

WORKERS RIGHTS WATCH

A semiannual report on labor protests and legal developments in Iran

Jul. - Dec. '24

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Executive Summary

This document presents the findings of a comprehensive study conducted by Volunteer Activists (VA) regarding labor issues and protests in Iran, spanning from July to December 2024. This report is the fifth in a series released biannually, aimed at delivering timely insights into the evolving labor landscape in Iran.

The primary goal of VA is to enhance global awareness of the labor challenges and protests occurring within Iran. Acknowledging these issues on an international scale is vital for the progress of the labor movement in the country. Furthermore, a deeper understanding of the needs of Iranian workers and trade unions enables international donors to tailor their programs and initiatives more effectively, ultimately enhancing organizational impact. VA's established networks within Iran facilitate the dissemination of this critical information.

Given the intricate and varied nature of Iran's labor environment, our research involved meticulous and extensive investigation to capture a holistic view of the prevailing issues, struggles and government responses to these. To that end, we utilized both primary and secondary sources, including online interviews with local labor activists, verified media reports and social media analysis.

Our findings from the second half of 2024 reveal significant developments in the labor sector under the new administration of President Masoud Pezeshkian, who took office on July 30, 2024:

Key Findings

1. Protests Statistics:

- Over 577 labor protests were recorded across more than 30 cities in Iran from July – December 2024.

2. Drivers of Protests:

- The predominant driver of protests is high inflation not being matched by corresponding increases in wages and pensions. This economic strain significantly impacted the livelihoods of workers and retirees.
- Other major points of contention were wage and pension and insurance payment arrears, alongside anger over difficult work circumstances.
- Another significant point of contention has been Iran's energy crisis, which exacerbated the broader economic challenges facing the nation.

3. Government Response:

- Labor activists continued to face high risks, including potential job loss and arrest, particularly those who are seen as leaders or masterminds behind the protests.
- There were several (proposed) changes in governmental policies impacting labor rights, both in favor and to the detriment of workers.
- Non-judicial government ways of seeking to quell labor unrest were on the rise.

Other takeaways from this report are listed in Table 1.

July - December 2024

577

Total labor protests

65

Cities across Iran

37

Worker sectors

29

Protest actions reached their demand

32%

Year over year Inflation rate

5

Government plans and bill drafts monitored

Table 1: Key takeaways from labour protests and monitoring

Iran's energy crisis led to disruptions in industrial activities.

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

Following pensioners, nurses and contract workers in the oil, gas, and petrochemical sectors held the next highest number of protests.

Some independent labor unions held their first general assembly in a long time.

Labor activists could face dismissals, salary denials, arrests, but also prosecutions simply for advocating for labor rights.

Both pensioners and nurses succeeded in forcing the government to (partially) give in to their demands.

A major incident at a coal mine in Tabas killing at least 51 miners and injuring 20 others, laid bare the dire working conditions for laborers and sparked national outrage forcing the government to take measures.

In a context where independent unions are banned, many labor protests erupted spontaneously. Registered quasi-governmental Islamic unions also occasionally engaged in activism; particularly in sectors that wield significant influence over the government, such as the oil industry.

To assist Iranian workers in attaining the best possible results, both Iranian labor activists and international actors can pursue a range of initiatives. These actions may include fostering greater collaboration with like-minded organizations and establishing platforms that promote the exchange of ideas and strategies. Furthermore, it is essential for independent trade unions to conduct general assemblies, even when just virtually, to (re)connect with their members.

1 Introduction

This report provides a comprehensive analysis of the labor landscape in Iran, focusing on the second half of 2024. It offers detailed overviews of worker protest actions and governmental responses within the labor sector.

By July 2024, Iranian workers were facing dire conditions. A combination of government mismanagement, nepotism, and international sanctions had plunged the economy into a deep decline. This economic downturn was further exacerbated by soaring inflation rates that were not matched by corresponding increases in minimum wage, as mandated by Iran's labor laws. As a result, the working class, along with many middle-class families, struggled to afford basic necessities such as food, medicine, and shelter.

However, July marked a significant moment in Iran's political landscape. At the start of 2024, it seemed that the hardline faction would maintain its grip on power, especially after then-President Ebrahim Raisi survived the 2022 street protests and was viewed as a potential successor to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. The unexpected helicopter crash that killed Raisi led to a surprising political shift. Although his temporary successor was also from a hardline faction, the subsequent presidential elections saw the emergence of 'wildcard' candidate Masoud Pezeshkian, who held reformist views. Pezeshkian ultimately won the election with a slim majority amid historically low voter turnout and was sworn into office on July 30, following Khamenei's approval. His relatively progressive stance on economic and political issues raised cautious hopes for change among some segments of Iran's impoverished workers and labor activists, despite widespread cynicism.

During his election campaign, Pezeshkian stated, „Inflation means emptying people's pockets.“ He not only proposed measures to combat inflation but also highlighted the injustice of stagnant wages, warning that inaction would exacerbate the divide between employers and workers. He expressed a commitment to aligning wages with inflation and advocated for better compensation for healthcare workers, including nurses.



Masoud Pezeshkian was elected to the Iranian parliament five times and served as Minister of Health and Medical Education from 2001 to 2005 under reformist President Mohammad Khatami. Of partial Kurdish origin, the former surgeon is known for his critical views. In response to Mahsa Amini's death, which ignited the 2022 „Women, Life, Freedom“ movement, he remarked, “It is unacceptable to arrest a girl for how she wears her hijab and then hand her body to her family.” He does oppose regime change, however.

Politically, Pezeshkian condemned the repression of protesters and criticized online restrictions, [boldly asserting](#), „What’s the need to filter the internet? We should set it free.“

Moreover, upon taking office, the majority of ministers in his cabinet associated with labor were affiliated with the reformist faction within Iran’s political structure. This included key positions in the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour, and Social Welfare, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Industry, Mines, and Trade, with the exception of one appointment (the Minister of Education).

Name of Minister	Ministry	Education	Professional Experience
Ahmad Meydari	Cooperatives, Labour, and Social Welfare	Ph.D. in Economics	Deputy Minister of Labour in the 11th and 12th Administrations
Mohammadreza Zafarghandi	Health	M.D., Vascular Surgery	Former President of Tehran University of Medical Sciences and Former Head of the Medical Council
Alireza Kazemi	Education	Ph.D. in Strategic Management	Deputy for Cultural and Educational Affairs under the former Minister
Mohammad Atabak	Industry, Mines, and Trade	Civil Engineering	Economic Deputy of the Mustazafan Foundation

Despite this potential window for change, Pezeshkian’s tenure saw numerous strikes and labor protests, including actions by nurses affecting surgeries, strikes in the oil sector, and thousands of pensioners demanding better pensions. This report explores the underlying reasons for this labor unrest and corresponding government responses. It also details (proposed) legal changes affecting labor from July to December 2024, as part of our broader initiative to monitor labor issues biannually.

In line with these objectives, the next chapter provides background on key labor issues in Iran before chapter three turns to the labor protests that occurred between July and December 2024. Chapter four examines governmental actions affecting labor during this period, detailing responses to protests and outlining (proposed) bills and laws that may impact the labor rights of Iranian workers. The fourth and final chapter builds on the preceding information, offering suggestions for future directions involving both Iranian labor unionists and international actors.

Methodology

Building on our monthly documentation of labor issues in Iran, this report employs a triangulation approach based on multiple sources. Insights were gathered from contacts within Iran's labor community, verified reports from Iranian newspapers, and social media monitoring.

Following this initial research, we conducted a targeted search for English-language sources, including newspapers and policy reports, to enhance accessibility and facilitate further reading.

It's important to note that this report does not comprehensively cover all actions and developments related to Iranian labor. Information gathering in authoritarian regimes is inherently challenging due to potential reprisals, and the availability of information varies across different economic sectors. Therefore, the labor issues in Iran are likely more extensive than what is documented here.

