

Labor Rights in Iran Annual Report



Annual Report no. 3

May 2020 - May 2021





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Introduction

In the last three years, Zamaneh has published 16 labor newsletters, three special reports (on teachers, oil industry contract workers, and workers' wage repression), and two labor yearbooks in Persian and English.

This is the third Zamaneh annual labor report, which covers issues related to workers' rights from May 2020 to May 2021.

For more information visit Zamaneh's [Labor Rights Page](#).

Last Year Briefly

Covid-19 arrived in Iran before the beginning of the Iranian calendar year 1399 (March 21, 2020). While senior government officials initially denied its existence in Iran, it quickly spread to all parts of the country and claimed the lives of many Iranian citizens by the beginning of the new Persian calendar year. The presence of coronavirus throughout Iran remained widespread until the end of the year.

According to statistics given by the Ministry of Health, 61,649 people died of coronavirus by the end of March 2021. The Ministry officials have repeatedly claimed that they have controlled the pandemic and made it possible for everyone to have access to the Covid-19 vaccine. In the winter of 2021, Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI), banned the purchase of foreign vaccines from the United States and Britain. A pharmaceutical company affiliated with the Barakat Foundation, a charity institution under the auspices of the Supreme Leader, claimed that it would soon produce Iranian vaccine. In February 2021, the Ministry of Health invited drug importing companies to import vaccines at the open market exchange rate. The government's inability to control the pandemic in an economy already plagued by sanctions and widespread corruption has made the economic situation even worse.

In the first months of the year, the Tehran Stock Exchange improved with the help of government advertising. To boost the stock market, the government sold its stake in banks, insurance companies, and several oil refineries. The Social Security Administration also offered a portion of its shares to make up for its budget deficit. President Hassan Rouhani repeatedly called on the public to participate in the stock exchange, and Ali Khamenei issued a license to buy Edalat Shares on the stock exchange. Edalat Shares is a kind of subsidy that is given to the beneficiaries through the Edalat Cooperatives in the provinces. The purpose of offering these shares is to expand the role of the cooperative sector in the Iranian economy. Under the Edalat Shares scheme, part of the shares of state-owned companies will be sold to lower-income groups. Consequently, the stock index rose to more than two million units by July 2020. From early August, after the government covered part of its budget deficit through the transfer of government shares, the stock market bubble gradually deflated, bringing the total stock index back to 1.2 million units.

The rial, the national currency, lost more than half of its value, and at one point in the year, the dollar exchange rate reached over 30,000 tomans (300,000 rials). The defeat of Donald Trump in the US presidential election, and the possibility of reducing sanctions in the early months of 2021, caused a relative decrease in the dollar exchange rate to about 22,000 tomans.

Under the pretext of controlling the foreign exchange market, the government stopped allocating foreign currency at preferential rates to certain commodities, including food and medicine. This policy led to an increase in the price of goods, especially food, and the scarcity of some pharmaceutical items, such that the point inflation rate, which indicates the rate of increase in the price of goods compared to the same period a year earlier, in March 2021 rose to 48.8% and the inflation rate for food and beverage reached 67%.¹

Some pharmaceutical items, including pen insulin and medication for liver transplant

1 [Radio Zamaneh](#), April 5, 2021

patients, became scarce in pharmacies. At the same time, some of these drugs were offered in the informal market at several times the price.

Health care costs rose last year because of the Covid-19 pandemic and healthcare liberalization policies. In June, Deputy Minister of Health Iraj Haririchi announced that the coronavirus pandemic had increased the cost of living of each household by 1.6 million tomans.² At the end of the year, the Statistical Center of Iran announced a point-to-point inflation rate for health products of 40 percent.

2 [Mehr News Agency](#), July 16, 2020.

Rising Prices and Empty Food Tables

Rising food prices have made the household basket smaller than last year. Some food items, including those with proteins, were removed from the basket.³ Earlier, while the subsistence basket was estimated at 4,965,000 tomans, the Supreme Labor Council (SLC) set the minimum wage for 2020 at 1,835,000 tomans. As in previous years, this figure was imposed on the workers without the consent of their representatives at the SLC (these representatives are ironically elected by government-affiliated organizations). Workers' complaints about wage suppression were unsuccessful. Despite a ruling by the Administrative Court of Justice in their favor, the government and employers refused to adjust wages until the end of the year.⁴

Coinciding with the start of the SLC's wage negotiations for 2021, the Vice President for Legal Affairs, in a statement to the Ministry of Labor and the Social Security Organization, recognized a new "Mutually Agreed Wage Policy," provided that the newly agreed amount is not less than the minimum wage. According to this policy, employers can avoid paying a bonus based on years of service at the end of the year. All they need to do is settle anew on a "mutually agreed wage" with the same workers.⁵

For 2021, the SLC has approved a 39% increase in the minimum wage for unskilled and 26% for skilled workers. Despite this increase, the minimum wage for a worker without children and work experience will still be less than four million tomans per month, while the poverty line in Iran is estimated at 10 million tomans.

