

Labor Rights in Iran Annual Report



Annual Report no. 4

2021



Contents

Introduction	4
A Brief Overview of Last Year	5
Protests are Answered with Bullets	7
They Don't Pay Workers	9
Major Protests	12
Imprisonment, Flogging, and Expulsion	19
Working Children	22
Asylum Seekers and Refugees	24
Informal workers	25
Death at Work	26

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Introduction

In the last four years, Zamaneh has published 19 labor newsletters, five special reports (on teachers, nurses, oil industry contract workers, wage suppression, and trade union repression), and three annual reports in Persian and English.

This document is the fourth Zamaneh annual labor report, which covers issues related to workers' rights from May 2021 to March 2022.

For more information, visit Zamaneh's [Labor Rights Page](#).

A Brief Overview of Last Year

The Iranian economy experienced one of its most problematic years in 2021 because of US sanctions, corrupt state institutions, and the COVID-19 pandemic. In the engineered presidential election, which candidates from only one faction attended, Ebrahim Raisi - a member of the “Death Commission” in the 1988 massacre of political prisoners - was named head of state.

Following the new president’s inauguration, Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Eje’i was appointed as head of the judiciary. However, these changes in the executive and judicial branches did not improve anti-labor and market-oriented policies, and the crack-down on labor rights activists continued.

After a six month hiatus, the thirteenth cabinet returned to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) negotiations to finalize the nuclear deal. The talks had been suspended since June 2021 under the pretext of changing the executive branch. Negotiations have not yet concluded at the time of writing. At the same time, sanctions have crippled Iran’s economy and made it impossible for many workers and wage earners to earn livelihoods.

According to some government institutions, Iran’s economy will reach the verge of bankruptcy if sanctions continue. The Program and Budget Organization Report, released in the summer of 2021, assesses that Iran’s economy will go bankrupt within the next three years if sanctions are not lifted.¹ The Research Center of the Islamic Consultative Assembly (Majles) has estimated that the year 1400 (21 March 2021 to 21 March 2022) budget deficit at 350 to 400 trillion tomans.² Meanwhile, the government’s debt to the banks and other real or legal institutions has reached 1500 trillion tomans.³ (The currency exchange rate at the time of this report is one US dollar ≈ 26,000 tomans.)

The government’s solution to its budget deficit is to reduce social spending and borrow directly and indirectly from the banks. Parliamentary bills related to increasing the salaries of retirees, teachers, judicial staff, and healthcare workers were amended or suspended last year due to a lack of funding.

The government officially eliminated the preferential currency allocation for the import of medicine and essential goods from the budget bill, a decision that independent experts and lawmakers believe will increase the price of food and medicine by four to six times.⁴

Inflation was reported at 43.7% in November-December 2021, and it was over 60% for food and beverages.⁵ The real inflation rate for consumers is higher than the one reported by official institutions. Last year, the prices of some food items more than doubled.

1 [Radio Zamaneh](#), October 17, 2021

2 [Tejarat News](#), October 15, 2021

3 [Etemad](#) Newspaper, November 20, 2021

4 [Radio Zamaneh](#), January 9, 2022

5 [Tejarat News](#), December 22, 2021

As the number of the unemployed affected by the recession has increased, rising food prices have pushed more of the population below the poverty line. The Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor, and Social Welfare estimates that about one-third of the Iranian population is below the poverty line. The head of the Social Security Organization Research Institute stated that based on current research, 31.8% of the people in urban areas and 50% of the population in rural areas are below the absolute poverty line.⁶ The director-general of the Ministry of Health's Nutrition Improvement Office also reported food insecurity in eight provinces as well as an increase in the number of children under the age of five suffering from malnutrition.⁷

The Statistical Center of Iran (SCI) announced the unemployment rate in the fall of 2021 at 8.9%, though this figure is far from reality.⁸ Although official statistics show a decline in the unemployment rate over the last two years, this decline is due to a reduction in the economic participation rate.

The economic participation rate fell to 40.9% in 2020, and decreased by 0.5% in the fall of 2021.

According to SCI, the economic participation rate for women fell by 1% for a total of 13.1%, while men's economic participation rate also fell slightly to a percent of 68.7.

The percentage of employed women in the fall (11.3%) was about five to six times lower than the percentage of employed men (63.5%), as in previous years.⁹

According to the Minister of Cooperatives, Labor, and Social Welfare, 14 million people are either unemployed or quasi-unemployed.¹⁰ By 2020, more than half of the population were employed in informal jobs, meaning they did not have an employment contract, social security coverage, or approved wages.¹¹ The number of workers in informal occupations was estimated at over 13 million last year.¹²

6 [ISNA](#), November 14, 2021

7 [Radio Zamaneh](#), October 17, 2021

8 [SCI](#), [Labor Force Census Results Fall ۲۰۲۱](#)

9 [SCI](#), [Labor Force Census Results Fall 2021](#)

10 [IMNA](#), 30 November 2021

11 [Detailed Report on Formal and Informal Employment in 2019-2020](#)

12 [Radio Zamaneh](#), December 3, 2021

Protests are Answered with Bullets

The persistence of sanctions, free market policies, the budget deficit, rent-seeking economic sectors, and corrupt governance have led Iran to several crises.

The drought crisis has forced tens of thousands of people from villages and cities to the outskirts of more affluent cities, which could be the start of the most significant forced migration and population displacement in Iran.

