

Labor Rights in Iran

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A Report By





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Brief Introduction

Zamaneh Media (Stichting Radio Zamaneh, ZM) monitors, analyzes and publishes on labor rights developments in Iran in a bi-monthly brief 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. The focus of the newsletter is on these key points: workplace safety, local discrimination, labor law, women, child labor, contract issues, unemployment, postponement or non-payment of wages, as well as the issue of labor organizations.

This is the first annual report on labor issues in Iran. The report covers issues and events approximately from May 2018 to May 2019.

This is a short report reflecting only the major topics. For information on the details of the news, please refer to the bi-monthly newsletters available at this address:

<https://en.radiozamaneh.com/labor/>

Labor Protests

In the past year, dozens of strikes and labor gatherings were held every week protesting the non-payment of wages, reduction or stopping of production units, the expulsion of workers and privatization of plants and factories across Iran. Unofficial statistics show a 27% increase in labor protests in 2018 compared to 2017.

In the past year, teachers gathered frequently in front of government buildings; they launched the "No to the Wage Slip" campaign in June and burned their payrolls. In December, they started the protest against the "Inefficient Supplemental Insurance", and in three rounds (October 14-15, November 13-14, and March 3-5, 2019) they organized strikes and sit-ins across the country.



Solidarity of Students with Teachers on Strike in Iran in 2018

The failure to provide funding for the implementation of the Law on the Administration of State Services, the failure to implement the teachers ranking plan, the lack of adequate wage increases, the plundering of the teachers' pension fund, and the commodification of education are among the reasons for the Iranian teachers' protests. At the same time, teachers call for the elimination of discrimination in the structure of the educational system, the right to public education in accordance with Article 30 of the Constitution, the abolition of the "full-time teacher" plan (which increasing working hours without wage increase), the release of the imprisoned teachers, and the right to organize and strike.

Truck drivers have been on strike to protest living-wage and work issues since May 2018. Their third round of strikes that began on September 23 spread to 381 cities and disrupted distribution of fuel and goods in some parts of the country.

The contract workers of the Islamic Republic's Railroad Company have repeatedly gone on strike at different railroad stations and disrupted the movement of trains because of the delayed wages and lack of job security.

Municipal workers in many parts of Iran face wage arrears and lack of job security. In some areas, delays in payment of wages have reached about one year. The heart of the problem is the violation of the law by contracting companies and widespread financial corruption in the city's municipal councils.



Haft-Tappeh Sugarcane Workers go on Strike in Khuzestan, Iran. One of the banners reads: "We the workers of Haft-Tappeh are hungry."

In the past year, between the drought and dust pollution crises and later the flood crisis, Khuzestan Province was the focus of many labor protests. Workers at the Haft-Tappeh Sugarcane Factory and National Industrial Steel Group in Ahwaz have repeatedly started strikes and street protests. The 38-day strike of the Ahwaz Steel in October and November of was one of the longest strikes in Iranian history.

The common denominator of the protests last fall in these two manufacturing complexes can be summarized in the slogan "No to Privatization" (stat-mediated privatization in which public factories are sold to private owners with state ties at a fraction of the actual price). On November 8, during the protests of the Haft-Tappeh sugarcane workers, one of their leaders, Esmail Bakhshi, called for the "autonomy" of the factory and its administration under the supervision of the "workers' councils."

From the National Steel Industrial Group in the city of Ahwaz to [HEPCO](#) in Arak, from the [Moghan Agro-Industry & Livestock Company](#)

in Ardabil to Imam Khomeini Hospital in Karaj, the scenario of state-mediated privatization is always the same: stopping of the economic activities of the production unit, firing of the workers and not paying deferred wages after the transfer of production units and enterprises to the private sector. Over the last decade, the privatization policy - and in fact, the transfer of the burden of insolvent institutions and production units to the workers - has become one of the holy dogmas of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Since the summer of 2018, with the intensification of the economic crisis, following the resumption of economic sanctions after the departure of the United States from the nuclear agreement, the impact of this large-scale policy on the lives of workers has become more pronounced.

