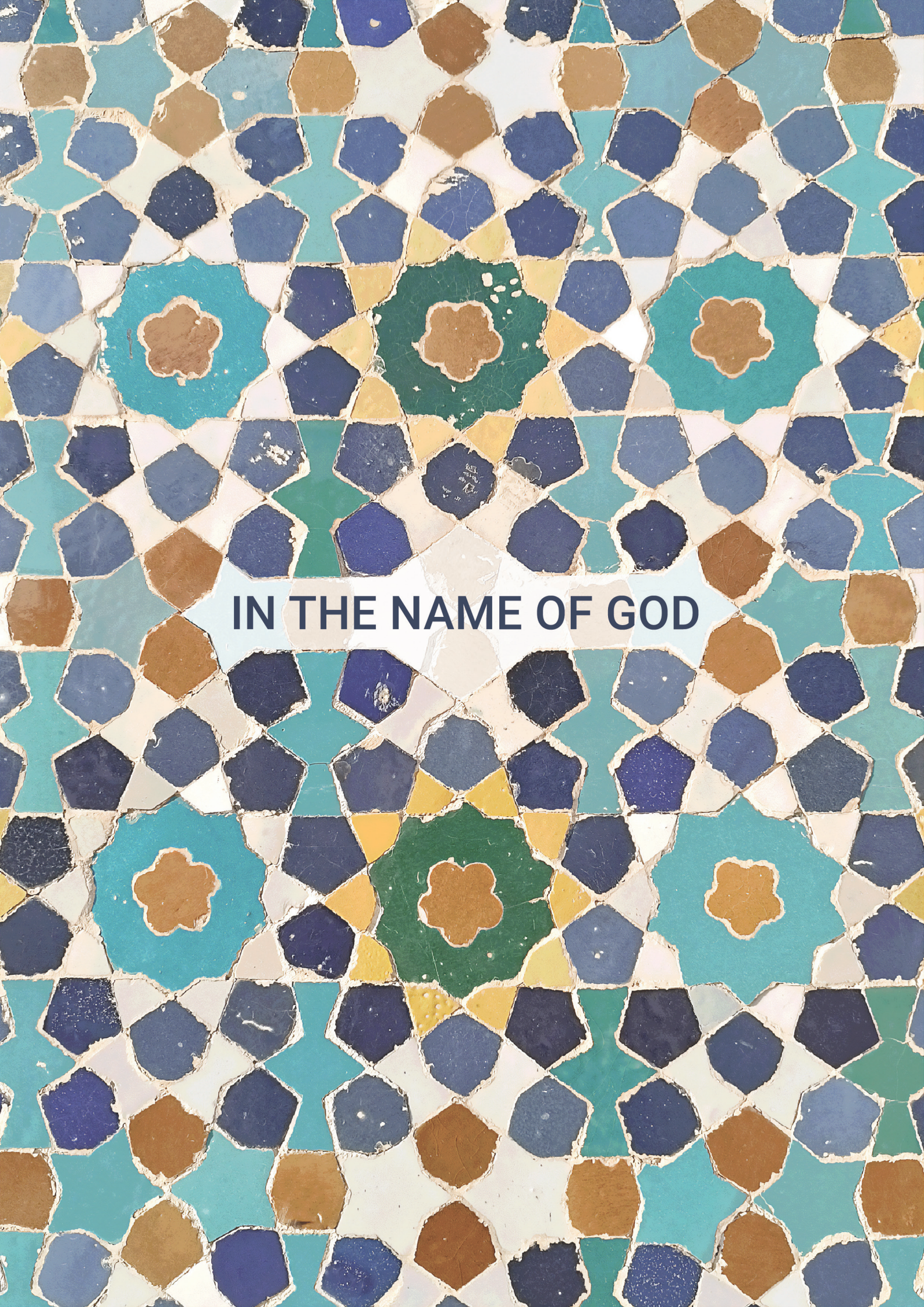
Towards Liveable and Inclusive Cities

Sustainable Urban Regeneration in I.R. IRAN

From Policy to Practice

2025

Urban Regeneration Corporation of Iran



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Acronyms and Abbreviations

APMCHUD	Asia Pacific Ministerial Conference on Housing and Urban Development
CJAP	Comprehensive Joint Action Plan
FYDP	Five Year Development Plan
HCAUP	Higher Council for Architecture and Urban Planning
HFIR	Housing Foundation of Islamic Revolution
ICHHTO	Iranian Cultural Heritage Handicrafts and Tourism Organisation
URCI	Urban Regeneration Corporation of Iran
MHP	Mehr Housing Plan
MO	Municipalities Organisation
MoI	Ministry of Interior
MRUD	Ministry of Roads and Urban Development
NLHO	National Land and Housing Organisation
NRP	National Regeneration Programme
NSURED	National Strategic Urban Regeneration and Empowerment Document
NSURP	National Sustainable Urban Regeneration Policy
SCI	Statistical Centre of Iran
SNDPL	Sixth National Development Plan Law
SURT	Sustainable Urban Regeneration Taskforce
TCRO	Tehran City Renovation Organisation
UDRO	Urban Development and Revitalisation Organisation
ULO	Urban Land Organisation
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UUHRP	Urban Upgrading and Housing Reform Project
RSUWG	Regional Slum Upgrading Working Group

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Note: Photo by H,Asvad

Foreword

With an urban heritage spanning several millennia, Iran ranks among the world's foundational civilizations in the evolution of human settlements. From prehistoric communities to historic cities such as Isfahan, Yazd, and Tabriz, Iranian urban structure has consistently reflected the integration of humanity, nature, culture, and art. During the Islamic periods, principles of communal life, neighborhood integration, and vibrant public spaces were further reinforced. Today, emerging concepts of sustainability, spatial equity, and resilience are being reconsidered through an ongoing global exchange of expertise.

The frameworks for urban planning in Iran were first established in the early twentieth century with the Municipal Law. Over time, successive institutions including the Supreme Council of Architecture and Urban Planning and the Sustainable Urban Regeneration Taskforce have evolved into an inclusive, multi-tiered framework that promotes collaboration and coordination across all levels of governance and stakeholders.

Today, with over 77 percent of the population living in cities, Iran faces both challenges and opportunities. Uneven development, housing crisis, natural hazards, and climate change have compelled policymakers to review established development models. Nevertheless, urban planning experience in Iran demonstrates institutional adaptability, resilience, and a capacity for learning; qualities that have recently given rise to innovative planning policies.

Within this context, the National Housing Movement aims to provide four million housing units. By utilizing local capacities and social capital, the movement seeks to enhance housing affordability by eliminating land-cost barriers, creating various financing mechanisms, and utilizing the technical and operational expertise of non-

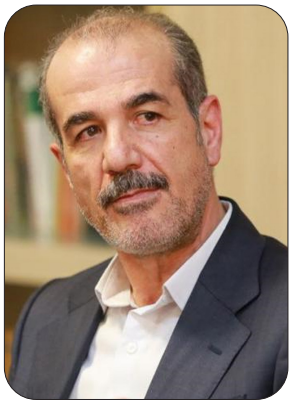
governmental organizations to bridge the gap between actual housing needs and access to safe, affordable, and dignified housing.

Simultaneously, the spatial development strategy in the country is transitioning from unregulated sprawl to targeted infill development. Through the revitalization of deteriorated urban areas, enhancement of existing infrastructure, and improvement of public transportation, we are striving to establish an endogenous, sustainable urban form.

Current strategic urban planning embodies a commitment to enhancing livability and inclusiveness for all, including Children, seniors, and people with disabilities. The Supreme Council's adoption of Child-Friendly City guidelines and Accessibility Standards for Persons with Disabilities demonstrates a responsive approach to designing safe, inclusive, and adaptive urban environments. The shift from conventional unproductive methods to problem-driven, participatory frameworks showcases our transformative approach to urban planning.

Urban regeneration viewed as a favorable strategy for addressing current challenges, with a focus on endogenous development and public participation. The goalies to create more livable and inclusive cities. Drawing upon its traditional and institutional capacities, the Islamic republic of Iran sees active participation in implementing the New Urban Agenda as a national duty.

Farzaneh Sadegh Malvajerd
Minister of Roads and Urban Development
May 2025



Foreword

With the transformation of the global economy and the accelerating pace of urbanization, a convergence of positive and negative phenomena has emerged. These phenomena impact not only national economies but also profoundly influence living conditions across urban areas, particularly in developing countries.

One of the most pressing challenges is the declining quality of the physical and social fabric of urban settlements, along with the increasing urbanization of poverty. Unequal access to decent jobs, adequate housing, resilient basic services, and the systemic marginalization of social minorities have all contributed to physical and spatial fragmentation. These factors have led to the emergence of urban and peri-urban zones facing multidimensional poverty. These areas are expanding rapidly due to being overlooked in formal planning systems.

In Iran, additional stressors such as prolonged drought, migration driven by regional political crises in neighboring countries, and economic sanctions have further accelerated the formation and growth of unsustainable urban areas and deteriorated urban areas. Despite these formidable constraints, urban regeneration efforts have persisted, with the annual production of more than half a million housing units over the past two decades.

We are firmly committed to the belief that addressing these interconnected challenges and achieving sustainable, inclusive, and balanced urban development requires the optimal utilization of infill development capacities and the active participation of citizens, especially those residing in deprived urban districts.

According to national policy documents, deprived urban areas in Iran are classified into three main categories: informal settlements, deteriorated urban areas, and historic centers. While these areas differ in their origins and structural characteristics, they are united by shared indicators of poverty albeit with varying dimensions and intensity. With

nearly one-third of the country's urban population residing in such areas, revitalization has been prioritized across several legislative and strategic platforms.

Notably, in the past two decades, the government has developed and adopted three national policy frameworks focused on empowerment, upgrading, and urban regeneration, Urban poverty is multi-functional with various related components; and multiple stakeholders involved in policy-making, decision-making, and implementation; therefore, it is essential to have a comprehensive perspective, integrate decisions, and coordinate programs and actions among all relevant stakeholders.

In response, Iran established the Sustainable Urban Regeneration Taskforce (SURT) in 2014, as a structured, cross-sectoral governance mechanism operating at all levels: national, sub-national, and local. This initiative aims to harmonize policies, coordinate actions, mobilize financial and institutional resources, and provide integrated stakeholder management to address all forms of urban decay.

By enhancing urban resilience, improving quality of life, and putting marginalized urban areas on a path toward inclusive growth, we aim to empower residents to take active roles in the urban development process. Our goal is to overcome physical fragmentation as well as social and economic exclusion in our cities.

We strongly believe that alongside proactive and preventive policies, endogenous development, rooted in the capabilities and assets of local communities, must be actively pursued. This can only be achieved through capacity-building, asset enhancement, participatory, demand-responsive approaches, and the mobilization of public, private, and civil society resources.

Indeed, the realization of urban prosperity for all hinges on equitable access to and enjoyment of our cities and human settlements. This vision will only be realized when we ensure that all residents across generations can live in cities free from discrimination. Creating inclusive, safe, affordable, resilient, and sustainable human settlements requires commitment to the principles and implementation of the New Urban Agenda. It is essential to remember that progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals must be grounded in both our historical legacy and the sharing of contemporary experiences; both nationally and internationally.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation to my colleagues at the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development (MRUD), the Urban Regeneration Corporation of Iran (URCI), all members of the Sustainable Urban Regeneration Taskforce (SURT), and municipal bodies, as well as local actors whose unwavering

dedication continues to drive improvement in the quality of urban life for our fellow citizens.

I want to thank the National Committee for Human Settlements of the Islamic Republic of Iran for promoting meaningful international engagement and creating platforms for the exchange of knowledge and best practices. I excited about the continued expansion of such collaborations.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to the Institute for Culture, Art and Architecture, affiliated with the Iranian Institute for Humanities and Social Studies(ACECR) for their valuable support in the preparation of this report.

It is my sincere hope that, through the continuation of these efforts, we will witness the advancement of urban prosperity, the alleviation of poverty, and the enhancement of the quality of life for the people of Iran and communities around the world.

Abdolreza Golpayegani,
Deputy Minister and CEO of
Urban Regeneration Corporation of Iran
May 2025

Figure 2: Jame Mosque, Ardestan

Note: Photo by H.Asvad

Foreword

In an era of rapid urbanization, where the urban population currently exceeds 56 percent and is projected to surpass two-thirds of the global total by 2050, emerging challenges—both natural and human-made—are becoming increasingly prominent. Climate change stands out as a primary concern affecting human settlements. Addressing the impacts and consequences of these phenomena necessitates the adoption of an integrated and synergistic approach at global, regional, national, and local levels, encompassing both policy and practice.

One manifestation of this approach is the alignment of global and national policy frameworks. This report, prepared by the Urban Regeneration Corporation of Iran (URCI), presents a profile of sustainable urban regeneration from policy to practice in Iran. A key aspect of Iran's sustainable regeneration program is the synchronization and alignment of strategies aimed at upgrading and revitalizing informal settlements and deteriorated inner-city areas with the global framework of the New Urban Agenda, which was adopted at the third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in 2016 in Quito, Ecuador. This program is driven by the Sustainable Urban Regeneration Taskforce (SURT), which has been established at both national and local levels. It employs a set of rules, policy tools, and incentives within a participatory framework to address the regeneration of informal settlements and deteriorated urban areas by bringing together all stakeholders and participants under the umbrella of SURT. Given the cross-border nature of some environmental and economic challenges facing urban development, sharing experiences practiced at regional and global levels is crucial for ensuring that cities and human settlements remain on a path to sustainability, making them livable and inclusive.

Sadegh Sadeghpour Aghdam

Advisor to Minister

and Secretary of National Habitat Committee

May 2025

Figure 3: Bazar, Isfahan

Note: Photo by H,Asvad

Executive Summary

This report, "Sustainable Urban Regeneration in I.R. IRAN: Toward Livable & Inclusive Cities – From Policy to Practice," documents the Islamic Republic of Iran's significant efforts and evolving strategies in addressing the multifaceted challenges of urbanisation through sustainable urban regeneration. Spearheaded by the Iran Urban Regeneration Corporation (URCI), a subsidiary of the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, these initiatives aim to transform Deprived urban areas into livable, inclusive, productive, and resilient spaces, thereby enhancing the quality of life for millions of citizens.

Iran, like many developing nations, has experienced rapid urbanisation, with its urban population share increasing nearly tenfold over the past half-century, reaching 74% by 2016. This demographic shift has brought considerable pressure on urban areas, manifesting in challenges such as the proliferation of Deprived urban areas (including historic areas, deteriorated areas, and informal settlements), housing shortages, urban poverty, macrocephaly, environmental degradation, and the need to accommodate refugee populations, all compounded by international sanctions and an aging population. In response, Iran has embarked on developing a National Urban Policy (NUP), with a pilot phase initiated in 2017, to provide a coherent framework for managing urban growth and leveraging urbanisation as a driver for national development.

The approach to urban renewal and upgrading in Iran has undergone a significant policy evolution over the past five decades. Initial interventions, largely physical and top-down, gradually shifted towards more equity-oriented, participatory, and comprehensive urban regeneration paradigms. This transition culminated in the landmark "National Strategic Document for the Revitalisation, Upgrading, Revitalisation, and Empowerment of Deteriorated and Deprived Urban Areas" in 2014, which marked a definitive shift towards holistic urban regeneration. This policy emphasises addressing not only the physical aspects but also the economic, social, environmental, and cultural dimensions of urban inefficiency, focusing on areas categorised under the TANUR framework (Target Areas and Neighborhoods for Urban Upgrading and Regeneration).

The National Urban Regeneration Policy is strategically designed around prevention and upgrading. Its core objectives include reducing urban poverty, enhancing urban resilience, strengthening urban identity while protecting cultural heritage, and increasing social cohesion. The implementation of this policy is guided by a multi-scalar approach, integrating actions at national, provincial, and local levels. A critical institutional development has been the establishment of National, Provincial, and County Taskforces for Sustainable Urban Regeneration, with the URCI serving as the secretariat for the National Taskforce, ensuring coordination and synergy among diverse stakeholders.

The executive framework of this policy is structured across four levels:

1. **Policies:** Involves the formulation of national strategic programmes (three key documents over three decades), guiding policy documents approved by the Supreme Council of Urban Planning and Architecture (SCUPA), and continuous improvement of institutional structures and processes.

2. **Programmes:** Central to this is the "National Urban Regeneration Programme," aiming to address Deprived urban areas nationwide (e.g., targeting 270 neighbourhoods annually under the Sixth National Development Plan), and the "Comprehensive Joint Action Plan," which outlines inter-sectoral interventions at urban and neighbourhood scales.

3. **Actions:** These are categorised into place-based initiatives (housing revitalisation, development of superstructure facilities, and upgrading of utility networks and public spaces) and thematic programmes (developing social and economic capacities through institution-building, capacity-building, tool development, networking, mainstreaming, and institutionalisation). To date, thousands of projects and actions have been implemented under these frameworks, significantly impacting target communities.

4. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** A suite of digital systems and monitoring tools has been developed by the URCI to enhance transparency, streamline processes, standardise information, and document progress in target regeneration areas.

Over the past decade, Iran has made substantial progress in institutionalising sustain-

able urban regeneration. Key achievements include a profound shift in discourse from "shelter" to "adequate housing," "inhabitant" to "citizen," and "settlement" to "neighborhood." The establishment of local development institutions, the implementation of thousands of projects, and the enhanced capacity of local actors signify a maturing approach.

The journey has yielded critical lessons: the necessity of integrated management and programme cohesion; the importance of differentiated, context-sensitive approaches for various types of Deprived areas; the need for inclusive social policies and affordable housing solutions for low-income groups; the efficacy of gradual, participatory upgrading processes; the imperative of voluntary and safe resettlement principles in hazardous areas; the pivotal role of strengthening local management and decentralisation; the need for targeted support for vulnerable groups; and the strategy of mobilising endogenous resources while fostering convergence with external support.

While challenges in implementation, inter-sectoral coordination, and resource mobilisation persist, Iran's commitment to sustainable urban regeneration has laid a solid foundation for continued progress. The experiences and lessons learned offer valuable insights for other countries facing similar urban challenges, highlighting the potential for knowledge transfer and international collaboration in creating more sustainable, inclusive, and resilient urban futures for all.

Figure 4: Sultan Amir Ahmad Bathhouse, Kashan

Note: Photo by H.Asvad

Introduction of Urban Regeneration Corporation of Iran

The Iran Urban Regeneration Corporation (URCI), as a subsidiary organisation of the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development of the Islamic Republic of Iran, is the primary governmental body responsible for the revitalisation, upgrading, and renovation of urban areas facing numerous challenges, including poverty, inadequate housing, and a lack of essential services and infrastructure. The fundamental objective of the URCI is to guide, coordinate, and organise all necessary activities and measures within these areas, within the framework of operational programmes and with a vision of enhancing the quality of life. The organisational evolution of the IURC reflects a deepening understanding and a more comprehensive approach to the issues facing these areas over time.

Figure 5: Iran Urban Regeneration Corporation

Note: Photo by F.Ghonche

The initial formal activities in the field of urban upgrading and renovation in Iran began in 1985 with the establishment of the Urban Improvement Bureau (the initial core of the IURC) within the Ministry of Roads

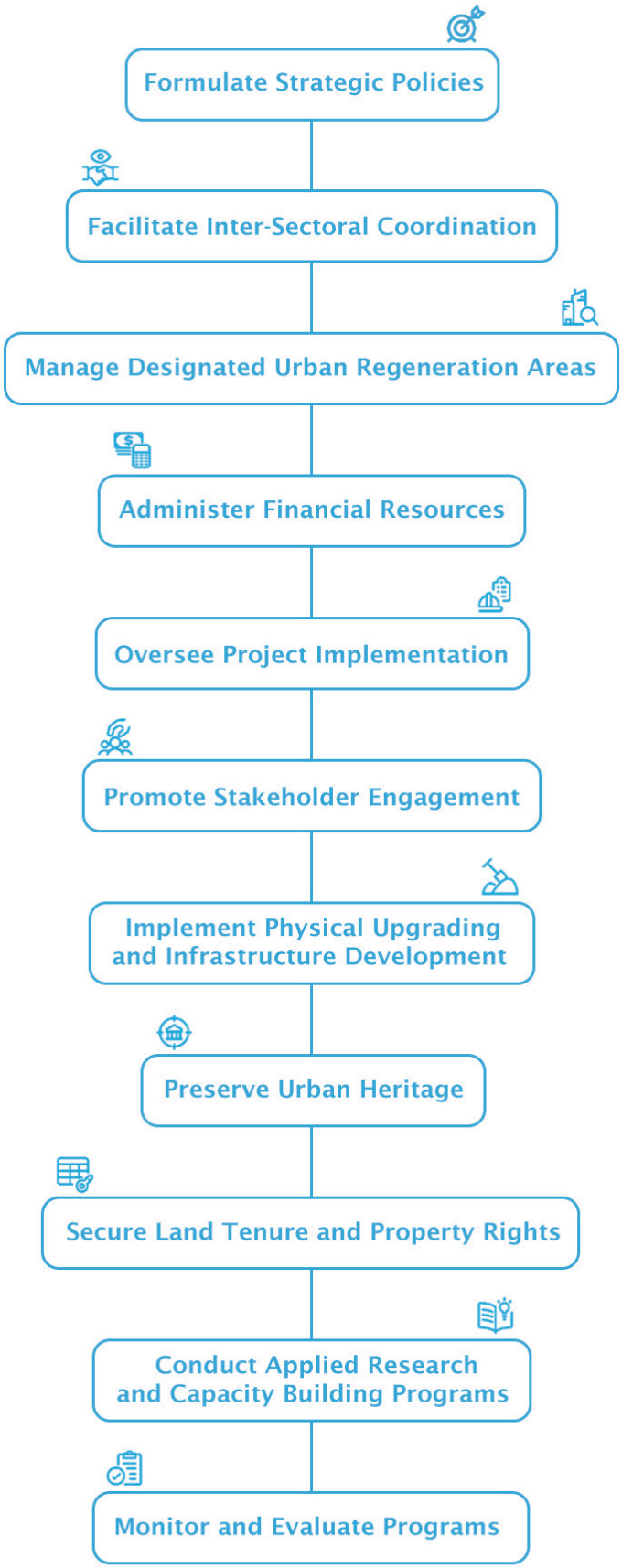


Diagram 1: Urban Regeneration Corporation of IRAN Responsibilities

and Urban Development. Recognizing the need for a more comprehensive and proactive approach, and with the mission of urban revitalisation and achieving sustainable and participatory cities, this bureau expanded its official activities in 1997 as the «Organisation for Urban Development and Improvement of Iran,» operating as a company affiliated with the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development. In 2004, with the aim of better coordinating the implementation of urban development and improvement projects nationwide, the organisation was renamed and restructured as the «Mother Company for Urban Development and Improvement of Iran.» Finally, in 2018, emphasizing its broader mission of coordinating among the numerous relevant agencies involved in the revitalisation, upgrading, and renovation process, as well as rethinking urban development paradigms, it was renamed and re-established as the «Iran Urban Regeneration Corporation.»

Main Objectives of the Corporation in the Field of Urban Development:

- Promoting inner-city development and improving the urban living environment.
- Revitalizing, renovating, and upgrading Deprived urban areas (historic areas, deteriorated areas, and informal settlements).
- Anticipating, preventing, and addressing urban poverty through urban development programmes.

Implementation Framework of the Corporation:

In the course of rethinking urban development paradigms within the framework of the National Urban Regeneration Policy, it became necessary for the Iran Urban Regeneration Corporation, as part of the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development and responsible for urban upgrading and renovation in Iran, to review and refine its programmes and actions.

With the aim of realizing urban regeneration policies, the structure of the corporation's actions is divided into three categories: policymaking, planning and action, and documentation and monitoring. Within these levels, extensive and significant actions have been taken, some of which are described below:

- Preparation of 3 national strategic documents and their approval by the Council of Ministers.
- Approval of two policy packages in the Supreme Council of Urban Planning and Architecture, focusing on strengthening urban renovation and upgrading in deteriorated and historic urban areas (incentive and support packages).

