



Labor Rights in Iran

A Zamaneh Project

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A Report by





Brief Introduction

Labor rights abuses occur daily, with no person/body held accountable. Attempts of local activists to protest these violations is often met with force. There have been limitations within advocacy groups at the international level, who often lack much needed information from the ground in order to build their case within the international arena. Therefore, Zamaneh Media (Stichting Radio Zamaneh, ZM) has decided to monitor, analyze and publish on local labor rights developments in Iran in a bi-monthly briefs in both Persian and English. These bi-monthly briefs details the state of labor rights and legislation in Iran to develop alliances of knowledge sharing in order to promote and build public pressure for the adoption and enforcement of internationally-recognized treaties related to labor rights in Iran.

Zamaneh has identified seven key areas of concern for Iran's workers which will be prioritized in these bi-monthly briefs to include: workplace security and health; discrimination in the workforce and fair wages; labor legislation; women in the workforce; child labor; contractual issues and unemployment; and freedom of association/unionization. Zamaneh monitors, collects and reports labor news through our platforms on a daily basis. This brief intended to be a thematic 'big-picture' and is published in two languages to increase the knowledge and awareness on workers situation in Iran and to shed light on key areas of concern in the month of June and July 2018.

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The Minimum Wage, the Plunging Rial and Workers living Under Poverty line

The Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) as a State party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) has not fulfilled the obligations of the Covenant with respect to the minimum wage cutoff in the year 2018. As the Iranian Rial (IRR) is plunging even further in value in June and July 2018, the debate continues that the national minimum wage is set at a cutoff that cannot provide Iranian workers and their families with a decent standard of living.

The minimum wage cut off is determined by the state body, Supreme Labor Council (SLC) in the spring. In March 2018, around the same time as the SLC's meeting for determining the minimum wage, independent labor organizations in Iran demanded that the monthly minimum wage be set at 50 million IRR which at the time equaled to 800 USD and with the current IRR to USD rates equals to ≈\$555.¹

The Wage Committee of the SLC, which is composed of government affiliated organizations such as the Workers' House and the Islamic Labor Councils (ILC), estimated in March 2018 that the living wage of a family of four (two adults, two children) is 26,698,000 IRR (≈300 USD). The SLC, however, in a long and erosive process, set the minimum wage for the workers this year even lower than the living wage determined by the Wage Committee to a monthly cutoff of 11,106,917 IRR (≈125 USD), a figure below half the poverty line cutoff estimated by labor rights NGOs.

Workers who are working under contracts that legally and illegally avoid subjecting them to IRI Labor Code (ILC) are often deprived of this minimum wage and work for less. This includes workers at small establishments with 10 or less employees, those working under blank contracts, those holding precarious employment as well as Afghan immigrants.

According to Article 41 of the ILC, the SLC is obligated to determine the minimum wage in accordance to the percentage of inflation announced by the Central Bank of Iran, considering also the provisions suitable for a decent standard of living. However, the government refuses to accept the benchmark salary required for a living wage as proposed by independent labor organizations arguing that "economic conditions" requires a lower minimum wage cutoff.

Earlier in July 2018 and two months after US President Donald Trump withdrew from the Iran Nuclear Deal, the IRR was plunging to a record

¹ The Iranian Rial (IRR) has been plunging to a record low in the months of June and July 2018 which is the duration of this report. All USD equivalent values to IRR that have been calculated in this report are in accordance to the unofficial street rate of 1 USD ≈ 90,000 IRR which is the approximate average for the two months. IRR has plunged even further by 1 Aug 2018 at a value of 1 USD ≈ 10,000 IRR which makes the monthly minimum wage set by Supreme Labor Council equal to ≈112 USD.

low against the USD. Ali Khodayi, the head of the ILC and the workers' representative at the SLC announced that with the fast changing value of IRR and the inflation, the SLC is to review the economic conditions and set another minimum wage cutoff. The new minimum wage as proposed by Khodayi was not yet announced by the end of July, early August 2018.

As the inflation and good's prices have been rising in June and July 2018, independent workers' organizations have estimated that the living wage of workers should double in order for them to have a decent living standard. However, these organizations do not have representatives in the SLC. Workers' representatives present at SLC are selected from government-affiliated labor organizations. Independent labor organizations and unions are protesting the absence of "real" worker representatives at SLC to negotiate for living wage and minimum wages considerations.