According to the Deputy Minister of Industry, Mining and Trade in March 2019, only about 15% of production units in Iran continue to operate in excess of 70% capacity. Many production units have been shut down, including [ElectroSteel](#), the largest refrigerator factory in Mashhad, the Ronak vaccine factory, the [Kiancord](#) Malayer factory, and the 50 years old Iran [Electricity Meter Manufacturing Company](#) in Qazvin, the latter was transferred in 2008 to the private sector.

The automotive industry has been hit critically after the US withdrawal from the nuclear agreement. According to the secretary of the Iranian Specialized Manufactures of Auto (ISMAPA), from January to December 2018, about 280,000 workers employed by contractors have been suspended. Similarly, stopping more oil, gas and petrochemical projects in South Pars Energy Special Economic Zone last summer has caused a wave of workers' expulsions.



One of the protesting retirees holds a slogan in her hands that says: “Bread, Work, Freedom;” this has become the slogan of many workers’ protests in Iran.

According to a labor force survey in the fall of 2018, 11.7% of the active population was unemployed. In the budget law this year, it is expected that all state institutions and companies will reduce 10% of their human resources. This decision, along with the consequences of the economic crisis, will add to the country's unemployed population next year.

The consequences of the economic crisis have also affected retirees. Monthly earnings of at least 70% of retirees and pensioners in Iran are below the poverty line. Retirees are complaining about the failure to implement the salary adjustment plan. They repeatedly gathered in front of government offices to express their dissatisfactions. On July 24, 2018, more than 13,000 retirees in an open letter criticized the MPs and the government of Hassan Rouhani for their lack of attention to the pensioners' livelihood problems.

From September 22 to December 29, 2018, when the Zayandehrud dam reopened, the eastern Isfahan farmers (cities of Khorasgan, Qahdrianjan, FouladShahr, Zarinshahr, Varzaneh, Koshk, Najafabad), repeatedly protested the failure of the authorities to supply water for autumn cultivation. they specifically called for the implementation of the 2014 High Council of Water resolution on the revitalization of the Zayanderud basin, as well as the implementation of Article 44 of the Fair Water Distribution Act (passed in 1982), which requires the government to compensate farmers for any non-provision of water.

Last summer, in a situation where the value of the national currency fell drastically and caused the dollar value of the minimum wage to fall sharply, contrary to ILO Convention on the Prohibition of Forced Labor (No. 105), which Iran has accepted, the Organization of Labor Mobilization, as one of the ideological arms of the Islamic Republic, forced thousands of workers to work one day without pay in a plan called the "Sacrifice Shift."

Suppression of Free Trade Unions Activities

The Islamic Republic of Iran has adopted the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) as well as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Despite all these binding conventions, the government of Iran does not tolerate activities of independent labor unions and explicitly refuses to recognize the right to strike and protest for workers, and it violently suppresses every workers' protest.

The Islamic Republic's reaction to the workers' demands is a police and "national security" approach. On November 26, 2018, the head of the judiciary, Sadegh Amoli Larijani, threatened the workers saying the "enemy" intends to use the tool of "labor demands" to undermine the government. Just one month before the workers' threat by the highest judicial authority in Iran, on October 27, Mohammad Shariatmadari replaced Ali Rabiei in the position of the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare. Rabiei had been impeached and dismissed in the parliament in the summer of 2018. Rabiei and Shariatmadari are similar in the sense that they both come from the security apparatuses and have work experience in intelligence institutions.



Police attacks Isfahan farmers protests.

