

Iran on the edge of a demographic trap

EXCLUSIVE

Social Desk

Iran is currently facing a demographic trap that could have serious economic and social consequences for the country in the coming years.

This “demographic trap is much closer than what people and responsible authoritative institutions feel,” according to Kazem Foroutan, the secretariat of the National Population Rejuvenation Headquarters, who spoke to IRNA on Saturday.

Simply put, a demographic trap is a situation where a country's population growth slows down but its dependency ratio, i.e. the proportion of non-working people to working people, remains high, which leads to economic and social challenges. This can occur when a society experiences a decline in birth rates without a corresponding increase in productivity or employment opportunities, resulting in an aging population that relies heavily on the workforce for support.

Iran's population growth has indeed slowed down significantly in recent decades, and its dependency ratio remains high as more and more people become elderly and there are fewer young workers to support them.

“We do not have much time to escape this demographic trap, and only with integrity, planning



● IRNA

and acting on then it's possible to change the population culture,” Foroutan further warned.

According to the latest census data, Iran's population grew by only 1.2 percent between 2016 and 2021, the lowest rate in decades. At the same time, the percentage of people aged 65 and over increased from 5.2 percent to 6.2 percent, while the percentage of people aged 15 to 64 decreased from 70.4 percent to 68.8 percent.

However, citing recent policies on population rejuvenation, Foroutan stated that things might change

“with positive and principal implementation” of those policies.

This demographic shift happening in Iran is putting a strain on Iran's public finances, as more and more people retire and start drawing on pensions and healthcare services. The government is already struggling to fund social welfare programs, and the situation is likely to get worse in the coming years. Concerns about Iran's demographic shift is nothing new. Previously, many experts have warned about the dire consequences of losing Iran's still open demographic window.

Speaking to Tasnim News Agency in 2021, Maryam Ardabili, a futurologist said, “We are really worried about a demographic trap or low birthrate trap.” She called the generation born from 1981-1991 a great gift for the country and stated that “The golden scenario would only materialize if this generation enter the managerial, transformation, and trend-setting processes.” Noting that Iran has little time to set cultural trends in terms of childbearing, she added, “Setting cul-

tural trends is a time-consuming process and we don't have much time. If we lose this golden opportunity, we'll have to invest 100 times more than what we need today just to gain half of what we can today.” Despite all the concerns, the aging population in Iran will soon affect the labor market – if it hasn't already. With fewer young people entering the workforce, there may not be enough workers to fill all the available jobs. This could lead to labor shortages, wage inflation, and reduced economic growth. Moreover, the healthcare and social services sectors are particularly vulnerable to the effects of an aging population. As more people require medical care and social support, there may not be enough trained professionals to meet the demand.

The demographic trap would also have social consequences in Iran. Family structures may change, with fewer people available to care for elderly relatives. This can lead to isolation and loneliness for older people, and put additional strain on healthcare and social

services.

Also, earlier this year, in a bid to sound the alarm over Iran's aging population at the International Congress of Palliative Care and Support for the Elderly, Kurosh Saki, president of Kashan University of Medical Sciences, said, “It's been about three decades that the country's population growth has had a downward trend.” He then proposed taking measures in order to remedy the situation.

To address these challenges, however, Iran will need to adopt innovative policies and investments in areas such as education, healthcare, and social welfare. The government may also need to consider increasing immigration and encouraging higher birth rates to boost the country's workforce, while trying to counter losing its educated workforce to immigration. All in all, the demographic trap is a serious challenge for Iran today that requires immediate attention. Failure to address it could have severe consequences for the country's economic and social well-being in the coming years.



● IRNA

Barcelona battles port authorities to curb cruise tourists



● GETTY IMAGES

The ships, at times dwarfing the average apartment building, begin lumbering into Barcelona while much of the city is still asleep. Stretching as long as five buses, some come to embark or disembark passengers, while others disgorge thousands of day-trippers keen to glimpse the city's modernist architecture and stroll the narrow streets of the gothic quarter.

It's a scene that plays out daily in Barcelona – much to the chagrin of some local officials. Last Monday, five cruise ships were slated to arrive; this Friday, on 14 April, eight are expected, The Guardian reported.

As the pace of arrivals picks up in this city of 1.7 million residents, the municipality is fighting back, in hopes of tempering Barcelona's status as one of the world's most popular cruise destinations.

“You will be walking and all of a sudden there's this mass of people who appear together in the street,” said Janet Sanz, the city's deputy major and counselor responsible for ecology, urbanism and mobility. “They don't consume anything and they don't have an economic impact ... They just wander for four or five hours and leave.”

The city has long waged battle over the number of cruise ship tourists arriving in the city which, in 2019, hit a record high of just over 3.1 million. Their efforts, however, have been consistently stymied by their lack of jurisdiction over the port.

This time around – as Sanz noted in a recent letter to the regional government – there are more reasons than ever for the region to flex its power over the port and curb arrivals, from the record-breaking number of passengers expected this year, to the precedent-setting limits put in place for Palma in Mallorca, the largest port in Spain's Balearic islands.

The region is also wrestling with its worst drought in decades, forcing water restrictions and a scramble to clear up to 1.5 tons of fish a day from a rapidly dwindling reservoir. “It is completely incomprehensible that we're suffering our driest year in 100 years but expecting more cruise passengers than ever,” said Sanz.



PIC OF THE DAY

A magnificent festivity, honoring the attendance of 4,000 nine-year-old girls and their beloved mothers, was held amidst the enchanting evening prayers of Maghrib and Isha, in the resplendent Shabestan of Imam Javad (PBUH) within the hallowed precincts of Shahcheragh (PBUH).

● AMIR SADEQIAN/TASNIM