
World Day of Social Justice

2018

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cause of
pervasive
unemployment
in Iran

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A brief review of the rampant unemployment across Iran over 4 decades of the clerical regime's rule
February 2018

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▶ introduction

The United Nations General Assembly has decided to observe 20 February annually, as the World Day of Social Justice to promote efforts to tackle issues such as poverty, exclusion and unemployment.

In Iran, however, employment opportunities have been eliminated due to regime's destructive economic policies.

Sitting on an ocean of oil and gas and other natural resources, 33% of Iran's population (26.4 million) live below the poverty line. Breadwinners for many households are forced to engage in menial jobs with low wages or dangerous jobs, risking their lives.

Speaking with the state-run Young Journalist Club a regime's economist Gholamreza Kiamehr said "in light of the high price of goods and services, a family who earns less than 3.5 million toumans is considered to be below the poverty line." This is while a large number of people do not earn a third of that amount.

The state-run Eco-Titr Website reported on April 19, 2017, "by the end of March 2016 Iran's population was 79 million, with 30 million Iranians fallen below the poverty line. It seems that the government does not have any specific plans to stop or reduce the trend."

The executive director of Khomeini's order said "12 million people are living below the utter poverty line while 25 to 30 million are living below the relative poverty line."¹

In this report Iran Human Rights Monitor sheds light on a small part of social injustice imposed on the society by the regime.



▶ Unemployment rate reached crisis levels

Unemployment has turned into a serious social harm in Iran as it reached crisis levels with 60 percent of the people unemployment in some Iranian cities, according to the regime's Interior Minister.

¹ The state-run Asre Iran news website, July 6, 2017

In an interview with the state-run ISNA news agency the minister noted, "Social harms are more acute in areas where the unemployment rate is high."

In the interview he says that in spite of Iran's 12% national unemployment rate, the same average in some cities has reached to 60%, Abdol-Reza Rahmani Fazli has reiterated, without naming the cities where the rate is so high.

This is while the regime considers anyone who works for one hour a week, as employed. Meaning that it greatly underestimates the number of the unemployed.

University graduates, athletes, women heads of household, the youth etc. are among the unemployed populace.

These official figures should be considered as minimum as there is no accurate method or system of data collection in Iran, while the government deliberately keeps part of these statistics secret in fear of public outrage.

However, the minimized figures disseminated by official outlets, are enough to reveal the disaster.

In a report titled "Three million Iranians are unemployed: the result of disregard for the production cycle!" the state-run Keyhan newspaper writes on September 23, 2017 "Unemployment figure among the country's working age population (ten years old and higher) has risen from 3,203, 398 in February 2017 to 3,366,973 in May same year."

"There are five to six million unemployed people in the country", writes state-run Javan newspaper on July 24, 2017.

Also state-run Abrar newspaper on July 26, 2017, quotes a mullahs' regime MP as saying "the number of country's unemployed is bigger than the official figures."

State-run Resalat newspaper on August 29, 2017, quotes regime's economist 'Ebrahim Razaghi' as saying "15 million Iranians are unemployed."

The state-run Vatan-e-Emrouz newspaper writes on April 1, 2017, "the number of country's unemployed people is added by 150 every hour. This amounts to 3600 more unemployed each day, 25200 each week, and 108 thousand each month. In other words, one million 300 thousand is added to the country's unemployment number each year."

"There are five to six million unemployed people in the country", writes state-run Javan newspaper on July 24, 2017.



Women's unemployment rate doubles that of men

Unemployment is rampant among women. From the 30 million women in Iran over the age of 10, only three million are employed and over 27 million Iranian women are not present in the workforce.²

Another study indicates that the number of working-age women is 32,252,090 people of whom only 4,289,528 are economically active and the rest have no economic role.³

The unemployment rate for young women under 30 years of age is 85.9 per cent.⁴

² The state-run Mehr news agency, June 8, 2016

³ The state-run T.News website, Fars news agency, August 16, 2015

⁴ The state-run Mehr news agency, January 5, 2016

In summer 2016, the National Statistics Center of Iran declared that the average unemployment rate for young women in Iran reached 47.3 per cent in summer 2015.