Last year, farmers took to the streets in different parts of Iran, particularly in Khuzestan, Isfahan, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, and Hormozgan. One of the largest protests against water shortages took place last summer in Khuzestan and lasted at least two weeks. According to local media reports, eight people were shot and killed by government officials and hundreds were detained during these Khuzestan protests, known as the “Uprising of the Thirsty People.”¹³

In Isfahan, farmers rallied for nearly one week to protest the lack of water supply and the transfer of water to neighboring provinces. These protests in Isfahan spread to the neighboring provinces of Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari as well as Lorestan. The government, which initially welcomed the peaceful protests and “sympathized” with them, ordered an attack on the protesters only a few days later. Police and security forces arrested more than 200 people and shot many, resulting in injuries and death.¹⁴

Isfahan has witnessed widespread protests by farmers in recent years. Water shortages in the province have caused significant losses for farmers and forced them to relocate. According to a member of the Supreme Council of Provinces, more than 50% of farmers in the three provinces of Yazd, Isfahan, and Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari have lost their jobs and turned to cheap labor and low-level passenger transport.¹⁵

Isfahani farmers believe that the government has reduced their share of water by transferring it to the Isfahan and Yazd steel industries.

The situation in Sistan and Baluchestan province, which suffers from recurring droughts, is worse than in Isfahan and Khuzestan. In this province, farmers have moved from villages to the outskirts of cities, and the region is on the verge of a crisis according to local officials and members of parliament.¹⁶

Sistan and Baluchestan province’s capital of Zahedan and its port of Chabahar, a free zone, are among the largest centers of marginalized populations in the country.

Sistan and Baluchestan province is one of the most deprived regions in Iran, and many of its residents face major livelihood problems due to the prolonged drought and the lack of government allocation for development. The devastating agriculture, lack of industrial development, and widespread unemployment have made the transportation of fuel (*sukhtbari*) across the Iran-Pakistan border one of the few ways for

13 [Radio Zamaneh](#), 5 August 2021

14 [Radio Zamaneh](#), November 25, 2021

15 [Radio Zamaneh](#), November 28, 2021

16 [Radio Zamaneh](#), August 3, 2021

the people of this region to earn a living.

On February 22, 2021, Iranian military forces targeted the *sukhtbars* at the official Shamsar border crossing near Saravan. The Baloch Activist Campaign has identified at least ten people killed and five wounded by Iranian military personnel.¹⁷ This firing on *sukhtbars* sparked widespread protests in Baluchestan, which resulted in the arrest of at least 16 people as well as the disruption of internet and mobile communication networks in Saravan and other Baluchestan cities.¹⁸

17 [Baloch Activists Campaign](#), February 23, 2021

18 [Radio Zamaneh](#), February 27, 2021

They Don't Pay Workers

On average about 3.5 union and labor rallies were held in different cities of Iran every day in 2021. At least one labor or union strike took place less than every two days. News media and labor rights groups recorded 618 rallies and 339 strikes in the past year. Deferred and insufficient wages were the leading causes of labor protests.

Municipal workers held the most protests over the past year. Wage arrears of over a year in some municipalities and temporary exploitative contracts between workers and contractors were the main reasons driving these protests.

According to Iranian media reports, municipal workers in at least 57 cities have protested in the past year over wage arrears, job insecurity and temporary contracts, contractor abuse, and low wages. These protests have occurred as strikes and rallies, during meetings with provincial officials, or through media interviews.

Last year, workers' wage arrears were estimated at 147 months total, a majority of which belonged to municipal and public sector workers.¹⁹

Workers' protests escalated as the year drew to a close.

In March 2021, the Supreme Labor Council set the minimum monthly wage at 2,652,000 tomans.²⁰ According to this decree, the minimum monthly salary of a worker with no experience and one child was set at 3,769,506 tomans, while the cost of living was estimated at 6,890,000 tomans.

The continued wage repression of workers has incited protests by various labor groups throughout Iran.

19 See [Labor Report no. 18](#), Zamaneh Media Foundation

20 [Radio Zamaneh](#), March 14, 2021

The below table depicts a selection of workers' protests over the past year.

Protest Group (Service and Production Units)	Reason for Protest	Remarks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipal workers in at least 57 cities • Sabalan Fabric of Ardabil • Barez Rubber of Kurdistan • Tabriz Tractor Manufacturing • Nina Cooking Oil of Sirjan • Arak Machine Building • Hadid Mobtakeran Industries • Marivan Highway • Jovein Cement Factory Industrial Complex • Maintenance of Railway Lines and Technical Buildings • Hashtgerd Metro • Ahwaz Metro • Nurses in several hospitals • Urumia Azarkam Company • Kaveh Float Glass Company • Lorestan Agriculture and Industry Complex • Negin Yarn Making Co. • Mahshahr Pipe Manufacturing • Provincial Telecommunications • Shiraz Telecommunication Industries • Damash Mineral Water Company • Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Agro-Industry Co. • Shafarood Dam workers 	Arrears	In some cases, the wage arrears of municipal workers have reached 18 months.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintenance of Railway Lines and Technical Buildings • Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Agro-Industry Co. • Contract workers in the oil and gas sector in more than 120 workshops • Electrical contract employees • Khuzestan rural water supply employees • Contract teachers • 89-day nurses (employment period) • Temporary contract nurses • Firefighters in Shahrekord 	Temporary contracts and job insecurity	<p>Outsourcing government projects and selling factories to the private sector has led to the proliferation of temporary contracts. According to labor activists, about 90% of workers have temporary contracts.</p> <p>Government agencies and private enterprises often lay off contract workers at the end of each season.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nurses • Maintenance of Railway Lines and Technical Buildings • Oil and gas third party (<i>Arkan-e-saales</i>) workers • Oil and gas contract workers • Social Security retirees • Steel Fund retirees • Informal teachers 	Discrimination in the wage ranking system	<p>Different contracts have led to wage differences for formal versus contract workers. There are 17 types of employment contracts in the health sector.</p> <p>Workers in the energy sector also receive varying wages due to different contracts. The wage gap between informal and formal workers is more than 20 million tomans.</p> <p>The income of state and military fund retirees, which includes official government employees, is at least three times higher than that of social security retirees.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Agro-Industry Co. • Kerman coal miners • Official teachers of the Ministry of Education • Nurses of Khomeini Hospital in Karaj • Yasuj Sugar Company • Moghan Agro-industry Company 	Privatization	Workers at Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Company achieved a historic victory when the courts ruled to evict the owners of the factory. The company is temporarily under government supervision.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction workers • Street vendors • Farmers banned from cultivation 	Poverty and lack of government support	<p>At least 1.5 million workers lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic. A limited number of them were able to obtain unemployment insurance.</p> <p>The decline in “formal” jobs has increased the number of informal workers. Most of them have neither health insurance nor government assistance.</p> <p>The recession in the construction industry has left construction workers unemployed.</p>

