

Report

Labor Protests in Jordan 2013

Labor Watch Reports

Prepared By:
Phenix Center for Economics and Informatics Studies
in cooperation with the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Jordan & Iraq

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للداسات الاقتصادية والمعلوماتية
ECONOMIC & INFORMATICS STUDIES

Phenix Center for Economics and Informatics Studies

Is an independent scientific institute founded as a house for study, research and public opinion measurement in Amman in 2003. the Center seeks to contribute to the realisation of comprehensive development in Jordan through developing and modernising of the Jordanian community at the economic, social, political and legislative levels, working to foster democracy in Jordan on the basis of freedom and equity, ensuring basic human rights at the social, political and civil levels for all Jordanians through developing projects and conducting studies and opinion polls and reports, in addition to creating a database that covers all fields of development to help realise the centre's objectives.



Friedrich - Ebert - Stiftung (FES)

Is a German non-profit political foundation based on the principles of social democracy. FES was founded in 1925 , FES promotes international cooperation, education and research in Germany and abroad. FES opened it's office in Amman in 1986 for supporting and enhancing efforts of civil society organisations to become accepted partners of public bodies, enhancing furthers political dialogue between decision-makers from Jordan, Iraq, Germany and the region, and strengthening the participation of youth in the political process.



Labor Watch

Is a joint program between Phenix Center for Economics & Informatics and Friedrich - Ebert - Stiftung (FES). Labor Watch Works to Monitor the status of labour and trade union movements in Jordan, lobbying for the development of labour legislations in cooperation with the concerned parties and in accordance to the international labour standards, contributing to the development of work conditions in Jordan, publishing reports on the status of laborers in Jordan, to raise awareness among workers themselves, facilitating the exchange of expertise in trade unions among other Arab and foreign countries to benefit from their experiences.

Disclaimer:

Phenix Center for Economics and Informatics Studies and Friedrich - Ebert - Stiftung is not responsible about the statements of workers and their leaderships.

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Introduction

In cooperation with the German Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Amman, LaborWatch (a program, which was established in 2009 as part of the Phenix Center's projects) monitors and investigates the Jordanian labor market at both the policy level and at the grassroots level where transformation and change occur. The LaborWatch team prepares regular reports, including an annual report of the various types of labor protests (strikes, sit-ins, or threats to strike and sit-in, as well as self-harm and suicide). This report is the fourth in the series of annual reports resulting from a daily monitoring of labor protests that took place in Jordan during 2013

The LaborWatch team believes that labor protests are the real expression of the nature and depth of the socio-economic crisis that Jordan has been experiencing, of the challenges and problems Jordan's labor market faces, and of a prevalence of work relations characterized by an imbalance among the various parties of production. This imbalance has negatively impacted on justice in labor relations and on the balance between the workers on the one hand and business owners and the government on the other hand

This report is one of a series of semi-regular reports, which FES and Phenix publish. It addresses employment and labor market policies at various levels. We hope that it will be a valuable resource for independent efforts in Jordan to improve working conditions by building balanced labor relations among equal parties

Ahmed Awad

Director

Phenix Center for Economics and Informatics Studies

Methodology

This report examines the labor protests carried out by workers in Jordan in 2013 and presents a socio-economic analysis of these protests. Monitoring these protests occurred through two mechanisms: First, LaborWatch reached out to protesters themselves and studied the details of these protests. Second, LaborWatch analyzed Jordan's media coverage of these protests in the print press, on websites, and on radio and TV stations. All of the protesters' activities – regardless of their form – were classified as protests, including strikes, sit-ins, threats to strike or sit-in, as well as self-harm and suicide. Data was analyzed using SPSS, a statistical analysis program for the social sciences. The report includes a large number of labor protests, which are categorized according to the kind of protest, the sector that they fall within (whether public or private sector, or the unemployed), the workers' motivation to protest, the role of the professional syndicates in these protests, the way the government and the business owners responded to the protests, how successful each protest was in realizing its objective, and the length of each protest and their distribution according to time and location.

