



WORKER RIGHTS WATCH

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

Jul. - Dec.'25

Published: Feb 2026

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Executive Summary

This publication presents the findings of Volunteer Activists' (VA) systematic review of labor conditions and worker-led collective actions in Iran between July and December 2025. It forms part of VA's ongoing biannual reporting on labor developments in the country.

The purpose of this report is to deepen international understanding of contemporary labor challenges in Iran and to assess the extent and nature of worker mobilization. International visibility is a critical source of support for Iran's labor movement, as recognition beyond national borders strengthens workers' confidence that their struggles are not isolated or ignored. Moreover, a detailed appraisal of workers' demands, together with the organizational strengths and limitations of trade unions representing them, can enable international donors to design targeted initiatives that respond more effectively to these realities and generate stronger outcomes. Drawing on its established networks inside Iran, VA is well placed to contribute such analysis. In light of the widespread street demonstrations that erupted in late December 2025—driven largely by economic hardship and demands for greater political freedoms—this report also contextualizes the broader protest environment in Iran, to which labor activism both contributed and within which it unfolded.

Iran's labor sector is highly heterogeneous, and capturing the breadth of labor-related grievances and actions required extensive and methodical research. The analysis presented here relies on a combination of primary and secondary data. VA gathered firsthand information through interviews, including online conversations, with labor activists operating within Iran. These accounts were complemented by corroborated media coverage, existing academic and policy research, and systematic monitoring of social media activity.

From this body of evidence, several central findings emerge regarding labor conditions and worker protests in the second half of 2025:

- The latter half of 2025 was marked by sustained and elevated levels of worker unrest, largely driven by wages that failed to keep pace with rapidly rising living costs as well by growing anger over a lack of government protection.

July - December 2025

471

Total labor protests

69

Cities across Iran

36

Worker sectors

15

Protest actions reached
their demand

45%

Year over year
Inflation rate

17

Government plans and
bill drafts monitored

- State authorities employed multiple strategies to suppress labor activism, relying not only on legal and judicial mechanisms but also on sectoral and professional bodies that imposed disciplinary sanctions on workers.
- Government announcements to end preferential, subsidized foreign-currency rates for importers deepened workers' despair, by accelerating the rial's decline and triggering a surge in (food) prices.

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

Table 1: Key takeaways from labour protests and monitoring

In the period under study, over 470 labor protests and strikes took place in 69 cities across the country. These actions are separate from the street protests that began in Iran on Sunday, December 28.

In geographic terms, protests were most frequent in southern provinces such as Bushehr, Khuzestan, and Fars, as well as in central provinces including industrial cities Arak and Isfahan. Tehran constituted another hotspot for protests.

The most significant and high-profile protests included large-scale demonstrations by third-party oil and gas personnel in Asaluyeh (with more than 4,000 participants), retirees from various pension funds, and workers employed in major industries such as petrochemicals, automobile manufacturing, steel, and aluminum.

Showing both the depth of despair and the strength of resolve among Iranian workers, labor protests included a mass "dry" hunger strike as well as collective action in which workers' solidarity helped secure the release of a previously arrested labor activist.

Labor activists faced arrests, prison sentences as well as workplace disciplinary actions; teacher activists were particularly targeted.

Because wages were not aligned with Iran's high level of price inflation, workers' livelihoods were greatly affected. As such, anger over declining life standards and a mere quest for survival greatly underpinned labor protests - even sector-based ones.

As the food budgets of many families shrank day by day, the latest official poverty-line statistics indicate that over 40 percent of Iranian households lived below the poverty line.

Workplace accidents were on the increase, claiming two to three lives daily.

Following the ceasefire with Israel, many small and medium-sized enterprises, citing reduced investment and market stagnation, turned to workforce.

The reimposition of UN sanctions on Iran in September 2025, and the subsequent collapse of the rial, greatly affected Iranian workers both materially and psychologically.

The Iranian government's move to raise fuel prices Iran through a restructuring of its gasoline subsidy and pricing system, created further strain on workers.

In the realm of lawmaking, some initiatives supported workers' rights, but follow up remained highly problematic, eroding workers' trust in the government.

The international community can support Iranian workers by drawing attention to their plight and ensuring their voices are heard, while the Iranian government, as well as activists and protesters inside Iran, can also pursue avenues that advance workers' rights and interests.

1 Introduction



Picture of protesters in Iran during December/January protests - Source: Social media

In Iran, the transition from December 2025 into January 2026 was marked by growing tension. This had little to do with the turning of the calendar year - Nowruz, the Iranian New Year, begins in March - but instead reflected mounting economic pressures and resentment towards the government that had been building for months. By late December, these pressures became visible in the form of widespread street protests, triggered by the sharp fall of the rial which further put prices up in a context of already widespread poverty.

At the time of writing, these protests have attracted significant international attention. Yet the events of December did not emerge suddenly or without precedent. In the months leading up to them, labor-related grievances had already been intensifying across the country, expressed through strikes, demonstrations, and other collective actions by workers in multiple sectors.

This biannual report focuses on those labor-related struggles, documenting workers' issues, labor protests, and governmental policy and law-making between July and December 2025. By doing so, it provides context for the broader social and economic conditions that shaped the environment in which the December protests took place. The report does not aim to explain the protests themselves, but rather illuminates the labor realities that contributed to the wider backdrop of unrest.

Altogether, this report has three main goals:

- To identify the key challenges faced by Iranian workers during the period from July to December 2025.
- To document and shed light on labor protests and collective action that took place during this period.
- To analyze government policies and practices that affected labor conditions and workers' rights.

Methodology

This report built on Volunteer Activists' ongoing documentation of labor issues in Iran, as presented on our Davtalab.org platform. Our monitoring followed the principle of triangulation and drew on three main sources:

- Direct input from contacts within Iran's labor community, providing first-hand insight into workplace

conditions and worker mobilization.

- Credible reporting from both domestic Iranian media and Persian-language news outlets outside the country.
- Documented material shared on social media platforms, particularly Telegram and WhatsApp, which are widely used by workers and labor activists to communicate and organize.

Research Limitations

This report relies solely on data and events that Volunteer Activists were able to collect, verify, and document. Given Iran's multilayered mechanisms of repression, it is likely that labor protests and violations of workers' rights extended beyond what could be recorded. Limited access to information in certain sectors, combined with the risks faced by workers and activists who speak out, means that the labor landscape in Iran is likely broader than what this report can capture.

In line with the objectives outlined above, this report is structured as follows. Chapter 2 examines key grievances faced by Iranian workers during the period under study. Chapter 3 documents labor protests and other forms of collective action undertaken by workers between July and December 2025. Chapter 4 analyzes legal and policy measures adopted by the Iranian government affecting labor conditions and workers' rights. The final chapter summarizes the report's main findings and offers recommendations for the international community, the Iranian government, and activists and protesters inside Iran, with the aim of informing their positioning and responses during a period of pronounced social and political instability.

Volunteer Activists hope that this report provides a clear and accurate account of workers' needs in Iran and contributes to strengthening collective action and increasing international awareness of workers' rights.

2 Labor issues in Iran

While workers worldwide face persistent challenges, the severity of these struggles is shaped by the broader economic and political context in which they live. The difficulties experienced by Iranian workers during the period under review reflect the country's volatile economic conditions and the widening gap between political power and social needs.

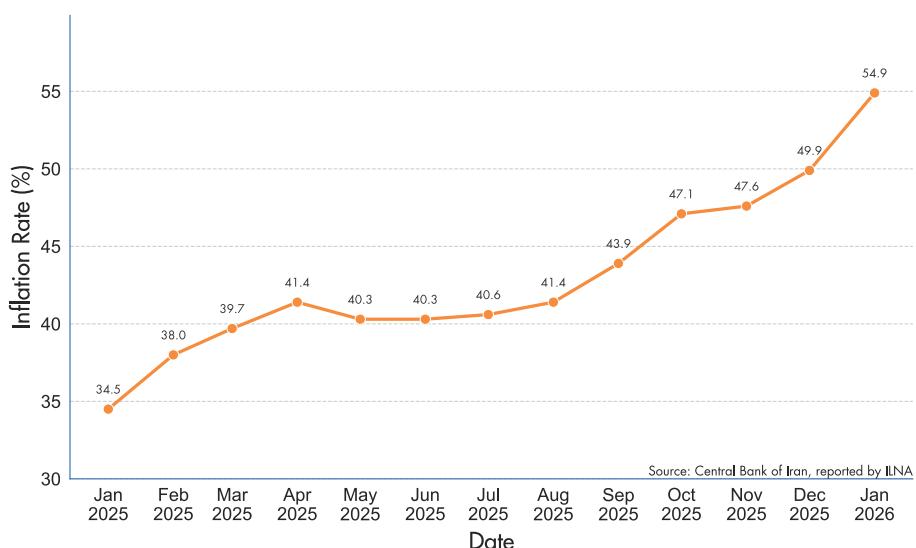
This chapter examines the main issues Iranian workers faced during the period under study and how these challenges affected their daily lives. The first section outlines the everyday problems workers encounter, such as low wages, job insecurity, and inadequate benefits. The second section analyzes major economic shocks that intensified these pressures. Together, these sections show how long-term structural problems and sudden disruptions jointly worsened workers' living conditions and strengthened demands for social and economic justice.

Everyday Struggles

Unindexed Wages and Pensions

In March 2025, the Supreme Labor Council approved a 45% increase in the minimum wage for the new Iranian year, raising the base minimum wage to approximately 103.99 million rials per month. However, this rise remained far below inflation and the real cost of living, meaning workers' purchasing power continued to decline.

Iran – Year-over-Year Inflation Rate (%)



Iran's economy continues to suffer from severe mismanagement and the impact of international sanctions, resulting in persistently high inflation and a steep loss of purchasing power for workers.

The erosion of incomes has pushed many households into poverty, with many workers struggling to afford basic necessities such as food, rent, clothing, and medical care. Government support policies - from cash subsidies to electronic commodity vouchers - have not kept pace with inflation. As economist Albert Baghzian describes, these measures are like "water poured into a sieve¹": they evaporate in the heat of

¹ <https://www.pishkhan.com/news/342443/>

inflation before ever reaching people's tables, leaving their real value effectively close to zero in the face of runaway price increases. A 2024 report by the Iranian Parliament's Research Center underscores the severity of ordinary Iranians' living conditions, finding that nearly half of the population consumes fewer than the recommended 2,100 calories per day. The report attributes this shortfall to rising food prices and shifting household priorities, as families facing economic uncertainty increasingly prioritize basic needs such as housing. At the same time, shrinking food budgets have forced many households to reduce spending on other essentials, including education and healthcare. For example, more than a million students dropped out of school last year due to financial hardship², while for 2025- amid subsidy cuts and rising rents- that figure is on the verge of doubling.

Wage Arrears

Not receiving wages for months is unfortunately far from uncommon in Iran. This practice has a severe impact not only on the workers themselves but also on their families, undermining their ability to meet basic needs. In some instances, salary arrears are never fully resolved, leaving workers trapped in long-term financial hardship.

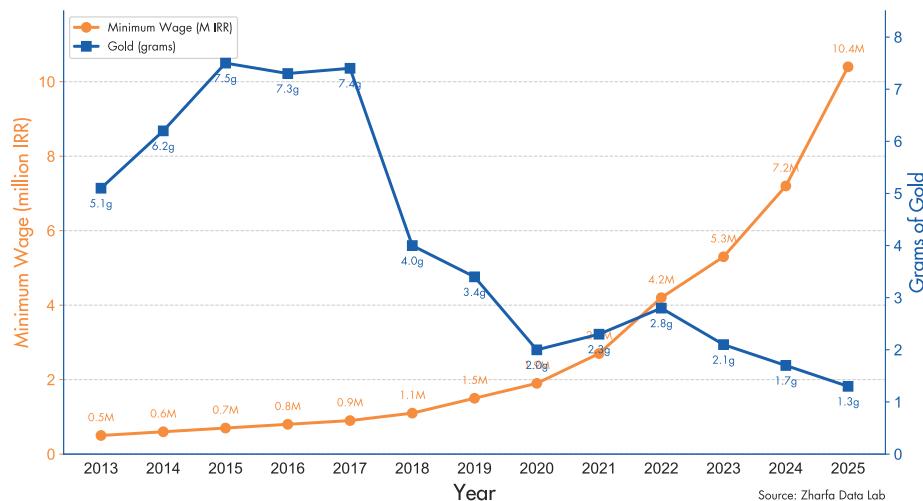
The immediate payment of outstanding salaries, or the settlement of deferred health and pension contributions, is therefore often a central demand of protesting workers.

Job Insecurity due to Temporary Contracts

In 1996, Iran's Administrative Court of Justice ruled that employers were permitted to use temporary contracts for jobs "of a continuous nature." Today, the vast majority of Iranian workers—about 90% of the workforce—are employed under such contracts. In a country where the unemployment rate is estimated at 10.8%, this creates severe job insecurity.

Workers on temporary contracts often receive fewer labor protections than those with permanent employment. Many are not directly hired by the companies they work for; instead, they are employed through contracting agencies that may deduct wages, provide poorer working conditions and can easily and without consequence dismiss them. Consequently, equitable treatment, an ending to the use of contractors and the right to permanent employment are important goals for many protesting workers.

Iran – Monthly Minimum Wage vs Gold Purchasing Power



Despite increases of minimum wages, the purchasing power of Iranians decreases as demonstrated by gold purchasing power.

Job-related fatalities

Contrary to government claims, workplace accidents and fatalities in Iran are rising. Official statistics indicate that around 200 workers died each month from work-related incidents in 2024, suggesting that safety measures are not being prioritized. ILNA reports from July to November 2025 show an average of two daily reports of worker fatalities or injuries, amounting to at least 30 affected workers per month. Many incidents involve construction workers, miners, municipal personnel, small industry laborers, and daily-wage workers—groups that often lack adequate insurance, safety training, and employer oversight.

Despite the severity of these figures, many accidents continue to go unreported due to opaque reporting systems and limited labor inspection. As a result, weak safety enforcement continue to leave workers vulnerable.

Worker suicide

Alongside rising workplace accidents, reports of worker suicides surfaced. Over the past six months, several workers—including Shahou Safri, a firefighter from Sanandaj, and Ahmad Al-Khamis, a municipal terminal worker—have taken their own lives. Available reports indicate that these deaths are largely linked to economic pressures such as low wages, unpaid salaries, and inability to cover medical expenses. Other contributing factors include layoffs, unemployment, conflicts with employers, and punitive administrative actions such as reprimands or suspension. In some cases, family or personal issues have also been cited.

The true number of worker suicides is likely underreported. Although suicide is not criminalized in Iran, it remains highly stigmatized, and limited access to mental health services discourages reporting and public discussion.

Political Grievances

Having examined socio-economic grievances driving labor unrest, the following section now turns to political grievances which increasingly shaped labor activism and public protest in the period under study.

