BACKGROUND

Female-headed households (FHH) account for 12% - or more than 2.5 million - of all Iranian households. This is an increase of 72% in the past fifteen years. The life expectancy ratio is higher among women than men, and more women are becoming heads of households among the elderly population due to the death of spouses and an increase in the divorce rate. 71.4% of women heading households are widows, 13.6% are married, 10% are divorced, and 5% have never married.

I.R. Iran is experiencing rapid socio-economic and demographic changes. In collaboration with the Demography Department of the University of Tehran and the Statistical Center of Iran, UNFPA Iran has conducted an extensive mapping of four key emerging population issues, including on female-headed households. The analysis will assist policy and decision-makers to effectively develop national policies and plans in order to cope with the implications of this issue in the country. It will be used in a series of advocacy and policy dialogue meetings with relevant stakeholders to further strengthen the capacity of the government.

Female-headed households (%)

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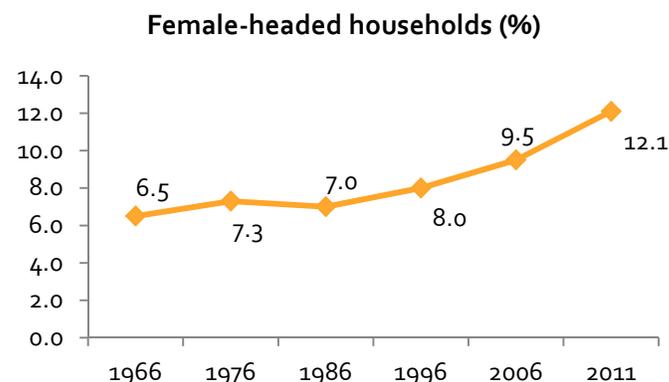
Because Everyone Counts

KEY FINDINGS

ECONOMIC

- Economically, FHH are more **vulnerable** than male-headed households. 43% of FHH fall into the two lowest income deciles, while only 16% of male-headed households fall into this category.
- The largest share of FHH in the two lowest income deciles is located in **Sistan and Baluchistan** province (64%).
- FHH **average income** is approximately 65% of average male-headed household income. Employment among FHH is significantly lower compared to male head of households.
- The average age of female heads of households in Iran is 57.6 (44.1 years for men). FHH are mainly headed by **middle-aged women** (aged 35-64), followed by elderly women 65+.

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC

- FHHs **have lower educational degrees** and literacy rates than male-headed households.
- At 16.6%, Sistan and Balouchistan has the highest percentage of FHH in the country.
- 44% of female heads of households between 35-64 are **illiterate**. This figure is even higher for FHH 65+, at 81%.
- 41% of female heads of households **live alone**, and approximately half live with their children.
- The Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation and the State Welfare Organisation support the needs of app. 45% of FHH **through provision of services**, such as monthly allowances, treatment, pension insurance, education, and vocational training.

HEALTH

- In all income deciles, the average per capita **health expenditure** is higher for FHH than for male-headed households.
- 7.9% of female heads of households suffer from **disabilities, physical and mental diseases** and 30% are unable to work due to health-related issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ➢ Conduct further **in-depth analysis** of the situation of FHH to develop targeted programmes. Limited data exists on the health status of FHH, including on health and nutrition.
- ➢ **Disaggregate data** on FHH in future health surveys.
- ➢ Address shortcomings in **FHH-related laws and their implementation**, as well as a lack of **coordination** among relevant organizations working on FHHs. In addition, there is a need for increased government support to CSOs providing services to FHHs.
- ➢ **Establish a high council** comprised of relevant government and non-government partners, which would develop a national programme on FHH.
- ➢ Establish a **harmonized data bank** on FHH, compiling all existing data.
- ➢ **Strengthen services** for FHH, such as provision of life insurance, as well as physical and mental support.
- ➢ Use **international experience** to further strengthen Iran's response to FHH.