



HUMAN VOICES BEHIND THE STATISTICS

Selected testimonies reflecting the human impact of inflation, poverty, food insecurity, housing pressures, and declining living standards in Iran.

“From June 10 to July 6, I earned only two million tomans.”

Sanaz, woman-headed household, Eastern Tehran

“My sense of loneliness never ends. Sometimes I feel as if I have been abandoned in a deep well with no rope to climb out.”

Zahra, Street Vendor, Tehran Metro

“For two or three weeks, work completely dried up. I had to borrow money from my brother.”

Shiva, University Graduate and Ride-Hailing Driver

“Sometimes we could not even afford plain bread.”

Tenant woman, Eslamshahr

In November 2025, Fereydoun Rostami, an employee of the Municipality of Marivan, set himself on fire in protest against economic and social pressures. His death became one of the most widely discussed symbols of the hardship experienced by segments of Iran’s workforce.

KEY FINDINGS

Major findings from the report on inflation, poverty, food insecurity, housing pressures, healthcare costs, and economic survival in Iran (2024–2026).

- Annual inflation reached approximately 57.7%, while point-to-point inflation approached 83.9%.

- *Food inflation significantly outpaced general inflation, reducing access to adequate nutrition for many households.*
- *The estimated poverty line for a family of four exceeded 55 million tomans per month, while average wages remained far below this level.*
- *Housing costs absorbed an increasing share of household expenditure, contributing to housing insecurity and displacement.*
- *Rising healthcare costs created growing barriers to medical treatment, particularly for low-income households.*
- *Growing numbers of households relied on borrowing, informal employment, and other survival strategies to meet basic needs.*
- *Women-headed households, informal workers, pensioners, children, and residents of deprived regions were disproportionately affected.*
- *Evidence from official statistics, international assessments, and personal testimonies indicates a widening gap between living costs and household income across Iran.*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between 2024 and 2026, Iran experienced a period of sustained inflation, rising living costs, declining purchasing power, and growing economic pressure on households. Official statistics, assessments by international organizations, and documented testimonies indicate that the gap between household income and the cost of living widened significantly during this period.

Annual inflation reached approximately 57.7 percent in May 2026, while point-to-point inflation approached 83.9 percent. Economic estimates placed the poverty line for a family of four above 55 million tomans per month, while average monthly wages remained substantially below that level. International assessments further estimated that approximately 36 percent of the population lives below the international poverty line.

Food insecurity emerged as one of the most visible consequences of the crisis. International organizations reported food inflation approaching 99 percent in early 2026, while the prices of basic staples such as flour and rice increased dramatically. Evidence presented in this report indicates that many households have reduced food consumption, altered dietary patterns, or relied on informal credit arrangements to obtain essential food items.

The report also documents the growing burden of housing and healthcare costs. Housing-related costs account for approximately 43.7 percent of urban household expenditure, while rising rents have increased pressure on low-income and middle-income households alike. At the same time, rising medical costs have limited access to treatment for some families, contributing to delayed care, incomplete treatment, and increased reliance on borrowing.

In response to these pressures, many households have adopted a range of survival strategies, including multiple jobholding, participation in the informal economy, borrowing, reducing consumption, and sending additional family members into the labor market. International estimates indicate that approximately 39 percent of Iran's employed workforce operates in the informal economy, often without adequate social protection or employment security.

From a human rights perspective, the evidence presented in this report raises concerns regarding access to adequate food, housing, healthcare, work, and an adequate standard of living. Taken together, the findings illustrate how prolonged economic hardship has increasingly affected the daily lives, economic security, and enjoyment of fundamental rights for millions of people across Iran.

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INTRODUCTION

Between 2024 and 2026, Iran experienced a prolonged period of high inflation, declining purchasing power, rising food prices, escalating housing costs, and growing pressure on household livelihoods. Official statistics, statements by government officials, assessments by international organizations, and documented testimonies from citizens all point to a common reality: for a substantial portion of the population, the gap between income and the cost of living widened significantly.

The consequences of this trend extend beyond economic indicators. Rising prices affect access to food, housing, healthcare, education, employment, and social security. For millions of households, economic hardship is no longer measured solely through inflation rates or poverty statistics. It is reflected in daily decisions about whether to pay rent, purchase food, seek medical treatment, or incur debt to cover basic needs.

The evidence presented throughout this report suggests that the burden of the economic crisis has fallen disproportionately on low-income households, women-headed households, informal-sector workers, children, and residents of economically marginalized regions. International organizations including the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the United Nations Development Programme, UNICEF, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the World Food Programme, and the International Labour Organization have all documented aspects of these challenges.

