



Home Office

# **Country Policy and Information Note**

## **Iran: Kurds and Kurdish political groups**

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# Preface

## Purpose

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

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

## Assessment

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

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

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

## Country of origin information

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Feedback

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

## Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

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

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

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

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# Assessment

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## 1. Basis of claim

- 1.1.1 Fear of persecution or serious harm by the Iranian authorities because the person is Kurdish and/or because of their perceived or actual affiliation to a Kurdish political group.

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## 2. Consideration of issues

### 2.1 Credibility

- 2.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).
- 2.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).
- 2.1.3 Decision makers should also consider the need to conduct language analysis testing (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).
- 2.1.4 For information on establishing membership of a Kurdish political group, see [Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran \(KDPI\)](#), [Kurdish Democratic Party-Iran \(KDP-I\)](#), [Komala Parties](#) (Kurdistan Organisation of the Communist Party of Iran) (Komala, Sazamane Kurdistan Hezbe Kommuniste Iran) (Komala, SKHKI), [Komala of Toilers of Kurdistan and the Komala Party of Kurdistan \(Komala Zahmatkeshane Kurdistan\)](#) (Komala, KZK) and [Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan](#) and [Party of Free Life for Kurdistan \(PJAK\)](#) (Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistan) in the country information section.
- 2.1.5 See also the country policy and information note: [Iran: Background Information \(including actors of protection and internal relocation\)](#).

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### 2.2 Exclusion

- 2.2.1 The PJAK, KDPI and the Komala Parties have mounted armed campaigns against the Iranian regime (see background to sections on the [Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran \(KDPI, PDKI or DPKI\)](#), [Komala \(Lomaleh/Komalah\) parties](#) and the [Party of Free Life for Kurdistan \(PJAK or PEJAK\)](#)).
- 2.2.2 If it is accepted that the person has been involved with such activities, then decision makers must consider whether one of the exclusion clauses is applicable.
- 2.2.3 For further information and guidance on the exclusion clauses, discretionary leave and restricted leave, see the [Asylum Instruction on Exclusion: Article 1F of the Refugee Convention](#), the [Asylum Instruction on Discretionary Leave](#) and the [Asylum Instruction on Restricted Leave](#).

## 2.3 Convention reason

- 2.3.1 A Kurd claiming to be at risk of serious harm or persecution on the basis of ethnicity falls under the Convention reason of race. A Kurd who claims to be at risk of serious harm or persecution on the basis of Kurdish political activity falls under the Convention reason of actual or imputed political opinion.
- 2.3.2 Establishing a Convention reason alone is not sufficient to be recognised as a refugee. The question to be addressed in each case is whether the particular person will face a real risk of persecution on account of their actual or imputed convention reason.
- 2.3.3 For further guidance on Convention reasons and particular social groups, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

## 2.4 Assessment of risk

### a. Kurdish ethnicity

- 2.4.1 There are about 8 million Kurds in Iran, approximately 10% of the population. Iranian Kurds mostly live in the north-west of the country in an area referred to as 'Kurdistan' by ethnic Kurds and their supporters (see [Demography](#)).
- 2.4.2 Kurds in Iran face institutional discrimination which affects their access to basic services such as housing, employment and education (see [State treatment of Kurds](#)).
- 2.4.3 In the country guidance case of [HB \(Kurds\) Iran CG \[2018\] UKUT 430 \(IAC\)](#) (heard 20-22 February and 25 May 2018 and promulgated 12 December 2018), the Upper Tribunal found: 'Kurds in Iran face discrimination. However, the evidence does not support a contention that such discrimination is, in general, at such a level as to amount to persecution or Article 3 ill-treatment.' (para 98 (2)).
- 2.4.4 In [HB](#), the Upper Tribunal also found:

'Since 2016 the Iranian authorities have become increasingly suspicious of, and sensitive to, Kurdish political activity. Those of Kurdish ethnicity are thus regarded with even greater suspicion than hitherto and are reasonably likely to be subjected to heightened scrutiny on return to Iran.

'However, the mere fact of being a returnee of Kurdish ethnicity with or without a valid passport, and even if combined with illegal exit, does not create a risk of persecution or Article 3 ill-treatment.

'Kurdish ethnicity is nevertheless a risk factor which, when combined with other factors, may create a real risk of persecution or Article 3 ill-treatment...' (para 98 (3) to (5))

### b. Kurdish political activity

- 2.4.5 In [HB](#), the Upper Tribunal found that other 'risk factors' which, when combined with Kurdish ethnicity, may create a real risk of persecution or Article 3 ill-treatment include:

a. 'A period of residence in the KRI [Kurdistan Region of Iraq] by a Kurdish returnee is reasonably likely to result in additional questioning by the authorities on return. However, this is a factor that will be highly fact-specific and the degree of interest that such residence will excite will depend, non-exhaustively, on matters such as the length of residence in the KRI, what the person concerned was doing there and why they left.

b. 'Kurds involved in Kurdish political groups or activity are at risk of arrest, prolonged detention and physical abuse by the Iranian authorities. Even Kurds expressing peaceful dissent or who speak out about Kurdish rights also face a real risk of persecution or Article 3 ill-treatment.

c. 'Activities that can be perceived to be political by the Iranian authorities include social welfare and charitable activities on behalf of Kurds. Indeed, involvement with any organised activity on behalf of or in support of Kurds can be perceived as political and thus involve a risk of adverse attention by the Iranian authorities with the consequent risk of persecution or Article 3 ill-treatment.

d. 'Even "low-level" political activity, or activity that is perceived to be political, such as, by way of example only, mere possession of leaflets espousing or supporting Kurdish rights, if discovered, involves the same risk of persecution or Article 3 ill-treatment. Each case however, depends on its own facts and an assessment will need to be made as to the nature of the material possessed and how it would be likely to be viewed by the Iranian authorities in the context of the foregoing guidance.

e. 'The Iranian authorities demonstrate what could be described as a "hair-trigger" approach to those suspected of or perceived to be involved in Kurdish political activities or support for Kurdish rights. By "hair-trigger" it means that the threshold for suspicion is low and the reaction of the authorities is reasonably likely to be extreme.' (para 98 (6) to (10))

2.4.6 Family members of people associated with a Kurdish political group may also be harassed and detained (see [Treatment of family members](#)).

2.4.7 Decision makers must consider each case on its merits, with the onus on the person to show that the activity engaged in is likely to be viewed as a Kurdish political activity or support for Kurdish rights by the Iranian authorities.

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#### c. Participation with Kurdish armed groups

2.4.8 Most Kurdish political parties have factions which have been involved in an armed conflict with the Iranian authorities in the northwest Kurdish region of Iran, primarily targeting security assets and personnel. Those involved in violent political activity are likely to be of the greatest interest to the Iranian authorities (see [Kurdish political groups](#)).

2.4.9 Family members of persons associated with a Kurdish armed group may also be harassed and detained (see [Treatment of family members](#)).

2.4.10 The Iranian government has a legitimate right to act against terrorism – including acts committed by the PJAK, KDPI, Komala or other armed groups



– and to use all lawful and proportionate means to do so. This includes seeking to prosecute those who belong to, or profess to belong to, or invite support for, the armed wing of the organisations.

- 2.4.11 However, prosecution may amount to persecution if it involves victimisation in its application by the authorities; for example, if it is the vehicle or excuse for persecution of a person or if only certain groups are prosecuted for a particular offence and the consequences of that discrimination are sufficiently severe. Punishment which is cruel, inhuman or degrading (including punishment which is out of all proportion to the offence committed) may also amount to persecution.
- 2.4.12 In order for the person to qualify on the basis of a breach of Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights (right to a fair trial), a person needs to demonstrate a real risk of a flagrant violation of that right. Decision makers should consider whether a person has demonstrated that the alleged treatment in the country of return would be so serious as to amount to a flagrant violation or a flagrant denial of the protected right. However decision makers must also consider whether the one of the exclusion clauses would be applicable (see exclusion). For further information, see the [Asylum Instruction on Considering human rights claims](#).
- 2.4.13 Decision makers must also refer to the country policy information note, [Iran: Background Information \(including actors of protection and internal relocation\)](#), for information and analysis about Iran’s judiciary, and the country policy information note, [Iran: Prison conditions](#), for information and analysis about Iran’s prisons.
- 2.4.14 For further information and guidance on assessing risk, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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## 2.5 Protection

- 2.5.1 As the person’s fear is of ill treatment/persecution at the hands of the state, they will not be able to avail themselves of the protection of the authorities.
- 2.5.2 For further guidance on assessing the availability of state protection, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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## 2.6 Internal relocation

- 2.6.1 As the person’s fear is of ill treatment/persecution at the hands of the state, they will not be able to relocate to escape that risk.
- 2.6.2 For further guidance on considering internal relocation and the factors to be taken into account, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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## 2.7 Certification

- 2.7.1 Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as ‘clearly unfounded’ under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

2.7.2 For further information and guidance on certification, see the [Appeals Instruction on Non-Suspensive Appeals: Certification Under Section 94 of the NIA Act 2002](#).

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# Country information

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## 3. Background

### 3.1 Demography

- 3.1.1 Kurds comprise 10% of Iran's population of over 80 million, the second largest ethnic minority behind Azeris (Azerbaijanis) (16% of the population)<sup>1</sup>.
- 3.1.2 Iran's Kurdish population is second in size only to the Kurds in Turkey and probably larger than the Iraqi and Syrian Kurdish populations combined<sup>2</sup>.
- 3.1.3 Iranian Kurds mostly live in the north-west of the country in an area referred to as 'Kurdistan' by ethnic Kurds and their supporters<sup>3</sup>. Kurdistan is also the name of an official province in Iran within this region<sup>4</sup>. The below map shows the location of the Kurds in the Middle East<sup>5</sup>.

