

# **WORKERS RIGHTS WATCH**

A biannual report on worker protests and legal developments in Iran

January to June 2023

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# Executive Summary

This report is the outcome of Volunteer Activists' (VA) effort to undertake a comprehensive examination of labour issues and labour protests in Iran in the period January – June 2023. It is the second in a series of biannual reports on these issues that Volunteer Activists (VA) will publish in the coming years.

In doing so, VA aims to offer the international community more insights into current labour issues and labour protests in Iran. Knowing that their voices are heard internationally, is highly important for Iran's labour movement. Also, by gaining an in-depth understanding of the needs of Iranian workers, as well as the capacities and needs of trade unions advocating for these, subsequent programs and activities could be designed by international donors to meet these organizational needs, resulting in greater impact. Given its contacts in Iran, VA is relatively well positioned to provide this information.

The Iranian labour landscape is vastly diverse and mapping the situation regarding labour issues and labour struggles was only possible through comprehensive and intensive research. Our assessment of the situation regarding labour issues and labour rights has been based on both primary and secondary sources. VA conducted interviews, sometimes online, with some of our labour activists on the ground. (Verified) media reports and published research were the secondary data source, alongside social media monitoring.

Based on this research, the following key observations can be made on labour issues and labour protests in Iran in the period January - June 2023:

- Whereas political protests largely stopped in 2023, labour protests continued, showing the vibrancy of the Iranian labour movement.
- Protests were highly diverse in character, including marches to Parliament, strikes and sit-ins to online campaigns aimed at changing law-making together with other representatives of Iran's civil society.
- The government's response to the labor protests was marked by duality. On one hand, it suppressed independent labor unions and activists and ignored workers' demands. On the other hand, it attempted to appease certain worker groups by making some concessions.

Other takeaways from this report are listed in Table 1.

## January - June 2023

406

Total labor protests

70

Cities across Iran

10

Worker sectors

7

Government plans and bill drafts monitored

74

Teacher activists arrested

16

Workers currently in prison

Table 1: takeaways from labour protests.

<b>Key takeaways from labour protests and monitoring</b>
VA's research found that from April to June 2023, the number of protests rose fourfold compared with the same period in 2022.
Dozens of trade union and labour activists were fired, denied salaries and arrested and prosecuted during the past six months just for trying to assert trade union and labour rights.
While the intensity of the government's suppressive tactics continues to hamper labor protests in Iran, labour protests were on the rise in several economic sectors, including oil, public sector, railway maintenance and cargo transport.
The Iranian government is actively pursuing numerous legal changes that impact labor rights in Iran, with implications that can be both positive and negative.
Besides labour protests addressing sector-specific issues, there were also protests regarding broader legislative issues, including those concerning the setting of the minimum wage.
Public campaigns launched in conjunction with other organizations, such as women's groups, have served as platforms for collaboration, bringing together labor unions and various stakeholders to work towards common goals.
By adopting innovative organizational strategies and implementing more effective actions, Iranian labor unions have the potential to inspire greater successes.
Iranian workers across sectors have increased cooperation online, using public statements and protest campaigns to disseminate their grievances and demands, such as February's Charter of Minimum Demands.
The international community can help Iranian CSOs, including by putting pressure on the Iranian government in meetings of international organizations to allow independent trade unions in Iran and by stimulating foreign press coverage on Iranian labor struggles.

Altogether, this report illustrates the operating conditions of Iranian trade unions, shows the current capacity of Iranian trade unions (and the limitations to these) and offers an insight into both existing and emerging needs of Iranian workers.

# 1 Introduction

When one thinks of recent protests in Iran, the Women, Life, Freedom movement immediately springs to mind. Last year's large-scale, anti-government protests shook Iran and received extensive coverage in the international media. As such, it is relatively well-known that the protestors – who started taking to the street following the death of Mahsa Amini in custody on 16 September 2022 – pursued political goals, from abolishing the mandatory hijab for women to establishing true democracy in Iran.

However, what is less known is that many protestors also took to the streets with another objective in mind: to improve the lives of Iranian workers and to end poverty and great inequality in Iran. This desire is, for instance, evident in the movement's anthem „Baraye“ („For the sake of“). Composed by singer-songwriter Shervin Hajipour, the song lists the reasons for taking to the street. One verse that was much sung has the following lyrics:

“For the shame of the inability to provide, for being penniless  
 For the yearning for just a normal life  
 For the dumpster diving boy and his dreams<sup>1</sup>  
 For this planned economy“

This call for socio-economic change and poverty reduction is perhaps little surprising. Iran has experienced significant economic decline since 2018, resulting in rampant price inflation, which has led to a drop in living standards – and widespread poverty – for those outside the elite circle. As such, there is [widespread public dissatisfaction](#) with the current state of affairs.

It is also worth noting that some of the protestors themselves were workers. This is, for instance, reflected in the backgrounds of three (out of altogether four) young protestors who were shockingly [executed](#) by the Iranian government for their role in the uprising: Mohammad Mehdi Karami, Mohsen Shekari, Mohammad Hosseini. Karami worked as a construction worker, while Hosseini was a labourer at a poultry farm and Shekari worked in a café.

Finally, several independent Iranian trade unions decided to heed the call of the protestors of the Women, Life, Freedom movement for a national strike, leading to workers from various sectors, such as oil workers and teachers, staging protests and strikes. While the trade unions adopted and expressed explicit support for the political goals of the Women, Life, Freedom movement, their support and involvement in turn heightened attention for workers' needs.

Today, that the Women, Life, Freedom movement has been halted due to violent government crackdowns in 2022, and the desired social and political changes envisioned by the protestors have not materialized, at least for now.

But what about the workers' struggles for better rights and improved living conditions? Did these die with the movement or do workers' struggles in Iran continue to persist? And if so, to what extent do these have an effect? In other words, what is the state of labour in Iran today?

<sup>1</sup> This line is a reference to an Iranian boy who was scavenging in the streets and, when asked by a reporter what his dream was for the future, replied he didn't know what that meant.

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This report aims to answer this question, by shedding light on key labor issues and protests that occurred between January and June 2023. Altogether, it has three objectives:

- Identify labour challenges and subsequent labour protests during the specified period.
- Analyse governmental policies that impact labour issues and workers' rights.
- Propose a viable way forward for Iran's labour movement based on observed trends and patterns.

The data presented in this report are derived from three sources. First and foremost, we relied on our contacts within the labour community in Iran, who provided valuable insights. Additionally, verified reports from Iranian newspapers were analysed, and social media monitoring was conducted. In some cases, relevant research findings from academia and recruitment companies were also utilized. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that this report is by no means exhaustive when it comes to actions and developments regarding Iranian labour. Gathering information in dictatorships is notoriously challenging, as people may fear reprisals for speaking out. Moreover, information availability varied across different economic sectors. Consequently, the labour issues in Iran are likely more extensive than what this report details.

In line with its three objectives, this report consists of three parts. The next chapter will, after first giving an overview of key labour issues in Iran, zoom in on the labour protests that happened between January and June 2023 and their outcomes. Following on from this, chapter three considers governmental actions with a bearing on labour issues in the period under study. Besides elaborating on the governmental responses to the labour protests described in chapter two, it also lists (drafted) bills and laws, or adaptations to these, that may affect the labour rights of Iranian workers. Building upon the preceding chapters, the fourth and final chapter of this report considers the strengths and weaknesses of Iran's labour movement and offers suggestions for the way forward.

## 2 Labour protests in Iran

As mentioned in the introduction, anger over their detrimental socio-economic position and pervasive poverty drives Iranian workers to engage in protests. Before delving into the actual worker protests that took place in the first half of 2023, it is useful to better understand the precise reasons behind these protests. Additionally, it is important to note that labor protests are not common in Iran, mainly because strikes organized by independent, non-registered labor unions are illegal in the country, and participants can face persecution or other types of sanctions.

### Labour issues

While the precise grievances that underpin strikes or other forms of protest are likely to differ per sector, some universal grievances are widely shared and act as key incentives for strikes and other labour action across professions and sectors over the past decade – including the period under study.

#### *Unindexed wages, benefits and pensions*

Due to the international sanctions on Iran, as well as governmental mismanagement of the economy, inflation is very high in Iran. Food prices increased by [78.5 percent](#) in April 2023, as a result. Wages, pensions, and benefits aren't always adjusted to match these price developments, however. This has led to widespread poverty, with people struggling to pay for life's necessities, from rent or mortgage to food, cloths and medical costs.

#### *Late payment of wages*

Iranian workers frequently face late payment of wages by employers. Not getting paid for months is, unfortunately, far from uncommon. Clearly, this has a huge impact on the welfare of the workers concerned, as well as their families. The immediate payment of salary arrears or deferred health or pension insurance may therefore be an important demand of protesting workers. In some cases, salary arrears never get settled.

According to data from Human Rights Activists, an Iranian NGO, around 76 percent of workers suffering from payroll arrears work for the public sector, 7 percent in the energy sector and 14 percent for (private) companies.

#### *Unsafe work environment*

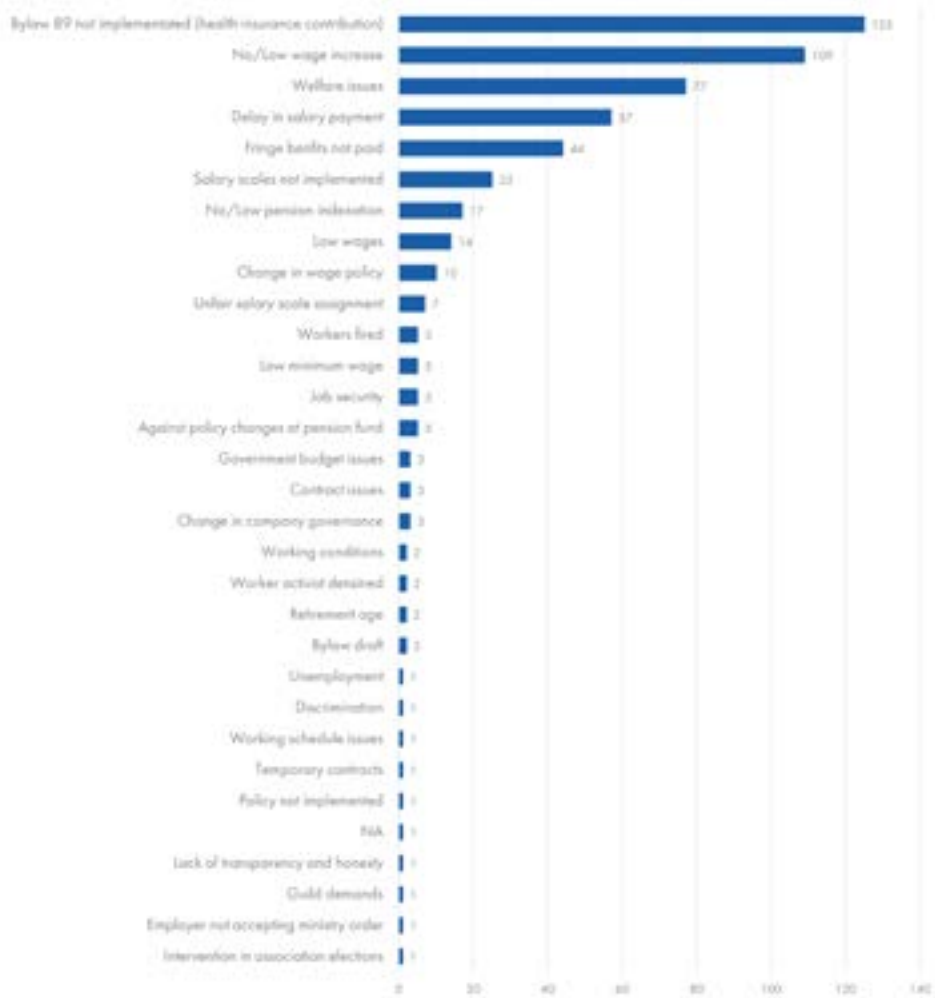
Particularly in the case of so-called 'blue collar' jobs, safety conditions are an issue. According to Human Rights Activists, at least 10,707 workers were injured in work-related incidents between May 2021 and May 2022, while 811 workers died in work-related incidents in that period. Better working conditions may therefore be an important demand of protesting Iranian workers.