The report examines three interconnected dimensions of the crisis. The first chapter analyzes inflation, poverty, and the erosion of purchasing power. The second chapter focuses on food inflation, food insecurity, and the right to adequate food. The third chapter examines the housing crisis, barriers to healthcare, indebtedness, and household survival strategies.

Taken together, the evidence illustrates how economic pressures have increasingly affected the ability of many households to maintain an adequate standard of living. The report does not seek to measure economic performance alone. Rather, it examines how economic developments have influenced the daily lives and fundamental rights of ordinary people.



CHAPTER 1

Poverty, Inflation, and the Erosion of Purchasing Power

Between 2024 and 2026, the continued rise in living costs and the rapid increase in the prices of goods and services placed growing pressure on Iranian households. Official statistics, statements by government officials, assessments by international organizations, and first-hand accounts from citizens all point to a consistent trend: the gap between income and the cost of living has steadily widened.

Under these conditions, poverty is no longer merely an economic indicator. For millions of people, it has become a daily reality that directly affects access to food, housing, healthcare, education, and other basic necessities. The economic crisis has increasingly extended beyond macroeconomic indicators and entered the everyday lives of ordinary citizens.



The Poverty Line and the Growing Gap Between Income and Living Costs

“The poverty line for a family of four has exceeded 550 million rials (55 million tomans) per month.”

This assessment, made by labor market expert Hamid Haj Esmaeili, is among the clearest indicators of the widening gap between household income and living expenses in contemporary Iran. While economic estimates place the poverty line above 55 million tomans per month, average wages remain significantly below the level required to meet basic living costs.

This gap is not merely an economic statistic. For millions of households, it translates into a continuous decline in purchasing power and increasing difficulty in meeting essential needs. Expenses that were once considered part of ordinary life have become daily concerns for a growing number of citizens; from purchasing food and paying rent to covering healthcare and educational costs.

The impact of economic hardship is visible not only in national indicators but also in household survival strategies. Field reports and case studies indicate that increasing numbers of families have been forced to eliminate non-essential expenses, reduce food consumption, postpone medical treatment, borrow money to pay rent, and work multiple jobs simultaneously. In some cases, economic pressure has contributed to severe social crises.

Warnings about declining purchasing power have not been limited to economists. Government officials and members of parliament have also acknowledged the widening gap between income and living costs.

Nasrollah Pejmanfar, Chairman of the Parliament's Article 90 Commission, warned during discussions on the 2025 state budget:

"A 20 percent salary increase has been proposed while inflation is projected at 33 percent. This means that compensation levels have not been adequately addressed in the budget bill, and the livelihood problems of government employees will certainly increase."

Several months later, Mojtaba Yousefi, spokesperson for Parliament's Budget Consolidation Commission, stated:

"With the budget submitted by the government, employees' purchasing power will decline by 25 percent next year."

Asad Salehi, a member of the Supreme Labor Council, also commented on workers' living conditions:

"The gap between workers' wages and actual market prices has deepened year after year, and the purchasing power of this segment of society continues to decline."

These statements demonstrate that concerns regarding declining purchasing power and rising economic pressure are reflected not only in international assessments and economic analyses, but also in the statements of officials and institutions within Iran itself.

Official data published by the Statistical Center of Iran indicate that annual inflation reached approximately 57.7 percent in May 2026. During the same period, point-to-point inflation was reported at approximately 83.9 percent, meaning that the cost of purchasing a similar basket of goods and services had nearly doubled compared to the previous year.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has also warned that Iran's inflation rate could reach approximately 68.9 percent in 2026, placing the country among those experiencing the highest inflation rates in the world.

The burden of inflation has not been distributed equally across society. According to data from the Statistical Center of Iran, annual inflation for the second income decile reached approximately 50.4 percent, compared with 46.3 percent for the tenth income decile. This disparity indicates that inflation exerts its greatest pressure on households with the fewest financial resources. Because low-income households spend a larger share of their income on food, housing, energy, and transportation, rising prices have had a disproportionately severe impact on their daily lives.

At the same time, official reports and statements by domestic experts point to expanding poverty, declining purchasing power, and growing difficulty in accessing necessities.

Ahmad Meydari, Iran's Minister of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare, acknowledged in January 2025 that preserving workers' purchasing power had become one of the country's most pressing

economic policy challenges. He warned that the continuation of inflationary trends could further reduce the purchasing power of working-class households.