### Kurds in the middle East



This map shows only the main areas of settlement of Kurds in the Middle East.  
Source: ATLAS - Syria, [www.ecoi.net/atlas\\_syria.pdf](http://www.ecoi.net/atlas_syria.pdf)



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<sup>1</sup> MRGI, Iran, undated, [url](#)

<sup>2</sup> Guardian, 'Poetry and silence', 26 February 2016, [url](#)

<sup>3</sup> Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior, The Kurds (p.22), November 2015, [url](#)

<sup>4</sup> Maps of the World, map of Iranian provinces, 30 September 2014, [url](#)

<sup>5</sup> Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior, The Kurds (p.184), November 2015, [url](#)

## 3.2 Language

- 3.2.1 Kurds speak Kurdish. Persian (Farsi) is the national language of Iran, used in government and education<sup>6</sup>. 'Literary Persian' (the language's more refined variant) is the predominant language of literature, journalism and the sciences and is understood to some degree by most Iranians<sup>7</sup>.
- 3.2.2 The OrvilleJenkins.com website has produced [a chart](#)<sup>8</sup> (last edited in January 2013) summarising an extensive survey and evaluation of the Kurdish peoples and the languages they speak.
- 3.2.3 Further information on Kurdish dialects can be found in the Austria – Federal Ministry of the Interior report, '[The Kurds: History – Religion – Language – Politics](#)' published in November 2015' (pages 30-51)<sup>9</sup>.

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## 3.3 Legal and constitutional framework

- 3.3.1 Article 19 of the Iranian Constitution states: 'All people of Iran, whatever the ethnic group or tribe to which they belong, enjoy equal rights; and color, race, language, and the like, do not bestow any privilege'.<sup>10</sup>
- 3.3.2 However, the US State Department (USSD)'s human rights report for 2017 published in 2018 stated that: 'In practice, minorities did not enjoy equal rights.'<sup>11</sup> For more information, see [State treatment of Kurds](#).

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## 3.4 History

- 3.4.1 For information on the history of the Kurdish region see the [Kurdish project website](#)<sup>12</sup> and the Austria- Federal Ministry of the Interior report '[The Kurds: History – Religion – Language – Politics](#)'<sup>13</sup>.

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# 4. State treatment of Kurds

## 4.1 Profiles of targeted Kurds

- 4.1.1 Amnesty International's 2017-18 report noted: 'Intelligence and security bodies frequently accused minority rights activists of supporting "separatist currents" threatening Iran's territorial integrity.'<sup>14</sup>
- 4.1.2 The same report also noted: 'Iran's border guards continued to unlawfully shoot and kill, with full impunity, scores of unarmed Kurdish men known as Kulbars who work as cross-border porters between Iraqi and Iranian Kurdistan. In September [2017], security forces violently suppressed protests

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<sup>6</sup> World Atlas, Society: What Languages are Spoken in Iran, 22 August 2017, [url](#)

<sup>7</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, 'Iran-languages', undated, [url](#)

<sup>8</sup> Orville Jenkins, The Kurdish Peoples, January 2013, [url](#)

<sup>9</sup> Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior, The Kurds (pp.30-51), November 2015, [url](#)

<sup>10</sup> Iran Constitution, 1989, [url](#)

<sup>11</sup> USSD, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Iran (Section 6), April 2018, [url](#)

<sup>12</sup> The Kurdish Project, Iran (Rojhelat or Eastern Kurdistan) (Section 6), [url](#)

<sup>13</sup> Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior, The Kurds, November 2015 (pp.162-65), [url](#)

<sup>14</sup> AI, Iran 2017- 2018 report, 22 February 2018, [url](#)

in Baneh and Sanandaj over the fatal shootings of two Kulbars, and detained more than a dozen people.<sup>15</sup>

- 4.1.3 The report also noted: ‘There was a heavy police presence across Kurdistan province in September [2017] when members of Iran’s Kurdish minority held rallies in support of the independence referendum in the Kurdish region of northern Iraq. More than a dozen people were reportedly arrested.’<sup>16</sup>
- 4.1.4 Freedom’s House’s 2018 report on Iran explained: ‘Activists campaigning for the rights of ethnic minorities and greater autonomy for minority regions have come under pressure from the authorities, and some have been jailed.’<sup>17</sup>
- 4.1.5 The Danish Immigration Service, Norwegian Landinfo and Danish Refugee Council’s fact-finding mission to Tehran, Ankara and London, 9 to 20 November 2012 and 8 to 9 January 2013, interviewing Azad Zamani, a ‘human rights activist of Kurdish origin in London’, stated:
- ‘It was considered that generally, no matter what ethnic or religious background, an individual has, if he or she plainly accets [sic] and lives by the Islamic regime, he or she will be left alone. However, there is institutional discrimination in Iran and it would for example be harder for a Kurd to get a job compared to a Persian Iranian. While it was considered that Kurds would be subject to harsher treatment from the authorities than ethnic Persians, one cannot say that there would be differences between how Kurds are treated in different areas of Iran. In the border areas where there could be some interactions and activities between armed groups, it is however, a different story’.<sup>18</sup>
- 4.1.6 In the same Danish report, a Western Embassy noted: ‘If the Kurdish people are organizing cultural activities and a number of people gather, the authorities will fear that it is a cover for political activities for which reason they are also suppressing cultural activities and expression.’<sup>19</sup>
- 4.1.7 The same Danish report, intervieweing the London-based Amnesty International International Secretariat (AIIS), stated: ‘The activities that Kurds conduct that can be perceived as political activities include social welfare and solidarity activities.’<sup>20</sup>
- 4.1.8 The Danish Refugee Council and Danish Immigration Service’s fact finding mission on Iranian Kurds, 30 May to 9 June 2013, consulting a ‘western diplomat and expert on Iran in Erbil’, stated that ‘being a Kurd in Iran does not necessarily mean getting into trouble with the authorities as has been the case in Syria. Troubles will start as soon as a person gets involved in political activities.’<sup>21</sup>
- 4.1.9 The same report also noted:
- ‘An NGO working with asylum seekers and refugees in Iraq stated that the Iranian intelligence agents are present in KRI, and they have good relations

<sup>15</sup> AI, Iran 2017- 2018 report, 22 February 2018, [url](#)

<sup>16</sup> AI, Iran 2017- 2018 report, 22 February 2018, [url](#)

<sup>17</sup> Freedom House, ‘Freedom in the World, Iran: profile 2018’, [url](#)

<sup>18</sup> Landinfo, DIS and DRC, FFM report (p.42), February 2013, [url](#)

<sup>19</sup> Landinfo, DIS and DRC, FFM report (p.40), February 2013, [url](#)

<sup>20</sup> Landinfo, DIS and DRC, FFM report (p.44), February 2013, [url](#)

<sup>21</sup> DIS and DRC, ‘Iranian Kurds’ (p.15), September 2013, [url](#)



with some of the Iraqi Kurdish political parties in KRI. Formerly, the Iranian intelligence service assassinated Iranians living in KRI but since 2009 this has no longer taken place. [...] Sardar Mohammad and Asos Hardi (Awene Newspaper) pointed to the strong presence of the Iranian intelligence in KRI and their ability to monitor Iranian nationals and their activities in the area. The source added that many Iranians residing in KRI have received threats from the Iranian intelligence service or have had their telephones tapped.<sup>22</sup>

- 4.1.10 The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and Danish Immigration Service (DIS), in their publication on Iran, 'Issues concerning persons of ethnic minorities, Kurds and Ahwazi Arabs,' March 2018, stated:

'The Iranian authorities have [a] military presence in the Kurdish areas. The military presence is not always visible. Sometimes the military does not appear as ordinary military but in plain clothes ... Kurds asserting their ethnic and religious identity are a target, as well as Kurds engaging in or associated with political activities. Further, Kurds promoting or perceived to be promoting separatism are also a target.

'A Western embassy noted that there is no persecution of Kurds solely because of their ethnicity in Iran. Another Western embassy mentioned that according to the Iranian laws, Kurds in Iran enjoy the same rights as other Iranian citizens; even though both embassies said that Kurds may be oppressed. Middle East Consultancy Services added that arbitrary detainment occurs.

'The authorities may interfere in cultural activities conducted in the Kurdish areas, but it is difficult to point out when the red line is crossed and why the authorities intervene. An associate professor explained that it depends on time and event. Further, activities framed as Kurdish are regarded with suspicion...

'Other activities that may trigger the attention of the authorities are gatherings of more than a few people. The authorities might interrogate the gathered people and arrest or question them without further prosecution, or with subsequent prosecution.'<sup>23</sup>

- 4.1.11 The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), in their 2018 report on Iran assessed that:

'...members of ethnic minority groups face a moderate risk of official and societal discrimination, particularly where they are in the minority in the geographic area in which they reside. This may take the form of denial of access to employment and housing, but is unlikely in most cases to include violence on the grounds of ethnicity alone. The risk to members of ethnic minority groups who are involved (or are perceived to be involved) in activism is higher.'<sup>24</sup>

- 4.1.12 The DFAT report added:

'International sources report that the government uses security, media and other laws to arrest and prosecute Kurds for exercising freedom of

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<sup>22</sup> DIS and DRC, 'Iranian Kurds' (p.56), September 2013, [url](#)

<sup>23</sup> DIS and DRC, 'Issues concerning persons of ethnic minorities', (pp.5-6), February 2018, [url](#)

<sup>24</sup> DFAT report (p.17), 7 June 2018, [url](#)

expression and association. The government has reportedly banned Kurdish-language newspapers, journals and books. Authorities have denied Kurdish NGO [non-Government Organisations]'s registration permits, and brought security charges against persons working with such organisations. NGOs claim this has suppressed legitimate activity. Authorities prohibited most schools from teaching the Kurdish language (although not its use in informal settings).'<sup>25</sup>

- 4.1.13 The DFAT report commented on the treatment of Sunnis, which includes most Kurds:

'In August 2016, approximately 25 Kurdish Sunnis were executed for the crime of "enmity against God". The executed men were part of a larger group, most of whom were arrested between 2009 and 2011 when several armed confrontations and assassinations took place in Kurdistan province. Several other Sunnis convicted on the same charge remain on death row. Authorities released videos after the execution featuring the convicted men confessing to involvement with a jihadist group that plotted armed attacks and assassinations of "non-believers". Many of the executed men had repeatedly denied their involvement in such activities during their years on death row, and in some cases the men were linked to crimes that occurred months after they had been arrested ... The Iranian government claims it acted to suppress Sunni extremism. DFAT assesses that Sunnis face a moderate risk of official discrimination in that the structure of the Islamic Republic inevitably favours the Shi'a Muslim majority to the exclusion of others. The considerable overlap between ethnicity and religion for many Sunnis makes it difficult to distinguish between discrimination on the grounds of religion and discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity.'<sup>26</sup>

- 4.1.14 For information and assessment of risk on Kurds involved in smuggling activities, see the [Country Information and Guidance document on Iran: Smugglers](#).

