

## IRAN

***GCPEA documented attacks on higher education students and faculty throughout the reporting period. Security forces and paramilitary groups reportedly arrested students in December 2017 and January 2018 for participating in protests, with courts subsequently charging many and sentencing them to prison. Academics were also reportedly detained and sentenced for reasons related to their research. School teachers participating in strikes and protests, many of whom were members of a teachers' union, were also affected.***

### **Context**

In December 2017, a movement of protests spread across Iran, initially in response to rising costs of living, and later addressing general grievances with both foreign and domestic policy.<sup>947</sup> In some cases, the protests provoked violent responses from state security forces.<sup>948</sup> Paramilitary groups also supported security forces in dispersing protests, including campus-based student groups<sup>949</sup>

According to Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, the repression of protests in 2017 and 2018 circumscribed the rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly, and heavily affected students, academics, and human rights defenders, amongst others.<sup>950</sup> More than 1,000 people were allegedly detained and 22 were killed in the first week of protests.<sup>951</sup> On January 5, 2018, the UN Human Rights Council issued a statement urging the Iranian government to respect the rights to life, freedom of expression and assembly and to ensure these and other fundamental rights were not met with violence, to avoid any further casualties.<sup>952</sup>

Amnesty International reported that many student activists continued to be barred from higher education between 2017 and 2019.<sup>953</sup> The government of Iran also acknowledged barring student activists from continuing their higher education through a system of marking names with stars in official documents. For example, in December 2017, authorities said they blocked 27 students from enrolling in graduate programs for reasons related to political expression.<sup>954</sup> On April 21, 2019, the Supreme Cultural Revolution Council's Committee for the Islamization of Universities passed an amendment allowing university students to be punished for their online activity, such as posting on social media.<sup>955</sup>

In addition, universities have systematically expelled Baha'i students and prevented them from enrolling, according to Human Rights Watch and other human rights monitors.<sup>956</sup> According to Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and media sources, during the reporting period, school teachers, coordinated through national teachers unions, went on strike or participated in demonstrations related to salary and contract issues, and the jailing of teachers' rights activists, which disrupted teaching and learning.<sup>957</sup>

During this period, the Iranian government also made positive strides to expand access to education at all levels. After a 2015 decree ensuring access to public education for all, the number of refugee children attending public schools in Iran increased from 361,571 in 2015 to 474,651 in 2018.<sup>958</sup> According to UNESCO, Iran had a net enrolment rate of 99.7 percent in primary education and had reached gender parity in gross enrolment rates.<sup>959</sup>

In the previous reporting period, GCPEA collected isolated reports of attacks on education in Iran but did not profile the country,<sup>960</sup> thus no comparisons can be made to *Education under Attack 2018*.

### **Attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel**

During the 2017-2019 reporting period, GCPEA documented 12 allegations of attacks on students, teachers, and other education personnel, which led to the arrest or conviction of at least 50 teachers and two students. In the majority of incidents reported by international NGOs and media, police and the Basij militia, a pro-government paramilitary group, reportedly used excessive force against teachers participating in strikes or protests relating to teacher salaries, contracts, and previous imprisonment of teachers. Branches of the Iranian Teachers Trade Association (ITTA) coordinated several of the strike actions during this period, which peaked in 2018.

In 2017, GCPEA collected two reports of attacks on schoolteachers. In one case, alleged Baluchi nationalists reportedly shot and killed a teacher and injured his two children in Jalayi Kalag, Sistan and Baluchestan province.<sup>961</sup> Also in 2017, authorities detained two leaders of the teacher's union who had been arrested and sentenced for their involvement in

a teachers' protest at the Parliament building in 2016. Human Rights Watch reported that authorities had previously released both men on bail, but they were summoned to serve their prison sentences.<sup>962</sup>