Major Protests

Retirees: Claiming rights on the street

Eighteen pension funds cover 6.89 million people in Iran. More than two-thirds of this population is covered by the two largest funds: the Social Security Organization (4,228,899 people) and the State and Military Pension Fund (1,507,048 people). The Armed Forces Social Security Organization is the third-largest fund with 700,000 pensions. Over 460,000 other retired, disabled, and living pensioners, rely on other funds.²¹

The Supreme Audit Court of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) reported that only 11% of retirees receive more than 10 million tomans per month and 89% of their salaries are between 5 and 10 million tomans.²²

Social Security retirees, who comprise the majority, receive lower pensions than other retirees. Up to 60% of them receive less than 5 million tomans per month, even after implementing the second stage of monthly salary adjustment. According to pension center officials, 6 out of 10 retirees from independent and government-affiliated organizations receive minimum wage.²³

Social Security pension equalization remained incomplete in 2020. During its final months, the former Iranian cabinet sent a bill to the parliament to equalize pensions. After the cabinet change, the head of the Planning and Budget Organization (PBO) and members of parliament delayed its approval, calling the bill financially burdensome and inflationary. This decision prompted protests by retirees.

In addition to those from Social Security, retirees from the Steel Industry Employees Support Fund, the Islamic Republic Airlines, and several other groups protested in front of government institutions at least once in the past year.

21 [Social Security Organization in the Mirror of Statistics](#), August 2021

22 [Fars News Agency](#), September 29, 2021

23 [Radio Zamaneh](#), September 19, 2021

Protest Group	Demands	Protest method
Social Security retirees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement Wage Equalization Plan • Complete and free health insurance • Increase salaries in line with real inflation and livelihood basket • Pay government debt to the Social Security Organization • Change the method of electing the Social Security Organization's Board of Trustees • Transfer of SHASTA shares to workers and retirees- Social Security Investment Company (SSIC, also known by its Persian acronym SHASTA), is Iran's primary state-owned investment company and the investment arm of the Social Security Organization, which provides healthcare entitlement and pension benefits for a large population of Iranian middle and working-class members. • Eliminate salary discrimination between government retirees and those from other public funds • Oppose the sale of shares of the Workers' Welfare Bank • Establish the Supreme Social Security Council with the participation of workers' representatives and retirees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rally in front of parliament • Rallies in different cities • Correspondence with members of parliament (MPs) • Correspondence with the CEO of the Social Security Pension Fund • Rallies on Sundays of the week called "Protest Sundays"
Steel Industry retirees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement of Wage Equalization Plan • Complete and free health insurance • Increase salaries in line with real inflation and livelihood basket • Eliminate salary discrimination between steel industry retirees and those from other public funds 	Weekly rallies in different cities
Iranian Airlines retirees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase retirement salary • Pay bonuses for years of service and deferred claims 	Rallies in Tehran
Retired teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement Wage Equalization Plan • Approve the Job Ranking Bill • Increase salaries in line with real inflation and livelihood basket • Stop repression and lawsuits against union activists 	Rallies in different cities
Shiraz Telecommunication retirees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay wage arrears 	Rallies in Shiraz
IRIB retirees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement of Wage Equalization Plan • Increase salaries in line with real inflation and livelihood basket • Provide the right to complete and free medical treatment 	Rallies in Tehran
Tehran Bus Company retirees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay bonuses for years of service 	Rallies in Tehran

Oil workers: An alliance against exploitation

Over the past few decades, the outsourcing of oil and gas field projects and privatization of refineries and other petrochemical industries has made working and living conditions unbearable for workers.

In the winter of last year, contract workers wrote letters and staged sporadic strikes demanding a resolution to their problems. Inadequate housing and dormitories, low wages, discrim-

ination between formal and contract workers, various forms of contracts, wage arrears, and the exploitation of contractors were the leading causes of protests by oil and gas contract workers. The protests began in mid-June 2021 at the Bidkhood Refinery in the Assaluyeh Special Energy Zone and quickly spread to more than 100 workshops and oil and gas and petrochemical refineries throughout Iran.²⁴

The demands of the contract workers were:

- Eliminate contracting companies
- Reduce working hours
- Reduce working days from 20 to 14 days per month and increase rest days
- Increase the minimum wage to 12 million tomans
- Improve the accommodations and the quality of food and health services
- Allow for the right to form a trade union
- Repeal the rules of free trade and special economic zones
- Prohibit summary dismissal of workers

The protests continued until the final days of summer. Workers returned to work after some contractors met their demand. Lawmakers promised to approve a plan to organize the employment of government employees, though this plan has not yet reached the open court of the parliament.

