THE GENDERED DIMENSIONS OF THE WATER CRISIS IN IRAN:

Impacts on Women's Health, Livelihoods, and Security

How Iranian Women Shoulder the Heavy Burden of a Deepening Crisis

Women's Committee
National Council of Resistance of Iran

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The Gendered Dimensions of the Water Crisis in Iran: Impacts on Women's Health, Livelihoods, and Security

How Iranian Women Shoulder the Heavy Burden of a Deepening Crisis

1. Introduction

The water crisis in Iran has moved far beyond a simple environmental issue — it has become a humanitarian, ecological, and economic disaster. While at first the problem seemed to be the result of drought and declining rainfall, its true causes ran much deeper: entrenched corruption and mismanagement at the heart of the ruling establishment. Until these systemic roots are addressed and removed, Iran's present — and its future — will only become more precarious.

2. A Portrait of the Crisis

A significant number of researchers and international observers emphasize that 70 to 80 percent of the current crisis stems from mismanagement, unsustainable policies, lack of transparency, and corruption. As one report notes, "Iran's water crisis is not a crisis of resources; it is a crisis of decisions—decisions that have made the land thirstier and the future darker. This crisis, alongside the erosion of public trust in governance, is a symptom of structural and managerial failure." (Newsweek, August 1, 2025; The Times, December 8, 2022; Reuters, April 27, 2021)

Field reports from various districts of Tehran indicate a severe decline in water pressure, to the extent that even residents on the ground floors of buildings are deprived of access to drinking water. In a public statement, the Tehran Regional Water Company urged citizens to use domestic pumps and storage tanks to "strengthen water pressure," effectively shifting the burden of water supply onto the people, many of whom lack the financial means to afford such equipment. (Ebtekar, July 21, 2025)

Reza Hajikarim, head of the Water Federation, has admitted: "Tehran's 'Day Zero', the day when buildings are completely cut off from water, arrived long ago. Yet the city still holds the world record for land subsidence, caused by excessive extraction of groundwater resources." (Jahan-e Sanat, August 6, 2025)

The destructive policies of the clerical regime, including unchecked dam construction, plundering of water resources by institutions such as the Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), discriminatory water transfers between regions, and the deliberate disregard of scientific warnings, have pushed the country to the edge of collapse.

Predictions such as "Iran will turn into a complete desert within the next 30 years" paint a bleak future marked by drastically depleted reservoirs, the destruction of wetlands, contamination of water sources, and the collapse of ecosystems.

Reports from state-run websites, including Shargh Network (March 15, 2025), reveal that the severe drought of 2025 has disrupted the lives of millions. The report, titled "Summer 2025: Iran and the Escalating Drought and Water Crisis," emphasizes that many parts of Iran, especially the central and southern regions, are facing prolonged water shortages, while farmers are unable to cultivate their crops due to dried-up wells and rivers. This situation has not only destroyed rural livelihoods, but has also triggered large-scale migration to cities, placing additional pressure on urban infrastructure.

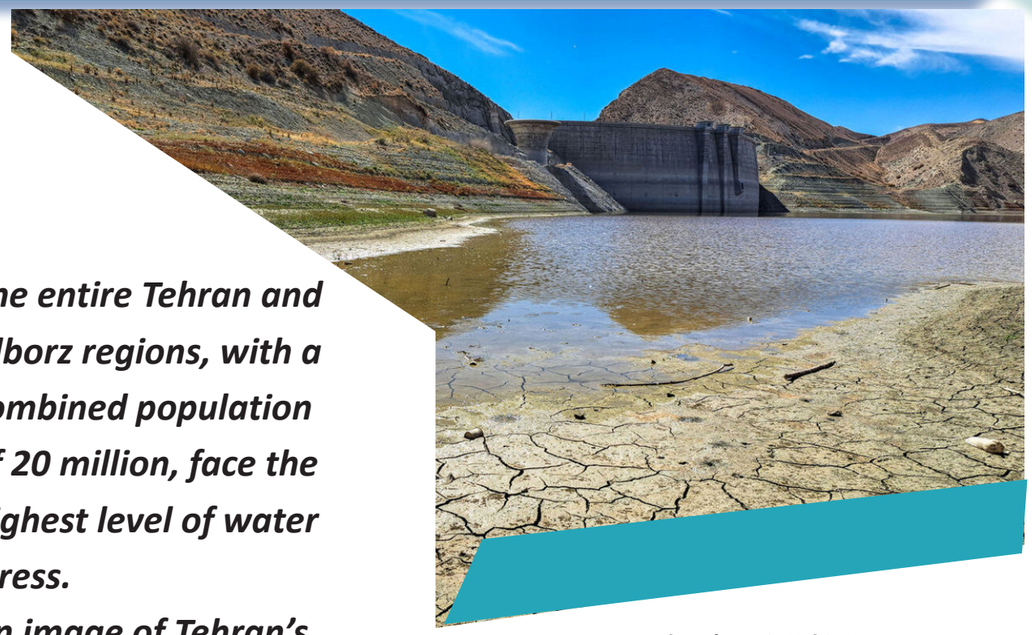
According to Eisa Bozorgzadeh, spokesperson for the water industry, the entire Tehran and Alborz regions, with a combined population of 20 million, face the highest level of water stress. (ISNA News Agency, July 21, 2025)

Energy expert Ali Moradi notes: "This issue is not limited to Tehran; most provinces—including Khorasan, Markazi, Hormozgan, and Sistan and Baluchestan—are also affected, placing the entire country in a state of crisis." (Arman-e Melli, July 20, 2025)

The Didban Iran website reported on July 23, 2025, that 50 percent of Iran's urban population across 24 provinces is experiencing water stress.

Meanwhile, Borna News Agency (November 18, 2024) announced that, according to data from the Iran Meteorological Organization, nearly the entire country is affected by drought.

According to NASA, Iran entered a 30-year drought cycle eight years ago. The severity of the drought is so extreme that Iranian agriculture is on the verge of total collapse, and the country is expected to become a full-scale importer of agricultural products. (Etemad – September 17, 2025)



Tehran's Amir-Kabir Dam

"The entire Tehran and Alborz regions, with a combined population of 20 million, face the highest level of water stress. An image of Tehran's Amir-Kabir Dam reveals this bitter truth."