Lack of Freedom of Association

Soaring price inflation has led to growing demands for independent trade unions and the right to associate freely during labor actions. Although labor unions are not overtly prohibited by the Iranian state, they must register as Civil Society Organizations to obtain licenses. Subsequently, independent unions often face registration denial, effectively criminalizing their existence and activities.

Arrests of Labor Activists

Even peaceful labor activists find themselves at risk of detention in Iran, as will be explored further in the next chapter. Their calls for release frequently fuel protests, particularly those organized by their unions. When everyday workers are arrested during strikes or demonstrations, demands for their release can spark additional protests, underscoring the interconnectedness of labor actions and civil rights.

Perceived Corruption and Elite Privilege

Many workers view Iran as a kleptocracy, where a political elite controls the economy and uses sanctions to enrich itself. This perception is strengthened by the Revolutionary Guard's dominance in key sectors, such

as oil, and by widespread nepotism in company management. These practices often cause inefficiency and company losses, increasing workers' fear of unemployment. Resentment grows further when the regime's revolutionary rhetoric clashes with widespread poverty, a contrast frequently highlighted on social media—especially Instagram—through images of the regime's children living in luxury while ordinary Iranians struggle.

Anti-Government Sentiment

Socio-economic grievances sometimes converge with broader anti-government sentiment, as labor activism becomes a channel for wider political discontent. Slogans such as "Down with the dictatorship" occasionally emerge, and while such expressions gained greater visibility during the street protests that began on December 28, 2025, they have existed in various forms for some time.

Economic shocks

Issues such as job insecurity, low wages, and restrictions on the right to protest have for years affected workers' lives in Iran. In the second half of 2025, however, several developments triggered significant shocks to Iran's socio-economic system, intensifying these pressures. The second part of this chapter provides a chronological overview of these developments.

July onward: Post-War Economic decline & Job Losses

Although the armed conflict between Iran and Israel lasted only twelve days (13–24 June 2025), its economic impact was immediate and severe. The war pushed Iran's already fragile economy into a deep crisis. Long-standing structural weaknesses—compounded by international sanctions, chronic inflation, and an ongoing energy crisis³—left the country particularly vulnerable to external shocks.

In the weeks following the ceasefire, key economic indicators deteriorated rapidly. The national currency depreciated sharply, inflation accelerated, and the stock market lost approximately 40 percent of its real capital. Investor confidence collapsed, culminating in public protests by shareholders at the Tehran Stock Exchange on 9 July. These developments reflected a broader climate of uncertainty that directly affected production, employment, and household livelihoods. Within this broader context, continued and increased military spending—rather than investment in domestic economic recovery—further strained the economy.

The post-war economic downturn quickly affected workplaces. Businesses faced collapsing demand and rising costs whilst also struggling with persistent electricity shortages that disrupted production well beyond the end of the conflict. Many companies reduced operations or suspended them entirely, leading to widespread layoffs⁴. Small and medium-sized enterprises—already strained by inflation and currency volatility—were among the hardest hits.

Workers bore the brunt of the shock. Reports from the Iran Chamber of Commerce and employment platforms IranTalent⁵ and JobVision⁶, indicate that 90 percent of businesses experienced a reduction or halt in production during the conflict, with 55 percent losing more than half of their operational capacity. In the immediate post-war period, the labor market effectively froze: job postings declined by 81 percent and job applications fell by 62 percent, reflecting a sharp collapse in hiring activity.

Survey data underscore the scale of job insecurity. Around 40 percent of respondents reported losing their

3 <https://www.khabaronline.ir/news/2097591>

4 <https://peykaan.com/4076>

5 <https://www.irantalent.com/blog/12-days-war-effects-on-businesses/>

6 <https://www.zoomit.ir/tech-iran/444589-jobvision-statics-after-war/>

jobs after the war and remaining unemployed weeks later⁷. Among both dismissed workers and those still employed, concerns centered on job security, declining incomes, rising living costs, and the absence of savings. For many households, job loss translated directly into food insecurity and mounting debt.

Informal workers—who constitute the majority of Iran’s labor force and lack (permanent) contracts, insurance, or legal protection - were particularly exposed. Layoffs and unpaid wages were reported across sectors including the digital economy, aviation, tourism, hospitality, and the media⁸.

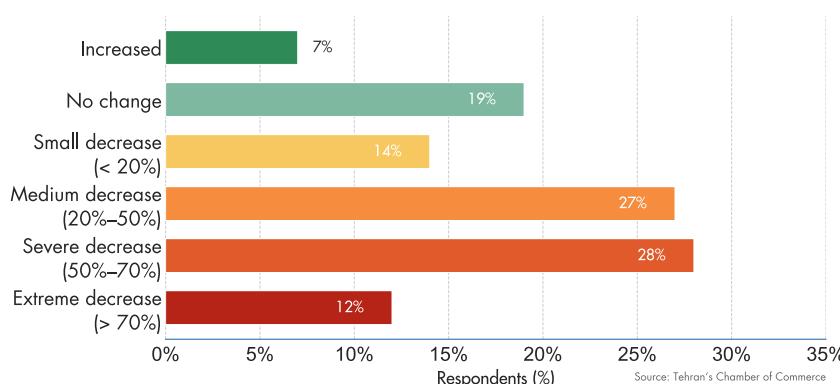
Journalists were among the groups disproportionately affected. Reporting by Hammihan Daily indicates that numerous media outlets carried out large-scale layoffs in the post-ceasefire period, in some cases dismissing entire editorial teams. Others delayed salaries or paid only partial wages. Unofficial estimates within the journalistic community suggest that approximately 150 journalists lost their jobs following the war.

Without access to unemployment benefits or effective state support, many workers were left without any means of livelihood.

Despite the scale of dismissals, the government failed to provide effective protection for workers. Although labor representatives and the Ministry of Labor publicly acknowledged the layoffs and pledged investigations⁹, no binding actions were taken to prevent dismissals or guarantee wage payments. Authorities also did not issue any directive prohibiting layoffs at workplaces that had not suffered direct war-related damage. During the war, the government had maintained a more active role in managing the economy—through price controls and relatively adequate distribution of goods and services—which helped preserve some public trust. Now that the government adopted a more hands-off stance, allowing layoffs and economic hardship to proceed without intervention, public confidence once again eroded.

The economic decline following the war did not abate in July. Instead, it marked the beginning of a prolonged period of instability in which workers continued to face job losses, declining incomes, and a lack of institutional protection.

Survey: Changes in Manufacturing & Services After Ceasefire Compared to Before the War



For many Iranians the post-war period did not represent recovery, but rather deepening economic turmoil.

⁷ The mass layoffs of workers at the Farda Motors plant in Borujerd—where part of the production facility had been damaged during Israeli attacks—were among these cases.

⁸ <https://peykaan.com/4076>

⁹ <https://www.qudsonline.ir/news/1082594>

August/September: Reimposition of U.N. Sanctions

International developments further affected workers' wellbeing. In late August 2025, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom formally notified the UN Security Council that they were invoking the "snapback" mechanism under the 2015 nuclear deal, alleging that Tehran of failing to meet its nuclear commitments. The letter, delivered on 28 August 2025, triggered a 30-day countdown to the automatic reinstatement of UN sanctions¹⁰.

The announcement immediately hit the economy: the rial plunged to near-record lows in unofficial markets as uncertainty and capital flight surged. When the 30-day period ended, UN sanctions were officially reimposed on 27–28 September 2025, reviving restrictions on trade, finance, and key sectors. This worsened economic distress, fueling further currency depreciation, inflation, and reduced access to international markets. Import-dependent businesses suffered most, and unemployment rose sharply, with estimates nearing 14 percent, especially among young and informal workers. For ordinary families already facing stagnant wages and rising prices, the renewed sanctions deepened the cost-of-living crisis and weakened job security.

November/December: Hyper Inflation due higher fuel prices and changing currency support

Rather than bringing relief, the final two months of 2025 pushed the Iranian economy to a breaking point. Two major policy shifts by the government—first on fuel prices and then on currency support—triggered a sharp escalation in economic hardship, deepening inflation and intensifying public anger.

November: Fuel Price Hike and Hyperinflation

Towards the end of October President Masoud Perzeshkian had already stated that "beyond doubt" fuel prices would need to rise to match the increase of domestic fuel consumption. In November 2025, the government indeed announced an increase in fuel prices by reducing long-standing subsidies.

The fuel hike contributed directly to a surge in inflation, worsening the already precarious financial situation

Fuel Protests

In November 2019, the Iranian government announced a sudden, sharp increase in gasoline prices and introduced rationing. The move triggered nationwide protests and riots as many Iranians—already struggling with inflation—viewed the hike as an unfair burden on the poor. The government responded with a severe crackdown*. However, it did not heighten fuel prices any further over the years—until November 2025.

* There is no precise official figure for the number of people killed during the November 2019 protests. Amnesty International has confirmed the deaths of at least 304 protesters, while Reuters reported that as many as 1,500 people were killed.

Housing Problems

As a result of Iran's ever growing inflation levels, workers increasingly experience housing problems. According to a report by the Parliament Research Center, rent levels in major cities—and even in smaller towns—rose to the point that many workers were pushed toward informal settlements or shared and unregulated housing. Within this context, some were forced, at the end of each month, to borrow from friends or relatives to pay rent.

10 Iran had already been subject to extensive international sanctions well before the 2025 UN "snapback." The snapback did not introduce entirely new measures; rather, it reinstated a large set of sanctions that had been suspended under the 2015 nuclear deal (the JCPOA). These restored restrictions were substantial, including in areas such as technology transfer, trade, and finance.

of workers and households. By late November, point-to-point inflation had reached 49.4%, meaning that the same basket of goods and services cost nearly half more than the previous year.

December: Currency Collapse

In December 2025, the government announced major cuts to preferential exchange-rate allocations that had subsidized imports of essential goods. This reduced access to cheap dollars, raised import costs, and deepened public distrust, since previous support packages rarely kept pace with inflation. As Chapter Four will show, the cuts were formalized in the government's budget bill submitted to parliament on 23 December 2025.

Combined with rising prices and sanctions pressure, the policy shift triggered a dramatic collapse of the rial, which plunged to historic lows above 1.4 million per U.S. dollar on the free market. Workers—many already juggling multiple jobs—saw real wages fall sharply, making basic necessities unaffordable.

As the rial fell and living costs surged, shopkeepers and bazaar merchants in Tehran began striking and closing their shops on 28 December. Public anger quickly spread, culminating in nationwide street protests by the end of the month, with many demonstrators demanding the fall of the Islamic regime.

3 Labor protests in Iran

As the previous chapter showed, economic pressures had already pushed workers to the brink well before the rial's collapse in December. This strain became visible in a wave of labor actions throughout the period under study. From July onward, strikes and demonstrations were often confined to individual sectors, yet they shared a common cause: workers struggling to survive amid rising prices, shrinking wages, and growing insecurity.

The depth of worker anger is reflected in the persistence of some protests, which originated in the first half of 2025 and continued into the second half of the year. For clarity, this chapter is divided into two parts. The first part examines these ongoing, recurrent protests, while the second part focuses on newly emerging labor mobilizations in 2025.

Methodological Note: Selection of Labor Protests

Protests were selected based on the extent of geographic spread, number of participants, and the persistence or repetition of protest actions, which contributed to greater public visibility.

Highlighting these cases does not diminish the importance of smaller or less visible protests. Rather, it provides transparency on the selection process and focuses on collective actions that offer broader insight into workers' demands, levels of mobilization, and prevailing patterns of labor unrest during the period under review.

Retirees

Retiree protests—often held outside government offices—have been a consistent feature of Iran's labor landscape for over a decade. In late 2025, these demonstrations intensified, becoming one of the most persistent expressions of social discontent. Retirees from multiple sectors participated, including Social Security (about eight million), civil service (around 1.7 million), steel industry (about 100,000), and Telecommunication Company retirees. Protests occurred nationwide, with many pensioners standing for hours in extreme heat to voice their demands.

Despite differences among pension funds, retirees share core demands focused on maintaining basic living standards. They call for full implementation of pay equalization and adjustment schemes, pension increases aligned with real inflation, and protections against further loss of purchasing power. They insist pensions earned through decades of work should not fall below the poverty line and argue the government must allocate sufficient resources in the annual budget to enforce pension laws¹¹.

Retirees also demand guaranteed free, high-quality healthcare. Many, especially those covered by Social Security, struggle to afford medical costs amid high inflation and underfunded insurance systems. Both basic and supplementary insurance often fail to cover medicines and procedures, leading to heavy out-of-pocket expenses. As one protester stated, "Retirees go into debt because of healthcare costs that insurances does not properly cover." They argue access to free healthcare is a legal obligation of pension institutions and that government debts to pension funds—especially for healthcare financing—must be settled.

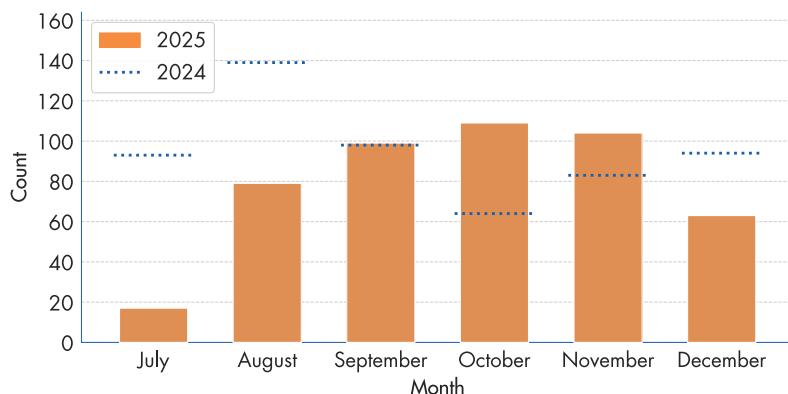
Retirees also call for pension fund independence from government control and political interference¹². They demand transparent management, prevention of government withdrawals from funds, and enforcement

¹¹ <https://www.ilna.ir/fa/tiny/news-1713404>

¹² <https://www.ilna.ir/fa/tiny/news-1692529>

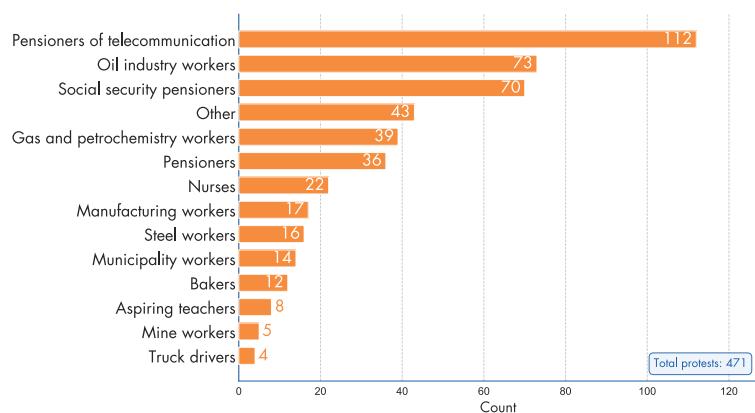
Statistics of labour protests between July and August 2025

Counts of Labor Protests per Month



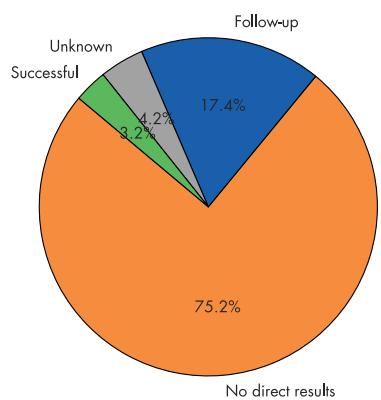
Due to the Israel-Iran war, the protests in July 2025 were minimal. During this period, protests restarted, with more protests in October and November compared to the same period last year.