Protest Group	Complaints
Volume contract workers in Gachsaran Oil and Gas Production Company ²⁵ (According to the Civil Service Law, a “volume contract” refers to the assignment of a task to a contractor without specifying how many workers are required. The contractor can use any number of workers to fulfill the contract.)	Job uncertainty, wage discrimination
Welders and workers of Behbahan Bidboland refinery	Contract uncertainty, insufficient wages ²⁶
Parsian oil and gas transportation workers ²⁷	Removal from the information system of manpower contractors and exclusion from the job classification plan
Workers of Lidoma Company in South Pars	Wage inequality, non-implementation of the ranking plan
Abadan refinery workers ²⁸	No wage increase, the status of contracts
Workers at Persepolis Petrochemical South Pars ²⁹	Failure to increase salaries according to labor law, unknown status of workers’ leave
Contract workers of the National Iranian Drilling Company ³⁰	Dismissal of workers
Official workers of the Ministry of Oil ³¹	No salary increases, unknown status of the pension fund statute, partial payment of bonuses and annuities

24 [Radio Zamaneh](#), June 22, 2021

25 [Zagros Fanoos](#), April 7, 2021

26 [Iran Kargar](#), May 11, 2021

27 [Iran Labor News Agency \(ILNA\)](#), April 12, 2021

28 [Free Union of Iranian Workers \(FUIW\)](#), April 24, 2021

29 [Iranian Students News Agency \(ISNA\)](#), April 22, 2021

30 [Free Union of Iranian Workers \(FUIW\)](#), May 4, 2021

31 [Radio Zamaneh](#), May 26, 2021

Temporary oil workers in the Petrochemical Special Zone ³²	Failure to implement the classification plan, the unclear status of contracts
Contract workers of the Ministry of Oil	Non-implementation of wage equalization plan, the unclear status of contracts
IGC workers in Assaluyeh	Insufficient wages
Persian Gulf Holding workers	Insufficient wages (workers demand a 25% pay increase)
Temporary workers of the Ministry of Oil	Status of contracts, low wages
Bushehr Petrochemical workers ³³	Failure to fulfill promises made by the contractors to improve living conditions, reduce number of work days, and increase wages
Razi Petrochemical workers ³⁴	Failure to fulfill classification plan, payment of deferred wage claims, improvement of accommodation and food quality, complete and free health insurance
Fajr Jam refinery workers ³⁵	Wage discrimination between formal and informal workers, long working hours, shift changes
Bandar Imam Petrochemical Workers ³⁶	Temporary contracts, outsourcing of workers to contract companies
Workers of Phase 14 of Assaluyeh ³⁷	Failure to fulfill the promises made by contractors for a plan of ten rest days / twenty workdays, improvement of payment status, improvement of the quality of accommodation (following the general summer strike)
Kangan Petroleum workers	Failure to fulfill the promises made by contractors for a plan of ten rest days / twenty work days, improvement in the payment situation, improvement of the quality of accommodation (following the general summer strike)
Dehdasht Petrochemical workers	Deferred wage claims
Ilam Petrochemical workers	Dismissal of contract workers
Workers of Gachsaran Oil Company	Non-payment of wages
Navid Zar Chemical workers of Mahshahr	Non-payment of wages
Gachsaran Petrochemical workers	Five months deferred wages
Abadan oil workers	Temporary contracts, wage discrimination
Petrochemical workers of Mahshahr texture chemistry	Discrimination in working conditions and wages, temporary contracts, non-implementation of the job classification scheme
Mahshahr Petrochemical Industrial Services workers	Failure to implement the job classification plan
Takab Sanat workers of the fifth refinery of South Pars	Dismissal of protesting workers

Miners against plunderers

Last year, mining continued to be at the forefront of work accidents, with at least 28 miners across Iran losing their lives.

32 [Iran Labor News Agency \(ILNA\)](#), May 12, 2021

33 [Oil Contract Workers' Strike Organizing Council](#), October 19, 2021

34 [IPNA](#), October 30, 2021

35 [ISNA](#), September 20, 2021

36 [Iran Labor News Agency \(ILNA\)](#), October 12, 2021

37 [Oil Contract Workers' Strike Organizing Council](#), September 26, 2021

The number of work accidents and fatalities increased due to a lack of labor safety regulation implementation by mine owners and managers, worn-out mines, abnormal operations, absence of worker safety equipment, and failure of the Ministry of Labor to supervise working conditions.

Miners staged widespread protests over working conditions in several areas last year. In Kerman province, one of the mining hubs of Iran, miners blocked the main roads. In East Azerbaijan, Sungun miners stopped working for several days.

