

Concluding Observation Committee on the Rights of the Child CRC/C/IRN/CO/3-4 para 76

Full recommendation:

The Committee recommends that the State party strengthen its efforts to further reduce poverty and extreme poverty, in particular in provinces populated by ethnic minorities, such as Sistan and Baluchestan, Khuzestan and Kurdistan. The Committee recommends that the State party take immediate steps, inter alia by increasing budgetary allocations, to improve housing and living conditions in regions with ethnic minorities, including the provision of access to safe drinking water, adequate sanitation, electricity, transportation facilities, schools and health-care centres.

Assessment using Impact Iran human rights indicators¹

A. Strengthen efforts to further reduce poverty and extreme poverty, in particular in provinces populated by ethnic minorities, such as Sistan and Baluchestan, Khuzestan and Kurdistan.

According to Article 19 of the 1979 Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran (“Iran”), “[a]ll people of Iran, whatever the ethnic group or tribe to which they belong, enjoy equal rights; color, race, language, and the like, do not bestow any privilege”. Article 20 and Article 31 of the Constitution respectively emphasize that “[a]ll citizens of the country [...] enjoy all human, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, in conformity with Islamic criteria” and “[e]very Iranian individual and family is entitled to a dwelling appropriate to its needs.” These laws seemingly guarantee access for all Iranians to adequate living conditions free from poverty, including ethnic minorities.

There are no publicly available official poverty estimates for Iran, with some domestic experts estimating it based on certain figures such as the minimum expenses of a family of 4, which changes frequently. Therefore, the World Bank has measured poverty in Iran using the international upper middle-income poverty line of \$5.50, expressed in US dollars at the 2011 PPP (per day per capita).² Reportedly, poverty fell in Iran between 2009 and 2013 by 5 percentage points to about 8 percent, before increasing to 12.9 percent in 2017.³

¹ ESCR.11.1.S.1; ESCR.11.1.S.3; ESCR.12.1.S.1; ESCR.12.2.4.S.1; ESCR.11.1.P.2; ESCR.11.1.P.3; ESCR.12.1.P.1; ESCR.12.1.P.6; ESCR.11.1.O.5; ESCR.11.1.O.1; ESCR.12.2.4.O.1

² https://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/poverty/987B9C90-CB9F-4D93-AE8C-750588BF00QA/AM2020/Global_POVEQ_IRN.pdf

³ https://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/poverty/987B9C90-CB9F-4D93-AE8C-750588BF00QA/AM2020/Global_POVEQ_IRN.pdf

According to a Majlis Research Center report, 16% of Iran's population were below the poverty line during the Persian calendar year 1396 (2017-2018), but that figure has increased between 23% to 40% in the year 1397 (2018-2019) and continues to rise.⁴ The report also predicted that 57 million (out of 81 million) Iranians would fall below the poverty line in the year 1398 (2019-2020).⁵

Iran's economy faces challenges, which may be exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The World Bank found that Iran could not sustain positive growth in per capita expenditure for the bottom 40% of the population (negative growth rate of 0.13%) during 2014-2017 despite positive economic growth.⁶ Domestic sources also found that Iran's inflation rate increased to 48% and economic growth was negative by the end of the year 1397 (2018-2019).⁷

Despite claims made in Iranian Parliament regarding efforts on social welfare and poverty alleviation measures, the poverty rate has remained high.⁸ In Iran, there are stark urban/rural divides in terms of wealth, with much higher rural poverty headcount rates of about 30%, compared to about 7% in urban areas. Inequality, measured by the Gini index in per capita expenditure, fell sharply between 2009- 2013 from 42.0 points to 37.4 points, but increased afterwards to 40.8 points in 2017.⁹

According to the five-year development plans of Iran, which is currently running its sixth program (approved in 2017 to cover the period 2017-2021), councils have been set up under the State Budget and Planning Organization in each province to identify needs, programs and proposals related to regional development.¹⁰ These councils, known as the Provincial Planning and Development Council,¹¹ have a mix of twenty-nine members without any dedicated seats for civil and non-governmental organizations, which often results in overlooking the needs of the population, particularly disadvantaged groups such as ethnic minorities.

