

Labor Rights in Iran



QUARTERLY REPORT NO. 26

July - September 2023



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Introduction

This publication is Zamaneh Media's 26th Labor Rights Report. These reports focus on key issues like workplace health and safety, various types of workplace discrimination, women's labor, child labor, unemployment, deferment or non-payment of wages, labor organization, and labor protests. Zamaneh Media continuously monitors labor news in Iran, and this report provides an overview of labor rights issues there.

The following quarterly report covers labor rights issues, events, and trends from July through September 2023. It is important to note that the information herein does not address all labor-related events and topics. In the winter of 2022-23, we published our [fifth annual Zamaneh newsletter](#). Additionally, our latest special report focused on the plight of the [Baluch fuel carriers](#). For all previously published reports related to workers' rights, please visit [Zamaneh's labor page](#).

Overview

Workers' struggle to better their living conditions continues against a backdrop of increasing economic challenges at the hands of the government. The Islamic Republic of Iran has blocked the Supreme Labor Council from convening to reassess salaries. As a result, the gap between wages and the cost of essential goods has tripled. Some Members of Parliament have indicated that approximately 28 million Iranians now live below the poverty line.

Data from Iran's Statistics Center reveals a decline in the official inflation rate as of July 2023. This decrease can be partially attributed to the price liberalization of essential goods and the abolition of the preferential currency system, in which the government provided currency lower than the market rate. Although this policy has worsened poverty, the government has pledged to offset the loss of purchasing power by bolstering non-cash subsidies for the lowest income deciles.

Housing and rental costs have surged despite the government's promises to stabilize these prices. This increase has driven the economically disadvantaged to relocate from urban centers to the peripheries and, in some cases, even to rural areas, a trend that government officials and experts refer to as "reverse migration." However, this term does not capture the profound economic and societal implications of this trend.

Iran's economy remains stagnant because of stalled nuclear negotiations with Western nations, country-wide sanctions, heightened repression, and a growing sense of despair. Pervasive internet censorship further also contributes to this stagnation. The Research Center of the Iran Chamber of Commerce has reported a deepening of the economic downturn.

Amidst these challenges, the nation approaches the anniversary of the tragic passing of Jina Mahsa Amini. Amini's demise incited widespread protests in 2022, and since then workers have steadfastly continued their fight against poverty and hunger.

Economic Distress Pushes Workers to the Brink in Iran

The economic turmoil in Iran has worsened to the point that it has affected the suicide rate, particularly among the working class. Job terminations, workplace discrimination, and unpaid wages have pushed some workers to take their own lives.

During the summer of 2023, there were reports of at least eight workers who took their own lives: two nurses from Kermanshah¹, two energy sector workers from Abadan Refinery² and Chowar Petrochemical in Ilam³, a railway worker from Raja Company⁴, a municipal employee in Ilam⁵, a construction worker in Zahedan, and a journalist from Dehdasht.

Job termination was the cited reason for four of these suicides. Two individuals took their lives due to the hopelessness of unemployment and poverty. The reasons behind the tragic suicides of the two nurses from Kermanshah remain undisclosed; however, many nurses grapple with temporary contracts and unfair wages and face stark discrimination and wage disparities. A significant number of nurses are employed under 89-day contracts through intermediary companies. Despite assurances from the authorities to adjust medical wages, junior nurses and doctors often work long hours for pay that is considerably less than their specialist counterparts. The Iran Medical Council (IRIMC) spokesperson has confirmed that at least 13 medical residents took their own lives in 2021 and 2022 alone.

1 [Radio Zamaneh](#), August 6, 2023

2 [Radio Zamaneh](#), August 17, 2023

3 [Radio Zamaneh](#), July 28, 2023

4 [Didban Iran](#), July 10, 2023

5 [Radio Zamaneh](#), September 3, 2023

A Somber Summer for Iranian Workers

From the beginning of summer through September 6, 2023, Iranian media reported the deaths of at least 116 workers due to occupational accidents (see below table). While this number may not capture the entirety of work-related fatalities in Iran, it is demonstrative of the increasing rate of deadly workplace incidents.

The construction industry, particularly building projects, roadwork, and well-drilling, reported the highest number of fatalities. This summer, 52 construction workers died and another 20 sustained injuries. This data highlights the alarming frequency of fatal incidents within the construction sector. Additionally, at least six of the deceased workers were Afghan nationals. Due to governmental restrictions on immigrant residency, many employers hire Afghan laborers at reduced wages without offering them insurance or formal contracts. The deaths of some workers are not reported since employers face financial penalties if found employing migrants without valid residency and work permits, according to the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor, and Social Welfare.