Protest Group	Complaints	Type of Protest
Seasonal workers of Aq Dareh gold mine ³⁸	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dismissal of a group of protesting workers / request to return to work 	Rally
Workers of Rochun Valley Copper Mine ³⁹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Job classification plan not implemented Low wages Unequal wages Temporary contracts 	Rally / meeting with provincial officials
Workers of Asminon Jan Faryab Mine ⁴⁰	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Job classification plan not implemented Temporary contracts Low wages 	Blocking the main road for three days
Kerman coal miners ⁴¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sale of company shares 	Rally and sit-in
Private sector workers in Kuhbanan coal mines ⁴²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discrimination in wage payments Harsh working conditions Privatization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Role of contractors 	Six-day sit-in
Workers of Sungun Copper Complex ⁴³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dismissal of workers Discrimination wage payments to formal and informal workers Temporary contracts 	Rally and sit-in
Workers of Midok Shahrabak mine ⁴⁴	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dismissal and detention of workers 	Rally
Goltoot coal miners ⁴⁵	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Harsh working conditions Wage discrimination Privatization Contracting companies 	Sit-in

Teachers: learning to organize

The commodification of education in the last two decades has increased the cost of schooling and led to the severe exploitation of teachers. The Ministry of Education has hired temporary instructors with part-time and low-wage contracts to compensate for teacher shortages.

Despite school closures, teachers have repeatedly staged rallies in various parts of Iran over the past year.

The Teachers' Salary Ranking Bill, which parliament dissolved due to government opposition, is one of the leading causes of these protests. The Coordinating Council of Teachers' Unions organized a new round of strikes and rallies throughout Iran as

38 [Radio Zamaneh](#), November 22, 2021

39 [Islamic Republic News Agency](#), November 17, 2021

40 [Dana Information Network](#), November 25, 2021; [Islamic Republic News Agency](#), November 25, 2021

41 [Iran Labor News Agency](#), November 6, 2021

42 [Radio Zamaneh](#), September 30, 2021

43 [Radio Zamaneh](#), December 5, 2021

44 [Iran Labor News Agency](#), September 26, 2021

45 [Rah Arman Kerman](#), October 3, 2021

schools reopened. Teachers organized four nationwide strikes and sit-ins from the beginning of the school year until the end of 2021.

The below table lists the protests of different groups of teachers.

Protest Group	Demands	Protest Type
Formal teachers ⁴⁶	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve the ranking bill so that teachers' salaries would reach 80% of university faculty members • Release imprisoned teachers and stop prosecuting them • Provide free education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rallies and sit-ins in different cities • Issuance of a statement
Service-purchasing teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay wage arrears • Amend contracts • Increase salary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rally in different cities
Green-certificate teachers (also known as <i>karnameh-sabz</i>) are informal teachers who have taught for years but have not been formally recruited by the government. After passing the written recruitment exams and face-to-face interviews, these teachers received a "green certificate" indicating that the government was obliged to hire them. Despite government promises, some Ministry of Education officials do not consider the possession of a green certificate as a guarantee of employment.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gain formal employment in the Ministry of Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sit-ins in front of the parliament and Ministry of Education buildings
Non-profit school teachers ⁴⁷	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase wages to compensate for reductions during the pandemic • Receive formal employment to address job insecurity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rally in front of the parliament
Teachers of Article 28 of the Statute of Farhangian University ⁴⁸	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase salaries • Eliminate job insecurity • Include in the ranking scheme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rally in front of the parliament • Rally in front of the Ministry of Education building in provincial centers • Correspondence with officials
Preschool teachers ⁴⁹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receive formal employment in the Ministry of Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rally in front of the parliament and the Ministry of Education building in Khuzestan province
Literacy movement instructors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receive formal employment in the Ministry of Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rally in front of the parliament

The existence of trade unions in most Iranian cities allowed teachers' protests to be organized, continuous, and widespread. On December 13, 2021, teachers staged a nationwide rally in 80 cities across the country that was unprecedented in the history

46 [Radio Zamaneh](#), September 25, 2021; [Radio Zamaneh](#), October 3, 2021; [Radio Zamaneh](#), October 14, 2021; [Radio Zamaneh](#), November 11, 2021

47 [Fars News Agency](#), May 16, 2021

48 [Radio Zamaneh](#), May 18, 2021; [Radio Zamaneh](#), May 16, 2021

49 [Asr Jonoub](#), October 2, 2021

of union protests over the past three decades. The government threatened, summoned, or arrested large numbers of union members in various cities.

Health workers: Helpless against the commodification of health services

The COVID-19 pandemic has made working conditions more difficult for Iranian nurses. Consecutive waves of the pandemic further exhausted medical staff, especially the nurse. Nurses' working hours increased and the government suspended the implementation of the Medical Staff Productivity Promotion Act, which was supposed to be implemented because of a nurse shortage during the pandemic.⁵⁰

Over 100 nurses have died since the onset of the pandemic, and at least 125,000 contracted COVID-19. Some of these nurses were forced to take unpaid leave for an extended period or resign.⁵¹ Nurses tend to migrate more often than other workers, and according to officials, 2000 of them have left Iran since the beginning of the pandemic.

Privatization of health services and delays in implementing the Nursing Services Tariff Law has led to wage gaps between formal and informal nurses working under different contracts.

The Nursing Services Tariff Law was passed 15 years ago but has not yet been implemented. Nurses say that doctors have actively prevented the law because they benefit from it not being implemented.

According to nursing officials in Iran, 35% of the 250,000-member nursing community works under temporary contracts, and they therefore suffer from wage inequality and other discrimination.⁵² Contracting companies pay their meager wages late and refuse to offer benefits.

Nurses have not yet been able to form a union independent of the government-controlled Nurses' House and Iranian Nursing Organization. An independent union does not exist because temporary contracts create divisions among nurses and there is a security and police presence in their workplace.

In the absence of an independent union, nurses have taken to the streets several times over the past year to protest exploitation, privatization of the health sector, and temporary contracts.

Wage discrimination and the dominance of doctors in the Iranian health system have also prompted newer physicians to protest.

