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A Zamaneh Project

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Introduction

This is the tenth 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, workplace discrimination, issues of labor law, contractual violations, women’s labor, child labor, and the conditions of the Kulbars.

Zamaneh Media monitors the above-mentioned labor issues daily and this bimonthly report presents the “big picture” about the most important Iranian workers’ rights issues in the past two months. The bimonthly newsletter aims to increase knowledge of the situation of the workers in Iran. Report no. 10 covers issues in the approximate range of December 2019 and January 2020. 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 government’s decision to reduce gasoline subsidies and to bring the price of this important energy source closer to its free market value, lead to widespread protests in Iran in November 2019. The National Iranian Oil Product Distribution Company (NIOPDC) announced on the midnight of November 15th, 2019 that they will implement the order of the Supreme Council of Economic Coordination and increase the price of gasoline for private vehicles by 300% - assigning a certain quota of gasoline volume to each vehicle depending on the type of ownership (private, public, taxi, etc.). The order to bring gasoline prices closer to the free market value of this commodity was implemented once years back but it was stopped after much complaint. The price of gasoline is still subsidized in Iran; however, the government has reduced the subsidized quota dramatically affecting the lives of many Iranian citizens who make a living their private cars.

The government brutally suppressed the protesters, killing at least 366 and up to 1,500 individuals, including 17 children, according to Amnesty International and media organizations such as Reuters. More than two months after the protests began, the government continues to refrain from reporting the actual casualty numbers including the death toll, injuries, and arrests. Most of the victims of this crackdown, according to senior government officials, were low-paid workers, the unemployed and individuals from marginalized communities. Sayyed Hossein Naghavi, a spokesman for the National Security Committee of the Islamic Consultative Assembly of Iran, reported that most of those arrested were unemployed or had low-income jobs, indicating the direct impact of rising gas prices on the livelihoods of urban workers and the poor.1

The rise in gasoline prices – as it was expected – lead to an increase in inflation in Iran. According to the Statistical Centre of Iran, the point to point inflation rate rose 0.8 percent by 21 December 2019 as compared to the previous month, reaching 40%. The inflation rate for the food and beverage group, which accounts for about a quarter of the costs of the Iranian household was announced at 55.7%. This means that an average worker household now must pay more for essential commodities such as food.2

Hassan Rouhani’s cabinet has promised to pay low-income Iranian families a "subsistence allowance" to accommodate for the increase in the price of goods and services caused by the rise in gasoline prices. According to a government spokesperson, a single person household will receive 55,000 tomans (4.2 USD)3 and a five-person household will receive an estimated 205,000 tomans (15.8 USD) monthly subsistence allowance if they are in the eligible income percentile. The government claims that after the increase in gasoline prices it has paid two monthly subsistence allowances to the low-income families affected by the price increase.4

However, labor rights activists and wage earners believe that the government’s allocation of subsistence allowances cannot compensate for the rising costs of goods. The income and cost

3 The average price of one USD was approximately 13,000 tomans during December 2019 and January 2020.
gap that most Iranians now face is far greater than the monthly subsistence allowance, which averages 10 USD, can account for. According to the latest estimates by the Wage Committee of the Supreme Islamic Labor Council – a government affiliated workers' association in Iran - the cost of a basket of essential goods for an average Iranian family of four amounts to eight million tomans (615 USD) per month. This is six million tomans a month more than the monthly minimum wage assigned for this fiscal year by the government. (The minimum wage with benefits such as the newly assigned subsistence allowance is at best around two million tomans for each wage-earner, which equals 154 USD per month.)

In such harsh economic conditions, many private firms and public institutions have been delaying the payments of workers' wages. Workers in some areas are forced to find income by becoming street peddlers, vendors, and Kulbars (human mules); and/or they join strikes and rallies to protest the nonpayment of their delayed wages. The Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) Judiciary and security forces have employed various crackdown approaches to the growing workers' protests. In factories or economic units in which the protests have gone on for a length of time (such as days or months) and the protests have become public in form of rallies outside the premises of the factory, the state security apparatus often uses excessive violence to suppress workers. This includes arrest, interrogation, and workers active in the protests end up with criminal charges against them. In those economic units in which the protests are still inside the premises of the factory and have not yet become visible in public streets, the security forces use more soft disciplining methods trying to "control" and "steer" the protesting workers. They would, for example, expel more radical workers or create divisions amongst the protesting workers and those who are less prone to staging protests.

