Since the start of the nationwide protests of Dec 2018 and Jan 2019 in Iran which was around workers’ and citizens’ economic demands for a better life, Zamaneh Media (Stichting Radio Zamaneh, ZM) has decided to monitor, analyze and publish on local 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.

Zamaneh has identified several 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 daily. This brief is intended to be a thematic ‘big-picture’ and is published in two languages to increase the knowledge and awareness of workers situation in Iran.

The current and fourth bi-monthly report covers events in the approximate range of April-May 2019. The newsletter does not claim to be inclusive of all labor events that took place during this period.
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Major Issues

Many Iranian workers began the New Year without receiving their outstanding wages and benefits from the year before. Those who did get paid celebrated a much less colorful Nowruz than what is customary due to the high inflation and high prices of food, fruits, nuts and sweets.

Many Iranians started the New Year with the fear that their employment contracts would not be renewed and the likelihood of being dismissed from work. That fear quickly became a reality in the first days after the Nowruz holiday. Iranian official news agencies announced the "mass expulsions" and "non-renewal of the contracts" for the workers in oil, petrochemical, gas, and manufacturing units. The trend is still ongoing and projected to be more intense in the coming months.

Many became unemployed after flooding that affected 25 provinces in the country. Government officials have not yet provided accurate statistics of those who lost employment in the wake of the flood.

It was in such a dire situation that workers greeted May 1st, the international Labor Day. While senior government officials, both the Supreme Leader and the President, praised the workers and encouraged them to "produce more" to counter the sanctions, the police attacked the assembly of workers and students in front of the Majlis, the Islamic parliament, and arrested many of the participants in the protests including workers, labor rights activists and journalists.

Two days earlier, several workers and labor activists were arrested in Karaj. In various cities, the security forces attacked the teachers’rallies on May 2, which is the teacher day in Iran, and arrested several members of the Iranian Teachers’ Trade Association.

Prosecution of Labor Activists

On the eve of May 1st, three prominent labor activists were transferred to the notorious Evin Prison: Esmail Bakhshi, a member of the Assembly of the Workers’ Representatives of the Haft-Tappeh Sugarcane Company, Sepideh Ghaliyan, a social activist in the Province of Khuzestan, and Amir Amirgholi, editor-in-chief of the Internet publication Gaam. They were arrested in connection with the protests of the Haft-Tappeh workers, Ahwaz Steel National Industrial Group, and the disclosure of the torture of Esmail Bakhshi in the detention center.

In another news, on May 9th in Haft-Tappeh, five workers were arrested and 19 were summoned to the judicial and security authorities. The Haft-Tappeh sugarcane workers' union
on May 13 announced the release of five. The next day, six workers were again arrested and transferred to the Fajr prison in the city of Dezful.

Sahab Zahiri, Nasser Naami, Omid Azadi and Kiani Nejad are among the workers who were arrested on May 9 and released later the same month. Adel Samayee, Faisal Taalebi, Seyyed Esmail Ja’hele, Rustam Abdollah Zadeh and Rostam Kathyroh were arrested on May 14th and transferred to Dezful prison.

Ali Nejati, a member of the workers’ syndicate of Haft-Tappeh, who was arrested during a workers' protests last year and released on bail, was summoned to the Evin Prison.

On 9 May, Workers and retirees of the Haft-Tappeh sugarcane company gathered at the workplace to protest the non-payment of wages. According to sources close to the workers, other complaints included the uncertain status of the contracts, the weak performance of the government-affiliated Islamic Labor Council, as well as the return of many expelled managers to their previous posts.

**Suppression of Workers and Teachers’ Gatherings**

On the eve of the International Labor Day, Iran's Deputy Minister of Political Affairs and Security, during a meeting with provincial security deputies, warned against workers' protests and called for "resolving" the issues before "workers come to the streets." Earlier, on April 26, security forces arrested at least 12 labor activists in the Jahan-nama Park in Karaj and sent them to jail. Alireza Saghafi, Haleh Safarzadeh, Parvin Mohammadi, Valeh Zamani, Saeed Torabian, Fouad Fathi, Mostafa Shaokat, Amir Abbasi, Safyar Ghorbani and Bilal Ghaziani were among those arrested.