The labor members of the Supreme Labor Council, who are elected from government-affiliated labor organizations, signed the Minimum Wage Act, while the subsistence basket in the Supreme Council's wage committee was set at 6,895,000 tomans.⁶

The government's promise to cover living expenses and pay unemployment insurance to the unemployed in 2020 was limited to the distribution of small food packages, minimal banking facilities, and the payment of unemployment benefits to only 670,000 of the total unemployed.

3 Radio Zamaneh, December 23, 2020.

4 Labor Rights in Iran, No. 12, [Radio Zamaneh](#), April-May 2020.

5 [Radio Zamaneh](#), February 7, 2021.

6 For more details, see Zamaneh's [Special Report on Wage Suppression](#), May 2021.

Women Expelled from the Labor Market

According to the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare, about 1.5 million people were added to the unemployed population in the past year. The official news agency of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRNA), citing a report by the Statistical Center of Iran, said that the number of unemployed in the service sector alone is 681,338.⁷ The Statistical Center of Iran in the report Labor Force Census, in winter 2020, announced that compared to winter 2019, at least 310,000 more people have been added to the unemployed population.⁸

In a report, the Parliamentary Research Center cited "frustration with finding work" as the main reason for job seekers "leaving" the labor market.

According to quarterly reports from the Statistical Center of Iran on the unemployment rate over the past year, the share of women in the labor market has decreased. By the fall of 2020, the population of economically active women was reduced by about one million. At the end of the same year, the number of employed women decreased by 439,000 compared to the previous year. The rate of women's economic participation also decreased by 2% compared to a year ago.



Graffiti to protest unpaid women's housework.

The decline in the number of working women in the past year could mean that Covid-19 has a greater impact on women's employment than men.

A large proportion of women's work is service jobs, or small workshops, and home-based businesses. In the last three years, the IRI has created 1,162,000 domestic or micro-jobs in its "job creation" programs. This number is significant because the total number of jobs created during the three years has been announced as 1.8 million.

7 [IRNA](#), April 4, 2021.

8 [Radio Zamaneh](#), April 4, 2021.

Unemployment and Coronavirus

Different statistics have been published on the number of people who lost their jobs in the past year. The Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor, and Social Welfare has estimated the number of jobs lost at about 1.5 million. In the first months of the pandemic, the Parliamentary Research Center estimated that 3.2 million to 6 million jobs would be lost. In March 2021, the Secretary-General of the Chamber of Trade announced that the increase in red alert zones would eliminate three million jobs.⁹

Many of the unemployed in home-based businesses, small workshops, seasonal works, peddling, as well as a large portion of services in restaurants, clothing, tourism, and the like, were not covered by unemployment benefits. According to the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor, and Social Welfare, by the end of the Iranian calendar year, in mid-March 2021, only 670,000 unemployed people were paid unemployment insurance benefits for three months due to the pandemic.¹⁰ In August 2020, the Deputy Minister of Industry, Trade, and Mines announced that the number of people who had registered for unemployment benefits was 1.7 million.¹¹



Protest rally of daily wage workers in Zahedan.

The closure of small workshops, restaurants, and a large portion of service jobs, in the absence of government social and financial support, increased the number of people employed in "informal" jobs, especially peddling.¹² Municipalities used the pandemic as an opportunity to put pressure on vendors. Peddling was banned on the busy streets of major cities. In Tehran, Sanandaj, Tabriz, Qazvin, Bandar Abbas, Yazd, Shiraz, Isfahan, and Ahvaz, under the policy of "organizing vendors," sidewalk sellers were driven from busy streets to places far from the city centers. In Ahvaz, peddlers' bazaars were destroyed at night,¹³ and in Sanandaj, peddlers were banned on the Ferdowsi sidewalk in the city

9 [Radio Zamaneh](#), April 4, 2021.

10 [Bazar News](#), March 25, 2021.

11 [Tasnim News](#), 17 September 2020.

12 [Radio Zamaneh](#), November 8, 2020.

13 [Iran Online](#), January 5, 2021.

center.¹⁴

Seasonal and construction workers were also left helpless in the coronavirus pandemic. Support for these groups was entrusted to government charity foundations such as the Foundation for the Oppressed and the Barakat Foundation. The financial support is limited to one or two donations of one to two million tomans, and the distribution of food packages.

Lack of government support put the unemployed in a quandary. Access to food became more difficult. The prices of bread, dairy products, legumes, eggs, oil, sugar, poultry, meat products, rice, and grains increased several times during the year, and sometimes some of these items became scarce. The consequence of this precarity was an increase in the suicide rate among workers and their families. The increase in suicide rates among children under 15 was shocking.

During the year at least seven workers committed suicide. Hamidreza Behboodi (fired worker at a sand factory in Rudbar), Reza Al-Kathir (fired worker at Haft-tappeh sugarcane plant), Bahram Ebrahimifar (of Marvdasht municipality), Imran Roshani Moghadam (of Hoveyze oil field projects), a construction worker in Kermanshah, and a contract worker at the Masjed Soleyman Regional Electricity Company committed suicide to protest of their living conditions and dismissal. Ali Akbar Fatemi, Bushehr's representative in the Supreme Council of Provinces, on October 17, 2020, confirmed the suicide of a 21-year-old worker in the Jam Industrial Zone in his province, saying that such suicides had previously occurred in industrial provinces but had not been reported in the media.¹⁵

14 [Radio Zamaneh](#), January 13, 2021.