2 Labor issues in Iran

As highlighted earlier, protesting in Iran can be relatively risky, yet the dire circumstances faced by the working class compel Iranian workers to take to the streets in protest. Before examining the specific labor demonstrations that occurred in the latter half of 2024, it is important to explore the underlying factors that fuel these protests. Although the protesting workers come from diverse backgrounds and sectors, their shared grievances often overlap, driving them to participate in strikes and other forms of labor activism. The following text provides a deeper understanding of these issues.

Unadjusted Salaries, Benefits, and Pensions

Due to a combination of sanctions and governmental mismanagement, Iran has experienced hyperinflation in recent years with Iran's Rial steadily experiencing a deep fall against the dollar. Official sources indicate that inflation during the second half of 2024 reached 32%.

As the minimum wage has failed to keep up with inflation in spite of many (online) protests in the first half of 2024, the purchasing power of ordinary Iranians has significantly declined. Consequently, more than one third of the nation now lives below the poverty line in a nation abundant in natural resources. Bartering valuable items for food is increasingly common as is having two jobs to survive. Raising wages and pensions in line with price inflation is therefore a demand of many protestors, regardless of the sector they work in.

Delayed Wage Payments

Adding further misery to the lives of ordinary Iranians, having to go months without pay is distressingly common in Iran. As a result, the prompt settlement of overdue salaries or delayed health and pension contributions has become a crucial demand among protesting workers. This situation affects both employees in private companies and those in government services, including nurses and teachers. In some instances, these wage arrears remain unresolved indefinitely.

Ineffective Implementation of Pay Structures

In the past, public sector employees, including teachers and nurses, successfully advocated for the introduction of progressive pay scales tied to objectively measurable criteria such as education, experience, and performance. Although some sectors have implemented job classification systems, their enforcement is often inconsistent and selectively applied.

Job Instability

In 1996, Iran's Administrative Court of Justice ruled that employers could utilize temporary contracts for positions deemed "of a continuous nature." Currently, around 90% of the Iranian workforce is employed under such temporary agreements. With an estimated unemployment rate of 10.8%, this situation fosters significant job insecurity, making it challenging for workers to advocate for fair treatment, as they can be easily dismissed.

Workers in non-office roles are particularly vulnerable to temporary contracts. For instance, an estimated 95% of oil workers

fall into this category. These temporary positions often come with diminished labor rights compared to permanent contracts, leading temp workers to demand more equitable working conditions and the possibility of securing permanent employment.

Nepotism

Strikes in Iran sometimes target the mismanagement of companies, with workers calling for more capable leadership or government intervention. Following the partial privatization of many former state-owned enterprises, many appointed CEOs and senior managers owe their positions more to their connections with the Iranian government than to their qualifications. This mismanagement can severely impact a company's performance, resulting in job losses and unpaid wages for employees.

Restrictions on Freedom of Association

During labor protests, calls for independent trade unions and the right to associate freely often emerge. Although labor unions are not explicitly banned, they must be registered to operate legally. Independent unions typically face registration denials, rendering their activities illegal. In contrast, Islamic Labor Councils, which are quasi-governmental unions, operate under significant government control and receive state support.

Detention of Labor Activists

As will be explored in greater detail in the next chapter, even peaceful labor activists in Iran face arrest and imprisonment. Demands for their release frequently feature in protests, particularly those organized by their respective unions. When ordinary workers are detained during strikes or protests, calls for their release can also spark subsequent demonstrations.

Anti-Government Sentiments

Labor protests often convey strong anti-government sentiments, with demonstrators chanting slogans like „Down with the dictatorship.“ Recent corruption scandals involving substantial sums of money and the misappropriation of workers' funds have heightened calls for significant governmental reform.

Meanwhile, government's spending on foreign policy priorities during the ongoing economic crisis has sparked increasing criticism from ordinary Iranians. This discontent is evident in [social media postings](#) in response to the country's energy crisis such as, „While there are donation boxes throughout cities in Iran to help the people of Gaza and Lebanon, the Islamic Republic doesn't care about Iranians,“ and „Our government is better at launching missiles than securing its own citizens' welfare.“ Pezeshkian was also elected on the promise of advancing a policy of better ties with the West, so as to get rid of the sanctions.

Hazardous Working Conditions

Workplace accidents in Iran are alarmingly common. In the first six months of 2024, around 730 workers were killed in workplace accidents, with the highest fatality rates occurring in construction and coal mining. Miners, in particular, face heightened risks.

This was vividly illustrated in the second half of 2024, when at least 51 miners lost their lives in a

Injury Rates in mines

- For every 100 miners, one or two experience severe injuries, disabilities, or death each year.
- Studies indicate that while accidents were more frequent before 2017, the death rate has increased in recent years.
- Many experts blame high workplace accident rates on:
- Managerial incompetence, especially in privatized mines.
- Lack of safety protocols and emergency preparedness.
- Low wages and job insecurity, which prevent workers from demanding better conditions.

Continued unsafety

Following the Tabas Mine accident, the government ordered the closure of unsafe mines.

However, our research shows that at least six more miners died in accidents since the Tabas disaster, notably:

- A miner at Kalat Golestan Coal Mine
- A miner at Khaf Iron Ore Mine
- Two miners at Sarcheshmeh Copper Mine (Kerman)
- A miner at Tazareh Coal Mine (Semnan)
- A miner at Nahavand Stone Mine

In all cases, lack of safety measures played an important role.

gas explosion at the Tabas Coal Mine in South Khorasan province on September 21, 2024. Footage revealed that some miners were so impoverished that they were wearing broken boots. Parliamentary research indicated that many safety protocols had not been followed by management, including a non-functional alarm system. This situation sparked national outrage and widespread protests on social media.

For other 'blue collar' workers safe working conditions can also be an issue. This is, for instance,

the case for workers in the oil industry, whose outdoor jobs are both physically demanding and often require the use of high risk equipment. Moreover, many of these workers are paid the bare minimum in terms of wages, especially when they are contract workers.



Many fatal mining accidents go unreported, as workers on temporary contracts fear retaliation or job loss if they speak out.

Energy Crisis

While spontaneous energy cuts had already posed challenges in Iran for some time, the country faced an unprecedented energy crisis in the second half of 2024 due to gas shortages. This situation resulted in state-mandated energy cuts, particularly during extreme hot and cold periods, as authorities sought to conserve energy.

The crisis not only created significant problems at the household level but also forced industrial complexes

and businesses to close their doors several days a week for extended periods. This led to increased job insecurity, as many employers, in an effort to cut costs and remain operational, were compelled to lay off staff, raising the risk of bankruptcy.

„Most units are struggling due to frequent power outages. This has resulted in decreased daily factory operations and therefore the number of shifts, and in some cases, there is no longer any overtime work available. Additionally, the shutdown of heating systems has made it extremely difficult to endure the cold,“ expressed a worker from a company in Shamsabad Industrial Town, Tehran, during an interview with Volunteer Activists regarding the mandatory power cuts.

3 Labor protests in Iran

Labor protests in Iran are fraught with challenges and dangers due to the illegality of strikes and the de facto ban on independent labor unions, which can not obtain necessary government permits. As a result, strikes often occur spontaneously or are merely orchestrated online by independent trade unions. Occasionally, activist factions within quasi-governmental Islamic trade unions attempt to organize protests, but these efforts rarely confronted the government directly.

Labor protests during the period under study occurred all over the country; rather than being limited to Tehran, they took place in over 30 cities, reflecting widespread worker dissatisfaction. We identified that most labor protests involved workers from the oil and gas industries, healthcare, education sectors (including non-permanent hourly-paid teachers, school service staff, and retired teachers), road construction and machinery industries and a range of pensioners covered by the Social Security Fund, Civil Servants Pension Fund, Steel Industry Pension Fund, and Telecommunications Pensioners.⁷

Expressions of discontent varied. In addition to strikes, many groups voiced their grievances through physical gatherings, often in front of management offices. Retirees typically protested outside government buildings.

Beyond sector-specific actions, there were broader protest activities, including targeted online campaigns and public statements, highlighting the multifaceted nature of Iran's labor movement.

