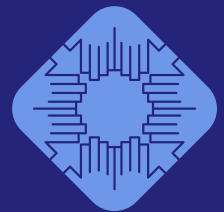


Labor Rights in Iran



QUARTERLY REPORT NO. 25

April - June 2023



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This publication is Zamaneh Media's 25th 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 April through June 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

The Iranian year 1402 (starting March 21, 2023) began on a somber note for workers as they continued to face wage suppression. While the official annual inflation rate exceeded 44 percent, the Supreme Labor Council raised the minimum wage by a meager 27 percent. The Council's decision resulted in a growing disparity between workers' wages and the cost of living, amounting to an 8 to 12 million tomans shortfall per worker. (Exchange rate at the time of this report's preparation: USD 1 = ~ 48,000.00 tomans)

The upward trend of the inflation rate persisted through April and May 2023. By May, the official inflation rate had escalated to 54.6 percent, and inflation for food products soared to an alarming 75.4 percent.

During this time, the government hiked the prices of several essential goods and services while it simultaneously repressed wages. The fare for intracity transportation rose by at least 25 percent and, in some cases, by as much as 55 percent.¹

Following an announcement by the Ministry of Agricultural Jihad, the price of raw milk surged by 25 percent, landing at 15 thousand tomans.² This hike in raw milk prices impacted the cost of widely consumed dairy products, such as yogurt, cheese, and pasteurized milk. Following the Association of Dairy Industry Producers' announcement, dairy product prices climbed by 30 to 35 percent.³

Prices for staple food items like chicken and eggs multiplied.⁴ The regulated price of chicken escalated from 63 thousand tomans per kilogram in mid-April to 73 thousand tomans by May 3.⁵ The cost per kilogram of eggs also reached 100 thousand tomans.

After another decree by the Ministry of Agricultural Jihad, sugar prices spiked by 41.6 percent. According to this Ministry, the bulk cost per kilogram of sugar rose from 18 thousand to 25.5 thousand tomans. Retail price for packaged sugar was between 33 to 38 thousand tomans per kilogram.⁶

This ongoing surge in inflation, particularly for food, has decreased poor households' calorie intake per capita. A Research Center of the Islamic Consultative Assembly (Iranian Parliament) report, "Poverty situation and characteristics of the poor in the decade 2011-2021," revealed that the average calorie intake per person plummeted to 2198 kilocalories in 2021. The first decile (the lowest-income segment of society, according to Iran's Statistics Center's classification) reported an intake of just 1497 kilocalories, indicating an increasing class divide and escalating food poverty among low-income families.⁷ The report further

1 [Mehr News](#), April 19, 2023; [IRNA](#), May 24, 2023 and [IMNA](#) May 8, 2023

2 [Tasnim News](#), May 13, 2023

3 [Fars News](#), June 1, 2023

4 [Farda News](#), April 17, 2023

5 [IMNA](#), May 3, 2023

6 [Taadol News](#), May 14, 2023

7 [Zamaneh](#), May 28, 2023

notes that tenants constrained by rent hikes were forced to cut back on other expenses, predominantly food. Therefore, tenants' average calorie intake has consistently been lower than that of landlords.⁸

Rising rents in Iran have become a catalyst for poverty. The Statistics Center reported an average rent hike of 38.3 percent in April,⁹ which does not always align with citizens' actual experiences: tenants in some urban regions saw their rent more than double from previous year.¹⁰ In urban locations, this rise in rent has prompted a wave of migration to the city outskirts or newly formed settlements.

According to a report by the Research Center of the Islamic Consultative Assembly, 55 percent of Iran's population lacked "adequate and affordable housing" in 2021.¹¹ This number has surged due to the increased rent and wage suppression of 2022, leading to unconventional living arrangements such as CONEX box residences, rooftop rentals, communal living, and even sleeping on buses.

Independent labor organizations have coined the government's wage suppression policies and forced impoverishment as a "declaration of war" against the working class and wage earners. During the time of this report, they vehemently demanded the revocation of the Supreme Labor Council's decision through protests, petitions, and complaints to the Court of Administrative Justice.

The Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company (SWTSBC) likened the approved minimum wage to a "bullet" aimed at the hearts of millions of workers. They noted that the assault on workers' households becomes increasingly evident every year, exposing the exploitative nature of the Supreme Labor Council and similar entities.¹²

Similarly, the Free Union of Iranian Workers decried the scant 27 percent wage hike as "a declaration of war and open enmity toward millions of wage earners and their families" by a government that "imposed poverty and misery on society."¹³

In an online campaign, over 36,000 workers called for the annulment of the Supreme Labor Council's decision and a reshuffle in the Council's membership to ensure that the vast labor community can influence Council decisions and protect workers' rights.¹⁴

Despite these protests, the Minister of Cooperation, Labor, and Social Welfare stated that the government had not committed to aligning workers' wage increases with inflation.¹⁵

8 The Research Center of Islamic Consultative Assembly, ['The State of Poverty and Characteristics of the Poor in the 2010s'](#), May 23, 2023

9 [Zamaneh](#), May 28, 2023

10 [Zamaneh](#), April 20, 2023

11 [Donya ye Eghteshad](#), May 20, 2023

12 [The Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company \(SWTSBC\)](#), March 22, 2023

13 [Free Trade Union of Iranian Workers](#), March 20, 2023

14 [Karzar](#), March 20, 2023

15 [Tahlil Bazar](#), June 7, 2023

Prison Letters

Reza Shahabi and Hassan Saeedi (board members of the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company, SWTSBC), Jafar Ebrahimi and Rasool Bodaghi (members of Tehran and Islamshahr teachers' unions), and Keyvan Mohtadi (a translator and researcher advocating for workers' rights), have been incarcerated since May 2022. Dawood Razavi, a retired bus worker from Tehran, was sentenced to five years in prison in September 2022;¹⁶ when his health deteriorated in jail, the security forces refused medical treatment.

