

Worker Rights Watch

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

January - June 2026

July 2026



Executive summary

A primary goal of Volunteer Activists (VA) is to enhance global awareness of the pressing labour challenges and worker protests taking place in Iran. Recognising the voices and experiences of Iranian workers on an international platform is vital for supporting the development of the labour movement and ensuring that workers' demands are not overlooked. This role became particularly important during the period under study. Prolonged internet shutdowns significantly restricted the ability of workers and activists inside Iran to communicate their experiences and draw international attention to labour-related developments. The world's focus on the armed conflict and geopolitical tensions involving Iran, Israel and the United States further diminished the visibility of workers' struggles.

However, international attention serves a purpose beyond information-sharing alone. In interviews with worker activists, the importance of international recognition was repeatedly emphasised as a source of encouragement and psychological support. Knowing that their struggles are being documented and acknowledged internationally can strengthen workers' sense of solidarity and reinforce their ability to continue organising under highly restrictive conditions.

Furthermore, a thorough understanding of the needs of Iranian workers and the demands of their trade unions allows international supporters to design more effective programmes and initiatives. With its established connections inside Iran, VA is well-positioned to provide this essential information and contribute to a more accurate understanding of labour developments in the country.

This report presents VA's findings regarding labour-related issues and protests in Iran during the period January to June 2026. It marks the eighth instalment in a biannual series aimed at providing consistent updates on labour dynamics, workers' grievances, and collective action within Iran.

The complexity of the Iranian labour landscape requires detailed and careful research to accurately represent the evolving challenges facing workers. This assessment draws on multiple sources, including reliable media reports, social media analysis, and discussions with VA's contacts inside Iran. However, prolonged internet shutdowns during the reporting period significantly limited access to information and communication channels. As a result, this report may be less comprehensive than previous editions, particularly regarding developments that could not be independently verified or documented.

The research identified several significant trends regarding labour issues and protests in Iran between January and June 2026:

- Labour mobilisation continued at lower volumes, reflecting heightened repression and the constraints created by the armed conflict
- Government efforts to restrict labour mobilisation increasingly extended beyond independent labour organisations and also affected formal, state-affiliated labour institutions, reflecting a broader narrowing of space for worker representation.
- The Iranian government introduced several measures intended to respond to workers' economic concerns, including increasing the minimum wage and implementing wartime economic measures. However, these steps remained insufficient to address rising poverty among workers, mitigate the effects of inflation, or adequately support informal workers and other vulnerable groups.

Additional findings from this report can be found in Table 1.

Table 1: Key takeaways from the research

Takeaway	Evidence and significance
Workers increasingly relied on adaptive forms of mobilisation.	Labour activism increasingly focused on defending existing rights and livelihoods rather than securing new gains. The organisation, timing, and forms of protest also adapted in response to heightened repression, security concerns, and a more restrictive operating environment.
Labour mobilisation remained geographically widespread	Although the number of labour protests fell to 111, compared with previous years, collective action continued across different regions, highlighting the persistence of widespread labour grievances despite the increased risks of protesting and organising.
Sustained labour pressure contributed to limited institutional openings and accommodation of workers' demands.	Some new mechanisms for worker participation and coordination were introduced, at least formally, while certain issues raised through protests were occasionally addressed. However, these developments remained limited and did not translate into broader improvements in workers' rights or the ability to organise independently.
Economic insecurity intensified across the workforce.	Inflation, exchange-rate instability, wage arrears, and rising costs of essential goods significantly undermined workers' purchasing power. These pressures deepened existing vulnerabilities and contributed to growing dissatisfaction among workers across sectors.
War-related disruption intensified employment losses and insecurity.	Reduced production, business disruption, and broader economic uncertainty following the outbreak of conflict contributed to layoffs, reduced working opportunities, and heightened insecurity, particularly among temporary workers, contractors, and informal workers in vulnerable sectors.
The war had direct human consequences for workers and working communities.	Workers were among those directly affected by the conflict, with casualties reported among people from different occupations, including teachers, municipal workers, and industrial workers. Beyond these immediate losses, the conflict also caused displacement and heightened insecurity among workers and their families.
Digital campaigns and alternative forms of collective action faced significant constraints.	Digital campaigns, petitions, and online information-sharing remained important tools for labour mobilisation. However, prolonged internet shutdowns restricted communication and limited the emergence of new digital initiatives during the reporting period.

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1. Introduction

When thinking about war, public attention often focuses on the military, air raids and civilians seeking shelter from immediate danger. While these images capture an important reality of conflict, they represent only one dimension of how war affects societies.

Less visible are the workers who continue to report to factories, hospitals, offices, construction sites, and other workplaces despite the risks surrounding them. For many, maintaining daily work routines during periods of conflict becomes not only economically necessary but potentially life-threatening.

Armed conflict affects workers not only through direct exposure to violence but also through its broader economic and political consequences. Wars frequently disrupt production, and, in its following, employment, and livelihoods, while governments operating in authoritarian contexts may use security concerns as a justification for expanding surveillance, restricting public freedoms, and further limiting opportunities for collective action. These dynamics are particularly significant in contexts where societies have already experienced widespread unrest and where authorities have responded to political demands primarily through repression rather than political reform.

The first half of 2026 in Iran was shaped by precisely such a convergence of pressures. The reporting period began with large-scale nationwide protests in January, driven by economic hardship, declining living conditions, and broader political grievances. These protests were met with severe state repression, including widespread arrests, violence, and further restrictions on civic space. The government response contributed to a more securitised environment in which workers, labour activists, and other civil society actors faced increased risks when expressing demands or organising collectively.

The outbreak of the Israel–Iran war in February 2026 and subsequent escalation involving the US further added to this instablization whilst also adding further layers of instability. Beyond its direct human consequences, the conflict intensified existing economic pressures through disruptions to production, employment, and livelihoods, while also creating additional constraints on communication, organising, and access to information. Together, these developments created an exceptionally challenging environment for Iranian workers.

Against this background, this report examines how Iranian workers experienced and responded to this period of overlapping economic, political, and security crises. It asks three central questions: What economic, social, and political challenges did Iranian workers face from January through June 2026? To what extent was collective action still possible, and what forms did labour mobilisation take under increasingly difficult conditions? What developments took place in labour-related legislation, policymaking, and state responses affecting workers and labour rights in Iran?

To answer these questions, the report proceeds in three parts. It begins by examining socioeconomic and political challenges confronting Iranian workers during the reporting period. It shows how long-standing labour problems—including inflation, declining purchasing power, insecure employment, and weaknesses in social protection—were compounded by the government's response to the January protests and by the consequences of the armed conflict with Israel and subsequent US military involvement. Together, these developments profoundly affected workers' livelihoods, employment, and workplace conditions.

Building on this analysis, the second chapter examines how workers responded to these pressures through collective action. It documents labour protests and strikes across a range of sectors, analyses the changing

character of labour mobilisation under increasingly restrictive economic, political, and security conditions, and considers how the government responded through engagement, repression, and labour-related legislation and policymaking.

The final chapter synthesises the report's principal findings and reflects on what they reveal about the changing nature of labour mobilisation in Iran during a period marked by deepening economic crisis, political repression, and armed conflict. It concludes with recommendations for Iranian civil society organisations and labour activists, the Iranian government, and the international community aimed at strengthening the protection and promotion of workers' rights in Iran.

Methodology & Data Collection

This report is based on the continuous monitoring and documentation of labour-related developments in Iran conducted by Volunteer Activists (VA). Throughout the reporting period, VA collected and analysed information on labour protests, strikes, workplace disputes, labour rights developments, and state responses across different sectors of the Iranian economy.

The research draws on multiple sources, including official and semi-official Iranian media, domestic independent media, reports by human rights monitoring organisations, and interviews with informed sources, particularly labour activists, workers and retired workers involved in labour-rights advocacy. Information was cross-checked and verified wherever possible before inclusion in the report.

The reporting period was marked by exceptional restrictions on access to information. The January 2026 protests and subsequent government responses increased surveillance and risks for activists and sources, while the outbreak of armed conflict with Israel and subsequent US military involvement resulted in prolonged internet shutdowns that disrupted communication channels used by workers and labour activists to document and share information.

These restrictions affected the ability to document labour developments, particularly labour protests and collective action. As a result, the findings presented in this report should be understood as a verified minimum rather than a comprehensive account of labour developments during the reporting period.

2. Workers' challenges and struggles

Despite Iran's considerable natural resources and its growing status as a military power, the first half of 2026 represented an increasingly difficult struggle for millions of Iranian workers to secure the basic necessities of everyday life.

While many of these challenges were not new, the reporting period marked a decisive deterioration – whilst also adding new issues. Three developments profoundly affected the conditions facing workers across the country: an unprecedented surge in inflation, the outbreak of armed conflict with Israel, and the US, and the longest nationwide internet shutdown ever recorded in Iran. Each created new pressures whilst these developments sometimes also acted in tandem. Together, these shocks increased the cost of survival, curtailed economic activity, exposed workers to deadly violence, and further intensified the pressures facing workers across the country.

The following sections examine how these overlapping crises affected the lives and livelihoods of Iranian workers during the first half of 2026, creating new pressures on incomes, employment, economic security, and (workplace) safety.

Deepening Cost-of-Living Crisis

As documented in our previous labour reports, price inflation that consistently outpaces wage increases has placed severe pressure on Iranian workers for years. As such, for many households, declining purchasing power had already become a defining feature of everyday economic life, forcing workers and pensioners to reduce consumption, rely on informal support networks, and seek additional sources of income to compensate for the growing gap between earnings and the rising cost of basic necessities.

The first half of 2026 severely deepened economic hardship for workers and pensioners in Iran. As inflation outpaced income growth, employment and pensions no longer guaranteed economic security or access to basic necessities. A 60 percent minimum wage increase for the Iranian year 1405 (beginning 21 March 2026) not only failed to keep pace with rising costs; multiple employers refused to implement the new wage resolution and shifted toward individual wage arrangements instead.

The sharp increase in prices began already before the outbreak of war. In December 2025, changes to foreign-exchange policies, reimposed UN sanctions, and growing economic uncertainty contributed to a rapid depreciation of the rial, which fuelled inflationary pressures across the economy. The open-market exchange rate of the dollar, which stood at around 131,000 tomans on 21 December 2025, rose to the 170,000-toman range by June 2026 and exceeded this level on some days. This represented an increase of nearly 30 percent within only a few months.

The depreciation of the national currency increased the cost of imported goods and production inputs, contributing to further price increases across the economy. Ecolran, a website specialising in economic analysis, published a report in February 2026 on the cost of living in the preceding month. Drawing on data from the Statistical Centre of Iran, it stated that the minimum livelihood basket had reached 5.254 million tomans per person in January 2026. For an average household of 3.1 members, this amounted to 16.289 million tomans, representing a 14.7 percent increase compared with December and a 97.2 percent rise compared with the same month of the previous year. For workers and pensioners whose incomes failed to adjust at the same pace, this rapid increase in the cost of basic goods represented a significant decline in their ability to afford essential necessities and maintain previous living standards.

Analysts argued that the coincidence of three key factors - the sharp rise in the open-market exchange rate, the doubling of the NIMA exchange rate, and the elimination of the preferential exchange rate - created a combined economic shock. Its direct consequences were a surge in the prices of essential goods and intensified pressure on the household livelihood basket.

The economic situation deteriorated further following the outbreak of war with Israel on 28 February 2026. The conflict disrupted supply chains, affected the movement and distribution of goods, and created further uncertainty in markets, contributing to additional increases in the prices of essential household items. Prices of basic food products rose sharply, including bread, grains, meat, poultry, eggs, and other protein-rich foods.

The deep gap between fixed incomes, including workers' wages, and the real cost of living pushed household livelihoods into a critical phase. Expert estimates in May placed the relative poverty line for an urban household in major cities such as Tehran at between 50 and 60 million tomans per month. In the same month, workers' representatives and labour activists stated in meetings of the Supreme Labour Council that, when actual housing, healthcare, and clothing costs were taken into account, the real monthly cost of a household livelihood basket had [reached](#) at least 70 million tomans. The average approved wage continued to cover only a small share of this amount, leaving many working households unable to maintain previous living standards.

The severity of the inflation crisis becomes clearer when its composition is examined. Prices had not increased uniformly across all categories of goods. The greatest pressure fell precisely on those areas directly connected to daily survival. In June, estimates based on data from the Statistical Centre of Iran showed that inflation in food and beverages had exceeded 133 percent. Within this category, several essential items experienced even [sharper increases](#): oils and fats rose by nearly 278 percent; red and white meat and related products by more than 171 percent; milk and cheese by approximately 152 percent; and bread and cereals by nearly 139 percent. These figures meant that essential food items relied upon daily by workers and households had often more than doubled in price within one year, with some categories approaching a threefold increase. As a result, rising food prices placed a heavy burden on Iranian workers, whose households had little ability to reduce spending or compensate through additional income, while average wages covered only a small fraction of the increased cost of living.

The crisis extended beyond food prices. Rising rents and housing costs placed additional pressure on household budgets, while increases in the cost of medicines and healthcare created further difficulties.

Having a job no longer guaranteed a basic standard of living in Iran, with over [60 percent](#) of workers estimated to be living below the poverty line.

