



⬆ Crows scavenge for food in the Saravan landfill near the northern city of Rasht, Iran, on November 9, 2017.
● IRNA



⬆ A worker looks around his unhygienic surroundings in one of the largest landfills in Iran in Aradkooh, southern Tehran, on September 13, 2021.
● ALIREZA MASOUMI/ISNA

changing people’s behavior prevents the source separation of waste. In the meantime, municipalities and city council members often refer to the “waste mafia” and waste pickers as the cause of chaos in this field. According to a recent parliamentary report, there are an estimated 14,000 waste pickers in Tehran alone, 4,700 of whom are children, and many of them are Afghan migrants.

Secret dumping, landfill accidents

Before the recent parliamentary session and the reading of the waste report, Damavand city’s Environment Department announced the discovery of waste that had been dumped

by six trucks from northern cities and left on the outskirts of Damavand. This approach to waste management has caused accidents, too. For example, in June 2013, a landslide at the Barmshour landfill in Shiraz killed seven people. The incident occurred when firefighters were trying to put out a fire at the landfill, and the garbage mound suddenly collapsed, burying 12 firefighters and municipality employees under it. Rescuers managed to save five people, but seven others died.

Turkey’s zero-waste experience

Although Iran has had some positive experiences in waste recycling and management, it still lags far behind its neighbor,

Turkey. For example, Hayedeh Shirzadi, an Iranian environmental entrepreneur, started a waste recycling company in Kermanshah in 1996, but due to obstruction by the Kermanshah municipality, she was unable to launch it until 1998. Her story shows the extent of the waste management problem in Iran. In neighboring Turkey, Emine Erdogan, the wife of the president, has been promoting the “Zero Waste” idea since 2017, which has not only improved waste management in Turkey but also prompted the UN to mark March 30th as “Zero Waste Day”. The plan was first implemented among the military and presidential staff. It eventually found its way among the people of Turkey and be-

came a cultural phenomenon. Interestingly, Turkey, with its global greenhouse gas emissions of 1 percent, was one of the few countries that did not join the Paris Agreement until 2021, along with Iran, Eritrea, Iraq, Libya, and Yemen. However, in 2021, the Turkish Parliament approved the agreement. Now, by successfully implementing its “Zero Waste” plan, Turkey has shown a different side of itself to the world. In Iran, however, not only are city and government officials unable to manage waste, but there is also no social movement among the people to address the issue. Perhaps Turkey’s “Zero Waste” experience can be a lesson, as it has prompted cashiers to ask

customers whether they want a plastic bag, instead of assuming that they do. The same phenomenon has already happened in European chain stores as well. Moreover, advertisements on plastic bags in Europe and Turkey promote waste reduction, whereas in Iran, chain stores give away plastic bags for free, and the bags only advertise the store’s logo, with no mention of waste management or reduction. On the other hand, a look at civil activities in Iran shows that not only has no similar movement emerged to improve waste management in Iranian cities, but even campaigns that have been launched to pressure city management to change its

waste management policies have been ineffective. For example, a campaign was launched in Ahvaz in 2021 and 2022 to force the municipality to pay attention to waste management, but it yielded no results. The mayor of Ahvaz, who took office in 2021, removed all waste collection contractors under the pretext of fighting corruption, despite the fact that the city lacks sufficient waste bins. Although the people of Ahvaz protested against the lack of waste bins from January 2022 to June 2022, there was no change in the city’s waste management or an increase in the number of waste bins.

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Two large compost turners operate over the Aradkooh landfill in southern Tehran, Iran.
● HASSAN SHIRVANI/IRNA