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## 4.2 Discrimination

- 4.2.1 Amnesty International<sup>27</sup>, Freedom House<sup>28</sup> and the US State Department<sup>29</sup> all note, in their respective annual rights reports, that ethnic minorities in Iran continue to report that they face various forms of discrimination. This ranges from problems with access to employment, housing, and land rights, access to political office, the exercise of cultural, civil and political rights, restrictions on the use of language and permission to publish books.

- 4.2.2 Freedom House, in their report 'Freedom in the World, Iran, 2018,' stated: 'Some provinces with large minority populations remain underdeveloped.'<sup>30</sup> The Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights (CCCR), Centre for Supporters of

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<sup>25</sup> DFAT report, Iran (p.18), 7 June 2018, [url](#)

<sup>26</sup> DFAT report, Iran (p.20), 7 June 2018, [url](#)

<sup>27</sup> AI, Iran 2017- 2018 report, 22 February 2018, [url](#)

<sup>28</sup> Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World, Iran: profile 2018', [url](#)

<sup>29</sup> USSD, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Iran, April 2018, [url](#)

<sup>30</sup> Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World, Iran: profile 2018', [url](#)

Human Rights (CSHR) and Minority Rights Group International (MRGI) in their report ‘Rights denied: Violations against ethnic and religious minorities in Iran,’ dated 13 March 2018, noted that minority-populated regions, including Kurdistan, ‘remain underdeveloped and excluded, with higher poverty levels and poorer health outcomes.’<sup>31</sup>

- 4.2.3 The USSD 2017 report noted that ethnic minority groups, including Kurds, ‘reported political and socioeconomic discrimination, particularly in their access to economic aid, business licenses, university admissions, job opportunities, permission to publish books, and housing and land rights.’ And that ‘[t]he law, which requires religious screening and allegiance to the concept of “velayat-e faqih,” not found in Sunni Islam, impaired the ability of Sunni (many of whom are also Baluch, Ahvazi, or Kurdish) to integrate into civic life and to work in certain fields...’<sup>32</sup>
- 4.2.4 The Bertelsmann Stiftung’s Transformation Index (BTI) 2018 report, covering 1 February 2015 to 31 January 2017, noted that the regime ‘discriminates against religious and ethnic minorities such as ... Kurds’ and that: ‘They are hindered in their religious life and excluded from positions in public services. Even citizen animosity towards religious or ethnic majorities grows since they face the establishment’s harassment and accusations of impinging on Islamic values and norms.’<sup>33</sup>
- 4.2.5 The USSD 2017 report also noted that the government ‘consistently barred [Kurds the] use of their languages in school as the language of instruction’ and ‘reportedly banned Kurdish-language newspapers, journals, and books’, although ‘did not prohibit the use of the Kurdish language in general.’<sup>34</sup>
- 4.2.6 The Congressional Research Service (CRS), in report on Iran dated October 2018, stated: ‘The Kurdish language is not banned, but schools do not teach it and Kurdish political organizations, activists, and media outlets are routinely scrutinized, harassed, and closed down for supporting greater Kurdish autonomy.’<sup>35</sup>

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### 4.3 Arbitrary arrests

- 4.3.1 Amnesty International’s 2017-18 report referred to the arbitrary arrest of ‘members of minorities who spoke out against violations of their rights.’<sup>36</sup>
- 4.3.2 The USSD 2017 report noted that the government:
- ‘disproportionately targeted minority groups’, including Kurds, for arbitrary arrests
  - ‘continued to use the law to arrest and prosecute Kurds for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and association.’

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<sup>31</sup> CCCR, CSHR and MRGI, ‘Rights denied’ (p.48), March 2018, [url](#)

<sup>32</sup> USSD, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Iran (Section 6), April 2018, [url](#)

<sup>33</sup> BTI 2018 Country Report – Iran, (p.27) 2018, [url](#)

<sup>34</sup> USSD, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Iran (Section 6), April 2018, [url](#)

<sup>35</sup> CRS, Iran (p.15), 10 January 2019, [url](#)

<sup>36</sup> AI, Iran 2017- 2018 report, 22 February 2018, [url](#)



- ‘punished publishers, journalists, and writers for opposing and criticizing government policies’ and ‘suppressed legitimate activities of Kurdish NGOs by denying them registration permits or bringing security charges against persons working with such organizations.’<sup>37</sup>

4.3.3 The March 2018 CCCR, CSHR and MRGI report noted that inequalities experienced by minorities ‘contributed to profound discontent and resentment, reflected in the arrests of thousands of peaceful demonstrators in these regions.’<sup>38</sup>

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#### 4.4 Physical abuse

4.4.1 The USSD 2017 report noted that the government ‘disproportionately targeted minority groups’, including Kurds, for physical abuse’ and that in pretrial detention, ‘authorities repeatedly subjected members of ethnic and religious groups to more severe physical punishment, including torture, than other prisoners, regardless of the type of crime for which the authorities accused them.’<sup>39</sup>

4.4.2 Amnesty International’s 2017-18 report referred to the ‘torture and other ill-treatment’ of ‘members of minorities who spoke out against violations of their rights.’<sup>40</sup>

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#### 4.5 Fair trial

4.5.1 Amnesty International’s 2017-18 report referred to ‘grossly unfair trials’ of ‘members of minorities who spoke out against violations of their rights.’<sup>41</sup>

4.5.2 For more information on fair trials, see the country policy information note on [Iran: background information, including actors of protection and internal relocation](#)

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#### 4.6 Death penalty

4.6.1 Amnesty International’s 2017-18 report stated that ‘members of minorities who spoke out against violations of their rights’ faced the death penalty<sup>42</sup>.

4.6.2 The USSD 2017 report noted: ‘Human rights organizations observed that the government’s application of the death penalty disproportionately affected ethnic minorities.’<sup>43</sup>

4.6.3 The March 2018 CCR, CSHR and MRGI report noted: ‘Drug-related offenses and moharebeh in particular are sentences that have been overwhelmingly used against minorities’, with ‘the death sentence for moharebeh ... [in] full

<sup>37</sup> USSD, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Iran (Section 6), April 2018, [url](#)

<sup>38</sup> CCCR, CSHR and MRGI, ‘Rights denied’ (p.48), March 2018, [url](#)

<sup>39</sup> USSD, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Iran (Section 6), April 2018, [url](#)

<sup>40</sup> AI, Iran 2017- 2018 report, 22 February 2018, [url](#)

<sup>41</sup> AI, Iran 2017- 2018 report, 22 February 2018, [url](#)

<sup>42</sup> AI, Iran 2017- 2018 report, 22 February 2018, [url](#)

<sup>43</sup> USSD, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Iran (Section 1), April 2018, [url](#)

force and is also more likely to be applied to minorities, especially ... Kurds.<sup>44</sup>

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#### 4.7 Detention and imprisonment

- 4.7.1 Amnesty International's 2017-18 report referred to the imprisonment of 'members of minorities who spoke out against violations of their rights.'<sup>45</sup>
- 4.7.2 The USSD 2017 report noted that the government 'disproportionately targeted minority groups', including Kurds, for prolonged detention<sup>46</sup>.
- 4.7.3 State of the World's Minorities, in their report of March 2018, commented: 'Prison data shows that at least three quarters of Iran's political prisoners are from ethnic minorities.'<sup>47</sup>
- 4.7.4 For sections 4.1 to 4.6, also see 4.7: [Profiles of targeted Kurds](#) and [Treatment of Kurdish political activists and family members](#)

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### 5. Overview of Kurdish political groups

- 5.1.1 Several Kurdish groups operate in Iran's Kurdistan region. These include:
  - Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) (Hizbi Democratiki Kurdistan Eran) (aka Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (DPKI) (PDKI)) (the party split into two factions in 2006)
  - Komala parties:
    - Kurdistan Organisation of the Communist Party of Iran (Komala, Sazamane Kurdistanane Hezbe Kommuniste Iran (Komala, SKHKI))
    - Komala of Toilers of Kurdistan and the Komala Party of Kurdistan (Komala, KZK) (Komala Zahmatkeshane Kurdistanane)
    - Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan
  - Party of Free Life for Kurdistan (Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanane) (PJAK)<sup>48</sup>
- 5.1.2 Many of these groups are based in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI)<sup>49</sup>.
- 5.1.3 The 2018 DFAT report observed:

'Unlike other ethnic minorities, many Kurds harbour strong separatist tendencies that have occasionally turned violent: after the 1979 revolution, Kurdish militants attempted unsuccessfully to break away from the Islamic Republic. Notwithstanding, Kurdish separatist activity in Iran has mostly been at a lower level than that of their Kurdish brethren in neighbouring countries, partly due to the fact that their living standards tend to be higher.

<sup>44</sup> CCCR, CSHR and MRGI, 'Rights denied' (p.19), March 2018, [url](#)

<sup>45</sup> AI, Iran 2017- 2018 report, 22 February 2018, [url](#)

<sup>46</sup> USSD, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Iran (Section 6), April 2018, [url](#)

<sup>47</sup> CCCR, CSHR and MRGI, 'Rights denied' (p.48), March 2018, [url](#)

<sup>48</sup> Jane's, Iran, 3 December 2018. Subscription source.