The Number of Labor Protests

As in 2012, the number of labor protests in 2013 continued to be high. Some 890 protests took place in 2013 compared to 901 protests in 2012—a slight retreat. This number underscores that large parts

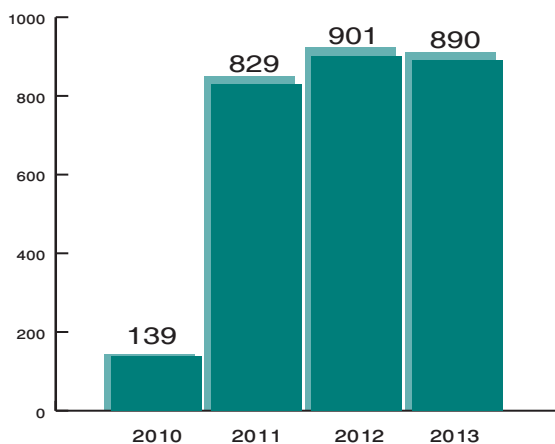
of both the public and private sectors continue to suffer due to decreasing levels of adequate work and worker satisfaction. The high frequency of protests also reflects the improvement in the exercise of freedom of speech and assembly over the last three years. Workers benefited from the new open environment and thus candidly expressed their grievances.

The persistent number and strength of protests and the introduction of unprecedented strikes reflects the workers' socio-economic awareness with regards to their rights. This new awareness created the incentive for them to ask for their basic human rights such as satisfactory and fair work conditions and an effective role for the labor unions. The majority of the official labor associations have played a marginal role in improving work conditions. Successive governments have impeded attempts to form new unions that represent the real interests of workers. Indeed, successive governments have rejected all attempts to do so since 1976. At that time, the government ignored the issue of improving working conditions. Instead, successive governments have continued to implement the same economic policies that have produced economic crisis. The improvement in the investment environment has led to a tangible deterioration in working conditions for the majority of workers in both the private and the public sectors.

Interestingly, one of the reasons for the increase in the number of labor protests over the last three years lies in Jordanian workers' increased confidence in their ability to change a tough reality. This became true especially after the radical transformations that took place in a number of Arab countries and the rise of the unprecedented socio-political activism in the region calling for genuine and comprehensive reform.

Table (1)
Labor Protests during
the Years 2010 - 2013

Year	Number of labor protests
2010	139
2011	829
2012	901
2013	890



The Distribution of Labor Protests by Type

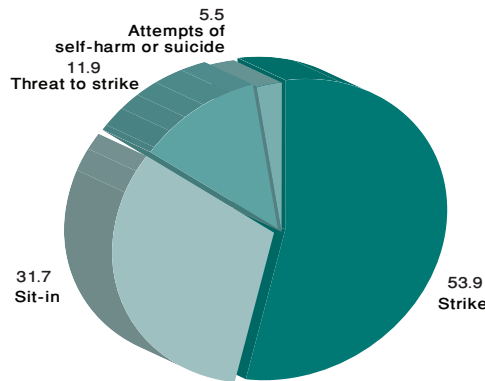
In line with the methodology employed in this report, all forms of protest carried out by workers against the business owners in the private sector or against the Board of Directors in the public sector are categorized as labor protests. Strikes comprised 53.9% of the total number of work protests, while sit-ins comprised 31.7%, and the threat to carry out protests to achieve certain goals 11.9%. Labor protests also include some unilateral actions, such as self-harm or even committing suicide. This kind of activism is deemed as part of the framework of protests against working conditions, comprising 2.5% of the total number of protests. The distribution of labor protests by type for 2013 is as outlined in Table (2).