According to data from the Iranian Legal Medicine Organization (ILMO), 1,900 workers died in occupational accidents during the Iranian calendar year 1401 (March 21, 2022 - March 21, 2023). Of this total, 850 were workers in the construction sector.⁶

During summer 2023, temporary employees in smaller workshops—many of which operate outside the purview of the Ministry of Labor and the Social Security Organization—experienced a notably high rate of fatalities. Media reports highlighted 24 accidents in these workshops, 15 of which were fatal.

The public service sector also experienced 17 fatal job-related accidents, while another 39 resulted in injuries. Certain occupations within this sector, such as electricians, municipal employees, and firefighters, had a heightened risk of fatal incidents.

In the mining industry, hazards such as explosions, structural collapses, and inadequate safety equipment led to the deaths of ten workers, with an additional two sustaining injuries. A notable incident was the explosion at the Tazareh Coal Mine, which claimed the lives of six miners. Over the past four years, this mine has been the site of three explosions, resulting in the deaths of nine workers. It is worth noting that the state holds 51 percent of the Tazareh Coal Mine shares, while the Eastern Alborz Coal Company holds the remaining 49 percent. The later is predominantly owned by the Isfahan Iron and Steel Company, holding 95 percent of its shares.⁷

Miners earn a monthly salary ranging from 8 to 9 million tomans, which can reach

6 [ILNA](#), July 17, 2023

7 [Radio Zamaneh](#), September 20, 2023

11 million tomans with overtime. Of the 1,500-strong workforce, only 300 are permanent employees, while the remaining 1,200 are contracted. Despite many contract workers boasting 15 or 16 years of experience, they remain on temporary contracts. (At the time of publication, 1 US dollar = 51,000 Tomans).

Many contractor companies overlook essential safety measures in their operations to maximize profits. This includes neglecting vital safety provisions such as installing proper ventilation systems in the tunnels, providing workers with standardized protective clothing, and employing medical and rescue personnel. According to workers' testimonies, even basic safety equipment like the fire extinguishers in the Tazareh mine are often empty.

In a conversation with Iranian domestic media, Amir Pirouz Kolahi-Azar, a faculty member at Damghan University's Faculty of Geosciences, noted the absence of a functional gas meter as a primary cause of the disaster at the Tazareh mine. He emphasized, "It's crucial to detect pockets of methane gas early during mining operations to prevent such mishaps." This process requires consistent monitoring, real-time measurements, and thorough analysis.

Further echoing safety concerns, the head of the Student Basij Organization in Semnan province relayed sentiments from the miners' families. They reported, "The gas measurement devices are old, worn out, and poorly calibrated." Additionally, they expressed concerns about the subpar structural support, noting, "the timber used to support the mine's ceilings and walls is both insufficient and poor quality." The families also pointed to inadequate protective gear for workers, citing a lack of essential items such as clothing, masks, mask filters, and protective helmets.⁸

Notably, the Ministry of Industry, Mining, and Trade is mandated to oversee the safety standards in mines.

Table 1: Reported work incidents in the summer of 2023

Sector	Deaths	Injuries
Construction	52	20
Industry	16	63
Small Workshops	15	9
Public Service	17	39
Mining	10	2
Agriculture	2	15
Other	4	1

The primary causes of workplace fatalities during the summer were falls from height, impacts from hard objects, electrocution, and suffocation.

8 [Akhbar-e-Madan \(Mine News\)](#), September 12, 2023

Several factors have contributed to the rising number of fatal accidents, including unsafe work tools, inadequate oversight from the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare, the closure of health centers, and the absence of technical protection committees in workplaces. The mental strain and physical exhaustion experienced by workers — both of which are exacerbated by increased exploitation and declining wages — also play significant roles in the uptick of fatal incidents.

Despite higher accident rates, government officials maintain that they've made strides in reducing workplace fatalities.

Crackdown

As the anniversary of the “Women, Life, Freedom” movement approached, many activists advocating for gender equality, union rights, and student issues faced increased scrutiny. In many cases, law enforcement summoned these activists or had court orders enacted against them.

Tightening Grip on Unionists

Jafar Ebrahimi, a representative of the Tehran teachers’ union who has been incarcerated since April 2022, was transferred from Evin Prison to Ghezel Hesar Prison. This relocation, along with 13 other prisoners, came as a response to their protest against the surge in prison telephone charges. Among those relocated was Kamyar Fakour, a journalist known for championing workers’ rights.⁹

In Ghezel Hesar Prison, Ebrahimi and Fakour face severe restrictions; they are denied medical services and access to personal belongings. They are held with 11 others in the ominously named “Safe Ward,” a confinement area reserved for those on death row.