<sup>49</sup> Jane's, Iran, 3 December 2018. Subscription source.

Kurdish groups in Iran do not agree on the degree of autonomy they seek, and many prefer to work within the Iranian political system to strengthen their rights as citizens.<sup>50</sup>

- 5.1.4 Jane's, updated 3 December 2018, noted: 'All Kurdish groups primarily target security assets and personnel, particularly in mountainous regions along the Iraqi border.'<sup>51</sup>
- 5.1.5 Al Monitor, in their article, 'How regional politics is restraining Kurdish militancy in Iran', 6 August 2018, reported:
- 'The Iranian Kurdish armed groups based in camps in Iraqi Kurdistan have, with a handful of exceptions, avoided major clashes with Iranian security forces since late July 1996, when Iran deployed hundreds of IRGC [Islamic Revolutionary Corps] personnel with heavy guns to attack the bases of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran near Sulaimaniyah.
- 'But over the past three years, there have been renewed tensions and confrontations between Iranian Kurdish armed groups and Iranian authorities.'<sup>52</sup>
- 5.1.6 A report by the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), dated October 2018, stated:
- 'Behind the walls of the Islamist revolutionary regime in Iran, Iranian Kurdistan had been relatively quiet since the mid-1990s. The Kurdish political parties could only operate in exile, mainly in Iraqi Kurdistan. For decades, they were far from being able to mobilise the masses in Iranian Kurdistan. Meanwhile, Kurdish activists in Iran became more influential in the political sphere, as experienced during the Green Movement in 2009. In the wake of the Arab Spring, this influence increased through the rise of nationwide demonstrations in Iran. When 25-year-old Kurdish woman Farinaz Khosrawani died in 2015 while trying to escape a sexual assault by an Iranian military officer, unprecedented protests spread across Iranian Kurdistan. It was during this time in 2015 that the Iranian Kurdish parties decided to return to armed struggle.'<sup>53</sup>
- 5.1.7 Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, in an article dated July 2018, reported that Iran's 'semi official Tasnim news agency' reported that militants killed members of the IRGC near the border with Iraq, 'the latest deadly clash in an area of Iran where armed opposition Kurdish groups are active'. The article quoted 'provincial security official Hosein Khosheqbal' who blamed the attack on the PJAK<sup>54</sup>.
- 5.1.8 The 2018 BTI report noted that: 'Some officials in Iran condemn the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq to protect PJAK and the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI), which restarted its armed conflict in the second half of 2016.'<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> DFAT report, Iran (p.18), 7 June 2018, [url](#)

<sup>51</sup> Jane's, Iran, 3 December 2018. Subscription source.

<sup>52</sup> Al Monitor, 'How regional politics is restraining Kurdish militancy in Iran', 6 August 2018, [url](#)  
Subscription required.

<sup>53</sup> SWP, 'The Changing Dynamics of the Kurdish Question' (p.2), October 2018, [url](#)

<sup>54</sup> RFE/RL, 'Militants Kill 10 Iranian Soldiers'. 21 July 2018, [url](#)

<sup>55</sup> BTI 2018 Country Report – Iran, (p.27) 2018, [url](#)

5.1.9 For further background and general information on Kurdish political groups see the:

- Danish Refugee Council and Danish Immigration Service report -[Iranian Kurds On Conditions for Iranian Kurdish Parties in Iran and \[Kurdish Region of Iraq\] KRI, Activities in the Kurdish Area of Iran, Conditions in Border Area and Situation of Returnees from KRI to Iran 30 May to 9 June 2013](#)<sup>56</sup>
- Austrian Centre for Country of Origin & Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD) COI compilation – [Iran: Political Opposition Groups, Security Forces, Selected Human Rights Issues, Rule of Law, July 2015](#)<sup>57</sup>
- Austrian report by the Federal Ministry of the Interior, [The Kurds: History – Religion – Language- Politics, November 2015](#)<sup>58</sup>
- Austrian Centre for Country of Origin & Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD), [Query response on Iran: Organization and functioning of political parties](#), 12 June 2017<sup>59</sup>
- Austrian Centre for Country of Origin & Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD), [Iran: COI Compilation](#), July 2018<sup>60</sup>

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## 6. Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI, aka PDKI and DPKI)

### 6.1 Background

6.1.1 The KDPI was founded in Mahabad in Iranian Kurdistan on 16 August 1945<sup>61</sup>.

6.1.2 According to the self-description on the official Website of the party ‘the PDKI [KDPI] is a democratic socialist party and [...] a member of the Socialist International (SI).’<sup>62</sup>

6.1.3 Global Security, in an undated piece, noted:

‘The party was practically liquidated when a Kurdish rebellion was crushed in 1966-67. It was reinstated after 1973, when Dr. Abd ar-Rahman Qasemlu was elected the party's Secretary-General. Since 1984 the party has been based in Iraq. As of 17 September 1992, the party was led by its Secretary-General, Moustapha Hedjri [he is still leader].

‘The KDPI was the largest and best organized of the Kurdish opposition groups and sought autonomy for the Kurds in Iran. It operated from its bases in Iraq against the Islamic regime. In the early 1980s a measure of autonomy in the Kurdish areas of western Iran were achieved following clashes

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<sup>56</sup> DIS and DRC, ‘Iranian Kurds’, September 2013, [url](#)

<sup>57</sup> ACCORD, COI Compilation, July 2015, [url](#)

<sup>58</sup> Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior, The Kurds, November 2015, [url](#)

<sup>59</sup> ACCORD, Query response, Iranian political parties, 12 June 2017, [url](#)

<sup>60</sup> ACCORD, COI Compilation, July 2018, [url](#)

<sup>61</sup> Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan [PDKI], About, homepage, undated, [url](#)

<sup>62</sup> Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan [PDKI], About, homepage, undated, [url](#)

between KDPI guerrillas and Revolutionary Guards, resulting in the latter's withdrawal from Mahabad, Sanandaj and Kamyaran, until a renewed government offensive, which allegedly left 1,000 Kurds and 500 government troops dead. In the 1990s- armed clashes continued between KDPI and government forces, including bombing attacks against Iranian Kurds, both in western Iran and inside Iraqi territory...

'The KDPI has long been subject to attacks by the Iranian regime...

'Kurdish opposition groups suspected of separatist aspirations, such as the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (KDPI), are brutally suppressed. At least 28 Kurdish prisoners convicted of national security charges remained on death row at the end of 2012.'<sup>63</sup>

- 6.1.4 Jane's, in an update of December 2018, noted that the PDKI (KDPI) announced the resumption of their armed campaign in February 2016<sup>64</sup>. The CRS, in their report of October 2018, put the date at July 2016. The source also noted that in late September 2018, Iran fired ballistic missiles at a base of the KDP-I in northern Iraq<sup>65</sup>.

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## 6.2 Recruitment to and membership of KDPI

- 6.2.1 The National World, in an article dated April 2016, identified economic neglect in the Kurdish region, the difficulty in Kurds getting jobs, unemployment (particularly among the youth) and the suspicion with which the Iranian authorities view ethnic, cultural or religious identities that differ from the Shia majority, as reasons why Kurds joined the KDPI. The article continued that the 'party's leadership believes it is benefiting from a growing dissatisfaction among Iran's Kurds' and quoted Qadir Wrya, a member of the KDPI politburo, that 'hundreds of people contact us every day.'<sup>66</sup>

- 6.2.2 A Danish Refugee Council and Danish Immigration Service fact-finding mission in 2013 citing several sources, reported:

'Regarding recruitment of new members to KDPI, Mohamed Sahebi (KDPI) informed the delegation that the minimum age for becoming a KDPI member is 18, and if a person is under below 18, he or she can become member of Lawan (Youth Organisation of KDPI). According to Mohamed Sahebi, if a person in Iran wishes to become member of KDPI, he may contact the local party cell and ask for it.

'...Concerning the organization of members of KDPI in Iran, KDPI's representative in Paris informed the delegation that there are three categories of persons affiliated with KDPI: members, sympathizers and 'friends'. As regards how members are organized KDPI's representative in Paris explained that they are organized in cells. Each cell consists of one or more members.

'...Apart from members and sympathizers, KDPI's representative in Paris described a third category of people connected to the party as "friends".

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<sup>63</sup> Global Security, 'Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI),' undated, [url](#)

<sup>64</sup> Jane's, Iran, 3 December 2018. Subscription source.

<sup>65</sup> CRS, Iran (p.15), 17 October 2018, [url](#)

<sup>66</sup> The National World, 'Iran's forgotten Kurds step up the struggle,' 16 April 2016, [url](#)

KDPI's friends are characterized as ones who participate in different activities that are encouraged by the party, such as participating in demonstrations, closing their shops during announced strikes, or writing articles about the situation of the Kurds in Iran in newspapers. The KDPI friends are not in all cases of Kurdish ethnicity.

