

# **Labor Rights in Iran**

A Zamaneh Project

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## 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 detail 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 is 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 months of August and September 2018.



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## Labor Issues in August-September 2018

With the sharp plummeting rate of the Iranian currency rial (IRR) in the past two months, the workers' monthly minimum wage shrank to \$90 with some receiving even less. According to the head of the Bakers Guild Association of Sanandaj, bread-makers in this city receive a daily wage of 25,000 tomans: the equivalent of less than \$3 a day with the current exchange rates.

Last August started with a new wave of protests against poverty, unemployment, and high prices. It started in the Shapour-no neighborhood in the city of Isfahan and spread to other cities including Gohardasht in Karaj, Sari, Shiraz and Mashhad, lasting five days in a row. Protesters in Shapour-no chanted "Workers say: better die than be humiliated!"

In August, Ali Rabiee the Minister of Cooperation, Labor and Social Welfare was dismissed following impeachment in the parliament. His reinstatement was rejected with 129 votes out of 243. The reasons mentioned included: the high unemployment rate among workers; poverty and work-related discrimination; widespread factory shutdowns within the past five years; fraudulent labor statistics, lobbying and favoritism; monopolization; pension fund bankruptcies; and delayed payments for petrochemical exports.

On 22 Mordad (13 August) more than 6000 retired workers signed an open letter to the parliament criticizing their representatives' efficiency and the performance of Hassan Rouhani's cabinet regarding living-wage conditions. A month later on 20 Shahrivar (11 September) in a concerted effort, scores of retirees took to the streets of several major cities such as Tehran, Mashhad, Tabriz, Yazd and Kermanshah, showing anger and discontent.

After several months of heated wage disputes and bank related obstacles, August witnessed the eventual shutdown of Kian Cord Factory, a major producer of tire cord fabric in the city of Malayer. In September, DigiKala, the largest online store in Iran, laid off 175 of its employees citing "the unfavorable economic tides and the present currency rates."

On 20 Shahrivar (11 September), with the national currency being steeply devalued and the buying power of wage-labor hitting the lowest level, 40,000 Iranian workers agreed to go to work for one day without pay. This was a plan put to work by Basijkargari, or the Organization of Labor Mobilization, to "assist our country in the face of economic warfare."

## Labor Protests

Like in previous months, each week in August and September of this year there were tens of rallies and walkouts by workers protesting the backlogged pay, decrease in production, layoffs and rampant privatizations.

What filled the top headlines in the same period were new rounds of militant strikes at Haft-Tappeh Sugarcane Plantation and Mill Complex. The plantation is located near Susa (Shush) the historical site of the Tomb of Daniel the Prophet, as well as the ancient sacred structures called Chogha-Zanbil (Ziggurat Dūr Untash), a 45-kilometer distance from the road connecting Andimeshk to Ahvaz in the province of Khuzestan. Haft-Tappeh Complex is viewed by most observers as the center of labor movement in Iran. Workers and pensioners at Haft-Tappeh have repeatedly held rallies and gone on strike since the winter of last year. The newest round started on 12 Mordad (3 August) and lasted for a few days. Then again strikes began on 27 Mordad (18 August), with grievances ranging from wages not paid for several months to delayed retirement cutoff for 400 workers (because of unpaid 4% contribution by government affiliated Social Security Organization); land breakup aiming at transfer of ownership to private sector; layoffs or suspensions in the animal feed division; and harsh measures by the new head of the security forces at the compound. More than 700 full time and 1500 daily contract workers are affected by these unstable conditions.



*Haft-Tappeh workers*

On 28 Mordad (19 August), the second day of the strike, the anti-riot special units arrested five workers who had attempted self-immolation in protest. The detained workers were charged with "disrupting the social order" and were later freed on a temporarily basis. On the same day, about 100 of the 340 retired Haft-Tappeh workers gathered in front of the Susa government headquarters demanding accumulated bonuses (called "sanavat" rights) which must be paid upon retirement. On 30 Mordad (20 August), the anti-riot forces once again tried to quell the protests. When Adnan Ghazi the Governor of Susa appeared in front of the strikers on 8 Shahrivar (2 September) offering promises, workers did not end their protest. Ultimately, on 11

Shahrivar (5 September), after three days of negotiations with the employer's representative and the economic Deputy Governor of Khuzestan, they ended the strike when some of their demands were met, including one month past due salary.