Table (2)
The Distribution by Type of Protest

Type of protest	Number of protests	Percentage
Strike	480	53.9
Sit-in	281	31.7
Threat to strike	106	11.9
Attempts of self-harm or suicide	23	2.5
Total	890	100

Distribution of Labor Protests by the Employing Sector (Private and Public Sectors)

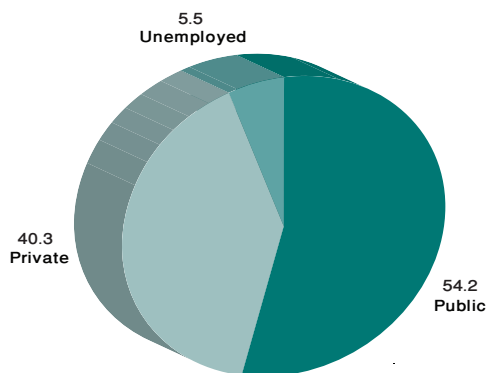
The Reasons for Labor Protest



While almost half of the labor protests (482 protests, or 54.2%) carried out during 2013 took place in the public sector, the percentage of protests that occurred in the private sector hit 40.3% (359 protests). The unemployed, who demanded only job opportunities, staged some 5.5% out of the gross total of labor protests.

Table (3)
Labor Protests by Sector

Type of protest	Number of protests	Percentage
Public	482	54.2
Private	359	40.3
Unemployed	49	5.5
Total	890	100



The reasons for the high number of labor related protests during 2013 are several. A quick glance at the figures included in Table (4) reveals that low wages and salaries are the reason that motivates most people to carry out protests. Half (49.7%) of the labor protests came on the heels of complaints about low wages. In addition, protests demanded benefits, part of which pertain to wages and allowances.

It should come as no surprise that improving living standards is a top priority since one of the most important challenges and imbalances in the Jordanian labor market is low wages. Three quarters of workers' wages in Jordan are below the absolute poverty line according to official figures published by the Department of Statistics (DOS) and the Social Security Corporation (SSC). The absolute poverty line (nutrition and non-nutrition) in Jordan for 2010 was JD813.7 per individual yearly and for the nuclear family composed of 5.4 members it is JD366 monthly. That said, the relative poverty line for a nuclear family in Jordan is about JD400 monthly. Official figures show that 62% of workers and subscribers of the SSC receive monthly salaries of JD400 and below. The average wage in Jordan is about JD412 monthly. Figures published by the DOS by the end of 2013 only underline this difficult reality. The department pointed out that some 42% of employed Jordanians receive

salaries of less than JD300 monthly and that 90% of employed Jordanians make less than JD500 a month. Put differently, the majority of families are incapable of covering their basic food and non-food needs. A close reading of these figures is enough to account for the intensity of labor protests that aim to improve income and wages. These protests are expected to increase in the future. Added to this problem is the low minimum wage in Jordan of JD190 per month, which is less than half of the poverty wage.

Moreover, the level of the working conditions have deteriorated for the majority of Jordanian workers. Many sectors do not enjoy the basic labor rights stated in Jordanian law pertaining to daily working hours, leave (official holidays, sick and annual leave), professional safety and health, the benefits from social security provided by the SSC, health insurance, etc. About 44% of workers in Jordan do not enjoy any form of social protection.

One in five protests (21.8%) were made against labor laws and regulations. These included decisions about labor policies, which were seen by workers as threatening their rights. In addition, workers protested decisions against the restructuring of Jordan's public sector. Equally important, they opposed the collective layoff of workers (87 protests, 9.8%).