The next section outlines the protest actions by Iranian workers across various sectors, followed by a discussion of intersectoral protests. To give a better idea of what the protests looked like, the discussion of the sector based protests will particularly highlight protest actions of the three biggest groups: nurses, gas and oil workers and retirees.

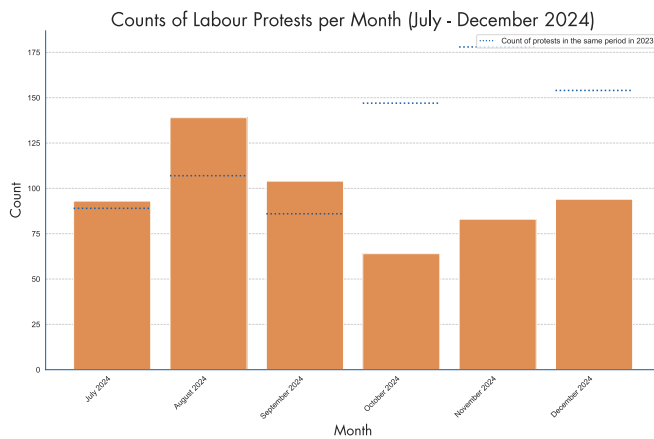
Key Labor Crisis Centres in Iran

- Nurses
- Retirees
- Workers in the oil, gas, and petrochemical industries
- Teachers awaiting employment status conversion and school service staff
- Unemployed or dismissed local workers
- Contract and outsourced workers in telecommunications
- Railway track and infrastructure workers
- Municipal service workers
- Industrial workers

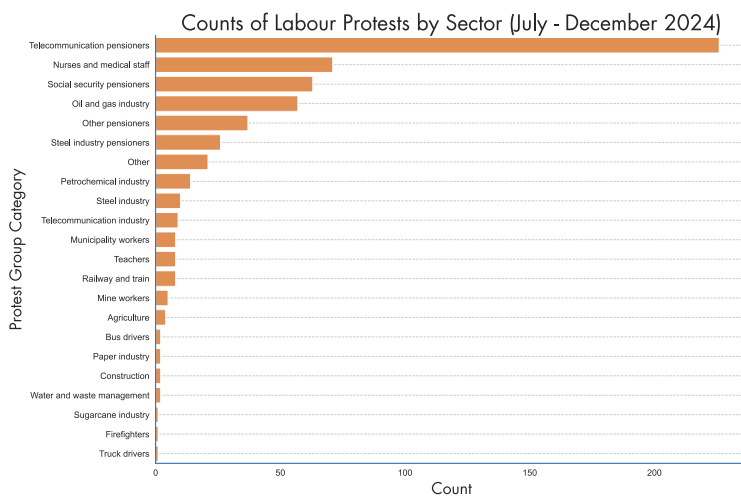
Nurses' Protests

In August, just weeks after Pezeshkian took office as president, nurses across the country organized protests through strikes and rallies, often taking place in hospitals and outside local government offices. According to the Free Union of Iranian Workers, the strike began at Imam Ali Hospital in Karaj on July 31, as [reported](#)

Statistics of labour protests between July and December 2024

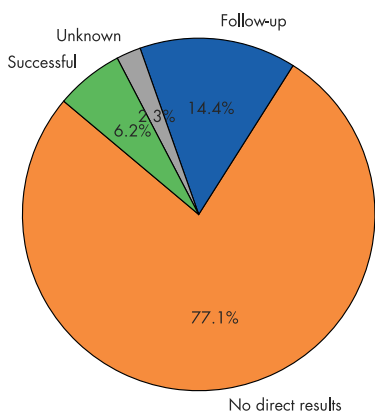


Compared to the same period in 2023, there has been an increase in the number of protests. It's important to note that these figures represent only in-person actions and do not include online protest activities.

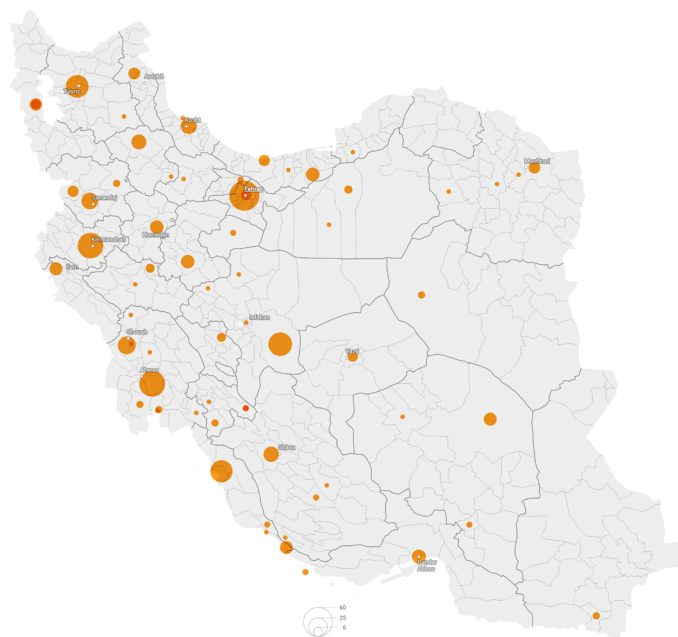


The majority of protest actions are carried out by pensioners, who assemble weekly in various cities across Iran. Between July and December 2024, workers organized protests in 37 different sectors.

Distribution of Protest Outcomes



The majority of protest actions did not result in immediate change. However, over 6% of the protest actions were successful, resulting in the employer making concessions. Over 14% is negotiating or the employer has made promises, which need further follow-up.



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.

[on Telegram](#). However, Shiraz quickly emerged as the main epicenter of the protests.

The widespread demonstrations in Shiraz, which resulted in the suspension of non-emergency operations at prominent hospitals like Namazi Hospital, inspired nurses from other cities to join the strike.

Similar to how Mahsa Amini's death ignited widespread protests in Iran, the passing of a female nurse significantly fueled the nurses' protests in the latter half of 2024. The reported death of nurse Parvaneh Mandani from exhaustion on August 2 [sparked protests in her hometown Shiraz](#), which rapidly spread nationwide. Earlier, four other nurses had died under similar circumstances, and during the protests, another nurse, Elaheh Kazemi, fell into a coma due to grueling working conditions, as reported by Iran International.

Gradually, nurses in cities such as Arak, Zanjan, Fasa, Jahrom, Yasuj, Qazvin, Ahvaz, Mashhad, and Bushehr joined the protests against the Ministry of Health's policies. Nurses from Isfahan, Kermanshah, Hamadan, and other cities also participated. By the end of August, according to the Secretary-General of Khane Parastar (the Nurses' Home, a political and labor organization), protests had spread to 21 cities and approximately 50 hospitals.



Workforce shortages, excessive workloads, and inadequate wages were driving Iranian nurses to despair.

The nurses' demands included:

- Improved pay
- An end to forced overwork
- Increased overtime pay (which was a meager 0.33 cents)
- Resolution of understaffing issues (the government had failed to allocate funds for hiring new nurses for years)
- Proper implementation of the nursing services tariff law, allowing nurses to independently carry out and charge for certain services without needing a doctor's approval.

During their strikes and rallies, slogans chanted or displayed on banners included: "From Shiraz to Mashhad,

strike, strike," "A nurse will die, but will not accept humiliation," "Expenses in dollars, our wages in rials," "No to mandatory overtime" while "Incompetent officials, resign!" [echoed in Zanjan](#). More lighthearted slogans, such as „Code 99," also emerged, and one nurse even expressed her frustrations through [rap](#), with the footage going viral on social media.

While some of these protests erupted spontaneously, the recently formed Coordinating Council of Nurses' Protests also [issued calls for action](#). A notable difference in the protests during the first half of 2024 was their broader and more radical nature. This time, not only did doctors and other medical staff join the movement, but emergency department nurses—who were grappling with personnel shortages and a lack of equipment—participated as well.

The collective actions of the nurses severely disrupted medical services across Iran, leading to the cancellation of surgeries nationwide, except for the most urgent cases, and limiting access to emergency departments. As a result, the strikes exerted significant pressure on the government.