Labor Protests and Past Due Payments

In the months June and July 2018, railroad workers in over 20 cities and truck drivers in more than 80 cities across Iran went on strike. Aside from the strikes in the transportation sector, more than a dozen of strikes, workers' protests and rallies took place with the main focus being past due wages, non-payment of benefits and a lack of job insecurity. The situation of workers has worsened with a rising cost of living and the manufacturing factories are inflamed. Production has stopped in many factories and wage claims have been delayed for months. Many hospitals refuse to provide healthcare services to workers who are covered by the Social Insurance Fund, the basic insurance services requires by Iran Labor Code for all workers. Hospitals are not accepting the Social Insurance Fund mainly because of postponement of bill payments which is also due to the fact that employers are not paying their share of the insurance fund. The wave of layoffs continues and those who are permanently discharged are not paid past due wages. Retired people are also affected with non-payment or past due payment of pensions. The table below details a number of labor protests in the manufacturing sector (the numbers of workers in each unit is based on the latest estimates as the numbers constantly change).

Sector	Date	Name of the Employer	Type of Protest / Duration	Dispute	# of Protesters	Total Workers	Location
Manufacturing	23 June	Almas Kavir Tile Company	Gathered in front of Municipality and Judiciary building /one day	Six months of unpaid wages and benefits including Social Insurance coverage	100+	400+	Yazd
Manufacturing	24 June	Tabriz Automotive	Picketing + Sit-in + Walkout/ ongoing	Unpaid wages & delayed payment for months	+200	800	Tabriz
Manufacturing	1 July	Tolypers Chemical Company And Alborz Packaging Industry Co.	Workers from the two factories gathered in front of Municipality building as well as in front of Ministry of Labor building in the province of Alborz/ one day	More than 500 workers sent home on compulsory unpaid leave	500	Unknown	Ghazvin, Alborz Province
Manufacturing	7 July	Kishwood Industries	Formal Complaint to Ministry of Labor Walkout / ongoing	70 workers laid off & 120 workers with more than 6 months of unpaid wages.	70 are plaintiffs in the formal complaint & 120+ workers are involved in ongoing walkouts	400+	Kish Island
Manufacturing	9 July-12 July	Almas Kavir Tile Company	Gathered in front of the city of Yazd Judiciary/ demonstrations in streets of Yazd/ four days	Six months of unpaid wages	100+	400+	Yazd

Transportation Sector: Iranian Truck Drivers go on a Mass Strike

As of 16 July workers of the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways (IRIR), Raja Passenger Train Company (Raja) under the umbrella of IRIR and the Freight Railway Transportation Company (also under IRIR) have gone on strike. They are protesting three-months of postponement of wages, non-payment of the three companies' share of the Social Insurance Fund which covers workers insurance, pension and benefits and lack of job security with increasing privatization of the companies. In the past twenty years, IRI has gradually privatized IRIR. Most workers are now hired through private companies and with short-term contracts and the private contractors are not following Iran Labor Code (ILC) regulations with regards to payments, insurance, pension and benefits.



Truck Drivers on Strike

On 17 July, workers in the Zagros branch of Railway Services and Technical Construction Company (RSTC) went on strike for delayed wages. Two days later on 19 July, workers in Tabriz, Salmas and Soufian hired by Iranian Rail Industries Development Co (IRICO) joined the Zagros workers. In the next two weeks more railway workers from various private companies joined the strike, which has been ongoing into the first week of August. In the following cities railway worker strikes have since been ongoing: Zanjan, Ajab Shir Marand, Semnan, Shahrud, Damqan, IslamShahr, Doroud and Andimeshk. On 25 July, in the city of Doroud, railway workers picketed and closed down the station. In Adimeshk the workers took to the city staging a demonstration in front of the governor's office. A month before this new wave of strikes in the railway and transportation sector, workers had gone on strike in eleven cities. Raja Passenger Train Company is taking close to 400 older wagons out of service, whose maintenance has proved costly. With it, 3000 workers are

expected to get laid off. As such railway strikes will likely continue into the month of August.