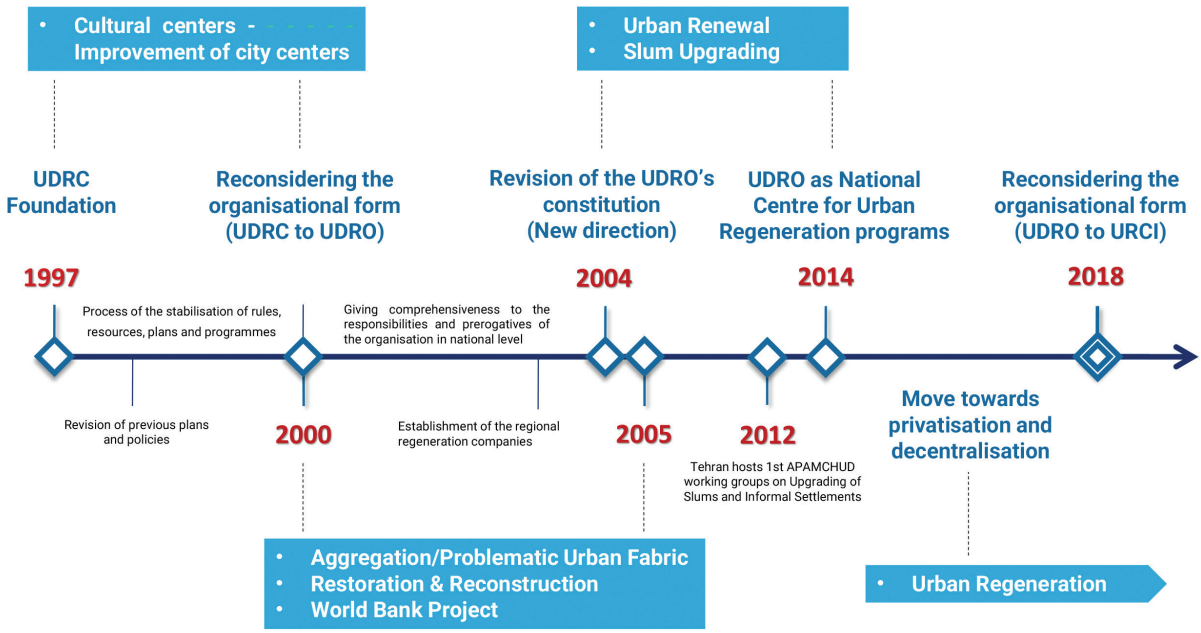


Diagram 2: Iran Urban Regeneration Corporation

- Approval of indicators for identifying Deprived urban areas in the Supreme Council of Urban Planning and Architecture.
- Development and approval of the National Urban Regeneration Programme with the goal of addressing 50% of Deprived urban areas in Iran.
- Guiding and implementing 3995 local and thematic programmes (housing, superstructure, infrastructure, and empowerment) within the framework of the National Urban Regeneration Program.
- Preparation of over 151 revitalisation and Revitalisation, upgrading, renovation, and empowerment plans for Deprived urban areas.
- Participation in the renovation of deteriorated areas in the form of consolidation models for over 150 projects.
- Implementation of over 1575 study, training, documentation, information dissemination, and cultural-promotional programmes, and the like.
- Identification of approximately 170,000 hectares of Deprived urban areas throughout Iran and preparation of a spatial database.
- Leading and holding over 10,737 meetings in the form of national, provincial, and district taskforces and specialised working groups on sustainable urban regeneration over a 9-year period (2015-2023).
- Conclusion of over 38 domestic and international memoranda of understanding with the aim of strengthening the cooperation network in the field of urban regeneration.

Figure 6: Ardestan

Note: Photo by H,Asvad

Preface

The emergence and persistence of deprived urban areas reflect the inefficiencies of sectoral and spatial development planning. Historical experience demonstrates that this phenomenon was an unavoidable aspect of early industrialization, even in today's advanced nations [1]. The primary cause lay in the absence of the requisite technical knowledge, institutional capital, and financial resources for sustainable policymaking. However, the continuation and expansion of these zones over time signify a dual failure: that of the market (Market Failure) and of policy (Policy Failure) [2]. Market failure manifests as the inability of pricing mechanisms to equitably allocate resources (such as land and housing) to low-income groups, while policy failure stems from inefficient institutions, contradictory laws, and a lack of integrated planning [3]. These twin failures culminate in spatial dysfunctions, such as spatial poverty traps, of which informal settlements are the most prominent contemporary manifestation.

Informal settlements, as one type of deprived urban area, refer to a collection of human habitations formed outside the formal urban planning and management system. According to the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), these settlements are typically characterized by a lack of security of tenure, insufficient access to basic urban services, high population density, and substandard housing quality. This phenomenon, depending on its formative context, manifests in various forms within urban areas, ranging from historic and deteriorated areas to informal settlements.

The evolution of global attention to the sustainability of human settlements can be traced through three pivotal Habitat conferences. The first Habitat Conference in Vancouver, Canada, in 1976, centered on "Adequate Shelter for All," marked the initial step in formally recognizing this issue at an international level. Two decades later, Habitat II in Istanbul, Turkey, in 1996, adopted a more comprehensive approach by emphasizing

the “Sustainable Development of Human Settlements.” The watershed moment in this progression was Habitat III in Quito, Ecuador, in 2016, which, with the adoption of the “New Urban Agenda,” presented an innovative framework for confronting urban challenges. This document, by underscoring citizen rights and community-based approaches, instigated a fundamental paradigm shift in the perception of these settlements. Globally, the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, particularly Goal 11 which focuses on “making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable,” had a historically significant concurrence with the developments of Habitat III. Specifically, Target 11.1 of this goal concentrates on “ensuring access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums.” This temporal convergence signals the global community’s resolve to adopt an integrated approach to addressing the challenge of informal settlements.

The study of deprived urban areas in theoretical literature reveals a significant conceptual evolution. From an initial perspective that viewed these settlements merely as an urban “problem” [4], we have now moved towards a paradigm that considers them part of the solution to urban issues [5].

This conceptual transformation of deprived urban areas in global literature, from a uni-dimensional, problem-focused view to a holistic, solution-oriented approach, has profoundly influenced urban policymaking in Iran. While in the early decades (1960s-1970s), the dominant approach was based on physical demolition and clearance of these settlements, recent decades have witnessed a fundamental shift towards integrated and empowering strategies. The World Bank’s intervention in the form of an upgrading loan in the 2000s was a turning point in this evolution. Although its initial aim was the physical improvement of settlements, in practice, it led to a change in policymakers’ attitudes, a strengthening of community-based approaches, and the creation of new institutional frameworks. The urban regeneration approach, which gained traction globally almost concurrently with the New Urban Agenda, represents a fundamental change in Iran’s urban policymaking. Transcending the uni-dimensional and physically-oriented perspectives of the past, this approach is founded on three core principles: integrated vision (amalgamating physical, social, economic, and environmental dimensions), participation (actively engaging local stakeholders), and institution-building (developing sustainable management structures).

Sustainable urban regeneration policy in Iran encompasses a diverse range of urban areas, which can generally be termed “deprived urban areas,” including historic areas, deteriorated areas, and informal settlements. Despite sharing common characteristics such as poverty, limited access to services and infrastructure, and high population density, these areas exhibit significant differences in terms of their formation, tenure status, and other contextual dimensions. Consequently, intervention programs and actions within them must be designed and implemented in a manner that is attuned to these distinctions.

Iran’s experience in implementing sustainable urban regeneration policy demonstrates that this approach, by fostering inter-sectoral coordination and leveraging local capacities, has taken effective strides towards improving deprived urban areas. The significance of the urban regeneration approach in Iran can be summarized in several key aspects:

•Firstly, this approach has transcended ad-hoc, project-based strategies to become a sustainable, process-oriented policy.

•Secondly, by forging links between different planning levels (from national to local), it has enabled the coordination of various actions.

•Thirdly, by recognizing the role of local communities, it has harnessed the internal capacities of these settlements as an effective factor in the development process.

These characteristics have transformed urban regeneration into an efficient model for addressing the challenge of informal settlements in Iran.

Iran’s experience in urban regeneration, despite numerous challenges, highlights the significant potential of sustainability principles and approaches for enhancing the quality of life in cities. This experience can offer valuable lessons for many developing countries facing similar challenges. However, the continuation and deepening of this approach necessitate constant attention to its various dimensions and the continuous updating of policies in light of global transformations and national experiences.

Figure 7: Yazd
Note: Photo by H,Asvad

Figure 8: Semnan
Note: Photo by Ghazbanpour

Chapter 1

National Urban Policy: A Framework for Guiding Sustainable Urbanisation

1.1. The Concept of National Urban Policy (NUP)

1.2. National Urban Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran

1.3. Urban Profile of the Islamic Republic of Iran

National Urban Policy: A Framework for Guiding Sustainable Urbanisation

1.1. The Concept of National Urban Policy (NUP)

A National Urban Policy (NUP) is a strategic tool for governments to manage and guide rapid urbanisation, capitalise on its positive aspects, and adapt to the inevitable pressures and tensions associated with this phenomenon. An NUP is understood as "a coherent set of decisions, derived through a deliberate and government-led process, for coordinating and rallying various actors towards a shared vision and objectives to promote transformative, productive, inclusive, and resilient urban development in the long term" (7).

According to UN-Habitat, "the unique feature of NUP lies in its ability to converge sectoral urban policies at the national level and to clarify roles and responsibilities horizontally among ministries and vertically among all levels of governance. Its implementation can lead to local and national economic growth, and ensure a fair quality of life for all, along with environmental protection. As a coordinating framework, NUP should not only consist of a list of remedial actions, but also encourage pre-emptive actions that strengthen sensitive economic, social and environmental development.

To harness urbanisation and mitigate its negative side effects, and to promote an urban paradigm shift, a coordinated approach and clear policy orientations are needed. This coordination is lacking in many countries where several government agencies are each responsible for an aspect of the challenges of urbanisation. Furthermore, urbanisation is generally not considered an opportunity for national development, and the overall understanding of the role of cities in national development and the importance of structural changes resulting from the growth of

urban centres is very limited."
Accordingly, the development of an NUP is a crucial step in reclaiming the importance of urban space and land, and provides the direction and course of action needed to support urban development. This policy provides a coherent and inclusive framework for addressing the concentrated issues resulting from rapid urban development (including urban poverty, slums, lack of basic services and infrastructure, and unstable housing).

1.2. National Urban Policy of Islamic Republic of Iran

The urban planning and management system in Iran has a history of over a century, beginning with the establishment of the modern institution of "Baladieh" (Municipality). The official entry into the arena of national development planning from 1948 was a turning point in this path. The period before the Islamic Revolution (until 1978) was mainly influenced by the paradigm of comprehensive urban planning, which, with a physical, centralised, and top-down approach, was implemented in the form of six national development plans. From the early days, tensions arose between different levels of governance (national, regional, and local) and the complexity of power relations among the numerous actors in the urban arena took shape, which continue to this day.
After the Islamic Revolution (1978), while maintaining and revising some of the previous planning tools (such as the introduction of detailed plans and later strategic-structural plans), we have witnessed conceptual and institutional transformations. With the increase in the urban population and the increasing complexity of urban issues, the concept of "urban management" became necessary, and the need for an integrated approach, inter-sectoral coordination, and strengthening the role of local management was emphasised. However, the transition from purely physical planning to efficient and integrated urban management has faced serious structural and operational challenges. The challenge of institutional (vertical and horizontal) and programmatic coordination and centralisation remains one of the main obstacles to achieving desirable urban management.
Therefore, the need for "urban policy" as a link between macro planning and effective implementation is felt more than ever. The lack of a coherent and

evidence-based policy framework, both in theory and in practise, makes it difficult to advance urban development goals. In these circumstances, macro development policies (including the Land Use Master Plan, the National and Regional Physical Plan, the National 5-Year Programme Laws, and the policies communicated by high authorities), macro-economic, social and environmental trends, and international commitments (such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the New Urban Agenda), have created new requirements and orientations for the urban policy, planning and management system, which require more coordinated and integrated mechanisms to achieve sustainable urban development. In the meantime, Iran has taken steps towards developing an NUP. The pilot phase of this program, entitled "National Urban Policy and Smart City Strategy Document in Iran," began in 2017 as a collaboration between UN-Habitat, the Government of South Korea, and three pilot countries (Iran, Nigeria, and Myanmar) (see reference).

Figure 9: Mausoleum of Saadi, Shiraz

Note: Photo by H,Asvad

Overall Framework of the National Urban Policy of Iran (Pilot Version)

The pilot phase of this program, entitled "National Urban Policy and Smart City Strategy Document in Iran," began in 2017 as a collaboration between UN-Habitat, the Government of South Korea, and three pilot countries (Iran, Nigeria, and Myanmar). The following is an abstract from the report:

The main objective of this programme was to develop a framework for the National Urban Policy and related Smart City strategies in Iran, and to create a platform for strengthening coordination, coherence, capacity building, mutual learning and exchange of international experiences in this field.

The overall vision of the National Urban Policy in Iran is to achieve "productive, inclusive, sustainable and resilient urban development" in the long term.

Figure 10: Lahijan, Gilan

Note: Photo by Ghazbanpour

These goals are in line with the principles of sustainable urban development emphasised by UN-Habitat. The National Urban Policy of Iran plays a dual role:

At the national level:

It acts as a tool for coordinating territorial and urban development. This is done by creating links between sectoral policies (such as housing, transport, environment) and integrating government actions at the national, regional and local levels.

At the international level:

It acts as a key operational mechanism for implementing, monitoring and reporting on global commitments and programmes related to sustainable urban development. Among the most important of these programmes are the "New Urban Agenda," the "Paris Agreement (COP21)" on climate change, and the "Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction."

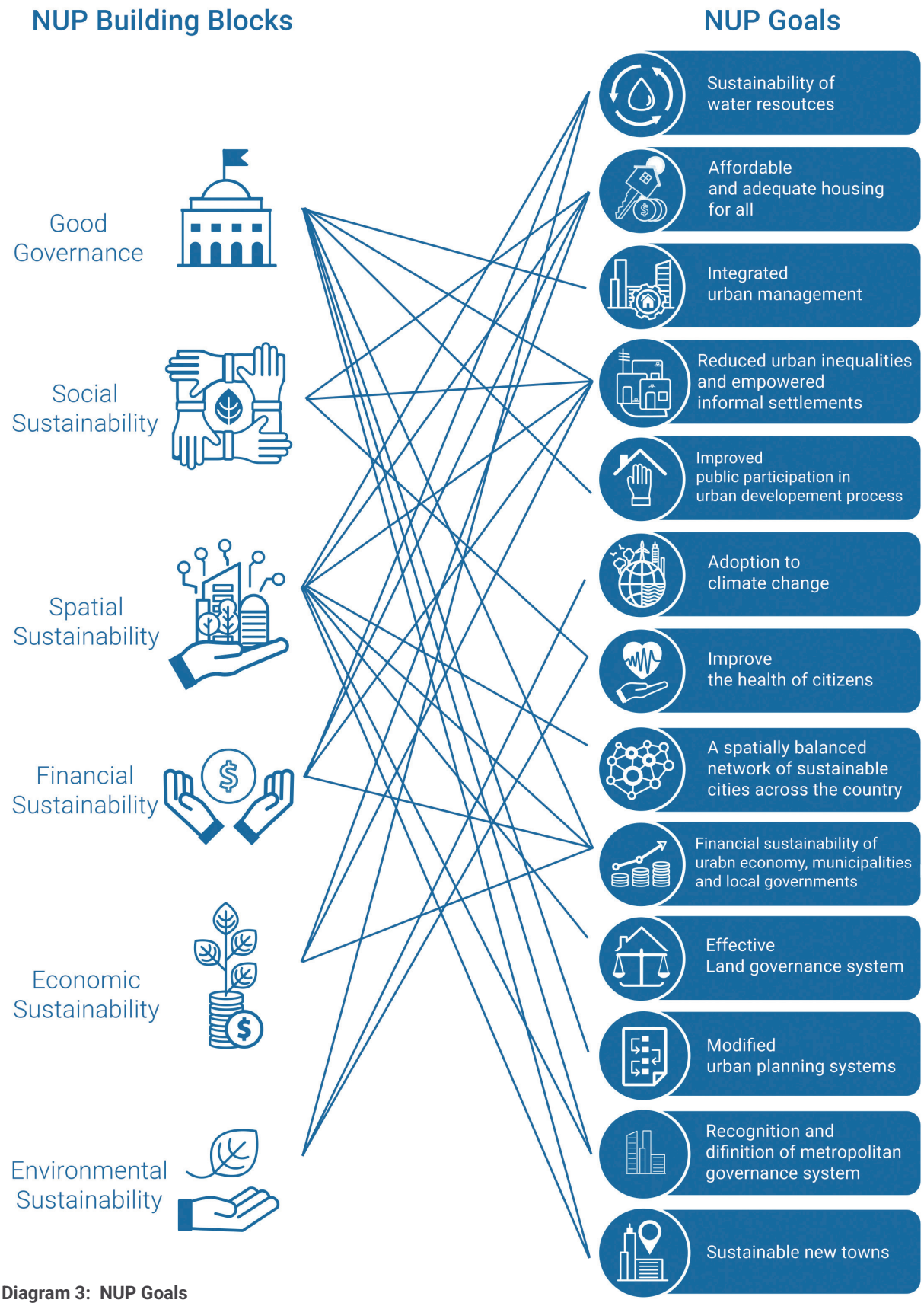


Diagram 3: NUP Goals

Note: Iran's National Urban Policy Report

Thirteen main areas have been identified as key priorities for the National Urban Policy of Iran:

- Policy 1: Transition to a coherent and integrated urban management system
- Policy 2: Creating an integrated framework for the urban and regional planning system of Iran
- Policy 3: Promoting participation at various levels of governance (from local to national)
- Policy 4: Pursuing effective measures to reduce the effects and strengthen adaptation to climate change
- Policy 5: Reviewing the housing planning system to achieve a balanced market for access to adequate and affordable housing for all
- Policy 6: Spatial planning for the realisation of a network of sustainable cities
- Policy 7: Establishing a land management system
- Policy 8: Improving the urban economy and providing sustainable revenue sources for municipalities
- Policy 9: Preventing the expansion of informal settlements and improving the quality of life in vulnerable urban areas
- Policy 10: Defining the concept and position of metropolitan areas in the urban planning and governance system of Iran
- Policy 11: Water-sensitive urban development through integrated water resources management (IWRM)1
- Policy 12: Rethinking the role and position of new cities as smart, eco-friendly, and economic cities
- Policy 13: Paying attention to the health and well-being of citizens in urban development. The identified priorities cover a wide range of challenges and opportunities facing Iranian cities and require coordinated action at different levels of governance, along with sufficient resource allocation and continuous monitoring.

1.3. Urban Profile of the Islamic Republic of Iran

The global process of urbanisation is expanding at an unprecedented rate, and it is projected that by 2030, the world's urban population will exceed 5 billion. This trend reflects an increasing concentration of population, economic activities, and development challenges in urban areas. In many developing countries, including Iran, urbanisation has created extensive changes in the spatial distribution of population, resources, and land use. According to the first official census of Iran in 1956, 31.4 percent of the population was urban. The year 1980 is a turning point in the spatial settlement system of the population in Iran; In this year, for the first time, the percentage of the urban population was equal to the rural population. This is while the equality of the urban and rural population in the world happened 28 years later, in 2008, and the United Nations called this year the year of "urbanisation." After passing this turning point, the population balance changed in favour of the urban population, and urbanisation increased. In general, the trend and process of urbanisation in Iran is mainly due to four main factors: natural growth of the urban population, net rural-to-urban migration, annexation of peripheral areas, and conversion of rural areas into cities. Urbanisation in Iran is associated with features and challenges:

- **Rapid Urbanisation:** Based on the results of the first official census in 1950, about one-third of Iran's population lived in 199 urban areas. According to the latest official census in 2016, this ratio has changed to 74.1 percent in 1242 urban areas.

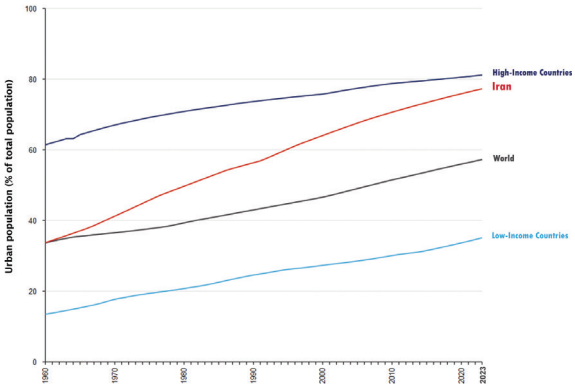


Diagram 4: Comparison of Iran's Urbanization Trend with the World, 1960-2023

- **Macrocephaly:** A detailed analysis of the population structure of urban settlements in Iran indicates a strong concentration of population in a limited ring. According to official statistics, more than 71 percent of Iran's urban population is concentrated in only 9 percent of the cities (99 cities with a population of more than 100,000 people). A phenomenon that shows the

necessity of balanced development of the urban network and strengthening the role of intermediate cities in preventing forced migration.

- **Expansion of Urban Poverty:** About one-third of Iran's urban population lives in settlements that face various physical, social, economic and environmental problems. In Iran, these areas include historical areas, deteriorated areas, informal settlements and high-risk areas, which together cover an area of more than 177,000 hectares.

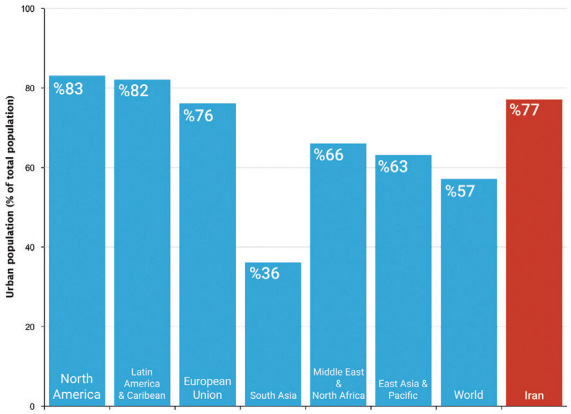


Diagram 5: Comparison of Urbanization Rates: Iran and Global Regions, 2023

- **Challenge of Providing Adequate Housing:** Providing adequate and affordable housing is one of the fundamental challenges in urban areas of Iran. Government efforts to resolve this crisis through social housing projects such as Mehr Housing and the National Housing Movement Plan have faced challenges in terms of affordability. Living in about 2.7 million unsustainable housing units and the share of about 40 percent of housing costs in the average urban household expenditure basket indicates an unfavourable situation in this area.
- **Climate Change and Environmental Hazards:** Iranian cities face serious environmental challenges caused by climate change (increasing temperatures, drought and subsidence, earthquakes, dust storms and sudden floods) and increased pressure on resources. Air pollution in cities is

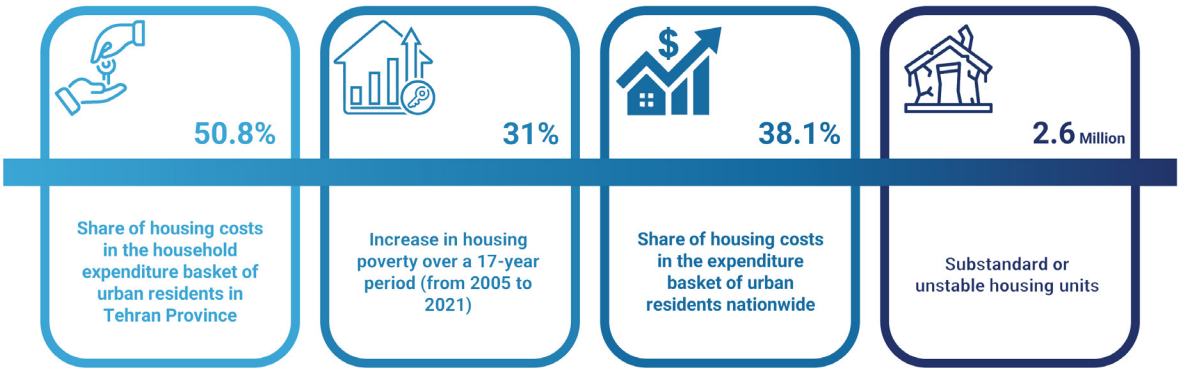


Diagram 6: General Condition Of Urban Housing in Iran, 2023

another threat to public health.

