Labor Rights in Iran
A Zamaneh Project

Volume 9   October / November 2019
Workers’ Rights in Iran

No. 9

October and November 2019

Introduction.......................................................................................................................... 1
Major Issues .......................................................................................................................... 2
The Gasoline Price Shock................................................................................................. 4
Protests: Continuation of strike in Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Complex and Azarab .......... 7
Anti-Riot Police Attacks Azarab Workers .......................................................................... 9
Workers at Zayandehrood Recreational Resort go on Strike .........................................11
Retirees and Teachers ...................................................................................................... 12
Layoffs and Dismissal of Workers ................................................................................... 14
Suppression of the Workers ............................................................................................. 16
Child Labor ........................................................................................................................ 19
Workplace Safety and Accidents ....................................................................................... 20
Kulbars or Human Mules ................................................................................................. 22
Introduction

This is the ninth bimonthly Labor Rights Newsletter of Zamaneh Media. The focus of these bimonthly reports has been consistently on unemployment, deferment or non-payment of wages and benefits, protests and strikes, freedom of association and assembly, independent unions, discrimination at workplace, issues of labor law, contractual violations, women’s labor, child labor, and the conditions the Kulbars.

Zamameh Media monitors the above-mentioned labor issues on a daily basis and this bimonthly report presents the “big picture” about the most important Iranian workers’ rights issue in the past two months. The bimonthly newsletter aims to increase knowledge of the situation of the workers in Iran. Report no. 9 covers issues in the approximate range of October and November 2019. The newsletter does not claim to cover all labor issues or events that occurred in this period.

We also released an annual newsletter in May 2018 and will publish the second annual report on Labor Rights in Iran in May 2020.
Major Issues

The sudden increase of gasoline prices affecting the livelihoods of low-income Iranians and the working class shocked the nation and sparked widespread protests across Iran. On November 15th, the Supreme Council of Economic Coordination, an extra-legal body comprising of the President of Iran, Hassan Rouhani, the head of the Parliament, Ali Larijani and the head of the Judiciary, Ebrahim Raisi decided to decrease Gasoline subsidies and increase the prices threefold. The decision was backed by the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) supreme leader, Ali Khamenei.1

Subsidized gasoline in Iran is a standard commodity that an increase in its value affects official and actual inflation rates and increases the costs of living for the working class and low-income Iranians, making their lives harder. Especially now in the second half of the Iranian fiscal year in which the gap between wages and the costs of living has significantly increased for working-class families.

On 9 Nov 2019, as speculations about the minimum wage for the next Iranian fiscal year (1399) were being published, Mohammad Bagher Nobakht - the spokesperson for the Plan and Budget Organization (PBO) of Iran - announced that they intend to increase the national minimum wage by 15% in March 2020.2

Meanwhile, one representative of the Association of Islamic Labor Councils who has a seat at the Supreme Labor Council (SLC) which is responsible for calculating the national minimum wage annually announced on 7 Oct 2019 that the cost for a living basket of an average family in Iran has reached to 8 million tomans (≈667 USD).4

According to Article 41 of the Iran Labor Code, the Supreme Labor Council (SLC) is the body that determines the minimum wage in accordance to the percentage of inflation announced by the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) and the calculations about the cost of the living basket of an average Iranian family. The SLC calculates the national minimum wage every spring when the fiscal Iranian year starts.

Since March 2018, independent labor organizations in Iran are demanding that the monthly minimum wage be set at an approximate value closer to 1000 USD. The Wage Committee of the SLC composed of representatives of government-affiliated workers’ associations such as Worker’s House and Islamic Labor Councils (ILCs) has refused to accept this amount. The March 2018, SLC announced the minimum wage at 11,106,917 IRR (≈222 USD). In March 2019, SLC set the minimum wage to 15,668,820 IRR (≈120 USD). The dollar value of the 2018 and 2019 minimum wage keeps decreasing because of the high inflation rate and the plunge of the IRR compared to USD. This is despite the fact that the market prices of goods and services in Iran increase based on the increasing inflation rate, the value of IRR and the value of imported goods in the global market.

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3 In the months of Oct and Nov 2019, every 1 USD was being exchanged for 12,000 tomans (120,000 IRR) on average and this is the value we are using for exchange rate for this report.
The Iran Statistical Center announced the inflation rate of mid-September to mid-October on 23 Oct at 42 percent.⁵ Compared to the same period in the previous month (mid-August to mid-September) there is a seven percent decrease in the inflation rate. However, the rate of inflation associated with essential goods like food is still increasing in this period. It is in these conditions that many workers report that factory management and the service industry are unable to pay their wages. Some workers have reported deferred wages for up to a year worth of work.

Production units are shutting down or are about to shut down, often stating the economic consequences of sanctions as the reason for halting or reducing production. Government officials, in particular, the Minister of Industry, Mines and Trade has said that they will not allow the closing of any production units.⁶ Yet the number of laid-off or fired workers is increasing despite the government announcing a decrease in the number of unemployed by the end of summer 2019.

Iran’s unemployment rate has fallen by 1.8 percent according to government statistics from summer 2018 to summer 2019. However, this decrease in unemployment rate does not correlate with the high inflation rate and economic growth rates. The rate of unemployment for Iranians with university degrees has increased between summers 2018 to 2019 by 4.3%. By the end of summer 2019, 43.8% Iranians with university education did not have jobs.⁷

Protests against the non-payment or late payment of wages and the transfer of factories and production units to the private sector (government mediated privatization) continued in Oct and Nov 2019 as with previous reporting periods. The government’s reaction to the ongoing protests in Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Complex in Khuzestan and the Azarab factory in Arak has been violent suppression and crackdown. Special Forces and security forces arrested the workers of the above-mentioned factories, used excessive force and physically attacked workers, and summoned a number of workers to local security and judiciary offices for questioning and interrogation. In Arak the antiriot police attacked the workers of Azarab, wounded some, send some to the hospital and arrested 21 individuals – some were released after.⁸ Judiciary and security authorities also arrested 14 workers of Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Complex and 13 workers of KutAbdullah Municipality authorities and

