

Report



Labor Protests in Jordan

2014

Jordan Labor Watch Reports

Prepared By:
Jordan Labor Watch
Phenix Center for Economics and Informatics Studies

March, 2015



للدراستات الاقتصادية والمعلوماتية
ECONOMIC & INFORMATICS STUDIES





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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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Foreword

The Phenix Centre for Economics and Informatics Studies is working within the framework of the Jordan Labour Watch Programme that was launched in the second half of 2009 to observe and monitor all labour policies in Jordan. It also observes and monitors all violations in the Jordanian labour market as well as labour transformations and movements that express themselves as protests.

Following a noteworthy increase in labour protests, the centre has since 2010 prepared and published an annual report that monitors labour protests in Jordan. This is the fifth such report that is part of the series of annual reports that monitor all types of labour protests, be they strikes, sit-ins, or threats of strikes or sit-ins, irrespective of the number of participants in such protests.

The importance of preparing this report is based on the supposition, adopted by the centre's team, that labour protests, whatever their shape and size, express social imbalances in the working relations between workers on the one hand and employers and senior management in the public and private sectors on the other hand. That supposition also holds that labour protests are one of the most prominent types of social protests, which according to various theories of social change, are considered as the main engine of social change and transformation.

The centre hopes, by preparing this report periodically, to provide accurate information to all interested researchers, politicians, political parties, parliamentarians and media professionals about the state of labour protest movements in Jordan; their characteristics and their social, economic and political contexts. This should contribute to understanding the real factors powering the social change that Jordan is experiencing. It should also aid the development of legislation and policies that will contribute to mitigating social strains and imbalances.

Ahmed Awad
Director
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Introduction

Labour protests are one of the most important types of social protests, which are the main engine that powers processes of social, economic and political change. Social change processes occur according to principles that are specific to societies and to the nature of their constituent social structures, which are usually determined by the characteristics of relations amongst the constituent parts of those societies. Perhaps the two basic social constituents of all societies are various kinds of workers on the one hand, and employers and senior managements in the public and private sectors on the other hand. The interest of the Phenix Centre for Economics and Informatics Studies in issuing this report periodically falls within this context.

This report aims to offer an economic, social, political and analytical reading of all the labour protests that occurred in Jordan during 2014. The Jordan Labour Watch team employed a descriptive analytical method in preparing it. All labour protests were monitored and confirmed in terms of their type, the economic sector in which they occurred, the reasons that prompted the workers and their labour organisations – which varied in their degree of development – to protest, the objectives of the protests, the role of labour organisations in carrying them out, their durations and their geographic and temporal distribution.

The monitoring and confirmation process was carried out in two ways. The first was direct communication with the protesters and observation of protest

details. The second involved analysis of Jordan's print, electronic and audio-visual media coverage of the protests.

According to the literature of sociology, protest is an organised collective effort aimed at effecting a change in stable social relations in a particular society through changing the principles governing that society's structures. According to this concept, a labour protest is the collective effort undertaken by a group of workers at a particular facility, or in a particular economic sector with the aim of improving labour conditions through amending the legislation, policies and regulations that govern these relationships, or with the aim of implementing legislation and policies that protect workers' rights.

It is a known fact that the right of workers to strike is protected and guaranteed by several international labour standards enshrined in international human rights law, and in particular in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. That right is also included in some of the covenants of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), particularly Covenant Number 87 relating to the freedom of forming trade unions and the protection of the right to organise, and the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.

Although there was a tangible reduction in the strength of protests in Jordan in 2014, labour protests as one form of social protest remain clear for all to see, although they were fewer in number than during the three preceding years.

Labour Protests.. Numerical Indicators

There were 474 labour protests carried out in 2014, and this constituted a noticeable fall compared to the three previous years.

Perhaps the fall in the number of labour protests, which came to 474 in 2014, is not basically attributable to a weakening of the imbalances in work relationships, which are a form of social relations. Rather, the fall was a response to the influence of several factors related to regional changes, increasing political and security tensions in several neighbouring countries, and the government's declared position of not responding to any demands of a labour nature by public sector workers and government requests to the private sector to avoid agreeing to workers' demands made as part of labour protests. Another factor was the position of the General Federation of Trade Unions opposing the practise by workers of their right to strike. That position was declared and applied more than once. Moreover, several security agencies intervened to prevent labour protests, using force to disperse some of them. This does not negate the fact that developing labour movements have weak capabilities when it comes to employing collective bargaining tools. Such weakness is an outcome of the fact that those movements have been deprived of the right to organise into unions for decades, and hence, they lack the basic

minimum knowledge capabilities and skills needed for dealing with senior managements and employers. This has foiled the majority of labour protests carried out over the past few years, prompting frustration on the part of several such labour protest movements and their union activists regarding the usefulness of such protests. This will in turn necessarily lead to deepening social imbalances, postponing their explosion.