50 Zamaneh Media, [Special Report on Iranian Nurses](#), April 2021

51 [Islamic Republic News Agency](#), May 11, 2021

52 [Radio Zamaneh](#), May 13, 2021

Imprisonment, Flogging, and Expulsion

As labor protests spread, the government intensified its repression of workers, trade union activists, and labor rights defenders.

With the enactment of laws and directives under the pretense of “improving the business environment,” the Islamic Republic facilitates the exploitation of workers in various sectors while arresting, prosecuting, imprisoning, and dismissing union activists.

Over the past year, many members of teachers’ unions, the Tehran Bus Syndicate, the Free Union of Iranian Workers (FUIW), the Coordinating Committee for the Establishment of Trade Unions, and other labor rights defender organizations have been summoned, detained, and imprisoned. Some labor activists, such as Osman Ismaili and Mahmoud Salehi, were summoned and arrested several times throughout the year. Parvin Mohammadi was tried in absentia and sentenced to prison.

Dismissals are another means of suppressing workers to prevent widespread protests, especially in free trade zones.

In the past year, the government arrested at least 64 and summoned to court 42 labor activists and workers’ rights defenders. It also sentenced 9 labor activists to a total of more than 270 months in prison, 124 lashes, and a fine of 23 million tomans.

The below table below lists examples of the repression of workers and workers’ rights defenders during 2021. Some were summoned, arrested, or tried more than once.

Repression Type	Names
Arrested	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nine protesting workers of Ahvaz District 2 Municipality⁵³ • Protesting workers of Saman Tile Factory⁵⁴ • Osman Ismaili, a labor activist in Saqqez⁵⁵ • Mahboubeh Farahzadi, retired union activist⁵⁶ • Nusrat Beheshti, retired teacher⁵⁷ • Asghar Amirzadegan, retired teacher⁵⁸ • Gholamreza Gholami Kandazi, teacher union activist⁵⁹ • Maryam Sadeghi, Member of the Coordinating Committee for the Establishment of Trade Unions⁶⁰ • Aziz Ghasemzadeh, a member of the Gilan Teachers' Union⁶¹ • Thirty participants in Labor Day Rally in Tehran and Kurdistan⁶² • Asal Mohammadi, labor rights activist⁶³ • Hiran Pirbodaghi, labor rights activist • Maziar Seyednejad, labor activist • Rasool Bodaghi, inspector of the Teachers' Union⁶⁴ • Leila Hosseinzadeh, a student activist defending workers' rights⁶⁵ • Alieh Eghdam Doost, a women's rights activist and labor rights defender • Sattar Zarei, poet and defender of workers' rights⁶⁶
Summoned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amanj Amini, a member of the Kurdistan Teachers' Union⁶⁷ • Jafar Ebrahimi, Teachers' Union⁶⁸ • Teymour Bagheri Koodakani, a member of the Gilan Teachers' Union⁶⁹ • Mahmoud Sedighipour, a member of the Gilan Teachers' Union⁷⁰ • Davood Razavi, Atta Babakhani and Ali Ghorbanian, members of the Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company Workers' Syndicate⁷¹ • Parvin Mohammadi, Member of the Board of the Free Union of Iranian Workers (FUIW) • Maziar Seyednejad, labor activist • Kamyar Fakoor, Amir Abbas Azarmvand, Roham Yeganeh, labor rights activists⁷² • Mahmoud Malaki, member of Bushehr Teachers' Union⁷³

53 [Asr Jonoub](#), June 4, 2021

54 [Free Union of Iranian Workers](#), April 29, 2021

55 [Radio Zamaneh](#), October 21, 2021

56 [Free Union of Iranian Workers \(FUIW\)](#), May 29, 2021

57 Teachers Union Channel, August 6, 2021

58 Hrana, July 28, 2021

59 [Hrana](#), September 8, 2021

60 [Radio Zamaneh](#), October 24, 2021

61 [Radio Zamaneh](#), October 11, 2021

62 [Radio Zamaneh](#), May 1, 2021

63 [Radio Zamaneh](#), November 7, 2021

64 [Radio Zamaneh](#), December 11, 2021

65 [Radio Zamaneh](#), December 7, 2021

66 [Radio Zamaneh](#), December 3, 2021

67 [Radio Zamaneh](#), November 12, 2021

68 Teachers Union Channel, September 8, 2021

69 Teachers Union Channel, August 9, 2021

70 Teachers Union Channel, 18 August 1400

71 [Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company Workers' Syndicate](#), February 11, 2021

72 [Radio Zamaneh](#), October 19, 2021

73 [Coordinating Council of the Teachers' Union](#), November 15, 2021

Sentence issued/executed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asghar Firoozi, labor rights activist⁷⁴ • Alireza Saghafi, labor rights activist • Haidar Ghorbani, member of the board of the Free Union of Iranian Workers (FUIW), sentenced to 11 years in prison • Parvin Mohammadi, Member of the Board of the Free Union of Iranian Workers (FUIW)⁷⁵ • Kamyar Fakoor, a journalist who defends workers' rights⁷⁶ • Confirmation of imprisonment and flogging of Ismail Gerami, retired teacher⁷⁷ • Mohammad Taghi Fallahi, Secretary of the Coordination Council of the Teachers' Union • Javanmir Moradi, member of the Coordinating Committee for the Establishment of Trade Unions • Arash Johari, labor activist • Mehran Raouf, labor activist
Dismissed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representatives of Iran Khodro Tabriz factory workers • Several protesting workers of the South Pars factory • Workers' representatives of Khuzestan Ports and Maritime Administration⁷⁸ • Gharib Havizavi and Hossein Rezaei, labor representatives in the National Steel Industrial Group⁷⁹ • 35 workers of Tehran Refinery for participating in a strike • Abolfazl Sedighi and Hamed Janeshkar Harzandi, maintenance workers of railway line and technical buildings in East Azerbaijan region⁸⁰ • Several Sepahan Isfahan Cement workers for participating in union protests⁸¹ • Mohammad Habibi, spokesman for the Teachers' Union • 100 workers of Aq Dareh gold mine⁸² • Three workers of Karun Cement Factory for following up on a work accident that resulted in the death of one worker⁸³ • 150 Shahinshahr spinning workers • Khomein petrochemical workers⁸⁴ • Workers of Ilam Milk factory⁸⁵ • Workers of the Fiber Factory of the Foundation for the Oppressed⁸⁶ • Four protesting workers in Miduk Square, Shahr-e Babak⁸⁷ • Tesco oil and gas workers in Assaluyeh⁸⁸

