

## WORKERS RIGHTS WATCH

A semi-annual report on workers' issues, protests  
and evolving labor regulations in Iran

Jan. - Jun.'25

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# Executive Summary

A primary goal of Volunteer Activists (VA) is to enhance global awareness of pressing labor challenges and labor protests occurring in Iran. Recognizing the voices of Iranian workers on an international platform is vital for the progress of the labor movement in the country. Furthermore, a thorough understanding of the needs of Iranian workers and the demands of their trade unions allows international supporters to design more effective programs and initiatives. With its established connections in Iran, VA is well-equipped to provide this essential information.

This report outlines our findings on labor-related issues and protests in Iran from January to June 2025 – as well as an analysis of (potential) legal changes that may impact labor conditions in the country. It marks the sixth installment in a biannual series aimed at delivering consistent updates on labor dynamics and demonstrations within Iran.

The intricate nature of the Iranian labor landscape necessitated thorough and detailed research to accurately represent the current state of labor issues and challenges. Our evaluation incorporated various sources, including reliable media reports, social media analysis, and discussions with our contacts in Iran.

From our research, several significant insights regarding labor issues and protests in Iran from January to July 2025 have emerged:

- Widespread labor protests took place during this period, continuing until Israel attacked Iran from June 13 to June 25, 2025
- A major driver of these protests was the growing frustration over the Iranian economy's rampant inflation, which has not been matched by corresponding increases in wages and pensions.
- The Israeli attacks on Iran exacerbated the difficulties faced by workers in Iran.

Additional findings from this report can be found in Table 1 (next page).

## January - June 2025

455

Total labor protests

83

Cities across Iran

34

Worker sectors

38

Protest actions reached their demand

32%

Year over year Inflation rate

5

Government plans and bill drafts monitored

**Table 1: Key takeaways from labour protests and monitoring**

Between January and June 2025, 455 labor protests occurred across 83 cities in Iran according to our investigation.

While the number of protests and strikes was significant, it is likely that the total would have been even higher if not for the outbreak of the Israel-Iran armed conflict by mid-June.

Among the most prominent and high-profile protests were widespread rallies of retirees, intense demonstrations by farmers in Isfahan in April 2025, and a ten-day nationwide truckers' strike in June.

Main demands centered on delayed wage payments, wage increases aligned with the poverty line, implementation of pension and salary equalization policies, improved healthcare and social services, and opposition to layoffs and the exploitative practices of contractor companies.

Labor activists faced arrests, prison sentences, workplace disciplinary actions, and, in one instance, a death row sentence, merely for peacefully advocating for their rights.

While certain protests achieved success in compelling the government to reconsider their actions in specific areas, most fell short of achieving the desired outcomes.

A tragic explosion at the Port of Shahid Rajaee in southern Iran resulted in 57 deaths and over 1,000 injuries due to apparent government negligence in handling flammable materials.

Workplace accidents continued to be excessively high, claiming two to three lives daily in Iran.

Iran's energy crisis combined with a malfunctioning bureaucracy continued to put great pressure on workers, including bakers.

In the realm of lawmaking, some initiatives supported workers' rights, while others did not.

The international community can support Iranian workers by drawing attention to their plight and by helping the Iranian government attend to workers' needs during (renewed) conflict.

# 1 Introduction



*On June 16th, Israel bombed the Iranian state TV building.*

On June 12, 2025, Israeli aircraft, despite orders to target only military sites, ended up hitting civilian areas in Iran, causing significant suffering for ordinary Iranians. A striking example is the Farda Motors factory in Ashtriyān, Lorestan Province. After the Israeli attacks on Tehran and other cities, missiles struck the factory, destroying 90% of it. Tragically, two workers, Iman Goudarzi, a welder, and Hossein Naqdi, an assembly line worker, lost their lives, while 35 others were injured.

Staying at home wasn't necessarily safe either. On June 14, during the Israeli strikes on Tehran, Hadis Fakhari, a female employee of the Social Security Organization, was killed along with her eight-year-old child in their home. Her husband was critically injured. This situation illustrates the harsh reality of war, where civilians often bear the brunt of the violence (similar to how Iranian attacks on Israel have also resulted in innocent casualties).

The impact of the war on Iranian workers went beyond direct casualties, however. Fearing shortages, prices for food and essential items skyrocketed. Many businesses shut down, leading to widespread layoffs. This was especially devastating for informal day laborers, who depend on daily wages to survive. Under the guise of national security, the Iranian government seized the opportunity to target and deport Afghan migrant workers, labeling them as agents of Israel.

All of this unfolded against the backdrop of a pre-existing crisis. This meant that even after a ceasefire was established, the situation for Iranian workers did not improve. Both before and after the armed conflict, life in Iran was tough, with the working class facing a steady decline in living standards due to a struggling economy and government mismanagement for years. Ordinary Iranians have been dealing with soaring prices for food, rent, and other essentials, worsened by one of the highest inflation rates in the world. Iranian workers also faced job insecurity, unpaid wages, and, on top of this, a lack of government tolerance for peaceful labor protests. In this context, it can be said that Iranian workers were caught in a double bind: suffering from the Israeli attacks while also being under pressure from their own government.

So, how did Iranian workers cope during this challenging time in early 2025? What key issues did different occupational groups face beyond the war, and how did this lead to labor protests? How did the government respond to these pressures? Finally, what did the combination of Israeli attacks and government actions mean for Iran's independent labor unions and their perspectives?

## Methodology

This report builds on our monthly documentation of labor issues in Iran, as detailed on our Davtalab.org platform. These mini reports track significant labor strikes and gatherings each month, across various economic sectors. Additionally, we monitored legal developments related to labor rights and government responses to labor demands.

As in previous reporting cycles, our research embraced triangulation principles. First, verified reports from Iranian newspapers were analyzed. Second, we conducted social media monitoring, focusing on Telegram and WhatsApp channels commonly used by workers and labor activists to share information. This monitoring aimed to identify labor protests and various forms of worker rights violations, including administrative and occupational discrimination, arrests, judicial sentencing, imprisonment, and disruptions to professional activities through threats and harassment.

Further information was obtained from human rights monitoring websites and interviews with informed sources, particularly labor activists and retired workers pursuing legal claims. These perspectives provided deeper analytical context and contributed to documenting labor rights violations. Following this initial research, we conducted a targeted search for English-language sources, including newspapers and policy reports, which were incorporated into the report to enhance accessibility and facilitate verification for non-Farsi speakers.

This report includes only data and events that Volunteer Activists were able to collect and verify. Due to the complex mechanisms of repression in Iran and the country's vast size, it cannot provide a fully comprehensive picture of labor issues in the country.

This report aims to provide more of an insight into this. Altogether it has three main objectives:

- Outline the key challenges faced by workers, along with labor protests and online positioning during January – July 2025.
- Map government policies that impact labor issues and workers' rights.
- Propose a viable way forward for Iran's labor movement, the international community, and the Iranian government based on observed trends and patterns.

To align with its three main objectives, this report is structured into three sections. The following chapter will outline key labor issues in Iran during the period under study and delve into the labor protests that took place from January to July 2025. In addition, relevant online petitions and declarations will be discussed. Chapter three will focus on the governmental measures affecting labor issues during the study period, detailing the responses to the protests discussed in chapter two, as well as highlighting proposed bills and laws that could influence the labor rights of Iranian workers. The final chapter will analyze the main findings and offer recommendations to Iranian trade unions, the international community, and the Iranian government to improve the conditions of Iranian workers during times of crisis.

Volunteer Activists hope that this report provides a clear picture of the demands of workers in Iran and will contribute to empowering action in the pursuit of labor rights in Iran.

## 2 Labor issues in Iran

Protesting in the authoritarian Islamic Republic poses significant challenges, as it can result in imprisonment—a risk that applies equally to labor protests. However, as mentioned in the introduction, Iranian workers have the water up to their necks, due to Iran's economic decline exacerbated by government mismanagement. This chapter begins with an overview of the most pressing labor issues in Iran, followed by a detailed examination of the labor protests that occurred between January and June 2025.

### Unindexed wages, benefits and pensions

Due to governmental mismanagement of the economy, as well as the international sanctions, inflation is very high in Iran.

In 2025, Iran's inflation rate is projected to exceed 35%, making it one of the highest in the world. According to many in Iran, in reality price inflation in Iran is even higher.

Wages, pensions, and benefits haven't been adjusted to match these price developments. Widespread poverty is the result, with people struggling to pay for life's necessities. Unprecedented price hikes in the health sector in 2025 as well as a housing crisis further add to the misery – and anger – of workers in Iran.

#### Health Sector Crisis

In May 2025, Iran's Statistical Center reported a staggering 12.5% monthly inflation rate in the "Health and Medical Services" category, the highest rate for this sector in 14 years. This crisis is not solely due to sanctions; medication costs have increased by 400% since the removal of subsidized foreign currency. The downsizing of the "DaroYar" (medicine subsidy) program, mismanagement of insurance systems, rising healthcare costs, and insufficient investment further pushed the health system to the brink of collapse. In January 2025, Iranian Pharmacists Association Board Member Hadi Ahmadi acknowledged that due to the price hikes "three out of ten Iranians who visit a pharmacy can no longer afford their medication."

