

## WORKERS RIGHTS WATCH

A semiannual report on labor protests and legal developments in Iran

Jan. - Jun. '24

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# Executive Summary

This report is the outcome of an extensive analysis conducted by the Volunteer Activists (VA) on labor-related issues and protests in Iran, covering the period from January to June 2024. It marks the fourth installment in a semiannual series aimed at providing regular updates on the labor situation in Iran.

VA's objective in doing so is to offer the global community a clearer understanding of the labor challenges and protests occurring in Iran. Recognizing these issues on an international level is crucial for advancing Iran's labor movement. Additionally, understanding both the needs of workers and trade unions in Iran allows international donors to better design their programs and initiatives, thereby improving organizational effectiveness. VA's connections within Iran enable it to supply this important information effectively.

The complex and diverse nature of Iran's labor landscape required thorough and detailed research to provide a comprehensive overview of the current issues and struggles. Our assessment included both primary and secondary sources, with VA conducting (online) interviews with local labor activists and consulting verified media reports, published research, and social media monitoring.

Our research over the first six months of 2024, shows dynamics typical for the state of labor under the government of President Ebrahim Raisi (2021-2024). In spite of governmental tendencies to try and suppress (organized) labor protests, brave workers nevertheless organized strikes on company premises and sometimes also took to the street or presidential buildings. Just like in preceding years, these employees were outdone in numbers by protesting pensioners, who turned out in even larger numbers, often holding rallies in front of provincial and national governmental buildings. In some cases, these protests actions also overlapped. Primary reasons for protests among workers and pensioners included harsh living conditions, unpaid wages and insurance benefits, non-implementation of laws and regulations, low wages, lack of job security, and objections to certain (planned) governmental policy measures, including the (limited) wage approval for year 1403 (21 March 2024 - 20 March 2025) and a planned retirement age increase.

One difference with the last six months of 2023 was that there was slightly less governmental repression of labor protests. This seemed merely due to the Iranian New Year and the holiday season rather than being the result of a deliberate change of direction of governmental policy, however. In any case, while

## January - June 2024

659

Total labor protests

82

Cities across Iran

40

Worker sectors

7

Government plans and bill drafts monitored

33%

Inflation rate

4<sup>th</sup>

Worker Rights Watch report

protesting for ordinary workers could already be risky – from potential job loss to being arrested – being active as a labor activist posed the biggest threat. As part of its policy to try and erode worker protests, the Iranian leadership particularly targets individuals that (are seen as) masterminds behind such actions.

## Key Findings

### 1. Protests Statistics:

- Over 659 labor protests were recorded across 82 cities in Iran from January to July 2024. These protests reflect widespread dissatisfaction and unrest among workers and pensioners throughout the country.

### 2. Drivers of Protests:

- The predominant driver of protests remains high inflation, which has not been matched by corresponding increases in wages and pensions. This economic strain has significantly impacted the livelihoods of workers and retirees.
- Another major point of contention has been the mismanagement of companies, which has exacerbated economic difficulties and contributed to the growing unrest among employees.

### 3. Government Response:

- There was a slight reduction in governmental repression of labor protests during this period, which appears to be more related to the Iranian New Year and the holiday season rather than a substantive policy shift.
- Labor activists continue to face high risks, including potential job loss and arrest, particularly those who are seen as leaders or masterminds behind the protests.

Other takeaways from this report are listed in Table 1.

In the period under study, the premature death of Raisi in a helicopter crash on 19th of May 2024 was a major event.

Unsurprisingly, Raisi's temporary succession by former first vice-president and fellow 'hardliner' Mohammed Mokhber, did not lead to a changing government stance regarding labor issues in Iran. Depending on whether Iran's new president, to be appointed later in 2024, will be of a similar hardliner faction as Raisi or a reformist one, this might change.

To help Iranian workers secure an outcome that is as positive as possible to them, there are several actions that can be taken both by Iranian labor activists and the international community, ranging from increased collaboration with likeminded parties to setting up platforms to facilitate the exchange of ideas. Meanwhile, educating the Iranian public about their socio-economic rights also remains important.

**Table 1: Key takeaways from labour protests and monitoring**

Pensioners united and were one of the most vocal groups, frequently staging protests in front of government buildings and often calling for the government to step down.

After pensioners, nurses and permanent and contract workers in the oil, gas, and petrochemical sectors held the most protests.

Compared to the first half of 2023, there were more protests in the first half of 2024 (406 versus 659)

Labor activists sometimes faced dismissals, salary denials, arrests, and prosecutions simply for advocating for labor rights.

There were several (proposed) changes in governmental policies impacting labor rights, both in favor and at the detriment of workers.

While some protests succeeded in forcing the government and employers to reconsider their actions in specific areas, the majority failed.

Despite Iran joining the ILO Convention 155, workplace accidents are still on the rise. In the six months covered by this report, over 125 workers died due to workplace accidents.

Even registered, quasi-governmental unions were repressed by the government in the period under study.

Iranian workers gained next to nothing following their protests.

# 1 Introduction

Iran is a country rich in natural resources, having significant oil reserves and a variety of other assets. Also, it boasts a diverse landscape and rich cultural history, making it a potentially attractive destination for tourism. Additionally, Iran hosts a relatively well-educated younger generation, which is essential for fostering a knowledge-based economy.

However, despite these advantages, poverty is rampant, with nearly one-third of the population living below the poverty line. Many Iranians need to take on multiple jobs to survive, if they can manage to do so, for unemployment levels are high. The housing crisis is another indicator of the deteriorating situation (see text box below).

Moreover, wages are not keeping pace with the nearly fifty percent inflation rate, while the payment of salaries is often severely delayed. Consequently, a growing number of Iranians are seeking employment abroad.

At first glance, international sanctions, primarily due to the regime's nuclear ambitions, may seem like the main cause for the economic decline, as they have severely hampered Iran's ability to trade and generate revenue. However, much like North Korea's poverty cannot be solely attributed to sanctions, Iran's economic woes are also a result of years of mismanagement. Misallocation of funds towards 'morality projects' instead of economic investments, obstruction of potential trade routes, systemic discrimination against women and minority groups, frequent government-orchestrated internet blackouts to prevent protests from spreading, and increased military spending have all contributed to the economic downturn. While the regime is

This report offers a comprehensive examination of the labor landscape in Iran, with a focus on the first half of 2024. It offers both details overviews of protest actions by workers and governmental actions in the realm of labor.

## Housing crisis

The current waiting period for a worker to purchase a 60-square-meter residential unit in Tehran is 228 years. High rent levels in Tehran and surrounding areas are forcing many workers to relocate to nearby towns and commute. Additionally, repeated economic shocks and salary delays make it nearly impossible for workers to secure stable housing without the constant worry of being evicted.



notorious for its political human rights abuses, protests against poor living conditions also come with risks. There is some space for workers to protest, especially in the case of pensioners, but the situation remains precarious. Labor protests can still lead to job loss, arrests, or other sanctions if they persist or become too disruptive. Perceived leaders of these protests often face even harsher penalties.

### Labor Migration

The Iranian Migration Observatory [reported](#) that approximately 2.2 million Iranians, emigrated last year for employment or other purposes, leading to crucial labor shortages in, among others, the medical sector.