In the past year, the Islamic Republic has used the following methods to prevent independent worker union activity:

- **Police Attack on Labor Union Gatherings**

For example, frequent attacks on gatherings of the Haft-Tappeh Sugarcane factory and the National Iranian Steel Group in Khuzestan, the attack on the Ziyar farmers (October 26, 2018), an assault on the gathering of the employed and retired teachers in Isfahan. (December 27, 2018)

- **Threats and Intimidation of Labor activists and Protest Workers**

Including sending threatening SMSs, summoning to intelligence and security agencies a wide range of workers and teachers during protests by Haft-Tappeh Sugarcane factory and the Steel Group and the nationwide sit-ins of teachers in October.

Similarly, following the truck drivers' strike in September last year, 11 high judicial authorities in Iran (including the head of the judiciary and attorney general of the country) each separately explicitly threatened the strike drivers with death sentence (all between September 25 and October 8).

- **Arresting Labor Activists and Forming Criminal Cases (with charges such as "disturbing public order", "propaganda against the regime" and "acting against national security")**

270 truck drivers on strike were arrested in September and 14 teachers arrested in October 2018.

On April 26, 2019, on the eve of the Labor Day, officials arrested 10 activists, among them Parvin Mohammadi, vice chairman of the Free Trade Union of Iranian Workers, Valeh Zamani, member of the Alborz Province Painters Syndicate, Alireza Saghafi and Haleh Safarzadeh, members of the Association of the Labor Rights Defenders. All ten are still in detention.

Mohammad Habibi and Mahmoud Beheshti Langroudi and Esmail Abdi, members of the Teachers' Association, and Abdolreza Ghanbari, Mohammad Sanayi, Rouhollah Mardani, Bakhtiyar Alami and Mokhtar Asadi are among those teachers who are currently in prison or exile or waiting for a prison sentence.

Esmail Bakhshi, the representatives of the Haft-Tappeh Sugarcane workers and Jafar Azimzadeh, secretary of the Free Trade Union of Iranian Workers, are among other labor activists still in jail.

Behnam Ebrahimzadeh, a labor activist, was sentenced to six years in prison in February, with a mandatory transcription of three books written by the leadership of the Islamic Republic about war and the

values of the Islamic Republic.



A wall mural in Tehran with the faces of imprisoned teachers Mohammad Habibi, Mahmoud Beheshti Langroudi and Esmail Abdi who are members of the Teachers' Association. It reads: "The doors to the classrooms are shut until the teachers are behind bars."

Iqbal Shaabani, a member of Sanandaj Bakers Syndicate, was arrested in January and temporarily released on bail in February.

- **Physical and Psychological Torture during the Arrest and Detention of Unionists**

For example, extreme torture and brutalizing of Esmail Bakhshi, a representative of the Haft-Tappeh Sugarcane Workers and Sepideh Gholiyan, an activist and journalist in November.

- **Broadcasting Forced Confessions of Labor Activists**

The broadcast of compulsory confessions, taken from Esmail Bakhshi, Sepideh Gholiyan, and Ali Nejati, a former chairman and member of the Syndicate of Haft-Tappeh Sugarcane Industry and a group of other activists, charged with cooperation with the oppositional political groups abroad, and even conspiring with the US government, trying to "overthrow" the Islamic Republic.

- **The Imprisonment of Labor Activists in Unsafe Places and the Lack of Medical Treatment for the Detained Workers**

For example, the workers from the Ahwaz Steel Group were arrested and then transferred to the detention center for violent criminals in June 2018; imprisonment of Hashem Khastar, a member of the board of directors of the Mashhad Teachers' Association, for a period of 19 days in a psychiatric hospital last October; imprisonment of Esmail Bakhshi and Sepideh Gholiyan at the same place that Islamic State terrorists (ISIS) were being detained.

- **Preventing the Free Circulation of News about the Labor Activists**

For example, the arrest of the editorial staff of the "Gham" magazine, due to covering the news of the strike and the protest of the Haft-Tappeh workers and Ahwaz Steel Group and defending the demands of the workers. Three members of the editorial board, Amir Hossein Mohammadifar, and Sanaz Allahyari from January 9 and Amir Amirgoli from January 16 are still in detention.