#### Housing Crisis

By summer 2025, Iran's housing market faced significant price increases, with some areas experiencing surges of over 40%. Government promises to cap rent hikes, increase housing assistance loans, and establish a formal rental market remained unfulfilled. The commitment to construct 300,000 housing units for workers failed to inspire confidence, particularly given the shortcomings of similar programs in previous administrations. As a result, tenants, especially those from low-income groups, experienced intense pressure, often being forced to downgrade their living standards, relocate to marginal areas, or accept substandard housing conditions. If this trend continues, it could lead to widespread homelessness.

### Late payment of wage

Not getting paid for months is, unfortunately, far from uncommon in Iran. Clearly, this has a huge impact on the welfare of the workers concerned, as well as their families. The immediate payment of salary arrears or deferred health or pension insurance may therefore be an important demand of protesting workers. In some cases, salary arrears never get settled.

### Mismanagement of companies

Iranian strikers sometimes also protest against the mismanagement, and consequently malfunctioning, of the companies they work for, demanding more competent leadership or governmental intervention.

Following the (partial) privatization of many former state companies, appointed CEO's and other high-ranking managers often thank their position more to their ties to the Iranian government than their capacities. When this compromises a company's performance and turnover, this can have huge consequences for workers, from job losses to salary arrears that get never settled.

### Energy Crisis

Since the second half of 2024, Iran has entered an unprecedented energy crisis, largely driven by gas shortages. This situation has led to state-mandated energy cuts, particularly during extreme heat and cold, as authorities attempt to conserve energy. The frequent power outages severely impact factories and businesses, making it difficult for them to remain operational with loss of work as a result.

*"There's no electricity for several hours in the morning. When it comes back, the machines either can't handle the power or get damaged. The line manager says there's no production go on unpaid leave. That means no work and no pay." - Statement from an interviewed worker from an industrial zone near Arak*

### Job insecurity

In 1996, Iran's Administrative Court of Justice stipulated that employers were allowed to use temporary contracts for jobs "of a continuous nature." Despite a relatively low [unemployment rate of 7.3 percent](#), job insecurity remains high due to the widespread use of temporary contracts, which now cover 90% of the workers. These contracts make it easier for employers to dismiss workers and harder for employees to push for fair treatment or permanent employment. As a result, achieving more equitable working conditions and securing permanent contracts may be crucial demands for protesting workers.

### Lack of freedom of association

During labor actions, demands for independent trade unions and freedom of association occasionally arise. While labor unions are not explicitly forbidden by law, these Civil Society Organizations need to be registered to obtain a license. In the case of independent labor unions, registration is typically denied, rendering them and their activities illegal.

### Arrests of labor activists

As will be illustrated in more depth in the following chapter, even the most peaceful labor union activists are detained in Iran and sent to prison. Demands for their release play often an important role in protests, especially those organized by the union they belong to. When 'common' workers get arrested during a strike or other actions, demands for their release also may become part of, or a reason for, follow-up protests.

### Dictatorship

Anti-governmental sentiments are also sometimes part of labor actions. Slogans like 'Down with the dictatorship' can sometimes be heard or seen. Whilst these sentiments became more prominent after the rise of Iran's protest movement in 2022, they were always there.



### Unsafe work environment

Working conditions in Iran, especially for so-called „blue-collar“ jobs, are often dire. According to Iran’s Social Security Organization, approximately 45,000 to 47,000 accidents are recorded annually, resulting in over 700 fatalities each year. Meanwhile, forty-five percent of the injured either become completely or partially disabled or die. Two tragic incidents in April highlighted once more the need for the Iranian government to engage more seriously with workers’ safety (see text boxes below).

### Living on the Periphery

Workers in borderlands, located far from the capital, often feel disproportionately impacted by the policies of the central government. Furthermore, the ethnic diversity in these regions often contrasts with the predominantly Persian political elite, which can lead to tensions and discrimination. As a result, the workforce in these areas faces unique challenges, prompting them to engage in labor actions more readily to advocate for their rights and needs.



#### Shahid Rajaee explosion

On April 26, 2025, a huge explosion occurred at the Shahid Rajaee Port in Bandar Abbas, Iran’s largest commercial port. The blast, triggered by a fire involving hazardous materials such as ammonium nitrate, resulted in at least 57 confirmed fatalities, although some reports indicate the death toll may be as high as 250. More than 1,000 workers sustained injuries, many of which were severe. The chemicals involved were not registered by Iran’s Ports and Maritime Organization, meaning that the storage and handling of these dangerous materials lacked oversight.



#### Mehman-Douyeh mine accident

Mining accidents are a frequent occurrence in Iran. Following the major Zareh Shahr coal mine incident in 2024, another tragedy unfolded on April 6, 2025. In the Mehman-Douyeh mine in Damghan, seven workers lost their lives due to gas suffocation and a lack of oxygen within a tunnel. This highlights the ongoing safety concerns in the mining industry, particularly regarding ventilation and emergency protocols.

### **Burdening Bureaucracy**

The Iranian government is notorious for its complex administrative procedures and regulations. Workers and businesses often face numerous hurdles as they navigate these bureaucratic processes, leading to significant delays in obtaining permits, licenses, and access to government funding. Additionally, apparent inefficiencies within the bureaucracy are exacerbated by issues of corruption and nepotism, fostering a perception that the government is exploiting the vulnerable to fill its own pockets. This sentiment contributes to growing frustration with governmental measures that are viewed as harmful to the average citizen.

### **Regional Conflict**

Iran's growing involvement in world and regional politics sometimes faces criticism domestically, as a significant portion of the working population believes that expenditure for military purposes had be better spent on combating poverty at home. This criticism was sometimes reflected in chants during protests prior to the war with Israel.

### 3 Labor protests in Iran

An analysis of the 455 labor protests that took place in the first half of 2025, highlights the diverse range of occupational groups involved and the variety of their demands. Protests spanned multiple sectors, including agriculture, transport, industry and the food sector. Furthermore, several groups of retirees organized large-scale protests, further illustrating widespread discontent across different segments of the Iranian population.

Expressions of discontent varied, with many groups articulating their grievances through physical gatherings in front of relevant government offices or through strikes. Additionally, online campaigns emerged as significant, and sometimes cross-sectoral, nodes of protest.

Below some of the most substantial and impactful protests are described, starting off with the offline ones.

#### Agriculture & Agrobusiness

In January 2025, farmers in Isfahan province, Iran, protested over water shortages. Farmers accused the government of breaking earlier promises by diverting water from the Zayandeh Rud river to other provinces, particularly Yazd. The river, vital for farming in the region, dried up in the process, thereby greatly affecting crops. These protests increased in late March and early April as the situation worsened, intensifying farmers' frustration over the government's failure to provide adequate water resources for agriculture. Farmers rallied in various locations, chanting slogans such as "Zayandeh Rud's water is our right" and "Thirty years of looting the river's water."

Unlike normal labor protests in Iran that go peacefully, the protests took an unexpected turn when on March 29, 2025, protests intensified when demonstrators set fire to a key water transfer station, disrupting water supply lines. The situation was described as critical, with officials warning of severe water shortages affecting the population in neighboring Yazd.

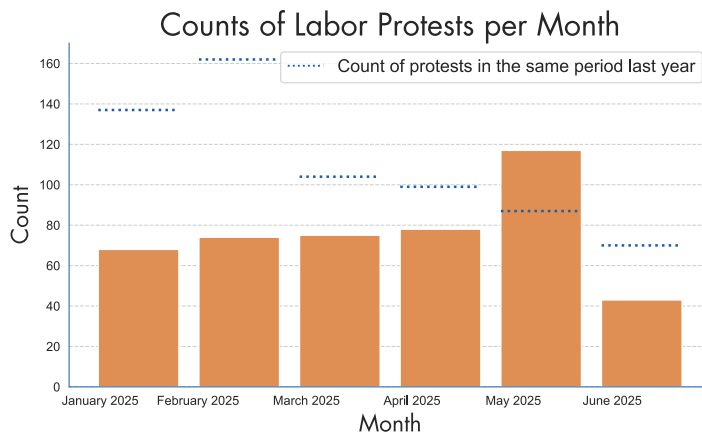
Meanwhile, canola and wheat farmers in Fars and Khuzestan province gathered in front of provincial and local government offices in May. They expressed their anger over power outages which had damaged their agricultural productivity whilst also demanding payment for the crops they had produced.