#### *Lack of pay scales*

Many Iranians complain about favouritism in the workplace and linked to this, about their salaries being determined in an unfair and untransparent manner. Nepotism, rather than objective guidelines, may inform the allocation of salary and promotions. According to Professor in Public Administration Ali Gholi Rowshan, this problem is [particularly prominent in the public sector](#). As such, many workers in the public sector, including teachers and nurses, demand the introduction of (progressive) pay scales and, linked to this, a (progressive) grading system based on acquired knowledge and skills, levels of experience, performance evaluations and other measurables. In several sectors, job rating or classification schemes do exist now,



### Frequency of protests per labour issue (Jan-Jun 2023)



### Geographical dispersion of labour protests (Jan-Jun 2023)



but in practice the implementation of these may be lacking only be selectively applied.

### *Job insecurity due to temporary contracts*

Arash Tabarok, a worker in Javar Petrochemical Company in Ilam, [ended his life](#) on 26 December 2022. This was the third suicide in 2022 at the Javar factory; Mohammad Mansouri and Ali Mohammad Karimi, two other workers, committed suicide on 7 and 8 August, respectively.

Although the company said Arash's suicide was unrelated to the factory, some workers asserted that he took his life after a sudden dismissal. They claimed that some people tried to negotiate a way for him to return to work, but the factory refused to remove the ban on his entry to the premises.

Such suicides have become more common as it has become easier for employers to dismiss workers, who face huge pressures due to the [high unemployment rate](#) and the dire state of the economy.

Making workers jobless is both easy and legal. Once the term of a contract—which is usually one to three months—comes to an end, workers have no legal recourse to stop employers from terminating employment. Often, a worker is dismissed unknowingly and is immediately replaced by another worker, leaving the dismissed worker with no hope of return to employment. This is more easily done in smaller and more disadvantaged cities such as Ilam in the west of Iran.

As Iran's economy stagnates, workers who are already struggling to make ends meet are paying the price when employers' profit margins are impacted, regardless of their length of their tenure. Workers' rights activists are often the first to face dismissals.

For example, Reza Azizpour, a 19-year veteran of a difficult and hazardous job at the Motorsazan Company, of the Tabriz Tractor Mfg. Co., [was dismissed](#) in February 2023 along with two coworkers, each of whom had 18 years of service in hard and hazardous work. Azizpour, 40, had only 11 months to his retirement. All three were dismissed because they acted as representatives for their coworkers.

In another incident that highlights this issue, four representatives of workers at Tehran Metro were dismissed in April 2023. ILNA (Iranian Labour News Agency) [reported](#) that the four workers—who represented 200 ticket sale workers—were sacked after attending a meeting with the contractor company's directors to discuss workers' overdue wages. The contracting company, which had employed the ticket sale workers on behalf of the state-run Tehran Metro, handed over the project to a new company at the beginning of the year without settling salaries and arrears. The workers elected four representatives to recover their dues. On 17 April, the four representatives attended a meeting at the invitation of the new contractor. In that meeting, which was also attended by both the previous and the current contractors, the previous contractor denied any payment arrears. The new contractor, who deemed the presence of the four representatives a hassle and nuisance, handed them their employment folders, and said their contracts would not be renewed.

[Chapter six of the Iranian Labour Law](#) lays out the limits on workers' representatives and organisations. Section 131, Note 4 reads: "Workers in any workplace can only have one of the three possible forms of representation: Islamic Labour Council, trade association, or workers' representatives". This chapter of the Labour Law specifically limits the activities of workers' organisations, because it mandates that the government and employers be represented and that the election process and other activities are supervised by the government. This lack of independence for workers' organisations is one of the primary criticisms of the Labour Law.

Because the law does not allow workers to form powerful independent trade associations advocating

for their rights, dismissing workers who work under temporary contracts and who have no organisational support is of no cost for the employers. Under this framework, the new contractor for the Tehran Metro was able to threaten the workers and dismiss their representatives.

### *Mismanagement of companies*

Iranian strikers sometimes also protest against the mismanagement, and consequently malfunctioning, of the companies they work for, demanding more competent leadership or governmental intervention.

Following the (partial) privatization of many former state companies, appointed CEO's and other high-ranking managers often thank their position more to their ties to the Iranian government than their capacities. When this compromises a company's performance and turnover, this can have huge consequences for workers, from job losses to unpaid salary arrears. The textbox below provides further details on this issue.

#### **Privatization**

The continuous and corrupt privatization of publicly owned companies in Iran typically favours wealthy government loyalists. This shift has led to short-term financial interests taking precedence over the welfare of workers. After falling into the hands of government loyalists and their families, these formerly publicly owned companies are often stripped of their assets, including land, which are swiftly converted into cash, regardless of the company's profitability. Unfortunately, the end result for workers in such newly privatized companies is usually the loss of their jobs without any social protection.

### *Inadequate minimum wage*

The annual minimum wage in Iran is officially determined by the Iranian Supreme Labour Council, which includes representatives from the government, employers, and employees, thereby following the tripartite system advocated by the International Labour Organization. However, in practice, the interests of employees may carry less weight compared to those of employers. Despite the council's stated purpose to adjust the minimum wage according to price inflation, this doesn't always happen, and the government may choose to disregard the council's recommendations. As a result, the Iranian minimum wage often fails to provide a livable income, impacting overall wages and pensions. The establishment of the minimum wage for 2023 in Iran caused significant controversy and triggered public protests, which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

### *Arrests of labour activists*

As will be illustrated in more depth in the following chapter, even the most peaceful labour union activists are detained in Iran and sent to prison. Demands for their release play an important role in protests, especially

#### **Names of workers under custody\***

This is a list of worker activists currently in prison, or prosecuted and awaiting imprisonment

Reza Shahabi | Davood Razavi | Hasan Saeedi | Reyhaneh Ansari Nezhad | Ighbal Shabani | Nasrin Javadi | Arash Johari | Kamal Karimi | Khobat Mahmoudi | Shademan Abdi | Bahram Gorgan | Jahanshah Asadi | Osman Ismaili | Mohammad Iran Nezhad | Morteza Seydi | Nasrullah Amirloo | Mazyar Seyed Nezhad

\* Excluding teacher activists under custody

those organised by the union they belong to. When ‘common’ workers get arrested during a strike or other actions, demands for their release also may become part of, or a reason for, follow-up protests.

**Lack of freedom of association**

During labour actions, demands for independent trade unions and freedom of association occasionally arise, as stated by labour activists. While labour unions are not explicitly forbidden by law, these Civil Society Organizations need to be registered to obtain a license. In the case of independent labour unions, registration is typically denied, effectively rendering them and their activities illegal.

**Anti-regime slogans**

In a more general sense, anti-governmental sentiments are also sometimes part of labour actions. Slogans like ‘Down with the dictatorship’ can sometimes be heard or seen. Whilst these sentiments became more prominent after the rise of Iran’s protest movement, they were always there.

**Financial situation of workers in Iran in numbers**



Inflation rate over time according to the Statistical Center of Iran ([tradingeconomics.com](https://tradingeconomics.com))

Average salary of nurses per month  
(source: Job Vision)

81M IRR ~ 180 USD

Average salary of teachers per month  
(source: Mehr News)

150M IRR ~ 330 USD

Average salary of oil industry workers per month  
(source: Keyhan)

260M IRR ~ 580 USD

Minimum wage per month for full time job  
(source: Fars news)

82M IRR ~ 182 USD

Average rent in Tehran  
(source: Asr Iran)

95M IRR ~ 211 USD

Average red meat price per kg  
(source: Association of sheep meat)

3.5M IRR ~ 7.80 USD

## Labour protests

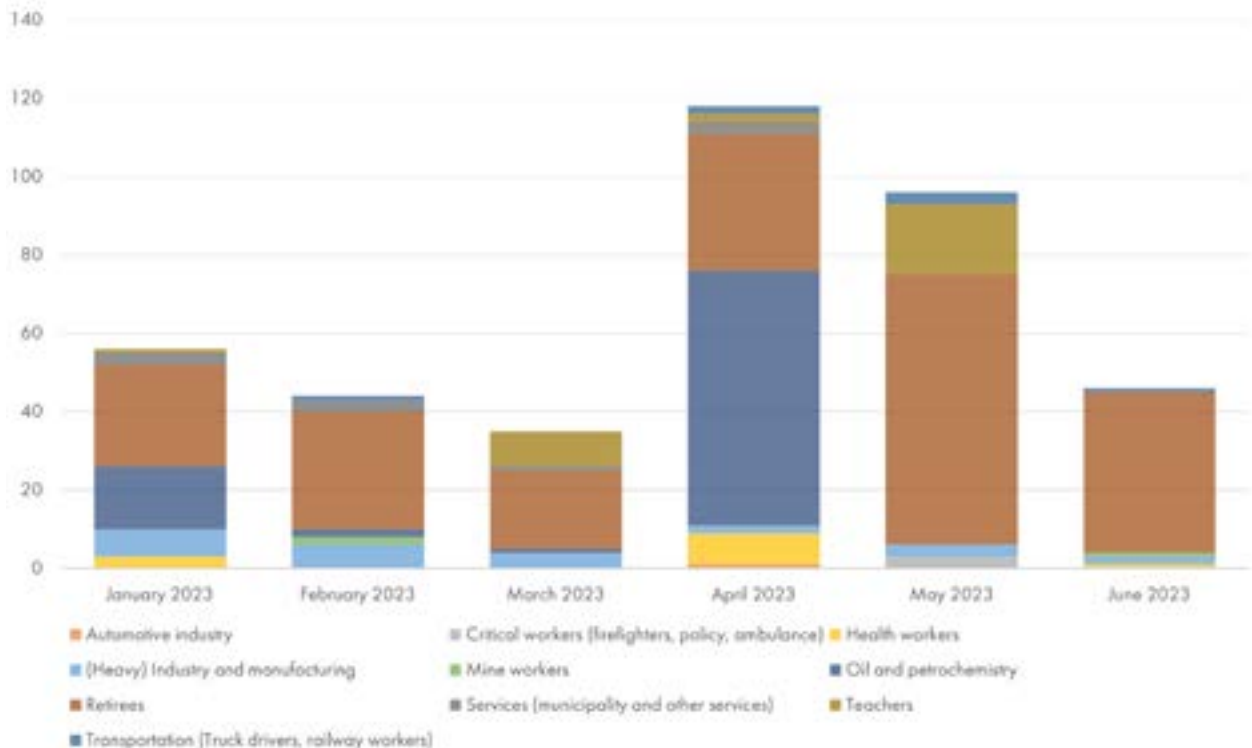
Workers' protests occurred – with ups and downs – in different parts of the country and comprised several types of actions, including public marches, protests and strikes.

