



Labor Rights in Iran

A Zamaneh Project

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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 June-July 2019. The newsletter does not claim to be inclusive of all labor events that took place during this period.



Table of Contents

Major Issues	4
Growing Unemployment.....	4
Growing Economic Hardships	5
Repression and Threats.....	5
Continuous Arrest and Harassment of Workers and Students.....	6
Preventing the Return to Work of Members of the Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company Union ..	8
The Safety of Women Labor Prisoners in Custody.....	8
Dismissals and Layoffs.....	8
Workers' Protests.....	9
The Farmers' Protest Against the Lack of Water Rights.....	10
Preschool Teachers and Educators	11
The Retired Workers	12
Workplace Safety	12
Peddlers, Hawkers and Street Vendors.....	13
The <i>Kulbars</i>	13
Child Labor	14
Migrant Workers.....	15



Major Issues

The trends of the past months have continued in June and July 2019. Demand-based protests are no longer only about increasing wages, the betterment of job security or less exploitation of workers but more focused on maintaining job opportunities, receiving past due wages, and calls for release of the arrested labor activists. This is mainly because an increase in unemployment and poverty has dramatically changed the status quo.

The pressure of economic sanctions is felt by the whole of the Iranian economy and is directly transferred to workers and other marginalized social groups. Poverty and unemployment are on the rise. Under these conditions, the authorities within factories, mines, service, and civil sector and other economic units force the workers to remain silent. Workers' wages, especially those of government workers and government contractors' workers, are not paid under the pretext of the economic crisis – the argument is the sanctions have affected the funds available. The most vulnerable part of the workforce are female workers as well as the migrant workers, most of whom are Afghan workers.

Growing Unemployment

The Statistical Center of Iran (SCI) announced the unemployment rate for the first quarter of the fiscal Persian calendar year 1398 (corresponding to 20 March 2019 to 20 May 2019) as 10.8%. Compared to the stats of the same organization for the same period, last year there is a 1.3% reduction in the unemployment rate. The numbers do not correspond to the reports of pressure felt by the unemployed. The government of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) is claiming less unemployment at a time that the number of workers who have lost jobs from the beginning of the current fiscal year has increased. SCI also claims that the rate of unemployment in 13 provinces in Iran has decreased to single value digits.

The discrepancies in the actual unemployment rate felt by Iranian workers and the numbers announced by the SCI is due to the particular definition of SCI of who is considered employed which includes interns, trainees, those serving in compulsory military services, domestic and unpaid work as well as those who work at least one hour per week.

The numbers that SCI has announced for the first quarter of the current fiscal year shows that 12 provinces have unemployment rates higher than the national average. Among them, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari (16.7%), Khuzestan (16.5%) and Lorestan (16.1%) have had the three highest rates of unemployment.

Independent economist and labor activists have warned against unemployment rates announced by SCI and other government sources for years, saying that it is much lower and not reflective of the actual numbers unemployment.

The gender gap in unemployment rates continues to haunt the Iranian labor market. The SCI report shows that in the spring of 2019, the women unemployment rate stands at 17.3% which is double the rate for male workers (9.1%). For the age group of 15-29 years old workers, the rates of unemployment for female workers stands at 35.3% versus 20.5% for males.

Unemployment rates for women with post-secondary education are twice that of the men of the same group. 25.3% of university graduated women are unemployed; that number is 12.2% for men which indicates that after graduating from post-secondary institutions women have a harder time securing jobs.

Growing Economic Hardships

The inflation rate of 20 May to 20 June 2019 was announced at 37.6%. This number is double the inflation rate of the same period of time last year. Based on the point-to-point inflation rate, the Iranian families have to spend 50.4% more this year on goods and services than they did last year. The inflation for the consumer price index covering food and beverages was reported 56.4% and point to point inflation for the category of food and beverages was reported 75% this year.