Image source: [Tasnim News](#)



photo : Kevvan Firouzei

By the spring and early summer of 2026, Iran's economy had entered one of its most intense inflationary periods in recent decades. In May, Iran's inflation rate reached a peak that economic analysts described as unprecedented in the post–Second World War period. According to these assessments, Iran experienced higher inflation only once before, in 1942 during the Second World War, when wartime disruption contributed to a severe economic crisis.

Also, according to data published by the Statistical Centre of Iran and reports in the economic media, point-to-point inflation reached 88.6 percent in June 2026. This means that, on average, Iranian households had to spend nearly 90 percent more to purchase the same basket of goods and services they had consumed in June of the previous year.



Image source: [IRNA](#)

Healthcare crisis

The effects of exchange-rate increases and the effective removal of the preferential exchange rate for medicines became quickly [visible](#). According to [statements](#) by healthcare professionals and pharmacists in the winter of 2025–2026 (Iranian calendar winter 1404), the prices of approximately 80 percent of medicines had increased. Consequently, pharmacies faced growing financial difficulties, with many unable to purchase medicines and some cheques returned unpaid. This disrupted the medicine supply chain and limited the ability of pharmaceutical companies to supply parts of the distribution network.

As a result, patients were required to bear a growing share of healthcare costs. According to responsible officials, out-of-pocket payments had risen to approximately 55 percent of total healthcare expenditure and, among lower-income deciles, in some cases accounted for around 53 percent of healthcare costs.

Iranians with serious conditions, including cancer, multiple sclerosis, diabetes, and other chronic illnesses, were particularly affected. Many imported or scarce medicines were either excluded from insurance coverage or became available only at extremely high prices on the open market. Field reports in domestic media further revealed the scale of the crisis. For example, the father of a sick child [told the media](#) that the cost of his child's medicines had risen from approximately 800 million tomans to more than 2.5 billion tomans, making continued treatment effectively impossible for the family.

The crisis extended beyond food prices. Rising rents and housing costs placed additional pressure on household budgets, while increases in the cost of medicines and healthcare created further difficulties.

At the same time, working class families that had previously relied on informal support networks, from borrowing from relatives to temporary flexibility from landlords, found these coping mechanisms increasingly difficult to sustain. As inflation affected wider sections of society, such forms of support that had helped households survive previous periods of hardship became increasingly limited. In concrete terms, this meant that many households on the breadline increasingly faced painful choices between essential expenses. For instance, the number of school drop outs significantly increased in the period under study because some families could no longer cover the associated costs - or because they needed their children to work as well to ensure household survival.

The depth of the economic crisis was reflected in growing social unrest. The large-scale street protests that erupted in January 2026 were initially driven by anger over rising prices, declining living standards, and the inability of many households to keep pace with increasing costs. However, the protests were followed by an extensive state crackdown, including arrests, intimidation, and the use of excessive force against protesters and executions.

Thus, these protests did not remove the underlying cause of economic grievances, which continued to shape workers' demands throughout the following months.

Rise in child labour

Hassan Mousavi Chalak, head of Iran's Association of Social Workers, warned in an interview with Khabar Online in June about the growing prevalence of child labour, including beyond visible forms such as street vending. He highlighted the presence of children in slaughterhouses, livestock farms, underground workshops, orchards, farms, and industrial settings, where they were often had to work in dangerous or otherwise harmful conditions. As a result of the economic crisis, malnutrition among children – and adults as well – was also on the rise.



The Iranian authorities' crackdown on nationwide protests resulted in the deaths of at least 6,126 people and the arrest of more than 41,800 others. Image source: [Wikipedia](#)

Unemployment

Images of industrial complexes and oil facilities engulfed in flames following air attacks on Iran by Israel and the United States travelled widely during the war. These images captured one of the most visible consequences of the conflict: the destruction and disruption of key economic infrastructure. Behind these damaged facilities, however, were thousands of workers whose employment, income, and livelihoods were directly affected.

The consequences were particularly severe in Iran's major industrial sectors, including steel, petrochemicals, oil, and energy, which employ large numbers of workers and support wider economic activity. Damage to production facilities, interruptions to operations, and uncertainty over the future of these industries created growing insecurity for workers regarding employment, income, and the continuation of normal working conditions.

The steel industry provides one of the clearest examples of how the war affected workers. Several major steel facilities were affected by air raids, including the Mobarakeh Steel Complex in Isfahan, Iran's largest industrial unit and one of the largest steel producers in the region. The complex employed approximately 27,000 workers and represented an important source of employment for workers directly employed at the facility as well as those connected to its operations.

Following the air raids, production at Mobarakeh was halted and the facility sustained extensive infrastructure damage. The consequences for workers were immediate. Although efforts were made to maintain some administrative operations, the majority of workers were unable to return to normal employment. According to reports from workers and labour sources, only around 2,000 administrative and managerial employees returned to the site, while the remaining workforce faced an uncertain situation. Many workers experienced suspension of normal duties, associated severe reductions in income, and/or pressure to seek alternative forms of employment, including informal and gig-based work.

Similar disruptions affected workers in other steel facilities, including Ahvaz Steel, Oxin Steel, Bagher Shahr Steel, and the Sefid Dasht Complex.

The petrochemical sector experienced similar disruption, especially in the final days before the ceasefire, when air raids affected major facilities in industrial areas including Mahshahr, Bandar Imam, Asaluyeh, Shiraz, and Marvdasht. Reports indicated that production processes were disrupted at more than 50 petrochemical facilities, with approximately 50 facilities shutting down. The sector employs around 140,000 workers.

Like their colleagues in the steel sector, petrochemical workers faced growing uncertainty as production was disrupted and facilities suspended or reduced operations.

The oil and energy sectors were similarly affected. Damage to energy infrastructure and industrial utility providers disrupted economic activity and created further uncertainty for workers employed in these sectors. Altogether, these disruptions added additional pressure to workers already facing



Power cuts as a result of war damage or for other reasons added to diminished economic activity in Iran and, in its following, economic insecurity and income losses for workers. Image source: [SNN](#)

rising living costs and declining purchasing power. The consequences of industrial disruption did not stop at the gates of the facilities directly affected by air raids. Across Iran's industrial economy, many workers are employed through contractors, temporary arrangements, or smaller companies connected to major industrial operations. Although these workers often perform essential roles within the same production systems, they generally have weaker employment protections and fewer resources to absorb sudden interruptions.

Meanwhile, the disruption of major industries also affected smaller companies whose own production depended on continued activity in these sectors. Businesses across manufacturing and related industries relied on steel, petrochemical products, oil, energy supplies, and other industrial inputs as part of their production processes. When major facilities reduced or suspended operations, these companies faced difficulties obtaining necessary materials, higher costs, production delays, and uncertainty over their ability to continue operating, leading to layoffs.

For smaller employers, these challenges came on top of existing economic pressures caused by inflation, rising production costs, and limited access to financial resources. Compared with larger companies, many had fewer reserves to maintain operations during prolonged disruptions and less ability to rely on institutional support or state assistance when facing sudden economic shocks.

For workers employed by these companies, the consequences were felt quickly through growing job insecurity and rising unemployment risks. Reduced working hours, suspended contracts, production slowdowns, and outright job losses undermined workers' ability to maintain stable incomes and placed additional pressure on households. Those employed through contractors and temporary arrangements were particularly vulnerable, as their employment depended heavily on continued production levels and the renewal of short-term contracts, leaving many exposed to sudden unemployment or prolonged income insecurity.

The scale of the employment crisis extended beyond individual workplaces. During the first half of 2026, official estimates and field data suggested that between two and four million people lost their jobs, making the employment crisis one of the most significant economic and social consequences of the war. According to the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour and Social Welfare, [more than 290,000 people were referred for unemployment insurance](#).



Preliminary [estimates](#) indicate that the U.S.-Israeli military assault on Iran caused more than USD 270 billion in total damage to the country's infrastructure. In the industrial sector, more than 3,000 industrial units across the country were damaged, approximately 500 of which were completely destroyed. Image source: [Tabnak](#)

Beyond the destruction of industrial facilities and its broader economic effects, the war severely affected workers whose livelihoods depended on everyday economic activity. Damage to transport networks and essential infrastructure, restrictions on movement, insecurity, and declining demand disrupted the work of many service-sector and informal workers, including taxi and delivery drivers, street vendors, small shop owners, repair workers, and restaurant employees. As people travelled less, businesses reduced operations, and households cut spending, these workers faced fewer opportunities to earn income. Workers relying on daily or short-term earnings were particularly hard hit. A missed day of work could mean a missed meal, an unpaid bill, or greater difficulty covering essential expenses. Unlike workers with stable employment arrangements, many informal and precarious workers had no paid leave, unemployment protection, or savings to rely on during periods of disruption.



The Ministry of Labour puts the number of informal workers in Iran at around 12 million – unofficial estimates are even higher. Image source: [Entekhab](#)

Altogether, the armed conflict with Israel and the United States pushed many workers into an even more precarious position. For those whose workplaces, incomes, or employment arrangements were directly affected, the war turned existing economic insecurity into an even deeper struggle to make ends meet. At the same time, the wider disruption to economic activity, investment, and employment prospects contributed to greater uncertainty and insecurity for workers across the economy.

Unfortunately, these economic consequences represented only one dimension of the impact of the war on workers.

The Human Cost of the War

The war's impact on workers extended beyond the erosion of wages, livelihoods, and economic security: it also claimed workers' lives and caused serious injuries. Workers were killed or injured while carrying out their duties in factories, schools, medical centres, emergency facilities, industrial estates, and government offices. Others were killed or injured in their homes, while commuting to or from work, or in public places.

According to [official figures](#) released by the Legal Medicine Organization, by 10 April 2026 the bodies of 3,375 people killed during the war had been identified, including workers.

Industrial workers were among those killed while carrying out their ordinary duties. On 14 March 2026, an attack on the Arshehkar Company in the Jay Industrial Estate in Isfahan killed 19 workers and engineers and injured four others while they were working inside the factory. At the time of the attack, employees were carrying out their usual tasks inside the factory, which produced cooling and refrigeration equipment¹.

The attacks were not limited to industrial workplaces. Teachers and other education-sector employees were also killed while carrying out their professional duties. The attack on Shajareh Tayyebbeh School in Minab on 28 February 2026, during the first hours of the war, meant that, besides dozens of students, 26 teachers [were also killed](#). The attack took place at around 10 a.m., while classes were underway. Among those killed were school principals, classroom teachers, a counsellor, and other educational employees, including Zohreh Shahriari, a

¹ Relatives and survivors disputed subsequent reports that the factory produced military equipment, emphasizing that it solely manufactured commercial cooling and refrigeration equipment and that those killed were ordinary workers just carrying out their jobs.

teacher who was six months pregnant. The deaths of these teachers and education-sector employees showed that even schools, alongside factories and other workplaces, could become sites of deadly violence during the conflict.

The killing of workers continued beyond the initial weeks of the war. On 4 April 2026, the first working day after the Nowruz holidays, Mehdi Veisitarbar, an employee of Fajr Energy Persian Gulf Company, was carrying out maintenance work and attending to machinery, as he had done for the previous 14 years. He was moving among equipment and working alongside colleagues when missiles struck the facility. He was killed together with Mohammad Torabi, Abouzar Reyhani, Ali Mombini, Hossein Hashempour, and Ali Emami.

These cases represent only a small part of the documented losses among Iranian workers. Reports from provinces across the country recorded the deaths and injuries of industrial workers, municipal workers, road maintenance workers, healthcare personnel, drivers, service workers, administrative employees, and others. For example, the director-general of the Department of Cooperatives, Labour and Social Welfare in Zanjan [stated](#) that nine workplaces were struck in the province during the war, killing 34 workers. In Isfahan, the bodies of 19 workers were buried following U.S. and Israeli attacks on the Jay Industrial Estate. Qom Province recorded 11 workers killed during the Ramadan War. Five of them - Esmail Jafari, Mohammad Vazini-Akbar, Saeed Ahmadi-Mina, Rahim Hassanlou, and Seyed Majid Movahed Abtahi - were [killed](#) in US and Israeli attacks on two production units in the Mahmoudabad Industrial Estate in Qom.

In West Azerbaijan, [labour reports](#) described the 7 March attack on the Heydarabad Industrial Estate in Sulduz and the Payard flour and starch factory, stating that at least ten workers at the factory were killed or remained missing: Aziz Abbaszadeh, Vahid Talebi, Tohid Bayramzadeh, Amirhossein Hassanzadeh, Asghar Khodayari, Hossein Mohammadi, Ali-Akbar Oroujzadeh, Mehdi Gholizadeh, Mohammad Alizadeh, and Ali Najafi. Twelve workers were also injured in an attack on the Abgineh production facility in Qazvin. In Qom, two Afghan migrant workers, Mohammad Jafari and Mohammad Sakhi Khavari, who were working in a building adjacent to the Assembly of Experts, were killed in the [3 March attack](#). In Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting News Agency [reported](#) that Mehdi Abbasi and Arman Abbasi, from the village of Borjoui, were killed in U.S. and Israeli attacks.

Municipal service workers were also positioned on the war's largely invisible front line. The deaths of at least 11 municipal employees and workers in Shiraz, Tehran, and Tabriz have so far been [documented](#). These included four Shiraz municipality employees killed in the attack on Zibashahr, while in Tehran Hassan Kheyran, a street cleaner, and Kamran Pasandak, a municipal gardener were killed during air raids. Their deaths illustrate how the consequences of the conflict extended to ordinary workers whose daily responsibilities were essential to the functioning of cities.