The biggest group of protestors were, just as in 2022, pensioners. Following a brief hiatus, prompted by the heavy presence of security forces during 2022 to suppress the Women, Life, Freedom movement, pensioners resumed their street protests in 2023. While the majority of pensioners protesting were pensioners dependent on social security, another large part was made up by Telecom pensioners.

## Worker protests per sector

Sector	No. protests
Retirees	222
Oil and petrochemistry	87
Teachers	30
Industry	24
Services	17
Health workers	12
Transportation	7
Critical workers	3
Mine workers	3
Automotive	1

Distribution of worker protests over time by sector



### Social Security pensioners protests

As the economic crisis worsens and the income gap widens, the number of Iranians taking to the streets to protest their circumstances increases every day, reflecting the escalating impact on people's daily lives. This is certainly true for pensioners in Iran covered by social security; an estimated 4 to 6 million Iranians. Their pensions do not keep pace with the country's rampant price inflation, resulting in [widespread hardship and poverty](#) for these pensioners.

Almost every week, groups of pensioners gather in front of social security organization offices across various cities, undeterred even by scorching temperatures exceeding 45°C in places like Ahvaz.

They march to the social security offices and chant slogans such as: „We are all united and tired of empty promises,“ „Equalization is our rightful demand,“ „Warriors of yesterday are hungry today,“ and „Only on the streets can we achieve our rights.“ Referring to unfulfilled promises of the current president, they chant that he is a liar and ask him to resign.

Besides wanting to receive a higher pension that adequately covers the cost of living, the provision of efficient healthcare services is another key demand of the pensioners.

#### Encouragement

By tirelessly demonstrating from April to September 2022, Iranian pensioners achieved a remarkable feat: they successfully persuaded the Iranian government to forgo a meagre 10% increase in their pensions and instead adopt the recommended 38% raise suggested by the Labour Supreme Council. This victory has emboldened Iranian pensioners to (continue to) employ demonstrations and marches to pursue their demands.

On February 28, 2023, the protests were set to reach their peak. Social security pensioners across the country had arranged to join forces with other pensioners, such as those covered by the Civil Servants Insurance Fund and the Armed Forces Insurance Fund and take together to the street in major Iranian cities. These included Tehran, Yazd, Isfahan, Marivan, Kermanshah, Shahrekord, Sanandaj, Ardabil, Ilam, Karaj, and Tabriz.

The largest outpouring of protesters was anticipated in Tehran, where pensioners planned to march towards the Parliament. In other cities, demonstrators expected to target Governor's offices and/or



Provincial Administrations to voice their grievances.

In the end, many of these planned protests on February 28 didn't happen due to governmental interference. For instance, in Tehran, security forces successfully prevented the gathering in front of the Parliament. According to eyewitnesses taking to social media security forces were stationed at the exits of the metro station leading to the Parliament and started to block and arrest some of them<sup>2</sup>. Consequently, most of the protesters decided to disperse and go home.

Reports on social media platforms like Telegram indicated that a significant number of the gathered protestors in Teheran were women. Telegram users highlighted the noticeable presence of female security forces\*. One bystander witness stated, „The presence of female security forces was larger than ever, indicating the hatred of the Iranian government towards women protesting, whether they are aged 15 or 70, whether they are students or retirees.

\*Given its gender segregation policies, the Iranian government strives to employ female security officers when arresting female protestors.

So far, the Iranian authorities have not given in to the demands of the pensioners.

### *Protests of Telecom Pensioners*

Besides the type of pensioners mentioned above, pensioners of the Telecommunication Company of Iran also took weekly to the street. This group of pensioners objects to the violation of workers' rights following the privatization of the telecom industry in the 2000s. Due to privatization, workers lost many of their employment and welfare benefits. Telecom retirees, an estimated 50,000 Iranians, are also facing problems accessing health services. The pensioners pay for supplemental health care insurance from their pension, but they don't receive the level of service they should be getting. As long as a pensioner visits contracted health care providers, there won't be a problem. However, if such providers do not offer the services needed and the pensioner visits an alternative health provider instead, the pensioner will have to pay the incurred costs<sup>3</sup>.

This situation has caused numerous problems for Telecom workers and pensioners.

In the meantime, the portion of insurance that pensioners must pay has steadily increased. In winter 2022, the telecom industry raised the pensioners' contribution towards supplemental health insurance from 20% to 30%. In 2023, the burden is now equally divided, with 50% being paid by the pensioners and the other 50% by the telecom company, further reducing the pension amounts. Adding to their concerns, pensioners are uncertain about whom they can turn to address their grievances.

These issues have fuelled a surge in protests during 2023. Telecom pensioners, more determined and frustrated than ever, have been staging demonstrations every Monday throughout the country. They are leveraging social networks, groups, and organizations like the „Supreme Coordinating Council of Telecom Workers Associations“ to coordinate their protests.

Their protests have not gone unnoticed. The substantial scale and frequency of the demonstrations, coupled with significant media coverage, have had an impact. In April 2023, the Minister of Telecommunications, despite claiming no responsibility due to privatization, urged the Telecom company to pay all dues owed to

<sup>2</sup> The exact number of detainees was never accounted for.

<sup>3</sup> The insurers justify their stance on the grounds that the telecommunication company has not paid its debts.



the pensioners. The settlement process began in 11 cities and got underway in others as well. Additionally, the head of the Article 90 Commission in the Parliament pledged to resume the monthly payment of food allowances for pensioners from May 2023, aiming to alleviate their financial burden.

However, governmental promises are not always followed up. Due to payment delays, the protests continue as pensioners persistently demand the fulfilment of the commitments made to them.

### *Teachers and Teachers' Union Activists*

In the first half of 2023 there were also several protests by teachers. Just like oil workers (see next section), this professional group is known for its willingness to engage in strikes or other protest actions. That has a lot to do with the Coordinating Council of Iran's Teachers Trade Unions ability to organize and coordinate protests. It actively engages in organizing various activities, such as nationwide protests, school sit-ins, online campaigns and petitions. These teacher-led protests showcase a remarkable level of coordination, occasionally spanning up to 20 cities simultaneously. Meanwhile, it also provides support to teacher activists facing prosecution by security and judicial authorities for their trade union activities.

While specific statistics on teacher participation, especially in protest gatherings, are not available, council members estimate that at least 10% of the 2 million working and retired teachers in Iran have taken part in protests between 2021 and 2022.

As part of their protest gatherings, teachers often assemble in front of education departments<sup>4</sup>. This was also the case in 2023. Another notable aspect of teachers' protests is that they tend to not only address socio-economic needs but also wider socio-political issues.

In early March, the Coordinating Council of Iranian Teachers' Trade Unions called for nationwide gatherings. On March 7, 2023, education departments in over 30 cities became gathering points for teachers. The protests focused on four key demands:

Participants first demanded an end to the serial poisonings of female high school students. The chemical attacks on girls' schools, which began in early November 2022, reached a peak in the winter of 2023. In total, between November 2022 and March 2023, [an estimated 7,000 schoolgirls were poisoned at dozens of schools in 28 of Iran's 31 provinces](#). These attacks are believed to be orchestrated by the Iranian government or extremist groups with governmental support, targeting underage pupils in a horrific manner.

Secondly, teachers demanded the proper implementation of their salary rating system. Although the government agreed to a salary rating system for teachers following protests in 2021 and 2022, implementation remained incomplete. The salary payments were supposed to be based on established prepayment scales linked to the teacher's junior, medior, or senior position. However, the rating system's implementation faced challenges in different parts of the country, partly because the government excluded activists from benefiting from this law due to their union activities, which teachers found unacceptable<sup>5</sup>.

Thirdly, teachers urged the implementation of the „Pension Equalization Law“ (see text box), seeking to achieve fairness in pensions for all retirees in similar circumstances, regardless of their retirement year.

Fourthly, teachers protested the monetization of education in Iran, meaning that fees now also need to be

<sup>4</sup> Offices of Education (that are part of the Ministry of Education). Each city has such an office.

<sup>5</sup> Reports by the Coordinating Council of Teachers Trade Associations indicate that approximately 250 teacher activists were excluded from the rating scheme which ensures the payment of teachers' salaries based on pre-established scales, all of which were trade union activists.



## Summary of teacher activists arrested January - June 2023

### Overall overview of data

Status	Number
Total arrested teachers	74
Released	27
Under custody	27
Unknown status	19
Dismissed from service	1

### Gender of arrested teachers

Gender	Number
Male	58
Female	16

### Status specification

Status	Number
Released on bail	13
Released without bail	14
Awaiting court verdict	19

### Geographical distribution of arrests

Province	Number
Kurdistan	17
Fars	11
Khuzestan	11
Tehran	10
Alborz	6
Bushehr	4
Isfahan	3
Gilan	3
Markazi	2
Kermanshah	2
Ghazvin	1
Ilam	1
Chaharmahal & Bakhtiari	1
Khorasan Razavi	1
North Khorasan	1

### Accusations against teachers

Accusation	Number
Unknown accusations	32
Participation in illegal teachers rally (without permit)	14
Propaganda activity against the system, society and collusion with the intention of disrupting internal security and membership in groups whose aim is to disrupt the country's security	13
Propaganda against the regime and inciting and seducing people	2
Action against internal security, disturbance of public order and comfort, disobedience to an officer while on duty	2

### Teacher activists currently under custody

Hamid Jafari | Sara Siaypoor | Marziyeh Janipoor | Aziz Ghasemzadeh | Anoosh Adeli | Mahmoud Sedighipoor | Pirooz Nami | Sadegh Sedaghat | Mohammad Ali Zahmatkesh | Gholamreza Gholami Kandazehi | Zeynab hamrang | Hossein Ramezanpoor | Osman Ismaili | Farzaneh Nazeranpoor | Fateh Osmani | Fatimeh Tadrissi | Asghar Aminzadegan | Rohullah Mardani | Salah Azadi | Hamid Mojiri | Abdul Razzagh Amiri | Zahra Esfandiyari | Iraj Rahnoma | Afshin Razmjooeyee | Mozghan Bagheri | Ali Hossein Shamayeli | Kiyumars Vaezi

paid for public schools.