3. The Double Burden on Women

The catastrophe of water scarcity has profound social and economic consequences that affect millions of lives in Iran. Long and unplanned water cuts have paralyzed urban and rural life; agriculture has collapsed, livestock suffer from thirst, and families lack even drinking water.

Signs of water scarcity appear in family relations, household economies, physical and mental health, and the growing wave of internal migration. Because of women's traditional responsibilities, such as caring for children or the elderly, preparing food, maintaining hygiene, and managing gardens and livestock, they bear the greatest stress.

It is women who, from morning to night, must manage the crisis of water shortage. The psychological strain caused by repeated water cuts, long queues at water tanks, deteriorating hygiene for children and women, and rising water costs deprive them of learning opportunities, health, and leisure. These conditions lead to depression, chronic anxiety, rising family tensions, and domestic violence.

3.1 Health Issues and Diseases Caused by Water Shortage

Lack of access to basic human rights such as clean water directly affects hygiene and health, especially for women, whose health needs are often treated as taboo subjects in Iranian society. In times of water scarcity, women cannot easily express or resolve their hygiene-related problems, and given the heavy workload many carry, their own health often becomes their last priority.

Marzieh, 32, from Chabahar, explains:

"Despite the coastal location of Konarak and Chabahar, there is no reliable supply of fresh water for these towns. We're forced to use salty and hard water for household chores like washing clothes and dishes, and even for bathing and toilets. Many women here suffer from infections, kidney stones, and digestive disorders." (Radio Zamaneh, December 3, 2024)

Salomeh from Gomishan, a northern Iranian town once known for fishing and caviar trade, adds:

"We've never had purified water here. The water in Gomishan has always been salty. Managing drinking water has always been the responsibility of women. I remember women tying their children to their backs with a chador and walking to fill water from the tankers. Women's and bladder diseases are common here, but there are almost no medical facilities because the town has been deliberately kept underdeveloped." (Radio Zamaneh, December 3, 2024)

Moreover, to access water, women often have to walk through remote and dangerous paths, exposing them to attacks by wild animals, the risk of sexual assault, and skeletal problems caused by physical strain. (Local newspaper Payam-e Ma, May 17, 2023)

3.2 Long Queues and "Water Portering"

In regions without water, women and children, especially young girls with limited physical strength, are forced to walk long distances to fetch water from springs, wells, or hootags (traditional open-water reservoirs) especially in Sistan and Baluchestan province. Many have lost their lives to crocodile attacks or drowning in these reservoirs.

Many women in this province suffer from anemia, vitamin D deficiency, and joint problems, all of which are worsened by the daily task of carrying heavy containers of water over long distances. (Jame'e 24, July 31, 2021)

Elnaz, a 36-year-old Baluch woman, says:

"In Nikshahr and nearby villages, water supply is often cut off for days. Water tankers come to sell drinking water, but even that water is not clean. Many of us must walk far to find springs or other water sources, which takes a lot of time, worsens our joint pain, and leaves us with less time to care for our children." (Radio Zamaneh, December 3, 2024)

In Khuzestan, water scarcity has become unbearable. Temperatures exceeding 50°C, lack of drinkable water, and saline rivers have turned life in this region into a living hell. Women and children spend hours in long queues to fill pots and barrels from water tankers.

Videos from villages like Abu Agab near Abadan show heartbreaking scenes of small children running after tankers with buckets in hand. (Mazra'e Sabz, July 27, 2025)

3.3 Water Shortage and Violence Against Women

Beyond household hardships, water scarcity also disrupts local economies and livelihoods, leading to widespread poverty. In turn, poverty contributes to child marriage, domestic violence, and various social harms. "One of the main causes of violence against women is poverty," notes Jame'e 24. (July 31, 2021)

Salomeh explains:

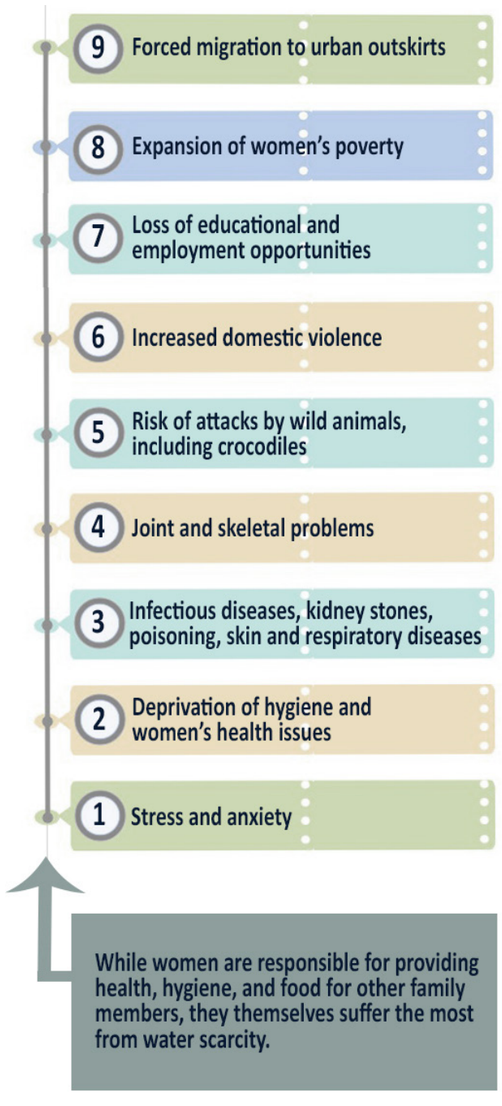
"As our city's economy worsened, education and healthcare declined too, and child marriage increased. Imagine how hard it is for a 15- or 16-year-old girl, already married, to deal with the water crisis, become pregnant, give birth, and care for her baby in these conditions." (Radio Zamaneh, October 17, 2024)

This pattern is visible throughout Iran's water-deprived regions, particularly in rural parts of Sistan and Baluchestan and South Khorasan, where the water crisis fuels school dropouts, child and forced marriages, and the neglect of women's health and hygiene. (Bahre Vari Website, December 17, 2024)

3.4. Loss of Educational and Employment Opportunities

The dominant culture imposed by the clerical regime — which defines the man as the "head of the household" and "provider," and the woman as "dependent" and "provided for" — has made women increasingly vulnerable amid the water crisis. In this culture, the significant role of women in the informal family economy, particularly in household, agricultural, and

livestock sectors, is ignored. Women spend their time and energy collecting and storing water and raw materials, as well as preparing food and maintaining family hygiene. Yet it is the man who gains access to the marketplace, recognition, employment, and wages. As women are distanced from opportunities for education and entry into the economic cycle, they move closer to the cycle of poverty. (Bahre Vari Website, December 17, 2024)



3.5. Reproduction of Feminized Poverty and Social Harm

In Iran, especially in the southern and southeastern regions, many villages lack access to piped drinking water and struggle with severe water shortages and drought. The little available water is often scarce and sometimes must be purchased. This situation perpetuates the cycle of poverty.

