

Labor Rights in Iran



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Brief Introduction

Zamaneh Media (Stichting Radio Zamaneh, ZM) monitors, analyzes and publishes on labor rights developments in Iran in a bi-monthly brief in both Persian and English. These bi-monthly [briefs](#) detail the state of labor rights and legislation in Iran to develop alliances of knowledge sharing in order to promote and build public pressure for the adoption and enforcement of internationally-recognized treaties related to labor rights in Iran. The focus of the newsletter is on these key points: workplace safety, local discrimination, labor law, women, child labor, contract issues, unemployment, postponement or non-payment of wages, as well as the issue of labor organizations.

This is the 13th ZM report on labor issues in Iran. The report covers issues and events in June-July 2020.

Major Issues

After the Supreme Council of Labor (SCL) passed the Minimum Wage Act, workers demanded its repeal, but it was rejected. The resolution was drafted without considering the official inflation rate and the subsistence basket, and without the consent of the labor representatives at the SCL. Finally, the Council only increased the aid to housing from 100,000 tomans to 300,000 tomans. This increase of 200,000 Tomans is to be implemented from the second quarter of the year, provided that this decision is approved by the Cabinet. ([Market rate](#) 1 USD = 23,700 Tomans)

The government and employers oppose the increase in wages while the gap between income and expenditure of a worker's family has reached more than 4,200,000 tomans. Meanwhile, the economy is facing a rapid fall of the Rial against the Dollar. The prices of some essential goods, which are part of the "livelihood basket," have increased by more than 100% compared to the same period last year. Faramarz Tawfiqi, the head of the Wage Committee of the Supreme Council of Labor, acknowledged that the subsistence basket value has reached a figure between 6 million and 490 thousand tomans and 6 million and 800 thousand tomans; A figure nearly three times the minimum wage.¹

The head of the Central Bank has announced the government's policy of "reducing the official inflation rate to 22%." This policy, however, will not affect the livelihood of the workers, because with the increase of prices and the fall in the value of the Rial, a small increase in wages has become ineffective. Government agencies, including the Research Center of the Islamic Consultative Assembly, predict that more people will fall below the poverty line this year.

Prior to the coronavirus crisis, the Iranian economy, affected by US sanctions, was struggling from recession and declining oil revenues. The Corona pandemic has exacerbated the situation. More businesses have closed, and more workers have lost their jobs. Government support remained at the level of unfulfilled promises, bank loans up to three million tomans, and cheap aid packages. The living conditions of wage earners have become more and more difficult.

Under these circumstances, delays in the payment of wages have provoked a wave of protests and strikes in various regions. Omran Roshani Moghadam, a worker at the Yadavaran oil field in the city of Hoveyzeh in Khuzestan province, hanged himself in protest.

¹ Iran Labor News Agency, [July 4, 2020](#)

Coronavirus Kills Workers

The outbreak of coronavirus in Iran has recently intensified, according to government officials. The government, however, continues to refuse to shut down service and manufacturing units because it does not want to pay any additional support costs. This behavior has endangered the health of thousands of workers.

In the Iran National Steel Industrial Group, a worker lost his life due to coronavirus.² The company's workers had previously written to factory managers warning of the spread of Covid-19 in the workplace.

In Assaluyeh oil and gas industry, according to reports in the Islamic Republic's media, the outbreak of the disease has crossed the red alert line. "Every day we receive shocking reports from Assaluyeh and Kangan and, unfortunately, we are witnessing deaths in the province," said Musa Ahmadi, Kangan's representative in the Islamic Consultative Assembly, without providing specific figures. "I did not get a percentage, but we do not have good figures. Not only the workers, but also the locals have been severely infected," Ahmadi said. According to him, the distribution of health packages in workplaces has stopped. Workers working on oil and gas projects in Assaluyeh live in densely populated dormitories.³

At least 40 workers at Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Agro-Industry Co. have contracted Covid-19 disease, and the number is rising.

The Ministry of Health, as the body responsible for announcing the statistics of coronavirus patients and victims, does not publish details and separate statistics on deaths due to this disease.

