

Report

Labor Protests in Jordan

2016

Labor Watch Reports

Prepared by:
Jordan Labor Watch
Phenix Center for Economic and informatics Studies
In Cooperation with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

May, 2017



للدراسات 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.

المرصد العمالي الأردني Jordan Labor Watch

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

The Phenix Center for Economic and Informatics Studies, within the scope of the Jordan Labor Watch Program, which was launched in the second half of 2009 in cooperation with Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, observes and monitors the events and activities of the Jordanian labor market at the policy level as well as labor developments and movements taking place on the ground. The annual report of labor protests of various kinds: strikes, sit-ins, threats of protest, and threats of self-harm (suicide), is one of several reports prepared by Jordan Labor Watch.

The importance of preparing this report lies in Jordan Labor Watch's belief that labor protests are one of the most important indicators of economic and social crises, particularly in the labor market. They accurately reflect the nature of prevailing labor relations that are characterized by an imbalance among the various parties; workers, employers, and government.

This report is part of a series of periodic reports issued by the Phenix Center for Economic and Informatics Studies in cooperation with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, covering many areas of the labor market including decent work in Jordan, women's economic participation, employment of persons with disabilities, migrant labor, and child labor among others.

This report aims to provide an analytical, economic, and social reading of all labor protests that took place in Jordan during 2016 using a descriptive analytical approach. All 2016 labor protests were monitored and documented in two ways; first via direct communication with protestors, documenting protest details; and second, by analyzing the press coverage of various forms of Jordanian media. All measures of protests, regardless of form, including threats of strikes or sit-ins as a form of protest, were classified as protests.

According to social scientific literature, protests are a collective effort seeking to change the character of established social relations within a specific community. Social movements consist of collective projects and efforts aimed at establishing a new system of life that are based in a sense of dissatisfaction with the prevailing model, and the desire to establish a new arrangement, which includes the essential elements of their survival and success, embodied in continuity, organization, and awareness of change. The causes and conditions that lead to protests vary; however, they usually occur following the failure or obstruction of collective bargaining as a means to pressure employers, or because of a lack of available channels for dialogue and negotiation with management and employers.

Ahmed Awad

Director

Phenix Center for Economics and Informatics Studies

Quantitative Indicators

Although labor protests rose by 22% from 2015 to 2016, they are still at low levels compared to 2011-2013-, numbering 288 protests for the year, compared to 236 in 2015.

The overall decline in protests from 2014 to 2016 can be explained by several causes. These include a lack of seriousness on the part of the government and the majority of employers in meeting workers' demands. Just 75 of the year's labor protests had their demands met compared with 213 protests whose demands were suspended following promises to meet them. Other factors include direct intervention through pressuring or coercing some protestors to withdraw from labor protests, security pressure, and forcible removal of protesters.

Several factors combine to deprive the majority of wage-earners in Jordan the right to organize. These include labor legislation that bars a wide range of workers from the right to organize for reasons related to the professional classification system issued by the Minister of Labor. Under this system, only designated professions are allowed to form unions, and the number of unions is limited to seventeen, a number that has not