Leaving farmland uncultivated due to water scarcity negatively affects employment and family economies. Many men are forced to migrate seasonally in search of work, leaving women and children behind in waterless villages to face countless hardships. These women, mostly due to poverty and social conditions, are poorly educated and lack formal, paid employment, making it impossible to secure a stable livelihood for themselves and their families. (Bahre Vari Website, December 17, 2024)

The water crisis has harmed women in two major ways. First, water management within households largely falls on women, and this responsibility is difficult in itself. However, due to the economic crisis and the growing migration of men, women are also forced to earn small incomes through handicrafts such as embroidery, which greatly increases their burden. Meanwhile, middlemen buy these products from the women at very low prices and sell them in Tehran for several times more. Most of the women have little bargaining power, as many of them do not even speak Persian fluently. (Radio Zamaneh, October 17, 2024)

These hardships sometimes force people into choices they would never willingly make. Therefore, water scarcity can also contribute to social problems such as begging. (Jame'e 24, July 31, 2021; Local Newspaper Payam-e Ma, May 17, 2023)

3.6. Forced Migration and Urban Marginalization

One of the most evident social consequences of the water crisis is the large-scale migration from rural areas to cities. The drying up of wells and rivers in provinces such as Khuzestan, Sistan and Baluchestan, and Fars has forced farmers to abandon their lands. These forced migrations, often ending up on the outskirts of major cities like Tehran, Mashhad, and Isfahan, have led to the expansion of urban slums and the deepening of poverty. The displaced populations, deprived of basic services such as access to clean drinking water, face inhumane living conditions. The regime has not only failed to implement any plans to manage these migrations but has also resorted to suppressing the protests of the affected people. (IranPedia, May 2, 2025)

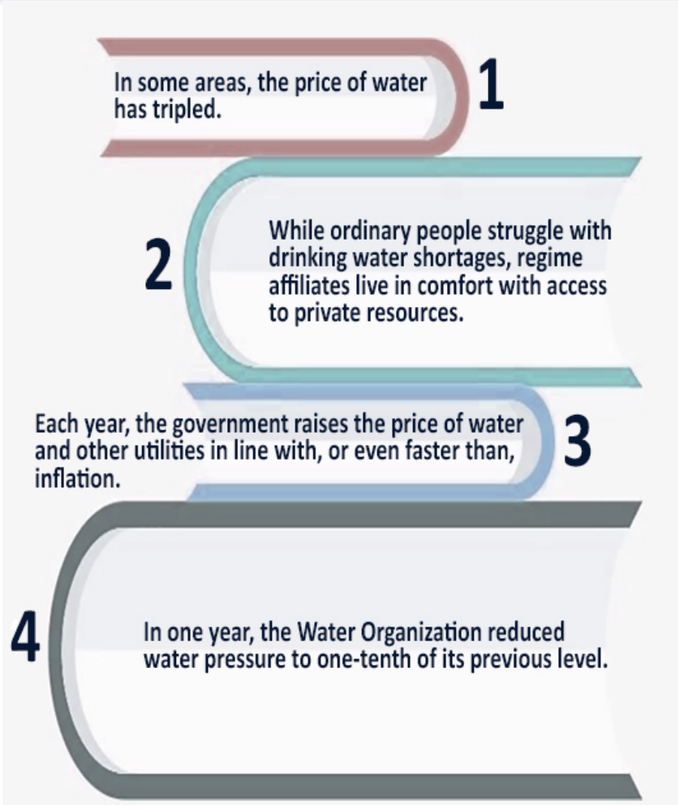
4. Collapse of Agriculture and Food Insecurity

The water crisis has directly destroyed the livelihoods of millions of Iranian farmers and jeopardized the country's food security. According to a report by Borna News Agency on December 18, 2024, widespread drought in 2025 has reduced agricultural production to zero in many regions. This situation has been especially catastrophic in areas such as Khuzestan, once known as the "granary of Iran." Farmers, unable to cultivate their lands due to the lack of water, now face massive debts and extreme poverty. The decline in agricultural production has not only driven up food prices but also turned Iran into a major importer of grains.

5. Rising Inequality and Widening Class Divide

The water crisis has deepened social inequalities in Iran and widened the class divide. While ordinary people in deprived areas struggle with shortages of drinking water, regime affiliates and the wealthy continue to live comfortably, enjoying access to private resources such as deep wells or expensive water supplies. This inequality is also evident in Tehran: affluent northern districts are supplied by private water tankers, while the southern parts of the city face severe rationing. The regime, responsible for fueling these disparities through discriminatory policies, has taken no steps toward equitable resource distribution. Instead, it has chosen to silence the voices of the deprived through repression. (IranPedia, May 2, 2025)

The displaced populations, deprived of basic services such as access to clean drinking water, face inhumane living conditions.

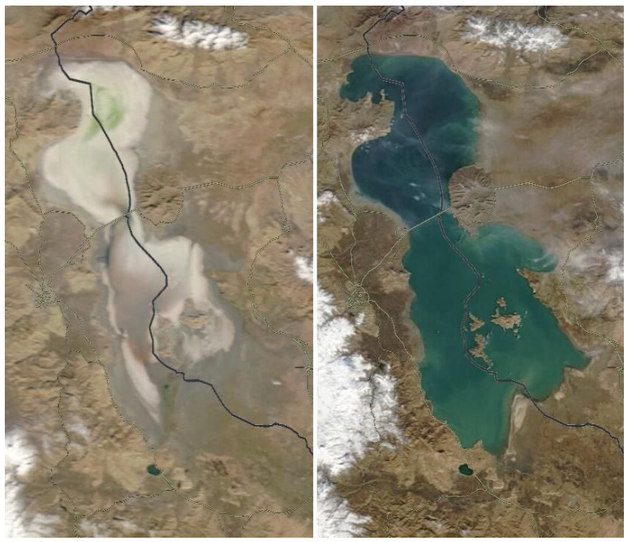


The price of water in some areas of Iran has risen to two to three times its previous rate. This increase has created more psychological and economic pressure for household consumers than it has acted as a deterrent. According to Mohammad Emami-Kurandeh, a legal expert, when subsidies were targeted, energy carriers were prioritized: water, gas, electricity, and anything recognized as energy. The goal was for the government not to pay subsidies for these carriers and to charge people the actual cost of providing them. In return, the additional income from these bills was supposed to be used to support vulnerable, low-income, and deprived segments of society, in other words, the same subsidies paid to the people.