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⁶ Mehr News Agency Iran & World News. "We do not permit the closure of any production unit," October 12, 2019: https://www.mehrnews.com/news/4744796/%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%84%DB%8C%DB%8B%97%DB%86-%D9%88%DB%88%DA%AF-%D9%86%DB%8C%DA%98%DB%8C%DB%85%DB%8B%97%DB%86-%D9%86%DB%8C%DA%AF-%D9%87%DB%8C%DB%86- %D9%88%DB%85%DB%8C%DB%85%DB%8A%DA%AF-%D9%87%DB%8C%DB%86-%D9%88%DB%85%DB%8C%DA%AF
⁷ Qatreh. “Has unemployment dropped in the summer?” ”Accessed November 27, 2019: https://www.mehrnews.com/news/4744796/%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%84%DB%8C%DB%8B%97%DB%86-%D9%88%DB%88%DA%AF-%D9%86%DB%8C%DA%98%DB%8C%DB%85%DB%8B%97%DB%86-%D9%86%DB%8C%DA%AF-%D9%87%DB%8C%DB%86-%D9%88%DB%85%DB%8C%DA%AF

Read more about all the latest news on the protests of workers of Azarab in Arak here: https://www.radiozamaneh.com/tag/%da%a9%d8%a7%d8%b1%da%af%d8%b1%d8%a7%d9%86-%d8%a2%d8%b0%d8%b1%d8%a2%d8%a8
opened criminal cases against them.9 Some protesting teachers and retirees were also summoned by judiciary officials in this period.

The judiciary also finally agreed to release Esmail Bakhshi on bail.10 Esmail Bakhshi a representative of the workers of Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Complex in Southeastern Iran has been sentenced to 14 years of prison time and 74 lashes on 7 Sept 2019. Bakhshi is now awaiting his appeal. While the Judiciary officials agreed to the conditional release of some labor rights prisoners, including Sepideh Gholian and the editorial team of Gaam Magazine, Bakhshi’s bail was delayed. Spideh Gholian who was temporarily released on bail was also re-arrested on 17 Nov 2019 during the protests against the rise in gasoline prices.11 Neda Naji, a labor prisoner is still being held in prison.

The Gasoline Price Shock

Gasoline prices increased on the night of 15 Nov 2019 with a reduction of energy-related subsidies. The previously halted plan of assigning a set quota of a number of liters of subsidized gasoline at a lower price to private and public vehicles was reinstated (previously it was argued that this plan has created abuse of the system and corruption thus the plan was suspended). According to the National Iranian Oil Products Distribution Company (NIOPDC), the price for the subsidized gasoline for private vehicles increased from 10000 IRR per liter to 15000 (0.125 USD) IRR per liter for the first 60 liters each month. The 60 liter is a quota cutoff for private vehicles. The price after the first 60 liters quota is still subsidized but offered at an increased price of 30000 IRR (0.25 USD) per liter. This means that the price of gasoline from Nov 15 onwards has a 30% increase for the quota assigned gasoline and a 300% increase for every additional liter of gasoline after that. Official taxi vehicles registered with the Taxi Organization of Iran have a quota of 400 liters of gasoline at the rate of 15000 (0.125 USD) IRR per liter. The quota for bi-fuel passenger cars and taxis is half this set amount of monthly quota. There are no special price provisions for private vehicles who work driving passengers via Uber-like apps or on the streets - they are treated as private vehicles.12

Radio Zamaneh. Police arrested seven Haft Tappeh sugarcane workers who were scheduled to meet with members of the Majlis Social Commission on Monday in Khorramabad: https://www.radiozamaneh.com/468084.
Haft Tappeh workers are constantly arrested and released every week in Iran. Click here to follow the latest developments in the arrests of Haft Tappeh workers: https://www.radiozamaneh.com/tag/%d8%a8%d8%a7%d8%b2%d8%af%d8%a7%d8%b4%d8%aa-%da%a9%d8%a7%d8%b1%da%af%d8%b1%d9%86-%d9%86-%db%8c%d8%b4%da%a9%d8%b1-%d9%87%d9%81%d8%aa-%d8%aa%d9%be%d9%87.
The sudden hike in gasoline prices shocked the Iranian citizens. A proposal to reduce energy-related subsidies and increase gasoline prices was previously debated and suspended in the Islamic Consultative Assembly several times. Angry Iranians took to the streets and this led to widespread protests across Iran.

Iranian state media announced that the decision to increase gasoline price was made at the level of the Supreme Council of Economic Coordination and with the backing of Iranian Supreme Leader.\(^{13}\) The Supreme Council of Economic Coordination said that they have made the decision in order to control "fuel smuggling" and enhance "targeted distribution of subsidies".\(^{14}\) Ali Khamenei, the supreme leader of IRI, has also ordered that the plan to decrease gasoline subsidies must be implemented.\(^{15}\)

A government spokesman has pledged to distribute revenues from increase gasoline prices to lower-income deciles of the Iranian population. According to government officials, about 60 million people in Iran will be eligible for cash social support that the government is calling "subsistence support."\(^{16}\)

The decision to start a "subsistence support" social assistance program in the form of cash was announced on 17 Nov to thwart widespread protests across Iran. The protests continued despite this. On 21 Nov, the details of the cash support program were announced and it became clear that it is around 550,000 IRR (4.5 USD) monthly supports for a single person family and it goes up to 2,050,000 IRR (17 USD) for a family of five.\(^{17}\)

According to Amnesty International, the death toll of protesters killed by the Iranian security forces has reached at least 143 since the onset of the protests on 15 November 2019. The death toll is expected to increase as more cases of death are being documented.\(^{18}\) At least 7000 individuals have been arrested in these protests.\(^{19}\)

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\(^{14}\) ibid.