• **Establishing Parallel and Bogus Syndicates in line with the Government**

In October a phony syndicate ordered from the top and in line with the government began its work to cast a shadow on the work of the legitimate Syndicate of Workers of the Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company. The same story goes for the "Council of Islamic Labor" in Shush instead of the "Assembly of Representatives" of Haft-Tappeh Sugarcane workers.

In Supplement 4, Article 131 of the Labor Code (1990), three institutions have been authorized to organize a workers' trade union, one of which is the "Islamic Labor Council." The law mentions "trade associations" and "workers' representatives" alongside the Islamic councils, but workers of a production unit are only allowed to have one type of organization. In practice, the Islamic councils are the only associations that the Islamic Republic of Iran tolerates and, in fact, imposes on the Iranian workers. Based on their legal definitions, these councils are not real labor unions. As stated in Article 1 of the Law on the Establishment of Islamic Labor Councils, the main purpose of their formation is "to create coordination in the progress of affairs in productive units." The problem with the Islamic Labor Councils is not only the ideological aspect and the "Islamic" constraint. These councils are undemocratic and anti-union by their very nature because of the way members are elected and decisions are made. Not everyone has the right to join the council, and membership is subject to the filtering of a selection panel. The selection panel is composed of a representative of the Ministry of Labor, a representative of the ministry that the relevant production unit is a subsidiary of, and a representative of the workers of the production unit. Islamic councils are fully subservient to the government, not even entitled to approve their constitution independently and without regard to the proposed statute of the state.

Minimum Wage

The Islamic Republic of Iran, despite its obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) has refused to adopt a rate for the national minimum wages that can sufficiently provide the Iranian workers and their families with a decent standard of living.

In March 2019, Iranian media reported that the Supreme Labor Council (SLC) has increased the minimum wage by 36.5% to 1,566,882 IRR (\approx 120 USD)¹. This is despite the fact that the minimum wage assigned is much lower than the cost of the “livelihood basket”² calculated by the wage committee of the SLC. State authorities celebrated the increase even though the dollar value of the 2019 minimum wage is 120 USD and it is even lower than that of 2018 (\approx 222 USD). This blow to the worker's living cost comes at the time that the inflation rate of the month prior to this decision was 26.9%³ and that the plunging Iranian money has drastically lowered the purchasing power of workers. In March 2019, the price per kilogram of chicken increased by 105.9% when compared to last March and the prices of food continue to rise.

According to the March 2019 forecast by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), inflation in Iran in the 2019 fiscal year will reach 37.2 percent. The IMF has predicted Iran's inflation rate will increase more by 2020 and goods prices can get up to 50 percent higher in prices. At the same time, the Statistics Center of Iran announced the annual inflation year in March 2019 9 (coinciding with the beginning of the Iranian New Year) to be at 26.9%. This officially announced inflation rate is much lower than the estimate by independent economists and institutions.

According to Article 41 of the Labor Code of Iran, the SLC at the end of each fiscal year determines the minimum wage for the upcoming year, based on the inflation rate and the average household's livelihood basket (minimum cost of housing, food, and necessities of life). In March 2019, as the Iranian fiscal year was coming to an end, independent economists and independent labor organizations demanded that the minimum wage be reflective of the “real” inflation rate (not the officially announced rate) and the most current cost of living. They proposed a minimum wage of seven million tomans (\approx 540 USD).

1 The Iranian Rial (IRR) reached a record low in the month of Sept 2018 with the unofficial street rate of 1 USD \approx 140,000 IRR. IRR has since fluctuated greatly with respect to USD but an average price of 1 USD \approx 130,000 IRR is the street price of Jan to April 2019. In March 2018, 1 USD was selling on the street market for 130,000 IRR. This estimated value is based on the value of IRR in March 2019. In May 2019, after Iran gave a 60 day notice to the countries member to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), commonly known as the Iran Nuclear Agreement, 1 USD was being traded for 150,000 IRR on streets of Tehran.