The misery index which takes into account both the unemployment and inflation rates in the first quarter of the current fiscal year in Iran has reached 48.9% - a number that is unprecedented. Looking at the inflation rate for each specific income deciles shows that families in lower-income deciles are more vulnerable and more prone to hardships. The inflation rate for the first two income deciles is reported as 50.1% and 53.1% respectively.

According to a report by the Iranian parliament, the first seven deciles of income distribution in Iran do not have the means to account for the expenses of life without receiving money in the form of subsidies or targeted social assistance. The economic conditions in Iran are such that production units, service industry, and the public sector do not have enough funding available to them to pay the wages of the workers in a timely manner or at all. In some sectors, the unpaid wages have been delayed as much as 10 months to a year and the workers have been working without any payments.

More so, the rising inflation as a result of economic sanctions that have hit the oil and gas economy of Iran has put oil, gas and petrochemical industry on the verge of a shutdown and many projects have been canceled and workers dismissed.

Repression and Threats

With the increase in the number of layoffs and the number of dismissed workers, the numbers of workers' protests are increasing. In the meantime, the Law Enforcement Force of the Islamic

Republic of Iran has announced the inauguration of a new police force called: “the Economic Security Police.”

Ayoub Soleimani, the deputy commander of Iran's Law Enforcement Force announced that the mandate of the Economic Security Police is to counter those “who disrupt the production cycle” and deal with those who "knowingly or unknowingly are aiding the enemies by becoming enemy infantry trying to disrupt the country's economy."

The Markazi Province Police Commander, Kiomars Azizi warned workers not to politicize labor protests and pursue labor demands within the confines of the factories’ administration so that “the enemy” or the “infiltrators” would not have a chance to exploit workers' demands and protests.

The statement from the Markazi Province top law enforcement official is significant because in the past two years workers from Heavy Equipment Production Company (HEPCO) in this province, as well as workers from AzarAb Industries, have been staging widespread protests at various times. AzarAb Industries’ workers also staged protests in the past two months to demand the improvement of work conditions.

The statements of these two law enforcement officials are in line with the warning and threatening statements against workers made earlier by other government officials. For example, Hossein Zolfaghari, the Security and Intelligence Deputy of Minister of Interior on May Day 2019 addressed a crowd of various provinces governors’ political-security deputies asking them to prevent workers from protesting on the street.

Ali Khamenei, IRI’s supreme leader, had also called the workers' protests "an enemy’s plan for economic unrest" - without mentioning the workers directly.

Continuous Arrest and Harassment of Workers and Students

Esmail Bakhshi, a representative of the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane workers, is still being held in prison. He was detained for a second time on 21 Jan 2019 after publically announcing that he had been tortured while in custody to pressure him to accept a forced televised confession. Bakhshi’s lawyer, Farzaneh Zilabi has announced that new charges were brought against his client, but despite the fact that the case was sent to Revolutionary Courts, there has not been a court hearing for these charges in the months of July. Court hearings might be planned for August 2019. Sepideh Gholian, a student and citizen journalist who was arrested in connection with the Haft Tappeh sugarcane workers' protests, and three members of the editorial board of Gam Magazine, Amir Amirgholi, Sanaz Allahyari and Amir Hossein Mohammadi Far are also awaiting trials.

Allahyari and Mohammadi Far went on hunger strike on 4 July to protest their continued detention, lack of due process and the fact that cases brought against them are not being sent to the hearing court. Asal Mohammadi, one other member of the editorial staff of Gam is free on bail but also awaiting trial.

Marzieh Amiri, Neda Naji, Atefeh Rangriz and Anisha Asadollahi, who were detained in connection with the International Workers' Day protest in Tehran, are still being held in custody. They are kept with violent crime prisoners to put more pressure on them.

Ali Nejati, a retired worker and member of the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Workers' Union, is also awaiting trial on his charges.