The state-run Shargh newspaper writes on May 9, 2017 "Rouhani caused 860 thousand women to go out of work in eight years."

Another state-run newspaper 'Saye-Rouz' quotes Labor Minister on September 3, 2017, as saying "unemployment rate among women has risen fivefold in the past 20 years."



Increasing unemployment due to the destruction of industry

One of the most important reasons behind Iran's high unemployment rate is rooted in regime's anti-national policy of excessive imports which has cost the country's industry and agriculture.

According to state-run Kayhan newspaper on May 12, 2017, "with closure of at least 30 of the country's most important brands and factories -- including Arj, Darougar, Azmayesh, Pars Electric, Esfahan's Polyacryl, Irana Tiles, Tabriz Machine Manufacturing, Istak, Isaac Bicycle Manufacturing, Varamin's Sugar Cubes, Ghou Vegetable Oil, Ray's Chiffon Fabrics, and Iran Wood -- one million workers have gone out of work in four years."

In the meantime, 60 percent of the country's factories are closed and the remaining 40 percent are operating with 30 percent of their capacity in the past four years. This on one hand and laying off 20 to 25 percent of semi-closed factories' workforce on the other have joined hands to double the problems and hardships of workers' lives.



Unemployed graduates

Almost 15 million people have no jobs, at least 4.5 million of whom are university graduates.⁵ In 1986, almost 70% of university graduates could find jobs shortly after leaving school. By 2011, that rate dropped to less than 50%.⁶

That is, more than 50% of Iran's educated are unemployed while the rest are employed in menial jobs such as construction workers, street peddlers, repairmen, etc. which are not compatible with their professional training and studies.

The state-run Iran newspaper on April 1, 2017, quoted regime's then presidential candidate as saying "the unemployment rate among the country's graduates is 40 percent."



Unemployment rates by age groups

The available state data shows unemployment is not limited to a specific age group or a number of urban or rural social sectors. This is an inclusive phenomenon throughout the country.

In a September 2017 report the state-run Tasnim news writes the unemployment rate among the youth has hit the highest level in 16 years. According to the latest data provided by the regime's national Statistics Center, around 29.2 percent of 15-24 year olds are unemployed.

⁵ Unemployment rate for graduates. (Hamshahri state-run Website – Jun. 17, 2017)

⁶ Employment and unemployment statistics for students and graduates. (Mehr state-run News Agency – Jun. 16, 2017)

Masoud Nili, an economist and advisor to President Hassan Rouhani has cautioned, "Unemployment among three groups is reaching crisis levels, namely the youth, women, and people with higher education."

▶ Porters products of rampant unemployment

Due to lack of job opportunities many people have to resort to difficult job of portering, risking their lives.

Back carriers are poor people who transfer goods such as fuel, cigarettes, electric equipment, clothing, tires, etc. with great difficulty and at a high risk to their lives to earn a living for their families. They sometimes have to transfer 100 to 150 kilograms on their backs in the mountains and valleys, in hot summer or cold winter.

More than 68,000 porters are working in Iran's border provinces, of which 16,000 to 18,000 are in Piranshahr and Sardasht, official statistics indicate.

Unofficial sources however estimate the actual number of porters to be around 350 to 500 thousand in border provinces.



Border porters include children, youths and the elderly. In addition to natural disasters such as avalanches and frostbite, or accidents like drowning in the river or falling into the valleys, they are constantly threatened by direct shooting of the regime's security forces.

Abdolkarim Hossein Zadeh, an MP from Ashnaviye, says "Due to poverty porters have resorted to this kind of job with low wages. We estimate that between 50 to 100 porters aged 10 to 70 lose their lives annually."⁷

In 2017 at least 245 porters in Iran were killed or wounded as a result of authorities opening fire.