'...Regarding recruitment of new members to KDPI, Mohemed Sahebi (KDPI) informed the delegation that the minimum age for becoming a KDPI member is 18, and if a person is under below 18, he or she can become member of Lawan (Youth Organisation of KDPI). According to Mohemed Sahebi, if a person in Iran wishes to become member of KDPI, he may contact the local party cell and ask for it.'<sup>67</sup>

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### 6.3 Membership cards

6.3.1 The 2013 Danish fact-finding mission also reported:

'...Mohammad Nazif Qadiri (KDPI) stated that KDPI normally does not issue ID cards and certainly not to members in Iran. ID cards will be issued only in special cases by the party's headquarter in Khoysanjak Camp in KRI, for instance when a member moves from one city to another and the holder of the card may need to be identified as a KDPI member. However, the party demands that the ID card must be returned to the KDPI office in KRI when the holder for instance, travels to Europe. However, this is not always done and the card holders have sometimes kept the card (which is against the KDPI rules).'<sup>68</sup>

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### 6.4 Verification of membership

6.4.1 The 2013 Danish Refugee Council and Danish Immigration Service factfinding mission were also informed:

'...Regarding letters of recommendation, KDPI's representative in Paris informed the delegation that when the representation in Paris is requested to verify whether a person is a party member or sympathizer, it will ask the party's headquarters in Khoysanjak Camp in KRI to investigate the case. Upon receiving the answer from Khoysanjak, the representation in Paris will issue a letter of recommendation. In the letter, in addition to the name of the person in question, it is stated in French whether the recommended person is a KDPI member or a sympathizer. The letter of recommendation, which is signed by KDPI's representative in Paris, will be sent by fax directly to the asylum administration in the country in question; it will never be handed to the recommended person himself.'<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> DIS and DRC, 'Iranian Kurds' (pp.30-32), September 2013, [url](#)

<sup>68</sup> DIS and DRC, 'Iranian Kurds' (p.32), September 2013, [url](#)

<sup>69</sup> DIS and DRC, 'Iranian Kurds' (p.32), September 2013, [url](#)



## 7. Kurdish Democratic Party-Iran (KDP-I)

### 7.1 Background

- 7.1.1 The KDPI split into two factions in 2006. This section refers to the KDP-I as distinct from the KDPI, although both factions claim to be the original group<sup>70</sup>.

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### 7.2 Recruitment to and membership of KDP-I

- 7.2.1 The Danish Refugee Council and Danish Immigration Service fact-finding mission in 2013 reported:

‘...According to Mustafa Moloudi (KDP-Iran), the requirements for people who want to become members of the party are first of all that they adhere to the goals and principles of the party, secondly that they have reached the age of 18, thirdly that they are of Iranian Kurdish origin, fourthly that they are recommended by two party members and finally that they must pay a monthly membership fee paid by all members...

‘Mustafa Moloudi (KDP-Iran) explained the process of recruitment of new members in Iran by saying that potential recruits are watched by the party members for a while. If a person is assessed to be a qualified and trustworthy candidate, then he will be approached by the party member watching him and asked if he is interested to join the party. If the candidate accepts to join the party and if the party finds it necessary, he will be sent to KRI to receive training. The source emphasized that recruitment of new members in Iran is not an easy task, and the involved party members will face a number of difficulties in this process, particularly due to the difficult security situation in Iran. Regarding the profile of the recruited, the source stated that the party focuses on recruitment of young people, particularly university students and educated men and women. The source stressed that the procedure for being recruited to the party is the same for men and women.’<sup>71</sup>

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### 7.3 Membership cards

- 7.3.1 The 2013 Danish Refugee Council and Danish Immigration Service factfinding mission were also informed:

‘...Mustafa Moloudi (KDP-Iran) informed the delegation that all party members in KRI are holders of a membership card. The membership card is of the size of a credit card and it has text on both sides. The membership cards issued to the full time professional members is of a pale blue color while the membership card issued to the ordinary members is of a pale yellow color. The party members living outside the party camp have the same pale yellow ID card as the ordinary members. The party’s peshmargas are also issued the pale yellow ID card for up to one year and after that they will hold the same cards as the high level professional members. Secret members living in Iran do not hold a membership card for security reasons.

<sup>70</sup> Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior, *The Kurds* (p.170), November 2015, [url](#)

<sup>71</sup> DIS and DRC, ‘Iranian Kurds’ (pp.36-38), September 2013, [url](#)

Within the party camp, there is a social committee that issues marriage certificates and birth certificates since the local government in KRI does not issue these documents to Iranian Kurds.<sup>72</sup>

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## 7.4 Verification of membership

### 7.4.1 The same source from 2013 reported:

‘...Mustafa Moloudi, (KDP-Iran) informed the delegation that the headquarters of the party in Khoysanjac, KRI issues letters of recommendation to members going abroad to seek asylum. Since all members have their names listed in the headquarters, it is possible to identify each one of them. The party issues letters of recommendation, but the source emphasized that letters of recommendation are not delivered to asylum seekers and they will only be issued directly to the asylum authorities or the asylum seekers’ lawyers in Europe. Every member has a written file within the headquarters which forms the basis of the description of the situation of the asylum seeker in the letter of recommendation. If a party member for instance goes to Denmark to seek asylum, he or she must address the local party committee that will then ask the headquarters to issue a letter of recommendation. The party’s sympathizers can also get a letter of recommendation if the KDP-Iran is certain that the person asking for the letter had to flee due to political activism. In such case it will be stated in the letter that he or she is a party sympathizer and not a member.’<sup>73</sup>

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## 8. Komala (Lomaleh/ Komalah) parties

These include Kurdistan Organization of the Communist Party of Iran, Komala (Komala, SKHKI), Komala of Toilers of Kurdistan and the Komala Party of Kurdistan (Komala KZK) and the Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan.

### 8.1 Background

#### 8.1.1 The Austrian Centre for the Country of Origin and Asylum Documentation (ACCORD), citing various sources, noted that Komala, originally known as the Tailors Revolutionary Group of Iranian Kurdistan, began an armed struggle against the regime after the Revolution. In 1983 Komala leaders and some Iranian communists formed the Communist Party of Iran and Komala became the branch of the party in Kurdistan. Since the 1980s, Komala has had bases in northern Iraq. At the behest of the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Komala stopped its guerrilla activities against Iran in the mid-1990s. There are many groups that claim the name Komala. Factions of the party include the Kurdistan Organization of the Communist Party of Iran, Komala (Sazman-e Kurdistan-e Hezb-e Kommunist-e Iran, SKHKI); the Komala of Toilers of Kurdistan and the Komala Party of

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<sup>72</sup> DIS and DRC, ‘Iranian Kurds’ (pp.36-38), September 2013, [url](#)

<sup>73</sup> DIS and DRC, ‘Iranian Kurds’, September 2013 (pp.36-38), [url](#)



Kurdistan (Komala Zahmatkeshane) Kurdistan, KZK); and the Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan<sup>74</sup>.

- 8.1.2 The Austrian report of November 2015 noted that: 'In the past Komala formed the strongest organization after the KDPI but today the party, similar to the KDPI, has become a shadow of its former self. It is banned in Iran and its base is located in KRG [the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government] area.'<sup>75</sup>
- 8.1.3 Jane's, in an update of 3 December 2018, noted that Komala announced the resumption of their armed campaign in 2017<sup>76</sup>.

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## 8.2 Recruitment to and membership of Komala parties

The 2013 Danish Refugee Council and Danish Immigration Service fact-finding mission reported:

### 8.2.1 Komala, SKHKI

'Regarding the party's mode of organization in Iran, Ebrahim Alizadeh, General Secretary of the Kurdistan Organization of the Communist Party of Iran, Komala (Komala, SKHKI) explained that Komala members in Iran are either individuals having no connection to other members and reporting directly to Komala SKHKI in KRI, or they are organized in cells where each cell comprises three to five members. In the cells, members divide the work between them and only one member has direct contact to Komala SKHKI in KRI. According to Alizadeh, besides party members, there are party sympathizers who are Kurds active for Komala without being members or without having any direct connection to the party. These people listen to the party's radio programs and watch Komala TV and conduct the activities which Komala encourages Kurds to do through these programmes.

'Ebrahim Alizadeh (Komala, SKHKI) informed the delegation that Komala SKHKI does not allow its members in Iran to get together in groups of more than two to three persons.'<sup>77</sup>

### 8.2.2 Komala, KZK

'... According to Omar Elkhazade (Komala, KZK), the party has a special procedure for people coming to KRI to become peshmargas. The procedure consists of extensive questioning of the person, for instance, about whom he knows in his city of origin. Besides, investigations are carried out into the individual's background by the party's underground cells in Iran. Even if the person is a family member of a Komala member, investigations are still carried out. Everyone who comes to join the party is under close scrutiny, according to Omar Elkhazade.'<sup>78</sup>

### 8.2.3 Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan

'...As regards recruitment of persons who approach the party in KRI in order to obtain membership, Siamak Modarresi, Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan,

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<sup>74</sup> ACCORD, Iran COI Compilation, July 2018, [url](#)

<sup>75</sup> Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior, The Kurds (p.173), November 2015, [url](#)

<sup>76</sup> Jane's, Iran, 3 December 2018. Subscription source.

<sup>77</sup> DIS and DRC, 'Iranian Kurds' (p.40), September 2013, [url](#)

<sup>78</sup> DIS and DRC, 'Iranian Kurds' (p.46), September 2013, [url](#)

said that an individual must complete one/two months of training while the party looks into the new recruit's background. If the investigation is complicated, for instance if the party does not know the individual's family, two party members must recommend the new recruit in order for him to be admitted. Once the person has been admitted to the party, he or she will participate in different tasks managed from the camp, such as broadcasting in the party's TV station, publishing or other administrative tasks. When asked whether the party recruits members outside of Iran, Siamak Modarresi confirmed that this takes place. Asylum seekers with a pending case can also be admitted as a member once the applicant's knowledge of the party has reached an acceptable level.<sup>79</sup>

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### 8.3 Membership cards

The 2013 Danish Refugee Council and Danish Immigration Service fact-finding mission reported:

#### 8.3.1 Komala SKHKI

'...Ebrahim Alizadeh (Komala, SKHKI) informed the delegation that the party issues three types of membership cards. For people living in the camp on a permanent basis, a blue card of a credit card size is issued. On the card is stated father's name, paternal grandfather's name, mother's name, gender, date of birth and place of birth. For people living in the camp on a temporary basis a beige card that is one and a half time bigger than a credit card is being issued. Finally, the party issues a special card for the peshmarga. The source further stated that if a member goes abroad, he or she must leave the membership card behind which they do not always do.'<sup>80</sup>