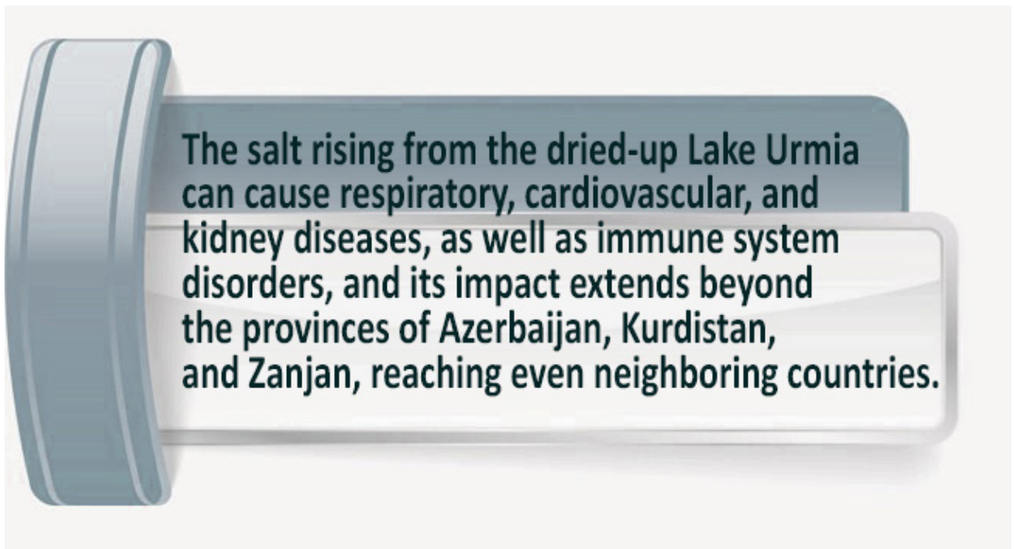
However, this policy caused widespread discrimination and disorder. Today, the number of subsidy recipients, which was supposed to include about 50 to 70 million people in those years, has dropped to less than 20 million. In fact, under the pretext of targeting subsidies and aiding the deprived, the government has excluded over 60 to even 80 percent of the population from legally receiving subsidies and now provides all energy carriers at market rates. As a result, costs have risen, government revenue has increased significantly, and most importantly, each year, when the government faces a budget deficit, additional subsidy recipients are arbitrarily removed under flimsy pretexts. Every year, alongside inflation, or even faster, the government raises the prices of water, electricity, gas, and other energy carriers multiple times. Over the past year, the Water Organization has reduced water pressure to one-tenth of its normal level, effectively depriving people of natural access to water for which they are paying substantial amounts. (Jahan-e Sanat, July 19, 2025)

6. Threat to Public Health and the Spread of Diseases

The shortage of clean water has had serious consequences for public health and has increased the risk of disease outbreaks. A report by Euronews on March 13, 2025, titled "Iran's Harsh Winter Is Over: Will the Water Crisis Hit People in Summer?" highlights health problems in Khuzestan, where residents, lacking access to safe water, have been forced to use contaminated sources. This situation has led to a rise in diarrhea and gastrointestinal infections.
In the northwest, a large part of the once-beautiful Lake Urmia has turned into a salt flat. The salt rising from this lake can be carried thousands of kilometers away, reaching the northeast of the country. According to available data and studies conducted years ago by Western environmental experts, these particles can cause respiratory, cardiovascular, and kidney diseases, as well as immune system disorders. The impact extends beyond the provinces of Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, and Zanjan, even affecting neighboring countries. Moreover, studies by Tabriz University of Medical Sciences indicate that some of these health effects are already manifesting. (Jahan-e Sanat Newspaper, July 22, 2025)
Eisa Kalantari, the former head of the Environmental Protection Organization, admitted last year: "In 2015, a series of skin and blood pressure-related illnesses occurred among citizens, which are among the hazards of the lake's drying." (Jahan-e Sanat Newspaper, July 22, 2025)



Lake Urmia before and after drying up



7. Women at the Forefront of Popular Protests

Water scarcity, as a driving factor, has escalated social tensions in Iran to unprecedented levels. The prominent presence of women in these protests is notable. Large-scale demonstrations in Khuzestan, which emerged in recent years due to water shortages and the drying of wetlands, continued in the summer of 2025. Instead of addressing the problem, the regime labeled protesters as "rioters" and, using military force, killed or arrested dozens of people. (Euronews, March 13, 2025)
Similar protests took place from May to August 2025 in various cities across Iran, including Shahr-e Kord and provinces in the south and center, with slogans such as "Water, electricity, life; it is our undeniable right" being chanted. (Wikipedia, August 11, 2025)
In Tehran, residents of Nasimshahr took to the streets on July 21 due to water shortages and three days of complete water cuts during the scorching heat of July.
Additionally, on July 23 and 24, Tehran and Eslamshahr witnessed anti-government protests in response to water and electricity cuts. In Tehran on July 23, protesters in several districts expressed their anger over the country's disastrous situation with slogans such as "Death to Khamenei, curse on Khomeini," "All these years of crimes, death to this regime," and "Death to the dictator." In Eslamshahr on July 24, the slogan "Death to Khamenei" echoed in response to repeated power outages. Similar protests were also reported on the same day in Marvdasht and Torbat Jam.
On Friday, July 25, the residents of Barzanun, Nishapur, also protested the ongoing water shortage by blocking the road. Villagers stated, "If there is no water, and if there is no response from the regime's authorities, then the road should not be open either!" (Secretariat of the National Council of Resistance of Iran, July 25, 2025)