Other protests in the agricultural sector included those at the Haft-Tappeh Sugarcane Company located in south-western Iran. On March 26, 2025, seasonal sugarcane workers at the company demonstrated against job losses resulting from increased mechanization. This protest highlighted the workers' concerns about the impact of technology on their livelihoods. On April 5, 2025, Haft-Tappeh workers organized

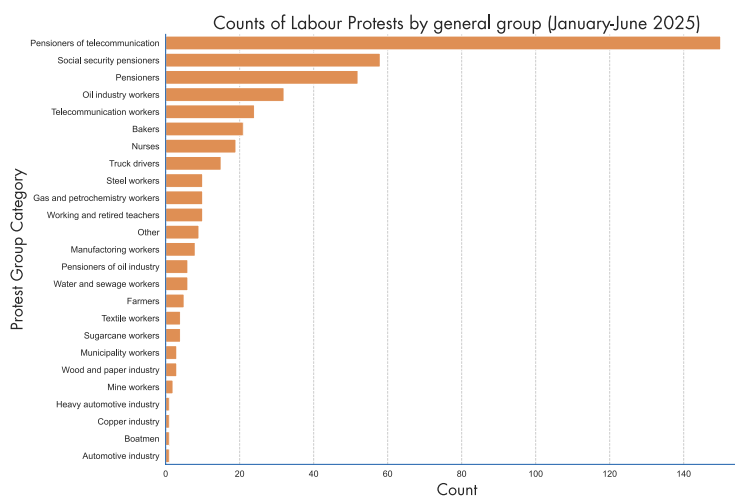


*Protest of farmers in Isfahan due to water shortage. Picture: [Iran Intl](#)*

## Statistics of labour protests between January and June 2025

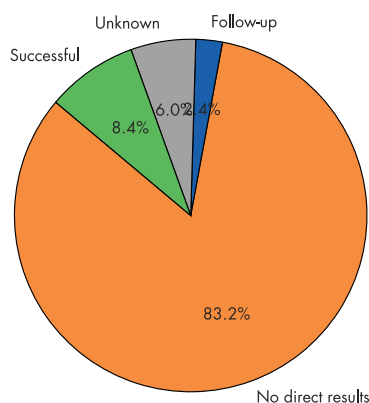


Compared to the same period in 2024, there has been a decrease in the number of protests. It's important to note that these figures represent only in-person actions and do not include online protest activities.



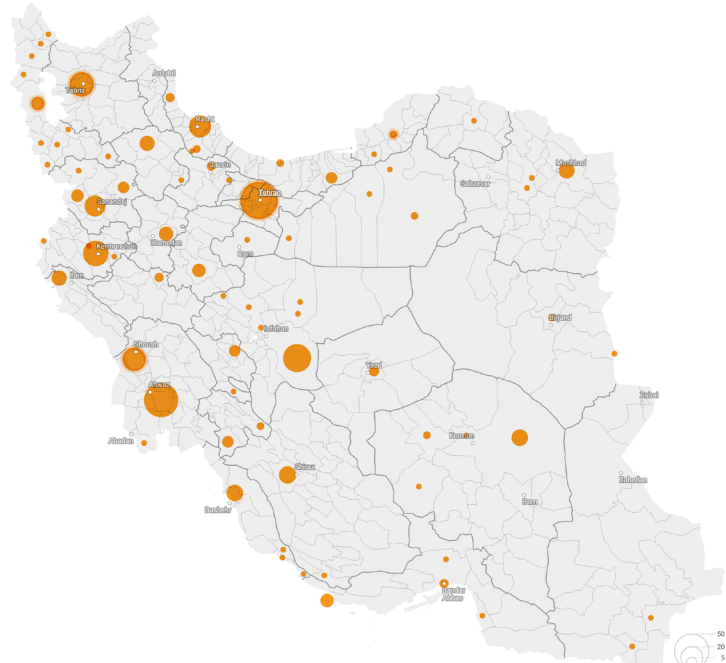
The majority of protest actions are carried out by pensioners, who assemble weekly in various cities across Iran.

### Distribution of Protest Outcomes



The majority of protest actions did not result in immediate change. Nevertheless, 8.4% of the protest actions were successful, resulting in the employer making concessions. Over 2% is negotiating or the employer has made promises, which need further follow-up.

Map of worker protests across Iran from January to June 2025



Most worker protests were registered in the western part of Iran. This area has more workplaces and industry compared to east Iran. West Iran is also more populated than the east. The overall geographical dispersion is similar to the same period last year.

another protest, this time addressing the critical issue of water shortages that were adversely affecting the sugarcane fields.

### Bakers

On May 17 and 18, 2025, bakers started to protest in multiple cities, including Isfahan, Ahvaz, Mashhad, and Qom. They called for urgent government intervention to address rising costs and unpaid subsidies, holding banners that read, “We are bakers, not slaves. Hear our voice.”

The protests were fueled by the failure of the government’s subsidy system, known as „Nanino,” which manages flour distribution to bakers. Bakers reported significant cuts to their flour quotas, making it impossible to sustain their businesses. In some cases, bakers were even forced to shut down their shops due to the mismatch between actually received amounts of flour and the amount eligible to receive. Many bakers expressed additionally frustration over rising costs, e.g. of fuel and insurance, alongside frequent power outages. Moreover, since the government transferred pricing authority to provincial governors and reduced bakery subsidies, [the price of bread nearly doubled](#), making it more difficult to sell. Also, POS systems frequently crashed while the system’s customer service fails to offer adequate support. Some bakers returned their card machines in protest.

The situation of bakery workers is even more dire. Working in hot, heavy, and poorly ventilated environments for up to 16 hours a day, they often lack insurance and job security. Most are paid daily wages and are the first to suffer when production drops. Some even sleep in the bakeries, spending months away from their families. Daily wages range from 300,000 to 500,000 tomans (3.75 USD to 6.2 USD) — sums that fail to meet the cost of living.

As part of the protests, bakers would sometimes dump raw dough that got wasted as a result in front of governmental offices. The protests continued into late May. Supporting the massive truck drivers’ strike (see below) was also increasingly a motivation for the protests.

The “Nanino” system, the state-run platform for managing bread distribution and sales aims to improve transparency and smart management of flour subsidies. Bakers receive flour based on the number of loaves of bread they sell. This process is monitored through a point-of-sale (POS) system, which registers each bread purchase. This is to prevent bakers from selling (subsidized) flour on the free market or exporting it.

However, the system got increasingly associated with excessive (provincial) government control, restriction, and quota reductions. Bakers are required to record the sale of each flour sack using multiple customers’ bank cards. If they fail to do so, the system logs a violation and reduces their quota. Power outages, device malfunctions, or even giving bread away for free to a worker are all considered violations. As a result, many bakers experienced significant income loss and quota cuts due to these rigid rules.

### Transport

The most significant strike in Iran’s transport sector involved truck drivers. In a massive ten-day strike, truck

In Iran, most truck drivers are small business owners who either lease or own their trucks.



drivers in dozens of cities across Iran demanded increased freight rates and improved working conditions.

On Monday, May 19, Iranian truck drivers brought the roads to a standstill by halting cargo loading at freight terminals, launching a new wave of nationwide strikes. The protests, which began in southern port city Bandar Abbas, quickly spread to dozens of other cities including Tehran, Kermanshah, Arak, Shiraz, Qazvin, Karouzan, Ilam, and Rostamabad..

A key grievance for truck drivers was the government's new fuel pricing plan set to take effect on June 21. This plan would drastically increase fuel prices for any usage beyond the established quota. Whereas truckers paid about 3,000 rials per liter (approximately 1.5 cents per gallon) based on GPS-tracked mileage and valid cargo waybills under the new plan, prices for excess fuel could soar to as high as 250,000

Table 2: Key grievances of Iranian truck drivers

Issue	Explanation
Unfair fuel allocation	Diesel fuel quotas for truckers were drastically reduced from 2,000 liters to just 100–200 liters per month. Delays in fuel distribution worsened the problem.
Inadequate freight rates	Freight tariffs did not keep pace with skyrocketing inflation and high truck maintenance costs. Repair and spare part expenses soared due to currency fluctuations.
Rising insurance costs	Social security and supplementary insurance premiums rose significantly, becoming unaffordable for many drivers.
Expensive spare parts	Prices for tires, oil, and other components got unaffordable due to dependency on expensive imports and free-market pricing.
Structural problems	Issues include freight mafias, police extortion on highways, lack of oversight on freight companies and middlemen, and discriminatory laws.



Truckers protested low incomes, rising costs, and the government's neglect of their professional needs.

Picture: [Radio Farda](#)

The National Union of Truckers and Drivers, a virtual platform, estimated that more than 100 cities participated in the strikes. However, this figure may be higher than the actual participation, since then the disruption to goods transportation and its potential impact on the economy and the distribution of essential commodities would likely have been higher. This is not to say the strike did not have a great impact. Videos on social media show roads being devoid of trucks altogether and truck driver gatherings at port entry and exit points. In some cities, there were even reports of fuel shortages and long lines at gas stations. According to analysts, even a five percent participation rate among truckers could disrupt the daily transport of 70,000 tons of cargo leading to shortages of essential goods, rising prices, and supply chain breakdowns.

rials per liter at market rates. While the government argued that the price hike was necessary to combat fuel smuggling, drivers contended that the quotas did not reflect their actual needs and that the increased costs would threaten their livelihoods.

