

# Demographic alarm grows as marriages, births fall, aging pressure mounts in Iran

## Social Desk

Iran is grappling with a deepening demographic slowdown as official figures show a sharp decline in marriages and births alongside rising aging pressures, prompting senior officials to warn that current trends could reshape the country's social and economic outlook for decades. Health ministry data show births fell by 87,661 in the 2023-2024 period, dropping to 892,268 in 2024, while marriages declined by 38,708 to 431,664 over the same period. The birth-to-death ratio slipped from 2.14 to 1.98, signaling a narrowing population growth buffer as Iran's fertility rate dropped to about

1.34-1.35, well below replacement level. "Marriage is the first link in the chain of population decline," said Deputy Health Minister Alireza Raeisi, noting that economic instability, rising living costs and job insecurity are delaying family formation. "When marriage is postponed, fertility inevitably follows a downward path." Officials also pointed to structural pressures in healthcare and aging. Around 10 percent of Iran's population now accounts for roughly 40 percent of hospital bed occupancy, reflecting what experts describe as a rapidly aging patient base and increasing strain on medical resources.



Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Abbas Salehi warned that demographic imbalance could carry broader national consequences. "If Iran loses its population capital, its econom-

ic and security capacity will be significantly weakened," he said, adding that within three decades, around one-third of the population could be elderly if current fertility trends persist.

The minister noted that while economic factors matter, cultural shifts are also playing a key role. "We are facing a deeper cultural challenge," he said, citing global examples where high-income countries such as Germany, Japan, and South Korea are also experiencing fertility declines. In a separate message, Iran's Leader Seyyed Mojtaba Khomeini also linked population growth to the country's future trajectory, saying the continuation of Iran's national "strength and influence" is closely tied to demographic capacity. He described population policy as a strategic priority, warning that declining fertility could limit long-term national development

and emphasizing the role of encouraging childbirth in shaping what he called a "promising future" for the country. Health officials said nearly 12 million people are currently of marriage age, yet delays in family formation remain widespread. They also reported that fertility has fallen from around 6.5 in the 1980s to near 1.3 today, describing it as a "structural transition" that is difficult to reverse. Population experts estimate that under current conditions Iran's elderly population could rise to 31-32 percent by 2051, with projections ranging from 93 million to just over 100 million depending on fertility recovery scenarios.

## Isfahan draws UNESCO restoration mission after damage to historic landmarks

### Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts said the restoration of Isfahan's historic monuments has been placed at the top of the government's agenda, as UNESCO prepares to send experts to assess and assist recovery efforts following recent damage to the UNESCO-listed city.

Reza Salehi-Amiri, speaking during a visit to the Safavid-era Chehel Sotoun Palace, said coordination with international bodies, including UNESCO, ICESCO and the United Nations cultural system, had intensified in recent weeks, CHTN reported.

He said the UNESCO secretary-general had agreed to dispatch specialists to Iran "at the earliest opportunity." "Isfahan is not just a city of buildings and structures; it is the identity and memory of Iran," Salehi-Amiri said. "It shines like a sun across this land."

He stressed that restoration work on damaged heritage sites would begin after technical assessments and approval by expert councils, adding that the government had prioritized accelerated reconstruction in coordination with local author-



ities and the private sector. Salehi-Amiri said a new high-level restoration committee had been established in Isfahan following a cooperation agreement between the municipality and the provincial heritage office, aimed at speeding up decision-making on preservation projects. "We are determined to restore these monuments so that both Iranian citizens and international visitors can once again experience them," he said. During the visit, officials also unveiled a cooperation framework for heritage management and reviewed damage assessments at several historic structures in the city's UNESCO-listed cultural core, including parts of Naqsh-e Jahan Square. The minister also highlighted Isfahan's expanding role beyond cultural heritage, unveiling plans to position the city as a regional hub for health tourism.

He inaugurated a five-star hotel within the Isfahan Health City complex, describing it as part of a broader investment exceeding 200 trillion rials in modern medical infrastructure. "In the future, Isfahan will stand not only as a cultural capital but also as a global destination for health tourism," he said, citing plans to attract up to six billion dollars in annual revenue from the sector. The minister also introduced a symbolic revival of traditional polo, or Chogan, in Naqsh-e Jahan Square as part of efforts to promote Iran's intangible heritage to international audiences. Salehi-Amiri, whose three-day visit includes heritage site inspections and participation in cultural events, said Isfahan remains "a living museum of Iranian civilization" and pledged continued government support for its restoration and global cultural profile.