Counts of Labour Protests by Sector (July – December 2025)



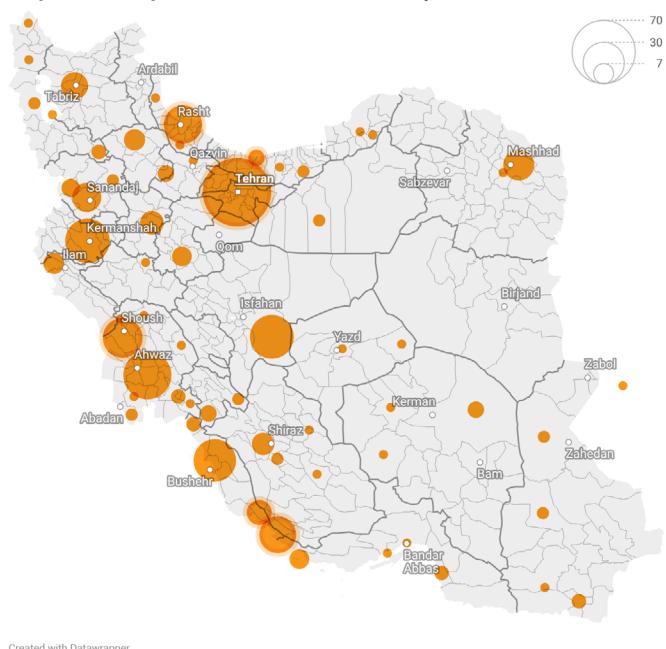
The majority of protest actions are carried out by pensioners, followed by oil industry workers.

Distribution of Protest Outcomes



The majority of protest actions did not result in immediate change. Only a handful of protests led to direct change. However, 17% of protests are in negotiations or following up with protest actions.

Map of worker protests across Iran from July to December 2025



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

of pension laws, especially for formally closed funds such as steel and civil service schemes. They urge Parliament and oversight bodies to actively defend retirees' rights by preventing budget violations and opposing policies that weaken pension stability. Common protest slogans include: "When it's our turn, the treasury is suddenly empty," "Where is the promised inflation control? Stop lying to the people," and "Social Security must be freed from government control."

Nurses

Nurses remained one of the most persistent and visible protest groups in the second half of 2025, striking and gathering across the country in response to unpaid wages, deteriorating conditions, and excessive workloads. Although the government had previously agreed to some demands, soaring inflation and budget constraints prevented meaningful improvements.

Their protests reflect long-standing, unresolved issues, including delayed performance bonuses (up to seven months), mission allowances (up to sixteen months), unpaid overtime, and unequal implementation of the nursing services tariff law. Other drivers include the income gap between doctors and nurses, chronic staff shortages, exhausting workloads, and job insecurity among contract and outsourced nurses.

Between July and December 2025, protests occurred in cities such as Mashhad, Kermanshah, Yasuj, Fasa, and Gilan. Despite the scale of mobilization, the Ministry of Health and medical universities largely ignored their demands, contributing to burnout, workforce attrition, and increased migration.

Administrative and judicial pressure against nursing activists became a central issue. After a protest in Kermanshah, fifteen nurses were summoned to a disciplinary committee on 14 November 2025, according to Mohammad Sharifi-Moghaddam, Secretary General of the Iranian Nursing Organization. In other cities, measures included security summonses, bonus reductions, forced shift changes, suspensions, and court cases against union activists, which organizers view as a deliberate strategy to suppress protest.

Tensions rose further after Mahmoud Shabestari, head of Mashhad University of Medical Sciences, stated that "everywhere in the world, nurses who abandon their shifts are considered criminals," and threatened punitive action. His comments sparked backlash on social media, where nurses highlighted income disparities, exhaustion-related deaths, and management's disregard for labor standards.

Hospital Emergency Personnel

Alongside nurses, other healthcare workers also mobilized as conditions worsened. In late November and early December 2025, emergency personnel in Tehran—including emergency medical workers—protested outside the Ministry of Health over unpaid benefits and dire working conditions. A common chant was: "The knife has reached the bones of the emergency sector," reflecting the sector's collapse. Serving a city of over ten million residents, protesters warned that chronic understaffing, insufficient resources, and escalating workloads were endangering emergency services and patient safety.

Financial strain and pay inequities were central concerns. Although clinical emergency staff are legally entitled to performance-based pay from hospital revenues, payments are often limited and irregular, with some delayed for years. Operational staff earn 20–35 million tomans per month, while administrative staff receive 50–60 million tomans plus overtime and managerial bonuses. Protesters also criticized the fact that clinical performance pay is sometimes awarded to non-clinical staff, violating regulations and fueling resentment. The lack of career advancement has further increased dissatisfaction.

Protesters also highlighted declining emergency capacity: in the last three years, emergency bases have

dropped to about one-third of needed facilities, increasing mission compressions and workloads. An aging ambulance fleet and underfunding have worsened the situation, contributing to more conflicts with patients' families.

A major issue was the lack of effective professional representation. Activists say the National Association of Medical Emergency Services is closely aligned with management, resulting in disjointed protests and punitive responses. Protesters have faced forced transfers, salary suspensions, compulsory leave, threats of dismissal, blocked salary cards, and coercion to sign unfair agreements. The "administrative violations" unit has also been used to intimidate union members. Additionally, there have been reports of unlawful changes to work conditions and duties for permanent and contract staff, mainly in response to organizing and legal demands, aimed at suppressing dissent rather than addressing problems.

Contract Workers at South Pars Oil and Gas Refineries

Large scale protests occurred in December 2025 when contract gas workers at South Pars staged large-scale protests at the gas field, a strategic energy hub. Around 9–10 December, over 5,000 workers marched through key locations in the city of Asaluyeh, attempting to reach local governorate offices despite security barriers. The next day, contract workers from oil, gas, and electricity sectors demonstrated in Tehran outside Parliament, highlighting frustration over stalled labor reforms.

Workers consistently voiced longstanding demands: workforce regularization and elimination of intermediary contractors; reform of discriminatory job classification; improved rotational shifts and leave; and minimum standards for job security and wage protection. These demands underscore both their urgency and the state's continued unwillingness or inability to address them.

Protest slogans captured workers' frustration, including: "End the bureaucratic grind—stop unpaid labor," "Our hard work has value—where is our rightful share?" and "Stealing workers' rights is a betrayal of the country." Participation from thousands of workers across twelve South Pars refineries—often joined by families—showed that grievances are widespread and deeply rooted, reflecting significant mobilization capacity even without independent unions.

Soft Control

Whilst highly impressive on the outside, a main challenge for the large-scale mobilizations by contract oil workers – or other labor groups - is the gap between size and impact. Even when thousands gather, such protests often fail to pressure decision-makers because they occur within tightly controlled frameworks, do not disrupt production, and are closely monitored. Organizing is often led by actors who, while critical of some policies, remain loyal to the political system and operate within strict limits, preventing escalation.

As a result, protests increasingly resemble low-cost, controlled expressions of discontent rather than effective bargaining tools. The contradiction between large-scale mobilization and political harmlessness is the key structural trap facing the South Pars labor protests.

More broadly, the trajectory of these protests illustrates a mechanism of "soft control." Through official and quasi-state intermediaries, protest energy is channeled into predictable forms, blocking independent organization and tactics such as strikes. Over time, protest becomes a symbolic ritual that releases frustration without producing real change. The South Pars experience warns that without organizational independence, tactical diversity, and a clear link to pressure mechanisms, even large mobilizations can be neutralized.

Bakers

Bakers also protested, with rising bread prices as their central grievance. While higher prices might be expected to benefit producers, in practice they left bakers in an untenable position. Since 2022, the government's "popularization of subsidies" has led to sharp price increases, doubling prices in some provinces and ending a unified national rate. Yet these increases have not translated into higher income, as they coincided with shrinking flour quotas, rigid price controls, and rising operational costs.

Protestors highlighted the steady reduction in flour allocations, which bakers say have fallen from 9–10 sacks per month to about 4—insufficient for even a few hours of daily production. Many bakeries now already shut by mid-morning. Protest slogans captured this sense of injustice, including: "We're bakers, not slaves—listen to us," "We serve society, not the government," and "No more empty promises—our table is empty."

These reductions have forced bakeries to lay off staff or rely on family labor. "With these flour quotas, nothing adds up anymore. We can't cover basic costs, and many of us are close to closing our doors entirely," one baker told Davtalab.



During periods of national crisis—including the 12-day war with Israel—bakers were among the few professions that continued operating uninterrupted and at full capacity to prevent food shortages. Today, however, the same sector faces declining support, shrinking flour allocations, and mounting financial problems. Picture source: [Tabnak](#)

Bakers also criticized the subsidy system's broader effects, arguing that dependence on subsidized flour undermines profitability and exposes them to public suspicion, with some consumers accusing them of profiteering. Some bakers have called for removing flour subsidies and transferring them directly to consumers, allowing bakeries to buy flour freely and compete on price and quality.

Although open street-level support has been limited, bakers' protests have drawn notable sympathy online, reflecting a shared recognition that both bakers and consumers are harmed by the same subsidy policies. Some bakers also criticized bakers' unions as passive institutions¹³ that collect fees without effectively advocating for workers' rights. Legally, these unions fall within a government-dependent and

Price gap

In response to bakers' protests, authorities suggested that bakers buy unsubsidized flour, but the price gap makes this unworkable: subsidized flour costs 100,000–200,000 tomans per sack, while free-market flour is about 1–1.5 million tomans. Bread prices remain administratively fixed, so bakers cannot pass higher costs onto consumers, meaning buying market-rate flour would force them to operate at a loss.

¹³ This lack of representation partially stems from Iran's guild system, where bakers' unions operate under the state-regulated Supreme Guild Chamber (*Otaghe Asnaf*) and function more like government-dependent bodies than independent labor organizations.

semi-state structure, rather than constituting a free or autonomous labor organization. As a result, bakers feel their grievances are not heard and that the system limits their ability to influence policy.

Industrial Workers

The protests described above received wide attention, but it was the industrial actions that often drew even greater notice—at times taking on almost heroic significance. Labor unrest spread across multiple sectors, including major strategic companies such as IRALCO, Zamyad, Razi Petrochemical, Khavarmianeh Sugar Company, and the National Steel Group in Ahvaz. While each strike and sit-in had its own specific triggers and demands, they shared common features, revealing the harsh realities faced by industrial workers in Iran. Some of the strikes also generated substantial support from other workers or the general public. The remainder of this section examines these protests in chronological order.

IRALCO: Protesting Low Wages and Harsh Working Conditions

In August 2025, more than 4,000 workers at the Iran Aluminum Company (IRALCO) in Arak launched one of the most intense and prolonged labor actions of the year. The strike lasted 50 days, making it a rare example of sustained industrial protest in a highly controlled environment. From mid-September onward, a large number of strikers escalated the action by engaging in hunger strikes, further underscoring the severity of their grievances.

The strike was in part driven in part by anger over unsafe working conditions that had resulted in the deaths of two colleagues, Mahmoud Davoudabadi and Jabbar Abdi. Workers' demands further focused on wages, permanent contracts, safety, an end to security pressures and intimidation at the plant and broader management and structural reforms (including replacement of the CEO).

By September 2025, the authorities had still not offered any meaningful concessions. In a striking and highly unusual move, the protests started to include dry hunger strikes, to draw the authorities' and media attention.

The severity of these actions led to several workers becoming critically ill and being transferred to hospitals. The strike was paused thereafter on 12 September. Besides health concerns this was also because the protests had achieved partial success: the payment of arrears and a review of the job classification scheme were put on the agenda while case-building against IRALCO worker representatives was halted. Nonetheless, more fundamental problems remained unresolved.

Although the strike did not secure the full range of its demands, it was still a significant labor event in Iran's protest landscape. The large number of participants and the escalation to hunger strikes drew unusually broad national attention, exposing the harsh and deteriorating working conditions faced by industrial workers. As such, this sustained protest laid bare the limits of institutional negotiation channels and contributed to growing public anger toward the government.

Razi Petrochemical Workers' Strike: Contract Labor and Wage Inequality

Razi Petrochemical is a major industrial complex located in Bandar-e Mahshahr, Khuzestan Province, within Iran's southern petrochemical region on the Persian Gulf. Between 8-26 of August, a large group of

Arak Aluminum Company (IRALCO) is Iran's largest aluminum producer. Located in Arak in Markazi Province, the company manufactures aluminum products such as ingots, billets, and slabs, with an annual output of about 190,000 tonnes. IRALCO is a key player in Iran's metals sector and is listed on the Tehran Stock Exchange.

contract and subcontracted workers—estimated at around 1,500—staged a multi-day strike at the site. The workers protested long-standing wage gaps between permanent staff and contract employees, as well as the company's failure to deliver promised payments and benefits.

These protests were met with intense security and judicial pressure, yet through unity and solidarity, workers managed to draw substantial attention from authorities, including the central government. Also, while numbers were lower than in IRALCO, it nevertheless constituted one of the largest, and longlasting, post-war labor protests – all this at a place of significant relevance to the Iranian government.

For nearly 20 days, the workers demanded improvements in their wages and working conditions. The protests led to some concessions, including the release of their colleagues, the removal of certain workplace restrictions, such as a lifting of entry bans imposed on some employees and the payment of wage arrears. Moreover, these protests marked a turning point in the emergence of cross-facility protests in the petrochemical sector and other comparable industries. Beyond its immediate outcomes, the Razi Petrochemical strike was significant because it helped set a pattern for labor mobilization across the petrochemical sector. It demonstrated that contract workers could organize collectively and extract limited concessions, even under restrictive conditions. The protest therefore became a reference point for similar actions in other industrial centers later in 2025.