Additionally, ethnic minorities are widely underrepresented in public affairs. For instance, no province governor belongs to an ethnic minority. None of Iran's provinces with predominantly

⁴ Research Center of the Iranian Majlis: <https://rc.majlis.ir/fa/report/show/1139714>

⁵ Iranian Mjlis, <https://rc.majlis.ir/fa/report/show/1139714>; Iran Wire, <https://iranwire.com/fa/features/31099>; and Radio Farda, <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/iran-poverty-line/29938182.html>

⁶ https://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/poverty/987B9C90-CB9F-4D93-AE8C-750588BF00QA/AM2020/Global_POVEQ_IRN.pdf

⁷ Research Center of the Iranian Majlis: <https://rc.majlis.ir/fa/report/show/1139714>

⁸ Radio Farda: <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/iran-poverty-line/29938182.html>

⁹ https://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/poverty/987B9C90-CB9F-4D93-AE8C-750588BF00QA/AM2020/Global_POVEQ_IRN.pdf

¹⁰ <https://rc.majlis.ir/fa/law/show/121060>

¹¹ <https://www.mporg.ir/home/wid/slider/id/101317/>

ethnic minority populations, such as Kurdistan or Sistan and Baluchistan, are run by a person belonging to that minority.¹²

Provinces with high concentrations of ethnic populations in Iran often experience low levels of development due to neglect from the Tehran-based central government. In 2015, Sistan and Balouchistan reported that 63% of its urban and 76% of its rural population are living under the poverty line. Despite the region's rich oil reserves which has led to major investments from the government, such developments have not benefited the Balouch people, which comprise the majority of the population in the region.¹³

A similar situation has arisen in the province of Khuzestan, whose population is 70% ethnic Arab. Despite the province holding between 90% and 100% of Iran's oil and natural gas reserves, Khuzestan has an unemployment rate of 16.2%, slightly higher than the national average.¹⁴ This figure exceeds 40% among ethnic Arabs, who often face hiring discrimination based on their ethnic identity.¹⁵ Over half of Khuzestan's Arabs live in poverty, and in segregated communities with limited access to healthcare and education. Little to none of Khuzestan's natural resource wealth is invested in the province's welfare and development.¹⁶

Kurdistan is another one of Iran's least developed regions, with over 60% of the Kurdish population living in poverty.¹⁷ Like Khuzestan and Sistan-Baluchistan, this province experiences a lack of job-creating investment from Tehran.

Despite Iran's claims to combat poverty, poverty in the country as a whole and especially in provinces that are largely populated with ethnic minorities, such as Sistan and Baluchistan, Kurdistan and Khuzestan, remains high.

¹² Joint submission to the Human Rights Committee from All Human Rights for All in Iran, Association for Human Rights in Kurdistan – Geneva, Association for the Human Rights of the Azerbaijani People in Iran, Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, OutRight International, Siamak Pourzand Foundation, Small Media, Impact Iran, 2020, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CCPR/Shared%20Documents/IRN/INT_CCPR_NGO_IRN_42317_E.pdf

¹³ Tasnim News, 'Chabahar national development projects crippled/63% of Chabahar's population are marginalized (Persian),' 19 December 2016.

¹⁴ Based on the Statistic Center of Iran. Iran data for 1397-1398 (2018-2019), <http://www.ibena.ir/news/102300/>. See also Tasnim News: <https://tn.ai/2113615>

¹⁵ Minority Voices Newsroom: <http://www.minorityvoices.org/news.php/en/1776/iran-the-oppression-of-ahwazi-arab-people-in-al-ahwaz>

¹⁶ Small Media Foundation: <https://smallmedia.org.uk/nationalfabric/Nationalfabric.pdf>

¹⁷ ANF News: <https://anfenglish.com/kurdistan/over-60-of-kurdish-people-in-east-kurdistan-live-in-poverty-says-mp-2658>

B. Take immediate steps, inter alia by increasing budgetary allocations, to improve housing and living conditions in regions with ethnic minorities, including the provision of access to safe drinking water, adequate sanitation, electricity, transportation facilities, schools and health-care centres.