The „Pension Equalization Law“ aims to address the disparity in pensions based on the retirement year. Currently, pensions are determined at the time of retirement, leading to unequal benefits for individuals in the same situation but with different retirement years due to age differences. The demand for pension equalization seeks to rectify this issue and ensure fair and equal pensions for all retirees facing similar circumstances.

Due to extreme security measures, the number of participants in many cities remained relatively low, with gatherings consisting of 50 to 200 people. In Tehran, security forces clashed with protesting teachers and forcefully prevented their gathering in front of the parliament. Shockingly, security forces employed extreme violence against the teachers. This led to a brutal incident involving a female teacher which got captured in pictures that were shared on the Coordinating Council’s social media channels.

In the aftermath of these events, over 30 teacher activists were arrested in various provinces, including Tehran, Gilan, and Kurdistan. The arrests were accompanied by physical and verbal abuse, and some teachers were prosecuted on security charges.

Despite these challenges, a second call to action was issued by the Coordinating Council on May 9. Prior to Teacher Day, held on May 2nd, several trade union activists in Tehran and Bushehr were already arrested with the aim of preventing teachers’ protests that day. On Teacher Day itself, Hossein Mehdipour, a teacher from Baluchistan Province who administered the „Teachers’ Demands“ Telegram channel, [was shot to death by two armed individuals](#). The arrests and the killing of Mehdipour led the Council to organize protests on May 9th, demanding the release of political prisoners as well as an official investigation into the murder of Mehdipour, which is widely thought to have been ordered by the Iranian regime.

By the end of June 2023, the protests had not yielded concrete outcomes.

### **Nurses**

Similar to pensioners and teachers, nurses have been engaged in continuous protests for the past six months. During the first half of 2023, numerous scattered demonstrations took place in hospital centres. Also, nurses demonstrated [in front of governor’s offices](#).

Besides salary arrays, the primary concerns revolve around the government’s failure to fully implement the Nursing Tariff Act, which was ratified in 2007. This law places limits on the amount of overtime nurses can work and grants them other benefits, such as setting a maximum for certain daily tasks. Moreover, if the act were effectively enforced, patients would be able to directly pay nurses for specific services, such as bandaging wounds, instead of these invoices being approved by doctors and largely paid to them. Such a system would be more cost-effective for patients and lead to increased income for nurses.

Despite its adoption 13 years ago, the act is still not widely and properly enforced. Salaries are not consistently paid according to the law or the appropriate salary scale. In response, the protesting nurses call for amendments to the nursing service tariff bylaw, contending that it was adopted behind closed doors without considering their interests.

Another significant grievance is the prevalence of various forms of employment contracts and the lack of job security, particularly among contractual workers who constitute a substantial portion of the Iranian

nursing community. This situation further fuels the protests, as changing employment status has long been a key demand. Nursing associations, like Khanay-e Parastar ('House of Nurses'), report that 50% of the total 130,000 nurses working under the Ministry of Health's structure are on temporary contracts and could benefit from the implementation of the Government Employees' Organization Scheme<sup>6</sup> if it is carried out.

The protests had not led to any government action by the end of June.

Recent reports suggest that the inability to safeguard employment rights for nurses has resulted in a substantial surge of over 300% in emigration to countries such as Canada among this group of health professionals. As a consequence, the shortage of nurses has evolved into a critical issue within the country's healthcare system.

## Strikes

Whereas Iranian pensioners, teachers and nurses mostly protested through rallies, other Iranian workers used strikes as the main protest means. In doing so, they often actively sought press coverage within Iran to try and put more pressure. Altogether there were strikes in four different sectors, that will now be discussed one by one.

### *Workers' protests in the oil, gas, and petrochemical sector*

The oil, gas, and petrochemical industry stood out as a significant protest space during the period covered by this report. Before delving into the actual protests, it is essential to gain a deeper understanding of this relatively unique sector to grasp the workers' demands fully. First, it holds a unique position in workers' protests due to Iran's heavy reliance on oil revenues, which makes the government particularly sensitive to the status of projects in this sector. This sensitivity provides the strikers with certain leverage in their protests.

Working conditions are also relatively unique. Workers in this sector commonly work far from home, in remote areas such as offshore locations. Additionally, they endure challenging working conditions, often in dirty and heavy environments, and rely on the companies they work for for their accommodation, healthcare, and safety. These unique circumstances give rise to specific demands.

Finally, the sector exhibits a wide diversity in employment contracts. Workers include permanent employees, contractual and sub-contractual employees, temporary and fixed-term contractors, and project-based employees. Consequently, different types of oil workers pursue various labour demands.

Protests took place between January to June 2023 among the following categories of workers:

### Key grievances

While the precise demands may differ per type of oil or gas worker, there are also some universal grievances. Oil workers tend to protest against the harsh working environments and long working hours, non-compliance with labour laws and regulations, low wages, wage arrears and unequal pay and job discrimination. The latter is especially an issue for fixed term temporary and project-based workers. Poor accommodation conditions and below par welfare arrangements are also an issue.

<sup>6</sup> If this scheme is approved by the Iranian Parliament, all contractual, temporary, and fixed-term employees will be granted permanent employment status.

### Permanent workers protests (January 2023)

This group of employees demanded the implementation of Article 10 of the Ministry of Petroleum's Duties and Powers Act (see text box), which has been approved for over a decade but has never been executed. During the second half of 2022, these workers already repeatedly organised protests and strikes. Their biggest demonstration so far [took place on 17 January 2023](#), in front of oil and gas companies and within the premises of refineries in 6 different cities.

#### Article 10

The Ministry of Oil shall be under obligation to exert regular and consistent efforts for recruitment and training of the necessary personnel and gaining access to advanced technologies and growth and development in various fields of the oil industry through appropriate ways and means in coordination and conformity with the policies of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education by preparation of appropriate educational programmes and creation of training centres and establishment of research and laboratory complexes and shall take appropriate measures for promotion of the level of knowledge and scientific and practical information of the employees and experts and creation of an appropriate atmosphere and environment for attraction and encouragement of the competent devoted and expert individuals.

While the authorities ignored the workers' demands at the time of the protest, the Ministry of Petroleum began the implementation of Article 10 in June. Some permanent oil workers are unhappy about the manner of execution of this law, however.

### Fixed term contract workers' protests (January to March 2023)

In winter (January– February 2023) when the (permanent) workers' protests were happening into oil rich regions, the Trade Union of South Pars Gas Complex Workers<sup>7</sup> sent three letters to the security and law enforcement authorities of Bushehr Province, requesting permission for a scheduled trade union demonstration<sup>8</sup>. However, permission was never granted so they continued to hold unorganized and scattered protests. Security forces stopped a planned demonstration by the trade union on 20th February 2023 and detained five labour activists<sup>9</sup>.

Their demands included accurate and full implementation of the job classification scheme, improved working conditions for hired vehicle drivers, and better welfare services specifically in camps and dormitories. The employers agreed to implement the job classification scheme as well as improve the status of the drivers.

### Project workers' protests (May 2023)

In addition to permanent and fixed-term contract workers, project workers also participated in the strike. This group, estimated to be between 150,000 to 200,000 individuals, can be considered the most vulnerable group of workers within the oil and gas industry. They primarily engage in the construction, equipment, and maintenance of oil, gas, and petrochemical projects. These workers often operate on a project-based

<sup>7</sup> The only trade union of workers in the South Pars region which, after many efforts, was able to obtain an activity license last year. Trade union activities in these regions face lots of difficulties and they are not usually allowed to act freely.

<sup>8</sup> Although peaceful gatherings are allowed based on Article 27 of the Iranian Constitution, all groups and associations be it civil, political, trade unionist, etc. need to obtain a specific 'permit' every time they want to organise a gathering.

<sup>9</sup> Alireza Mirghaffari, chairman of South Pars Gas Complex workers' trade union, Hojjat Rezaei, representative of Refinery No.6 workers in South Pars Gas Complex, Zabihollah Mirzaei, auditor of the South Pars Gas Complex worker's trade union were summoned to the Security Police department and arrested there. Behdad Gholami, a member of Refinery No.6 trade union was arrested along with another worker who belonged to the trade union of Refinery No.5 in the venue where the gathering was planned to convene. In total, 13 workers were also banned to enter their workplace. All these workers were released after a short while and returned to work.

basis with short-term or even no contracts, subjecting them to the most unsafe working conditions.

The campaigns started this year relatively early (see also textbox). 21 April 2023 marked the beginning of project-based workers' fourth consecutive campaign in the oil, gas, and petrochemical industries. The campaign's main demands include a 20-day working plan followed by 10 days of rest, a 79% increase in pay – considering the hard-working conditions - and the issuing of a copy of their contract to workers by employers.

### 20/10

This campaign promotes a working schedule of 20 days of work and 10 days off. Working conditions are harsh, and most workers are not from the working area. Having 10 days off allows them to travel home and recover and to see their families.

Another distinguishing factor about this year's campaign was its geographical dispersion. The worker's strikes were not limited to South Pars, Asaluyah and Kangan oil projects – as was the case previously. They expanded into Kerman, Khuzestan, Kohgiuleh and Boyer Ahmad, Isfahan, Arak, Fars, and other places where project workers were employed. Altogether, over 80 small contracting companies<sup>10</sup> and 12,000 workers joined the campaign.

The protests achieved some success, which was widely covered by Iranian media. An evaluation of the campaign showed that around 40% of project-based workers in some major contracting companies were able to sign contracts based on the campaign's proposed divisions.

### Truck Drivers

„The fuel tank is empty, enough with poverty and misery!“ was printed on one of the posters calling for a truck drivers' strike on May 22, 2023. This strike mainly came about due to unfulfilled governmental promises that were done in 2022.

As our [previous bi-yearly report on labour issues described](#), in November 2022, truck drivers organized a 10-day strike across at least 19 provinces, causing significant disruptions to the country's cargo transport system. The drivers were protesting against a range of issues, including low freight rates, reduced fuel quotas, issues with calculating tonne/km, diesel fuel allocation requirements, poor road conditions, high costs of oil and essential fleet supplies, mismanagement in fleet renovations, delayed payments, and other grievances.