This report documents the actions of Iranians who, despite these restrictions, bravely confronted the regime through street protests and other forms of labor activism. This includes thousands of pensioners, who have not seen the promised pension equalization and are particularly burdened by rising prices. To provide a comprehensive understanding of the state of labor in Iran, the report also details subsequent governmental actions and proposed legal changes affecting labor, focusing on the period from January to June 2024 as part of our broader project to monitor labor issues semiannually.

The report is structured to align with these two objectives. The following chapter provides an overview of key labor issues in Iran and focuses on labor protests that took place between January and July 2024, exploring their outcomes. Chapter three delves into governmental actions affecting labor issues during the study period, detailing governmental responses to the labor protests and outlining proposed bills and laws, or adaptations to existing ones, that may impact the labor rights of Iranian workers. The fourth and final chapter builds on the information presented in the previous chapters, evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of Iran's labor movement and offering suggestions for future directions.



*Faced with an economic crisis, limited political freedoms, and little hope for change, a growing number of Iranians chose to migrate to neighboring countries or beyond.*

The data for this report were gathered from three main sources. Firstly, insights were gathered from our contacts within Iran's labor community, offering valuable perspectives. Additionally, verified reports from Iranian newspapers were analyzed. Finally, social media monitoring was conducted. It is important to note that this report does not cover all actions and developments related to Iranian labor comprehensively. Information gathering in authoritarian regimes is inherently difficult due to potential reprisals and information availability varied across different economic sectors. Therefore, the labor issues in Iran are likely more extensive than what is documented here.

## 2 Labor protests in Iran

As mentioned in the introduction, fury 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 2024, it is first useful to better understand the precise reasons behind these protests.

### Labor issues

Despite the differences among various protesting groups of workers, the grievances that motivate them to engage in strikes and other labor actions, transcend sectors and therefore show a lot of overlap. The text below offers more of an insight into these.

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




As mentioned, inflation is very high in Iran. Food prices increased by 87 percent as a result (source: Trading Economics). Violating Iran's Labor Law, wages, pensions, and benefits haven't been adjusted to match these price developments.

#### *Late payment of wages*

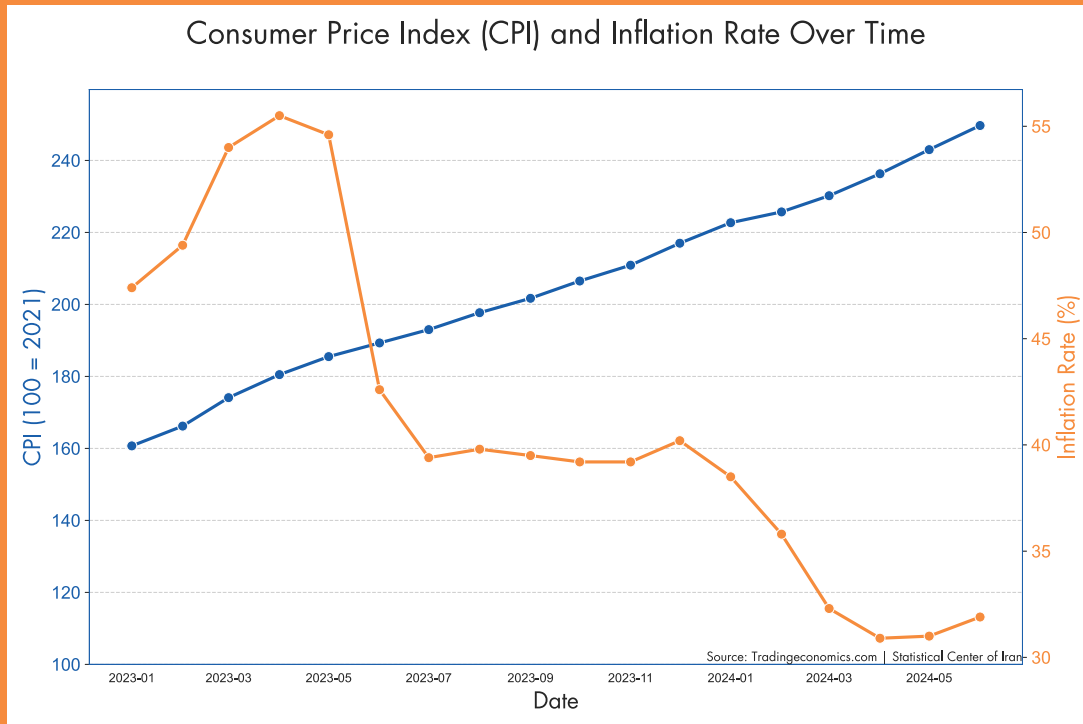
Not getting paid for many months is, unfortunately, quite common in Iran. The immediate payment of salary arrears or deferred health or pension insurance may therefore be an important demand of protesting workers. In some cases, salary arrears never get settled.

#### *Poor implementation of classification schemes*

Previously, many workers in the public sector, including teachers and nurses, demanded 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

		March 2023	June 2024
	<b>Rice (1kg)</b>	1.210.000 Rial (2.42 USD)	1.197.000 Rial (2.03 USD)
	<b>Meat (1kg)</b>	4.500.000 Rial (9.00 USD)	6.742.000 Rial (11.43 USD)
	<b>Egg (1kg)</b>	510.000 Rial (1.02 USD)	659.000 Rial (1.12 USD)
	<b>Oil (900g)</b>	700.000 Rial (1.40 USD)	627.000 Rial (1.06 USD)
	<b>Minimum wage</b>	53.082.840 Rial (106.17 USD)	71.662.840 Rial (121.46 USD)





Hyperinflation has hit Iran over the past years, with inflation rates ranging from 31% to 56% in the past 18 months. The Consumer Price Index increased by 32% from June 2023 - June 2024 (189.3 points versus 249.7 points in June 2024). Since wages have not kept pace with inflation, the purchasing power of ordinary Iranians has plummeted. This economic situation has pushed approximately 30% of Iranians below the poverty line.

rating or classification schemes do exist now, but in practice the implementation of these may be lacking or only be selectively applied.

### **Job insecurity due to temporary contracts**

In 1996, Iran’s Administrative Court of Justice stipulated that employers were allowed to use temporary contracts for jobs “of a continuous nature.” Currently, the majority of Iranians (90% of the workforce) are employed on temporary contracts. In a country with an estimated unemployment rate of 10.8 percent, this creates great job insecurity – whilst also making it more difficult for Iranian workers to insist that employers treat them correctly, as they can be laid off very easily.

People in non-office jobs are particularly likely to be contract workers. For instance, 95 per cent of oil workers are estimated to work on temporary contracts. Under these temporary contracts workers often have far less favorable labor rights than they would under a permanent contract. More equal working conditions and/or the acquisition of permanent contracts may therefore be an important demand of temp workers.

### **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.

### *No freedom of association*

During labor actions, demands for independent trade unions and freedom of association occasionally arise. While labor unions are not explicitly forbidden by law, these Civil Society Organizations need to be registered to obtain a license. In the case of independent labor unions, registration is typically denied, rendering them and their activities illegal. This is in contrast to the Islamic Labor Councils, quasi-governmental labor unions which tend to be very much under the control of the government, from which they also receive support.