- **Internal Migration:** About 61 percent of Iran's provinces are known as migrant-sending areas, the most important reasons for which are unbalanced development and centralism, climate change and environmental hazards (such as drought, dust storms, floods).
- **The Refugee Issue:** The Islamic Republic of Iran hosts one of the largest urban refugee populations for one of the longest periods in the world, and has been a haven for refugees for four decades. According to official reports, it is estimated that about 4.5 million displaced people with different residency status are present in Iran, the majority of whom are Afghans. This number of refugees has changed the population composition of many cities and put additional pressure on urban infrastructure such as housing and public services (3).
- **International Sanctions:** International sanctions have had a profound impact on urban development in Iran. According to the World Bank, Iran's gross domestic product (GDB) halved between 2010 and 2020 (from $487 billion to $262 billion). During the same period, inflation rose from 10 percent annually to 45 percent. By reducing economic growth and the level of public welfare and increasing inflation, sanctions have limited the government's ability to invest and rebuild urban infrastructure and develop affordable housing.
- **Aging Population:** According to official estimates, one-third of Iran's population will be elderly in the next 30 years; This is while the trend of changes in this index in developed countries occurs over 70 to 120 years. Increased public spending (especially health), infrastructure shortages, changing

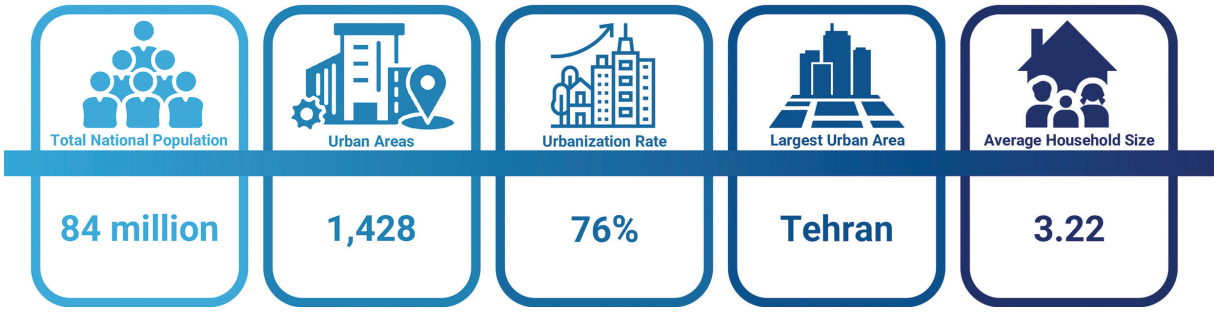
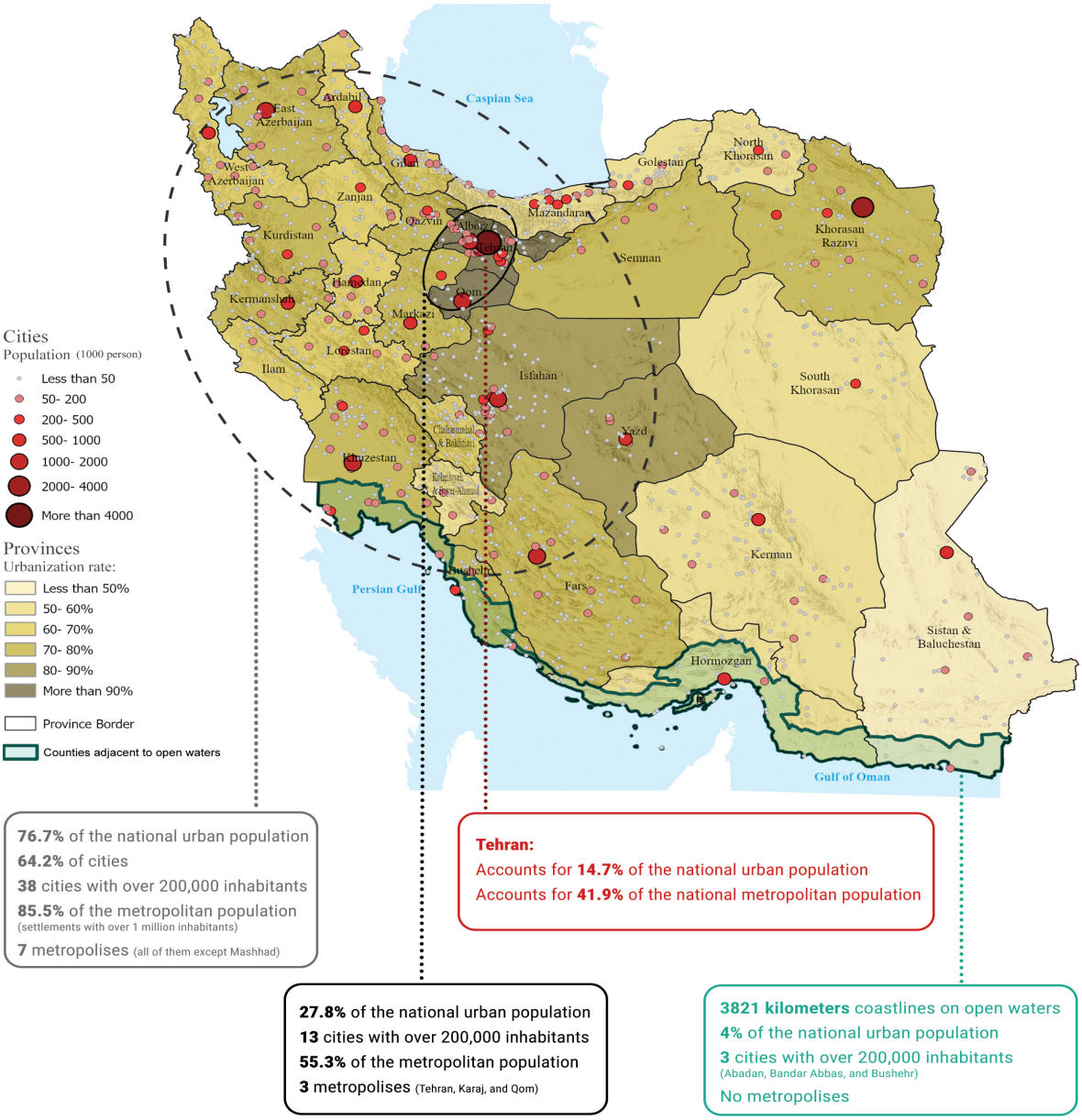


Diagram 7: Comparison of Urbanization Rates: Iran and Global Regions, 2023

lifestyles, and increased dependence and instability of the welfare system are among the most important challenges ahead.

- **Relative Underdevelopment of Coastal Cities:** The total length of Iran's coasts is about 4,700 kilometers (28.4% of the borders), a large part of which is dedicated to the southern coasts with a length of 3,821 kilometers. Despite the access of the southern cities of Iran to open waters, less than 4 percent of Iran's urban population lives in this area.



Map 1: Spatial distribution of urban population and urbanization in Iran - 2016

Figure 11: Bandar-e Anzali

Note: Photo by H,Asvad

Figure 12: Dowlat Abad Garden, Yazd
Note: Photo by H,Asvad

Chapter 2:

Urban Renovation and Upgrading in the Islamic Republic of Iran

2.1. The Policy Evolution of Urban Renewal and Regeneration

2.2. Deprived Urban Areas: A Core Challenge for Urban Development

Urban Renovation and Upgrading in Iran

2.1. The Policy Evolution of Urban Renewal and Regeneration

The evolution of urban revitalisation and upgrading policies in Iran over the past half-century has undergone a gradual and developmental transition. It shows a shift from purely physical interventions (1970s), towards equity-oriented and emergency approaches (post-Revolution era -1979- and war era -until 1988-), then sectoral and consolidation interventions (1988-1989), a transition to the discourse of empowerment and institutional development (1997-2005), followed by a focus on planning and indicator development (2005-2009) and participatory revitalisation (2010-2012), and finally, a move towards city-wide, inclusive, community-oriented paradigms (from 2013 onwards). A more in-depth review will follow.

- **Period 1979 to 1989:** During this era, numerous revolutionary institutions were formed with the aim of organizing the land and housing situation. Organisations such as the Mostazafan Foundation (Foundation of the Oppressed), the Islamic Revolution Housing Foundation, and Jihad-e Sazandegi (Construction Jihad) were established. Urban upgrading policy also commenced with the issuance of directives for preparing “facilitation plans” (Tarh-haye Ravanbakhshi), but these plans largely adopted a governmental nature and were limited to localised and physical projects.
- **Period 1989 to 1993:** After the end of the Imposed War (Iran-Iraq War), attention to the central urban areas and the centres of war-damaged cities increased. Plans known as “historical-cultural corridors” were also prepared in some cities. A significant development during this period was the transformation of municipalities into semi-private, independently revenue-generating organisations,

which led to the sale of excess building density and the vertical expansion of cities. This compromised urban living quality and exacerbated the spread of informal settlements. The First National Development Plan (1989-1993) was implemented with an emphasis on land preparation policies and increasing the construction of durable buildings. The policy of infill development and attention to urban centres was also prioritised from 1991, leading to the preparation of urban upgrading and revitalisation plans.

Period 1993 to 1997: The Second National Development Plan (1995-1999) was implemented during this period, and we witnessed the formulation of the National and Regional Physical Plan. Studies on marginalisation and the concept of informal settlements were introduced into urban development literature. The "PAK" policy (Savings, Mass Construction, and Downsizing - Pasandaz, Anboohsazi, Koochaksazi) and the reform of regulations concerning housing sector subsidies and the rental housing law were other initiatives of this period. The policy of addressing problematic urban areas and utilizing lands in urban centres for housing provision was prioritised, leading to the development of standard terms of reference (ToR) aimed at consolidation. The establishment of the Urban Development and Improvement Organisation of Iran (UDRC) and the delegation of many housing revitalisation-related tasks to this organisation are other important events of this era. Furthermore, the establishment of the National Engineering Disciplinary Organisation (NCESO) and the approval of Regulation 2800 (Seismic Design of Buildings) were aimed at improving construction quality, although strict oversight of its implementation was lacking. Reviews indicate that urban regeneration, with the goal of revitalizing abandoned or underutilised urban spaces and strengthening cultural identity, gained attention during this period.

Period 1997 to 2005: With the commencement of operations by the Urban Development and Improvement Organisation, this body assumed the role of policymaker, planner, and supervisor for development and upgrading programmes. The policy of infill development, relying on intermediate lands, and the development of studies on marginalisation (informal settlements) were among this organisation's

initiatives. The Third National Development Plan (2000-2004) began with an approach focused on regularisation and empowerment, emphasizing the upgrading, revitalisation, and Revitalisation of urban areas. Collaboration with the World Bank for the regularisation of informal settlements led to the preparation of the National Empowerment Document for Informal Settlements in 2003. This document represented a confluence of Iranian and global urban development programmes and emphasised the government's facilitative role and public participation. The principle of Security of Tenure in informal settlements was introduced for the first time, and social, educational, and institution-building measures were prioritised.

Period 2005 to 2009: This period was marked by the establishment of indicators for fine-grain texture, instability, and impermeability (lack of access) to identify deteriorated urban areas, which led to the identification of over 76,000 hectares of such areas nationwide. Institution-building for the National Empowerment Document for Informal Settlements continued. The Comprehensive Housing Plan was prepared in 2006, one of its objectives being the regularisation of informal settlements based on participation and resident empowerment. However, the emergence of the Mehr Housing initiative in 2007 led to the neglect of other provisions of the Comprehensive Housing Plan. The approval of the Law on Organizing and Supporting Housing Production and Supply in 2008 laid the legal foundation for various incentives and facilities for housing revitalisation, as well as the implementation of Mehr Housing projects. Studies show that the Mehr Housing project, as one of the largest public housing projects, significantly contributed to homeownership for low-income households. This period coincided with the Fourth National Development Plan (2005-2009).

Period 2009 to 2013: During this period, Facilitation Offices and Revitalization Services were established in Tehran to facilitate processes in deteriorated urban areas. The Law on Supporting the Revitalisation, Upgrading, and Revitalisation of Deteriorated and Deprived Urban Areas was approved in 2010. This law paved the way for extensive transformations in the path of urban revitalisation and upgrading in Iran. The Fifth National Development Plan (2011-2015) emphasised the

preparation and revision of the Comprehensive Housing Plan with an empowerment approach and the creation of a platform for resident participation. However, the allocation of a large portion of the government budget to Mehr Housing led to the neglect of other social, institutional, and cultural policies and the failure to achieve the programme's objectives regarding the Revitalisation of deteriorated areas. The construction of over 1.2 million Mehr urban housing units was implemented by 2014, but it was accompanied by challenges such as a lack of attention to housing industrialisation, low accessibility, and a shortage of services.

Period 2013 to 2020: In this era, the revision of indicators for identifying deteriorated areas (shifting the focus from "deterioration" to "inefficiency") and a change in approach towards urban regeneration were prioritised. The National Strategic Document for the Revitalisation, Upgrading, Revitalisation, and Empowerment of Deteriorated and Deprived Urban Areas was approved in 2014, aiming to encompass all target areas requiring intervention (historical areas, deteriorated areas, and informal settlements). National, Provincial, and County Taskforces for Sustainable Urban Regeneration were established, and relevant executive bylaws were prepared. The Sixth National Development Plan (2017-2021) also paid special attention to Deprived urban areas with a neighbourhood-oriented approach. In 2018, the Iran Urban Development and Improvement Mother Company (UDRO) was renamed the Iran Urban Regeneration Corporation (URCI). The Omid Housing Plan (Hope Housing Plan) was introduced, centred on the public sector with private sector participation, aimed at reconstructing residential units in deteriorated areas and implementing urban regeneration catalyst projects. An emphasis on sustainable urban regeneration and simultaneous attention to economic, social, environmental, and physical-spatial dimensions are characteristic of this period.

Summary: The review of policymaking in the field of urban revitalisation and upgrading in Iran reveals numerous fluctuations and shifts in approach across different periods. Policies have evolved from an exclusive emphasis on physical development to an appreciation of social, economic, and participatory dimensions. Nevertheless, challenges such as the growth of informal settlements, the deterioration

of urban areas, the shortage of adequate housing for low-income groups, and incoordination between programmes and actions persist.
The move towards sustainable urban regeneration and the empowerment of local communities appears to be a promising approach to address these challenges, but it requires meticulous planning, sufficient resource allocation, and continuous monitoring of implementation. The next section of the report will provide a detailed presentation of a decade of national urban regeneration policy in Iran.

2.2. Deprived Urban Areas; The Challenge of Urban Development in Iran

The share of urbanization in Iran increased from 31.4 percent to 74 percent over a 50-year period (1956-2016), representing a nearly tenfold growth in its urban population.
This rapid urbanization has led to a decline in the quality of life across significant portions of urban areas. It is estimated that approximately 20 million people reside in over 177,000 hectares of urban areas requiring upgrading and substantial interventions to enhance living standards. More than 48 percent of buildings within these areas have been identified as structurally non-durable.

Deprived urban areas, as defined by the latest resolution of the Supreme Council of Urban Planning and Architecture (2021), are identified as "Target Areas and Neighborhoods for Urban Upgrading, Renovation, and Regeneration." Deprived Urban Areas: These are areas within the city that require renovation, upgrading, and revitalization. They are categorized into types such as historical areas, deteriorated areas, and informal settlements. The prominent characteristics of these areas are as follows:

- Residents have lower per capita incomes and higher unemployment rates as compared with the city averages.
- As compared with the city averages, housing units are not durable, population density is high, and there are also environmental problems.
- Residents have inadequate access to urban services and infrastructure.
- As compared with the rest of the city, social aberrations are apparent and further encouraged.
- Historic and cultural identities have been neglected—social dignity and social esteem have declined in these areas—giving rise to an underclass substitution effect.

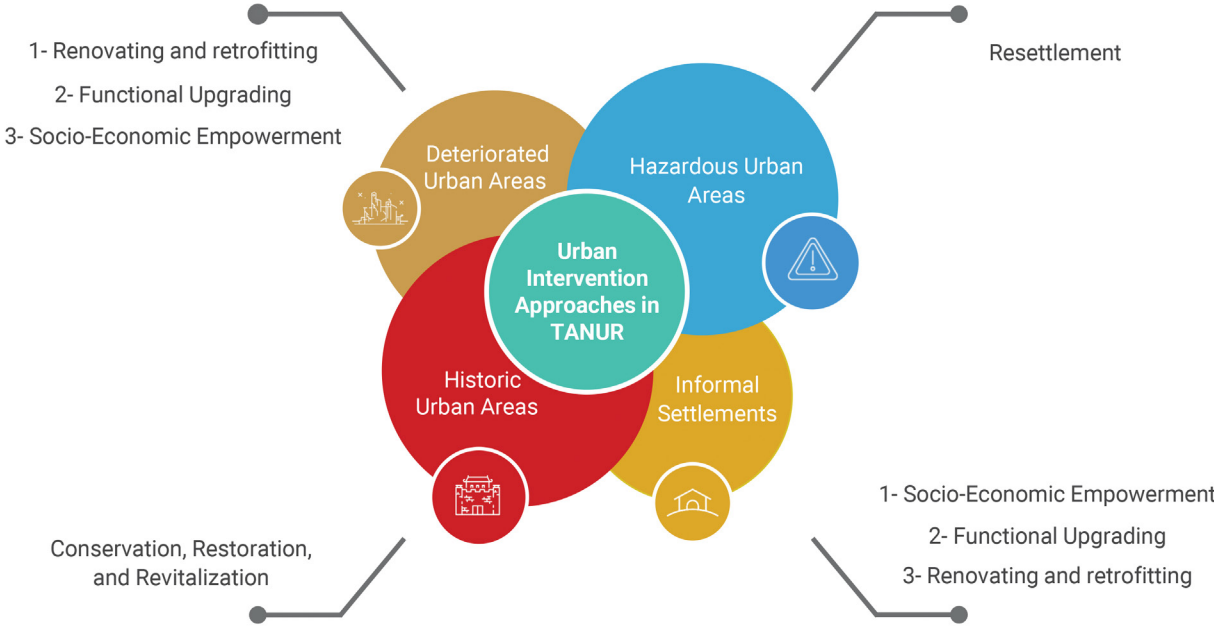


Diagram 8: Categories of Urban Areas and Associated Intervention Approaches

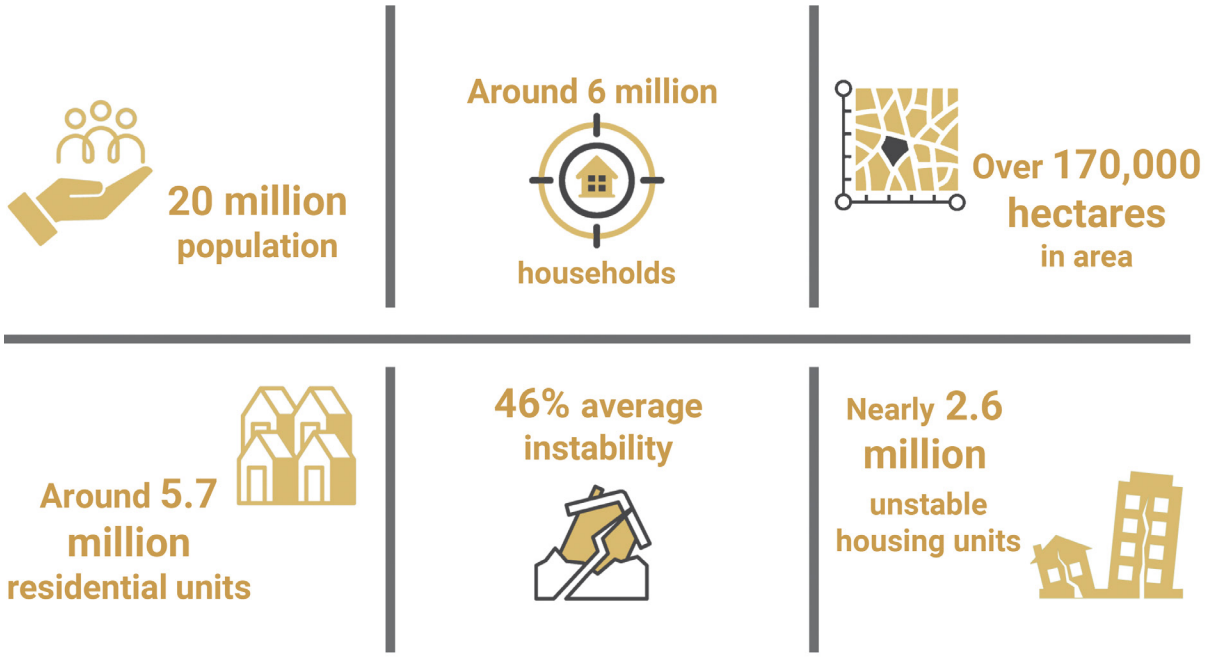


Diagram 9: Target Areas and Neighborhoods for Urban Upgrading and Regeneration (TANUR)

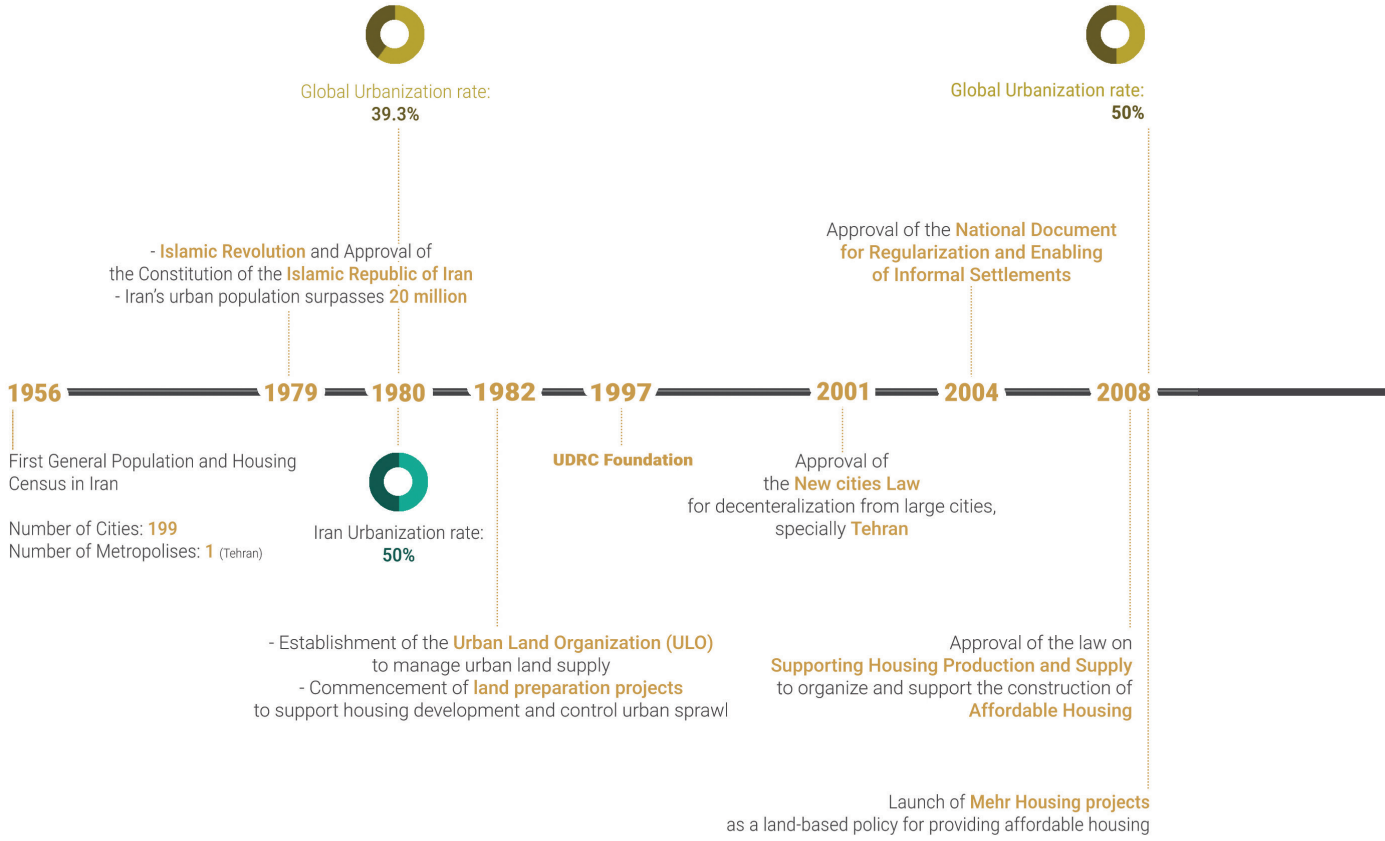


Diagram 10: Timeline of Key Urban Development Milestones in Iran

2011

Low on **Supporting the Rehabilititation, Improvement, and Renovation of Deteriorated and Underutilised Urban Areas**