Final Word

The crisis currently referred to as an energy imbalance is neither sudden nor the result of climate change; rather, it is the cumulative outcome of corruption and policies imposed on the people, intertwined with the nature of a religious dictatorship. The water crisis is yet another of the countless reasons behind the political instability and the lack of legitimacy of the clerical regime.
Kaveh Madani, head of the Water, Environment, and Health Institute at the United Nations University, says: "If we pay attention to our country, we can see the signs of a serious, hard-to-treat disease, a severe infection, or even cancer in various sectors. One day we can't breathe because of Tehran's air pollution, another day it's dust storms, another day the water situation, the status of an educational institution, the price of the dollar and the economy, the stock market, or industry. If we look closely, the signs of crisis are appearing across all sectors. Many of these issues share common roots. We must admit our failure." (Etemad, July 26, 2025)
Repeated protests in Khuzestan, Isfahan, and other provinces, triggered by water shortages, reflect the growing anger of the people at the regime's incompetence. The suppression of these protests, which has resulted in the deaths of demonstrators, has further fueled public outrage and weakened the foundations of the regime's power.
Signs of a nationwide uprising aimed at overthrowing this illegitimate regime are visible everywhere. What concerns the international community and awakened consciences, however, is assisting the people of Iran in this critical endeavor. Recognizing the organized alternative of the Iranian people, who have fought for Iran's freedom for decades, will not only accelerate the liberation of the Iranian people from dictatorship but will also bring peace and friendship to the free world.

Appendix:

1. Dimensions of Water Crisis in Iran

When the Lakes Disappear

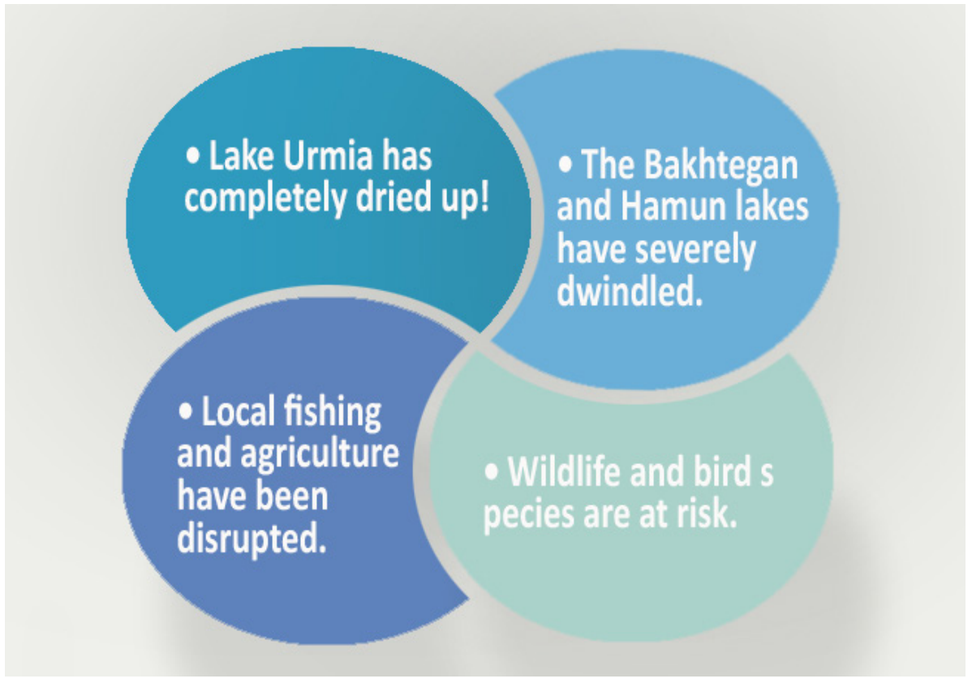
On September 7, 2025, Donya-e-Eqtesad reported: "Lake Urmia has completely dried up." According to the latest NASA satellite image of Lake Urmia, the once-blue gem of northwestern Iran has entirely vanished, no trace of a lake can be seen in the aerial image. Earlier in the summer, environmental authorities had already warned that Lake Urmia would be 100 percent dry by the end of the season.

Located in northwestern Iran, Lake Urmia was once the largest lake in the Middle East, spanning at least 5,200 square kilometers.

In addition to Lake Urmia, Lake Bakhtegan, Iran's second-largest lake located in Fars Province, is also struggling with severe water loss and drying. Renowned for its rich biodiversity and birdlife, the lake's decline is largely attributed to the construction of Doroodzan, Sivand, and Molla-Sadra dams along the upper reaches of the Kor and Sivand rivers.

Lake Hamun, in Sistan and Baluchestan Province, is likewise facing drying and a sharp drop in water levels. The lake holds major economic significance for the local population, as fishing and farming traditionally take place around it, and some of the indigenous people use the lake's resources to sustain their daily lives. (Ghatreh News, "The Main Causes of Iran's Lake Drying Crisis")

Even the Caspian Sea is drying up under the shadow of government corruption. Over the past 20 years, its water level has dropped by two meters. (Khabar Online, February 8, 2025)



Lake Maharlou

Lake Urmia

The Rivers Are Dying

The situation of Iran's rivers is equally alarming. Aftab News reported on July 4, 2022: "Iran's most turbulent rivers have dried up; the country's water resources are in a critical state." The Karun River, Iran's longest and most water-rich river, has dried up. The Sefidrud River, the second-longest river in Iran and the primary water source for over 170,000 hectares of rice paddies in Gilan Province, is now on the verge of collapse.

Images of dead fish on the cracked, parched riverbed have emerged from the Karkheh River, Iran's third-largest river. The Dez River, which flows from the Zagros Mountains, is taking its last breaths and has completely dried up for the first time in recorded history. Other rivers—including the Kashkan in Lorestan, the Chalous River, one of Iran's water-rich rivers, the Aras, and the Hirmand River once known as the "Wild River" have all dried up.

Hedayat Fahmi, former director-general of water resources at the Ministry of Energy, states that in Iran, catastrophic management attributes water scarcity to climate change to avoid taking responsibility for its own failures.