15 [Iran Labor News Agency \(ILNA\)](#), October 18, 2020

Protests: Workers Against Exploitation and Hunger

Over the past year, despite a coronavirus pandemic and police crackdown, protesters took to the streets chanting slogans against exploitation, poverty, unemployment, and lack of social support. They consisted of industrial workers, teachers, nurses, job seekers, peddlers, seasonal workers, and farmers.

HRANA, a body of human rights activists, has registered 23,873 protest rallies in the Persian calendar year 1399. Of this number, 16,741 were workers' actions, which took the form of either strikes or rallies at the workplace or in front of government buildings and the parliament.

Job insecurity, inadequate wages, long delays in payment, and harsh working conditions were among the main causes of labor unrest over the past year.

Municipal workers, often on temporary contracts through HR companies, protested widely. Delays in the payment of municipal workers' wages in some cities have exceeded one year. Sisakht, Kut Abdullah, Lushan, Khorramabad, Sanandaj, Alvand, Abadan, Ahvaz, Yasuj, Khorramshahr, Zahedan, Sari, Hamidiyeh, Zanjan, Karun, Marivan, Dehdasht were among the cities whose municipal workers rallied to protest poverty and wage arrears.¹⁶

In the industrial production sector, workers in Iran Khodro Tabriz, Zamzam, Qazvin Meter Manufacturing, Iran Poplin Rasht, HEPCO Arak, Haft Tappeh Sugarcane, and several small and large mines also protested. Social security retirees and other pensioners, farmers in East Isfahan, and temporary oil and gas workers have also protested several times over the past year to demand their unpaid salaries.

Railway maintenance workers, who work on temporary contracts through Iran Traverse Contracting Company, city bus drivers in Tehran and Urumia, and truck drivers in Sistan and Baluchistan also rallied several times last year in protest.

Seasonal workers in Zahedan, Mashhad, and Tehran, peddlers in Sanandaj, Karaj, and Ahvaz also staged rallies to protest the imposition of poverty and hunger and the ban on peddling.

¹⁶
2020.

For more details on municipal workers' protests, see [Labor Rights in Iran Newsletter, No. 15](#), October-December

Privatization Scandal at Haft Tappeh

In the spring and summer, workers at Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Agro-Industry Co. staged a long sit-in for more than 70 days to protest the delay in ousting of Omid Asadbeigi and Mehrdad Rostami, two owners of the company, who have been prosecuted for involvement in currency corruption.¹⁷ During the sit-in, several members of parliament came to the rally and promised to pursue the issue of ousting the owners.



Haft Tappeh sugarcane workers strike in summer, 2020.

Although the Supreme Audit Court of Iran ruled that the transfer of Hafta Tappeh sugarcane company to the private sector was a "violation" and voted to annul it,¹⁸ the Minister of Economy and Finance referred the case to the Privatization Organization Arbitration Board. The Board's jury, made up of representatives of chambers of commerce, guilds and co-operatives, and "trusted" government experts, voted in favor of the company's owners. Iranian media reported in December 2020 that the expropriation case had been referred to the General Court following a complaint from the Privatization Organization.¹⁹ More than three months after the case was referred to the General Court, its verdict has not yet been officially announced. Workers and labor rights advocates argue that accepting expropriation of the private sector in Haft Tappeh Sugarcane would mean officially announcing the failure of privatization policies. Privatization policies in Iran, which have been marred by widespread corruption, have in recent years led to widespread protests by workers, students, teachers, nurses, and critics of free-market policies.

Ali Ashraf Abdullah Poori Hosseini, the former head of the Privatization Organization, who was fired and later arrested in the summer of 2017, was sentenced to 15 years in prison

17 [Radio Zamaneh](#), 23 August 2020.

18 [Radio Zamaneh](#), September 8, 2020.

19 [Student News Network](#), January 25, 2021.

in connection with corruption in the sale of government shares in companies, especially in the case of Haft Tappeh Sugarcane and Tabriz Machine Building.

In November 2020, Iranian news media reported the "resignation" or "dismissal" of Alireza Saleh, Abdullah Poori Hosseini's successor, in the Privatization Organization. Ahmad Alireza Beigi, a member of the Fact-finding Committee to Investigate the Performance of Privatization Organization, said Saleh was ousted because of "illegal actions to misappropriate public property."²⁰

20 [Alef News](#), November 16, 2020.

Oil and Gas Workers

In July 2020, oil and gas project workers launched a long-running strike that quickly spread from Assaluyeh to 50 oil and gas centers in 10 provinces. The main demands were decent wages, a proper employment contract with job security, workplace amenities, and the right to organize.

The implementation of the "General Policies of Article 44" (of the Constitution), which emphasizes the privatization of enterprises, has led to the most violent exploitation of workers in Iran's oil and gas projects over the past two decades. They are hired for one project at a time with short-term contracts, paid for low wages, without a union, mostly in special or free economic zones, such as Qeshm, Assaluyeh, Mahshahr, Khorramshahr, and Abadan. In the first months of 2021, a group of workers at the Assaluyeh refinery complained about the neglect of their rights in a letter to the parliament.²¹

21 [Zamaneh Media](#), Special Report on Oil Industry's Contractual Workers' Strike, December 2020.