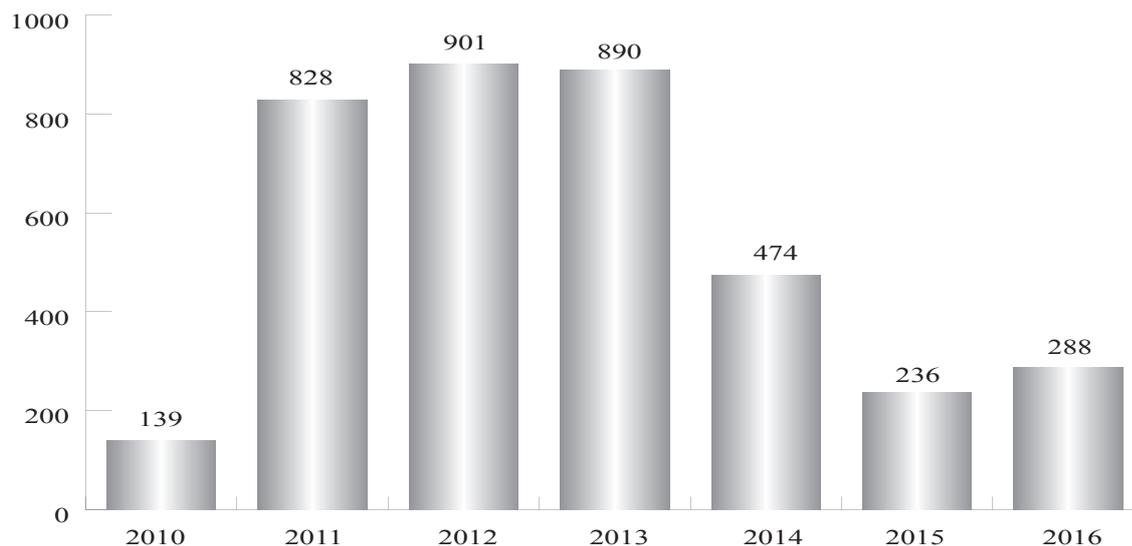
been increased in nearly four decades. Other factors include the weakness of a majority of Jordanian labor unions, self-imposed constraints that result in the selection of stagnant leaderships, an indifference to the real problems affecting workers in Jordan, and a loss of momentum following the Arab Spring that encouraged a wide range of workers to protest their working conditions.

These protests reflect the depth of the economic and social crisis in Jordan, the wave of price increases, the imposition of taxes in light of low wages, and a host of other factors that have pushed a great many workers to protest the difficult conditions of their work. These factors include: declining working conditions for the majority of workers caused by a significant decline in minimum wages, a lack of basic labor rights protected by Jordanian law enjoyed by a wide range of workers, such as: daily working hours; annual, sick, and official leave; provision of occupational health and safety measures; social security benefits provided by public institutions; and a lack of health insurance along with other conditions of decent work. Table 1 illustrates the number of labor protests in Jordan over the past seven years.

Table (1)
Protest Distribution from 2010 to 2016

Year	Number of Protests
2010	139
2011	828
2012	901
2013	890
2014	474
2015	236
2016	288

Figure (1)
Labor Protests over the Past Seven Years



Sectoral Distribution of Protests

Throughout 2016, private sector workers held a total of 185 labor protests, which made up 64% of all protests, while public

sector workers held 23% of all protests, or 67 labor protests, and the unemployed carried out 36 protests accounting for 13% of all labor protests.

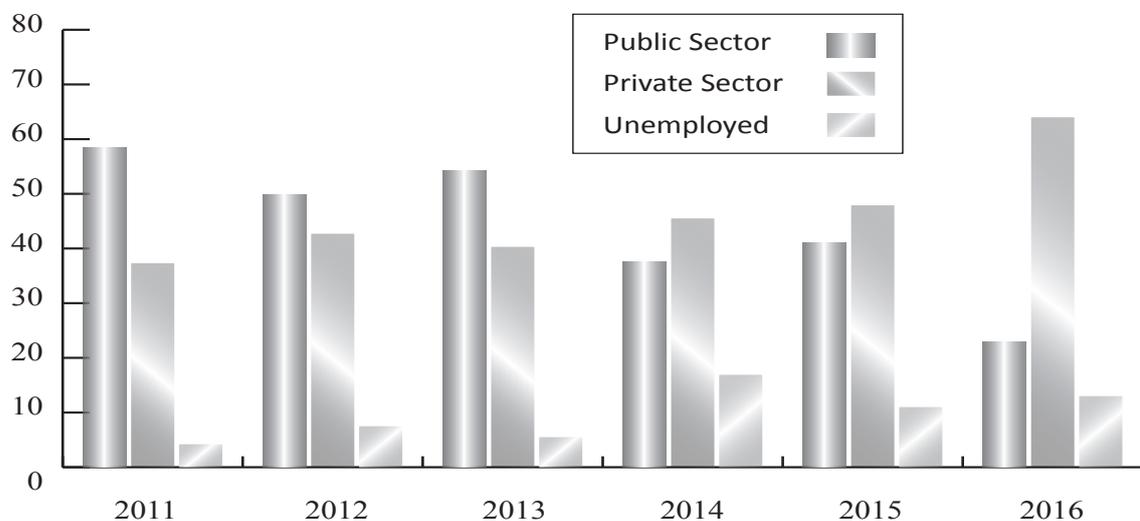
A significant decline in labor protests within the public sector was observed, which reached a high of 58.5% of all protests in 2011. Several factors explain this decline, including the declining momentum of protests in general, as well as structural changes in salaries of public sector employees that led to wage increases and tightening restrictions for a wide range of employees. The decline in public sector protests also notes the striking increase in labor protests in the private sector, which can be explained by the general

