

Population Situation Analysis

Islamic Republic of Iran

Executive Summary 2016



First Edition

Population Situation Analysis of I.R. Iran

Executive Summary

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General Population Decree issued by His Eminence the Supreme Leader of the I.R. of Iran, Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Khamenei

In the Name of God, the Merciful,

Taking into account the importance of population issues in terms of national sovereignty; and considering the dynamism, productivity and youthfulness of the current population as an opportunity and advantage, and in order to compensate for the decrease in population growth and fertility over the past years, the new general population decree are announced. Noting the positive impact of population on the country's development, it is imperative that comprehensive plans for economic, social and cultural progress of the country are implemented in line with population policies. It is also necessary that relevant stakeholders coordinate and share responsibilities in this regard, and that appropriate actions to be taken with due diligence. The results of continuous monitoring of policy implementation need to be reported.

Seyed Ali Khameneie
20 May 2014

General Population Decree

1. Promoting dynamism, productivity and youthfulness of the population through increasing fertility rate to above replacement level.
2. Eliminating obstacles to marriage, facilitating and advocating family formation and childbearing, lowering the marriage age, supporting and empowering young couples to cover their living costs and nurture a righteous and able generation.
3. Allocating adequate resources for mothers especially during pregnancy and breastfeeding, insurance coverage for delivery, treatment of infertility among men and women, and strengthening relevant support institutions.
4. Strengthening the foundation and stability of family institution through revision and completion of public education about the purity of family and childrearing with emphasis on life and communication skills, and counselling services based on Iranian-Islamic values and culture, and development and strengthening of the social security system, health, curative and medical treatments in line with reproductive health and childbearing.
5. Promoting and institutionalizing an Iranian-Islamic lifestyle and tackling undesirable aspects of the Western lifestyle.
6. Improving life expectancy, ensuring health and healthy nutrition of the population, and the prevention of social problems, particularly addiction, accidents, environmental pollution and diseases.
7. Establishing a culture of respect for the older persons and creating conditions for maintaining their health, and caring for them in families, making necessary provisions to utilize the experience and capacity of older people in different fields.
8. Empowering working-age population by establishing a culture and revising, strengthening and harmonizing the educational system for entrepreneurship and professional skills, in line with the needs of society and their talents and interests, in order to generate effective and productive employment.

9. Geographic and spatial re-distribution of the population, according to environmental capacities with emphasis on ensuring adequate water supply aiming for equal distribution and reduction in population pressure.
10. Retaining and attracting population in rural- and border areas, and areas with low population density, establishing new population settlements, especially on islands and coasts of the Persian Gulf and the Oman Sea, through development of infrastructure networks, supporting and encouraging investment and establishing a business environment with sufficient income.
11. Managing immigration and emigration in line with the general population decree through development and implementation of appropriate mechanisms.
12. Encouraging expatriates to participate and invest, and utilizing their capacities and capabilities.
13. Strengthening components of national identity (Iranian, Islamic, Revolutionary) and promoting unity and social cohesion across the country, particularly among those living in border areas and expatriates.
14. Continuous monitoring of qualitative and quantitative aspects of population policies, through the establishment of appropriate mechanisms and the development of local indicators of human development and conducting studies on population and human development.

Executive Summary

Background

Iran has been experiencing remarkable demographic transition during the past three decades. Population growth significantly decreased from 3.9 per cent in 1976-1986 to 1.3 in 2006-2011, and total fertility rate in the same period sharply declined from nearly 7 to 1.8 children per woman. After the Islamic Revolution, the trend of fertility and mortality as well as population growth has caused an enormous increase in the population of youth which gradually will shift to population ageing in the next decades. This situation necessitates for reviewing and revising population policies in Iran. Announcement of the general population decree by His Eminence the Supreme Leader of I.R. of Iran in 2014 paved the way for addressing population issues and revising population policies considering both quantitative and qualitative aspects of population. It is evident that successful implementation of the population decree requires an appropriate knowledge of demographic transitions.

Considerable attention of decision- and policy-makers as well public opinion to the population issues create great demand for preparation of a comprehensive population situation analysis based on scientific data and information. The **Population Situation Analysis (PSA) of I.R. Iran** was prepared during the last year in collaboration with a team of experts and scholars including several demographers and economists. The preliminary results of this situation analysis was presented in a seminar jointly organized by the Strategic Research Center of Presidential Office, Majlis Research Center, Strategic Research Center of the Expediency Council as well as the National Institute of Population Research in 2016, and received several constructive comments and inputs. This report provides an executive summary of the first edition of the population situation analysis. PSA aims to explore demographic trends, provide comprehensive knowledge about various aspects of population dynamics, and present a realistic image about the current situation and future population trends in the country. The report also aims at suggesting appropriate solutions addressing the population issues. It has been decided that national action and strategic plans to be developed in the next run via formation of a national technical committee.