Reza Shahabi, Hassan Saeedi, and Keyvan Mohtadi were called into Branch One of the Evin Prosecutor's Office,¹⁷ signaling the opening of a new case. The specifics of the charges against them have yet to be disclosed.

In observance of International Labor Day, Mohtadi and Shahabi penned an open letter to the millennial youth who partook in the protests known as "Woman, Life, Freedom." They wrote:

"A generational movement finds its genuine essence when faced with social divisions and structural differentiation. The most overlooked aspect is a collective identity formed around occupation and class status. All significant historical transformations have inherently included a class dimension. In addition to forging a collective identity, the workplace struggle can often yield enduring accomplishments and impact while steering clear of violent street clashes."¹⁸

During the 2023 International Labor Organization conference, Shahabi wrote another letter to the representatives of independent trade unions. He implored:

"Support Iranian workers and reject the security officers, who have been dispatched to the International Labor Organization as supposed representatives of the Iranian workforce. Dispel them from the board of directors of the International Labor Organization or labor committees. Insist on the comprehensive enforcement of International Labor Organization conventions, particularly those related to the right to organize, collective bargaining, and freedom of association."

In another section of the letter, this SWTSBC board member urged the trade union representatives:

"The members of the Islamic Republic of Iran's delegation to the International Labor Organization meeting do not truly represent Iranian workers, as they were not chosen through a democratic, coercion-free process, and without fear of retaliation by management, security forces, and the employer. Assuming there were any elections, these individuals, who have

¹⁶ [Zamaneh](#), June 8, 2023

¹⁷ [Zamaneh](#), May 29, 2023

¹⁸ [Zamaneh](#), April 30, 2023

been appointed through fraudulent voting, have merely carried out the instructions of the employer and government for their own benefit and to exploit government privileges. They have never sided with the workers; rather, they have consistently acted against workers' interests. It's an ill-kept secret that these members are extensions of their employers and the government's security apparatus, endorsing the dismissal of workers and allowing oppressive measures against the working class."¹⁹

As in past instances, the Islamic Republic of Iran dispatched members of Khane Kargar (House of Labor) and other government-affiliated unions to represent Iranian labor organizations at the International Labor Organization conference. The delegation included:

- Ahmadreza Moini, member of the Supreme Labor Council and board member of the High Center of Islamic Labor Councils
- Mohammadreza Tajik, member of the Supreme Labor Council and the Coordination Center of Islamic Labor Councils
- Gholamreza Abbasi, advisor for labor affairs to the Ministry of Labor.
- Seyed Mohammad Yarahmadian, chairman of the Supreme Assembly of Workers' Representatives
- Somayeh Golpour, head of the High Center of Trade Unions
- Majid Firouzabadi, Deputy Director of the Central Insurance Company
- Seyyed Ahmad Mousavi, official post(s) undisclosed
- Olia Ali Beigi, leader of the High Center of Islamic Labor Councils and trustee for the Social Security Organization²⁰

The assignment of delegates with a history of repressing workers and from government-backed labor organizations sparked outrage in Ali Nejati, a retired employee of Haft-Tappeh Sugarcane Company and one of the founders of its workers' union. In a letter to the participants of the 2023 International Labor Organization conference, he wrote:

"These representatives of government organizations are chosen by employers, law enforcement, and security agencies, not workers. Workers did not elect these individuals. At best, workers were coerced into voting for candidates endorsed and nominated by repressive entities."²¹

Eight independent Iranian labor organizations echoed this sentiment in a joint letter to the delegations attending the 2023 International Labor Organization Summit. They wrote, "In the past two years, labor activists, protesting teachers, and other social activists and trade unions have been the primary targets of widespread repression in Iran." The letter demanded, "that the participants of the ILO Summit condemn this rampant oppression and the escalating violations

¹⁹ [Zamaneh](#), June 2, 2023

²⁰ [Zamaneh](#), June 8, 2023

²¹ [Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Agro-Industry Co. Labor Syndicate](#), June 3, 2023

of workers' and teachers' rights, especially the infringement of the right to form independent organizations and the right to assemble and protest, which are fundamental rights in any society." The authors also urged the summit to expel the illegitimate representatives to the International Labor Organization and bar the Iranian government's delegation from participating in the conference.²²

On June 9, 2023, numerous trade unions from France, Norway, Switzerland, Italy, Sweden, and Denmark, responded to the call of the Iranian Protests Organizing Committee by rallying at the conference venue in Geneva, demanding the expulsion of the Islamic Republic's representatives.²³

22 [Zamaneh](#), May 30, 2023

23 [Zamaneh](#), June 9, 2023

Intensified Suppression of Workers

A government directive leaked by hackers reveals the Cultural Deputy of Defense Propaganda of the Armed Forces General Staff issuing several instructions to the Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council. This directive includes decisions approved by the Headquarters to Combat Hybrid Warfare, which discuss strategies for handling potential worker protests and strikes on International Workers' Day and Teachers' Day. These proposed solutions reflect part of the government's repressive approach toward workers. The third paragraph of the directive underscores "the necessity of engaging with and supporting influential figures in education and labor" to manage the influx of independent workers and teachers. The fourth paragraph suggests heightened vigilance to "swiftly impede the establishment of any network management that could potentially link the demonstrations and strikes of workers and teachers." Other strategies proposed by the Headquarters to Combat Hybrid Warfare include "delegitimizing activists," "identifying and neutralizing social media administrators inciting labor and teacher strikes on social networks," and "summoning principal, labor, and teacher leaders." These strategies aimed to curb the worker and teacher protests and prevent potential alliances.

The arresting, summoning, and penalizing of teachers' union members, oil and gas contract workers, independent labor organization members, and workers' rights advocates soon after the Nowruz holiday can be interpreted as practical steps toward implementing these instructions.

Between March and May 2023, numerous teachers were arrested, summoned, or penalized by workplace supervisory boards. Several oil and gas contract workers, labor activists in Kurdistan province, and a group of civil activists advocating for workers' rights in Tehran were also detained.