decline in various working conditions that will be reviewed in a later section of this report, particularly as it relates to wage stagnation. Meanwhile, rates of protest among the unemployed have continued to rise, largely because unemployment rates have continued to rise of the past several years. During the fourth quarter of 2016, unemployment reached 15.8%, an unprecedented rate compared to the past ten years. Table 2 illustrates these indicators.

Table (2)
Relative Distribution of Protests by Labor Sector

Labor Sector	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Public Sector	23.0%	41.1%	37.6%	54.2%	49.8%	58.5%
Private Sector	64.0%	47.9%	45.5%	40.3%	42.7%	37.3%
Unemployed	13.0%	11.0%	16.9%	5.5%	7.5%	4.2%

Figure (2)
Relative Distribution of Protests by Labor Sector



Types of Protests

For the purposes of this report, protests have been divided into strikes, sit-ins, threats of protest, and threats of self-harm (suicide). While their composition has varied over the years, in 2016 there were 162 sit-ins, or 56.0% of all protests, 71 strikes (25.0%), 41 threats of protest (14.0%), and 14 threats of self-harm (5.0%).

Although Jordan Labor Watch observed 14 cases directly related to self-harm, Jordan

witnessed 117 cases of suicide in 2016, no small portion of which were for economic reasons indirectly related to work. Experts attribute attempts to self-harm (suicide) for economic reasons to an excess of pressures in life, an inability to positively cope with and manage stress, solve problems, and compel people to respond to certain appeals. There are also those who consider attempts to self-harm a cry for help. Table 3 illustrates these indicators.

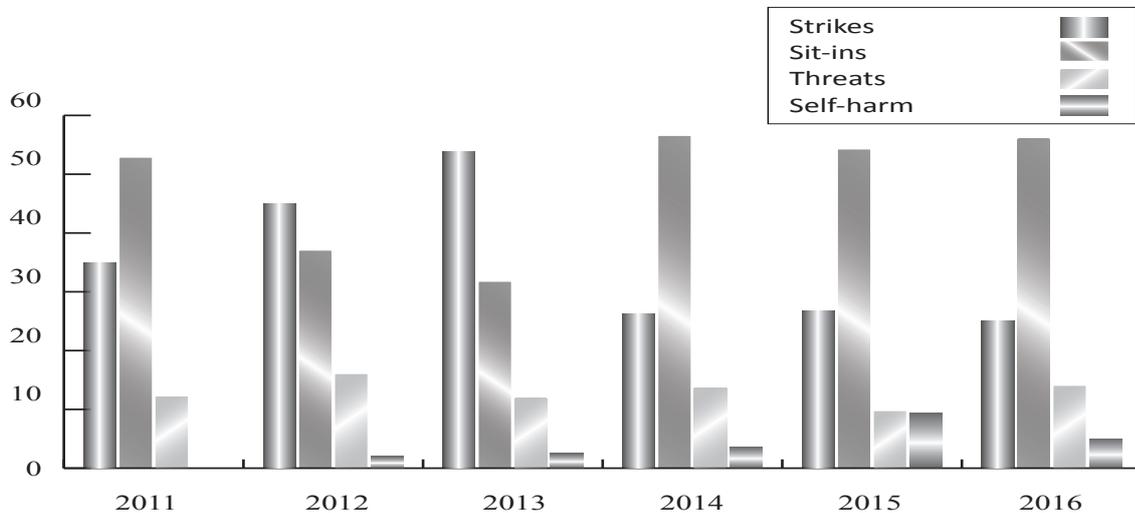
Table (3)