Dozens of teachers lost their lives in U.S. and Israeli attacks during the war. According to official figures, 67 teachers - 50 women and 17 men - were killed. Image source: [Fararu](#) and [Shargh Daily](#)

The occupational breakdown of documented worker casualties is presented below.

Occupational group	Killed	Injured
Teachers, educational staff, and instructors	67	1
Physicians, nurses, pharmacists, healthcare personnel, emergency workers, and rescuers	24	6
Industrial, manufacturing, and construction workers, and engineers employed in production units	38	49
Municipal employees, road maintenance workers, oil-sector workers, agricultural employees, and infrastructure-service workers	16	3
Drivers, service workers, restaurant workers, retail workers, caretakers, and cleaners	9	3
Administrative, banking, insurance, postal, media, technical, and office employees	9	0
Total	163	62

A detailed record of documented worker casualties during the first two weeks of the war (28 February–15 March 2026), including the date, location, and occupation of each individual, is provided in [Appendix A: Documented Worker Casualties During the First Two Weeks of the War](#).

Workplace fatalities and occupational safety risks

The deaths documented above resulted directly from military attacks during the conflict. At the same time, workers in Iran continued to face longstanding risks in workplaces unrelated to direct military action. Workplace accidents remained a serious threat to workers' lives, reflecting persistent problems including unsafe conditions, weak oversight, and inadequate protection.

According to the Legal Medicine Organization, 1,879 people lost their lives in workplace accidents during the first eleven months of the Iranian year 1404 (21 March 2025–19 February 2026). This represented an increase of 0.9 percent compared with the previous Iranian year.

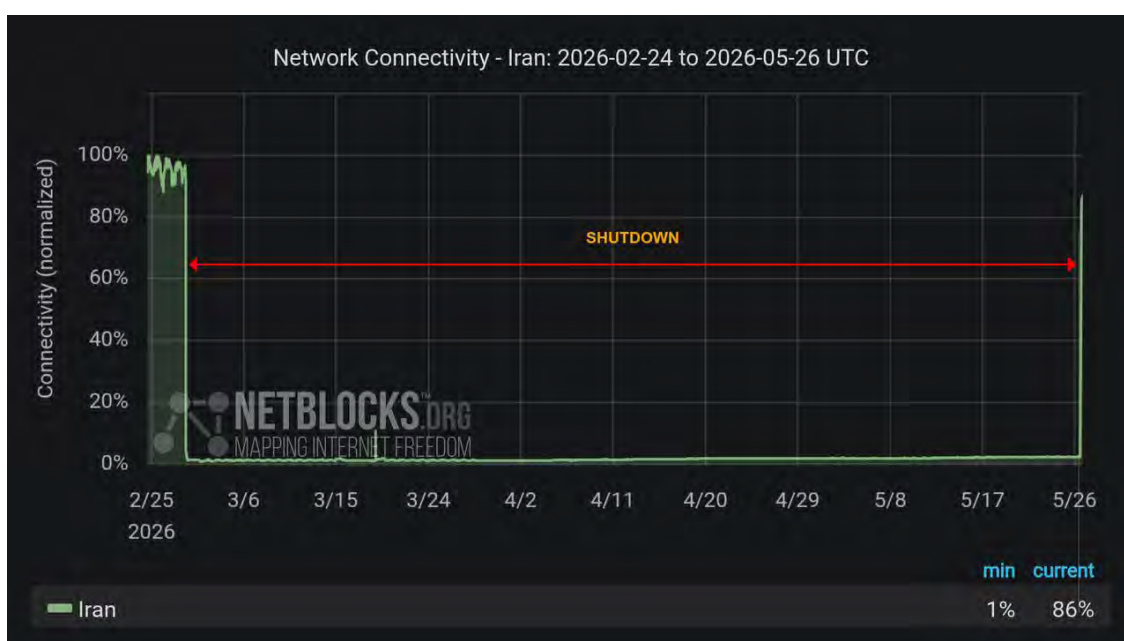
In addition, the inflation, supply disruptions, and economic uncertainty intensified during the war created further challenges for maintaining workplace safety. In many production units, employers faced increasing difficulties obtaining the equipment and materials required to protect workers. Disruptions to industrial activity affected the availability of certain goods and inputs, while rising prices made safety equipment, including protective clothing and other basic occupational safety materials, more difficult to afford. These pressures were particularly challenging for smaller employers with limited financial resources and fewer possibilities to absorb sudden increases in costs.

One such case was the death of Hamid Hosseinpanahi, a young electrical line worker employed by a contractor working for Kurdistan's electricity distribution network. On International Lineworker Day, 19 April 2026, his colleagues told ILNA that he had been electrocuted and killed while carrying out an operation on 15 April. According to workers, line workers are sent into the field during wartime to maintain the stability of the electricity network, yet remain deprived of minimum safety standards, adequate insurance, suitable work clothing, and direct employment contracts.

Taken together, deaths resulting from workplace accidents and those caused by military attacks demonstrate the multiple and overlapping threats facing Iranian workers. The war created a new and deadly danger, while longstanding labour vulnerabilities continued to place workers' lives at risk.

Effects of Internet Shutdowns

Internet filtering and shutdowns in Iran lasted for 21 days following the January protests and for a further 88 days following the military assault, creating one of the longest periods of severe communication disruption experienced by Iranian workers in recent years. Their impact extended far beyond communication. According to official and trade-sector estimates, more than 10 million people depend on internet-based businesses for their livelihoods. The restrictions were estimated to have directly resulted in the loss of at least one million jobs, while indirectly affecting the employment and incomes of approximately two million additional workers. The disruption therefore created an additional burden for workers already facing rising inflation, growing employment insecurity, political repression, and, later, the economic consequences of war.



In an effort to suppress dissent and prevent protests from spreading, the Iranian government imposed the world's longest government-ordered internet shutdown, depriving workers and businesses of vital economic activity and contributing to the loss of an estimated 1 million to 2 million jobs. Image source: [Netblocks](#)

Although Iran's National Information Network (NIN) remained partially accessible during periods of restricted international internet access, it could not replace the international platforms on which many workers and businesses depended. Small businesses and self-employed workers who had built customer networks through platforms such as Instagram could not simply transfer these relationships to domestic alternatives. As a result, many lost access to customers, online payment systems, suppliers, and business contacts that had taken years to establish. Moreover, the NIN, as a government-controlled network, has not been widely embraced by many Iranians, who remain reluctant to rely on it due to concerns over surveillance, privacy, and state control, further limiting its ability to replace international platforms.

Although some users were able to bypass restrictions through virtual private networks (VPNs), these services were often expensive, unreliable, or difficult to access during periods of severe disruption. The ability to maintain connectivity therefore became increasingly shaped by economic resources. Higher-income users and businesses were more likely to afford paid VPN services or alternative communication tools, while many working-class users, informal workers, and small-scale entrepreneurs were unable to do so. The restrictions therefore deepened existing inequalities by limiting access to communication, information, and economic opportunities most severely among those with the fewest resources.

The economic consequences were particularly severe for workers whose livelihoods depended directly on digital platforms. Small online retailers, delivery workers, freelancers, home-based businesses, and many

self-employed workers experienced immediate income losses when they could no longer communicate with customers, receive orders, or provide services. Research on businesses operating through Instagram found that 64 percent were owned by women, while 71 percent of the goods sold were domestically produced and a further 10 percent consisted of handicrafts and other locally made products. These figures demonstrate the important role that digital platforms played in supporting local production and household livelihoods.

The impact of internet restrictions was therefore not limited to large or formally registered businesses. The greatest burden fell on small, home-based, women-led, rural, and student-run enterprises, many of which lacked access to formal markets, physical shops, insurance, or compensatory state support. As labour activist Ehsan Sohrabi observed, the restrictions raised particular concerns for households surviving on small-scale online commerce, including women heads of household and those relying on digital work to cover education and basic living costs.

The greatest burden falls on small, home-based, women-led, rural, and student-run enterprises—groups already operating at the margins of the economy, with little capital to establish physical shops, limited access to formal markets, and no meaningful protection through insurance or compensation mechanisms.

The effects also extended beyond self-employed workers. Milad Tirandaz, head of the Media Committee of Iran's Artificial Intelligence Council, reported that the entire marketing team at the company where he worked was dismissed following the internet disruptions. He noted that employees who had been carefully recruited from hundreds of applicants lost their jobs as a result of conditions created by the internet restrictions, illustrating how these disruptions also affected employment within the formal digital economy.

The restrictions also affected workers who were not directly employed in online businesses. Communication between employers and employees became more difficult, access to banking and payment services was disrupted, and workers found it harder to search for employment or obtain information relevant to their work. Businesses likewise faced difficulties communicating with customers, suppliers, employees, and commercial partners, adding further pressure to an economy already affected by political unrest and armed conflict.

Beyond their economic effects, the internet restrictions significantly reduced workers' ability to organise and communicate collectively. Following the January protests, and later after the outbreak of war on 28 February, limits on digital communication further weakened workers' capacity to exchange information, coordinate activities, maintain networks of solidarity, and document labour rights violations. Labour activists also found it considerably more difficult to communicate with international partners, notify media outlets, and draw international attention to labour issues in Iran. This increased the isolation experienced by many activists and reduced international visibility of workers' experiences precisely when labour pressures were intensifying.

The restrictions also had broader humanitarian consequences. During a period marked first by widespread protests and heightened repression and later by armed conflict, many people struggled to obtain reliable information or remain in contact with family members and friends. Although some telephone services remained available, the loss of internet-based communication significantly reduced people's ability to check on relatives, share information, and access trusted news. The shutdowns also disrupted communication between people inside Iran and the Iranian diaspora, leaving many families abroad unable to obtain timely information about the safety of loved ones. For diaspora organisations, journalists, and labour rights groups, the restrictions further complicated efforts to document developments, verify information, and amplify workers' experiences internationally.

Taken together, the internet restrictions became an integral part of the labour crisis during the first half of 2026. They reduced workers' ability to earn a living, weakened communication and collective organisation, and made it more difficult for labour activists to ensure that workers' experiences remained visible both inside Iran and internationally. For many workers, the shutdowns therefore represented not only an economic burden but also an additional source of stress, uncertainty, and isolation.

Women workers and the gendered impact of the war

As the preceding discussion already suggests, the economic consequences of the war did not affect all workers equally. Women workers were disproportionately affected by job losses and employment insecurity, reflecting long-standing gender inequalities in Iran's labour market.

Following the ceasefire, Zahra Behrouz Azar, the presidential deputy for women and family affairs, stated that approximately one-third of all unemployment insurance claims submitted during the previous 40 days had been filed by women. Given that women represent a substantially smaller share of Iran's formal labour force than men, she described this figure as a significant indication that women had been disproportionately affected by workforce reductions.

Sociologist Simin Kazemi observes that periods of economic crisis often expose and reinforce existing inequalities in the labour market. According to Kazemi, workers in insecure employment are typically the first to lose their jobs, while persistent gender stereotypes can lead employers to view women's employment as less essential than men's. As a result, women may be dismissed earlier or overlooked when employment opportunities become more limited.



Meanwhile, not all women who lost their livelihoods could rely on government assistance or other forms of income support. Female workers are disproportionately concentrated in informal work, home-based production, small businesses, and service-sector occupations. Many also depend on social media and online platforms to sell goods or generate income, making them particularly vulnerable to the repeated internet shutdowns imposed during the reporting period. These workers often lack stable contracts, insurance coverage, and effective social protection, leaving them with few safeguards when their sources of income disappear.

Although women represent a smaller share of Iran's formal workforce, they accounted for approximately one-third of unemployment insurance claims registered during the 40 days following the ceasefire. Image source: [ISNA](#)

These patterns were particularly significant because many Iranian households depend on women's earnings. Women head approximately 22.5 percent of households in Iran, many of which are among the country's most economically vulnerable. For these families, the loss of women's employment did not represent the loss of a secondary income but of the income on which the household depended to pay for food, rent, healthcare, and education.

The war therefore did not create the inequalities facing women workers, but it intensified them. Existing patterns of insecure employment, limited social protection, and unequal access to stable work meant that many women experienced the economic consequences of the conflict more quickly and more severely than other groups of workers.

3. Labor Protests

The difficult circumstances in which workers found themselves profoundly shaped labour protest during the period under study. Severe economic hardship and political repression generated widespread grievances that increased workers' willingness to mobilise². At the same time, however, these very conditions also imposed significant constraints on collective action, limiting the scope, duration, and effectiveness of protest. This tension between persistent mobilisation and mounting constraints is central to understanding the dynamics of labour protest during this period.

The following section begins with an overview of the main labour protests and strikes that took place during the reporting period. It then compares these developments with patterns of labour mobilisation observed in previous years. In addition to workplace protests and other forms of collective action, workers also turned to online mobilisation. The final part of the section examines these digital forms of protest and activism.

Major Protests

Retirees: Persistent Protesters against the Livelihood Crisis

Among all groups that protested during the period under review, Social Security retirees, civil service retirees, and other pensioners organised some of the most sustained and geographically widespread actions. Their repeated gatherings in cities including Tehran, Shush, Ahvaz, Kermanshah, Rasht, Arak, Isfahan, and Tabriz demonstrated that the livelihood crisis facing retirees had become a nationwide issue rather than a concern limited to a particular occupational group.

