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IRAN: Iranian authorities plan to use facial recognition to enforce new hijab law

Government says it will use technology on public transport in crackdown on women's dress

By [Weronika Strzyżyńska](#)

The Guardian (05.09.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3L0ceF2> - Iranian government is planning to use facial recognition technology on public transport to identify women who are not complying with a strict new law on wearing the hijab, as the regime continues its increasingly punitive crackdown on women's dress.

The secretary of Iran's Headquarters for Promoting Virtue and Preventing Vice, Mohammad Saleh Hashemi Golpayegani, announced in a recent interview that the government was planning to use surveillance technology against women in public places following a [new decree signed by the country's hardline president, Ebrahim Raisi](#), on restricting women's clothing.

The decree was signed on 15 August, a month after the 12 July national "Hijab and Chastity Day", which sparked countrywide protests by women who posted videos of themselves on social media with their heads uncovered on streets and on buses and trains. In recent weeks, the Iranian authorities have responded with a spate of arrests, detentions and forced confessions on television.

"The Iranian government has long played with the idea of using facial recognition to identify people who violate the law," said Azadeh Akbari, a researcher at the University of Twente, in the Netherlands. "The regime combines violent 'old-fashioned' forms of totalitarian control dressed up in new technologies."

The hijab, a head-covering worn by Muslim women, became mandatory after Iran's revolution in 1979. Yet, over the decades since, women have pushed the limits of the stipulated dress code.

Some of the women arrested for defying the new decree were identified after videos were posted online of them being harassed on public transport for not wearing the hijab properly. One, 28-year-old [Sepideh Rashno](#), was arrested after a video circulated on social media of her being berated for "improper dress" by a fellow passenger, who was then forced off the vehicle by bystanders intervening on Rashno's behalf. According to the human rights

group Hrana, Rashno was beaten after her arrest and subsequently forced to apologise on television to the passenger who harassed her.

Rashno is not the first person to suffer violent repression as a result of going viral on the internet. In 2014, six Iranians – three men and three women – [were sentenced to one year in prison and 91 lashes](#) after a video of them dancing in Tehran to Pharrell Williams's song Happy had more than 150,000 views.

Since 2015, the Iranian government has been phasing in biometric identity cards, which include a chip that stores data such as iris scans, fingerprints and facial images. Researchers worry that this information will now be used with facial recognition technology to identify people who violate the mandated dress code, both in the streets and cyberspace.

"A large chunk of the Iranian population is now in this national biometric data bank, as many public services are becoming dependent on biometric IDs," said Akbari. "So the government has access to all the faces; they know where people come from and they can easily find them. A person in a viral video can be identified in seconds."

She added: "By doing that, the government proves a point: 'Don't think that a small thing happening on a bus somewhere is going to be forgotten. We know who you are and we will find you and then you will have to suffer the consequences.'"

"Ebrahim Raisi is a real ideologue," said Annabelle Sreberny, professor emeritus at the Centre for Iranian Studies at Soas University of London. "There are terrible economic and environmental problems facing Iran. The inflation rate may now be reaching 50%, but the government is choosing to focus on women's rights."

Sreberny added: "I think it is part and parcel of a failing government that is simply not dealing with these massive infrastructural, economic and environmental issues. And women are seen to be a soft target."

IRAN bans women from stadiums, again

Women were not allowed to attend the last World Cup qualifying match played yesterday in Mashhad. Out of 12,500 tickets sold online, at least 2,000 were reserved for women. Women stage a protest outside the stadium for a right won after a long struggle. For a local Islamic leader, women's presence is a form of "vulgarity".

Asia News (30.03.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3DqOI07> - Iranian authorities have again banned women from entering stadiums to watch football matches, overturning [a long battle](#) that saw a [young woman](#) set herself on fire in protest and die.

Since the Iranian revolution of 1979, women have been excluded from all sporting events and venues where men compete in teams or individually.

According to reports from the semi-official *ISNA* news agency, women were banned from attending the last qualifying match for the Qatar 2022 World Cup, set for the end of the year.