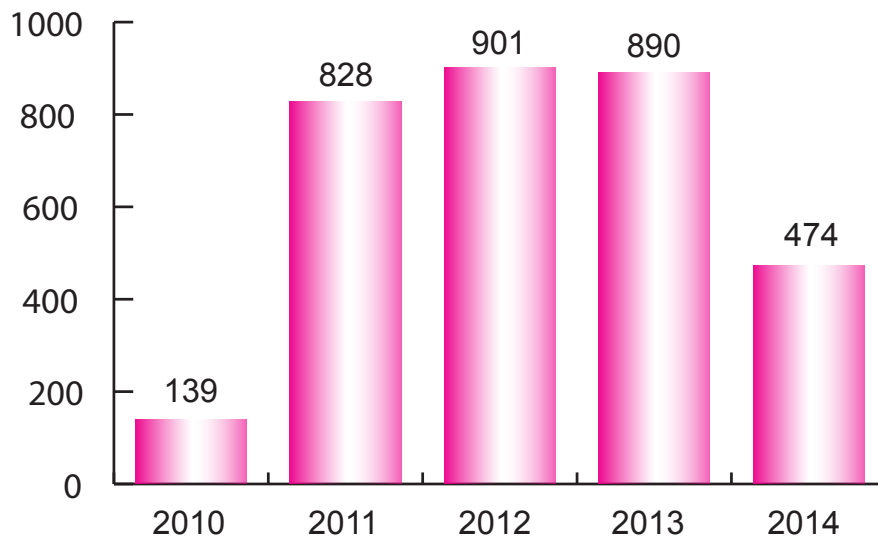
In addition, labour protests suffered a setback because of the violence practised by some employers and senior managements in the public and private sectors. Several workers were subjected to administrative penalties, including changing the nature of their jobs, transfers to different locations and deductions to pay. This was the case with workers at the Abyad Fertilizers and Chemicals Company, which fired seven of its workers following their protest to demand better working conditions.

Other factors that can be added to the above are direct intervention in the shape of pressuring or enticing some protesting workers to withdraw from labour protests, rewarding workers who opposed the protest at the expense of their protesting colleagues, security pressures and ending several protests by force.

An estimated 250 thousand male and female workers participated in labour protests. They took part in 349 actual labour protests out of an overall number of 474 protests.

Table (1): Distribution of Labour Protests during (2010-2014)

Year	Number of Protests
2010	139
2011	828
2012	901
2013	890
2014	474
Total	3232

Distribution of Labour Protests during (2010-2014)

Types of Labour Protests

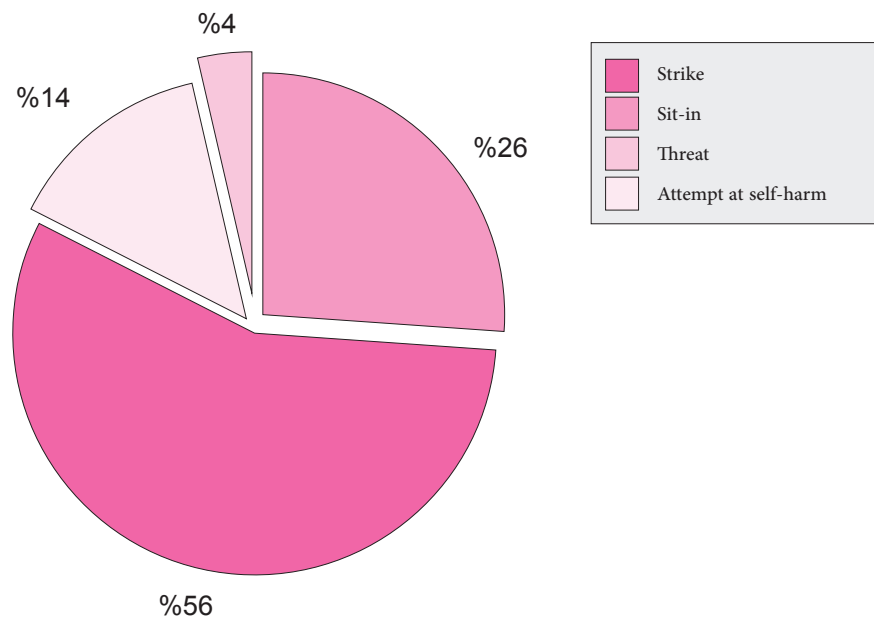
There were four types of labour protests: strikes, sit-ins, threats to carry out such measures and self-harm. Sit-ins were the main form of protest, constituting a percentage of 56.5% of all protests, and totalling 168. The second most common form of protest was strikes, which formed 26.2% of all protests and totalled 124.