**TABLE 1 – Labor Protests in Agriculture and Food Industry (August-September 2018)**

Date	Protesters	The Subject	Form	Number of Protesters	Location
8 and 13 August	Sugar beet farmers in Naqadeh villages	Nonpayment for a year	Rally / Factory shutdown	Unknown	Naqadeh, West Azerbaijan Province
3 September	Workers at Zanjan Vegetable Oil Plant	Factory closure, compulsory leave, unpaid insurance premiums and unpaid 28 months of wages	Holding a rally in front of the Governor's office	50-60	Zanjan, Zanjan Province
4 September	Workers at the Pegah Milk Factory	The Revolutionary Guards seized the land that the factory made available to workers for housing	Holding a rally on the lands that were seized	700	Tehran-Pars neighborhood in Tehran
22 to 29 September	East Isfahan farmers	Non-payment for the autumn season	Parked the tractors in public transit areas	Unknown	Isfahan

Around the same time, the workers at the Iran National Steel Industrial Group stopped working in protest to their wages being held for four months. They also demanded the supply of raw materials and the restarting of the production lines.

Iran National Steel Industrial Group, also known as Ahvaz Steel, is located 9 kilometers into Ahvaz-Khorramshahr highway. With a workforce of 3,500, it is one of the few large producers of steel rolling in the country. Ahvaz Steel was privatized in 2009. Two years later, the new owner of the Group, Amir Mansoor Aria (a.k.a Mahafarid Khosravi) was arrested on charges of embezzling 3,000 billion tomans. He was executed in 2014. The steel plant was temporarily under the supervision of the Prosecutor General and its appointed managers, later to be transferred to the Iranian National Bank. In 2017 the Ahavz Steel was given to the private sector and again later handed back over to the National Bank. This unstable course caused the plant to be operative at only 5% of its production capacity.

Due to the uncertainty in the ownership of the Ahavaz Steel, its workers called their new round of protests the "Transparency Week" and held rallies at regular intervals in front of the management building and other locations such as the Governor's office, the Justice Department office, and the branch supervisory headquarters of the National Bank of Khuzestan. The protests lasted till 8 Shahrivar (30 August). On that day, the first shipment of raw materials arrived. The managers also promised to pay one month of the past due wages. Furthermore, the province's Deputy Governor announced the allocation of 200 billion tomans to jumpstart the production.

**TABLE 2 – Other Protests in Industrial Sector (August-September 2018)**

Date	Protesters	The Subject	Form	Number of Protesters	Location
7 August	Workers at CHOUKA Iran Wood & Paper Industries Inc.	3 months wage withholding, no insurance, no job security, 50% reduction in production capacity	Gathering at workplace	Unknown	Talesh, Gilan Province
8 August	Gilana Tile Workers	40 months wage withholding, factory closure	Gathering at workplace	110	Rudbar, Gilan Province
8 August	Workers at Mavi Wood Products	Factory closure, no prospect in sight	Gathering at workplace	Unknown	Maku, West Azerbaijan Province
15 August	Workers at C.S.T. (Industrial Compressors in Tabriz)	6 months wage withholding, no insurance	Gathering at workplace	Unknown	Gharamalek industrial village, Tabriz East Azerbaijan Province
18 August	Workers at IRCAST-SCHAUENBERG TEHRAN (heavy steel structures for oil, gas and petrochemical projects)	4 months wage withholding	Gathering in front of Labor Office in Mahshahr	50	Mahshahr, Khuzestan Province
18 August 1 September 23-25 September 29 September	Workers at Tolypers Detergent Factory and Alborz Packaging	Factory closure, 150 workers suspended, mandatory leave of 400 others	Gathering at workplace Gathering in front of Labor Office in Alborz County	150	Alborz industrial village, Qazvin Qazvin Province
29 September	Workers at Alborz Packaging Factory	Factory inoperative	Gathering at workplace	Unknown	Alborz industrial village, Qazvin Qazvin Province
20 August	Workers at Pars Saveh Rubber Factory	Privatisation, lack of job security	Gathering at workplace	Unknown	Saveh, Markazi Province
21 August 28 August	Retired workers at Qazvin Naznakh, Farnakh, Mahnakh Textile Company	Non-payment of wages ten years after the closure of the plant	Gathering in front of Governor's Office	80	Qazvin, Qazvin Province
26 August	Workers at Khuzestan Tire & Rubber Co.	200 layoffs	Gathering at workplace	Unknown	Gotvand County, Khuzestan Province
27-28 August	Workers at Iran Carton Co.	4 layoffs and lack of job security	Holding a rally and demonstration	400	Shahabad, Tehran
10 September 15 September 17 September	Workers at Takestan Industrial Group	40 layoffs, wage withholding, lack of job security	Gathering in front of manager's office	200	Takestan, Qazvin Province
23 September	Association of Retired Workers at Alborz Steel	"Poverty and destitution" afflicting workers at Alborz	Open Letter to the head of the Alborz Steel Pension Fund	Unknown	Qazvin, Qazvin Province
25 September	Workers at Vafa-e-Sepehr Co.	Wage withholding	Gathering in front of manager's office	Unknown	Bam, Kerman Province

## Construction and Infrastructure

Workers in the construction sector have also been protesting the long delays in wage payments. Many large-scale projects are suspended due to a shortage of capital and the wave of layoffs continues. On 12 Mordad (3 August), Mohammad Mehdi Zahedi, the Kerman-Ravar representative in the parliament, said those working in the Safarood Dam project have not been paid for five months. Similarly, 170 contract workers who did construction work for the Ahwaz subway were not paid for 18 months.