Protesting retirees have repeatedly highlighted that their pensions no longer cover basic living expenses, while the gap between retirement income and the actual cost of living continues to widen. Rising prices of food, healthcare, and essential goods, combined with delays in pension adjustments, have significantly reduced purchasing power.

During the period under review, retirees continued to demand the implementation of pension equalisation measures, payment of outstanding arrears, improved healthcare coverage, and pensions adjusted in line with inflation. They also criticised the failure of state institutions and pension funds to address their deteriorating economic situation.

The crisis facing retirees extended beyond pension payments. Healthcare costs and weaknesses in supplementary insurance coverage became increasingly important issues. Many retirees argued that existing social protection mechanisms were no longer sufficient to cover basic medical needs, forcing some to borrow money or postpone treatment.

The slogans used during pensioner protests reflected both economic grievances and growing frustration with government institutions. Among the frequently reported themes were demands for economic justice, criticism of unfulfilled promises, and calls for dignity and recognition.

Pensioners' demands also reflected concerns about the sustainability of Iran's pension system. Accumulated government debt, economic stagnation, unemployment, and demographic pressures have weakened pension funds and intensified concerns among retirees about both their present living conditions and their future security.

² The convergence between economic grievances and broader demands for social rights was reflected in chants such as "Bread, work, freedom," which appeared across some of the labour protests during the period under study.

Persian slogan	English translation	Main theme
نان، کار، آزادی	Bread, work, freedom	Linking economic hardship with broader social demands
وعده وعید کافیه، سفره ما خالیه	Enough with promises, our tables are empty	Frustration over unfulfilled commitments and declining living standards
مجلس، دولت، بس است فریب ملت	Parliament, government, enough deceiving the people	Criticism of state institutions and perceived failure to respond
نه مجلس، نه دولت، نیستند به فکر ملت	Neither parliament nor government cares about the people	Rejection of institutional neglect
دشمن ما همینجاست، دروغ میگن آمریکاست	Our enemy is right here, they say it is America	Criticism of domestic governance and official narratives

Oil, Gas, and Petrochemical Workers: Protesting Job Insecurity and Reduced Benefits

Workers in the oil, gas, and petrochemical sectors were another important protesting group during the period under review. Protests by workers at South Pars Refinery 10 in Asaluyeh, Ghadir Petrochemical, Petronad Petrochemical, and other industrial sites demonstrated that labour tensions extended into some of Iran's most strategically important economic sectors.

A significant share of these protests took place in southern industrial regions, particularly Asaluyeh, Mahshahr, Bandar Imam, and Khuzestan. Workers' main demands concerned reduced benefits, changes to overtime payments, wage insecurity, poor accommodation conditions, and the continued reliance on contractor-based employment. Protests in January in particular also had calls for more political freedom or regime change.

Workers repeatedly argued that outsourcing arrangements created unequal treatment between permanent and contract employees. They demanded direct employment contracts, equal access to benefits, greater transparency regarding employment conditions, and protection against arbitrary dismissal.

At Petronad Petrochemical in Bandar Mahshahr, workers protested dismissals affecting locally recruited employees.

The protests in the oil and petrochemical sector reflected broader concerns regarding the expansion of precarious employment arrangements in industries traditionally associated with higher wages and stronger labour protections.

Company-Contracted Workers: Challenging Employment Insecurity

Another significant group of protesters consisted of company-contracted and outsourced workers employed in government institutions, municipalities, industrial companies, and service sectors.

For years, these workers have demanded the removal of intermediary contractors and the establishment of direct employment relationships with the main employer. During the period under review, they continued to gather outside government offices, provincial administrations, and workplaces to demand regularisation of their employment status.

Their demands focused on equal wages and benefits with permanent employees, timely payment of salaries, greater job security, and an end to repeated short-term contract arrangements. Workers argued that contractor-based employment contributed to wage discrimination, insecurity, and exclusion from benefits.

The prevalence of these protests demonstrated that employment insecurity had become one of the central concerns affecting workers across different sectors of the Iranian economy.

Nurses and Healthcare Workers: Defending Working Conditions and Patient Care

Nurses and healthcare workers also remained an active protesting group during the period under review. Their demands reflected both longstanding occupational grievances and broader concerns about the state of the healthcare system.

Nurses protested against low wages, unpaid claims, compulsory overtime, excessive workloads, staff shortages, and the continued failure to fully implement the Nursing Services Tariff Law. Many healthcare workers argued that rising responsibilities, inflation, and staff shortages had made their working conditions increasingly unsustainable.

At the same time, nurses increasingly framed their demands around the consequences of deteriorating working conditions for patients. They argued that shortages of healthcare personnel, exhaustion among nurses, and the departure of experienced staff affected not only healthcare workers themselves but also the quality of care available to patients, particularly vulnerable patients who depended on public healthcare services.

This dual focus was reflected in the slogans used during nurses' demonstrations. Alongside demands for improved working conditions, nurses emphasised their connection with the public and the patients they served - for instance, by chanting "Vulnerable patient, vulnerable nurse!" - presenting their mobilisation not only as a professional struggle but also as a defence of safe and dignified healthcare.

The protests therefore combined occupational demands with broader concerns about the future of public healthcare and the ability of the healthcare system to provide adequate care.

Mine Workers: Protesting Wage Arrears and Unsafe Working Conditions

Mine workers, particularly those employed in the coal mines of Kerman and the Zarshouran gold mine in Takab, also launched important protests in the period under study. Davtalab documented eight labour gatherings and protests at the Zarshouran mine in Takab, West Azerbaijan, and the Hashouni mine in Kerman.

In the case of Hashouni coal mine workers, protests included appeals to local authorities. In early May 2026, workers gathered in front of the Kuhbanan governorate to protest delayed wage payments and unpaid claims, including outstanding February payments. These protests reflected broader concerns among mine workers regarding wage insecurity, inadequate benefits, and unsafe working conditions.

At the Zarshouran gold mine in Takab, West Azerbaijan, workers continued a strike that had already begun in late December 2025 and extended into January 2026. The protest centred on wage disparities between mine workers and factory employees, with workers arguing that those performing physically demanding mining work received lower wages and fewer benefits.

Workers demanded wage increases, access to bonuses and employment benefits, and an end to inequalities linked to contractor-based employment. They also raised concerns regarding workplace safety, hazardous conditions, and insufficient oversight.

Industry

A reported 1,600 workers at Tabriz Machinery Group went on strike on 23rd of June, in response to not being paid for two months.

Railway Workers: Protesting Contractual Instability

Railway track and infrastructure workers, together with some public-service workers, maintained a visible

presence in labour protests during the period. Their protests were preceded by similar actions in 2025, demonstrating the persistence of longstanding grievances. In 2026 protests took place on 29 April, 13 May and 28 June.

Most railway infrastructure workers are employed through contracting companies and repeatedly protested against their contractual status, low wages, delayed payments, and lack of employment security.

Their principal demands included the removal of intermediary contractors, direct employment contracts, timely payment of wages, and access to benefits comparable to permanent employees.

New developments in labour mobilisation

At first glance, labour mobilisation during the reporting period may appear broadly consistent with previous years. Workers across a wide range of sectors continued to organise protests and strikes, and labour actions were recorded in 25 cities across Iran, demonstrating that labour grievances remained geographically widespread.

However, a closer examination reveals several important new developments in labour mobilisation during the first half of 2026. These developments unfolded against the backdrop of the deepening economic crisis, intensified political repression, restrictions on communication, and, from 28 February onwards, armed conflict. Together, these developments affected both the scale and the character of workers' collective action.

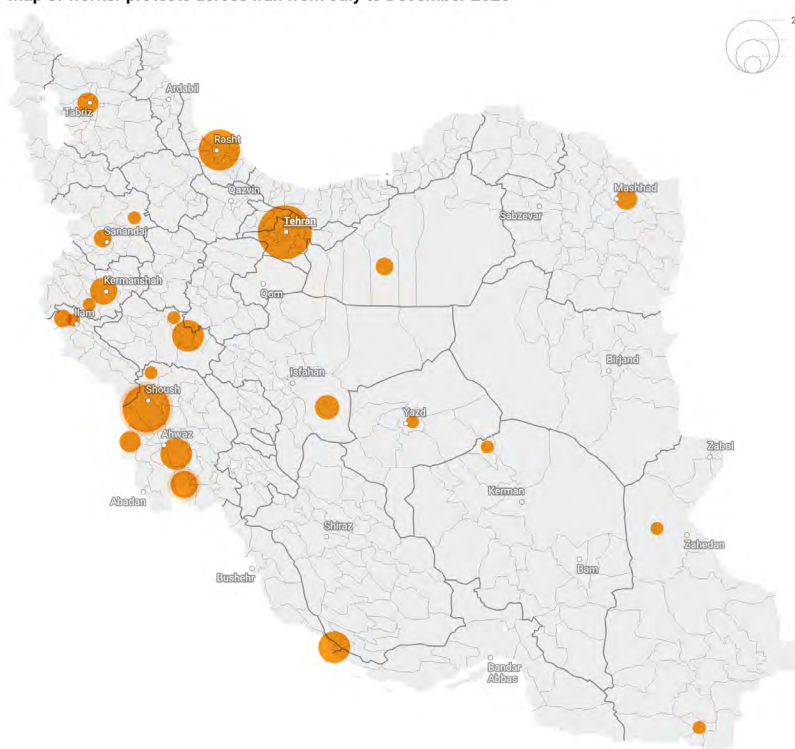
Quantitative changes: a decline in recorded labour mobilisation

While the number of recorded labour protests during the reporting period declined significantly compared with previous periods, this decrease should not be interpreted as evidence that workers' grievances had diminished. Rather, it appears to reflect the increasingly restrictive environment in which workers and activists operated, marked by heightened risks of arrest, dismissal, surveillance, and other forms of pressure.

The data indicate that, although labour mobilisation remained present during the broader protest period, recorded worker protests decreased significantly as authorities intensified repression and security measures. The January–February 2026 monitoring period, which coincided with the continuation of nationwide protests and the government response to them, recorded substantially fewer worker gatherings than the preceding period.

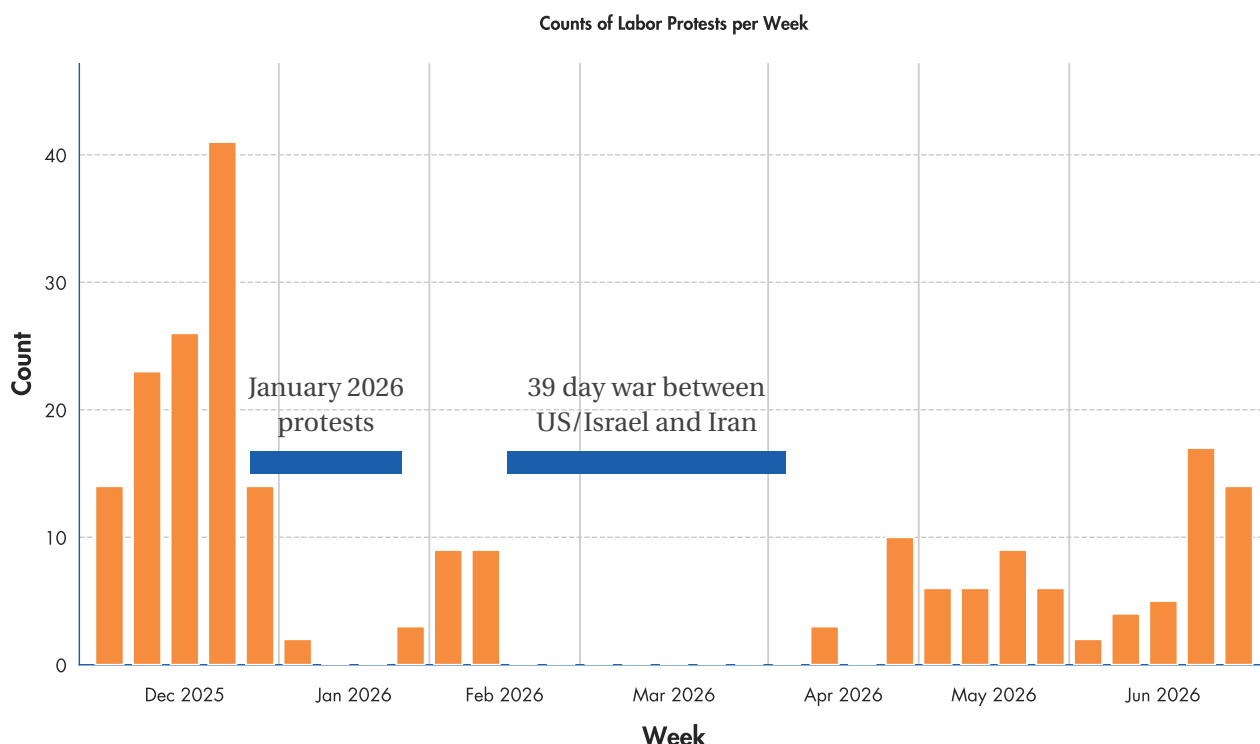
The outbreak of the Israel–Iran war on 28 February 2026 further intensified these constraints. During the

Map of worker protests across Iran from July to December 2025



Created with Datawrapper

Map of worker protests documented in the period January to June 2026. 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.