On 6 July 2019, Farzana Zilabi, a lawyer who represents both Nejati and Bakhshi reported that their cases were sent to Tehran's Revolutionary Courts. According to Zilabi, Mr. Nejati has been charged with "assembly and collusion to act against national security" and "propaganda against the state." Esmail Bakhshi's charges include "assembly and collusion to act against national security," "acting against national security through propaganda" and "insulting the supreme leader," "spreading lies in order to disrupt public opinion" and "disrupting public order by attending illegal gatherings."

The workers or labor activists who are in custody are not the only ones who are being mistreated or threatened with security charges brought against them. On 17 June 2019, Haft Tappeh Sugarcane workers published the names of 100 individuals who had supported the cause of the Haft Tappeh workers and had been subject to prosecution and/or persecution as a result. Among them, a total of 31 workers were arrested during the protests at Haft Tappeh which were about the state mediated privatization of the company and past due wages and benefit payments. Nine labor activists were also arrested in connection with supporting Haft Tappeh protests. 60 more workers were arrested in recent months. Security forces also used phone calls to threaten workers.

According to Haft Tappeh workers' report, factory directors under pressure from the security forces wanted to withhold Esmail Bakhshi's paycheck and were intending to dismiss him, canceling all his payroll and benefits. However, the factory directors faced yet another protest from the workers' side and decided not to execute the plan they had for Bakhshi.

Jafar Azimzadeh, a member of the board of directors of the Free Union of Iranian Workers (FUIW), remains in prison. Shapour Ehsani Rad, another member of the board of directors of the FUIW has been arrested on Monday 29th of July at his workplace in Tehran.

Also, the state-run Iran Labor News Agency (IRNA) on 17 June 2019, wrote that four Karun Cement workers, Farshad Khodadadian, Khorram Aghabigi, Peyman Soleimani and Amin Hatami have been summoned to answer to judicial authorities. Over three years ago, these workers had a case opened against them following the factory directors complaint against them for participating in the factory's labor protests. They were charged with "disturbing the society's order" and "participating in illegal gatherings."

Preventing the Return to Work of Members of the Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company Union

Three workers who have been members of the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company (SWTSBC) are facing obstacles caused by the Ministry of Labor authorities as well as Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company's authorities to return back to work.

Hassan Saeedi, Nasser Moharmazadeh, Hossein Karimi Sabzevar, Reza Shahabi and Farhanaz Shiri are five bus drivers and members of SWTSBC who have been dismissed and are not allowed to come back to work. Nasser Moharramazadeh, Hossein Karimi Sabzevar, and Farahnaz Shiri staged a sit-in in front of the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour, and Social Welfare on July 8th.

The director of Tehran's Labor Office had promised in May that conditions will be created for the return of Farahnaz Shiri to work. Ms. Shiri also has a back to work order from the Administrative Justice Court. However, the directors of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company still do not comply by such orders and continued to prevent fired workers from returning to work.

The Safety of Women Labor Prisoners in Custody

Neda Naji, Atefeh Rangriz and Sepideh Gholian, Iranian activists and citizen journalists who were arrested for supporting the labor causes in Iran, were attacked twice in prison in July. Naji, Rangriz and Gholian were attacked by an inmate transferred to Gharchak from Varamin's Psychiatric Ward according to Naji's husband on July 30.

Human rights groups are concerned about the well-being of women labor prisoners who are kept with violent crime inmates – this has been a strategy of Iranian authorities to put more pressure on the prisoners.

Sepideh Gholian is also in Gharchak prison and went on being on hunger strike for 10 days to object to the violent treatment of prisoners and prisoners' families by security and prison authorities.

This is the second time that women labor prisoners are attacked inside the prison. Neda Naji's husband announced on 6 July that Neda Naji and Atefeh Rangriz were beaten and physically attacked by prison authorities. He had expressed concern for the safety of the two prisoners and said that the judiciary and prison authorities were not responding to the families' follow-ups.

Dismissals and Layoffs

About 6,000 workers are on the verge of being laid off or permanently dismissed at Bid Boland Gas Refinery in Khuzestan, Iran. Workers at this refinery have staged at least two sit-ins in the past two months to protest the "mass layoffs" of workers.