Miners

The talk of offering shares in the state-owned Kerman Mines Company on the stock market on April 20, 2020, caused 3,000 Kerman miners to take to the streets in Razan, Kuhbanan, and Ravan districts. After three days of protests, provincial officials promised to address the workers' demands.

In early May, miners took to the streets again when promises of transparency regarding the sale of shares, the improvement of workers' contracts, and the implementation of job classification failed. They continued to protest in Kerman, Razan, Kuhbanan, and Ravan streets.

Officials at the Steel Industries Pension Fund, which had decided to sell shares in the coal mines, announced on May 12 that they had reached an agreement the workers would return to work. The workers, however, protested again the next day.²²

The third round of the Kerman coal miners' sit-in resumed after a group representing the workers attended a joint meeting with government officials and company managers to review the proposed job classification plan. After the meeting, they announced the proposed job classification scheme had nothing to do with their demands and they cannot accept it.²³

22 [Radio Zamaneh](#), May 10, 2020.

23 [Radio Zamaneh](#), May 17, 2020.

The Pensioners

6 out of every 10 retirees receive a minimum wage, a monthly salary of fewer than 2.8 million tomans. The implementation of the pension Equalization Law was delayed until last summer due to what was described as a budget deficit and lack of resources. In the summer, the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare and the Social Security Pension Fund finally announced that they had implemented the equalization of pensions under the new title of "proportionality."

Those covered by the Social Security Pension Fund objected to the new way of calculating their salary increase. They took to the streets several times and shouted their demands: pension increase based on the poverty line, implementation of Article 69 of the Social Security Law which emphasizes increase of retirement salary based on the inflation rate and cost of living, full free health insurance, payment of government debt to the Social Security Organization, which has reached more than 300 trillion tomans, as well as changing the composition of the board of directors of the Pension Fund and transferring part of the shares of social security companies to the retirees.



Retirees have taken to the streets many times in the past year.

The protests continued until the last days of the Iranian calendar year. Retirees took to the streets again after the Nowruz holiday with similar demands. The most prominent feature of the pensioners' protests is that they are nationwide; they take place in all provincial capitals and many cities and towns.²⁴

According to official statistics, about 3.5 million retirees are covered by the Social Security Pension Fund. Retiree activists believe that more than 70% of pensioners live below the poverty line.

24 [Radio Zamaneh](#), March 17, 2021, and [Radio Zamaneh](#), April 1, 2021

Nurses: Deadly Exploitation

The coronavirus pandemic has made conditions more difficult for nurses in Iran. According to union officials, 80,000 nurses became infected with the coronavirus. 8,000 of these nurses could not return to work due to severe illness. In 14 months, from the beginning of the outbreak to the end of the Iranian calendar year 1399 (March 20, 2021), 110 nurses, including two pregnant nurses, died of coronavirus.²⁵

Over the past year, nurses have been writing letters, holding rallies at work, or in front of the Ministry of Health and parliament buildings, calling for the implementation of the Nursing Tariff Law, salary increases, the dismantling of contractors, and the hiring of new nurses. The Tariff Law was passed in 2007 and was implemented for physicians in hospitals across the country after a trial run at a hospital in Tehran. In the case of nurses, this law is supposed to define the types of nursing services that are then registered in the patients' files and to collect the tariff from the patients accordingly. In this plan, doctors are paid based on the services they provide. Since the implementation of the plan, the doctors' pay at public hospitals has increased dramatically, but nurses have not benefited from the plan.

HR contracting companies, which are themselves affiliated with the Ministry of Health chain companies such as Avaye Salamat (The Voice of Health), evade paying nurses any bonus or overtime pay with the excuse that public hospitals have lost most of their revenue due to reduced referrals. In December 2020, the parliament's Deputy Health Commission Chairman said that 45% of nurses working in government hospitals were Sherkati (Corporate). Corporate nurses are employed temporarily with a minimum wage.²⁶

25 [Fars News Agency](#), April 17, 2021.

26 [IRNA](#), December 21, 2020.

Education: Students Who Drop Out, Teachers Who Are Exploited

The coronavirus pandemic closed schools for a long time and replaced them with online education. This situation made it more difficult for children and students from poor families or residents of deprived areas to continue their education. It caused many of them to drop out of school.

At the beginning of the school year, when the Ministry of Education used the Shad Network (student education network) for virtual education, news of the suicide of several students who could not afford a smartphone was published in the Iranian domestic media. Between September 5 and the end of October 2020 alone, at least 17 child suicides were reported. Seyed Mohammad Mousavizadeh, an 11-year-old student in Bushehr, was one of the children who died due to the family's financial inability to buy a smartphone. In addition, one student in Urumia, two students in Bandar Abbas, six students in Ramhormoz, and three students in Neishabour committed suicide for similar reasons.²⁷ "This year we saw the suicide of teenagers under the age of 15," said the Deputy Minister of Youth Affairs at the Ministry of Sports and Youth, without announcing the exact number of child suicides.²⁸



Wall graffiti protesting the commodification of education that led to the suicide of Mohammad Mousavizadeh, a student in Bushehr.