Number of labour protests documented by Volunteer Activists grouped per week. During the January 2026 anti-government protests and the war between US/Israel and Iran, workers did not organise protests. After the ceasefire, protests started slowly.

February–March 2026 monitoring period, no media-reported labour gatherings could be documented. Instead, the combination of armed conflict, heightened securitisation, communication restrictions, and uncertainty appears to have temporarily disrupted workers' ability to organise and publicly express demands. Labour mobilisation resumed in subsequent months, demonstrating that worker activism had been constrained rather than brought to an end.

Qualitative changes: a changing character of labour mobilisation

Alongside the decline in volume, the reporting period witnessed several important qualitative changes in the nature of labour mobilisation.

First, labour activism temporarily converged with broader political mobilisation.

January 2026 represented an important moment in which labour mobilisation intersected with the nationwide protests that had begun in December 2025. Labour-related demands concerning wages, inflation, pensions, and declining living standards became closely connected to wider expressions of public dissatisfaction.

This convergence was visible across different groups of workers and labour activists. Teacher activists participated in the broader protest movement, while workers at the strategically important South Pars refineries responded to calls for nationwide strike action. Other groups of workers and retirees also linked workplace grievances to wider expressions of economic and social dissatisfaction. In this context, issues that had traditionally been expressed through workplace-based mobilisation - including declining purchasing power, wage insecurity, pension problems, and the failure of state institutions to protect livelihoods - became part of a broader public debate about economic hardship and political conditions.

Second, the targets and framing of labour demonstrations changed.

In previous years, demonstrations were frequently directed towards company management or employers and focused primarily on workplace-specific demands. During the reporting period, however, a greater number of demonstrations took place outside government offices and public institutions. This suggests that workers increasingly viewed governmental bodies less as regulators and more as directly responsible actors for deteriorating labour conditions, declining purchasing power, and the failure to address long-standing economic grievances.

Third, the forms of collective action adapted to a more restrictive environment.

The dominant trend moved towards shorter-term and non-continuous gatherings, including demonstrations outside workplaces, government offices, and other public institutions. Nevertheless, more disruptive forms of collective action did not disappear. Data collected by Davtalab during the period under review show that, in at least 28 cases, workers in certain industrial occupations stopped work and combined strikes with protest gatherings. These cases demonstrate that, despite the increasingly restrictive environment, some groups of workers continued to use strikes as a means of exerting pressure on employers and state institutions.

Fourth, labour mobilisation became increasingly defensive.

From February onwards, many workers' actions focused less on achieving new gains and more on preventing further deterioration in their livelihoods. These actions sought to defend existing benefits, prevent wage reductions, secure unpaid wages, and resist worsening employment conditions. This shift reflected the severe economic pressures facing workers during a period marked by inflation, currency instability, conflict-related disruption, and growing uncertainty.

Major Online Campaigns

During the first six months of 2026, online campaigns were also an important form of collective action among workers, retirees, teachers, nurses, and other wage earners in Iran. While these campaigns had existed before this period, their importance increased as inflation, repression, insecurity, and restrictions on public mobilisation made large-scale (street) protests increasingly difficult.

A review of the Karzar platform³ and trade union-related social media networks between January and June 2026 shows that the main themes of labour and occupational campaigns reflected the broader economic crisis. The sharp rise in inflation and the continued decline in purchasing power placed wages, pensions, and the widening gap between income and living costs at the centre of many campaigns. Alongside these livelihood concerns, job security, the expansion of contractor-based employment, healthcare rights, and demands for equal treatment within public institutions were among the most frequently raised issues. Another feature of the online campaign landscape was that it consisted of both cross-sectoral and sector-specific forms of mobilisation.

The following sections examine the most significant labour and occupational campaigns during the first six months of 2026, focusing on the demands raised, the groups involved, and the extent to which digital mobilisation allowed workers to maintain collective action during a period of exceptional political and economic instability.

Campaigns on wages, pensions, and livelihood conditions

The largest category of online campaigns concerned the erosion of purchasing power and the inability of wages and pensions to keep pace with rapidly rising living costs.

³ Karzar, an Iranian online petition platform comparable to Change.org, has become an important venue through which workers, retirees, and other professional groups organise signature campaigns, document grievances, and seek public support for labour-related demands.

Campaign demanding a dignified wage based on the livelihood basket

This campaign was launched during the meetings of the Supreme Labour Council on wage determination, with support from the Supreme Centre of Trade Associations of the South Pars Oil and Gas Industries. It attracted approximately 10,000 signatures and followed similar initiatives organised in previous years around wage negotiations.

Drawing on Article 41 of the Labour Law, participants argued that the minimum wage should be determined according to the real cost of living rather than official inflation figures alone. The campaign highlighted the growing gap between workers' incomes and household expenses and argued that the failure to adjust wages in line with living costs represented not only an economic problem, but also a broader social crisis.

The campaign's principal demand was therefore the implementation of Article 41 and the determination of wages according to the actual livelihood basket. Within this framework, a fair wage was presented not as a welfare demand, but as a minimum condition for maintaining social and economic stability.

Campaign demanding salary increases for public-sector employees in line with real inflation

This campaign was launched in opposition to the livelihood-related provisions of Iran's 1405 (March 2026–March 2027) national budget. Public-sector employees and teachers argued that the proposed 20 percent salary increase was incompatible with inflation exceeding 50 percent and represented a failure to protect employees' purchasing power.

Participants referred to Article 125 of the Civil Service Management Law and argued that salary adjustments should reflect actual inflation levels rather than official budgetary limitations.

Campaign demanding implementation of Article 85 on supplementary insurance for retirees

This campaign collected more than 38,000 signatures and focused on the gap between legal obligations concerning retirees' healthcare coverage and their actual access to adequate insurance.

Based on Article 85 of the Civil Service Management Law, signatories argued that serving employees and retirees should receive equivalent supplementary insurance coverage. In practice, however, many retirees faced inadequate coverage and rising medical costs, forcing some to borrow money to pay for healthcare expenses.

The campaign therefore demanded the full implementation of Article 85, equal access to supplementary insurance, and an end to discrimination between serving employees and retirees.

Taken together, these campaigns demonstrate that livelihood demands during this period extended beyond requests for higher income. They reflected a broader crisis in which existing wage-setting and welfare mechanisms were increasingly unable to protect workers and retirees from inflationary pressures.

Campaigns by nurses and healthcare workers

Healthcare-related campaigns focused primarily on wage discrimination, payment structures, and the deterioration of working conditions.

Campaign protesting wage payments and implementation of the special allowance within the Ministry of Health

With more than 55,000 signatures, this was among the largest occupational campaigns during the period under review. The campaign focused on what participants described as discrimination within the Ministry of Health's payment system.

Signatories, many of whom were non-academic employees of medical universities and healthcare centres, argued that salary differences between occupational groups within the medical sector had widened significantly. They criticised the unequal implementation of special allowances and argued that employees carrying much of the practical burden of healthcare provision had been excluded from comparable financial benefits.

The campaign demanded reform of salary coefficients, fair implementation of allowances, and recognition of the difficult conditions faced by healthcare workers. It reflected wider concerns regarding increasing workloads, staff shortages, and the growing gap between professional responsibilities and income levels.

Beyond the web: campaigns that moved into public spaces

Online campaigns and petitions were not always confined to cyberspace. In several cases, retirees extended their collective action beyond digital platforms to raise concerns over pensions, fund governance, and economic insecurity. In Rasht, campaigning retirees submitted a petition to the Minister of Cooperatives, Labour and Social Welfare opposing government interference in the Social Security Fund, exemptions from employers' contribution payments, the non-implementation of Article 54 of the Social Security Law, and the widening gap between pensions and the poverty line. Earlier, a petition signed by 1,804 Social Security retirees was registered with the organisation's secretariat, calling for the rapid implementation of pension increases and the third phase of pension equalisation.

Campaigns by company-contracted and outsourced workers

The demand to remove intermediary companies and regularise employment status remained one of the most persistent themes of labour activism during this period. More than 1,600 people participated in campaigns concerning the regularisation of company-contracted and outsourced workers.

These campaigns involved workers employed in government institutions, banking, healthcare, municipalities, water and wastewater services, metro services, and other public-sector-related organisations. Among the groups involved were company-contracted workers nationwide, outsourced employees of Bank Keshavarzi and Bank Sepah, workers at Tehran Water and Wastewater Company, healthcare workers at medical universities, Tehran Metro employees, and service workers connected to various public institutions.

Despite differences between sectors, their demands were remarkably consistent: removal of intermediary companies, direct employment contracts, equal wages and benefits with permanent employees, greater job security, and an end to repeated short-term contract renewals.

Workers argued that intermediary employment systems had become a structural source of wage discrimination and insecurity. The repetition of these demands across different institutions demonstrates that contractor-based employment has become one of the most significant labour issues affecting a large section of Iran's workforce.

Campaigns by teachers

Teachers continued to use online campaigns to pursue both livelihood demands and broader institutional claims concerning the education system. These campaigns reflected not only dissatisfaction with salaries and working conditions, but also wider concerns about inequality, transparency, and the declining social position of teachers.

Campaign demanding recognition and implementation of teachers' ownership rights in the Teachers' Reserve Fund

This campaign, launched by retired teachers and other education workers, attracted more than 63,000 signatures. It sought to transform longstanding demands for transparency and reform of the Teachers' Reserve

Fund into a broader claim based on ownership rights.

Signatories argued that the fund's assets, companies, and holding groups were created through decades of deductions from teachers' salaries. Teachers should therefore not be regarded merely as beneficiaries of the fund, but as its actual owners with the right to oversight and participation in decisions concerning its resources.

The importance of this campaign extended beyond complaints about mismanagement. It challenged the relationship between the state, fund managers, and teachers, arguing that those whose contributions created the fund should have a meaningful role in determining how its assets are managed and distributed.

Campaign demanding the 25,000-point special allowance for teachers

This campaign collected more than 15,000 signatures and demanded that serving and retired teachers receive the full 25,000-point special allowance available to other government employees.

Participants argued that existing salary reforms had failed to address the widening gap between teachers' incomes and living costs. The campaign framed the issue as one of wage justice within the public sector, arguing that teachers remained among the lowest-paid government employees despite the importance of their social role.

The demand was therefore not presented simply as a request for additional income, but as a demand for recognition of teachers' professional status and an end to discrimination within the government payment system.

Campaign demanding reform of deductions from student teachers' salaries and an increase in the 1405 education budget

With more than 31,000 signatures, this campaign focused on the financial structure of Farhangian University and the deductions made from student teachers' salaries.

Participants argued that the university's growing reliance on internal revenues had effectively transferred part of the financial burden of teacher training onto future teachers themselves. They demanded increased public funding, greater transparency, and an end to excessive deductions from student teachers' incomes.

The campaign also reflected broader concerns about the future of the education system and the treatment of teachers from the beginning of their professional careers.

Campaign demanding action on teachers' livelihood conditions

This campaign collected more than 32,000 signatures and focused on the chronic wage crisis among teachers. Signatories argued that annual salary adjustments had failed to reflect actual living costs and that inflation had steadily eroded teachers' purchasing power.

Rather than seeking only another temporary salary adjustment, the campaign demanded a fundamental revision of the payment system and a broader recognition of teachers' economic and professional status.

While many teachers' campaigns continued to focus on wages, employment conditions, and institutional reform, teachers' digital networks also became a space for documenting the human consequences of the January protests and the subsequent violence (see textbox).

Empty Desks and Abandoned Backpacks: Teachers' Digital Campaigns for Remembering Children Killed During the Crisis

Not all online campaigns during the first six months of 2026 focused on wages, employment conditions, or institutional reforms. Teachers' networks also became a space for documenting the human consequences of the January protests and the subsequent armed conflict, particularly the deaths of children and students.

The **Empty Desks** and **Abandoned Backpacks** campaigns, initiated by the Coordinating Council of Iranian Teachers' Trade Associations, sought to preserve the names and stories of children whose lives were cut short during this period. Through digital platforms, teachers and activists collected information about students killed during the January protests and children who died in the bombing of Shajareh Tayyebbeh School in Minab on 28 February 2026.

The symbols chosen by these campaigns - the empty desk and the abandoned school bag - carried a meaning beyond the individual deaths they documented. They represented the absence left behind in classrooms, families, and communities: children who would never return to school, sit again with their classmates, or continue the education that shaped their future.

By focusing on ordinary objects from everyday school life, the campaigns transformed casualty figures into personal stories. An empty desk was no longer simply a sign of absence; it became a reminder of a child whose future had been interrupted. An abandoned backpack represented not only a lost possession, but also a life, a family, and a future that had been taken away.

The **Empty Desks** campaign documented the names and identities of school students and children under the age of 18 killed during the suppression of the January protests. The Coordinating Council framed these deaths not only as a political issue, but also as a violation of children's rights and their right to education. The campaign argued that every empty desk represented a lost future and a child deprived of the opportunity to learn, grow, and participate in society.

Following the bombing of Shajareh Tayyebbeh School in Minab during the armed conflict, the **Abandoned Backpacks** campaign extended this work to children killed during wartime violence. Through its Telegram channel, the Coordinating Council collected photographs and information about victims and emphasised that schools and children must never become targets of military action.