At the same time in Kurdistan, Ghaleb Hosseini and Mozaffar Salehnia were summoned to the IRGC. Ahmed Taghizadeh, a labor activist living in Orumiyeh, was summoned to the security office of the city on April 25.

On the International Labor Day, the state-owned House of Labor, as in previous years, turned the ceremony into a platform to support the Islamic Republic and endorsement of government policies against workers. At the same time, the police raided the gathering of workers in front of the parliament building, arresting and sending to jail more than 40 labor activists, members of the Tehran Bus Company’s Syndicate, the Free Trade Union of Workers and Students, and a number of writers and journalists.
The International Labor Day rally in front of the Islamic parliament, Majlis, where many protesters were arrested.

Neda Naji, Atefeh Rangriz, Hasan Saeedi, Farhad Sheikh, Nasrin Javadi, Nahid Khodajoo, Marzieh Amiri and Keyvan Samimi are still being held in detention. Reza Shahabi, secretary of the trade union of workers of the Tehran Bus Company, who was arrested at the gathering, was later released on bail.

According to a report by the Free Trade Union of Workers, an independent labor organization, Jafar Azimzadeh, Nahid Khodajoo, Azam Khezri Javadi (Nasrin Javadi) and Farhad Sheikh are four of the senior members of the union who are in prison, and court orders have been issued for Parvin Mohammadi, Hadi Soleimani and Mehdi Fakhri. Other members of the union are also threatened by telephone.

One day after the workers’ rally, teachers also gathered in different cities in front of the Education Ministry buildings. Police in several cities arrested several teachers. Rasoul Bodaghi and Mohammad Falahi, two members of the board of directors of the Teachers’ Association, were among those arrested. The two were released on bail. Yasser Amini Azar was arrested in Marivan city.
Based on a report by Teachers for Justice, rallies were held in Saqez, Marivan, Sanandaj, Divandareh, Javanrood, Islamabad, Kermanshah, Aligudarz, Hamedan, Malayer, Tabriz, Urmia, Ardabil, Tehran, Malard, Isfahan, Khomeini Shahr, Yazd, Shiraz, Sari Rasht, Mashhad, Torbat Heydariyah, Ahvaz, Arak, Qazvin, Karaj and several other cities. In Tehran, police officers arrested at least eight people. Some detainees were released a few hours later.

Mohammad Ali Zahmatkeshan, a teacher in Fars province, was imprisoned. In Ahwaz, the Revolutionary Guards arrested three teachers, Naji Rari, Maher Dassumi and Ali Abidwayi. They were arrested for participating in "Flood Assistance People's Committees."

**Labor Protests**

The crackdown did not stop the workers from protesting. In addition to the gathering of the Labor Day, workers in the municipality continued to protest in Khuzestan Province in the last two months. The main reason for workers' protests that took place with sit-ins was a delay in six to 18 months of wage payments. Workers of the Ahwaz Urban Railway Project also gathered in front of the project’s Executor’s Office in April this year. Authorities responded with the expulsion of six workers. On April 8, retired workers from the Haft-Tappeh Sugarcane
Industrial Complex gathered in Shush (Susa) to protest non-payment of their seniority and bonus payments. A month later the retirees of the complex joined the workers’ rally.

Maintenance workers of the of Islamic Republic Railroad Company, Zagros Basin

In April, 600 workers from Nekachoob Company, located in the city of Miandorud, Mazandaran province, gathered to protest the non-renewal of labor contracts. The managers blamed the Organization of the Forestry for not renewing the contract with the company, causing the closure of the factory and the layoffs.

Workers from the Zanjan-based oil refinery, who in the past year have met several times to protest the cancellation of labor contracts, once again gathered in the city of Zanjan after the promises of government executives and factory officials failed to materialize.

Other events include the Kosar tile workers’ rally in which the workers gathered against the governorate of Abarkuh, as well as the protests of the railway maintenance workers in several cities. Kosar tile workers have faced three months’ of delayed salary. The situation of Railway Company employees, who are tied to contracting companies, is different. In addition to deferred wages, they have not yet received their "sanavat" pay for past years. “Sanavat” is a
type of bonus that is only granted to contract workers who are terminated and is equivalent to
one month's salary per year of work. These workers engaged in sits-in several times last year,
shutting down trains in some central stations. They demanded the withdrawal of contracting
companies and the conversion of temporary contracts into formal ones. The authorities of the
Islamic Republic Railway Company refused to accept this request.