The guideline for the establishment of **Urban Regeneration Service Offices** to support target Deteriorated and Informal neighbourhoods

2013

UDRO as **National Centre for Urban Regeneration programs**

2014

Approval of the **National Strategic Document for Revitalising, Upgrading, Renovating and Enabling Deteriorated and Underutilised Urban Fabrics**

2015

SDG 11
Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable

2016

Last General Population and Housing Census in Iran

Number of Cities: **1242**
Number of Metropolises: **8**
(Tehran, Mashhad, Isfahan,Tabriz,Shiraz, Ahwaz, Karaj and Qom)

approval of the **National Urban regeneration program**

Habitat III New Urban Agenda as the global framework for sustainable urban developement

2018

Elaboration of **Urban regeneration policies** to enhance livability and quality of life in target urban areas

2021

Review and amendment of the **Guideline for Identifying Target Neighbourhoods for Urban Upgrading, Renovation, and Regeneration**

2022

Prepration of the preliminary draft of **Iran's National Urban Policy (Iran's NUP)**

2023-4

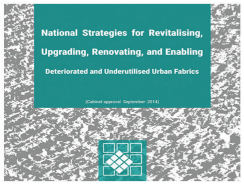
Approval of the **Set of Incentive Measures for Revitalizing and Strengthening Habitations within Cultural-Historical Urban Areas**

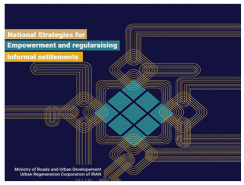
Global Urbanization rate: **57%**

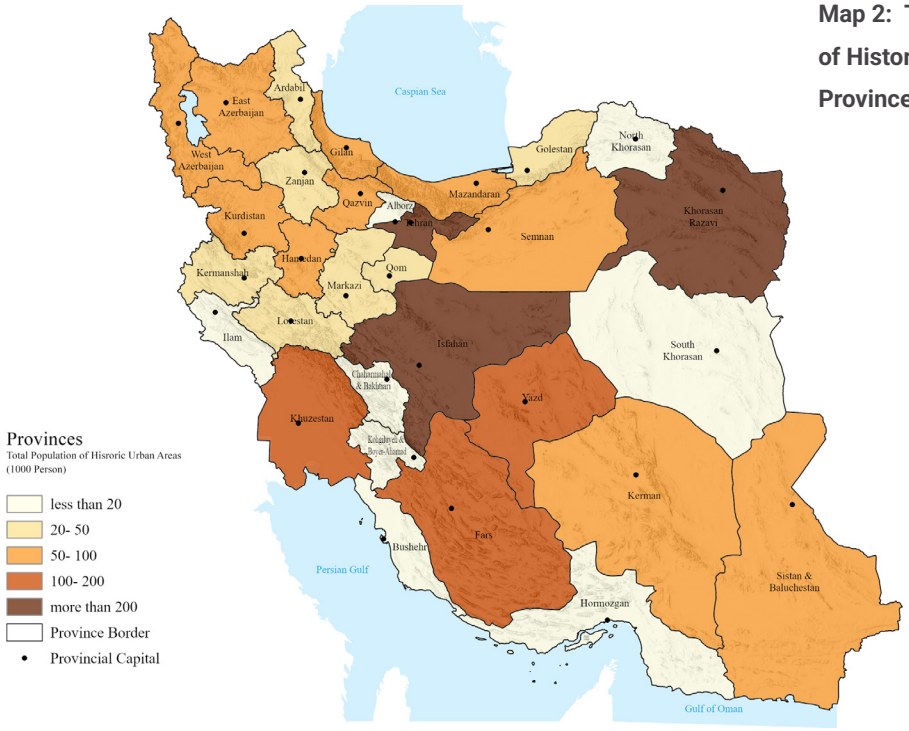
Iran Urbanization rate: **77%**
Iran's urban population had exeeded **70 million**

Approval of the **National Strategic document for Empowerment and regularaisation of Informal settlements**

Approval of the **Physical incentive regulations and policies ensuring neighbourhood renewal in Deteriorated and Underutilised Urban Fabrics**







Map 2: Total Population of Historic Urban Areas by Province - 2016

Historic Urban Area

Section(s) of city reflecting cultural-historic values, formed through the interaction between human beings and their surrounding environments in the course of time and distinguished from other zones by apparent characteristics and constituent structures

Map 3: Total Area of Historic Urban Areas by Province - 2016

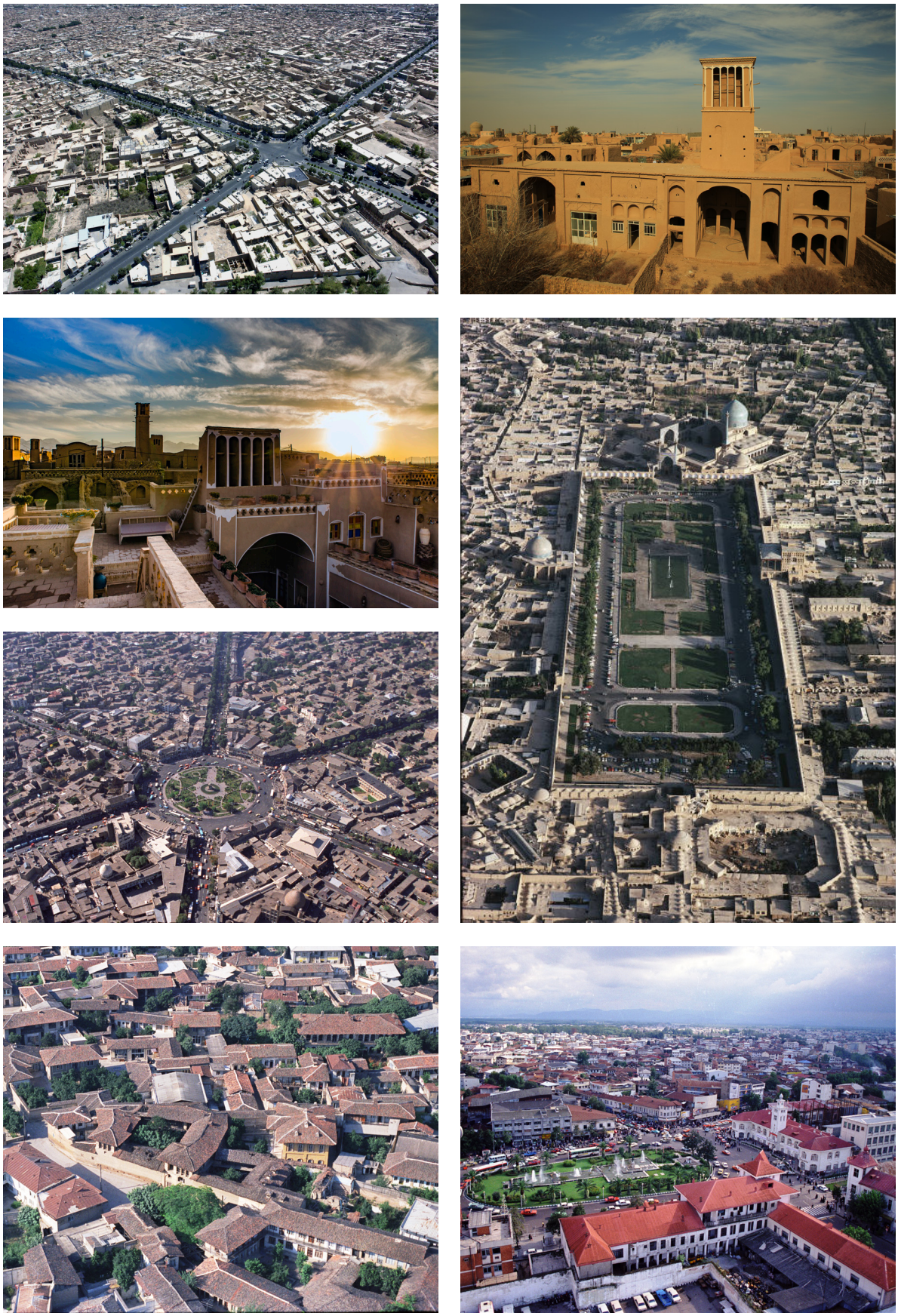
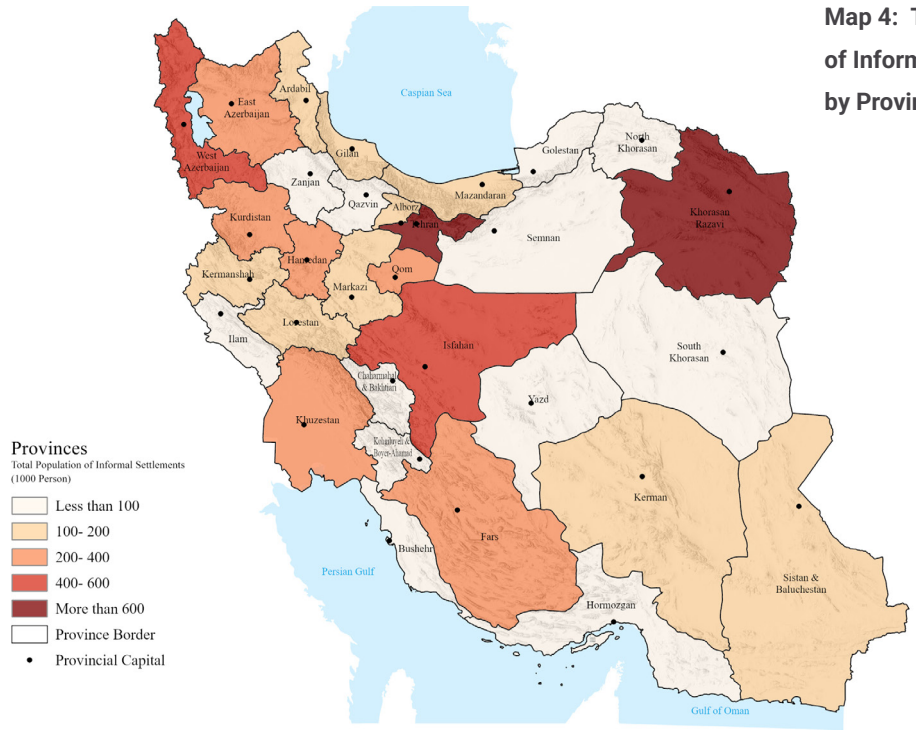


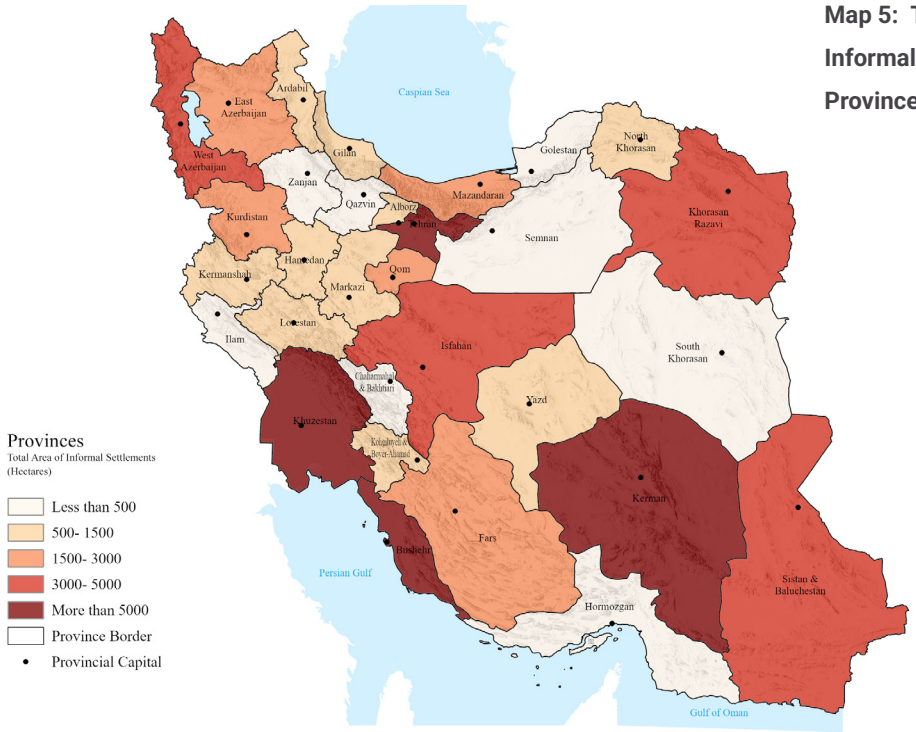
Figure 13: Images from Some Historic Areas



Map 4: Total Population of Informal Settlements by Province - 2016

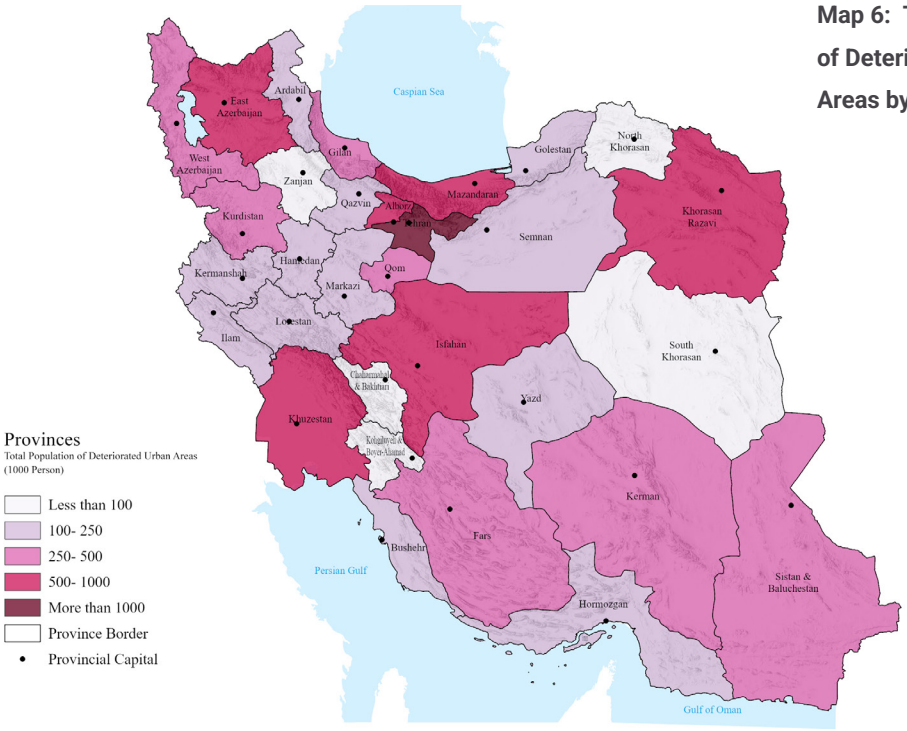
Informal settlement:

Areas predominantly inhabited by rural migrants and the urban poor, which have developed without legal permits and outside of formal and legal urban development planning (such as comprehensive and detailed plans), either within or outside the legal boundaries of cities.



Map 5: Total Area of Informal Settlements by Province - 2016

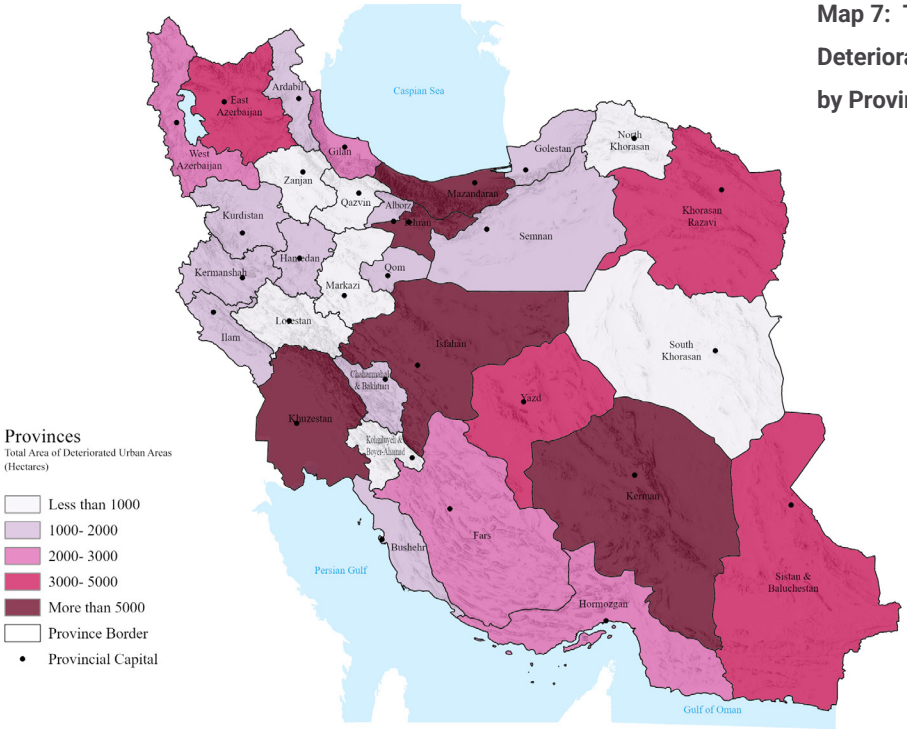
Figure 14: Images from Some Informal Settlments



Map 6: Total Population of Deteriorated Uran Areas by Province - 2016

Deteriorated urban area:

Refers to areas within a city where, over past years, constituent elements—including superstructures, infrastructure, buildings, structures, streets, and access ways—have become dilapidated and inefficient, and whose residents suffer from multiple economic, social, cultural, and physical problems.



Map 7: Total Area of Deteriorated Uran Areas by Province

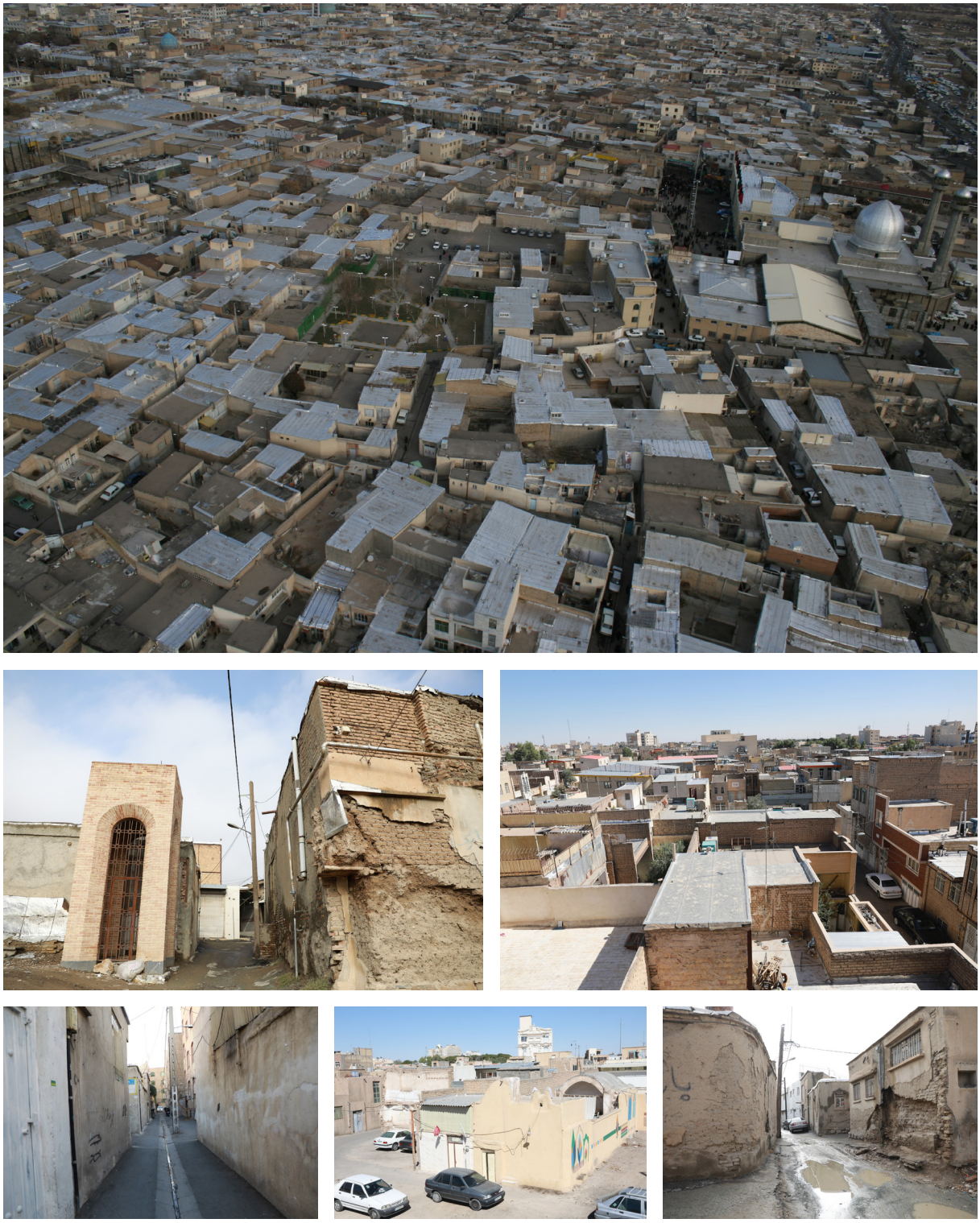


Figure 15: Images from Some Deteriorated Urban Areas

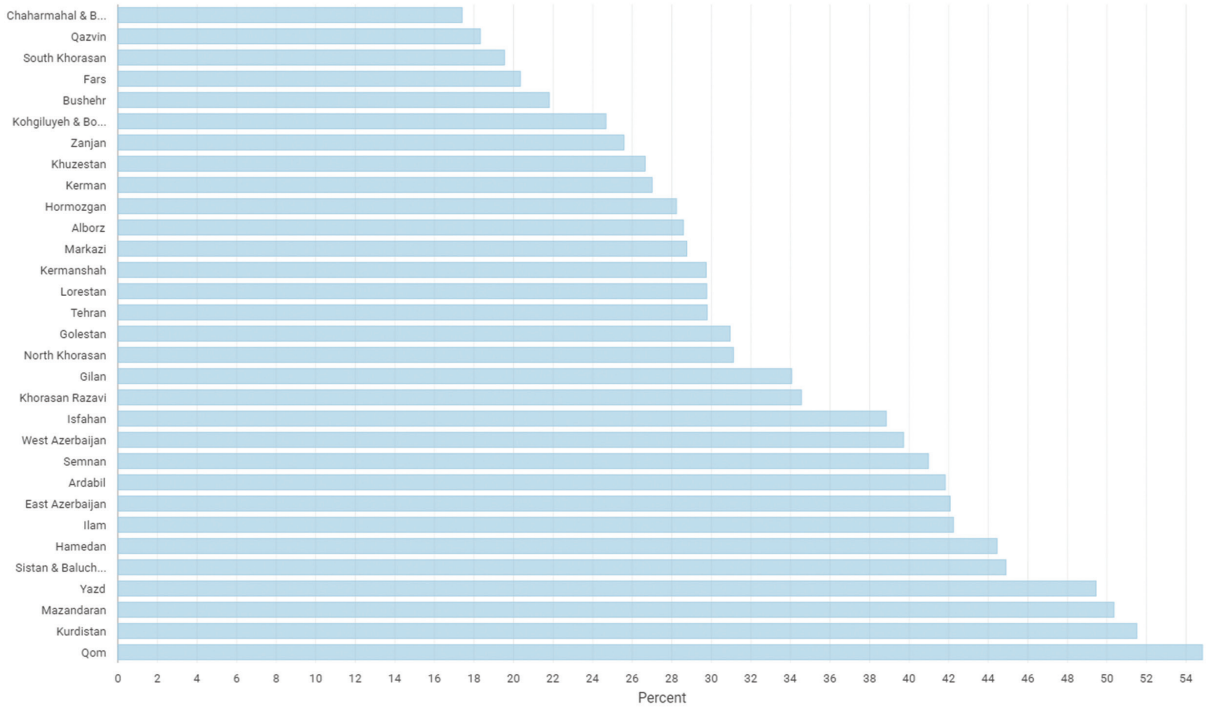


Diagram 11: Percentage of Provincial Urban Population Residing Within Deprived Urban Areas - 2016