2 The living basket is the cost of living calculated by the wage committee of SLC that is equal to the amount of money needed to sustain a basic standard of living. It includes minimum cost of housing, food, and necessities of life.

3 <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/437688>

The Wage Committee of the SLC⁴ is composed of representatives of government-affiliated workers' associations such as Worker's House⁵ and Islamic Labor Councils (ILCs)⁶. In accordance with Article 167 of the Labor Code, the members of the SCL are: Minister of Labor and Social Affairs, two experts appointed by the ministry of labor and approval of SCL members, three representatives of the employers (one from the agriculture sector); three representatives of the workers (one from the agriculture sector) who are elected by the Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Labor Councils.

The three representatives of workers' often find a way to SLC come from government-affiliated workers associations and not independent unions. That is to say that the workers' representatives are vetted so only those aligned with government policies can find a seat at SLC.

In the summer 2018, after the reinstatement of the United States economic sanctions against Iran and the subsequent currency shock, workers' representatives at the SLC announced that contrary to the common practice of adjusting the national minimum wage at the beginning of each fiscal year, they have plans to revise the minimum wage and compensate for the loss of purchasing power of workers. In August 2018, the workers' representatives at SLC announced that they have agreed with the representatives of employers and the government to increase the monthly minimum wage by 800,000 tomans (~65 USD). However, it soon became apparent that the agreement was conditional and they had only agreed to provide workers' families with \$65 USD worth of coupons and vouchers to purchase essential goods –a decision that stands in contradiction to ILO's Protection of Wages Convention (No. 95). Iran has ratified and is a member of ILO's convention 95.

Workers' representatives of SLC say that the monthly cost of living of each Iranian family increased by 87.23% between Jan 2018 and Nov 2018. Despite this, the promise of minimum wage adjustments never

4 Members of the SCL are Minister of labor, two experts appointed by the ministry of labor, three representatives of the employers; three representatives of the workers elected by the Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Labor Councils. To read more please see "Right to work, Labor Rights & Trade Unions in Iran" by International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the League for the Defense of Human Rights in Iran (LDDHI) (2013), Submission to the CESCR 50th Session of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Geneva, 29 April – 17 May 2013, pg 19:

https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CESCR/Shared%20Documents/IRN/INT_CESCR_NGO_IRN_13463_E.pdf

5 Worker's House (Khaneh Kargar) was initially established as an independent umbrella union for all workers in Iran post-1979 revolution. It is now a government-affiliated umbrella workers' association which is used by the government to control and suppress independent unionists. To read more please see "Right to work, Labor Rights & Trade Unions in Iran" by International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the League for the Defense of Human Rights in Iran (LDDHI) (2013), Submission to the CESCR 50th Session of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Geneva, 29 April – 17 May 2013, pg 46:

https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CESCR/Shared%20Documents/IRN/INT_CESCR_NGO_IRN_13463_E.pdf

6 Islamic Labor Councils (ILCs) are worker's associations but they are not independent. ILCs are present in almost all large production, industrial, agricultural and services units and consist of the representatives of workers and office employees, elected by the general assembly as well as a representative of the management. However, the workers' representatives are heavily vetted, and this has made ILCs into government affiliated associations. To read more see: "Right to work, Labour Rights & Trade Unions in Iran" by International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the League for the Defense of Human Rights in Iran (LDDHI) (2013), Submission to the CESCR 50th Session of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Geneva, 29 April – 17 May 2013, pg 20-21:

https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CESCR/Shared%20Documents/IRN/INT_CESCR_NGO_IRN_13463_E.pdf

occurred. The government and employee representatives at the SLC went on to not hold the monthly mandatory meetings of this council. The abandonment of monthly meetings is against Article 168 of the Iranian Labor Code which states that at least one monthly meeting amongst the members of SLC is mandatory. In December 2018, the office of the Ministry of Labor officially declared that it opposes any adjustments to the national minimum wage and the SLC stopped debating the issue altogether.