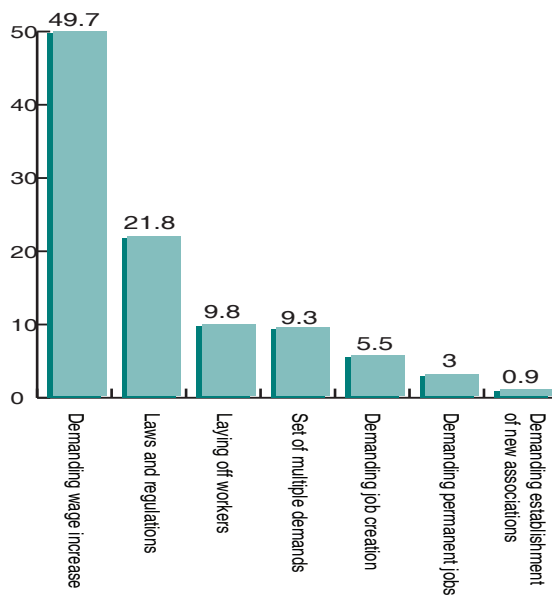
Further protests asked for benefits. In addition to demanding an increase in

wages and allowances, the protesters asked for the definition and regulation of working hours, permanent employment, ending service gratuity and changing job descriptions for workers in some sectors. They protested against the lack of job security and the delay in paying salaries and wages. These made up about 9.3% of all protests.

Unemployed Jordanians carried out 49 protests (5.5% of the total) demanding job creation. A further 27 protests (3% of the total) pertained to getting a permanent job (changing the form of contract). The protests that focused on establishing new labor unions or reforming existing ones decreased to 8 protests only. Those who worked on setting up new unions are already doing so without the need to carry out strikes. The majority of workers in Jordan are deprived of the right to form labor unions. The law deprives many sectors of the right to organize. The Labor Law and the system of occupational classification, which is based on the Labor Law, identify the vocations that are allowed to establish unions. These vocations are limited to 17 and this number has remained unchanged for almost four decades.

Table (4)
The Distribution of Labor Protests by
Reason for Protest

Reasons for protesting	Number of protests	Percentage
Demanding wage increase	442	49.7
Laws and Laying off workers	194	21.8
Set of multiple demands	83	9.3
Demanding job creation	49	5.5
Demanding permanent jobs	27	3
Demanding establishment of new associations	8	0.9
Total	890	100



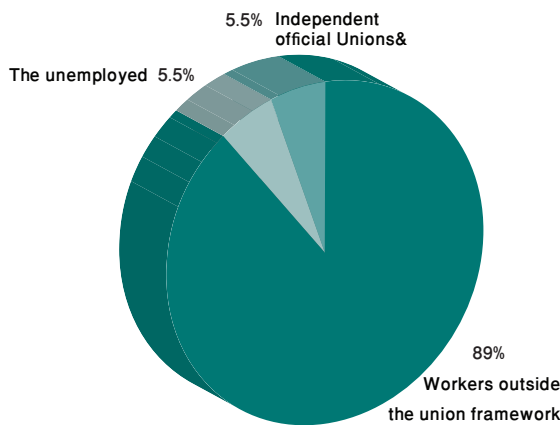
The Role of the Existing Trade Unions

The majority of official labor unions have a history of weak performance and are isolated from the majority of workers. Worse, the Labor Law only allows those who work in the private sector to register with the seventeen labor unions, as defined within the framework of the occupational classification system. Prospects to reform these unions are dim due to the domination of certain individuals in the leadership of these unions and their lack of democratic bylaws. For the previously mentioned reasons, thousands of workers in public and private sectors have been compelled to stand up for their right to organize. They did so without regard to the imposed legal constraints that ban the formation of labor unions and the restrictions regarding strikes. Clearly, these constraints no longer suit the nature of the most recent transformations that the Jordanian society has been experiencing.

For this reason, 89% of labor protests carried out in 2013 occurred outside the framework of the current unions. The percentage of protests carried out by both official and independent labor unions and their preparation committees reached only 5.5% of the total number of protests. 5.5% of the protests were conducted by the unemployed asking for job opportunities.