\(^{17}\) Fars News. Government promises to curb inflationary pressures due to gas prices: https://www.farsnews.com/news/13980825000861/%D9%88%D8%B9%DA%AF%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D9%87
\(^{18}\) ibid.


On November 16th, protesters set a bank on fire in the city of Behbahan. They were protesting the increase in gasoline prices.

The Iranian government is increasing the price of gasoline at a time that its oil revenues have decreased and is facing a looming budget deficit. There are various reports on the budget deficit. Hassan Rouhani has recently been cited as saying that his administration is facing deficit that is close to nearly two-thirds of the yearly $45 billion budget, at around $30 billion USD. A recent report by Etemad daily in Iran calculated the budget deficit around one hundred thousand billion toman which is closer to eight billion USD.20

An increase in the price of gasoline as a standard and essential commodity will affect the inflation rate and will push up prices for other commodities. Post the gasoline hike, our estimate shows that the living basket of an average Iranian family will reach a price of eight million toman per month (670 USD). In Sept 2019, Iran's Labor News Agency calculated the costs of living for an average 3.3 persons working family based on the prices of essentials goods in the living basket of such family and according to the formulas used by the Supreme Labor Council’s Wage Committee. With the increase in the price of goods over the summer 2019, an average worker’s family needs at least 7,580,000 toman (630 USD) to be able to accommodate for the costs of living in the current economic conditions in Iran.21 The cost of the living basket of working class families is expected to increase even more with the increase in the price of gasoline.

20 Etemad Online. The government’s difficult way to compensate for the deficit. https://etemadonline.com/content/361896/%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%AF%D8%B4%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D8%AA-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%8A-%D8%AC%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%83%D8%B3%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%AC%D9%87

21 ILNA News Agency. In September, the living wage basket increased to 7,580,000 toman / the cost of living increased again by 53,000 thousand toman. https://www.ilna.news/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B1%DA%A9%DB%8C-9/807536-%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%AF-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B4-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%B1%DA%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D9%85%D8%8C%D9%84%DB%8C%D9%88%D9%86-
Also, many Iranians who are unemployed or who have multiple jobs, drive passengers using private vehicles. These private passenger taxis are treated as private vehicles with a 60 liters quota of gas per month. The decision to increase the price of gasoline will eliminate a lot of driving jobs simply because the drivers will not be able to make enough earnings with the current gasoline prices. It will also increase the fares for passengers. According to Alireza Ghanadan, the executive director of Tehran’s Taxis Organization, in this city alone 80 thousand cars are used to drive passengers as private and public taxis. The increase in the price of gasoline means jobs lost for an already economically vulnerable group.

Along with private vehicles used for passenger driving as a source of income, motorcycles are largely used in Iran for goods and passenger transport, as well as delivery and courier services. The number of motorcycles registered in Tehran in July 2019 was 2.5 million, of which 850,000 motorcycles are used as a source of income for drivers who do pick-up, delivery, and passenger transportation, mostly around Tehran’s grand market, the Bazar. Of the nearly 33 million vehicles in the country, nearly 12 million are equivalent to 35% are motorcycles. Greater Tehran has the highest number of motorcycles with 21% of the total number of motorcycles in the country- about 2.5 million, and Khorasan Razavi, Isfahan, and Fars each have slightly more or less than one million motorcycles.

The rising gasoline rates will make a large part of the population who work with their private vehicles, unemployed. Another consequence of rising gasoline prices in the coming months is the rising cost of all manufactured and transported goods. This situation will increase the official inflation rate that in Oct 2019 had reached 49% and in Nov decreased to 42%. It would ultimately lead to an increase in the cost of living and can lead to closures of factories or reductions in production which means layoffs for workers of production units.

Continuation of strike in Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Complex and Azarab

Starting 23 Sept 2019, Haft Tappeh Sugarcane workers started a new round of protests and strike. During this round which started because twenty more workers were fired, security forces threatened several workers with phone calls, summoned some to local security
offices and arrested three workers. The strikes and protests lasted more than a month. Khuzestan security police also arrested a total of eleven workers who were scheduled to attend a meeting with the Iranian parliament’s Social Commission on their way to Tehran on the road from the city of Shush to the city of Khorramabad. This makes for 14 total arrests in the month of October related to Haft Tappeh protests. All of these workers were released on bail after a few days with pending criminal cases against them. The demands of Haft Tappeh sugarcane workers remain to be the removal of the private sector owner of the complex, the return of fired workers, an end to the repression and persecution of workers and the payment of overdue wages.24

The strike of Haft Tappeh sugarcane workers on 13 October 2019. A number of Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Complex workers went on strike and gathered outside of the factory to protest the firing of their colleagues on 22 Sept 2019. The strike and protest lasted more than a month. Photo from the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Workers’ Syndicate (independent union).

The round of strikes and protests of Haft Tappeh Worker in late Sept and Oct was successful in pressuring the private owners of the factory to hire back some of the twenty fired workers. The private owners had fired the twenty workers, some of which were members of the government-affiliated association of Islamic Labor Council, citing reasons such as "unnecessary force" and "end of the contract period." After the wave of protests and strikes at the premises of the Haft Tappeh Complex, the management team agreed to hire back 17 of the twenty workers that were fired.

For more details on the Haft Tappeh Workers' protests in September and October, see: Radio Zamaneh. Haft Tappeh workers gather in protest of the layoffs. https://www.radiozamaneh.com/467157
About the crackdown and arrest of Haft Tappeh workers in October, see: Radio Zamaneh. 14 sugarcane workers arrested. https://www.radiozamaneh.com/468024
However, the owners of the complex refused to hire back, Mohammad Khannifar, who has been sentenced to five years in prison by the Revolutionary Court System and two more workers. Esmail Bakhshi is also a fired worker who has not been hired back.\footnote{Information in this paragraph comes from interviews and the Telegram page of Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Workers Syndicate (an independent not officially recognized union that protesting workers run). The page link on telegram is: \url{https://t.me/syndica_7tape} Also see: Radio Zamaneh. Haft Tappeh sugarcane workers rally in front of the city of Shush’s governorate. \url{https://www.radiozamaneh.com/474751}}

The Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Workers’ Syndicate (the not “officially” recognized independent union), in a statement blamed the dismissal of Khannifar and the persecution of workers on a three entities, the private owners of the factory, the province of Khuzestan’s governorate and the city of Shush’s Offices of Ministry of Intelligence. The statement says that the persecution of workers is the common agenda of private owners of Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Complex, Khuzestan’s governorate and Ministry of Intelligence security forces based in the city of Shush. After the widespread protests in 100 Iranian cities against the hike in gasoline prices, the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane workers resumed their protest on November 16th and this time they took to the streets of Sush and main market of the city.