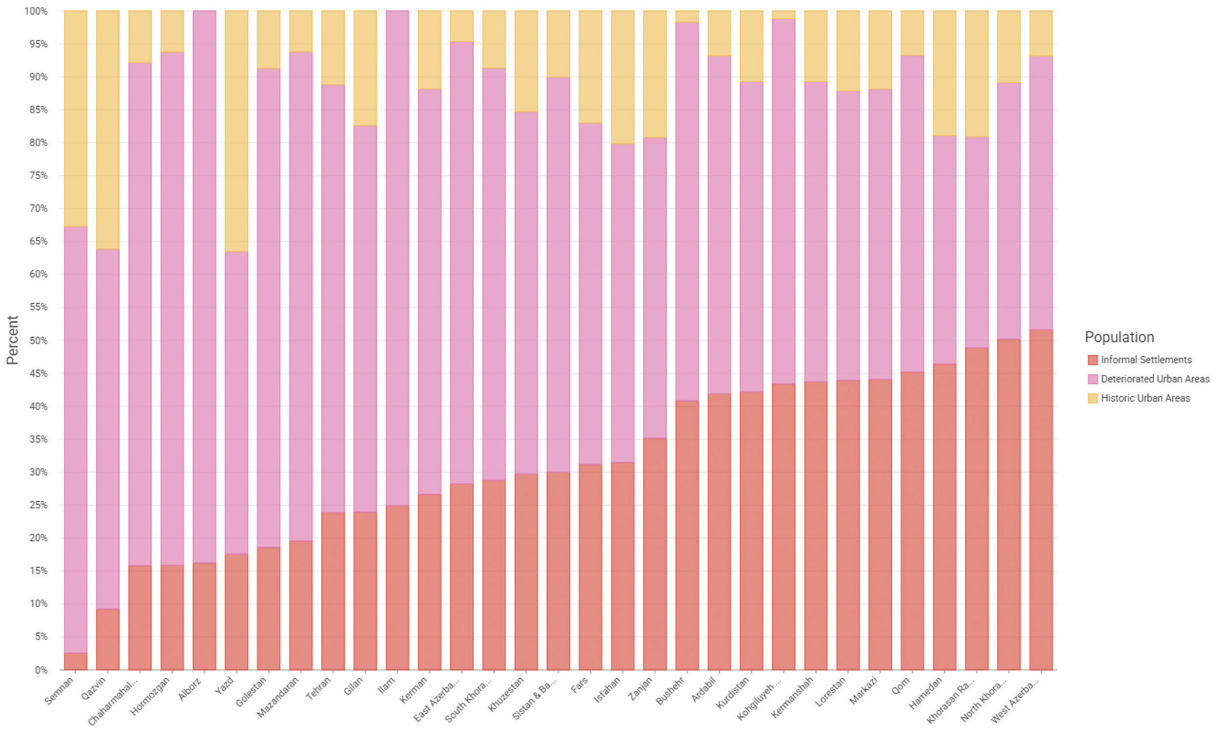


Diagram 12: Distribution of the Population Across Types of Deprived Urban Areas by Province - 2016

Figure 16: Naqsh-e-Jahan Square, Isfahan

Note: Photo by Unknown

Figure 17: Shahzadeh Hossein
Note: Photo by H,Asvad

Figure 18: Vakil Mosque, Shiraz

Note: Photo by H.Asvad

Chapter 3:

Sustainable Urban Regeneration in the Islamic Republic of Iran: National Policy and Implementation

3.1. Introduction to Urban Regeneration Concepts

3.2. Iran's National Urban Regeneration Policy: The Rationale

3.3. Iran's National Urban Regeneration Policy: Content and Objectives

3.4. Iran's National Urban Regeneration Policy: Strategic Approach

3.5. Executive Framework of Iran's National Urban Regeneration Policy

Sustainable Urban Regeneration in the Islamic Republic of Iran: National Policy and Implementation

3.1. Introduction to Urban Regeneration Concepts

The issues and challenges of urban life have always been a concern for humanity. However, in the modern sense of urban planning practise, governments' confrontation with inefficiency in cities dates back to the period after the First and Second World Wars. Subsequently, diverse approaches and policies were employed to respond to these challenges and meet the needs of citizens.

"Urban reconstruction" after World War II, between 1950 and 1960, was the primary policy of governments in dealing with Deprived urban areas. In this policy, the fabric of these areas was considered problematic, deteriorated, and an unhealthy urban core, which was addressed through authoritarian reconstruction. This approach adopted a museological view of the city's historical heritage and emphasised residential functions, access to light, air, and sanitation in a general sense. Under this policy, only the physical dimension of the challenges was considered and emphasised by planners. The solution was defined as the demolition of the city's spatial and physical structure and its authoritarian reconstruction through top-down plans. The absence of life in its true meaning, evident in the outcomes of physical reconstruction projects in the 1960s and 1970s, highlighted the necessity for a change in policies addressing urban inefficiency.

Consequently, "urban renewal" was defined as a policy seeking to achieve other aspects of civil and social life in cities. However, in practise, this policy was implemented through two streams: "redevelopment," involving the acquisition and consolidation of Deprived areas, which was, in a way, a continuation of the authoritarian reconstruction approach and was

accompanied by the displacement of the urban poor from urban development programmes and their relocation to suburbs; and "urban revitalisation," a form of renewal that also considered economic and social development.

The spread of poverty, unemployment, and crime following the economic crisis of the 1970s, and the implementation of top-down policies in development programmes, transformed the need for a change in value systems and attention to social dimensions and qualitative aspects of civil life into a public demand by the end of that decade. "Urban regeneration" is a policy that emerged in the early 1980s in response to the negative consequences of urban renewal. This policy, which has undergone an evolutionary process to date, in its later definition and with an emphasis on the dimensions of sustainable development, encompasses actions that, by addressing urban problems, lead to permanent and sustainable improvements in economic, physical, social, and environmental conditions.

3.2. Iran's National Urban Regeneration Policy: The Rationale

Urban changes and transformations in Iran during the 1970s and 1980s (the 1350s and 1360s SH), particularly population shifts within cities, especially metropolises, led to numerous issues and problems. These included the phenomenon of informal settlements and inadequate housing in disadvantaged urban areas, the depopulation of central city areas, and a decline in the quality of life in these zones. Policies and programmes adopted in urban plans, for various reasons, not only failed to prevent the decline in the quality of life but, in some cases, exacerbated the problems in these areas. The main reasons for this issue, which necessitate a change in policies addressing these areas within the urban development planning process, are:

Lack of a spatial planning perspective and disregard for the complex and multidimensional nature of cities.

Absence of national consensus and incoordination among various agencies involved in urban management.

Exclusive focus on physical and aesthetic dimensions, neglecting social, economic, and environmental considerations. Disregard for the cultural-historical values and heritage of cities, threatening remaining artifacts with demolition.
Low quality and unsafe construction practises.
Insufficient attention to existing capacities in development programmes for Deprived areas.
Insufficient attention to the role of actors, especially municipalities as policy implementers, and resident participation.
The National Strategic Document for Upgrading, Revitalisation, and Empowerment of Deteriorated and Deprived Urban Areas (approved by the Council of Ministers, 2014), resolutions of the Supreme Council of Urban Planning and Architecture regarding the paradigm shift from "deterioration" to "inefficiency" and emphasizing the concept of urban regeneration (2014), the resolution on core approaches for the conservation and Revitalisation of historical and cultural areas (2017), the directive on the methodology for identifying target areas for urban regeneration (2018), the approval of the National Urban Regeneration Programme (2017), and other legal requirements, have all been approved in recent years to consolidate and strengthen the national urban regeneration policy. These documents, particularly the provisions of Articles 59, 60, and 61 of the Sixth National Development Plan Law, confirm and emphasise the urban regeneration approach as a necessity for rethinking the processes, methods, and conventional tools of urban planning when dealing with Deprived urban areas (including historical areas, deteriorated areas, informal settlements, and areas located in high-risk zones). The selection of urban regeneration as the main policy in the aforementioned documents necessitates the articulation of a clear framework of basic concepts and executive solutions for this policy in planning and action for these areas. Accordingly, this section of the report will specify through which laws and directives, by which institutions, and within what framework the national urban regeneration policy has been operationalised. This part of the report will also narrate a decade of efforts to improve the quality of life in these areas.

3.3. Iran's National Urban Regeneration Policy: Content and Objectives

A) Definition Urban regeneration policy is a set of comprehensive and integrated perspectives and actions aimed at guiding the process of sustainable urban growth and development, designed to restore the identity of cities and neighbourhoods, enhance the quality of urban life, and increase the liveability of cities. According to the "National Strategic Document for the Revitalisation, Upgrading, Revitalisation, and Empowerment of Deteriorated and Deprived Urban Areas" (2014): "Urban regeneration is a comprehensive development process in economic, social, environmental, and physical spheres to improve the quality of life in target areas and neighbourhoods in conjunction with the rest of the city." This policy is operationalised in two broad domains: prevention and upgrading:

1. Prevention and Foresight Domain: In this domain, programmes and actions must be designed and implemented in a way that prevents the expansion and reproduction of Deprived urban areas. These programmes are formulated at the city, metropolitan, and provincial scales, based on a spatial planning approach and territorial development. The emphasis is on the balanced distribution of population and activities, endogenous urban development, and avoiding uncontrolled horizontal urban sprawl – sprawl that leads to the destruction of natural resources and negative environmental consequences. Utilizing Deprived, heterogeneous, and porous inner-city lands as development reserves within the framework of Revitalisation, upgrading, and revitalisation plans is also a key focus of this domain. Furthermore, programmes such as poverty alleviation, linking physical development with socio-economic development, and providing affordable housing for low-income households within the framework of comprehensive plans with a new approach are other fundamental pillars of the prevention and foresight domain.

2. Upgrading Domain: In this domain, the executive policy of regeneration focuses on formulating programmes at the scale of target areas and is implemented within the framework of a coordinated urban development policymaking system. These programmes are executed in the form of "neighbourhood-based regeneration programmes" and emphasise two key principles:

- **Neighbourhood-Centricity:** Physical

revitalisation alone is not sufficient; rather, the Revitalisation of the social and economic organisation of the neighbourhood, relying on its cultural identity, must be considered.

- **Participation-Centricity:** The regeneration process requires a revision of the neighbourhood management system (such as neighbourhood councils, community houses, revitalisation and facilitation offices) and must be based on mutual interaction between local management and residents, in a way that enables the participation of all actors – regardless of their financial, cultural, or livelihood capacity. Empowering this social organisation, both collectively and individually, is the foundation for realizing this policy.

B) Objectives: This policy adopts a comprehensive, participatory, process-oriented, strategic, city-wide, and community-based approach that leads to the improvement of liveability indicators and the quality of life for citizens. The national regeneration policy includes a network of flexible actions and programmes at various spatial scales and strives towards achieving sustainable development goals. This national policy pursues four key objectives: **reducing urban poverty and preventing its reproduction, enhancing urban resilience, strengthening urban identity and protecting cultural and social values, and also increasing social cohesion among citizens**.

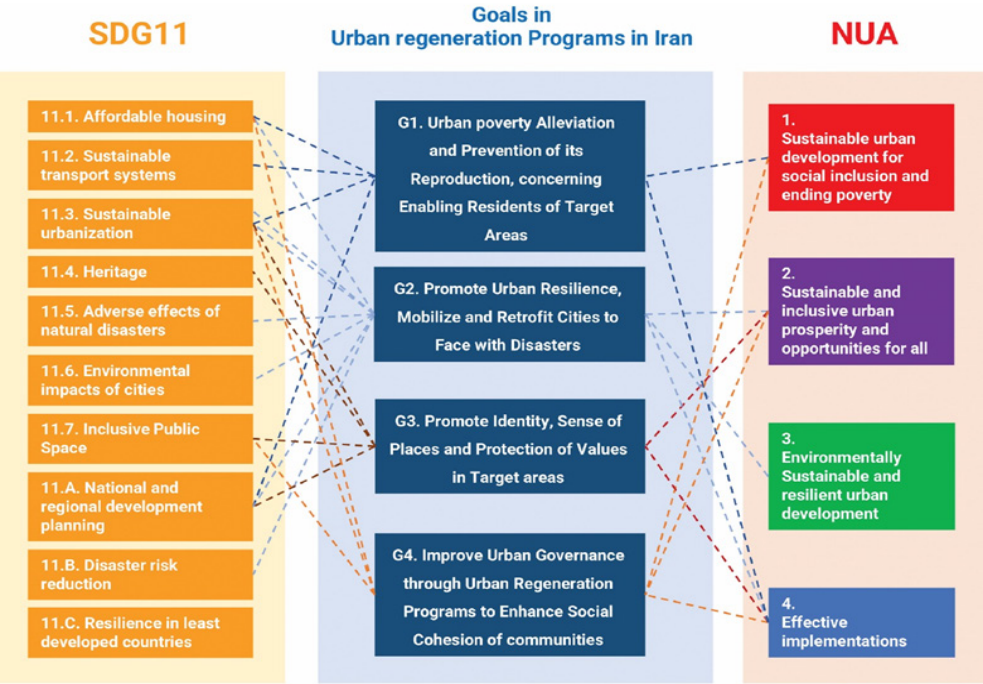


Diagram 13: Alignment of SDG11 and New Urban Agenda (NUA) with Goals in Urban Regeneration Programs in Iran

The vision of this policy in target areas is to improve the economic, social, and environmental conditions of residents, such that sustainable development and liveability indicators in these areas are upgraded to the average level of surrounding cities.

3.4. Iran's National Urban Regeneration Policy: Strategic Approach

The realisation of regeneration policies requires the application of a set of process-oriented, theme-based, and place-based solutions, formulated within a policy-institutional program, which all relevant institutions, including governmental bodies, urban management, and non-governmental organisations, are obliged to implement. These solutions include:

1. Formulating regeneration programmes at national and local scales with a spatial-strategic vision and a holistic approach to the city.
2. Establishing cooperation networks and participatory planning mechanisms to attract maximum participation from all actors, especially residents.
3. Identifying, creating, and strengthening institutions that support the implementation of regeneration programmes.
4. Securing the necessary financial and legal instruments to support programmes.
5. Enhancing the level of residential satisfaction among residents of target neighbourhoods and areas.
6. Achieving an "all-inclusive" approach in the process of preparing and implementing programmes.
7. Conserving and restoring cultural-historical areas as parts of urban identity, in coordination with the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism Organisation.
8. Protecting the natural environment and urban bio-capital.
9. Promoting internal and sustainable development of the local community in target neighbourhoods and areas.
10. Respecting citizens' rights and expanding public spheres.
11. Adopting an "urban catalyst" approach in formulating programmes and executive actions.
12. Creating a balance in land utilisation and optimizing the use of spatial resources.
13. Improving the transportation and accessibility system, with an emphasis on the Transit-Oriented Development

(TOD) model.

14. Paying attention to the requirements and considerations of urban resilience in regeneration programmes.

15. Managing the urban-scape and enhancing the spatial-physical quality of public spaces and buildings in target neighbourhoods.

16. Institutionalizing sustainable urban regeneration policies, strategies, and solutions through education, discourse-building, information dissemination, and cultural-promotional activities.

17. Avoiding actions that lead to social, cultural, economic, or physical disruption of local communities.

18. Creating enforcement mechanisms to ensure the full realisation of these solutions.

3.4.1. Institutional Framework of Iran's National Urban Regeneration Policy

In the past, the government and municipalities have made numerous efforts to reduce the problems arising from Deprived urban areas. However, given that improving the quality of multidimensional phenomena such as urban poverty requires the active cooperation and participation of various groups and actors – including government agencies, municipalities, the private sector and developers, non-governmental organisations – as well as coherence and integration in their programmes and actions, the centralised structure governing the sectoral planning system and the lack of an integrated and coordinated urban management institution have resulted in the implementation of revitalisation and upgrading programmes for these areas in many cities across the country having low effectiveness and limited success. Consequently, responsible agencies (mainly governmental) and municipalities have each acted sporadically and sometimes in parallel, based on their own terms of reference. This lack of coordination in various dimensions and the absence of synergy among actors have not only failed to improve the situation in these areas but have also increased the intensity and complexity of the problems, especially in informal settlements.

Therefore, effectively addressing Deprived urban areas and adopting policies with a multifaceted approach require the adoption of a comprehensive and integrated strategy that can simultaneously target the various social, economic, and physical

dimensions of the problem and benefit from the mutual synergy between these dimensions. Realizing this approach is beyond the capacity of a single executive agency and necessitates commitment and coordination among all relevant institutions, the participation of non-governmental and private entities, and the engagement of local residents.

On the other hand, examining the reasons for the failure or low feasibility of many urban development plans in Iran – under titles such as comprehensive plans, detailed plans, and strategic-structural approaches – shows that these plans, in addition to their top-down nature and lack of attention to local capacities, suffer from a fundamental flaw: the absence of appropriate institution-building at various levels of policymaking, planning, and implementation. Previous experiences in urban empowerment and regeneration initiatives in the country, as well as recommendations and policies from international institutions like UN-Habitat, indicate that upgrading the status of Deprived areas requires multifaceted actions (including housing revitalisation, upgrading neighbourhood infrastructure and services, and improving social and economic conditions) with appropriate institutional mechanisms and strengthening institutional coordination capacity.

In this regard, to align policies,

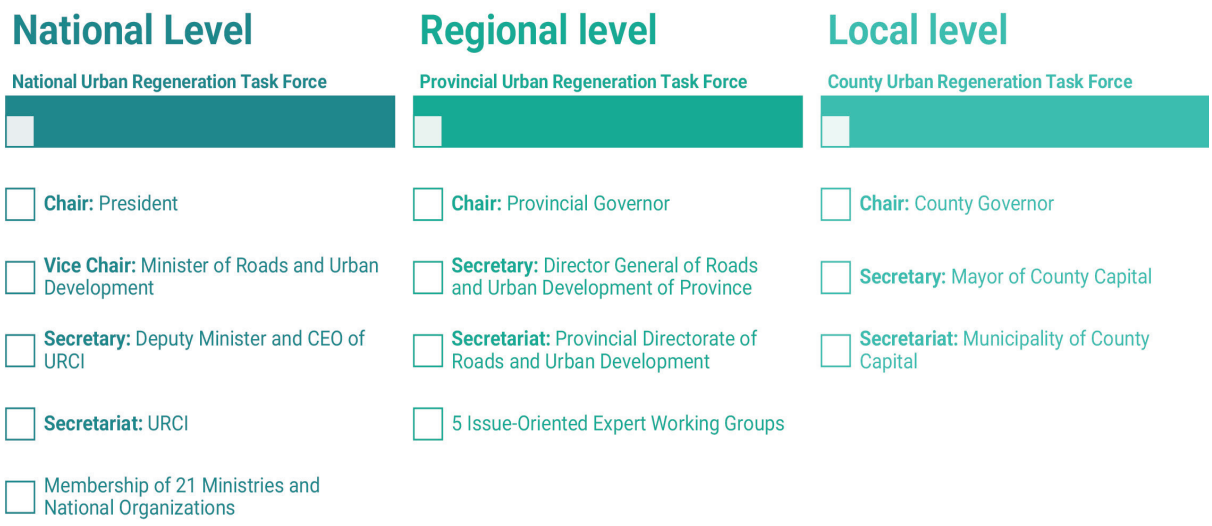


Diagram 14: National Task Force of Sustainable Urban Regeneration

coordinate actions, synergise resources, manage integratively, and create procedural unity among all actors at the national and local levels, and within the framework of Clause 2 of the resolution "National Strategic Document for Revitalisation, Upgrading, Revitalisation, and Empowerment of Deteriorated and Deprived Urban Areas" approved in 2014, National, Provincial, and County Taskforces for Sustainable Urban Regeneration were established. These taskforces, as coordinating institutional structures, have filled the gap of a lack of a coordinated upgrading and regeneration model and have provided a framework for establishing integrated management from the national to the local level.

3.5. Executive Framework of Iran's National Urban Regeneration Policy

As mentioned, the realisation of urban regeneration and the improvement of citizens' quality of life depend on the definition and implementation of an interconnected and synergistic set of coordinated programmes and actions at the urban and local scales, which will be specifically pursued in target neighbourhoods and areas.

After the establishment of the National Taskforce, a comprehensive process began to operationalise this policy. Urban Regeneration Corporation of iran (URCI), as the secretariat of the National Taskforce, was responsible

Diagram 15: Urban Regeneration Leadership and Programs

for leading this process at three levels: a) Policies, b) Programmes, and c) Actions. The results of a decade of efforts to achieve the objectives of this policy will be presented below.

Level A: Policy

3.5.1. Preparation of Strategic Programmes

In Iran, national strategic programmes have played a pivotal role in directing urban revitalisation, upgrading, and empowerment policies. Since the early 2000s (1380s SH), a series of pioneering initiatives, utilizing innovative international approaches and based on strengthening social capital and empowering residents, commenced in the form of informal settlement upgrading programmes and housing sector reforms. These actions, particularly within the framework of the joint cooperation project between the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the World Bank, significantly influenced policymaking in addressing urban poverty and informal settlements. The initial outcome of this collaboration was the formulation and approval of the "National Empowerment and Regularisation Document for Informal Settlements" in 2003 (1382 SH). This document, emphasizing proactive and preventive approaches, presented policies and strategies to address the challenges arising from informal settlements and quickly paved the way for the implementation of local programmes in various cities across the country. These programmes were primarily implemented with a focus on community-led development and by establishing cooperation networks between provincial and local institutions. The results of these actions not only led to improved living conditions in these settlements but also, the experiences gained provided generalisable models for other types of Deprived urban areas, including deteriorated and historical areas. Continuing on this path, and based on the joint proposal of the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, the Ministry of Interior, the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism Organisation, and the Supreme Council of Provinces, and pursuant to Article 16 of the "Law on Supporting the Revitalisation, Upgrading, and Revitalisation of Deteriorated and Deprived Urban Areas" (approved in 2010), the formulation of the "National Strategic Document for Revitalisation, Upgrading, Revitalisation, and Empowerment of Deteriorated and

Deprived Urban Areas" was prioritised. This document was finally approved by the Council of Ministers on June 6, 2014, marking a turning point in Iran's urban policymaking system.

The necessity for preparing this document arose from the fact that the urban regeneration process in Iran required integrated management, institutional coordination, procedural unity among relevant agencies at national and local levels, and a comprehensive approach to all types of Deprived areas. The ultimate goal was to enhance the quality of life, reconstruct urban identity, and strengthen local governance through institutional synergy.

However, executive experiences and evaluations conducted in the years following the approval of this document showed that informal settlements, due to their specific social, economic, physical, and institutional complexities, require special attention and more distinct policymaking. In response to this challenge, and to complement previous documents, an updated version of the "National Empowerment and Regularisation Document for Informal Settlements" was formulated and approved in 2023 (1402 SH).

The new document, emphasizing concepts such as knowledge-based urban development, social policymaking, housing affordability, community-led development, and institutional streamlining, pursues two key objectives: first, the upgrading and improvement of informal settlements, and second, foresight and prevention of the future expansion of these

Diagram 16: Urban Strategic Documents

settlements.