Table (5)
Labor Protests during 2013 by Sector

Reasons for protesting	Number of protests	Percentage
Demanding wage increase	442	49.7
Laws and Laying off workers	194	21.8
Set of multiple demands	83	9.3
Demanding job creation	49	5.5
Demanding permanent jobs	27	3
Demanding establishment of new associations	8	0.9
Total	890	100



The Means of Responding to Labor Protests

Unlike in previous years, but for the second year in a row now, the government and some business owners pursued a new approach of responding to labor protests. In 2013, force was used to end

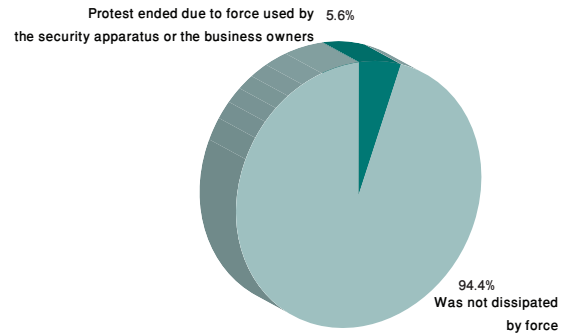
some protests. On some occasions, the police intervened to end sit-ins organized by the unemployed in the governorates of Tafilah and Ma'an by using tear gas. The police justified the use of force by saying that protesters set fire to tires and vandalized public properties.

Additionally, a sit-in by workers at the port of Aqaba was ended by force. Members of the syndicate committee and some workers were arrested. Moreover, some private sector institutions fired workers collectively to counter union activists who lead labor protests. Some activists and union leaders in the public sector were subject to penalties as well. These penalties include a sudden change in the nature of their work, marginalization, suspension of their authority, transferring them from one place to another, depriving them from promotion, punishing them administratively, depriving them of opportunities for training and occupational development, and preventing them from using the facilities dedicated to them such as housing, as was the case for protesters working for the Customs Department.

Protesters were also subject to psychological pressure when their protests were distorted, belittled, and their effectiveness and impact reduced. On some occasions, protesters were accused of vandalizing public properties, impeding work, and decreasing productivity. In some cases, there was a direct intervention in the protests by the means of tempting some protesters –

usually the protest leaders – to withdraw from the labor protests. Also, those who opposed protests were rewarded at the expense of their protesting colleagues. Protesters were subject to verbal abuse and some of them were interrogated by the business owners and government officials.

In 2013, security pressures on the activists and leaders of labor protests emerged. The security apparatus exerted pressure on them and their families so that they would end their activism. Also governmental and security agencies intervened by asking some business owners to stop granting protesters privileges if they continued taking part in protests. In addition, information about the plans of the protesters was leaked to business owners. In total, the government and its agencies ended 50 protests (5.6% of the total number of protests) by force.



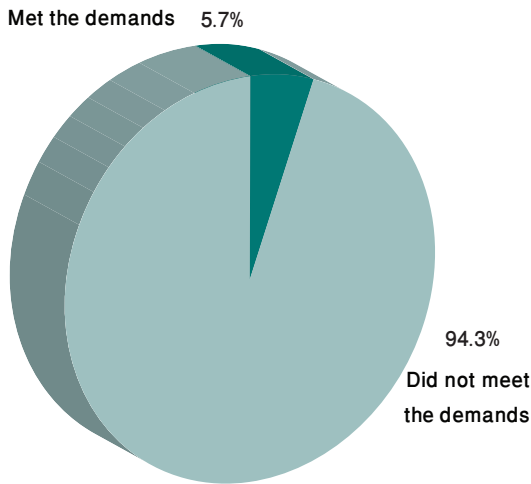
In light of the absence of genuine dialogue between the state and the parties of production, the weakness of state institutions, the clear absence of unions to represent a majority of workers, and the limited experience of workers in negotiation, most protests were not successful. The number of protests whose demands were not met was 839 (94.3%) while those whose demands were met—whether partially or in full—was only 51 (5.7%).