Iran has already qualified for the competition, the first country in Asia to do so. However, FIFA, the world football governing body, had ordered Iran to allow women access to stadiums as a prerequisite for admitting its team's participation in the competition.

Local sources say that out of 12,500 tickets sold online, at least 2,000 were reserved for women for a game played with Lebanon in the north-eastern city of Mashhad, which ended with two nil score in favour of the home team.

A video circulating on social media shows hundreds of female soccer fans chanting “we object” in response to the decision to ban them from attending the match.

So far no one has taken responsibility for the ban. *Khabaronline*, an Iranian news website, said that “despite tickets being sold, women are still not allowed to attend [matches at] the stadium.”

Ahmad Alamolhoda, Friday prayer leader in Mashhad, who was appointed by the country’s supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, said he was always against women’s presence as spectators in men’s sports competitions. In his view their attendance is a form of “vulgarity.”

In a post-match interview, team captain Alireza Jahanbakhsh said it would be great to see women in stadiums in the future because they too enjoy seeing the country’s team.

For the first time in decades, hundreds of Iranian women were allowed to attend the Asian Champions League final match in 2019 between Persepolis and the Japanese Kashima Antlers in Tehran.

Last January, more than 2,000 women went to Azadi stadium to watch the match in which Iran defeated Iraq and clinched a spot at the World Cup.

IRAN: Honor killings will continue as long as Iran’s laws protects killers

Widespread practice of child marriage means more young girls will be murdered

Center for Human Rights in Iran

Center For Human Rights in Iran (10.02.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3BdK8B8> - Mona “Ghazal” Heydari was 17 years old when her husband, Sajjad Heydari, decapitated her and paraded her head on a street in the Iranian city of Ahvaz, Khuzestan Province—at times smiling at a camera.

“Now do you have anything more to say?” he said while carrying the girl’s severed head in his hand by her hair in a video clip that was aired by the state-owned Rokna News Agency before the government banned it from republication.

Sajjad Heydari was arrested, but so far no charges have been announced against him for killing his child bride, and if they are, Iranian law would still work in his favor, allowing him to go unpunished, or at worst serve a mere 10 years in prison.

At the core of this crime are two unaddressed issues in Iran—the lack of protections for violence against women in Iran, and the widespread practice of child marriage. As such, these individual acts of murder are closely tied to government policies.

Iran’s laws offer girls and women little protection from widespread domestic violence

Iranian laws allow men to carry out various forms of violence against women with little if any consequence. For example, Article 302 of Iran's [Islamic Penal Code](#) states that a man can legally kill a person for committing a crime that is punishable by death under Sharia (Islamic) law, such as adultery. A woman in Iran, however, could never walk free after killing her adulterous husband and could actually be executed.

Indeed, there's no guarantee that Sajjad Heydari will be charged, and Iranian media reports are indicating that Mona Heydari's father may never seek justice for his daughter. Meager attempts to provide stronger legal protections to girls and women have long remained [blocked from becoming law](#) by Parliament.

In addition to lenient punishments for fathers and husbands for violence against girls and women, other aspects of Iranian law compound the problem. For example, a woman can't leave the marital home without proof that she's endangered, and if a woman does flee, she forfeits financial maintenance. Orders of protection do not exist, and shelters for abused women are woefully absent in much of country. In general, the police consider violence by family members to be a "family matter."

Widespread child marriage leaves many girls desperate to flee, vulnerable to honor killings

Meanwhile, the legal marriage age for girls in Iran is 13. Younger girls can be married off if their father or male guardian receives a judge's approval. Mona's father [confirmed](#) that court-approval was granted to allow her to get married at age 12.

The latest figures from the Statistical Center of Iran shows that 9,753 girls between the ages of 10 and 14 were married in the spring of 2021, a 32 percent increase compared to the previous spring. The increase has been fueled by low-cost state [marriage loans](#) that parents have increasingly sought to benefit from by marrying off their young daughters.