### *Arrests of labor activists*

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

### *Dictatorship*

Anti-government sentiments are often integral to labor actions. Slogans like „Down with the dictatorship“ frequently emerge during protests. Although these sentiments gained prominence following the rise of Iran's protest movement, they have long existed. Increasingly, corruption scandals involving vast sums of money and the misuse of workers' funds, such as pension funds, have fueled calls for an end to corruption and demands for significant governmental reform.

### *Unsafe working conditions*

Work accidents in Iran continue to rise due to the non-compliance with safety protocols. A review of the reports from the Iranian Labor News Agency on work accidents reveals that between (end of) December 2023 and June 2024 alone, more than 125 workers were killed in work accidents.

Statistics show that in 1402 (21 March 2023- 20 March 2024), 2,115 workers (mostly construction workers and miners) were killed in work accidents, which equates to [5.79 workers per day](#). These workers could have been alive today with their families had simple safety protocols been followed, such as regular breaks in hot weather, the provision of safety equipment and regular checks of equipment and machines for safety.

Informal workers in Iran are individuals who are legally permitted to work but do not have formal employment contracts. Employers might rely on informal workers to keep their official employee count below ten. This allows them to circumvent certain labor laws, including those related to insurances and safety equipment.

Most of these injured workers were either workers in so-called blue-collar jobs, especially construction workers or miners and workers in large industrial factories. Informal workers, appear to be particularly at risk.

One of the deadliest work accidents in 2024 occurred in June, when a landslide at the Shazand Arak sand and gravel mine [killed four workers](#) named Mohammad Boulhassani, Nosratollah Yarmohammadi, Mojtaba Najafi, and Ayatollah Rezaei. None of the four had accident insurance, since they were informal workers.

Other informal workers are also at risk. According to Kurdpa, the human rights website which covers news in Kurdistan, 507 koolbars, people that transport goods often on their backs and often in borderlands got killed or injured in the Persian year 1402 (21 March 2023- 20 March 2024).



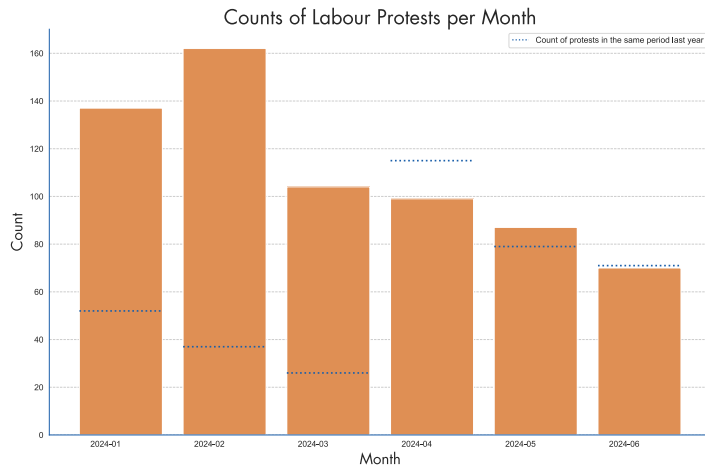
The Shazand Arak sand and gravel mine is one of several private sector mines where government oversight has significantly diminished following privatization at the expense of workers' safety. On June 16, one of the mines of Shazand Arak collapsed. Four workers are trapped and the rescue team found two dead workers under the rubble, as of reportings after the accident. Source: [Asr Iran](#)

### Worker Suicides

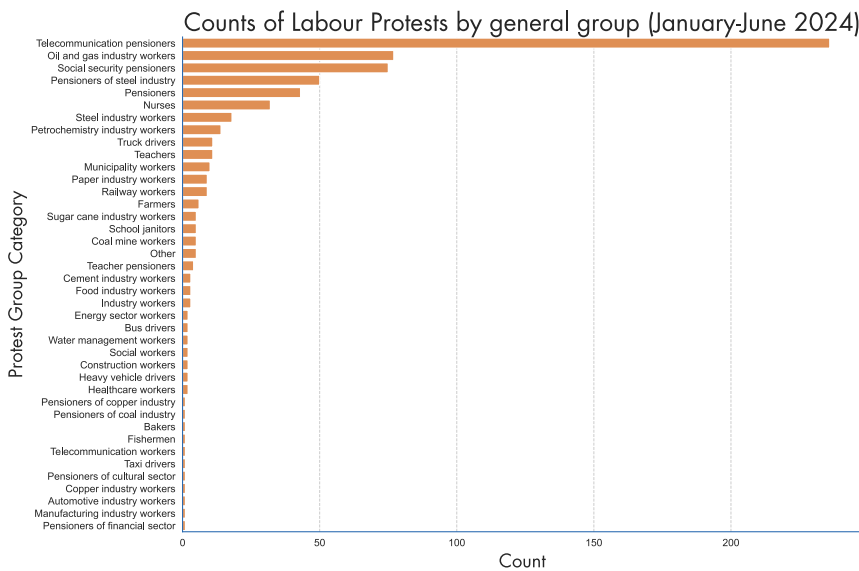
In extreme cases, desperation over their economic plight, may put workers increasingly at risk of suicide. Based on newspaper articles, at least five workers committed, or tried to commit, suicide between December 2023 and June 2024. Despair over their economic circumstances played a major role in this, as illustrated by their suicide notes or statements made in the workplace.

Instances of (attempted) suicide among workers	Date
A worker in Khaniabad fruit and vegetable market, Tehran ended his life by <u>hanging himself</u> .	January 2024
A worker at the Chabahar desalination plant <u>attempted suicide due to unpaid wages</u> . According to a witness, he went to a nearby unfinished building and, complaining about feeling ashamed in front of his family, intended to end his life. Eventually, after talking with officials and receiving his overdue payments, he came down from the building.	January 1
A (self-employed) FAWV trailer driver from around 35 years old from a village around Shiraz, <u>hanged himself</u> on a high-voltage power tower after his trailer collided with a bridge at kilometer 15 of the Sirjan-Shiraz route	January 30
A worker named Abdulrahman Ahmadi committed suicide due to his inability to cover his eye treatment costs amounting to 700 million rials (about 1300 USD), which meant, among others, he could no longer care for his disabled son.	February 12
A worker with about 8 years of experience at Boroujerd Textile Company learnt that he was fired, <u>upon which he intended to commit suicide</u> . Only when his supervisors stepped in and promised to help find a solution, did he change his mind.	May 6