² Radio Zamaneh, [June 16, 2020](#)

³ Radio Zamaneh, [June 23, 2020](#)

Coronavirus and Unemployment

Government sources announced the unemployment rate at the end of the Iranian year 1398 (20 March 2020) at %10.6. Three months after the start of the new year, the Islamic Parliament Research Center revealed that the official unemployment rate was at least three percent higher than the announced figure. According to the same report, between the winter of 2018 and the winter of 2019, at least 885,000 people were laid off their jobs, and the unemployed population dramatically increased.⁴

Unemployment has been on the rise since the beginning of 2020. From the official start of the outbreak in February to April 19, 30% of companies have laid off at least one worker. According to a study by the Statistical Center of Iran, the highest number of layoffs is in the agricultural sector. In April 2020, 43.4% of agricultural firms fired at least one person, and in May, 34% fired at least one person. The lowest number of unemployed is in the industrial and mining sectors, where in the first months of the outbreak (February-March) 22.6% and in April 11.6% of these companies fired some of their workforce. In the service sector, 31.3% of firms laid off at least one worker in February and March. In April, after the reopening of sales and service centers, the dismissal of service workers also fell by about 10 percent. However, 22.1% of companies in this sector fired at least one worker.⁵

As of June 2,851,864 people have registered to receive unemployment insurance, according to the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare. According to its Deputy Minister, only 711,800 of these people are covered by unemployment insurance.⁶

Unemployment insurance is granted only to those unemployed who have an employment contract and insurance payment history. As of June 21, only 270,000 people had been paid unemployment insurance, according to government officials. As per the Islamic Parliament Research Center, most of the victims of coronavirus are employed in the private sector who do not have employment and insurance contracts.

The Islamic Parliament Research Center revealed, in a report, that nearly 60% of employees in 2019 were uninsured and employed in small workshops with less than 10 workers.⁷ The government has excluded workshops with less than 10 workers from some provisions of the labor law.⁸

4 Radio Zamaneh, [June 14, 2020](#)

5 Tousee Irani Newspaper, [June 28, 2020](#)

6 Gostaresh Sanat Newspaper, [June 25, 2020](#)

7 Islamic Parliament Research Center, [Analysis of Labor Market Indicators in Winter 2019](#)

8 Islamic Parliament Research Center, [Exceptions and Exemptions for Workshops of Less than 10 People](#)

Workers' Protests

The wave of labor protests began in May and peaked in June and July. Wage arrears are the main cause of many protests, especially protests by municipal workers in various parts of the country. These workers are generally employed by contracting companies with temporary contracts and low wages.⁹

Table 1: Protests by municipal workers in the last two months

Municipality	Demands	Municipality	Demands
Abadan	Two months of deferred wages, part of the benefits of 2019	Marivan	3 months deferred salary, non-payment of New Year bonus and previous bonuses
Hamidieh	20 months deferred salary	Khorramabad	11 months deferred salary
Kutabdollah	Non-payment of wages since March, Last year's deferred wages	Rasht	3 months arrears of wages, conversion of the contract into a volume work contract
Andimeshk	Deferred wages for about a year	Shahinshar	Change of contractor, change of contract
Ahvaz	Deferred salary from 3 to 9 months	Souran	4 months deferred salary, 6 months premium, bonus of the previous year
Khorramshahr	3 months deferred salary	Boushehr	Deferred wages for several months
Parsabad	3 months deferred salary	Mohammadshahr	Reduction of workers' salaries by order of the mayor
Sisakht	7 months deferred salary	Dehdasht	3 months deferred salary

City officials and city council members in various areas have cited declining municipal revenues as the main reason for delays in workers' wages. Municipal workers are often hired by contractors and work in green space services and waste collection.

Delays in the payment of wages have also raised the voices of workers in other sectors. Literacy movement educators, health care workers, miners, and retirees rallied at their workplaces or in front of government buildings to protest the non-payment of wages, uncertain contracts, poor working conditions and low wages.