The expansion of poverty among women-headed households presents particularly alarming dimensions. According to data released by the Iranian Welfare Database, approximately 55 percent of women-headed households fall within the country's poorest income decile. Women-headed households now account for more than one-fifth of all households in Iran, while many of these women work in informal, low-income occupations without stable social protection or long-term economic security.

International Assessments: A Broader Picture of Economic Hardship

Assessments by international organizations also point to intensifying economic pressure on Iranian households.

In its latest estimates, the World Bank reported that approximately 36 percent of Iran's population lives below the international poverty line. This figure highlights the vulnerability of a significant portion of society to economic shocks and rising living costs.

The World Bank has further noted that low-income households have borne the heaviest burden of food inflation and housing costs. Rising prices for food and rent have disproportionately affected vulnerable groups, further reducing their ability to meet basic needs.

In its April 2026 World Economic Outlook, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) warned that Iran's inflation rate could reach approximately 68.9 percent, placing the country among the nations experiencing the highest inflation levels worldwide.

Assessments by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) indicate that vulnerable households in Iran spend approximately 45 percent of their total consumption expenditure on food. As a result, increases in food prices directly affect both the quality and quantity of their diets.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in its assessment of conditions in Iran, has referred to a "cost-of-living crisis," emphasizing that rising prices for essential goods, housing, utilities, and energy have made access to basic necessities increasingly difficult for many households. The agency warned that a significant number of families are living at or near subsistence levels.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has likewise warned that rising prices and declining real incomes are placing growing pressure on household living standards and workers' purchasing power. According to the organization's assessment, the continuation of inflationary trends could further reduce workers' real incomes and deepen the economic vulnerability of low-income groups.

The United Nations Development Programme has also estimated that approximately 39 percent of Iran's employed workforce operates within the informal economy. Workers in this sector typically lack job security, social insurance coverage, and effective social protection mechanisms, leaving them particularly exposed to economic shocks.

Taken together, the assessments of international organizations present a picture consistent with official data and domestic statements: a society in which a substantial share of the population faces rising living costs, declining purchasing power, and increasing difficulty in accessing basic necessities.

These findings extend beyond economic indicators alone. Field reports from different regions of Iran suggest that rising living costs, declining purchasing power, and growing economic uncertainty have become part of the daily reality of millions of households.

The Human Impact of the Crisis

Behind every economic indicator are individuals whose lives are directly shaped by these developments.

Sanaz, a woman-headed household living in eastern Tehran, described the collapse of her income in stark terms:

“From June 10 to July 6, I earned only two million tomans.”

Zahra, a street vendor working in the Tehran metro system, spoke of the emotional toll of economic hardship:

“My sense of loneliness never ends. Sometimes I feel as if I have been abandoned in a deep well with no rope to climb out.”

Shiva, a university graduate in Persian literature who turned to ride-hailing work to support herself, explained:

“For two or three weeks, work completely dried up. I had to borrow money from my brother.”

The consequences of economic pressure extend beyond declining income. Nader, a 42-year-old worker in Iran’s film industry, lost his job in early 2026 while his wife’s online business income also disappeared. The family exhausted its savings paying rent before eventually being forced to leave their rented home and move in with relatives in another city.

As Nader explained:

“We were using our savings to pay the rent, but if we had continued, there would have been nothing left for food or medical expenses.”

In another documented case, a dismissed worker from the Marvdasht Petrochemical Complex, unemployed for more than two months, reported that financial hardship had forced him and his elderly mother to reduce their food consumption to a single meal per day.

He stated:

“I have an elderly mother, and I feel ashamed in front of her. We have reduced our meals to one a day, and even that is difficult to afford.”

Conclusion

The evidence presented in this chapter indicates that rising living costs, declining purchasing power, and widening gaps between income and essential expenses have increased economic pressure on many Iranian households. For a growing number of families, these pressures extend beyond financial hardship and increasingly affect access to basic necessities.

One of the most visible consequences of this trend has been its impact on food consumption and household nutrition. The following chapter examines food inflation, food insecurity, and the implications of rising food costs for the right to adequate food in Iran.



CHAPTER 2

Food Security and the Right to Food

If inflation and declining purchasing power are the first visible signs of an economic crisis, its most tangible effects can be observed at the family dining table.

Between 2024 and 2026, food prices in Iran continued to rise at a pace exceeding that of many other goods and services, placing severe pressure on low-income households. For many families, the issue was not merely that food had become more expensive; it was that access to an adequate, diverse, and nutritious diet had become increasingly difficult.