On 3 January 2020, Qasem Soleimani, the Iranian major general leading the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Quds Force, was killed by the United States drone attack in Iraq. This changed the situation for IRI both domestically and within the region. Inside Iran, the government used this assassination to gather support for what they called "national unity" by holding Soleimani's funeral in several cities. One of the cities the IRI chose for the funeral rally of Soleimani was the city of Ahvaz, where widespread workers' protests had been taking place over the past four years. In Tehran, the procession planned by the government changed the social space of the city. During the mourning period the government had assigned to Soleimani’s funeral, news of the workers' protests was censored more than ever by state media. Internationally, IRI stated that it would not accept any restrictions on uranium enrichment, and it would start the fifth step in reducing its commitments under the 2015 nuclear agreement known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Many assumed that this decision will increase the likelihood of military conflict and war with the United States. IRI fired missiles at two US military bases in Iraq on January 8th, 2020 and in response, the US imposed new sanctions on Iran. In the process of attacking the US bases in Iraq, IRI downed the Ukrainian passenger plane that had just taken off from the Tehran airport on the night of the attack. The IRGC and IRI Armed Forces hid the truth about the downing of the jetliner for three days. In Iran, a new wave of protests broke out on January 15th, 2020 when IRI Armed Forces admitted that it had fired at the Ukrainian passenger plane. The January 2020 protests were not as widespread as the November 2019 riots. However, many joined the street rallies in major urban centers in
January 2020, despite the security measures and the violent crackdown of the gasoline protests in November 2019.

**Suppression**

Thousands of people have been killed, injured or detained in various parts of Iran following protests over gasoline prices in November, which Iranian government officials said spread to over 180 cities in 28 provinces. Iranian officials continue to refuse to provide details on the death toll. So far only Saadollah Zarei, one of the journalists of a conservative newspaper, *Kayhan*, whose editor in chief is appointed by the IRI’s Supreme Leader, has reported that 175 individuals were killed in the protests. The *Kayhan’s* reported death toll differs from the numbers reported by most media and human rights organizations. *Kalameh*, a media organization close to Iranian reformists reports 631 deaths. Reuters reported that 1500 people had been killed in the November protests by Iranian antiriot police and security forces. Among the dead are at least 18 children.

On 27 November, Hasan Naghavi Hosseini, an MP and the spokesperson for the National Security Parliamentary Commission announced that 7000 individuals were arrested during or related to the gasoline protests. IRI’s Minister of Intelligence has also said that most of the arrestees are from low-income families, many are also unemployed, reflecting widespread suppression of workers and the urban poor during protests over gasoline prices.

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*Kalameh*, 2 January 2020; https://www.kaleme.com/1398/10/12/klm-275274/
*Reuters News Agency*, 23 Dec 2019: https://reut.rs/2R07Eem
After the gasoline protests ended, security forces continued summoning or arresting workers and labor activists. The Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company announced on 11 December 2019 that 16 members of the union had been summoned by Tehran security police. In December, Tehran's Appeals Court also upheld a lower court ruling that sentenced Hassan Saeedi – a member of the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company to five years in prison. In addition to the five-year imprisonment, Hassan Saeedi has been sentenced to a two-year ban from using a smartphone, prohibited from being a member of any political party and banned from activity on any social networking sites and social media. Hassan Saeedi was arrested on 1 May 2019 at a gathering in Tehran on Labor Day.

Neda Naji, a student arrested at the same Labor Day protest as Saeedi, is still being held in prison. The Tehran Revolutionary Court sentenced Neda Nadji to five years and six months in prison. She is waiting for her appeals request.

However, the appeals review decisions of other labor activists are coming in and, in most cases, the judges are issuing a minimum of five years imprisonment.

Atefeh Rangriz and Marzieh Amiri, a sociologist and journalist respectively, who were arrested on May Day in 2019, were both sentenced to five years imprisonment by Branch Two of the Appeals Court in Tehran province. Both cases were presided over by Judge Ahmad Zargar as the appeals judge. Atefeh Rangriz’s original sentence was 11 years and six months of imprisonment as well as corporal punishment of 74 lashes. Marzieh Amiri’s original sentence was 10 years and six months in prison and 147 lashes. Anisha Asadollahi, another Labor Day detainee who was sentenced to one year in prison, was re-arrested and transferred to prison. Marziyeh Amiri’s case was sent to prison authorities to be carried out on 28 January 2019. She has not yet been called to go to prison by the authorities, but the decision to send the case for sentence order to prison means she can be summoned to prison at any time.