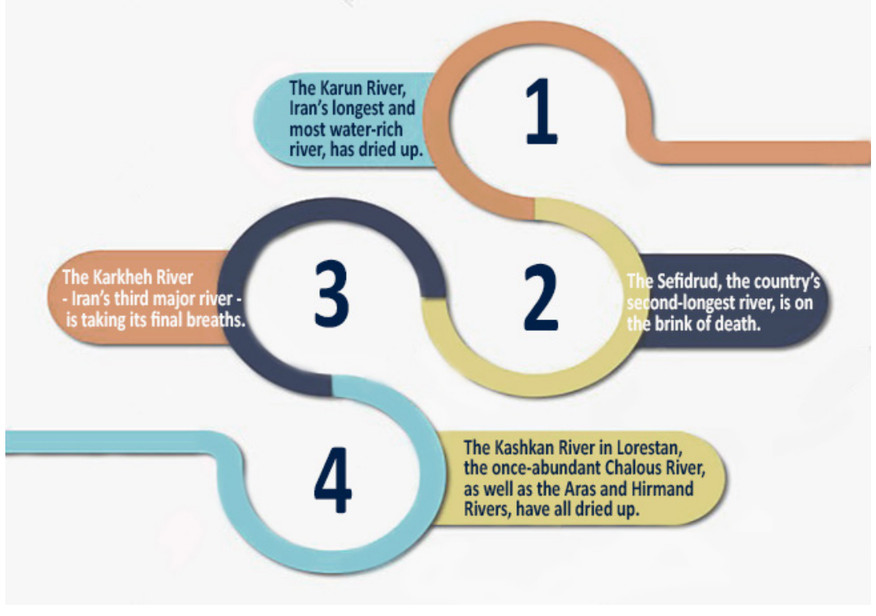
Mournful Wetlands

Another devastating aspect of Iran's water crisis is the destruction of wetlands and aquatic ecosystems, which play a vital role in environmental balance. Shargh Network (March 15, 2025) reported the drying of wetlands such as Hoor-al-Azim in Khuzestan and Gavkhuni in Isfahan. Once havens for diverse plant and animal species, these wetlands have been transformed into barren lands due to uncontrolled dam construction and water diversion by the regime.

The series of dams on the Zayandeh-Rud River, built to supply water for industrial and agricultural projects affiliated with the regime, have dried up Gavkhuni Wetland, and the resulting dust storms pose serious health risks to residents. (Iranpedia, May 2, 2025)

Mazandaran Wetland

Kashkan River



Empty Dams

The condition of Iran's dams represents another tragic chapter in the country's water crisis. Water stored behind Iran's dams is evaporating at a rate three times higher than the global average. (Ebtekar, July 21, 2025)

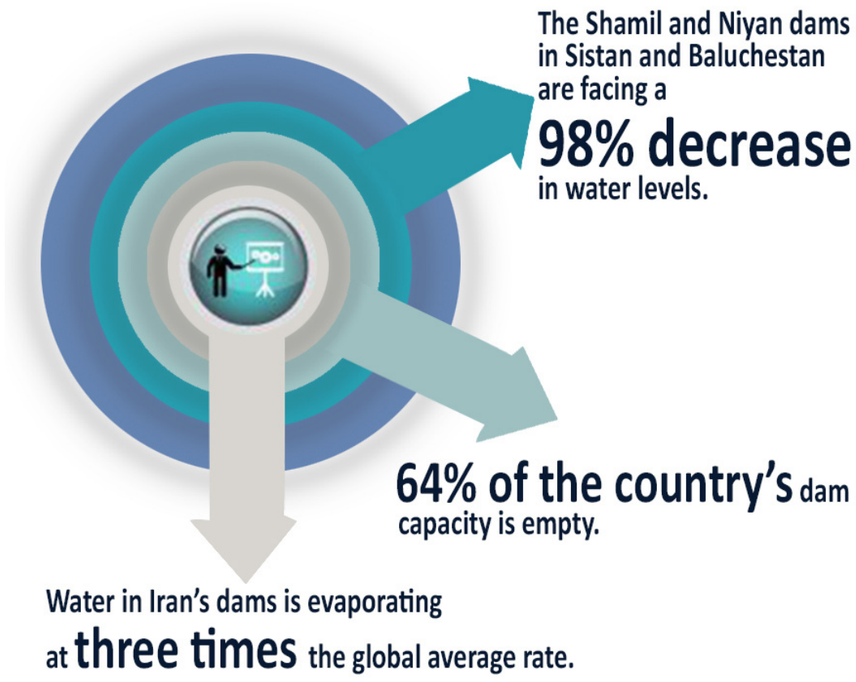
State news agency Mehr reported under the headline, "64% of the country's dams are empty": an inventory of the country's dams shows that dams in Tehran, Khorasan Razavi, Qom, West Azerbaijan, Sistan and Baluchestan, Hormozgan, Golestan, South Khorasan, Zanjan, Kerman, Fars, and Markazi provinces are in critical condition. (Mehr News Agency, September 21, 2025)

The total water volume in the country's dams has decreased by 25% compared to last year. Amir-Kabir Dam, as of September 20, 2025, held 30 million cubic meters of water, reflecting 17% of its capacity, a 73% decrease compared to the same time last year. Lar Dam, with 24 million cubic meters of water, is only 3% full, 43% less than the previous year. (ILNA, September 21, 2025)

Energy expert Mohammad Ebrahim Raisi warned that Tehran's water crisis could escalate if Mamlou Dam goes offline; if this occurs, Latyan, Lar, and Karaj dams would also be affected. (Setareh-e Sobh newspaper, June 25, 2025)

Among provinces, Hormozgan has suffered the most, with Shamil and Niyan dams experiencing a 98% decrease compared to last year, marking the most critical situation. These dams previously played a key role in supplying water to southern Iran. Esteghlal Dam in the province has also seen a 76% reduction in water levels. (Ham-Mihan, July 21, 2025)

Tehran Dam



Land Subsidence and Its Impact on Infrastructure

A study published in 2024 revealed that excessive extraction of groundwater resources has caused widespread land subsidence; in some areas, the rate exceeds 10 centimeters per year, affecting 3.5% of Iran's land. The subsidence rate in certain regions is among the highest in the world, increasing the vulnerability of critical infrastructure, including airports and roadways. (The Guardian, September 25, 2024)