**Anti-Riot Police Attacks Azarab Workers**

Azarab Industries workers started a new round of protests on 6 Oct 2019. During the summer 2019, following protests of the workers, local authorities met with workers in order to find a solution to workers’ demands of payments of overdue wages and transfer of the company’s shares from its largest shareowner, the Agriculture Bank of Iran to MAPNA Investing Group (MAPNA stands for Iran Power Plant Projects Management Company; it is an investing company with more than 40 subsidiaries and smaller companies).
However, this transfer of ownership of shares never took place and so in Oct 2019, the Azarab workers started a new round of protests first on the factory’s premises and subsequently, the protesters moved to the entrance gate of the city of Arak. The antiriot police and security forces attacked the Azarab protesting workers on 7 Oct 2019 with teargas after the protesters blocked the North-South Railway running through the city of Arak. Some workers were wounded, and security forces arrested 41 workers. Most of the arrested workers were released temporarily on bail after three weeks. Judiciary and security officials have opened criminal cases for the protesting workers.26

Azarab Industries is a manufacturing factory that constructs machinery needed for power plants including boilers and pressure vessels. The factory is going through financial trouble because of government mediated privatization mismanagement and multiple loans with banks. Azarab workers have consistently demanded the removal of the private owner of the factory and its return to the government-owned Industrial Development and Renovation Organization of Iran (IDRO) also known as IDRO Group. IDRO operates under the Ministry of Industries and Mines and has privatized many of its companies under the mandate of Iran Privatization Organization. However, common mismanagements in the process of government mediated privatization lead to lost revenues, production reduction and workers suffering from overdue payments of wages and benefits as well as dismissals. Azarab has 1700 workers.27

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27 For more information on the authorities’ treatment of the Azerab workers after the new round of protests in October, see Radio Zamaneh: Radio Zamaneh. Head of the Islamic Labor Council of Azerab: All arrested workers have been released. https://www.radiozamaneh.com/471408
Workers at Zayandehrood Recreational Resort Go on Strike

Workers of a recreational resort by the banks of the river Zayandehdood in Chadegan village of Isfahan province go on strike for more than twenty days. Nearly 115 workers took part in this strike. The strikes were ongoing until 11 Nov 2019. Most of these workers have been working for more than 10 to 15 years for this resort but they are still employed on temporary contracts.

The resort they work for is comprised of 2000 rental villas, which tourists often rent to use the resort and its amenities. Chadegan resort near a village with the same name and in a country with the same name has attracted many tourists but workers say that the parent company is not willing to give them permanent contracts, benefits, and better wages even though the business is booming.28

The villas are owned by Sazema-e Omran-e Zayandehrood (Zayandehrood Construction Organization), an affiliate of the Municipality of Isfahan which took over Crown lands in the 1980s from the government and constructed resorts and other development projects. Zayandehrood Construction Organization is hiring workers from the nearby villages with temporary contracts and a salary that is way below the set minimum wage.

Radio Zamaneh. Three workers at Azarab Company are still in custody, and one was summoned. https://www.radiozamaneh.com/470902
Radio Zamaneh. Seven of the arrested Azarab workers were released. https://www.radiozamaneh.com/470568
Radio Zamaneh. Markazi provincial labor representatives insist on repelling privatization in the meeting with the Labor Minister. https://www.radiozamaneh.com/470475
Fars News. The Zayandehrood Construction Company’s Case the Workers’ Contracts are at the State Inspection Office. https://www.farsnews.com/news/139808180000026/
Workers in the following manufacturing factories, and government or service industry entities, also went on strike during this reporting period for contract violations, temporary contract, job insecurities related to contracts, and late payment or nonpayment of wages. Protests and strikes were reported in:

1. Sherkat Kontor Sazi Iran workers in Qazvin
2. Jalil Hospital workers in the city of Yasuj
3. Fasa Sugar Factory worker in the city of Fasa;
4. Kutabdullah Municipality workers in the city of Ahvaz;
5. Shushtar Municipality worker in the city of Shushtar;
6. Kerman Province’s Old Bam Restoration Project workers in the city of Bam;
7. Kerman Municipality workers in the city of Kerman;
8. Golnaz Vegetable Cooking Oil workers in Kerman;
9. Kashan Municipality workers in Kashan;
10. and workers of Persian Gulf Transportation Company near Bandar Abbas.

Retirees and Teachers

On 10 Nov 2019, Iranian retirees gathered in protest in front of the Islamic Consultative Assembly (in front of IRI’s Parliament Building). Before the rally, the riot police units blocked the roads leading to the parliament and arrested several people who were planning to attend the protest. This protest was organized after a call by twenty independent organizations. The organizers announced in a statement that they are gathering in front of the parliament to protest “unbearable living conditions” and unprecedented “imposed poverty and misery.”

According to government officials, at least 60% of retirees are living on a "minimum rate of pensions" and more than one million and five hundred thousand retirees have to work despite retirement to make ends meet. In their previous rallies, retirees had called for the implementation of the Income Equalization Act, which promises pensioners an income equal to that of working employees in the job they served at. The government of Hassan Rouhani has not anticipated the implementation of the Income Equalization Act in the country’s annual budget.