Together, these campaigns demonstrated that teachers' digital activism during this period extended beyond professional demands. In conditions where independent institutions capable of documenting abuses and defending public rights were severely restricted, teachers' networks became spaces for remembrance, protection of children's rights, and demands for accountability.



Image source: [X](#)

4. Government policies & law-making

Government responses to labour mobilisation during the period under review broadly followed three interconnected approaches: **disengagement**, whereby many workers' demands were simply ignored; **selective engagement**, involving limited concessions or negotiations in response to particular campaigns; and **repression**, through which the state sought to restrict labour mobilisation and narrow the space available for collective action.

Disengagement

For many workers and retirees, the principal government response was simply the absence of any meaningful response. Numerous demonstrations, petitions, and public appeals received little or no acknowledgement from the relevant authorities, despite addressing issues that had remained unresolved for years, including unpaid wages, pension arrears, employment insecurity, and deteriorating working conditions.

Selective Engagement

Although disengagement remained the dominant response, government institutions occasionally sought to engage with labour demands through negotiations, public statements, or limited concessions. Such engagement generally focused on addressing immediate pressures rather than resolving the structural causes of labour unrest.

Examples included promises regarding pension adjustments, discussions over wage increases, and negotiations surrounding employment conditions in particular sectors. In most cases, however, these responses remained partial, were implemented only after sustained pressure, or failed to address workers' broader concerns regarding inflation, declining purchasing power, and employment insecurity. In most cases, the responses of responsible institutions to the demands of retirees, industrial workers, nurses, and company-contracted employees took the form of promises to review grievances, establish specialised working groups, pay part of the arrears, or refer cases to administrative bodies. The continuation of similar protests across different cities, however, shows that a substantial share of these promises were either not implemented or failed to produce any noticeable improvement in protesters' livelihood and employment conditions. A good example was the earlier-mentioned protests at Petronad Petrochemical in Bandar Imam (Mahshahr) against the dismissal of around 200 locally recruited employees in May 2026. Although local labour authorities and officials later issued decisions supporting the return of some dismissed workers, questions regarding the implementation of reinstatement decisions and longer-term employment security remained unresolved.

It is important to note that the effects of labour mobilisation are not always immediately visible or limited to individual actions or campaigns. Although structural issues underlying labour grievances remained unresolved, sustained pressure from workers and labour organisations appeared to have prompted government institutions to introduce limited forms of worker engagement.

One example was the establishment of the "Tehran Province Coordination Council," bringing together the Tehran Province Centre of Islamic Labour Councils, Tehran Province trade associations, the retirees' centres of Tehran city and province, and the Tehran Province Employers' Centre. According to one member of the workers' group on the Supreme Labour Council, the council was established amid criticism of unilateral government decisions concerning workers, retirees, and the Social Security Fund. At its first meeting, members criticised the process through which regulations, resolutions, and proposals were submitted by the Social Security Organization and the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour and Social Welfare to the government and

parliament without meaningful participation by those affected. They also renewed calls for tripartism—the principle that workers, employers, and the government should all participate in decision-making concerning labour and social security.

Although the council does not signify labour independence, its establishment represents a limited institutional response to longstanding demands for greater worker participation and suggests that sustained labour pressure can, at times, prompt incremental changes even within a highly constrained environment.

Another development was the establishment of the country's first specialised dispute-resolution council for building painters. Construction workers are among the most vulnerable sections of Iran's workforce, with many lacking stable contracts, insurance coverage, or effective access to legal remedies. While the council's practical impact remains uncertain, its establishment reflects continuing pressure for sector-based representation, faster dispute resolution, and greater employment protection.

Taken together, these developments do not amount to a broader opening of Iran's labour relations system. They nevertheless suggest that, despite the state's generally restrictive approach, sustained labour mobilisation can at times prompt limited institutional responses and incremental adjustments, even where broader demands remain unresolved.

Online campaigns followed a similar pattern of limited state engagement. In most cases, no direct government response could be identified, and campaigns conducted through digital platforms appeared to have little immediate impact on official policy or decision-making. Nevertheless, online mobilisation occasionally appeared to have contributed to broader advocacy efforts and helped sustain attention around specific labour demands. One example was the campaign calling for the abolition of temporary employment contracts. In this case, the government appeared to respond to at least some of the concerns raised, and limited progress was made towards reforming contractual employment arrangements, as discussed in the second part of this chapter.

Repression and the narrowing of civic space

Despite occasional concessions, repression remained the defining feature of the state's response to labour mobilisation. Authorities relied on arrests, legal pressure, intimidation, surveillance, and restrictions on collective organising to limit workers' ability to pursue their demands. This pressure affected both individual activists and the wider structures through which workers organised, including independent unions, informal networks, and even officially recognised labour bodies.

Targeting of labour activists

Teacher activists remained among the groups most frequently targeted, reflecting both their prominent role in labour organising and their participation in broader public protests. At least 30 teachers' trade activists faced arrest, prison sentences, and financial penalties. Fourteen teachers remain imprisoned: Ali Ahmadi, from Shiraz; Masoud Farhikhteh, from Alborz; Abdolreza Amanifar, from Bushehr; Alireza Shayegan, from Sabzevar; Amir Rahimi, from Azna; Siamak Chehrazhi, from Ahvaz; Bakhtiar Rezvani, from Yasuj; Keyumars Vaezi, from Sonqor; Arman Shahpourikhou, from Izeh; Vahid Ghasemi, from Fariman; Forouzan Yektaei, from Rasht; Mohammad-Hassan Davoudi, from Urmia; Yousef Amini, from Bukan; and Mahnaz Haddad Kakhki, from Fariman. One teacher, Ali Mardasi, has been sentenced to death.

However, repression did not eliminate all avenues for labour advocacy. In relation to demands for the release of detained activists, teacher activists achieved some limited successes through sustained advocacy. Persistent solidarity among teachers' trade activists contributed to the release of three trade activists - Manouchehr Aghabeygi, Mohammad-Ali Zahmatkesh, and Mahmoud Seddighipour - during the past six months. Aghabeygi was released in April 2026 and Zahmatkesh in June 2026; the timing of Seddighipour's release could not be independently verified. These releases represented only limited gains within the broader context of continued

repression against teachers' trade activists.

Repression following mass protests and the shrinking of public space

The repression surrounding the January 2026 protests also had a significant impact on labour mobilisation. The protests began amid growing economic pressure, including rising prices, declining purchasing power, and widening gaps between income and living costs. Although initially driven by economic grievances, they quickly developed into broader anti-government demonstrations.

Reports indicate that workers, wage earners, and unemployed people constituted a significant proportion of those affected by the crackdown, which reportedly killed an estimated tens of thousands of Iranians and led to the imprisonment of many more.

According to the study [Lives Lost in Dey](#), which examined a sample of 957 people killed during the January 2026 protests and their Instagram traces, approximately two-thirds of victims were aged 30 or younger. The study found that students and people working in service-sector, small-scale trade, and other customer-facing occupations were among the most frequently identified groups, indicating that those affected included many people from economically vulnerable and precarious sections of society.

According to Mohammad Habibi, spokesperson for the Coordinating Council of Iranian Teachers' Trade Associations, at least 11 serving and retired teachers were killed during the protests, while dozens of others were arrested. The crackdown contributed to a climate of fear and pushed labour and trade movements into a period of reduced public activity.

Meanwhile, online campaigns greatly suffered from internet blockades, which weakened their reach and effectiveness by restricting access to digital platforms, disrupting coordination, and reducing visibility both domestically and internationally.

Restrictions on independent organisations and communication networks

Beyond the direct targeting of activists, authorities also sought to weaken the organisational capacity of labour movements. Following the January 2026 protests, labour activists reported increasing numbers of summonses, threats, and security-related pressure. Many labour gatherings became smaller and less frequent, while independent organisations and informal worker networks reduced their public activities or ceased operating altogether. Teacher activists were among those particularly targeted, reflecting the broader pressure placed on organised labour. At least 36 teacher activists were reportedly arrested or dismissed from their positions, with punitive measures against educators further limiting the ability of professional associations and worker networks to organise, advocate for better conditions, and collectively voice grievances.

The increasingly restrictive environment also affected online mobilisation. As worsening living conditions fuelled a growing number of online campaigns and petitions, internet restrictions and communication disruptions made it increasingly difficult for workers and activists to coordinate collective action, publicise demands, and maintain links between different groups. In this respect, online mobilisation became subject to the same dynamics as street protests: deteriorating socio-economic conditions generated greater pressure for collective action, while securitisation and restrictions on communication narrowed the space in which that action could take place.

In some cases, including that of the Telegram channel of the [Free Union of Iranian Workers](#), which had more than 6,500 subscribers, reports suggested that security institutions had gained access to or control over the platform. This indicates that state intervention extended beyond infrastructural disruption to include attempts to monitor, infiltrate, and potentially control workers' communication networks.

The decline in recorded labour protests during the months following January should therefore not be interpreted as evidence that workers' grievances had diminished. Rather, it reflected the rising risks associated

with collective action, the disruption of communication channels, and the narrowing space available for both online and offline mobilisation.

Pressure within official labour structures

A significant development during the period under review was the growing extension of political pressure from independent labour organisations to officially recognised labour bodies operating within Iran's formal industrial-relations system. The resignation of Somayeh Golpour, head of the Supreme Centre of Iranian Workers' Trade Associations, illustrated the growing tensions within these official structures.

In an interview with the state-run ILNA news agency, Golpour criticised what she described as the "engineering of the will of labour organisations by powerful Godfather type structures", political interference in organisational decision-making, the exclusion of workers' representatives from key policy discussions, and the transformation of labour organisations into bodies expected primarily to endorse decisions that had already been taken.

These criticisms are particularly significant because workers' trade associations are among the labour organisations formally recognised by the Iranian state and, unlike independent unions, operate within the official labour-relations framework. The concerns expressed by the head of the country's largest officially recognised labour body therefore suggest that government control increasingly extended beyond independent activists to organisations embedded within the state's own institutional structures.

More broadly, these developments point to a gradual weakening of meaningful worker representation, the erosion of organisational autonomy, and a narrowing of the already limited space available for collective bargaining and social dialogue.

Government and Parliamentary Plans and Measures

Government responses to labour mobilisation were not limited to the immediate handling of protests or broader efforts to shape the organisational and institutional environment in which labour demands can be expressed and negotiated. Throughout the period under review, government and parliamentary actions also shaped the wider policy environment in which labour relations evolved, including by pursuing a series of legislative and policy initiatives intended to address broader challenges in labour relations, pensions, and social welfare. Many of these measures were presented as structural reforms aimed at improving the sustainability of the welfare system, strengthening public finances, or increasing administrative efficiency. At the same time, however, they became the subject of significant controversy among workers, retirees, trade organisations, and social policy experts, many of whom argued that the proposed reforms would weaken labour protections and transfer a growing share of economic risks onto workers and pensioners.

Together, these initiatives illustrate that the government's response to the labour crisis extended beyond managing protests. It also sought to address labour relations, pensions, and social welfare through legislative and policy reform. Whether these measures represented genuine structural reform or primarily mechanisms for containing public expenditure and transferring economic risks onto workers and retirees became a central point of contention throughout the period under review.

Four initiatives were particularly prominent during the reporting period: the Bill to Amend the Social Security Law and Establish a New Social Security System, the Bill to Change the Basis for Calculating Retirement Pensions, the Plan to Remove Contractors and Regularise Company-Contracted Government Employees, and the welfare and livelihood measures contained in the 1405 Budget. All four generated widespread debate because of their direct implications for the job security, incomes, retirement conditions, and social-protection rights of millions of workers and retirees.

Bill to Amend the Social Security Law and Establish a New Social Security System

Current status: Draft under government review

The Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour and Social Welfare has stated that the bill aims to create an integrated social security system, reduce pension-fund imbalances, improve coordination among insurance funds, and reorganise the government's welfare obligations. Its principal components include establishing a new institutional structure for the national social security system, redefining the financial relationship between the government and insurance funds, increasing coordination or facilitating the merger of pension funds, introducing different levels of social protection, reforming funding mechanisms, and expanding the government's role in welfare policymaking.

The bill has nevertheless attracted widespread criticism. Critics argue that the Social Security Organization is founded on the principle of *haqq al-nas*—rights belonging to the public—and is financed through contributions paid by workers and employers rather than through general government revenue. They therefore contend that the proposed reforms would increase state control over workers' intergenerational assets.

Retirees, labour activists, and social policy experts have also warned that the bill could reduce the managerial independence of the Social Security Organization and incorporate it more directly into the government's financial structure. They note that the government already owes the organisation hundreds of trillions of tomans and argue that these debts should be settled before structural reforms are pursued. Critics further emphasise that the draft was prepared without meaningful participation by workers' representatives and is inconsistent with key principles promoted by the International Labour Organization.

Bill to Change the Basis for Calculating Retirement Pensions

Current status: Under expert review in specialised parliamentary commissions

The bill proposes changing the basis for calculating retirement pensions from the final two years of employment to a longer reference period, such as the final five or ten years. The government has presented the proposal as part of a broader programme of parametric pension reform designed to improve the financial sustainability of pension funds. It argues that extending the calculation period would prevent unusually large salary increases immediately before retirement from disproportionately increasing pension liabilities.