In summary, Iran's experience in the last three decades shows that Iran has an evolutionary path in the field of policymaking for urban regeneration; a path shaped by the formulation and implementation of three national documents in the areas of empowerment, revitalisation, and upgrading, and which has now, relying on past experiences and new conceptual developments, reached a stage of maturity.

3.5.2. Guiding Policy Documents

To institutionalise the concept of regeneration in Iran's urban development literature and to create a foundation for the realisability of its objectives at the operational level, the formulation and approval of a set of guiding policy documents were prioritised by policymakers. These documents, aimed at enhancing institutional coherence, facilitating executive processes, and establishing the necessary legal and technical frameworks for effective intervention in target urban regeneration areas, have played an important role in consolidating the regeneration policy. In this context, the Supreme Council of Urban Planning and Architecture of Iran, as the highest policymaking body in Iran's urban development sector, has been central to the approval of these documents and has approved a set of key policies, which can be categorised as follows:

- **Designation of historical areas in 168 cities and determination of intervention approaches (2017):** This resolution was formulated with the aim of actively conserving the cultural and physical heritage of cities and defining intervention approaches appropriate to the historical characteristics of the urban area. It served as the basis for designing upgrading and Revitalisation programmes for these areas.
- **Policies for river Revitalisation and regeneration of riverside spaces (2017)**: This resolution aimed to reintegrate rivers into the urban life cycle, enhance environmental quality, and create dynamic and participatory public spaces along riverbanks. It was recognised as an example of urban space regeneration.
- **Executive policies for urban regeneration (2018):** This resolution was formulated to articulate theoretical concepts, define medium-term and long-term missions and objectives, and provide executive frameworks

for implementing urban regeneration policy. It served as a reference document for urban planners.

- **Methodology for identifying target areas and neighbourhoods for upgrading, revitalisation, and urban regeneration (2021):** This resolution, by providing a set of indicators, metrics, and action approaches, offered a tool for systematically identifying priority neighbourhoods requiring action and was a step towards a more targeted allocation of resources.
- **Incentive policies and physical regulations for neighbourhood revitalisation (2023):** This package, aimed at enhancing the participation of residents and local investors, provided new tools for revitalisation and social empowerment by offering a set of physical incentives, facilitative regulations, and incentive schemes for the revitalisation of deteriorated areas.
- **Incentive solutions for restoring and strengthening inhabitation in historical areas (2024):** Given the trend of declining liveability in historical urban areas, these policies were designed to retain the resident population, restore urban life to these areas, and strengthen the cultural and historical identity of cities.

In summary, these policy documents are not only used as executive tools to achieve urban regeneration objectives in Iran, but also, by making urban regulations more affordable, enhancing participatory capacities, and attracting investment, they provide the necessary foundations for sustainable and inclusive regeneration in target regeneration areas.

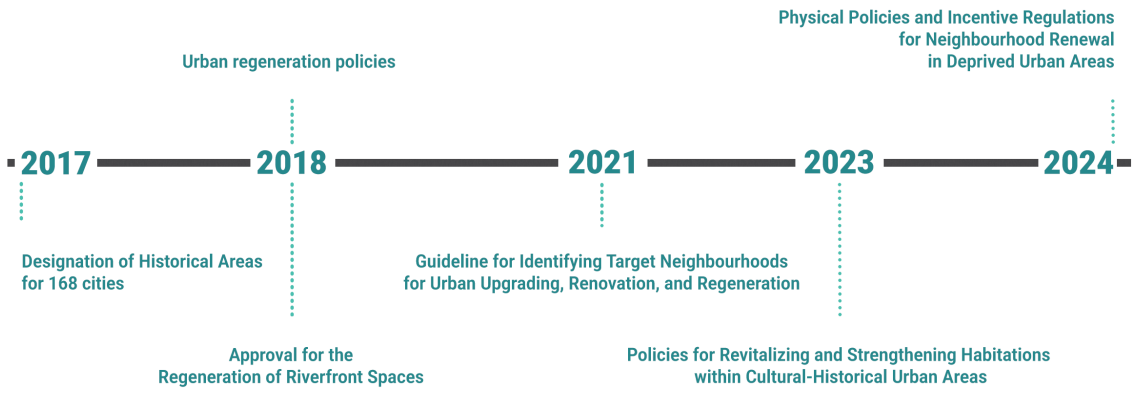


Diagram 17: Policy Documents Approvals of the Supreme Council of Planning and Architecture (ISCPA)

3.5.3. Improving Structures and Processes

To achieve the objectives of the **National Sustainable Urban Rege`neration Policy** and to reform institutional structures, organise the executive system, and delineate the operational mechanisms required for the effective advancement of regeneration programmes and actions at various levels, a series of **regulations**, **procedural manuals**, **and operational guidelines** have been formulated and issued by the relevant authorities. These documents, aimed at enhancing institutional coherence, inter-organisational coordination, targeted utilisation of resources and capacities, and systematic guidance of planning and intervention processes in target areas, play a fundamental role in realising regeneration objectives. In this context, the **Iran Urban Regeneration Corporation (IURC)**, as the secretariat of the **National Taskforce for Sustainable Urban Regeneration**, has played a pivotal role in the development, updating, and dissemination of many of these documents.

These guidelines and procedural manuals have been formulated by drawing on field experience, engagement with local stakeholders, and provincial feedback, in such a manner that, whilst emphasising a **community-based** approach, they also allow for adaptation to the diverse conditions of target neighbourhoods. The most significant of these documents include:

- **Executive Bylaw of the National Sustainable Urban Regeneration Taskforce:** As an overarching document, it defines the institutional structure, executive framework, and mandates of various institutions in achieving the National Regeneration Programme.
- **Bylaw on the Operation of Sustainable Urban Regeneration Taskforce and their Members:** This outlines the regulations for the establishment, composition, and operational procedures of the National, Provincial, and County Regeneration Taskforce.
- **Guideline for Clarifying Core Concepts and Definitions of Regeneration:** Formulated to promote a shared understanding of key terminology, conceptual frameworks, and planning approaches in this field.
- **Operational Guideline for the Community-Based Regeneration Model for Target Areas and Neighbourhoods:** This guideline, whilst emphasising

genuine resident participation, delineates a model for planned intervention centred on the local community.

- **Guidelines and Procedural Manuals for Preparing Regeneration Plans:** These encompass the process, format, indicators, and requirements for developing local and detailed regeneration plans at various urban planning levels.
- **Guideline for Identifying Stakeholders and Influential Actors in the Urban Regeneration Process:** Developed to analyse the stakeholder network and facilitate processes of dialogue, consensus-building, and conflict management.
- **Directive for Mainstreaming Regeneration in Areas and Neighbourhoods:** Aims to create sustainable social, cultural, and economic currents towards enhancing urban quality of life.
- **Reforming the Organisational Structure of the Iran Urban Regeneration Corporation:** Focusing on strengthening the facilitative, coordinating, and empowering role of this institution in policymaking and implementation.
- **Directive for Identifying and Intervening in Underprivileged Neighbourhoods:** This document presents a targeted approach to upgrading areas with severe social and physical vulnerabilities.
- **Guideline for Developing the Participatory Urban Regeneration Document:** Emphasising participatory processes, this institutionalises the involvement of local stakeholders in

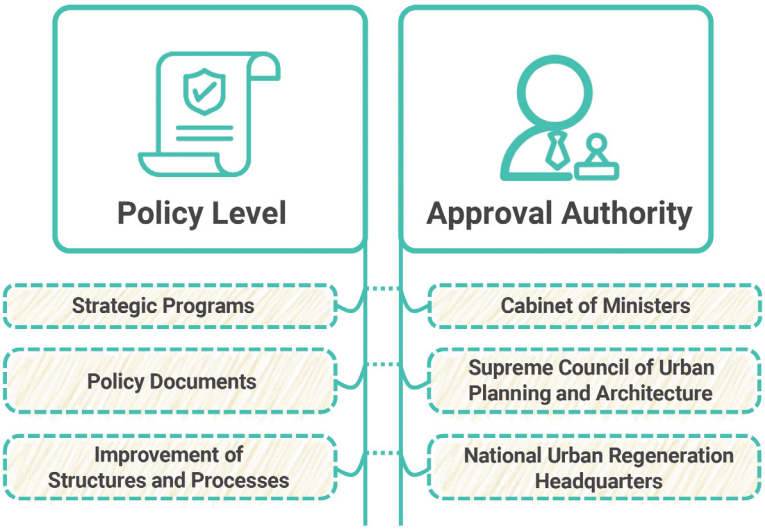


Diagram 18: Policy Levels and Approval Authorities

developing the strategic document for their neighbourhood.
Collectively, this set of documents forms the executive backbone of the National Regeneration Policy and, by emphasising a **multi-scalar approach**, facilitates linkages between national, provincial, urban, and local planning levels. For further information and access to the full text of these documents, interested parties may refer to the official website of Urban Regeneration Corporation of Iran.

Level B: Programmes

3.5.6. National Urban Regeneration Programme

With the gradual transition of intervention policies in Deprived urban areas from a "physical renewal" model to an "urban regeneration" approach, the evolution of approaches and methods of action was also prioritised by policymakers. This transformation redefined the scale of intervention from macro-level and physically-oriented towards small-scale, thematic, and neighbourhood needs-based actions. Urban regeneration policy emphasises the linkage of physical dimensions with social, economic, cultural, and institutional considerations, pursuing it through comprehensive, participatory, and multi-sectoral programmes.
A turning point in this shift of approach was the approval of the "National Strategic Document for the Revitalisation, Upgrading, Revitalisation, and Empowerment of Deteriorated and Deprived Urban Areas" in 2014. This document defined interdisciplinary and integrated objectives across three dimensions: physical-spatial, socio-cultural, and economic-environmental, and placed the enhancement of urban quality of life in target areas, in conjunction with other urban spheres, at the centre of attention.
Subsequently, Article 59 of the Sixth National Development Plan Law (2017–2021) mandated the government to implement regeneration programmes in at least 270 target neighbourhoods annually across the country. Following this, the "National Sustainable Urban Regeneration Taskforce" was approved and communicated to provincial and county taskforces, aiming to fulfil the quantitative requirements of this law. This programme, relying on the framework of the National Regeneration Policy and supporting legal documents, has become one of the most comprehensive and organised

government action programmes in the field of regeneration and enhancing the quality of life in cities.

At the scale of target neighbourhoods, this programme pursues four key missions:

1. Enhancing the quality of public spaces and neighbourhood infrastructure.
2. Developing and equipping superstructure and social services.
3. Upgrading, revitalising, and retrofitting residential units.
4. Empowering residents socially, economically, and institutionally.

- Institutional Structure and Implementation Process:

The implementation process of the National Sustainable Urban Regeneration Taskforce is inter-sectoral, multi-stage, and participatory, involving various governmental, public, local, and private sector entities. In the first step, the Iran Urban Regeneration Corporation (Secretariat of the National Taskforce), in collaboration with municipalities, the Ministry of Interior, and other relevant agencies, prepares the annual regeneration programme for 270 target neighbourhoods and submits it to the National Regeneration Taskforce for approval. Upon approval, this programme is communicated to all member agencies.

The Secretariat of the National Taskforce, the Iran Urban Regeneration Corporation, by playing a facilitative and coordinating role, is responsible for overseeing the programme's implementation at national, provincial, and local levels. At provincial and county levels, Regeneration Taskforce, based on the requirements of the national programme, prepare a "Comprehensive Joint Action Plan" for target areas and submit it to the Provincial Regeneration Taskforce for approval and implementation.

To expedite project implementation, the government utilises various support instruments, including:

- Gratuitous transfer of state-owned land in target areas.
- Allocation of credits from the annual budgets of agencies.
- Provision of bank loans at preferential rates.

Municipalities also play a key role in the local realisation of the programme through active participation in plan preparation, issuance of construction permits, and provision of public services.

- Financial Resource Mobilisation Mechanism

Financial resources for the implementation of the National Regeneration Programme are mobilised through integrated mechanisms based on synergising institutional capacities. According to resolutions from the National Taskforce for Sustainable Urban Regeneration, all member agencies of this taskforces are obliged to allocate at least **30 per cent of their urban activity-related budgets** to regeneration implementation programmes in target areas and neighbourhoods. Furthermore, the capacities of private sector participation, civil society organisations, and local groups are also utilised in mobilising resources and implementing projects.

3.5.7. Comprehensive Joint Action Plan

The "Comprehensive Joint Action Plan," as the executive and operational tier of the National Sustainable Urban Regeneration Taskforce, encompasses an integrated framework of inter-sectoral interventions at both urban and neighbourhood scales. This plan is designed to enhance the quality of life in target areas, aiming to elevate key urban liveability indicators—such as housing standards, per capita public space, and access to urban services and infrastructure—to the city average within the programme's horizon.
In addition to physical-spatial considerations, the Comprehensive Joint Action Plan, emphasising community-based development, also

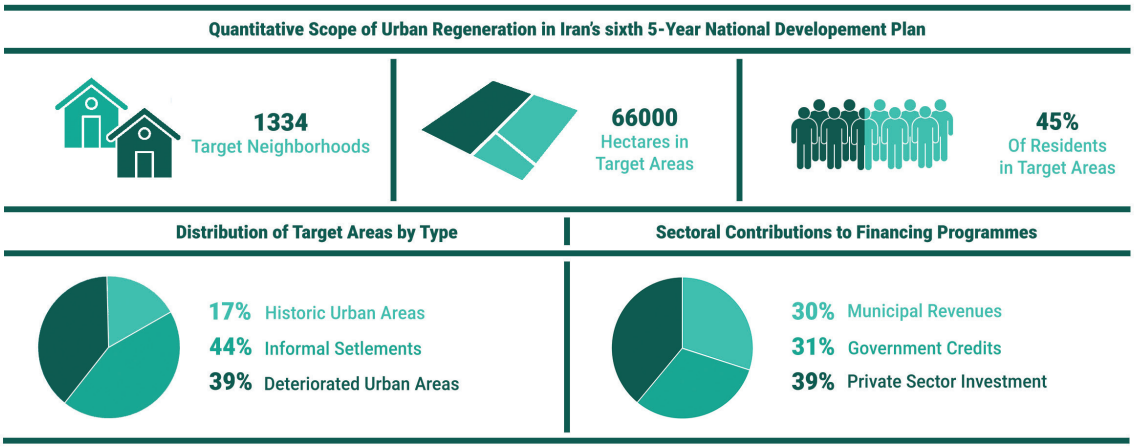


Diagram 19: Quantitative Scope of Urban Regeneration in Iran's Sixth Six-Year National Development Plan

focuses on improving social conditions, increasing social capital, and enhancing employment and income-generation opportunities for residents of target neighbourhoods. These objectives are pursued through the design and implementation of community development plans tailored to the specific characteristics and capacities of each area.

In this regard, the urban regeneration implementation programme in each target area comprises a coherent and phased set of actions implemented synergistically at two levels: the city and the target neighbourhoods. These actions, relying on stakeholder participation, institutional synergy, and the utilisation of diverse resources, are considered drivers for achieving the objectives of the National Regeneration Programme at local levels.

- Place-Based Programmes:

- Development and equipping of superstructure facilities and services (construction of cultural centres, sports halls, schools, clinics, libraries, emergency services, fire stations, etc.).
- Upgrading and enhancement of urban and neighbourhood utility networks and urban spaces (upgrading and development of water supply and sewerage lines, electricity, gas, telecommunications networks, etc., as well as equipping urban spaces including streets and urban and

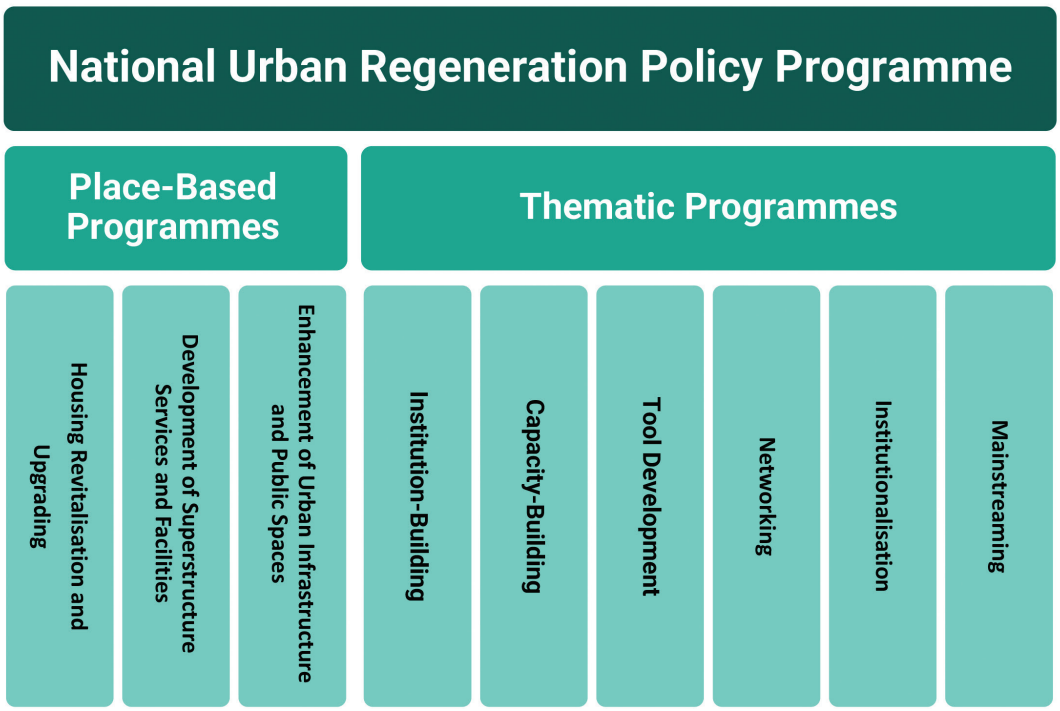


Diagram 20: National Urban Regeneration Policy Programmes

neighbourhood squares, banks of rivers, seas, lakes, and wetlands, and open spaces around railway terminals and public buildings).

- Housing upgrading, revitalisation, and retrofitting (management of loan provisions, incentives, and support packages for housing revitalisation and retrofitting, and resettlement of at-risk informal settlements).

- Thematic Programmes:

- Development of social and economic capacities through institution-building, capacity-building (conducting training courses and enhancing citizens' skills), and tool development (providing supporting financial and legal instruments).
- Institutionalisation (documentation, database creation, and evaluation), networking (creating cooperation networks among various actors, such as concluding memoranda of understanding, etc.), and mainstreaming through the implementation of promotional, informational, and cultural programmes.

Figure 19: Dezful

Figure 20: Rasht

Table 1: Comprehensive Joint Action Plan for Urban Regeneration by Programme Axes and Role of Agencies (Approved)

No.	Programme Axes	Key Regeneration Actors	Number of Projects/Actions
1	Development of Superstructure Facilities and Services	Municipalities	1344
		Other Agencies	1286
		Iran Urban Regeneration Corporation	1097
	Sum		3727
2	Upgrading Urban and Neighbourhood Infrastructure	Municipalities	984
		Other Agencies	1004
		Iran Urban Regeneration Corporation	252
	Sum		2240
3	Enhancing Economic and Social Capacities	Municipalities	257
		Other Agencies	2117
		Iran Urban Regeneration Corporation	154
	Sum		2528
4	Housing Revitalisation (Preparation of Regeneration Plans and Programmes, Housing, Land Acquisition)	Municipalities	363
		Other Agencies	248
		Iran Urban Regeneration Corporation	55
	Sum		666
Grand Total			9161

Level C: Actions

3.5.8. Place-Based Programmes: Development Catalysts at the Neighbourhood Scale

Within the framework of the new urban regeneration approach, emphasising the government's role as policymaker, facilitator, and supporter, traditional approaches based on direct governmental intervention and project-based methods have been avoided. Instead, small-scale, place-based projects have been prioritised as development catalysts at the neighbourhood level.

Aiming to strengthen intra-neighbourhood dynamics and foster self-help initiatives, small-scale pilot projects are designed and implemented. In this model, the guidance, leadership, and management of urban regeneration policies and programmes are organised through the "National Regeneration Programme" and the "Comprehensive Joint Action Plan," based on thematic and place-based actions.

Place-based actions are primarily categorised into two key areas: enhancing the quality of public spaces and housing, and possess the following characteristics:

1. Speed of Implementation: Can be planned and completed within a short-term timeframe.
2. Localised Impact: Targeted intervention to improve the quality of the physical and social environment at the neighbourhood level.
3. Participatory Nature: Active resident involvement in the process of needs identification, decision-making, and implementation.
4. Scalability and Dissemination Potential: The ability to generalise and utilise results as "Development Trigger Projects" for other institutions and target areas.

Main Axes of Place-Based Actions, without requiring comprehensive intervention across the entire area, are organised along the following three main axes:

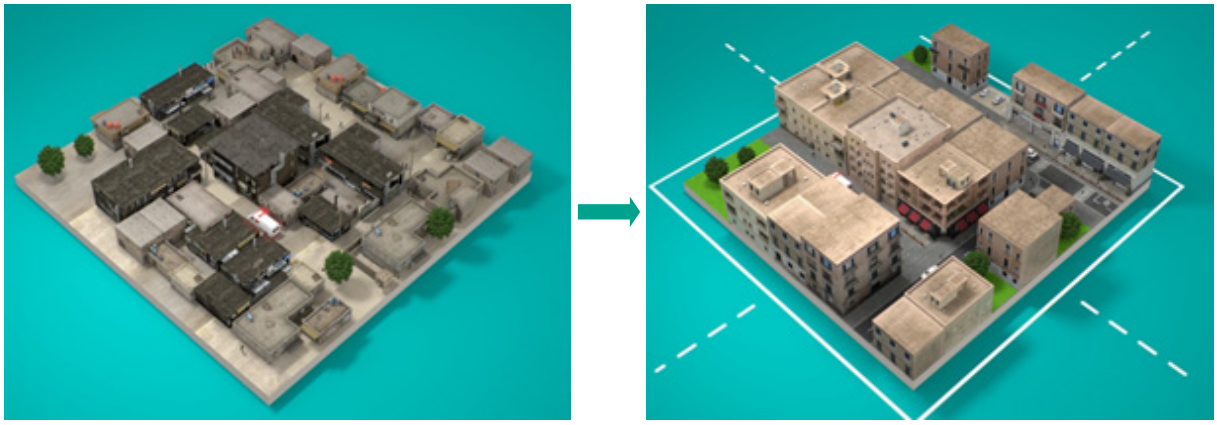
- Housing Revitalisation, Upgrading, and Retrofitting: Includes managing the provision of financial loans, offering incentives, and support packages for the revitalisation, retrofitting, and safety enhancement of residential units in target areas.
- Development and Equipping of Superstructure Services and Facilities: Includes the construction or renovation of service and public spaces such as

cultural centres, sports halls, schools, clinics, libraries, emergency service bases, fire stations, and other local service centres, with an approach aimed at reducing spatial inequality in access to services.

- Upgrading and Enhancement of Urban and Neighbourhood Infrastructure and Public Spaces: Includes the revitalisation and expansion of infrastructure networks such as water supply, sewerage, electricity, gas, and telecommunications; as well as enhancing the quality of urban spaces including streets, squares, banks of rivers, lakes, wetlands, and open spaces surrounding public buildings and urban transport terminals like railway stations.