Meanwhile, the U.N. has reported that at least [17 percent](#) of Iranian girls under the age of 18 are married off by their families each year. A common theme in honor killings in Iran has been the victim's—who are often child brides that have been forced to marry—desperation to flee abusive marriages.

Mona heydari: from battered child bride to murdered wife

Mona Heydari was married off at the age of 12 and became a mother at 14 after having a child by Sajjad Heydari. A source close to her family told the London-based [IranWire](#) Persian news site that she had tried to escape him by fleeing to Turkey because she was "suffering from domestic violence."

"Every time she talked about divorce or complained about her husband's assaults, they convinced her to continue her marriage for the sake of her child but eventually she dropped everything and ran away," added the source.

Mona Heydari had returned to Iran with "assurances that she would not be in any danger if she came back," the source told IranWire. "But a few days after she returned home, Sajjad and his brother tied her hands and feet and cut her head off. Sajjad's brother rolled her decapitated body in a blanket and threw it away in another neighborhood while Sajjad walked around in the street holding her head in his hand."

After she was murdered, Sajjad Heydari's mother [told](#) the state-owned Fars News Agency that Sajjad Heydari was "provoked" because his reputation had been damaged by rumors that his wife had committed adultery.

Society decries violence and child marriages to no avail

Her killing has renewed debates among Iranians about the Iranian government's [refusal](#) to pass laws that could have better protected Mona Heydari and girls and women like her, as well as the inhumane practice of [child marriage](#) in Iran. These issues have long prompted societal outcry, and have once again become loudly debated on social media by Iranians following news of Mona Heydari's murder, which was first reported on February 5, 2022.

Despite broad societal condemnation of the practice, clerics, conservative lawmakers and other state officials continue to block attempts to raise the minimum marriageable age in Iran, and each year tens of thousands of girls under the age of 15 are married off by their families each year in Iran, according to state statistics. In reality, the numbers are likely much higher as many families in Iran do not register underage marriages.

Meanwhile so-called "honor killings" continue to occur in Iran with at least seven children and women known to be murdered in this manner this year in Iran. They include: [Romina Ashrafi](#) (13), [Shakiba Bakhtiar](#) (16), [Mobina Souri](#) (16), [Faezeh Maleki](#) (21), [Reyhaneh Ameri](#) (22), and [Fatemeh Farhi](#) (19).

IRAN: Beheading of 17-year-old shocks Iran, renews debate about violence against women

By [Golnaz Esfandiari](#)

Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty (08.02.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3BcFjIs> - After Sajjad Heydari beheaded his 17-year-old wife, Mona Heydari, he paraded her severed head in the streets of the southwestern Iranian city of Ahvaz in an attempt to prove that he's an honorable man. Footage of the macabre scene was posted online showing him smiling.

Mona Heydari's killing, which was reported on February 5, is the latest publicized case of an "honor killing" in which mostly women are killed by their male relatives on the grounds they dishonored their family for any number of alleged moral failings -- including eloping, committing adultery, requesting a divorce, or even unfounded accusations of tainting the family's reputation.

The gruesome killing in the capital of Khuzestan Province has shocked the nation and renewed a debate about widespread violence against women and the lack of legal protections.

Mona Heydari had reportedly fled to Turkey months before her slaying to live with a Syrian man she had met online. The young wife and mother of a 3-year-old son was killed a few days after she returned to Iran after reportedly receiving assurances from her family that she would be safe.

Her husband and his brother, who reportedly helped carry out the crime, are in custody. Reports say Mona Heydari had been forced into marrying her cousin and that she had given birth to her son when she was only 14. According to Iranian media reports, she is said to have been subjected to violence by her husband, who had refused to divorce her.

Many in Iran have blamed the Islamic legal system as well as the country's patriarchal culture and traditions for fostering an environment that allows for such a killing, which comes less than two years after 14-year-old Romina Ashrafi was beheaded by her father

in northern Iran. Ashrafi's father, who before killing her had consulted a lawyer to find out what punishment he could face for the crime, was later sentenced to eight years in prison. U.S.-based sociologist Hossein Ghazian told RFE/RL's Radio Farda that many men believe the women in their families are their property.