Official reports, assessments by international organizations, and testimonies from citizens indicate that food insecurity has become one of the most significant social and human consequences of Iran's economic crisis.

"Sometimes we could not even afford plain bread."

This testimony from a tenant woman living in Eslamshahr offers a human portrait of a crisis that is also reflected in official statistics and international assessments. Between 2024 and 2026, rising food prices became one of the most serious pressures on household livelihoods in Iran, making access to sufficient and nutritious food increasingly difficult for lower-income groups.

In its April 2026 Poverty and Macroeconomic Outlook report, the World Bank estimated food inflation in Iran at approximately 99 percent in February 2026; a figure substantially higher than overall inflation during the same period. This gap demonstrates that the actual pressure on household food consumption, particularly among low-income families, is significantly greater than what general inflation indicators alone suggest.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), in its assessment of 10 June 2026, reported that retail wheat flour prices in Tehran increased by approximately 170 percent in April 2026 compared with the previous year, while rice prices rose by approximately 220 percent. The same report recorded a roughly 140 percent increase in the government's guaranteed wheat procurement price.

Field evidence suggests that rising food prices have not merely altered consumption patterns but have also pushed some households toward dependence on credit purchases. One report from Tehran described how several young women divided responsibility for obtaining food on credit: one purchased cooking oil and tomato paste on account, another obtained bread and cheese through informal credit arrangements, while a third was responsible for acquiring legumes. Such arrangements illustrate the survival strategies adopted in response to escalating food costs.

These figures indicate that Iran's food crisis is not simply the result of general inflation. Some of the most basic food staples, including flour, bread, rice, and cereals, have experienced price increases far exceeding overall inflation rates. For households that devote a substantial share of their income to food, such increases translate directly into reduced purchasing power and fewer dietary choices.

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), vulnerable households in Iran allocate approximately 45 percent of their total consumption expenditure to food. The organization has warned that elevated food inflation increases the likelihood that vulnerable families will either reduce the quality of their diets or consume less food overall.

Field reports further indicate that many low-income households have gradually removed nutritionally valuable foods from their consumption baskets. Labor and economic experts have repeatedly warned that meat, dairy products, fruit, and other key sources of protein and micronutrients have become infrequently consumed or increasingly inaccessible for a growing number of families.

From a human rights perspective, these warnings carry particular significance. When families are forced to reduce either the quality or quantity of food they consume in order to cope with rising prices, the crisis becomes more than a matter of income and inflation. It becomes a question of the right to adequate, safe, and nutritious food.

Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognizes the right of every individual to adequate food and an adequate standard of living. Sharp increases in food prices, combined with declining purchasing power, have seriously undermined the realization of this right for segments of Iranian society.



Food Insecurity and Malnutrition: From Economic Pressure to Physical Harm

Rising food prices do not merely reduce household purchasing power. When families are compelled to reduce either the quantity or quality of the food they consume, the consequences can directly affect health, child development, and overall well-being.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has warned that high food inflation in Iran may push vulnerable households toward lowering the quality of their diets or reducing overall food consumption. This concern is particularly significant for families that already spend a large

share of their income on food and therefore have limited capacity to absorb further price increases.

Assessments by UNICEF indicate that food insecurity has become a serious concern in parts of Iran. In reports concerning Sistan and Baluchestan Province, UNICEF has identified food insecurity as one of the region's principal challenges and noted that significant numbers of children suffering from acute malnutrition have required treatment and nutritional support.

Women-headed households, who account for approximately 22.5 percent of all households in Iran, are among the groups most vulnerable to food insecurity. Approximately 55 percent of these households fall within the country's poorest income decile, increasing their exposure to rising food prices and declining living standards.

According to UNICEF data, Sistan and Baluchestan records the highest rate of child malnutrition in the country, estimated at approximately 11.7 percent. These figures demonstrate that the consequences of the economic and food crisis are not evenly distributed across Iran and that economically marginalized regions face substantially greater risks.

The World Food Programme (WFP) has also warned that sharp increases in food prices weaken households' ability to cope with future economic shocks. Families that already devote most of their income to food possess far fewer resources to absorb the effects of illness, unemployment, rent increases, or other economic disruptions.

The implications of food insecurity extend beyond nutrition alone. Food insecurity can contribute to increased vulnerability among children, deteriorating public health outcomes, reduced educational performance, and growing pressure on low-income families. For this reason, many international organizations regard access to sufficient and nutritious food not merely as a welfare concern but as a fundamental human right.