All the while that the decision-making bodies in Iran refuse to raise workers' wages proportional to the inflation rate and fluctuations of the IRR, more privatization of previously public services such as education and health services has imposed more costs on the Iranian families.

Women Workers

Contrary to the ILO Conventions 100 and 111 which Iran has accepted, women workers in the Islamic Republic of Iran do not enjoy equal rights with men. Gender discrimination is evident not only in wage gender gaps, insurance favoritisms, and unequal benefits but also in access to the job market and job security.

According to May 2018 report of the Center for Statistics of Iran, one of the main indicators of the labor market, the rate of women's economic participation declined from 17% to 14.9% between 2005 and 2015.⁷ From 2005 to 2015, women's economic participation increased when looking at age groups 10 to 29.⁸ However, after age 30, economic participation of women decreases mainly due to barriers that working married women and mothers face. The passing of the Law on Retirement of Employed Women With 20 Years of Service adopted in January 2017 which Iran describes as a legal means to protect women's employment,⁹ is in fact a discriminatory process of early elimination of women from the labor market linked to the idea of opening up the market for more male workers and protecting sanctity of motherhood and wifeness. In fact, most of Islamic Republic's initiatives to support women's employment are often specific to those occupations that are considered "domestic and home-based" work "appropriate" for women.

Pay gap based on gender continues to persist and the Iranian government has not taken any effective measures to address this. The Statistical Centre of Iran, on the 30 October, released the results of the center's research on the average wage in the agricultural sector in the

7 According to a May 2016 report that was sponsored by the President's office, the Plan and Budget Organization (PBO) and the Statistical Centre of Iran:

<https://www.amar.org.ir/Portals/0/News/1396/shbkar.pdf>

8 *ibid.*

9 IRI UPR Mid-Term Report (2015-2016), pg 91 & 96.

summer of 2018. According to this report, the average daily wage of a male farm worker was 57,000 tomans and the average wage of a female farm worker was 42,000 tomans, indicating a difference of 15,000 tomans.

The Statistics and Strategic Information Center of the Ministry of Labor reports that the number of unemployed women in Iran has increased by 25% over the past seven years.¹⁰ The unemployed population in Iran has had an annual growth of 1.8% in the last seven years. The unemployment rate for women has an average annual growth rate of 3.8%, reaching 32.3% in 2017. The actual unemployment numbers are far greater than that since the Ministry of Labor in Iran considers anyone who works even one hour a week as employed.

In Iran's Labor Law, there is no guarantee for the protection of a female workers' job who takes a maternity leave both in terms of job-back-guarantee and in terms of unfair dismissal. In other words, employers are not penalized for dismissal of an employee based on taking a leave of maternity and female employees are not entitled by law to return to the same job after maternity leave. A survey by the Social Security Organization of Iran in 2018 shows that over an 18 month period in 2017 and 2018, 47,000 women were fired for taking maternity leave.

Last year, the Iranian Administrative Court, revoked a bylaw prohibiting the expulsion of women during pregnancy and nursing.

Child Labor

On August 16, 2018, a six-year-old child was collecting cardboard boxes and plastic bags on a Mahshahr country road when he was struck by a bus and killed. In December 2018, a video went viral on social media that showed a contractor of Kerman city council abusing child laborers selling flowers. The contractor forced the children to eat the flowers they were selling. On 12 March 2018, a 15-year-old Kulbar (human mule) carrying goods in the mountains died after a fall. These are a few of the many tragic news related to child labor in Iran in 2018.

In June and July 2018, child rights groups documented and reported that a number of municipal contractor companies use cheap child labor in waste recycling centers. These children, with an average age of 12 years, are often Afghan migrants. Each day they work on average ten and a half hours in garbage collection zones and recycling plants without masks or gloves, under sub-standard conditions and without any regard on part of the contractors for their health or safety. There have been

10 Labor Rights in Iran Report, Zamaneh Media, Volume 3, Oct & Nov 2018, pg 32-34 : <https://www.tribunezamaneh.com/download/180591/?version=pdf>

numerous reports that these child laborers are sexually abused as well.