Distribution of Labor Protests According to Type by Percentage

Type of Protest	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Strikes	25.0%	26.7%	26.2%	53.9%	45.0%	35.0%
Sit-ins	56.0%	54.2%	56.5%	31.7%	37.0%	52.8%
Threats	14.0%	9.7%	13.7%	11.9%	16.0%	12.2%
Self-harm	5.0%	9.3%	3.6%	2.5%	2.0%	-

Figure (3)

Protests by Protest Type (Percent)



Protest Causes

There are many reasons for labor protests, including the demand for increased wages and allowances, improved worker benefits and incentives, objections to dismissals, and demands for job security alongside other reasons. The numbers indicate that multi-goal labor demands ranked first among the priorities of wage-earners for the first time in six years, with 86 protests, or 30% of all protests, followed by protests over the implementation of new directives and regulations that harm workers with 73 protests, or 25% of all protests, whereas demands to provide employment opportunities came in third place with 36

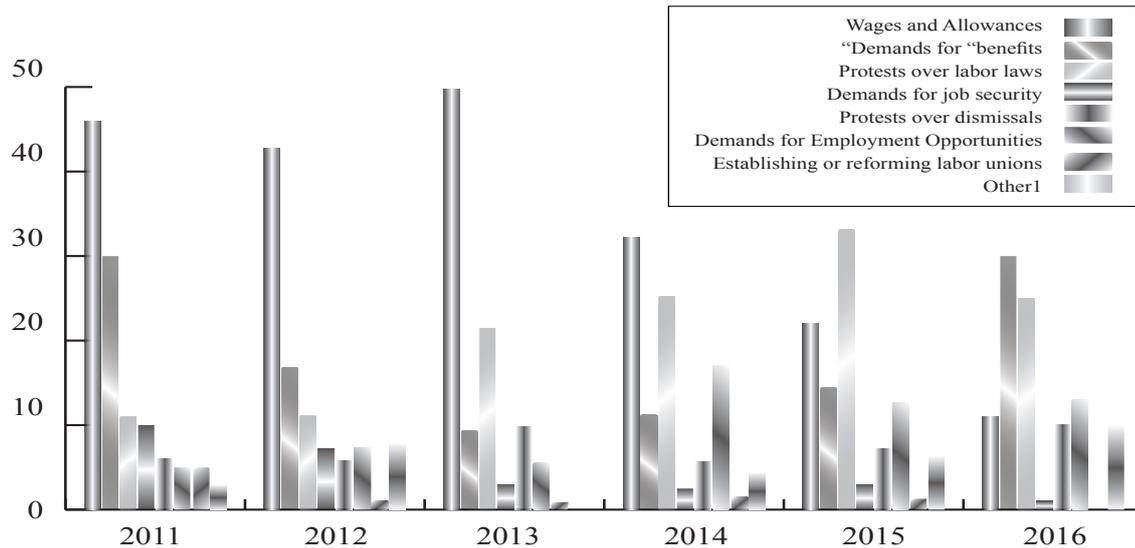
protests, or 13% of all protests. The rate of protests aiming to increase wages fell to fourth place with 32 protests (11%), followed by protests over collective dismissals, where 29 were carried out, making up 10% of all protests, and which resulted from workers' lack of stability and job security in their places of work, whereas there were 3 protests (1%) demanding job security. Protests demanding better health and safety in the work place, and protests over worker arrests, the provision of health insurance, and demands for leave, account for 10% of protests with 29. Table 4 illustrates these indicators.