There were 65 threats of protest action, constituting 13.7%. There were 17 threats of self-harm or suicide, constituting 3.6%. Some protests were held to demand job opportunities, or to demand financial rights following termination of employment, or to complain about termination of employment.

Table (2): Distribution of protests by type

Type of Protests	Number of Protests	Percentage
Strike	124	26.2%
Sit-in	268	56.5%
Threat	65	13.7%
Attempt to self harm	17	3.6%
Total	474	100%

Distribution of protests by type



Between the public and private sectors

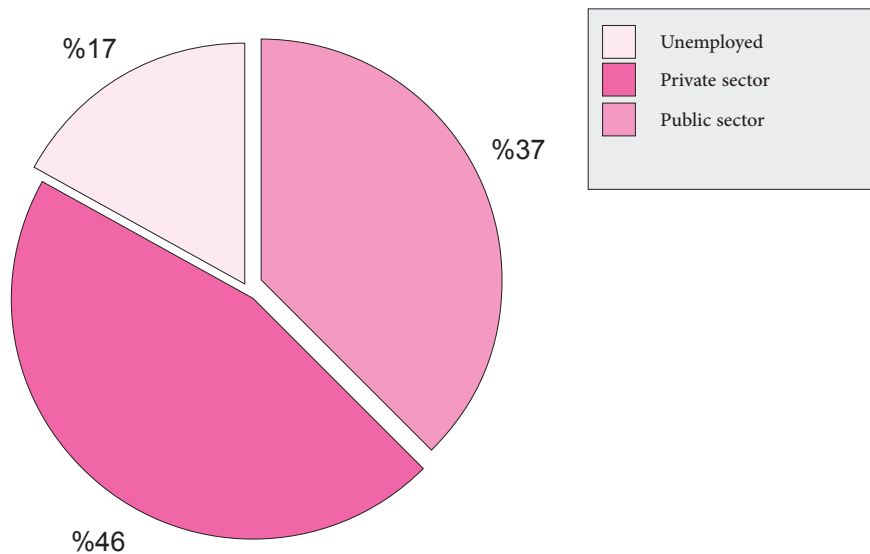
The highest number of labour protests in 2014 was recorded in the private sector, comprising 45.5% of overall protests and coming to 216 protests. This is contrary to the situation during the previous three years, when labour protests in the public sector comprised the highest percentage. This fall is attributable to several reasons, most notably the penalties suffered

by a number of workers in the public sector, amendments to the Civil Service Regulations and the strengthening of penalties against workers in accordance with those regulations. There were 178 protests in the public sector, constituting 37.6% of overall protests in 2014. There were 80 protests by unemployed persons demanding job opportunities, concentrated in the Governorates of Maan, Tafileh, Karak and Aqaba and constituting 16.9% of protests.

Table (3): Labour protests by employment sector

Employment sector	Number of Protests	Percentage
Public Sector	178	37.6%
Private Sector	216	45.5%
Unemployed	80	16.9%
Total	474	100%

Labour protests by employment sector



Labour Protests: Causes and objectives

Labour protests were carried out for several reasons, including to demand higher wages and improvements to benefits and incentives for workers, to protest dismissal from work, to demand permanent employment status at places of employment and for other reasons that will be reviewed in this part of the report.

For the fifth consecutive year and despite

the reprioritisation of workers' demands and their importance, protests that were aimed at increasing wages or additional allowances, or demanding extra salaries – such as thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth month salaries – were at the forefront of labour protests in 2014. There were 153 such protests, constituting 32.2% of all protests. It should be noted that protests demanding increases and improvements of average wages occurred amidst an increase in poverty. The absolute per capita poverty

line (nutritional and non-nutritional) in 2010 was 813.7 dinars per year. For the standard average household comprising 5.4 persons, the absolute poverty line is 366 dinars per month. The poverty line for the standard average Jordanian household stands at around 400 dinars per month. Official figures indicate that 62% of workers and social security subscribers earn monthly salaries of 400 dinars or less, and that the average (monthly) wage in Jordan is 412 dinars. Figures released by the General Statistics Department at the end of 2013 confirm this difficult situation. According to those figures, 42% of Jordanian workers earn monthly salaries that are lower than 300 dinars, and 90% of workers earn monthly salaries that are below 500 dinars. This means that most families are unable to cover their basic nutritional and non-nutritional needs. A close reading of these figures is sufficient to explain the high percentage of labour protests that are aimed at improving wages, and to indicate that they will increase in the future because of the austerity policies that the government is practising, particularly in relation to wages. In addition, the minimum wage in Jordan remains at the low level of 190

dinars per month, which is less than the absolute poverty line.