Only eight days later, the government promised to address (several of) their concerns, including by amending fuel quotas and implementing tonne per km as the basis for determining freight rates. However, these promises have not yet been followed up to the frustration of Iranian lorry drivers.

In a social media group for truck drivers, one driver expressed his anger over unfulfilled promises, stating: „The government still hasn't fulfilled our request for tonne per km as the basis for determining freight rates, and it still hasn't been introduced in 33 cities. Meanwhile, heavy freeway tolls are in effect, with the government essentially taking from drivers' pockets while these costs should be covered from oil revenues.“

The mounting frustration prompted the Truck Drivers Independent Trade Unions<sup>11</sup>, which primarily operates online, to call for another nation-wide strike on May 22, 2023. On that day, groups of truck drivers went

<sup>10</sup> These smaller employment agencies feel that the bigger agencies are treating them unfairly.

<sup>11</sup> In each region, there is a union. Together, these unions form this overarching group.

on strike in five cities, refusing to load or offload cargo.

Three days into the strike, it already delivered results. The Market Regulation Headquarters, a government body empowered to regulate prices in Iran, agreed to the Transport Supreme Council's earlier request to increase public road transport freight rates by 30 percent. This swift decision probably reflected the significant impact of the 10-day strike in November 2022, which left supermarket shelves empty and fuelled widespread anger towards the Iranian government. This renewed promise to implement the freight rate increase was enough to halt the strike for the time being. However, the Nationwide Coordinating Union of Drivers has warned that if their demands are not met, they may soon call for another nationwide strike of truck drivers.

### Employed drivers

According to a 2016 report, the majority of cargo truck drivers in Iran are owners of their vehicles. This unique ownership structure highlights the prevalence of self-employed drivers in the country's road transport sector. However, it's worth noting that a small percentage of the truck fleet is owned by transport companies, and they employ drivers for their operations.

One key concern raised by employed drivers is the absence of categorizing their profession as a hard or hazardous job, despite the challenging working conditions they face. As a result, they miss out on certain benefits such as an earlier retirement age and other associated perks. This has become a significant point of contention for these drivers, who believe their dedication and efforts deserve proper recognition and support.

Moreover, the lack of adequate insurance and healthcare coverage is a prevailing issue that affects many drivers in the industry. This lack of protection puts them at considerable risk, especially considering the nature of their work and the potential hazards involved in long-haul trucking.

### Railway workers

Where each of the groups above were also protesting in the second half of 2022, this was not the case for railway track and infrastructure personnel. This is not to say this group is new to labour protests, they held, for instance, also strikes in 2018 due to unpaid wages.

During the first six months of 2023, railway (track and infrastructure) workers held gatherings and strikes. Besides demanding better labour rights, including regarding working conditions, wages and contracts, a prime demand is also to be able to work directly for (a government owned) Islamic Republic of Iran Railways. Due to fears of dismissal, these strikers tended not to contact Iranian media to avoid coverage of their protests – unlike the groups of workers discussed above.

Track and infrastructure workers of the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways are among the seven thousand workers of this company who work on project basis under supervision of contracting companies and are responsible for the repair and maintenance of railway tracks. Despite having a highly sensitive job, due to the high stress and high concentration needed, these workers have minimum job security under temporary employment contracts and experience frequently months-long delays in receiving their wages on numerous occasions during the past few years.

As a result of these ongoing problems, as part of their protests they demand that privatized companies such

as Railway Services & Technical Construction Engineering Co. (TRAVERS) be once more government owned. The workers believe the root cause of their problems to be the presence of various contractors in track and infrastructure services and all companies contracted to offer these services must be dismissed so that the workers can directly work for the railways. According to workers' news sources, any contractor who offers the lowest bid wins the projects; other requirements and qualifications which are important in offering public works to contractors are usually ignored. Consequently, timely payment of salaries and fringe benefits of workers is not a priority for companies contracted by the Iranian Railways. These include companies such as Railway Services & Technical Construction Engineering Co., Rail Sanat Karan, Gostaresh Rah Ahan (GAR), Joosh Gostar, Falaq Qom and some employment companies that together manage a large number of contractual workers in different parts of the country.

The actions of the railway workers to promote better and fairer work conditions have so far not delivered any results.

### Earlier actions

In the past three summers, so during the dedicated period for rail maintenance and facility repair, project workers have been campaigning for fair wages and improved working conditions in accordance with the law. These campaigns aim to challenge the labour force exploitation by contracting companies.

These protest circles are formed by worker activists who cooperate through friendship circles. They voice their demands on social media platforms such as Telegram, Instagram, and other platforms. Their objective is to mobilize project-based workers nationwide, urging them to join the movement and organize strikes against labour exploitation. More specifically, the campaigns have emphasized the use of the 20-10 principle (20 days of work and 10 days of rest) in organizing work schedules, gaining popularity amongst project-based workers.

### Municipal Workers

Approximately a thousand municipal workers in Yasuj, an industrial city located in the Zagros Mountains of southwestern Iran, have not been paid since July 2022. In early March 2023, a video went viral on social media and was picked up by many major Iranian news agencies, bringing attention to their plight. The video featured a local IRIB<sup>12</sup> news team interviewing workers gathered in front of the Yasuj City Council. The workers expressed their grievances, stating that they hadn't received payment for 8 months to a year and wondered what they should do, as the situation had not been resolved even after an entire year.

All the interviewees expressed a sense of hopelessness about any improvement. They doubted that their voices would be heard by anyone, including the mayor and the city council. When asked how many times they had approached the City Council regarding their situation, they replied, "A hundred times, maybe more."

Municipal workers across the country are facing similar challenges. In recent years, the outsourcing of urban services by municipalities has had serious repercussions for the workers engaged in providing these services. The proliferation of employment agencies has resulted in many municipal workers in different cities being employed by contractors rather than directly by municipal offices. These contractors and employment agencies cut costs on initial investment, equipment, and raw materials, but their involvement has had a substantial impact on the financial affairs of municipalities, to the extent that they are believed to influence

12 IRIB stands for the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting. It is Iran's national broadcasting organization.

the appointment and dismissal of mayors in certain regions. In short, these agencies are seen to hold all the power, while the workers are left with little control or influence over their working conditions and rights.

In the past six months, contracted municipal workers in at least ten cities, including Tehran, Zibashahr (Isfahan province), Susangerd (in Khuzestan Province), Ilam (Chehar Mahal & Bakhtiari Province), Yasuj (Kohkiluyeh & Boyr Ahmad Province), Jiroft (Kerman Province), Birjand (South Khorasan Province), Qeshm (Hormozgan Province), Khash, Iranshahr, and Zabol (Sistan & Baluchistan Province), Bandar Imam Khomeini (Khuzestan Province), and Rudbar (Gilan Province), have organized protest gatherings due to unpaid salaries.

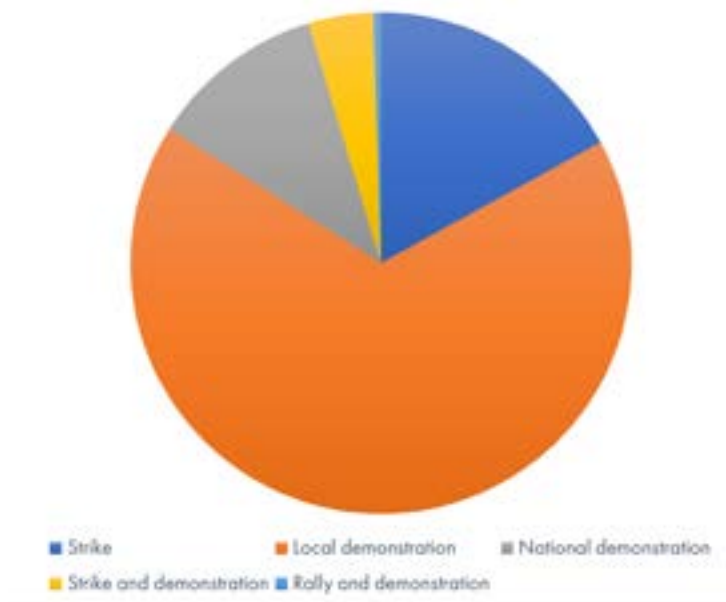
In one of these protests, namely the one on January 22, 2023, municipal workers in Khuzestan [assembled](#) in front of the Governor’s Office in Ahvaz for extended periods, accompanied by their family members.

Most of the protesting workers were owed wages ranging from 2 to 10 months. Furthermore, the Jobs Classification Scheme was not implemented in most contractor companies, resulting in many experienced workers receiving only minimum wage and lacking job benefits. The workers were also frustrated over the employer’s failure to pay health insurance.

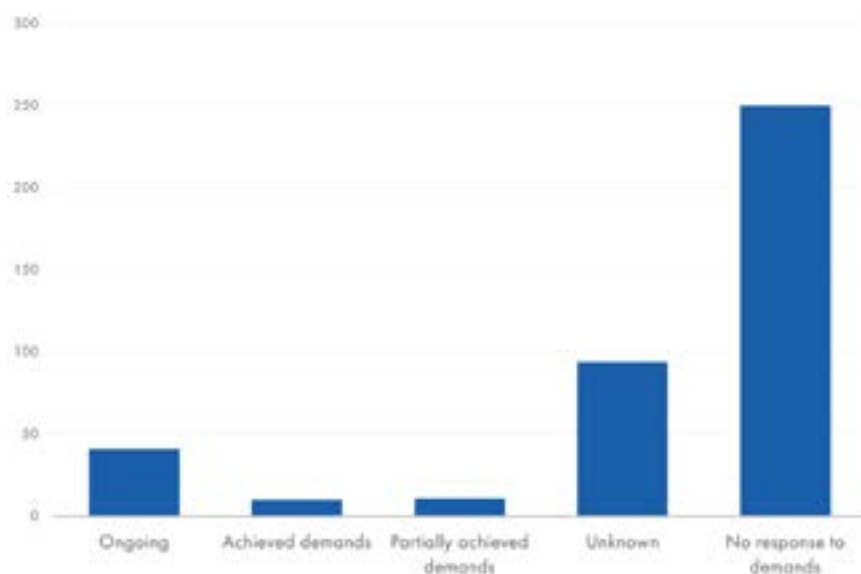
Apart from demanding their overdue wages, a significant request is a change in their employment status. These workers, engaged in urban space management tasks like garbage collection, street cleaning, maintenance, and park upkeep, face minimal job security due to their temporary contracts<sup>13</sup>.

While the issue of salary arrays remains unresolved, there has been progress in meeting

Type of labour protests in Iran - Jan - Jun 2023



Result of protests - 1 month after protest



<sup>13</sup> Like other types of workers, the absence of support from (independent) labour associations makes them vulnerable, as any criticism of their poor working conditions can lead to immediate dismissal.