74 [Radio Zamaneh](#), June 5, 2021

75 [Radio Zamaneh](#), December 7, 2021

76 [Hrana](#), November 2, 2021

77 [Radio Zamaneh](#), September 21, 2021

78 [Iran Labor News Agency](#), April 21, 2021

79 [Free Union of Iranian Workers \(FUIW\)](#), June 12, 2021

80 Free Union of Iranian Workers (FUIW), June 28, 2021

81 Free Union of Iranian Workers (FUIW), June 30, 2021

82 [Radio Zamaneh](#), November 21, 2021

83 [Mehr News](#), October 26, 2021

84 [Oil Contract Workers' Organizing Council](#), October 26, 2021

85 [Fars News](#), October 26, 2021

86 [IRI Broadcasting \(IRIB\)](#), December 8, 2021

87 [Iran Labor News Agency](#), September 26, 2021

88 [Shoar-e-sal News](#), December 14, 2021

Working Children

The shift away from in-person education due to the COVID-19 pandemic has led to an increase in dropouts.

The reason behind dropping out is often students' lack of access to the internet or online learning tools such as cell phones, tablets, and computers. The Ministry of Education has acknowledged that 970,000 students have dropped out. The Social Security Organization Research Institute (SSORI), however, estimates that more than three million students have dropped out of school due to a lack of access to e-learning.

At the same time, the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan caused a new wave of Afghan migration to Iran. Although IRI prevented Afghans from entering Iran by establishing border camps and tightening border controls, provincial officials claim that this immigration influx has increased the number of working children.

According to the president of the Iran Association of Social Workers, 80% of working children are forced to work due to economic poverty.⁸⁹ Another study examining working girls' experiences in Tehran found that economic deprivation is the leading cause behind why girls go to work.⁹⁰

The CEO of the Tehran Municipality Welfare, Services, and Social Partnerships Organization has warned that a new wave of working children is on the way.⁹¹

Government officials refuse to provide accurate statistics on working children, and children's rights activists tend to report different statistics. According to government agencies, there are 500,000 working children in Iran. According to the head of the Iran Association of Social Workers, the number of children employed in workshops outside the scope of labor law (such as tailoring, carpet weaving, repair shops, and small workshops) is about 7 million alone.⁹²

The labor laws of the Islamic Republic stipulate that the minimum working age is 15 years, and so children aged 15 to 18 are not included in child labor statistics. Children working in home-based businesses or family workshops do also not count toward government statistics.

The Tehran municipality employs children through contractors and has handed over the task of "organizing the working children" to the Revolutionary Guards (IRGC).⁹³ The city of Tehran has also announced that it intends to "lock the bins to deal with garbage scavengers."⁹⁴ This plan, however, is more about securing the interests of waste management companies and the contractors that work in the field rather than protecting the working children who have no choice but to collect saleable items from the trash.

Other cities have also implemented the "organizing working children" plan. In this

89 [Asr-e-Iran News](#), June 6, 2021

90 [Iranian Students News Agency](#), May 3, 2021

91 [ILNA](#), October 13, 2021

92 [Radio Zamaneh](#), December 5, 2021

93 [Eskan News](#), October 20, 2021

94 [ILNA](#), September 21, 2021

plan, IRGC agents record the profiles and retinal images of children who were arrested on the street and taken to temporary detention centers. If the government identifies the child's family, it accepts a written commitment from them not to allow their child to work on the streets again. According to the Tehran State Welfare Organization director-general, if a working child is arrested twice, his/her case and that of his/her family will be referred to the judiciary based on the family's previous commitment. If the detained child is an immigrant, s/he will be deported, and if s/he is an Iranian citizen, his/her parents will be fined.⁹⁵

Iranian government officials claim that over 70% of working children are foreign nationals. Migrant children, mostly Afghans, are exploited in brick kilns, garbage collection, and waste separation workshops. In garbage collection and separation centers, children work without any protective equipment and are exposed to a variety of diseases.

95 [Iran Labor News Agency \(ILNA\)](#), May 8, 2021

Asylum Seekers and Refugees

The Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan has increased the number of refugees to Iran. Iran, which had made it harder for Afghans to stay before the Taliban took over, closed its borders to refugees and announced that it would temporarily house them in border camps in Sistan and Baluchestan, South Khorasan, and Khorasan Razavi, before returning them to Afghanistan.⁹⁶

Two months after the Taliban took over Afghanistan, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) announced the deportation of 28,000 Afghan refugees from Iran in the course of one week. According to the IOM report, Iran has expelled 3,200 unaccompanied Afghan children. The number of refugees who returned to Afghanistan from Iran last year was over half a million.⁹⁷

Afghan immigrants with Iranian residence permits have also faced more restrictions in the past year. In addition to the rising cost of living and their lack of even meager government support, the Iranian government has stated that a national card is now required for Afghan immigrants to receive certain public services. Afghan workers in Tehran Municipality were not vaccinated against coronavirus because they did not have a national card.