Despite the challenges, the nurses received substantial support from independent trade unions and the public. The Labor Union Organization Assistance Coordination Committee, the Khuzestan Province Pensioners Alliance, and Haft Tappeh sugar plant workers issued a statement of solidarity: "Workers, teachers, and pensioners have similar demands to nurses concerning wages and welfare benefits. Until conditions improve, the already commercialized health system will lead more people to face death and destruction."

The Coordinating Council of the Iranian Teachers Trade Association also expressed support, stating, "We hope our dear nurses achieve their demands through unity and activism... Consider us your sympathizers."

Even the Nurses' Home showed support from its more activist members. Secretary-General Mohammad Sharifi Moghaddam noted: "It is increasingly rare to find these days a nurse without a foreign language textbook, as the majority are seeking to emigrate abroad due to their terrible working conditions."

Oil, Petrochemical, and Gas Platform Workers

In addition to the nurses' strikes, the oil, gas, and petrochemical industries became significant arenas of protest during the period covered by this report. As noted in our [previous report](#), a nationwide strike involving oil and gas workers began on June 19, initiated by the unofficial Council for Organizing Oil Contract-Workers' Protests. Initially, around 8,000 workers from 60 contracting companies participated, but by the end of June, the strike had expanded to an estimated [20,000 workers across 100 companies](#), impacting several refineries, including the third and fifth facilities of South Pars—the world's largest natural gas field. By mid-July, participation surged to an estimated 23,000 oil workers, including permanent staff, across 123 companies. The South Pars Oil and Gas Workers' Syndicate—a state-influenced union—was also involved in organizing the protests, which saw both contract and permanent oil workers joining the strike.

Protesting workers held gatherings one or two days a week, primarily on Tuesdays, which became known as #ProtestTuesdays on social media.

Workers in operational zones and gas platforms made several key demands, including:

- Wage adjustments in accordance with labor laws
- Removal of salary caps

Strikes in the oil sector are particularly influential due to Iran's reliance on oil revenues, making the government sensitive to disruptions. Historically, such strikes played a crucial role in the overthrow of the Shah regime, leading to the establishment of the Islamic Republic.

- Implementation of Article 10 of the Oil Ministry Law, which mandates wage and benefit reforms
- Elimination of unfair job classifications

Contract workers, particularly in South Pars Gas Refineries and Mahshahr Petrochemical Plants, demanded:

- Job status conversion and elimination of middlemen contractors
- Implementation of the job classification scheme (which was supposed to be in effect by May 2024)
- Fair compensation and benefits

Additional demands from contract oil workers included:

- Immediate reinstatement of all dismissed workers
- A safer work environment
- The right to organize, assemble, and protest

The protests also addressed the unjust dismissal of two labor activists by the National Gas Company's selection board: Hojjat Rezaei, a member of the South Pars Oil and Gas Workers' Syndicate and worker representative at the 6th South Pars refinery, and Yaser Ahmadinejad, an employee of Arkan Saless Excavation Company. Despite filing an appeal, Ahmadinejad's case remains unresolved, as does Hojjat Rezaei's, leaving them in a state of uncertainty.

Reflecting on their dismissals, Hojjat Rezaei stated, "The National Gas Company's selection board falsely framed us as radical labor activists with a history of arrest and detention. We were accused and detained due to the protests we held in March 2023, but the court cleared us of all charges the very next day. Yet, I am still not allowed to return to work."



Currently, out of the 205,000 active workers in Iran's oil industry, only 61,000 are estimated to be permanent, with the remainder being temporary or contract workers [facing increasingly precarious conditions](#).

Protests occasionally included work stoppages during certain shifts, with gatherings typically consisting of several dozen workers at individual refineries. A notable protest on November 26 illustrated the scale of discontent among workers facing difficult and deteriorating working conditions. According to unofficial reports, approximately 3,000 workers participated out of a total of 14,000 at the South Pars Gas Complex, representing about 21% of the workforce—a significant figure. Wildcat strikes also occurred.

By December 2024, protests continued. For instance, contract workers at Gachsaran Oil and Gas Company, a subsidiary of the National Iranian South Oil Company, staged protests over unfair wages, job security concerns, and livelihood issues, accusing Iran's oil and gas sector of discriminatory practices. Meanwhile, [employees of Fajr Jam Gas Refinery in southern Iran](#) continued a month-long series of protests, gathering in front of their administration building in Asaluyeh, southern Iran, to demand action on their grievances.

Pensioners

Despite their advanced age, pensioners hold a unique position within the landscape of labor protests in Iran. They represent the largest demographic group participating in these movements. Pensioners are also among the most dedicated and active groups when it comes to organizing gatherings. These protests occur weekly in over ten cities, including Tehran, Kerman, Bandar Abbas, Shiraz, Isfahan, Hamadan, Tabriz, Rasht, Ahvaz, Sanandaj, Zanjan, and Sari. Retired teachers and retired steel workers lead in participation levels, successfully elevating their protests beyond intermediary government institutions like pension offices. They have targeted decision-making bodies such as the Budget and Planning Organization and the Presidential Office, extending their demonstrations to street marches and chanting slogans in metro stations.

An other significant achievement of these diverse retiree protests is the promotion of collective action. In the absence of independent organizations to advocate for retirees' rights and challenge flawed policies, retired union activists have formed groups on social media to share news, reports, and calls for collective protests.

Joint demonstrations by pensioners covered by the Social Security Organization, Civil Servants Pension Fund, and Steel Industry Pension Fund often occur, either spontaneously or through prior coordination, in front of government institutions. Protesters stand for hours outside social security offices and pension funds, setting up empty tables and voicing their grievances through slogans such as:

- „Yesterday's warriors are hungry today.“
- „A retiree's pay lasts only for a week.“

And

- „Only on the streets can we reclaim our rights.“
- „Neither the parliament nor the government cares about the people.“
- „Our demand is clear: just enforce the law now!“
- „Government officials, have some shame; stop denying our rights!“
- „[Incompetent government, shame, shame](#)“

The protests are fueled by a range of grievances, including inadequate pensions, and the failure to adjust pensions to align retirees' incomes with those of active employees. Additional issues include repeated delays



From the Social Security Fund to the Civil Servants Pension Fund, Oil, Steel, and Telecommunications Pension Funds, pensioners have taken to the streets almost daily, gathering at the entrances of pension fund offices.

in pension payments and unpaid welfare benefits and food allowances for retired telecommunications worker as well as healthcare insurance concerns, including for retired steel industry workers. Protesters also frequently carry placards demanding the release of imprisoned union activists.

Other Workers' Protests

Alongside the protests mentioned above, several other workers' protests occurred as well.

Non-Permanent Teachers

In recent months, non-permanent teachers from the Ministry of Education, who have been awaiting employment status conversion despite years of service, have held scattered protests in front of various government institutions, including the Ministry of Education, on July 24, 2024, and September 22, 2024. Among the protesters are teachers from the Literacy Movement, preschool teachers, and those on contract.

Their primary reasons for protest include:

- Failure to implement employment regulations
- Lack of employment status conversion
- Designation as part-time teachers
- Low wages and inadequate insurance

School Service Workers

In addition to the teaching workforce, school service workers (janitors and custodians) also intensified their protests in recent months. These workers were protesting poor living conditions alongside low wages, and the lack of employment status conversion.

The deficit of approximately 40,000 school service workers created additional burdens for parents, who might be forced to pay for external cleaning services or take on classroom cleaning responsibilities

Sidelining

At the start of the current academic year, the Ministry of Education faced a shortage of nearly 176,000 teachers. Instead of hiring those who have been waiting for years due to bureaucratic barriers, the 14th government opted to rehire over 70,000 retired teachers. The President signed an executive order to recruit these retired educators for the 2023–2024 academic year, allocating financial resources for their return.

themselves. Meanwhile, working custodians are facing excessive workloads, leading to job burnout and dissatisfaction, while their wages remain extremely low (around 12 million tomans per month, ~171 USD).