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the demand for different contracts in certain places, like Tabriz and Khuzestan province. In Tabriz, the mayor's decision and a bill passed by the Tabriz City Council allowed over 3000 park and green space workers to shift from employment agencies to direct fixed-term contracts with the municipality. Similarly, in Khuzestan province, 210 municipal workers changed their employment status to fixed-term contracts with the municipality in April 2023.

### **Inter-sector labour action**

In addition to protests specific to certain sectors as outlined above, 2023 also witnessed actions Iranian workers or worker representatives that addressed broader issues transcending individual sectors. These actions included campaigns, strikes, and protest gatherings.

### *Campaigns and Demand Charters*

Campaigns and demand charters have emerged as part of the workers' and wage earners' demand-driven actions in Iran. These initiatives have gained popularity in the past six months, including because of increased restrictions on civil and trade union activities. These campaigns and demand charters can bring worker groups and trade associations closer together, fostering collaborative networks. Below are some of the most notable campaigns and demand charters during the studied period:

### *Charter of Minimum Demands endorsed by 20 civil and trade associations*

As the popular protests started to slow down by the end of 2022 due to severe crackdowns, a collective of 20 civil groups and trade unions [issued](#) "The Charter of Minimum Demands of Civil and Trade Associations" on the countdown to the anniversary of the 1979 Revolution (11 February 2023). It was signed by organisations such as women rights associations, but also by workers and teachers' groups such as the Coordinating Council of Iranian Teachers Trade Associations, the Free Union of Iranian Workers and Oil Workers Organizing Council. The signatories outlined various demands, including the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners, full equal rights for women, job security, wage increases for workers, teachers, working and retired civil servants, and the freedom of independent associations, among other crucial matters.

### *Demands Charter on World Labour Day*

On World Labour Day, activists faced the familiar challenge of celebrating the day while also advocating for workers' rights. As in previous years, the government-imposed restrictions on marches and gatherings on May 1st. However, the group of civil and trade associations that had previously published the „Charter of Minimum Demands of 20 Civil and Trade Associations" in solidarity with the Iranian protest movement issued a new resolution on this occasion.

In this resolution, they expressed solidarity with the ongoing strikes of oil project workers that had begun on April 21, 2023. They emphasized that the Iranian working class would play a central role in future political changes and could create significant historical impact. The resolution outlined 12 key demands, including the release of political prisoners, job security, workplace safety, and an immediate increase in wages for workers, teachers, and civil servants.

The signatories of this resolution included various organizations such as the Coordinating Council of Iranian Teachers Trade Associations, Pensioners Alliance, Protest Organizing Committee of Oil Project Workers, Protest Organizing Committee of Fixed Term Oil Workers, Iranian National Steel Group Workers' Independent Voice (Ahvaz), Council of the Social Security Organization Pensioners (BASTA), Haft Tapeh

Sugar Cane Workers Syndicate, Association of Workers' Rights Defenders, and Alborz Province Painters and Decorators Syndicate.

### *Protests regarding the Seventh Five-Year Development Plan*

As will be discussed in more depth in the next chapter, the draft of Iran's Seventh National Development Plan was unveiled in mid-May 2023. Upon its publication, it faced significant criticism, particularly from legal experts in the field of worker rights and worker rights activists. Several clauses within the plan became the subject of great controversy. These articles covered issues such as allowing employers to pay half of the minimum wage during the first three years of employment and granting them the right to unilaterally terminate employment contracts.

Within days of the draft's release, numerous online campaigns were launched to protest the plan's anti-worker provisions. Petitions were signed by more than 40,000 Iranians in less than a month, addressing the government and the parliament and urging them to halt further violations of workers' and pensioners' rights. One of the petitions stated: „Workers and civil servants have endured significant hardships in recent years, with salaries failing to keep up with the inflation rate, and their legal rights being violated in various ways.“

Workers from companies such as HEPCO, a manufacturer of construction equipment, and Doroud Cement Company, as well as pensioners covered by the Social Security Organization, organized protest gatherings. The latter displayed also placards opposing any changes to retirement fund mechanisms and the retirement age, which was also part of the Development Plan.

These protests succeeded partially. As the next chapter will reveal in more detail the protests played a pivotal role in the removal of the two highly contested articles regarding employment. However, the clauses related to changes in retirement regulations remained in the final version of the plan submitted to the Parliament by Iranian president Ibrahim Raisi on June 18th.

# 3 Government policies & law-making

In the pursuit of workers' rights, the scope of possibilities is profoundly shaped by the state's discretion. To that end, the first part of this chapter maps and analyses the responses of the government to the labour protests that occurred between January and July 2023. The second part of the chapter considers the legal picture, examining (proposed) changes to labour laws or plans that affect labour rights.

## Governmental responses to labour actions

When we compare how the government dealt with worker protests in the first half of 2023 to the latter half of 2022, we notice some striking similarities; the government's response to worker protests is two-sided.

On the one hand, sometimes the government reluctantly gives in to the demands of workers, but only when it's in their best interest to do so. This usually happens when the workers are from essential sectors like oil and trucking, and their protests can have a big impact on the country's economy. When large groups of workers protest regularly for a long time, it can also make a difference. The protesting pensioners are a case in point. Whilst this year the pensioners didn't (yet) achieve their demand of adjusted pensions, in 2022 the government eventually partially gave in. This shows that the government recognizes the validity and legitimacy of organized labour protests, at least to some extent.

The other facet of its Janus-faced response to labour actions involves relentlessly persecuting labour activists and independent labour unions. Iranian courts often label strikes and labour protests as security threats. This is evident in the treatment of teachers' demands. The Iranian government ultimately agreed to a salary rating system following extensive teachers' protests in 2021 and 2022. It even started a campaign promoting the implementation of the salary rating system, to win the hearts of teachers. Yet, the government cracked down on teacher activists and accused them of being a security threat.

Labour activists affiliated with the Coordinating Council of Iranian Teachers Trade Associations were particularly attacked. Our research shows that from January to June 2023, over 75 teacher activists were detained and tried. These activists were charged with security related offences such as "spreading propaganda against the regime" and "conspiracy and collusion with the intention of threatening national security". The following table illustrates the treatment of teacher rights activists in the first six months of 2023.

Meanwhile, labour activist and teacher Hossein Mehdipour was shot under highly suspicious circumstances.

Atekeh Rajabi from the city of Mashhad was of the teachers arrested during the teachers' protests in 2023, namely on the one of May 9th. She went on a five-day dry hunger strike and was finally released on a hefty bail of IRR 15 billion (33.350 USD).

Another example can be found in the oil sector. As mentioned, some main contractors ultimately accepted the demands of the project workers. The Iranian government had a strong hand in this process. Nevertheless, the campaign's organizers were arrested and accused of crimes against 'national security'.

As such, the process of securing worker rights in Iran can at times be likened to a tug of war between Iranian workers on one side and the Iranian government on the other. Meanwhile, the government's resources are increasingly limited, making it more difficult for them to meet workers' demands.

Even when labour activists are not being arrested, their situation can be tough. They often experience

intimidation by security forces. For example, as mentioned in the previous chapter, pensioner labour activists in certain cities received threats through phone calls and in-person warnings.

Labour activists may also face problems on the work floor. For instance, as mentioned earlier, some teacher activists were excluded from the salary rating system. That was no coincidence. Disciplinary committees and security offices of education departments often target teachers who show even the slightest act of defiance. Disciplinary punishments, such as written warnings or admonitions, records in personnel files and compulsory retirement are imposed, even for minor acts or a post on social media. Similar patterns can be found in other sectors.

Dismissal is also a looming threat. The lack of strong and legally recognized workers' representation exacerbates this issue. Combined with temporary contracts, it is easy to dismiss workers. One example occurred in [June 2023](#) when Kerman Railway Infrastructure decided to terminate the employment of 350 workers in the province. These workers had been employed by the contracting company for about a decade, but they had consistently been denied severance pay upon the completion of their contracts. Additionally, some legally entitled fringe benefits were unjustly withheld due to the questionable legitimacy of their initial employment contracts when they began working in the infrastructure sector.

In response to these challenges, the affected workers took a stand by refusing to sign new contracts. Instead of addressing their legitimate concerns, the employer's agents terminated their employment. It is crucial to emphasize that all these workers sought was a fair and legally compliant contract, as approved by the Labour Department, and the rightful disbursement of their severance payments. Moreover, in a country with an estimated unemployment rate of 10 percent, dismissal carries significant weight. Sadly, this incident is one of many (see textbox for another example).

Overall, advocating for labour rights continues to be a highly risky endeavour with significant personal costs in Iran.

In April 2023, the ILNA News Agency reported how four representatives of Tehran Metro workers, who were speaking on behalf of 200 ticket sale workers, were sacked. The reason behind their dismissal was their attempt to address workers' overdue wages during a meeting with the contractor company's directors.

The situation unfolded when the contracting company responsible for employing ticket sale workers on behalf of Metro Company transferred a project to a new company at the beginning of the year without settling salaries and arrears. Faced with this issue, the workers elected four representatives to negotiate and recover their unpaid dues.

On 17 April 2023, the four representatives attended a meeting, which had been initiated by the contractor and was attended by both the previous and current contractors. During this meeting, the previous contractor denied any payment arrears. However, the new employer viewed the presence of the four representatives and their follow-ups as a hassle and nuisance. In response, the new employer handed them their employment folders and bluntly stated, „we don't renew your contracts!“

This incident highlights the challenges faced by labour activists in Iran. Employers can react strongly to workers advocating for their rights and attempt to silence their efforts through dismissals and contract terminations.

There were also favourable developments, however. Legal victories were secured for trade union activists on trial. The Administrative Tribunal declared „participation in trade union activities“ [as legal](#) (21 January 2023), leading to the exoneration of a teacher facing charges for attending trade union gatherings. The Supreme Court also [exonerated a trade union activist](#) charged with propaganda against the system due to trade union activists. These verdicts may set a precedent for other teachers, as well as other workers, facing similar charges.

### **(Prospective) Legal Developments Impacting Labour**

During the period covered by this report, several policy game changers were either deliberated or approved by the Iranian government. These will now be discussed one by one below.

#### *Minimum Wage Approval adopted by the Supreme Labour Council<sup>14</sup>*

Each year, the Supreme Labour Council in Iran determines the rate of the minimum wage for the upcoming year, in accordance with the Iranian Labour Law.

In March 2023, the Supreme Labour Council in Iran approved a minimal 27 percent increase in the national minimum wage for the upcoming Persian year 1402, starting on March 21, 2023. This increase was significantly lower than the (conservatively) estimated 50% price inflation rate and violated Iran’s labour law.

The Supreme Labour Council is a tripartite structure with representatives from the government, employers, and workers. This structure often results in unfair outcomes, with government and employers on one side and worker representatives on the other.