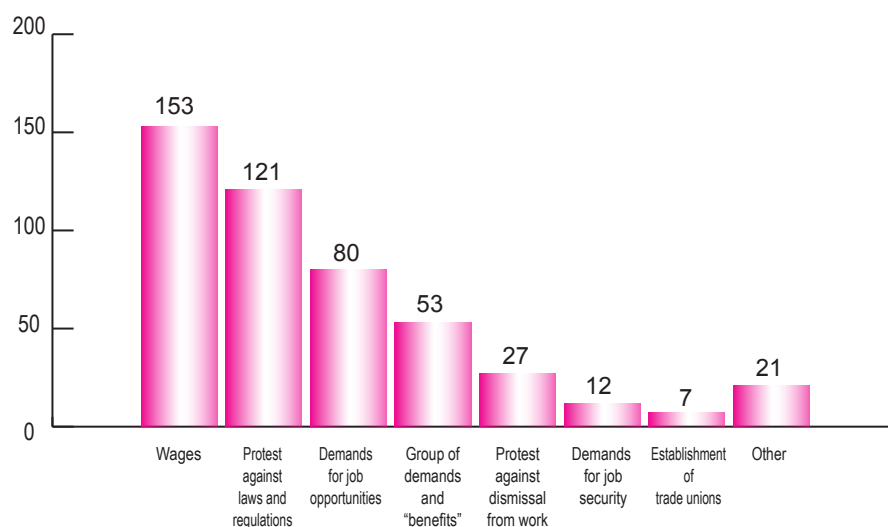
The second highest number of protests was related to the implementation of new instructions and regulations that harmed workers. There were 121 such protests, comprising 25.5% of all protests. The third highest number of protests was carried out by unemployed persons demanding job opportunities, and came to 80, comprising 17% of the total. This was followed by demands for combined groups of benefits, with 53 protests comprising 11.2% of the total. There were 27 protests against dismissal from work, comprising 5.7% of the total. The absence of job stability and security for workers at their places of work, which entails an absence of the principles of justice, resulted in 12 protests demanding confirmation of fixed employment. This comprised 2.5% of the total. There were seven protests demanding the establishment of new trade unions, comprising 1.5% of the total. There were 21 labour protests, comprising 4.4% of the total to demand health and safety measures at work places, to protest the arrest of a number of workers and to demand health insurance and time off.

Table (4): Labour protests according to cause

Cause of protests	Number of Protests	Percentage
Wages	153	32.2%
Protests against laws and regulations	121	25.5%
Demands for job opportunities	80	17%
Group of demands and <benefits>	53	11.2%
Protests against dismissal from work	27	5.7%
Demands for job security	12	2.5%
Establishment of trade unions	7	1.5%
Other ¹	21	4.4%
Total	474	100%

1 Health and safety at the work place, holidays, solidarity with striking workers, health insurance, demands for the release of arrested workers.

Labour protests according to cause



Distribution by economic sector

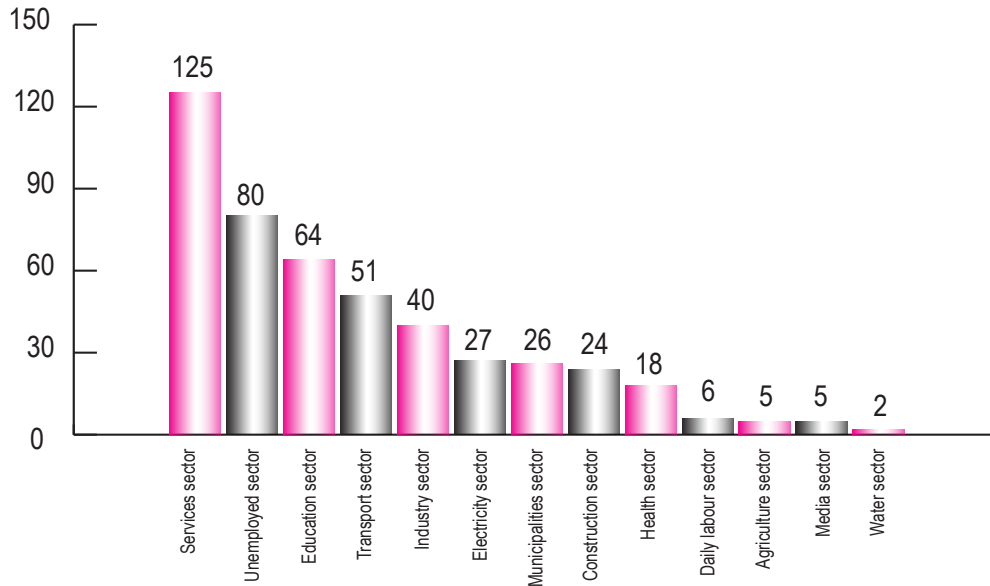
Labour protests in 2014 occurred across several economic sectors to varying degrees, with protests in the services sector comprising the highest proportion of roughly one quarter. There were 125 protests in the services sector, comprising

26.3% of the total. Unemployed persons carried out 80 protests, comprising 17% of the total. Workers in the education sector carried out 64 labour protests, comprising 13.4% of the total. There were 52 protests in the transport sector, comprising 10.7% of the total. The table below shows protests distributed by economic sector.