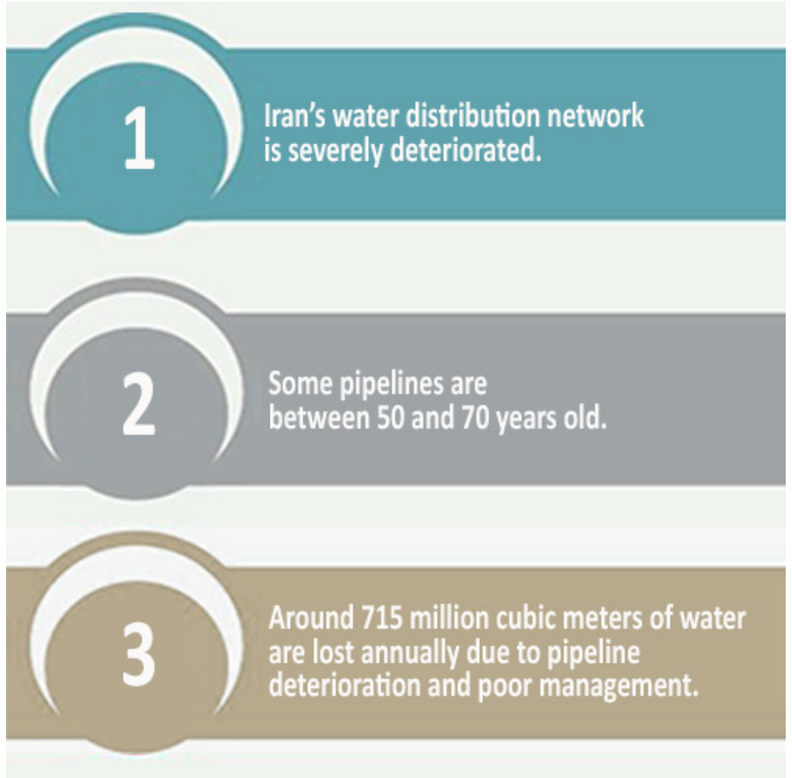
State-affiliated media Arman-e-Melli also reported on July 20, 2025 that 30 provinces are experiencing subsidence due to extraction of groundwater resources. Energy expert Ali Moradi stated that over 60% of the country's water supply comes from underground sources, with extraction rates three times faster than their natural replenishment.

2. Structural Mismanagement and the Water Mafia

It must be said that the term "mismanagement" is insufficient to describe the performance of the clerical regime. Even state media use the term "Water Mafia." Everyone in Iran knows that this phrase refers to a network of regime-linked individuals and institutions — ministers, contractors, and security organizations — that push forward large, water-intensive projects for political and economic gain, without regard for technical or environmental considerations.

The state-run Jahan-e San'at newspaper wrote: "The current crisis is neither sudden nor a product of climate change, but the accumulated result of years of mismanagement." (Jahan-e San'at newspaper, July 26, 2025)

According to Hossein Raghfar, an economist, "One of the key factors behind the water crisis has been the adoption of flawed or unprincipled policies imposed on the country.



The second factor is greed; the exploitation of national resources under economic pretexts. Since the years following the Iran–Iraq War, and even during the first decade after the 1979 Revolution, projects were launched with no regard for environmental principles. For example, the Mobarakeh Steel Complex was established in the dry region of Isfahan (central Iran), and hundreds of other water-intensive factories have caused major disasters for the country. The construction of steel and petrochemical plants in Iran's eastern and western dry regions, if not outright betrayal, was completely unprincipled. Unfortunately, these programs still continue. Numerous dams have been built in desert areas incapable of retaining water." (Arman-e Melli newspaper, July 23, 2025)

Mehdi Esmaeili Bidehendi, a professor at the University of Tehran's Faculty of Environment, stated: "Our dams have unintentionally contributed to higher evaporation. In the past, water flowed freely through riverbeds and replenished our groundwater. By storing it behind dams, we created reservoirs where constant evaporation occurs, and the rate of evaporation from these reservoirs is far greater than if the water had continued its natural course through rivers." (Ebtekar newspaper, July 21, 2025)

Energy expert Mohammad Ebrahim Raisi explained: "Groundwater functions as a stored resource. But now, over 60 percent of Tehran's water comes from groundwater and wells drilled within the city. The excessive withdrawal from the country's aquifers has increased from 130 billion to around 160 billion cubic meters." (Setareh-e Sobh newspaper, June 25, 2025)

Historical Summary

In the 1980s and 1990s, under the pretext of economic self-sufficiency and post–Iran–Iraq War reconstruction, the Iranian regime launched massive dam-building projects without adequate environmental studies.

For example, the Gotvand Dam in Khuzestan Province (southwestern Iran), inaugurated in 2011, was built atop salt domes, which salinized the Karun River and caused one of Iran's worst environmental disasters. This project, which consumed vast amounts of public funds, not only failed to help local agriculture but also destroyed downstream wetlands and disrupted the lives of millions of people.

From the 2000s onward, regime institutions — particularly the Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) — took control of construction and agricultural projects, leading to excessive extraction of groundwater. Multiple independent reports indicate that IRGC-controlled companies drilled illegal wells and diverted water to industrial zones under their control, turning once-fertile plains into barren lands.

This systematic plunder, combined with the lack of oversight over water consumption in agriculture (which uses more than 90 percent of the country's water resources), laid the foundation for today's crisis.

In the 2010s, as climate change intensified and rainfall decreased, environmental experts increasingly warned of the imminent collapse of Iran's water resources. Yet the regime, instead of reforming its policies, chose to suppress dissent and deny reality.

Public protests in Khuzestan Province in 2021, sparked by water shortages and the drying of the Hour al-Azim Wetland, were violently crushed, and no fundamental solution was offered. This trend continued through 2025.

This historical background shows that Iran's water crisis is not merely the result of incompetence; it is part of the regime's deliberate strategy to preserve its power at the cost of destroying the nation's natural resources. (IranPedia, May 2, 2025)

3.Aging Water Infrastructure and Waste

The state-run EcoResaneh website wrote on July 15, 2025: "Iran's water distribution network is outdated, and there has not been sufficient investment to modernize it… Discussions about the existence of a 'Water Mafia,' particularly in critical regions such as Isfahan, have not been clarified or addressed."