On 20 Shahrivar (11 September), groups of workers in the Chamshir Dam in Gachsaran County gathered at their workplace to protest their job conditions; 800 to 950 of them hadn't been paid for 10 months.

On Mordad 30 (21 August), several workers at Omran Souleh Company gathered in Jayhoon Street, Tehran, in front of the company's offices, to protest layoffs and seven months of unpaid salaries. Omran Soule Company produces metal structures for buildings and roads, active in Hashtgerd urban development projects and construction of high-rises in Tehran. The protest continued until Shahrivar 1 (23 August).

Most companies in the construction sector are government contractors. They put the blame for unpaid wages on the government for not honoring its financial commitments.

**TABLE 3 – Oil and Petrochemical Industries (August-September 2018)**

Date	Protesters	The Subject	Form	Number of Protesters	Location
6 August	Workers at Iranian Offshore Oil Company (IOOC)	Wage reduction of 500,000 tomans	Gathering at workplace	Unknown	Kharg Island Oil Terminal
18 August	Trainees at Oil Company in Azadegan Oil Fields	No hire following two years of internship	Gathering in front of the office of MP from Dasht-e-Azadegan	50-60	Dasht-e Azadegan , Khuzestan Province
29 August	Workers at Green Petroleum Coke Plant in Khormshahr	Withholding wages and bonuses	Strike	Unknown	Khorramshahr, Khuzestan Province
28 August to 18 September Discontinuous	Workers at Farabi Petrochemical Co.	Deferred wages, failure to implement job ranking	Strike, including 3-day hunger strike	Unknown	Mahshahr Port, Khuzestan Province
6 September 8 September	Workers at Asaluyeh National Petrochemical Company, phases 21, 22	2 to 5 months wage withholding	Holding a rally in front of the contractors' offices	Unknown	Asaluyeh County, Bushehr Province
27 September	Unemployed youth in Abadan	Unemployment, demanding local hiring	Holding a rally in front Abadan Refinery entrance, 2nd phase	50	Abadan County, Khuzestan Province



## Transportation: Truck Drivers' Strike Spreads to more than 258 Cities

Workers at the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways (IRIR) and its affiliates continued their strike into August and September. The new round had been called by Railway Workers' Councils on 25 Tir (16 July). The strike took place at 23 train stations and in some cities the railroads were blocked.

Thousands of railway contract workers, employed by rail manufacture contractors such as Automotive Industries Development Company (AIDCO), Jooshgostar Railway Development Company and others, put forward their most urgent demands in a statement issued by Railway Workers Coordination Council: full payment of past due salaries; compensation for health insurance premiums as well as comprehensive coverage plan; cancellation of temporary contracts; recognition of independent labor organizations; recognition of the right to organize and plea-bargain; a ban on summary dismissals; and improvement of workplace conditions.

On 17 Mordad (8 August) the railway workers ended their strike when authorities pledged to address the issues. Those promises were not kept and subsequently on 3 Shahrivar (25 August) a new round of protests began.

According to Railway Workers Coordination Council, the railroad workers, their number estimated at 7,000, have not received their pay for a period of 6 to 33 months. The strike forced the rail manufacture company to release one month's back pay.

In another development, truck drivers were also on strike since 1 Mordad (23 July) which lasted at least till 18 Mordad (9 August). This was the second round. Other cities joined them on 10-15 Shahrivar (1-6 September) and once again, this time all over the country, on 1 Mehr (23 September).



*In September 127 truck drivers were arrested and imprisoned.*

According to a statement issued by the Nationwide Truckers Coordinating Union on 31 Shahrivar (22 September), some of the demands put forward are: pension increase and work-hazards compensation; reduced prices for rubber and spare parts; 70% fares increase; reduction in insurance premiums; removal of the middlemen at the terminals; and disciplinary measures for the traffic police officers who conduct arbitrary stops and take bribes.

By the end of September, the truckers' strike spread to more than 258 cities in 31 provinces. It is still ongoing and reportedly have caused shortages at gas stations and general stores.

The government has taken a harsh policing approach in dealing with the truckers' strike. According to judicial authorities, in September alone 127 drivers in various cities were arrested and imprisoned. The striking drivers were threatened with severe measures and long jail sentences.