600 workers from Lordegan Petrochemical Company in the western province of Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari have also been dismissed. These workers staged a number of gatherings in protest to mass dismissal and demanded to be sent back to work.

On 22 June, the Sana Andisheh Company which was a contracting company working for Abadan Refinery and taking care of its hydro maintenance, dismissed 100 workers after the workers protested past due wage and benefit payments as well as work conditions.

In Mahshahr Port in Khuzestan province, tens of workers have been dismissed due to project cancellations or lack of funding and equipment.

The new wave of layoffs is not limited to oil, gas and petrochemical sectors. Small and large manufacturing and service sector companies are also firing workers on a daily basis citing “force reduction” as a reason. Five workers at Karoon Fish Company were laid off. Four administrative employees of Bonab University were also fired on 28 June. Labor activists say that the number of workers who are sent to forced leave, are laid off or fired exceeds the numbers that are reported in the media.

Government officials, however, still declare the number of unemployed as just over 3,240,000 people. Among the total population of unemployed in December 2018, only 258,000 individuals used unemployment insurance services. The Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour, and Social Welfare has outsourced unemployment insurance services to the private sector. This has raised concerns among workers. Even government-affiliated workers' organizations have expressed concern over privatization of unemployment insurance.

According to unemployment insurance regulations in Iran, employees can receive unemployment insurance payments and pensions from six to 50 months – depending on the number of years of employment and payment of premiums. The minimum period of insurance payment for unemployment insurance is six months.

The Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour, and Social Welfare stats show that the number of individuals receiving unemployment insurance has increased by 36.7% from March 2017 to March 2018. The Ministry of Labour has so far not released any information on the number of individuals receiving unemployment insurance from March 2018 to March 2019.

Women's share of unemployment insurance payments from March 2017 to March 2018 was 23%, which again reflects the deep gender gap, discrimination and inequality in the Iranian job market.

Workers' Protests

From 22 May to 10 July (beginning Khordad to 19 Tir in Persian calendar), there were a total of 65 protests, sit-ins, and gatherings reported in various parts of Iran. More than half of the protests were about delayed wages or non-payment of wages. A total of 34 protests were about non-payment of wages and/or non-payment of benefits.

Workers' gatherings and sit-ins were reported in various parts of Iran, and the delayed payments were the cause of more than half of the workers' sit-ins. Workers rallied at five different locations to protest their deferred wages or unpaid work benefits. The longest protests against non-payment of wages occurred in Kut-e Abdollah in Khuzestan province. Municipal workers in Kut-e Abdollah have stopped working and gone on strike as of 28 June 2019. Prior to the onset of the strike in Kut-e Abdollah, municipality workers were not paid for a total of four months of wages and benefits. The mayor of Kut-e Abdollah had said that lack of available funding for municipal revenues is the main reason that the workers have not been paid. He had promised that the workers' deferred wages would be paid gradually.

In addition, municipal workers in four other cities, including the cities of Sarfaryab and Gachsaran in Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province, as well as cities of Kermanshah, Aghajari and Ahvaz in Khuzestan provinces, protested the delay in the payment of wages, cancellation of job benefits, failing of the employee to deposit insurance premiums and the conditions of employment contracts. The municipal workers are employed on temporary contracts by minimum wage contracting companies.

Also in Ahvaz and Tehran, city train workers gathered several times in front of the municipal buildings or contracting companies hired by the city. Workers of the Ahwaz City Train have six months of suspended payments on wages that have been delayed and promised. The Ahwaz City Train Project also owes the workers six months of benefits and their protests have not been successful in the past year and they have not yet been paid.

In Tehran, too, workers at the Fathabad Station have not been paid for four months. Workers who are working on Tehran City Train Project at Fathabad Station have told media that the contractor has fired them without paying the last four months of the payroll.