The acute shortage of school service workers led to declining hygiene and sanitation standards in educational environments.

Dismissed Local Workers

The dismissal of local workers—who have spent months or years working on industrial and production projects, only to be laid off under „redundancy“ claims once these projects are suspended or completed—has become a common occurrence in Iran’s labor system, leading to widespread labor protests.

During the period under study, labor protests by laid off local workers occurred in various industries. For instance, on December 16, in Rabar and Bardsir, Kerman province, 130 unemployed workers, each with 5 to 12 years of experience, [gathered to demand employment opportunities](#) at the Daraloo Copper Industry. Other examples include:

- Petrochemical workers in Chovar (Ilam)
- Workers in Rabar and Bardsir (Kerman)
- Contract workers in the Kahnuj Titanium Mine
- Workers at the Haftgel Oil Desalination Plant, many of whom remain unemployed after four years and are still seeking re-employment.

Although some argue that local hiring preferences violate the Constitution and merit-based hiring principles, local workers—especially those in underprivileged and impoverished areas—believe they should be prioritized for jobs in industries that exploit their region’s natural resources.

Suicides Linked to Dismissals

The impact of layoffs can be devastating. In Chovar, located in Ilam province, three unemployed workers attempted suicide within a single week in July 2024. Among them were two recently dismissed contract workers from Arghavan Petrochemical Company, along with the wife of a laid-off employee. Over the past three years, at least six workers from the Chovar Petrochemical Plant tragically took their own lives following job losses.

Contract Workers in the Telecommunications Industry

The victims of privatization in Iran are not limited to dismissed workers and lost public assets. Even employees who remained under private-sector contracts have suffered due to mismanagement and corruption.

Between July and December 2024, thousands of telecom contract workers organized protests and online campaigns, appealing to the President and Minister of Communications to resolve their long-standing issues.

These workers contended that the controversial sale of the Telecommunication Company of Iran in 2009 was, in fact, a „semi-private“ (or „pseudo-privatized“) scheme that not only failed to deliver genuine private-sector efficiency but also had a detrimental impact on their jobs through:

- Lack of job security (3-month contracts)
- Extremely low wages, even for skilled specialists
- Lack of job security (3-month contracts)
- Dismissal of labor representatives advocating workers' rights
- Failure to implement ranking and seniority-based promotions
- Delayed wage payments
- Unpaid benefits and insurance deductions
- Outstanding employer debts to the Social Security Organization, leading to frequent disruptions in healthcare coverage

Additionally, telecom contract workers criticized:

- The appointment of former local contractors as mid-level managers, rather than young professionals
- The widespread rehiring of retirees, instead of redistributing human resources efficiently
- Unrealistic workloads, where one specialist must perform the work of three to four employees for base pay

Estimates suggest that more than 35,000 workers are employed under telecom contract arrangements.

Railway Track and Infrastructure Workers

The railway track and infrastructure workforce represents one of the most volatile labor crisis centers in Iran, with their struggles occasionally making headlines. Within the organizational and labor hierarchy, this sector is among the most challenging and neglected divisions of railway workers.

Recent reports indicate that Iran's Railway Company ranks third among the top ten state-owned companies in terms of workforce size, employing over 22,000 workers across various departments. Employees are stationed not only at the headquarters but also across 21 railway regions nationwide. The privatization of passenger transport and operations in railway planning, supervision, and management has nearly reached completion, with 11 out of 14 subsidiaries of Iran Railways privatized by 2021.

Research shows that while labor issues in railway contract companies have become widespread since privatization, the most vocal protests in recent years have come from railway track and infrastructure maintenance workers, particularly those employed by the „Travers“ company, which has over 6,000

employees and is one of the largest railway subcontractors. For nearly a decade, the combination of privatization, contractors' failure to pay wages and benefits, and the absence of independent labor unions has fueled growing protests across all 21 railway regions. Since the mid-2010s, these protests have escalated from demonstrations outside Parliament to public warnings about the risks of neglecting railway infrastructure due to unpaid wages.

According to railway infrastructure workers, between 7,000 and 10,000 maintenance employees are currently working under various contractors without any oversight of their operations.

The key grievances of these workers are:

- Delayed wages and unpaid insurance premiums for three to four months, leading to frequent strikes and demonstrations.
- Lack of health insurance and unpaid pension contributions, which adversely affect workers' retirement and unemployment benefits.
- Temporary contracts lasting one to three months, making labor organization extremely difficult.
- Job insecurity, allowing contractors to terminate workers at the end of each contract period, even after more than ten years of service.
- Threats against worker representatives, which discourage collective bargaining efforts.

While these protests occasionally gain attention in mainstream media, they often remain confined to internal social media networks due to censorship and government restrictions.

Municipal Service Workers

Cities such as Tabriz, Ilam, Tabas, Sari, Kut Abdollah, and Yasuj witnessed widespread protests by municipal service workers during the period under study, including in December. These workers—who lack collective bargaining power—are facing persistent issues that seem endless.

Municipal service workers, responsible for urban sanitation, green space maintenance, and waste collection, often work under contract-based employment and are frequently denied full wages and benefits. Many have reported between 2 to 10 months of unpaid salaries.

During extreme weather conditions, such as heavy rainfall and flooding, these workers are also forced to serve as emergency responders, clearing blocked city drainage systems despite not being compensated for these extra duties.

Challenges in the Municipal Sector:

- Most city workers are employed through contractors, leading to:
 - Unpaid wages, as municipal funds are often redirected by contractors to settle debts rather than paying workers.
 - Delayed insurance contributions, affecting workers' healthcare coverage.
- Contractors frequently change, leaving workers in limbo as new contractors refuse to honor past commitments.

- Municipalities, despite being the primary employer, fail to take responsibility for unpaid wages.
- Corruption and mismanagement—contractors often win municipal tenders by offering the lowest bid, disregarding worker rights and legal protections.



For over three years, protesting municipal workers have demanded better oversight of contractors, stable contracts, and direct employment by municipalities.

Industrial Workers

Labor issues in various industries triggered protests, making these sectors key crisis points. The primary causes of industrial protests include:

- Low wages
- Job insecurity
- Managerial inefficiency

Major protests have been reported in companies such as:

- Wagon Pars (railway equipment manufacturing)
- Moghan Agro-Industry
- Shadgan Steel
- Ahvaz Steel
- Barez Tire
- Dena Tire

These protests mainly targeted corporate mismanagement, accusing executives of destabilizing production through inefficiency and corruption. One of the largest protests was at Wagon Pars Company, a major producer of railway equipment and machinery, occurring from the end of July into August.

- Employees demanded the resignation of the CEO, citing failure to address workers' financial hardships.

-
- The protests lasted two months and led to the arrest of several workers.
 - The movement drew attention from provincial and national authorities.
 - Workers complained about wage disparities, particularly compared to other subsidiaries of MAPNA Holding (Wagon Pars' parent company).
 - Protesters demanded salary increases and longer contracts, rather than the short-term agreements currently in place.

Energy shortage protests

Frustration over the energy crisis and the subsequent closure of industrial operations also led to occasional protests. For instance, on December 16, 2024, [workers from Saba Industrial Town](#), located along the Tehran-Saveh highway, blocked the road in protest against recurring power outages. They burned old tires, creating symbolic scenes of labor protests against government decisions. In addition to this, the internet became of prime site of protest.

Online Campaigns and Statements

Over the past few years, workers and trade union activists have increasingly used virtual petitions to advance their demands in addition to their field protests. They do so mainly through e-petitioning platforms such as [www.karzar.net](#), the Iranian version of [change.org](#).

The labor and trade union campaigns registered between July and December can be categorized into four levels.

Campaigns for fair wages and benefits

Examples include campaigns for addressing nurses' demands and livelihood problems, campaigns by civil servant and military retirees to implement 90% pension adjustments relative to active employees, „Tell a Worker“ Campaign, campaigns for increasing wages for employees and workers considering fluctuations in the exchange rate and inflation, campaigns for revising minimum wages for workers).