**TABLE 4 – Taxi Drivers (August-September 2018)**

Date	Protesters	The Subject	Form	Location
4 August	Gharachak Varamin taxi drivers	Failure to implement the City Council's resolution on the consolidation of taxi lines in the area	Gathering in front of the Governor's Office	Varamin, Tehran Province
8 August	Babol taxi drivers	Against "Uberization" and internet cab services	Gathering in front of the temporary offices of the internet Snap car service in Babol	Babol, Mazandaran Province
8 August	Abhar taxi drivers	Protesting the low cab-fare and high cost of spare parts	Holding a rally	Abhar, Zanjan Province
9 August	Mehran taxi drivers	Lack of job safety	Strike	Mehran, Ilam Province
13 August	Mehrabad Airport special cab drivers	Unprecedented cost of airline tickets and a reduction in the number of passengers	Holding a rally	Tehran (capital city)
16 August	Mehran Border Terminal taxi drivers	Unemployment after closure of the border terminal	Walkout to the city center and holding a rally	Mehran, Ilam Province
27 August	Khorramabad taxi drivers	Low cab-fare, against personal and internet car services	Demonstration in a major city square	Khorramabad, Lorestan Province
4 September	Paveh taxi drivers	Low cab-fare	Strike and holding a rally	Paveh, Kermanshah Province

## Scant Pay Raise versus 430% Currency Devaluation

Under the Labor Law in the Islamic Republic wages are set at annual meetings held by the Supreme Council of Labor. Present at each meeting are the labor, employer, and government representatives. The labor representatives are appointed by the officially approved labor entities which do not reflect the aspirations of independent workers' organizations.

In 2018 the Supreme Council of Labor, in a long excruciating process, set the monthly minimum wage to 1,114,140 tomans (less than \$150 a month by current exchange rates), a figure substantially less than half the real poverty level.

Given the drastic fall in the value of the national currency combined with the speedy rise in prices, last June a committee within the Supreme Council of Labor agreed to add 800 thousand tomans to the minimum wage. The government and employer representatives rejected a cash payment, proposing instead a voucher card for basic goods. The final agreement is still pending.

Some labor activists oppose the idea of a basic goods voucher, saying it will cause shady dealings and a black market for the issued vouchers. Besides, they contend, it is up to the workers themselves to decide how to spend their earnings.

Government and employers believe any cash payment to the workers would increase liquidity and heat up the inflation. But many independent economists think the best way for liquidity management is regulatory measures imposed on monetary institutions. Not to mention that even a small increase of this amount to the minimum wage, bargained over such a painstakingly long process, is still not commensurate with currency devaluation and the eroding buying power of the workers.

According to Mohsen Bagheri, vice chairman of the Islamic Labor Council of Tehran, "the 430 percent reduction in the value of the national currency during the last seven months has caused a severe blow to the workers' conditions." Based on official statistics, in the month of August a working-class household needed to spend 72% of its earnings on basic foodstuff. Faramarz Toufighi, one of the three labor representatives at the Supreme Council of Labor has said that since December of last year the purchasing power of workers has dropped by 72%.

**TABLE 5 – Education and Urban Services (August-September 2018)**

Date	Protesters	The Subject	Form	Number of Protesters	Location
5 August	Workers at Azadi Stadium	The expulsion of 6 workers and withholding wages / return of the expelled workers to work	Holding a rally in the stadium and march to the Ministry of Sports	20	Tehran
5 August	Retirees at Farhangian University	Non-payment of bonuses and retirement benefits	Holding a rally in front of the headquarters of Farhangian University	Unknown	Tehran
7 August	Workers at Tamarchin Border Customs	19 months wage withholding	Strike	Unknown	Piranshahr border, West Azarbaijan Province
8 August	Sardasht municipal workers	Several months wages and insurance withholding	Holding a rally in front of the municipal headquarters	Unknown	Sardasht, West Azarbaijan Province
8 August	Lushan municipal workers	5 months wage withholding	Expressing discontent in the media	80	Lowshan, Central District of Rudbar County, Gilan Province
8 August	Tabas laid off municipal workers	Fired by contractor	Holding a rally in front of the municipal headquarters	20	Tabas, South Khorasan Province
13 August	Pre-primary teachers in Karoun city	The transfer of management to the private sector and non-payment of insurance premium by the new management	Rally in front of the Education Department offices	90	Karun, Khuzestan Province
13-15 August 23-25 September	Employee's representatives at Edalat Shareholders Cooperative	41 months wage withholding	Holding a rally against the building of the Ministry of Economy and Finance  Holding a rally in front of the building of the privatization organization	1,500	Tehran
19 August	"Service Purchasing" teachers	Four months of deferred wages, no insurance and benefits	Gathering in front of the Islamic House of Reoresentatives (Majlis)	Unknown	Tehran
21 August 26-27 August 29 September	Imam Khomeini Specialized Hospital in Karaj	5 to 11 months' salary deferral, the hospital's uncertain status after the announcement of its auction and transfer of ownership	Holding a rally in front of the Organization of Cooperation between Alborz Municipalities  Gathering in front of a hospital and holding a rally in front of the House of the Nation in Alborz Province	200-300	Karaj, Alborz Province
21 August	Municipal contract workers in Nazarabad	6 months wage withholding	Holding a rally in front of the municipal headquarters	Unknown	Nazarabad, Alborz Province
24-25 August	Alvand laid off municipal workers	Expulsion after changing the	Holding a rally in front of the	90	Alvand, Qazvin Province