Zamyad: Protesting Overtime Cuts and Welfare Arrears

On 15 September 2025, around 1,500 workers at the Zamyad Automobile Manufacturing Company in Tehran staged protests at the factory gates in response to the elimination of overtime and the nonpayment of welfare-related arrears. For many employees, overtime constitutes an essential part of daily income, and its removal added significant economic pressure.

In addition, the prohibition of elections for worker representatives and the lack of space for organizing have further complicated workers' demands. The protests at Zamyad succeeded in conveying some of the workers' initial demands to the company and its following Iranian government (the management of large companies are routinely selected by the government). This was not entirely without result: for instance outstanding wage arrears got settled. Yet, structural improvements in working conditions remained absent.

National Steel Group: Wage Arrears & Stalled Production

In October 2025, workers at the National Steel Group in Ahvaz engaged in highly visible protests over late wages, production shutdowns, and management inaction. On 7 October 2025, steel workers gathered in front of the Khuzestan provincial governor's office and marched toward the local county governorate to press their demands, drawing support from local merchants and other residents. Their protests highlighted ongoing frustrations with delayed pay and deteriorating work conditions in one of the region's major industrial employers but failed to generate any yields.

Khavarmianeh Sugar Company

Just before the end of December, workers at the Khavarmianeh Sugar Company in Shush, Khuzestan

Razi Petrochemical one of Iran's largest producers of ammonia, urea fertilizer, sulfuric acid, and related chemicals, and the sole domestic producer of some key fertilizer inputs. It supplies both domestic markets and exports and occupies a strategic position within Iran's petrochemical industry, a core pillar of the national economy.

Province, began a strike. On December 22, around 350 contract workers halted work over long-standing wage and occupational demands. The strike continued for nine days and gained prominence due to strong collective solidarity, resistance to security pressure, and significant media attention.

Workers demanded fair implementation of the job classification scheme, wages comparable to regional companies, job security, the right to form an independent workers' organization and council, accurate overtime and Friday pay, food allowances, elimination of 12-hour shifts, and hiring of local seasonal workers. They also criticized the Shush Labor Department for siding with the employer and ignoring workers' demands.

The strike sparked cross-regional solidarity, with support actions reported in Gilan, at the Zarshouran gold mine strike in Takab, and among healthcare workers. Chants such as "Our pain is your pain" and "No to executions" linked labor demands with broader political calls, including opposition to repression and demands for detainees' release. Independent labor unions and activist groups issued statements of support.

On December 29, five workers—Hossein Khesafpour, Karim Rezaei Kaab (the elected representative), Moslem Zahiri, Mahmoud Al-Kathir, and Masoud Mehrabi—were summoned and charged with "disrupting production and factory order" and "communicating with hostile media."

However, upon this, collective solidarity strengthened the strike. Workers rejected the accusations as unfounded and lawful. The arrests appeared intended to intimidate the workforce, especially since one detainee had been a leading candidate for the Islamic Labor Council and had already been dismissed. Subsequently, the workers accompanied their summoned colleagues to the police station and gathered outside the security headquarters, turning individual pressure into collective resistance. On December 30, security forces warned workers to end the strike or face "serious case-building," but the strike continued. Later that evening, the five detained workers were released on bail—an unusually swift development—and returned to the factory to a warm welcome.

On December 31, workers entered the tenth day of the strike and declared that arrests and threats would not deter them, warning that continued inaction could lead to expanded protests.

Miners

Toward the end of 2025, there was also labor unrest in the extractive sector. On 27 December 2025, Kurdish and local workers at the Zarshouran gold mine in Takab were on strike protesting discrimination and unequal treatment under mine management affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), according to the Hengaw Organization for Human Rights and IranWire. Workers cited systematic favoritism, the removal of welfare benefits, and pay disparities between local and non-local employees, which they said began after the mine was transferred last year to Ariana Company, an IRGC-affiliated firm. While local workers reported losing welfare services and employment benefits, non-local employees with IRGC connections were said to receive higher salaries and improved conditions. The strike involved local and Kurdish workers and continued despite cold weather and reported threats of dismissal if the strike persisted. Protesters maintained a peaceful strike, demanding an end to discriminatory practices, but the action remained unresolved as 2025 came to a close.

Aspiring Teachers

Besides workers and retirees, university graduates also mobilized in protest. Throughout September and October 2025, Iranians who had participated in the Ministry of Education's recruitment exams for teachers

held repeated demonstrations in several cities, including in front of the Ministry's headquarters. Protests took place on 14 and 18 September and on 1 and 6 October, with participants objecting to both the administration of the exams and the announced results¹⁴. One widely used slogan captured their grievances succinctly: "We saw no justice—only lies."

Protesters focused their criticism on the use of coefficients, quotas, and bonus points in the exam scoring, which they viewed as fundamentally unfair. They argued that these mechanisms allowed candidates with lower academic scores to be accepted over others, disproportionately disadvantaging young and single applicants who did not qualify for such bonuses and undermining merit-based selection.

In Iran, entry into the public education system follows two main pathways. One is through Farhangian University, which trains student-teachers over several years and places them directly in schools upon graduation. The other is via national recruitment exams administered by the Ministry of Education, through which graduates from other fields compete for teaching positions based on written exams, interviews, and short-term pedagogical training. While this dual system helps address teacher shortages, it often results in temporary contracts, unequal pay, and heightened competition.

The most contested provisions included martyr and veteran quotas (25 percent and 5 percent), bonus points stipulated under Article 89 of the Seventh Development Plan—such as those based on marital status and number of children—and preferential coefficients for prior employment within the education system. Reports that candidates without relevant teaching backgrounds were prioritized over long-serving contract teachers further intensified perceptions of discrimination.

These protests typically took the form of statement readings, placard displays, and street gatherings, articulating broader demands for fair employment and equal access to public-sector jobs. Ministry officials, however, defended the bonuses as "in line with the law and logic." Protesters viewed this response as emblematic of the growing gap between state elites and the aspirations of ordinary citizens seeking merit-based employment.



Graduates' protests highlighted widespread perceptions that the recruitment system favors privileged groups, limiting fair access to public-sector employment for ordinary Iranians. Picture source: [Mehr News](#)

Online Petitions

Across the world, the internet is a key space for activism. In Iran, where independent labor organizations and public protests are restricted, online campaigns—especially petitions—have become a major outlet for workers and professionals.

Karzar.net, often described as Iran's Change.org, hosts many of these campaigns and remains one of the few platforms for open collective expression. Open letters to officials also serve as starting points for broader online mobilization. In the absence of independent unions, these initiatives function as substitute mechanisms for collective demands.

Between July and December 2025, online campaigns mainly focused on wage adjustments amid high inflation and supported offline labor struggles. They addressed issues such as low wages, pensions, corruption, discriminatory hiring, repression of advocacy, and pension rights. Signature counts—from thousands to over 155,000—show broad support.

These campaigns generally fall into three types: cross-sectoral grievances, sector-specific working conditions, and sector-based demands for freedom of association and independent organization.

Cross sectoral campaigns

Cross-sectoral campaigns have largely centered on a shared concern among Iranian workers and professionals: the ability to earn a livable income through wages that keep pace with inflation. These campaigns commonly emphasize the need to link wage increases directly to real inflation rates. A prime example of this was the campaign outlined below.

Campaign: "Wage Increases Based on Real Inflation"

According to the latest report by the Statistical Center of Iran, point-to-point inflation reached an alarming 49.4 percent in November 2025. This figure indicates that the purchasing power of Iranian households has been nearly halved compared to the previous year. Against this backdrop, the campaign "Wage Increases Based on Real Inflation" has garnered more than 59,000 signatures. The campaign calls for the explicit enforcement of the Civil Service Management Law and demands that wages be adjusted in line with the actual rate of inflation.

The organizers—whose campaign remains ongoing—argue that with inflation hovering around 50 percent, proposals for a 20 percent wage increase for the coming year are both inadequate and deeply troubling. Following the rejection of the initial budget bill, lawmakers have since suggested wage increases in the range of 30 to 35 percent; however, these figures still fall well below the prevailing inflation rate and therefore fail to address the continued erosion of real incomes.

Sectoral campaigns: better working conditions.

A significant number of sectoral campaigns were also launched during this period. Reflecting the precarious position in which many Iranian workers find themselves, several online initiatives focused on demands for improved working conditions. While not all of these campaigns were directly connected to offline protests, many were closely linked to ongoing labor actions on the ground. Three illustrative examples - linked to socio-economic demands - are presented below.

Campaign: "Full Implementation of the Teachers' Special Allowance"

The "Full Implementation of the Teachers' Special Allowance" campaign was one of the broadest and

most widely supported professional campaigns in recent months. Teachers and retired education workers demanded the full implementation of the legally mandated 25,000 wage points in their pay rulings. Under the special allowance system, teachers' salaries were calculated through a point-based framework: educators accumulated points over time through years of service, obtaining higher academic degrees, completing additional in-service training, publishing scientific articles, and being recognized as exemplary teachers of the year. Once a certain number of points was reached, salaries were supposed to increase accordingly.

Although the ranking plan was formally implemented, activists argued that the allowance was not applied in full, leaving many teachers' salaries below the official poverty line. As a result, the system failed to deliver its core objectives—namely pay fairness, staff retention, and improved educational quality—and continued to undermine teacher motivation. The campaign gathered more than 150,000 signatures yet remained at a dead end with no official response. This was despite the fact that official reports consistently showed that education workers received the lowest pay among all government employees.

Themes in Online Labor Campaigns

Our analysis of labor campaigns launched over the past six months reveals strong convergence around several core themes:

- **The wage crisis and inflation:** Many campaigns highlight the widening gap between wages and inflation, emphasizing the erosion of purchasing power and the fact that both workers and retirees have fallen below the poverty line.
- **The “special allowance” and wage justice:** Teachers and other public-sector employees have called for implementation of the 25,000-point special allowance provided for under the Civil Service Management Law and referenced in the Seventh Development Plan. Campaigns frame the allowance—based on service, qualifications, and professional credentials—as essential to restoring wage justice.
- **Hiring and workforce regularization:** Numerous campaigns address the unresolved status of outsourced and contract workers, as well as applicants awaiting placement after recruitment exams, opposing discriminatory hiring practices and precarious employment.
- **Repression of professional advocacy:** Protests against the treatment of nursing activists feature prominently and are presented as indicative of a broader security-oriented response to labor and professional demands.
- **Institutional corruption and pension fund crises:** Several campaigns focused on the Teachers' Savings Fund, raising concerns about transparency, property rights, and calling for structural reform.
- **Discrimination in welfare and pay equity:** Campaigns by retirees demand benefits comparable to active employees, while nurses and emergency personnel emphasize persistent pay inequities within the healthcare system.

Campaign: “Organizing Contract Workers in Oil and Gas”

The “Organizing Contract Workers in Oil and Gas” campaign was launched with a demand to eliminate

intermediary companies and convert workers to direct employment. In it, a group of oil and gas workers wrote to the president calling for immediate action on the Government Workforce Organization Plan¹⁵ and the conversion of workers and employees' status. Signers describe the current situation as structural exploitation. The campaign had generated 21,206 signatures by 31 December 2025.

Campaign to Reduce Nurses' Working Hours

The "Reduce Nurses' Working Hours" campaign was launched in response to chronic workload pressure, the denial of official holidays, and nurse burnout. Addressing the Speaker of Parliament, signers called for revisions to working-hours laws and compensation for imposed overtime. The campaign has more than 2,700 signatures and remains unanswered.

Sectoral Campaigns: Release of labor activist

Besides sectoral campaigns related to socio-economic demands, there were also campaigns calling for the release of detained labor activists, including the following:

Campaign Supporting Nursing Activist

The "Support Mohammad Hosseinpour" campaign emerged in response to disciplinary measures and administrative pressure against a nursing professional activist in Gilan. Mohammad Hosseinpour, a prominent nursing activist, was formally accused by the administrative violations board of Gilan University of Medical Sciences in July 2025. According to his colleagues, the complaint was filed following his publication of a campaign on the Karzar platform¹⁶, as part of his efforts to advance nurses' demands.

Supporters framed the case as emblematic of a security-oriented response to professional advocacy and called for the lifting of restrictions against him. The campaign gathered more than 6,900 signatures, reflecting broad backing within the nursing community. Beyond the initial complaint—which resulted in a three-month suspension from work—the Ministry of Health also filed a separate complaint accusing him of "spreading falsehoods," and he was subsequently summoned to the prosecutor's office.

A complete overview of the online worker campaigns documented and analyzed by VA is provided in Appendix I.

¹⁵ As will be explained in more depth in the next chapter, the "government workforce organization plan," seeks to offer contracted workers direct employment with the government. However, this plan has been stalled for many years now including by getting stuck in the Iranian Parliament.

¹⁶ While Karzar.net itself is a legal, Tehran-based petition platform used by citizens to gather signatures and advance civic demands, its operations occur within Iran's broader environment of internet control and surveillance.

4 Government policies & law-making

Labor issues and struggles—and the ways in which they are experienced by ordinary workers—are largely shaped by the extent of government support for the working population. This chapter explores these dynamics by examining government responses to labor protests, as well as its policies and laws related to labor.

Government Responses to Labor Protests

Government responses to labor protests have not been uniform. While the state's reactions varied in character, the overall pattern indicates that concessions were limited and temporary, while suppression of labor mobilization intensified.

Concessions

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Iranian government occasionally made concessions to workers.

However, these measures were largely non-structural and failed to address the underlying issues. Concessions typically focused on short-term financial relief, such as the payment of wage arrears (which in itself highlights the precarious state of labor in Iran) or modest wage increases. In some cases, partial management changes were promised.

Many of these commitments were vague and lacked clear mechanisms for implementation. Furthermore, as nurses experienced earlier, wage increases can be quickly eroded by persistent inflation. More broadly, the government failed to address the core demands of protesters—namely, job security and decent wages—and instead continued to pursue austerity policies.

Suppression

Meanwhile, in a context where independent trade unions are effectively banned, the government increasingly targeted largely spontaneous labor mobilizations by identifying and repressing perceived leading activists, further undermining workers' ability to organize. Labor activists associated with Iran's once most powerful labor unions, such as the Coordinating Council of Iranian Teachers' Trade Associations (CCITA), frequently faced reprisals.

As protests expanded in scale and scope alongside Iran's growing economic difficulties, government suppression intensified—to the point that meetings were even invaded. This widening repression further exposed the gap between the regime's revolutionary rhetoric and workers' everyday realities. The remainder of this section will now outline key instances of government suppression of labor action¹⁷.

Following the ending of the war, the Iranian government engaged in widespread suppression. It was clear that Israel had had inside help. Under the cloak of safeguarding national interest, many dissidents were (re)arrested and a climate of fear ruled. Following increased protests, in August government crackdowns also extended to labor activists,

In a context where independent trade unions are effectively banned, the government increasingly targeted largely spontaneous labor mobilizations by identifying and repressing perceived leading activists, further undermining workers' ability to organize. Labor activists associated with Iran's once-powerful unions, such as the Coordinating Council of Iranian Teachers' Trade Associations (CCITA), frequently faced reprisals.