In 2018, Amnesty International documented the alleged arrest of at least 23 teachers by authorities following participation in strike action in October and November. Eight of the arrested teachers received sentences, ranging from nine months to over ten years in prison, 74 lashes, or other punishments.<sup>963</sup> During strikes and protests, teachers demanded better working conditions and improvements to the education system, as well as drawing attention to teachers jailed as a result of previous strikes. In the same year GCPEA collected eight allegations of incidents of attacks on school students and teachers, five of which took place in October and November 2018.<sup>964</sup> These attacks included arrest, excessive use of force, and protest repression, such as in the following:

- On May 10, 2018, in Tehran, state security forces reportedly used excessive force to disperse a teacher protest. At least seven teachers were allegedly arrested, and others injured.<sup>965</sup>
- Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International reported that in late May 2018 in Tehran, authorities arrested teacher a during a peaceful protest held by ITTA.<sup>966</sup>
- During a nationwide teachers' strike on October 14 and 15, 2018, police reportedly arrested two prominent members of the national teachers' union, according to Education International and a human rights monitor. Teachers were reportedly striking over low salaries, the declining quality of the education system, and the on-going arresting of teachers.<sup>967</sup>
- On November 12, 2018, Amnesty International and another human rights monitor reported that authorities arrested another teacher for his involvement in a national teacher strike planned for November 13 and 14, 2018. According to Amnesty International, a Revolutionary Court in Sanandaj, Kurdistan province, sentenced the teacher to a year in prison in February 2019.<sup>968</sup>

Police also reportedly used excessive force against school teachers and students during three education-related protests in 2019:

- Local sources alleged that on February 7, 2019, in Isfahan city, police fired teargas at teachers protesting a range of issues, including for the government to release detained teachers.<sup>969</sup>
- On May 2, 2019, the Teachers' Coordinating Council of Iran reported that teachers and retired teachers demonstrated in front of the Ministry of Education in Tehran to demand increases to salaries and pensions. Police allegedly dispersed the protest and arrested nine teachers. Two of the detained were allegedly board members of ITTA.<sup>970</sup>
- According to local media sources, on June 8, 2019, police reportedly arrested two high school students who participated in a protest about the dates of university entrance exams, in front of the National Organization of Educational Testing.<sup>971</sup>

### **Attacks on higher education**

During the 2017-2019 reporting period, GCPEA identified at least 20 reported incidents of attacks on higher education students and personnel, leading to the detention of at least 150. The alleged attacks primarily involved the violent repression of student protests or the detention of academics and students in relation to their academic work or their involvement in protests related to education or that occurred on campus.<sup>972</sup> Iran was not profiled in the previous reporting period, but GCPEA received reports of attacks on higher education between 2013-2017 that occurred on average one to two times per year.<sup>973</sup>

On December 27, 2017, student protests, as part of a wider protest movement against government policies, erupted and continued throughout January 2018. According to the New York-based Center for Human Rights in Iran, the Intelligence Ministry arrested at least 90 university students on or around December 28, 2017.<sup>974</sup> Human Rights Watch and members of the Iranian Parliament estimated that the government's Ministry of Intelligence arrested 150 university students during and after the December 2017-January 2018 protests.<sup>975</sup> The UK-based media group *The Telegraph* published an open letter alleging rights violations by state authorities against protesting students, including descriptions of physical

and psychological violence while in detention including threatening female student with forced virginity tests.<sup>976</sup>

In April 2019, Scholars at Risk submitted to the UN Human Rights Council's Third Cycle of Universal Periodic Review of the Islamic Republic of Iran 16 reports of imprisonment and/or prosecution, three reports of violence, and seven reports of higher education institutions' retaliation against academics and students between 2014-2019.<sup>977</sup> This submission also included cases in which authorities convicted and sentenced two Baha'i professors to prison for reasons related to their educational work.<sup>978</sup>

In 2018, GCPEA compiled 18 reported incidents of attacks on university students and scholars, of which three involved university-based Basij branches or security forces allegedly using excessive force to disperse student protesters, and 15 reported arrests or detentions of scholars and university students.<sup>979</sup> In 2018, Scholars at Risk reported that several students and professors arrested for their involvement in the 2017-2018 protests were sentenced to long prison for sentences between one and eight years.<sup>980</sup> Examples included:

- According to Scholars at Risk, on January 1, 2018, state security forces detained four members of a student union in Tehran while they were attempting to secure the release of fellow students arrested during a campus protest on December 30, 2017. The students were allegedly arrested following a meeting with the University of Tehran's chancellor.<sup>981</sup>
- Scholars at Risk reported that on January 24, 2018, Iranian authorities allegedly arrested a professor at Imam Sadiq University, on charges of espionage related to his academic work on environmental projects. The professor died in detention on or before February 10, 2018, allegedly under "suspicious circumstances".<sup>982</sup>
- According to Scholars at Risk and a monitor, in late February 2018, authorities arrested a photography student for her participation in student protests in late December 2017. Following her release on bail in March, in August 2018, Branch 26 of Tehran's Revolutionary Court sentenced the student to seven years in prison, 74 lashes, a two-year ban on travel, and a ban from political and social activities. She was tried on charges of assembling and collusion, propaganda against the regime, and disturbing public order.<sup>983</sup>
- Scholars at Risk and *The Guardian* reported that on March 12, 2018, a political science professor at the University of Tehran was sentenced to 18 months in prison on charges of "propaganda against the state" for discussing 2017-2018 protests and civil unrest in Iran – a topic directly related to his scholarship - with an international publication.
- Amsterdam-based Iranian media *Radio Zamaneh* reported that on April 12, 2018, students of Amir Kabir University in Tehran organized a demonstration on campus in support of teachers and workers. Basij forces attempted to disperse the gathering, leading to violence and the injury of at least one student.<sup>984</sup>
- Scholars at Risk and international media reported that Iranian authorities arrested two professors of demography of the University of Melbourne and the University of Tehran respectively, on December 1, 2018. The state charged both academics, whose research focused on Iran's fertility rates, with espionage and accused the academics of manipulating state demographic statistics in their work.<sup>985</sup> Since 2014, the Iranian government has promoted policies to raise the fertility rate, a reverse from decades of family planning policies to lower the birth rate.<sup>986</sup> As reported by *The Sydney Morning Herald*, one scholar, a dual Australian-Iranian citizen, was released from prison in Iran in January 2019.<sup>987</sup>

Amnesty International reported in a September 3, 2018 news release that in 2018, authorities targeted and arrested women graduate students for their academic work and activism on advancing women's rights in Iran. These arrests occurred within a broader crackdown by authorities on human rights and women's rights activists, which occurred between August 31 and September 3, 2018.<sup>988</sup> Two documented instances, included in the total of 17 arrests reported above, include:

- A monitor reported that on September 1, 2018, that a female student was arrested days prior to hosting a workshop on Iran's marriage laws. On November 6, 2018, authorities released her on bail until trial.<sup>989</sup>
- According to the International Federation for Human Rights and other sources, on September 3, 2018, authorities arrested a graduate student and gender activist, holding her at Evin prison until October 20, 2018

when she was released on bail. The first hearing of her case occurred on February 17, 2019, in Tehran, on the charge of “assembly and collusion against national security by seeking to normalize homosexual relations”; the court denied her or her legal representatives from attending the hearing or reading her file. The student’s academic research and conference attendances were reportedly used against her in trial.<sup>990</sup>

According to Scholars at Risk and other rights-based reporting, in 2019, branches of the Basij paramilitary forces continued to use excessive force against academics and students, as well as arresting and detaining them in relation to their scholarship. However, the frequency of these attacks decreased as compared to 2018. An independent rights monitor observed that 104 students were arrested and one student received a courts summons in 2019, indicating a six percent decline in comparison to 2018, though the alleged arrests may not have met GCPEA’s definitions of attacks on education.<sup>991</sup> GCPEA compiled four reports of arrest from NGOs, media, and human rights groups in 2019:

- On May 13, 2019, Scholars at Risk and local and international media outlets reported clashes surrounding a student protest at the University of Tehran on the university’s hijab requirement, and the increased presence of security forces and “guidance units” to monitor hijab wearing during Ramadan. A local source reported that Basij militia members, many of whom could be students, and plain-clothed vigilantes violently attacked the student protesters, beginning outside of the Faculty of Fine Arts and continuing inside a main auditorium.<sup>992</sup> Scholars at Risk and *France 24* noted that university officials denied the presence of state security forces on campus to monitor hijabs and described the violence on campus as occurring between two student groups.<sup>993</sup>
- On an unspecified date in early June 2019, Scholars at Risk reported that Iranian authorities arrested a French-Iranian scholar and director for the Center for International Studies at an unknown location. The academic, whose scholarship related to the Iranian post-revolution era, was reportedly detained on espionage-related charges.<sup>994</sup>
- On August 11, 2019, Scholars at Risk and *The Guardian* reported that Iranian intelligence agents arrested a British-Iranian scholar at his residence in Tehran and detained him at Evin prison. He had published academic work on controversial topics such as female genital mutilation and child marriage.<sup>995</sup>
- On November 18, 2019, Scholars at Risk, *The New York Times*, and human rights organizations reported allegations by a student union that plainclothes Basij paramilitaries entered the University of Tehran campus to prevent a demonstration of students on campus. Misusing medical neutrality, the paramilitary forces reportedly entered campus in ambulances, arrested at least 50 students, and transported them to Evin Prison and Greater Tehran Penitentiary.<sup>996</sup>

<sup>947</sup> Bozorgmehr Sharafedin, “What has brought Iranian protesters onto the streets?,” *Reuters*, January 2, 2018.

<sup>948</sup> Note: In particular, the Sazeman-e Basij-e Mostazafan (the Basij), a volunteer militia ancillary to the IRGC, which operated throughout the country during the reporting period was involved in dispersing protests. See: “Iran: Stop increasingly ruthless crackdown and investigate deaths of protesters,” Amnesty International news release, January 4, 2018; “Iran deploys Revolutionary Guards to quell ‘sedition’ in protest hotbeds,” *Reuters*, January 3, 2018).

<sup>949</sup> Ali Alfoneh, “The Basij Resistance Force,” United States Institute of Peace, 2015; Alissa J. Rubin, “Iran’s Revolutionary Guards: The Supreme Leader’s Military-Industrial Complex,” *The New York Times*, April 9, 2019; “Profile: Iran’s Revolutionary Guards,” *BBC*, January 3, 2020.

<sup>950</sup> “Iran: Stop increasingly ruthless crackdown and investigate deaths of protesters,” Amnesty International news release, January 4, 2018; Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2019*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2019), Iran chapter.

<sup>951</sup> “Iran: Stop increasingly ruthless crackdown and investigate deaths of protesters.”

<sup>952</sup> “Iran: UN experts urge respect for protesters’ rights,” OHCHR news release, January 5, 2019.

<sup>953</sup> Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Report 2017/18*, (London: Amnesty International, 2018), Iran chapter, p. 198.

<sup>954</sup> “Attacks against Iranian scholars, students recorded at UN,” *University World News*, April 20, 2019; Other examples of starred student files: “Tehran University Student Launches Campus Sit-In Against Being Blacklisted for Activism,” Center for Human Rights in Iran (CHRI) news release, October 15, 2019.

<sup>955</sup> “Iran Sets Stage for More Crackdowns on University Students’ Online Activities,” CHRI news release, April 29, 2019.

<sup>956</sup> “Top Student Expelled for Being Baha’i,” Human Rights Activists News Agency, (translated by Iran Press Watch; Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2019*, Iran chapter.

<sup>957</sup> For example: “Iran: Release Detained Labour Rights Activists,” Amnesty International public statement, May 1, 2019, p.2; “Iran: Mounting Crackdown on Teachers, Labor Activists,” Human Rights Watch news release, November 22, 2018; “Contract Teachers in Iran Protest and Demand Permanent Contracts,” *Radio Zamaneh*, August 5, 2019.