#### 8.3.2 Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan

'... Siamak Modarresi, Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan, informed the delegation that peshmergas and people working in the camp have membership cards. Besides, the party issues membership cards to its members in Iran. However, it was added that members in Iran may not carry their membership cards due to security reasons. The party has a copy of all membership cards in its archive.'<sup>81</sup>

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### 8.4 Verification of membership

The 2013 Danish Refugee Council and Danish Immigration Service fact-finding mission reported:

#### 8.4.1 Komala SKHKI

'...Ebrahim Alizadeh (Komala, SKHKI) stated that Komala issues letters of recommendation which are sent from the party's official e-mail address directly to the asylum authorities. According to the same source, neither a party ID-card nor a letter of recommendation handed over by an asylum applicant is proof of his or her membership of Komala. Only letters of

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<sup>79</sup> DIS and DRC, 'Iranian Kurds', September 2013 (p.48), [url](#)

<sup>80</sup> DIS and DRC, 'Iranian Kurds', September 2013 (p.43), [url](#)

<sup>81</sup> DIS and DRC, 'Iranian Kurds', September 2013 (p.48), [url](#)

recommendation received directly from the party by the asylum authorities can be considered as valid proof of membership. The party also issues letters of recommendation for its sympathizers. The letters will be made on the basis of an investigation into the sympathizer's past activities. The source emphasized that the letter will only be issued for people who the party considers to be under threat.<sup>82</sup>

#### 8.4.2 **Komala KZK**

'...Omar Elkhanizade (Komala, KZK) mentioned that Komala, KZK, issues letters of recommendation to both members and sympathizers to support them in the asylum procedure. However, he stressed that these letters are sent directly to the immigration authorities. Omar Elkhanizade (Komala, KZK) stated that an asylum seeker can contact Komala, KZK, and ask for a letter of recommendation. Elkhanizade further stated that Komala is able to investigate and establish if a person is a member or a sympathizer having performed activities for the party. Investigations about sympathizers and their activities will be carried out by the secret cells in Iran. If a person, for instance, has spent a few months in the Komala camp, the party will assess whether he or she will be at risk upon return to Iran. Only if Komala finds that the asylum seeker is threatened, it will issue a letter of recommendation. A letter of recommendation is send directly to the asylum authorities.'<sup>83</sup>

#### 8.4.3 **Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan**

'...Siamak Modarresi, Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan, stated that party members who wish to seek asylum can go to the party representation in the country to which they have fled and ask the local secretary of the party for a letter of recommendation. The secretary will then address the party representation abroad, which is in Canada, who will ask the party camp in KRI to investigate the background of this person. If the asylum seeker is known to the party, the representation in Canada will issue the letter of recommendation and send it to the lawyer or the asylum court in the country in question. In some cases, a letter of recommendation can be issued directly from the camp. In the past, these letters were handed to the party member. This practice was however halted when it turned out that some letters of recommendation were fabricated. Today, the party does not hand over letters of recommendations directly to the asylum seeker. The source emphasized that if an asylum seeker delivers a letter of recommendation to the asylum authorities in Europe, the letter should be considered as fabricated.'<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> DIS and DRC, 'Iranian Kurds', September 2013 (p.43), [url](#)

<sup>83</sup> DIS and DRC, 'Iranian Kurds', September 2013 (p.46), [url](#)

<sup>84</sup> DIS and DRC, 'Iranian Kurds', September 2013 (p.48), [url](#)

## 9. Party of Free Life for Kurdistan (PJAK or PEJAK)

### 9.1 Background

9.1.1 The Jamestown Foundation, in their January 2018 publication, 'Party for Free Life in Kurdistan: The PKK's Iranian Wing Bides Its Time,' stated:

'PJAK was founded in the mid-1990s as an independent student-led movement inside Iran. However, it is today part of the People's Congress of Kurdistan (Kongra-Gel). A purported umbrella group for regional Kurdish movements, Kongra-Gel is in practice dominated by the Turkish-Kurdish Kurdistan's Workers Party (PKK). Like the PKK, PJAK is loyal to PKK founder Abdullah Ocalan's Marxist-derived ideology, which it seeks to apply to the Iranian context.

'Moreover, the group's central platform is a call for "democratic self-administration," which is derived from Ocalan's principle of "democratic confederalism"—essentially a form of ethnic self-governance. The party also puts a strong emphasis on issues such as cultural rights, ecology and gender equality, and has a female co-chair; priorities like these have greatly helped its Syrian equivalent, the PKK-aligned Democratic Union Party (PYD), gain significant international legitimacy in recent years.

'PJAK therefore functions today as the PKK's Iranian wing, although it includes non-Iranian Kurds and its Iranian personnel move between it and both the PKK and the YPG. Like other PKK groups, PJAK is also nominally divided between its military wing, the East Kurdistan Defence Forces (YRK), and its political wing, the East Kurdistan Democratic and Free Society (KODAR). The group likely has one or two thousand fighters, the majority of whom are in Syria and Iraq. As with other PKK branches, the group ostensibly seeks to work with all Iranians, but in practice its membership is almost exclusively Kurdish.'<sup>85</sup>

9.1.2 The CRS report of October 2018 noted:

'Its leader is believed to be Abdul Rahman Haji Ahmadi, born in 1941, who is a citizen of Germany and lives in that country. Many PJAK fighters reportedly are women. PJAK was designated by the Department of the Treasury in early February 2009 as a terrorism supporting entity under Executive Order 13224, although the designation statement indicated the decision was based mainly on PJAK's association with the Turkish Kurdish opposition group Kongra Gel, also known as the PKK.'<sup>86</sup>

9.1.3 Radio Europe/Radio Free Liberty also noted that the PJAK has links to the PKK<sup>87</sup>.

9.1.4 Jane's, in an update of 3 December 2018, noted that the PJAK 'has also [along with the PDKI and Komala] resumed its operations in Iran since August 2015, but refused to co-ordinate with other Kurdish groups, which have formed a joint committee in January 2018.'<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Jamestown Foundation, 'Party for Free Life in Kurdistan', 15 January 2018, [url](#)

<sup>86</sup> CRS, Iran (p.15), 17 October 2018, [url](#)

<sup>87</sup> RFE/RL, 'Militants Kill 10 Iranian Soldiers', 21 July 2018, [url](#)

<sup>88</sup> Jane's, Iran 3 December 2018. Subscription source.

- 9.1.5 Al Monitor, in their article, 'How regional politics is restraining Kurdish militancy in Iran', 6 August 2018, reported:

'In the case of PJAK, things have been particularly complicated. While there have been intermittent clashes between the group and the IRGC since the fierce fighting of the summer of 2011, the parties have until recently avoided serious bloodshed. The uptick in violence in recent weeks appears to have begun after the IRGC on July 11 [2018] and 14 [2018] ambushed two PJAK units near the Iranian border towns of Marivan and Paveh, leaving four fighters dead.'<sup>89</sup>

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## 9.2 Recruitment to and membership of PJAK

- 9.2.1 The 2013 Danish Refugee Council and Danish Immigration Service factfinding mission reported:

'Asked about recruitment of new members, Shamal Bishir (PJAK) explained that PJAK strives to recruit young men and women and to get them to come to the mountains and become professional members. In order to become a professional member of PJAK, one must have reached the age of 18 and be in good health. The source stressed that both men and women can become professional members. The source added that PJAK welcomes members of other ethnicities than Kurds. New members receive theoretical training that includes the history of humanity, the history of Kurdistan, gender and the importance of women participation in the struggle, rhetoric, ecology and ecology awareness, military tactics and method. Besides theoretical training the member will practically go through military training too.'<sup>90</sup>

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## 9.3 Membership cards

- 9.3.1 The DRC and DIS FFM report also noted '...The same source also recorded that Shamal Bishir (Head of Foreign Affairs, PJAK) said that PJAK does not issue membership cards.'<sup>91</sup>

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## 9.4 Verification of membership

- 9.4.1 The 2013 Danish Refugee Council and Danish Immigration Service fact-finding mission reported:

'...As regards the issuance of letters of recommendation, Shamal Bishir (PJAK) stated that PJAK issues such letters when a person affiliated with the party seeks asylum abroad. The source emphasized that the letter of recommendation will be sent directly from PJAK's office in Sweden to the asylum authorities in the country in question or to the asylum seeker's lawyer. Shamal Bishir (PJAK) emphasized that PJAK has a policy to stop youth immigrating to Europe and the party tries to channelize the youth's ambition into struggle against the Iranian regime. It was added that there

<sup>89</sup> Al Monitor, 'How regional politics is restraining Kurdish militancy in Iran', 6 August 2018, [url](#)

<sup>90</sup> DIS and DRC, 'Iranian Kurds' (p.53), September 2013, [url](#)

<sup>91</sup> DIS and DRC, 'Iranian Kurds' (p.53), September 2013, [url](#)

may be some persons affiliated with PJAK who go to Europe and ask for asylum but they do so on their own initiative. According to the source, there are PJAK people who have been sent to Europe by the party for organizational work but not many.<sup>92</sup>

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## 10. Treatment of Kurdish political activists

### 10.1 Profiles of political targets

10.1.1 The Landinfo report of February 2013, 'Conversion to Christianity, Issues concerning Kurds and Post-2009 Election Protestors as well as Legal Issues and Exit Procedures', reported that an international organization in Ankara said that,

'...in the Kurdish areas, individuals who are suspected of connections to KDPI, Komala and Khabat may be called in by the security agencies. Individuals who organize cultural activities may also be called in for questioning. It was added that this is not a standard security control, but a way in which the authorities set pressure on such individuals by showing them that they are under surveillance.

'It was considered that the system targeted members of these groups, that is those who were documented members, and considered that in these cases, their family members, including women and children, may be pressured by the authorities as well. It was explained that the authorities, in order to target those individuals, may go directly to the family members of the active persons of those groups in search of these individuals as well as a means of putting pressure on them and their families.