¹⁷ in addition to the actions already outlined in the previous chapter, discussing worker protests.

For instance, following the nearly 20 day long strikes at Razi Petrochemical between 8-26 of August, there were repercussions. A review of reports circulated on social media indicated that, following these protests, two workers at the company—Ahmad Assakereh and Javad Rashidi—were detained for five days. They were tortured to such an extent¹⁸ that they attempted suicide¹⁹.

Meanwhile, the 40+ day strikes by workers at IRALCO, between 29 July and 12 September resulted in the opening of judicial cases against five worker representatives at the company.

In addition, in August, as part of the continuing wave of pressure against labor and civil activists, four teachers' union activists—Younes Azadbar, Shohreh Kasaei, Amir Vaqari Ferehnak Langaroudi, and Ebrahim Daneshpazhouh Nehzami—were summoned, based on official notices from the judiciary, to Branch 4 of the Investigative Office of the Rasht Public and Revolutionary Prosecutor's Office in Gilan province. According to a statement by the Coordinating Council of Iranian Teachers' Trade Associations, three of these activists—Younes Azadbar, Shohreh Kasaei, and Ebrahim Daneshpazhouh—were to appear before the prosecutor's office within five days to respond to the charge of "disrupting public order and security." Meanwhile, a courtcase against former social security worker and retiree activist Amir Vaqari Ferehnak Langaroudi was initiated after he published critical posts about Iran's economic and social conditions on his personal social media page²⁰.

That same month, the Ministry of Education's Administrative Violations Appeals Board issued disciplinary rulings against seven members of the Sanandaj Teachers' Trade Association: Majid Karimi, Ghiath Nemati, Salah Haji-Mirzaei, Nasrin Karimi, Leila Zarei, Faisal Nouri, and Mohi al-Din Rihani. These rulings included permanent dismissal, temporary suspension, forced retirement with demotion in rank, removal from school deputy positions, and internal exile. Some media outlets that covered the story cited the teachers' union activities—particularly their participation in the teachers' association elections in May 2024—as the main reason for these rulings. Media outlets close to security institutions, meanwhile, accused these teachers of involvement in the 2022 protests. Allegations such as closing schools, inciting students, and participating in illegal meetings were among the charges brought against them.

The crackdown on teachers' activists did not remain limited to Gilan Province and These rulings were issued despite the fact that the teachers' demands went no further than the implementation of constitutional principles—including Articles 15, 26, 27, and 30—and the realization of the ranking system and fair conditions for education.

Despite these pressures, however, residents and civil and union activists in Sanandaj showed their support for dismissed and persecuted teachers on August 28 by organizing a protest walk from Koodak Park to a recreational area on the slopes of Mount Abidar. Several union organizations affiliated with the Coordinating Council also issued statements²¹ condemning the sentences handed down against union activists in Kurdistan and Kerman.

On August 3, Branch One of the Kerman Court also issued verdicts sentencing eight teachers and union activists in Kerman province—Shahnaz Rezaei, Zahra Azizi, Mitra Nikpour, Fatemeh Yazdani, Leila Afshar, Majid Naderi, Mohammadreza Behzadpour, and Hossein Rashidi Zarandi²²—to prison terms on charges

18 <https://ap.lc/CpHSn>

19 Following protests by their fellow workers, they got released.

20 <https://davtalab.org/2025/3969/>

21 <https://t.me/kashowra>

22 These teachers had previously been summoned multiple times by the security police and the prosecutor's office in 2022 and 2024, and in some cases had been detained and later released on bail.

such as "acting against national security," "propaganda against the system," and "membership in opposition groups." Reports published by the Coordinating Council of Teachers' Trade Associations show that altogether nearly 36 teachers and union activists faced summonses and arrests as well as dismissals, suspension from service, or administrative exile between July and November 2025. These actions occurred in several provinces, including Kerman, Kurdistan, Gilan, West Azerbaijan, Isfahan, and Tehran, indicating the range of the crackdown. The text box below outlines further arrests and sentences for labor activists.

Actions like dismissals, suspension from service, or administrative exile show that pressure on professional activists not only persisted in the second half of 2025 but, in some cases, could be subtle and confined to professional settings. This was certainly not confined to teachers. In the healthcare sector, nurses faced disciplinary actions similar to those experienced by teachers. Protests over unpaid wages, delayed performance-based payments, and excessive workloads were met with administrative disciplinary summonses, case-building, and lawsuits by the Ministry of Health. According to the secretary-general of Iran's House of Nurses, these measures follow a targeted, hierarchical pattern—from inducement and administrative pressure to benefit reductions and security summonses.

Government repression of strikes through arrests or prison sentences

Masoud Farhikhte — imprisoned teacher and member of the Teachers' Union of Islamshahr

On September 15, 2025, Masoud Farhikhte was arrested during an extraordinary meeting of the Coordinating Council of Iranian Teachers' Associations in Shahreza and transferred to the Karaj Central Detention Center. On November 24, he was moved to solitary confinement as a punitive measure. Farhikhte had previously been sentenced to four years, one month, and 17 days in prison.

Hossein Mirbehari — founder of the Society for the Defense of Child Laborers and Street Children

Hossein Mirbehari, one of the founders of the Society for the Defense of Child Laborers and Street Children and a well-known children's rights activist, was arrested on October 15, 2025. After 33 days in solitary confinement and 12 days in a public ward, he was released on bail a few minutes ago with a bond of 5 billion tomans.

Younes Azadbar — retired labor activist, organizer of Sunday protest gatherings

Branch 5 of the Enforcement Office of the Rasht Revolutionary Court issued a summons dated November 25, ordering Gilan labor activist Younes Azadbar, one of the organizers of the Sunday protest gatherings, to report within ten days to begin serving his sentence. He had previously been sentenced by Branch 2 of the Rasht Revolutionary Court, presided over by Mohammad-Ali Darvish, to seven months and 16 days for "propaganda against the system" and fifteen months and one day for "insulting the Leader." The Appeals Court upheld the ruling in full. He is also facing several other open cases.

Preventing a demonstration by Esfahan Steel workers

On Wednesday, November 18, 2025, Esfahan Steel workers who intended to hold a protest rally — as previously announced — in front of the Esfahan Governor's Office and the Zarrin-Shahr District Office, were blocked by a large presence of security forces, plainclothes agents, and company security personnel. According to reports, several workers present were identified and arrested.

Statement of the Coordinating Council of Iranian Teachers' Associations condemning the violent arrest of Jahangir Rostami, retired teacher and member of the Teachers' Association of Harsin

Jahangir Rostami — retired teacher in Harsin, retired activist in weekly pensioners' protests

"With anger and deep concern, we learned that on October 17, 2025, security forces raided the home of Mr. Jahangir Rostami, arresting him with violence and transferring him — according to his family — to Tehran and Evin Prison. On December 15, he was released on bail. This security approach toward union activity is an attack on the very principle of public education. Criminalizing organizing and the articulation of professional demands by teachers is neither law nor reason; it is merely an attempt to silence the voice of schools and society. We consider this action unlawful and unethical."

Mohammadzaman Kamrava — retired teacher in Ahvaz, retired activist in weekly pensioners' protests

Mohammadzaman Kamrava, a retired activist from Ahvaz suffering from severe health issues including a brain tumor and heart and lung problems, was arrested on Saturday, October 11, 2025, during a raid on his home.

Zhale Rouhzad and Esmail Gerami — teacher activists

On Tuesday, October 7, 2025, Intelligence Ministry forces raided the home of teacher and labor activist Zhale Rouhzad with a search warrant and confiscated all electronic devices belonging to her and her husband, Esmail Gerami.

Raid on a meeting of teachers' union activists

On Tuesday, September 16, 2025, the first day of the extraordinary assembly of the Coordinating Council of Iranian Teachers' Associations in Shahreza, security forces stormed the venue and arrested 18 representatives and union activists.

Shahab Darabi — truck driver and supporter of the strikes

On August 25, 2025, truck driver Shahab Darabi from Eslamabad-e Gharb, who had been arrested for supporting the truckers' strikes, was sentenced by one of the branches of the Revolutionary Court to three years and one day in prison. The conviction was connected both to his participation in the truckers' strikes and his supportive posts on social media.

Alongside these pressures, direct intervention in collective and organizational spaces emerged as a new layer of repression. On September 16, 2025, the General Assembly held by the Coordinating Council of Iranian Teachers' Trade Associations in Shahreza, Isfahan Province, was interrupted by a raid conducted by security forces. Eighteen representatives and union activists were arrested, and their belongings were confiscated.

The Coordinating Council reported that 17 of the arrested teachers were released after approximately eight hours of interrogation; however, Masoud Farhikhteh, a well-known activist within the teachers' union, remained in custody.

Farhikhteh had previously been sentenced to more than four years in prison in August 2025 by Branch 12 of the Alborz Province Court of Appeal. His charges included "assembly and collusion against internal security" and "propaganda against the regime." According to the Coordinating Council, his ongoing detention raised alarms about the possibility of him being transferred to prison to serve his sentence.

In a statement, the Coordinating Council of Iranian Teachers' Trade Associations expressed its disapproval, condemning:

"this blatant raid, that stresses that the authorities not only show zero tolerance for independent union and collective activities, but also target teachers' most basic right to hold internal assemblies through coercion and intimidation. The council demands the immediate release of Masoud Farhikhteh and the prompt return of all confiscated personal belongings, and reaffirms its commitment to defending teachers' rights."

This government action was part of a broader policy that restricted space for independent activity while strengthening aligned, "managed" institutions. The earlier closure of the Office of the Tehran Province Journalists' Union on 20 August²³, at the request of Tehran's municipality, fits this pattern. The Association denounced the move as a "blatant assault on trade union independence, the professional freedom of journalists, and the pluralism of society." According to Akbar Montajabi, the Association's chair, it should be understood as part of a wider campaign against independent professional organizations, alongside the earlier closures of societal institutions such as the House of Humanities Scholars and the Iranian Sociological Association. A group of veteran journalists and journalism professors expressed deep concern over the sealing and silencing of spaces for dialogue and civic participation, particularly "at a moment of national crisis."

Altogether, developments in the month(s) following the war signaled the start of a new wave of security and judicial pressure on labor and union activists in Iran. While workers' and teachers' protests were primarily focused on livelihood, professional, and legal demands, security and judicial bodies increasingly framed these actions as threats to the political order. Case-building, disciplinary rulings, temporary detentions, summonses, prosecutions, and heavy administrative sentences reflect a unified pattern of repression aimed at curbing independent union activity and preventing broader social solidarity. The harsh crackdown on street protests on 28 December fits squarely within this same pattern.

Evolving Labor Policies & Law

During the period under review, a range of labor-related policy measures were implemented or proposed. These initiatives reflected both worker and employer demands, as well as the government's efforts to reduce public spending. The following section first discusses legal and regulatory reforms, followed by a separate analysis of the 1405 budget bill.

Implementation of the livelihood commodity voucher program

Under the current administration, a series of measures and programs have been put on the agenda to support vulnerable groups, one of which is the electronic commodity voucher. The electronic voucher is a form of digital coupon that the government provides to support household livelihoods and distribute subsidies more evenly. This credit can only be used to purchase specified items such as meat, rice, cooking oil, pasta, milk, cheese, yogurt, sugar, eggs, and legumes from contracted stores, and it cannot be withdrawn as cash. Under this program, households can use the allocated credit to purchase essential goods from designated stores.

Under the original design, lower-income deciles were supposed to receive larger amounts. In 2025, households in the first to third income deciles received 500,000 tomans per month, while those in the fourth to seventh deciles received 350,000 tomans.

The program began in March 2024 and has now completed its fifth phase. A review of its implementation shows that while the monetary value of the electronic voucher for households in the first through seventh deciles was quite limited and covered only a small portion of basic needs, it nevertheless had a psychological support effect, especially among minimum-income households.

With the outbreak of nationwide street protests in Iran in December, the government announced that it would deposit one million tomans per month into electronic voucher accounts for 80 million people. This move followed the removal of the 28,500-toman preferential exchange rate. In the first payment, the government transferred four months' worth of subsidies, totaling four million tomans, into beneficiaries' accounts.

"Zero Accidents" Campaign

The "Zero Accidents" campaign was launched by the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare and its affiliated organizations with the aim of reducing workplace accidents and improving safety conditions across work environments. The campaign primarily focuses on training and awareness-raising among workers, enhancing safety standards, ensuring continuous monitoring of worksites, and expanding field inspections. In addition, it seeks to utilize new tools—such as digital accident reporting systems—to generate more accurate and reliable data on workplace safety.

The campaign targets all industries and sectors, with particular attention given to high-risk workplaces such as construction, transportation, and mining. As its name suggests, the campaign's ultimate objective is to achieve "zero accidents" in work environments.

While this goal is both commendable and widely supported, experts, including academics in the field of occupational safety, caution that it may be difficult to achieve in practice. Many workplaces suffer from a weak safety culture and insufficient safety training for employees. Furthermore, inspection and oversight mechanisms often remain inadequate. Without meaningful reforms to management structures—granting them greater responsibility while also strengthening supervision by labor institutions to ensure stronger employer accountability—the "Zero Accident" campaign risks remaining largely symbolic, and significant reductions in workplace accidents may fail to materialize.

In short, although the campaign represents an important step toward raising public awareness and generating social and legal pressure to improve worker safety, its success will depend on sustained commitment and careful, continuous monitoring. Only then can it produce lasting, positive effects in reducing occupational injuries.

The "Beta" Plan for Retirees

A new government scheme, dubbed "Beta," was launched in cooperation with Bank Refah to offer retirees installment loans for purchasing household appliances. The plan is presented as a new livelihood package for Social Security retirees, but it is not a direct cash benefit. The plan was officially launched after a memorandum of understanding was signed in mid-October 2025 between Mohammad Asadi, head of the High Council of Retirees, and Esmail Lalgani, CEO of Bank Refah Kargaran.

The card allows retirees to buy household appliances and other Iranian-made goods from chain stores and affiliated retailers in installments through a credit-based support scheme built around a specialized

purchase card issued through Bank Refah Kargaran.. According to the limited information released so far, eligible retirees can apply for the card and, after a credit assessment, make purchases up to a limit of under 100 million tomans (some reports suggest the limit may be higher). Purchases would be repaid over roughly 30 installments. Applicants must receive their pension through Bank Refah, have no outstanding debts or bounced checks, have active banking services, and be younger than 77. This age limit excludes older retirees—many of whom are among the most vulnerable—and leaves them without access to the program. The plan also requires retirees to pass a credit-scoring process and does not require a check or guarantor. However, full details have not been published, and much of what is known is based on incomplete information from partner stores and general statements by officials.