The Court of Appeal sentenced Esmail Bakhshi and Mohammad Khanifar, two workers fired from the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Complex, to five years of imprisonment each. Sepideh Gholian (a student and labor rights activist), as well as the editorial board of Gaam magazine, including Amir Amirgholi, Amir Hossein MohammadiFard, and Sanaz AllahYari, were each sentenced to five years in prison. Farzaneh Zilabi, the lawyer representing Ali Nejati – a retired worker of Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Complex – announced that Nejati had been sentenced to five years of prison. In addition, the cases of 13 Haft Tappeh sugarcane workers who had originally received up to eight months of imprisonment as well as corporal punishments such as lashing were
reviewed in the city of Shush Court of Appeal. The 13 workers have been charged with “disturbing the public order” for taking part in the Haft Tappeh workers' protests. 12

Jafar Ebrahimi, a teacher and a member of the Tehran's Teachers' Association, was arrested in the city of Shahriar on 27 December 2019 and transferred to prison. Judicial authorities prevented Ebrahimi from being released on bail. 13 In addition to Ebrahimi, Mohammad Habibi, Mahmoud Beheshti Langroudi and Esmail Abdi, three other members of the Teachers' Association remain in prison. According to Mohammad Taghi Fallahi, secretary of the Tehran Teachers' Association, 50 teachers have been summoned to the Judiciary in the past year and criminal cases have been opened against them. 14

On 7 December 2019, Parvin Mohammadi, vice-president of the Free Union of Iranian Workers was arrested at the city of Karaj District number 1 Prosecutor's Office and transferred to Kachuyie Prison to serve a year in prison. She was arrested in May 2019 and sentenced to one year in prison after a trial. Jafar Azimzadeh, the secretary of the Free Union of Iranian Workers has also been jailed since May 2019. 15 The Sanandaj Revolutionary Court sentenced Kamran Sakhtemangar, a labor activist in the Kurdistan province, to six years in prison. Khaled Hosseini, another labor activist in Kurdistan, was arrested and released on bail a few days later. Jalil Mohammadi, a labor activist in Sanandaj, was also arrested during this reporting period. Labor activist Ali Ishagh was also arrested after protests over gasoline prices. The Judiciary has granted him temporary freedom if he is able to make a 200 million tomans bail (15,400 USD). 16 Many of those arrested during the gasoline protests in Iran, much like Ali Ishagh, do not have the financial means to pay the bail money. As such, they are being kept in prison pending their trials.

On 4 January 2020, Mohammad Taghi Abaayi, director general of the Markazi Province’s office of the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor, and Social Welfare, disclosed that two Heavy Equipment Production Company (HEPCO) workers who were arrested during the summer protests at the factory and later released on bail were re-arrested. 17 The identities of the two arrested HEPCO workers have not yet been disclosed.

### Labor Protests

Non-payment of wages, delayed wages, benefits, and bonuses, and the demands for the payment of them continue to be the foremost reasons for workers' protests in various parts of Iran in this reporting period. Despite the fact that public protests over gasoline prices lead to a violent crackdown and harshening of security measures, and despite the fact that several workers were arrested in various cities in the aftermath of the November protests, the protests of workers, nurses and school teachers did not stop.

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12 Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Workers' Union Telegrams Channel, 7 January 2020; https://t.me/syndica_7tape/2492
13 Telegram Channel of Teachers' Association of Iran, 9 January 2020; https://t.me/kasenfi/7773
14 Telegram Channel of Teachers' Association, 29 Dec 2019; https://t.me/kasenfi/7692
16 Radio Zamaneh, 9 December 2019; https://www.radiozamaneh.com/478827
On 2 January 2020, nurses in the city of Mashhad gathered in protest in front the Khorasan Razavi province’s governorate. The protesting nurses demanded the payment of their deferred wages. Earlier, the House of Nurses, one of the nurses' main trade unions, published an open letter to the Iranian President, Hassan Rouhani, stating that Iranian nurses would not attend the Nursing Awards and Nurses Day celebrations in protest over their work conditions. Nurses in Iran continue to work under pressure, with many hours of overtime, and they get paid low wages that are either delayed or deferred. The Ministry of Health has assigned the hiring of nursing services to private companies and contractors that hire nurses with temporary contracts and on minimum wage. The average delay for late payment of nurse’s wages in public hospitals has reached 14 months. According to the head of the Iranian Nursing Organization, currently, nurses' monthly wages are delayed somewhere between 8 to 22 months.18