Expulsions
The new year for the workers in Iran started with widespread layoffs. Flooding in 25 provinces
left at least 30,000 workers unemployed. Aghqla Industrial Park in Golestan province went
completely under flood water. Workers and farmers lost their jobs in Lorestan province as
well. This situation was repeated in Khuzestan province. Government officials have yet to
report specific data about workers and farmers who have lost their jobs and income due to the
floods, but estimates indicate a loss of at least thirty thousand jobs.

The deputy minister for Co-operation, Labor and Social Welfare said on the first day of the
flood that workers from flood areas would be given unemployment insurance without delay.
Over time, it became clear that only workers who already had coverage with formal contracts
would be entitled to unemployment insurance. This situation deprives a large number of
seasonal workers, farmers, even the self-employed, of post-flood safety support.

Aghqla Industrial Park was flooded in Golestan province
In addition to the floods, economic sanctions and subsequent stagnation in production units also led to the expulsion of dozens of workers in different parts of Iran. The exits of French and Korean auto companies last year made the automobile related chain, the workshops, and part production units face difficulties. According to a board member of the Automobile Parts Association, 200,000 workers were fired. The Association of Parts Manufacturers predicted an increase in the number of unemployed workers in this sector to 400,000.

The second wave of unemployment since January has occurred in the energy sector especially in oil and gas extraction, and petrochemical projects. Last year, the French company Total terminated its contract with Iran at the South Pars project. The Islamic Republic’s Ministry of Oil announced that the National Petroleum Corporation of China would replace Total by an agreement between the two countries, an issue that did not materialize until the project was stopped and its workers were expelled.

On April 14, the Iranian government news agency (ILNA) announced the expulsion of 50 workers at Bandar Imam Petrochemical Complex in Khuzestan province. All these workers were hired on a temporary basis and covered by the company's human resources contractor.

On May 7, the same news agency reported that 140 workers were fired at Mahshahr Special Economic Zone and Bandar-e-Imam Petrochemical Company, and 80 Mahshahr pipeline workers are on the verge of being fired.

On May 6, Iran’s domestic media reported that Saba’s knitting factory in Tehran was closed due to stockholders’ disagreement and 170 workers were fired. This news was disclosed one month after the closure and dismissal of workers.

On May 3, the newspaper "Asr-e-Jonub" announced the firing of 78 Mahshahr pipelines workers in the city’s special economic zone. The company also had fired 108 workers last winter, but they returned to work after the government officials brokered a deal.

263 workers in the Assaluyeh Special Economic Zone, in a letter to Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh, have said that they have been fired, their salaries have not been paid and they have no income to pay for their living expenses and will inevitably have to collect "dry bread." They wrote in the letter that they are young educated university students in Bushehr who have been assigned to South Pars for work in the oil industry as workers, servicemen, clerks, mechanics, and maintenance crew in Pars Special Zone.

In the province of Lorestan, the executive secretary of the Labor House, a government-affiliated labor organization, announced that the closure of factories had left at least 3,000 workers unemployed. The governor of Isfahan on April 17 announced the closure of more than 300 production units, based in the industrial towns of this province. According to Isfahan governor, these units have been transferred to banks due to debt, and banks have shut them down, expelling the workers. According to government officials, about 2,000 production units are owned by banks.
In Hamedan, the Keyvan food factory, affiliated with Darugar holding, expelled 35 workers in April. The Shadegan Steel Company in Khuzestan province also expelled 22 workers this month without any explanation. On April 15, 600 workers from Nekachub, located in the city of Miandorud, Mazandaran province, gathered in protest for the non-renewal of labor contracts. All these workers were told that the plant would be shut down. Also, 50 Ivan Steel Workers located in Ilam Province were fired on Nowruz Holiday (the Iranian New Year day).