Retirement associations and activists have criticized the plan, arguing that it ignores retirees' real financial conditions. As Maliha Nasrollahi Azad, a board member of the Gilan Province Retirees Association, told Vazeh on October 6, 2025: "The majority of our retirees are minimum-wage earners, receiving about 14 million tomans. With this low level of income, they do not even have the ability for credit purchases and installments for home appliances for their children's dowries." She added that high monthly installments could consume more than half of a retiree's pension, creating an unsustainable burden. Ali Dehghankia, head of the Tehran Social Security Retirees Association, also told Vazeh on October 6 that the plan needs "more logical conditions" that reflect retirees' real financial capacity. Both representatives confirmed that retiree associations have been invited to participate in the implementation process, but they are still waiting for the publication of full and final details. Critics argue that unless the plan is paired with real pension increases and longer repayment terms, it will push low-income retirees deeper into debt rather than improving their livelihoods.

Plan to remove cash subsidies for higher income households

The plan to eliminate cash subsidies for 18 million people began in August with the aim of fulfilling budgetary requirements and reducing the heavy deficit in the targeted subsidy system—a deficit that, according to the Audit Court, had exceeded 266 trillion tomans. Under the 2025 budget law, the government was allowed to remove subsidies for households in higher income brackets (upper income deciles), with the goal of eventually removing around 18 million people from the cash subsidy rolls by the end of the current Iranian year.

In practice, however, with a sudden change in criteria, the cutoff was lowered to "monthly per capita income exceeding 10 million tomans after deducting housing rent"—a benchmark that differs significantly from previous standards based on multiples of the minimum wage (ranging from 30 to 60 million tomans depending on household size). The government and the Ministry of Welfare announced that higher-income households had been identified using indicators such as income, bank transactions, property ownership, vehicles, foreign travel, and, more recently, per capita income after rent, and that objections could be filed through the Hemayat platform. In practice, however, weak public communication and inaccessible response channels fueled widespread confusion among households.

Controversy and criticism largely focused on the fact that subsidy cuts began not with affluent groups but with workers and retirees on fixed incomes, sometimes even below the poverty line. Critics argued that the 10 million toman threshold was lower than the officially announced poverty line for the first half of 2024 and far below unofficial estimates of a 30 to 35 million toman poverty line. As a result, many working-class and pensioner households were mistakenly classified as high-income simply because they owned a home or had modest savings. Economic experts attributed these errors to weak data systems, the government's inability to clearly distinguish between income and expenses, and pressure from the budget deficit. They

warned that continuing this approach without transparency and revised criteria would lead to public distrust and social discontent. Even members of parliament emphasized that the current indicators did not align with the real cost of living or with sharp differences in household expenses, particularly housing, and that the government would ultimately be forced to revise the policy.

Scheme to Raise Construction Workers' Insurance Contributions

In November 2025, parliament's Social Commission reviewed a proposal to increase construction workers' insurance contributions from 7% to 13.5%. This proposal is the latest development in a long-running dispute over who should fund construction workers' insurance coverage.



Of an estimated 1.3 million construction workers, nearly half still lack basic insurance. Picture source: [ISNA](#)

In 2007, construction workers' insurance shifted toward a self-employed model, removing the obligation from employers and placing the burden on seasonal, precarious workers. Since then, especially around Article 5 of the law and how funding is provided, multiple amendments (namely in 2012, 2014, 2018, 2022, 2023, and 2024) have promised expanded coverage.

Progress has repeatedly stalled due to funding disputes, resistance from the Social Security Organization, and pressure from employer groups, however.

Critics say the new proposal repeats these failures. Labor unions argue that raising worker contributions or relying on construction permit fees does not address the core issue: employers' responsibility. They warn that this approach simply forces workers—who face high risk and unstable income—to shoulder the cost. As one union activist

put it, this proposal is just "reaching into workers' pockets," forcing the most vulnerable workers to pay for a problem created by employers. Social Security claims it lacks resources to expand coverage, but labor activists argue this contradicts the substantial revenue generated by construction projects and the legal obligation of employers under Article 38.

Article 5 of The Social Insurance Law for Construction Workers defines how construction workers are identified and verified in order to receive social insurance coverage. Under this provision, workers engaged in construction trades can be certified without needing a fixed employer and then enrolled in the Social Security Organization for health, disability, and pension benefits.

Plan to Regularize Government Employees and the Rumor of "Direct Payment Without Removing Contractors"

Despite years of debate among Parliament, the government, and the Guardian Council, the plan to regularize government employees has not been finalized and remains stalled under the fourteenth administration. Officials from the Administrative and Employment Affairs Organization, including its head, insist that resolving the status of outsourced and contract workers requires a clear legal framework and that they are committed to addressing the issue. However, the long review process and lack of concrete action have left hundreds of thousands of outsourced and indirectly employed workers in a state of uncertainty.

At the same time, rumors have circulated that the government may move toward "direct payment" of wages to workers while keeping contractors in place. Labor activists argue that this would not solve the core problem, and would instead preserve the contractor-based employment system. They claim that outsourced workers have performed the same work as permanent staff for years but have been denied equal pay, benefits, and job security. Critics also argue that maintaining contractors violates principles of equality and administrative justice and adds unnecessary costs to the public budget.

For outsourced workers—especially those in long-term or permanent roles—the main demand remains clear: direct and permanent contracts with public institutions. This demand has not been met, and the plan remains suspended while its details and the government's willingness to reform the law remain unclear. Thus, a significant discrepancy exists between workers' demands to remove contractors and the government's limited or delayed response.

The broader pattern described above also affected the education sector, where non-official teachers—such as purchased-service and hourly teachers—continued to face insecurity and inequality, as outlined below.

Plan to Formalize the Employment Status of Non-Official Teachers

The plan to regularize the employment status of more than 200,000 teachers outside formal employment has been placed on the agenda of both Parliament and the government.

However, the Planning and Budget Organization resisted funding the conversion of purchased-service teachers from freelance hourly status to fixed-term contracts. The parliamentary education committee says this opposition is not mainly about affordability, but about payment methods and long-term financial commitments.

Critics argue the plan would not increase government spending because it mostly extends contracts from nine to twelve months, meaning the cost is already embedded in current expenses. The plan was already being implemented in some provinces, especially in Sistan and Baluchestan, where thousands of teachers had been issued orders for formal contracts. When the process was halted, it caused widespread dissatisfaction, especially given the region's severe teacher shortages and economic hardship. Parliament even wrote directly to the president demanding the plan resume.

The plan would provide job security and basic benefits, helping address Iran's teacher shortage by making the profession more stable and attractive. It has broad public support. However, disagreements between executive bodies over funding and employment rules have kept the plan suspended. As a result, this group of teachers remain caught between promises of inclusion and the reality of ongoing uncertainty.

Plan to consolidate pension funds

The debate over merging pension funds has resurfaced in Iran. Previously discussed in the Sixth and Seventh

Development Plans, it was postponed in 2023 and November 2024 due to insufficient legal and economic infrastructure. With 17 largely closed pension funds now dependent on the state budget, the government is again pushing consolidation to cut administrative costs. However, the merger of Homa's pension fund into the National Pension Fund raised concerns, as declining service levels and ongoing protests indicate that consolidation can weaken beneficiaries' rights. Rumors about merging the Oil Industry Pension Fund into the National Pension Fund and the Rural and Nomads Social Insurance Fund into Social Security have also sparked opposition.

Supporters say merging newer funds like the Rural and Nomads Social Insurance Fund could temporarily strengthen Social Security due to healthier support ratios. Critics argue this benefit is short-lived, since rural population decline and aging will soon turn consolidation into a burden. They emphasize the real issues are structural: fewer contributors, an aging society, low birthrates, growing informal employment, and poor investment of pooled resources. Farshid Yazdani, former secretary of the Strategic Planning Council of the Social Security Organization, has warned that many funds, including the Steel Fund, IRIB Fund, and Municipality Fund, are nearing bankruptcy. Without broader reforms, merging funds could worsen dissatisfaction by standardizing pension obligations unfairly across sectors.

Plan to insure ride-hailing drivers

The insurance of ride-hailing drivers became a much debated labor topic during the period under study. The Social Security Organization insisted that insurance coverage for drivers working on platforms such as Snapp and Tapsi must be mandatory and warned that activity without insurance would no longer be permitted, a position strongly opposed by the platforms.

Ride-hailing services, which expanded from the mid-2010s through technology and flexible labor, now handle millions of daily trips and rely on millions of drivers, most of whom are part-time. The absence of a clear employment definition has left many drivers—especially full-time and other vulnerable groups—without insurance, undermining their security in the face of illness, accidents, and burnout.

To address this gap, parliament and the government, through the Seventh Development Plan and its regulations, proposed extending Social Security coverage to drivers. The plan includes a 13.5 percent contribution from drivers' income and a 4 percent levy on each trip's fare. Critics say the model is vague and could harm part-time and retiree drivers by raising trip costs and reducing demand. The platforms argue coverage should apply only to full-time drivers and be jointly financed by the state, drivers, and platforms. International experience suggests that without a tailored framework for platform work, neither labor rights nor business sustainability can be secured.

Plan to transfer Bank Refah

The transfer of Bank Refah Workers to the state, based on a parliamentary resolution around 2019 and implemented under Iran's Seventh Development Plan (2023–2027), has become one of the most controversial social security decisions in recent years.

For decades, Bank Refah operated as the financial arm of the Social Security Organization (SSO), playing a central role in liquidity management, pension payments, and insurance and healthcare settlements. Under banking reform provisions in the Seventh Development Plan, which limit any single shareholder to a maximum of 33 percent ownership, the SSO's majority control was reduced in 2025, with effective control shifting to the state-linked Deposit Guarantee Fund. Authorities justified the move as a legal requirement, but retirees and labor activists argue it amounts to the de facto nationalization of a bank built with workers' insurance

contributions and blurs the line between regulation and asset expropriation.

The government and banking regulators maintain that full SSO ownership is incompatible with new banking laws aimed at correcting systemic imbalances. Bank Refah's managers, however, argue that the bank is financially sound and that the issue stems from stricter Central Bank requirements. Proposals to exempt Bank Refah due to its unique role or to transfer it to affiliated pension funds remain unresolved, turning what was framed as a technical banking reform into a broader social and labor issue.

According to experts, early signs of concern have already appeared in the form of occasional payment delays, pressure on Social Security's cash resources, and greater difficulty in managing healthcare obligations, despite official assurances that the transfer would not disrupt operations. In a wider context of frustration with pension insecurity, government mismanagement, and economic hardship, many retirees and families reliant on Social Security view the transfer as another example of state priorities overriding ordinary people's economic security. Still, only 33 percent of the bank's shares are currently managed by the Social Security Organization, while 67 percent are held by the Deposit Guarantee Fund. Efforts to restore full ownership and management to the Social Security Organization are ongoing²⁴, including a campaign demanding the return of Bank Refah to the Social Security Organization, which was launched on Karzar.net on 30 June 2025 (see Appendix I for further details).

Implementation of the real-time unemployment monitoring plan

The "real-time unemployment monitoring system," launched through cooperation between the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare and the Central Bank, is designed to track employment conditions on a monthly basis, identify reasons for layoffs, and enable targeted government support for struggling businesses. Developed as a supplement to traditional labor statistics, the system relies on administrative records and national ID-linked data to provide more timely information on labor market trends.

According to Labor Minister Ahmad Meydari, the system draws on insurance and company data to track job exits caused by factors such as seasonal layoffs, liquidity shortages, power outages, or production downturns. The government hopes this will help distinguish firms in genuine distress and allow early intervention through preferential-rate bank facilities, with the Central Bank linking labor data to financial support.

However, the plan, announced on 10 November, has faced strong criticism over its lack of transparency and unclear integration with existing labor databases. Labor organizations say they were excluded from its design and warn that, since more than half of Iran's workforce is informal and not covered by insurance data, the system risks being largely symbolic. Critics argue that without broader data reforms and clear links to tangible support, the initiative will fail to address unemployment and may further undermine public trust in employment policy.

Amendments to the law on regulating and supervising border trade, kulbari, and seafaring

The law on "regulating and supervising border trade, kulbari, and seafaring," approved by parliament on 15 March 2024 and regulated by cabinet on 27 January 2025, aims to reduce smuggling, formalize border livelihoods, and create sustainable employment in border regions. Recent amendments adopted by the Article 4 Working Group in September have renewed public attention. These changes increased transparency in kulbari and seafaring imports and strengthened the role of institutions such as the Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade, customs, and the Food and Drug Organization in defining eligible goods,

24 <https://www.ilna.ir/fa/tiny/news-1715994>

import ceilings, valuation, and oversight. The government argues that the reforms support border livelihoods while protecting domestic production through higher tariffs on goods with local equivalents.



Picture of a Kulbar. Picture source: [Tabnak](#)

However, controversy centers on the tension between border imports and domestic industry protection. Critics contend that allowing imports of home appliances, industrial parts, and consumer goods—even with higher tariffs—could create unfair competition, benefit intermediary networks, and fail to reach actual border residents. The limited profits for kulbars and high costs have also meant that the law's goals have not been fully realized, raising concerns about weakened domestic industries and threats to formal employment. In response, authorities have proposed revising the bylaw, increasing transparency, setting minimum value thresholds, and steering imports toward raw materials and goods without domestic equivalents. Experts argue that without strict implementation and clear reporting on border residents' benefits, the policy risks becoming a legal channel for unregulated imports rather than a development tool.

Nevertheless, what is evident is that sweeping structural reforms in economic, regional, and security policies are urgently needed to improve the situation for Kolbaris. They continue to face life-threatening violence, with Iranian border guards shooting at them for alleged smuggling activities. In December alone, IranWire documented two incidents involving Kurdish Kolbaris, while the HENGAW Organization for Human Rights reported even higher numbers in other months. The rising fatalities among Kolbaris, along with increasing workplace deaths, worker suicides, and precarious employment contracts, highlight the broader erosion of working-class life in Iran. In such conditions, work no longer guarantees survival; instead, it poses a significant threat to life.

In addition to the initiatives discussed above, other legislative proposals, including related to working hours in the public sector and the regulation of foreign labor were under review, during the period. As these measures were either still in the legislative stage or had limited direct impact on labor-market outcomes within the timeframe of this report, they are discussed in Appendix II.

The 1405 (2026–27) Budget Bill

On 23 December 2025, the government submitted the annual budget bill for the Iranian year 1405 to Parliament, as required by the constitution. The budget sets the country's one-year revenue and expenditure framework and signals broader economic and social priorities.

Drafted amid high inflation, the 1405 budget became one of the most controversial in recent years. One

major dispute centered on cuts or eliminations of funding for several institutions, especially cultural bodies²⁵. In response, 180 reformist political and economic figures demanded that these institutions be defunded entirely and that the budget prioritize wage increases that match inflation, as required by law²⁶ rise in line with inflation, since under the law wages are supposed to track inflation.