Table (6)
Responses to Labor Protests

Response	Number of protests	Percentage
Protest ended due to force used by the security apparatus or the business owners	50	5.6
Was not dissipated by force	840	94.4
Total	890	100

Table (7)
Labor Protests during 2013 by Final Result

Response	Number of protests	Percentage
Meeting or not meeting the demands	51	5.7
Did not meet the demands	839	94.3
Total	890	100



The Distribution of Labor Protests by Month

Table (8) shows the distribution of protests by month. The largest number of protests occurred during February 2013 (15.5% out of the total protests). On the other hand, only 3.8% of protests occurred in August. The reduced number of protests in August coincided with the month of Ramadan, when many Jordanians fast during the day.

Table (8)
The Distribution of Labor Protests by Month

Month	Number of protests	Percentage
January	61	6.8
February	137	15.5
March	116	13.1
April	92	10.3
May	87	9.7
June	104	11.7
July	68	7.6
August	34	3.8
September	40	4.5
October	36	4.0
November	57	6.4
December	58	6.5
Total	890	100

The Distribution of Labor Protests by Governorate

The majority of protests in 2013 (363 protests, or 40.8% of the total) took place in Amman. This percentage aligns with the share of Jordanians who live in Amman, which is a similar percentage. Similarly, most institutions and businesses are located in Amman. Irbid comes second to Amman with 14.3% of total protests, followed by Ma'an, Karak, Tafilah, Mafraq, Zarqa, Balqa, Madaba, Ajloun, and Jerash. Interestingly, the percentage of labor protests carried out simultaneously in more than one governorate was 7.1% (63 protests). Table

(9) illustrates the distribution of labor protests by governorate.

Table (9)
Labor Protests by Governorate

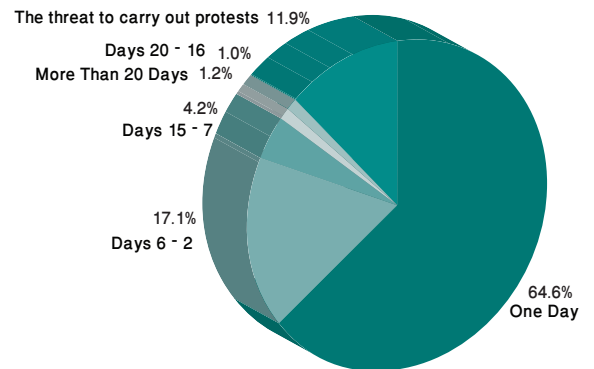
Month	Number of protests	Percentage
Amman	363	40.8
Irbid	127	14.3
Ma'an	69	7.8
Karak	52	5.8
Aqaba	42	4.7
Tafilah	35	3.9
Ma'fraq	33	3.7
Zarqa	30	3.4
Balqa	29	3.3
Madaba	23	2.6
Ajloun	14	1.6
Jerash	10	1.1
Total	890	100

The Distribution of Labor Protests by their Duration

Most of the protests in 2013 (575 protests or 64.6% of the total) lasted for one day. 152 protests (17.1% of total protests) that lasted between 26- days. See Table (10) for more details.

Table (10)
The Distribution of Labor Protests by their Duration

Month	Number of protests	Percentage
1	575	64.6
2 - 6	152	17.1
7 - 15	37	4.2
16 - 20	9	1.0
More than 20 days	11	1.2
The threat to carry out protests	106	11.9
Total	890	100



Conclusions and Recommendations

The high number and intensity of labor protests has continued over the past three years. These protests underscore the persistent and profound imbalances in labor relations in both the private and public sectors. These imbalances are in part caused by labor policies, including the deprivation of many workers of the right to organize in labor unions in order to seek a more balanced relationship with business owners. The labor law limits the right of workers to establish unions. The Constitutional Court ruled unequivocally in Resolution Number 6 (2013) that workers in the public sector have the right to establish their own associations. However, the Civil Service Bureau has yet to clarify the mechanism for forming labor unions for those who work in the public sector. This in turn pushes a majority of workers to carry out hastily organized protests without proper preparations or even a warning to business owners in the private sector and the senior management in the public sector.