Figure 21: Home
Note: Photo by H.Asvad

Place-Based Programmes; Housing Revitalisation, Upgrading, and Retrofitting



Transforming Inadequate Housing into Adequate Housing

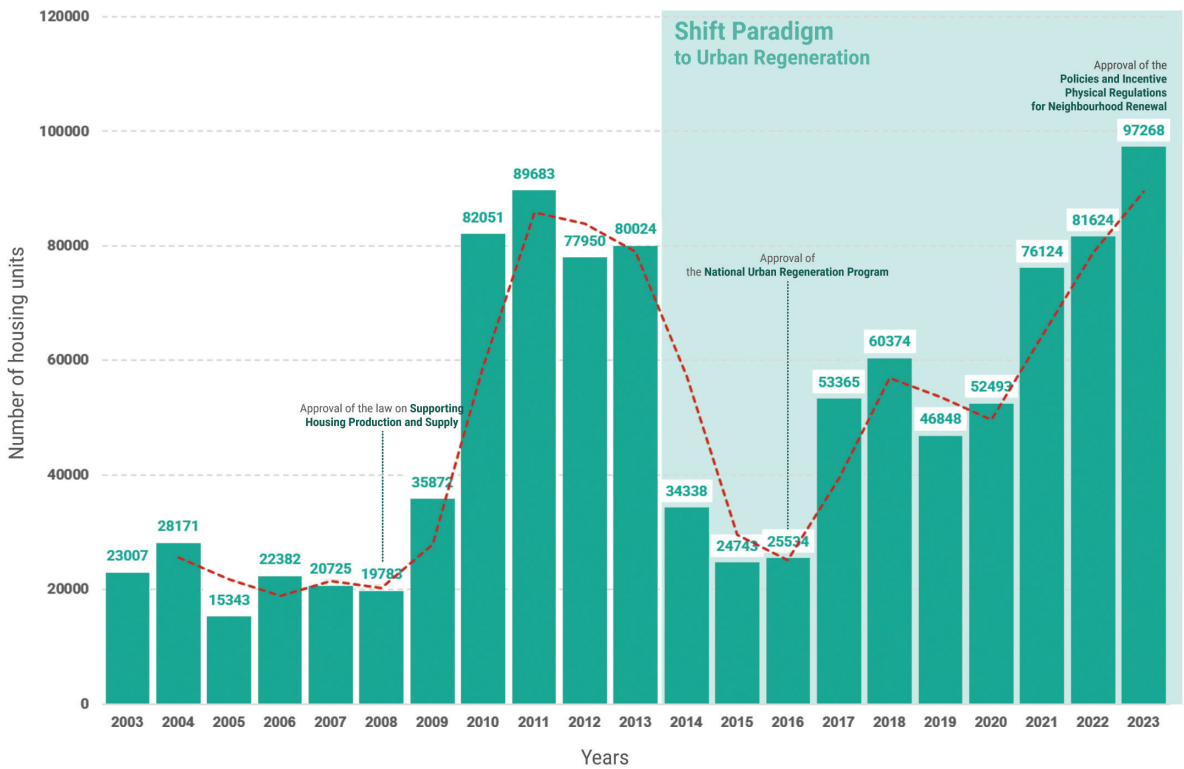


Diagram 21: Trend of Housing Renewal in Deteriorated urban areas (2003 - 2023)

Introducing Exemplar Projects for Housing Revitalisation, Upgrading, and Retrofitting

Figure 22: Velayat Residential Complex - Semnan
53 Blocks, 140 Residential Units, 24 Commercial Units

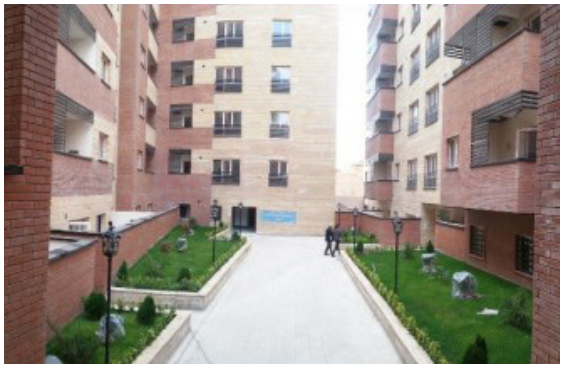


Figure 23: Sirous Residential Complex - Semnan
6 blocks, 214 residential units, and 54 commercial units

Figure 24: Revitalisation of Fazeli House, Sari

- Development and Equipping of Superstructure Facilities and Services

In line with the objectives of the National Urban Regeneration Programme, the development and equipping of superstructure services and infrastructure, as one of the main pillars for enhancing urban quality of life, holds a special place in actions within regeneration target areas. These actions pertain to the creation and strengthening of public and social service centres such as cultural centres, neighbourhood houses, sports halls, educational centres, clinics, libraries, emergency service bases, and fire stations.

The aim of these actions is to increase access for low-income groups residing in Deprived areas to public services, strengthen social capital, enhance the sense of belonging, and improve urban liveability at the neighbourhood level. The approach to developing superstructure services, beyond addressing physical needs, seeks to enhance human and social capacities and create equal opportunities for the growth and flourishing of residents in regeneration target neighbourhoods.

In this regard, between 2014 and 2024, a total of 1,168 projects in the field of developing and equipping superstructure services and infrastructure have been implemented in urban regeneration target neighbourhoods across the country. These actions have included the construction of libraries, cultural spaces, neighbourhood houses, sports facilities, parks, urban spaces, and service centres; actions that have not only led to the enhancement of the physical functions of neighbourhoods but have also provided a suitable platform for empowering local communities and enhancing social cohesion.

Table 2: Performance of Superstructure Projects of the Joint Action Plan by Type of Action (2013-2024)

Project Category	Number of Provinces	Number of Cities	Number of Neighbourhoods/ Areas	Number of Projects
Educational (Primary, Secondary, etc.)	16	32	71	227
Sports and Multipurpose	22	37	60	145
Parks and Urban Open Spaces	27	62	129	218
Health - Therapeutic	13	26	56	141
Neighbourhood House, Library & Cultural Centre	19	45	70	195
Revitalisation and Upgrading	17	31	70	139
Law Enforcement	2	3	3	21
Commercial	14	19	20	39
Other	16	26	40	43
Total	31	122	361	1168

Introducing Exemplar Projects for Development and Equipping of Superstructure Facilities and Services

Figure 25: Facade Improvement of Shah Tahmasb Square, Yazd

Figure 26: Construction of Library, Gachsaran

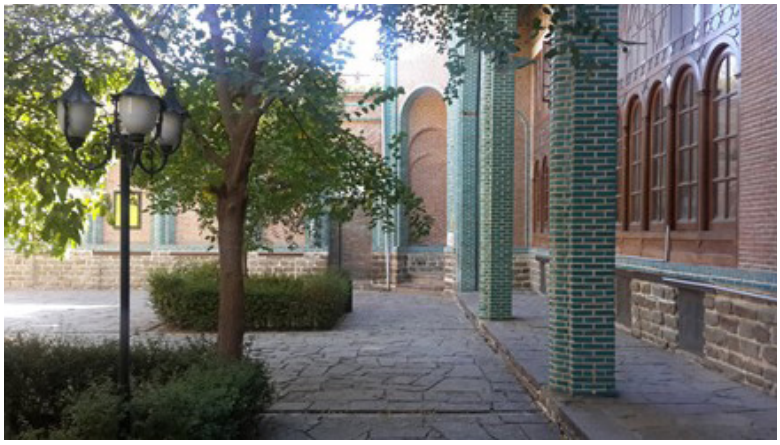


Figure 27: Revitalisation of Hedayat School, Urmia Library

Figure 28: Construction of School, Sanandaj

Figure 29: Library, Rasht

Figure 30: Park, Arak

Figure 31: School, Rasht

Figure 32: Clinic, Ilam

Figure 33: 9 Shahid Khodadadi School - Bushehr

Figure 34: Shahid Ahmadi Roshan School – Qom

Figure 35: Cultural-Social Complex, Karegaran Neighbourhood, Birjand

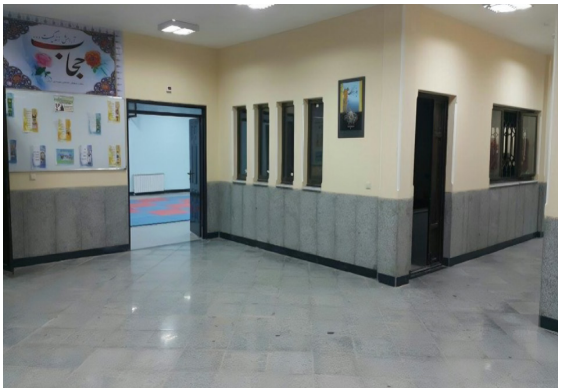


Figure 36: Cultural-Social Complex, Firouzabad Neighbourhood - Kerman

- Upgrading and Enhancement of Urban and Neighbourhood Utility Networks and Public Spaces

The upgrading and enhancement of infrastructure networks and public spaces at urban and neighbourhood scales are key pillars of the National Urban Regeneration Programme. These actions are designed and implemented to improve the quality of the living environment, strengthen infrastructure, and increase the resilience of target areas. The aforementioned interventions include the development, revitalisation, and retrofitting of water supply, sewerage, electricity, gas, and telecommunications networks, which are implemented alongside the organisation and equipping of public spaces such as streets, squares, banks of rivers, lakes, wetlands, and areas surrounding transport terminals and public buildings.

The aim of these actions is to enhance access to basic services, increase the quality of liveability, create a safe and vibrant environment, and provide a suitable platform for fostering participatory upgrading and revitalisation processes in target areas. Furthermore, these projects play an effective role in cohering the physical structure, reducing spatial fragmentation, and stimulating local development.

Programme Achievements (2013-2024):

Between 2013 and 2024, a total of 2,445 actions in the field of upgrading and enhancing urban and neighbourhood utility networks and public spaces were completed in urban regeneration target neighbourhoods, including the following:

- Construction and upgrading of main and secondary thoroughfares;
- Upgrading of electricity, gas, water supply, and sewerage networks;
- Organisation and equipping of urban public spaces;
- Improvement of spaces surrounding terminals, squares, and public buildings;
- Environmental interventions in the riparian zones of rivers, wetlands, and coastal strips.

These actions have paved the way for increasing the quality of life, strengthening the sense of social belonging, and facilitating the participatory regeneration process in Deprived urban regeneration target areas.

Introducing Exemplar Projects for Upgrading and Enhancement of Urban and Neighbourhood Utility Networks and Public Spaces

Figure 37: Upgrading Saray-e No Neighbourhood - Naeen

Figure 38: Upgrading Marvi Street, Tehran

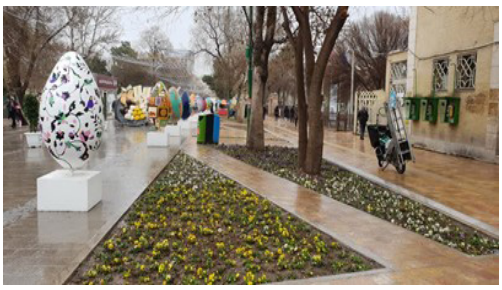


Figure 39: Organisation of Sabzeh Meydan (Square), Qazvin

Figure 40: Upgrading of Thoroughfares, Kamb Neighbourhood, Chabahar

Figure 41: Historical-Cultural Axis Upgrading of Thoroughfares, Sardar Jangal Neighbourhood, Rasht

Figure 42: Street Lighting, Altimur Neighbourhood, Mashhad

Figure 43: Upgrading Streets

Figure 44: Upgrading Streets

3.5.9. Thematic Programmes: Development of Social and Economic Capacities in the Urban Regeneration Process

Social and economic empowerment is a purposeful process wherein individuals, groups, and local communities, by enhancing their capacities, are enabled to gain greater control over various aspects of their individual and collective lives and play an active role in the local development process. This empowerment is pursued through three axes: institution-building, capacity-building, and tool development:

- **Institution-building** refers to the formation and strengthening of local social and civil institutions, aimed at enhancing social capital, attracting public participation, and increasing community involvement in urban planning and management processes.
- **Capacity-building**, by providing educational opportunities, developing skills, and enhancing social and civic awareness, creates the foundation for meaningful resident participation in improving their quality of life.
- **Tool development** refers to the creation of financial, legal, and regulatory frameworks to facilitate and expedite the urban regeneration process, achieved through identifying obstacles and providing specific solutions such as formulating bylaws, reforming laws, designing incentives, and granting loans.

Alongside these axes, a series of **non-physical and promotional programmes** are envisaged to sustain and deepen the effectiveness of actions, including:

- **Networking:** Aimed at creating synergy and preventing duplication of effort, through the formation of networks and self-help groups, strengthening inter-sectoral cooperation, and utilising diverse participatory tools among various stakeholders.
- **Mainstreaming:** Aimed at shaping a public discourse and demand among citizens, through education, promotion, information dissemination, organising cultural and specialised events, and producing practical resources and documents to enhance public awareness.
- **Institutionalisation:** Aimed at consolidating and sustaining programmes through documentation, establishing databases, continuous monitoring and evaluation of actions, knowledge management, and reforming planning and implementation structures

and processes.

Collectively, within the framework of the National Programme and Joint Action Plan for Regeneration, 2,528 empowerment and promotional activities have been approved, of which 983 have been completed to date. Below, some of these actions will be presented based on the following thematic categorisation:

- Strengthening local social and civil institutions
- Training and skills development for managers, experts, practitioners, and residents
- Creating legal and support instruments
- Discourse-building
- Conducting applied studies and preparing upgrading plans
- Documenting actions and sharing experiences
- Developing cooperation networks
- Promoting and organising cultural programmes

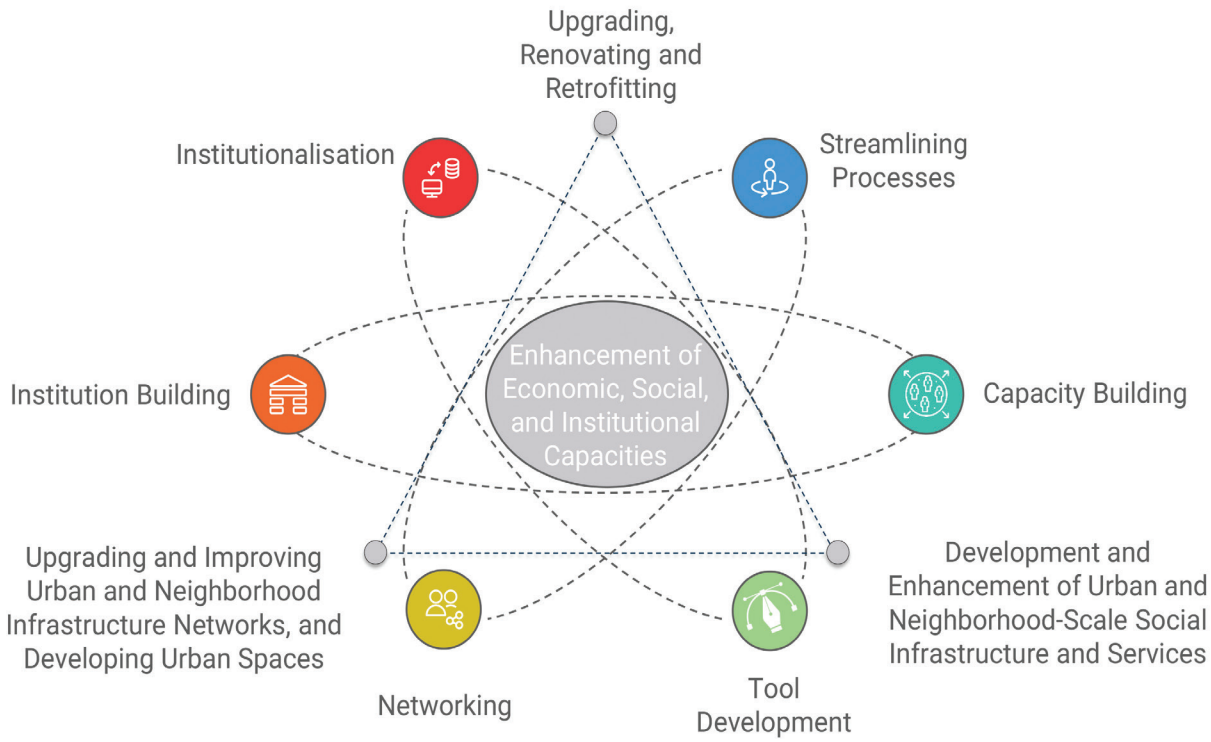


Diagram 22: Empowerment Programmes in the National Urban Regeneration Policy

- Thematic Actions: Empowerment (Institution-Building, Capacity-Building, and Tool Development)

A) Institution-Building

- Strengthening the role of facilitative institutions in the neighbourhood regeneration process through support and participation in the establishment of any neighbourhood development institution within the framework of regeneration objectives.
- Establishment of 25 Facilitation Offices in regeneration target neighbourhoods.
- Establishment of Revitalisation Services Offices in deteriorated areas by Tehran Municipality. (Refer for details).
- Establishment and operation of 24 Neighbourhood Development Institutions in informal settlements by the Iran Urban Regeneration Corporation.
- Establishment and operation of 138 Community-Based Development Offices in 235 informal settlements by the Ministry of Interior.
- Establishment of secretariats for transferring specialised urban regeneration experiences across the country (5 regions).
- Support and participation in the formation of any neighbourhood development institution within the framework of regeneration objectives.
- Strengthening the role of development institutions in the regeneration process of urban regeneration target neighbourhoods. Neighbourhood Development Institutions, and at a lower level, Neighbourhood Development Centres, as connecting links among the four key actors (citizens, grassroots organisations and the private sector, influential local managers, and national policymakers), provide the social and institutional platforms for participatory planning and enhance their operational effectiveness in development actions.

B) Capacity-Building

- Conducting 1,575 training-oriented programmes for the four key actor levels (citizens, grassroots organisations and the private sector, influential local managers, and national policymakers).
- Joint cooperation with the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour, and Social Welfare for job creation, strengthening local cooperatives, and enhancing welfare and social security in informal

settlements.

- Conducting specialised training courses for managers and employees, professionals, researchers, and local practitioners.
- Implementing a local community empowerment and micro-business development programme in 12 cities across the country, such as Sabzevar, Varamin, Sanandaj, Naysar, Saqqez, Baneh, Marivan, Shahriar, Karaj, Urmia, Ardabil, etc., in collaboration with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs).
- Kardouk Knowledge Seekers Company: Preparing a basic skills training programme to improve livelihood and living environment conditions in Naysar neighbourhood, Sanandaj, and Saqqez city.
- Social empowerment with an emphasis on formulating an action plan to enhance grassroots and organisational social capital and forming a local participation nucleus in Vakilabad neighbourhood, Urmia, by the Women's Association for Combating Environmental Pollution.
- Implementing a community-based empowerment programme as a pilot in 5 informal settlements of Ardabil city and presenting a suitable model for its generalisation by the Farhikhteh Empowerment Institute.
- Preparing a social participation and empowerment programme in informal neighbourhoods of Karaj and Shahriar cities with an emphasis on women and children by the Mehr Afarin Panah Asr Charitable Institute.
- Preparing an entrepreneurship programme and establishing a women's socio-economic institution in informal settlements of Marivan by the Zhyar Institute.
- Allocating facilities and space for CSO activities.
- Holding specialised meetings for transferring CSO experiences.

C) Creating Legal and Support Instruments

- Formulating the bylaw on the operation of Urban Regeneration Taskforce (National, Provincial, and County) and specialised working groups.
- Transforming urban regeneration into one of the main programmatic axes of Iran (Article of the Sixth National Development Plan Law).
- Reforming the structure and articles of association of the Iran Urban

Regeneration Corporation with an emphasis on the facilitative role of this institution.

- Preparing the urban regeneration document and developing its curriculum for conducting a foundational upgrading course in collaboration with the Office of National Building Regulations and Construction Control.
- Preparing design guidelines (architecture and urban design) for urban regeneration target areas.
- Regulating the procedural manual for preparing provincial, urban, and local documents, and formulating and refining the steering process.
- Reforming the system of contracts and procurement affairs.
- Including urban regeneration expertise in the country's technical-executive system within the High Council for Technical and Infrastructural Affairs.
- Reforming the budgeting system (leveraged budgeting with programme priority).
- Designing the processes, executive, and financial structure of the Local Development Fund.
- Providing loans for upgrading and revitalisation of target areas and neighbourhoods.
- Providing loans for temporary resettlement deposits.
- Developing incentive and support packages for revitalisation and upgrading.
- Defining the roles and contributions of actors in the implementation of each action, with an emphasis on cooperation and participation of all involved groups.
- Strengthening the role of development institutions in the neighbourhood regeneration process through formulating guidelines for developer qualification and operational procedures, formulating the zero-land investment model process, preparing the ground for launching a charitable fund for the Revitalisation and revitalisation of deteriorated areas, formulating a support package for developers in regeneration target neighbourhoods, etc.
- Launching a property management system.

Empowerment (Institution-Building, Capacity-Building, and Tool Development)

Figure 45: Women's Association for Combating Environmental Pollution in Urmia.

Figure 46: Zhyar Institute in Mariwan.

Figure 47: Daneshpajouhan Kardouk Company in Saqqez.

Figure 48: Daneshpajouhan Kardouk Company in Baneh.

Figure 49: Specialized Training Courses for Managers and Regeneration Forcetasks Meetings

Figure 50: Training-oriented workshops at various levels of urban regeneration actors in Kashmar city

Figure 51: Holding a series of specialised-thematic meetings focused on sustainable urban regeneration

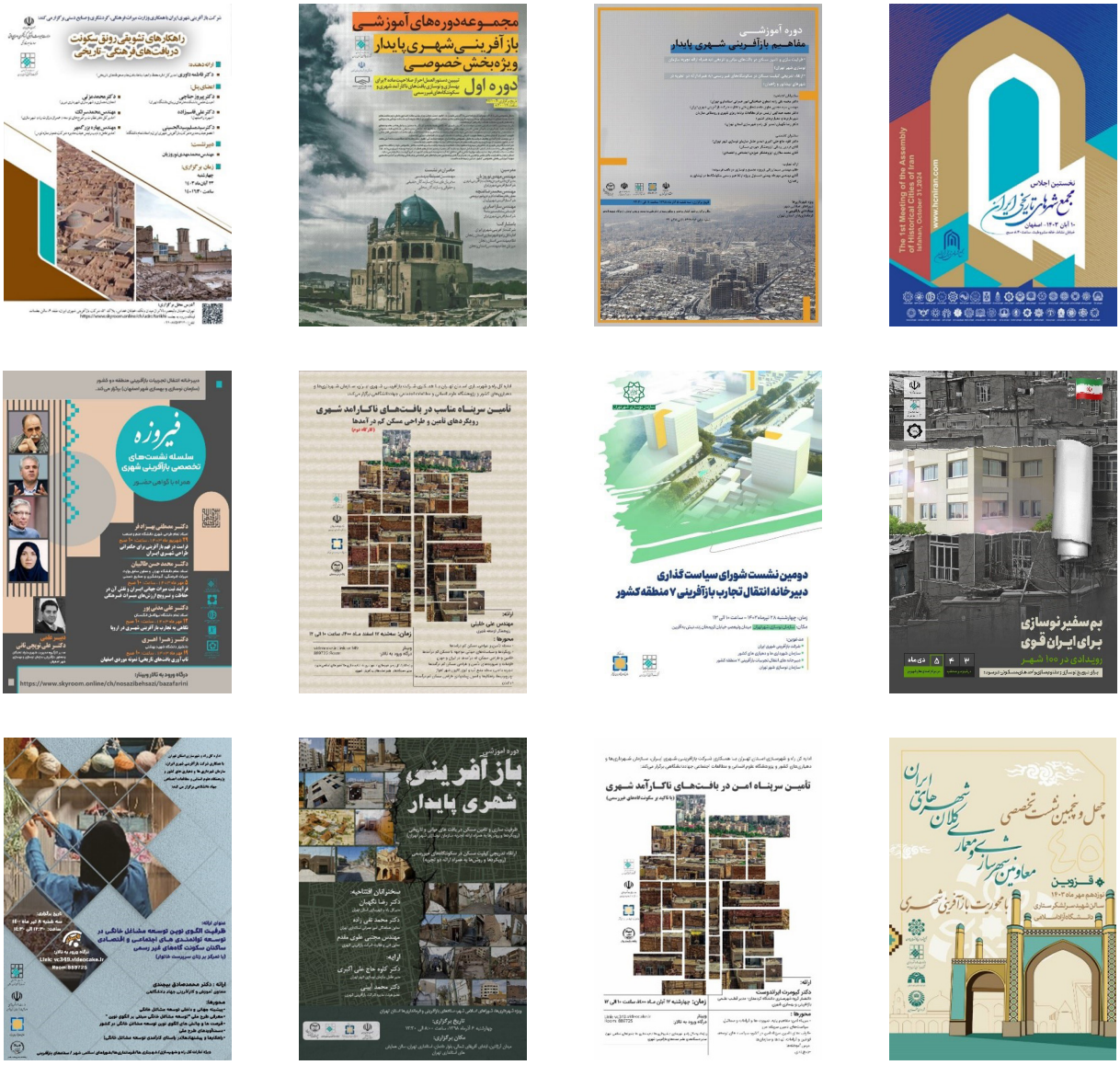


Figure 52: Holding a series of specialised-thematic meetings focused on sustainable urban regeneration