In the wake of these incarcerations, the Revolutionary Courts issued prison sentences for several workers and advocates for workers' rights. Farzaneh Zillabi, a lawyer representing workers of the Haft Tappeh sugarcane factory, Ahvaz Steel, and teachers of Khuzestan province, was sentenced to one year and eight months in prison.²⁴ Maryam (Anisha) Asadollahi, the official translator of the SWTSBC, who was arrested on May 9, 2022, and subsequently released on bail, received a prison sentence of five years and eight months from the Tehran Revolutionary Court.²⁵

The same court sentenced Davood Razavi, a retired SWTSBC worker incarcerated since September 27, 2022, to five years in prison, accompanied by a two-year prohibition on social activities.²⁶ Furthermore, Zeinab Hamrang Seyedbiglo, a retired teacher detained in Evin prison since February 2023, was sentenced to

²⁴ [Zamaneh](#), May 21, 2023

²⁵ [Zamaneh](#), May 15, 2023

²⁶ [Zamaneh](#), June 7, 2023

five years by Branch 26 of the Tehran Revolutionary Court.²⁷

On the eve of International Labor Day, security forces arrested Kamyar Fakoor, Sarvenaz Ahmadi, Jaleh Roohzad, Olduz Hashemi, Asal Mohammadi, Hiran Pirbodaghi, Anisha Asadollahi, and Reyhaneh Ansarinejad while they were visiting the family of Mohammad Habibi, the spokesperson of the teachers' union.²⁸ Six of the detainees were released on bail, while Kamyar Fakoor and Sarvenaz Ahmadi, who had previously been sentenced to eight months and three years, eight months in prison respectively, remain incarcerated.²⁹

- On International Workers' Day, security officers apprehended Ata Babakhani, a retired worker and SWTSBC workers' union member.³⁰ He was released on bail the following day.
- Burhan Saeedi,³¹ a Sanandaj-based labor activist, has remained in detention since May 18, 2023.
- Several other workers arrested in Sanandaj, including Iqbal Shabani, the Inspector of the Bakers Syndicate, Kamal Karimi, Abdullah Khairabadi, Hajar Saidi, Habibullah Karimi, Iqbal Pishkari, Sirvan Mahmoudi, Shadman Abdi, and Khabat Mahmoudi, have since been released on bail.³²
- Farhad Sheikhi, a labor activist in Tehran, was arrested and detained again.³³ He has been provisionally released on bail pending the conclusion of his proceedings.
- Mohammad Irannejad, Morteza Seidi, and Nasrullah Amirlou, three labor activists arrested in 2022, faced retrial at the Shahriar Revolutionary Court.³⁴ Previously, the Revolutionary Court had sentenced Irannejad to one year in prison. He served this sentence until he was released in February 2023. Security forces detained Seidi and Amirlou on April 15, 2022, but they were released on bail on May 2 and May 9, 2022 respectively.
- Osman Esmaili, a labor activist in Saqqez who had been detained from February 8 to April 17, 2023, received a court summons shortly after his release.³⁵

In addition to the arrests and court rulings targeting labor activists, employers also leverage dismissals of workers and workers' representatives as a tool for oppression and to exert pressure. During the spring, at least six workers' representatives were dismissed due to their pursuit of union demands.

Four representatives from the metro ticket sales department, who were invited to a meeting with contractor company management to discuss unpaid workers'

27 [Coordinating Council of Teachers' Union Organizations](#), May 29, 2023

28 [Zamaneh](#), April 28, 2023

29 [Zamaneh](#), May 10, 2023

30 [Zamaneh](#), May 1, 2023

31 [Free Trade Union of Iranian Workers](#), May 18, 2023

32 [Free Trade Union of Iranian Workers](#), May 31, 2023

33 [Zamaneh](#), May 29, 2023

34 [Free Trade Union of Iranian Workers](#), April 27, 2023

35 [Zamaneh](#), May 28, 2023

wages,³⁶ along with two representatives from the Nakh Alborz Company located in the Alborz industrial town of Qazvin, faced dismissal or suspension for pushing for union demands.³⁷ In Asaluyeh, numerous workers were threatened with dismissal for participating in a strike (refer to the oil and gas workers' protest section for additional details).

36 [Etemad Online](#), 21 April 2023

37 [ILNA](#), May 17, 2023

Protests

Resistance from Teachers

Teachers have built the most organized trade union in Iran. Their protests over living conditions, oppression of union activists, privatization of schools, the sale of Ministry of Education property under the Productivity Plan, and widespread student poisoning in schools have continued through 2023.

Since the end of March, teachers have organized at least three rallies on March 28,³⁸ April 7,³⁹ and May 9,⁴⁰ 2023. The May 9 protest marked the anniversary of the execution of Farzad Kamangar, a Kurdish teacher, by the Islamic Republic. These protests spanned over 30 cities and in some areas, including Tehran, Rasht, Isfahan, Sanandaj, Marivan, and Mashhad, police forces responded with force.

In an effort to prevent teachers from rallying in April and May, security forces arrested many trade union activists, including Mohammad Habibi, the spokesperson for the Coordinating Council of Trade Unions. Administrative misconduct boards punished dozens of teachers for participating in rallies or sit-ins in 2022. The Etemad Daily reported on May 31 that the Minister of Education had ordered the exclusion of at least 250 teachers from job ranking due to their trade union activities.⁴¹

The following list names some labor and teacher activists who were arrested.