The vast majority of labor protests (89%) were carried out by workers who were not union members. This refutes the often-repeated argument that the labor protests in Jordan were implemented by the new and independent unions. The real problem lies in the imbalance of labor relations and the lack of fair labor conditions, not in the predisposition of workers in both private and public sector to establish new and independent unions.

The mechanisms for labor conflict resolution in Jordan according to the Labor Law have not succeeded in defusing the tension or minimize the number of labor protests. They only address disputes that take place between the official unions and the business

owners in the private sector. If anything, the definition of a labor-related dispute in the Labor Law is incapable of absorbing the social transformation in the labor market. It only covers 5.5% of the total of labor-related disputes documented in this report.

It is necessary to point out the increasing phenomenon in 2013 of self-harm or suicide or the threat to do so for reasons linked to work. Two workers died and others were seriously injured. Another significant result is that around half of the labor protests carried out by workers in the public sector were protests against working conditions. Also, the majority of protests called for a wage increase. The majority of labor protests lasted for one day only and most took place in Amman.

In light of these results, LaborWatch presents the following recommendations:

1. The principles of adequate work – in all of its elements – should be implemented for all workers in Jordan
2. Wages in both the private and public sectors should be reconsidered. Wages are extremely low when one takes into account the absolute poverty line and the need to be linked to the inflation rate.
3. The minimum wage must be reconsidered. The minimum wage in Jordan is less than half of the absolute poverty line. It, too, should be connected to the inflation rate.
4. There is a wage gap within individual institutions. Two-thirds of workers are making less than JD400 per month while some senior employees in the public and private sectors are receiving extremely high salaries. This only increases the level

- of social tension. For this reason, there is a need to define a maximum wage.
5. The Social Security umbrella should be expanded to include all workers in Jordan. 44% of workers do not enjoy any form of social protection. Besides, all subscribers to the SSC should be provided with health insurance as half of the workers in Jordan do not have health insurance.
 6. Article 31 of Jordan's Labor Law, which restricts unions in the public sector and allows for collective layoffs, and should be amended.
 7. The Labor Law, as pertaining to the establishment of labor unions, should be amended. All workers who receive wages in Jordan should be allowed to freely form their own unions. Also, current associations lack democratic bylaws and do not allow members to exchange the leadership. The articles of the law should be consistent with the most recent constitutional amendments. The establishment of unions is to be in line with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which Jordan ratified and published in the Official Gazette. Jordan should also ratify Convention 87 of the International Labor Organization, which pertains to the freedom of association and protection of the right to organize. The constraints imposed on workers in Jordan that deprive them of the right of association did not prevent them for forming unions. Therefore, the law should be amended to reflect this reality.
 8. The civil service system in Jordan should be reformed to allow for workers in the public sector to freely establish unions in a way that safeguards their rights as outlined in the most recent constitutional amendments of 2011 and in accordance with the Constitutional Court ruling Number 6 of 2013, which grants workers in the public sector the right to organize. The amendments should also be consistent with the provisions of the Convention 87 of the International Labor Organization, which pertain to freedom of association and the right to organize. Also, the amendments should allow for collective bargaining with the government, as it is difficult to deal with labor protests in the public sector if absence from work warrants punishment.
 9. The articles of the Labor Law pertaining to labor-related disputes and the mechanism for conflict resolution should be amended. These mechanisms failed to fairly resolve the increased number of labor-related disputes. New mechanisms and techniques – in line with the freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining – are needed.
 10. It is necessary to increase the effectiveness of inspections carried out by the Ministry of Labor in order to ensure the implementation of relevant articles of the Labor Law. This requires increased allocations for the Ministry of Labor from the public budget. This way, the number of inspectors and their capacities would be increased.