

2023 - 2024

# Systematic Denial of ID Issuance to Azerbaijani Children in Iran

Report

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# INTRODUCTION

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. INTRODUCTION

THIS ability to name a child is a fundamental right rooted in personal autonomy, cultural identity, and familial privacy. However, in Iran, the state imposes severe restrictions on naming practices, disproportionately targeting ethnic minorities such as Azerbaijanis and Baloch people. These restrictions are part of a broader forced assimilationist agenda that seeks to enforce Persian linguistic and cultural dominance. By rejecting non-Persian names and withholding birth certificates from children whose names do not conform to state-imposed norms, the Iranian government systematically marginalized ethnic minorities. This policy erases cultural identities and denies individuals access to essential services, reinforcing cycles of exclusion and inequality.

In Iran, the process of obtaining a birth certificate for a child from an ethnic minority group is fraught with bureaucratic obstacles and discrimination. Civil registry offices enforce a strict list of

government-approved names, predominantly Persian and Islamic-Shiite. Parents seeking to register names outside this list, particularly those reflecting non-Persian languages such as Azerbaijani Turkic or Balochi, often face outright rejection. For example, Azerbaijani families are frequently denied the right to name their children Volkan/Vulkan (meaning volcano) or Ayil (meaning resurrection or awakening) simply because these names do not conform to Persian linguistic norms. Instead, parents are forced to select from the government's predetermined list.

The arbitrary and subjective nature of this naming policy aligns with Iran's broader strategy of cultural assimilation. By controlling which names are legally recognized, the government actively suppresses minority languages and identities. Azerbaijani civil activists in Iran see this policy as part of a systematic effort to engineer a homogeneous national identity, one that privileges Persian culture while erasing the rich diversity of Iran's ethnic communities.

The right to choose a child's name is recognized under international human rights law as an essential component of identity and self-determination.

Several global conventions affirm this right. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) upholds personal freedoms and the right to a private family life, both of which extend to naming practices. Similarly, the Convention on

the Rights of the Child (CRC) states that every child has the right to a name and nationality from birth, reinforcing the principle that state interference in naming violates fundamental human rights. Additionally, the International Covenant on

Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) explicitly protects against discrimination and cultural suppression, which occur when governments impose naming restrictions based on ethnicity, language, or religion. Iran's restrictive naming policies violate these international commitments, undermining the rights of parents and children

alike. By enforcing a narrow definition of acceptable names, the state erodes cultural heritage and denies families the right to pass down linguistic and historical traditions to future generations.

The impact of Iran's naming restrictions extends far beyond cultural suppression.

The refusal to register specific names can lead to the denial of birth certificates, which, in turn, prevents children from accessing essential services such as healthcare, education, and social protection. Individuals cannot enroll in schools, obtain lawful employment, or receive public healthcare without official identification.

Hospitals may refuse to treat children without legal documentation unless their families can afford exorbitant fees, and even in death, they may be denied proper burial rights.

This policy disproportionately harms communities already marginalized due to political and economic discrimination. In poverty-stricken and underdeveloped regions, the inability to obtain a birth certificate further entrenches deprivation and inequality. Azerbaijani, Baloch, and other minority populations suffer the most from these systemic injustices, as their children are often denied legal identity solely because their parents chose names that reflect their cultural heritage rather than the state-imposed Persian standard.

The Iranian government's restrictions on

naming rights and birth registration represent a clear violation of fundamental human rights. By forcing families to adhere to Persian-centric naming policies, the state not only erases minority identities but also perpetuates cycles of marginalization and exclusion. The prohibition on issuing birth certificates, particularly for Azerbaijani children whose names do not conform to Persian norms, is a grave injustice that demands urgent reform. To align with international human rights standards, Iran must abolish restrictive naming laws and ensure that all children, regardless of ethnic background, have access to birth registration and the fundamental rights it protects. Without such changes, Iran's naming policies will continue to serve as a tool of oppression, deepening social inequalities and eroding the rich cultural diversity of its people.