		contractor without payment of the past due wages	municipal headquarters		
26 August 29 August	Zabol municipal workers	5 months deferred salary	Holding a rally in front of the Governor's Office	Unknown	Zâbol, Sistan and Baluchestan Province
29 August	Employees of Amirmomenin Hospital in Zabol	wage arrears without pay and salary reduction	Gathering at the hospital	Unknown	Zâbol, Sistan and Baluchestan Province
30 August	Nurses	Failure to enforce the Tariff-payments Law for nursing services	Twitter Storm - Nurses want to repeat this on eighth and twenty-seventh of every month	Unknown	Entire country
4 September	Municipal contract workers in Ababdan Zone 2	Three months deferred salary	Holding a rally in front of the municipal headquarters	20	Abadan, Khuzestan Province
4 September	Firefighters at Shadegan Fire Department and Safety Services	Wage deferrals	Holding a rally in front of the municipal headquarters	30	Shadegan, Khuzestan Province
15 September	Workers at Abadan Fire Department and Urban Services	--	Holding a rally in front of the municipal headquarters	Unknown	Abadan, Khuzestan Province
16 September	Workers at Abadan Municipal Waste Management and Construction Departments	Three months deferred salary and no insurance payments	Gathering in front of the building of the municipal construction company / blocking the entrance	80	Abadan, Khuzestan Province
18 September	Nurses in Golestan Province	12 months deferred wages	Media coverage	Unknown	Golestân Province
24 September	Teachers at the Literacy Movement Bureau	Uncertain employment status	Gathering in front of the offices of the Ministry of Education	Unknown	Tehran
29 September	Municipal Workers at Ahvaz Green Space, 8th district	Wage deferrals	Holding a rally in front of the municipal headquarters	Unknown	Ahvaz, Khuzestan Province
29 September	Nurses in Tehran	Denial of a loan, despite depositing in a cooperative	Holding a rally in front of the cooperative of the Nursing Organization of Tehran	50	Tehran

## Crackdown on Labor and Suppression of the Unions

In the last two months, the IRI once again demonstrated that it does not tolerate independent labor unions and won't accept their right to protest.

On the second day of demonstrations at Haft-Tappeh Sugarcane Plantation and Mill, the anti-riot units attacked protesters with tear gas canons, pepper gas, and sticks. They arrested five workers and later released them on bail. On 5 Shahrivar (27 August), the internal security service in Susa contacted Ismail Bakhshi, who had called for the formation of independent workers' councils to take control of the workplace, and other labor spokespersons summoning them to their headquarters saying "if they don't present themselves to the authorities" they will be arrested and jailed. The security forces also tried to arrest journalists who were at the scene.

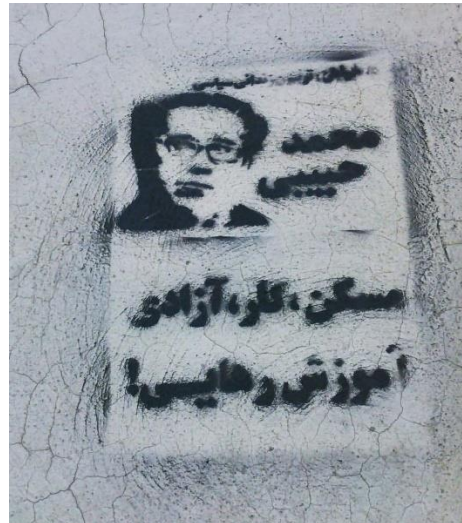
At Ahvaz Steel Complex, the special police units prevented the workers from gathering in front of the National Bank of Khuzestan. On 21-22 Khordad (11-12 June), the anti-riot forces had attacked the steel workers, arresting 60 protesters and putting them in the drug detention center of Ahwaz.

In August, Tehran's security police arrested Hassan Saeedi, Dawood Razavi and Ata Babakhani, three members of a cooperative housing project called Sepidar 2 and 3, belonging to Tehran bus workers, and detained them for several hours. In the city of Marivan, where four environmentalists were perished in a forest wildfire, the police arrested several labor activists who were participating in a ceremony honoring those killed in the fire. In the city of Arak, 16 workers at HEPCO (Heavy Equipment Production Company) were summoned to Arak Prosecutor's Office for "disturbing the social order" and "taking part in illegal gatherings." The workers had blocked the north-south railways in protest, citing unpaid wages, uncertain status of their employment and the transfer of their production unit to new managers.