The protests were coordinated by the National Union of Truckers and Drivers, a semi-underground network that utilized Telegram for organization.

These strikes represented more than just a labor dispute; they highlighted the escalating economic and social crises in Iran. As the backbone of the country's transportation system, truck drivers faced a multitude of challenges, and the government's inadequate responses only fueled the protests.

One driver stated: "We are not just fighting for ourselves, but for the future of our children. When the freight rates don't cover our costs and fuel is not delivered on time, how are we supposed to work and survive?"

The strike received widespread public backing, as many citizens resonated with the truckers' struggles against rising costs and economic hardship. Various labor unions also expressed their support, including the Workers of the Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company and the Coordinating Council of Teachers' Trade Unions of Iran (CCITTA). Drivers from Snapp, Iran's equivalent of Uber, also showed solidarity on social media.

The truck drivers' strike inspired other labor actions in May, including the continuation of the bakers' strike and protests by teachers. Hadi Ghaemi, executive director of the Center for Human Rights in Iran, [noted](#) that the strike resonated widely because the truck drivers were not just advocating for their own rights; they were shedding light on systemic injustices affecting millions. Truck drivers expressed a collective awareness that their struggle extended beyond their own interests. One driver remarked, "When truckers strike to defend their rights, they're defending the same rights taken from others." The strike's origin in Bandar Abbas was also significant, as the recent explosion in the area had severely impacted the local economy and safety, with some drivers asserting that the blood of the victims was not spilled in vain.

The Iranian truckers' strike garnered significant attention from international organizations, including the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) and the North American Truckers' Union. Steve Cotton, the ITF's General Secretary, condemned the judicial threats directed at the drivers (as discussed in the next chapter) and called on both the Iranian government and the International Labour Organization (ILO) to respond to the drivers' economic demands.

State-affiliated media such as the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) attempted to downplay the strikes by reporting that transportation operations were "running normally". However, the strike had clear repercussions on the economy, disrupting the delivery of agricultural goods and hampering industrial inputs.

Given that trucks transport around 80-90% of all domestic freight in Iran, the protests highlighted the essential role of truckers in the nation's economy.

Another protest in the transport sector, which had already occurred earlier on, involved metro workers.

On April 20, Tehran Metro workers staged a demonstration [outside the municipality and city council offices](#) to protest, among others, their unpaid wages. As reported by the regime-affiliated ILNA news agency, chants included "Full enforcement of the Supreme Labor Council's wage resolution" and "An end to unregulated hiring practices."

The Tehran Metro is recognized as the largest subway system in the Middle East. It is owned and operated by the Tehran Urban and Suburban Railway Company. Each day, Tehran Metro accommodates more than 3 million passengers.

### Pensioners

In recent months, retirees' protests in Iran intensified and became more persistent, turning into one of the most continuous and widespread forms of social dissatisfaction in the country. Retirees from various sectors, including Social Security retirees (approximately 8 million), civil service retirees (around 1.7 million), steel retirees (about 100,000), and especially retirees from the Telecommunication Company of Iran (though the exact number of these retirees was unknown), took part in these protests. What set these protests apart was not just their recurrence across different cities and times, but the active presence of elderly Iranians, many of whom, despite poor health, filled the streets with passionate, protest-driven chants.

Slogans such as "No to war, no to bloodshed, we want lasting welfare," "Expensive bread, expensive medicine, yearning for a morsel of bread," and "When it was our turn, the treasury was empty" reflected a deep economic crisis and the severe concerns facing a large portion of retirees. Low and fixed pensions, when matched against skyrocketing inflation and the soaring costs of basic goods, medicine, housing, and healthcare, forces many retirees to live below the poverty line, unable to meet even their most basic daily needs.

Telecommunication retirees, who were among the most organized groups in these protests, specifically demanded the full implementation of a 2010 regulation that adjusted their pensions based on years of service, job position, and real inflation rates. Their protests often featured slogans such as "Implementation of the regulation is our absolute right" and "Enough discrimination," emphasizing their demands to the telecom company and relevant governmental institutions. Steel retirees, meanwhile, voiced serious concerns about the poor state of their pension fund, delayed payments, lack of pension harmonization, and insufficient financial support. They staged repeated protests in front of government buildings in cities such as Isfahan, Ahvaz, Tehran, and Tabriz.

A key component of these protests was also the involvement of Social Security retirees, who make up a large segment of the country's retired population and often received the minimum pension. Their main demands included full implementation of pension harmonization, pension increases in line with real inflation, payment of backdated dues, improvements in healthcare services, and restoring the Social Security Organization's independence from government control. Common slogans included "Social Security must be freed from government monopoly" and "We won't stop until we get our rights."

Beyond economic demands, retirees also targeted the government's inefficiency in their protests. They blamed corruption, mismanagement, and indifference from the economic and political elite for their suffering. Slogans such as "Death to these managers," "Where was inflation control? Stop lying to the people,"



### Most frequently voiced labor demands from January – July 2025

1. Payment of Back Wages and Increasing Salaries and Pensions in Line with Inflation and the Poverty Line: This was a constant demand from both workers and retirees across all months.
2. Implementation of Salary Equalization for Retirees and Active Employees: A shared demand from retirees of various pension funds and teachers, frequently heard as a unifying slogan during protests.
3. Improvement of Working Conditions and Elimination of Intermediary Contractors: Especially in oil, gas, petrochemical, telecom, and industrial sectors, workers have called for reforms to eliminate third-party contractors that undermine labor rights through exploitative outsourcing arrangements.

reflected deep-seated anger and widespread distrust toward the authorities. Finally, there were sometimes also demands for the release of labor activists in prison, including Esmail Gerami who was imprisoned for organizing retiree protests.

### Education & Health Sector

In January, February, and May 2025, teachers organized protests to demand formal, permanent employment status, overdue wage payments, and pension equalization. Many also raised concerns about the lack of enforcement of the new salary grading system reflected in their pay statements. Protesting teachers included those on temporary contracts and literacy educators, with retired teachers also participating in the demonstrations.

Nurses were also highly dissatisfied with their working conditions. In February 2025, they protested delayed wage payments, their extremely low salaries, and issues related to overtime pay and service tariffs. Mohammad Sharifi-Moghaddam, the Secretary-General of Iran's Home of Nurses (a type of state-sanctioned professional organization for nurses), reported that some nurses in Tehran are essentially homeless due to having to live in poverty. To avoid paying rent, they work multiple shifts and sleep in their cars during rest hours. Harsh working conditions were also a focus point. No wonder, since according to World Health Organization standards, there should be three nurses per 1,000 people. However, Sharifi-Moghaddam noted that in recent years, Iran has reached a record low, [with only „one and a half nurses“ per 1,000 people](#). This not only increases patient mortality, it also means that Iranian nurses have to work extremely hard, [with some literally collapsing as a result](#).

### Oil, Petrochemical & Gas sector

From January through June 2025, workers in the oil, gas, and petrochemical industries staged widespread protests across multiple regions, including Ahvaz, Gachsaran, Bushehr, Mahshahr, Lavan Island, and Tehran. A central demand in nearly all demonstrations was the removal of contractor companies, with workers calling for status conversion, permanent contracts, and equal access to job benefits and welfare services. Protesters frequently cited the non-implementation of the job classification scheme, low wages, and the failure to enforce labor laws.

Contract and third-party workers were particularly vocal. Many had not received wages for several months, and others reported being denied end-of-service bonuses, overtime pay, or even the right to protest. Some strikes, such as those in South Pars and Mahshahr, were met with threats of retaliation by management, including delayed claims processing and dismissal. Several protests also raised concerns

about discriminatory practices, particularly against Baluchi workers and those in support roles, and pointed to unequal treatment between permanent staff and those on temporary or outsourced contracts.

The protests spanned both state-run and private entities in the energy sector, with many workers highlighting harsh working conditions, salary cuts, increasing taxes, and the absence of long-promised employment reforms. Despite repeated demonstrations, in almost all cases no official response was given. Where responses were issued, such as in Mahshahr, they amounted only to verbal promises with no concrete follow-up.

### Manufacturing & Industry

Meanwhile, in manufacturing and industry, there were several strikes and other types of protests. These included a three-day strike by workers at the Borujerd Textile Factory in Borujerd, which took place in mid-February 2025. Frustrated by months of unpaid salaries, the workers united in their demand for justice.

As spring approached, the pattern of labor unrest continued to unfold. On May 13th, aluminum factory workers in Arak held demonstrations inside their plant. They expressed their concerns over production disruptions caused by frequent power outages, which threatened not only their jobs but also the stability of their families.

The unrest spread further, with workers in the Kheirabad Industrial Zone and Shiraz Industrial Park taking action on May 11th, 2025. They blocked roads in protest, highlighting the paralysis of production processes, due to power cuts and inadequate managerial planning.