Table (4)
Distribution of Labor Protests in 2016 According to Cause

Causes of Protests	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Wages and Allowances	11.0%	22.0%	32.2%	49.7%	42.7%	46.0%
Demands for "benefits"	30.0%	14.4%	11.2%	9.3%	16.8%	30.0%
Protests over labor laws	25.0%	33.1%	25.2%	21.5%	11.1%	11.0%
Demands for job security	1.0%	3.0%	2.5%	3.0%	7.2%	10.0%
Protests over dismissals	10.0%	7.2%	5.7%	9.8%	5.8%	6.0%
Demands for Employment Opportunities	13.0%	12.7%	17.0%	5.5%	7.4%	5.0%
Establishing or reforming labor unions	-	1.3%	1.5%	0.9%	1.1%	5.0%
Other ¹	10.0%	6.4%	4.4%	-	7.9%	3.0%

(1) Health and safety, leave, solidarity with workers on strike, health insurance, demands for the release of detainees

Figure (4)
Labor Protests in 2016 According to Cause



Protestors

For the sixth consecutive year, the majority of protests were carried out by labor groups that do not have a union framework to organize them. The percentage of protests carried out by workers outside the framework of their labor organizations reached 60% with 174 protests, whereas labor unions and their official and independent committees carried out 62 protests (22%). Professional trade unions carried out 5% of protests with 16, while the unemployed carried out 13% of all protests. Table 5 illustrates these indicators.

Interestingly, the majority of labor protests were carried out by segments and groups of workers with no trade union framework to organize them or by segments and groups

that bypassed their labor union framework and replaced it with self-organized bodies advocating for their interests and demands. This points to the weakness and often times the lack of channels for dialogue and negotiation between workers in various groups, on the one hand, and management and employers on the other, as is reflected by the increased number of protests.

This forces us to continually think about the great impact that the absence of active labor unions has in weakening working conditions in Jordan. The labor sectors that enjoy decent working conditions in Jordan are the sectors whose workers enjoy the right to organize effectively. In this context, it is worth mentioning that a large majority of wage-earners do not enjoy the right to organize. The total number of workers that

have a trade union organization is only 5%, while the rest do not have the same right to organize themselves in trade unions as workers in the public sector. The majority of private sector workers are denied the

right to organize by law. Additionally, the absence of democratic practices within the vast majority of public trade unions, denies hundreds of thousands of workers the possibility to participate.

Table (5)
Distribution of Labor Protest by Protest Group

Labor groups that carried out protests	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Workers outside trade union frameworks	60.0%	62.3%	62.4%	89.0%	85.2%	98.0%
Labor unions and committees	22.0%	17.4%	14.8%	5.5%	7.3%	2.0%
Professional trade unions	5.0%	7.6%	5.9%	-	-	-
The Unemployed	13.0%	12.7%	16.9%	5.5%	7.4%	-

Figure (5)
Distribution of Labor Protest Group (Percent)