The use of children at waste recycling centers is a violation of ILO's Convention on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor (No. 182), which Iran joined in 2002.



Many child laborers in Iran are from Afghan immigrant families and work under sub-standard conditions

Article 79 of the Labor Code of Iran prohibits the employment of children under the age of 15. However, Iran has not signed the ILO Convention concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment (No. 138). Although the Labor Code in Iran has designated a minimum age to work, the ambiguities of the statute make it possible for children under the age of 15 to be employed.

The main solution of the institutions and the government organization for solving the problem of child labor is the "Plan for Organizing Children's work" (approved by the Cabinet of Ministers in 2005). The plan basically promotes the collection of child workers from the streets by police forces. Child rights activists are concerned and critical of the violent treatment that child laborers are receiving and argue that police and municipal officials should not be the executing bodies of this plan.

Although there are no reliable statistics on child laborers in Iran, observations suggest an increase in the number of children under the age 15 who are working. Officials and government officials estimate the number of children working at two million. But children's rights activists argue that the actual numbers are closer to 5 to 7 million child laborers across Iran.

According to officials of the State Welfare Organization of Iran (SWOI), in the province of Tehran alone there are twenty thousand child laborers among which 63.7% are Afghan migrants and 4% are from Pakistani migrant families.¹¹ According to Iranian parliamentarian Fatemeh Saeedi, more than 90 percent of child laborers in Iran are deprived of having an education. According to Article 30 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, "the government is obliged to provide free education facilities for all people until the end of high school (18 years old)."

Kulbars (Human Mules)

Last year, hundreds of Kulbars or human mules - who cross the borders on foot mostly in Iranian Kurdistan, West Azerbaijan, Kermanshah and Ilam - have been killed or wounded. These Kulbars are either killed or wounded by border guards, as a result of fall from heights in mountainous regions they cross or as a result of the explosion of landmines they step on.



Islamic Republic of Iran treats Kurdish Kulbars (human mules) as a security threat.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has been treating Kulbars as a security

11 According to officials from State Welfare Organization of Iran (SWOI) in a June 2018 report: <http://www.hamshahrionline.ir/news/407828/%DA%AF%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B4-%D9%88%D8%B6%D8%B9%DB%8C%D8%AA-%DA%A9%D9%88%D8%AF%DA%A9%D8%A7%D9%86-%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%DB%B5%D-B%B5-%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%B5%D8%AF-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%DB%8C%D9%86-%D8%A8%DB%8C%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%88-%D8%A8%DB%8C%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B1>

threat. “Hangav” Kurdish media reports that from March 2018 to March 2019 a total of 75 Kolbars have been killed and 180 have been wounded. The report goes on to say that the cause of death for 70% of the cases has been the direct firing of shots by the border guards. According to the annual report released by the Human Rights Activists in Iran a year before this (between March 2017-18), a total of 46 Kulbars were killed and 58 were injured by border guards and Iranian law enforcement forces.

There are no reliable numbers about the exact number of Kulbars active in Iran; Jalal Mahmoudzadeh, a representative of the Mahabad in the Islamic Consultative Assembly, announced on 27 May 2018, that the number of Kulbars in Iran is estimated at 80,000.

Labor law experts argue that carrying of goods by human mules in the Kurdish regions of Iran is generally the result of the lack of development, economic undeserving, and discriminatory policies of the Iranian government in these areas. According to state institutions, the unemployment rate in these areas is higher than the average unemployment rate in the rest of the country.

Immigrant Workers

In the past year, with the intensification of the economic crisis and the fall of the national currency Rial (IRR), many Afghan displaced workers left Iran. According to the World Organization for Migration (IOM), more than 770,000 Afghan nationals left Iran in 2018. This figure was 466,000 in 2017. The economic crisis, however, was not the only reason for the departure of Afghan migrant workers from Iran last year and the departure has not been made voluntarily.