Available evidence suggests that Iran's food crisis cannot be understood simply as a matter of more expensive groceries. For a portion of the population, particularly those living in deprived regions and low-income households, the crisis has become directly linked to health, child development, and access to minimum standards of living.

Domestic Warnings: When the Public's Food Basket Becomes a Subject of Official Concern

The rise in food prices and the decline in household purchasing power have not been highlighted solely in international reports. Government officials, members of parliament, labor representatives, and domestic experts have repeatedly warned about the livelihood consequences of these developments.

Asad Salehi, a member of Iran's Supreme Labor Council, stated:

“The gap between workers’ wages and actual market prices has deepened year after year, and the purchasing power of workers continues to decline.”

These remarks come at a time when food prices have risen faster than many other categories of goods and services. For households that devote a substantial share of their income to food, declining purchasing power translates directly into reduced access to adequate and nutritious nutrition.

A baker in Tehran reported that some customers can no longer afford a full loaf of bread and instead ask to purchase half a loaf or even a smaller portion of traditional sangak bread. According to his account, many of these customers come from low-income or salaried households whose purchasing power has been eroded by rising living costs.

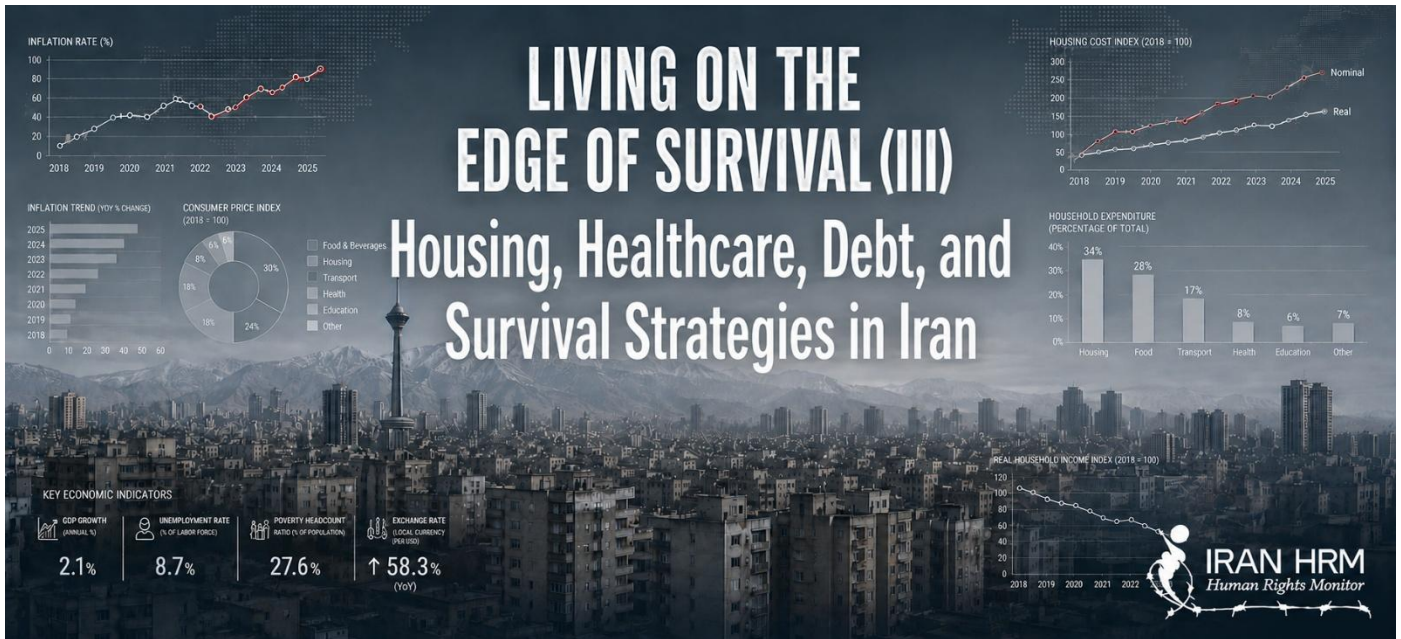
Taken together, assessments by the World Bank, UNDP, FAO, UNICEF, and the World Food Programme, alongside statements by domestic officials and experts, present a broadly consistent picture: rising food costs have placed disproportionate pressure on lower-income households and have increasingly challenged the food security of segments of Iranian society.

For many families, the issue is no longer simply that food has become more expensive. The deeper concern is the growing difficulty of securing an adequate, diverse, and nutritious diet; a condition whose consequences extend beyond household economics and affect health, child development, and overall quality of life.