A projected minimum 20 percent pay raise for public-sector employees—raising the minimum salary to around 15.6 million tomans—sparked public outrage. The increase falls far below inflation and risks setting a low benchmark for the minimum wage, since civil service pay often influences decisions by the Supreme Labor Council. In a context where even 35–45 percent raises failed to restore purchasing power, a 20 percent increase would greatly deepen wage poverty and inequality.

The budget also signaled major subsidy reforms, including reducing or eliminating subsidized foreign-currency allocations for imports, which would likely raise the cost of basic goods such as food and wheat. The government argued that savings would be redirected to alternative support mechanisms such as vouchers or direct cash transfers.

Nevertheless, the bill faced strong backlash, beginning with Tehran’s bazaar merchants and escalating into broader street protests. On 29 December 2025, the parliamentary budget committee rejected the bill’s general outline, arguing it would worsen purchasing power. In response, President Masoud Pezeshkian wrote to Parliament on 30 December 2025, agreeing to revise the bill and proposing adjustments including higher salaries and benefits for employees and retirees, revised tax exemptions, and expanded support for vulnerable households. However, given the widespread suspicion of government intentions, the proposed revisions arrived too late—by then, the “genie was already out of the bottle,” and the budget had become another catalyst for the protests sweeping the country.

After street protests emerged, beginning with Tehran’s bazaar merchants, parliament rejected the budget bill. Masoud Pezeshkian then sent a letter to the speaker of parliament formally announcing the withdrawal of the bill and its revision in committee, writing:

“Through this letter, I hereby express my agreement with coordination and the implementation of reforms, with due regard to inflation considerations and the budget ceiling, as follows:

1. Reforms that lead to higher wages and benefits for government employees and our dear retirees.
2. Reforms and application of an effective tax rate in a way that improves the business environment.
3. Revisions to tax exemption rates for individuals and legal entities, taking into account the need to strengthen exemptions for government wage earners at lower income levels.
4. Reforms to raising the value-added tax rate in a way that directs these resources toward providing commodity vouchers for vulnerable groups in society.
5. Any reforms that lead to increased subsidies for commodity vouchers and to strengthening people’s livelihoods”. *

After that, Mojtaba Yousefi, spokesperson for parliament’s budget consolidation commission, said on 30 December 2025 about next year’s pay increase for government employees: “Given that the government does not have sufficient resources to raise salaries in line with inflation, from our point of view a figure between 30 and 35 percent is fair and, under current conditions, desirable”. **

* <https://khabaronline.ir/xppXV>

** <https://khabaronline.ir/xpq2Q>

5 Analysis & way forward

The six months examined in this report show that labor protests in Iran emerged under the combined pressure of structural crises affecting wage earners: chronic inflation, austerity and shock policies, political and military instability, and the failure of official mechanisms to restore purchasing power or guarantee basic living standards. Workers, retirees, and employees across sectors face declining living standards, job insecurity, rising workplace accidents, and the expansion of deadly informal labor.

Overall, the findings show that labor protests during July–December 2025 were no longer merely responses to narrow, sector-specific demands. Instead, they increasingly took the form of actions centered on the “right to survival.” Escalating inflation, the collapse of purchasing power, postwar instability, and shock policies in currency, energy, and subsidies created conditions in which large segments of the working class, retirees, and wage earners faced direct threats to their livelihoods — and even to their lives.

The breadth and intensity of these protests correlated closely with key economic shocks during this period, including sharp currency devaluation, surging inflation, and sudden subsidy reductions. These shocks did not only deepen hardship; they also widened the social base of discontent. What began as labor unrest expanded into broader street protests as households across Iran experienced a shared sense of economic collapse and state failure.

In response, the government’s approach has largely avoided dialogue, wage adjustment, or reform of support structures, relying instead on security containment, soft control, judicial case-building, and administrative pressure. This widening gap between the lived reality of wage earners and the state’s official narrative has fueled the persistence and growing radicalization of labor protests in workplaces, as well as their increasing convergence with broader social unrest.

At the same time, the state’s systematic restriction of political freedom and the right to free association has further undermined trust in official institutions. Independent unions and workers’ organizations are blocked or criminalized, peaceful protests are treated as security threats, and labor activists face arrest, intimidation, and legal prosecution. This repression not only violates core labor and human rights standards, but also deepens the democratic deficit in Iran, as workers are denied the basic mechanisms of collective representation and social participation.

From this perspective, the labor protests documented here are not isolated incidents but part of a broader crisis in labor relations, economic governance, and political legitimacy. Without structural economic, social, and political reforms — including meaningful wage adjustment, social protection reform, and genuine political freedoms, including the right to free association — the intersection of labor unrest and wider street protests is likely to persist, with increasing intensity and higher social cost.

The six months examined in this report show that labor protests in Iran have taken shape amid the simultaneous weight of several structural crises on wage earners’ lives: chronic and accelerating inflation, the government’s austerity and shock policies, instability driven by military and political tensions, and the failure of official mechanisms to restore purchasing power or guarantee basic living standards. In this context, workers, retirees, and employees across different sectors are facing not only a steady decline in living standards, but also job insecurity, rising workplace accidents, and the expansion of deadly forms of informal labor.

An examination of how the government has responded to these conditions shows that instead of offering

structural answers (e.g. welfare policies instead of austerity) to economic and social demands, the dominant strategy has been the securitization of protests, the control of union and professional activity through oversight bodies, and the use of judicial and administrative pressure. While this approach may lead to the temporary, superficial containment of protests, in practice it has deepened distrust, eroded social capital, and shifted the crisis from workplaces to broader layers of society.

From this perspective, the labor protests documented in this report should not be seen as isolated incidents, but as signs of a persistent crisis in labor relations, livelihoods, and economic governance—a crisis that, if the current course continues, is likely to reemerge in the coming period with greater intensity and higher social costs.

Key Trends Identified in July–December 2025

Our field research and media monitoring identified the following key developments (table 2).

Table 2: Key labor trends January - June 2025

1. Layoffs in the post-war period

After the end of the war and the economy's entry into what the government called a phase of "reconstruction and adjustment," workforce downsizing became one of the dominant trends in manufacturing, services, and project-based sectors. Workshop closures or partial shutdowns, reduced production capacity, stalled development projects, and the termination of temporary contracts left thousands of workers suspended or dismissed. These layoffs abruptly stripped workers of even minimal economic security. In many cases, employers absolved themselves of responsibility by citing "emergency economic conditions" or "declining orders," while oversight bodies played little effective role in protecting labor.

2. Expansion of protests across industries and services

Alongside intensifying economic pressure, the scope of labor protests during the period expanded noticeably, spreading from large industrial units to services, education, bakeries, and contracting companies. Protests largely centered on unpaid wages, low pay, temporary contracts, job insecurity, and layoffs, and in many cases took the form of street gatherings, short strikes, or workplace sit-ins. Although many protests were interrupted by repression or lack of response, their repetition and wide geographic spread reflected the depth of discontent and the blockage of formal channels for pursuing labor grievances.

3. The livelihood and existential crisis of workers

Workers' livelihood crisis went beyond a simple loss of purchasing power, turning securing food, housing, healthcare, and education into a daily struggle. Runaway price increased for basic goods, rent, and medical costs, combined with the failure to adjust wages and delays in paying legally mandated salaries, pushed large segments of the workforce below the poverty line. Reports of skipped meals, second and third jobs, forced migration, children dropping out of school, and even worker suicides illustrated a reality in which survival had replaced a dignified life for much of the working class.

4. The continuation of repression and security-based responses

Throughout the six months reviewed, security measures against workers' collective action and labor activists continued, and in some cases intensified. Summons, arrests, threats, court rulings, workplace dismissals, and pressure on professional associations were all used to contain protests and prevent worker organization. This security-driven approach not only refused to recognize economic and professional demands but treated any form of collective action as a threat, effectively closing off the space for social dialogue.

5. Legal reforms affecting workers' conditions

During the period, a range of bills and initiatives related to the labor market and social policy were placed on the agenda of the government and parliament. While presented as efforts at "structural reform" or "organization," taken together they signaled a redefinition of the state's role and a shift of part of the economic crisis onto labor. From (forced) insurance for ride-hailing drivers and construction workers to revised regulations on hazardous jobs, reorganized government employment, consolidated pension funds, and cut or reduced subsidies, these policies focused less on strengthening job security and social protection than on managing resource shortages and reducing institutional obligations. The central role of bodies such as the Social Security Organization, parliament, and the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare in advancing these policies had direct consequences for wages, insurance coverage, pensions, and the quality of life of millions of workers and retirees, heightening the risk of deeper job insecurity, social inequality, and outright poverty.

6. A two-tier system of access and privilege

In many government institutions, access to employment, promotion, and economic opportunity became increasingly shaped by political connections, patronage, and personal networks. This two-tier system rewarded individuals with ties to the Revolutionary Guards, political elites, or influential institutions, while ordinary workers faced discrimination, job insecurity, and limited upward mobility. The result was a growing sense that state institutions served a privileged minority rather than the public, undermining trust in governance and reinforcing social inequality.

7. The ongoing economic crisis and the widening gap between wages and inflation

Ultimately, what linked all of these trends was the persistence of the economic crisis and the deepening structural gap between wages and inflation. While inflation climbed close to 50 percent and rising prices made everyday life more difficult month after month, wages not only failed to keep pace, but in many cases were not even paid in full. This structural gap trapped workers in a cycle of chronic poverty, debt, and psychological exhaustion, darkening any prospect of improvement. It shows that Iran's labor crisis is not temporary or merely the result of external shocks, but is rooted in existing policies and deeply unequal economic and governance arrangements.

Recommendations for International Labor and Human Rights Organizations and Activists

In light of the trends outlined in this report—from the rise in workplace accidents and the expansion of informal and dangerous labor to institutional repression, livelihood crises, and labor-costly legal reforms—the following recommendations can serve as a strategic roadmap for international labor and human rights organizations and activists:

Independent and systematic documentation of labor rights violations

International labor and human rights organizations, including the International Labour Organization and Amnesty International, can support independent labor news networks and local researchers in systematically recording data on workplace accidents, work-related suicides, layoffs, and the repression of labor organizations. The lack of institutional transparency in Iran makes it essential to produce parallel reports on a continuous basis and present them in both domestic and international forums.

Targeted pressure on the Iranian government through formal international mechanisms

Activists can make use of ILO conventions and supervisory mechanisms—particularly those related to freedom of association, occupational safety and health, and non-discrimination—to raise specific cases.

Repeatedly referring labor rights violations, the repression of professional associations, and unsafe working conditions to specialized committees increases the political cost for the government of maintaining the current situation.

Linking labor rights to human rights and sustainable development

Organizations such as Human Rights Watch can highlight the situation of Iranian workers not merely as a labor issue, but as a broader human rights and development crisis. Emphasizing the links between poverty, informal labor, child labor (including in kulbari), and work-related deaths can help attract the attention of development and humanitarian institutions.

Support for safe and independent organizing

Given the repression of independent labor organizations, discreet but effective forms of support—such as training in labor rights, digital security, and regional networking—can help labor activists inside the country maintain their voices without being exposed to direct danger. Global labor federations, including the International Trade Union Confederation, can play a key role in this area.

Special focus on workplace safety and informal labor

Specialized international bodies can design targeted initiatives to highlight Iran's workplace safety crisis, from global campaigns on construction and mining work to dedicated reports on kulbars as victims of informal labor. Raising these issues at regional and global levels can strengthen transnational solidarity.

Strengthening transnational and media solidarity

International activists can prevent the isolation of Iranian workers' voices by connecting their protests and demands to similar movements within Iran and in other countries. Translating, republishing, and amplifying Iranian workers' narratives through international media and networks is one of the most effective ways to break the cycle of silence and normalize resistance to repression.

Overall, combining legal pressure, careful documentation, support for independent organizing, and transnational solidarity can help international organizations and activists move beyond expressions of concern toward meaningful action in support of workers in Iran.

Recommendations for the Iranian government

Recognize protest as a social issue

Treating livelihood crises as a security problem does not resolve them; it deepens the state–society divide and pushes protests toward more radical forms.

Halt shock-therapy policies

Implementing so-called "economic surgery" amid high inflation and a collapse of public trust escalates social unrest and lacks any social mandate.

Structural Reforms

Replace austerity with welfare-centered policies, while tackling structural corruption and reducing the oligarchic concentration of economic and political power.

Release detainees and end violence

Immediate release of detained protesters, an end to security prosecutions, and guaranteed access to medical treatment are preconditions for any de-escalation.

Reopen spaces for mediation and social dialogue

Without the ability for independent professional, labor, and civic organizations to operate, there is no mechanism for social bargaining or the transmission of demands.

End the internet blackout

Cutting internet access violates the right to information and destroys many small online businesses. It exacerbates livelihood crises and social discontent, angering youth and teenagers—an important segment of the protest base. Additionally, this action heightens fears of state-led repression and concealment.

Recommendations for Activists and Protestors Inside Iran

Avoid polarizing and exclusionary framings

The use of slogans and discourses that marginalize or demean segments of society – including gendered or exclusivist rhetoric – has in practice narrowed the social base of the protests.

Translate livelihood grievances into a shared political language

Transforming economic suffering into political demand requires a common, concrete, and non-ideological vocabulary capable of unifying different social groups around minimal yet broad-based objectives.

Prioritize low-cost and sustainable forms of action

Under current conditions, professional actions, limited strikes, dispersed civil disobedience, and creative modes of protest may prove more effective and durable than direct street confrontations.

Avoid reliance on foreign support

Experience shows that political hope invested in external intervention does not yield sustainable change and undermines the legitimacy of domestic action. Pursue democratic principles and values in protests and demands.

Appendix I: Major Online Professional and Labor Campaigns (July–Dec 2025)

Campaign Demanding the Return of Bank Refah to the Social Security Organization

The “Return Bank Refah to Social Security” campaign took shape around retirees’ and labor activists’ objections to the bank’s transfer to the state. Pointing to the intergenerational nature of Social Security’s resources, signers argued that the transfer violates insured workers’ property rights and called for the bank to be returned to the Social Security Organization’s actual control. The campaign has gathered more than 5,000 signatures, and the latest updates indicate that a parliamentary proposal titled “suspending the enforcement of certain legal provisions of the Social Security Organization related to Bank Refah Workers” has been uploaded to the Majles system. Still, 33 percent of the bank’s shares are currently managed by the Social Security Organization, while 67 percent are held by the Deposit Guarantee Fund, and efforts to restore full ownership and management to the Social Security Organization continue²⁷.

The SSO historically owned Bank Refah as its financial arm — a bank established to serve workers and retirees through the social security system — but the 2025 application of the new rule effectively reduced SSO’s control from a majority shareholding to just one part (around 33 %) while the larger share went to the state-linked Deposit Guarantee Fund.