According to Ministry of Education officials, at least 30% of students cannot use online learning due to lack of internet or smartphone access. Deputy Education Minister Javad Hosseini said in January that three million students did not have access to any smart devices - phones, tablets, or computers - and that only 12% had access to the Internet independently.²⁹

Teachers in disadvantaged areas, often working in the form of service purchases, are required to attend classes. The number of this group of teachers who are employed by

27 [Labor Rights in Iran Newsletter, No. 15](#), October-December 2020.

28 [Didban Iran \(Iran Watch\)](#), October 28, 2020.

29 [Radio Zamaneh](#), February 7, 2021.

hourly contracts through third-party companies reaches 21,700.

The Education Services Purchase Plan, which has been on the agenda of the Ministry of Education since 2015, allowed the ministry to “fully cover the educational needs of students by buying teaching services in areas where there is insufficient capacity in public schools.”

Service purchase teachers have a monthly income of about 500,000 to 700,000 tomans. Companies contracted with the Ministry of Education only pay them for the number of working days - 10 to 15 days per month. The cost of travel to the locations, which are sometimes far from urban areas, is borne by the teachers themselves. Some of them stay at the teaching location to reduce the cost of transportation.³⁰

The Iranian education system is facing a shortage of instructors due to declining enrollment in teacher training colleges and the retirement of current teachers. To fill the gap, in addition to hiring Service Purchase teachers, the Ministry of Education also employs graduates of other universities under Article 28 of the Farhangian University Statute. The salary of this group of teachers is about 2.8 million tomans per month.

Hourly-paid teachers, literacy instructors, kindergarten and preschool educators are among the other employees in the education sector who have precarious employment status. They receive low and sometimes less than the minimum wage. They have repeatedly rallied in front of the parliament building or the government educational buildings in the provinces over the past year. Their main demands are changing the job contract from temporary to permanent, eliminating intermediary contracting companies, enjoying the salaries and benefits of formal teachers, and being included in the teachers ranking scheme.³¹

Teachers in non-profit and non-governmental schools with temporary contracts and low salaries, also experienced more difficult conditions last year, especially after the coronavirus outbreak.³²

The Teachers' Union, which had been able to organize several nationwide demonstrations in the early academic year 2019-2020, lost the possibility of organizing a mass protest with the pandemic causing the closure of schools. However, these "informal" teachers staged protests at least 15 times during the year.

30 [Radio Zamaneh](#), February 18, 2021.

31 [Radio Zamaneh](#), September 12, 2020.

32 [Radio Zamaneh](#), September 24, 2020.

Working Children: Helpless in Hard Times

The plunging of families into poverty has led to an increase in the number of children who have dropped out of school. Also, according to children's rights activists, the coronavirus epidemic has increased the number of working children. In Isfahan province, the managing director of a non-governmental child assistance center announced in April 2020 that the number of working children was on the rise sharply.³³

There are no accurate statistics on the number of working children in Iran. In 2019, the Ministry of Labor announced that their number was about 500,000. Children's rights activists, however, report the employment of more than four million children. Most of them work as street peddlers or in garbage collection, waste separation shops, and construction workplaces.



The number of working children increased during the coronavirus epidemic.

Every year, government agencies such as the municipalities, the Welfare Organization, and the police implement projects called "Collecting and organizing the working children." With no positive effect so far, these initiatives have rather increased violence against working children.

In the last days of 2019, the officials of the Welfare Organization and the Ministry of Interior of the Islamic Republic announced that most of the children who have been "collected", meaning arrested, through the "collecting and organizing the working children" project are "non-Iranians" and "immigrants." The Director-General of Social Affairs at the Tehran Governor's office announced at the time that 400 Afghan children arrested as part of the collection plan would be returned to Afghanistan.³⁴

In August 2020, Iranian domestic media reported the deaths of four working children, all of whom were immigrants, in Shahinshahr, Isfahan Province. A few days earlier, the Iranian Students News Agency had reported the arrest and detention of 10 working

33 [Radio Zamaneh](#), May 17, 2020.

34 [Radio Zamaneh](#), March 15, 2021.

children in the basement of the Shahinshahr Welfare Office.³⁵

In May 2020, the Tehran municipality banned the employment of migrant children - or, as Islamic Republic officials call them, "illegal aliens" - in the waste collection and garbage separation sector.³⁶

In January 2021, Iranian news agencies reported the suicide of a working child named Mohammad in Mahshahr. He was 11 years old and, according to his family members, was a peddler.³⁷

In August, Mani, a child from the village of Shamshir in the city of Paveh, fell from a mountain while being chased by border guards. He had gone to work as Kulbar, or human mule/cargo carrier with his mother to buy a smartphone and attend online classes.³⁸

35 [Iranian Students News Agency \(ISNA\)](#), September 5, 2020.

36 [Radio Zamaneh](#), June 14, 2020.