Retirees and independent experts, however, argue that the proposal would substantially reduce future pensions and transfer the financial burden of the pension system's structural problems onto insured workers. Under conditions of high inflation and rapidly rising living costs, critics warn that the measure would increase poverty among future retirees and further reduce purchasing power. Rather than addressing the government's accumulated debts to pension funds or undertaking broader fiscal reform, they regard the proposal as a form of concealed pension retrenchment.

Plan to Remove Contractors and Regularise Company-Contracted Government Employees

Current status: Approved by parliament; undergoing resolution of outstanding objections and awaiting implementation

The plan has been under discussion for several years and became one of the principal demands of company-contracted and outsourced workers during the period under review. Its stated objectives include eliminating labour-supply intermediary companies, establishing direct employment relationships with government institutions, reducing corruption associated with contracting arrangements, and strengthening job security.

Supporters argue that intermediary contracting has contributed to wage discrimination, reduced workers' incomes, and undermined employment security. Despite parliamentary approval on 17 July 2023, implementation has been repeatedly delayed because of concerns regarding financial costs, uncertainty over the categories of workers covered, and resistance from parts of the executive branch.

Prospects for implementation nevertheless appeared to improve during the reporting period. On 1 May 2026, coinciding with International Workers' Day, President Masoud Pezeshkian announced on X that he had "issued the order to dismantle contracting companies". Two days later, Minister of Cooperatives, Labour and Social Welfare Ahmad Meydari confirmed that the instruction had been issued before the war and that the ministry was actively pursuing the regularisation of company-contracted employees.

Despite these statements, important questions remain unresolved. Parliament continues to prepare the legal framework required for implementation, while labour representatives have expressed concerns regarding the effects of regularisation on wages, employment conditions, and eligibility criteria.

According to Ali Keshvari, deputy chair of parliament's Article 90 Commission, provisions concerning the regularisation of company-contracted employees were incorporated into the 1405 budget and are being translated into executive procedures. He stated that the government, together with the Administrative and Recruitment Affairs Organization and the Planning and Budget Organization, is developing criteria based on work experience, qualifications, and educational background, with wages to be paid directly to employees rather than through intermediary companies.

Keshvari also emphasised that implementation would necessarily be gradual. Because many employees had entered public employment through different recruitment mechanisms, including informal appointments, additional assessment procedures would be introduced before regularisation. According to his estimates, a substantial proportion of eligible employees could be covered before the end of the year.

Welfare and Livelihood Measures in the 1405 Budget

Current status: Approved by parliament

The 1405 budget introduced a series of welfare and livelihood measures that became central to debates over social policy during the reporting period. These included a substantial increase in government tax revenues through higher tax collection targets and an increase in value-added tax from 10 to 12 per cent, the removal of the preferential exchange rate for many essential imports, the continuation of cash subsidies, and an expanded electronic commodity voucher programme.

The government presented the budget as an effort to maintain fiscal discipline while mitigating pressure on household livelihoods through targeted compensatory measures. In practice, however, support relied primarily on cash transfers and commodity vouchers after price increases had already occurred rather than on preventing increases in the cost of living.

Critics argued that eliminating the preferential exchange rate while simultaneously increasing value-added tax would contribute to higher prices for essential goods and intensify inflationary pressures. They further noted that previous experience had demonstrated that cash subsidies rapidly lose their value under conditions of sustained inflation and therefore fail to compensate for declining purchasing power.

Additional concerns focused on the regressive nature of higher value-added tax, delays in financing the commodity voucher programme, weaknesses in oversight of essential imports, and the continuing gap between official salary increases and the actual cost of living. Although public-sector wages and pensions were increased by between 20 and 43 per cent, both official and independent estimates suggested that inflation remained well above these levels, implying a continued decline in the real incomes of workers, retirees, and other salaried households.

Overall, assessments by labour representatives and independent experts suggested that these measures were presented as structural reforms intended to improve efficiency, strengthen public finances, and modernise the welfare system. In practice, however, many argued that they focused less on addressing the underlying structural weaknesses of Iran's labour market and social protection system than on reducing public expenditure and shifting a greater share of economic adjustment onto workers and retirees.

Emergency Wartime Measures

In addition to these longer-term legislative initiatives, the armed conflict with Israel and the United States prompted the Iranian government to introduce a series of emergency wartime measures aimed at mitigating the immediate economic and social consequences of the conflict. These measures sought to preserve employment, maintain access to existing social protection mechanisms, and stabilise the supply of essential goods. However, their scope remained limited, with many focusing on short-term administrative relief rather than addressing the deeper economic vulnerabilities facing workers, including inflation, declining purchasing power, insecure employment, and gaps in social protection.

In addition to considering existing measures, the Iranian government also adopted new policy decisions following the armed conflict with Israel and the US including the following:

Preferential Exchange Rate for Essential Goods

Status: Adopted by cabinet (April 2026)

In April 2026, the government approved a preferential exchange rate of 285,000 rials (28,500 tomans) per US dollar for imports of medicines, consumable medical supplies, infant formula and its raw materials, and wheat. The measure applies to imports worth up to USD 5.3 billion and partially reverses earlier reforms that had removed preferential exchange rates for essential goods.

The government presented the measure as a means of stabilising prices and safeguarding supplies of essential goods during the war. Observers have nevertheless questioned its effectiveness, noting that the scheme covers only a limited range of goods and that the substantial gap between the preferential and market exchange rates may create opportunities for rent-seeking and unequal allocation of resources.

Wartime Relaxation of Unemployment Insurance Rules

Status: Implemented during the wartime emergency

The government announced that workers who lose their jobs as a result of war or other force majeure events may receive unemployment benefits without meeting the ordinary six-month insurance contribution requirement. Additional administrative measures included allowing large employers to submit unemployment lists directly to Labour Offices, establishing a dedicated telephone application hotline (1420), and extending registration deadlines following disruption to the online Labour Relations System.

These measures were intended to facilitate access to unemployment insurance under emergency conditions. However, eligibility remained largely confined to insured workers, leaving daily labourers, platform workers, and many informal workers outside the scope of protection. Reports also indicated significant delays in the payment of approved unemployment benefits.

Suspension of Employment Contracts During Wartime

Status: Implemented during the wartime emergency

The government clarified that where workplaces are unable to operate because of war damage, employment contracts should be treated as suspended rather than terminated. Workers are expected to return to their previous employment once operations resume, subject to procedures administered by the Labour Office and the Supreme Labour Council. The clarification provides a degree of legal protection for workers in formally registered employment. However, it does not address workers in informal employment or cases where businesses cease operating because of indirect consequences of the conflict, such as supply-chain disruption or economic recession.

Temporary Social Security Measures

Status: Implemented during the wartime emergency

The Social Security Organization introduced a number of temporary administrative measures, including suspension of non-essential workplace inspections, extension of healthcare eligibility for insured workers after contribution payments ceased, temporary suspension of certain enforcement actions, automatic extension of healthcare coverage for some dependants, and extensions of deadlines for submitting insurance declarations and paying contributions.

These measures were primarily intended to ensure continuity of existing social insurance services during the conflict. They did not establish new forms of income support and therefore offered limited assistance to workers who had lost employment or who were not covered by the formal social security system.

The Social Security Organization stated that during the war it not only paid approximately two trillion tomans in unemployment benefits to insured workers but also provided a range of other services, including 41 trillion tomans in New Year bonuses to retirees, 25 trillion tomans to settle debts to medical centres, 7.5 trillion tomans in direct treatment costs, and 85 trillion tomans in pensions. Nevertheless, on 9 June, the state-run ILNA news agency reported that the main wave of unemployed applicants who had completed the administrative process in March and April and received final text-message confirmation that their files had been sent to local branches were still waiting for their first unemployment-insurance payment. The report also noted that “it appears increasingly likely that payments will begin gradually from mid-summer - which would mean a delay of more than three months in the payment of unemployment benefits.”

Emergency Employment Support Credit Scheme

Status: Implemented from 28 February 2026

The Ministry of Economic Affairs introduced an emergency credit programme for enterprises employing between two and fifty insured workers. The loans were intended to finance wages and social insurance contributions, with interest rates varying according to the employer's success in maintaining employment levels.

The scheme was designed to reduce dismissals by supporting employers rather than providing direct assistance to workers. Critics note that it excludes self-employed persons, informal workers, micro-enterprises, and larger enterprises, while the relatively high interest rates and short repayment periods may limit its effectiveness during a prolonged economic downturn.

Wage Measures

Status: Minimum wage increase adopted; additional flexibility under consideration

The statutory minimum wage for the Iranian year 1405 was increased by approximately 60 per cent. At the same time, the government proposed allowing financially distressed enterprises greater flexibility in applying wage increases to employees earning above the statutory minimum wage. While the increase was presented as a response to rising living costs, its practical impact has been questioned because of implementation delays and persistently high inflation. The proposed flexibility for higher wage levels has also raised concerns that employers may seek to limit agreed wage increases under the guise of wartime economic pressures.

Commodity Voucher Programme

Status: Expanded during the wartime emergency

The government expanded the use of commodity vouchers to support household consumption during the conflict, providing assistance valued at approximately one million tomans per household. The programme was intended to cushion the impact of rising food prices and supply disruptions. However, the value of the vouchers falls well below estimated living costs and is widely regarded as an emergency relief measure rather than a comprehensive response to the deterioration in household purchasing power.

5. Analysis & Way Forward

The first half of 2026 represented one of the darkest periods for Iranian workers since VA began monitoring labour conditions in Iran. Workers faced a convergence of overlapping crises that reinforced one another. Persistently high inflation and declining purchasing power coincided with growing employment insecurity, the continued expansion of temporary and contractor-based work, and weak social protection. These economic challenges were compounded by restrictions on freedom of association, repression of labour activism, prolonged internet shutdowns that disrupted communication and organising, and persistently high levels of occupational fatalities. From 28 February onwards, these challenges were further exacerbated by an armed conflict that resulted in worker casualties, damaged production capacity, and disrupted large parts of the labour market.

These developments did not emerge in isolation. Rather, they compounded longstanding economic and political problems in Iran. Many of the challenges documented during this reporting period - including precarious employment, inadequate wages, limited social protection, and restrictions on workers' rights - had already been entrenched for years and intensified significantly during the first half of 2026. Repression also reached unprecedented levels. Notably, even state-affiliated labour organisations increasingly found themselves at odds with government policies and intervention, highlighting the shrinking space for independent advocacy as well as growing tensions within officially recognised labour institutions.

Despite these adverse conditions, there were also signs of resilience. Iranian workers continued to mobilise on a nationwide scale, albeit less frequently than in previous reporting periods and through more adaptive forms of collective action, reflecting the combined effects of severe economic hardship, intensified repression, and heightened security concerns. At the same time, sustained labour mobilisation and mounting economic pressures appeared to compel the government to respond, at least in part, to workers' grievances. Measures such as increasing the minimum wage, advancing proposals to limit the use of temporary employment contracts, and introducing support for workers whose employment was disrupted by the conflict reflected an acknowledgement of worsening socioeconomic conditions. In addition, some new institutional mechanisms were introduced that, at least formally, provided workers with greater opportunities to participate in discussions on economic issues. However, these initiatives remained insufficient to offset the effects of inflation and declining living standards. Moreover, they largely failed to address the vulnerabilities of workers outside formal employment relationships, including temporary, contract, and informal workers, who remained among those most exposed to economic insecurity.

Looking ahead, labour mobilisation is likely to continue to be shaped by the interaction between persistent economic grievances, state efforts to restrict collective organising, and broader geopolitical tensions. Although repression has constrained workers' ability to mobilise openly, existing networks of solidarity and recurring forms of collective action suggest that labour activism is unlikely to disappear. The extent to which workers can sustain these networks, develop new forms of organisation, and translate shared grievances into collective demands will remain central to the future trajectory of labour mobilisation.

The recommendations that follow are intended to support these efforts by strengthening the protection of workers' rights and livelihoods, reinforcing channels of representation and solidarity, and addressing both the immediate consequences of recent crises and the structural factors that continue to undermine decent work in Iran.

Key Recommendations

To Civil Society and Labour Activists in Iran

- Strengthening small-scale, local, and trust-based communication networks to preserve information-sharing, mutual support, and connections among workers where formal organising structures face restrictions.
- Supporting systematic documentation of labour conditions, including wage arrears, dismissals, precarious employment, workplace accidents, safety violations, and restrictions on labour rights.
- Developing diverse forms of peaceful collective action and advocacy, including issue-based campaigns, joint statements, information-sharing initiatives, and other approaches suited to a restrictive environment.
- Strengthening solidarity across different groups of workers, including formal and informal workers, teachers, retirees, service workers, and workers in vulnerable sectors facing shared challenges related to inflation, insecurity, and weak social protection.
- Promoting secure communication practices and awareness of digital security measures to protect workers, activists, and labour networks.
- Promoting labour rights awareness and practical guidance for workers, including information on wage entitlements, workplace safety, and available channels for raising concerns, particularly among workers in precarious and informal employment.
- Strengthening worker-led capacity building and leadership development, including supporting workers in developing skills related to negotiation, collective problem-solving, workplace advocacy, and adaptive forms of organising suited to a restrictive environment.
- Ensuring greater inclusion of workers who are often underrepresented in labour organising, including women workers, migrant workers, informal workers, temporary workers, and those in vulnerable sectors, whose exposure to economic insecurity and rights violations is often heightened.
- Fostering networks of cooperation among labour actors, civil society groups, and independent experts, where possible, to share knowledge, document emerging challenges, coordinate support, and strengthen advocacy for workers' rights and social protection.