The number of fired workers in the past two months could be much higher than what was published in the media. According to government sources, of the 43,000 units located in industrial districts of Iran, close to 12,000 are not operating at all. Only 25% of production units are operative with a capacity of over 70%. Saeed Zarandi, Deputy Planning Director of Iran’s Ministry of Industry, Mines and Trade also announced recently the closure of 2,000 units.

Hadi Sadaty, vice chairman of the Construction Workers' Center, said that in the new year unemployment among these workers will reach 60%. According to him, 780,000 of Iran's 1,300,000 construction workers are now unemployed.

Work Related Accidents

In the past two months, the deaths of 37 workers were reported in Iran's media. The actual number is much higher. Last May, the Tehran Forensic Office reported that casualties from work accidents from March 2018 to March 2019 were five percent higher than the year before. In this period, only in Tehran, 423 workers died due to work-related accidents. The Office of Cooperatives, Work and Social Welfare record only the reports of workers' incidents when the workshops are under the direct supervision of the Department of Labor and Social Security. All other incidents are not recorded.

The ministry of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare claimed in a report a 6% reduction in work accidents last year. According to the report, the number of occupational injuries was 9,996 among which is 97.2% of injuries were for men and 2.8% for women. The figure for the previous year was 10,531.

The number of casualties in the past year was announced to be 678, which does not appear to be the actual figure and only includes the casualties of the workshops covered by the Labor and Social Security Act. In Mazandaran province alone, the number of deaths due to work-related accidents was 88, which is 9% higher than last year’s statistics. In the province of West Azerbaijan, the forensic organization reported an increase of 9% in death due to work accidents. 61 people died in this province due to work accidents.

The largest number of work related accidents was due to falling and slipping numbering 3556 cases; impact of objects and equipment was recored to be 2070 cases; and 2027 cases of getting caught inside or between objects and machinery were also reported. The largest number of occupational accidents, according to the type of incident, in the Persian calendar year of 1397 (March 2018 to March 2019) was related to falling and slipping(34.3%) and
collision with objects and equipment (19.9%). Last year, the largest occupational accidents included 37.8% in the construction of the buildings; 34.3% in the industrial plants and workshops; and 11.3% in other public services.

Reports published in Iran's domestic media also show that construction workers have the highest rates of work-related casualties. Many of them do not have social security coverage. The main reason for the incidents is the failure to implement safety measures. The Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare has the task of overseeing the safety of the workshops, but inspections are not carried out due to what is called the "shortage of manpower."

According to domestic media, in the past two months, four workers at the Neguin Alborz Melting Plant in Abhar City fell into a steel smelter and all died, one immediately and three a few days later. The collapse of a tunnel in Tehran-North freeway killed six and injured at least five workers. In Estahban, Fars province, a structure holding a water reservoir collapsed and took the lives of two workers.

During the same period, at least two construction workers were reported dead in the cities of Taibad and Kangan. In Taibad, a construction worker died from falling from a height. In Kangan, an Afghan laborer was buried alive under the debris while demolishing a building. In Zanjan, a construction worker fell from a height and lost his life. In the city of Torbat-e-Jam, a wall collapsed and killed a worker. A construction worker in the city of Hamedan fell to his death. In Bukan, a construction worker died during work. A tile worker in Dezful lost his life after a fall. In the city of Chardavol in Ilam province, a pool worker died at work. A worker was...
injured at the Arak Aluminum factory and died after being transferred to the hospital. The explosion of a rock mine in Isfahan killed a worker. Again, in Isfahan the explosion of bitumen tanks resulted in the death of a welder. In Lorestan province, three workers at Iran Ferroalloys Industries Company were killed due to furnace explosion. A mechanic repair worker in Zanjan died due to an explosion and the severity of the injuries were such that he died when arrived at the hospital. A construction worker was killed in the Khomein city of Markazi province. In the city of Fariman, a fire caused the death of a workshop guard. Another guard at a construction site in Tehran died of gas inhalation. In Khomeini Shahr, a worker lost his life when he fell into a well. Falling into a well in Zahedan also killed three workers. A worker in Iranshahr was killed in a workshop due to the explosion of a gas cooler charging capsule. A Yazd Steel Company employee also suffered an electric shock and died. An Afghan civil service worker was killed while cleaning sewage in Mehrab, Shiraz.