On 8 December 2019, workers and staff at Isfahan's Al-Zahra Hospital staged a sit-in to object to the deferment of their wages. Around 3,500 staff and health workers at Isfahan's Al-Zahra Hospital have not received their overtime payments and bonuses in the past nine months.19 Isfahan nurses also rallied the next day to protest the implementation of the Ghasedak plan in front of the provincial governor's building.20 On December 29, 2019, the Iranian Health Minister said he was opposed to the Ghasedak plan and that this payment formulas pan for nurses' wages should come to an end. The Ghasedak plan that has been implemented over the past two years uses complicated formulas in payment of nurses' wages that holds payments of bonuses and overtime and pays nurses less than they would be paid on a monthly salary. One problem that Iranian nurses have with the Ghasedak plan is that the Ministry of Health has introduced a formula for calculating nurses' salary that mixes overtime and bonuses. Bonuses are usually paid annually but overtime is calculated on a monthly basis. According to the nurses, since the plan has been implemented, nurses' payment for overtime has been delayed and overtime payment has been reduced. The nurses want the plan to come to an end. Nurses in Iran receive between 4000-6000 tomans per hour of overtime, which translates to a maximum of 0.50 USD hourly payment per hour of overtime.

19 Zamaneh, 10 December 2019; https://www.radiozamaneh.com/478599
Retirees and Teachers


Retirees continued their protests in front of the Islamic Consultative Assembly building on 23 December 2019. They demand the implementation of the law on the equalization of payments based on which a retiree will receive a payment closer to the payments of a working employee. However, during the current fiscal year in Iran (the year 1398), the government allocated only two thousand billion tomans (about 466,000,000 USD at the government rate of 43,000 tomans to a dollar. The market rate is about two to three times the government rate) for the implementation of this law. According to the head of the Plan and Budget Organization of the Islamic Republic of Iran (PBO), the law will not be implemented fully, and pension payments will be increased only gradually. An estimated 75 percent of retirees in Iran earn less than two million tomans a month in pension payments, which translates to less than 154 USD. This is at a time when the cost of living for an average family of four is calculated at eight million tomans. Other demands of the protesting retirees included health and supplementary insurance coverage, the halting of the privatization of education in Iran, and the provision of adequate health and social security. The government of the Islamic Republic intends to implement a parametric reform of social security services in Iran that would reduce the pensions and benefits and increase the age of retirement. The retirees are also opposing this parametric reform plan.

On 23 December 2019, at the same time as the retirees protested in Tehran, teachers across the country organized sit-in protests in solidarity with retirees and for their own demands. Teachers


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in the provinces of Bushehr, Kurdistan, Fars, Khorasan Razavi, South Khorasan, Hormozgan, Mazandaran and Gilan joined the sit-ins. On 23 December 2019, at the same time as the teachers' protests were scheduled to happen, the government closed schools in Tehran and Alborz provinces stating air pollution as a hazard for students. Protesting teachers' demands include increasing the education budgets, raising teachers' salaries, and stopping the privatization and commodification of education.  

End of the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Workers' Strikes, HEPCO Protests Resume

On 4 December 2019, Haft Tappeh Sugarcane workers ended their two-month and 12-day strike and protest. The demands of the protesting workers, who were repeatedly summoned and threatened by the security services of the city of Shush during their strike, consisted of: the return of the fired workers, the dismissal of the private owners of the company, the temporary return of the company to the government (undoing of the privatization process), the transfer of shares of the factory to the workers, the payment of past-due wages and benefits, a stop to security forces' persecution of protesting workers, and a stop to the Judiciary's opening of criminal cases against the protesters. On 20 October 2019, as general protests were happening all across Iran against the hike in gasoline prices, Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Complex's private owners temporarily closed the factory and then later reopened it.

The owners had promised the workers that they would allow Esmail Bakhshi and Mohammad Khannifar, two workers who were sentenced to five years in prison and fired by the owners, to come back to work. Iran's state-run news agency ILNA, even claimed that Esmail Bakhshi had returned to work. This news, however, was denied a few days later indicating that the factory owners' promises to the workers were not fulfilled. On 20 December 2019, the head of the Judiciary of the city of Shush promised the workers that a return to work order for Bakhshi and Khannifar will be pursued in the province's provincial council. The head of the city's Judiciary also promised the workers that the trials of arrested workers of Haft Tappeh will be postponed for six months. However, both promises were not fulfilled and the arrested Haft Tappeh Sugarcane workers with criminal cases opened against them were put on trial again in January 2020.