Preparation and completion of the present report would not have been possible without the support of various institutes and organizations. Hereby gratitude is expressed toward all organizations, institutes, research centers as well as all authors for their cooperation and support for preparation and publication of this report. We hope that this report could result in promoting knowledge about the demographic situation in Iran and providing adequate evidence for formulation of effective population action plans and programmes.

Population Policies

- Demographic transition in the Islamic Republic of Iran in recent decades paved the way for changes in population policies. To this end, the Population Decree announced by His Eminence the Supreme Leader provides a suitable model for preparing policies that take into account both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the population.
- Considering the dynamic nature of population situation in the country, it is crucial to further focus on new and emerging population and development trends. Population and development programmes need to aim beyond population size and growth, and include inequalities in workforce supply and demand that occur as a result of changes in the population structure including population ageing. In the short and medium terms, emphasis must be placed on training, education and especially youth employment, as a priority. Furthermore, attention must be paid to youth's awareness and needs in areas of marriage, childbearing and reproductive health in order to prevent the spread of HIV and other Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD).
- In the last two decades (1990s and 2000s) population policies placed more emphasis on reduction of population growth and family planning programmes. However, consistent with the Population Decree, future population programmes need to be comprehensive and cover various dimensions such as diverse population groups, employment, youth and adolescents' needs, migration and marginalization, ageing and quality of health. Moreover, considering the transitional nature of the population, such policies must be dynamic and adaptable to new and evolving situations. More importantly, the current and future population status must be integrated in the National Development Plans as well as the national, sectoral and regional budgets.
- Formulation of population policies and relevant rules and regulations requires legislators and policy-makers to be abreast of changes in the population situation in the country. Cooperation among policy-making bodies and legislative, executive and educational institutions prepares favorable grounds for assessing, identifying and ratifying related laws, as well as allocating the necessary resources to address population issues. In line with the Population Decree, the strengthening of educational research centers can contribute to increasing the awareness and knowledge of officials and policymakers on population and sustainable development related issues. Furthermore, it is necessary to support research activities on emerging population issues, to carry out population projections based on scientific methodologies at national and provincial levels, and to analyze applied research for the purposes of planning, budgeting, evaluation, and implementation of policies and population programmes. In summary, laying the groundwork for policy making and planning in the abovementioned areas requires a clear understanding of the past and current status of population, as well as an analysis of existing challenges and opportunities and their implications. The following paragraphs review some aspects of population issues in the country, and provide policy suggestions.

Fertility and Childbearing

- The levels and patterns of fertility have experienced a significant change since the mid-1980s. Total fertility rate declined from around 7 children per women in 1979 to the replacement level in 2000. However, the speed of fertility decline has slowed down in

recent years, and the TFR has been hovering around 1.8-1.9. Continuation of below-replacement level of fertility would lead to slow population growth in the future.

- Economic insecurity has altered the couples' attitudes and women's behaviors toward childbearing, resulting in the low-fertility ideals. Considering the changes in families' views, maintaining the quality of life of existing children will have priority over having more children even in case of better economic situations. Nevertheless, in spite of the existing belief in fewer children, a significant number of young population – as a consequence of baby boom in 1980s - is gradually entering into their reproductive ages, and the country will face a rise in number of births which could slightly affect the population structure.
- Having two children have been the model behaviour among the Iranian married women for the past decade. However, in order for the fertility rate to stay at the replacement level, marriage among young generation particularly those who were born right after the revolution should be facilitated. If not, it is obvious that fertility will gradually decrease. Therefore, this must be in the priority action of any population policy.
- Improvement in the reproductive health of families and individuals is considered one of their inevitable rights. Any change in population policies, whether aimed at increasing or decreasing the population, or at improving population characteristics, requires reviewing the reproductive health programmes. In the past, reproductive health programs focused mostly on family planning services and sought to reduce the number of children. Nonetheless, it must be noted that achieving below-replacement level fertility, reduction in the ideal number of children, and shortening of reproductive life-span do not necessarily translate into a reduction in the demand for family planning nor should such services be restricted. The shortening of child bearing period for Iranian women means that provision of reproductive health services must continue both during childbearing period (20s and 30s) and after the end of childbearing years (30s and 40s). Lack of reproductive health services in these periods would result in an increase in the unmet needs and in the number of unwanted pregnancies which may will end in increased numbers of illegal abortions that threaten the health and lives of mothers. It is recommended, therefore, that new reproductive health programs including family planning services be designed and developed with an emphasis on couples' participation and based on couples' conditions and needs, offered along appropriate quality counseling.