- Mohammad Habibi, the Coordinating Council of Teachers' Union Organizations spokesperson, was arrested in Tehran on April 5 and released on bail in May.⁴²
- Ismail Khodayari, a teacher from Khorramdasht, was summoned to court. He had previously been sentenced to mandatory retirement, along with the demotion of his job group by the Administrative Offenses Investigation Board.⁴³
- Mohammad Saeedi Abu Eshaghi, a Lordegan-based teacher, received a summons from the prosecutor's office.⁴⁴
- Zainab Hamrang, a retired teacher, was sentenced to 5 years in prison.⁴⁵
- Masoud Farhikhata was arrested on May 1 and released on bail on May 26.⁴⁶

38 [Zamaneh](#), March 28, 2023

39 [Zamaneh](#), April 7, 2023

40 [Zamaneh](#), April 8, 2023

41 [Etemad](#), May 31, 2023

42 [Coordinating Council of Teachers' Union Organizations](#), May 21, 2023

43 [Coordinating Council of Teachers' Union Organizations](#), June 2, 2023

44 [Coordinating Council of Teachers' Union Organizations](#), June 2, 2023

45 [Coordinating Council of Teachers' Union Organizations](#), May 29, 2023

46 [Coordinating Council of Teachers' Union Organizations](#), May 26, 2023

- Hamid Mujiri, a Khomeinishahr-based teacher, was subjected to mandatory retirement.⁴⁷
- Mohsen Omrani, a member of the Bushehr teachers' union board of directors, was apprehended.⁴⁸
- Mahmoud Malaki, Asghar Hajeb, and Abdolreza Amanifar were summoned to court.⁴⁹
- Maryam Jalali Hosseini, a teacher, was apprehended in Tehran.⁵⁰
- Ateke Rajabi, a teacher, was arrested in Mashhad on May 9 and released on bail on May 14.⁵¹
- Farzad Safi Khanpour, a teachers' union activist, was arrested in Sanandaj.⁵²
- Mohammadreza Alijani was forced into retirement with the demotion of his job group.⁵³
- Fatemeh Tadrissi, a teacher, was apprehended in Tehran.⁵⁴
- Kokab Bodaghi, a teachers' union activist in Izeh, was summoned to court.⁵⁵
- Farzaneh Nazeranpour was taken into custody to serve an eight-month prison sentence.⁵⁶
- Reza Tahmasabi, Ghiyath Ne'mati, Majid Karimi, Baha Maleki, Faisal Nouri, and Jamil Amini were summoned to the Intelligence Department in Sanandaj.⁵⁷
- Security officers searched the home of Tahira Naghii, the Secretary General of the teachers' organization, confiscating her mobile phone and laptop.⁵⁸
- Zahra Avaz-zadeh, a teachers' union activist in North Khorasan, was summoned to court.⁵⁹
- An indictment was issued against Aram Qaderi, Tahsin Mustafa, Sivan Soleimani, and Aram Mohammadi, teacher union activists in Marivan, for participating in union assemblies.⁶⁰
- Omid Shah Mohammadi, a teachers' union activist in Diwandara, was detained

47 [Coordinating Council of Teachers' Union Organizations](#), May 22, 2023

48 [Zamaneh](#), April 30, 2023

49 [Zamaneh](#), April 30, 2023

50 [Coordinating Council of Teachers' Union Organizations](#), May 21, 2023

51 [Coordinating Council of Teachers' Union Organizations](#), May 16, 2023

52 [Coordinating Council of Teachers' Union Organizations](#), May 14, 2023

53 [Coordinating Council of Teachers' Union Organizations](#), May 10, 2023

54 [Coordinating Council of Teachers' Union Organizations](#), May 10, 2023

55 [Coordinating Council of Teachers' Union Organizations](#), May 8, 2023

56 [Coordinating Council of Teachers' Union Organizations](#), May 2, 2023

57 [Coordinating Council of Teachers' Union Organizations](#), May 1, 2023

58 [Coordinating Council of Teachers' Union Organizations](#), April 26, 2023

59 [Coordinating Council of Teachers' Union Organizations](#), April 22, 2023

60 [Coordinating Council of Teachers' Union Organizations](#), April 19, 2023

for a prison sentence.⁶¹

- Rohollah Mardani, a teachers' union activist, was summoned to the Karaj Revolutionary Court.⁶²
- Security forces arrested Fatemeh Zandkarimi, a Sanandaj-based teacher, and later released her on bail.⁶³
- Mahmoud Beheshti Langaroudi, a teachers' union activist in Gilan province, was prosecuted for insulting the leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran.⁶⁴
- Mohammad Ghanati, a teacher in Arak, was apprehended.⁶⁵
- Iraj Tobeiha and Hossein Ashrafi, teachers' union activists, were arrested in Najaf Abad.⁶⁶
- The Board of Investigation of Violations sentenced Maryam Zirak, a member of the Qazvin Teachers' Union, to early retirement and wage reduction.⁶⁷
- Aziz Ghasemzadeh, Anoush Adeli, and Mahmoud Sedighipour were arrested and relocated to Lakan prison for a one-year sentence.⁶⁸
- Asghar Amirzadegan received an eight-month prison sentence.⁶⁹
- Zahra Esfandiari, Mozghan Bagheri, Asghar Amirzadegan, Abdul Razzaq Amiri, Iraj Rahnama, Gholamreza Gholami, Mohammad Ali Zahamtakesh, and Afshin Razmjo were prosecuted in Fars province.⁷⁰ Shiraz Revolutionary Court sentenced them to prison for two to five years.⁷¹
- Pirouz Nami, Siamak Sadeghi Chehrazi, Zohra Bakhtiari, Shahriar Shirvaniya, Emad Rafieinejad, Ali Karushati, Kokeb Bodaghi, Moin Zargani, Sadegh Naseri, Iqbal Tamradi, and Behnia Bahameinejad were prosecuted in Khuzestan province.⁷²
- Hamida Zare Cheshmeh, Ahmad Changizi, Mansour Mirzaei, Seyyed Mohammad Fakhrul-Hosseini, and Mehdi Kalantari were summoned to the Yazd Revolutionary Court.⁷³