At least 10 porters were shot dead by Iran's State Security forces in the first two months of 2018.

Below are some instances of arbitrary killing of porters:

- The State Security forces beat to death a 13-year-old boy, named Rasoul Yousefi for possessing 20 liters of gasoline.
- A 19-year-old porter, an accounting student of Khorramabad University, who was shot and injured by the State Security Force in Sardasht, north west of Iran, lost his life in a hospital in January 2018.
- Authorities in Ashnaviye on January 3, 2018 opened fire on a number of porters, killing two by the names of Abdul-Latif Sha'bani & Shuwan Mahmoudi, reports indicate. Sirvan Pasandi, 34, was also killed by state police on the same day.
- Anti-riot guards took part in Wednesday January 24, 2018, attack on what authorities claim to be "smugglers," killing a young man by the name of Hossein Mallahi. This IRGC attack was staged in Bandar-e-Kargan, South of Iran

⁷ The state-run Shahrvand Daily, January 2017.

Iran's human organs trade product of unemployment

Selling one's own body organs or blood "on the black market" has recently turned into a source of income for jobless people across Iran.

Men, women, educated people, the youth etc. openly post ads on the walls in streets adjacent to hospitals to offer their kidneys, liver, blood, cornea, bone marrow, etc. for sale.

New ads appear almost daily. Behind each is a tale of individual woe joblessness, debt, a family emergency in a country beset by economic despair.

Iran is the only country in the world where selling and buying of kidneys is legal. A government foundation registers buyers and sellers, matches them up and sets a fixed price of \$4,600 per organ. Unofficial statics estimate at least 14,000 kidneys are sold annually.

Hosseinali Shahriari, the head of parliamentary health committee, acknowledged to the rampant kidney sail, stating "What's wrong with a person who lives in poverty, selling a kidney for 20 to 30 million toumans? Iran is one of a few countries where selling organs including kidneys in legal."⁸

Unable to make ends meet for their family and children, 300 workers of Chahar Gonbad Copper factory [posted a big banner](#) announcing that they are offering their kidneys for sale due to extreme poverty.



This phenomenon is of such a scale that even the state-run media cannot turn a blind eye on it.

The state-run Mashregh News Website has released an [image](#) of a statement posted on a road sign of a street, reading, 'A couple is desperate to sell their kidney and bone marrow due to problems. The test is ready. The blood types are O+ and A+.'



⁸ The state-run Mashregh News Website, February 28, 2017.

The situation has become more appalling as recently, some people have set up their business by creating websites for exchange of body organs between sellers and buyers.⁹

▶ Street vendors

Unemployment and bankrupt economic conditions have left millions of people under the poverty line and forcing them into peddling to earn their living.

Street vendors are in fact decent breadwinners who have resorted to this job as a last option, 98 percent of whom do not have another source of income. According to a research carried out by Ahmad Meydari, Deputy Minister of Social Welfare has recently "65 percent of street vendors are married and have two children, this is while, on average they earn less than one million toman per month."¹⁰

Without providing legal means of livelihood for the peddlers and creating job opportunities for them, municipal contractors violently confront the vendors, confiscate their wares and carts or impose fines on them, under the excuse of illegal trade.

- On August 12, a fruit [peddler was beaten up](#) to death by municipality agents who violently tried to confiscate the vendor's car.
- Violent approach of agents of Arak's municipality led to an old [peddler woman's heart attack](#) on September 1, 2017.
- Thursday, November 17, 2016, a destitute woman who was peddling in the street to earn her living, was attacked by a municipality agent. After removing her stuff, the municipality agent engaged in a verbal confrontation with the defiant woman and beat her in the head.
- A [video posted](#) on Social media shows how Municipality patrol attacks a street vendor for no good reason in northern city of Talesh. This is the viciousness practiced by Iran's authorities towards people trying to make ends meet.
- A [video](#) shows municipality agents throw the properties of a vendor to the street stream.
- In a [video](#) disseminated on social media Municipality patrol can be seen as attacking a street vendor and his wife is trying to prevent them to confiscate their car and items.
- A [street vendor was beaten](#) by municipality agents in Bijar. The vendor was injured and taken to hospital.
- The State Security Force in Ahwaz, [attacked and severely beat](#) a man by the name of "Jafar," while mistaking him for a wanted suspected by the name of "Jafari."



