

Concluding Observations Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights E/C.12/IRN/CO/2 para 27

Full recommendation

The Committee recommends that the State party address the high drop-out rate of girls in rural areas and of Ahwazi Arab children. The Committee recommends that the State party take measures to address the high illiteracy rates among Ahwazi Arabs and Azeris. It also recommends that the State party take steps to improve the quality of instruction in and physical infrastructure of schools in rural areas, and to increase the number of female teachers in rural areas.

Assessment using Impact Iran human rights indicators¹

A. The State party should address the high drop-out rate of girls in rural areas and of Ahwazi Arab children.

Article 19 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran contains guarantee of equality for all the people of the Islamic Republic of Iran, regardless of ethnic group or tribe, and states that “colour, race, language, and the like, do not bestow any privilege”. Article 20 of the Constitution stipulates that men and women are equally protected under the law and enjoy all human rights that are in compliance with the Islamic criteria. Additionally, Article 30 provides that the Government shall make available and free of charge educational facilities for all up to the close of the secondary stage.²

In 2018, a representative of the Ministry of Education reportedly stated that more than 151,046 girls dropped out of school that year.³ Reports identified a number of factors that might explain the reasons behind the high drop-out rate of girls in rural areas. Child marriage has been reportedly one of the most common reasons for children to drop out of school,⁴ particularly in rural communities.^{5 6} One survey showed that about 37.5% of married children were illiterate.⁷ Other reasons identified were the lack of schools in rural areas as well as long distances between villages, reportedly forcing girls to drop out,⁸ notably due to economic constraints and families being more willing to send boys travelling long distances to reach

¹ ESCR.13.1.S.1; ESCR.13.2.S.1; ESCR.13.2.S.2

ESCR.13.1.P.2; ESCR.13.1.P.3; ESCR.13.2.P.3; ESCR.13.2.P.17

ESCR.13.1.O.4; ESCR.13.1.O.7; ESCR.13.2.O.2; ESCR.13.2.O.3; ESCR.13.2.O.5; ESCR.13.2.O.19; ESCR.14.10.1

² http://www.iranchamber.com/government/laws/constitution_ch03.php

³ Minority Rights Group, https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/MRG_CFR_Iran_EN_Sept191.pdf

⁴ Shahrzad News, Millions drop out for over the last four years, (12 January 2010) available at: <http://www.shahrzadnewz.net/index.php?page=1&newsItemId=3938&Language=en>

⁵ Minority Rights Group, https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/MRG_CFR_Iran_EN_Sept191.pdf

⁶ Radio Farda, ‘Half the girls living in border areas drop out of school,’ 9 September 2017. <https://en.radiofarda.com/a/iran-school-drop-out-among-girls/28726094.html>

⁷ Report of the U.N. Secretary General, August 2019, <https://undocs.org/en/A/74/273>

⁸ Radio Farda, ‘Half the girls living in border areas drop out of school,’ 9 September 2017. <https://en.radiofarda.com/a/iran-school-drop-out-among-girls/28726094.html>

their schools.⁹ The lack of female teachers has also been identified as a factor discouraging families to send their girls to school.^{10 11} Additionally, reports have showed that in poor areas, families rely often on children as laborers,¹² a phenomenon that reportedly affects more girls than boys.¹³ Governmental statistics from 2016 reported that the literacy rate of women living in rural areas (72.8%) is below than the literacy rate of women living in urban areas (88.0%), and much lower than the rate of literacy of men both in urban (93.5%) and rural areas (83.9%).¹⁴ Iranian authorities have reported that only 40% to 50% of girls living in border provinces complete their high school education.^{15 16} These figures may indicate that both gender and economic factors can hinder access to and/or stay in school, resulting in the high drop-out rate of girls in rural areas. Girls from ethnic minorities and living in rural areas have been reportedly further disadvantaged. For instance, the Sistan-Baluchestan province, inhabited predominantly by the Baluchi ethnic group, has a reported girls drop-out rate of 60% by the fifth grade level.¹⁷

High drop-out rates have also been reported among Ahwazi Arab children. The number of Ahwazi Arabs living in the Islamic Republic of Iran is estimated to be up to 5 million,¹⁸ predominantly located in the province of Khuzestan, also one of the poorest provinces in the country.¹⁹ Reported discriminations and violence towards Ahwazi children (including verbal and physical abuse from teachers) combined with shortages of teaching staff and infrastructures in Khuzestan province, go some way to explaining the high dropout rate among this group.^{20 21 22} Additionally, although Iranian law guarantees access to free education (Article 30 of the Constitution) reports have shown that the economic and financial burden induced by education,²³ notably commuting to school and buying school supplies, are forcing a significant number of children to drop out of school. These are felt the most keenly

