human Rights, more than 92% of executions it recorded in these four provinces in 2025 had not been announced by the authorities. None of those it recorded in Sistan and Baluchestan had reportedly been publicized by official media. Verification therefore relies on families, prisons, local organizations and available public announcements. [2]

For the period from 10 October 2025 to 10 October 2026, Kurdpa says it identified 77 Kurds, 70 Baloch, 29 Arabs and 17 Turks among those executed. These figures cover cases in which ethnic origin could be established; they are neither an official total nor population-based rates. [13]

Death-penalty cases involving members of minorities do not all concern the same offenses: drug crimes, murder subject to qisas (retribution), political cases or national-security charges. A prisoner's ethnic origin does not, by itself, establish the reason for an execution. Trial safeguards, access to counsel and torture allegations must be examined in each case. [2][3]

For women from minority communities, the effects of gender, religion, ethnic origin and economic circumstances may overlap. Cases involving the prosecution of women activists or members of religious communities illustrate this, but the data reviewed do not permit a statistical comparison of risks across groups. [10]

In some provinces, children may face obstacles linked to poverty, civil-registration status or the lack of public schooling in their first language. Article 15 of the Constitution permits the teaching of regional-language literature but does not establish a general right to bilingual schooling. The material cited here provides no basis for attributing school dropout to language or ethnicity alone. [1][5]

Some Kurdish, Baloch, Turkmen and Arab communities live in border provinces. The authorities cite the need to combat smuggling, armed groups, drug trafficking and espionage there. Those security concerns do not justify collective guilt or the prosecution of peaceful linguistic demands. [3][7]

External conflicts may also heighten suspicions of collaboration directed at religious minorities. Allegations of espionage discussed in the 2025 investigations must be based on individual conduct, not a person's religion or family relationships. [10]

Conclusion and recommendations for the Iranian authorities

The equality proclaimed in the Constitution coexists with a public school system dominated by Persian and a state whose official religion is Twelver Shia Islam. The difficulties documented differ among communities: civil-registration problems and economic hardship in border areas for some Baloch; prosecutions of Kurdish or Azerbaijani activists; and arrests and environmental concerns reported in Khuzestan. These findings do not describe the circumstances of every member of the communities concerned. [2][3][5][6][7][10]

The constitutional distinction between recognized and unrecognized religions also affects access to rights. The investigations cited report restrictions against Bahá'ís and Christian converts, obstacles faced by some Sunnis and, in more specific cases, pressure on members of other communities. The circumstances of Jews, members of historically recognized Christian churches and Yarsanis cannot be reduced to a single pattern. [9][10]

The authorities should publish reliable data on regional, linguistic and religious inequalities, with the consent of those concerned and strong confidentiality safeguards. Independent researchers could then assess disparities in education, employment, healthcare or criminal justice without turning data collection into a tool of surveillance.

Article 15 could be implemented more fully through bilingual or multilingual programs where there is local demand, including in Arabic, Balochi, Kurdish and Azerbaijani Turkish. Proficiency in Persian would remain an educational goal; it does not require abandoning mother-tongue education or prosecuting peaceful cultural activities. [1]

The authorities should stop using national-security provisions against peaceful expression and religious practice. They should also ensure prompt access to a lawyer of the detainee's choice, inform families of detentions and investigate allegations of torture or enforced disappearance. Language, ethnic origin or religion must not be treated as evidence of disloyalty. [3][7][9][10]

A moratorium on executions is particularly urgent in political, religious and drug-related cases, and where proceedings are challenged because of torture or a lack of legal assistance. At a minimum, the authorities should publish judgments, charges, information on appeal rights and data enabling independent scrutiny. [2][3]

Development policies should address local needs in Sistan and Baluchestan, Khuzestan and Kurdish regions: water, healthcare, education, jobs, transport and environmental protection. Residents, including women and representatives of the communities concerned, should be able to participate in decisions. [7][11]

Recommendations for states and regional organizations

States and regional organizations should:

1. Raise concerns about linguistic, religious and political restrictions in diplomatic exchanges with the Iranian authorities, seeking responses on documented cases.
2. Support demands by Arabs, Baloch, Kurds and Azerbaijani Turks for linguistic, cultural, social and political rights, and for participation in decisions that affect them.
3. Call for the release of people detained solely for peacefully exercising their rights, including journalists, human-rights defenders and cultural or religious activists.
4. Call for a moratorium on executions, commutation of death sentences and observance of fair-trial guarantees, with a view to abolition.
5. Target those responsible for serious violations with sanctions rather than the civilian population, and avoid broad economic measures that would deepen hardship in marginalized regions.
6. Defend freedom of thought and religion for all people, whether or not they belong to a community recognized by Iran's Constitution and whether or not they profess a religion.
7. Ensure that protection measures address the particular obstacles faced by women and children from minority communities, including in education, healthcare and access to justice.
8. Support civil-society organizations, independent media and human-rights defenders who document abuses, both in Iran and in the diaspora.
9. Protect refugees and asylum seekers at risk of persecution, uphold the principle of non-refoulement and assess the risks of transnational repression.
10. Include minority rights in diplomatic, political and economic relations with Iran rather than setting them aside during security or trade negotiations.