According to [Article 41 of Iran’s Labour Law](#), the minimum wage is determined based on the two components of the inflation rate and the livelihood basket (the cost of living for a worker and family).

This year, despite the official livelihood basket being announced between IRR 130 million and IRR 180 million and the inflation rate about 50 percent, the government and employer representatives did not agree to increase the minimum wage proportionately with these rates. Instead, they finalized the increase to a mere 27 percent during the final hours of the last day of the Iranian year 1401 (on March 20, 2023), and the new minimum monthly wage was set at IRR 53,070,000 for 1402 (from March 21, 2023, onwards).

This minimal increase was met immediately met with fierce criticism from both official and non-official<sup>15</sup> worker associations. During the first month of the new year, a petition to annul the minimum wage approval was signed by 18,000 workers and sent to the President’s office, but it remained unanswered.

The government initially promised to adjust the minimum wage if necessary but later reneged on that promise. In response to a subsequent request by the Supreme Labour Council to adjust the wage, Iran’s Ministry of Cooperation, Labour, and Social Welfare claimed that the inflation rate was going down and accused workers’ representatives of spreading false information.

Other protests against the inadequate wage increase followed – including the protests listed in the previous chapter – but without any meaningful results. When a few hundred workers filed a complaint to the

<sup>14</sup> According to Article 167 of the Labour Law, the Supreme Labour Council is a tripartite council comprising representatives of workers, employers and the government whose most important duty is to determine the annual minimum wage of workers.

<sup>15</sup> The official ones are Islamic Labour Councils, which are normally very moderate and by many Iranians considered to be in the government’s pocket. The nonofficial ones are the trade unions mentioned in the previous chapter, which operate independently and are not affiliated with the government.

Administrative Tribunal and requested the annulment of the wage approval, their appeal was rejected. Meanwhile, the Article 90 Commission of the Parliament also disqualified itself from investigating the issue. The situation remained unresolved, leaving workers dissatisfied and frustrated.

### ***Scheme to Determine the Employment Status of Afghan Citizens in Iran***

**Current Status of the Plan:** In process of implementation by the government and the Ministry of Cooperation, Labour, and Social Welfare

More than 650,000 Afghan citizens participated in this scheme of the Ministry of Cooperation, Labour, and Social Welfare. They registered themselves and recorded their employment information in the relevant website to enable the Iranian government to determine the employment status of Afghan refugees residing in Iran. Participation in the survey was possible since the scheme's start on 28 February 2023 until 5 May 2023 and took place in 15 Iranian provinces. Afghan men between 18 and 60 years old could participate in the scheme. The target population of this plan was about 1,250,000 people [of which an estimated 650,000 participated](#).

Under this scheme, (permitted) residence of the participants will depend on the clarification of their employment status. Participants will benefit from the legal advantages predicted in the plan. In contrast, those who fail to enter their information in the plan will risk losing their legal status in Iran and may face deportation.

Under the Iranian Labour Law, it is prohibited for foreign citizens without a valid work permit, temporary work permit, or temporary work card to be employed in the country. Employers found hiring such foreign workers will be in violation of the law and will be subject to fines. To enforce this regulation and deter unauthorized employment of Afghan workers, the government has initiated the plan with the backing of some semi-governmental workers associations, including the „Worker House“ (Khane Kargar) and the „Coordinating Council of Islamic Labour Councils.“ The primary objective of this plan is to gather more data regarding the residency status of foreign citizens and to make it harder for Afghan workers to work illegally.

### ***Bill to Organize Kulbars***

**Current Status:** Bill proposed by the government, waiting to be discussed in the Parliament

The government of the 13th Administration proposed a bill to organize Kulbars, which are porters carrying goods on their backs over the mountains, mostly in Iranian Kurdistan on the border with Iraq. Besides legitimate cargo transportation, some Kulbars also engage in smuggling commodities like fuel and tobacco to make a living.

The bill was sent to the Parliament in December 2022 through the double urgency fast track mechanism and is currently under consideration in the Economic Commission and the National Security Commission. Although it was expected to be approved and enacted before May 2023, it is still awaiting discussion in the Parliament.

The bill aims to strike a balance between national and local economies by allowing Kulbars to import goods in small quantities for five years, exempting them from customs duties during this period. Instead, a 5% added value tax will be collected at the time of goods delivery, and the entire tax revenue will be deposited into the treasury. The government claims that these funds will be allocated to the economic

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development of the border region, where more than 70,000 people work in this hazardous profession.

If enacted, this bill could significantly improve the situation for Kulbars, who have long faced dangers and legal challenges. For a long time, Iranian law considered the activities of Kulbars a crime, punishable with several months of detention or fines representing the value of the seized goods. According to UN Special Rapporteurs for Human Rights in Iran, Iranian border guards also systematically and indiscriminately shot at Kulbars, thereby killing and wounding dozens of Kulbars annually. The legalization of their activities by the Iranian government will hopefully end these atrocities.

Still, critics argue that the bill lacks essential expert attachments and might act as a way for the government to sidestep its responsibility toward the deep poverty in the border areas and their inhabitants. They also believe that some provisions in the bill do not align with the actual employment conditions of Kulbars.

### ***The Plan to Organize Public Sector Employees***

Status: *Waiting to be considered by the Parliament*

A plan aimed at restructuring the recruitment and hiring procedures for public sector employees was presented to the Iranian Parliament in October 2020. The plan encompasses a single article, which states: „Starting from the date of implementing this law, the employment of any workforce, under any regular and full-time arrangement, within all organizations subject to Article 29 of the Sixth 5-year Economic, Social, and Cultural Development Plan of the Islamic Republic of Iran (ratified on 4th March 2017 with further amendments and annexes), as well as their subordinate and affiliated institutions and companies, will be exclusively carried out through public announcements, nationwide examinations, or the recruitment procedure (employment examination).“

As such, this plan aims to centralize and standardize the hiring process for public sector positions, which could greatly reduce nepotism by promoting transparency and a merit-based selection process. It would also mean that public sector employees, including teachers and nurses, would work directly for the government.

Upon final ratification of this plan, at least 2 million fixed-term and contractual public sector employees will see their employment status changed. With the ratification of the public sector employment plan, contracting companies will be completely excluded from the employment market and eliminated. Therefore, this plan has also been named „The Plan to Eliminate Manpower Supply Companies.“ As a result of this plan, three types of employment will remain: permanent employment, fixed-term employment, and contractual employment. Other forms of employment contracts, such as hourly paid teaching contracts, service provision contracts, project-based contracts and indirect company contracts will no longer exist. Such a change in employment status for public sector employees will greatly reduce their employment concerns and lead to an increase in their salaries and fringe benefits. Altogether, the plan is considered to be highly beneficial for public sector workers.

However, the plan has not yet been approved due to the government’s failure to provide for the financial burden it entails. Some worker activists believe that the influence and lobbying of private sector contractors, who see their interests at risk, have been influential in delaying the plan’s approval.

### ***The Bill to Amend the Labour Law***

Status: *Final consideration in the cabinet*

Amending the labour law has been a long-standing objective for all administrations. However, such

amendments have always lacked the inclusion of worker representatives by means of tripartism in the decision-making process, leading to one-sided outcomes.

One year into Ibrahim Raisi's presidency, his administration introduced new amendments to the labour law, which are currently under discussion in the government cabinet. Some key provisions of the bill include:

- The maximum period for temporary employment of workers subject to the Labour Law will be limited to four years. After four years, the temporary contract will become permanent.
- Employers are prohibited from requesting checks or other monetary guarantees from employees<sup>16</sup>.
- Dismissing workers on disciplinary grounds will be made easier.
- The dismissal of female employees who are on maternity leave will be prohibited until the end of the breastfeeding period (until the child is two years old).
- An employee's marriage cannot serve as a cause for terminating their employment.

While the proposed bill does provide more job security for workers, it has also raised concerns among worker activists. They highlight the absence of tripartism in its proposal as a point of concern, urging for a more inclusive decision-making process. Additionally, worries have been expressed regarding the potential misuse of easier dismissal provisions and the practical enforceability of the bill if approved.

### *Seventh National Development Plan*

Status: Submitted by the Government to the Parliament

On May 29, 2023, the Iranian government's spokesperson announced the approval of the Seventh Five-Year National Development Plan during a special cabinet meeting. Similar to many other actions taken by Ibrahim Raisi's administration, the plan received [significant backlash](#), with various groups issuing statements against specific provisions. Some workers even protested in groups. Worker activists and experts in worker rights [criticized it as](#) a „confused plan,“ „non-productive,“ „causing inequality,“ and „fanciful.“ Academics also labelled it a failed development plan, stating it lacks essential characteristics such as „purposefulness, rationality, and multi-faceted legitimacy.“

Labour unions, workers in companies such as HEPCO (manufacturer of road construction machinery) as well as pensioners strongly protested, initiating online campaigns to demand the removal of the plan's anti-worker contents (see also the previous chapter).

According to Article 15 of the Seventh Development Plan, employers have the authority to pay „half“ of the minimum wage to employees „during the initial three years of employment,“ with insurance deductions following the same basis. Furthermore, employers will be granted the right to „cancel the employment contract in the first three years.“

Article 16 permits the payment of less than the minimum wage to vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities, under the pretext of „incentivizing employers to hire job seekers supported by Welfare Departments, Relief Committees, or Prisons Organisation.“ This directly contradicts two clauses under Article 41 of the Labour Law, which emphasize that the minimum wage should be determined based on the inflation rate and the cost of living for a worker's family.

<sup>16</sup> Sometimes, employers ask for a check or other monetary guarantee from employees. If the employee makes a mistake or something similar, the employer can terminate their employment and withhold the monetary guarantee, similar to a deposit for a house rental.“



## Additional protests

Also, numerous campaigns on petition platforms like „Karzar“ and „Farsman“ were launched against the anti-worker clauses in the Seventh National Development Plan. The National Supreme Association of Islamic Labour Councils expressed their disagreement with the mentioned clauses in a letter to the Minister of Labour. These associations also revealed the involvement of certain entrepreneurship enterprises, such as Imam Hossein Employment Institute in Isfahan, which helps find employment for vulnerable individuals and former prisoners in drafting these clauses. Labour activists believe such institutions aim to deregulate labour, leading to further workforce exploitation.

The plans towards retirement and pension funds in the Seventh Development Plan also sparked controversy. It proposes an increase of the retirement age by 2.5 years over a gradual 5-year process, citing the financial deficit of pension funds and their inability to pay pensions. The Technical Committee for the Follow-up of Civil and Armed Services Pensioners' Demands protested, considering this increase a breach of Iranian labor law.

As a result of the protests, the government withdrew some clauses. On June 18, the final draft of the Seventh National Development Plan was submitted to the Parliament, with Articles 15 and 16 deleted. The clauses concerning pension funds remained unchanged.