Ebrahimi’s health has been a cause for concern. Before his imprisonment, he was diagnosed with a compromised immune system. His attorney revealed that while in custody, Ebrahimi developed diabetes and required urgent medical care. Plans were in motion to grant him medical leave to get treatment before his transfer to Ghezel Hesar Prison. However, the Organization of State Prisons denied this request.¹⁰

On September 14, 2023, the Coordinating Council of Teachers’ Union Organizations reported the urgent transfer of Jafar Ebrahimi to Rajaei Hospital in Karaj due to his overall health condition and loss of consciousness. The council noted, “No hospital has confirmed his admittance, and there’s a concerning lack of information regarding his condition.” After a brief meeting, Ebrahimi’s defense lawyer disclosed visible signs of abuse on Ebrahimi’s neck, shoulders, body, wrists, and forehead.¹¹

Keyvan Mohtadi, a translator and writer advocating for workers’ rights, was previously detained and sentenced to five years in prison in relation to the case of the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company (SWTSBC). For showing solidarity with Ebrahimi and Kamyar Fekour, Mohtadi was placed in solitary confinement in Evin prison.¹²

Adding to the growing list of political prisoners, SWTSBC member Reza Shahabi

9 [Radio Zamaneh](#), September 3, 2022

10 [Radio Zamaneh](#), September 9, 2023

11 [Coordinating Council of Teachers’ Union Organizations](#), September 14, 2023

12 [Radio Zamaneh](#), September 10, 2023

has been denied phone privileges for protesting Mohtadi's solitary confinement. Both Shahabi and Mohtadi have been incarcerated since April 2022.¹³

Several other labor activists also remain imprisoned. These individuals include Rasool Bodaghi of the Coordinating Council of Teachers' Union Organizations, as well as SWTSBC board members Hassan Saeedi and Dawood Razavi. On September 12, 2023, the SWTSBC raised an alarm over Razavi's deteriorating health while in custody.¹⁴

Arrests and Sentencings

The status of some labor activists is listed below:

Anisha Assadollahi, an SWTSBC translator, saw her prison sentence executed by security officers. Arrested in April 2022, Tehran's Revolutionary Court sentenced her to five years.¹⁵

Labor activist Reyhaneh Ansarinejad, detained in the spring of 2022, received a four-year sentence from the courts. Additional penalties included prohibitions on social media, leaving the country, and affiliating with political or social entities. Ansarinejad's defense lawyer criticized the Revolutionary Court's president for delivering a judgment solely based on security reports, discounting the defense's arguments.¹⁶ Reyhaneh was called to commence her sentence on September 20, 2023.¹⁷

Younes Azadbar, a Telecommunications Company retiree from Gilan province, was detained during a retiree' rally on July 19, 2023. The Revolutionary Court charged him with "muhareba" (war against God). It's worth noting that pensioners from the Telecommunications Company of Iran have been protesting for over nine months.¹⁸

Osman Esmaili, a worker from Saqqez in the Kurdistan Province, arrested on International Labor Day in 2022, was handed a 39-month prison sentence by the Sanandaj Revolutionary Court, with a mandatory 16 months served. Esmaili secured a temporary release in March 2023 after posting a one billion toman bail.¹⁹

Kamal Karimi, a Kurdish labor activist, was given a 9-month suspended prison sentence.²⁰

13 [The Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company \(SWTSBC\)](#), September 11, 2023

14 [SWTSBC](#), September 12, 2023

15 [Radio Zamaneh](#), July 26, 2023

16 [Radio Zamaneh](#), July 27, 2023

17 [Radio Zamaneh](#), September 22, 2023

18 [Radio Zamaneh](#), September 1, 2023

19 [Radio Zamaneh](#), August 29, 2023

20 [Radio Zamaneh](#), July 18, 2023

Kurdish labor activists received suspended prison sentences: Shadman Abdi (three years),²¹ Khabat Mahmoudi (three years),²² Iqbal Sha'bani (two years, six months),²³ Iqbal Pishkari (one year),²⁴ and Abdullah Khairabadi (20 months).²⁵

Ramyar Dehdar, another labor activist, was taken into custody in Sanandaj.²⁶

Child rights advocate Fereshteh Sadiq Sefat was arrested in Rasht.²⁷

Retribution Against Teachers Through Mass Dismissals

Several teachers faced judicial court trials this summer due to their involvement in union and political protests, with sentences ranging from imprisonment to job termination.

Teachers' unions orchestrated the most coordinated union demonstrations in 2021 and 2022. Teachers organized multiple protests amidst the "Women, Life, Freedom" uprising in the fall and winter of 2022, and in reaction to consecutive chemical attacks on girls' schools, resulting in the poisoning of many students. In these rallies and several official statements, they vehemently denounced government aggression.

Over the past year, the security forces, judiciary, and Ministry of Education jointly launched a crackdown on teachers' unions and their activists. The security apparatus penalized teachers for participating in demonstrations and sit-ins and voicing their political opinions. This retaliation included: summons from security officials, court trials, imprisonment, permanent and temporary job suspensions, wage cuts, and forced retirements. Some of the teachers who were targeted had over two decades of teaching experience.