To the Government of Iran

- Ensuring freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the right to peaceful collective action, while ending pressure, intimidation, and legal action against labour activists exercising these rights.
- Improving enforcement of wage regulations, ensuring timely payment of wages and employment-related benefits, and protecting workers' purchasing power in the context of inflation and rising living costs.
- Addressing precarious employment practices, including insecure temporary contracts and contractor-based employment arrangements, while extending effective labour protections to informal and vulnerable workers.
- Expanding social protection coverage for workers affected by economic crisis, conflict, unemployment, and industrial disruption, including those outside traditional formal employment structures.
- Developing effective responses to employment losses caused by economic disruption and conflict through measures that support livelihoods, employment creation, and affected households.
- Improving occupational health and safety standards, strengthening labour inspections, ensuring employer

accountability, and addressing persistent causes of workplace accidents.

- Establishing meaningful mechanisms for social dialogue between workers, employers, and state institutions to address labour grievances and support more effective policy responses.
- Ensuring that wage and pension policies reflect inflation and the real cost of living in order to prevent further erosion of workers' welfare.
- Reviewing public expenditure priorities to ensure sufficient resources are directed towards social protection, employment security, and protection of workers' livelihoods.

To the International Community

- Supporting diplomatic efforts aimed at achieving lasting peace between Iran, Israel, and the United States, reducing regional tensions, and preventing further escalation of conflict.
- Ensuring that labour rights remain an integral part of international engagement with Iran.
- Supporting independent monitoring, reporting, and documentation of labour rights conditions and violations.
- Maintaining international visibility of labour rights violations and workers' experiences, including by informing international media, supporting responsible reporting, and engaging with labour rights networks, recognising that international attention can provide both practical support and important moral solidarity to workers operating in an increasingly restrictive environment.
- Supporting labour rights defenders, civil society organisations, and networks documenting workers' experiences and advocating for labour rights.
- Assessing and addressing the social and humanitarian consequences of sanctions, conflict, and economic policies on ordinary workers and their livelihoods.
- Supporting initiatives that strengthen decent work, social protection, occupational safety, and employment resilience during periods of crisis.
- Providing technical support and facilitating exchange of knowledge and experience on labour protection, social security, occupational health and safety, and labour relations.
- Strengthening cooperation between international labour organisations, human rights institutions, researchers, and civil society actors to improve understanding of labour challenges and support effective responses.

Appendix A: Documented Worker Casualties During the First Two Weeks of the War (28 February–15 March 2026)

This appendix provides a chronological record of documented workers killed or injured during the first two weeks of the war, from 28 February to 15 March 2026. It includes workers whose occupations could be identified through publicly available information, including industrial workers, teachers and other education-sector employees, healthcare personnel, emergency workers, municipal employees, road maintenance workers, drivers, service workers, administrative employees, and others.

The record is not intended to represent a complete list of worker casualties. No comprehensive and independent database of workers killed or injured during the war has been published. The cases included here represent only those that could be documented through available sources and should therefore be understood as a minimum record of identified worker casualties.

The appendix excludes members of the military, police, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and the Basij, even where they also held civilian occupations. It also excludes individuals whose occupation could not be established.

28 February 2026

Minab, Hormozgan Province - Shajareh Tayyebah Primary School

The attack on Shajareh Tayyebah School killed 26 teachers and members of the school staff alongside dozens of students. Those killed included school principals, classroom teachers, a counsellor, and other educational employees:

Fatemeh Taherifard, principal of the girls' school; Poursan Gholipour, principal of the boys' school; Samira Basardeh, first-grade teacher; Fatemeh Salari, teacher; Fereshteh Sangarzadeh, teacher; Marzieh Bashirifar, second-grade teacher; Fatemeh Asgari Minab, teacher; Fatemeh Fadavi Hokmi, teacher; Mandana Salari, first-grade teacher and mother of Liana Mohammadi, one of the students killed; Fatemeh Shahdadi, physical education teacher; Raheleh Ranjbari, teacher; Maliheh Naiemi, teacher; Sima Karimi, teacher; Mohaddeseh Mohammadian, teacher; Farideh Mokhtari, teacher; Elham Karimi, deputy principal and relative of students killed in the attack; Razieh Zamani, teacher; Mahsa Ranjbari, school counsellor; Narges Zakeri, teacher; Mahdieh Rasouli, teacher; Neda Solhizadeh, teacher; Marzieh Firouzi, teacher; Nasim Neyestani, teacher; Khadijeh Kamali, Qur'an teacher; Aniseh Karimi, teacher; and Zohreh Shahriari, teacher.

A driver and a pharmacy technician working at a clinic near the school were also killed.

Lamerd, Fars Province

Rababe Dehdashti, a radiology specialist, was killed in the attack on Lamerd. Mahmoud Najafi, a sports coach, and Hamid Amini, an Iranian-Norwegian engineer, were also among those killed. Rahimeh Shahabi, a volleyball coach, was injured at Shahid Naeimi Stadium.

1 March 2026

Tehran - Absardar neighbourhood

An Afghan building caretaker was reported killed.

Tehran - Niloufar Square

Kamran Pasandak, a municipal worker and gardener at Niloufar Square, and Seyed Mehdi Ahmadizadeh, a graphic designer employed by Snapp, were among those killed.

Tehran - Judiciary building adjacent to the historic Radio Arg

Sadra Radaei, a sound engineer and producer at Radio Namayesh/Radio Nama, was killed.

2 March 2026***Sarableh, Ilam Province***

Sousan Mohammadzadeh, a teacher, was killed.

Tehran - Iranshahr Street, Tehran Provincial Emergency Medical Services building

Mohammad-Esmaeil Tavakoli, head of Tehran Emergency Medical Services, was injured.

Urmia - Ghasemieh neighbourhood

Milad Kouhkolani, an employee of Urmia Municipality, was among those killed.

3 March 2026***Hajib village/Buin Zahra, Qazvin Province - Farm***

Mojtaba Jahanshahlou, a farmer and caretaker of the farm, was injured in an attack that killed his two daughters.

Qom - Resalat Square, Secretariat building of the Assembly of Experts

Two Afghan migrant construction workers were killed in the attack: Mohammad Sadeghi and Mohammad Sakhi Khavari. Mehdi Asghari, an employee of Bank Sepah, also lost his life.

Tehran - Near Enghelab Square/South Kargar Street

Dr Ali Arya, a third-year orthopaedic resident at Sina Hospital, was killed. On the same day, Ali Abdollahi, an emergency operations specialist in western Tehran Province, was killed in a separate attack.

4 March 2026***Alvand, Qazvin Province - Alborz Industrial City***

The attack on Alborz Industrial City injured 23 people. Reports and images from the site indicated that Tose'e Machine-Saz Farayand Mehr and Airpad Sanat Alborz were damaged or destroyed.

Mehran, Ilam Province - Border Guard Clinic/Medical Centre

Mohammadreza Abbasi, a physician, was killed.

Kermanshah - Naft Square

Ali-Akbar Parang, a fuel-transport driver employed by the Kermanshah Oil Products Distribution Company, was killed.

5 March 2026

Kilometre 80 of the Qazvin–Zanjan Freeway - Pasargad Service Complex

Among those killed in this attack were Behrouz Mohammadi, a cook at the Pasargad complex; Fa'eze Zeinali, a bank employee; Arash Molaei, a sandwich-shop worker; and Hüseyin Fırat, a truck driver from Turkey.

Those injured included Soheil Molaei, who worked in his father's sandwich shop, as well as a taxi driver and another restaurant worker.

Khomein - Basij Street, shop beside the clinic

Atefeh Sohrabi, head nurse of the intensive care unit at Hazrat Fatemeh Zahra Hospital in Khomein, was killed.

Shiraz - Zibashahr Park/Camp

Houshang Tork-Olia and Sajjad Charkhandeh, emergency operations specialists at the Zibashahr emergency base; Hassan Mohammadi, an employee of the communicable diseases unit at Shohaday-e Valfajr Health Centre in Shiraz; and Alamdaar Akhbarfar, a Shiraz municipal worker, were killed. Reports also indicated that three additional Shiraz municipal workers were killed.

Qazvin - Abgineh Production Unit

Twelve workers employed at the Abgineh production facility were injured. Parsa Crystal Company, a producer of glassware and handicraft products, sustained severe damage.

6 March 2026

Dorcheh/Valashan, Isfahan Province

Razieh Abedi, a nurse, was killed.

Mahabad - Red Crescent building

The attack on the Red Crescent building injured one person.

7 March 2026

Shahran Oil Depot

Mohammad-Hassan Zaghi and Mohammadreza Ahmadi, two workers connected to the oil depot, were killed.

Heydarabad Industrial Estate, Sulduz

At least ten workers at the Payard flour and starch factory were reported killed or missing: Aziz Abbaszadeh, Vahid Talebi, Tohid Bayramzadeh, Amirhossein Hassanzadeh, Asghar Khodayari, Hossein Mohammadi, Ali-Akbar Oroujzadeh, Mehdi Gholizadeh, Mohammad Alizadeh, and Ali Najafi.

8 March 2026***Borujerd***

Ensieh al-Sadat Omidali, a member of the healthcare staff who was 19 weeks pregnant, was killed.

Jarquyeh, Isfahan Province

Abbas-Ali Motamedi, a retired physical education teacher, was killed in an attack on a private Qur'an gathering held in a home.

Khorramabad - Lorestan Agricultural Jihad Organization

Yousef Sefidpari, an employee of the Lorestan Agricultural Jihad Organization, was killed alongside his child.

9 March 2026***Tehran - Resalat Square, Jajeroudi Alley***

Among those killed in the attack on residential blocks were Seyedeh Farideh Sanei, an English teacher at Alavi School; Mohaddeseh Rezaei, manager of a women's sports club; Hamid Mirzaei, a postal employee; Zhila Ghaffarian and Saeed Mirzaei, insurance representatives; Ahmad Mirzaei, a shopkeeper; Souma Salimi, an instructor working with autistic children; and a domestic cleaner.

Tehran - Apadana/Sohrevardi Street, Ghazal/Safaian Pharmacy and Clinic

Parastesh (also known as Maedeh) Dehaghan, a pharmacist, and two pharmacy employees were killed.

11 March 2026***Tehran - Haqqani Street, Rayaneh Khadamat Omid (Bank Sepah information-technology contractor)***

Initial reports stated that bank employees were working an additional shift to prepare salary payments for the final month of the Iranian year. No clear figures on those killed or injured were published.

Bandar Lengeh - Balouki neighbourhood

Fatemeh Habashi, a retired primary-school teacher, was killed.

Fardis - Beginning of Simin Dasht Road/Vahdat Township

An unidentified itinerant fruit seller was killed when his fruit-selling pickup truck was struck.

12 March 2026***Tabriz - Shahid Kasaei Expressway***

Neda Amini-Azar, a teacher at Hatemlou Girls' School in Bostanabad, died from injuries sustained in the attack.

Tehran-Qom Toll Station - Red Crescent Rescue Base

Three Red Crescent rescuers were injured.

13 March 2026***Khomein - Khizab village***

Majid Fazli, an employee of the Prisons Organization, and Leila Mohammadi, an operating-room technician and specialist, were killed.

Zanjan - Nikpey Road Maintenance Station

Six road maintenance workers were killed while carrying out their duties: Jabbar Hassani, Hossein Askarlou, Mohammad Ahmadi, Mohammad-Hossein Rahimi, Khalil Alimardani, and Mohammadreza Najafi. Two others were injured.

14 March 2026***Eyvan, Ilam Province***

Ali-Nazar Mahmoudi, a pharmacist, was killed in an attack on a residential home.

Isfahan - Jay Industrial Estate, Arsheh Kar Company

The attack on the Arsheh Kar Company in the Jay Industrial Estate was the largest single case documented in this review. At the time of the attack, workers and engineers were carrying out their usual duties inside the factory, which manufactured cooling and refrigeration equipment.

Nineteen workers and engineers were killed and four workers were injured.

Those killed were Ehsan Shabihi; Javad Shabihi; Alireza Ahmadi; Mohammad Khodadadian; Hassan Mohammadi, an engineer; Sajjad Naderi Zaniani; Seyed Morteza Tabatabaei; Ali Barati; Hassan Jamalvand; Mohsen Akbari; Mahmoud Abdollahi; Masoud Labafi Khorasgani; Nourollah Taghizadeh; Hossein Dadkhah; Sajjad Zarei, an engineer; Hadi Mohammadi; Mohammad-Javad Matlabifesharaki; Ahmadreza Zolfaghari; and Javad Abdollahi.

The injured workers were Hojjat Jamalvand, Ehsan Vaezi, Mehdi Sharifi Khatounabadi, and Reza Jamshidian.

15 March 2026***Qom - Mahmoudabad Industrial Estate, Lightweight Concrete Factory***

The lightweight concrete factory, which employed 110 workers, was completely destroyed in the attacks. Seven workers were killed and ten others were injured.

The cases documented in this appendix form part of the wider dataset presented in this report. Between 28 February and 15 March 2026, at least 121 workers and other identified occupational groups were documented as killed and at least 62 as injured under the methodology described above.

The occupational breakdown of documented worker casualties is presented in the main text of the report.

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 specializations 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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