61 [Coordinating Council of Teachers' Union Organizations](#), April 13, 2023

62 [Coordinating Council of Teachers' Union Organizations](#), April 12, 2023

63 [Coordinating Council of Teachers' Union Organizations](#), April 12, 2023

64 [Coordinating Council of Teachers' Union Organizations](#), April 11, 2023

65 [Coordinating Council of Teachers' Union Organizations](#), April 11, 2023

66 [Coordinating Council of Teachers' Union Organizations](#), April 10, 2023

67 [Coordinating Council of Teachers' Union Organizations](#), April 9, 2023

68 [Coordinating Council of Teachers' Union Organizations](#), April 8, 2023

69 [Coordinating Council of Teachers' Union Organizations](#), June 11, 2023

70 [Coordinating Council of Teachers' Union Organizations](#), June 10, 2023

71 [Zamaneh](#), June 17, 2023

72 Source above

73 [Coordinating Council of Teachers' Union Organizations](#), June 17, 2023

Oil, Gas, and Petrochemical Workers' Strike

Contract workers from the oil, gas, and petrochemical sectors initiated a significant strike on April 21, 2023. These workers, who had previously staged lengthy strikes to advocate for their rights, made the following demands:⁷⁴

- An immediate salary increase by 79 percent
- A schedule of 20 workdays followed by ten rest days per month
- Improvements to dormitory conditions and transportation and meal services
- Abolition of contracting companies
- Removal of the "15-day unpaid trial work" clause in contracts
- Removal of the "protest prohibition" clause in contracts
- Timely wage payments

The strike, which included walkouts, extended to over 100 workshops involved in various projects. The major hubs for this strike were Asaluyeh in Bushehr province, home to many oil and gas projects, and Khuzestan province, which hosts numerous refineries and petrochemical plants.

Security institutions, having implemented extensive measures since 2022 to ensure project security and curb labor protests, announced the arrest of several "errant contractors" on May 3, 2023.

Sekhavat Asadi, CEO of Pars Energy Special Project, issued an ultimatum to the striking workers: return to work within a week or face dismissal and replacement.⁷⁵ Despite these threats, the workers continued their strike. On May 14, the deputy security officer of the Bushehr Governorate attributed the workers' strike to "foreign influences" and announced the arrest of eight participating workers, claiming the strike had ended.⁷⁶ However, the Oil and Gas Contract Workers' Protest Organizing Council refuted this claim in a statement released on May 15.⁷⁷

On May 25, following legal prosecutions and a security crackdown on oil and gas project workers, the Tasnim news agency quoted security sources as saying the "second leader of the strikes" had been arrested in Asaluyeh.⁷⁸ To date, only one worker, Sajjad Khosravi, has been confirmed as charged. The committee overseeing the establishment of labor organizations also reported the "arrest" and "abduction" of oil and gas contract workers on the job but did not disclose any identities.⁷⁹

Oil and gas contract workers comprise the largest temporary workforce in Iran.

⁷⁴ [Zamaneh](#), April 21, 2023

⁷⁵ [Zamaneh](#), May 3, 2023

⁷⁶ [Zamaneh](#), May 14, 2023

⁷⁷ [Zamaneh](#), May 15, 2023

⁷⁸ [Zamaneh](#), May 25, 2023

⁷⁹ [Zamaneh](#), May 28, 2023

Many of these workers operate in specialized energy zones or free trade zones, which are areas not covered by labor law. The significant influence of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its affiliates over oil and gas projects has resulted in a highly securitized work environment. Contract workers are not permitted to form independent organizations, and the government attempts to manage and suppress labor protests by establishing Islamic councils or organizations aligned with the government.

Ongoing Protests by Retirees

The government's continued encroachment on retirees' living standards and pension funds remains a pressing issue. The government's debt to the Social Security Organization is estimated at around 600 trillion tomans.⁸⁰ Despite claims by government officials of allocating 200 trillion tomans towards this debt, the delay in full payment has resulted in a budget deficit for the Social Security Organization, pushing many of its retirees and pensioners into poverty.

Over the past three months, Social Security Organization pensioners have staged weekly protests every Sunday across various cities. Their primary demand is a salary increase that reflects the actual rate of inflation and the cost of living. However, despite the widespread protests, the government has raised pension amounts by only 21-27 percent, leaving the minimum recipients of the Social Security Organization's pension fund with a monthly income of less than six million tomans.⁸¹

On May 5, the Council of Retirees issued a statement demanding improvements to retirees' quality of life. They called for "the reinstatement of tripartite management to the Social Security Council's administrative structure," "the dismissal of the Social Security Organization's CEO," and "the impeachment of the Minister of Cooperatives, Labor, and Social Welfare."⁸²

In the Seventh Development Plan bill, the government has planned extensive measures that could adversely affect pensioners' livelihoods. These proposed changes include increasing the retirement age, altering the method of calculating retirement salaries - leading to reduced pension amounts - and revising the definition of complex and harmful jobs. These proposals have been submitted to parliament and, if approved, will further exacerbate the challenges faced by retirees.

"Protest Mondays" Organized by Telecom Company Retirees

The 2009 sale of the government's shares in the Iran Telecommunication Company to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the Execution of Imam

80 [Iran Magazine](#), May 15, 2023

81 [Jamaran](#), May 21, 2023

82 [Zamaneh](#), May 5, 2023

Khomeini's Order (EIKO) significantly impacted the livelihoods of the company's employees and retirees. As part of the transaction, the new shareholders committed to fulfilling all wage and benefit obligations to current and retired employees. However, over the years, the company has stripped away certain welfare benefits stipulated in the sales agreement, affecting both retirees and employees.

In response, Telecom retirees have staged demonstrations every Monday from April through June, protesting the removal of welfare benefits, food allowances, and the inadequacy of their retirement pay.⁸³

Other labor protests

Workers in several sectors, including municipal services and smaller manufacturing industries, continue to express their discontent. Long-standing wage delays, temporary contracts facilitating easy employee dismissal, and low wages remain the primary drivers of numerous labor protests.