Campaigns Related to Improving Workplace Safety and Job Security

Examples include the „Save the Lives of Iranian Miners“ campaign, a campaign calling for improved mine safety, reduced working hours for miners, increased wages, and enhanced job security. These campaigns, directed at government officials from the head of state to the ministers of industry and labor and the head of the judiciary, have so far garnered over 12,000 signatures. They gained momentum after numerous mining accidents, particularly the Tabas mine incident, which deeply affected public opinion.

Campaigns Related to the Approval or Implementation of Laws and Regulations

Examples include the campaign to approve the „Plan to Organize Government Employees“. Since 2020, this plan, aimed at eliminating contractor and intermediary companies in workforce supply and ensuring equal employment and wage conditions across all government departments, companies, and organizations, has stalled in parliament. It is now awaiting approval by the Expediency Council, with over 19,000 workers launching a campaign demanding its ratification and implementation.

Campaigns Defending Labor Representatives or Workers' Associations

Examples include the „Don't Silence Workers' Voices“ campaign, which has been directed at Ahmad Meydari, the Minister of Labor and Chairman of the Supreme Labor Council, and has so far collected over 6,000 signatures. This campaign supports Alireza Mirghafari, an advisor to the labor team in the Supreme Labor Council, who in the first part of 2024 encouraged the labor team not to sign the wage resolution because it did not comply with the legal requirement that wages should follow inflation levels. Following these outspoken views, Mirghafari was removed from his position.

Anti-Discrimination Campaigns

There were two notable campaigns by female workers in the oil industry advocating against job discrimination. Women employed in this sector raised their voices, particularly on social media, highlighting that both state-owned and private oil and petrochemical companies had, in recent years, barred them from participating in recruitment exams and had failed to allocate positions for women in engineering roles, such as petroleum and chemical engineering. They emphasized that many female graduates in these fields, including some who were top-tier graduates, were often completely excluded from recruitment exams in related industries and denied job opportunities that matched their skills and qualifications.



Approximately 17,000 women are employed in the Iranian oil industry, about 8 percent of the total workforce. Source: [Tehran Times](#).

4 Government policies & law-making

The advancement of workers' rights is closely linked to the flexibility afforded by the state. This chapter explores the actions, policies, and legislative initiatives that have impacted labor rights in Iran during the specified timeframe. The first section provides an analysis of the government's reactions to labor protests, highlighting both repressive measures and more passive responses. Government responses to online activism are also highlighted.

In the final section, the discussion shifts to the legal framework, examining proposed changes to labor laws that either introduce new challenges or offer partial solutions to existing problems.

Governmental Responses to Labor Protests

Passive and Unresponsive

In many instances, the government adopted a passive stance toward protesting workers and retirees, often failing to act on earlier commitments and taking minimal or no action to disperse gatherings. This suggests a reluctant acknowledgment of the legitimacy of these organized labor protests. However, this approach resulted in the continued neglect of workers' demands, even when they were legally justified or previously assured.

Police Violence and Arrests

Despite being a member of the International Labour Organisation, Iran does not support independent activism, and even previously recognized independent trade unions are now disregarded. The government frequently sought to suppress labor unrest, particularly during larger protests, as seen in the case of the nurses' demonstrations.

The peaceful protests of predominantly female nurses were met with police intervention, sometimes involving violence to disperse crowds, which drew international concern. Several protesting nurses were arrested, including Zahra Tamaddon, head nurse at Masih Daneshvari Hospital in Tehran, and Pouya Esfandiari, a Kurdish nurse from Divandareh. Although Tamaddon and others were quickly released following intervention from the Vice Health Minister for Nursing, Firoozeh Mojirian-Sharh, a nurse at Qaem Hospital in Mashhad, did not receive timely assistance and fell into a coma due to severe police violence, prompting international criticism, [including from the US State Department](#). Additionally, teacher activists, particularly from ethnic minority groups, faced arrests, such as Kokab Bodaqi-Panah, a teachers' union activist in Khuzestan, who was charged for her activities. Compared to the previous regime, arrests were less frequent, and no prominent large-scale lawsuits were initiated against labor activists. However, many labor activists, especially those in teacher unions viewed as a significant threat, were imprisoned.

To better understand the government's harsh response to union activists, consider the following cases:

- **Mohammad Habibi**, spokesperson for the Tehran Teachers' Association, was imprisoned again in November 2024 following his protests against the serial poisonings of female students in schools during the autumn and winter of 2022. He is set to serve six months in prison.
- **Somayeh Akhtarshomar**, a union activist from Marivan, was permanently dismissed from the education system on October 6, 2024, due to her membership in the Teachers' Association and her social media activities, despite her 17 years of experience as an English teacher. Her dismissal was upheld by the Appeals Committee of the Ministry of Education.

- [Asghar Hajeb](#), [Mahmoud Malaki](#), [Mohsen Omrani](#), and [Abdolreza Amanifar](#), board members of the Bushehr Teachers' Association, were previously dismissed from their jobs and sentenced to fines of IRR 240 million (342 USD) as an alternative to two years in prison for "acting against national security."
- [Aziz Ghasemzadeh](#), a teacher union activist and spokesman for CCITTA in Gilan Province, spent months in prison without medical care and was informed upon his release in summer 2024 that he would be denied ranking benefits in his termination of service order.

Such cases are numerous. For instance, Esmail Abdi, a mathematics teacher and former secretary general of the Iranian Teachers' Association, has spent many years in and out of prison. Although currently released on a heavy bail of IRR 20 billion (28.571 USD), he has been barred from leaving the country due to new charges fabricated by the IRGC Intelligence Unit, which claims he harmed national security. He was previously forced to resign after 21 years of service, with charges relating to what authorities describe as "leading national protests."

Meanwhile, many other labor activists remain imprisoned, including Rasoul Bodaghi.

Work Repercussions

The government increasingly relied on disciplining labor activists through their employment or threats thereof. Many nurses received messages from security officers warning them of potential dismissal. The first half of 2024 indicated that this fate awaited them. As Secretary-General of the Nurses' Home, Mohammad Sharifi Moghaddam, noted, „Nurses know very well that striking risks their jobs, demonstrating their willingness to face termination for their cause.“ Teacher activists were similarly targeted, as they were under the previous government.

The suppression of teacher union activists continued through both judicial and administrative actions.

Documents collected from teachers' virtual channels and groups, later verified and published on the Coordinating Council of Iranian Teachers' Associations' virtual platform, reveal that in the second half of 2024, more than 30 previously arrested teachers and union activists faced new sentences or restrictions. Among them were Mohammad Habibi, Mohsen Omrani, and Hamidreza Selgi. Kurdish teacher activist Sarveh Pourmohammad had her jail sentence reduced from ten to five years but was still arrested and imprisoned during this period.

The use of work repercussions extended to other sectors as well. Nearly 150 welders at Tehran Refinery were dismissed, while 15 representatives of oil contract workers faced termination [for protesting unpaid wages and demanding better working conditions](#). In some cases, protesting workers, particularly those perceived as instigators, faced additional disciplinary measures, such as exclusion from job classification schemes or forced relocation away from their families.

Concessions

Although the majority of labor protests did not yield significant results, there were a few exceptions. Following government intervention, nurses received a partial payment of six months' outstanding wages in two phases (the first phase totaling 7 trillion tomans (100m USD) and the second phase 2.5 (36m USD) trillion tomans) to settle delayed payments. Additionally, overtime pay was increased from IRR 270,000 to IRR 800,000-1,000,000 per hour (0.39 to 1.14-1.43 USD). However, wage arrears continued to be paid gradually and inconsistently across different cities. The persistent issues of nurse shortages and forced overtime work remained unresolved, prompting ongoing protests in some regions.

In response to multiple rounds of protests by school custodians, Parliament addressed the issue during the 2025 budget review in October 2024. Proposals were introduced to improve the financial situation of school custodians, including a commitment to equalize their salaries by the end of 2025. The Education Commission's proposal also aimed to ensure that school custodians receive a designated salary coefficient, similar to other service employees. However, it remains uncertain whether these promises will be fulfilled.