The attitude of employers and government officials towards migrant workers, and specifically Afghan migrant workers, is discriminatory, humiliating, along with police and security practices. Migrants often work under sub-standard conditions, without insurance and legal protection, and are under the pressure of a permanent layoff.

Specifically, the Iranian government systematically refuses to issue and renew the residency permits of Afghan refugees. Many Iranian officials believe that Afghan workers have "reduced the size of the Iranian job market and job opportunities."

According to Article 120 of the Labor Code in Iran, “alien nationals” cannot hold a job unless they obtain a visa with a 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.

Afghan migrant workers are legally allowed to work only in jobs such as construction and agriculture, kilns, stones, waste recycling, well drilling, gravestones, fertilizer production and the like; and their employment in supermarkets, restaurants, fruit stores and the like are not allowed. Also, the employment of Afghan migrant workers is prohibited at least in the 16 western and central provinces of Iran.

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.

According to Hossein Zolfaghari, Deputy Political and Security Secretary of Iran's Interior Ministry, in 2008, the Islamic Republic of Iran has returned 740,000 Afghan migrants to Afghanistan.

There is a lot of evidence that Iranian law enforcement agencies humiliate and physically abuse Afghan migrants during police prosecution, detention, transfer to the camp, and the eventual expulsion of undocumented Afghan workers. 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.

Work Related Accidents

The number of accidents at work in 2018 was 2.9% higher than in the previous year. According to the chairman of the Forensic Medicine Organization, the number of cases of accidents at the forensic hospital in 2018 was 28,568, including 1378 women and 27,751 men.

The annual number of accidents in Iran has risen since 2015. According to the Forensic Medicine Organization, in 2015, 2016, and 2017, 1,494 people, 1,644 people and 1,675 people died from work accidents, respectively.

In January 2018, Hassan Hashemi, the Minister of Health, said that 2000 people die every year from work-related incidents, which is more than six people a day.

Official statistics on work accidents in Iran include only workers subject to labor law and covered by social security. While the victims of work

accidents are more so those who do not have social insurance.

Falling, stricken by hard objects, burning, and asphyxiation are among the most important causes of death during work in Iran. According to Ali Mozaffari, Director General of Labor Inspection in the Ministry of Co-operation, Labor and Social Welfare, 98% of work-related deaths are preventable if the safety measures were properly in place. The most important factors in the high incidence of work-related accidents in Iran are:

- The failure of employers in the training and supervision of workshops, which, according to Article 91 of the Labor Code, are required to provide the necessary facilities for the protection of workers' health and safety, training workers, and monitoring compliance with safety and health regulations.
- The failure of the inspectors of the Ministry of Co-operation, Labor and Social Welfare, which, according to Article 96 of the Labor Law, are responsible for monitoring the observance of safety precautions and the availability of appropriate equipment at workshops.
- Ambiguity in the law and the executive duties of government agencies on the issue of workers safety.

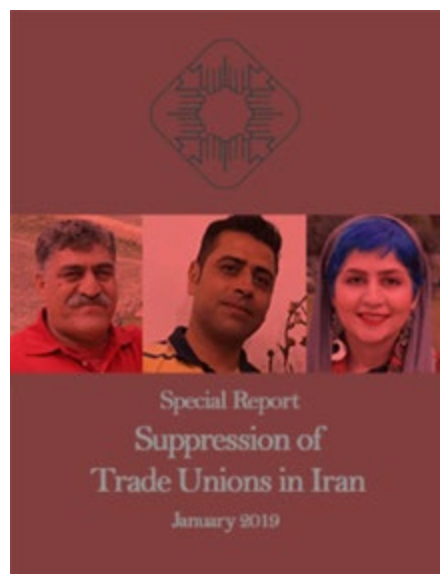
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