## Statistics of labour protests between January and June 2024

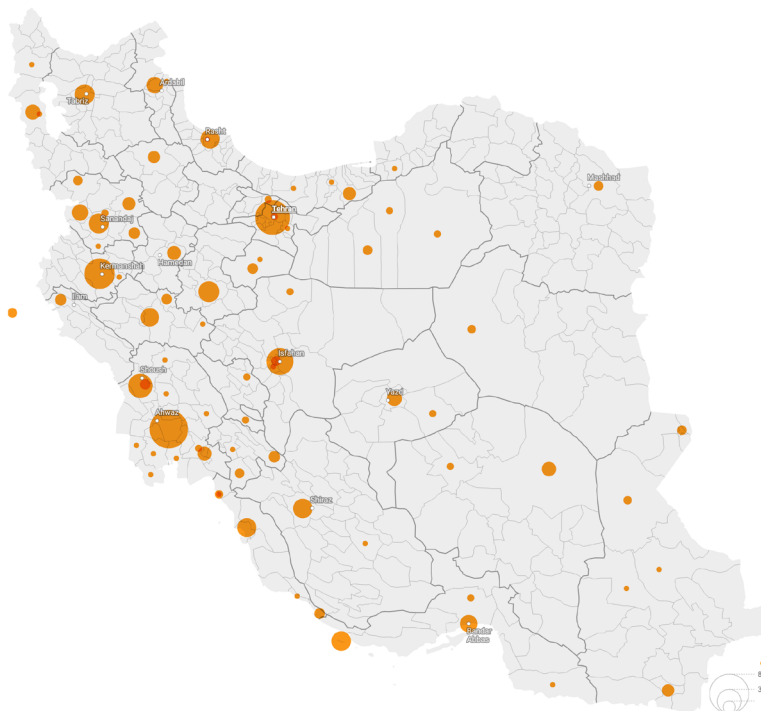


Compared to the same period in 2023, there has been an increase in the number of protests. It's important to note that these figures represent only in-person actions and do not include online protest activities.



The majority of protest actions are carried out by pensioners, who assemble weekly in various cities across Iran. 31 different industries and worker groups organized protest actions between July and December 2023.

Map of worker protests across Iran from January to June 2024



Most worker protests were registered in the western part of Iran. This area has more workplaces and industry compared to east Iran. The west is also more populated than the east. The overall geographical dispersion is similar to the same period last year, however, protests were organized in more cities than in the same period last year.

## Labor protests

While labor protests are challenging and dangerous in Iran due to the illegality of strikes and gatherings organized by independent, non-registered labor unions, they have occurred with notable frequency in recent years, including in 2019, 2022, and 2023. The first half of 2024 continued this trend with a remarkable wave of protests, as documented monthly by Volunteer Activists on the Davtalab.org platform.

These protests were highly diverse in character, occurring across various sectors. Among the protesters were oil platform workers, industrial workers, truck drivers, and school janitors. Additionally, it wasn't just 'blue collar' workers who took to the streets. Nurses, teachers, and gold retailers also engaged in protests. Thousands of pensioners joined the movement, further amplifying the collective voice of discontent.

A notable feature of these protests was their geographical dispersion. Protests were not confined to Tehran but spread across 82 cities, reflecting widespread dissatisfaction.

The expressions of discontent varied. Many groups articulated their grievances through physical gatherings, often in front of regional government or management offices. Strikes were also a common method of protest.

Beyond sector-specific protests, there were more general protest activities. These took the form of online campaigns and issued statements, demonstrating the multifaceted nature of the movement.

The next section will first outline the protest actions by Iranian workers in various sectors. Following this, intersectoral protests will be discussed.

### *Oil, petrochemical and gas platform workers*

On June 19, a nationwide strike involving oil and gas workers began. Calls from the Council for Organizing Oil Contract Workers' Protests partially instigated these. Initially involving around 8,000 workers from 60 contracting companies, the strike expanded [to 20,000 workers across 110 companies](#) by the end of June.

Both permanent and temporary workers from refineries, platforms, and terminals, including the South Pars Gas Complex, staged weekly protests. Although their protests coincided, the demands of permanent and contract workers differed slightly.

Temporary contract workers in South Pars demanded better implementation of the job classification plan, improved wages, and a 14-day on/14-day off shift schedule to allow more time with their families. They also protested against substandard living conditions, inadequate workplace safety, and the role of intermediary contractors. As one labor representative highlighted, disparities in living conditions are stark, with some workers enduring vermin-infested dormitories while others enjoy air-conditioned rooms.

Discrimination in the distribution of the Oil Card, which provides benefits like meal allowances and welfare assistance, was another key issue. Many informal and temporary workers are excluded from this benefit.

Permanent workers on oil platforms called for the removal of salary caps and demanded wage payments in accordance with employment laws. They opposed the Ministry of Oil's wage segmentation, arguing it could drive specialists out of the industry.

Strikes in the oil sector hold significant influence due to Iran's reliance on oil revenues, making the government particularly sensitive to disruptions. Historically, such strikes were pivotal in the overthrow of the Shah regime, leading to the establishment of the Islamic Republic.





Currently, out of the 205,000 active workers in Iran's oil industry, only 61,000 are permanent employees, with the remainder being temporary or contract workers [facing increasingly precarious conditions](#). The picture above shows the National Iranian Drilling Company workers staging a protest in the southern city of Ahvaz. Source: [Iran International](#)

### Teachers

Teachers and their unions organized the largest-scale workers' protests from 2021 to spring 2022. Following intensive government repression, with many union leaders landing in jail, the protests quieted down significantly. This pattern continued into 2024. Despite efforts of the Coordinating Council of Iranian Teachers' Trade Associations (CCITTA), only small-scale protests [occurred](#) on May 3rd to commemorate Teacher's Day.

Protesters demanded the release of all imprisoned teachers, free education for all, and an end to gender discrimination. They also condemned the „suppression and threats“ against educators. While there were calls for early retirement, the focus of these protests was less on socio-economic demands.

Despite the emphasis on political and social issues during the protests, teachers still experience economic hardship. A [survey](#) conducted by Volunteer Activists on May 1 among teacher activists revealed that the majority of respondents consider the pursuit of socio-economic demands for both active and retired teachers to be the primary duty of the trade associations. Transitioning from union activities to political activities was the least favored option, receiving only 15% of the votes. This sentiment may explain the very low turnout for the May 2024 Teachers' Day rally organized by Coordinating Council of the Iranian Teachers' Trade Associations (CCITTA), alongside the severe government suppression of CCITTA activities.

### Nurses

“I need food on my table!” was a slogan chanted by nurses during their protests. These started for the most part from April onwards and occurred in hospitals as well as [in front of governor's offices](#).

Besides higher salaries, protesting nurses demanded the full implementation of the Nursing Tariff Act. Already ratified in 2007, this law limits mandatory

Nursing associations, like Khanaye Parastar (House of Nurses), report that 50% of the 130,000 nurses working under the Ministry of Health's structure are on temporary contracts.



*It is common for Iranian nurses to be forced to work more than 120 hours overtime a month for just 33cts per hour - if she or he gets paid at all. In some cases this has lethal consequences. On the 13th of May the head of the Iranian Nursing Organization announced that three nurses passed away in April due to exhaustion. Picture source: [Iran Wire](#)*

For just 33 cents per hour, Iranian nurses often work more than 120 hours of overtime a month, if they are paid at all. Some nurses have died due to these extreme conditions. On May 13th, the head of the Iranian Nursing Organization announced that three nurses had died in April from Karoshi syndrome, which is death due to exhaustion.

overtime. Effective enforcement of this act would also allow patients to pay nurses directly for specific services, such as bandaging wounds – instead of payments being funneled through doctors. Such direct payments to nurses would not just be cheaper for patients; it would increase the income of nurses– who currently earn below the poverty line.

Another significant grievance is the prevalence of various forms of employment contracts and the lack of job security, especially among contractual workers who make up a large portion of the nursing community.

### **Railway Workers**

During the first six months of 2024, railway workers, particularly in Kerman, held gatherings and strikes. They demanded better labor rights, including improved working conditions, wages, and contracts, and sought the ability to work directly for the government-owned Islamic Republic of Iran Railways.