<sup>958</sup> Information received from a confidential source.

- <sup>959</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Iran (Islamic Republic of).
- <sup>960</sup> GCPEA, *Education under Attack 2018*, p. 29.
- <sup>961</sup> “Baluchi rebels gun down two people in southeast,” Iran Times International (Washington, DC), April 21, 2017.” as cited in START, GTD 201704150029.
- <sup>962</sup> “Iran: Mounting Crackdown on Teachers, Labor Activists.”
- <sup>963</sup> “Iran’s ‘year of shame’: More than 7,000 arrested in chilling crackdown on dissent during 2018,” Amnesty International news release, January 24, 2019.
- <sup>964</sup> A full list of references can be found on GCPEA’s website, [https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/eua\\_2020\\_references.pdf](https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/eua_2020_references.pdf)
- <sup>965</sup> GardaWorld, News Alert, Iran: Security forces beat and arrest protesting teacher in Tehran May 10, May 11, 2018; *ILNA*; *Radio Zamaneh*; *Al Riyadh*; *BBC Persian*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID IRN1056; “Iran’s ‘year of shame’: More than 7,000 arrested in chilling crackdown on dissent during 2018”.
- <sup>966</sup> “Iran: Mounting Crackdown on Teachers, Labor Activists”; “Iran: Release Detained Labour Rights Activists,” Amnesty International public statement, May 1, 2019, p.2.
- <sup>967</sup> “Four Teachers Detained in Iran and Several Others Summoned to Court After Peaceful Sit-In,” Center for Human Rights in Iran news release, October 19, 2019; “Iran: Solidarity with trade union leaders arrested after teachers’ strike,” Education International news release, October 17, 2019.
- <sup>968</sup> “Iran: Release Detained Labour Rights Activists,” p.2.
- <sup>969</sup> *Eteraze Bazar*; *HRANA*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID IRN3625.
- <sup>970</sup> Coordinating Council of Teachers Syndicates in Iran, as cited in ACLED, Event ID IRN4154.
- <sup>971</sup> Iran International; Human Rights Activists News Agency, as cited in ACLED, Event ID IRN4378.
- <sup>972</sup> GCPEA, *Education under Attack 2018*, p. 29.
- <sup>973</sup> For example: UN General Assembly, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ahmed Shaheed, A/71/418, September 30, 2016, para. 38; “Mohaddeseh Ghasemi Arrested and Transferred to Intelligence Office of Shiraz,” Human Rights Activists News Agency, February 4, 2017.
- <sup>974</sup> “University Student Activists Sentenced to Prison After Being Arrested by President Rouhani’s Intelligence Ministry,” Center for Human Rights in Iran, June 14, 2018.
- <sup>975</sup> Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2019*, Iran chapter; “Iran is Imprisoning University Students Accused of Attending Protests,” Center for Human Rights in Iran news release, July 13, 2018.
- <sup>976</sup> Parisa Rafiee, “What is going on in the detention centers? ( ),” *Telegraph*, Open Letter, May 9, 2019; “Tehran University Student Speaks Out Against ‘Virginity Tests,’ Inhumane Interrogation Methods,” Center for Human Rights in Iran, May 11, 2019.
- <sup>977</sup> Scholars at Risk Network, *Scholars at Risk’s Submission to the Third Cycle of Universal Periodic Review of the Islamic Republic of Iran: United Nations Human Rights Council 34th Session*, (New York: Scholars at Risk, April 2019), para. 10.
- <sup>978</sup> Scholars at Risk Network, *Scholars at Risk’s Submission to the Third Cycle of Universal Periodic Review of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, para. 28.
- <sup>979</sup> A full list of references can be found on GCPEA’s website, [https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/eua\\_2020\\_references.pdf](https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/eua_2020_references.pdf)