Table 2: Major protests by workers, teachers, and nurses in the last two months

⁹ Radio Zamaneh, [May 27, 2020](#)

Location	Demands
Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Agro-Industry Co. ¹⁰	Payment of deferred wages from the beginning of the new year Eviction of private sector owners Return of fired workers Return of embezzled wealth to workers Seventy fired workers whose contracts have not been renewed since June 1 also want to return to work.
Persian Gulf International Transport Company	End job insecurity Payment of deferred wages
Khuzestan Comprehensive Health Services Center	End job insecurity Return of fired workers
Rampco Company	End job insecurity Payment of deferred wages
Educators of the literacy movement	New hiring and conversion of contracts Repeal the the law on recruitment of teachers and educators of the literacy movement
Rural Water and Sewage of Khuzestan	Payment of deferred wages
Zagros Railway Technical Lines and Buildings	Payment of deferred wages Fulfilling the contractor's obligations
Fars Province Telecommunications	Implementation of job classification plan and elimination of wage discrimination Return to work of protesting fired workers
Telecommunication industry retirees	End-of-service bonus payment (some retirees have died. End-of-service bonus has not been paid after 10 years).
Workers of Sanandaj Industrial Town	Unemployment insurance payment
Butchers of Izeh city	Endangering livelihood following the closure of the slaughterhouse due to unsanitary conditions Abolition of the obligation to industrialize the slaughterhouse
Nurses in Tabriz	Job security and contract change Elimination of discrimination in payment of wages
Chahar Gonbad copper mine in Sirjan	Payment of four months' salary arrears
Abadan oil refinery	Return to work and assigning of dismissed contract workers
Retirees of Khuzestan Cement Company	Arrears payments
Educators of Khuzestan Literacy Movement	Payment of 2 years deferred wage
Nurses of Yasuj city	Contract extension
Isfahan Tile Company	Payment of one to two years of deferred wages Cancel privatization
Retired teachers	One-time payment (not in installments) of end-of-service bonus
Teachers of non-profit schools	Payment of wages after school closures
Nurses of Mashhad	The solution to the shortage of nursing staff and increasing work pressure

¹⁰ Radio Zamaneh, [July 3, 2020](#)

Haft Tappeh Sugarcane: Protest to Cancel Privatization

Workers at Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Agro-Industry Co. went on strike to protest the non-payment of wages and the transfer of the plant to the private sector. The strike coincided with the trial of Omid Asadbeigi and Mehrdad Rostami, owners of the company. The two bought the shares of the company, the largest sugarcane complex in the Middle East, in a controversial deal five years ago. The workers' demand in the new round of protests is to cut off the private sector, return the fired workers to work, pay deferred wages, and hand over factory shares to the workers. The workers' protest continued until the first days of June this year.

Despite widespread protests by Haft Tappeh workers over privatization, the government is still unwilling to fire the company's owners, who are accused of embezzling currency and are currently on trial.

Nurses: Exploitation During the Coronavirus

Iran's health system is facing a shortage of nurses. Prior to the outbreak of coronavirus, the number of nurses per capita in Iran was 1.6 per thousand. According to Shamsuddin Shamsi, head of the Supreme Council of the Nursing Organization, the number of nurses per hospital bed in Iran is 1.5 less than the minimum standard.¹¹

The coronavirus epidemic made the shortage of nurses more obvious, and the workload on nurses doubled. According to Mohammad Mirzabeigi, head of the Nursing Organization, 7,000 nurses working in hospitals became infected with coronavirus, and 18 died.¹²

The Ministry of Health hired nurses on 89-day contracts to make up for the shortage of medical staff in some provinces. After the temporary reduction in the number of identified patients, the nurses who were hired on a temporary basis were laid off. The nurses gathered in front of government buildings in several cities, including Yasuj¹³, Tabriz, Mashhad, Isfahan, and Rasht¹⁴, and demanded that their contracts be converted to permanent ones. However, despite the shortage of nurses, the Ministry of Health has ordered public and private hospitals to deploy only 10% of their staff to work in the coronavirus wards, as the number of patients has risen again and many provinces are in a "red alert" situation.¹⁵

In the city of Mashhad, protests were met with police violence. Police raided those who had gathered to protest work pressure and arrested 11 nurses.¹⁶

11 IRNA News Agency, [July 1, 2020](#)

12 Salam-e-no, [June 10, 2020](#)

13 Kebnanews, [June 17, 2020](#)

14 Mehr News Agency, [June 29, 2020](#)

15 ILNA News Agency, [June 28, 2020](#)

16 Radio Zamaneh, [July 1, 2020](#)

Whips on Workers' Bodies

The judiciary overturned the convictions of a number of labor activists, including Ismail Bakhshi, a Haft-Tappeh sugarcane worker, Hassan Saeedi, a member of the Tehran Bus Company Syndicate, members of the editorial board of Gam journal, and Labor Day 2019 detainees. However, The crackdown on workers and labor activists continued with arrests, floggings, and attacks on rallies.