During this period, dozens of workers were injured for the lack of safety standards. For example, in the past month alone, the fire in the artificial leather production unit of the Aibakabad industrial park in Arak left 16 injured. Seven workers from the Boloorak Alborz were poisoned by ammonia gas leak. Two workers of the Haft-Tappeh Sugarcane plant were also injured by a boiler explosion at the factory. The explosion injured seven workers at the Rohammetal melting plant at the Chenaran Industrial Park. Five workers in one of the brick-burning furnaces in Mohammad Abad, Isfahan, were injured in the aftermath of a city gas explosion. All of them were Afghan workers.

**Shooting the Kulbars**

Over the past two months, Iranian border guards have been firing regularly at the *kulbars* (human mules). In April three *kulbars* were shot dead by border guards. Six *kulbars* were also injured this month in the same way. Three *kulbars* died due to falling from heights, freezing weather and falling into the water.

![Kulbars](image_url)

Three *kulbars* died because of drowning in water. One of them was 17 years old.
Kulbars’ killings continued in May. Five were killed and eight wounded by border guards. News sources also reported 11 kulbars being injured as a result of cold weather, falling, drowning, and so on. Three were drowned, one of them only 17 years old. Another lost his life when he fell from a mountain height.

On May 19, Iran’s commander of the border guards Qassem Reza while defending the killings said kulbars are “border aggressors, deceived smugglers, and security threatening gangs.”

Women

Women’s unemployment remains close to two times that of men, according to the country’s statistics office. As the economic downturn intensifies, the job security of women workers is more threatened than before. Many of them are engaged in "informal jobs" with temporary contracts, said Masoumeh Ebtekar, the current Vice President for Women and Family Affairs.

Somayeh Golpour, chair of the Women’s Committee of the Higher Center of Labor Unions, mentioning data from government-affiliated organizations and House of Labor, said that 80% of non-insured employees, including domestic and shop workers, are women. She described the status of the women’s labor contracts as “insecure,” and said employers demand checks and promissory notes from women, and this is one of the concerns of women workers in informal workshops, fearing the loss of employment. She also said women in villages and small towns constitute "cheap labor without a legal contract."

A workshop for a charity organization (Halima) in Zahedan, which employed women heads of household and children with a salary lower than the minimum wage.
In addition, Iranian women continue to face government barriers to employment. In a special case of fishermen on the island of Hengam, Hormozgan province, officials said they were not licensed to fish on the pretext that “fishing is not a job for women.” In another example, the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare and Tehran Bus Company refused to let Farahnaz Shiri, a driver at the Tehran Bus Company and a member of its workers’ syndicate, return to work. Ms. Shiri was fired in 2011 along with 30 other drivers with "forced compensation." She appealed to the Administrative Justice Tribunal and was able to obtain permission to return to work as an office worker, but the bus company officials continue to prevent her from entering the workplace.

**Afghan Immigrants**

Sanctions, the worsening of the economic downturn, and increased tensions between Iran and the United States have once again put Afghan immigrants at greater risk. President Hassan Rouhani and Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, on May 9, on the Iranian national TV, explicitly signaled increased pressure on Afghan refugees. Araghchi said Iran would expel Afghan immigrants if it faces more economic pressure. He claimed several days later that he was misunderstood, but the Ministry of Cooperation, Labor and Social Welfare increased the fine for the employment of Afghan immigrants. According to the new law, the fine for using Afghan refugees "without a residence and employment permit" would be five times the daily wage of a worker.

Afghan refugees in a workshop based in the forced settlement camp in Torbat-e-Jam. These workshops are outside the scope of labor law.
The Iranian government has limited the occupation of Afghans to low menial jobs and their residency to certain restricted areas. The Deputy Interior Minister for political and security affairs said in February that the capacity of migrating cities, the term that the government uses for forced refugee camps, will increase in 2019.

In the last two months, at least three Afghan workers were reported to have died due to work accidents. Afghan workers are employed in construction jobs, well drilling, sewage channels and brick burners with earnings lower than the minimum wage, without insurance and formal contracts.
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January 2019

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