Iranian truck drivers' strikes, which started on 20 May, continues in the month of June over low pay, rising road tariff costs, raising tolls and a lack of benefits and pensions including Social Insurance benefits. Truck drivers in over 80 cities in Iran stood in protest besides their vehicles refusing to move. Truckers in Iran, the number of which reaches over 350,000, either own their vehicles or work for contractors in different sectors and get paid for load transportation. They demand between 30% to 50% increase in wages, but the government has only agreed to a 20% increase. In the month of May, the government brutally cracked down truck drivers on strike arresting 17 drivers. This led to the new wave of strikes starting on 23 July, mainly because the demands of the truckers were ignored despite the involvement of members of parliament, government representatives and the head of the Social Insurance Fund. As of 27 June, crackdown and arrests started with security forces removing the license plates of truckers, for example in the city of Kermanshah. By the end of June, the trucker strikes continued in more than 85 cities and 25 provinces.

City bus drivers of Isfahan and Tehran also joined the strikes on 4 July and 7 July respectively. In various cities, taxicab drivers and drivers of manufacturing factories also joined in Kermanshah.

Oil and Petrochemical Industries

With the reinstatement of US sanctions on Iran's oil and oil industry and Iran's Central Bank, the almost entirely government owned oil and petrochemical sector is having a hard time paying wages. The more expert workers who are on the payroll of the National Iranian Oil Company and affiliated companies are getting their wages. However, less skilled local workers mainly in southern Iran, workers contracted temporarily through private companies, and temporary contract workers are now experiencing hard times because of past due payments.

For local workers and less skilled workers in southern Iran there is also an ethnic division when it comes to jobs. The locals and ethnic minority groups in some areas are losing their jobs; while the more skilled workers often brought to the area from urban centers continue to work.

These industries and their workers will suffer the most when the US starts the oil export sanctions in November 2018.

Sector	Date	Name of the Employer	Type of Protest	Dispute	# of Protesters	Total Workers	Location
Oil Industries & Energy	23 June	Kangan Petro Refining	Laid off security guards, kept themselves lock-in in the refinery compound	Laid off with undelivered promise of new positions	20	11,000 in South Pars and 400+ in Kangan	South Pars/North Dome Gas-Condensate field
Oil Industries & Energy	1 July	National Iranian Drilling Company	Walkout and Picketing	Unpaid wages for more than two months	Unknown	17,000	Ahvaz, Khuzestan
Oil Industries & Energy	4 July	Gachsaran Petrochemical Company	Gathered in front of the admin building	Unpaid wages of more than 80 contractor workers	60+	1700	Gachsaran, Behbahan
Oil Industries & Energy	8 July	Gachsaran Petrochemical Company	Gathered in front of Gachsaran Governor Office	Unpaid wages of more than 80 contractor workers	70+	1700	Gachsaran, Behbahan
Oil & Petrochemical Industries	25 July, continued for 5 days	Mahshahr Petrochemical Plant	Gathered in front of the main building	Unpaid wages and benefits and demands not refused	240+	3000	Imam Port, Mahshahr

Construction and Infrastructure Building

The construction sector has been hit hard and many workers are complaining about unpaid wages and benefits. This has affected projects that deal with infrastructure development across the country. In the month of June, workers of Raman Construction who is the contractor in charge of Boroujerd- Arak Road Construction Project have not been paid wages for 6 months. Most construction companies who have government contracts, blame the government entity responsible for providing them with funds when it comes to delayed wage payments.

Workers who are hired by contractor companies in phase 8 of the construction of the New City of Pardis (17 km North of Tehran) have also been protesting delayed payments sporadically from 3 to 24 July.

On Saturday 8 July, 16 workers who have been hired by Khamesh Construction gathered in the field workshop of the company in the city of Khoda-afarin in East Azerbaijan province to protest past due wages. Khamesh Construction, who is in charge of building the aquaduct water supply system of the city, has also not paid its share of Social Insurance Fund costs that will cover workers medical insurance and benefits. On 26 July construction workers of Abidar Commercial Complex in Sanandaj Kurdistan, staged a protest for non-payment of wages in the past six months.

Agriculture and Agri-Food Production

According to 2015 statistics of the Ministry of Agriculture, imports for food comprise a total of 13 billion USD in Iran. This has been reduced to 9 billion USD in 2016. Even though the return of US imposed economic sanctions will not include food and drugs, IRI will still have a hard time importing agri-Food needs of its population. Cost of food in Iran has increased with more than 20% in June and July of 2018 compared to the same period in 2017. Aside from problems with delivery of agri-food imports, privatization of many food production companies has also lead to mass layoffs and nonpayment of wages and benefits in the food sector.