Conclusion

The evidence presented in this chapter indicates that the consequences of rising food prices extend far beyond household consumption patterns. Food insecurity increasingly affects public health, family well-being, and overall living standards, raising broader concerns regarding the right to adequate food.

At the same time, the pressure created by rising food costs leaves fewer resources available for housing, healthcare, and other essential needs. The next chapter examines how these pressures contribute to housing insecurity, barriers to medical care, household debt, and the survival strategies adopted by many Iranian families.



CHAPTER 3

Housing, Healthcare, Debt, and Survival Strategies (2024–2026)

For many Iranian households, the consequences of the economic crisis no longer end at the dining table. When income is no longer sufficient to meet everyday expenses, economic pressure spreads into other dimensions of life; from securing shelter and paying rent to accessing healthcare, maintaining employment, and preserving a minimum level of economic security.

Under such conditions, any economic shock can have consequences far beyond a decline in purchasing power. The loss of a job, a sudden increase in rent, illness within the family, or the disappearance of a source of income can become more than a financial setback. For many households, such events can trigger a crisis that affects the very foundations of daily life.

In some cases, economic hardship has resulted in tragic responses.

Ahmad Baladi, a 20-year-old resident of Ahvaz, set himself on fire in front of municipal officials after authorities demolished his family’s small business, which represented their sole source of income. He died several days later from severe burn injuries. The case attracted widespread public attention and became a symbol of the vulnerability of households whose livelihoods depend on informal economic activities and daily earnings.

Although exceptional and tragic, these incidents occurred within a broader context in which millions of households face rising housing costs, barriers to healthcare, job insecurity, indebtedness, and a continuing erosion of purchasing power. Under such conditions, the economic crisis extends beyond income and prices and becomes a matter of economic security, health, and human dignity.



Housing Costs and the Growing Burden on Households

According to official data, approximately 43.7 percent of urban household expenditures in Iran are devoted to housing, fuel, and utilities. This represents the largest category of household spending and demonstrates that housing exerts a greater influence on family livelihoods than any other area of expenditure.

This situation exists at a time when economic estimates place the poverty line for a family of four above 55 million tomans per month, while average wages remain substantially below that threshold. As a result, a growing share of household income is absorbed by rent and housing-related expenses.

Between 2024 and 2026, rising rents and housing costs placed increasing pressure on both low-income households and the middle class. For many families, the issue was no longer home ownership; it became the struggle to remain in their existing homes and continue paying monthly rent.

The consequences of this trend are visible in the daily lives of tenants across the country. A 45-year-old woman living in Tehran's Bahar neighborhood, who had lived independently for more than two decades, reported that after her monthly rent rose to 400 million rials, she could no longer afford to maintain an independent household and was forced to search for a roommate for the first time in her life.

As she explained:

"I lived alone for more than twenty years, but now I am forced to change my standards of living."

Official and media reports indicate that rising housing costs have pushed some households toward more peripheral neighborhoods, smaller housing units, or areas with fewer services and resources. Under these conditions, housing is no longer merely an economic commodity. It has become one of the most important determinants of household welfare and security.

In some cases, the rising cost of living has forced residents to leave major cities altogether. A veteran editor in Iran's publishing sector, who had lived and worked in Tehran for more than twenty years, reported that in 2026 he was compelled to leave the capital and return to his hometown of Kashan because of rising housing costs and declining employment opportunities. His experience reflects a broader pattern of reverse migration driven by the growing cost of living in Tehran.

From Homeownership to Simply Keeping a Roof Overhead

The rising cost of housing has affected more than the ability of families to purchase homes. For many households, maintaining their existing place of residence has itself become an increasing challenge.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has described rising housing costs as part of Iran's broader "cost-of-living crisis" and warned that increases in the prices of essential goods, services, and rent have made access to basic necessities more difficult for many households.

The growing share of household budgets devoted to housing has consequences extending well beyond shelter. When a substantial portion of income is consumed by rent and housing-related expenses, fewer resources remain available for food, healthcare, education, and other essential needs. As a result, the housing crisis becomes intertwined with broader patterns of poverty and economic deprivation.

Media reports and social assessments in recent years indicate the expansion of settlement in peripheral areas and increasing pressure on low-income households to find housing that matches their limited financial resources. For many families, the choice between housing quality, access to services, and affordability has become part of everyday reality.

