

Iranian Lawmakers Aim To Scrap Discriminatory Citizenship Law



A group of Iranian lawmakers are looking to scrap a longstanding law that denies citizenship and equal rights to Iranian children born to foreign fathers.

If approved by parliament, a recently drafted bill would overturn the discriminatory legislation and affect the lives of thousands of children abroad and inside Iran -- especially Iranian children with fathers from the large community of Afghan refugees and migrants living in the Islamic republic.

Iranian rights activists have been campaigning for years to abolish the law, under which only Iranian men can pass their nationality to spouses or children.

For years, the citizenship of children born in marriages between Iranian women and Afghan refugees has been the driving force behind changing the law. To this point, such children are essentially stateless.

In recent days, the campaign to abolish the law was given an unexpected boost following the death of Maryam Mirzakhani, an award-winning Tehran-born mathematician who died of cancer in the United States on July 15. Mirzakhani's only daughter, 6-year-old Anahita, has a Czech father and is thus ineligible for Iranian citizenship.

Iran's semiofficial Fars news agency reported that a group of lawmakers made an official request on July 16 to expedite voting on the bill.

The agency claimed that Mirzakhani had asked in her will that Iranian nationality be granted to her daughter. RFERL could not independently verify that claim.

Reza Shiran told the pro-government Mashregh news outlet on July 17 that he was collecting signatures to introduce the bill on the assembly floor. He said he had collected 60 signatures in the 290-seat chamber.

He said the bill was intended to ?grant citizenship to Mirzakhani's daughter,? adding that ?equal attention? should be brought to the status of children born to Iranian mothers and Afghan fathers.

His remarks came after the parliamentary cultural committee on July 11 approved the **wording of the draft legislation**, which would extend the granting of Iranian citizenship to the offspring of foreign fathers.

Before becoming law, the legislation needs to be approved by parliament and ratified by the Guardians Council, the powerful clerical body that must approve all proposed legislation.

Human rights groups have welcomed efforts to repeal the law as a step toward gender equality in Iran.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) researcher Tara Sepehri Far says the current law discriminates against women and denies equal rights to thousands of children in Iran.

?In the case of marriages between Iranian women and Afghan refugees, mostly undocumented refugees, it has left many children who are born and raised in Iran with no path to nationality, which affects their access to many other rights such as education, health care, and jobs,? Far says.

The United Nations estimates the number of Afghan citizens in Iran at just under 1 million, many of whom claim to face violence and injustice in the Islamic republic. Tehran puts the figure of documented and undocumented Afghan refugees and migrants closer to 3 million.

Tehran has expelled many Afghans and periodically threatens those who remain with mass expulsions.

Many of them moved to Iran following the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and the civil war that followed the Soviet withdrawal. Others sought refuge in Iran after the Taliban took power in Afghanistan. Many have taken on menial work that is of little appeal to Iranians, yet they are often blamed for insecurity and unemployment.

In 2015, Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei issued a decree allowing all Afghan children to be allowed into schools.

Afghans are still denied basic services, however, including access to health care, jobs, and even housing.

Source : Radio Farda