## First nat'l museum charter approved in Iran to unify cultural governance

### Arts & Culture Desk

Iran approved its first comprehensive national museum charter, a senior heritage official said, setting out a unified governance framework for the country's 830 museums and formally defining the role of museums within the national cultural system.

Ali Darabi, deputy minister for cultural heritage, told IRNA that the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution had endorsed the "National Museum Charter" after months of consultations with specialists, museum executives and academics, alongside reviews of international and domestic practices. He described the document as a "strategic roadmap" for the future



of Iran's museum sector. Darabi said the Islamic Republic had, for the first time, established a high-level policy document clarifying the functions of museums and outlining the responsibilities of the state and other institutions in supporting and developing the sector. Under the charter, 20 state bodies have been assigned defined responsibilities through

what officials described as an "institutional mapping" mechanism. The entities are required to coordinate with the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts on museum policy, development and oversight. Darabi said one of the charter's central pillars was the establishment of "integrated museum governance", bringing state-run museums,

collections affiliated with the armed forces, banks, public institutions and private-sector museums under a common policy and regulatory structure for the first time.

He said the framework did not entail state ownership or interference in institutional holdings, but instead aimed to introduce shared standards, coherent supervision and coordinated management to curb overlap and fragmentation across the sector.

The charter is expected to strengthen museums' contribution to cultural capital, national identity, public education and tourism development, while consolidating their standing within Iran's broader cultural landscape.

## Iran seeks bigger share of \$350m toy market

### Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's toy market is valued at \$300 million to \$350 million, but domestic producers account for only about \$100 million of that total, Secretary of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution Abdolhossein Khosropanah said in Tehran, as officials moved to bolster local manufacturing and curb imports. Speaking at the 62nd meeting of the Toy Supervisory Council, Khosropanah said, "The global games and toys industry is worth around \$130 billion," adding that Iran must move toward a more coordinated governance model focused on regulation rather than traditional oversight, Mehr News Agency reported. He outlined priorities including investment security, market development, and support for creative industries. Industry representatives and officials also reviewed the implementation of

Iran's national toy document, a policy framework designed to align industrial production with cultural and educational goals. The plan aims to unify fragmented data systems and improve coordination between state bodies and private manufacturers. Hamed Alamati, head of the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA), said Iran plans to launch comprehensive scientific surveys on production and consumption trends. "In previous years, available figures were largely estimated," he said, adding that nationwide exhibitions are being expanded, including in rural provinces, to stimulate local markets. Leila Babaei, a senior cultural affairs official, emphasized the need for unified data collection and inter-agency participation, noting that only one ministry has so far formally appointed a representative to the national

framework. Industry voices raised concerns over informal imports and weak enforcement. It is estimated that 60 to 70 percent of imported toys enter the country outside formal regulatory channels, prompting calls for tighter customs oversight and tariff enforcement. Despite challenges, officials reported progress in production capacity, with more than 600 manufacturing units active and over 40 million toys produced in the current year. Exports reached \$40 million across 25 countries in the year ended March 20, 2025, though officials acknowledged recent fluctuations in trade performance. Khosropanah said the council must focus on "problem-solving governance," not structural expansion, as Iran seeks to reposition toys not only as consumer goods but as instruments of cultural identity and child development.

## Short film 'Warden' from Iran sweeps two awards at Portugal festival

### Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian short film 'Warden' clinched the Best Short Film and Best International Short Film awards at the 13th Leiria International Short Film Festival in Portugal, marking the first time the production has secured a double win at the European event. Written and directed by Sabah Mohammadi, the film was produced by the Iranian Youth Cinema Society's Kurdistan office alongside Mohammadi, ILNA reported.

The annual festival, hosted by the Leiria Film Fest Cultural Association, ran from May 5 to 10 at Miguel Franco Theatre in Leiria. 'Warden' follows the manager of a girls' dormitory whose routine night shift spirals into confrontation after a student returns late, turning an ordinary corridor into a charged emotional crossroads. The cast includes Yasaman Nasiri, Tara Qobadi, Atefeh Azmodeh, Fardin Qaderi and Elham Banihashem. International distribution is handled by Madakto Pictures.