Informal Settlements and Urban Marginalization: The Hidden Cost of the Housing Crisis

The burden of rising housing costs extends beyond increasing rents. For a portion of Iranian society, it has resulted in forced relocation to peripheral neighborhoods, informal settlements, and underserved urban areas.

According to officials responsible for urban regeneration programs, between 7 and 8 percent of Iran's population lives in informal or marginal settlements. These areas are often characterized by inadequate infrastructure, limited public services, insufficient educational facilities, weak transportation networks, and restricted access to healthcare.

The expansion of informal settlements is not merely a reflection of housing shortages. It is also an indicator of the widening gap between household income and the cost of living. When rent absorbs a substantial share of household resources, families are often compelled to relocate to less expensive areas with fewer services and opportunities.

Homelessness: The Most Severe Form of Housing Deprivation

At the lowest end of this cycle, some individuals and families face the risk of losing shelter altogether.

Although official statistics on homelessness in Iran remain limited and fragmented, media reports and social assessments in recent years have documented growing concern regarding both visible and hidden forms of homelessness. These include living in overcrowded shared rooms, relying on relatives for extended periods, residing at workplaces, or using public spaces as temporary shelter.

In some cases, households have been forced to adopt arrangements that were previously considered outside the norm in order to avoid homelessness. Shared living arrangements among unrelated adults, returning to parental homes in middle age, long-term residence with relatives, and the subdivision of small housing units among multiple families have all emerged as coping mechanisms in response to rising housing costs.

The combined pressure of escalating rents, declining purchasing power, and unstable incomes has increased the risk of housing loss among lower-income groups. Under such conditions, housing security has become one of the most important components of household economic and social security.

The right to adequate housing is recognized in international human rights instruments. Any trend that restricts access to suitable shelter for larger segments of society has consequences extending beyond economics and directly affects human dignity, health, and social security.

Housing, Poverty, and Food Security: Interconnected Crises

The housing crisis in Iran is no longer merely an economic issue. It has increasingly become a structural factor contributing to the erosion of economic and social rights.

Analysis based on official household data indicates that tenant households spend approximately 44 percent of their total expenditures on housing, while their average daily caloric intake has fallen to approximately 1,815 calories. This represents a decline of roughly 28 percent compared with 2006 levels. These findings suggest that many families are effectively sacrificing food security in order to maintain access to shelter.

At the same time, officials responsible for urban regeneration programs have acknowledged that between 7 and 8 percent of the population lives in informal settlements. In addition, approximately six million tenant households, representing nearly twenty million people, are directly exposed to continuing rent increases.

Under these conditions, rising housing costs and declining purchasing power have pushed many families toward shared housing arrangements, reverse migration from major cities, relocation to peripheral settlements, and in some cases homelessness.

The economic burden of housing is not limited to tenants. Approximately 39 percent of Iran's workforce is employed in the informal economy, a sector that enjoys the lowest levels of social protection and is particularly vulnerable to inflation, unemployment, and rising housing costs.

Taken together, these trends indicate that the housing crisis has become a structural driver of poverty, food insecurity, and the gradual erosion of family stability in Iran.

Healthcare Deprivation: When the Cost of Treatment Exceeds Household Means

The economic pressures experienced between 2024 and 2026 affected not only access to food and housing. Rising healthcare and medical costs also made access to essential treatment increasingly difficult for segments of Iranian society.

Farid Hashemnejad, head of the Iranian Dental Technicians Association, stated in May 2026 that the prices of some materials used in dental services had increased by as much as 100 percent.

He warned:

“Some implant procedures that previously cost around 300 million rials now cost nearly twice that amount.”

Hashemnejad further noted that rising prices had forced part of the population to forgo dental care altogether, stating:

“Inflation has completely pushed a portion of the population out of the dental services market.”

These statements reflect a broader trend in which the cost of treatment, medication, and healthcare services has increased at a pace exceeding the financial capacity of many households.

The burden of medical expenses extends far beyond dental care. In one documented case, the spouse of a cancer patient reported that the cost of a life-saving medication had risen from 65 million tomans during the early stages of treatment to 114 million tomans by the fifth treatment cycle. According to the family, they faced an impossible choice: continue treatment while absorbing escalating costs or postpone essential medical care.

At a time when a large share of household income is already consumed by rent and food expenses, healthcare often becomes a secondary priority. The result is delayed treatment, abandonment of medical care, reliance on incomplete treatment, or borrowing money to cover healthcare costs.

From a human rights perspective, access to healthcare and medical services forms part of the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. When treatment costs exceed the financial means of significant segments of society, this fundamental right becomes effectively inaccessible for many citizens.