Another key demand was the release of arrested colleagues who had led or joined



*Track and infrastructure workers, responsible for the repair and maintenance of railway tracks, work under project-based contracts with minimal job security and frequently face delays in wage payments.*

earlier strikes [and the replacement of their CEO](#).

Out of fear of dismissal, these protesting workers did not contact Iranian media or go on social media, unlike other protest groups.

### **Truck Drivers**

In April and May, large-scale strikes erupted among truck drivers [across Iran](#) over a cut in the subsidized fuel quota from 3,000 liters to just 500 liters.

### **Industrial Workers**

On January 28, workers at the Iranian National Steel Industrial Group in Ahvaz protested outside the company's headquarters, chanting slogans like „[We haven't seen justice](#).” The protests lasted eight days, with further strikes in February. Workers demanded job classifications, better working conditions, and the removal of the allegedly corrupt CEO. They also called for the release of arrested colleagues and proposed running the factory based on workers' councils. Large groups of Ahvazians cheered and expressed support for the workers' demands during town protests.

Other protests for better wages occurred at the Pars Paper Industrial Group in northern Khuzestan province, demanding the removal of ownership from Melli Bank and greater worker participation in company management. Hundreds of workers went on strike, gathering in front of the factory. The suspension and blocking of entry cards for 38 workers, following their protests, further fueled discontent.

### **School Janitors**

In the past six months, school janitors and other support staff also protested and/or went on strike. They demanded salary adjustments and [the inclusion of overtime compensation](#) from the Education Department in their salary slips. In doing so, they pointed out that their demanding schedules prevent them from taking on additional jobs, making it difficult to support their families. They also called for equalization of pensions based on ranking and less wage differences between themselves and educational staff.

### **Pensioners**

In terms of numbers, it was pensioners who took the lead in labor protests in the first six months of 2024, however. Thousands of them demonstrated weekly [outside pension fund offices or provincial government buildings](#) in cities like Tehran, Kermanshah, Yazd, Shiraz, Hamedan, Ardabil, Karaj, Qazvin, Agvaz and Sanandaj. Chants that could be heard included „We won't rest until we secure our rights,” and „Enough of promises, our tables are empty.”

Three main groups can be identified:

#### **Social Security Pensioners**

Social Security pensioners, numbering 4 to 6 million, were protesting their economic hardships, demanding pensions proportional to the cost of living, efficient healthcare services, and the implementation of the „equalization” law. The Social Security Fund, facing resource shortages and managerial inefficiencies, has been unable to meet these demands.

#### **Civil Service Pensioners**

Likewise, civil service pensioners protested against inadequate pensions and inefficient medical insurance.



Their demands have become more vocal amid worsening economic conditions. These protesters also sought the implementation of equalization or salary adjustments, as mandated by Article 98 of the Civil Service Law.

### Telecommunications Pensioners

Around 50,000 telecom pensioners also continued their protests into 2024, demanding their rights following the privatization of the telecommunications sector in 2009. They face significantly lower pensions compared to other funds. Despite government directives for the telecommunications company to address these issues, the desired outcomes have not materialized.

Besides these economic demands, the protests by pensioners were often characterized by anti-regime slogans such as „Incompetent government, shame, shame.“ Sometimes pensioners also held up banners [calling for the release of political prisoners](#), including imprisoned trade activists.

### Inter-sector labor action: campaigns and statements

Besides protests in various economic sectors, there were also intersectoral protests. These took mostly the form of both campaigns and statements. Below, we spotlight some of the most noteworthy of these campaigns and demand charters which are mainly online, starting off with the campaigns.

#### Campaigns and Statements

The initiation of online campaigns and the issuing of statements are integral components of the demand-driven actions of worker activists in Iran. This trend has witnessed a notable uptake in the first part of 2024 owing to limitations arising from the closure of spaces for trade unionist and civil activities.

#### Campaigns

Three particular campaigns are important to highlight. They centered around a desired increase of the minimum wage in line with inflation levels by the Supreme Labor Council which yearly decides upon



The setting of the minimum wage by Iran’s Labor Council is traditionally a hot item in Iran. While according to the Iranian labor law the setting of the minimum wage needs to keep pace with price inflation, in reality this is not always the case. The setting of the minimum wage takes traditionally place ahead of the Persian New Year, also called Nowruz, and is decided by the Supreme Labor Council. Headed by the Minister of Labor, this council consists of six people: two government representatives, two representatives of the employers and two worker representatives. Picture source: [IRNA](#)

the increase of the minimum wage for the upcoming Persian New Year, which started on 21 March in 2024. The campaigns, all of which were posted on Karzar.net (The Iranian equivalent of Change.org.), will now be discussed one by one.

### Campaign: Requesting Labor Representatives Not to Sign the Wage Decree

Launched: March 2, 2024

This [campaign](#), urged the two labor representatives in the Supreme Labor Council not to sign the minimum wage increase decree unless Article 41 of the Labor Law was adhered to—which stipulates that the increase should reflect the inflation rate.

Underpinning this campaign is the reality that, within the Supreme Labor Council, government representatives frequently side with employers, leaving worker representatives in the minority. The campaign also criticized the previous year's wage decision, which set wages 20% below the inflation rate, causing significant economic hardship for workers.

Under the hashtag #WorkersRights, the campaign gathered over 5,100 signatures.

### Campaign: Requesting Labor Representatives Not to Sign the Wage Decree

Launched: March 2, 2024

This campaign urged the two labor representatives in the Supreme Labor Council to withhold their signatures from the minimum wage increase decree unless Article 41 of the Labor Law was adhered to, ensuring the increase reflects the inflation rate. The campaign highlighted the economic hardship among workers due to last year's inadequate wage increase of just 20% and years of economic strain.

A key motivation was the tendency of government representatives to side with employer representatives, leaving worker representatives in the minority. The campaign criticized the previous year's wage decision, which set wages 20% below the inflation rate, and demanded that future decisions strictly comply with the law to protect workers' rights. Under the hashtag #WorkersRights, the campaign gathered over 5,100 signatures.

### Campaign for the Live Broadcast of Wage Negotiations

Launched: March 3, 2024

5,800 signatures [were collected](#) petitioning for the live television broadcast of negotiations within the Supreme Labor Council on the minimum wage increase. The goal was to enhance transparency in discussions that are crucial to the welfare of Iranian workers, but which typically take place behind closed doors.

### Campaign: Demand for a 150 Million Rials Minimum Wage

Launched: March 15, 2024

Alireza Mirghafari, an oil worker from the South Pars Complex and a worker representative, [initiated this campaign on Karzar.net](#). The demand for a 150 million rials minimum wage for the upcoming Persian year is based on the argument that the current wage fails to meet the cost of living. Just like the earlier-mentioned campaign Requesting Labor Representatives Not to Sign the Wage Decree, the campaign called for the implementation of Article 41, Clause 2 of the Labor Law, which ties minimum wage adjustments to living

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expenses. The campaign went viral, gathering over 100,000 signatures in one month.