The table below summarizes labor protests from April to June 2023, representing only the demonstrations reported in the media.

Table 1: Labor protests across different sectors (April-June 2023)

Place of protest	De-ferred wages	Low wages	Tem-porary contract	Job classi-fication	Dis-miss-als	Workplace discrimi-nation	Other	Additional expla-nation
Haft-Tappeh Sugar-cane Factory ⁸⁴				*			*	Non-implement-ation of wage equalization Objection to CEO's insulting words
Pars Haft-Tappeh Paper ⁸⁵		*	*	*				Low salaries Temporary con-tracts Non-implementa-tion of job classifi-cation
Qeshm Municipal-ity ⁸⁶	*		*					Three to four months of unpaid wages
Saravan Municipality	*							Three to four months of unpaid wages

83 [Mokhaberat Farda](#), June 6, 2023

84 [Zamaneh](#), May 1, 2023

85 [Zamaneh](#), May 4, 2023

86 [Chelbim](#), April 8, 2023

Place of protest	De-ferred wages	Low wages	Tem-porary contract	Job classifi-cation	Dismiss-als	Workplace discrimina-tion	Other	Additional expla-nation
Bandar Imam Mu-nicipality ⁸⁷	*							-
Ilam city services ⁸⁸	*							-
Jiroft Municipality ⁸⁹					*			Dismissal of 180 workers
Yasuj Municipality ⁹⁰	*							-
Tehran Municipality traffic control ⁹¹	*							-
Command center of Tehran Metro Company ⁹²	*							-
Tehran bus ser-vice ⁹³	*							-
Qazvin bus ser-vice ⁹⁴						*		-
Mashhad firefight-ers ⁹⁵	*						*	-
Qazvin highway project ⁹⁶					*			Dismissal of a group of workers after the digitalization of toll collection
Qom Railway tech-nical construction and maintenance ⁹⁷					*			Dismissal of a group of workers
Kerman Railway technical construc-tion and mainte-nance ⁹⁸	*		*					Three months of unpaid wages
Zanjan Railway technical construc-tion and mainte-nance ⁹⁹	*							-

87 [ILNA](#), May 13, 2023

88 [Zamaneh](#), May 23, 2023

89 [Zamaneh](#), May 23, 2023

90 [Free Trade Union of Iranian Workers](#), June 12, 2023

91 [Eco Iran](#), April 30, 2023

92 [Eghtesad Online](#), 25 April 2023

93 [The Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company \(SWTSBC\)](#), May 30, 2023

94 [ILNA](#), May 28, 2023

95 [ISNA](#), May 13, 2023

96 [Rokna News](#), May 13, 2023

97 [Zamaneh](#), May 23, 2023

98 [Zamaneh](#), May 4, 2023

99 [ILNA](#), April 17, 2023

Place of protest	De-ferred wages	Low wages	Tem-porary contract	Job classi-fication	Dismiss-als	Workplace discrimina-tion	Other	Additional expla-nation
Tehran schools services				*				Low salaries
Qom nurses		*				*		Dissatisfaction with calculation for wages and benefits (<i>ta'rofeh</i>)
Nurses of Kurdistan ¹⁰⁰		*				*		Dissatisfaction with calculation for wages and benefits (<i>ta'rofeh</i>)
Qazvin nurses ¹⁰¹		*				*		Dissatisfaction with calculation for wages and benefits (<i>ta'rofeh</i>)
Yasouj nurses ¹⁰²								Dissatisfaction with calculation for wages and benefits (<i>ta'rofeh</i>)
Shiraz nurses ¹⁰³		*				*		Dissatisfaction with calculation for wages and benefits (<i>ta'rofeh</i>)
Sajjad Shahriar Hos-pital ¹⁰⁴	*	*				*		Dissatisfaction with calculation for wages and benefits (<i>ta'rofeh</i>) Nonpayment for work clothes
Medical interns of Kermanshah ¹⁰⁵		*				*		Wage discrimi-nation

100 [Zamaneh](#), April 24, 2023

101 [ILNA](#), April 17, 2023

102 [Asr Dena](#), May 6, 2023

103 [ILNA](#), April 26, 2023

104 [Free Trade Union of Iranian Workers](#), May 1, 2023

105 [Free Trade Union of Iranian Workers](#), June 6, 2023

Place of protest	De-ferred wages	Low wages	Tem-porary contract	Job classifi-cation	Dismiss-als	Workplace discrimina-tion	Other	Additional expla-nation
Tarzeh coal mine ¹⁰⁶		*						Low salary
Chadormelo iron ore mine ¹⁰⁷	*							-
Madekosh Bandar Abbas iron ore mine ¹⁰⁸	*	*		*				-
Khorasan Steel ¹⁰⁹	*							-
Sadr Steel ¹¹⁰					*			Dismissal of 23 workers
Mahshahr pipe-making ¹¹¹					*			Dismissal of 140 workers
Saipa Zanjan parts manufacturing ¹¹²		*						-
Darugar holdings	*				*		*	-
Yazd Tire ¹¹³	*	*						-
Kalibar Nepheline Syenite Company ¹¹⁴	*		*					-
Regional electricity operators of Khuz-estan ¹¹⁵	*						*	-
Gachsaran oil and gas					*			Dismissal of sev-eral workers
Bandar Abbas truck drivers ¹¹⁶							*	Reduction of fuel quota Low freight rates
Astara taxi drivers ¹¹⁷							*	Low fares
Isfahan farmers ¹¹⁸							*	Failure to provide water rights