## Plan to Merge Pension Funds

Status: Being investigated by the government

The Iranian government is contemplating a plan to merge 18 retirement funds to address the country's pension crisis. The Ministry of Labour communicated this to reporters. The plan is the government's response to a budget deficit of 3,000 trillion rials (approximately \$6 billion) and its mounting debt to these funds.

The government believes that merging the pension funds could reduce overhead costs, for instance by the need for less staff, and bring about more efficient management. However, experts argue that this measure will not resolve the pension crisis, as it fails to address the financial gap resulting from the government's inability to meet its pension fund commitments and may lead to bankruptcy of these funds. Additionally, allegations of mismanagement and embezzlement, such as a missing \$400 million out of the steel industry pension fund, have fuelled scepticism regarding the government's handling of the funds.

Workers have voiced their strong disapproval of the merger plan through rallies in various cities, expressing widespread concern and discontent. Critics propose an alternative approach, advocating for a more democratic management process that returns control to the workers, the original owners of the funds.

As of now, the government's plan remains under investigation, and further details are yet to be disclosed.

## Iran's pension funds

Iran's pension system consists of 18 contributory pension funds. All offer defined benefit (DB) pensions to their members. The four largest ones, ranked by the number of members they serve, are as follows:

Social Security Organization (SSO)

Civil Servants Pension Fund (CSPF)

Rural and Nomads' Pension Fund (RNPF)

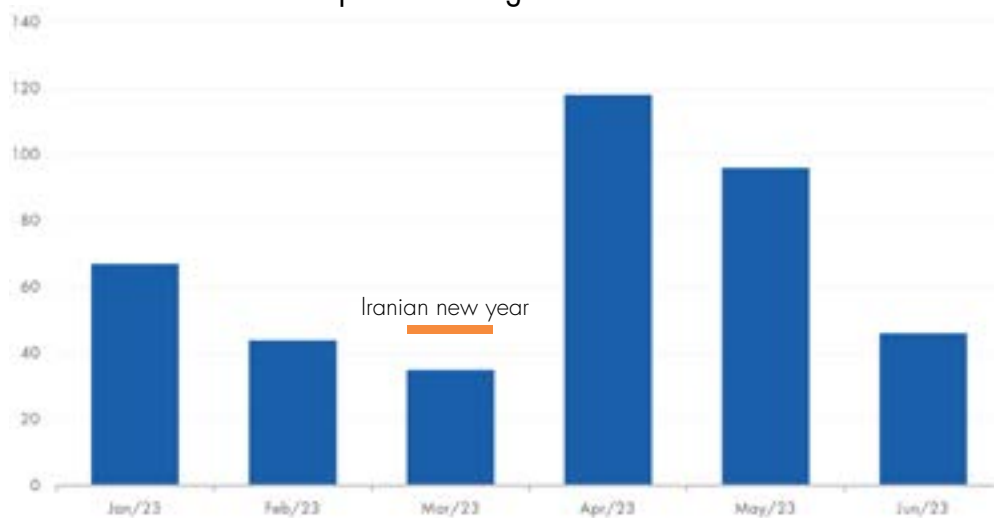
Armed Forces Pension Fund (AFPF)

## 4 Analysis & way forward

From January to June 2023, there was a notable increase in anti-government protests among wage earners, despite the restricted space for activism following the suppression of the Women, Life, Freedom movement. Investigations by “Volunteer Activists” on the gatherings and strikes that were reported in Iranian media<sup>17</sup> show that an average of 60 acts of protest occurred each month from January 2022 to June 2023.

During the period under scrutiny, worker protests considerably increased, particularly after the government’s controversial approval of the new minimum wage in March 2023. The strikes reached their climax in April-May, mainly because of the extensive strikes of oil and gas project workers.

Worker protests during the first half of 2023



Numerous groups that organized street protests and online campaigns in the previous period under study continued their activism from April to June. These groups include pensioners covered by the Social Security Organization, teachers, oil, gas, and petrochemical industry workers, municipal workers, and truck drivers. Although on the whole the protests yielded relatively little, the achievements of some of these protests keep the window of hope for activism open.

Achievements include:

- In June 2023, the Ministry of Petroleum agreed to implement the provisions of Article 10 of the Ministry of Petroleum’s Duties and Powers Act, benefitting both permanent and contractual employees.
- Following the strike action in May, the campaign of oil project workers resulted in improved employment contracts with some contractors, including major ones.
- Campaigns against four anti-worker articles in the Seventh National Development Plan forced the government to withdraw two of the most controversial articles, including those allowing the payment of half the minimum wage to new recruits for up to three years and unilateral worker dismissal by employers.

Meanwhile, legal victories were secured for trade union activists: the Administrative Tribunal declared „participation in trade union activities” as legal, leading to the exoneration of a teacher facing charges for

<sup>17</sup> The actual figures are likely to be higher due to restrictions on media reporting/protesting workers groups shying away from media attention out of fear of losing their jobs.

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attending trade union gatherings. The Supreme Court also exonerated a trade union activist charged with propaganda against the state due to trade union activities. These verdicts may set a precedent for other teachers, as well as other workers, facing similar charges.

However, despite these achievements, the government's treatment of worker demands and protests was unfavourable to workers, with the government employing the following two strategies:

### Avoidance

Ignoring the demands, postponing approval of protective and supportive rules and regulations and failure to enforce laws (such as the two-year delay in ratifying the law for organizing public sector employees in the Parliament, failure to properly implement the rating law, defective implementation of nursing services tariffing and so on).

### Repression

Employing violent, punitive, and suppressive measures against activists and trade or worker associations, including by beating or even shooting worker rights activists, by threatening and intimidating them and/or by excluding them for job rating systems or other job benefits or by firing them.

If workers' demands are not meaningfully addressed, protests are likely to deepen, expand, and disperse. The labour market's increasing instability and the worsening economic crisis have led to a rise in protests. A review of the demands of workers shows that the ongoing and deepened disparity between wages/pensions and living costs is turning into one of the most important causes for workers' protests and social unrest. Despite a severe crackdown towards the end of 2022, the worker movement has remained dynamic, and protests have continued.

### Recommendations for Iranian trade unions

Protest patterns vary across different sectors. Teachers engage in political and trade union struggles, while Telecom pensioners focus on trade union activities and lobbying to achieve their goals. However, all groups involved in labour protests face common challenges:

- Limited mobilizing and organizational power, which hinders widespread participation.
- Lack of tolerance and cooperation among Iranian trade unions.
- Poor discursive and organizational ability in negotiating with policymakers, particularly regarding wages. Protestors have not proactively engaged in a conversation with the government on the seventh development plan, nor have they shown intentions to build a relationship through dialogue. Instead, workers' representatives tend to adopt a 'we are against, hear our demands' approach, rather than a more collaborative 'we want to talk along' attitude.

In short, due to the lack of a broader approach<sup>18</sup> – and in spite of limited resources such as strike funds – many worker and trade union protests remain confined to street or workplace actions, leading to a prolonged and exhausting process. These protests, led by various groups including worker activists in different sectors, represent a wide spectrum of Iranian workers who share common grievances. To achieve results, adopting a broader approach is crucial, as demonstrated by case studies worldwide.

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<sup>18</sup> The extent of this problem varies across sectors. For instance, teachers engage in both political struggle and trade union protests, while telecom pensioners utilize trade union activities, street protests, and lobbying to demand their rights and achieve their goals.

In light of the labour movement's structural weaknesses in countering systemic suppression of workers (activists), we recommend the following actions for trade union and labour activists:

- **Periodical assessments:** Conduct regular assessments of weaknesses, strengths, threats, and opportunities in field and virtual activities.
- **Document events:** Record protest events and outcomes through official and unofficial workers' associations to enhance learning capacity.
- **Strategic planning:** Utilize short-term, mid-term, and long-term strategies to promote trade union actions and garner popular support.
- **Foster cooperation:** Cultivate an attitude of tolerance and cooperation among unions and avoid undermining each other's efforts.
- **Mental resilience:** Learn and employ techniques for mental resilience to navigate critical conditions and maintain morale.
- **Stakeholder participation:** Create and revitalize assemblies, organizations, and informal associations to maximize stakeholder involvement.
- **Leverage social media:** Utilize social media to assess needs, mobilize support, and establish virtual associations.
- **Form alliances:** Create inclusive alliances to pursue common demands such as wage increases and more permanent contracts and work toward an annulment of laws which restrict the formation and free operation of independent worker associations or harm workers' rights in other ways.
- **Get international support:** Complain to international institutions like the International Labour Organization and the Committee on Freedom of Association in cases of (severe) labour rights violations.

### **Recommendations for the international community**

Members of the international community can bolster the efforts of Iranian labour activists to improve the livelihoods of workers in Iran. Policy makers, labour unions and other international actors outside Iran can engage in the following activities:

#### ***Help Iranian labour unions diversity their methods of protest***

Share information and best practices on the use of social media and lobbying with Iranian workers. The use of social media as a means to pressure employers and the government to advocate on behalf of workers' needs is essential for successful social activism and strategic planning.

Support advocacy training and capacity building among Iranian labour unions, for instance through targeted online programs for Iranian labour activists. Provide training on the use of infographics, video clips, and other tools.

#### ***Stimulate and support the creation of independent labour unions***

Advocate to the Government of Iran and the International Labour Organization to allow free and independent labour unions in Iran.

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### *Strengthen trade union leadership in Iran*

Share best practices and skills to support worker rights activists and trade union leaders in their efforts to secure better working conditions for workers and their communities. This includes negotiation skills, using existing labour laws, exploiting legal strategies, etc. Share information and knowledge to call out the Iranian government through the ILO and elsewhere in violations of fundamental human rights; for example, when arresting labour union leaders.

### *Increase the visibility of Iranian workers around the world*

The international community could try and promote more (international) media coverage on (organized) labour struggles in Iran by connecting to journalists. Although international media attention doesn't guarantee success, it can provide valuable support to worker activists who face difficult and dangerous circumstances on a daily basis in a country in which the working class continues to be heavily marginalized.

Through all of the actions above, the international community can bolster Iranian labour unions and strengthen their position against the Iranian government. Consequently, the voices of Iranian workers would garner increased recognition, potentially paving the way for substantial improvements in their livelihoods.

## About us

Volunteer Activists (VA) is a nonprofit, non-governmental organization based in the Netherlands. From 2001 to 2007, VA operated inside Iran as the largest capacity building organization in the country. From 2012, the VA team continued its activism from Amsterdam following security threats. Assisting Iranian CSOs through research-informed capacity building is one of the primary activities of VA. Other specialisations include: facilitation of information exchange among civil society activists, advocacy and expansion of democracy and human rights and peace building - both within Iranian society and communities in the MENA region.

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