Table (5): Labour protests by economic sector

Sector	Number of Protests	Percentage
Services sector	125	26.3%
Unemployed sector	80	17.0%
Education sector	64	13.4%
Transport sector	51	10.7%
Industry sector	40	8.4%
Municipalities sector	26	5.5%
Construction sector	24	5.1%
Health sector	18	3.8%
Daily labour sector	6	1.3%
Agriculture sector	5	1.1%
Media sector	5	1.1%
Water sector	2	0.4
Weaving and fabrics sector	1	0.2%
Electricity sector	27	5.7%
Total	474	100%

Labour protests by economic sector



The role of the trade unions in labour protests

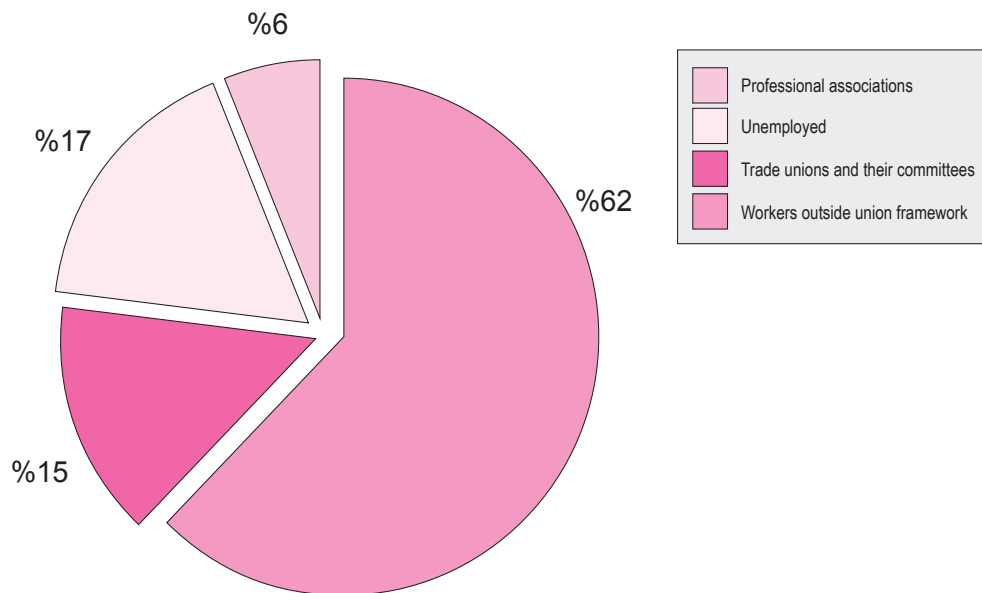
For the fifth consecutive year, labour protests were carried out by labour groups that are not organised within any trade union frameworks. There were 296 such protests, constituting 62.4% of the total. Trade unions (official and independent) and their committees carried out 70 protests, comprising 14.8% of the total. Professional associations carried out 28 protests, comprising 5.9% of the total. The unemployed carried out 80 protests, comprising 16.9% of overall protests.

The above helps to explain, in addition to the factors already mentioned, why the majority of labour protests did not achieve their goals. Workers who are not allowed to organise themselves into unions usually lack the ability to engage in successful collective bargaining and to

organise their protests in a manner that enables them to achieve their purposes. Perhaps depriving most workers in Jordan in the public and private sectors from organising themselves into unions explains the high number of labour protests in general, and their persistent occurrence at high levels, despite the fall in their numbers over the past three years. Effective, democratic and independent unions are usually more mature when it comes to developing their union discourse and demands, rendering them more rational and capable of implementation. Moreover, their activities to achieve their demands are more efficient. This is then reflected in a fall in the number of labour protests on the one hand, because they have other means of practicing in collective bargaining, and in successful achievement of their demands on the other hand.