Haft Tapeh is a town in Khuzestan whose inhabitants' livelihood is heavily dependent on a Sugar Cane Plantation that not only provides them with work, but also provides the rest of the country with sugar and paper mill fibers.



Haft Tapeh Workers on Strike

Current and retired workers of the Haft Tapeh Sugar Cane Plantation have been protesting since January 2018. In the months of June and July 2018, both retired workers and current workers have organized sit-ins, walk outs and strikes to demand unpaid wages, unpaid Social Insurance payments on part of the employer and security intimidation of the workers. Sugar cane cutter workers were one of the groups that went on strike. Another 500 of the retired workers also organized protests to demand their Social Insurance and pension payments. Haft Tapeh Sugar Cane Plantation is one of Iran’s oldest food manufacturing companies.

The company was transferred to the private sector in 2015.

Sector	Date	Name of The Employer	Type of Protest /duration	Dispute	# of protesters	total workers	Location
Agriculture and Agri-food Production	9 July -ongoing	Haft Tapeh Sugar Cane Plantation and Mill Company	Sugar Cane Cutters go on Strike	Unpaid wages & security intimidation of workers	100+	5000+	Haft Tapeh Khuzestan
Agriculture and Agri-food Production	8 July & 22 July	Haft Tapeh Sugar Cane Plantation and Mill Company	Formal Complaint to Ministry of Labor + Picketing	Retired workers unpaid pensions and insurance	200-500+	5000+	Haft Tapeh Khuzestan

City Workers and Teachers

In June and July 2018, city workers from municipalities of Karaj, Yasuj, Esfahan, Marivan, Ahvaz and Abadan protested unpaid wages. Workers of the Alvand Municipality and the workers of the Green Zone 11 in Karaj have not paid wages in 3 months. City workers of the Bandar-I-mam Municipality and the workers of the Rural Water and Wastewater Management Company of Khuzestan have also not seen a dime of their wages in 5 months. City workers of the municipality of Marivan who are mostly a Kurdish ethnic minority, have not been paid for 9 months.

There has also been layoffs without payments of past due wages and back pay. Seven city workers from Kamyaran were fired on 23 July and around the same time 52 skilled city workers of Lamard in the Fars province were fired without payment of past due wages.

On 21 July, seven employees of the Kamyaran municipality's contract were fired despite their contract of employment, and on the same day, on 1 August, 52 Lamard municipality workers in Fars province were dismissed without paying their wage claims.

In July, workers from the municipalities in Karaj, Yasuj, Esfahan, Marivan, Ahvaz, Abadan met with protesters in front of the buildings.



Ahvaz, Khoozestan Teacher Protest

Since early July, Iranian teachers protest that their demands for a 20% increase in wages was not met, which sparked a spontaneous campaign of “No to Paychecks.” The 20% increase in salaries was approved by the Iranian parliament and the Guardian Council after the teachers staged demonstrations and sit-ins in front of the Iranian parliament in

the spring of 2018. Despite the legal ratification of the raise, the Iranian government refused to increase teachers' paychecks. In the spring a number of teacher union activists were arrested. On 14 July, a number of principals from KhomeiniShahr schools resigned to protest reduction in benefits and pensions. On 15 July, a group of teachers from the city of Shiraz gathered in front of the city's Board of Education building.

As "No to Paychecks" continued, hospital workers of the city of Karaj joined the teachers by going on strike for past due wages and benefits.

Crackdown on Freedom of Association: Three members of Teacher's Trade Association in Iran are in Prison

In Iran, the government and the Judiciary do not tolerate independent workers' unions. Union activity has been legally only possible within a handful of government affiliated worker's organizations. Therefore, protesting unfair work conditions, contract violations and unpaid wages has become the main focus of workers, especially at a time that worsening of the economic conditions has led to many layoffs and delayed payments in salaries and benefits.

In the months of June and July 2018, almost all workers protests were suppressed to some degree; some violently and some with arrests. The story has become the daily news that workers protest overdue or none payment of wages and some are arrested in each protest.