Some of the Iranian Government's practices, such as the relative lack of State investment in and attention to regions with high concentrations of ethnic minorities as well as a decrease in their regional budgets, continue to keep large numbers of Iranians in poverty. For example, the provincial budget of Sistan and Baluchestan decreased by 48% in fiscal year 1397 (2018-2019)¹⁸ compared to the previous year,¹⁹ while the provincial budget of Kurdistan decreased by 58%.²⁰

In some regions with ethnic minorities, the rural population has lower access to basic facilities when compared to the national average. For example, out of the villages in the Sistan and Baluchestan province, 46% had access to electricity (55% as national average), 12% to drinking water (13% as national average), 2% to the Internet (8% as national average), 6% to the communication and telephone system (14% as national average), and 2% to the garbage collection system (11% as national average).²¹

In recent decades, the Iranian government has implemented various plans and programs to reduce the problems associated with housing access. In 2007, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad introduced the "Mehr housing plan" which aimed to create 2.2 billion new housing opportunities for low income and disadvantaged individuals. By the time President Hassan Rouhani came to power in 2013, this plan had not been widely implemented, with only around 700,000 housing units having been built. Moreover, the housing project was poorly planned since many houses were built outside of the main urban areas without access to transportation and basic necessities. In 2019, President Hassan Rouhani once again vowed to implement this housing initiative, yet it reported that no major progress has been made and low-income families in Iran still struggle to find affordable and adequate housing, in the midst of heavy sanctions imposed by the United States, which have devalued the Rial greatly.²²

The Housing Foundation and the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee, the two bodies that are responsible for providing housing for low-income people and "for organizing and addressing the livelihoods of the poor and needy," signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 2016 for the construction of 20,000 units of "supportive housing" in rural areas. Yet there is little information available on whether this particular measure has alleviated Iran's affordable housing crisis.²³

¹⁸ <https://shenasname.ir/laws/budjet/1397/4378-budjet97>

¹⁹ <https://shenasname.ir/laws/budjet/budjet98/4962-budjet98>

²⁰ <https://shenasname.ir/laws/budjet/budjet98/4962-budjet98>

²¹ Annual statistics of each provinces and annual statistics from Iran's statistics center: <<https://www.amar.org.ir/>>

²² <https://www.aljazeera.com/ajimpact/iranians-struggle-afford-housing-prices-soar-190730150209889.html>

²³ <http://www.jahannews.com/sdcez78nejh8pzi.b9bj.html> and

<https://www.maskanco.ir/Components/News/View/NewsPDF.aspx?id=920&lcid=1033>

Overall, despite such housing projects and construction over the years, Iran still has housing-related problems, including the lack of affordable housing, especially for low-income and vulnerable individuals, many of whom are members of ethnic minorities. Reportedly, low-income families in Iran struggle to find housing opportunities that provide the most basic human necessities like sanitation, running water and heat.²⁴

In Khuzestan, a province where 32% of its urban and 26% of its rural population lived under the poverty line in 2015, a high number of Ahwazi Arabs live in informal settlements due to displacement. These settlements are known for lacking basic living conditions, such as a functioning sewage system, electricity, medical facilities and even schools.²⁵

Due to underdevelopment in provinces with largely ethnic minority populations, members of ethnic groups such as Balouch, Arabs and Kurds often have limited access to education. School facilities are often inadequate for hosting children due to the various safety and health risks associated with their use.²⁶ Additionally, there is often a scarcity of schools in these regions, forcing students to use transportation to go to school, which not everyone can afford.²⁷ Official State figures from 2017 showed that 25,000 to 30,000 children in Sistan and Baluchestan province did not receive an education that year, but this number could be closer to 120,000.²⁸

