

PhD project by Fataneh Malek

## **Affordable housing program in Iran: A study of challenge and opportunities for Iranian women**

This study focuses on Iran's affordable housing program, analyzing its challenges and opportunities for Iranian women. Iran, with 87.92 million people (2021), grapples with housing shortages, urban growth, and rising prices. This disproportionately affects low- and mid-income groups, especially women, hindered by economic and social barriers. Gender bias worsens the housing issues for women, seen through inheritance laws, marriage rules, and social norms. Laws and customs restrict housing choices, more so for single, divorced, or widowed women. Property owners and agents often resist them, and economic barriers limit financial resources. Labor force gender disparities worsen the problem, along with inheritance discrepancies.

Gender's role in affordable housing is underexplored. Urgent focus on gender relations in housing is vital, particularly in gender-unequal nations like Iran. Solving women's housing challenges requires a holistic approach, addressing both economic and social factors. Previous initiatives like Ahmadinejad's Mehr program lacked inclusivity. It did not serve single young women or offer rental options. Still, it has progressed by including women as beneficiaries. As a result, the Mehr program provides an excellent research opportunity to explore women's perspectives and understand how these low-income women were able to afford to purchase a Mehr unit and what difficulties they faced during this program.

This research utilizes a qualitative methodology under the interpretive-constructivist paradigm to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research questions. The Mehregan Mehr project, which serves the population of Mashhad, the second largest city in Iran, has been chosen for the case study. It aims to provide this perspective based on primary data collected through in-depth interviews with women. Examining women residents' perceptions and experiences of barriers to accessing the Mehregan project will provide insight into how the Mehr program has met women's specific housing needs and challenges. The ultimate goal is to develop pragmatic criteria that can guide the formulation of inclusive and effective affordable housing policies for women in Iran.