'Asked about the situation in the Kurdish area, a Western embassy stated in the Landinfo report of February 2013 that; "it is difficult to obtain information on the ground. During the Khatami period, a dialogue started up between the central government and the Kurdish areas. However, nowadays, one hears more and more of ordinary persons being pursued by the authorities because of family members being members of PJAK, Komala or KDPI. It is considered that opposition is gradually increasing, but it is not possible to say anything about what kind of activity is going on".<sup>93</sup>

10.1.2 The Landinfo report, intervieweing Azad Zamani, a 'human rights activist of Kurdish origin in London', noted that '...if an individual were caught with a leaflet, he would most likely be arrested and tortured as well as forced to confess to being a member of whatever group could have been behind such a publication. He or she would go through a five minute trial and the outcome such a trial could vary from many years imprisonment to a mild sentence. It is impossible to say.'<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> DIS and DRC, 'Iranian Kurds' (p.53), September 2013, [url](#)

<sup>93</sup> Landinfo, DIS and DRC, FFM report (p.43), February 2013, [url](#)

<sup>94</sup> Landinfo, DIS and DRC, FFM report (p.45), February 2013, [url](#)



- 10.1.3 The Landinfo report of 2013, consulting several sources, stated that ‘an individual does not need to be a member of PJAK in order to be pursued and that others somehow affiliated could face risks.’<sup>95</sup>
- 10.1.4 In the DRC/DIS FFM report of September 2013 Ziryan Roj Helaty, of Tanupo Magazine, stated that ‘...anything related to KDPI, even talking about the Kurdish people and their rights could create a problem. Someone who talks directly about KDPI is, in the eyes of the regime, affiliated with KDPI, and a person speaking about Kurdish rights is seen as a general threat ... Kurdish patriotism that has spread throughout the Middle East in recent years, may also reach Iran, and this is exactly what the regime in Iran fears.’<sup>96</sup>
- 10.1.5 The FFM report also stated:  
‘...According to UNHCR in Erbil, persons with a high political profile as well as human rights activists are targeted. ... Members of KDPI will get approximately two to ten years of prison if they are arrested by the Iranian authorities. Based on information from asylum seekers, KDPI members will be tortured during pre-trial detention in order to confess and disclose names of other KDPI members. The duration of the detention will typically be from one to six months depending on the level of the detainee’s engagement. The sentence which is imprisonment will depend on the level of the engagement of the person and the evidence that are presented against him’.<sup>97</sup>
- 10.1.6 The Austrian report compiled by the Federal Ministry of the Interior on Kurds, dated November 2015, noted: ‘The mere presumption of being a member of any of these parties can lead to long-term prison sentences. Many Kurds are among the victims of political persecution with frequent charges of terrorism – in particular the alleged support of PJAK – and often disproportionate degrees of punishment.’<sup>98</sup>
- 10.1.7 The March 2018 CCCR, CSHR and MRGI found that ‘in many cases, ethnic and religious minorities have been arbitrarily arrested and detained in connection with a range of peaceful activities’. The report listed these activities as:
- advocating for linguistic freedom
  - organising or taking part in protests
  - being affiliated with opposition parties
  - campaigning against environmental degradation in their areas
  - participating in religious or cultural activities<sup>99</sup>
- 10.1.8 The report observed that ‘the simplest forms of ethnic rights activism are often deliberately construed by the authorities as a threat to national security or falsely conflated with separatism.’<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Landinfo, DIS and DRC, FFM report (p.41), February 2013, [url](#)

<sup>96</sup> DIS and DRC, ‘Iranian Kurds’ (p.16), September 2013, [url](#)

<sup>97</sup> DIS and DRC, ‘Iranian Kurds’ (p.16), September 2013, [url](#)

<sup>98</sup> Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior, The Kurds (p.176), November 2015, [url](#)

<sup>99</sup> CCCR, CSHR and MRGI, ‘Rights denied’ (pp.15-16), March 2018, [url](#)

<sup>100</sup> CCCR, CSHR and MRGI, ‘Rights denied’ (pp.15-16), March 2018, [url](#)

## 10.2 Discrimination

- 10.2.1 The DRC/DIS FFM report of September 2013 cited Ebrahim Alizadeh, a member of Komala SKHKI, who claimed that members of his party who were freed after arrest 'lost their public jobs, for instance if they were working as teacher, and they were not allowed to work anymore in the public sector.'<sup>101</sup>

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## 10.3 Arrests, detention and imprisonment

- 10.3.1 The DRC/DIS FFM report of September 2013, consulting a Western diplomat and 'expert on Iran' in Erbil, observed that there 'is no tolerance on the Iranian regime's side for any kind of activities with connection to the Kurdish political parties and any affiliation with one of these parties would be reason for arrest. The main reason for this is that these parties' ultimate goal, despite their non-violent opposition, is a change in the regime of Iran...'<sup>102</sup>
- 10.3.2 The Landinfo report of 2013, consulting several sources, stated that 'many cases have been reported regarding imprisonment, torture [and] terrible prison conditions ... in Iran of PJAK members and supporters.'<sup>103</sup>
- 10.3.3 The Austrian report compiled by the Federal Ministry of the Interior on Kurds, dated November 2015, noted: 'Many Kurds are among the victims of political persecution with frequent charges of terrorism – in particular the alleged support of PJAK – and often disproportionate degrees of punishment.'<sup>104</sup>
- 10.3.4 The DRC/DIS report of February 2018, in consultation with Middle East Consultancy Services, referred to the reported arrests of 'dozens' of Kurds, without warrant, for suspected affiliation with the KDPI<sup>105</sup>.
- 10.3.5 The CCCR, CSHR and MRGI report of March 2018 observed that 'Kurds are often detained for mere membership of Kurdish political parties.'<sup>106</sup>
- 10.3.6 The same report observed in September 2017 authorities arrested 'at least' 100 Kurds in Sanandaj because they celebrated the result of the Kurdish independence referendum in Iraq; 'some' of these people were subsequently charged<sup>107</sup>.
- 10.3.7 The same report cited the Iran Prison Atlas, a database run by the not-for-profit United for Iran, which, as of 21 January 2018, showed that, of 'at least' 657 political prisoners, 76% were from ethnic minorities, with Kurds forming the largest group<sup>108</sup>.

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<sup>101</sup> DIS and DRC, 'Iranian Kurds' (p.16), September 2013, [url](#)

<sup>102</sup> DIS and DRC, 'Iranian Kurds' (p.15), September 2013, [url](#)

<sup>103</sup> Landinfo, DIS and DRC, FFM report (p.41), February 2013, [url](#)

<sup>104</sup> Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior, The Kurds (p.176), November 2015, [url](#)

<sup>105</sup> DIS and DRC, 'Issues concerning persons of ethnic minorities', (p.6), February 2018, [url](#)

<sup>106</sup> CCCR, CSHR and MRGI, 'Rights denied' (p.15), March 2018, [url](#)

<sup>107</sup> CCCR, CSHR and MRGI, 'Rights denied' (p.16), March 2018, [url](#)

<sup>108</sup> CCCR, CSHR and MRGI, 'Rights denied' (p.15), March 2018, [url](#)



- 10.3.8 The same report observed that detained minority rights activists ‘are usually not informed of their charges right away, sometimes having to wait weeks or months. Eventually, however, activists are usually presented with vaguely worded and extremely broad charges drawn from Iran’s Penal Code. The most notorious of these charges include moharebeh (‘waging war against God’) and efsad-e-fel-arz (corruption on Earth), both of which can carry the death penalty.’<sup>109</sup>
- 10.3.9 An Amnesty International report of September 2018 reported that Iranian Kurds, Houshmand Alipour and Mohammad Ostadghader, were arrested by security forces on 3 August on suspicion of taking part in an armed attack against a security base in Saddez, Kurdistan province. The article claimed they were ‘held incommunicado for week ... [and] were shown on state television on 7 August making a forced “confession” incriminating themselves. They have had little access to their families and no access to lawyers of their choosing.’<sup>110</sup>

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#### 10.4 Death sentences and executions

- 10.4.1 The DRC/DIS FFM report of September 2013, consulting a Western diplomat and ‘expert on Iran’ in Erbil, stated that ‘the execution rate is high among Kurds in Iran. A large part of these executions are based on accusation of drug smuggling. Sometimes political activists are executed under the pretext of being drug smugglers.’<sup>111</sup>
- 10.4.2 The Landinfo report of 2013, consulting several sources, stated that ‘many cases have been reported regarding...executions in Iran of PJAK members and supporters.’<sup>112</sup>
- 10.4.3 The CRS report of October 2018 noted: ‘Abuses of Kurds are widely cited as providing political support for the Kurdish armed factions, with several Kurdish oppositionists having been executed since 2010.’<sup>113</sup>
- 10.4.4 The FFM report also cited Mustafa Moloudi of KDP-Iran, who ‘explained that some of the (KDPI) party members who had been conducting secret activities in Iran were caught by the regime. While some of them were executed and some were freed after a period of detention, others were exchanged.’<sup>114</sup>
- 10.4.5 The FFM report also cited Ebrahim Alizadeh, a member of Komala SKHKI, who told the delegation that ‘if a Komala cell member is arrested by the Iranian regime, he will be tortured, imprisoned for life or even executed.’<sup>115</sup>
- 10.4.6 The FFM report also stated:
- ‘...Ammar Goli, a well-informed Kurdish journalist, stated that at the moment, there are 200 cases involving persons arrested by the Iranian regime

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<sup>109</sup> CCCR, CSHR and MRGI, ‘Rights denied’ (p.18), March 2018, [url](#)

<sup>110</sup> AI, ‘Urgent action’, 11 September 2018, [url](#)

<sup>111</sup> DIS and DRC, ‘Iranian Kurds’, September 2013 (p.15), [url](#)

<sup>112</sup> Landinfo, DIS and DRC, FFM report, February 2013 (p.41), [url](#)

<sup>113</sup> CRS, Iran (p.15), 17 October 2018, [url](#)

<sup>114</sup> DIS and DRC, ‘Iranian Kurds’, September 2013 (p.16), [url](#)