The following list provides a snapshot of the punitive actions taken against teachers:

- Mihrab Farsad Mokhtari, a Nowshahr teacher, was arrested on September 20.²⁸
- Shilan Yusofi from Saqqez was forcibly retired and faces salary decrease due to his participation in a teachers' rally.²⁹

21 [Radio Zamaneh](#), July 18, 2023

22 [Radio Zamaneh](#), July 18, 2023

23 [Radio Zamaneh](#), July 19, 2023

24 [Radio Zamaneh](#), July 19, 2023

25 [Radio Zamaneh](#), July 19, 2023

26 [Radio Zamaneh](#), July 19, 2023

27 [Radio Zamaneh](#), July 19, 2023

28 [Radio Zamaneh](#), September 22, 2023

29 [Coordinating Council of Teachers' Union Organizations \(CCTUO\)](#), September 12, 2023

- Mahmoud Malaki, a Bushehr Teachers Union board member, was arrested on June 25 by security forces.³⁰ The Supervisory Board of Administrative Violations (SBAV) later permanently dismissed him.³¹
- In Alborz Province, Rahman Abedini, Lotfullah Jamshidi, and Gholamali Shahriari faced temporary dismissal, as decreed by the SBAV.³²
- Safieh Basim of Karaj was forced into retirement by the SBAV.³³
- The SBAV handed Elaheh Sadeghi from North Khorasan a two-month dismissal.³⁴
- Ahmad Alizadeh, an Abdanan teacher, faced forced retirement and was also demoted from his position.³⁵ Additionally, the appeals court sentenced him to three years and one day in prison.³⁶
- Aziz Ghasemzadeh, an incarcerated Teachers Union member from Gilan, was dismissed from his job.³⁷
- Suleiman Abdi, associated with the Kurdistan Teachers' Union in Saqqez, initially received a sentence of eight months in prison and 74 lashes. His sentence was later converted to 720 hours of free teaching at the Relief Foundation, with the flogging suspended for two years.³⁸
- Security forces targeted the residences of Pirouz Nami, Ali Kroshat, and Siamak Sadeghi Chehrazi, and confiscated their phones following a protest from the Ministry of Information over these union activists' acquittal in Ahvaz.³⁹
- Sara Siahpoush, from the Tehran Teachers Union, was sentenced to six years in prison⁴⁰ and fired.⁴¹
- Farouq Saeedzadeh, an educator and environmentalist in Marivan, was demoted and had a salary reduction.⁴²
- Yaqub Mohammadi from Abdanan was forced into retirement.⁴³
- Zahra Sayad Delshad, a Bandar Anzali teachers' union activist, faced early re-

30 [CCTUO](#), June 25, 2023

31 [CCTUO](#), August 21, 2023

32 [CCTUO](#), 28 June 2023

33 [CCTUO](#), June 29, 2023

34 [CCTUO](#), 7 July 2023

35 [CCTUO](#), 10 July 2023

36 [CCTUO](#), 17 August 2023

37 [Radio Zamaneh](#), August 29, 2023

38 [CCTUO](#), 20 July 2023

39 [CCTUO](#), 6 August 2023

40 [Radio Zamaneh](#), July 16, 2023

41 [CCTUO](#), 27 August 2023

42 [CCTUO](#), 10 July 2023

43 [CCTUO](#), 11 July 2023

tirement and a job demotion.⁴⁴

● Abolfazl Khoran, a Markazi Province teachers' union member⁴⁵, was handed a complex sentence: six years and eight months in prison, 74 lashes, a two-year exile to Delfan town, and a two-year ban on internet activity.⁴⁶

● Union activists Lida Esmaili⁴⁷ and Alireza Hemati⁴⁸ faced penalties including early retirement and temporary dismissals.

● Omid Afzalipour⁴⁹ and Rahim Daniyali⁵⁰ both educators, were handed three-month suspensions.

● Mansoureh Sarafra⁵¹ and Ashraf Farhomay,⁵² both from Gilan, were forced into early retirement with pay cuts.

● An SBAV decision permanently dismissed Mohammad Saeidi Abu Ishaghi, a teacher in Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province.⁵³

● Gholamreza Akbarzadeh Baghban, Tahmasb Sohrabi Otagwari, Taimur Bagheri Kudakani, and Hossein Mehdizadeh Falakdehi, all affiliated with the Gilan Teachers Union, were each sentenced to three months in prison.⁵⁴

● Shiva Amelirad,⁵⁵ Kurdistan teachers' union, and Fariba Onami,⁵⁶ Gilan teachers' union, were both permanently dismissed.

● Bahareh Askarizadeh, a Khuzestan union activist, faced a four-month suspension.⁵⁷

● Gholamreza Asghari, an Ardabil union activist, was detained by security personnel⁵⁸ and was freed on bail on September 2, 2023.

● Educators Abdullah Abd al-Maliki,⁵⁹ Mahmoud Safdari,⁶⁰ Amin Minaei,⁶¹ and Arman Sohrabi,⁶² were all arrested, with Safdari later released on bail.