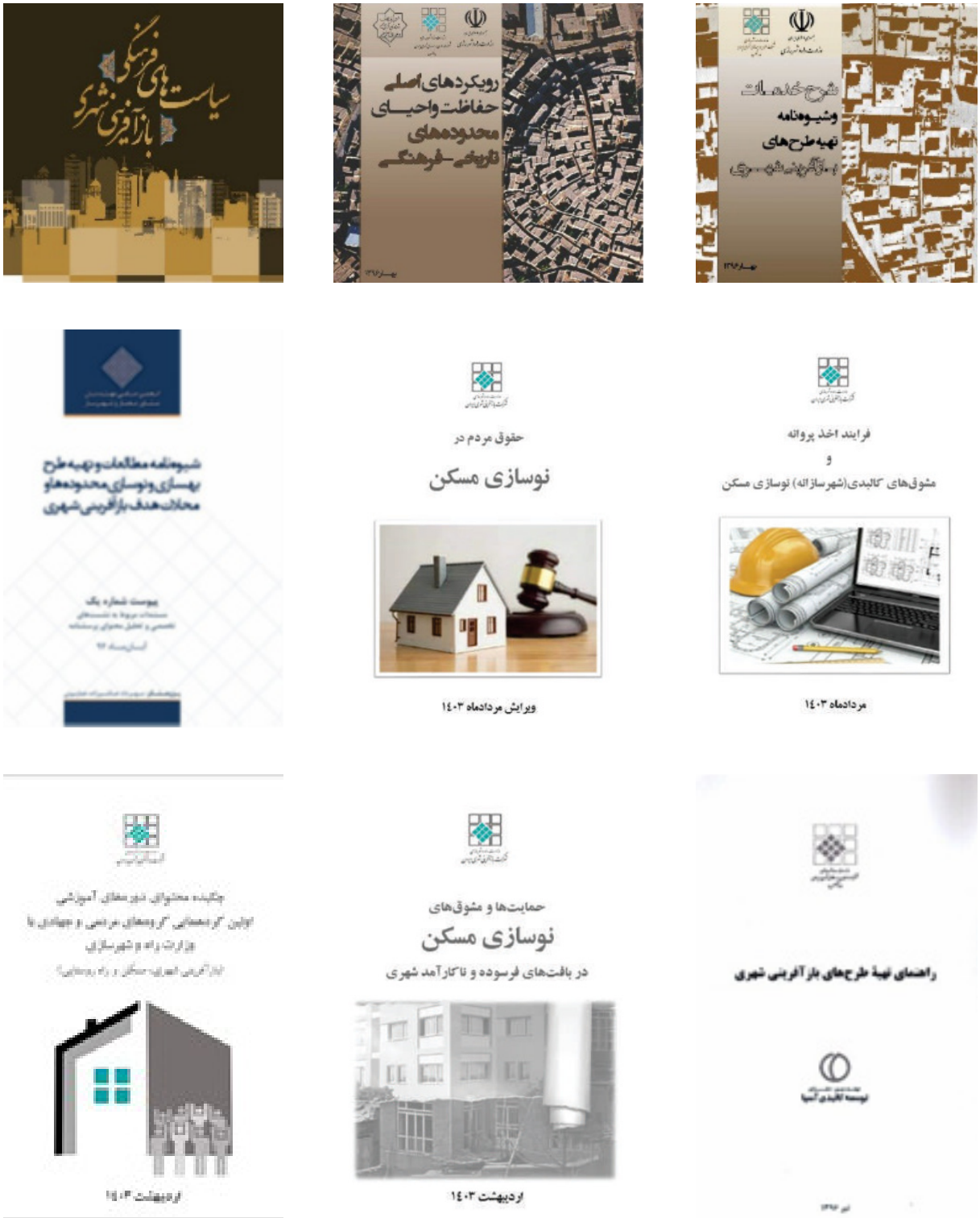


Figure 53: Tool Development

- Thematic Actions: Discourse-Building (Networking, Mainstreaming, and Institutionalisation)

A) Establishing a Joint Cooperation Network at International, National, Provincial, and Urban Levels

- Establishment of the National Urban Regeneration Taskforce with the membership of 11 ministries and 10 national organisations and institutions as the strategic body for the National Urban Regeneration Policy.
- Organisation and establishment of the secretariat for the National Sustainable Regeneration Taskforce within the Iran Urban Regeneration Corporation.
- Establishment of Provincial and County Urban Regeneration Taskforce.
- Launching a policymaking council comprising experts and senior managers for consultation and guidance on the National Urban Regeneration Policy.
- Joint actions with CSOs and NGOs towards identifying, creating, and strengthening capacities in the urban regeneration process.
- Formation of specialised working groups, including economic upgrading and public participation and finance, foresight and prevention of the expansion of Deprived urban areas, social, cultural, and health upgrading, villages located in the immediate vicinity of cities, CSOs, and protection and revitalisation of historical-cultural areas.
- Formation of a joint working group with the Road Maintenance and Transportation Organisation regarding road architecture, aiming to revitalise temporary settlements and valuable historical caravanserais along roadsides.
- Formation of a joint working group with the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways aiming to enhance environmental quality in railway-related spaces across Iran.
- Membership and cooperation with the working group on locating railway stations and railway station architecture.
- Formation of a regional working group for upgrading informal urban areas at the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Housing and Urban Development (APMCHUD), aiming to exchange knowledge and experiences related to upgrading deteriorated and informal areas and creating a network of research institutions, governmental bodies, and civil society among Asia-Pacific countries.
- And concluding over 37 memoranda of understanding for cooperation in the

field of urban regeneration.
Holding over 10,658 meetings of Regeneration Taskforce at national, provincial, and local levels, along with specialised working groups.

B) Mainstreaming

- Organising 2 National Urban Regeneration Best Practice Events.
- Holding national conferences on the theme of urban regeneration.
- Preparing and publishing promotional documents such as brochures (37 titles), educational films and infographics, etc.
- Establishing media relations, organising public events, and coordinating and holding meetings by the public relations department.
- Producing and broadcasting documentaries on national media.
- Organising exhibitions and festivals.
- Establishing public communication through launching a dedicated system.
- Organising cultural-promotional competitions, including the “My City, My Neighbourhood” painting competition, the “Muharram and Urban Life” photography competition, the “Quest for Quality” photography competition, etc.
- Preparing and producing 60 audio-visual documentaries to promote urban regeneration.

Table 3: Number of Meetings of Urban Regeneration Taskforce and Specialised Working Groups (2015-2024)

Number of Meetings of Urban Regeneration Taskforce and Specialised Working Groups (2015-2024)			
Specialised Working Groups	County Taskforces	Provincial Taskforces	National Taskforce
4492	5042	1068	56

Holding over 10,658 meetings of Regeneration Taskforce at national, provincial, and local levels, along with specialised working groups.

C) Institutionalisation

- Conducting over 132 research, study, and applied projects.
- Delineating a comprehensive training programme for regeneration actors in the areas of foundational principles and concepts of urban regeneration, strategies and policies, operational programmes, implementation methods, and lessons learned.
- Holding 153 specialised meetings (66 thematic meetings and 87 issue-based specialised meetings).
- Documenting over 25 programmes and actions.
- Supporting over 200 student theses focused on urban regeneration.
- Translating, compiling, and editing 44 book titles and publishing 16 issues of the “Haft Shahr” specialised journal.
- Defining and promoting the “City Dialogue House” institution and launching 4 pilots in Tehran, Tabriz, Gorgan, and Kerman.
- Collaborating in the documentation of historical railway stations.

Discourse-Building (Networking, Mainstreaming, and Institutionalisation)

Figure 54: Mainstreaming Actions in Regeneration

Figure 55: Discourse-Building and Promotion

Figure 56: Discourse-Building and Promotion Publication of the Haft Shahr Architecture-Urbanism Journal

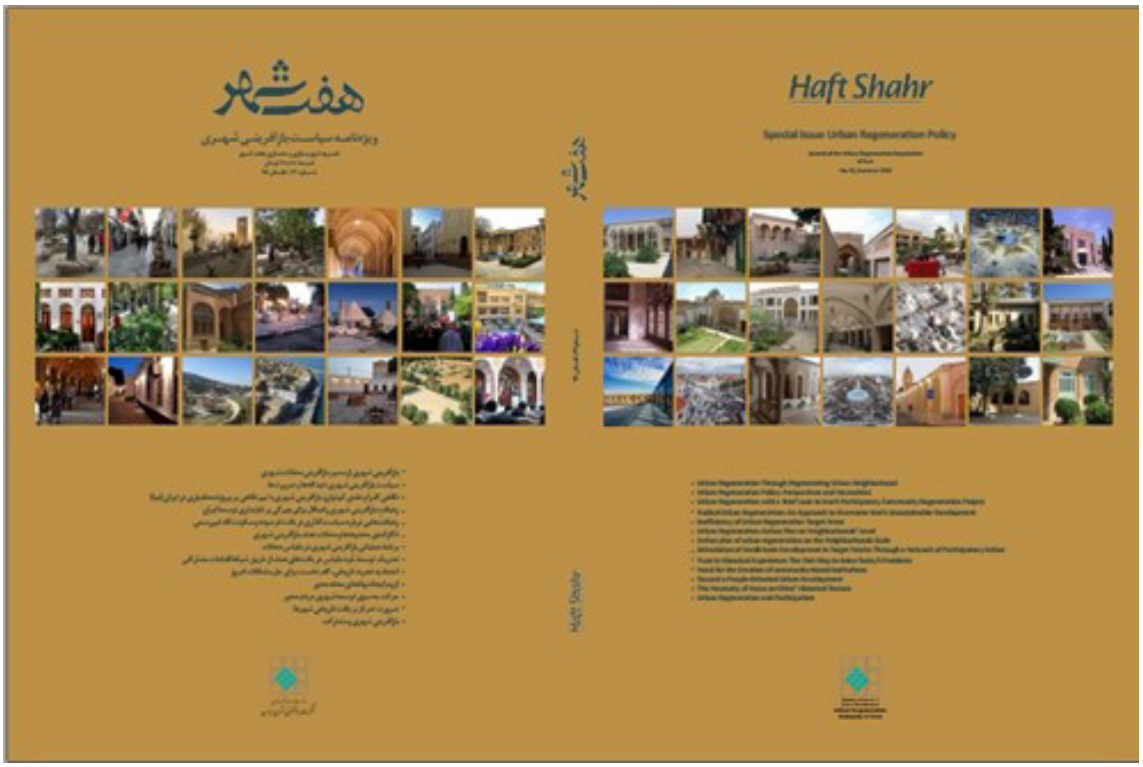


Figure 57: Discourse-Building and Promotion Documentation and Evaluation of Actions and Experiences

Figure 58: Mainstreaming Actions Exhibitions, Visual and News Productions

Level D

3.5.10. Monitoring and Evaluation of Actions

Systematic monitoring and evaluation of the Iran Urban Regeneration Corporation's (IURC) actions, as a cornerstone of good governance in urban regeneration programmes, plays a fundamental role in ensuring the efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability of policies and interventions. In this regard, over the past decade, the IURC has designed and launched a series of digital systems and monitoring tools aimed at increasing transparency, facilitating executive processes, standardizing information, and documenting actions within target regeneration areas. Some of the most significant systems established include:

1. **System for Providing Revitalization Loans and Temporary Relocation Allowances:** This system aims to register, review, and monitor the process of granting financial facilities to property owners residing in target regeneration areas for the renovation of their residential units or for temporary accommodation during construction.
2. **System for Supporting Research and Dissertations:** To strengthen the linkage between academia and policymaking, this system facilitates the registration of, and financial or academic support for, research projects, dissertations, and studies related to urban regeneration.
3. **System for Competency Certification (Article 4 of the Law on Supporting the Revitalisation, Upgrading, and Revitalization of Deteriorated Areas):** This system is designed for the assessment and issuance of professional competency certificates for consultants, developers, investors, and other actors active in the field of urban regeneration.
4. **System for Selecting Training Course Providers:** Aimed at enhancing the professional and specialized capacities of urban managers, facilitators, and local implementers, this system standardizes the process for selecting and evaluating trainers and educational institutions.
5. **System for Presenting Joint Action Plan Statistics and Information:** This tool is for collecting, registering, and analyzing data related to the performance of collaborating institutions in the implementation of regeneration programmes at the neighborhood, city, provincial, and national levels.

6. GIS Mapping System for Target Areas: An interactive platform for viewing, analyzing, and utilizing spatial data (location, population, land use, ongoing projects, etc.) within target regeneration areas across the country.

7. Urban Regeneration Management System and Municipal Network: One of the IURC's most significant structural initiatives has been the establishment of this system to integrate data and enhance institutional coordination. Over 700 municipalities nationwide use this system to upload and update information regarding local projects, needs assessments, and performance reports.

The development of these informational and oversight infrastructures represents an effective step towards achieving evidence-based planning, enhancing institutional transparency, and increasing the productivity of public investments in the urban regeneration sphere. Moving forward, enhancing data analyzability, establishing systemic connectivity between these systems, and transforming them into smart decision-making platforms can play a crucial role in improving urban governance in Iran.

For further information and access to the full text of these documents, interested parties may refer to the official website of Urban Regeneration Corporation of Iran.

Chapter 4:

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

Over the past two decades, the process of urban upgrading and revitalization in Iran has followed a transformative and evolutionary path. This path has shifted from scattered, project-based, and predominantly physical interventions towards integrated management, program-based approaches, and the strengthening of participatory methods. The formation of the institutional structure for this process began with the establishment of the Iran Urban Development and Improvement Corporation in 1997. Subsequently, a series of studies and research in the late 1990s, as well as collaboration with the World Bank in the early 2000s in the field of urban upgrading, significantly contributed to consolidating the theoretical and conceptual framework of this domain.

One of the significant achievements of this period was the approval of the "National Empowerment and Regularization Document for Informal Settlements" in 2003. This document, inspired by the fundamental principles of the first UN-Habitat (United Nations Human Settlements Programme) declaration (Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements, 1976), is considered a turning point in Iranian urban policymaking. For the first time, the civil rights of the inhabitants of these settlements, including security of tenure, and their social rights, such as access to basic services, were officially recognized. This document also provided the necessary institutional and policy framework for the effective participation of residents and their interaction with the government, paving

the way for a shift in perspective towards informal settlements from an "insoluble urban problem" to an "urban issue with potential."

The devastating Bam earthquake in 2003 further highlighted the importance of urban renewal and urban seismic retrofitting. Consequently, the Fourth National Development Plan (2004–2008) mandated the government to undertake revitalization, retrofitting, and the preparation of a Comprehensive Housing Plan with an approach centered on sustainable development, social justice, and the empowerment of low-income groups. Furthermore, the resolution by the Supreme Council of Urban Planning and Architecture of Iran, defining indicators for identifying areas in need of revitalization and upgrading – including instability, fine-grain texture, and impermeability (lack of access) – provided the necessary legal dimensions for intervention in these areas. As a result, within less than eight years, approximately 76,000 hectares of deteriorated urban areas were identified.

However, the lack of distinction between different types of deprived urban neighborhoods and the absence of differentiated programs severely diminished the effectiveness of interventions. This challenge necessitated a revision of approaches, eventually leading to the replacement of revitalization policy with urban regeneration policy. This policy shift was formalized with the approval of the "National Strategic Document for the Revitalisation, Upgrading, Revitalization, and Empowerment of Deteriorated and Deprived Urban Areas" in 2014. This document, by adopting a comprehensive, multidimensional, and context-sensitive approach to different types of areas, is considered an effective step towards improving the quality of life for residents and enhancing the efficiency of urban interventions.

The shift in approach from large-scale, physically-oriented interventions to small-scale, community-based actions was institutionalized through the experience of sustainable urban

regeneration policy. The conceptual transition from “shelter” to “housing,” from “inhabitant” to “citizen,” and from “settlement” to “neighborhood” was solidified in Iranian urban development literature through the implementation of a decade of sustainable urban regeneration policy. Policies, programs, and actions were shaped and evolved under this conceptual transition.

The preparation of three national strategic documents over three decades, each playing an evolutionary theoretical and procedural role relative to the previous one; the establishment of regeneration taskforces; and the transition from physically-oriented indicators to livability and city-wide indicators in the identification, revitalization, and upgrading process (at the policy level); the formulation of the National Regeneration Program and the elevation of urban revitalization and upgrading to a national issue within the framework of the Sixth National Development Plan (at the planning level); and the experience of establishing and operating local development institutions and implementing the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in both thematic and area-based categories (at the action level), were all tools for improving urban quality of life under the umbrella of sustainable urban regeneration in Iran.

The shift in approach from large-scale, physically-oriented interventions to small-scale, community-based actions was institutionalized in Iran through the implementation of sustainable urban regeneration policy. This transformation provided a platform for a conceptual transition from “shelter” to “adequate housing,” from “inhabitant” to “citizen,” and from “settlement” to “neighborhood.” These transitions, over a decade of implementing this policy, have become established in Iranian urban development literature and have shaped the conceptual and operational framework of policies, programs, and actions.

At the policymaking level, the preparation and approval of three national strategic documents in three consecutive decades—each

representing an evolutionary step in theoretical and operational dimensions compared to its predecessor—have played a decisive role. The establishment of "Sustainable Urban Regeneration Taskforce" at national, provincial, and local levels, and the shift from purely physical indicators to "livability indicators" and "inclusive" urban indicators in the process of identification, revitalization, and upgrading, signify a transformation at the policy level.

At the planning level, the formulation of the "National Urban Regeneration Program" and the transformation of urban regeneration into a "national issue" within the framework of the Sixth National Development Plan have been important steps in institutionalizing this approach in macro-development plans.

At the action level, the experience of establishing and operating "local development institutions" and implementing the "Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action" in both thematic and area-based categories demonstrates an effort to combine institutional, social, and physical capacities with the aim of improving urban quality of life within the framework of sustainable urban regeneration.

Despite challenges in the process of implementation, institution-building, inter-sectoral coordination, and resource mobilization, sustainable urban regeneration policy in Iran has generally shown a progressive trend and has managed to establish its position within Iran's urban planning and development system. This experience, particularly in terms of institution-building, strengthening local participation, enhancing the role of local communities in decision-making, and giving simultaneous attention to social, economic, physical, and environmental dimensions in programs and actions, has high potential for transfer to other countries facing similar conditions.

In conclusion, it can be said that sustainable urban regeneration policy in Iran has not only created a discursive shift in the perception of deprived urban areas but has also been able to lay the foundations for multi-level action,

integrated planning, and participatory policymaking. Based on this experience, some of the most important extractable lessons learned are:

- **Integrated Management and Program Cohesion:** Effective advancement of regeneration programs requires integrated management at various levels and inter-sectoral coordination in policy formulation and implementation. This is achieved when regeneration programs and actions are directly linked to comprehensive spatial and urban development documents, and a departure is made from uncoordinated sectoral and project-based approaches.
- **Attention to the Diversity of Deprived Area Types:** Success in regeneration necessitates a precise understanding of the diversity among deprived urban areas, including deteriorated, historic, and informal settlements. Adopting differentiated approaches tailored to the characteristics of each type of these areas significantly increases the effectiveness and efficiency of policies and executive actions.
- **Contextualized and Inclusive Social Policy:** Iran's experience shows that social policies must be formulated in a way that they are both inclusive of different societal strata and appropriate to the socio-economic characteristics of each region. The focus of these policies on strengthening the family institution through the provision of services such as education, health, housing, insurance, and social support plays a fundamental role in enhancing urban resilience and social justice.
- **Housing and Urban Development Affordable for Low-Income Groups:** Reforming urban planning orientations and formulating regulations appropriate to the economic capacity and living conditions of low-income groups are prerequisites for success in regeneration. Achieving this goal requires a review of the housing and urban planning policymaking system.
- **Gradual Upgrading:** Effective regeneration is based on the gradual, step-by-step improvement of the quality of life in the neighborhood. This process will be successful when intervention measures are designed and implemented not from top-down but based on the capacities, assets, and participation of the residents.
- **Voluntary and Safe Resettlement in the Face of Hazards:** When dealing with areas exposed to natural or

man-made hazards, the principle of resettlement must be accompanied by full respect for human rights, active participation of residents, ensuring social satisfaction, and guaranteeing suitable housing replacement. Successful implementation of this principle requires effective dialogue and fair compensation mechanisms.

- **Strengthening Local Management and Decentralization:** Increasing the authority and capacity of local institutions, including municipalities and local bodies, plays a pivotal role in achieving regeneration. Utilizing participatory mechanisms, capacity building for civil society organizations, and enhancing the link between people and decision-making institutions are key factors for success in local regeneration management.
- **Targeted Support for Vulnerable Groups:** Policymaking in deprived areas will not be effective without identifying and providing special support to vulnerable groups, especially female-headed households, children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. Designing empowerment and social support programs tailored to the conditions of these groups is a necessity for equity-oriented planning.
- **Mobilizing Endogenous Resources with External Convergence:** Advancing sustainable regeneration policy requires the optimal aggregation of local, governmental, public, community, and private resources. Appropriate institution-building and the use of innovative financial and institutional tools can provide the platform for the effective use of neighborhoods' internal capacities and create synergy with external resources.

Glossary of Terms

Urban Regeneration: The process of comprehensive development in economic, social, environmental and physical terms aimed at enhancing the quality of life bacross target urban areas and neighborhoods in connection with the rest of the city.

Target Urban Areas and Neighborhoods: Areas that are the subject of regularization plans of this Document based on approved initiatives for their revitalization, rehabilitation and renovation.

Deprived urban areas: These are areas within the city that require Revitalisation, upgrading, and revitalization. They are categorized into types such as historic areas, deteriorated areas, and informal settlements. The prominent characteristics of these areas are as follows:

- Residents have lower per capita incomes and higher unemployment rates as compared with the city averages.
- As compared with the city averages, housing units are not durable, population density is high, and there are also environmental problems.
- Residents have inadequate access to urban services and infrastructure.
- As compared with the rest of the city, social aberrations are apparent and further encouraged.
- Historic and cultural identities have been neglected—social dignity and social esteem have declined in these areas—giving rise to an underclass substitution effect

Deteriorated urban area: Refers to areas within a city where, over past years, constituent elements—including superstructures, infrastructure, buildings, structures, streets, and access ways—have become dilapidated and inefficient, and whose residents suffer from multiple economic, social, cultural, and physical problems.

Historic Urban Areas: Section(s) of city reflecting cultural-historic values, formed through the interaction between human beings and their surrounding environments in the course of time and distinguished from other zones by apparent characteristics and constituent structures.

Informal settlement: Areas

predominantly inhabited by rural migrants and the urban poor, which have developed without legal permits and outside of formal and legal urban development planning (such as comprehensive and detailed plans), either within or outside the legal boundaries of cities.

Empowerment: The expansion of residents' assets and capabilities with the aim of enhancing their own quality of life and enabling their participation in the regularization and development process.

Foresight and Prevention: Refers to a set of systematic policies, programmes, and actions within various spatial, social, land, and housing development frameworks, aimed at preventing the formation and growth of informal settlements.

Regularization: Regenerating target urban areas and neighborhoods through reanimation, revitalization, rehabilitation and renovation that enable residents and enhance the quality of their lives and activities in the settlements.

Renovation: The holistic process in economic, socio-cultural and physical terms, aimed at restoring proper living conditions based on new relations and establishing a dynamic balance in target urban areas and neighborhoods.

Revitalization: The purposive process comprising a set of measures aimed at protecting and enhancing the quality of target zones and neighborhoods while preserving their authenticity and integrity.

Urban upgrading: Is a multi-sectoral approach to improving the physical, social, economic and environmental conditions of deprived urban areas, especially informal settlements and slums, through the provision of basic services, infrastructure, housing improvements, and institutional development. with community participatio

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Academic Center for Education, Culture and Research
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Namakab Rud, Mazandaran Province
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