37 [Borna News Agency](#), February 1, 2021.

38 [Hamshahri Online](#), September 14, 2020.

Labor Repression: Dismissals, Detentions, and Floggings

Following the Covid-19 pandemic, human rights organizations in Iran and civil society activists wrote letters to senior Islamic Republic officials calling for the release, even if temporarily, of prisoners to prevent them from contracting coronavirus in prisons. The authorities of the Islamic Republic, however, ignored these demands, made the conditions more difficult for the prisoners, and at the same time arrested more workers and union activists and transferred them to the same virus-infected prisons.

Jafar Azimzadeh, secretary of the Board of the Free Trade Union of Iranian Workers, fell gravely ill in prison, but officials refused to transfer him to a clinic. Mohammad Davari, a labor activist in Adel Abad Prison in Shiraz, contracted coronavirus. Several detainees of the November 2019 protests also contracted coronavirus in prison. Imprisoned teacher Ismail Abdi was denied access to medical services. In the last days of last year, he was transferred from Evin Prison to Rajai Shahr Prison. Jail relocation is a means of putting more pressure on labor activists, women, and political activists in prisons. In the last months of the Iranian calendar year 1399, many of these activists were "deported" from Tehran prisons to other cities.

Outside prison, in April and October, many trade union and labor rights activists were summoned or detained by security forces. Elvar Qolivand, Shabnam Ashouri, Loghman Pirkhezrian, Neda Pirkhezrian, Arash Johari, Valeh Zamani, Arman Ismaili, Osman Ismaili, Mohammad Salehi, and members of the board of directors of the Kamyaran Construction Workers' Association were among those summoned or detained by security forces on the anniversary of the November 2019 protests.

During the same period, at least three workers were sentenced, namely Rasoul Talibmoghaddam, a member of the Tehran Bus Company Drivers' Syndicate, Ruhollah Barzin, a bakery worker in Choram, and Davood Rafiei, a fired Iran Khodro worker.

Mohammad Habibi, a member of the Teachers' Union, and Mohammad Reza Ramezanzadeh, a member of the North Khorasan Teachers' Union, were expelled from the education system while in prison.

The managers of Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Company fired six labor representatives. They returned to work after their colleagues protested. Later, 26 Haft Tappeh sugarcane workers were summoned to court for protesting the dismissal of their colleagues. The cases of these workers are currently being heard in court.

In the Iran Khodro car factory in Tabriz, and the Fifth South Pars Gas Refinery in Bushehr province, the managers prevented the protesting workers go back to work. Workers at the Arak HEPCO Company, who were arrested during the 2018 and 2019 protests, were sentenced to imprisonment, flogging, and forced labor in a court of first instance. Arak officials later announced that they were acquitted.

The table below shows some of the pressure on labor activists over the past year:

Name	Title	Repression Method	Outcome
Jafar Azimzadeh	Member of the Free Trade Union of Iranian Workers	Retrial in prison, sentence of 13 months imprisonment, lack of access to medical services	Was released at the end of his sentence
Nahid Khodajoo	Member of the Free Trade Union of Iranian Workers	Summoning to prison, freezing a bank account	Awaiting transfer to prison
Nasrin Javadi	Member of the Free Trade Union of Iranian Workers	Summoning to prison, freezing a bank account	Awaiting transfer to prison
Parvin Mohammadi	Member of the Free Trade Union of Iranian Workers	Summoned to prison, trial in absentia and sentenced to one year in prison	Awaiting transfer to prison
Shapoor Ehsani	Member of the Free Trade Union of Iranian Workers	Summoned to prison	Imprisoned
Haidar Ghorbani	Member of Marivan Construction Workers Association	Detention, summoning by telephone to security agencies	Free on bail
Javanmir Moradi	Member of the Coordinating Committee for the Establishment of Trade Unions	Detention, solitary confinement	Free on bail
Osman Ismaili	Member of the Committee for the Defense of Imprisoned Workers	Summons to court	Acquittal
Mahmood Salehi	Member of the Committee for the Defense of Imprisoned Workers	Summons to court	Acquittal
Sajjad Shokri	Labor activist	Sentenced to four years in prison for participating in a Labor Day rally in 2019	Imprisoned
MaziarSeyednejad	Labor activist	Sentenced to four years in prison for participating in steel workers' rallies	Free on bail
Keyvan Samimi	journalist	Summoned to prison to serve a three-year prison sentence for participating in a Labor Day rally	Imprisoned
Davood Razavi	Member of the Bus Company Syndicate	Summons to security agencies	