Campaign to Reduce Nurses’ Working Hours

The “Reduce Nurses’ Working Hours” campaign was launched in response to chronic workload pressure, the denial of official holidays, and nurse burnout. Addressing the Speaker of Parliament, signers called for revisions to working-hours laws and compensation for imposed overtime. The campaign has more than 2,700 signatures and remains unanswered.

Campaign Supporting Nursing Professional Activists

In the “Support Mohammad Hosseinpour” campaign, nurses protested disciplinary measures and administrative pressure against this professional activist. Mohammad Hosseinpour is a nursing activist in Gilan, and the administrative violations board at the province’s medical university filed a complaint against him in July 2025. According to his colleagues, the complaint followed his publication of a campaign on one of the country’s legal platforms as part of his efforts to pursue nurses’ demands. Signers described the case as emblematic of a security-style response to professional advocacy and called for restrictions to be lifted. Although the campaign gathered more than 6,900 signatures, beyond the Gilan University of Medical Sciences’ complaint—which resulted in a three-month suspension from work—the Ministry of Health also filed another complaint accusing him of “spreading falsehoods,” and he was summoned to the prosecutor’s office.

Campaign for Pay Equity for Emergency Medical Services Personnel

The “Pay Equity for Pre-Hospital Emergency Personnel” campaign was launched on 1 November 2025 to bring EMS workers’ pay into line with hospital nurses. Citing the demanding and high-risk nature of their work, emergency responders called for serious reforms to tariffs and benefits. With more than 4,000 signatures, this demand has still not received a clear response. Protests by this segment of the healthcare workforce intensified during the fall and peaked in December, but according to some reports, officials have responded not by addressing the problems but by using forced transfers and threats of dismissal against protesters²⁸.

27 <https://www.ilna.ir/fa/tiny/news-1715994>

28 <https://www.sharghdaily.com/fa/tiny/news-1072292>

Campaign Calling for the Removal of the Head of the Nursing Organization

The "Request to Remove the Head of the Nursing Organization" campaign alleged financial opacity and managerial inefficiency on the part of Ahmad Nejatian. Protesters called for reform of the profession's representative structures and greater accountability from leadership. This campaign, too, despite more than 2,100 signatures, has not led to a clear outcome. Nursing activists criticizing the Nursing Organization's performance in its current term say that the group that entered the sixth-term Supreme Council elections under the name "Arman Group" claimed during the campaign that they were the only group capable of building effective relations with the state and resolving nurses' problems through engagement. Today, they argue, that performance has contradicted those claims²⁹.

Campaign: "Full Implementation of the Teachers' Special Allowance"

The "Full Implementation of the Teachers' Special Allowance" campaign is one of the broadest and most widely signed professional campaigns in recent months. Teachers and retired education workers are calling for the full 25,000 wage points to be applied in their pay rulings. The campaign has gathered more than 150,000 signatures but is still stuck in a dead end with no response. Teacher activists say that despite the implementation of the ranking plan, the salaries of many teachers are still below the official poverty line, and that this situation continues to undermine both educational quality and job motivation. The main goal of the special allowance is to ensure pay fairness and retain staff. Even so, official reports indicate that education workers receive the lowest pay among all government employees.

Campaign: "Demands of Third-Party Staff at the Ministry of Oil"

The "Demands of Third-Party Staff at the Ministry of Oil" campaign centers on insurance, housing, implementation of an Administrative Justice Court ruling, and job security. Contract oil workers describe their situation as a form of structural discrimination. Addressed to the Minister of Oil, the campaign remains in a follow-up stage without a clear official response.

Campaign: "Protest by Applicants to the Ministry of Education Recruitment Exam"

The campaign "Protest Against Injustice Under the Name of the 'Employed Coefficient,'" which has collected more than 11,000 signatures, was initiated by candidates for the Ministry of Education's teacher recruitment exam and formally addressed to the Minister of Education.

Campaign: "Organizing Contract Workers in Oil and Gas"

The "Organizing Contract Workers in Oil and Gas" campaign was launched with a demand to eliminate intermediary companies and convert workers to direct employment. In it, a group of oil and gas workers wrote to the president calling for immediate action on the "government workforce organization plan" and the conversion of workers and employees' status. Signers describe the current situation as structural exploitation.

As will be explained in more depth in the next chapter, the "government workforce organization plan," which was reviewed in the 11th and 12th parliaments, has still not reached a conclusion. It has now been referred to the government, and it is said that the government has no objection to removing contractors. In this context, some labor activists have suggested that instead of sending the plan back to parliament, it should be approved directly by the cabinet, so it does not have to go through the already-tested earlier path³⁰.

29 <https://khp1.ir/?p=56780>

30 <https://www.ilna.ir/fa/tiny/news-1694363>

Campaign: "Pay Adjustment for the Second Half of the Year"

The "Pay Adjustment for the Second Half of the Year" campaign was launched in early fall, addressed to the Speaker of Parliament, calling for a minimum 30 to 35 percent pay increase in line with inflation. The employee and retiree signers—numbering more than 11,000—warned that current wages have fallen below the poverty line. The demand went unanswered.

Campaign: "Objection to a 20 Percent Pay Raise for 2026"

According to media reports and some information received, the proposed pay increase for next year has been set at 20 percent. This approach has been taken even though the final coefficient is usually determined in the final stages of drafting the national budget bill and can change depending on the balance of public revenues and expenditures. Meanwhile, inflation has now risen to over 50 percent, which could undermine the real impact of any pay increase. In this context, the "Objection to a 20 Percent Pay Raise for 2026" campaign, in a class-conscious and critical tone, describes this level of increase as a continuation of anti-wage policies and warns of a deepening class divide. With more than 8,000 signatures, it is still collecting signatures and has not yet prompted an effective response.

Campaign: "Seasonal Welfare Payments for Retirees"

With more than 32,000 signatures, the "Seasonal Welfare Payments for Retirees" campaign calls for retirees to receive welfare benefits comparable to those of active employees. This demand has also remained in limbo. Pursuing pension equalization, ensuring salaries are paid on time, providing loans, allocating religious and leisure trips, strengthening Social Security healthcare, avoiding delays in paying retirees' supplemental insurance premiums to contracted companies, and raising pensions in line with inflation are among the core demands of retirees who have effectively set the pace of street protests almost every week.

Campaign: "70 Percent Increase in Retirees' Pensions"

More recently, the "70 Percent Increase in Retirees' Pensions" campaign, with more than 78,000 signatures, has put forward what it calls retirees' minimum livelihood demand for survival under inflationary conditions. Retirees backing the campaign argue that if current conditions continue, only a 70 percent increase in pensions can cover basic living costs for wage earners and pensioners. Since the level of pension increases for 2026 will be set through the national budget bill, different retiree groups are trying to make sure the government hears their protest to the continuation of the current crisis. This campaign is also still ongoing.

Campaign Calling for the Dissolution of the Teachers' Savings Fund

Opposition to the performance of the Teachers' Savings Fund has intensified over the past year. At least three campaigns calling for the dissolution of the Teachers' Savings Fund, citing corruption cases and mismanagement, have been launched, collecting a combined total of more than 45,000 signatures on the Karzar platform. Signers describe the fund as inefficient and lacking transparency and have called for a clear determination of teachers' assets. They argue that the solution lies either in deep structural reform or in the fund's complete dissolution. It is reported that roughly 180 to 190 billion tomans are deducted monthly from teachers' salaries and transferred to the fund—a substantial amount that, according to experts, should be managed transparently and professionally so that its benefits are returned to the teaching community.

Campaign: "Wage Increases Based on Real Inflation"

According to the latest report from the Statistical Center of Iran, point-to-point inflation reached the alarming level of 49.4 percent in November 2025. This figure clearly shows that the purchasing power of Iranian

households has been nearly halved compared to the previous year. In this context, the campaign "Wage Increases Based on Real Inflation," with more than 59,000 signatures, calls for the explicit implementation of the Civil Service Management Law and for wages to be aligned with the real inflation rate. The organizers of the campaign, which is still ongoing, argue that with inflation at around 50 percent, talk of a 20 percent wage increase for the coming year is unacceptable and deeply concerning. After the rejection of the budget bill, lawmakers have now spoken of a 30 to 35 percent pay increase, which still falls short of the inflation rate.

Campaign: "Warning to the Government Over Failure to Implement the Special Allowance"

The campaign "Warning to the Government Over Failure to Implement the Special Allowance," launched by a group of public-sector employees—including civil servants, municipal workers, nurses, teachers, and retirees—has gathered more than 11,000 signatures. It accuses the government of refusing to implement the law and directly addresses the Speaker of Parliament. This campaign also remains unresolved. Although the government has made promises to improve conditions, months after the start of the new wave of professional campaigns across education, healthcare, oil, the civil service, and retirement sectors, reviews show that none of these demands—backed by tens of thousands of signatures—has yet led to a concrete executive decision. From the special allowance for teachers to pension adjustments and the regularization of contract workers, all of these campaigns remain listed as "ongoing"—a situation that above all reflects chronic decision-making paralysis and the lack of response from official institutions.

Appendix II: Supplementary Policy & Legal Initiatives

Bill on reducing administrative working hours and closing offices on Thursdays

The bill to reduce working hours in government offices, currently under review by the Islamic Consultative Assembly, aims to improve work-life balance, enhance productivity, and raise the quality of life of public-sector employees. The proposal amends Article 87 of the Civil Service Management Law by reducing weekly working hours to 44 and redefining the workweek as Saturday through Wednesday, making Thursday an official day off for public institutions.

The bill has been examined by the Social Commission, with input from the Guardian Council and the Administrative and Recruitment Affairs Organization, focusing on implementation mechanisms and potential economic effects. To avoid disruption to broader economic activity, the private sector has been explicitly excluded from the scope of the law. Once approved, implementation would be carried out gradually and in phases to allow institutions to adapt, while maintaining government flexibility to adjust working hours or declare closures in emergency situations such as air pollution.

The proposal has been generally welcomed by government employees, who cite reduced burnout and improved family planning, and by human resources experts who argue that a more concentrated workweek could improve productivity. Some economic actors, however, have expressed concern about reduced overlap between public- and private-sector working hours.

Bill on the structure, duties, and powers of the National Migration Organization

The bill on the structure, duties, and powers of the National Migration Organization, submitted to parliament in 11 articles and later merged with a separate 56-article proposal, seeks to regulate the presence and employment of foreign nationals and reduce irregular migration. Under the bill, the new organization would oversee policies related to residence, nationality, employment, education, health care, housing, and the issuance of residence and work permits.

A central component of the bill is the creation of a system to register and announce authorized occupations for foreign nationals, intended to better organize and monitor their participation in the labor market. The bill is expected to proceed through review by a joint parliamentary commission before provisional approval in the chamber.

Despite its stated objectives, the bill has drawn significant criticism from experts and research institutions, including the Research Center of the Iran Chamber of Commerce. Key concerns include the lack of explicit reference to Articles 120–129 of the Labor Law, the removal of the Employment Technical Board from decision-making, unclear boundaries of the organization's authority, reliance on an outdated "job atlas," and an unrealistic implementation timeline. Critics warn that these weaknesses could intensify competition between domestic and foreign workers, undermine job security for Iranian workers, and disrupting employment policymaking. One of the problems with this plan is the potential for exploitation and abuse of migrant workers and migrants more broadly, an issue that fell outside the scope of this report.

Additional concerns relate to enforcement mechanisms and their alignment with existing penal provisions, particularly Article 181 of the Labor Law. Observers argue that without clearer legal consistency, the bill risks uneven enforcement and legal uncertainty. While the proposal could improve institutional coordination, experts stress that without fundamental revisions to the employment provisions and stronger guarantees for labor-law enforcement, it may expand informality and weaken protections for domestic workers rather than

achieving its stated goals.

Efforts to change regulations on hazardous and arduous occupations placed on the Social Security Organization's agenda

After years of stagnation, revisions to the bylaw on hazardous and arduous occupations have been placed back on the government's agenda, with the stated aim of more precisely redefining these jobs and striking a balance between workers' rights, employers' interests, and the financial sustainability of the Social Security fund. According to statements by the labor minister and the head of the Social Security Organization, these changes are not intended to broadly expand early retirement. Instead, the focus is on standardizing and improving working environments and distinguishing inherently hazardous jobs from those that could be removed from the "hazardous and arduous" category through better safety and health conditions. The new bylaw has been drafted with the participation of worker and employer representatives, the Ministry of Labor, the Ministry of Health, and the Social Security Organization, and before being sent to government commissions it is being reviewed through public consultation and joint meetings.

This process has prompted mixed reactions. On one hand, some experts and employers have welcomed clearer job classifications, a reduction in what they describe as unrealistic financial burdens, and tighter control over early retirement, viewing the changes as a way to provide more targeted support to workers who are "truly eligible." On the other hand, there is serious concern within the labor community that redefining job titles or shifting occupations between "Group A" and "Group B" could undermine the rights of workers employed in genuinely hazardous and arduous jobs. Labor relations experts warn that any improper tampering with job categories that are also internationally recognized as hazardous could trigger widespread worker backlash and erode trust in the reform process.

Drafting of a revised contractor safety regulation

A draft revision of the "Contracting Safety Regulation," more than 14 years after the previous version was approved, has been prepared by the Labor Inspection Department of the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare. The goal is to bring the regulation in line with major changes in the contracting sector and to raise safety standards at worksites. Grounded in Articles 85 and 86 of the Labor Law, the draft consists of 21 articles, eight notes, and two technical annexes. It was reviewed at the 195th session of the Supreme Council for Technical Protection in July 2025, and the Ministry of Labor has now invited all stakeholders to submit comments and proposals. The main focus of the revision is described as reducing workplace accidents, strengthening oversight mechanisms, redefining the responsibilities of contractors and employers, and protecting human capital, with the aim of updating and systematizing safety frameworks in contracting projects.

At the same time, the draft—particularly the removal of the requirement for a "contractor safety competency certificate"—has drawn serious criticism from labor activists. Ehsan Sohrabi, a former member of the Supreme Council for Technical Protection, noted how:

"Instead of strengthening inspections and safety training, by removing the requirement for contractors' safety qualification certificates the Ministry of Labor has made preventive oversight ineffective and nullified it. This decision contradicts the national employment policies' emphasis on enhancing workplace safety and the Seventh Development Plan's focus on reducing work-related accidents".³¹

31 <https://www.ilna.ir/fa/tiny/news-1700395>

Sohrabi described the move as being in clear conflict with the spirit of the Labor Law, national employment policies, and the Seventh Development Plan, warning that eliminating safety certification weakens systems of evaluation and accident prevention. Critics stress that the safety competency certificate is not a symbolic formality but a mechanism for assessing contractors' training, technical capacity, and safety record. Abandoning it, they argue, could lead to more accidents, greater economic losses, and direct threats to workers' lives—especially at a time when the new regulation itself acknowledges that achieving real workplace safety is a time-consuming process.

About us

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

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