### *Joint Statements*

Statements that were issued by labor representatives in the period under study included:

#### **Pledge of the Organizations for May 1st**

This charter, issued on May Day, is known as the „1403 Pledge“ and is based on a previous charter of minimum demands published on February 14, 2023, by twenty associations. The pledge, backed by several virtual labor groups, calls for:

- Elimination of all forms of discrimination, class oppression, and poverty
- Abolition of contracting and inefficiency in social insurance
- Halting the privatization of education
- Complete ban on the execution of protesters
- Unconditional freedom of belief, expression, and thought
- Freedom for the press, political parties, trade unions, public gatherings, strikes, and marches

Signatories include the Pensioners Alliance, the Kermanshah Electrical and Metal Association, the Iranian Pensioners' Council, the Council for Organizing Protests of Contract Oil Workers, the Council for Organizing Protests of Informal Oil Workers, the Coordinating Council for Nurses' Protests, the Call of Iranian Women, and the Demand for Justice Organization.

The charter was both online and offline distributed.

#### **Resolution of the Associations for International Workers' Day**

On May 1, 2024, a resolution titled „Resolution of the Labor and Teachers' Unions for May Day“ was published. The resolution, composed of ten clauses, targets:

- Structural corruption of the regime
- Impact of the capitalist system on people's lives
- Government's repressive policies towards women
- Exploitation, cronyism, and government-sanctioned corruption
- Necessity of education in the mother tongue

It was signed by various independent labor unions, including the Coordination Council of Iranian Teachers Trade Associations, the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company, and the Free Union of Iranian Workers.

## 3 Government policies & law-making

The pursuit of workers' rights is intricately tied to the leeway granted by the state. This chapter examines government actions, policies and legislative proposals influencing labor rights in Iran during the specified period. The first part details and analyzes the government's responses to labor protests, including both suppressive tactics and more passive reactions. Following this, the governmental response to the online actions is assessed.

Finally, the latter part of the chapter delves into the legal landscape, exploring (the status of) proposed changes to labor laws that either introduce new issues or partially resolve existing ones.

### Governmental Responses to Labor Protests

#### *Suppression*

While Iran is a member of the International Labour Organization, it does not endorse independent activism. Even formerly recognized independent trade unions are now disregarded, and the government frequently seeks to hinder their activities.

The Iranian government's response to labor unrest, as detailed in the previous chapter, rests on two pillars: ignoring demands and responding proactively. The former is particularly evident in its responses to the demands of strikers, while the latter is more prominent in its actions against the protests themselves or the planning of such activities.

#### *Unmet Labor Demands*

In the first part of 2024 the government ignored the demands of protesting workers in recent times, making no concessions. This is unlike 2022 and 2023. This is particularly noteworthy given that some labor groups, such as oil workers and truck drivers, had significant economic leverage. Prices rose further due to truck drivers' strikes, but unlike in 2022, the government did not yield to their demands.

The reasons for this shift are speculative. However, it is plausible that the government's increasingly strained finances, due to inflation, the devaluation of the Rial, and increased military expenditure, played a role.

#### *Proactive Measures Against Protests*

In dealing with protests, the Iranian government took a more proactive approach. It aimed to pre-empt major labor protests, including issuing strict directives prohibiting labor actions on May Day, a traditional day for workers' protests. This year, even Islamic Labor Councils, the government's own monitored labor unions, were instructed not to organize any activities on Labor Day.

As in previous years, the government particularly targeted teacher activists, including those affiliated with the Coordinating Council of Iranian Teachers' Trade Association. Ahead of Teachers' Day on May 2, security officers arrested teacher activists, including at least four in Tehran during a call for a rally by the Coordinating Council of Teachers' Unions.

In Kurdistan, authorities clamped down on teacher activists of the Kurdistan Teachers' Union (KTU). On the eve of an election for the board of directors, which was to be held virtually on April 29, union member and election organizer Khalid Ahmadi was arrested by security forces. Seventeen other union activists were summoned and threatened with arrest if they participated in the election.

### *Direct Suppression of Labor Protests*

When it came to the direct suppression of actual labor protests, teachers were once more at the forefront. On June 12, a large protest gathering of retired teachers took place in front of the Budget and Planning Organization in Tehran. Dozens of protesting retirees were arrested by law enforcement and security forces, with reports of disproportionate violence, including officers breaking the arm of a retired teacher.



Even retired teacher activists did not escape the wrath of the government. Picture source: [Iran Wire](#)

Besides teachers, other labor groups also faced arrest, notably the protesting steel workers in Ahvaz. Dozens of workers were suspended, and security cases were filed against 24 protesting workers.

### *Work Sanctions*

Work repercussions were another tool used by the Iranian government to suppress worker activism. Some nurses who had been protesting faced six-month suspensions by university disciplinary committees. Teachers advocating for trade union rights often found themselves excluded from the teacher ranking system or subjected to penalties such as salary deductions.

Worker activists were sometimes also fired or forced into early retirement. At least 13 teachers [were dismissed in the past six months](#), and a group of railway workers [faced a similar fate](#) after participating in a petition against their CEO.

The consequences of such dismissals can be long-lasting. Finding new employment is often difficult due to the competitive job market in Iran and the government's practice of blacklisting individuals involved in protests.

Despite these measures, the government's response to labor protests in the first part of 2024 appeared slightly less punitive compared to the second half of 2023. The Persian New Year on March 21 and the holiday period likely contributed to this temporary leniency. However, compared to 2022 and 2023, the government's stance could still be considered slightly more relaxed.

This shift may be linked to its refusal to make concessions regarding strikes and other labor protests this year. As noted in the previous chapter, while arrests can dampen protests, they can also incite further



unrest. Aware of the growing societal anger over deteriorating living conditions and insufficiently adjusted minimum wages, the government might have chosen a more cautious approach, limiting its actions to what it perceived as the most urgent threats.

### **Governmental Responses to Online Actions**

Compared to sector-specific protests, some intersectoral protests had more significant impacts. However, these ultimately proved to be Pyrrhic victories.

Despite generating a relatively small number of signatures, the Karzar campaign „Requesting Labor Representatives Not to Sign the Wage Decree“ and the subsequent demand for live coverage of the minimum wage negotiations in the Supreme Labor Council in March were initially successful. The Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) accepted this demand, covering the negotiations live in the final days.

Similarly, the modest campaign „Requesting Labor Representatives Not to Sign the Wage Decree“ appeared to have a considerable impact. When the government and employers' representatives agreed on just a 35% minimum wage increase against the labor representatives' wishes in the Supreme Labor Council, both labor representatives walked out. Council member Alireza Mirghafari later commented on the semi-official ILNA news agency, „Whether you are a little under water or not doesn't really matter. What matters is that you are drowning.“

This walkout was unprecedented for two reasons. Firstly, it marked the first time labor representatives had ever walked out. Secondly, earlier in the year, the Iranian government had replaced a vocal labor representative considered too sympathetic to workers' grievances with one deemed less radical.

However, after an all-night meeting, the decree was ratified with only the signatures of the government and employers' representatives, with the approval of the Minister of Labor. The Iranian government subsequently announced on May 19 that the minimum wage increase would be a mere 35%. As such, the campaign for a minimum wage increase to 150 million rials failed, in spite of the successes advocates of a better minimum wage increase had made in the previous two campaigns.