Finally, as detailed in the second part of this chapter, the government made some concessions to civil servant pensioners. The poor working conditions for miners also prompted Minister Meydari to discuss improving their rights, albeit after initially denying any employer responsibility for the Tabas mine incident. He remarked, „The conditions in the mines severely damage workers' lungs, and measures must be taken to prevent illnesses while increasing wages to reflect the hazardous nature of their work.“ However, this promise might have only served only to temporarily pacify public opinion, as will be further explored in the second part of this chapter.

Online deterrence

Government monitoring, filtering, and crackdowns on online activities have continued unabated, significantly impacting online labor activism. In this context, the „Karzar“ petitioning campaign platform, widely utilized by ordinary Iranians –including workers seeking to voice their grievances and advocate for change – signed a memorandum of cooperation with the Strategic Deputy Office of the Presidential Administration on December 3, 2024. This agreement aimed to expedite the process of addressing the demands of various societal groups, according to the deputy office.

Matin Ramazankhah, Deputy for Provincial Strategies and Social Capital of the Strategic Vice Presidency, [stated](#), „Previously, there was a system in the Center for Strategic Studies, but it had not proven effective. We decided to lend credibility to external systems and support all platforms. This is the first time that the voices of the people are being heard directly through the Campaign within the government. Campaigns will be monitored based on the number of signatures through various government channels.“

While there may be some truth to this initiative, the memorandum could easily serve as a pretext for increased government control. Even if it does not directly impose restrictions, its association with the government may instill fear and deter Iranian workers from using Karzar for their petitions.

Proposals and Draft Bills in the Field of Labor Relations

While proposals such as the „Plan to Organize Government Employees „ and „Pension Adjustment to Align Retiree Wages with Active Workers,“ especially in the social security sector, remain stalled in parliament, several new suggestions, proposals, and draft bills related to labor relations have been introduced during the six months covered by this report. These proposals could potentially impact workers. However, the primary actors and proposers in this area are primarily the government and parliament, with little involvement or influence from workers or their representatives. Below are the most significant developments:

Amendment to the Mining Law

Current Status: Under review in parliament

In the wake of the tragic accident at the Tabas coal mine and the subsequent public outcry, the improvement of miners' working conditions and wages has become a focal point in political discussions. On October 6, 2024, an [amendment to Iran's mining law](#) was proposed and signed by 47 Members of Parliament, and it is currently under review.

At first glance, this proposal appears to be a positive step, with the stated goal of enhancing miners' lives through increased wages and stricter safety regulations. However, our analysis of the amendment reveals that it primarily benefits mine operators and investors. [The draft](#) emphasizes expanding the scope and conditions of mining operations, while prioritizing increased production and the acceleration of the exploitation process. In stark contrast, it lacks any clauses addressing wage increases for miners.

Proposal to Increase Miners' Wages in the Supreme Labour Council

Current Status: Proposed by the Minister of Labour

The issue of increasing miners' wages was raised by the Labour Minister in the wake of the Tabas mine incident. Research indicates that the net income of a miner working at a depth of 700 meters was only IRR 85 million (~121 USD) per month last year, with a hardship allowance for mining of approximately IRR 6,000,000 (8.67 USD) per month. Ahmad Meydari, the Minister of Cooperatives, Labour, and Social Welfare, emphasized the need for wage increases, stating, „Miners' lungs are severely damaged, and their wages are insufficient. It is unjust for contract miners, who face job instability, to earn less than permanent workers. We will propose an increase in miners' wages, and this issue must be reviewed in the Supreme Labour Council.“

Since the next meeting of the Supreme Labour Council is set for 2025, no decision has yet been made. However, even if the Council agrees to the proposal, there is no guarantee that miners will actually receive increased wages. Iran has a notorious history of postponing wage increases; for instance, a mere 5% increase promised to nurses never materialized, which contributed to their feelings of disrespect and ultimately led to a strike.

Resolution to Deposit the Social Security Organisation's Healthcare Contribution into the National Treasury

Current Status: Adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers

By the end of October 2024, the Cabinet of the 14th government (Pezeshkian's cabinet) [approved](#) a proposal for the transfer of funds designated as 9% of the 27% healthcare share of the Social Security Organization into the national treasury, as announced by Mohammad Reza Aref, the First Vice President. This amount, referred to as the (9/30) share, has traditionally been allocated by the Social Security Fund for the healthcare of insured individuals and retirees.

The decision drew significant criticism from labor and retiree representatives. Alireza Mahjoub, Secretary-General of the Workers' House and a member of the Board of Trustees of the Social Security Organization, stated, „The funds related to the healthcare of the Social Security Organization, like any other fund, should not be deposited into the government treasury. It appears that this decision is primarily aimed at providing the government with additional resources. The critical question remains: should these additional resources come from the healthcare funds of workers and retirees? This money rightfully belongs to those who have suffered injuries or disabilities.“

Critics have also highlighted that this decision undermines the independence of key bodies, such as the Board of Trustees and the Board of Directors of the Social Security Organization., potentially compromising the quality and accessibility of care for those in need.

Pension Adjustment for Civil Servant Pensioners

Current Status: Approved and Circulated for Enforcement by the Government

On October 21, Iran's government approved a proposal to increase pensions for retirees to 90% of the salary and allowances of their working counterparts. Government spokesman Zabihollah Salman explained that if a retiree's pension falls below this threshold, the difference will be calculated, and 40% of that difference will be added to their pension as a separate line item, with future annual increases.

This adjustment is intended for various members of the Civil Servants Pension Fund, including civil service employees, teachers, judges, and so forth. The harmonization regulation was approved by the Council of Ministers on December 15 and is retroactive to November 21.

While this plan appears promising, there is a significant gap between expectations and reality. Many retirees find that the equalization plan has not substantially improved their financial circumstances, prompting renewed calls for protests. For example, a retiree from the Postal Company shared with Iran Focus that his pension increase amounted to just four loaves of bread. In general, adjustments for the lowest-paid pensioners have been minimal, frequently not exceeding 1 million rials (approximately \$1.50). Additionally, some retirees indicated that their pensions had decreased instead of increased, suggesting possible calculation errors. These issues prompted calls for meetings with the National Pension Fund and sparked new protests.

2024 Budget Bill

Current Status: Under review in Parliament

The government submitted the 2024 budget bill to Parliament in November. Notably, Note 12 proposes a 20% increase in salary coefficients for various categories of public servant wage earners for the upcoming year, despite the annual inflation rate exceeding 34% as of September. The note states: „The salary coefficients for various groups of wage earners and retirees in 2024 will increase by 20%.“

While the Supreme Labour Council, which includes representatives from workers, employers, and the government, is responsible for setting workers' wages, the percentage increase in civil servants' salaries tends to influence government representatives within the Council. This raises concerns that the proposed 20% adjustment—significantly below the inflation rate—could further suppress workers' wages.

Additionally, the budget allocates IRR 2000 trillion (2.9b USD) to settle the government's debts to the Social Security Organization and other creditors. The government is the largest debtor to the Social Security Organization due to its failure to meet obligations related to the insurance of certain groups, with estimates of this debt ranging from IRR 4000 (5.7b USD) trillion to IRR 7000 (10b USD) trillion.

Moreover, the Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran is required to allocate an advance payment equivalent to 3% of total expenditures to the Targeted Subsidy Organization (which gives out subsidies to workers with low income) to ensure timely payments for targeted subsidy programs. This was upon request from the Planning and Budget Organization.

5 Analysis & way forward

Our analysis of the labor situation in Iran between July -December 2024 reveals that the primary concerns of Iranian workers revolved around livelihood issues and the pursuit of improved living conditions.

These challenges created an environment conducive to the resurgence of labor protests.

