While Iran has a skilled and educated workforce, its workers face serious rights violations. Independent unions aren’t recognized, labor leaders and activists are imprisoned and there is widespread child labor, migrant worker exploitation and discrimination against women and minorities.

**Workers’ rights denied**

Workers face:
- Unpaid wages, often for months
- Wages below fair wage levels
- Mismanaged/corrupt privatization schemes

**Right to organize: denied**
- Independent trade unions not recognized
- No effective collective bargaining, dispute resolution or grievance mechanisms
- Independent labor leaders imprisoned
- Strikers risk arrest and dismissal
- State-controlled “Workers’ House” operates in lieu of unions

**Labor protests**
- Ongoing for decades
- Occur across sectors
  - e.g. sugar, heavy equipment, steel, oil and petrochemicals, teachers, truck/bus drivers, railway workers, nurses, farmers, bazaar merchants

**There are labor laws—but they’re ignored**
- Iranian labor laws not enforced
- Loopholes leave many workers unprotected
  - Exempt from most regulations:
    - Workplaces with less than 10 employees
    - Family-owned/run businesses
    - Many agricultural sectors

Workers not protected

Fatal work accidents

8X world average

Iran’s Legal Medicine Organization (ILMO), 2014

60% of workplace deaths in construction

High accident rates also in mining, metals, machinery

Iran average annual workplace deaths

(2000 deaths from March 2015—March 2016)

Iran’s Minister of Health, Head of Iran’s Construction Workers’ Center

World average annual workplace deaths

Why so unsafe?

Insufficient monitoring/enforcement

800 occupational health & safety (OHS) auditors for 12 million registered workers

1 auditor per 15,000 workers

Iran’s National Institutes of Health Research, Ministry of Labour Department of Social Affairs

Opaque subcontracting

Companies/municipalities subcontract work to private sector without contracts

Labor law loopholes exempt many workplaces from oversight

Insurance

One in three workers has none; remainder often under-insured

Iranian government reports

Workers don’t report or treat work accidents/illnesses

90% of workers employed under temporary contracts

Lack of job security means workers do not demand the required insurance or report OHS violations

1 out of 3 workers are in informal sector with no protections

Urban Economics Association of Iran, Financial Tribune
Estimates:
3 million* to 7 million** child laborers
*UNICEF
**Scientific Association of Urban Economics of Iran

Law banning children under 15 from work not enforced
Used in small and other workplaces exempt from regulations
High-risk sectors: textiles, waste disposal, mining, agriculture, construction, domestic work, street vending

3 million Afghan migrants in workforce
UNHCR (pre-COVID-19)

Exploited through:
- Dangerous work without safety procedures
- Unpaid or underpaid work
- Squalid living conditions near work sites

WOMEN'S UNEMPLOYMENT
2X MEN’S
National unemployment rate 11%, but unemployment rate 10% for men; 19% for women
World Bank, 2019 (pre-COVID-19 pandemic)

Women disproportionately hired under temporary contracts
Women can be prevented from hiring or dismissed at husband’s behest
Sexual harassment largely unreported due to stigma and inadequate laws

Discriminated in hiring and pay
Applicants often required to state religion
Baha’is routinely refused employment

Law enforcement

Exploitation is widespread

Discrimination is rife

Sexuality

Disabilities

Religious/ethnic minorities

60% UNEMPLOYMENT RATE
5X NATIONAL AVERAGE

Inaccessible roads, transportation and buildings prevent employment

Same-sex relations illegal; LGBTQ community must hide identity

Sexuality

Gender

World Bank, 2019 (pre-COVID-19 pandemic)
ESMAIL ABDI
is a high school teacher and former Iranian Teachers’ Trade Association secretary general. He was issued a six-year prison sentence in 2016 for his peaceful advocacy of teachers’ rights. Abdi is facing additional years in prison with the June 2020 enforcement of an older suspended 10-year sentence.

SEPIDEH QOLIYAN
is a freelance labor reporter serving a five-year prison sentence for participating in peaceful rallies by striking sugar mill workers in 2018, and for publicly reporting that she and fellow detainees were tortured while in the Intelligence Ministry’s custody. On furlough since February 2020, she was returned to prison in June 2020.

ESMAIL BAKHSHI
is a founding member of the Workers Union of Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Agro Industrial Company. He was detained for several months in 2018 and 2019 for peacefully protesting unpaid worker wages. Bakhshi publicly reported he was tortured during his detention and was sentenced to five years in prison. He was pardoned in May 2020.

JAFAR AZIMZADEH
is the chairman of the Free Union of Iranian Workers. He is serving a six-year prison sentence on various national security-related charges for peacefully defending workers’ rights and fair wages and protesting the persecution of labor leaders. Azimzadeh was sentenced to an additional 13 months in prison in June 2020.

The Center for Human Rights in Iran is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to the protection and promotion of human rights in Iran.

For more information on these issues visit www.iranhumanrights.org