Marriage and Family

- Policy interventions in family-related issues are common in various countries including Iran. Since behaviors of family members are shaped by social, economic, cultural and demographic factors, it is imperative that comprehensive policies and programmes should be designed and taken into account the complexity of family issues.
- Lack of reliable data sources to monitor the situation of families in the country is one of the major obstacles to the identification of family issues. Period and case studies that are designed to assess a specific subject (and not encompassing the various aspects of family related behavior and attitudes) cannot provide policy makers with comprehensive information. It is, therefore, suggested to benefit from the valuable experience of research and statistical centers in the country in order to design prospective and longitudinal surveys at national level. This would further enrich research on family issues and make useful information sources accessible for planning purposes. Assessing family-related issues

and policies in this field, as well as decision-making and planning must be based on scientific evidence as much as possible.

Population Structure and Golden Opportunity

- In the last decade, changes in the age structure of the population including “youth bulge” and increase in the number of people in their active years (15-64 years) led to the occurrence of the “Golden Opportunity” or “Demographic Window”. Proper investment in this opportunity can lead to an increase in production, productivity and savings, and entail valuable economic gains for the country.
- Transitions in the age structure of the Iranian population, the dominance of the age group (15-29), and the resulting demand for entering the job market calls for special attention to the issue of employment. Although the country is faced with an increase in the workforce, the job market suffers from shortage of skilled and trained workers. Educational and training programmes aimed at enhancing the workforce’s skills have a significant impact on the golden opportunity and the country’s economic prosperity. Moreover, creation of suitable employment opportunities could prevent the migration of the educated and skilled workforce (brain drain), and provide required facilities for elites and high qualified university graduates to return to the country. Planning for development and job creation in the country requires inter-sectoral collaboration between the public and private sectors, which in turn calls for the preparation of appropriate inter-sectoral strategies. It must be noted that demographic dividend is temporary and transient, and the “window” will only last for about three decades. Secondly, taking advantage of the existing demographic opportunity necessitates the preparation of proper institutional context and suitable political and social environment. Thirdly, not applying the right policies to take advantage of this opportunity, can lead to serious challenges including higher unemployment rates, false employment, political instability, pressure on resources and lack of social security for the elderly.
- Currently, unemployment is one of the major economic challenges in Iran. The structure of the unemployed youth in the country (more than 70 percent of the unemployed are under 30 years of age) and the unemployment of university graduates could lead to social problems. Furthermore, given the increasing number of women being admitted into universities and hence their increasing demands for jobs, this group will make up a large percentage of unemployed university graduates, and female unemployment will be on the rise, unless a fundamental change in the current structure of the job market is to occur. Therefore, job creation for the youth and the next generation of job seekers, must be considered among the top priorities of population policies and programmes.
- Women constitute half of the potential workforce and their potential capabilities lead to social development and economic prosperity. In recent decades, women’s participation in economic activities, especially public activities has slightly increased, but their economic participation is still low. There are many areas where it is possible for women to increase their economic participation and be promoted to higher levels of management, but in order to achieve this goal comprehensive and sustainable planning is necessary.

Middle-age

- A large portion of the population will reach their middle-age in the next few years. Even though the middle-age group could provide special grounds for economic growth due to

financial savings and cumulated experience and skills, the increasing prevalence of chronic and costly diseases is also part of the characteristics of this age group. Lifestyle modifications, continuation of health programmes for the middle-aged, creating required infrastructure in the health system to meet the needs of this age group, as well as screening of non-communicable diseases such as cancer, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases must be a priority for public education and health planning.

Ageing

- Population ageing is one of the long-term consequences of an increase in life expectancy and change in age structure. The ageing phenomenon is an inevitable issue for countries that have experienced a decrease in mortality rates, and improvements in health and social development. The change in population structure has happened in almost all developed countries, and its starting point can already be observed in many developing countries. Additionally, people who reach the age of 65 will have a higher life expectancy, and this will have a remarkable impact on social security and welfare programmes for the older persons. Therefore, policy makers need to pay special attention to the ratio and the number of individuals aged 65 and over in the forthcoming years, particularly for the health and social security sectors of the country.
- The significant increase in the population of older people will have considerable impact on the pattern of diseases and the need for healthcare in the future. The number of people who are suffering from chronic and non-communicable diseases (diabetes, cancer, hypertension, reduced vision, hearing and memory loss), as well as the duration and the cost of care will increase. Management of health needs of a population which is transitioning towards ageing requires changes in the healthcare system, and education and training of skilled human resources. New plans should consider the concepts such as ethical issues in health and medical programmes, as well as the role of family, society, and the organizations investing in public and private sectors. As a result of an increase in their life expectancy, women would outnumber men in the old age. Compared to men, a greater percentage of women are widowed, have often no independent source of income and mainly depend on their family members. In addition, women are usually the caregiver in their families, and face many challenges as they reach old age. Old-age welfare programmes should be developed with a gender-based approach and special attention must be paid to women.