¹⁰⁶ [Zamaneh](#), May 23, 2023

¹⁰⁷ [Zamaneh](#), May 23, 2023

¹⁰⁸ [Zamaneh](#), May 29, 2023

¹⁰⁹ [Free Trade Union of Iranian Workers](#), June 6, 2023

¹¹⁰ [Free Trade Union of Iranian Workers](#), April 17, 2023

¹¹¹ [Free Trade Union of Iranian Workers](#), April 9, 2023

¹¹² [ILNA](#), April 19, 2023

¹¹³ [Zamaneh](#), May 1, 2023

¹¹⁴ [Free Trade Union of Iranian Workers](#), May 29, 2023

¹¹⁵ [ILNA](#), April 9, 2023

¹¹⁶ [Pensioners Council](#), April 9, 2023

¹¹⁷ [Free Trade Union of Iranian Workers](#), April 27, 2023

¹¹⁸ [Free Trade Union of Iranian Workers](#), April 8, 2023

Lamard farmers ¹¹⁹							*	Low price of buying wheat
Kermanshah Governorate ¹²⁰		*						-

119 [Coordinating Council to Organize Labor Unions](#), May 4, 2023

120 [Iran Watch](#), May 9, 2023

The State of Informal Laborers

A 2020 report from the Iranian Statistics Center on formal and informal employment indicated that out of a working population of 23,263,047, approximately 13.5 million individuals were engaged in “informal jobs.” This represents about 58 percent of the total working population in companies where the company’s activity was unregistered, the number of workers reported was fewer than ten, or where individuals were employed in roles without official and regular salary and wage compensation.¹²¹

According to the same report, by the winter of 2022, the employed population had increased to 23,716,000 – a rise of only 453,000 from 2020. Despite this, the report estimated a seemingly unrealistic unemployment rate of 9 percent for 2022, likely attributed to a low economic participation rate. Only 26 million out of 64 million working age people, or 40.5 percent, were economically active (employed or seeking employment) during the winter of 2022; 38 million people were neither employed nor seeking employment.¹²² According to the report’s data, over 63 percent of Iran’s population aged 15–69 was unemployed in 2022. However, these individuals likely generated minimal income through informal jobs like freight work, kulbari (transporting cargo by foot across the country’s western borders), passenger transport, peddling, and other similar roles.

In the winter of 2022, Iran’s labor force census reported that Kurdistan and Kermanshah, provinces with the country’s highest unemployment rates of 20.5 and 15.1 percent respectively, were also the primary regions for kulbari activity.¹²³ In Sistan and Baluchistan, where fuel transportation or sukhtbari (carrying fuel across Iran’s eastern border) serves as a primary income source for many unemployed individuals, the unemployment rate was reported to be at 10.3 percent. This figure represented a 2.7 percent increase from winter 2019. It is crucial to consider the province’s low economic participation and employment rates: the economic participation rate dropped by one percentage point (from 35 to 34) between the winters of 2021 and 2022, while employment decreased from 32.4 to 30.5 percent.¹²⁴ Over the same period, military officials targeted fuel carriers (sukhtbars) and on-foot cargo carriers (kulbars), the largest group of informal workers, with deadly violence at border crossings.

From April to June 13, 2023, 68 sukhtbars were reportedly killed. Fatal road accidents and vehicle fires caused the deaths of 58 fuel carriers, while border guards killed ten others. At least seven sukhtbars were injured by gunfire from Iranian border agents, and seven kulbars were wounded in road accidents. Among the fatalities were at least three children and one hourly paid teacher.¹²⁵ In Sistan and Baluchistan province, low salaries and delayed teacher wage payments have

¹²¹ [Zamaneh](#), November 3, 2021 and Statistics Center report

¹²² [Farhikhtegan Daily](#), April 30, 2023

¹²³ [Zamaneh](#), April 16, 2023

¹²⁴ Statistics Center of Iran, [2022 winter labor census results](#)

¹²⁵ [Zamaneh](#), April 13, 2023

compelled some to resort to fuel carrying (sukhtbari).¹²⁶

In Kurdistan, border guards killed two kulbars and injured 27 others. Falling from heights or cardiac arrest also claimed the lives of three kulbars, while falls or mine explosions injured two others.

On May 26, during a visit to Kermanshah province, Interior Minister Ahmed Vahidi announced the implementation of a project titled “Dignity of Kulbars.” According to him, this plan aims to legalize, secure, and bring transparency to the kulbars’ activities.¹²⁷

126 [Zamaneh](#), April 8, 2023

127 [Tasnim News](#), May 26, 2023

Exploitation of Child Labor

A member of the Tehran Islamic Council has reported that the number of children working on the streets in Iran is rising daily. Sudeh Najafi, head of the Health Committee of the Council, has estimated the number of child laborers in Tehran at 70,000 and said they face numerous instances of abuse. She stated that 80 percent of these children are not Iranian citizens.¹²⁸

In April, Mohammadreza Heydarhai, head of the Social Victims Affairs Office of the State Welfare Organization of Iran, announced that there are approximately 120,000 working children in Iran. He noted that of these, 14,500 “were identified, and around 10,500 of them utilized the services of the welfare organization.” He maintained that the rest of these children chose not to accept aid.¹²⁹

Heydarhai identified poverty, exacerbated by the economic crisis, as a significant factor contributing to the rise in child labor. He said, “Many of these children are Afghan citizens, and their families have no source of income; hence they work as a family to earn a living.”¹³⁰

Despite Iranian labor laws prohibiting the employment of children under the age of 15, contractors from the Tehran Municipality continue to exploit children in demanding jobs.¹³¹

Fatemeh Daneshvar, CEO of the Mehafarin charity organization, confirmed a decrease in the working age of child laborers and an increase in their numbers following the Taliban’s return to power in Afghanistan. She reported that children as young as 11 to 12 years old work in underground workshops and brick kilns. According to her, these working children face the risk of sexual exploitation and accidents on the street, with her organization receiving several reports of sexual abuse of street children.¹³²

Government officials have suggested banning the entry of “foreign nationals” and extraditing Afghan children across the border as two effective strategies to decrease the number of street children. The Deputy of Social Affairs of the Welfare Organization said, “Until the laws and policies concerning citizens are revised, it is impossible to seriously and comprehensively tackle the issue of street working children.”¹³³