⁹ The state-run Tabnak Website, September 15, 2017.

¹⁰ The state-run Eghtesad Online Website, July 25, 2017.

- During a [protest by a group of people](#) who had lost their money to the Valiasr Institution, a female protester was [run over by police](#). Despite this, the West Tehran Police Information Center accused the woman of feigning illness in a statement, saying that a criminal case was filed for her.



Jobholders endure incessant injustice

The situation is even harsh for job holders as the authorities failed to pay their salaries and bonus.

The minimum wage for workers was set at 929,931 toumans in 2017 according to the Supreme Council of Labor, while the poverty line stands at 2.3 million toumans.¹¹ But the depth of the tragedy is that even the same wage is not paid to workers for months. Those workers who stand up for their rights would be dealt with, fired or even imprisoned.

Under such hopeless conditions a worker named Bizhan Gholuzi reached the point of setting himself on fire due to their atrocious living conditions. He lost his life on February 11, 2018.

- 35 workers of the Imam Khomeini Hospital were fired when they protested delayed paychecks for the past three months.
- Workers of the Perli Co. in the Iran Mall project, has recently launched strike, protesting how their paychecks have been delayed for the past 5 months.
- When workers of the Haft Tappeh Sugar Cane Co. continuously protest demanding delayed paychecks, the State Security Force and Special Guard, attacked them, arresting a number of protesters.

A worker or teacher who does not receive its salary on normal basis for months cannot provide the family's monthly rent, thus many end up sleeping on cardboard boxes on the streets, a phenomenon that has become widespread.



¹¹ The state-run Mehr news agency, September 13, 2016.

▶ Grave and canal dwellers

Images of homeless people living in empty graves just outside the capital deeply shocked the public, reigniting discussions over the alarming rate of poverty as a result of unemployment.

These pictures were originally published by the newspaper Shahrvand which recently published another moving images on [sewage canal dwellers](#) in Tehran. This shows the desperation of the homeless people who also have to gather items and foods from bins in order to be able to survive.

After drug addiction, panhandlers, beggars and street children, people living out of cardboard boxes on city streets constitute the capital's fourth major dilemma.

The Iranian Deputy Health Minister Mohammad Hadi Ayazi acknowledged the vast scope of this problem, stating that 7,500 "grave sleepers" had been rounded up in a single day by security forces.¹²

Official statics [indicate](#) 15,000 homeless people live only in the capital from which 5,000 are women, unofficial figures however hit 20,000.

University graduates are among those living out of cardboard boxes.

Ali, a homeless man says "With a degree in civil engineering, I have been living in the street, searching the trash to find something to eat or sell."¹³



▶ Final word

The human rights situation in Iran has been getting worse over the past 39 years under the rule of the Islamist regime. The people are getting poorer and poorer, while the leadership is getting richer.

Unemployment in Iran is increasing, with reports suggesting that almost 15 million people have no jobs. As a result, poverty is widespread with 33 million Iranians living below the poverty line.

under such circumstances, Iran tops the list for the number of suicides committed in the Middle East. It is third on the list on a world scale. There is a large percentage of women committing suicide, and the number concerning teenagers is rising.

As we celebrate the International Social Justice Day, let us not forget the Iranian people who stood up for their rights during the recent protests. They took to the streets, risking their lives with such slogans like "We live like beggars, the Supreme Leader lives like God."

Let us remember all those courageous Iranians fallen for a better world, and those who dream of a world with social justice and human rights.

¹² The state-run Fars news agency, December 29, 2016

¹³ The state-run ILNA news agency, February 12, 2018.