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30 Tasnim News Agency. Government’s Delaying of the Implementation of Pensioners’ Income Equalization Plan. https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1398/08/16/2134215/%D8%AA%D8%A3%D8%AE%DB%8C%D8%B1-%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%BC-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%AD-%D9%87%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%8C-%D8%AD%D9%82%D9%88%D9%82-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%B4%D8%B3%D8%AA%DA%AF%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D8%89%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%AD-%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D9%8E%D8%8C%D8%B4-%D8%A8%D8%8C%D9%86%D8%8C-%DA%A9%D8%B1%D8%AF
Demonstration of retirees in Alborz province

In addition, retired and working teachers in Tehran and retired workers of East Azarbaijan Telecommunication Company in Tabriz also took part in rallies and gatherings to protest the economic hardships.\(^{31}\)

In a letter to parliamentarians, some 16,000 contract teachers (working on temporary hourly based contracts) protested contract-based discriminations and asked the parliamentarians to look into their work conditions and pay gap compared to tenured teachers. The temporary contract teachers are hired by contractor companies, and they receive a lower pay compared to teachers who are hired with formal Board of Education contracts.\(^{32}\)

Working and retired teachers also gathered in different cities of Iran in front of the Board of Education buildings on 5 October to demand improvement of their living conditions, release of imprisoned teachers and to protest the privatization of education.

\(^{31}\) ILNA News Agency. We Tabriz telecommunications workers protest the law not being implemented / we wrote letters repeatedly. https://www.ilna.news/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B1%DA%AF%D8%B1%DB%8C-%929330-%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B6-%D9%85%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA%DB%8C-%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%8C-%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%8C%D8%B2-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%B9%D8%AF%D9%85-%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%8C-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%A7-%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%87-%D9%86%DA%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C-%DA%A9%D8%B1%DB%8C-%929330

Teachers' protest with slogans against privatization of education system

Layoffs and Dismissal of Workers

As economic recession intensifies in Iran, more manufacturing, industrial and development projects are slowing down or completely shutting down and more workers are being laid off, dismissed or sent to unpaid leaves. In the city of Shush, the Shush Sugar Factory laid-off workers, sending them to unpaid forced leaves until further notice. The fired workers told official Iranian news agencies that the factory’s production line was shut down and only a limited number of workers could work for up to two days a week.33

Sahand-e Tabriz, the manufacturing factory of combine harvesters was also closed in early November. Factory workers, who were laid off, announced that the closure of the factory was after a private bank took over the properties and assets of this manufacturing unit. The owners of the factory had defaulted on loans making it legal for the bank to take over the assets.34 According to the Ministry of Industry, Mines, and Commerce, more than one thousand industrial and production units have had their assets seized because of debt to the banking system.35

33 IRNA. Shush Sugar Factory Workers Gather in Protest. https://www.irna.ir/news/83547807/%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B1%DA%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B4%D8%B1%DA%A9%D8%AA-%D9%82%D9%86%D8%AF-%D8%B4%D9%88%D8%B4-%D8%AA%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%B9-%DA%A9%D8%B1%DA%AF%D9%86%D8%AF
34 Tabriz Daily. Stop the Seizure of Tabriz Combine Factory. http://tabrizdaily.ir/%d9%85%d8%a7%d9%86%d8%b9-%d8%aa%d9%88%d9%82%db%8c%d9%81-%da%9d%87%db%8c%d9%86%db%8c%da%9d%87%db%8c%d9%86%e2%80%8c%d8%b3%d8%a7%d8%b2%db%8c-%d8%aa%d8%a8%b1%db%8c%d8%b7
35 Radio Zamaneh. 1280 Production and Industrial Units are Facing Problems. https://www.radiozamaneh.com/474488
In Ilam, at least 70 workers of a potassium sulfate plant were laid off. The management cited a shortage of material for production as the reason for the dismissal of the workforce. On Oct 30th, the plant’s CEO confirmed the reduction in production, stating that the fired workers were referred to the Social Security Organization for unemployment insurance.  

Fouladin Zob Amol Foundry (FZAF) with 1600 workers is also on the verge of closure. The plant faces a shortage of access to raw material which is affecting production capacity. Fouladin Zob Amol Foundry is one of the largest manufacturers of metal foundry castings and parts in Iran.

In Kermanshah province, the Kazheh Tile Company located in EslamAbad Industrial City has shut down its production line because of lower sales. The warehouses of the factory are filled with unsold tiles, the company stated. According to the CEO of the company, the closure of the production line has costs 800 workers their jobs and they have been laid off.

Officials in the Islamic Republic of Iran do not provide exact statistics on production units that are on the verge of closure or have shut down production due to economic problems. The head of the Judiciary, Ebrahim Raisi has claimed that his office has prevented the closure of more than five hundred production units through legal interventions. Government officials and some parliamentarians have questioned such a claim, calling it unrealistic. They have asked for the release of details of production units that the Judiciary claims it has prevented their bankruptcy or their closure.

The escalation of the recession and the closure of production units have increased the outflow of Afghan migrant workers as well as Iranian workers to the neighboring countries.

36 Radio Zamaneh. 70 workers of a potassium sulfate plant were laid off in Ilam.  
https://www.radiozamaneh.com/471665

37 IRNA. Mazandaran’s Largest Parts Manufacturing Factory is not doing well.  
https://www.irna.ir/news/83516387

38 Fars News. Kazheh Tile Factory has stopped production/800 workers on the verge of losing jobs.  

39 Fact Nameh. What has the Judiciary done to prevent the closure of factories?  
Ali Shariati, a member of the Iranian Chamber of Commerce, said this year that the number of Iranian street vendors has increased in the Iraqi Kurdistan region.40

**Suppression of the Workers**

On 30 Oct 2019, Haft Tappeh sugarcane worker, Esmail Bakhshi, was released on a hefty bail of 750 million toman (68,000 USD). Bakhshi who was re-arrested in January 2019, after revealing to the public that he was subject to torture while in detention in Dec 2018, was sentenced to 14.5 years in prison of which 7.5 years is executable under the Islamic Penal code of Iran. He has also been sentenced to corporeal punishment of 74 lashes. He has appealed his sentence, awaiting the appeals court. He is now out conditionally.41