The Informal Economy and Household Survival Strategies

The experience of the cancer patient’s family reflects a broader reality in which many households are increasingly forced to rely on informal financial resources simply to meet essential needs.

Under such conditions, debt is not incurred for investment or economic advancement. Instead, borrowing becomes a means of paying rent, purchasing food, obtaining medical treatment, or covering other basic living expenses.

As living costs rise and purchasing power declines, many households have adopted a range of survival strategies. These include working longer hours, holding multiple jobs simultaneously, sending additional family members into the labor market, reducing consumption, borrowing money, and participating in the informal economy.

Among women-headed households, these survival strategies have taken many forms. Numerous women have turned to street vending, selling goods in metro stations, home-based work, online

sales, and other low-income service occupations in an effort to compensate for declining earnings. Some have reported that economic stagnation and reduced consumer demand now threaten even these limited sources of income.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) estimates that approximately 39 percent of employed people in Iran work in the informal economy. These workers generally lack social insurance, job security, and many forms of institutional support, making them particularly vulnerable to economic shocks.

Field evidence suggests that a significant share of this informal economy rests on groups with limited access to social protection. Street vendors, small-scale traders, ride-hailing drivers, and day laborers are among those whose income depends directly on daily market conditions and who are often the first to experience declining earnings during periods of economic disruption.

Labor market experts have repeatedly warned about the expansion of informal economic activity. Labor market specialist Hamid Haj Esmaeili has argued that the informal economy is accounting for an increasing share of economic activity in Iran, weakening labor protections, reducing oversight, and increasing job insecurity.

Shiva, a university graduate in Persian literature who turned to ride-hailing work in order to support herself, described her experience:

“For two or three weeks, work completely dried up. I had to borrow money from my brother.”

Her testimony illustrates how even university-educated individuals are increasingly forced to rely on unstable and informal employment in order to cope with declining incomes and rising living costs.

Under these conditions, many households are compelled to depend on informal financial resources, borrowing, or reductions in consumption in order to bridge the gap between income and expenses. For a growing segment of society, the challenge is no longer improving living standards but simply maintaining a minimum level of subsistence.

Debt, Borrowing, and the Erosion of Economic Security

One of the most direct consequences of rising living costs has been growing household dependence on debt and borrowing.

When income is insufficient to cover essential expenses such as food, rent, healthcare, and education, borrowing becomes a tool for meeting basic needs.

Field accounts indicate that borrowing is increasingly used not for investment or economic development but for everyday survival. From loans used to pay rent and purchase food to

borrowing for medical treatment, debt has become an integral part of the survival strategies adopted by a growing number of households.

Domestic and international assessments indicate that the continuous decline in purchasing power, the expansion of informal employment, rising housing costs, and escalating food prices have all contributed to this cycle. As a result, segments of Iranian society face not only income poverty but also chronic economic insecurity.

Conclusion

An examination of official statistics, international assessments, and documented personal testimonies indicates that between 2024 and 2026 a substantial portion of Iranian society experienced a continuing erosion of purchasing power and a steady increase in living costs. High inflation, rapidly rising food prices, growing housing expenses, and escalating healthcare costs have intensified pressure on households and widened the gap between income and the cost of living.

The consequences of these developments are visible not only in economic indicators but also in the daily lives of ordinary people. Evidence suggests that many households have been forced to reduce food consumption, postpone medical treatment, borrow money to meet essential needs, enter the informal economy, relocate their homes, or fundamentally alter their way of life. Testimonies collected from different regions of the country describe families reducing meals, abandoning treatment, sharing housing with others, or leaving their communities because of mounting economic pressures.

Assessments by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the United Nations Development Programme, the International Labour Organization, UNICEF, and other international institutions present a similar picture. Their findings indicate that the effects of the economic crisis have fallen disproportionately on vulnerable groups, including low-income households, women-headed households, informal-sector workers, children, and residents of deprived regions.

From a human rights perspective, access to adequate food, suitable housing, healthcare, and a decent standard of living are rights recognized under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The evidence presented throughout this report indicates that, for a significant portion of Iranian society, the enjoyment of these rights is facing growing restrictions.

In a country possessing some of the world's largest oil and gas reserves, the testimonies and evidence collected in this report point to a different reality; one in which millions struggle to maintain minimum living standards, secure daily food, pay rent, or obtain essential medical treatment. The gap between the country's economic potential and the living conditions experienced by large segments of its population remains one of the most significant economic and social rights challenges facing Iran today.