Workers at Electric Meter Makers of Qazvin (Kontorsazi Qazvin), Fasa Sugar, Abadan Combined Cycle Power Plant, Karaj' Imam Khomeini Hospital, Niloufar Birjand Tile Company, Bakhtar Bioshimi Biochemical Plant in Kermanshah, AzarAb in Arak, Pars Paper and Mazandaran Province Forestry workers (rangers) have also protested in the past two months for not receiving their wages.

Also, the maintenance and technical workers of the Islamic Republic of Iran Railway Company who are most often employed by contracting companies have begun a new round of strikes and protests for delayed wages and the non-payment of insurance premiums by the employee. Media reported workers' protests and strikes in the three provinces of Lorestan, Markazi and East Azerbaijan in June and July this year.

The Farmers' Protest Against the Lack of Water Rights

Farmers in Khuzestan and Isfahan provinces rallied several times after government officials failed to deliver on the promise of fair allocation of water rights. The East Isfahani farmers were also demanding an end to the ban on rice cultivation. In Isfahan province, after the spring rainfall, the farmers were hoping that the government will give them a larger share of water

rights and that it would remove restrictions on the cultivation of some crops, including rice. However, the river Zayandeh Roud that provides their water was once again redirected away from East Isfahan fertile lands.

In Khuzestan, rice growers of cities of Shooshtar and Hamidieh, as well as a number of villages in the same area, protested against the extension of the ban on rice cultivation in front of the Hamidieh and Shooshtar provincial government buildings. After the spring flood ruins, many of the fertile lands of Khuzestan, the province's governor and the Minister of Energy promised farmers this spring that the ban on rice cultivation would be lifted to compensate for the damages of the flood to farmers.

However, that promise failed to materialize and nearly 40,000 farmers and workers of rice fields stayed unemployed and without income.

Preschool Teachers and Educators

Protests by teachers and preschool educators continued despite the end of the school year. Retired teachers in several Iranian cities rallied in front of the Board of Education buildings after the Iranian judicial system issued a prison and flogging sentence for one union member, Hamid Reza Rahmati. A member of the Iranian Teachers' Trade Association of the city of ShahReza, Hamid Reza Rahmati went on strike last year as teachers staged a sit-in in front of the Board of Education building of the city. Branch 103 of the Criminal Court of the city of ShahReza sentenced Hamid Reza Rahmati to three years in prison, 74 lashes and two million tomans (around 170 USD) of fines.

In addition, preschool educators and adult literacy educators gathered in protest in Ahvaz and Tehran. In Ahvaz, preschool teachers gathered at least twice in front of the Khuzestan provincial governor's office.

The rallies came after preschool educators were told their temporary hourly based contracts would become fixed sessional contracts. Iranian Board of Education hires teachers based on their credentials of having completed a Teacher's College degree. Teachers are hired on three levels: 1 – temporary hourly based contract in which a teacher will only get paid for the hours spent in or on the classroom (Haghol Tadrissi Teacher); 2 –with a fixed sessional contract in which the teacher is hired without having the required credentials and has fixed yearly contract; 3 – tenure teacher in which a teacher is hired on full credentials with permanent contract with benefits. What teachers prefer are tenure contracts. The Iranian Ministry of Education has announced that it will increase the employment of teachers from the private sector in the form of sessional contracts in the coming school year to compensate for the shortage of teachers and educators.

On 28 June, adult literacy teachers from across Iran came to Tehran and rallied in front of the Public Administration and Employment Office, to demand the implementation of a resolution that has been approved by Iranian parliament to hire adult literacy teachers with tenure contract. The parliament of the Islamic Republic of Iran ordered the Ministry of Education to upgrade the contract of adult literacy educators to permanent contracts. The Ministry of Education, however, refuses to accept and enforce the parliament's resolution.