### Online initiatives

In recent years, workers and labor activists have increasingly utilized online campaigns, petitions and statements to try and influence Iran's labor landscape. When it came to sector-specific initiatives in the first part of 2025, teachers were particularly active – alongside other state-affiliated groups such as nurses and civil servants in administrative positions. In cross-sectoral initiatives, concerns over a fair minimum wage were prominent, alongside broader issues related to human rights & democracy.

Online campaigns in Iran are often launched on [www.karzar.net](http://www.karzar.net), an Iranian equivalent of Change.org, and frequently incorporate petitions.

### Teachers

**Campaign for Aligning Teachers' Salaries with Inflation:** This initiative demands that teachers' monthly salaries be raised to at least 40 million tomans to reflect the cost of living, ensuring they can live with dignity.

**Campaign to Reform or Dissolve the Teachers' Savings Fund:** Members of the Teachers' Savings Fund are calling for reform and restoration of their rights due to management issues and financial mismanagement. A petition for the fund's dissolution was submitted on April 13, citing poor economic returns and lack of transparency.

**Nationwide Teachers' Campaign:** Launched jointly by teachers and teacher retirees, this campaign demands the allocation of 25,000 special allowance points to teachers to address the disparity between their salaries and living costs.

## Nurses

**Nationwide Healthcare Workers' Campaign "25,000 Special Allowances Points are a Health Worker's Right":** Similar to the teachers, healthcare workers are advocating for the full allocation of 25,000 special allowance points, emphasizing their sacrifices during the COVID-19 pandemic. Over 72,000 signatures have been collected in support.

## Miscellaneous

### **Request to Reconsider the 20% Salary Increase for Government Employees and Retirees in 2025:**

This campaign calls for a minimum 30% wage increase for government employees and retirees to match inflation rates, urging the President to adjust salaries according to the real cost of living.

### **Campaign to include Dispute Resolution Council Employees in the Public Sector Employee Organization Scheme:**

On June 22, 2025, a campaign was launched to capitalize on the ongoing delays in the government employee organization plan (see next chapter), advocating for the inclusion of 10,000 contract employees working for the Dispute Resolution Council. Organizers sent a letter to Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, the Speaker of Parliament, requesting necessary directives to ensure these contract employees will also be eligible for direct employment by the government on a permanent contract.

The Dispute Resolution Council in Iran is a governmental body within the judiciary, designed to foster amicable resolutions between individuals and/or private entities. Its primary goal is to alleviate the burden on the courts and streamline the process of resolving disputes.

## Cross sectoral initiatives

### **Campaign for a 70% Increase in the Minimum Wage:**

As the Supreme Labor Council approached its deadline for setting the annual minimum wage in March 2025, labor groups advocated for a wage increase in line with Article 41 of the Labor Law. The "Campaign for a 70% Wage Increase for 2025" gathered over 115,000 signatures from March to April. Led by Alireza Mirghafari of the South Pars Refinery Workers' Union, the campaign aims to prevent labor representatives in the Labor Council from endorsing inadequate wage decisions, as seen in 2024.

### **Determination of the minimum wage**

The annual minimum wage in Iran is officially determined by the Iranian Supreme Labour Council, which includes representatives from the government, employers, and employees. In practice, the interests of employees carry less weight than employers' ones. Despite the council's stated purpose to adjust the minimum wage according to price inflation, this doesn't always happen or the government may disregard the council's recommendations. As a result, the Iranian minimum wage often fails to provide a viable income, impacting overall wages and pensions. The establishment of the minimum wage for 2023 and 2024 in Iran caused significant controversy and triggered public protests.

**Union Declarations on Stance Regarding Israeli Attacks:** Following the Israeli and then the U.S. attacks on Iran, various independent labor and professional organizations took to the web to voice their anti-war statements in response to the escalating conflict in Iran and the surrounding region. These included the Syndicate of Workers of the Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company, The Syndicate of Workers of Haft-Tappeh Sugarcane, Retired Workers of Khuzestan, The Retirees' Unity Group, The Coordinating Committee to Help Form Workers' Organizations, The Teachers' Trade Association of Iran (Tehran), and The Coordinating Council of Teachers' Unions of Iran, emphasized their commitment to democracy and human rights. They

condemned violence as a means to gain power and asserted that only the Iranian people had the right to determine their future.

The unions highlighted the devastating impact of war on the working class and called for an immediate ceasefire, arguing that war merely serves imperialist interests while harming the populace. They rejected the notion that Israeli attacks were a legitimate means to dismantle the Ayatollah regime, pointing out that forced regime change had historically failed to establish sustainable democracy. Instead, they advocated for social struggle, class solidarity, and grassroots organization as the true paths to liberation, warning that the solution to Iran's challenges lay not in militarism but in the collective voice of the people.

The stance of these unions was particularly significant given the heavy persecution they face from the Iranian government. Their declarations against foreign aggression not only reflected a principled stand for democracy and human rights but also served as a courageous act of defiance against a regime that sought to silence dissent. By advocating for social struggle and grassroots organization, they asserted that the path to liberation lay in the collective voice of the people, rather than in the destructive forces of war.

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## 4 Government policies & law-making

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Even the most authoritarian government needs to maintain semblances of legitimacy by occasionally addressing the socio-economic needs of their citizens. This dynamic is evident in the Iranian government's responses to (longstanding) labor demands. While it seeks, on one hand, to ruthlessly persecute Iranian activists, the period under study also saw the Iranian government grant concessions to certain protesting worker groups, including in the area of law-making.

### Governmental responses to labor protests

#### *Suppression*

While Iran is a member of the International Labour Organization, it does not endorse independent activism. What's more, in the first part of 2025 pressures on labor and trade activists intensified compared to 2024. The government frequently sought to suppress and harm labor rights activists, including through crackdowns and arbitrary arrests, judicial prosecutions, prison sentences and other deterrents.

#### *Crackdowns & arbitrary detention*

Arrests and crackdowns in the first six months of 2025 can be broadly divided in two categories. First, a crackdown on renowned labor activists, some of which had already been sentenced before. This was particularly the case at the start of 2025 and happened in particular in Kurdistan. For instance, on January 6, 2025, Sosan Razani, a well-known women's and labor rights activist from Sanandaj (Kurdistan), was interrogated and accused of "propaganda against the state" and "disturbing public opinion."

Sometimes, arrests were also carried out preemptively. For instance, in January 2025, Tariq Kaabi, a worker at the Haft-Tappeh Sugarcane Company, was taken from a work shuttle and forcefully arrested by intelligence agents on his way to work for allegedly distributing materials on workers' rights online. He is currently being held in Dezfoul prison. (That said, Kaabi is the family member of former political prisoner Maher Kaabi and current prisoner Ahmad Kaabi, and his arrest may also have been linked to these family ties).

In the spring, the trend of repression continued unabated. Instead of primarily targeting well-known labor representatives, arrests started to increasingly include ordinary participants in protest movements, including those who played highly active roles. On March 26, security forces confronted seasonal sugarcane workers at Haft-Tappeh Sugarcane Company during a demonstration against job losses caused by mechanization. This clash resulted in injuries to both workers and security personnel, with several workers being detained.

On April 21, 2025, five Tehran Metro employees—Hashem Golafshan, Aqil Nasrollahi, Reza Fozifard, Asghar Choupani, and Hadi Khoshbakht—were arrested by agents from the Ministry of Intelligence. These workers, who served as representatives and acted as intermediaries in negotiations with management, were released on bail only after paying a sum of 20,000 USD.

Following the truck drivers' protests that began on May 22, at least 40 drivers were arrested for „disrupting public order,” „inciting strikes,” or „being exploited by enemies.”

In eastern Isfahan, farmers protesting the revocation of their water rights and discriminatory water policies faced significant repression. In particular, during May, these protests were met with a robust security response as authorities attempted to suppress the unrest.

The bakers' protests were also met with violence. Peaceful gatherings were sometimes dispersed with extreme force; a video from Mashhad on May 24 shows officers violently breaking up a protest.

In June, the arrest of bakers began. Faraj Faraji, a baker from Ilam province, was detained on June 4th after dumping spoiled dough outside the provincial governor's office. Although he was released following local protests demanding his freedom, he has since been summoned to court.

In Iran, individuals can be taken away and subjected to arbitrary detention, even while already incarcerated, highlighting the systemic abuses within the justice system. On December 22, 2024, Mohammad Davari, a labor activist serving a 4.5-year sentence in Adilabad Prison in Shiraz including for „insulting the Supreme Leader,” was taken to an unknown location for 17 days, where he was tortured before being returned to prison.

### Sentencing

In addition to rounding up labor activists, the Iranian authorities tried to create a climate of fear by handing down harsh sentences to labor activists. Whereas some of the individuals arrested in the first half of 2025 were freed for good, others were merely released on bail to be sentenced later on. A significant case is that of Kamran Sakhtemangar, a former political prisoner and labor activist, who was apprehended without a warrant by Ministry of Intelligence agents in Sanandaj, on February 6, 2025. He secured his release on bail on March 11, 2025, but was later summoned to court on June 9, 2025. During this hearing, Sakhtemangar faced accusations of “propaganda against the regime” at Branch 2 of the Revolutionary Court in Sanandaj.