Esmail Bakhshi after release from prison in Oct 2019

Sepideh Gholian, Amir Amirgholi, Sanaz Allahyari, Asal Mohammadi and Amir Hossein Mohammadi Fard, who were arrested and sentenced to long-term imprisonment in connection with the protests of the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Workers and the Ahwaz National Steel Company, were all released temporarily on bail. Marzieh Amiri, Shargh Daily’s journalist, and Atefeh Rangriz, a sociologist and social justice researcher, who were arrested during the Labor Day rally on 1 May 2019, were also temporarily released on bail. Neda Nadji, of the Labor Day 2019 detainees is still in prison.42

IRI state media attributed the temporary release of the labor prisoners to interventions of the newly appointed head of the Judiciary, Ebrahim Raisi in what they called Raisi’s defense of workers’ rights. This claim however lost sense when security forces and the

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40 Radio Zamaneh. An increase in the number of Iranian street vendors working in Iraqi Kurdistan. [https://www.radiozamaneh.com/467047](https://www.radiozamaneh.com/467047)
Judiciary started summoning and detaining protesting workers in Arak, Shush, and Tehran.43

In Tehran, Reza Shahabi, the secretary and treasurer of the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company (SWTSBC) was summoned and interrogated again. Shahabi was arrested and released temporarily on bail after taking part in the 1 May 2019 International Labor Day rally in Tehran. SWTSBC reported that the summoning and further interrogations of Reza Shahabi are in connection with a new criminal case that the Judiciary’s Security Crime Prosecution’s Branch Two located at Evin prison has opened up against Shahabi. Mohammad Nasirpour, the prosecutor for the Evin prison branch of the Judiciary has charged Reza Shahabi with "syndicate activities" and has told him that other union activists will also be summoned for questioning.44

On 29 Oct 2019, Parvin Mohammadi, vice president of the Free Union of Iranian Workers (FUIW), which is an independent union and not recognized by the state, announced she was summoned to serve her one-year sentence in prison. She was arrested in July 2019 in a protest gathering at the Jahan Nama Park in Karaj, in Alborz province. The Revolutionary Courts sentenced Mohammadi to one year in prison for participating in this gathering. Jafar Azimzadeh, the chair of the board of directors of the Free Union of Iranian Workers, who is currently serving a six year sentence in ward 8th of Evin prison, has been informed that the Judiciary has initiated a new criminal case against him with new charges. He was summoned to prosecutor’s office at Evin Prison on 9 Nov 2018 and told that he was being charged with new crimes because of an audio file in which Azimzadeh objects to the sentencing of labor prisoners including those arrested in connection with the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Complex protests and strikes. Azimzadeh’s current sentence is related to him being arrested in the winter of 2018. The new case opened against him is pending.46

Hamid Rahmati, a member of the Shahreza Teachers’ Association, was re-arrested in front of his residence in the city of Shahreza. Rahmati had been staging a one-man sit-in protest on the premises of Shahreza’s board of education building in protest to the detention of teachers’ unionists since Dec 2018. He was first arrested in Jan 2019 and then freed temporarily on a 40 million toman s bail (38,000 USD based on average rate for winter 2018). Branch 103 of Shahreza Criminal Court sentenced this union activist to three years

46 The Official Website of Free Union of Iranian Workers (FUIW). A new criminal case against Jafar Azimzadeh opens at Branch II, Ward 33 of Evin Prosecution. http://www.etehad-e.com/%d9%be%d8%b1%d9%88%d9%86%d8%af%d9%87-%d8%b3%d8%a7%d8%b2%db%8c%d8%ac%d8%af%db%8c%d9%87-%d8%ac%d8%b9%d8%b1%d9%88%d8%b7%d9%81%d8%b1-%d8%b9%d8%b1%d8%a7%d8%af%d9%87-%d8%aa%d9%88/
imprisonment, 74 lashes and two million tomans (1800 USD) fines for “disturbing the public order by committing disorderly behavior, and inciting violence by texting in the cyberspace.” Rahmati has gone on hunger strike (dry food strike) twice in the two arrests and imprisonments.47

Mohammad Habibi, a teacher and a member of the Tehran Teachers’ Association, also started a civil protest inside the prison. He is protesting the lack of attention to prisoners’ medical conditions and harassments on the part of prison officials. Prison officials have asked Habibi to pay for his own medical expenses while in custody. Habibi was once again transferred to a new ward in Evin Prison. Changing wards can be a punishment in Iranian prison system.48

Mahmoud Beheshti Langaroudi, a teacher and Teachers Association Unionist who is now serving the last year of his five-year sentence, suffers from multiple medical conditions and has requested parole. The teachers' trade union activist has served four years of his five-year sentence and can be granted conditional release under Iran’s Islamic penal code. However, his lawyer Hossein Taj has informed the public that his parole request was denied by the Judiciary. "The request was sent with the consent of the prison authorities and other officials to the judicial authority, which was then denied by the Tehran prosecutor," said Hussein Taj.

On 6 October 2019, Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Complex Workers, who were planning to attend a meeting of the Social Council members of the Islamic Consultative Assembly, were arrested as they were travelling to Tehran. On the road from Shush Road to Khorramabad, they were stopped and arrested. In the wake of the protests by the Haft Tappeh sugarcane workers in Oct 2019, the city of Shush Intelligence Service summoned several workers who were vocal during the protests or had given speeches. The security officials made them sign affidavits attesting not to attend any more rallies. A number of these workers were released on bail the following day until the court hearing.49

In Arak, security forces and police arrested a total of 60 more Heavy Equipment Production Company (HEPCO) and Azarab employees in two separate police raids. At least 29 HEPCO workers were arrested in the protest that was violently attacked by security forces in September 2019. Judicial authorities have declined to say exactly how many HEPCO workers were arrested. In Oct 2019, the city of Arak’s prosecutor said that 23 workers were released after the initial arrest and six more will be released after legal proceedings.