Sepideh Gholyan, one of the detainees of the weekly protests in 2018, was not pardoned. She was sent to prison to serve her five-year sentence.¹⁷ The sentence of Amir Amirgholi, another detainee in this case, has also not been revoked.

The sentence of 74 lashes for Rasool Talib Moghadam was carried out in May this year. He was one of the detainees of the Labor Day ceremony who was arrested in May 2019 in a rally in front of the Islamic Consultative Assembly. In addition, the flogging of a bakery worker, Ruhollah Barzin, was carried out in the city of Charam. He was sentenced to 55 lashes after a complaint from the city's Friday prayer leader.¹⁸

On June 16, security forces arrested and transferred Shapur Ehsani Rad, a board member of the Free Trade Union, to prison. He was also arrested last August, and sentenced to prison, exile, and deprivation of social rights. Haidar Ghorbani, another member of the trade union, as well as a member of the Kamyaran Construction Workers' Union, was arrested on June 6 and released on bail after 23 days.¹⁹

Jafar Azimzadeh, secretary of the board of directors of the Workers' Free Trade Union, who was transferred to Evin Prison to serve a six-year sentence, was tried again in prison and sentenced to another 13 months.²⁰ Azimzadeh has been imprisoned for more than 15 months.

Nahid Khodajoo and Nasrin Javadi²¹, two women members of the Free Trade Union, were also summoned to prison to serve their sentences.

Mahmoud Salehi and Osman Ismaili, two labor activists in Kurdistan, were also tried on

¹⁷ Radio Zamaneh, [July 21, 2020](#)

¹⁸ Radio Zamaneh, [July 2, 2020](#)

¹⁹ Radio Zamaneh, [June 16, 2020](#)

²⁰ Free Trade Union of Iranian Workers, [June 9, 2020](#)

²¹ Free Trade Union of Iranian Workers, [June 30, 2020](#)

June 21st.²² The court eventually acquitted both. Dariush Nikzad, a worker at the Aqdara gold mine, who was arrested in 2017, was transferred to prison for failing to pay a fine in exchange for imprisonment.²³ The court sentenced him and a number of other workers to 21 months in prison. These workers, who were arrested during the 2017 protests, were sentenced to a fine in an appeals court. Seven others were imprisoned because they could not afford to pay a fine of 5 million tomans.

The 42 protesting workers of AzarAb Industries, who were summoned and detained during the September 2019 march, were sentenced in a court of first instance to one year in prison, 74 lashes, and one month of forced labor (free work).²⁴ Following the news, judiciary officials in Markazi Province announced that all the workers had been acquitted in court.²⁵

Reza Sayyahi and Ismail Haghghatjoo, two workers in the Hamidiyeh municipality, were arrested on June 23rd following a protest against non-payment of wages, and were released on bail of 100 million tomans four days later.²⁶ Earlier in May, police attacked Ahwaz municipal workers who had gone on strike to protest non-payment of wages. During the attack, a number of workers were injured and taken to medical facilities.²⁷

On July 14th, on the 30th day of the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Agro-Industry Co. workers' strike, Shoush security police arrested at least four workers, Mohammad Khanifar, Yousef Bahmani, Ebrahim Abbasi and Muslim Khavar Cheshmeh, and transferred them to Dezful Prison. On the evening of July 13th, Ismail Mohammad Vali, a journalist who had gone to Shousha to cover the workers' protests, was arrested.

Mohammad Reza Dabirian, a Haft Tappeh sugarcane worker, was sentenced to 222 lashes by the Shousha Criminal Court.