The Retired Workers

The government continues to refuse to implement the Law of Equalization of Pensions which promised an 18% increase to government pensioners' annual income. The law also allows the income of pensioners to become closer to the income of the currently employed workers. According to official statistics, more than 70% of Iranian retired workers are receiving pensions that are closer to minimum payments and that places them below the poverty line (the government has allocated a minimum cut off for pensions and most pensioners receive payments close to this minimum cut off). Three months after the start of the Iranian fiscal year 1398 (as of 21 March 2019), Iran's Pension Organization – a state agency in charge of Iran's Pension Fund, has not implemented the approved 18% increase in pensions. In addition, the Islamic Consultative Assembly has put forward a resolution to revise the social security laws of the country called "the Parametric Social Security Reforms," and the government has asked the Social Security Organization (SSO) and the Civil Servants Pension Organization (CSPO) (which functions under the Ministry of Welfare and Social Security) to start allocating assets sale in order to compensate for funds to finance and pay debts.

On 18 and 29 June 2019, Retirees gathered in front of the Islamic Consultative Assembly building and the Ministry of Cooperative, Labor and Social Welfare respectively. Their demands include the enforcement of the Pension Equalization Act, adequate insurance, transparency of the Pension's Funds managed by Civil Servants Pension Organization and improved living conditions.

Workplace Safety

From 10 June 2019 to the time of completion of this bimonthly report, 77 workers lost their lives in work-related accidents in different parts of Iran, and a total of 96 workers were injured while working. Among the workers who died due to workplace accidents were two child laborers.

Most of the workplace accidents resulting in death were in the construction sector with a total of 21 deaths and 29 injuries; least three of the dead workers were Afghan migrant workers. Most construction workers in Iran work without contracts, they get paid hourly and as a result, they have no social security or medical insurance covering work-related accidents. Iranian government agencies report non-compliance with workplace safety standards as the main cause of work-related accidents. But what is often ignored is the inadequacy of government inspection agencies in overseeing workplace safety standards.

14 water well diggers were also killed in the past two months and five well diggers were injured. Well digging jobs also hire mostly hourly-paid workers who do not have contracts with social benefits and insurances. Two of the 14 who lost their lives during this period were migrant workers but their nationalities were not released to the media.

Nine Mineworkers also lost their lives during this period due to work-related accidents and seven mineworkers were injured. The IRI has contracted or allocated mining projects to the private sector or to organizations affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The private sector and IRGC affiliated institutions to maximize profitability, have been lowering

workplace safety standards, inspections and safety cost which has increased the risk of accidents at the workplace leading to the death and injury of workers.

Work accidents in both the small and large industrial units in the past two months have resulted in the 25 deaths and 51 injuries. Most of these incidents took place in small workshops such as repair shops, confectionery units and plastic parts manufacturing units. The workers in smaller manufacturing units work usually outside the supervision of the Ministry of Labor inspectors.

In the past two months, six municipal workers lost their lives while working. Municipal workers are also often employed by low-wage paying private contractors. The contractors employ municipal workers with temporary contracts and keep them on minimum hourly wage.

Six other workers were injured in work-related accidents in service or agricultural sectors.

Peddlers, Hawkers and Street Vendors

In Tehran and Tabriz, peddlers, hawkers and street vendors were physically attacked by police based on a vending bylaw that does not permit blocking the public's right-of-way. Tabriz Municipality has banned all form of vending in the area surrounding and near the Grand Bazaar (central traditional marketplace). The governor of Tabriz said that the plan to limit vending near the Grand Bazaar is being implemented by the collective request of a group of shop owners at Bazaar. After the implementation of the plan to limit vending near Bazaar, a group of peddlers and street vendors gathered twice in front of the governor's office. Eyewitnesses reported the short-term arrest of a number of peddlers who took part in these protests.

In Tehran too, street vending is now banned all along Vali-e-Asr Street - an 18 km north-south street that is the main shopping destination of city of Tehran with stores all along the street. Tehran police have cited blocking the public's right-of-way as the reason for this ban. 130 peddlers in a letter to the mayor of Tehran demanded a halt to the plan to remove peddlers from streets of Tehran. The peddlers in their letter say that the ban on street vending will affect more than 3000 paddlers who now have to provide "an empty table" to their families. The demands of the peddlers have been ignored.