44 [CCTUO](#), 12 July 2023

45 [CCTUO](#), 7 August 2023

46 [CCTUO](#), 9 September 2023

47 [CCTUO](#), 9 August 2023

48 [CCTUO](#), 9 August 2023

49 [CCTUO](#), 10 August 2023

50 [CCTUO](#), 10 August 2023

51 [CCTUO](#), 11 August 2023

52 [CCTUO](#), August 14, 2023

53 [CCTUO](#), 22 August 2023

54 [CCTUO](#), 23 August 2023

55 [Radio Zamaneh](#), August 23, 2023

56 [Radio Zamaneh](#), August 23, 2023

57 [Radio Zamaneh](#), August 26, 2023

58 [CCTUO](#), 29 August 2023

59 [CCTUO](#), 18 September 2023

60 [CCTUO](#), 17 September 2023

61 [CCTUO](#), 15 September 2023

62 [Radio Zamaneh](#), September 17, 2023

Workers' Dismissals Amid Protests

Employers have taken disciplinary action in various workplaces against vocal and protesting employees, often resulting in dismissals.

According to available reports, approximately 1,500 employees were laid off from Techno Energy Sepehr Company (TESCo)⁶³ and Alhaavi Pharmaceuticals.⁶⁴ TESCo, a key telecommunication and electrical equipment provider for southern oil and gas projects, terminated around 600 employees within 40 days.⁶⁵ Company proprietors cited production losses as the primary reason for these layoffs.

In Chabahar, several contract municipal workers lost their jobs following a protest outside the Islamic City Council building.⁶⁶

At the Pooya Polymer Company in Sanandaj, four workers were terminated for advocating for trade union rights and staging protests.⁶⁷ Similarly, two employees at a factory for Tehran's Darugar, a manufacturer of personal care products and detergents, were dismissed for their protest activities.⁶⁸ In the energy sector, 38 Bankol oil and gas project employees were terminated following demonstrations protesting their work conditions.⁶⁹

Iran's faltering economy has exacerbated worker dismissals. The number of affected workers is believed to be higher than in media reports.

The latest study by the Research Center of Iran's Chamber of Commerce highlighted a notable trend. Managers from "multiple export-oriented units" mentioned implementing "workforce adjustment" due to liquidity challenges. The term "workforce adjustment" is a euphemism for layoffs, frequently utilized in employer communications to soften the impact of the message.⁷⁰

63 [Radio Zamaneh](#), August 6, 2023

64 [Salamat News](#), August 14, 2023

65 Ibid

66 [ILNA](#), July 3, 2023

67 [Radio Zamaneh](#), July 15, 2023

68 [ILNA](#), July 16, 2023

69 [Radio Zamaneh](#), September 1, 2023

70 [Radio Zamaneh](#), September 10, 2023

Protests

Pensioner Protests Grow in Scope

The scale and intensity of protests by retirees have also spiked. Pensioners from various funds represented the group that protested most frequently this summer. A number of these demonstrations in several cities escalated into violence due to police interventions. Several retirees were detained in Ardabil and Rasht.⁷¹ In Tehran, the police and security forces prevented a planned rally outside the parliament from materializing.

Social Security pensioners demanding an enhancement in their pension benefits were not the only ones in the streets.⁷² Protestors' demands included increased pension rates, alignment of pensioner salaries with those of active workers, and the provision of comprehensive, free medical insurance. Various groups participated in this movement: pensioners from the Iran Telecommunication Company, the Civil Servants Pension Fund, the Armed Forces Pension Fund, the Steel Industry Employees Support Fund, and a contingent of retirees from the medical sector. The primary grievance of these groups was the government's role in worsening their financial hardships and perpetuating economic disparities.

The financial issues in pension funds are rooted in flawed governmental policies. Under the proposed Seventh Development Plan, the government intends to mandate the sale of pension fund assets to bridge budgetary shortfalls, modify regulations concerning high-risk jobs, and consolidate different pension funds.

Energy Sector Protests Intensify

On July 2, 2023, contract workers from the oil sector ceased operations at the Khark and Asalouyeh oil terminals, voicing their discontent over poor food quality and workplace discrimination.⁷³ In Tehran, hundreds from the Arkan-e-Saalis oil industry project took to the streets. Dehloran petrochemical contract workers and Arya Sasol Polymer Company employees staged protests in Asaluyeh.⁷⁴

Arkan-e-Saalis workers pressed for the elimination of intermediary human resources contracting firms, instead advocating for direct employment contracts. These workers also called for a job classification system, better access to welfare amenities, and improved canteen conditions.

