

FACT Sheet

LABOR IN IRAN

August 2020

Center for
**HUMAN
RIGHTS**
in Iran

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

<https://survey.ituc-csi.org/iran.html?lang=en#tabs-2>

Workers not protected



Fatal work accidents
8X world average

Iran's Legal Medicine Organization (ILMO), 2014

High accident rates also in mining, metals, machinery

60%
of workplace deaths in construction

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

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



1 auditor per **15,000** workers



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



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



Discrimination is rife



**60%
UNEMPLOYMENT
RATE
5X
NATIONAL
AVERAGE**

Inaccessible roads, transportation and buildings prevent employment



Same-sex relations illegal; LGBTQ community must hide identity

● 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



● Estimated **2 million** Afghan migrants in workforce
UNHCR (pre-COVID-19)

● Exploited through:

Dangerous work without safety procedures

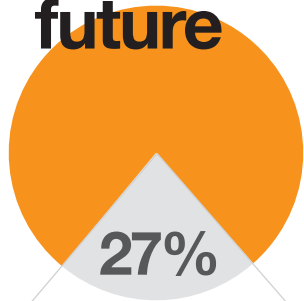
Unpaid or underpaid work

Squalid living conditions near work sites



Exploitation is widespread

An uncertain future



Youth unemployment rate
(ages 15-24)

*World Bank, 2019
(pre-COVID-19 pandemic)*

Iran's **45%** labor participation rate* well below the **61%** global rate**

* World Bank, 2018
**World Bank, 2019

Mass **protests**, fueled by economic grievances and met with violent state suppression, are **increasing**

International commitments

Founding member of International Labour Organization (ILO) but hasn't ratified Conventions on right to organise, collective bargaining or work safety

State Party to International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) but violates Article 22 on right to join trade unions

State Party to International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESC) but violates Article 8 on right to join trade unions and strike and Article 7 on work safety

The **cost** of labor rights activism



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.



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 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.



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.