Ata Babakhani	Member of the Bus Company Syndicate	Summons to security agencies	
HalehSafarzadeh	Member of the Association of Defenders of Labor Rights	Summoned to prison	Imprisoned
Alireza Saghafi	Member of the Association of Defenders of Labor Rights	Summoned to prison	Imprisoned
Tavakol Jamshidi	Representative of private bus drivers in Tehran	Arrest	Free on bail
Ali Ishaq	Labor activist	Sentenced to five years in prison for participating in the November 2019 protests	Imprisoned
Shabnam Ashouri	Member of the editorial board of Agahnameh magazine	Arrest	Free on bail
Elvar Gholivand	Civil-labor activist	Arrest	Free on bail
Neda Pirkhezrian	Civil-labor activist	Arrest	Free on bail
Loghman Pirkhezrian	Civil-labor activist	Arrest	Free on bail
Arash Johari	Labor activist	Detention - Sentenced to 16 years in prison	Imprisoned
Valeh Zamani	Member of the Painters' Trade Union	Arrest	Free on bail
Mehran Raouf	Labor activist	Arrest	Still being held in the IRGC detention center
Arman Ismaili	Labor activist, filmmaker	Arrest	Free on bail
Khosrow Sadeghi Borujeni	journalist	Summoned to prison for a three-year sentence	Imprisoned
Peyman Farhangian	Labor activist, author	Sentenced to 38 years in prison	Free on bail
MortezaHeydari	Labor activist	Arrest	Free on bail
Ali Nejati	Retired sugarcane worker	Summoned to serve 5 years in prison	Was previously on the "amnesty" list.
Ebrahim Abbasi Manjezi	Weekly sugarcane worker	Arrest, summons, deportation	Free on bail
Yousef Bahmani	Weekly sugarcane worker	Arrest, summons to court	Free on bail
Hamid Mombini	Weekly sugarcane worker	Arrest, summons to court	Free on bail
Masoud Hayuri	Weekly sugarcane worker	Arrest, summons to court	Free on bail
Hossein Hamdani	Weekly sugarcane worker	Arrest, summons to court	Free on bail
Mohammad Reza Dabirian	Weekly sugarcane worker	Arrest, sentenced to 222 lashes	

Reza Siyahi	Worker of Hamidiyeh Municipality	Arrest	Free on bail
Ismail Haghghatjoo	Worker of Hamidiyeh Municipality	Arrest	Free on bail
Ismail Abdi	Teachers' Union	Arrest, sentenced again to 10 years in prison	Exile to GhezelHesar Prison
Mohammad Reza Ramezan-zadeh	North Khorasan Teachers Union	Sentenced to 15 years in prison, 74 lashes, expulsion	Imprisoned
Himdreza Jalayee	North Khorasan Teachers Union	Sentenced to 4 years in prison	Free on bail
Ali Froutan	North Khorasan Teachers Union	Sentenced to three years and eight months in prison	Free on bail
Mustafa Robati	North Khorasan Teachers Union	Sentence to three years and eight months in prison	Free on bail
Saeed Haqparast	North Khorasan Teachers Union	Sentence to three years and eight months in prison	Free on bail
Hassan Johari	North Khorasan Teachers Union	Sentence to three years and eight months in prison	Free on bail
Jafar Ebrahimi	Teachers' Union	Arrest, summons, house search	Free on bail
Mohammad Habibi	Teachers' Union	laying off	Released from prison at the end of his sentence
Adel Asakreh	Teacher of SofehShadegan village	Sentenced to 9 years in prison	Free on bail
Hassan Kiarasi	Haft Tappeh paper worker	Arrest	Free on bail
Ismail Gerami	Retired worker	Arrest	Still in detention

Migrant Workers: The Hariroud Tragedy and the Legalization of Shooting at Immigrants

Immigrants' lives in Iran have become more difficult due to rising inflation, the recession, and the coronavirus pandemic. Financial support, although limited, did not go to immigrants. Although officials from the Islamic Republic, after meeting with Afghan officials, announced that "legal" migrants would be treated free of charge if they contracted the coronavirus, medical services did not include a large proportion of migrants who did not have a residence card. They were forced to leave Iran. Afghan officials announced in February 2021 that in the past year 500,000 Afghans had "voluntarily" left Iran. 150,000 of these migrants were forcibly returned to Afghanistan by Islamic Republic officials.³⁹

In November 2020, a group of lawmakers proposed to the parliament a bill called Organizing Foreign Nationals according to which immigrants entering Iran's borders without a permit would be fined up to 100 million tomans and returned immediately to their country of origin. The plan also calls it "legal" to shoot and kill immigrants, allowing military personnel to chase, hunt down, and open fire on immigrants in their moving vehicles. The families of the immigrants who are killed this way are not entitled to "Diya" or Islamic indemnity charges. In this plan, those citizens who help immigrants will also be punished.⁴⁰

Before the law's passage, Iranian border guards killed at least 10 Afghan refugees trying to enter Iran in April 2020. According to Afghan officials, Iranian border guards detained and tortured 46 Afghan refugees in the last days of April and dumped them in the Hariroud River, killing 10 and leaving 17 missing. Officials in the Islamic Republic of Iran have never formally denied responsibility for the killings.⁴¹

The detention of migrants and their transfer to special camps, the freezing of migrants' bank accounts, the restriction of their living quarters and allowing only "permitted" occupations for migrants, torture, ill-treatment, and denial of welfare services are other anti-immigrant measures taken by the Islamic Republic last year.

39 [Radio Zamaneh](#), February 24, 2021.

40 [Radio Zamaneh](#), November 28, 2020.

41 [Radio Zamaneh](#), May 11, 2020.