On 23 December 2019, workers of the Heavy Equipment Production Company (HEPCO) Contracting Company rallied in protest against the unfulfilled promises of officials of the city of Arak, in front of the central governorate of the Markazi Province. The protest came two weeks after a meeting of local officials with Eshagh Jahangiri, the Vice President of Hassan Rouhani, in which the fate of the city of Arak’s two main industrial factories HEPCO and Azarab were to be decided. HEPCO manufactures heavy equipment for construction, railroad, oil, gas and energy, Kelvin 2013; 21Eshagh Jahangiri, the Vice President of Hassan Rouhani, in which the fate of the city of Arak’s two main industrial factories HEPCO and Azarab were to be decided. HEPCO manufactures heavy equipment for construction, railroad, oil, gas and energy, and transportation activities.

References:
23 Radio Zamaneh, 4 December 2019; https://www.radiozamaneh.com/477761
as well as mining industries. Azarab manufactures heavy parts for water and water pressure in power plants, petrochemical plants, gas refineries, etc. including boilers, valves, water turbines, and pressure vessels. Both HEPCO and Azarab have been unsuccessfully privatized by the Iran Privatization Organization (IPO), damaging production capacity and workers’ rights.

In the 23 December meeting attended by the Vice President of Iran, officials at the meeting pledged to address the two companies' problems including the deferred wages of workers and low production. Present at the meeting were also Mohammad Shariatmadari (the Minister of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare); Mohammad Eslami (the Minister of Roads and Urban Development); Ali Aghazadeh, the governor of Markazi province where HEPCO and Azarab are located; the general manager of the National Bank of Iran or Bank-e Melli who is shareholder, and the head of the IPO. HEPCO has now been transferred back to IPO after many workers’ protests but the government and IPO have plans to re-privatize it – this time they promise it will be a better privatization.26

HEPCO workers rallied once again in protests on December 1st, 2019 in Arak. On this day, the Azarab workers also took to the streets along with HEPCO workers. The ParsWagon workers – who manufacture railroad wagons and carts - also joined the Azarab and HEPCO workers by going on strike for two days and not working. Following these protests in Arak and the strikes of ParsWagon workers, two workers from ParsWagon were summoned to the Judiciary.27

City of Marivan Municipality Workers Have Turned to Kulbari

Ahvaz metro workers rallied again on Monday, December 9th and Tuesday, December 10th, 2019. These are construction and railroad workers who are involved in the making of the city of Ahvaz’s metro system. They were protesting the six-month delay in payments of their wages. Ahvaz Municipality and Kayson Construction, a contracting company for Ahvaz Municipality, blame each other for not paying the workers' wages. The Khuzestan Provincial Council has ordered both the private contractor Kayson and the Municipality to pay the workers and ordered each to be responsible for 50% of the past due wages and benefits.28

In Khuzestan province, workers of the KutAbdullah Municipality (or Kut-e Abdollah Municipality) and the workers of Sadaf Dodeh Fam factory in the city of Dezful that manufacture carbon black also rallied to protest unpaid wages and lack of job security. KutAbdullah Municipality workers once again started a one-day strike on 16 December 2019, protesting their unpaid wages. They

26 Radio Zamaneh, 2 January 2019; https://www.radiozamaneh.com/480935
also staged a rally outside the municipality building. On 25 September 2019, 13 KutAbdullah municipality workers were arrested in relation to their periodic protests and strikes.

Workers at the Sadaf Dodeh Fam factory, whose factory is under the holding of the Mostazafan Foundation of Islamic Revolution (a state-owned national holding company), went on strike on 17 December 2019. The Sadaf Dodeh Fam workers refused to work and gathered on the premises of the factory to protest lack of job security, failure of the factory owners to implement the job classification plan as suggested by the government and the layoff of workers' representatives. The official Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) reported on the layoffs of workers and the plans of the holding owners to lay off 40 to 70 more workers because of the workers' protests. Protesting workers demanded that the dismissed workers be allowed to come back to work, and the company executives pledged not to fire any more workers.

In the city of Marivan in the province of Kurdistan, municipal workers stopped working from 24 December 2019, in protest of their unpaid wages. On 4 January, Iran's State Labor News Agency (ILNA) reported that some municipal workers of the city of Marivan are now forced to work as Kulbars (human mules) because they are not getting paid and they need to make ends meet. Municipality workers in many cities in Iran are not getting paid their wages. In this reporting period, the head of the Islamic City Council of Jahrom in Fars province also reported that the municipality workers of this city have "several months" of unpaid wages. 280 contract workers who have contracts with the city of Omidiyeh municipality in Khuzestan have not been paid for four months. Omidiyeh is a small town of 12,000 families and 280 of them have not had any payments in the past four months. The Omidiyeh municipality is citing a lack of funds as the reason for these deferred payments.

Municipal workers in most parts of Iran have wage arrears – in particular, those working as contractors or as workers for contractors. Municipalities hold human resource contractors responsible for the delayed payments. Contractors claim that it is the municipality that is not paying them in a timely manner and thus they cannot pay workers.