⁹ Minority Rights Group, https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/MRG_CFR_Iran_EN_Sept191.pdf

¹⁰ Minority Rights Group, https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/MRG_CFR_Iran_EN_Sept191.pdf

¹¹ Radio Farda, <https://en.radiofarda.com/a/iran-school-drop-out-among-girls/28726094.html>

¹² Radio Farda, 'Half the girls living In border areas drop out of school,' 9 September 2017. <https://en.radiofarda.com/a/iran-school-drop-out-among-girls/28726094.html>

¹³ Farda News Agency, 'Akharin Amar-e-tark-e- tahsil-e-danesh amouzan-e-dokhtar [The latest dropout statistics for female students],' 25 June, 2018, <https://bit.ly/334rdHt>

¹⁴ Statistical Centre of Iran, *Nataayej-e-tafsili-ye- sarshomaari-e-omoumi-e-nofous va maskan 1395* [Detailed report of the results of national population and housing censuses of the year 1395], May/June 2018, https://www.amar.org.ir/Portals/0/Files/fulltext/1395/n_ntsonvm_95-v2.pdf

¹⁵ Radio Farda, <https://en.radiofarda.com/a/iran-school-drop-out-among-girls/28726094.html>

¹⁶ Radio Farda, 'Half the girls living In border areas drop out of school,' 9 September 2017. <https://en.radiofarda.com/a/iran-school-drop-out-among-girls/28726094.html>

¹⁷ Minority Rights Group, https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/MRG_CFR_Iran_EN_Sept191.pdf

¹⁸ Human Rights Watch, [https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/04/29/iran-sweeping-arrests-ahwazi-arab-activists#:~:text=\(New%20York\)%20%E2%80%93%20Iran',Human%20Rights%20Watch%20said%20today.](https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/04/29/iran-sweeping-arrests-ahwazi-arab-activists#:~:text=(New%20York)%20%E2%80%93%20Iran',Human%20Rights%20Watch%20said%20today.)

¹⁹ Iran Focus, <https://www.iranfocus.com/en/life-in-iran/34478-iranian-cities-are-not-only-below-poverty-line-they-are-below-misery-line>

²⁰ DUSC, <https://www.dusc.org/en/drasat/2498/>

²¹ Ahwaz Monitor, <https://www.ahwazmonitor.info/new/iranian-teacher-beats-racially-abuses-nine-year-old-ahwazi-boy/>

²² UNPO, <https://unpo.org/article/19115>

²³ Iran Focus, <https://www.iranfocus.com/en/life-in-iran/33917-the-iranian-education-system-in-tatters-due-to-poverty>

in poorer provinces, including Khuzestan, where rates of children deprived of education are reportedly the highest.²⁴

In its General Comment no.13, the Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights stipulates that “education has to be within safe physical reach, either by attendance at some reasonably convenient geographic location (e.g. a neighborhood school) or via modern technology (e.g. access to a “distance learning” programme)” and that education “has to be affordable to all”.²⁵ However, reports indicated that rural areas lacked schools, forcing children to travel long distances. The Committee further states that “a State must protect the accessibility of education by ensuring that third parties, including parents and employers, do not stop girls from going to school.”²⁶ Yet, reports have shown that child marriage and family decisions were amongst the main reasons behind the high school dropout rate of girls.²⁷ Additionally, although the Iranian legal framework does not explicitly prevent married girls from attending school,²⁸ a court ruling may still give the right to a husband to restrict his wife’s education if he finds it “incompatible with the interests of the family or with his or his wife’s dignity”.²⁹

In 2014, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Women and Family Affairs reportedly signed a number of memorandums committing the government to, among other goals, address girls dropout in Iran.³⁰ The government also reportedly engaged in a number of measures considered key in the return of almost 34,000 girls to school in 2016.³¹ Yet drop-out rates among girls in rural areas remain high as of today. The Iranian National Body for the Convention of the Rights of the Child.³² During the State’s 2016 CRC review, the Iranian National Body for the Convention of the Rights of the Child listed the main achievements of its established working groups, notably of its Education Workgroup which include “analysis of the educational issues of the educationally deprived children” and of its Support and Coordination Workgroup, including “analysis of different dimensions of supporting children who are deprived of education.”³³ There is no readily available information that might indicate that such analysis have been impactful in practice. In July 2020 the Ministry of

²⁴ [Minority Rights Group, https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Rights-Denied-Violations-against-ethnic-and-religious-minorities-in-Iran.pdf](https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Rights-Denied-Violations-against-ethnic-and-religious-minorities-in-Iran.pdf)

