

## Concluding observation Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights E/C.12/IRN/CO/2 para 9

### Full recommendation:

The Committee recommends that the State party take steps to lift all restrictions on access to university education, including bans on female and male enrolment, limited quotas for women in certain fields, and gender segregation in classrooms and facilities.

### Assessment using Impact Iran human rights indicators<sup>1</sup>

With regards to access to education, Article 30 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran stipulates that “The government must provide all citizen with free education up to secondary school and must expand free higher education to the extent required by the country for attaining self-sufficiency.” Article 20 states that “All citizens of the country, both men and women, equally enjoy the protection of the law and enjoy all human, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, in conformity with Islamic criteria”.<sup>2</sup>

Despite these legal safeguards, women in the Islamic Republic of Iran face restrictions to access higher education.

The Iranian government does not publish statistics regarding its efforts towards a reduction or elimination of discrimination in higher education. There are reports that point to a pattern of lack of gender equality in terms of access to education, especially for women belonging to ethnic and religious minority groups.<sup>3</sup> Enrollment statistics indicate that women have limited access to certain academic specializations at university. In 2017, the gross enrollment ratio of women in all majors in Iran was 62.86%, compared to 73.33% for males.<sup>4</sup> In its 2019 National Report to the Universal Periodic Review, the Government reported that “At present, 43.98% of the university students are female”, although not specifying in what academic specializations women were the most present. Available data suggest that the generalized women ban from engineering academic specializations have contributed to the overrepresentation of women in humanities or social sciences which reportedly offer lower employment prospects after graduation.<sup>5</sup> In 2015-2016 the number of

<sup>1</sup> ESCR.13.2.S.5

ESCR.13.2.P.12

ESCR.13.1.O.7; ESCR.13.2.O.11

<sup>2</sup> Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, English translation, <https://irandataportal.syr.edu/wp-content/uploads/constitution-english-1368.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Minority Rights Group, [https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/MRG\\_CFR\\_Iran\\_EN\\_Sept191.pdf](https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/MRG_CFR_Iran_EN_Sept191.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> UNESCO, <http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/ir>

<sup>5</sup> Minority Rights Group, [https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/MRG\\_CFR\\_Iran\\_EN\\_Sept191.pdf](https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/MRG_CFR_Iran_EN_Sept191.pdf)

women enrolling in engineering majors in Iran was 355,360, compared to 1,148,044 for males.<sup>6</sup> Although recent, readily available and official disaggregated data as to the enrollment of women in higher education are scarce, the underrepresentation of women in the labour market suggest that women have still limited access to higher education.<sup>7</sup>

#### A. Bans on enrolment

In 1983, gender segregation policies were introduced in the Iranian education system that implemented quotas and resulted in the exclusion of women from 91 out of the 169 academic specializations existing at the time.<sup>8</sup> Despite the lifting of these policies in 1993, the Government introduced gender-rationing measures in universities in 2012, resulting again in women being excluded from 77 academic specializations in 36 universities.<sup>9 10</sup> A decree prepared and approved by the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution<sup>11</sup> in 2013 on the "Islamization of Universities" (Strategic Guide for Islamization) to be implemented by all educational entities, called for "Institutionalizing the culture of chastity and veil (*hijab*), organizing the public space of universities and preserving the affairs of the university scientific environment." Under the same note, (Note 14.6) it mandates all educational institutions to "review and improve the design of spaces and optimize university services in order to reduce unnecessary mixing of girls and boys."<sup>12</sup> The implementation of policies after 2012 correlated with the decrease of women enrollment in universities.<sup>13</sup>

In higher education regulations in Iran, a number of academic specializations are classified by gender and bar women from enrollment. For this reason, there are some specializations in which women are not allowed to study/enroll. For instance, in 2014 women were excluded from the Biosystem Mechanical Engineering and Islamic Theology degrees at Shiraz University.

Majors that are known to have been banned for women include computer science, industrial engineering, chemical engineering, mechanical engineering and material engineering at Arak University. Additionally, natural resources engineering, forestry and mining engineering at Tehran university; political science, accounting, business administration, public administration, mechanical engineering, and civil engineering at Esfahan University and 14 social sciences majors at Emam Khomeini University.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>6</sup> [https://iranopendata.org/en/dataset/universities-higher-education-terms-major-education-gender-durg-years-1367-1394/resource/a092f0ad-0964-47f8-9d59-55a4c1c2ec77?inner\\_span=True](https://iranopendata.org/en/dataset/universities-higher-education-terms-major-education-gender-durg-years-1367-1394/resource/a092f0ad-0964-47f8-9d59-55a4c1c2ec77?inner_span=True)

<sup>7</sup> Minority Rights Group, [https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/MRG\\_CFR\\_Iran\\_EN\\_Sept191.pdf](https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/MRG_CFR_Iran_EN_Sept191.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Fathi, M., 'Becoming a woman doctor in Iran: The formation of classed and gendered selves', *Gender and Education* 30, 1, 2018, pp.59-73.

<sup>9</sup> Mehr News Agency, <https://bit.ly/2YfDM44>

<sup>10</sup> Minority Rights Group, [https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/MRG\\_CFR\\_Iran\\_EN\\_Sept191.pdf](https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/MRG_CFR_Iran_EN_Sept191.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> A body of the government based in Qoms, in charge of ensuring that education and culture in Iran follow Islamic guidelines.

<sup>12</sup> Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, <https://bit.ly/3pTn8kb>

<sup>13</sup> Minority Rights Group, [https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/MRG\\_CFR\\_Iran\\_EN\\_Sept191.pdf](https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/MRG_CFR_Iran_EN_Sept191.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/09/22/iran-ensure-equal-access-higher-education>

## B. Gender quotas

Each year in the Islamic Republic of Iran, a Guidebook for Enrolled Candidates is published, which provides the university quota, quota for men and women, and information for admission.<sup>9</sup> However, since 2019, gender quotas appeared to be no longer in place in the Islamic Republic of Iran.<sup>15 16</sup>

## C. Higher Education Segregation<sup>17</sup>

With regards to the segregation of higher education classrooms and universities, Iran's higher education system is divided into two separate types of universities. Regular universities, which are called governmental universities, have multi-gender classrooms, except for a few universities that are reserved only for women. In *Azad* Universities which were formerly non-governmental but are currently under control of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, classrooms are segregated by gender, in almost all its branch around the country.

Although gender quotas reportedly appear not to be in place anymore in the Islamic Republic of Iran<sup>18</sup> higher education in Iran remains segregated by gender. Women are barred from certain academic specializations in universities, notably in engineering. This suggest that the Islamic Republic of Iran has not taken steps to lift all restrictions on access to university education for women.

Recommendation Status:

This recommendation has **NOT** been implemented.

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<sup>15</sup> National Organization of Educational Testing, Guide on the capacity of universities and selection of major - mathematics and technical majors entrance exam - year 1397, in Farsi, [http://www6.sanjesh.org/download/sar97/selection97/1-Riyazi-1397-2-Final-970502\\_1130\\_AM.pdf](http://www6.sanjesh.org/download/sar97/selection97/1-Riyazi-1397-2-Final-970502_1130_AM.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Minority Rights Group, [https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/MRG\\_CFR\\_Iran\\_EN\\_Sept191.pdf](https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/MRG_CFR_Iran_EN_Sept191.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Minority Rights Group, [https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/MRG\\_CFR\\_Iran\\_EN\\_Sept191.pdf](https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/MRG_CFR_Iran_EN_Sept191.pdf)