The Kulbars

From the beginning of the current Persian year (March 2019) until 10 July 2019, a total of 65 *Kulbars* (human mules) have been killed or injured. 17 of these *Kulbars* were killed by direct shots of Iranian forces and 25 were killed during transportation of goods because of natural accidents or were shot by Iranian border patrol forces. Snow and frost claimed the lives of two *Kulbars* in this period and one died as a result of falling from a height in the mountainous border regions. Two other *Kulbars* were killed in accidents.

The direct firing of Iranian border guards wounded 41 *Kulbars*. Landmine explosions and falling from altitude also injured three *Kulbars* altogether.

The Iranian government does not recognize *Kulbars* as workers and human mules do not have any protection. As of two years ago, Iran started imposing more restrictions on *Kulbars*, which according to state officials "do not pass through accepted passages." Iran's Intelligence Deputy of the Minister of Interior has formally accused *Kulbars* of "smuggling goods" and has made an accusation connecting human mules to "terrorist groups."

There are no precise stats on the number of active *Kulbars* in Iran but Rasool Khezri, a representative of Piranshahr in the Iranian parliament, had earlier said that there are nearly 80,000 *Kulbars* active in Iran mostly in West Azerbaijan, Kurdistan and Kermanshah provinces.

Child Labor

In Tehran, the controversial plan to remove street children and send them to shelters has been underway and was implemented this spring and summer. The Street Children Removal Program removed the child laborers from the streets with the police force and the children were then transferred to the childcare centers.

This year, the Street Children Removal Program was launched in Tehran from 12 June 2019. During the implementation of the program, the governor of Tehran announced that 249 child laborers were identified and arrested and transferred to the childcare center. Of these, 189 were children of immigrant families.

On 8 July 2019, the city of Shiraz's Welfare Organization Director announced the identification and "removal" of 1000 Street Children in the city and added that the children were being transferred to care centers. Government officials in Qazvin, Hamedan, Birjand and several other cities announced the implementation of the same program identifying child laborers and transferring them to care centers.

On 13 June 2019, the results of a study on the "waste management mafia in Iran" was published which showed that child laborers and mainly migrant child workers constitute the largest population of waste collection force in Tehran. According to the head of the research team, Kamil Ahmadi, a total of 14,000 people in Tehran make a living by means of some form of garbage collection. Among those who work in the waste management sector as waste collectors, 53% are 17 years or younger. This means that a total of 4200 children are laborers working as garbage or waste collectors for recycling. According to Kamil Ahmadi's research, 89% of the children exploited by "garbage mafia" are child migrant workers.

Exact statistics on the number of street children and child laborers in Iran have not been released yet, but the Statistics and Information Center of the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare announced in July this year that the number of child laborers has increased by 21 percent over the past two years.

Migrant Workers

Iran is stepping up its crackdown on Afghan immigrants. Following statements by IRI's president, Hassan Rouhani and the Deputy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the expulsion of Afghan migrants from Iran, government officials in various provinces announced the implementation of the "National Aliens Organization Plan." Under this plan, Afghan migrants with residence permits will be transferred to camps the Iranian government has called "guest-town" (MehmanShahr), and those without permits will be deported. Official sources have reported the departure of more than 700,000 Afghan workers over the past year from Iran. Khabaronline News Agency reported in July that more 570,000 more Afghan refugees have left.

Mehdi Mahmoudi, director general of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs office of Coordination of National Aliens said on 27 June that 150,000 "illegal immigrants" are expelled from Iran annually.

Seyyed Ali Qasemi, Director of Province of Khorasan Razavi's Office of Coordination of National Aliens also announced the launching and implementation of the Afghan Refugee Return Plan. The plan is implemented in three phases of education, employment and return. As part of this plan, Afghan immigrants can seek education and employment between three to five years in Iran and Afghanistan (with coordination with this office) and eventually return to their home country with security, seeking job opportunities.

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