Table (6): Breakdown of Labour protests by group

Group of protests	Number of Protests	Percentage
Workers outside union framework	296	62.4%
Trade unions and their committees	70	14.8%
Unemployed	80	16.9%
Professional associations	28	5.9%
Total	474	100%

Breakdown of Labour protests by group

Geographical distribution of labour protests

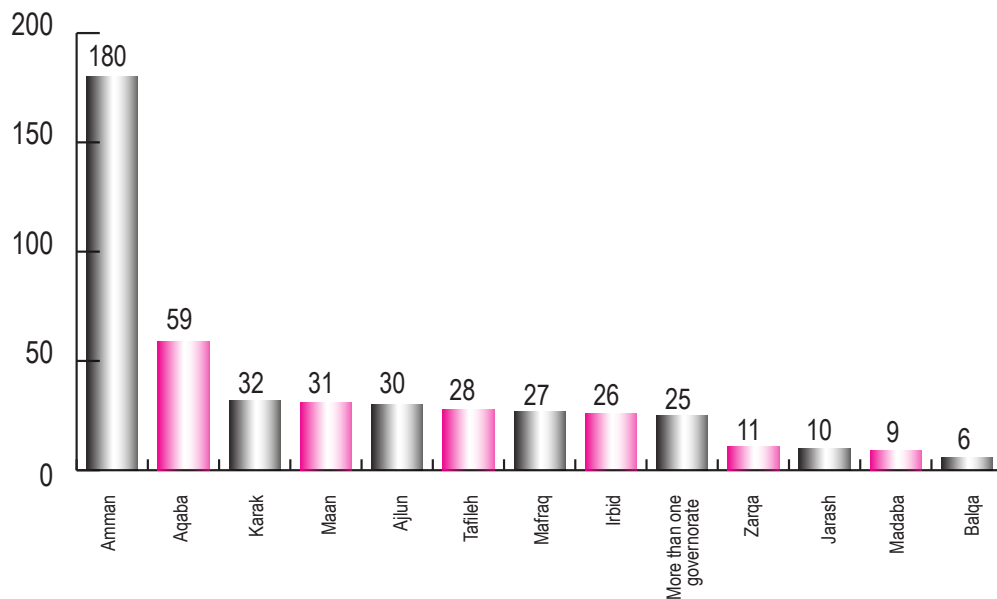
The highest proportion of protests, which came to 180 and comprised 38% of the total, occurred in the capital, Amman, because most business sectors and their institutions are based in Amman, and hence, most workers work in Amman, and the largest proportion of the population lives in the city. This was reflected in the fact that protests were concentrated in Amman. Aqaba came second, with 59

protests, comprising 12.4% of the total. It is common knowledge that Aqaba's economic importance in Jordan is growing year after year. Protests were concentrated in the ports sector, be it the official port, the containers port or other institutions. Karak came third with 32 protests, comprising 6.8% of protests. The vast majority of protests in Karak were by workers in the public sector. The attached table shows the distribution of protests by governorate.

Table (7): Labour protests by governorate

Group of protests	Number of Protests	Percentage
Amman	180	38%
Aqaba	59	12.4%
Karak	32	6.5%
Maan	31	6.5%
Ajlun	30	6.3%
Tafileh	28	5.9%
Mafraq	27	5.9%
Irbid	26	5.5%
More than one governorate	25	5.3%
Zarqa	11	2.3%
Jarash	10	2.1%
Madaba	9	1.9%
Balqa	6	1.3%
Total	474	100%

Labour protests by governorate



Temporal distribution of labour protests

It is noteworthy that labour protests were concentrated in the first three months of 2014, with protests occurring in the first quarter of that year comprising 43.4% of the total. March saw the highest number of protests, which came to 99, comprising 20.9% of the total, followed by February, which saw 59 protests comprising 12.4% of the total, followed by January, when 48 protests occurred comprising 10.1% of the total. This is mainly because workers' expectations of obtaining additional benefits, particularly when it comes to wages and wage increases, are high early in the financial year. Moreover, workers can review financial reports issued by