49 Zamaneh Radio. 14 Haft Tappeh sugarcane workers arrested: https://www.radiozamaneh.com/468024. Radio Zamaneh. Police arrested seven Haft Tappeh sugarcane workers who were scheduled to meet with members of the Majlis Social Commission on Monday in Khorramabad: https://www.radiozamaneh.com/468084. Haft Tappeh workers are constantly arrested and released every week in Iran. Click here to follow the latest developments in the arrests of Haft Tappeh workers: https://www.radiozamaneh.com/tag/%d8%a8%d8%a7%d8%b2%d8%af%d8%a7%d8%b4%d8%aa-%da%a9%d8%a7%d8%b1%da%af%d8%b1%d9%86-%d9%86%db%bc%d8%b4%da%a9%d8%b1-%d9%87%d9%81%d8%aa-%d8%aa%d9%be%d9%87

Labor Rights in Iran vol. 9
On 21 Oct 2019, Mehr Abbas Ghasemi, the Arak’s prosecutor confirmed the arrest of 21 workers of the Azarab factory. Javad Saberi, chairman of the Islamic Labor Council of the Azarab factory, later announced that 41 workers have been arrested from this factory. According to Javad Saberi who heads the government approved Islamic Labor Council at the factory, 14 of the arrestees were arrested during the worker’s protest on 20 Oct 2019 and 20 more workers were summoned to Arak’s prosecutor’s office and arrested there. Ghasemi did not elaborate on how and when the seven other workers were arrested. Arrested workers of Azarab have been released on bail pending trial.

On 20 Oct 2019, Nawab Hajian Saeedi, the mayor of KutAbdullah confirmed the arrest of at least 13 people in connection with the protests of the city’s municipal workers. In the past two years, Kutabdullah municipality workers have rallied several times in front of the Kutabdullah Municipality building and Khuzestan province governorate in protest of their unpaid wages. Kutabullah municipality workers were arrested this time after they went on strike, refusing to collect garbage. The strike was organized in protest to the privatization of city’s waste collection and transfer of their contracts to a private contractor.

Tafigh Mohammad, Saman Maleki, and Faramarz Shariati, of labor activists of Kurdistan, were either arrested or summoned to the judiciary. Khaled Hosseini, a Kurdish labor activist, was also arrested and released on bail after a few days. Also, Kamran Sakhtemangar, who was released on bail in September after an initial arrest, was summoned to jail to serve a one-year sentence. Mohammad Davari, a labor activist in Yasuj, has also been arrested by security forces and is still being held in prison.

### Child Labor

At the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year in Iran, government sources released various statistics on children who have left school. Ahmad Reza Parandeh, the Director of Social Problems at the Ministry of Co-operation, Labor and Social Welfare announced that 141,000 identified school-aged children in Iran cannot attend school. Alimyar Mohammadi, Zahedan’s deputy in the Islamic Consultative Assembly has reported that in the province of Sistan and Baluchistan alone, there 127,000 school-aged children who

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Read more about all the latest news on the protests of workers of Azarab in Arak here: https://www.radiozamaneh.com/tag/%da%a9%d8%a7%d8%b1%da%af%d8%b1%d8%a7%d9%86-%d8%a2%d8%b0%d8%b1%d8%a2%d8%a8


Read more about all the latest news on the protests of workers of Azarab in Arak here: https://www.radiozamaneh.com/tag/%da%a9%d8%a7%d8%b1%da%af%d8%b1%d8%a7%d9%86-%d8%a2%d8%b0%d8%b1%d8%a2%d8%a8


53 IRNA. 141 thousand children who do not go to school have been identified. https://www.irna.ir/news/83535466/۱۴۱-

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either have no access to school or cannot attend schools.\textsuperscript{54} Parandeh stated that disability and poverty are the main reasons that school-aged children in his province are not attending schools. Ahmad Maydari, Iran’s deputy minister of Cooperatives, Labor and Social welfare, had said earlier that some children who are out of the school system are breadwinners of their families and therefore cannot seek education.

Iranian government this summer launched a program to organize child labor in Tehran and several cities. The program used police forces to arrest street children and send them to child services houses. The government has not published any statistics on the number of children that have been arrested and transferred to child services detention centers. However, project executives have published statistics stating that more than 90% of children arrested in Tehran and the suburbs were immigrants and/or children living in poverty-stricken slums located in the peripheries of the urban centers.\textsuperscript{55}

On 6 Nov 2019, Tayeeb Siavoshi, a member of the Social Committee of the Islamic Consultative Assembly said that 60% of working children are child migrant workers in Iran. According to Siavoshi, waste collection private contractors in Iran who often are hired by municipalities to collect garbage or manage recycling locations, hire migrant child workers under the age of 15 paying them lower than minimum wage and benefiting from their labor.\textsuperscript{56}

Senior Iranian Ministry of Interior officials had said in September 2019 that working children who are arrested from the streets would be deported to their home countries. Most child laborers in Iran are from Afghan migrant families.

### Workplace Safety and Accidents

During the past two months, at least 66 workers lost their lives while working in different parts of Iran, and 127 workers have sustained injuries due to workplace lack of safety and

\textsuperscript{54} Nagaam News. Alim Yarmohammadi, 127 thousand school age children that do not attend schools have been identified in Sistan and Baluchistan. https://negaam.news/%d8%b9%d9%84%db%8c%d9%85-%db%8c%d8%a7%d8%b1%d9%85%d8%ad%d9%85%d8%af%db%8c%d8%8c-%d9%86%d9%85%d8%a7%d9%86%d8%a7%d9%87-%d9%85%d8%b1%d8%a7%d9%85-%d8%b2%d8%a7%d9%86%d8%a7%d9%86-%d8%af%d8%b1/