²⁵ CESCR General Comment No. 13: The Right to Education (Art. 13) <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4538838c22.pdf>

²⁶ CESCR General Comment No. 13: The Right to Education (Art. 13) <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4538838c22.pdf>

²⁷ Radio Farda, <https://en.radiofarda.com/a/iran-school-drop-out-among-girls/28726094.html>

²⁸ Report of the U.N. Secretary General, August 2019, <https://undocs.org/en/A/74/273>

²⁹ CRC/C/IRN/CO/3-4

³⁰ Mehr News, <https://en.mehrnews.com/news/104849/Girl-dropouts-to-return-to-school>

³¹ Financial Tribune, <https://financialtribune.com/articles/people/51541/gov-t-struggling-to-reduce-dropout-rates-in-schools>

³² The role of the Iranian National Body for the Convention of the Rights of the Child is “to set up plans and programs to promote the child rights and respect to their character” and has the responsibility to monitor and assess the implementation of child rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (Article 2 National Body for the Convention on the Rights of the Child Bylaws). The body is headed by the Minister of Justice, who appoints most of its members and officers and includes three NGO representatives among its 23 members (Justice for Iran, submission to the CRC, 2015,

https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CRC/Shared%20Documents/IRN/INT_CRC_NGO_IRN_19746_E.pdf)

³³ The Supplementary Response of the (NBCRC) regarding the Concluding Observation on the Combined third and fourth periodic reports of the Committee on the Rights of the Child for the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2016,

https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2fCRC%2fCOB%2fIRN%2f23480&Lang=en

Education reportedly launched a plan to return to school children who dropped out.³⁴ There is no readily available information that might indicate the existence of governmental measures addressing specifically the issue of dropouts among Ahwazi Arab children.

B. The State party should take measures to address the high illiteracy rates among Ahwazi Arabs and Azeris

Article 15 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran identifies Persian as the official language but permits the use of “regional and ethnic languages in the press, the mass media, and the teaching of their literature at schools, alongside the Persian language...”.³⁵ However, the restrictive language of Article 15 does not protect fully the right of minorities to learn and teach in their mother tongue. Although Article 101 of the Charter on Citizens’ Rights recognizes the right of citizens to learn, use and teach their own local language and dialect,³⁶ the Charter is not legally binding.

Despite these restricted legal guarantees, the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran raised concerns about reports of Kurdish, Ahwazi Arab and Azerbaijani-Turk (or Azeri-Turk) lacking access to education in their mother tongues.^{37 38} These concerns were echoed by the U.N Secretary General,^{39 40 41} noting reports indicating that members of ethno-linguistic minorities, including the Azeri community as well as Arabs, were being denied the opportunity to teach their language in schools.⁴² The reported state-imposed ban on Azeri-Turkish being taught in school would go some way in explaining such struggle.⁴³ In 2016, reportedly up to 40,000 Ahwazi Arab children were denied access to education for failing the Farsi language proficiency test, although Farsi being their second language.⁴⁴ A lack of teaching in a children’s mother tongue has reportedly been causing high school dropout and illiteracy rates, notably among Azeri⁴⁵ and Ahwazi Arab children.⁴⁶

³⁴ Tehran Times <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/450506/Plan-for-returning-drop-outs-to-school-started>

³⁵ [Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, English translation, https://irandataportal.syr.edu/wp-content/uploads/constitution-english-1368.pdf](https://www.constitutionofiran.org/constitution-english-1368.pdf)

³⁶ Charter on Citizens’ Rights, English translation, <http://president.ir/en/96865>

³⁷ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, January 2020, https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/IR/Report_of_the_Special_Rapporteur_on_the_situation_of_human_rights_in_the_Islamic_Republic_of_IranA4361.pdf

³⁸ See more : Association for the human rights of the Azerbaijani people in Iran, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CRC/Shared%20Documents/IRN/INT_CRC_NGO_IRN_19735_E.pdf

³⁹ IRNA, www.irna.ir/news/83404283/ (in Farsi).