In response, two new campaigns were quickly launched on Karzar under the trending hashtags: “Nationwide Workers' Strike” and “Impeach the Minister of Labor”. The latter campaign called on members of Parliament to impeach Minister of Labor Solat Mortazavi for displaying a lack of neutrality and violating Article 41 of Iran's Labor Law, which mandates that workers' wages be adjusted annually in line with the inflation rate. This campaign gathered [over 60,000 signatures](#).

Meanwhile, alongside the petition, three complaints were submitted to the Administrative Justice Court on April 30 regarding the minimum wage hike not being adjusted for inflation for the coming Persian year. One complaint was submitted by an Islamic Labor Council. Although these ideologically driven unions tend to be highly government-controlled, some of the workers' representatives they host are more vocal than others. Additionally, widespread anger about the insufficient increase in the minimum wage fueled these actions.

Despite these protest actions, the government's position remained unchanged; both the Minister of Labor and the minimum wage increase remained firmly in place.

### **Governmental Response to Statements**

Similarly, the jointly issued statements by independent labor unions, as outlined in the previous chapter, had no effect. This outcome might have been anticipated since these statements tend to outline future wishes

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rather than comprising concrete goals.

### **(Proposed) legal revisions**

As mentioned in our previous report, in the second half of 2023 Iran's Seventh National Development Plan was formally accepted by the Parliament. Governmental (prospective) policies and legislation in the period under study were unsurprisingly all linked to this plan or previous development plans. It also meant there were few new policy initiatives and most legal initiatives are ones under review by either parliament, government or the Guardian Council.

#### ***Pension Equalization for Pensioners Covered by Civil Servants Pension Fund, Armed Services Pension Funds, and Social Security Pension Fund***

Status: Under review in the Parliament

In June 2024, the head of the Budget and Planning Organization announced that the Seventh National Development Plan, which was adopted in 2023, includes the subject of pension equalization, which is to be implemented over three years: 40% in the first year, and 60% in the following two years.

This plan would clearly be highly positive for Iran's pensioner population. However, this announcement does not necessarily mean that pension equalisation is indeed going to happen, or at least not in the short run. The legal roots of this plan go as far back as eleven years ago, when the Islamic Consultative Assembly (Parliament) passed the Pension Equalization Law to increase retirees' salaries to match those of active employees over a specified period.

Article 98 of the Civil Service Law states that if the coefficient of the permanent employees' salary table changes, the government is obliged to adjust pensions proportionally to the part of this change caused by the cost of living. In June 2024, the head of the Budget and Planning Organization announced that the seventh plan includes the subject of pension equalization for civil servants, which is to be implemented over three years: 40% in the first year, and 60% in the following two years. Accordingly, the fourth, fifth, and sixth development plans already emphasized the need to align retirees' salaries with those of active employees and for funds to be freed to implement this. However, a lack of actual budget allocation has so far meant that pension equalisation remains a paper tiger.

#### ***The Plan to Increase Retirement Age and Service Record in the Seventh National Development Bill***

Status: Approved by the Parliament, awaiting ratification by the Guardian Council

Pensioner rights are also at the center of this plan. However, whereas the plan outlined above would benefit pensioners, this plan is widely regarded as eroding pensions rights. The plan stipulates that the maximum years of service for men will gradually increase to 35 years and for women to 30 years. Accordingly, the retirement age will be set at 62 for men and 55 for women instead of 60 for men and 55 for women which was the prior retirement age.

Approved in November 2023 by the parliament, this bill's fifth chapter, amending pension funds likewise raised concerns among civil servants and workers alike. So far the Guardian Council, which is responsible for ensuring the conformity of legislation with religious and legal standards, has not ratified the plan.

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

Status: Awaiting consideration in the Parliament



The Guardian Council acts as a de facto far upper legislative house and is comprised of six Islamic faqihs (experts) and six jurists. It has veto power over legislation passed by the Iranian parliament when it labels this legislation as inconsistent with the constitution and/or Islamic law. The council is widely seen as one of the most influential bodies in Iran. Picture source: [Shora GC](#)

The Plan to Organize Public Sector Employees is another plan that got caught in the pipeline. Despite being introduced in the Parliament about four years ago, is still caught between the government, Parliament, and the Guardian Council.

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

Status: Awaiting consideration in the Parliament

The Plan to Organize Public Sector Employees is another plan that got caught in the pipeline. Despite being introduced in the Parliament about four years ago, is still caught between the government, Parliament, and the Guardian Council.

This plan was already submitted to the Parliament in October 2020 and stipulates that: „From the date of the enforcement of this law, the employment of any workforce, under any consistent and full-time format in 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 4 March 2017 with further amendments and annexes), as well as their subordinate and affiliated institutions and companies, will be solely through public advertisement, centralized nationwide exams, or by undergoing the recruitment procedure (employment examination).“

Initiated by the parliament without allocated financial resources, the Guardian Council has blocked the plan until a budget is secured. Some worker activists believe that the influence and lobbying of private sector contractors, who see their interests threatened, are behind this delay.



Upon final ratification of this plan, a minimum of 2 million fixed-term and contractual employees working in the public sector will be organized, and their employment status changed. This is because the public sector employment plan, upon ratification, will result in the complete exclusion of contracting companies from the employment market, leading to their elimination. Consequently, this plan is often referred to as „The Plan to Eliminate Manpower Supply Companies.“ Under 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, indirect company contracts, and so on, will cease to exist. Thus, any consecutive and full-time employment in organizations will be exclusively through public job advertisements, centralized nationwide exams, and the recruitment procedure. As such, this plan would greatly benefit public sector employees, such as civil servants, teachers and nurses, by enhancing job security and an increase in salaries and fringe benefits.

### ***The Bill to Amend the Labor Law (Worker Job Security Act)***

Status: Under review in Parliament

This bill, sent to the Parliament for final review and approval in early May 2024, includes changes to workers' job security, specifically Article 7 and Article 27 of the Labor Law. Currently, Article 7, Clause 1 stipulates that the Ministry of Labor determines the maximum duration for temporary employment in non-permanent jobs, which was set at four years in 2019. However, the thirteenth administration, led by Ebrahim Raisi, increased this duration to five years. If a worker stays in the same job for five years, their contract automatically becomes permanent. In short, this law makes it more difficult for workers to obtain a permanent contract.

This bill also makes it easier for employers to dismiss workers. If the worker commits a serious offence, the employer can terminate the worker's contract without the need for three written warnings. Furthermore, the bill stipulates that the decision on whether a worker should be dismissed or taken to court for a serious offence will be made by the disciplinary committee and not by labor unions, which has drawn criticism from official labor organizations.

The bill also stipulates that obtaining guarantees, checks, and promissory notes as surety from the worker is allowed if the employer has given valuable items to the worker and needs security due to their value. This addition violates Article 27 of the Labor Law, which prohibits any form of security, checks, and promissory notes from the worker.

### ***Amendments to the Unemployment Insurance Law***

Status: Under review in the government

Alongside the ongoing efforts of the thirteenth administration to amend provisions of the Labor Law and Social Security, amendments to the Unemployment Insurance Law[1], approved in 1990, have also been on the government's agenda in the past six months. These amendments focus on Articles 1, 5, 6, and 7 of the Unemployment Insurance Law, expanding the coverage of unemployment insurance in terms of eligibility but reducing the duration of benefits. The proposed amendments are currently being reviewed by the cabinet and are expected to be submitted to Parliament as a bill soon. While praising that more people will be protected by the insurance, the reduction in the duration of benefit payments from 36 months to 21 months for single individuals and from 50 months to 24 months for married individuals has sparked

criticism from labor activists.