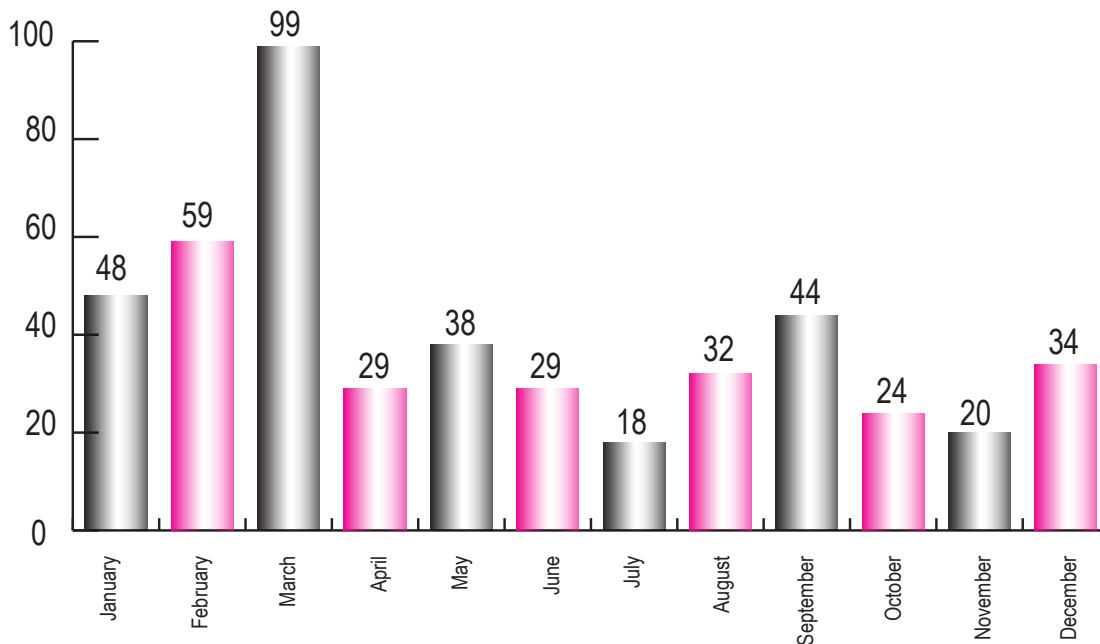
the establishments that employ them in the private sector early in the year. By protesting at the start of the year, workers in the public sector aim to get a share of the state's budgetary allocations at two levels (central government and independent corporations), or to object that additional allocations have not been set aside for them.

On the other hand, the number of labour protests fell in July, when 18 protests, comprising 3.8% of the total, occurred. The fall was mainly a result of the fact that Ramadan, when public activities usually slow down, coincided with July. The table below shows protests distributed by month.

Table (8): Labour protests by month

Month	Number of Protests	Percentage
January	48	10.1%
February	59	12.4%
March	99	20.9%
April	29	6.1%
May	38	8%
June	29	6.1%
July	18	3.8%
August	32	6.8%
September	44	9.3%
October	24	5.1%
November	20	4.2%
December	34	7.2%
Total	474	100%

Labour protests by month



Durations of labour protests

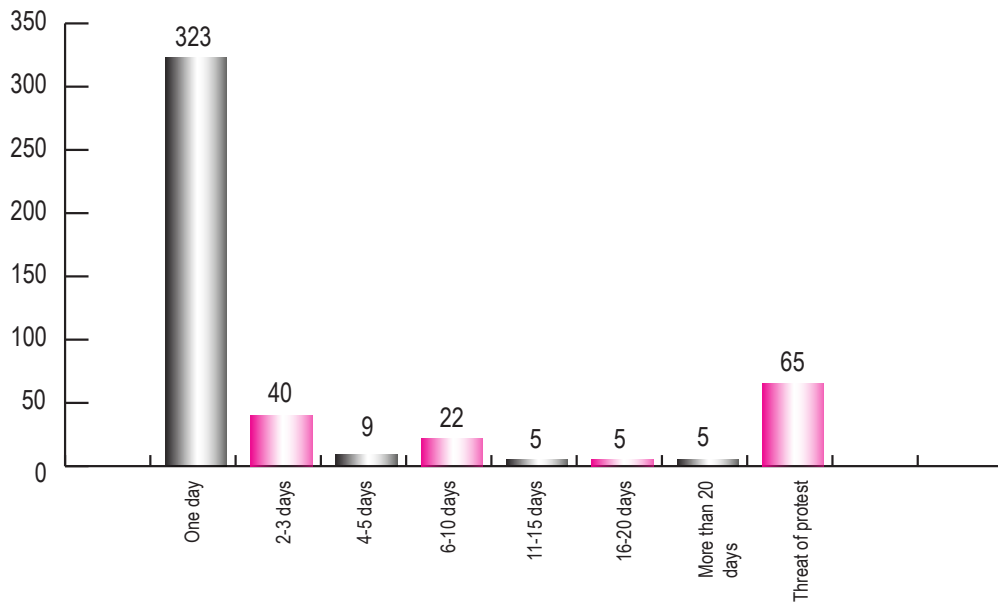
The analysis of the durations of labour protests that occurred in Jordan in 2014 shows the noteworthy result that two-thirds of them lasted for only one day. This indicates that the majority of protests were intended to merely send messages to employers and senior managements. This also explains the

failure of the majority of those protests to achieve their objectives. Most of them were carried out without prior planning and with a high degree of spontaneity. The second longest protests lasted two to three days, with 40 protests comprising 8.4% of protests in that category. The remaining protests lasted for various periods of time.