Workers of state-owned companies in the oil-rich southern regions and those from state-operated drilling firms rallied in Tehran. Some employees of the Arkan-e-Saalis project at the Tehran Refinery were joined by their families in the

71 [Radio Zamaneh](#), July 29, 2023

72 [Radio Zamaneh](#), July 7, 2023

73 [Radio Zamaneh](#), July 7, 2023

74 [Radio Zamaneh](#), July 17, 2023

demonstration.

In Dehloran, petrochemical employees rallied outside their facility, decrying the company's impending closure and job cuts. They eventually escalated their demonstration by blocking the petrochemical plant's entrance.⁷⁵

In the Special Region of South Pars, Arya Sasol Polymer Company's workforce and engineers staged a protest that spanned fifteen days, up to July 6, to decry seven months of unpaid salaries.

Dissatisfied with their working conditions, the Abadan Refinery's overhaul workers transitioned their two-day protest at the refinery to a more public setting: the Abadan Mosque on a Friday.⁷⁶

Official employees of the Gachsaran Oil and Gas Company assembled outside the Gachsaran Oil Company's central building, demanding the enactment of Article 10 from the Ministry of Oil Staff Regulations.⁷⁷

Siraf Pishgaman Refinery's green tank project workers, Jahan Pars contractor employees at Bushehr Petrochemical Site Number One, and South Adish Refinery workers in Kangan all went on strike.

Lastly, the National Iranian Drilling Company's workforce opposed the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance's decision to privatize the company.⁷⁸

Other Labor Unrests

Labor-related protests spiked over the summer. Many of these demonstrations, held as workplace rallies or strikes, were primarily driven by demands for payment of delayed wages or salary increases.

Public service sector protests prominently featured municipal workers. Their temporary, often daily, contracts and lack of proper representation left them particularly vulnerable to labor contractors and municipal bodies. Reports emerged from certain provinces about delayed salary payments for contract workers accumulating for six months to a year.

Employees of Iran Carton, a leading carton packaging firm in Iran, and Machine Sazi Arak (MSA), a prominent Iranian manufacturing entity, staged extended protests. At MSA, a workplace strike persisted for over two weeks.⁷⁹ While initial media coverage overlooked the workers' grievances, the media directed its at-

75 [Radio Zamaneh](#), July 22, 2023

76 [Radio Zamaneh](#), August 6, 2023

77 Ibid

78 [Radio Zamaneh](#), September 20, 2023

79 [Radio Zamaneh](#), August 31, 2023

tention to the protests after it came to light that the Provincial Security Council met without the workers' representatives. It's worth noting that MSA is under the umbrella of the Farhangian Reserve Fund, which is currently embroiled in a corruption scandal.

Between July 23 and 25, 2023, contract workers from Chadormalu Mining and Industrial Company went on strike to decry wage discrepancies, substandard pay, and inadequate health coverage. United in their cause, their solidarity pressured both the employer and the contractor to commit to addressing their concerns.⁸⁰

Another significant protest emerged from the dismissed employees of the Agh-Darreh Gold Mine (Agdarreh Mine) in Takab County, West Azerbaijan Province, alongside jobseekers from neighboring villages. Security personnel confronted the protesters, resulting in the detention of several individuals. As of late September, six workers remained incarcerated.⁸¹

Tehran's metro city train conductors also voiced their concerns, rallying against stipulations in the Seventh Development Plan. The Islamic Consultative Assembly (Iranian Parliament) scrutinizes the draft for this initiative. Through this scheme, the government seeks broader public service privatization, including healthcare, and proposes alterations to labor regulations and social security, to the detriment of workers and pensioners.

The table that follows offers a summary of the labor protests during the summer. However, it may not encapsulate all instances of dissent.

Table 2: Overview of Workers' Protests in Summer 2023

Location/Protesting group	Low wages	Delayed wages	Dismissal	Demand for job classification	Demand for cancellation of temporary contracts	Wage discrimination	Other demands	Description
Jiroft Municipality workers ⁸²		*	*					140 workers were dismissed.
Sisakht City municipality workers ⁸³		*					*	The municipality imposed additional tasks on workers without extra compensation.

80 [Radio Zamaneh](#), July 29, 2023

81 [Radio Zamaneh](#), September 7, 2023

82 [Radio Zamaneh](#), September 20, 2023

83 Ibid

Gilan Electricity Distribution Company drivers ⁸⁴	*				*		*	New contracts removed benefits and allowed the contractor to terminate agreements unilaterally within 48 hours.
Iranshahr University of Medical Sciences employees ⁸⁵			*		*			Protest over the dismissal of 89-day employees.
Rural Telecommunications Company employees ⁸⁶		*						-
Chabahar municipality workers ⁸⁷			*					Protest against the termination of contract workers.
Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Agro-Industry Co. workers ⁸⁸				*				-
Metro (city train) drivers ⁸⁹							*	Protest against the anti-labor provisions of the Seventh Development Plan Bill.
Dehdasht unemployed individuals ⁹⁰							*	Protest demanding employment in Dehdasht Petrochemical Company.
Bank employees ⁹¹	*					*		-
Nasser Khosrow bazaar peddlers ⁹²							*	Protest against restrictions on peddler expansion.
Bastak City Water and Sewage Department workers ⁹³		*						Protest to claim three months of unpaid wages.
Ministry of Health contract employees ⁹⁴			*					-