According to laws such as the „Labor Law“ and „Unemployment Insurance Law,“ eligible individuals for unemployment benefits are those insured by a workplace with a specified workplace identification code. The employer pays 23% of the worker’s wages as „employer’s contribution“ to the Social Security Organization, and 7% is the worker’s share to contribute towards their insurance premium. Consequently, 30% of the worker’s wages are paid to the organization as insurance premium so that they can enjoy unemployment insurance benefits when needed. The primary reasons that prompt governments to improve unemployment insurance services include providing stability, increasing psychological security for individuals during unemployment, and providing financial support to unemployed individuals.

### ***Proposal to Reduce Employee Working Hours and Increase Weekend Holidays***

Status: Under Review by the Parliamentary Social Commission

In Iran, the weekend falls on Thursdays and Fridays. However, in May 2024, the government proposed a bill to reduce employee working hours during the week and extend the weekend to two days. The Parliament agreed to reduce the working hours to 40 hours per week and designated Saturdays as a holiday, resulting in a two-day weekend on Fridays and Saturdays. According to the approved plan, the working week would run from Sunday to the end of Thursday, with Friday and Saturday as holidays.

Economic stakeholders, including the Chamber of Commerce, are supporters of this proposal. They argue that with most of the world observing weekends on Saturdays and Sundays, having holidays on Thursdays and Fridays in Iran would significantly hinder economic and business exchanges, leading to substantial economic losses.

Following the conclusion of the Eleventh Parliament’s term and the objections raised by the Guardian Council and the Expediency Discernment Council, this proposal was referred back to the Parliamentary Social Commission. The final decision on this matter remains uncertain. Labor groups have not yet taken a position on the proposal.

# 4 Analysis & way forward

The first half of 2024 illustrated many typical dynamics of then president Ebrahim Raisi's rule, reflecting broader strategies of Iran's hardline regime.

Key aspects of this policy included:

- Wage Suppression: Persistently low wages lagging behind the rising cost of living.
- Inadequate Enforcement: Poor implementation of existing laws and regulations.
- Unilateral Law Modifications: Attempts to unilaterally change labor and social security laws.
- Union Suppression: Crackdowns on independent unions and labor activists.

This led to a surge in labor protests driven by worsening living conditions, primarily due to the continued stark mismatch between wages and pensions versus skyrocketing inflation rates. Consequently, ordinary Iranians struggled to put food on the table and maintain shelter. Their plight was intensified by inadequate labor law enforcement, resulting in delayed payouts and unsafe working conditions.

*Table 2: Main Reasons for Protests by Iranian Workers (January-July 2024)*

Issue	Description
Unaffordable living costs	Skyrocketing inflation making basic necessities unaffordable
Unpaid salaries	Several months of unpaid wages
Wage caps	Protesting wage caps by oil platform workers
Contractor activity	Protesting continued use of contractors in most sectors
Low wages	Protesting insufficient wages
Job classification plans	Protesting non-implementation or selective implementation of job classification plans
Union activist repression	Protesting suspension, punishment, and dismissal of union and labor activists
Retirement age increase	Protesting raised retirement age in the Seventh Development Plan
Nursing services tariff	Protesting incomplete implementation and low overtime payments
The setting of the minimum wage for Persian Year 1403	Protesting the lack of an inflation adjusted minimum wage and lack of labor representative endorsement
Supportive laws and insurance	Protesting non-implementation of supportive laws and insurance for workers

Government response to these widespread labor actions differed from previous years.

### Unmet demands

Unlike in previous years, no concessions were made regarding the demands of the strikes or protests not even to groups with significant leverage such as lorry drivers or oil workers. This could be due to the regime's own economic pressures including price inflation and heightened expenditure on arms.

Other distinctive government actions in the period under study include:

#### *Less than usual suppression of Independent Labor Unions*

There was suppression of workers' protests and the activities of independent labor unions, but it was less intense than in preceding years. For instance, there were no major court cases against labor activists.

The holidays due to the Persian New Year in March, which commonly delay procedures, likely played a role in this. Other possible explanations include the government fearing more labor unrest following arrests, which already ran high.

#### *Targeting Quasi-Governmental Labor Organizations*

The government targeted its quasi-governmental labor organizations. For the first time, the regime forbade Islamic Labor Councils from organizing any Labor Day activities and ousted a labor representative from the Supreme Labor Council for being too bold.

This was most likely because even within these ranks, workers' resistance towards government socio-economic policy appears to be growing. It is perhaps telling that the successor of the ousted workers' representative, along with the remaining labor representative in the Supreme Labor Council, walked out of negotiations when the government sided with employers to keep the minimum wage increase well below the inflation level.

Meanwhile, the state's law-making efforts were mixed. (Proposed) changes were both detrimental and beneficial to workers. Beneficial plans that offered more job security and the indexation of pensions were not new, however, and were still in the pipeline after many years.

The failure to pressure the Iranian government to adjust the minimum wage for inflation - despite the action of the worker representatives in the Supreme Labor Council, and the online petitions by workers which gained a lot of traction, Iranian workers de facto gained nothing in the period under study.

### Future Outlook and Recommendations

Predicting the future improvement of Iranian workers' conditions is challenging. The outcome of the succession crisis following Raisi's passing could lead to a more moderate and progressive leader, but other scenarios are also possible. Even with a moderate leader, workers' rights may not improve amidst a fragile economy and numerous other issues.

To maximize the likelihood of Iranian workers' voices being heard, several recommendations can be made:

#### *To Iranian Trade Union Activists*

- **Build Support Bases:** Many protests begin without union involvement, decreasing their chances of success. Establish broad support bases through online campaigns, trusted contacts, or other means.
- **Collaborate:** Partner with like-minded organizations to create a united front, enhancing personal security and collective strength.

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- **Craft Powerful Narratives:** Use compelling narratives and slogans to attract support, focusing initially on one key theme. Successful hashtags demonstrate the power of this approach. Even when they remain, for now, without government action it is also a good way to build unity and solidarity among workers
  - **Explore Alternative Influences:** Consider other methods besides protests, the achievements of which are often low but carry great personal costs for the workers involved. One example is regional lobbying through letters to influential political actors and clergy.

### *To the International Community*

- **Strengthen Union Connections:** Reinforce links between foreign and Iranian labor unions to foster solidarity and to stimulate the exchange of ideas
- **Promote Socio-Economic Rights:** Focus efforts on advocating for socio-economic rights in Iran to improve living and working conditions.
- **Support Labor Activists:** Provide advocacy and resources to Iranian labor activists, helping them navigate challenges and amplify their voices.
- **Monitor and Report Violations:** Ensure a close watch on labor rights violations in Iran and report these to international bodies to maintain global awareness and pressure.
- **Educate the Public:** Raise awareness among the Iranian public about their socio-economic rights to empower them with the knowledge needed to advocate for their own interests.
- **Offer resources:** Help Iranian worker activists with targeted ICT security training programs as well as other needs that were earlier on identified by this group.

## 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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