## 2. UNDOCUMENTED CHILDREN IN IRAN

### 2.1. UNDOCUMENTED CHILDREN IN IRAN

THE government has not released the number of persons without identity documents. According to Tayyeba Siavashi, a member of the 10th Iranian Parliament, there are around a million undocumented children in Iran. In an interview with

the Khane Mellat News Agency, Massoud Rezai, a former member of the Social Commission of the Iranian Parliament, stated that there are rumors that one million individuals in Iran lack proper documentation<sup>1</sup>. According to certain studies, there are around 100,000 undocumented individuals in Sistan and Balochistan<sup>2</sup>.

Undocumented individuals are often excluded from accessing essential healthcare, education, social services, and, even the most basic vaccination, educational, and medical rights. They do not have the right to get a driver's license, a home, or even a SIM card.

The impact of this exclusion was particularly evident during the coronavirus pandemic when many undocumented people faced severe hardships due to their inability to access vaccines and critical medical treatments. Fatemeh Kikhah, a general practitioner in Sistan and Balochistan, told Hamshahri: "In Zahedan, I examined sixty patients. Although vaccines were available, fifty of them were unable to receive them because they lacked identification documents. It was an extremely depressing time. They left the facility without vaccination<sup>3</sup>."

Beyond healthcare, the consequences of being undocumented extend even to death. Shafi, a young girl without identity credentials, described the tragic fate of many in her community: "Many peo-

ple have died but are not permitted to be buried because they lack identification documents. The sound of crying and mourning comes daily from the cemetery next to our house; we have become neighbors with death. In life, they had no documents to prove they existed, and in death, they were buried without a ceremony<sup>4</sup>."

While some Azerbaijanis in Iran continue to struggle for an identity card, many Iranian Azerbaijani parents have long fought for their children's fundamental rights and successfully obtained official documents with Azerbaijani names. However, administrative obstacles persist, making it difficult for many families to secure identification papers for their children.

<sup>1</sup>[www.icana.ir](http://www.icana.ir)

<sup>2</sup>[www.hamshahrionline.ir](http://www.hamshahrionline.ir)

<sup>3</sup>[www.hamshahrionline.ir](http://www.hamshahrionline.ir)

<sup>4</sup><https://www.hra-news.org/2021/hranews/a-31431/>

Iranian Azerbaijanis have frequently encountered bureaucratic resistance when attempting to register their children's names, particularly when choosing Azerbaijani-Turkic names. In this report, we will examine cases of families who have faced these challenges, highlighting the systemic barriers that prevent children from obtaining identity documents and the broader implications of this discriminatory policy.

# DOCUMENTED CASES OF ID DENIAL



## 3. DOCUMENTED CASES OF ID DENIAL

### 3.1. DOCUMENTED CASES OF ID DENIAL IN 2023

THE civil registration office in Tabriz has refused to issue a birth certificate for **Bayjan Jabraeili**. The Azerbaijani child was born on October 7, 2023.

On November 16, 2023, the family of **Huntay Mehralibeglou** staged a symbolic birthday celebration in front of the civil registry office in Jolfa to protest the authorities' refusal to issue his birth certificate. During the gathering, family members and relatives held placards with messages such as "Choosing a child's name is one of the basic rights of citizenship," "My name is Huntay," and an image of activist Yorush Mehralibeglou,

who remains detained in the Intelligence Department's detention center.

Huntay's father, Taymaz Mehralibeglou, has spent six years exhausting all legal, administrative, and judicial channels in pursuit of his son's birth certificate, yet his efforts have been in vain. As a result, Huntay faces significant hardships, including restricted access to medical care and education.

The Ardabil Province Civil Registry Department has refused to approve the Turkic name **Dolunay Sadeghifar** for a newly born Azerbaijani baby. The department justified its decision by stating that the name is not included in the list of authorized names within the civil registration system.