Workers of Chadormalu iron ore mine in the Yazd Province of central Iran, staged a protest on the premises of the mine on 22-25 December 2019. Most of these mineworkers are contract workers hired by the Chadormalu Mining and Industrial Company and during their protest that lasted at least three days, they protested the violation of job classification requirements of the Labor Code by the company.

The mineworkers were demanding that the owners would abide by the requirements of the Iran Labor Code for a job classification plan. Iran labor code requires the employers to make a clear-cut job classification in the contract of the employee including plans for payroll, wage levels based on wage charts, job descriptions, workplace categorization, payment of employees costs,
clear definitions of overtime and bonuses, etc., but employees, even government employees working under the Ministry of Labor regulations, keep violating the job classification laws and regulations. This is the mineworkers' second protest in the past three months. Earlier in November 2019, they had staged a protest in the mine’s prayer area. Most of these workers were hired by contracting companies.  

In Qazvin, the bakers rallied to protest the unchanging price of bread – which is determined by the government – standing in front of the province’s governorate building.  

In Takestan, also in Qazvin province, the workers of Kourosh Food Industry company's Oila brand gathered in protest. Oila is one of the oil brands of Kourosh Food Industry that manufactures various kinds of cooking oil. The workers of this oil factory work long shifts of 12 hours a day, six days a week, and get paid a monthly wage of 1,200,000 to 1,500,000 tomans (92-115 USD). The hourly payment of Oila workers is far below the legal national minimum wage. The workers of Oila are demanding at minimum a payment per the national minimum wage assigned for this fiscal year, an end to temporary contracts and direct permanent contracts with the factory.  

### Continuation of Layoffs and Firing of Workers

The Statistical Centre of Iran (SCI) announced the unemployment rate at the end of the month of Azar (21 December 2019) as 10.8%, claiming that compared to three months ago unemployment has increased by 0.2% and that compared to last year at this time, it has decreased. SCI in calculating the percentage of Iranians in the labor force accounts for all unpaid interns, unpaid trainees, unpaid family workers, soldiers, and those who worked at least one hour a week as employed. Even with such a broad definition of employment, the numbers published by the SCI show that at least one in four Iranians under the age 25 is unemployed. SCI reports the unemployment rate for college graduates as 17.4%, which, due to the broad definition of employment by SCI, is an unrealistic representation of the actual unemployment rate among university-educated Iranians.

The SCI released the above numbers claiming unchanging conditions of unemployment at a time when the country was hit with waves of layoffs and firing of workers in Iran. Several major construction projects have been halted in recent months. In Sistan and Baluchistan province, the Sistan Water Supply Project has stopped and workers who had contracts with this project have been fired. Workers House, a government affiliates workers' association, has announced that the fired workers of major construction projects such as the Sistan Water Supply Project have begun smuggling fuel to pay for the costs of living.

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36 ibid.  
38  
On 22 December 2019, it was announced that 23 workers of the Qazvin Steel Company (Qazvin Foolad Co.) were laid off with the factory's authorities citing "workforce reduction" as the reason. 41 600 dismissed workers of Fouladin Zob-e Amol or FZA (a manufacturer of steel parts in Amol) are still unemployed. These workers lost their jobs in recent months as a result of the crisis in the automaker and auto parts industries. Iran’s auto industry is facing a major crisis and it is expected that thousands of workers will lose their jobs in the coming months. In Kerman, more than 2,000 workers are expected to become unemployed. In Amol, about 1,600 more workers may lose their jobs. The main crisis of Iranian automakers - a mostly government-invested and rentier sector - began after the United States withdrew from the nuclear deal and after the reinstatement of the sanctions. The foreign investors and foreign automakers that had planned to bring businesses into Iran left the country after the US withdrew from the JCPOA or they canceled contracts with the Iranian government. 42

The economic crisis in the pharmaceutical sector has also led to the layoff of about 6,000 workers in the pharmaceutical distribution sector. The financial crisis of the pharmaceutical factories and drug distribution companies is due to the failure of insurance companies to pay the drug companies for the insurers' claims. The pharmaceutical industry is suffering because health insurance companies are not paying them for prescriptions that had coverage. 43