Regional Disparity

- Although Iran has been successful in achieving many development goals at national level, there are still regional disparities as far as development indicators are concerned. Fertility level is higher than three children in Sistan and Baluchistan, and infant and child mortality rates are still high in this province. Differences in income and poverty levels in such regions are also high in comparison to other provinces in the country. Differences in income and unequal access to education and healthcare services affect people's ability to properly plan for their families. Therefore, reducing income disparities and eliminating regional differences are considered crucial needs for the country. Failure to do so, means that a significant percentage of the population would remain poor and would not be able to participate in development programmes. National and provincial accounts, as well as poverty maps could be utilized to show inequalities in different regions of the country.

Education

- Remarkable progress was made in the fields of literacy and education in Iran. However, disparities in the level and quality of education in different regions of the country are still problematic. On the other hand, considering the demands of the job market, availability and relevance of vocational and specialized trainings are still among the challenges which are facing the education sector. Imbalances between complementary educational facilities which are provided by the public and private sectors, as well as centralization of such educational programmes in large cities, has led to unequal competition among the students. This could in turn, lead to drop out of a group of young people or failure to achieve the goals to which they aspire. Development of skill-based education to train human resources in accordance to the demands of the job market is one of the top priorities of education in the country.

Migration

- Changes in fertility and mortality rates in recent decades played a major role in the growth and structure of the population. Still, migration will also determine the future of the population in Iran. Annually, over one million people move within the boundaries of the country. Socio-economic disparities in different geographical areas affect the pattern of internal migration in Iran. Recognizing these patterns as well as determination of causes must become a priority for the implementation of population decree and policies.
- In recent years Iran has experienced both sending and receiving migrants. Presence of refugees in Iran in the last three decades, especially Afghan refugees, has brought about newly emerging issues in the society. Their repatriation on one hand and their continuous presence in Iran on the other will have considerable effects on social and economic development. Informed planning regarding repatriation or integration of the remaining refugees in Iran calls for ongoing scientific studies. Migration of Iranians abroad, especially experts and specialists (brain drain), has accelerated during recent years. The country's need for skilled workforce requires innovative strategies such as expansion of the job market and implementation of laws that facilitate the return of expatriate Iranian experts.

Urbanization

- Currently, almost 72 percent of the population resides in cities and this ratio is likely to grow to more than 75 percent in the coming years. The increase of metropolises, population density, and lack of appropriate and affordable housing, traffic, urban environmental pollution, potable water supply and management plans for possible crises are some of the urban challenges that require continuous short-term and long-term planning.

Environment

- Limited natural resources, decrease in precipitation and increase in usage of underground water resources, expansion of agricultural lands, increase in soil erosion, pollution and urban waste, and inappropriate waste management are among the main environmental challenges facing the country. Population growth along with its uneven distribution in the country and overcrowding in some areas of the country, especially big cities, has caused an

increase in the demand for use of limited urban land, increase in residential construction, and expansion of transport, industrial and commercial activities; thus placing these areas under high ecological stress. Lack of attention to the country's macro indicators in terms of economy and environment, in demographic planning play an important role in intensifying environmental issues and threats. The necessity for an appropriate and suitable environment in order to improve quantity and quality of the population is an obvious and unquestionable matter. Therefore, while trying to balance the population, it is important to thrive for a healthy environment that moderates issues and risks and allows for achieving economic growth and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Demographic Data and Statistics

- Technical capacity exists in the country for generation and dissemination of reliable and timely population data and information; however, in some areas there are still lack of baseline data and statistics for production of population and development indicators. At the national level, data for monitoring and evaluation of population and sustainable development indicators must be made available. Measuring some indicators such as poverty rates, inflation, and their projections are still problematic. Furthermore, integrated data and information in other areas such as unemployment, socio-economic status of older persons, the situation and number of refugees and migrants, as well as indicators on environmental issues are neither available nor accessible. In addition, conducting longitudinal surveys on certain demographic characteristics such as fertility and family related issues are necessary. Lack of consistency in socio-demographic data derived from vital statistics systems and population censuses has another challenge with regard to production of integrated data and information. Some data are not easily made accessible to researchers and the research centers. Hence, in order to effective monitoring of population policies, it is necessary to produce quality, timely and harmonized data and information.