Table (9): Labour protests by duration

Number of protests days	Number of Protests	Percentage
One day	323	10.1%
2- 3 days	40	8.4%
4- 5 days	9	1.9%
6- 10 days	22	4.6%
11- 15 days	5	1.1%
16- 20 days	5	1.1%
More than 20 days	5	1.1%
Threat of protest	65	13.7%
Total	474	100%

Labour protests by duration



The use of force during labour protests

The protest scene in 2014 witnessed a change of tactics by the government and its various apparatuses in dealing with labour protests. The government position became more biased in favour of employers, encouraging them not to meet the demands of protesting workers. The government itself did not respond to the demands of protesters working in the public sector, who carried out almost one-third of protests. In addition, the government prompted some security apparatuses to intervene to forcibly end some labour protests.

The security apparatuses directly intervened to forcibly end around 29 protests, and some union representatives were detained for various periods because they had carried out strikes. Other forms of intervention by the government and its security apparatuses included advance threats against workers threatening to protest, or threatening them during protests. The most prominent example of this is the experience of workers at the containers port, where 29 workers and union activists amongst the company's workforce were arrested, and three members of the General Union of Port and Clearance Workers were also detained.

Conclusion & Recommendations

It is clear from the report that there was a tangible drop in the number of labour protests carried out in 2014 compared to the previous three years. The number of workers participating in such protests was estimated at 250 thousand. Most protests took the shape of sit-ins, and the number of labour protests in the private sector was greater than in the public sector. Around one-third of protests focused on demands for improving wages and allowances. One quarter of labour protests occurred in the services sector, and the majority were carried out by labour groups that were deprived of the right to organise themselves into unions. Just over one-third of protests were carried out in the capital, Amman, while the lowest number of protests occurred in the Balqa governorate. Roughly 43.4% of the protests occurred in the first quarter of the year, and two-thirds of protests lasted for only one day.

The report makes the following recommendations:

1. All aspects of appropriate labour principles and standards must be applied to all waged workers in Jordan.
2. Wage levels in the public and private sectors must be reconsidered with a view to increasing them because they are low.
3. The minimum wage level, which is below half the absolute poverty line, must be genuinely reconsidered and linked to average inflation rates.
4. Maximum wages must be capped, because the wages of two-thirds of workers in Jordan are below 400 dinars per month, while several senior employees working in the same public sector and private sector institutions earn very high salaries. This exacerbates social discrepancies.
5. The social security umbrella should be extended to include all workers in Jordan, because roughly half of those working in the country have no form of social protection. In addition, all those enrolled in the social security scheme should also be given health insurance, because around half of those working in Jordan do not have health insurance, and roughly one third of citizens do not have any form of health insurance.
6. Article 31 of the Jordanian Labour Law, which relates to the restructuring of institutions and allows collective dismissals from work, must be amended.
7. Texts in the Labour Law relating to the establishment of trade unions must be amended, and all waged workers in Jordan must be allowed to freely establish their unions. The monopoly that existing trade unions have on the representation of workers must be cancelled, because those unions do not employ the most basic

principles of democratic processes and do not allow their leaderships to be changed. The law must be made consistent with the recent amendments to the constitution, and the establishment of trade unions must be in line with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which Jordan has ratified and published in the Official Gazette. ILO Convention 87 relating to the freedom of association and protecting the right to organise must be speedily ratified. The constraints placed on workers in Jordan that prevent them from forming labour unions have not prevented them from forming them, and it is necessary to amend the law to recognise this reality.

8. The Civil Service Regulations must be amended to allow public sector workers to freely establish their own unions in a manner that protects their rights, which are mentioned in the constitutional amendments of 2011 and in the decision of the of the Constitutional Court issued as Interpretation Number 6 of 2013. The latter guarantees the right of public sector workers to establish their own unions. Such amendments must also be in line with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which Jordan has ratified and published in the Official Gazette. They must also allow the existence of collective bargaining between government administrations and workers, because it is unreasonable for labour protests in the public sector to be treated as absences from work that incur penalties.
9. Articles of the Labour Law relating to the concept of a labour dispute and the mechanisms for settling labour disputes must be amended. They have proved to be a resounding failure in finding just settlements of worsening labour disputes, and it is necessary to employ new mechanisms and tactics to settle labour disputes in a manner that is consistent with ILO Convention 98 relating to the right to organise and to engage in collective bargaining.
10. Inspections of the labour market carried out by the Ministry of Labour must be more effective to guarantee the application of the Labour Law. This requires an increase in the allocations of the Ministry of Labour in the government budget, so that the ministry can increase the number of its inspectors and develop their inspection capabilities.