The first part of 2025 also saw various labor activists being sentenced based on arrests predating 2025. This mainly involved teacher activists, whose union (CCITTA) was once the most organized and powerful in

On his personal page, Kamran Sakhtemangar asserted that freedom of expression is a fundamental civil and political right, and he defended his position at the court hearing, providing a range of social, political, and legal arguments against the death penalty.

Iran. Several teachers who had peacefully demonstrated in past years for enforcement of the salary ranking law, pension equalization, and the release of imprisoned colleagues got sentenced. For example, in a joint case, the Revolutionary Court of Ahvaz sent four teacher union activists—Siamak Sadeghi Chehrazai, Kokab Bedaqi Panah, Pirooz Nami, and Ali Koroshat—to a combined 24 years in prison on 7 January 2025.

Also, in March 2025, 15 teacher activists, including Mohammadreza Moradi, Salah al-Din Hajimirzaei, Behzad Ghavami, Seyed Ghiyas Na'mati, Reza Tahmasebi, and others, were summoned to the Sanandaj Criminal Court for participating in June 2022 protest gatherings, which were supported by the teachers' union.

Meanwhile, many other (teacher) labor activists who were already sentenced in previous years remain imprisoned.

Furthermore, in a chilling development, Iranian authorities sentenced female

It's not just teachers who are jailed for their beliefs in Iran; the same applies to many school principals. For instance, in March, the Qazvin Revolutionary Court sentenced Kobra Taherkhani, a school principal and teachers' union activist from Qazvin, to three years in prison. She was convicted of „insulting Khamenei” and „propaganda against the Islamic Republic,” stemming from content about (worker) rights she posted on her Instagram account.

labor activist Sharifeh Mohammadi to death for the second time in February 2025, despite the Supreme Court having previously overturned her initial sentence in October 2024. Mohammadi was previously a member of the Association of Labor Organizations.

### **Physical, Psychological, and (Threats of) Sexual Violence**

Both during their arrests and in prison, labor activists habitually endure physical and psychological torture. There is also increased openness about the use of (threats of) sexual violence by authorities, targeting both females and males. Activist Mohammad Davari bravely brought this topic to public attention in a letter to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, which was made public in January 2025.

Davari wrote:

"I have heard your recent statements emphasizing action against those who disturb society's 'psychological security.' Yet, not even a month after my father's death, I got abducted from prison [in December 2024] under brutal conditions, leaving my mourning family—who were preparing for his fortieth-day memorial—in a state of terror and despair. ... I was beaten so badly that my ribs and chest were bruised, my nose bled, my feet were wounded, my glasses were broken, and I was humiliated and sexually threatened with a broken bottle to silence me. For what crime?"

His openness is notable given that (threats of) sexual violence carry a significant taboo, especially in a relatively conservative society like Iran.

### **Psychological Torture**

Psychological torture can take many forms. One method employed by Iranian authorities is to inflict harm on political prisoners through their families. For instance, prison authorities informed Sharifeh Mohammadi of the renewal of her death sentence on her son Aydin's 13th birthday. At other times, Iranian police may arrest family members who are not imprisoned on fabricated charges.

### **Other deterrents**

In addition to arrests and the threat of imprisonment, Iranian authorities employ various work-related measures to punish teacher activists. For example, in May 2025, the Kurdistan Education Disciplinary Committee initiated administrative cases against several teachers: Mohi al-Din Reyhani, Leila Zarei, Nasrin Karimi, Faisal Noori, Salah Hajimirzaei, Majid Karimi, and Ghiyas Na'mati. As a result, these teachers may lose their job, (with little chance of reemployment), lose essential job benefits, or risk being reassigned to remote areas for work.

Besides proactive suppression and punishment, the Iranian government's response to labor actions and activists between January and June 2025 included two other reactions:

### **Passive**

In many cases, the government took no or minimal action to disperse protest gatherings or break up strikes. This suggests a degree of implicit recognition of the validity and legitimacy of these protests by the Iranian government. However, this approach also led to the ongoing neglect of workers' demands, even when they were legally justified or despite previous assurances.

### *Striking Compromises*

While most of the protests detailed in the previous chapter did not result in significant achievements, some did secure partial successes. Below are some notable achievements:

1. **Truck Drivers** Truck drivers' concerns were discussed during an open session of the Iranian Parliament, including rising costs of tires, increased insurance premiums, lack of spare parts and challenges related to fuel quotas. In response, MPs promised to import (more) tires and to try and ensure a fair distribution of fuel quotas. Additionally, the Ministry of Roads pledged to streamline the registration process for imported trucks. On June 4, 2025, Parliament formally approved these measures, along with a moderated decrease in insurance premiums, improved fuel quotas, and higher transport rates.

Although many truck drivers announced they would continue protesting until their key demands, such as aligning fare increases with inflation, far fairer fuel allocation, and much lower insurance costs, were more closely addressed, the protests were suspended following Israel's attack on Iran.

2. **Bakers** The widespread protests in May prompted the government to implement reforms. Despite intermittent disruptions in the banking system, the payment of bread sales revenue was resumed, and a new system was introduced allowing citizens to purchase bread on credit. Although these reforms were preliminary and influenced by wartime conditions, they signified the national impact of bakers' protests.
3. **Retired Telecommunication Workers** After years of persistent protests, including weekly gatherings in front of government buildings, retired telecommunication workers successfully secured part of their financial entitlements. They received a long-overdue 30% increase in retirement benefits from the Telecommunications Company of Iran, aligning their pensions with telecom workers' salaries.
4. **Municipal Workers** Through union pressure and repeated demonstrations, both in 2024 and into 2025, the Islamic Consultative Assembly (Parliament) passed a plan on April 23 adding special bonuses to the income of municipal workers, such as administrators. These benefits aligned their income more closely with that of other government employees, thereby improving their living conditions.

These examples illustrate that labor protests, even when strong, independent unions are largely absent or cannot operate freely, can yield tangible results. The continuous and determined efforts of labor groups, along with widespread societal support, have gradually created the necessary pressure for decision-making bodies to respond, highlighting the significant potential of labor activism within Iran's current social structure.

### *Online petitions and statements*

None of these seemed to have had the desired effect, at least not yet in June. Having said that, the campaign for a higher minimum income may have influenced government decisions in that area by increasing the minimum wage more than before (see also below). However, this is difficult to ascertain.

### **Labor-Related Plans and Bills**

Besides responding to labor demands during protests, the Iranian government and parliament also sought to fundamentally change the labor landscape through law-making efforts. The section below discusses the most important developments.

### *Determination of the Minimum Wage for the Persian year 1404 (2025-2026)*

*Latest Status: Approved by the Government*



The determination of the minimum wage is often highly contested in Iran. It is supposed to follow inflation rises but often falls short of that. As VA's previous labor reports indicated, earlier mismatches led to large-scale protests.

This time, the government decided on March 16 upon a 45% minimum wage increase for the upcoming Iranian New Year. This figure is relatively significant compared to previous years. Having said that, it still falls far short of the two main legal variables in determining the minimum wage, namely the cost of living basket, representing the minimum monthly cost for basic needs, as well as the inflation rate (see also text box below).

According to the Statistical Center of Iran, the point-to-point inflation rate for households from March 21 to April 20, 2025, was 38.9%, with food inflation reaching 42.7% compared to the same month last year. Vegetables and legumes experienced a staggering 89.1% increase, making them the highest among food categories, followed by fruits and nuts at 65%. Although these figures are conservative and do not fully capture the real market situation, they reveal a harsh reality: from March 2024 to March 2025, an Iranian family needed to spend 90% more than the previous year just to purchase basic items, which have increasingly become substitutes for meat. Meanwhile, the minimum wage increased by only 45%, resulting in approximately a 50% wage gap for purchasing essential food items. In this context, Faramarz Tofghi, a labor activist and former workers' representative in the Supreme Labor Council, commented on the true extent of wage lag: "A simple calculation shows that from March 2024 to March 2025, the dollar increased in value by 79%. In contrast, wages rose by only 45% and 32% during the same period. Even assuming no speculation or profiteering, and that the dollar's price increase directly translated into cost-of-living inflation, wages are at least 34% behind. In short, while the dollar went up 79%, wages rose only 45%. To compensate for the wage lag caused by the dollar increase in 2024, wages should rise by at least another 34%."

### **Public Sector Employee Organization Scheme**

*Status: Awaiting Implementation by the Government and Parliament*

This plan aims to tackle the uncertain job status of public sector employees which are commonly not directly employed with the Iranian government but on temporary contracts through contracting agencies. The scheme entails the full elimination of these outsourcing companies. Instead, public sector employees should work directly for the government, and preferably on a permanent contract. By improving both pay and workplace rights as well as job security, this plan would signal a considerable improvement for public sector employees.