"Men own the mind and bodies of women. They draw a line and consider it a societal duty to protect their honor," Ghazian said. "If they fail, they believe they have to prove their honor, and [often] do so by killing the women whose bodies have been violated."

'There Is No Law'

Female lawmaker Elham Azad said "there is no law with an executive guarantee" to protect women from violence in Iran.

She expressed hope that pending legislation on the Protection, Dignity And Security Of Women Against Violence would prevent such horrific crimes in the future.

The bill, passed by the government of then-President Hassan Rohani in January 2021 but waiting to be passed into law by parliament, criminalizes violence against women, including action or behavior that causes "physical or mental harm" to women.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) has said that, despite having "a number of positive provisions," the proposed legislation [falls short of international standards](#).

Iran's vice president for women's and family affairs, Aniseh Khazali, [wrote on Twitter](#) in the wake of Mona Heydari's killing that parliament placed an urgent review of the bill on its agenda after fixing "shortcomings."

Khazali also said that the judiciary is determined to impose the most severe punishment against Sajjad Heydari and his accomplice. She did not provide further details.

'We Did Not Get Any Results'

Lawyer Ebrahim Nikdel Ghadam, who represented Ashrafi's high-profile case, argued in court at that time that Iranian law did not create a deterrent against such killings.

He said Ashrafi's father did not receive the highest sentence he could receive for murdering a child, which is punishable by three to 10 years. He was exempt from the "retribution" law -- meaning the death penalty -- since according to the Islamic Penal Code he was the girl's guardian.

"The beheaded child bride might be alive today if Iran's government had enacted laws against the cruel practice of child marriage and protections against domestic violence." -- Hadi Ghaemi, Center for Human Rights in Iran

However, Nikdel Ghadam said the court didn't accept an additional punishment of internal exile, which is allowed under Iranian law.

"Although Romina's mother was terribly afraid for herself...and this concern was raised many times in court, we did not get any results. Why? Because there are problems in this field when it comes to the law," he said.

He also suggested that light sentences for those who kill their female relatives pave the way for more such killings.

"We see that they did not deal with the case and a brutal murder properly to set [an example], and the result was that less than two years later we are witnessing another tragic event, another life lost," he said.

Hadi Ghaemi, the executive director of the New York-based Center for Human Rights in Iran, said Iranian authorities are "as responsible for Heydari's death as her murderers."

"The beheaded child bride might be alive today if Iran's government had enacted laws against the cruel practice of child marriage and protections against domestic violence," Ghaemi said on Twitter.

IRAQ: 20-year-old girl who converted to Christianity murdered after Tik Tok Video

Christian News (10.03.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3t2IRdR> - A 20-year-old girl- who converted to Christianity has been murdered after releasing a TikTok video.

Iman Sami was killed on 7th March in Northern Iraq, after a suspected retaliation with her family following a TikTok video she posted where she was singing Christian spiritual songs.

Iman was a daughter of a Muslim cleric.

International Christian Concern (ICC)'s President Jeff King shared his concern, he said: "For someone born as a Muslim to be open about exploring Christianity is a tremendous act of bravery, as most Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) in the region face intense pressure from both their families and communities.

"Maria's TikTok post should not have ended with her death.

"Iraq is just emerging from a very difficult time when Christians experienced a horrific genocide.

"It is an important step toward healing for Iraq to pursue an investigation of due process into issues related to freedom of speech and religion."

The Christian community in Iraq continues to suffer severe consequences of the ISIS genocide, and Muslim Background Believers are specifically at a high risk of targeted violence because of their conversion to Christianity.

The persecution faced by Iraq's Christian community has forced most to flee the country.

Christian news site Ankawa Today published on Facebook: "Iman Sami, known as Maria, was found by the police last night.

"She suffered in her life because of her early marriage, where she drowned in marriage at the age of only 12 years.

"After separation from her husband, she lived alone.

"She was an activist in the field of women's rights and a brave woman.

"She has videos on the TikTok app that reached hundreds of thousands of views. Her brother and uncle killed her yesterday!"