Ethnic minorities, including Arabs, Azerbaijani Turks, Balochis and Kurds, also have faced targeted discrimination on the basis of their ethnic identity and are generally side-lined from employment and general public services, including education and health care.²⁹ For instance, the use of minority languages are effectively restricted under the Constitution, notably in schools where the teaching of a minority language is only permitted for literature classes. The Ministry of Education has reportedly circulated reminders to teachers and school administrators that the use of Kurdish and Turkish languages inside public schools is forbidden.³⁰ In 2016, up to 40,000 Ahwazi Arab children reportedly were denied access to education for failing the Farsi language

²⁴ <https://www.aljazeera.com/ajimpact/iranians-struggle-afford-housing-prices-soar-190730150209889.html>

²⁵ <https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Rights-Denied-Violations-against-ethnic-and-religious-minorities-in-Iran.pdf>

²⁶ Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (2012), page 14: <https://unpo.org/downloads/437.pdf>

²⁷ Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (2012), pages 14-15: <https://unpo.org/downloads/437.pdf>

²⁸ Centre for Human Rights in Iran, 'Impoverished children without identification documents deprived of education in Iran,' 22 July 2017.

²⁹ Joint submission to the Human Rights Committee from All Human Rights for All in Iran, Association for Human Rights in Kurdistan – Geneva, Association for the Human Rights of the Azerbaijani People in Iran, Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, OutRight International, Siamak Pourzand Foundation, Small Media, Impact Iran, 2020, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CCPR/Shared%20Documents/IRN/INT_CCPR_NGO_IRN_42317_E.pdf; and Minority Rights Group, <https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Rights-Denied-Violations-against-ethnic-and-religious-minorities-in-Iran.pdf>

³⁰ Minority Rights Group, <https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Rights-Denied-Violations-against-ethnic-and-religious-minorities-in-Iran.pdf>

proficiency test, although Farsi is their second language.³¹ Furthermore, Kurdish language teachers have experienced harassment and persecution.³²

Low levels of development in regions populated by ethnic minorities are also linked with a lack of access to healthcare services, goods and facilities. Despite an increase in the number of medical centers in the last few decades, many rural areas and villages – often populated by ethnic minority populations – still lack adequate medical facilities. In the whole of Sistan and Baluchestan province, which has a population over 2,775,014 people, there are only 21 hospitals, 208 medical clinics, and 109 radiology laboratories.³³ Kurdistan province, with a population of 1,603,011 people, has 17 hospitals, 148 medical clinics, and 53 radiology laboratories.³⁴

Overall, provinces such as Sistan and Balouchistan and Kurdistan have low levels of life expectancy, when compared to other regions in Iran.³⁵ Air pollution is another significant issue affecting the lives of many members of ethnic minorities in these regions, with cities such as Ahvaz, Sanandaj and Kermanshah have been marked as heavily polluted by the World Health Organization.

Recommendation Status:

This recommendation has **NOT** been implemented.

³¹ UNPO, <https://unpo.org/article/19590>

³² Joint submission to the Human Rights Committee from All Human Rights for All in Iran, Association for Human Rights in Kurdistan – Geneva, Association for the Human Rights of the Azerbaijani People in Iran, Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, OutRight International, Siamak Pourzand Foundation, Small Media, Impact Iran, 2020, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CCPR/Shared%20Documents/IRN/INT_CCPR_NGO_IRN_42317_E.pdf

³³ Annual statistics of each provinces and annual statistics from Iran's statistics center: <<https://www.amar.org.ir/>>

³⁴ Annual statistics of each provinces and annual statistics from Iran's statistics center: <<https://www.amar.org.ir/>>

³⁵ <https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Rights-Denied-Violations-against-ethnic-and-religious-minorities-in-Iran.pdf>