On 11 June 2018, antiriot and security police attacked the protests of Iran National Steel Industrial Group workers in Ahvaz. A total of 60 workers were arrested on 11 and 12 June and were transferred to the Ahvaz prison narcotic ward, a tactic of humiliation. The workers were protesting 3 months of unpaid wages when the crackdown began. Most workers were released on bail with various charges brought against them, but at least 10 were kept more than a week in prison. The workers had staged a sit-in in front of the offices of the Members of Parliament from the city of Ahvaz. The 8 workers who were kept in prison the longest were charged with disruption of public peace and destruction of public property. The charges were brought against them with the direct complaint of the city's MPs. Prior to the protests that lead to the arrests, the workers of Iran National Steel Industrial Group were on strike for 20 days. Despite the arrests and the charges, the workers continued their protests the following days.

"The right to form unions and independent organizations;"
"the suspension of layoffs and temporary or permanent discharge of a worker;"

“end to police, security and judicial prosecution and persecution of workers, teachers and other union activists;” and “freedom of association, strike, protest, and opinion,” were among the main demands presented in a joint statement signed by a number of independent workers’ unions in on 1 May 2018. The Syndicate of Workers of the Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company, whose members have been subject to ongoing persecution, were among the signatories of the statement.

In June 2018, 3 Iranian unionists who came to participate in the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) 107th Session of the International Labour Conference in Paris were arrested upon return to Iran. Reza Shahabi, the treasurer of the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company, Davood Razavi a member of the board of directors of the same syndicated union as well as Loghman Oveysy from the Teacher’s Trade Association of city of Marivan in Kurdistan province of Iran came to France to attend the ILO conference and meet with fellow labor union members from other countries. On 21 June, Shahabi and Razavi were arrested in Tehran Imam Khomeini International Airport (IKA) and Razavi’s passport and both men’s personal belongings including publications they had brought along from France were confiscated. This is not the first arrest for Shahabi or Razavi. Shahabi has served a 6 year sentence for labor rights related activities and Razavi has been serving a 5 year sentence for the same activities.

Davood Razavi in a speech delivered in Paris in a side meeting of the 107th Session of the International Labour Conference said that judicial and security prosecution of labor activists, the inadequate conditions of imprisoned workers and the failure to implement international labor provisions are obstacles that workers in Iran face. He also noted that the crackdown on independent trade union activities is also reinforced by the “destructive role” that government affiliated workers associations like the Worker’s House and the Islamic Labor Councils play. According to Razavi, these government affiliated workers associations are constantly sending false reports and misinformation about the condition of Iranian workers to international bodies and international labor organizations.

The Teacher’s Trade Association in Iran has been hit hard with the Judiciary’s disciplinary measure against its members. On 18 June 2018, Ruhollah Mardani, teacher and a university student who has been in custody since the January 2018 uprisings in Iran, was sentenced to six years in prison.

On 25 June, 6500 teachers and civil society activists signed and submitted a letter to the Iranian Parliament’s education commission and the Ministry of Education and demanded the immediate release of teacher and union activist Mohammad Habibi. A member of the Board of Directors of Tehran Teachers’ Association, Habibi was arrested in May in a

teachers' protest in front of the Plan and Budget Organization and has been kept in custody since.

Mahmoud Beheshti Langroudi, a member of the Teachers' Association, went on a two-week hunger strike in prison on 2 July 2011, in protest of how the Judiciary, the Prosecutor's Office and prison guards treat union workers and political prisoners in Evin Prison. This is Beheshti Langroudi's second arrest and imprisonment in the last two years. Ismail Abdi, another member of the Teachers' Association, is still in prison. Ali Akbar Baghani, a former vice president of the Teachers' Association of Iran, who has finished serving a 1 year prison sentence was sentenced to 10 years of exile in Zabol.