96 Hamshahri Online, August 18, 2021

97 [Radio Zamaneh](#), November 12, 2021

Informal workers

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the number of informal workers. According to government agencies, over six million workers are employed without insurance or contracts.

Vendors, couriers, Snapp drivers, clothing merchants, and restaurant workers are among the informal workers who have experienced more difficult conditions over the past year.

At the beginning of the year, the government banned peddlers from working in 43 cities. To support vendors and peddlers, the Foundation of the Oppressed delivered coupons worth one million tomans (approx. USD 40) to a limited number of vendors in Tehran twice.⁹⁸ The government failed to provide adequate protection to peddlers, and in many cities, it violently prevented them from operating. In Ahvaz, the police destroyed the peddlers' market overnight.⁹⁹ In Sanandaj, peddling on Ferdowsi Street was banned.¹⁰⁰

In Tehran's District 20, city agents tasked to remove sidewalk blockages attacked a peddler.¹⁰¹ The violent treatment of peddlers by city agents has increased in recent years. In addition to disrupting their activities, city officials have also sexually harassed female vendors on numerous occasions. The Harassment Watch website, which monitors sexual violence in Iran, reports the experiences of female vendors who have been sexually harassed by municipal roadblock removers or subway officers.¹⁰²

According to Snapp rideshare and food delivery platform officials, working conditions have worsened for their urban drivers, who have grown to about one million over the past year.¹⁰³ Restaurant workers were also affected by the pandemic, as estimates show that at least 30% of them have lost their jobs in the past year.

98 [Mashreq News](#), January 31, 2021

99 [Islamic Republic News Agency](#), January 4, 2021

100 [Radio Zamaneh](#), January 13, 2021

101 [Radio Zamaneh](#), May 16, 2021

102 [Dideh-ban-Azar \(Harassment Watch\)](#), May 1, 2021

103 [Radio Zamaneh](#), December 26

Death at Work

The deregulation of the business environment, transfer of technical inspections to the private sector, and lack of Ministry of Labor workshop inspectors resulted in an increase in the number of work accidents. According to the Minister of Labor, work accidents kill at least 700 workers annually.

Article 95 of the Labor Law indicates that the responsibility for implementing technical and occupational health regulations lies with workshop owners or officials of the economic units. Whenever an accident occurs due to rule non-compliance, the employer or manager is held criminally and legally liable.

According to the Labor Law, the Inspection Office of the Ministry of Labor is responsible for checking workshops for compliance, but the officials have reduced the number of inspections due to a staffing shortage.

“The small number of labor inspectors and the inactivity of safety officials in the workshops are the factors that lead to accidents,” said the chairman of the Central Province Association of Safety and Health Officials in response to mining accidents. “Safety experts are present in all workshops in the country, but this important issue is not institutionalized in the mines. This means that there is no safety officer to monitor the mining employer’s performance and the supervision of the Ministry of Labor is inaccurate.”¹⁰⁴

The Ministry of Labor has delegated part of its responsibility for inspecting workshop units to the non-governmental sector and intends to continue this transition. In May 2021, Deputy Minister of Labor Relations Hatem Shakerami confirmed the shortage of inspectors in the Ministry of Labor, saying that the ministry plans to use the capacity of non-governmental organizations to inspect workshops.¹⁰⁵

Accurate statistics on the frequency of work accidents and the number of workplace fatalities are difficult to access due to the lack of transparency in official information and the failure to record all work-related deaths.

The following table is based on reports published in Iranian news media and includes the last three quarters of 2021. During this period, nearly 900 workers were killed and injured, with construction workers, miners, and public service workers most likely to fall victim to these accidents. The number of deaths among public sector workers has also increased due to the pandemic.

Sector	Deaths	Injuries
Building and digging wells	139	92
Mines	26	27
Small workshops	32	40
Large units	28	191

¹⁰⁴ [Radio Zamaneh](#), May 9, 2021

¹⁰⁵ [Iranian Students News Agency \(ISNA\)](#), May 2, 2021

Public service	51	81
Agriculture	34	147
Total	310	578

Kulbars

Over the past year, 46 Kurdish *kulbars* in the border areas of West Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, and Kermanshah provinces were killed by border patrol shootings and natural disasters, according to human rights watchers in Kurdistan. Another 122 were injured. *Kulbars* are porters who carry heavy cargo of commercial goods on their backs and cross dangerous border areas so that guards do not intercept them.

A child *kulbar* committed suicide after Iranian border guards confiscated his cargo cattle. Others who lost their lives were: five *kulbars* to avalanche, three *kulbars* to frostbite, three *kulbars* to falling from a height, three *kulbars* to heart attack while carrying cargo, one *kulbar* to drowning in a river, and nine *kulbars* in road accidents.

Iranian military personnel shot and injured 77 *kulbars*. Turkish border guards shot and tortured another three *kulbars*, Iraqi border guards shot and killed one, and landmines killed 12 and injured three. Twenty-six *kulbars* were also wounded in various other accidents.¹⁰⁶

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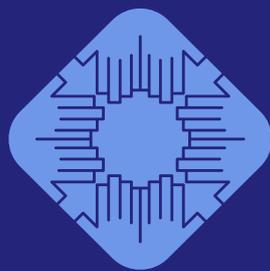
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