On 24 Shahrivar (15 September) six teachers' union activists received their sentence. They were among the teachers arrested last May while holding a rally in front of the Planning and Budget Organization in Tehran who were temporarily freed from Evin Prison on bail. The verdict issued at branch no. 1060 of the criminal court of Tehran for government employees declares 9 months mandatory jail sentence, 74 lashes, and a fine to be paid in cash for Aliya Eghdamdoost, a member of the Retirees' Alliance, Rasool Bodaghi, a former inspector at the Tehran Teachers Union, Ismail Gerami, Javad Zolnouri, Hossein Gholami and Mohammad Abedi, on charges of "disturbing the social order by participating in illegal gatherings" and "resisting officers while on duty."

Mohammad Habibi, the other teacher activist accused in this case, was sentenced to 10 ½ years' imprisonment and 74 lashes, re-enforced by a supplementary two-year ban on joining any political or social groups, and a ban on leaving the country. Habibi's verdict was handed by the 26<sup>th</sup> branch of the Tehran Islamic Revolutionary Court. Education International (EI), the global

union federation of teachers, strongly condemned the verdict while Coordinating Council of Iranian Teachers issued a statement demanding Habibi's "immediate release."



*Graffiti slogan, "Free Mohammad Habibi!"*

Mahmoud Beheshti Langroudi, Ismail Abdi, and Roohollah Mardani are among other teachers in jail at the beginning of the new academic year. Ali-Akbar Baghbani is spending his jail term in the city of Zabol.

Assault on truck drivers could be the height of security measures against union workers in the past two months. By the end of September, 127 truckers have been arrested in Qazvin, Pakdasht County, Razan County in Hamedan Province, Fars Province, North Khorasan, Semnan and Bushehr. Others were threatened with cancellation of their fuel rations.

Judicial authorities in Iran, such as Mohammad-Jafar Montazeri the Attorney General, and Ali al-Qasi-Mehr the head of the Fars Province's Justice Department, using Islamic jurisprudence terminology, declared those on strike as committing "Ghata'al-Tarighi" and "Fesad-fil-Arz". According to an old law passed in 1931, the first offense applies to all "road bandits" and any "leader of armed criminals." Such person, based yet on another Islamic penal code passed in 2013, is a "Muhareb" (combatant against the state) whose punishment ranges from "cutting off the right hand and left leg" to "exile" and "execution." The second offense, that of "Fesad-fil-Arz," covers any person who "has violated the corporal integrity of a human being, endangered the internal and external security of the country, disseminated false claims, has destabilized the economic order, committed arson and physical destruction, spread poisonous microbial and dangerous substances, established or participated in centers of prostitution." The punishment for any of those offenses is a death sentence.

## Discrimination Against Afghan Migrant Workers

In recent months, many migrant Afghans have left Iran as the economic crisis intensified due to the collapse of the Rial. Since the beginning of this year, the Rial (IRR) has lost two thirds of its value against the US dollar and one fifth of its value against the Afghani (Afghanistan currency). Some have migrated to Turkey to find work. Turkey's Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu said in April that 29,899 Afghan migrants had entered Turkey illegally in the first four months of this year.

However, the economic crisis was not the sole reason for the Afghans to leave Iran in recent months, nor was it a purely voluntary exit.

On Mordad 15 (6 August), Interior Minister Abdul-Reza Rahmani Fazli announced that since the beginning of this year 730,000 Afghan refugees without documents have been "collected" throughout the country. The "collecting" mission is done by law enforcement forces with high security tactics. According to Saeed Bayat, Tehran's Director for Immigrants and Foreigners, law enforcement forces deliver an average of 100 to 150 foreign nationals per day to "Tehran's Caretaker Camp" to be returned to their country.

Afghan migrant workers are the lowest wage earners in Iran. They legally obtain jobs only in construction, agriculture, thermal kiln processing, stone cutting, waste recycling, well drilling, fertilizer production, and the like. And these jobs are confined to Afghan workers who hold a residence permit, while officials say that at least half of the Afghan migrant workers are without documents and hence not protected by the labor law, without any insurance and benefits.

The high number of job incidents among Afghan workers reflects this situation. On Thursday, August 9, in the city of Mashhad two Afghan workers digging wells fell in and died after the walls of the well collapsed.

According to Article 120 of the Labor Code in Iran, alien nationals cannot hold a job unless they obtain a visa with work permit for a specified occupation. They must obtain the permit in accordance with applicable laws and regulations. Any use of foreign nationals without a work permit or in a work other than what is specified in that permit is punishable with 91 to 180 days of imprisonment, in accordance with Article 181 of the Labor Code.

The general policy of the Iranian government is the expulsion of undocumented immigrants and non-renewal of residence permits for those who are legal. Ahmed Mohammadifar, director general for immigration and foreigners' affairs at the Interior Ministry has said that the residence permits for 830,000 out of a million and a half legal immigrants have not been renewed for various reasons.



