

IRAN'S NEW POPULATION BILL DENIES WOMEN ESSENTIAL HEALTHCARE

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Iran's new bill on "rejuvenation of the population and support of family" violates a woman's right to reproductive healthcare and information. Therefore, ACHRS condemns the new bill and urges significant amendments to achieve safe and legal population growth.

As of November 1st, Iran's Guardian Council approved the bill of 'rejuvenation of the population and support of family'. With this bill, sterilization and free distribution of contraceptives in the public health care system are forbidden, unless pregnancy is of danger to the carrying woman. Furthermore, the bill adds to current restrictions on abortion access. In this way, the government tries to achieve population growth by restricting women from access to reproductive healthcare and information - violating women's rights.

With a lasting decrease in the Iranian population, Iran has tried to increase childbirth numbers to keep the country young. While this in itself is not something to worry about, the way Iran has been reinforcing this is of grave concern. The country's policies have shifted from providing family planning and access to contraception to restricting access to and information about contraceptives. In doing so, women are steered towards 'their primary role': a childbearing mother. Since 2013, the government's desire for marginalizing women has not been a secret, as demonstrated by the Women's Committee of Iran. The supreme leader of Iran, Ali Khamenei, positioned a woman's societal role as house housekeepers and child-bearers in stating that 'housekeeping and pregnancy are great and artistic work for women'. Also in 2016, Khamenei advocated for the development of a wide-ranging national movement to encourage and simplify marriage.

As this bill will be in effect for seven years, the likely implications of this plan are an increase of unsafe abortions, a rise of child marriages and diminished freedom overall for Iranian women. As Sepehri Far said: 'Expecting to achieve population growth by restricting the right to health and privacy is a delusional understanding of policymaking and one that will only lead to rights abuses'.

In legal terms, the marginalization of women is clearly visible. According to the Tehran Times, Iranian law requires higher education students to be taught about the benefits of childbearing. Moreover, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Sports and the Ministry of Culture are

required to allocate 30% of their budgets to non-governmental organizations that work to reduce the age of marriage, facilitate youth marriage, encourage childbearing, and strengthen families.

Concerning this specific population plan, it violates the international women's right to health, as both the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights state that the right to health of women includes the right to sexual and reproductive health. Iran has ratified both the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and should therefore respect, protect and fulfil a woman's right to health.

Amman Center for Human Rights Studies condemns the approval of the bill on 'rejuvenation of the population and support of family' as it clearly violates the right to health and will have serious consequences for women's freedom, not only concerning reproductive healthcare and information but also generally in life. Therefore, ACHRS urges the Iranian government to refrain from implementing the new population plan or to adjust the plan significantly to achieve safe and legal population growth.