

Concluding Observations Committee on the Rights of the Child CRC/C/IRN/CO/3-4 para 52

Full recommendation:

The Committee recommends that the State party review its laws and policies in order to provide children with age-appropriate information and that it take measures to ensure a reasonable balance between the threat to national security and freedom of expression.

Assessment using Impact Iran indicators¹

The Iranian Internet law and policy restricts freedom of online expression, access to information, and association of children and adolescents in contravention of the Convention. According to ARTICLE 19, Iran's 2010 Computer Crimes Law is "saturated with provisions that criminalise free expression. Offenses such as 'crimes against public morality and chastity' and 'dissemination of lies' are engineered to ensnare all forms of legitimate expression."^{2 3} The law is vague and overly broad, allowing the government to censor all forms of critical or disfavored expression and subject content providers to prison or fines. For example, under the law "using a computer or telecommunication system to disseminate lies... with the intention of damaging the public, disturbing the public state of mind, or that of the official authorities" is a punishable offense.⁴ Restrictions on Internet content and use not only impact content providers but also severely restrict access to information for users.

The Computer Crimes Law mandates that internet service providers (ISPs) are liable for enforcing all content restrictions. Failure to do so means risking fines and closure of businesses.⁵ This essentially privatises enforcement of the law, placing it in the hands of private individuals who do not have the training to implement even a less vaguely phrased law, and who are motivated to over-restrict content.⁶ As a result, Iranian ISPs, independently or under orders of government agencies, block a range of online content that is protected under the Convention, including entire social media platforms, human rights websites, news sites, political blogs, arts and music websites, websites dedicated to health and well-being, and religious websites.⁷ Social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, which are popular amongst children and

¹ CRC.12.1.S.1; CRC.12.1.P.1; CRC.12.1.O.1; CCPR.21.1.S.1; CCPR.21.1.P.1; CCPR.21.1.O.1

² [ARTICLE 19, Computer Crimes in Iran: Online repression in practice \(5 December 2013\)](#)

³ [Impact Iran submission to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, review of the 3rd and 4th periodic reports of the Islamic Republic of Iran](#)

⁴ [ARTICLE 19, The Islamic Republic: Computer Crimes Law, \(2012\)](#)

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ [Impact Iran submission to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, review of the 3rd and 4th periodic reports of the Islamic Republic of Iran](#)

⁷ [UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Report on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, \(4 October 2013\)](#)

adolescents, are blocked in Iran, as are select pages of the online encyclopedia Wikipedia.⁸ In the current communications environment in Iran as elsewhere, Internet access constitutes a vital platform for expression for children, as well as a source of information about the news, culture, and society they live in. Additionally, social media platforms serve as a means of association for children where they form groups, discussions, and organise activities with peers.

Websites in Persian and other languages for human rights organisations – including many that report and advocate for the rights of children such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, ARTICLE 19, and the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran – are also blocked. As such, children’s access to information about their human rights is greatly curtailed. Websites belonging to some minority religious groups, including Christians, Baha’is, and Sufi Muslims are also blocked, undermining children’s freedom of thought, conscience and religion. According to the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, local monitors identified over 40,000 sites blocked by authorities and ISPs in just the ten months before February 2014.⁹ The Campaign’s research has shown that government Internet controls and censorship are becoming simultaneously more pervasive and harder to detect.¹⁰

Authorities have also started limiting some smart phone chat and text applications, such as WeChat, understood to be popular among adolescents.¹¹ The state blocks social networking platforms including Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Google. Blog-hosting platforms like WordPress, Blogspot, and Blogger are also blocked. The messaging app Telegram was the most widely used messaging app in Iran by 2017, with an estimated 40 million monthly users. On December 31, 2017, the government blocked Instagram and Telegram after the spread of political unrest and street protests. The service was later unblocked in January 2018, but on April 30, a Media Court prosecutor issued an order to filter Telegram. Subsequently access to the platform was blocked by Internet Service Providers and mobile operator.¹²

Censorship of the news media also greatly undermines the right of children and adolescents to access information, particularly related to social and political issues. ARTICLE 19 findings show that, despite a formal prohibition of censorship under Iranian law,¹³ the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA), Iran’s official news agency, which is directly subordinate to the government, monitors all articles written by journalists before they are published to ensure their compliance with IRNA’s five governing principles.¹⁴ These principles are: 1) preservation of state secrets and national security, 2) upholding public morality, 3) strengthening linguistic and religious solidarity, 4) maintaining human dignity, and 5) not publishing information prohibited by law.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ [International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, Internet in Chains: the Front Line of State Repression in Iran, \(November 2014\)](#)

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² [TechCrunch](#)

¹³ [ARTICLE 19 and PEN International, Joint Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review of the Islamic Republic of Iran, \(15 March 2014\)](#)

¹⁴ Ibid.

Yet ARTICLE 19 and PEN International found that “a wide range of independent and official reports allege that individuals, including media workers, are routinely summoned to government offices to be instructed or warned not to continue exercising their right to freedom of expression.”¹⁵

Recommendation Status:

This recommendation has **NOT** been implemented.¹⁶

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ For more please see: [Impact Iran submission to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, review of the 3rd and 4th periodic reports of the Islamic Republic of Iran](#)