⁴⁰ Report of the U.N. Secretary General, January 2020, https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/IR/Report_of_the_Secretary-General_on_the_situation_of_human_rights_in_the_Islamic_Republic_of_IranA4320.pdf

⁴¹ Report of the U.N. Secretary General, January 2020, https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/IR/Report_of_the_Secretary-General_on_the_situation_of_human_rights_in_the_Islamic_Republic_of_IranA4320.pdf

⁴² Report of the U.N. Secretary General, August 2019, <https://undocs.org/en/A/74/273>

⁴³ Center for Human Rights in Iran, <https://iranhumanrights.org/2019/03/irans-intelligence-ministry-slaps-azeri-rights-activist-with-new-charges-claim-hes-organizing-protests-from-prison/>

⁴⁴ UNPO, <https://unpo.org/article/19590>

⁴⁵ Association for the human rights of the Azerbaijani people in Iran, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CRC/Shared%20Documents/IRN/INT_CRC_NGO_IRN_19735_E.pdf

⁴⁶ Center for Human Rights in Iran, <https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2013/10/khuzestan-teachers/>

In its General Comment on Article 13 of the Convention, the Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights stipulates that education should be accessible for all and “flexible so it can adapt to the needs of changing societies and communities and respond to the needs of students within their diverse social and cultural settings.”⁴⁷

In 2012, reportedly 70% of students who started their education in the Islamic Republic of Iran did not have Farsi as their mother tongue,⁴⁸ yet ethnic minorities lack access to education in their mother tongue. Additionally, Article 13 also “requires States to take positive measures that enable and assist individuals and communities to enjoy the right to education”.⁴⁹ The failure to take measures to address *de facto* educational discrimination may amount to a violation of Article 13.⁵⁰ As of today, Ahwazi Arabs and Azeris still lack access to education in their mother tongue which have been preventing them from staying in school and learn how to read and write.

C. The State party should take steps to improve the quality of instruction in and physical infrastructures of schools in rural areas, and to increase the number of female teachers in rural areas.

Article 43 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran provides that the economy of the Islamic Republic of Iran shall be based on providing essential needs, including education. However, in June 2019, the state-run IRNA News Agency reported that approximately 27% of Iran’s school building were in ruin, 34% needed repair and only 39% of schools had safe buildings. A lot of the schools requiring renovation are reportedly located in the Sistan and Baluchestan province,⁵¹ where a majority of its population reportedly live in rural areas.⁵² In 2016, the Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concerns about “poor living conditions in regions traditionally inhabited by ethnic minorities, that in some cases completely lacked basic services such as [...] schools, which had a direct negative impact on the rights of children living in those regions.”⁵³

The state organization for School Renovation, Development, and Equipment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, reporting to the Ministry of Education, is in charge of school facilities and equipment countrywide. In 2019, Iran’s Ministry of Education stated that the government was committed to improve the quality of education as well as school infrastructures.⁵⁴ In January 2020, Tehran’s mayor stated that between 60 to 70% of schools in the city were unsafe while noting limited public funds due to the financial crisis.⁵⁵ Reports have indicated the

⁴⁷ CESCR General Comment No. 13: The Right to Education (Art. 13)

<https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4538838c22.pdf>

⁴⁸ UNPO, <https://unpo.org/article/21115>

⁴⁹ CESCR General Comment No. 13: The Right to Education (Art. 13) <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4538838c22.pdf>

⁵⁰ CESCR General Comment No. 13: The Right to Education (Art. 13) <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4538838c22.pdf>

⁵¹ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, July 2019,

<https://undocs.org/A/74/188>

⁵² Iran Wire, <https://iranwire.com/en/features/5523>

⁵³ CRC/C/IRN/CO/3-4,

https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC/C/IRN/CO/3-4&Lang=En

⁵⁴ Iran Press, <https://iranpress.com/content/14137>

⁵⁵ Iran Wire, <https://iranwire.com/en/features/6660>

involvement of the Iranian Government in school-building projects abroad, notably in Syria.
56

There is a general shortage of teachers in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Reports have indicated as well that there is still a lack of female teachers in rural areas.⁵⁷ There is no readily available information that might indicate the existence of governmental measures aiming at increasing the number of female teachers in rural areas.

In its General Comment on Article 13 of the Convention, the Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights stipulates that education should be available in functioning educational institutions and in sufficient quantity. Conditions to function include notably “buildings or other protection from the elements” but also “trained teachers receiving domestically competitive salaries”. Reports indicate that the Islamic Republic of Iran lacks adequate school infrastructures in rural areas and a significant number of schools in the country are in poor, even unsafe, conditions. Added to the general lack of teachers, these adverse conditions impact the delivery of quality education to Iranian children. Additionally, the lack of female teachers in rural areas have been reportedly limiting access to education to girls.^{58 59}

Recommendation Status:

This recommendation has **NOT** been implemented.

⁵⁶ Iran Wire, <https://iranwire.com/en/features/6660>

⁵⁷ Radio Farda, <https://en.radiofarda.com/a/iran-school-drop-out-among-girls/28726094.html>

⁵⁸ Minority Rights Group, <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/1203136/download>

⁵⁹ Radio Farda, <https://en.radiofarda.com/a/iran-school-drop-out-among-girls/28726094.html>