11. Involve representatives of different communities directly in international consultations on Iran's political and institutional future, without assuming that they share the same priorities.

Protecting individual and collective rights also depends on the ability of the communities concerned to participate freely in public life.

Sources:

[1] Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, adopted in 1979 and revised in 1989; Persian text reproduced by Lawlex from the Iranian Parliament Research Center; accessed 26 November 2026. https://lawlex.ir/laws/asasi

[2] Iran Human Rights, "Annual Report on the Death Penalty in Iran 2025" (2026), especially the section "Ethnic Minorities"; accessed 26 November 2026. https://iranhr.net/media/files/2025_Annual_Report_on_the_Death_Penalty.pdf

[3] Kurdistan Press Agency (Kurdpa), "Report on 6 Months of Structural Repression; More Than 1,430 Gross Human Rights Violations in Kurdistan," 25 July 2026, in English; accessed 26 November 2026. https://kurdpa.net/en/news/2026-07-25-60567

[4] Hengaw Organization for Human Rights, "Iran executes two Kurdish religious prisoners convicted of baghi," 14 July 2026, in English; accessed 26 November 2026. https://hengaw.net/en/news/2026/07/article-65

[5] HalVash Human Rights Organization, "Violent arrest of several Baloch citizens without identity cards by military forces in Zahedan," 5 February 2026, in English and Persian; accessed 26 November 2026. https://www.haalvsh.org/en/2026/02/05/%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%AA-%D8%AE%D8%B4%D9%88%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%A2%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%B2-%DA%86%D9%86%D8%AF-%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%86%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D9%84%D9%88%DA%86-%D9%81%D8%A7/

[6] Association for Human Rights of Azerbaijanis in Iran (ArcDH), « تداوم تبعیض و جرم‌انگاری فعالیت‌های مدنی علیه آذربایجانی‌ها در ایران، مانعی در برابر توسعه پایدار است » ["Continued discrimination and criminalization of Azerbaijani civic activity in Iran are an obstacle to sustainable development"], September 2026, in Persian; accessed 26 November 2026. https://fa.arcdh.eu/%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%B9%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%AD%D9%82%D9%88%D9%82-%D8%A8%D8%B4%D8%B1-%D8%A2%D8%B0%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D8%B1%DA%A9-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B4%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A7/

[7] Alahwazi Organization for Human Rights, "Report on Human Rights Violations in Ahwaz Region" (2026), in English; accessed 26 November 2026. https://www.alahwaz-hro.com/report-on-human-rights-violations-in-ahwaz-region/

[8] Alahwazi Organization for Human Rights, "Arrest of Several Arab Citizens in Nighttime Intelligence Raids in Qaleh Chenan, Ahwaz," November 2026, in English; accessed 26 November 2026. https://www.alahwaz-hro.com/arrest-of-several-arab-citizens-in-nighttime-intelligence-raids-in-qaleh-chenan-ahwaz/

[9] Article18, "'Scapegoats' – 2026 Annual Report" (report on violations against Christians in Iran during 2025), published in 2026; accessed 26 November 2026. https://articleeighteen.com/reports/23548/

[10] IranWire, "Conscience Held Captive: The State of Religious Minorities in the Islamic Republic of Iran – Annual Report: 2025" (covering, among other periods, October–December

2025), published 9 February 2026; accessed 26 November 2026. https://iranwire.com/en/religious-minorities/151212-conscience-held-captive-the-state-of-religious-minorities-in-the-islamic-republic-of-iran-annual-report-2025/

[11] Tasnim News Agency, citing data from the Statistical Center of Iran, « شکاف ۶٫۵ درصدی نرخ بیکاری در کشور؛ جزئیات » ["A 6.5% gap in unemployment rates across the country: details"], provincial unemployment data for summer 1404/2025; published in 2026, in Persian; accessed 26 November 2026. https://www.tasnimnews.ir/fa/news/1404/11/19/3511882/%D8%B4%DA%A9%D8%A7%D9%81-6-5-%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%B5%D8%AF%DB%8C-%D9%86%D8%B1%D8%AE-%D8%A8%DB%8C%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%DA%A9%D8%B4%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%AC%D8%B2%D8%A6%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%AA

[12] Kurdistan Press Agency (Kurdpa), "Kurdistan: Arbitrary Detention of 62 Kurdish Citizens in One Month," 28 August 2026. https://www.kurdpa.net/en/news/2026-08-28-60950

[13] Kurdistan Press Agency (Kurdpa), "From October to October: The Islamic Republic Executed at Least 1,461 People Over the Past Year," 11 October 2026. https://www.kurdpa.net/en/news/2026-10-11-61309

[14] Iran Human Rights, "7 Arab and Kurdish Prisoners of Conscience Executed in Ahvaz and Karaj," 4 October 2025; accessed 26 November 2026. https://iranhr.net/en/articles/8123/