Kulbars and Sukhtbars: Bullets Instead of Bread

The closure of the borders, the plan to sell the fuel quota in the border areas to the Revolutionary Guards instead of local traders, and the brutality of the IRI's border guards made the life and livelihood of the *kulbars* (cargo carriers on foot, or 'human mules,' Western borders) and *sukhtbars* (fuelcarriers, Eastern borders) more difficult last year. In the past year, at least 45 *kulbars* have been killed (37 by direct bullets, 8 from frostbite, falls from heights, or landmine explosions) and 118 injured.

The government's promises to support the *kulbars* were in vain. In the final months of the year, the Barakat Foundation took on the responsibility of "creating jobs" for *kulbars*. The foundation employs workers by lending and setting up small workshops in villages and deprived areas. The Barakat Foundation is affiliated with the Imam Khomeini Executive Headquarters, which is run under the auspices of the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.

The border provinces of Kurdistan, Kermanshah, and West Azerbaijan, where most of the *kulbars* live, are among those with the highest unemployment rates. The official unemployment rate is 18.8% in Kurdistan, 18% in Kermanshah and 14.7% in West Azerbaijan.⁴²



Graffiti protesting the killing of Baluchis in Iran.

Sukhtbars in Sistan and Baluchistan experience a similar situation. According to government officials and members of parliament, the unemployment rate in some parts of the province, especially in the south, reaches 60%. Two-thirds of the region's population lives below the poverty line. Many young people in the area have been forced to resort to fuel smuggling or *sukhtbari* to earn a living. The IRI, in the form of a plan called Razzaq, has set a fuel quota for residents within a 20-kilometer radius of the border areas. The plan allows the residents to sell this quota outside Iran. Last year, the Revolutionary Guards (IRGC), which provides security for the country's eastern borders, was named as

42 [Radio Zamaneh](#), April 4, 2021.

the plan's executor.

By handing over the Razzaq plan to the IRGC, *sukhtbars* faced more restrictions on border crossings. In February 2021, *sukhtbars* were fired upon by IRGC in the Saravan border area. According to Baluch Rights Activists in Iran, 10 *sukhtbars* were killed and at least six were injured in the shooting. The killing of the *sukhtbars* sparked widespread protests in Baluchistan. Protesters occupied the governor's office in Saravan for several hours.⁴³ However, security officials disrupted the mobile phone network and cut off the Internet, depriving citizens of the opportunity to report on the crackdown.

Human rights activists have documented the killing of at least 46 *sukhtbars* by military personnel in the Iranian calendar year 1399.

43 [Radio Zamaneh](#), February 23, 2021.

Work Accidents

The coronavirus pandemic did not reduce work-related accidents. The Forensic Medicine Organization has confirmed the death of 1258 workers due to work accidents in the first eight months of the Iranian calendar year 1399 (from late March to late October 2020). In a separate report, 415 deaths from work-related accidents were reported in the last four months of the year, bringing the total number of workers killed in the workplace to 1,673 last year. During the same period, 5426 workers were injured on the job, according to news media reports. The highest rate of work accidents is still related to construction workers.⁴⁴

Chapter 4 of the Labor Law of the Islamic Republic, in two parts, explains the technical protection and occupational health requirements. Article 96 of this law makes the Inspection Office of the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor, and Social Welfare responsible for overseeing the implementation of regulations governing working conditions.⁴⁵

The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs has announced the ratio of the number of inspectors to the number of workers in Iran as one in 15,000. In March 2021, the chairman of the board of directors of the Association of Occupational Safety and Health Officials and a member of the Supreme Council of Technical Protection of the Ministry of Labor announced the number of labor inspectors at 1,200. He claimed that the increase in the number of labor inspectors was contrary to the general policies of Article 44 of the Constitution, which emphasizes privatization. The Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor, and Social Welfare has proposed that inspections of workshops and production units be entrusted to the private sector and non-governmental organizations.⁴⁶

Government agencies consider only accidents that occur in workshops covered by the Social Security Administration to be "work accidents." According to Article 60 of the Social Security Act, any accident while on duty that occurs to the "insured" worker is considered a work accident. For this reason, the annual statistics of the Social Security Organization and the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor, and Social Welfare do not include workers without contracts and no insurance who are injured or killed because of a work accident.

According to the Director-General of Labor and Employers' Organizations in February 2021, only 9.5 million Iranian workers are insured, of which only 6.5 million are covered by the labor law.⁴⁷

Uninsured construction workers, migrant workers in "informal" occupations, seasonal workers, and family workshop workers are among those who do not receive medical assistance or compensation in the event of an injury at work, and in the event of death because of accidents. The survivors are not compensated.

44 The statistics of work-related accidents have been collected based on reports and news published in the Iranian domestic media.

45 [Labor Law of the Islamic Republic of Iran](#), Chapter Four.

46 [Iran Labor News Agency](#), April 8, 2021.

47 [Nasim Online](#), March 15, 2021.

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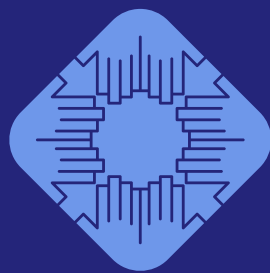
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