Child Labor: Municipality Waste Management Contractors Employ Children

On 19 July 2018, Ahmed Fazelian, the Chief Justice of the Alborz Province announced that the province's month long program to gather child laborers and offer them support, shelter, transitional housing and community educational programs has identified and enrolled more than 27,000 youth laborers. The program known as the "Street Children and Child Laborer Regulating Initiative"² has been around and poorly implemented since 2005. As of 24 June 2018, the program is being implemented in the province of Alborz. The program was designed to be under the supervision of the State Welfare Organization of Iran (SWOI) or Sazman-e Behzisti and partner NGOs, but in reality it is the city police and the municipality officials who are in charge. Independent children rights activists, NGOs and even elected officials in the city council and Alborz municipality voiced their concerns in the month of June when it became apparent that the police are using violence to arrest children, rather than to direct them to support centers and shelters. The manner in which municipality agents and the police interacted with enrolled children has been documented with violent arrests, physical punishment, beating and transport of Afghan children to the Iran-Afghanistan border to initiate deportation. Moreover, the program is separating some children from their families and social services of SWOI are deciding on the matter of reunification of children with families.

The concerns about violent regulatory practices against child laborers in Alborz province coincided with the publication of reports in June and July 2018 on the exploitation of child laborers by municipal contractors in major urban centers in Iran, particularly in the waste disposal and recycling sector. The municipalities initially denied these reports as false allegations, but after the release of a photo of children dressed in municipality garbage collector uniforms, going through garbage without gloves and masks in provinces of Alborz, Tehran, Isfahan, North Kho-

² In Persian the program is called Tarh-e Samandehi-ye Koudakan-e Kar va Khiyaban.

rasan and Lorestan, the municipalities blamed the private contractors for hiring children at materials recovery facilities. Children rights activists have told Zamaneh Media that municipalities are not regulating the recycling private contractors and these companies are exploiting the child laborers for their low wages without considering their health and safety.



Children wearing garbage collector uniforms

According to Ahmad Reza Parandeh, the head of the Office of Social Welfare Affairs at the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare, who has looked into Tehran's municipal waste recycling contractors, all 26 contractors of the Tehran municipality ignored safety and health standards for their workforce. Similar research has not yet been conducted on other municipalities' waste management programs.

According to children's rights activists who have done field studies in materials recovery facilities, children are working 10 to 20 hour shifts per day for private contractors. In Karaj the capital of Alborz province, 85% of children working in outdoor garbage dumps are from Afghanistan. Major urban centers in Iran do have some separation programs for waste, but most waste management and separation of recycling material occurs at garbage dumps where low wage workers and child laborers go through garbage, separating recyclable material.

Article 79 of the Iranian Labor Code (ILC) prohibits employment of individuals below 15 years of age. The text of ILC, similar to the provisions of International Labor Organization (ILO), is concerned about work that deprives children of their childhood. However, Iran has not signed ILO's Minimum Age Convention (Convention No. 138).³ Despite minimum age

³ In 2002 IRI signed and ratified the 1999 International Labor Organizations' Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention (C182). For detailed legal analysis of IRI's adaptation of ILO's treaties and conventions concerning child labor please read "Hard Labor: Workers' Rights in Iran" by Small Media.

of employment being set at 15, Iran's ILC has many ambiguities that allow for the persistence of children in the country's workforce. Programs such as "Street Children and Child Laborer Regulating Initiative" have been around for a long time but even their short term implementations raises concerns about the wellbeing of child laborers enrolled in these programs.

Despite the fact that the number of street and working children in Iran is increasing, organizations such as SWOI or Sazman-e Behzisti who is responsible for the welfare of the child laborers has not been able to provide reliable statistics on the number of working children across the country. Nahid Tajoldin a member of Iranian Parliament states that there are between three to 7 million street children in Iran. Among those, the official estimate is that 2 million are child laborers. However, children's rights organizations and activists have questioned official estimates and report that between 5 to 7 million children in Iran are laborers; 50% of whom are immigrant children mainly from Afghanistan.

Implementation of government funded research, advocacy and capacity building programs have been mostly conducted in Tehran and Alborz provinces. According to official SWOI research, there are more than 20,000 child laborers in Tehran and among them over 70% are children of immigrant families from Afghanistan. According to a 2017 survey conducted by SWOI, in the province of Tehran the average age of entry into the workforce for child laborers is 11. In June 2018 Hadi Shariati, a child labor activist, announced that a field research in Tehran which studied 75 child laborers has found that aside from physical health problems, 50 of these children have experienced suicidal thoughts and 15 of them have attempted suicide in the past.