84 Ibid

85 [Radio Zamaneh](#), July 7, 2023

86 Ibid

87 Ibid

88 Ibid

89 Ibid

90 Ibid

91 Ibid

92 [Radio Zamaneh](#), July 7, 2023

93 [Radio Zamaneh](#), July 22, 2023

94 Ibid

Location/Protesting group	Low wages	Delayed wages	Dismissal	Demand for job classification	Demand for cancellation of temporary contracts	Wage discrimination	Other demands	Description
Southeast Railway Company (Traverse Company) workers ⁹⁵			*					Protest over factory closure.
Khazar Steel Company workers ⁹⁶							*	Protest following the death of a worker in a work-related accident.
Neyshabur municipality workers ⁹⁷				*				-
Iranshahr municipality workers ⁹⁸		*						Protest to claim outstanding wages.
Rudbar municipality workers ⁹⁹	*	*					*	Protest against forced overtime and unpaid insurance.
Asaluyeh municipality workers ¹⁰⁰		*						Protest to claim two months of unpaid wages.
Abadeh Cement Company workers ¹⁰¹		*						Protest to claim five months of unpaid wages.
Tabriz Compressor Company workers ¹⁰²		*		*			*	Protest over job insecurity.
Pars Haft Tappeh Steel Company workers ¹⁰³				*				-
Zerand Steel Company drivers ¹⁰⁴	*							-
Chadormalu Mine workers ¹⁰⁵	*			*		*	*	-

95 Ibid

96 Ibid

97 [Radio Zamaneh](#), July 29, 2023

98 Ibid

99 Ibid

100 Ibid

101 Ibid

102 Ibid

103 Ibid

104 Ibid

105 Ibid

Khazar Plastic Factory workers ¹⁰⁶			*				*	-
Agh-Darreh job-seekers ¹⁰⁷							*	-
Khomeini Hospital in Tehran employees ¹⁰⁸	*			*	*	*	*	-
Shaygan Steel Company workers ¹⁰⁹					*			-
Iran Carton Company workers ¹¹⁰	*						*	Protest over extended work hours and inadequate wages.

106 [Radio Zamaneh](#), August 6, 2023

107 Ibid

108 Ibid

109 Ibid

110 [Radio Zamaneh](#), August 20

Location/Protesting group	Low wages	Delayed wages	Dismissal	Demand for job classification	Demand for cancellation of temporary contracts	Wage discrimination	Other demands	Description
Kerman Railway Technical Building workers ¹¹¹	*	*		*				-
Isfahan nurses ¹¹²	*	*	*			*	*	-
Milad Hospital medical personnel ¹¹³	*					*		Protest demanding a 50 percent wage increase.
Refah Chain Stores Co. (supermarkets) workers ¹¹⁴	*		*	*				-
Tabas Coal Mine workers ¹¹⁵	*				*	*		-
Machine Sazi Arak Manufacturing Company (MSA) workers ¹¹⁶	*				*		*	-
Khash municipality workers ¹¹⁷	*	*						-
Khorasan Railway Company workers ¹¹⁸	*		*	*		*		-
Rural Telecommunications Company Employees in various provinces ¹¹⁹		*					*	-

111 Ibid

112 [Radio Zamaneh](#), September 3, 2023

113 Ibid

114 Ibid

115 Ibid

116 Ibid

117 Ibid

118 Ibid

119 Ibid

Informal Workers

Seasonal construction laborers represent the majority of Iran’s informal workforce.

In August 2023, the head of the Association of Construction Workers’ Unions highlighted delays in revising the construction workers’ insurance law which resulted in 300,000 workers losing their insurance.¹²⁰ After prolonged negotiations between the Parliament and the Guardian Council, the Construction Workers Insurance Law amendment was ratified on September 13. Per this revision, workers are responsible for seven percent of the insurance premium. Nonetheless, only those possessing a technical license qualify for construction workers’ insurance. Employers are obliged to contribute 10 to 25 percent of total licensing fees (fees related to building licenses, renovations, and significant repairs) towards the insurance premiums for workers.¹²¹

Uninsured construction workers face dire risks, with many falling victim to fatal accidents. The construction industry accounts for nearly half of all fatal workplace accidents.

In an open letter to the Islamic Consultative Assembly (Iranian Parliament), the Kurdistan Province Construction Workers’ Association disclosed that 800,000 construction workers lacked insurance.¹²²

Peddlers, another sizable informal workforce, are often challenged by municipal regulations. Various municipalities constantly introduce stricter rules governing their operations.