Afghan workers not only face hazardous jobs and sub-standard working conditions without any protection under the labor law, but also discriminatory, humiliating, and hostile treatment in the hands of employers and government officials.

Many Iranian officials believe that Afghans have shrunk the Iranian workers' food table. Saeed Bayat, director general for immigrants and foreigners' affairs in Tehran province, said on 25 Tir (16 July) that Afghans steal "job vacancies" from Iranian workers. Similar remarks came from Nader Ghazipour, MP from Urumia and the vice chairman of Labor Committee in parliament, Massoud Babayee, the Director General of the Labor, Social Co-operation and Social Welfare Organization of Qazvin province, and Ruhollah Babayee Saleh, member of the board of the Social Commission in Iranian Parliament.

In May 2017, the Iranian Statistics Center estimated the number of Afghan migrants to be about 1.6 million. But the Afghan Ministry of Refugees and Returns holds that the number of Afghan refugees in Iran in 2018 was 2,430,000, of which one million live without legal papers.<sup>1</sup>

Last August, Saeed Bayat, director general for immigrants and foreigners' affairs in Tehran province and Muhammad Ajami, director general for immigrants and foreigners' affairs of the Province of Khorasan Razavi announced the number of foreign nationals present in Iran to be 3 million and 3.2 million respectively. But on 8 Tir (29 June) AbulFazl Fatullahi, vice chairman of the High Center for the Workers' Guild Associations, said by last January there have been around 4.7 million refugees and immigrants in the country. According to him, 75% of these immigrants are employed, amounting to about 3.5 million. The number of insured workers is no more than 20.000, which is about 0.5%. Child labor is part of this workforce. In Yazd, for example, 80% of the working children are Afghan migrant workers.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://morr.gov.af/fa/>

## Child Labor

Some municipal contractors use children as cheap labor in waste recycling centers. The children work under sub-standard conditions without the required gloves and masks. They often become targets of sexual abuse. More than 50% of them are Afghan children.

Tayebeh Siavoshi, MP from Tehran and a member of the parliament's Cultural Commission, said on 1 August: "Children working at waste-separation sites are in dire situation. They are reported getting sick, contracting AIDS, sometimes dying and being buried at the same garbage removal sites." Ms. Siavoshi's remarks were focused on Mahmoud-Abad waste-accumulation site near Shahr-e-Ray in the outskirts of Tehran.

Elham Fakhari a member of the City Council of Tehran told reporters, "According to a study on the prevalence of AIDS among a thousand child workers in Tehran, 4-5% of them are infected with AIDS." She added a third of child workers with AIDS are 10 to 14 and two thirds are 15 to 18 years old.

According to a research conducted by Imam Ali Society, a student NGO, the average age among 600 to 700 children working in waste recycling sites is 12 years old. On average a child works 10.5 hours a day. The study shows 50 to 60% of the child workers eat and sleep at the same sites. They often contract severe skin diseases, AIDS, hepatitis, dysentery, tuberculosis, tetanus, skin lesions, intestinal parasites, polio, and scoliosis. Sussan Maziarfar who directed the study says: "There are work permits issued for these children, but the municipal authorities deny that they have issued them while contending there are city officers who take a bribe of 200 - 400 thousand tomans to let children work on the sites."

There is an agreement between children rights activists, members of the City Council, and MPs that the municipal authorities must be blamed for the plight of children of labor. On 19 August Majid Farahani a member of the City Council of Tehran said, "We need to hold the corrupt officials and the waste disposal contractors to account" for "exploiting" the child workers.

On August 16, a 6-year-old child, Heydar Askaravi, was hit by a bus and killed on the road to Mahshahr while collecting cartons and plastics.

In Alborz Province, the government agencies implemented for the first time on June 24 a plan called Child Labor Organizing Plan to address the problem. This plan which was originally ratified in 2005 puts the municipality and the police in charge of the working children. Ever since, the harsh police crackdown on children has been criticized by rights activists and members of the City Council of Tehran.

Article 79 of the Labor Law in Iran prohibits the employment of children under the age of 15 but ambiguities contained in the law has made it possible to evade that minimum. Also, Iran has not signed the ILO sanctioned minimum age (Convention No. 138).<sup>2</sup>

There are no official statistics on child labor in Iran, but the number seems on the rise. Government officials estimate the number of children working at 2 million while children's rights activists believe it to be 5 to 7 million. At least 50% are immigrants, notably from Afghanistan.

According to the State Welfare Organization's officials, there are 20,000 child laborers in Tehran, more than 70% of them are Afghans. A survey conducted by the same organization last year stated that the average age of a child worker in the capital city is 11 years. There is no reliable data regarding the family background of these children.