Distribution of Labor Protests by Economic Sector

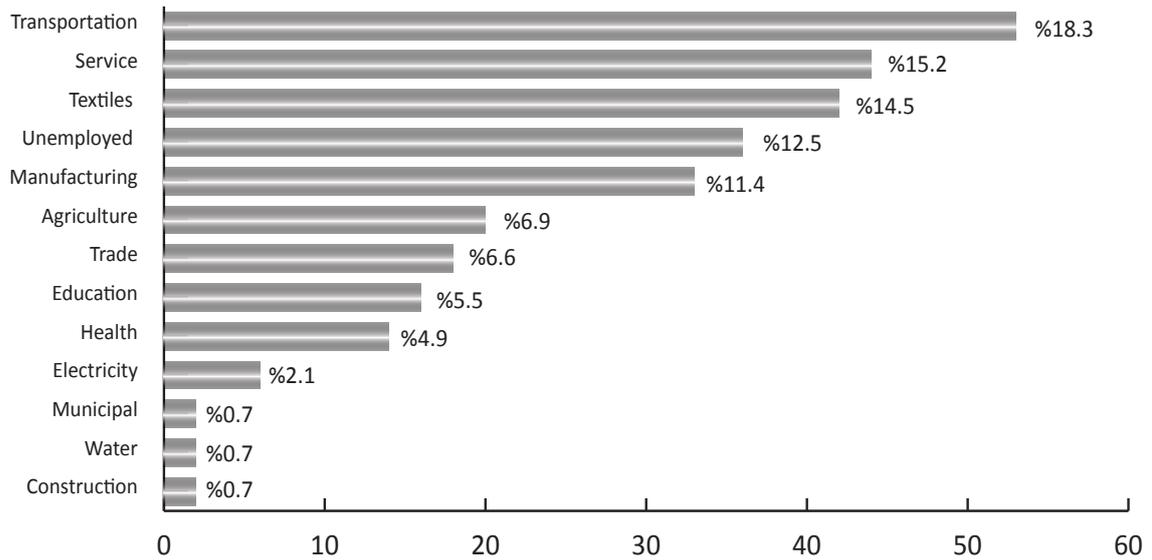
The labor protests that took place in 2016 were distributed across a number of economic sectors to various degrees. Protests by workers in the transport sector made up 18% of protests with 53, which ranked first, followed by the service sector

which made up 15% of total protests with 44. The textiles sector carried out 14.5% of all protests with 42, while the unemployed carried out 12.5% of protests with 36, followed by the manufacturing, agriculture, education, health, electricity, municipalities, water, and construction sectors. Table 6 illustrates these indicators.

Table (6)
Distribution of Labor Protests in 2016 by Economic Sector

Labor Sector	Number of Protests	Percentage
Transportation	53	18.3%
Service	44	15.2%
Textiles	42	14.5%
Unemployed	36	12.5%
Manufacturing	33	11.4%
Agriculture	20	6.9%
Trade	18	6.6%
Education	16	5.5%
Health	14	4.9%
Electricity	6	2.1%
Municipal	2	0.7%
Water	2	0.7%
Construction	2	0.7%
Total	288	100.0%

Figure (6)
Distribution of Labor Protests by Labor Sector (Percent)



Geographic Distribution of Labor Protests

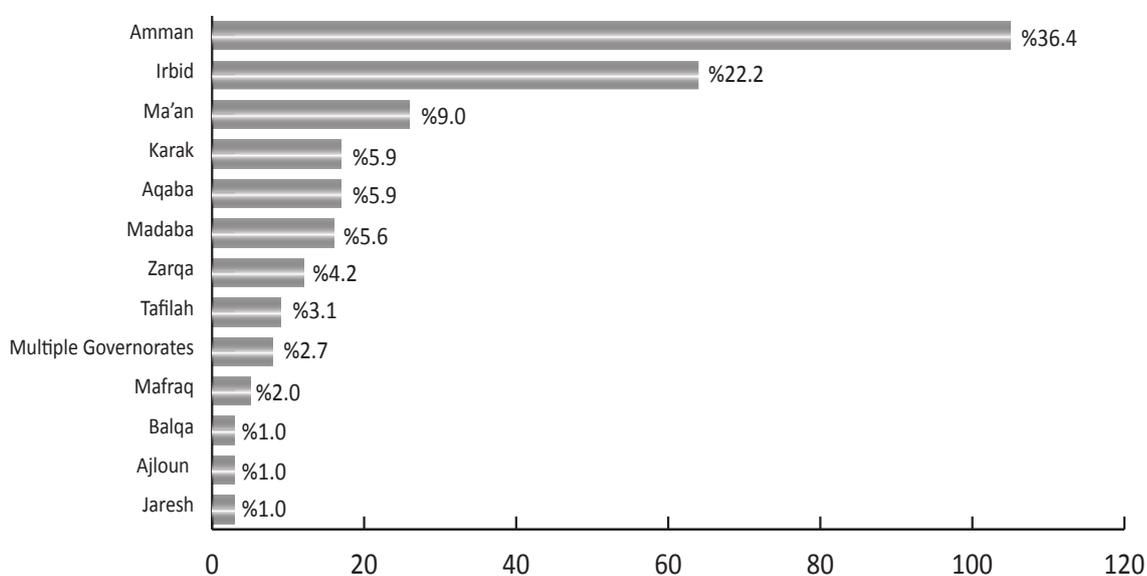
Amman ranked first in terms of the number of labor protests that took place in 2016 with 105 (35%), followed by Irbid in second place with 64 (22%). Ma'an was third,