In Tehran, home to the largest population of peddlers, the city’s Islamic Council advocated for removing peddlers’ stalls.¹²³ In August, the District 12 municipality declared its intentions to initiate the “plan to relocate peddlers.”¹²⁴ In cities like Bushehr¹²⁵ and Tabriz,¹²⁶ peddlers were confronted by “municipal obstruction removal” forces, leading to the confiscation of their goods.

Sales service personnel, predominantly in retail stores, eateries, and coffee shops, comprise another segment of short-term and vulnerable workers. These individuals are often recruited for meager salaries on a short-term basis and are exploited without insurance.¹²⁷

Other informal labor categories include fuel couriers (sukhtbars), cargo bearers

120 [Khabar Online](#), July 29, 2023

121 [Tasnim News](#), September 13, 2023

122 [Jamaran News](#), July 9, 2023

123 [Radio Zamaneh](#), July 23, 2023

124 [Etemad Online](#), August 22, 2023

125 [IRNA](#), July 13, 2023

126 [Tabriz Municipality](#), August 1, 2023

127 [ILNA](#), August 5, 2023

(kulbars) in Baluchistan and Kurdistan, porters, home-based carpet weavers, and motorcycle couriers. Comprehensive data regarding motor couriers and carpet weavers remains undisclosed.

Both sukhtbars and kulbars risk their lives for basic sustenance. Kulbars navigate perilous border regions evading border patrol while bearing substantial commercial loads on their backs, while sukhtbars transport fuel along Iran's eastern boundaries.

At least 40 kulbars sustained injuries from falls or security services' gunfire this summer. Over 80 percent of kulbars' injuries, which occasionally result in amputation or permanent impairment, arise from military confrontations in border zones,

During the same time period, reports confirmed the death of 11 kulbars. Six met their end at the hands of military forces, while the others perished due to accidents such as falls, evasion incidents, or heart failure.¹²⁸

Following the "Woman, Life, Freedom" uprising last year, the Islamic Republic of Iran bolstered its military presence along the shared border with the Kurdistan Region. Concurrently, the Iraqi government assumed control over its side of the border, intensifying the risks kulbars face during their journeys.

Additionally, an undetermined number of sukhtbars in Sistan and Baluchistan went missing during a flood.¹²⁹ Reports from Hal Vash and the Baloch Activists Campaign confirmed the discovery of at least 12 sukhtbars' bodies who had disappeared in the floodwaters. However, the exact number of missing sukhtbars remains uncertain.

In just three months, 57 sukhtbars lost their lives while another 29 reported injuries. Road mishaps are the primary cause of death among sukhtbars.¹³⁰

128 The statistics related to the death and injuries of Kulbars have been extracted from [Kolbar News](#) website.

129 [Halvash News](#), July 27, 2023

130 The statistics related to the death and injuries of sukhtbars have been collected from [Halvash News](#) and [Baloch Activists' Campaign](#).

Immigrants

In June, the Islamic Republic executed two Afghan migrants on charges of “terrorist acts” at the Shahcheragh Holy Shrine in Shiraz.¹³¹ During this time, the security apparatus of the Islamic Republic amplified anti-immigrant sentiments through the use of state media. They attributed “terrorist acts” to migrants and refugees without offering concrete evidence, which expedited the expulsion of Afghan migrants.

According to Afghan news sources, the Iranian authorities repatriated over 100,000 Afghan migrants during June and July alone.¹³² The number of Afghans deported from Iran between March and August 2023 is estimated to be over 224,000.¹³³

In response to growing constraints on Afghan migrants, the Iranian government declared Kermanshah province off-limits.¹³⁴ In Shiraz, they also mandated that “foreign nationals” refrain from residing near the Shahcheragh Holy Shrine.¹³⁵

Over the past year, both government-affiliated media outlets and some private sector publications have consistently fueled animosity toward Afghan migrants.

131 [Radio Zamaneh](#), July 8, 2023

132 [Khamma Press](#), August 30, 2023 and [Tejarat News](#), August 3, 2023

133 [Khamma Press](#), August 2, 2023

134 [8 AM](#), July 22, 2023

135 [IRNA](#), August 23, 2023

Working Children

Reliable statistics regarding children who are out of school remain unpublished. The data provided by governmental institutions is often inconsistent. Despite the discrepancies, there's a common thread: the rising number of children discontinuing their education.

The Research Center of the Islamic Consultative Assembly (Iranian Parliament) estimated that working children constitute 15 percent of the entire child population (those under 18 years of age). This report suggests that 10 percent of these working children are not enrolled in school.¹³⁶

Economic hardships are a significant factor driving the rise in child labor and school dropout rates. Government reports indicate that nearly one million school-aged individuals in Iran have opted out of formal education. The dropout phenomenon has intensified in recent years, particularly in the aftermath of the coronavirus crisis.

136 [Tabnak News](#), July 30, 2023

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