22 Hrana, [June 21, 2020](#)

23 Hrana, [June 11, 2020](#)

24 Radio Zamaneh, [June 23, 2020](#)

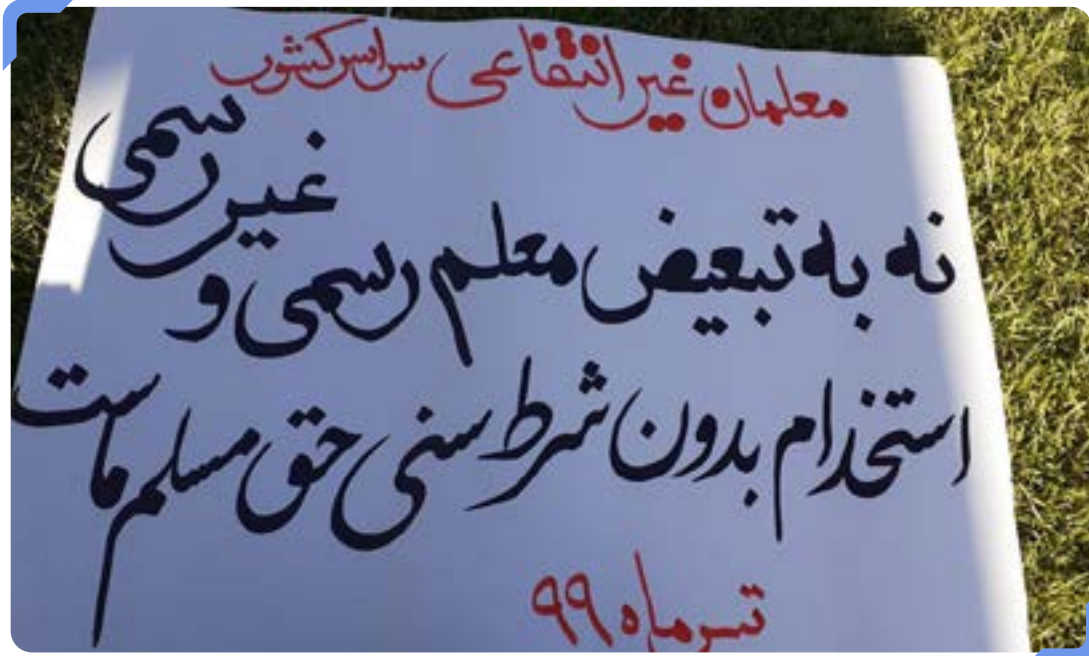
25 IRNA News Agency, [July 3, 2020](#)

26 Free Trade Union, [June 28, 2020](#)

27 Radio Zamaneh, [May 27, 2020](#)

Teachers: Repression and Exploitation in Education

Iran's education system is facing a shortage of teachers. The Ministry of Education, however, is not willing to hire teachers and wants to provide the teachers needed for the next school year with buying service packages and outsourcing plans.²⁸



Placard: "Non-Profit Teachers Nationwide. No to discrimination between formal and informal teachers! Employment without age requirement is our inalienable right. July 2020"

The policy of privatizing the education system has provoked widespread protests. Some of the teachers and members of the Teachers' Union who had been involved in sit-ins and protests for the past two years were arrested, tried and sentenced to prison.

The Revolutionary Court sentenced seven members of the North Khorasan Teachers' Union to a total of 41 years in prison.

According to the Teachers' Union, the Revolutionary Court has issued the following verdicts: Mohammad Reza Ramezanzadeh was sentenced to 15 years in prison, 74 lashes, a fine of nearly three million tomans, and a ban on party activities; Hossein Ramezanzadeh to eight years in prison, 74 lashes, ban on party activities; Hamidreza Rajaei to four years in prison and ban on party activities. Ali Forootan, Mustafa Rabati, Saeed Haghparast, and Hassan Johari were each sentenced to 44 months in prison. The teachers were arrested during the 2018 protests. The sentences of these teachers were issued last year and have just been confirmed. In a letter to the head of the judiciary, the Teachers' Union revealed: "Despite the lack of any documents in the case, the Revolutionary Court of Bojnourd has charged seven Khorasani teachers with attempting to invade and occupy military bases, insulting officials and other crimes. They have been sentenced to long prison terms, exile and flogging. Neither the lawyer nor the seven defendants have ever seen a single document in support of these completely false accusations during the

²⁸ Radio Zamaneh, [June 11, 2020](#)

court hearings and when reviewing the contents of the case."²⁹

Adel Asakereh, a teacher in the village of Safeh Shadegan in Khuzestan Province, was also sentenced to nine years in prison for protesting against the unequal distribution of funds and the lack of educational assistance for rural students.³⁰

Yaser Amini Azar, a teacher in Mahabad, Nahid Fath'alian, a teacher working in Tehran, Mohammad Habibi and Ismail Abdi, two members of the Teachers' Union in Tehran, are still in prison for protesting against the privatization of education and participating in teachers' union protests in recent years.