<sup>115</sup> DIS and DRC, ‘Iranian Kurds’, September 2013 (p.16), [url](#)

accused of being members or sympathizers of PJAK. In reality, many of these persons are not affiliated with PJAK, but are rather student activists, human rights activists, cultural activists etc. Since 2006, there have been 25 cases of persons sentenced to death accused of being connected to PJAK. Six out of these 25 persons have been executed. While three of them were PJAK members, the other three had no connection to PJAK". These were ...a teacher, a government employee and a Turkish citizen who was arrested in the border area between Iran and Turkey. The source emphasized that if PJAK members are sentenced to death, the party will make public statements about that.... the government knows that these people have no connection to PJAK but it uses the allegation of affiliation with PJAK as an excuse to eliminate people whom it considers a threat.<sup>116</sup>

- 10.4.7 A report by the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), dated October 2018, stated that, in 2015, 'Iranian Kurdish parties decided to return to armed struggle. The response of the Iranian regime was to increase levels of repression. Kurdish activists received severe sentences, and the number of death sentences rose sharply.' It noted that 'there are reports of 135 Kurds being executed in Iran just between October 2016 and October 2017<sup>117</sup>.
- 10.4.8 An Amnesty International article dated May 2018 reported 'Ramin Hossein Panahi was sentenced to death in January 2018 for "taking up arms against the state" (baqi). His conviction was based upon his membership of the armed Kurdish opposition group Komala, but no evidence linking him to activities involving intentional killing – the required threshold under international law for imposing the death penalty – was presented at his trial.'<sup>118</sup>
- 10.4.9 The DFAT report of June 2018 stated: 'In January 2017, a court sentenced an Iranian Kurd to death for alleged cooperation with the proscribed Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan, and gave six others lengthy sentences on the same charges.'<sup>119</sup>
- 10.4.10 Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, in an article dated September 2018, reported that the IRGC said it has killed six members of the PJAK that took part in a July attack on an Iranian border post near Iraq<sup>120</sup>.
- 10.4.11 In the same article, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty reported that Iran announced that it had executed 3 Iranian Kurds accused of belonging to a militant group and taking part in attacks against civilians and security forces in western Iran<sup>121</sup>.
- 10.4.12 The UN General Assembly, in a report dated August 2018, reported:  
'In June 2017, Ramin Panahi was arrested for alleged membership of the Kurdish nationalist group Komala and was sentenced to death on charges of "taking up arms against the State". Special procedures issued statements

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<sup>116</sup> DIS and DRC, 'Iranian Kurds', September 2013 (p.17), [url](#)

<sup>117</sup> SWP, 'The Changing Dynamics of the Kurdish Question' (p.2), October 2018, [url](#)

<sup>118</sup> AI, 'Imminent execution of Kurdish man must be halted', 1 May 2018, [url](#)

<sup>119</sup> DFAT report, Iran, 7 June 2018 (p.18), [url](#)

<sup>120</sup> RFE/RL, 'Dead Six Kurdish Militants', 8 September 2018, [url](#)

<sup>121</sup> Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Iran Executes Three Kurdish Prisoners..., 8 September 2018 [url](#)

calling for the annulment of his conviction in the light of reports of torture in detention and unfair trial. OHCHR [Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights] also received reports concerning the health and treatment of Kurdish prisoners Zanyar Moradi and Loghman Moradi, who were sentenced to death in 2009 on the basis of confessions made following alleged beating. Similarly, OHCHR received information regarding the health of Zeynab Jalalian, who is serving a life sentence following her arrest in 2007 for alleged membership in a prohibited Kurdish opposition group.<sup>122</sup>

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## 10.5 Treatment of family members

### 10.5.1 The Landinfo report stated:

‘Asked about the consequences for family members of political activists, an international organization in Ankara informed that ‘If a person is deemed to be affiliated to a separatist party, he would be at risk. Family members could be regarded as oppositional as well. In the Kurdish regions, families are larger and links are closer. If a person is affiliated to the KDPI, one would expect to find other activists [sic] within the family. It is the general trend of the authorities to seek out family members in the event that an activist is a fugitive. Going after families also creates an example of fear as well.’<sup>123</sup>

### 10.5.2 The Landinfo report of 2013, consulting several sources, stated: ‘Families to PJAK members can also be at risk and face arrest and interrogations by the authorities. It was added by the sources that they obtain information on the situation in Iran through the internet and publicly accessible sources as well as through refugees.’<sup>124</sup>

### 10.5.3 The DRC/DIS FFM report of 2013, citing Ebrahim Alizadeh, a member of Komala SKHKI, noted that the consequences of an arrested Komala member’s family were that they ‘may be arrested, but they will be freed on bail after a while.’<sup>125</sup>

### 10.5.4 The FFM report also stated ‘...According to Ziryan Roj Helaty (Tanupo Magazine), the Iranian regime is highly sensitive to the Kurdish population in Iran, and the regime always reacts disproportionately towards activities conducted by Kurds. As a result, if the Iranian regime for instance catches a sympathizer carrying out an activity against the government, the consequences for him and his family will be serious.’<sup>126</sup>

### 10.5.5 The FFM report also stated:

‘...Asked how the regime treats the family of someone who has been caught with a flyer, UNHCR Erbil answered that the family will be harassed until the wanted person shows up. The regime will sometimes detain a family member and interrogate him for a few hours and then release him; or the regime will hold one of the family members in detention. When asked in

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<sup>122</sup> UN General Assembly, Situation of human rights in Iran (para 59), 6 August 2018, [url](#)

<sup>123</sup> Landinfo, DIS and DRC, FFM report, February 2013 (p.43), [url](#)

<sup>124</sup> Landinfo, DIS and DRC, FFM report, February 2013 (p.41), [url](#)

<sup>125</sup> DIS and DRC, ‘Iranian Kurds’, September 2013 (p.16), [url](#)

<sup>126</sup> DIS and DRC, ‘Iranian Kurds’, September 2013 (p.15), [url](#)

which cases family members will be harshly or mildly punished, UNHCR Erbil answered that there is no basis in the Iranian law to detain a family member to a person whom the authorities has failed to arrest. However, in practice once the authorities find out that a person who has actively been working against the government has escaped from them, they would interrogate the family members and sometimes detain them for a while and use torture to make them confess about the whereabouts of the wanted person.

‘As regards pressure on the families of Kurdish political activists and Kurdish political party members, a Western diplomat and expert on Iran informed the delegation that the Iranian authorities put the families under pressure. This can be done by removing them from their positions in the public sector, frequently calling them in and asking them questions, calling the families to threaten them with imprisonment and with depriving them of access to higher education or employment in public positions, investigating their computers, etc.’<sup>127</sup>

10.5.6 The Danish Refugee Council and Danish Immigration Service’s joint publication on Iran, ‘Issues concerning persons of ethnic minorities, Kurds and Ahwazi Arabs,’ March 2018, stated:

‘An associate professor said that it is not possible to confirm whether family members of former or current Kurdish activists with a political conflict will be targeted by the authorities, nor is it possible to tell if there is a systematic targeting of family members by the authorities. While one security agency can act systematically in this regard, another would not. In Iran, there are a number of different intelligence services; those affiliated with the Ministry of Interior, those affiliated with the military and those affiliated with the Revolutionary Guard. Furthermore, the intelligence agencies play different roles and follow different chains of command. Family members of former or current Kurdish activists will be monitored, but it depends on the profile of the active family member and the level of his/her political activities. Furthermore, if a Kurd is not politically active and does not have a politically active family member with a significant profile, it is less probable that he/she would be targeted.

‘Descendants of politically active parents, who have not participated in political activities opposing the official line, will in principle not face any risk, a Western embassy (3) stated. Another source noted on the contrary that descendants of Kurdish activists may risk surveillance because of their parents’ activities. According to Amnesty International, whether descendants of Kurdish activists are a target for the authorities depends on the profile of the parents, how well-known the parents’ activities are, and what the parents have been advocating.

‘Some local Sunni-Muslim sheikhs are also a target and recently, they have been accused of Wahhabi and Islamic State propaganda by the authorities.

‘In general, it cannot be ruled out that conflicts related to religious activities will be inherited from generation to generation.

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<sup>127</sup> DIS and DRC, ‘Iranian Kurds’, September 2013 (pp.21-22), [url](#)

'One source pointed out that the authorities may make investigations on persons whose family members have strong links with former prominent Kurdish activists. Sometimes the interrogation will take place to intimidate people and sometimes it will be to get specific information. If the person interrogated is not high profiled, he/she will probably be warned and released, but still monitored to see whom he/she meets with.'<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> DIS and DRC, 'Issues concerning persons of ethnic minorities', (pp.7-8), February 2018, [url](#)

# Terms of reference

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

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

- Background
  - Demography
  - Language
  - Legal and constitutional framework
  - History
- Treatment of Kurds by the state and society
  - Overview
  - Kurds
- Kurdish political groups
  - Overview
- Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI, aka PDKI and DPKI)
  - Background
  - Recruitment to and membership of KDPI
  - Membership cards
  - Verification of membership
- Kurdish Democratic Party Iran (KDP -I)
  - Background
  - Recruitment to and membership of (KDP-I)
  - Membership cards
  - Verification of membership
- Komala (Lomaleh/ Komalah) parties
  - General background
  - Recruitment to and membership of Komala parties
  - Komala, SKHKI
  - Komala, KZK
  - Komala, Party of Iranian Kurdistan
- Membership cards

- Komala, SKHKI
  - Komala, KZK
  - Komala, Party of Iranian Kurdistan
- Party of Free Life for Kurdistan (PJAK)
  - Background
  - Recruitment to and membership of PJAK
  - Membership cards
- Treatment of Kurdish political activists and family members

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# Version control

## Clearance

- version **3.0**
- valid from **30 January 2019**

## Changes from last version of this note

Updated country information and reflection in the assessment of the CG case of HB

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