After four years in development, the plan was still not finalized by the end of June 2025. However, compared to previous years, both the government and Parliament have begun to engage more seriously with the scheme, each proposing their own plans to facilitate its implementation. Following various cabinet meetings on the scheme, the government submitted its proposal to Parliament on May 11, 2025. It was decided that after review and consensus in a relevant commission, a resolution should be reached. The parliament reviewed the plan while also presenting its own. It also announced that if the government were not to accept its draft, it would proceed with its own urgent double-priority bill.

During a visit to Parliament by the director of the Administrative and Recruitment Affairs Organization, Ali Babaei Karnami, the head of the Parliament's Social Commission, expressed the expectation that the

government would approve the bill and submit it for finalization by June 20th, given the great efforts made by the members of Parliament.

However, the government ultimately did not agree to any proposals that day. It remains unclear whether this was solely due to the outbreak of armed conflict with Israel or if other factors were also at play.

### ***The Supportive Livelihood Coupon Plan***

*Latest Status: Partially implemented by the Government*

In June 2023, the Iranian government established the National Credit Network, a food rationing and electric coupon program targeted at low income groups. Following on from that, the current fourteenth government, promised the provision of electronic coupons (known as "Kala Barg-e Electronic") to a wider range of the population. These digital vouchers allow households to purchase essential goods. While originally targeting only the first three income deciles, under President Masoud Pezeshkian's guidance the plan now also includes deciles four to seven (albeit with less credits allocated, thereby benefiting around 75 % of the population).

While the Kala Barg scheme provides significant support to Iranians, its implementation faltered. Although the scheme was successfully executed in both March and April, the third round, originally scheduled for May 10, was postponed due to a lack of funding and got rescheduled for July.



*The Kala Barg credits are exclusively for purchasing specific essential items, including meat, rice, oil, pasta, milk, cheese, yogurt, sugar, eggs, and legumes, from designated stores. They cannot be converted to cash. Picture: [Asr Iran](#)*

### ***Amendments to Early Retirement Plan***

*Latest Status: Under Review by the Government and Chamber of Commerce*

The idea behind the Early Retirement Scheme is that workers in particularly strenuous and relatively dangerous jobs should have the opportunity to retire earlier. While this principle is not up for debate,

proposed amendments to the scheme are highly controversial.

In a new proposed regulation, the secretariat of the hazardous occupations committee would be transferred to the Social Security Organization. From the perspective of labor representatives, this action grants extensive authority to an institution that has not shown satisfactory performance in protecting workers' rights. Mohsen Bagheri, a member of

the Supreme Council of Islamic Labor Councils warns that with this change, the organization may, in many cases, deny retirement requests, effectively preventing workers from exercising their rights under the law. In his view, this is a transfer of power to an institution that aligns with employer interests.

Another controversial new condition that has been set is that only workers who are simultaneously covered by both the Labor Law and Social Security would be eligible to benefit from this law. This would make access to early retirement practically impossible.

Finally, there is the proposed removal of a large number of jobs from the classification of hazardous and arduous occupations that are clearly hazardous. The fact that even mining is not mentioned in this regulation is both telling and alarming, especially given the deadly mining accidents that have occurred in recent years.

Perhaps due to these protests, the scheme remained under discussion, rather than definite decisions being taken.

### Current challenges

Workers in hazardous jobs are frequently burdened with the responsibility of paying the 4% insurance premium out of their own pockets – having spent years working for various contractors. This is particularly challenging for low-income workers, making it difficult for them to afford this essential coverage. Compounding these issues, many workers find their job titles recorded as “general laborer.”

### *Special Allowance Plan for Government Employees*

*Latest Status: Approved by Parliament*

This plan, reviewed by the High Supervisory Board of the Expediency Council, authorizes the government to add a special allowance to the salaries of employees in executive government bodies to enhance payment equality among various ministries and increase productivity through heightened rewards.

However, it has been finalized with some amendments. Only civil servants working for government organizations subject to Article 5 of the Civil Service Management Law, such as the Islamic Consultative Assembly (Parliament), the Guardian Council, the Expediency Council, the Armed Forces, and municipalities (with the Interior Ministry's approval), will benefit from the plan. Moreover, the details of the Parliament's resolution indicate that this plan is optional rather than obligatory, meaning the government must implement it only if sufficient resources are available within the annual budget ceiling. As such, this plan could benefit government employees, but a hard guarantee is lacking.

## 5 Analysis & way forward

The first half of 2025 has been a highly challenging period for Iran's working population. Issues such as severe poverty, a lack of affordable housing and hazardous working conditions not only persisted from previous years but also worsened. Still, the Iranian government prioritized the securitization of labor struggles over addressing the urgent socio-economic needs of its citizens. While some concessions were made, they were minimal and largely insufficient. For instance, the increase in the minimum wage, though slightly higher than in previous years — possibly due to fears of renewed protests — remains below the rate of inflation in Iran.

**Table 3: Key labor trends January - June 2025**

### **1. Relentless Wave of Nationwide Labor Protests**

In the six-month period covered by this report, more than 80 protests and strikes have occurred monthly in at least 25 Iranian cities. These protests span across retirees, truck drivers, farmers, bakers, heavy industry workers and public service personnel, indicating a collapse in even the minimum standards of job-related welfare in the country.

### **2. Anti-Worker Legislative Reforms**

New regulations, such as amendments to the hazardous and arduous jobs directive, have been passed contrary to workers' interests. These changes restrict early retirement and transfer the authority to assess job difficulty to institutions not representing workers, such as the Social Security Organization.

### **3. Infrastructural Crisis and Job Insecurity**

Power outages, production disruptions, and incidents like the explosion at Shahid Rajaei Port have placed workplace safety and job security in a state of crisis. Industrial workers, farmers, and bakers have become victims of infrastructural mismanagement.

### **4. Increased Security Crackdowns**

Labor activists got severely targeted and protests often met with government repression. For instance, the strikes by truck drivers and farmer protests were met with widespread arrests and heavy-handed security responses. More than 40 drivers were detained during the recent truck drivers' strike.

### **5. Wartime Living Conditions**

Following Israeli attacks on Iran some workers were killed or got severely injured due to attacks by Israel, companies were forced to shut down.

### **6. Economic Crisis and Decline in Purchasing Power**

Despite rampant inflation, the minimum wage for workers remained around \$200 per month — a figure drastically lower than the actual cost of living (estimated at \$255 to \$325 per month). Currency instability and industrial recession have worsened this economic decline.

The government responded to specific sector demands during protests and strikes, but these favorable actions were confined to only a handful of demonstrations. Although online protests serve as a vital outlet for ordinary Iranians to express their concerns, the impact of online petitions and campaigns has also been either negligible or minimal.

In addition, the first half of 2025 witnessed the 12-day armed conflict between Israel and Iran in June, which severely impacted Iranian workers. The conflict resulted in widespread layoffs, with Afghan workers

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facing heightened deportations. Furthermore, national security concerns frequently provide authoritarian governments with a pretext to suppress dissent, potentially leading to intensified crackdowns on independent labor activists in the near future. Finally, the rising risk of military conflict is likely to shift public spending toward defense, sacrificing workers' social welfare, healthcare, and insurance.

Amidst all these problems, there are also glimmers of hope, however. Notably, a strong sense of national unity emerged around larger protests. For instance, the strikes by truck drivers garnered support from various groups. Conversely, the drivers expanded their focus from sector-specific issues to broader socio-economic and political concerns impacting Iranian society. This reflects the increasing determination of Iranians to advocate for their socio-economic rights and justice, along with a deepening sense of solidarity among them.

Additionally, this period underscored the power of sustained protests and perseverance. While truck drivers and bakers hold considerable leverage as gatekeepers to essential goods, the same cannot be said for the telecom retirees. Nevertheless, thanks to their weekly protest gatherings, the government also made concessions to this group by providing them with additional income.

Furthermore, the attacks by Israel did not lead to radicalism; Iran's independent trade unions continued to uphold democracy, non-violence, and the protection of human rights as their guiding principles, despite the lack of a historical precedent for genuine democracy in Iran. This indicates that investments in programs aimed at fostering civil society in Iran can yield positive results and contribute to creating a more supportive environment.

Another noteworthy aspect is that, despite the absence of strong independent unions in Iran that can openly play their role, labor activism continues to occur. The truck driver strikes coordinated solely online by the National Union of Truckers and Drivers. As the government fosters fear and anger in the wake of the Israeli attacks and with increased securitization looming, it is crucial for Iran's civil society to continue playing its vital role. The same holds true for when renewed armed conflict between Israel and Iran might occur. To support this process, the following actions are proposed for Iran's trade unions.

## **Recommendations for Iranian Trade Union Activists**

### ***Practice Self-Care and Collective-Care***

In the current context of heightened tensions and conflict, union activists must prioritize both individual well-being and collective resilience. Encourage rest, mutual support, and the sharing of mental health resources to sustain long-term activism under pressure.

