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3.1.3. Human rights defenders, activists, and lawyers

COMMON ANALYSIS
Last update: January 2025

A human rights defender is a person who, individually or in association with others, professionally acts to promote or protect human rights. Examples of human rights defenders include lawyers, members of human rights NGOs, academics, and trade unionists9. A human rights activist is a person who believes strongly in political or social change based on the respect of human rights, such as the abolishment of the death penalty, and takes part in activities to try to make this happen10. Such activities include protests, strikes, boycotts, online campaigns, civil disobedience, protest art, etc.11. Human rights activism also covers, for example, ethnic and religious minorities rights, SOGIESC person's rights and women's rights activism. Human rights lawyers act to protect human rights, advocate for the rights of clients against ill-treatment by the authorities, etc.

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For assessing international protection needs related to activities on social media, please refer to EUAA Practical Guide on Political Opinion, 3.7. Political opinion expressed via social media.

The analysis below is based on the following EUAA COI report and Queries: Country Focus 2024, 4.3, 4.12; COI Human Rights, 1.2 1.6; COI Musicians. Country Guidance should not be referred to as source of COI.

In Iran, human rights defenders, activists, and lawyers face increasing restrictions and pressure, especially following the 'Women, Life, Freedom' protests.

Step 1: Do the reported acts amount to persecution?

Some acts reported to be committed against individuals under this sub-profile are of such severe nature that they amount to persecution. More specifically, human rights defenders, activists, and lawyers face arbitrary arrest, detention, criminal prosecution including on charges of committing crimes against the country's national security, torture, flogging, and ill-treatment in detention. Human rights defenders, who openly express solidarity with the protesters of the 'Women, Life, Freedom' movement and defence lawyers representing persons implicated in protest-related cases face reprisals. Lawyers are targeted for their professional activities, including providing legal assistance to protesters and their families, advocating

against torture and ill-treatment of their clients, as well as for expressing solidarity with the protests and speaking to the media. Lawyers defending converts to Christianity are similarly targeted, with several being convicted to various prison terms. Furthermore, the Iranian authorities have put increased pressure on women activists and human rights activists who advocate for the abolishment of the death penalty including by imposing criminal charges on them. Female lawyers in Iran face challenges such as mandatory *hijab* rules and harassment in the court room. Activists and lawyers advocating for SOGIESC person's rights, too, face censorship, harassment, and arbitrary arrest by the Islamic Republic. Iranian authorities often refer to vague laws such as 'morality' or 'national security' to silence dissent and target individuals who promote SOGIESC person's rights. Artists who publicly supported the 'Women, Life, Freedom' movement risk imprisonment.

The severity and/or repetitiveness of other acts that human rights defenders, activists, and lawyers could be subjected to and whether they occur as an accumulation of various measures, should also be considered. For example, human rights defenders, activists, and lawyers have been subjected to harassment including judicial harassment, interrogations, threats, suspension from legal practice, travel bans, (internal) exile, prohibition on residing in Tehran, a ban on joining political and social groups, and disciplinary actions by bar associations because of pressure by the authorities. Artists whose art challenges political constraints, including musicians, face enhanced online monitoring, punishments or restrictions on their ability to work and travel.

Please refer to Individuals perceived to have transgressed Islamic norms or laws for the situation of artists challenging cultural constraints.

Step 2: What is the level of risk of persecution?

A well-founded fear of persecution would in general be substantiated for human rights defenders, activists, and lawyers.

Step 3: Is there a ground for persecution?

Where well-founded fear of persecution is substantiated for an applicant falling under this profile, this is highly likely to be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion, as human rights defenders, activists and lawyers would be perceived as being critical of the authorities.

See other contents concerning Political dissent and opposition:

- 3.1.1. Members and sympathisers of opposition parties and movements (perceived as) critical of the Iranian authorities
- 3.1.2. Protesters
- *3.1.3. Human rights defenders, activists, and lawyers*
- 3.1.4. Journalists and other media workers (perceived as) critical of the Iranian authorities

European Union External Action Service, Human rights defenders, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/human-rights-defenders_en

- 10

  Adaptation based on Cambridge Dictionary.

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  Liberties, Democracy and Justice, What is Activism: Definition, Types, Role, Examples, Importance, https://www.liberties.eu/en/stories/activism/44871

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