128 [Zamaneh](#), June 11, 2023

129 [Khabar Online](#), April 17, 2023

130 [Entekhab](#), May 2, 2023

131 [ISNA](#), May 8, 2023

132 [Hammihan Online](#), June 12, 2023

133 [Fars News](#), June 13, 2023

Migrant Workers and the Intensified Restrictive Measures

The living conditions of immigrants in Iran, particularly refugees from Afghanistan, have become increasingly difficult. Disputes between the Iranian and Taliban governments over the Hirmand River have exposed Afghan immigrants to greater threats. Mohammad Sargazi, the representative of Zahedan in the Islamic Consultative Assembly (Iranian Parliament), suggested that the government leverage immigrants to exert pressure on the Taliban.¹³⁴

The Minister of the Interior of the Islamic Republic announced the creation of a distinct organization dedicated to the “regulation of immigrants and foreign nationals.”¹³⁵

The Iranian government has made it illegal for immigrants to purchase property.¹³⁶ The Deputy Minister of Labor, Cooperation, and Social Welfare has tied the extension of Afghan immigrants’ residency to their employment status, stating, “According to labor law, foreign nationals without a work permit or temporary work card are not allowed to work in the country. Employers who hire them are in violation of the law and will be fined.”¹³⁷

Special patrols have formed in some provinces to handle “illegal residents.”¹³⁸ In Gerash City, Fars province, landlords are prohibited from renting properties to immigrants. The city’s governor encouraged employers to “utilize local workforce and refrain from hiring and employing undocumented foreign nationals.”¹³⁹

On Qeshm Island, the governor labeled renting accommodations to immigrants a “crime,” warning, “Individuals who rent property to unauthorized foreign nationals, either short-term or long-term, or facilitate their presence on the island will face severe repercussions. Their property will be sealed, and they will be charged with aiding and abetting the residency of unauthorized foreign nationals, and subsequently reported to the prosecutor’s office.”¹⁴⁰ On June 4, the director of Darghan city affairs of the Qeshm Free Zone Organization announced the closure of 10 businesses run by “foreign citizens.” He stated, “As per the country’s laws, foreign nationals cannot work in Iran unless they have an entry visa and have received a work permit under the relevant laws and regulations.”¹⁴¹

The “Employment System of Foreign Nationals” project has been implemented as a national initiative in all provinces. According to an order from Fars Province’s Chamber of

134 [Iran Watch](#), May 21, 2023

135 [IRNA](#), May 26, 2023

136 [Etemad Online](#), May 24, 2023

137 [Tasnim News](#), April 4, 2023

138 [Mehr News](#), May 12, 2023

139 [Pandari](#), April 30, 2023

140 [Chelbim](#), May 30, 2023

141 [Khabar Online](#), June 4, 2023

Guilds, the employment of non-Iranian salespersons is forbidden. In June, government officials boarded up all shops owned by Afghan immigrants and those owned by Iranians employing Afghan workers in Fars province.¹⁴²

142 [Zamaneh](#), June 12, 2023

Workplace Safety

According to a report from the Iranian Legal Medicine Organization (ILMO), in the Iranian calendar year 1401 (March 21, 2022, to March 21, 2023), 1900 workers lost their lives due to workplace accidents.¹⁴³ In contrast, the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor, and Social Welfare acknowledged only 711 work-related fatalities.¹⁴⁴ The discrepancy between the ILMO and the Ministry's reports implies that 1,189 workers died in uninsured or unregulated workplaces.

Falls from heights, predominantly on construction sites, accounted for the highest number of fatal incidents for workers in 2022 at 45.3 percent. High-ranking Ministry of Cooperation, Labor, and Social Welfare officials have estimated that at least 500,000 construction workers are uninsured.¹⁴⁵

To lessen the financial burden on construction owners and employers, the Islamic Consultative Assembly proposed the revision of Article 5 of the Construction Workers Insurance Law in an urgent plan. This proposal, which had previously been approved for implementation in January 2023, effectively halted the enforcement of this legal provision. Akbar Showkat, the chairman of the board of directors of the construction workers' union, attributed the suspension of the insurance clause for construction workers and the revision of Article 5 of the newly approved law to the influence of the "construction mafia."¹⁴⁶

During the spring of 2023, like in previous periods, most work-related fatalities occurred in the construction sector. Nearly half of the 49 work-related deaths reported between March and June involved construction workers.

One hundred four workers were injured in this period, with construction workers accounting for the highest number of incidents at 33 cases.

The number of fatal work accidents reported among working women is lower due to limited economic participation and minimal formal employment. The ILMO said 30 female workers died in the Iranian calendar year 1401, which may not reflect reality.

Besides being paid less than men for similar roles, female workers face harsher conditions due to the requirement to wear the hijab at work. This obligation has led to fatal accidents. On June 5, 2023, a female worker in a Neishabur plastic factory died after her headscarf was caught in a plastic injection machine. This incident echoed a similar tragedy from November 2020 when Marzieh Taherian, a textile factory worker in the Semnan Desert, died under similar circumstances.¹⁴⁷ An Iranian lawyer specializing in workers' rights revealed after the female

143 [ILNA](#), May 1, 2023

144 [ILNA](#), May 30, 2023

145 [Iran Newspaper](#), May 10, 2023

146 [Iran Newspaper](#), May 10, 2023

147 [Zamaneh](#), June 5, 2023

factory worker's death that she was uninsured.¹⁴⁸

At least one of the victims of workplace accidents this spring was a child: an 11-year-old boy who lost his life due to a gas canister explosion at his workplace.¹⁴⁹

Table 2: Workplace Accidents, Spring 2023

Sector	Death	Injury
Construction	24	33
Industry	9	26
Small workshops	5	5
Mining	2	19
Services	0	12
Public/municipal services	5	5
Agriculture/animal husbandry	4	4

148 Farshad Esmaili's [tweet](#), June 7, 2023

149 [Zamaneh](#), June 7, 2023

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