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Main Reasons for Workers' Protests in Iran (July to December 2024)

Protest Issue	Description
Mismatch Between Wages and Cost of Living	The devaluation of Iranian currency and subsequent inflation have crippled the lives of millions of Iranian workers who earn minimum wages below the poverty line.
Inadequate Implementation of Labour Laws and Regulations	Laws and regulations passed and enacted by the government and Parliament are poorly implemented due to lack of monitoring and inadequate budgeting. Examples include pension harmonization, job classification schemes, teachers' ranking, and nursing service tariffs and unsafe work conditions in (mainly) blue collar jobs.
High Healthcare Costs and Inadequate Insurance Coverage	Imbalances in insurance funds and incomplete healthcare coverage have significantly increased healthcare costs, especially for retirees, making it one of the main reasons for protests.
Delayed Payments of Wages, End-of-Service Benefits, and Pensions	Insufficient budget allocations for meeting financial obligations in industries, administrative bodies, and pension funds have led to delays of several days or even months in paying dues to some groups.

Ordinary Iranians not only struggled to meet basic needs but also faced worsening conditions due to Iran's acute energy crisis, which led to prolonged shutdowns in many industrial and manufacturing sectors, threatening bankruptcy and job losses in a country already grappling with high unemployment. While the roots of the energy crisis predate Pezeshkian's administration, the government had opportunities to address the ongoing disconnect between the minimum wage and inflation, as well as the numerous demands from impoverished and marginalized workers, including wage arrears and improved safety measures.

In short, Pezeshkian's response to labor issues was limited. While he made some efforts to improve nurses' wages following their strikes, this action seemed more a reaction to disruptions than a genuine commitment to reform. The new cabinet issued pension equalization rulings, but many of these initiatives were already in

progress under the previous government and amounted to little more than token gestures. Additionally, the pledge to assist school janitors did not yet translate into meaningful support, as is the case with improving the lives of miners. Altogether, amid a significant volume of strikes and labor protests between July and December, the government's overall response was characterized by minimal compromises, raising serious doubts about its commitment to addressing the systemic issues faced by workers across various sectors.



Masoud Pezeshkian assumed office under the banner of a „Reconciliation Government,“ aiming to foster harmony between the people and the government while promoting transparency and integrity. In reality, the Iranian authorities' reactions to labor protests that emerged following the inauguration of President Pezeshkian's cabinet largely mirrored past practices

Politically, there was little progress in the freedoms associated with labor protests. Similar to the previous administration, the new government resorted to coercion in an attempt to control labor activism. However, it appeared more reluctant to employ harsh measures such as arrests and initiating court cases against labor activists. Instead, employment agencies increasingly acted as the government's enforcers, imposing penalties like dismissals and bans on re-entering the sector, as well as selectively distributing job benefits. This more subtle form of coercion may be a popular strategy for the government because it allows them to maintain control over labor movements without drawing significant attention to their actions. By avoiding overt repression, the regime can also limit the potential for international scrutiny and pressure, while still effectively suppressing dissent and managing public perception.

In the realm of online protests, a similar subtle strategy may be emerging. The Memorandum of Understanding between Iran's largest online petitioning network, Karzar.Net, and the government raises concerns about increased government control over this platform. Additionally, it is noteworthy that many labor activists remain imprisoned, including those with precarious health conditions.

Overall, the future appears bleak for Iran's workforce unless the Pezeshkian regime initiates substantial reforms. The persistent disconnect between the minimum wage and high inflation threatens to stifle economic growth, making deflation increasingly unlikely. Furthermore, the unresolved energy crisis, a result of years of mismanagement and underinvestment, continues to undermine Iran's economic stability.

Despite these challenges, there are also opportunities:

1. **Collective Action Success:** The successful protests by Iran's nurses demonstrate that collective leverage

can be a powerful tool for achieving change. Similarly, pensioners have shown that their numbers can significantly impact outcomes.

2. **Emergence of Online Assemblies:** In spite of years of severe repression, some of Iran's trade unions have begun to hold online assemblies. This development could lead to more organized and impactful protests. The lack of trade union involvement in many protests has often resulted in uncoordinated actions, diminishing their chances of success. By holding assemblies, even virtually, trade unions can reconnect with their worker base.
3. **Necessity for public support:** The public outcry following the Tabas coal mine incident compelled the Iranian government to officially commit to increasing miners' wages. This illustrates that even a highly authoritarian regime like the Iranian one requires public support to maintain its authority.

Recommendations for Strengthening Workers' Voices

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

To Iranian Trade Union Activists

1. **Build Support Bases:** Many protests start without union involvement, which can diminish their chances of success. To enhance collective action, it is crucial for independent labor unions to establish broad support bases through online campaigns, trusted contacts, and various outreach methods. In addition to organizing (online) general assemblies (see point 5), labor union activists should proactively counter the narratives propagated by Iranian security forces and avoid becoming overly focused on abstract societal concepts.
2. **Collaborate:** Partner with like-minded organizations to create a united front. This collaboration can amplify collective strength, making it more difficult for authorities to suppress dissent.
3. **Craft Powerful Narratives:** Develop compelling narratives and slogans to attract support, focusing initially on one key theme. Successful hashtags have shown the effectiveness of this approach. Even in the absence of immediate government action, this strategy can help build unity and solidarity among workers.
4. **Explore Alternative Influences:** Consider methods beyond traditional protests, which often yield low achievements but carry significant personal risks for workers. For example, regional lobbying through letters to influential political figures and clergy can be an effective way to advocate for workers' rights.
5. **Restart or Continue Online General Assemblies:** Maintain or initiate online general assemblies, even if this is not outlined in the original statutes. These gatherings can facilitate communication, foster solidarity, and keep the momentum of activism alive.
6. **Utilize Secure Communication Tools:** Given the risks of surveillance and repression, prioritize the use of secure communication platforms for organizing and sharing information. Tools that offer end-to-end encryption can help protect sensitive discussions and maintain confidentiality among members.
7. **Document and Share Stories of Repression:** Collect and document instances of repression faced by union members and workers. Sharing these stories, whether through social media or independent publications, can raise awareness both domestically and internationally, putting pressure on authorities.
8. **Establish Solidarity Networks:** Create networks of support with other marginalized groups, including

women's rights organizations, environmental activists, and other civil society groups. Building coalitions can amplify voices and create a broader movement for change.

9. **Promote Mental Health and Well-being:** Recognize the psychological toll of repression and activism. Establish support systems, such as counseling or peer support groups, to help members cope with stress and maintain their mental well-being.
10. **Engage in International Advocacy:** Reach out to international labor organizations and human rights groups to raise awareness about the situation of Iranian workers. Building relationships with these entities can lead to increased pressure on the Iranian government and support for local unions.

To the International Community

1. **Support Workers' Rights in International Forums:** The International Labor Organization (ILO) and organizations such as the Human Rights Council should use international mechanisms to pressure Iran to comply with its obligations under ILO conventions, especially those related to freedom of association and collective bargaining.
2. **Establish Safe Channels to Support Workers:** Cooperating and engaging with Iranian labor activists inside and outside the country is essential to amplify their voices and connect them with international movements.
3. **Develop Digital Platforms:** Create safe online tools for Iranian workers to share their grievances without fear of government reprisals and to organize anonymously.
4. **Targeted Sanctions:** Impose sanctions on individuals and institutions within the Iranian government responsible for suppressing workers' rights.
5. **Support Independent Research and Reporting:** Support NGOs and research projects to document abuses against Iranian workers and provide evidence and documentation from independent labor activists to garner international support.
6. **Strengthen Solidarity with Global Labor Movements:** Encourage international labor unions to adopt resolutions in support of Iranian workers and launch solidarity campaigns. Facilitating communication between Iranian workers and their counterparts in other countries can help exchange knowledge and build networks.
7. **Encourage Legal Action:** Utilize international legal mechanisms to hold the Iranian government accountable for workers' rights violations.
8. **Strengthen Grassroots Movements:** Provide training and resources to grassroots organizers to strengthen informal networks inside Iran.
9. **Membership Support:** International organizations can support Iranian independent labor unions to become members of international coalitions, as membership fees cannot be paid by Iranian labor unions due to sanctions and economic situation.
10. **Amplify Voices:** International organizations can elevate the voices of Iranian labor movements at global forums by highlighting current successful petitions and protests. Also, they can actively engage with media outlets to raise awareness about the challenges

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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