The economic stagnation in the construction industry has caused hundreds of workers to lose their jobs. Pirouz Cheraghi, the head of the Yaftaabad Fire Brick Makers Workers Association, told the Iranian Labor News Agency in December that most of the brick industries and fire brick kilns in Shamsabad, Chahar Dangeh, and Golshahr have shut down. In Ismailabad, on the Saveh Road leading to the city of Saveh, there were 30-40 brick kilns active, but among them only three to four are still making fire bricks. In Mahmoudabad, near Khavar Road, there were 50 brick kilns, but only five are now active in brick making. The closing down of brick kilns has led to many workers losing their jobs – many of whom were migrant workers from Afghanistan. These migrant workers lack social security protection, they work 18 hour a day shifts and work for less than the minimum wage. Most of these migrant workers become homeless after the kilns shut down as they live in the building of the kilns with minimal amenities. 44

Jamshid Edalatian, a former member of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) commented about small businesses and productions units during this reporting period stating that the banks are taking over smaller economic units for loan defaults. Edalatian did not provide any specific statistics on the banks taking ownership of small production units. The Expediency Council has forbidden banks from owning industrial units because of debt on loans. The banks, however, have ignored the order and have taken ownership of at least 1,400 production units which owed the banks money. 45

Women and the Widening of the Gender Gap

In 2019, the gender gap widened in Iran and Iran’s position in the Global Gender Gap sunk six points down to 148. According to the SCI this autumn, the employment rate for women was about one-sixth of that of men, and the women’s unemployment rate was about twice the rate of men’s unemployment. The rate of unemployment for men above 15 years of age, according to SCI, was 8.9% and the same rate for women was 17.3%. The economic participation rate of women has reached 17.5% and that of men is 71.

Iranian media reports during this period indicate that with the harsh economic conditions hitting the country, women workers are more exploited in the workplace than men. For example, clothing shops and retail stores in the north of Iran often hire female sales workers who are low-paid and are willing to submit to difficult work conditions. These female sales workers are often hired with lower than minimum wage hourly payments and get fired if they object to the work conditions. Most retail shops hire sales workers on temporary contracts or without contracts and the women rarely have any benefits or insurance coverage of any kind. In addition to all this, the worsening of economic conditions in Iran is affecting women’s job

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46 Zamaneh, 3 January 13, 2020; https://www.radiozamaneh.com/482343
47 Statistical Center of Iran, 4 January 2020; http://bit.ly/2s8sijU
security and female workers are often the first to be fired or dismissed when business slows down. Many Iranian women now work part-time and in informal jobs. Somayeh Golpour, the chair of the Women's Committee of High Union of Trade Workers’ Associations, cites the lack of insurance coverage, delayed payments in the form of checks and promissory notes, long work hours and cheap labor as major problems that working women face in Iran. On the employment situation of women, Golpour says: "Working women have always been victims of economic crises, and in addition to providing cheap labor for employers, they are also the first choice for force reductions." 50

**Kulbars: The Death of two Child Human Mules or Kulbars**

On 17 December 2019, 14-year-old Kulbar Farhad Khosravi died in the mountains of Kurdistan due to frostbite along with his brother, Azad Khosravi, who was 18 years old at the time of death. According to their family, the two brothers had been forced to work as human mules to support their family. Following the announcement of the deaths of the Khosravi brothers, Kurdistan province MPs in the Iranian parliament called for a plan to stop the border guards from shooting directly at the Kulbars. 51 According to the locals, the two brothers had to take an unfamiliar and harsh mountain road when they died from frostbite because the border guards had closed down the safer mountain roads.

According to a report by the Kurdistan Human Rights Network in 2019, 79 Kulbars were killed and 165 were wounded while transferring goods on their backs over the Iranian border. Three of the Kulbars who died – including Farhad and Azad Khosravi and Ismail Savojinejad - were child laborers under the age of 18. Among the Kulbars who died in 2019, 57 of them were killed by being shot directly by the Islamic Republic of Iran’s border guards. 22 have died as a result of accidents such as falling from a height, frost, avalanches, road accidents, border guards chasing them and the explosion of landmines. In 2019, the border guards shot and injured 154 Kulbars. Eleven Kulbars were injured by natural elements, like mountain road conditions, falling from a height, frost, etc. 52

50 BidarZani, 8 December 2019; [http://bidarzani.com/29589](http://bidarzani.com/29589)
52 Kurdistan Human Rights Network, 5 January 2020; [http://kurdishhumanrights.net/fa/?p=11305](http://kurdishhumanrights.net/fa/?p=11305)
Child Laborers and Migrant Workers

During the November protests, at least 17 children were killed by the Islamic Republic antiriot police and security forces. Mohsen Mohammadpour, a child laborer in the city of Khorramshahr, was one of those children killed during the November protests. According to his family, Mohsen, who was only 17 years old and a high school student, was working as a construction worker while studying to help his family.