Workplace Fatalities: Everyday Six Workers do not Return Home from Work in Iran

On 24 July 2018, Ghassem Hassani a 34-year-old father of two and employee of Mehriz Cement Factory died as a result of an accident at the mechanical mill unit of his workplace. This is one of dozens of workplace accidents that occur daily in Iran, leading to disabilities, organ failures, long-term illnesses and death. On 25 July, 4 well-drilling workers in the village of Chakab in the province of Razavi Khorasan died of inhalation of carbon monoxide gas at the well. The next day, a construction worker in Urmia fell from a six-story building to his death. On 27 June, a fire at Abadan 600 Petrochemical Company, a producer of PVC in south of Iran, killed Nader Farhani and left 18 of his colleagues with various degrees of burns and injuries. On 2 July, 5 workers of an “unlicensed” cardboard box factory in the village of Mahmoodabad in Pakdasht died at work because of what was announced to be either a gas leak or an electric shock accident. On the same day, 2 workers died in a fire at a paint factory in Karaj. On 12 July, a contractor worker of Babol City Hydro died as a result of electric shock while working on electric posts. On 20 July, 2 workers were killed and 1 worker sustained life threatening injuries after an explosion at Pouyan Petrochemical Plant located in the city of Khomein. These are only a number of workplace fatalities and injuries in Iran in the months of June and July that have made it to the daily news.

In January 2018, Hassan Hashemi, the Minister of Health and Medical Education, announced that 2,000 Iranian workers die each year from on-the-job injuries or accidents. This number means that 6 Iranians die every day due to work-related injuries. Three years before, in April 2015, Hassan Hefdahtan, the Deputy Minister of Labor Relations at Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare (aka Ministry of Labor; MCLS),⁴ announced that at least 9,900 Iranian worker die per year from work-related injuries; that is close to 27 deaths per day.

These numbers do not mean that jobs are getting safer in Iran in the past three years. There are no official and publically available statistics that details methodologies of gathering data on work-related injuries at a national level. More so, statistics offered by the Ministry of Labor is only on workers who find employment legally and within the frameworks of Iran Labor Code (ILC) and are therefore covered by the Social Security Insurance (SSI) as required by Article 148 of ILC⁵, which covers

⁴ The official name of this ministry is Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare (MCLS), however, it is commonly referred to as the Ministry of Labor in the political lingo in Iran and the two titles are used interchangeably in this report.

⁵ Article 148 of the ILC requires employers to provide insurance based on Social Security Act for all their employees. However, this only occurs when workers are hired under legal contract. When hired illegally or with blank contracts, the workers are often denied insurance rights. Both workers and employers are responsible to provide a percentage of the Social Security Insurance costs. The amount the workers contribute is calculated every year with minimum wage calculations.

medical costs, unemployment, disability, etc. However, the ministry has not shown interest in gathering data on work related injuries that occur to workers who are not covered by SSI and are not protected by ILC.

This includes those employed by business or production units with 10 or less employees, those working in “free trade zones”, and workers with blank contracts. The latter is common illegal practice in Iran that employers subject workers to by making them sign a black sheet of paper to which they later add binding clauses and agreements in case of disputes. It often involves workers waving their rights including work related injury insurance for medical costs and unemployment. In Iran, more than 90% of workers work with temporary and blank contracts that are not covered by SSI.

Fatal injuries after falling down during work is the number one cause of workplace fatalities in Iran. According to Ali Mozaffari, director of labor inspection at the MCLS, 98% of workplace fatalities and accidents are preventable. The MCLS blames employers who do not fulfill their legal obligations with regards to occupational health and safety requirements of ILC. However, according to ILC, it is the ministry who is responsible for overseeing the implementation of labor health and safety regulations.

Workplace safety and accident preventions have consistently been on the list of demands of Iranian workers. A joint statement issued by the independent labor unions in Iran on 1 May 2018, voices concern about lack of concerns for workplace safety: ““Temporary and blank contracts, lack of job security, presence of contractor and intermediary companies; accidents, medical conditions, and fatal injuries caused by the lack of occupational safety and health, especially in the transportation, mining and construction sectors, have consistently been the cause of the incapacitating problems of the workers in the country.” The statement goes on to list a number of demands including for the abolition of blank contracts, monitoring of the practices of contractors and intermediary companies, immediate implementation of Construction Workers’ Insurance, placement of all workers even from small workshops and free zones on full coverage insurances as it is required by ILC and governed by ILC.