## 3.2. DOCUMENTED CASES OF ID DENIAL IN 2024

THE civil registration office in Tabriz has refused to issue a birth certificate for an Azerbaijani child named **Duygu**, born on October 7, 2023.

**Volkan Azarmi Rad**, an Azerbaijani child born on January 26, 2023, in Tabriz, has been denied essential documents, including a birth certificate, preventing him from accessing medical care and social services such as insurance. Authorities have justified this refusal by objecting to his Turkic name.

His father, Rahman Azarmi Rad, has faced persistent resistance from both the Tabriz civil registry office and the courts, which cite cultural and religious reasons for rejecting the name Volkan. In a document issued by the 23rd branch of the Tabriz General and Legal Court, officials claimed that "Volkan is a foreign name" and does not conform to Iranian religious and Islamic culture.

After an arduous struggle spanning two years and three months, the family of **Alp Aslan**, an Azerbaijani child living in Tabriz, finally secured a birth certificate for him on January 27, 2024.

The civil registration office of Tabriz city has opposed the issuance of a birth certificate for an Azerbaijani child named **Selin Ahani**, born on March 2, 2024. Despite her birth, bureaucratic hurdles have prevented the timely acquisition of essential documentation for Selin, depriving her access to essential rights and services.

After more than five months of persistence and legal efforts, a court ruling finally led to the issuance of a birth certificate for a newborn named Alp Aslan. His father, Ahmad Aghaei, engaged in a nearly six-month legal battle after the East Azerbaijan Civil Registry Office refused to register his son. Despite the bureaucratic hurdles, the Tabriz court ultimately ruled in his favor, ordering the registry office to issue the birth certificate and securing the child's legal recognition.

Morteza Nourmohammadi, who was arrested last year after being summoned by the Civil Registration Office in Soufiyan, spent 80 days in solitary confinement before being released on bail. After months of effort, he announced that he had successfully obtained a birth certificate for his son, Hunay.

A couple chose the name **Sevgi** for their daughter and attempted to register her birth, but officials refused, claiming the name was not permitted and insisting they select another. For five months, the parents fought back through civil resistance and legal action, refusing to comply with the imposed restrictions. With the legal support of Asgar Mohammadi, their persistence paid off, and the authorities ultimately approved Sevgi's registration, granting her a birth certificate.

It has also been reported that the Civil Registration Office refused to allow two families to register Turkic names, Elshan and Elnur, for their children.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## 4. RECOMMENDATIONS

### 4.1. RECOMMENDATIONS

To address these injustices, Iranian authorities must implement comprehensive legislative and regulatory reforms to ensure that all children, regardless of their ethnicity, cultural background, or the names chosen by their families, are granted birth certificates without discrimination. The government's restrictive list of approved names, which enforces ideological and cultural uniformity, must be abolished in favor of inclusive policies that embrace and promote Iran's rich cultural and ethnic diversity. These policies should align with international human rights standards, guaranteeing that every child, regardless of their name or ethnic origin, has equal access to fundamental rights such as healthcare, education, and social services.

The right of parents to name their children is a fundamental human right, recognized in international human rights frameworks, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. A child's name is deeply tied to their identity, heritage, and sense of belonging. Denying parents the freedom to choose culturally significant names is not just a bureaucratic hurdle—it is a violation of their rights and an attempt to erase linguistic and cultural diversity. Governments have a responsibility to respect and protect these freedoms rather than impose restrictions that force assimilation and marginalization.

Addressing this issue requires more than just removing discriminatory policies; it demands a clear and actionable plan that fosters an environment of fairness and inclusivity. Strengthening legal protections for minority communities, respecting cultural identities, and amplifying their voices are crucial steps toward ending systemic discrimination. This is not merely about administrative reforms—it is a vital step toward justice, equality, and social cohesion. By ensuring that every child's rights and dignity are upheld, regardless of their ethnic background, Iran can move toward a more just and united future, reinforcing its commitment to fairness and human rights for all.



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