In the city of Qom 80% of child workers do not have anyone to watch over them, claimed Reza Saligheh the head of the city's Welfare Organization on 4 September. However, on the same day, Seyyed Mohammad-Kazem Nazari, the political and security deputy of the Governor of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province, said 80% of the working children's parents have found work in construction without any insurance coverage. Two days earlier, Ebrahim Jorjani, the deputy chairman of the City Council of Gorgan, announced an increase in the number of child workers in his city, but saying based on findings by the Welfare Organization 75% do have caretakers. Meanwhile, Habibullah Massoudi-Farid, deputy director of the Welfare Organization of Iran, said 96% of children live with their parents.

Article 30 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic states, "it is the duty of the government to provide free education for those who finish the secondary school (18 years of age)." Nevertheless, by entering the labor market early on, the child workers are denied their right to education.

On 22 Khordad (12 June), Elham Fakhari a member of the City Council of Tehran said 72% of child workers lack enough literacy or are completely illiterate. The results of a research done in the Parliament shows 3.2 million children in the country did not have access to any education. Hemayat Mirzadeh, spokesperson for the parliament's Education and Research Commission, believes the reason for children staying out of school is a national plan implemented several years ago which prevent primary schools from having repeat classes in the afternoon.

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<sup>2</sup> In 2002, The Islamic Republic (IRI) signed and ratified the so-called Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention (1999 by ILO).

## Workplace Accidents

On 7 Mordad (29 July), two workers digging a well in the village of Kedenj, Fars Province, were killed during work.

On 15 Mordad (6 August), an employee of a manufacturing company in the city of Zarandiyeh was electrocuted at work.

On 17 Mordad (8 August), three workers were killed in a fire in the engine room at the National Olympic Academy located in Seoul Street, Tehran. Same day, the director of Fire Department in the city of Nahavand announced the death of four workers when a building under construction collapsed. Two days earlier, a wheat silo in Eastern Azerbaijan caved in suddenly and buried alive four workers at that facility.

On 19 Mordad (10 August), a twenty-five-year-old Afghan worker was crushed under concrete blocks when an old house in the western part of Tehran was being demolished.

On 13 Shahrivar (4 September), six workers died, three of them Afghans, when an elevator collapsed at a high-rise under construction in the northwest part of Tehran.

On 15 Shahrivar (6 September), at a steel casting plant called Kovar in Fars Province, a worker was killed when he fell from a height.

On 25 Shahrivar (16 September), the Abneel coal mine in Kerman Province collapsed, killing one and injuring seven miners.

According to a statement released this year on 27 Mordad (18 August) by Iranian Legal Medicine Organization, in a ten-year period (2007- 2017), there has been 15,997 job-related casualties consisting of 15,767 men and 230 women. The highest toll in this period belongs to three provinces of Tehran (3,373), Isfahan (1,383), and Khorasan Razavi (880); a total of 5,634.

The year 2013 has the highest death toll of 1,994 and the year 2009 the lowest of 1,225. The death rate increase has reached 10% for 2016 and 9.1% for 2017.

Falling from heights has been the biggest cause of death in the same 10-year period, that is 6,640 (41.5%). Other causes include fatal injuries by hard objects, asphyxiation, and deep burns.

Ali Soleimanipour, the chief medical examiner in Isfahan Province has reported 38 job-related deaths and 961 injuries in his province during the first four months of this year, which includes 64 women and 897 men. The figure for the same period in Mazandaran Province, according to Ali Abbassi the chief medical examiner, is 28 job-related deaths. Kamrooz Amini, the chief medical examiner in Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province, reported 163 job-related injuries in the first 5 months of this year.

**TABLE 6 – Work Related Fatalities 2008-2017 (left to right bars)**



In February 2016, the Health Minister Hassan Hashemi claimed that each year close to 2000 people die due to work-related accidents, that is, more than six a day. The official count applies only to those who are covered by the law and entitled to health insurance under Article 148 of the Labor Code. Most accident victims do not have medical coverage because they work in small shops with ten or less employees or are hired in manufacturing and service units within the "Free Trade Zones." There's also the so-called "white signature" contract workers that are not included in official statistics. In Iran, more than 90% of the workforce consist of temporary or contract workers.

According to Farshad Ismaili, a researcher on labor law and social security, high rates of work-related accidents in Iran is largely due to lack of mandated "training" and "supervision" at workshops. Article 91 of the Labor Code requires that employers install the necessary equipment for the safety of the workplace. They must train the workers and follow the protective rules and sanitary regulations. Mr. Ismaili believes the main obstacle to worker safety is "the conflicting laws and duties of government agencies." He says: "to be able to standardize the laws, lines of legal responsibility must clearly be drawn, and the conflicting legal tasks must be eliminated. What is needed is a national document for setting goals and consolidating a single policy regarding matters of job safety in workplaces."