where 26 protests were held (9%). These distributions do not vary significantly from the protests of 2015, since the business sector is concentrated in Amman. Table 7 illustrates these indicators.

Table (7)
Distribution of Labor Protests in 2016 by Governorate

Governorate	Number of Protests	Percentage
Amman	105	36.4%
Irbid	64	22.2%
Ma'an	26	9.0%
Karak	17	5.9%
Aqaba	17	5.9%
Madaba	16	5.6%
Zarqa	12	4.2%
Tafilah	9	3.1%
Multiple Governorates	8	2.7%
Mafraq	5	2.0%
Balqa	3	1.0%
Ajloun	3	1.0%
Jaresh	3	1.0%
Total	288	100.0%

Figure (7)
Distribution of Labor Protests According to Governorate by Percentage



Protest Duration

The length of labor protests varied according to their organizers, their demands, and the mechanisms used to deal with them. The length of protests ranged from one to twenty days, the majority of which were suspended for a day to give decision-makers and the relevant authorities the

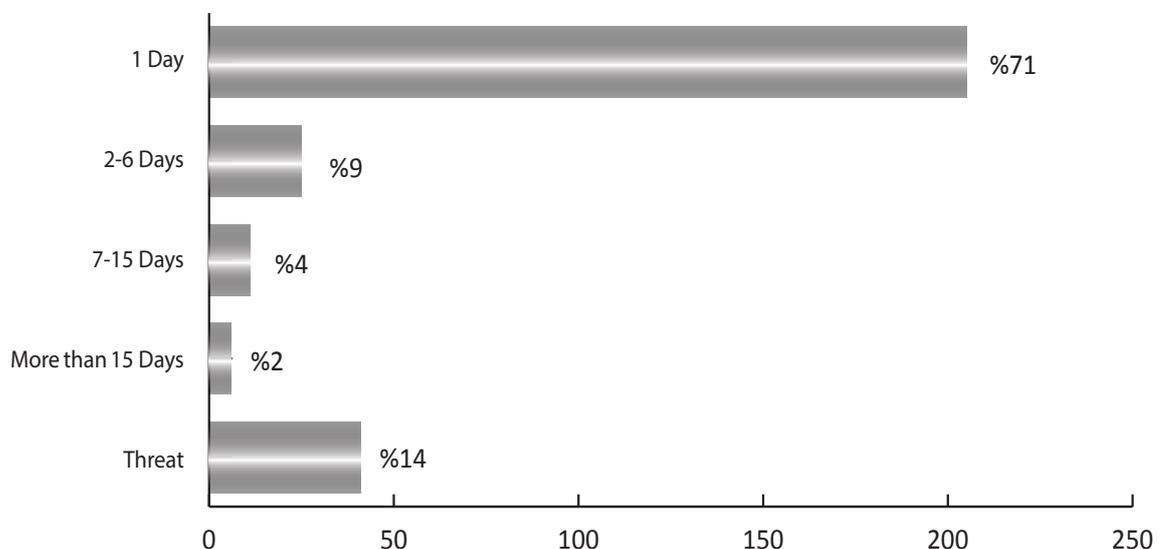
opportunity to reevaluate their demands and find mechanisms with which to meet them. Protests which lasted for only one day made up 71% of all protests with 205, followed by 9% of protests that lasted for two days. Table 8 illustrates these indicators.