Mohammad Ebrahim Raeisi stated: "Around 715 million cubic meters of water are lost annually due to the deterioration of the pipeline network and weaknesses in infrastructure management and investment." (Setareh-e Sobh newspaper, June 25, 2025)

Urban affairs expert Hossein Imani Jajarmi noted: "Tehran's population continues to grow due to migration from other cities, even though its water resources are limited and unstable." (Arman-e Emrooz newspaper, July 22, 2025)

He added that water pressure drops cause serious issues even for homes on the first and second floors. However, if the pressure is increased, leakage rises to about 80 million cubic meters annually. Some pipes are between 50 and 70 years old. (Etemad newspaper, July 22, 2025)

Mehdi Pirhadi, head of the Tehran City Council's Commission for Health, Environment, and Urban Services, stated, "More than 165 million cubic meters of leakage have occurred from the Lar Dam alone." (Ham-Mihan newspaper, July 21, 2025)

Reza Haji-Karim, head of the Water Federation, admitted, "Even under these critical conditions, construction permits are still being issued in the western and eastern parts of Tehran." (Jahan-e San'at newspaper, August 6, 2025)

4. Regional Discrimination in Water Distribution

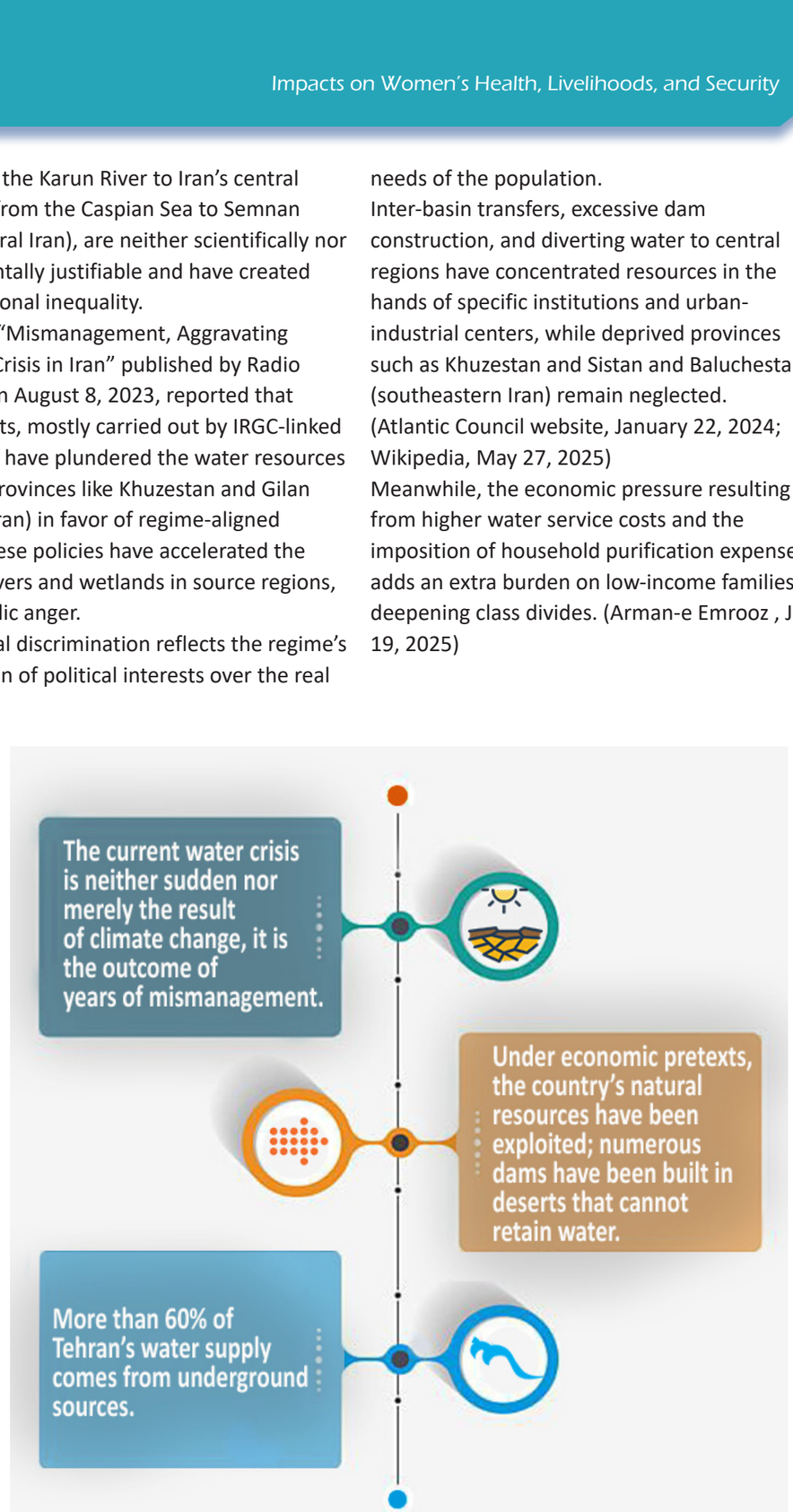
One of the most destructive aspects of the regime's policies is the series of inter-basin water transfer projects implemented to supply water to central and industrial areas favored by the regime. These projects, such as transferring water from the Karun River to Iran's central plateau or from the Caspian Sea to Semnan (north-central Iran), are neither scientifically nor environmentally justifiable and have created blatant regional inequality.

The article "Mismanagement, Aggravating the Water Crisis in Iran" published by Radio Zamaneh on August 8, 2023, reported that such projects, mostly carried out by IRGC-linked companies, have plundered the water resources of border provinces like Khuzestan and Gilan (northern Iran) in favor of regime-aligned regions. These policies have accelerated the drying of rivers and wetlands in source regions, fueling public anger.

This regional discrimination reflects the regime's prioritization of political interests over the real needs of the population.

Inter-basin transfers, excessive dam construction, and diverting water to central regions have concentrated resources in the hands of specific institutions and urban-industrial centers, while deprived provinces such as Khuzestan and Sistan and Baluchestan (southeastern Iran) remain neglected. (Atlantic Council website, January 22, 2024; Wikipedia, May 27, 2025)

Meanwhile, the economic pressure resulting from higher water service costs and the imposition of household purification expenses adds an extra burden on low-income families, deepening class divides. (Arman-e Emrooz , July 19, 2025)



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