### ***Adapt Activities to the Realities of Wartime***

Traditional forms of organizing may invite securitization and repression in times of war or heightened conflict. Adjust methods of engagement to minimize risks, such as shifting toward low-profile or decentralized forms of activism, while still advocating for labor rights.

### ***Promote Constructive Social Dialogue***

Even amidst instability, pursuing social dialogue is essential. Push for constructive engagement with employers, local authorities, and community leaders to maintain a focus on labor welfare and prevent labor issues from being sidelined in national emergencies.

### *Expand Conflict Management and Resolution Capacity*

Equip union members with tools and training in nonviolent conflict resolution and crisis communication. Strengthening these skills can reduce internal tensions and foster solidarity in diverse and sometimes divided workplaces.

### *Strengthen Solidarity Across Sectors*

In times of division, unity is a strategic asset. Proactively build alliances with workers from different industries, professions, and backgrounds. Joint actions and shared platforms can increase visibility and effectiveness.

### *Deepen International Connections*

Leverage relationships with international labor unions and organizations to amplify the voices of Iranian workers. These connections can provide strategic advice, advocacy channels, and protection through international pressure.

### *Support Migrant Workers and Uphold Inclusive Labor Rights*

Show active solidarity with migrant workers, especially vulnerable groups such as Afghan laborers. Emphasize that labor rights are universal, and build inclusive campaigns that reflect the diversity of the working class in Iran.

## **Recommendations for the Iranian government**

Meanwhile, to ensure that workers' rights can be upheld as much as possible in times of renewed conflict with Israel or the U.S. – as well as in times of an economic crisis – the Iranian government could consider the following:

### *Establish a “National Labor Crisis Insurance” Mechanism for Formal and Informal Workers*

A new independent body should be created under the High Council of Labor to cover exceptional situations such as war, sanctions, natural disasters, or sudden economic shocks. This institution must be supported by predictable funding sources (e.g., public budget allocations, a share of oil revenues, or wealth taxes) and operate transparently to distribute wage insurance and unemployment subsidies to affected workers.

### *Mandate Government-Supported “Wage Subsidies” to Prevent Layoffs*

In times of national crisis, the government should directly pay a portion of workers' wages to prevent businesses from downsizing. This model, implemented in countries such as Germany, Japan, and Turkey, helps preserve jobs during emergencies. For example, the government could cover 30–70% of monthly wages for a period of six months to a year.

### *Suspend Tax and Insurance Obligations for Small and Medium Businesses in Affected Areas*

The government should immediately halt tax and social insurance collections from small businesses in crisis zones and grant temporary exemptions. As many tourism operators, restaurants, guesthouses, and digital platforms face severe downturns, additional financial pressure could lead to widespread closures and job losses.

### *Strengthen Field Inspections and Launch a “National Labor Rights Violation Reporting Platform”*

The Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor, and Social Welfare should establish a public platform where workers



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can report unlawful dismissals or unpaid wages directly and quickly. On-site inspections in large enterprises must also be intensified.

#### *Enforce the Right to Reemployment Post-Crisis in Accordance with Article 30 of the Labor Law*

Employers who shut down factories or production units during war or crisis must rehire the same workers once operations resume, as mandated by Article 30 of the Labor Law. The government must ensure this provision is enforced and take legal action against violators.

#### *Provide Emergency Relief to Households with No Income Due to War or Layoffs*

In collaboration with local NGOs and municipalities, the government should deliver immediate livelihood aid—including food baskets, shopping vouchers, or targeted cash transfers—to workers who lose their jobs during the crisis. These supports must go beyond the ineffective monthly credit subsidy model and directly address households' daily needs.

#### *Create a Dedicated Support Fund for Platform Workers and Emerging Job Sectors*

Given that platform workers (e.g., ride-hailing drivers, online sellers, freelancers) are excluded from traditional legal protections, the government must establish an independent fund to support them during emergencies. Funding could come from special levies on large online platforms or international assistance.

#### *Impose an “Emergency Layoff Ban” on Corporations with Stable Revenue or State Support*

Companies receiving direct or indirect government financial support—including airlines, mining and petroleum firms, and tech companies—must be legally barred from laying off employees during crisis periods. Violation of this ban should carry substantial financial penalties.

#### *Develop a “National Job Retraining Plan” for Laid-Off Workers*

The government should fund intensive training programs to help laid-off workers acquire new technical, digital, or vocational skills through public and private training centers. This initiative can facilitate quicker reentry into the job market and reduce the psychological toll of unemployment.

### **Recommendations for the International Community**

Finally, the international community can significantly contribute to the protection of workers' rights in Iran by supporting both independent trade unions and the Iranian government through the following actions:

#### *Establish an Independent International Fact-Finding Committee on Workers' Conditions in Iran*

The ILO and human rights bodies such as the UNHRC must initiate independent investigations into the widespread violations of Iranian workers' rights.

#### *Increase International Pressure to Enforce Fundamental Labor Conventions*

The Islamic Republic is failing to uphold its core obligations to the ILO, including the right to freedom of association and the prohibition of forced labor. Diplomatic pressure, formal complaint procedures, and raising Iran's case in global forums are essential.

#### *Launching a Digital Registration System for Informal Workers with ILO Technical Support*

Drawing on the successful experiences of platforms like eDopomoga and Diia in Ukraine, the ILO could

provide both technical and financial assistance to Iran's Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour, and Social Welfare in developing an emergency digital registration platform. This platform would aim to identify informal workers typically day laborers who are paid on a daily basis and hired each morning — and connect them to essential support services.

In the event of renewed direct conflict between Israel and Iran, this system would facilitate easier monitoring of these workers' situations and locations, enabling quicker rescue efforts if necessary. Additionally, the platform could serve as a vital tool for enhancing transparency, targeting aid effectively, and building legal capacity for the future.

Furthermore, establishing this digital registration system could also contribute to a more organized labor market, ultimately fostering greater resilience within Iran's workforce.

Platforms like eDopomoga and Diia are digital services designed to streamline access to government services and support for citizens. They are focused on enhancing transparency, efficiency, and user experience in public administration. Below is a comparison of these platforms and their key features.

Feature/Platform	eDopomoga	Diia
Country	Ukraine	Ukraine
Purpose	Provides financial assistance and social support services to citizens, especially during crises.	Serves as a comprehensive digital platform for accessing various government services and documents.
Key Services	Financial aid applications. Social service access. Information on available support programs,	Digital ID and documents (e.g., passports, driver's licenses). Access to government services (e.g., tax, healthcare). E-services for businesses.
User Interface	User-friendly interface designed for easy navigation and application processes.	Intuitive design that allows users to quickly find and access services.
Mobile Accessibility	Available as a mobile app for easy access to services on the go.	Also available as a mobile app, enabling users to manage documents and services from their smartphones.
Integration	Integrates with various government databases to streamline the application process for aid.	Integrates multiple government services into one platform, reducing the need for physical visits to government offices.
Target Audience	Primarily aimed at individuals seeking social support and financial assistance.	A broader audience, including individuals, businesses, and government agencies.

### *Declare a Livelihood Emergency for Iranian Workers in International Forums*

Given the levels of inflation, the housing & health sector crisis, and wage devaluation, international organizations should pressure the government of Iran to recognize the livelihood conditions of Iranian workers as a social emergency.



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### *Legal support & media awareness*

More legal resources should be allocated to independent unions and labor-oriented journalists. Creating secure communication networks to document labor conditions in a safe way is a prerequisite for this. Also, ensuring (international) media don't just know about the violation of political human rights in Iran but also about socio-economic ones could help amplify the voices of Iran's workers.

### *Supporting the Drafting of an "Emergency Labor Protection Law in Wartime Conditions"*

The ILO can facilitate the development of an emergency legal framework in Iran that protects the minimal rights of workers — even those without formal contracts — in wartime. This includes access to cash assistance, medical care, food security, and protection from discrimination and arbitrary dismissal. That way, workers in Iran can be better protected in the case of renewed armed conflict with Israel.

### *Applying International Pressure to End Discrimination Against Migrant Workers, Especially Afghans*

The ILO should utilize its monitoring mechanisms (such as the Committee on Freedom of Association or the supervisory body for Convention No. 111 on discrimination) to document and follow up on structural discrimination, wage disparities, mass layoffs, or lack of insurance coverage for Afghan migrants in Iran. In cooperation with UNHCR, it should also provide legal and humanitarian support to migrant workers within Iran and within the wider region.

### About us

Volunteer Activists (VA) is a nonprofit, non-governmental organization based in the Netherlands. From 2001 to 2007, VA operated inside Iran as the largest capacity building organization in the country. From 2012, the VA team continued its activism from Amsterdam following security threats. Assisting Iranian CSOs through research-informed capacity building is one of the primary activities of VA. Other specialisations include: facilitation of information exchange among civil society activists, advocacy and expansion of democracy and human rights and peace building - both within Iranian society and communities in the MENA region.

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