- <sup>980</sup> Scholars at Risk, *Free to Think: Report of the Scholars at Risk Academic Freedom Monitoring Project*, (New York: Scholars at Risk, October 2018, pp. 15-16; See also: CHRI identified 19 students issued with prison sentences up to 12 years: “19 University Students in Iran Issued Long Prison Sentences as One More is Tried in Tehran,” Center for Human Rights in Iran, August 17, 2018.
- <sup>981</sup> Scholars at Risk Network, Academic Freedom Monitor, Unknown, January 1, 2018.
- <sup>982</sup> Scholars at Risk Network, Academic Freedom Monitor, Imam Sadiq University, January 24, 2018.
- <sup>983</sup> “University Student Sentenced to Seven Years Imprisonment in Iran as Another is Ordered to Attend Friday Prayers,” Center for Human Rights in Iran, August 31, 2018; Parisa Rafiee, “What is going on in the detention centers?”; “Parisa Rafiee’s continued detention for ‘non-cooperation’: failure to state charges and lack of access to a lawyer,” Center for Human Rights in Iran, March 12, 2018; Scholars at Risk Network, *Scholars at Risk’s Submission to the Third Cycle of Universal Periodic Review of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, para. 30.
- <sup>984</sup> *Radio Zamaneh*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID IRN3178.
- <sup>985</sup> Scholars at Risk Network, Academic Freedom Monitor, University of Melbourne | University of Tehran, December 1, 2018; “Two Academics Who Held Australian Postings Detained, Summoned in Iran,” Center for Human Rights in Iran, December 4, 2018.
- <sup>986</sup> Farzaneh Roudi, Pooya Azadi, and Mohsen Mesgaran, “Iran’s Poulation Dynamics and Demographic Window of Opportunity,” Stanford Iran 2040 Project, Working Paper No. 4, October 2017, p. 10.
- <sup>987</sup> Reuters, with Anthony Colangelo, “Australian university academic held in Iran has been freed: lawer,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, January 28, 2019.
- <sup>988</sup> “Iran: Arrests of lawyers and women’s rights activists signal intensifying crackdown on civil society,” Amnesty International news release, September 3, 2018.
- <sup>989</sup> “Women’s Rights Activist Najmeh Vahedi Released On Bail,” *HRANA*, November 7, 2018.
- <sup>990</sup> “Gender Equality Researcher Tried in Iran Under National Security Charge,” Center for Human Rights in Iran, March 25, 2019; “Iran: Judicial harassment of Ms. Rezvaneh Mohammadi,” International Federation for Human Rights, Urgent appeal, March 20, 2019.
- <sup>991</sup> Human Rights Activists in Iran (HRAI), Human Rights Situation in Iran - Annual Report 2019, (HRAI: Virginia, 2019), p. 18.
- <sup>992</sup> “Paramilitary Force Attacks Tehran University Protest Against Hijab Enforcement Units,” Center for Human Rights in Iran press release, May 13, 2019.
- <sup>993</sup> “Students clash over hijab at Tehran University,” *France24*, May 13, 2019; Scholars at Risk Network, Academic Freedom Monitor, University of Tehran, May 13, 2019.
- <sup>994</sup> Scholars at Risk Network, Academic Freedom Monitor, Paris Institute of Political Studies, June 1, 2019.
- <sup>995</sup> “British dual national Kameel Ahmady detained in Iran,” *The Guardian*, August 14, 2019; Scholars at Risk Network, Academic Freedom Monitor, Unaffiliated, August 11, 2019.
- <sup>996</sup> Farnaz Fassihi and Rick Gladstone, “Iran Declares Protests Are Over, but the Evidence Suggests Otherwise,” *The New York Times*, November 21, 2019; Human Rights Activists News Agency, as cited in ACLED, Event ID IRN5701; “Initial Reports Show Thousands Arrested in Iran’s Crackdown on November Protests,” Center for Human Rights in Iran, November 22, 2019; Scholars at Risk Network, Academic Freedom Monitor, University of Tehran, November 18, 2019.