Despite repression, the teachers' protest continues. A group of "teaching-for-fee" teachers³¹, pre-school teachers, and non-profit school teachers, as well as literacy movement instructors³², gathered in front of the Central Education Organization and the Islamic Consultative Assembly in June and July this year. The protesters want formal employment, conversion of contracts, and wage increases.³³ (The so-called Teaching for A Fee are a group of elementary and pre-school teachers used by the Ministry of Education to meet the need for a teacher, especially in disadvantaged areas, without a specific employment obligation. Compared to formal teachers, they receive much lower pay and benefits.)

29 Iranian Teachers' Union Telegram Channel, [July 6, 2020](#)

30 Radio Zamaneh, [June 20, 2020](#)

31 Mehr News Agency, [June 14, 2020](#)

32 Radio Zamaneh, [June 23, 2020](#)

33 Etemad Online, [June 21, 2020](#)

Child Labor: Grounds for Expelling Migrant Children

Since the outbreak of coronavirus, working children have been exposed to more harm. On the one hand, the economic poverty of these children's families deprives them of the possibility of staying at home, and on the other hand, they are more likely to become infected with coronavirus in urban areas and at work.

The municipality of Tehran, which itself benefits most from child labor, has banned the employment of children and "foreign nationals" in the waste sector. In a statement, the mayor of Tehran asked citizens to report on children working in waste collection and recycling jobs. Most children involved in garbage collection and recycle segregation are "foreign nationals." The deputy mayor of Tehran has announced that the number of garbage collecting children in the city is about 4,000. The ban on employment of children in this sector, without providing a solution for their livelihood, is a ground for expelling them from Iran.³⁴

Under Iranian laws, the employment of children under the age of 15 is prohibited. Children under the age of 18 should also not be employed in jobs that are deemed harmful.

Iranian government institutions, however, do not accept the responsibility of providing livelihood for working children from poor families. Recently, Habibaullah Masoudi Farid, Deputy Minister of Social Welfare Organization of Iran, said that 55% of working children are "non-Iranians". According to government officials, the majority of working children are Afghan.³⁵

Year by year, Iran is tightening residence rules for Afghan immigrants. This spring, two groups of Afghan refugees were harassed and killed at the Harirod border crossing. According to Islamic Republic's media, the governments of Iran and Afghanistan are in talks to sign a memorandum to prevent the entry of migrants from Afghanistan and the extradition of Afghans.³⁶

³⁴ Radio Zamaneh, [June 14, 2020](#)

³⁵ Daneshjoo News Agency, [July 7, 2020](#)

³⁶ Afkar News, [June 21, 2020](#)

Work Accidents

Despite the mass closure of businesses in various sectors of the economy, work-related accidents in Iran continue to claim workers' lives. The Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare publishes annual reports of deaths and injuries at work, citing statistics from the Forensic Medicine Organization alone. According to these statistics, [in 1398](#) (March 21, 2018 - March 21, 2019), 28,208 work accidents were registered. 726 workers lost their lives in work accidents and 9,751 workers were injured.

The Forensic Medicine Organization and the Ministry of Labor record only those work accidents that are officially reported. The construction sector has the highest number of work accidents and deaths. But because most of the workers in this sector are without insurance and contracts, and sometimes even without a residence permit, in the reports of government institutions, most of the accidents are not recorded and are hidden from view.

Miners and those who work in small workshops, which are often outside the scope of labor law, are next in number of work accidents.

In the past two months (May 21st to July 8th), Iranian media reported about 50 work accidents that killed 22 workers and injured at least 60 others.

On July 3rd, a work accident at the Sertitan mine in Kermanshah province killed one worker and injured several others. A work accident at the Tabriz Machine-Building Factory also resulted in the death of two workers.

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