\textsuperscript{55} Shoma News. Most Child Laborers are from the Slums. https://www.shomanews.com/%d8%A8%d8%AE%d8%B4-%d8%A7%d8%AC%d8%AA%d9%85%d8%A7%d8%B9%d8%8C-%d9%81%d9%88%d8%B1%d8%8C-%d9%85%d9%87%d9%85%d8%AA%d8%B1%d8%8C%d9%86-%d8%A7%d8%AE%d8%A8%d8%A7%d8%B1-%d8%A7%d8%AC%d8%AA%d9%85%d8%A7%d8%B9%d8%8C-5/919138-%d8%AD%d8%A7%d8%B4%d8%AC%d9%87-%d9%86%d8%B4%d8%BC%d9%86-%d8%A8%d8%AF%d9%86-%d8%A7%d8%A9%d8%8B%d8%B1%d8%8C%d8%AA-%d9%88%d8%AF%d9%86-%d8%A7%d9%86-%d9%8A%d8%B2%d9%85%db%8c%d8%af%db%8c-%d9%86%d8%a7%d9%86-

\textsuperscript{56} Donya-ye Eghtesad. The accumulation of wealth of municipal contractors from hiring child laborers. https://donya-e-eqtesad.com/%d8%A8%d8%AE%d8%B4-%d8%AE%d8%A8%d8%B1-64/358754-%d8%A8%d8%B1%d9%88%d8%AA-%d9%BE%d8%AC%d9%85%d8%A7%d9%86%d9%8A%d8%B1%d8%8C-%d8%A9%d8%A7%d8%B2%d9%86-%d8%A7%d8%8C-%d9%86%d8%AF%d9%86-%d8%A9%d8%8B%d8%B1%d8%8C-%d8%AE%d8%A7%d8%8C-%d8%A9%d8%8B%d8%B1%d8%8C-%d8%A7%d8%8C-%d8%A8%d8%A7%d8%B2%d8%8C%d8%A7%d9%81%d8%AA-%d8%B2%d8%A8%d8%A7%d9%84%d9%87
accidents. Most of the accidents were reported during the harvest season and in the agricultural sector. According to official sources in Iran, at least 79 farmers in different parts of Iran were injured during work and 12 workers died due to work-related accidents. Crashes, falls from heights, accidents, and machinery over turns played a major role in agricultural job-related fatalities and injuries. Most agricultural workers in Iran are seasonal, cash paid, and not insured.

In small industrial workshops, in the past two months, we have recorded 34 cases of work-related injuries and 18 job-related fatalities. During this reporting period, 15 road and construction workers were killed, and four others were injured. Of the job-related fatalities in the construction sector, one was a migrant worker from Afghanistan and among those injured three were Afghan migrant workers. Construction workers are usually hired based on hourly or whole day payments, without contracts and insurances.

In the past two months, 11 hand-dug well diggers, four mineworkers and four workers at large industrial units lost their lives while at work. The number of mine-work related injuries during this period was one person. There were also two injuries in large workshops and two in other sectors.

Iran’s Forensic Medicine Organization also reported a 7.5% increase in work-related fatalities in the first six months of the current Iranian year (21 March 2019 - 20 March 2020 corresponds to the year 1398 in Iran), compared to the first six months of the previous year.

According to the report, the number of job-related fatalities in the first six months of the Iranian year 1398 has been 896. Eight of the 896 workers who lost their lives at the job in the first six months of the year 1398 are female workers.57

Falling from a height was the number one reason for job-related fatalities in the first six months of the current Iranian year. 345 of the 896 victims died after a fall from height at the workplace. 232 died when struck by a hard object, 140 died from electrocution or other electric hazards, 78 died from burns and 43 from suffocation due to lack of oxygen. The causes of the death of 51 others have been cited as "other reasons."

During the first six months of the year, 14,200 people were injured in work-related accidents, of which 649 were women. This makes work-related injuries for women 4.6% of the total injuries reported.58

Labor activists state that the actual numbers of job-related fatalities and injuries are higher than these numbers reported by government agencies like the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare. They argue that these official statistics do not take into account fatalities and injuries of those working without contracts, uninsured workers and ’illegal’ ones like Afghan migrant workers.

57 Radio Zamaneh. Increase in the number of job-related accidents in Iran. https://www.radiozamaneh.com/473931
58 ibid.
Hossein Akbari, a labor activist who has spoken to Shargh Daily about discrepancies of statistics offered by government agencies on job-related fatalities and injuries, says that the numbers do not reflect all incidents related to lack of workplace safety. Akbari says these statistics do not reflect all work-related accidents since the workshops are not regularly monitored in terms of safety and health-related causalities and injuries.59

According to the Labor Code of Iran, the Ministry of Co-operation, Labor and Social Welfare is obliged to inspect industrial units, production units, factories, and small workshops to ensure that they comply with safety requirements. The ministry, however, does not have enough workforce to conduct regular inspections and they keep citing a shortage of inspectors.

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**Kulbars or Human Mules**

Since September 2019, IRI’s border guards have completely blocked some of the mountain routes commonly taken by Kulbars. Kulbars are human mules that transport goods across the borders on their backs. News sources close to the Kulbars in Kurdistan, have confirmed the closure of the TahTah mountainous border route in Uramanat, Kurdistan. Closing of routes commonly taken by Kulbars has made their movements harder in the mountains and forces them to take routes that are not safe. Regardless of the imposed limitation, the Kulbars continue to carry goods from unblocked routes.60

In the past two months, Iran's border guards have been responsible for at least 44 direct firings at the Kulbars. Eight Kulbars were killed by the direct firing of the border guards and at least 37 were injured. Five Kulbars have been killed either due to fall from height or due to explosions of landmines. 61

According to Rasool Khezri, an MP for the city of Piranshahr in the Iranian Parliament, nearly 80,000 people are making a living as human mules. The Islamic Republic of Iran has declared working as a Kulbar an "illegal" activity and an act of "smuggling goods." IRI has formally declared that it will shoot those Kulbars who enter Iran from informal border routes.

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59 ibid.
60 Data collected and fact checked by Zamaneh Media.
61 ibid.
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