Mohsen Mohammadpour, a 17-year-old child laborer, was shot dead by antiriot police during November protests in the city of Khorramshahr.

In the first week of December 2019, security forces arrested child rights activist Zohreh Sayyadi. News of her arrest was published by the media about a week after her actual arrest. Ms. Sayyadi works to support migrant children without National Identification Cards who live on the outskirts of Tehran. She was released temporarily on bail on 23 December 2019. It is important to note that Sayyadi’s arrest comes only days after the Director-General of Tehran's Department of Social Welfare said that 86% of child laborers of Iran’s capital Tehran are not Iranian citizens. At the same time, Farzaneh Marvasti announced plans to implement the second phase of a project called Organizing Street Children. In the first phase of the project, the Department of Social Welfare employed police and used force to arrest child laborers. The children were then transferred to the custody of the private sector contractor who placed them in overpopulated safe houses.

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Mohammad Shariatmadari, Minister of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare, also said on 4 January 2020 that about 70-75% of working children in Iran are not Iranian.55

After the protests over gasoline prices in November, the Iranian government and judicial officials saw Afghan migrants as the main participants in the street protests – particularly those living in the outskirts of large urban centers. On 21 December 2019, Mansour Haji, the Director General of Tehran Province’s office for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs described the migrants and "Afghan nationals" as "the main pillars" of the protests on the outskirts of Tehran. He called for planning to deal with Afghan migrants who start as workers but are now becoming employers buying land and businesses.56 He suggested the power of Afghan migrant workers to purchase businesses and land should be limited. Haji called the “problem group” Afghan migrants who came to Iran as children and now consider themselves Iranians.

Mehdi Mahmoudi, Director General of the Ministry of Interior Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs, threatened foreign nationals in the aftermath of the November protests, stating that if migrants living inside Iran do not abide by Iranian law, they will be transferred to refugee camps and returned to Afghanistan.57

On 8 January 2020, Javad Abtahi, Khomeini Shahr's representative to the Islamic Consultative Assembly, confirmed the detention of Afghan refugees during the November protests. He stated that there were several Afghan migrant detainees among those arrested during the protests.58 A week earlier, on 1 January 2020, Mohammad Javad Montazeri, Tehran's Chief Prosecutor, had denied the arrest of any migrants from Afghanistan during the November protests.59

Ebrahim Hejazi, the head of Afghan Migrant Affairs in Iran at the Embassy of Afghanistan in Tehran, has said that his embassy knows of nine Afghan migrants in Iran who were killed during the November protests.60 Iranian officials have denied this claim. A spokesperson for the Afghan Foreign Ministry, however, acknowledged the killing of Afghan migrants in the November protests and demanded that the bodies of those killed be returned to their families.61

Workplace Accidents, Mineworkers under Debris

According to the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare, in the first six months of this Iranian year (1398 – March-August 2019), a total of 898 workers lost their lives due to work-related accidents.62 The construction sector still has the highest rate of work-related accidents and job casualties. According to this report, in the first six months of the Iranian year 1398, 354 workers died after falling from a height, 232 died due to a hard object hitting their body, 140

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55 Sobh-e Now Newspaper, 5 January 2020; http://sobhe-no.ir/newspaper/857/10/34608
58 Shafaqna, 8 January 2020; https://af.shafaqna.com/FA/251450
61 Meydan, 22 Dec 2019; https://meidaan.com/archive/66251
were electrocuted, 78 died due to burns, 43 died of suffocation and oxygen deprivation, and 51 died for other reasons. More than a third of work-related accidents occur in the construction sector, with 38% of accidents in the construction sector resulting in the death of the worker.\textsuperscript{63}

Iranian news media reported 64 workers’ deaths due to work-place accidents between 16 November – 11 December 2019. During this period, 77 workers were injured during work. Construction workers continue to be at the top of work-related accidents leading to death. 28 construction workers died as a result of accidents during this time period and 18 were injured. Among the dead were at least two Afghan migrant workers and one child laborer.

Construction workers usually work based on hourly wages and are hired for the workday without a contract and insurance. As a result, many work accidents in the construction sector are not reported because the workshops are not covered by insurance.

In the period between 16 November – 11 December 2019, at least nine miners were reported to have died while doing their jobs. Eight miners were injured as a result of work-related accidents. Ashraf Mansouri, a health and safety expert, says that disregard for safety regulations and lack of supervision by the authorities are two main reasons work-related accidents are so frequent in Iran.\textsuperscript{64}

\textsuperscript{64} Zamaneh, 10 January 2020; https://www.radiozamaneh.com/483607
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