Table (8)
Distribution of Labor Protests in 2016 by Protest Length in Days

Length in Days	Number of Protests	Percentage
1	205	71%
2-6	25	9%
7-15	11	4%
More than 15	6	2%
Threat	41	14%
Total	288	100%

Figure (8)

Labor Protests in 2016 by Protest Length in Days



Dealing with Labor Protests

The protest scene in 2016 witnessed a continuation of negative treatment towards protests by employers and the government whether it was by failing to respond to protesters' demands, preventing workers from protesting, imposing administrative sanctions on union activists, arresting them, or by bringing a stop to protests by force.

Eight workers and labor representatives were arrested in the Aqaba Economic Zone as a result of their sit-in, while attempts were made to break up the protest by force more than once. Likewise, the space for a sit-in of public drivers near al-Mashaghel Circle in the Tabarbour area was closed off to prevent protests. Several sit-ins for the unemployed in the Madaba Governorate demanding

better employment opportunities were also interrupted, while protests organized by servis drivers in the Irbid Governorate and a sit-in of Amman-Saudi Travel Line drivers, held because Saudi authorities prevented Jordanian cars from entering Saudi territory unless they were model year 2010 or newer, were broken up as well. Security forces also prevented employees of the Jordan Al Abyad Fertilizers and Chemicals Company from holding a sit-in in front of the House of Representatives. A protest of Ramtha drivers, which came about as a result of the drivers' opposition to their treatment by customs officers, was also interrupted by security forces. Ph.Ds with motor disabilities were also prevented from having a sit-in in front of the Swedish Embassy.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This report shows that, while labor protests continued at levels lower than in 2011-2013, their numbers are still striking. They reflect a fundamental imbalance in labor relations, thus reflecting the tensions within the Jordanian labor market. These protests illustrate the depth of the economic and social crisis in Jordan characterized by the continued decline of decent work indicators, the persistence of low wages and inequality, the extent of insurance evasion, and an increased tax burden on society which is primarily the result of unfair tax policies and expanding revenues from indirect taxes that are pushing price indicators significantly higher. As a result of all of these factors, and others, tens of thousands of workers have held 288 protests in 2016, a 22% increase over 2015 levels which saw 236 protests.

The report finds that the labor market in Jordan continues to suffer from significant gaps in the application of decent working standards and fundamental principles and labor rights to various degrees. This occurs in the form of legislation, policies and practices, that fail to provide adequate and decent employment opportunities and sufficient forms of social protection to workers or enable them to exercise their right to organize and bargain collectively, promote social dialogue

on all policies affecting the interests of various parties to production, eliminate all forms of widespread compulsory labor in many employment sectors, eliminate discrimination in employment and occupation according to various standards, and protect all marginalized groups within the labor force including children, women, and the disabled.

The report also finds that the continued denial of real gaps in the labor market in Jordan will only deepen social imbalances and will inevitably lead to instability at the social, economic, and political levels, which will negatively affect Jordan's overall stability.

Recommendations

1. The principles and standards of decent work, along with fundamental principles and labor rights, should be applied to all wage-earners in all their components in Jordan.
2. Wage policies in the public and private sector should be reevaluated with a view towards increasing wages because levels are very low and do not match price levels experienced in Jordan, which are the highest in the Arab region according to many specialized international reports.
3. A maximum wage limit should be set. At the same time that the salaries of nearly two thirds of wage-earners in

Jordan is less than 500 JD per month, many senior employees working in the same institutions in the public and private sector are receiving very high salaries, increasing the level of social inequality.

4. Article 31 of the Jordanian Labor Law should be amended to restructure institutions that allow collective dismissals.
5. The Labor Law concerning the formation of labor unions should be amended to allow all wage-earners in Jordan to freely establish unions and to abolish existing unions' monopoly on worker representation, which lacks even the most basic rules of democratic operation and does not allow for the renewal of its leadership to bring the provisions of the law in line with recent constitutional amendments and to align the process of establishing labor unions with the provisions of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which Jordan has ratified and published in the Official Gazette. The ratification of ILO Convention No. 87 on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize should also be accelerated, as the restrictions on workers in Jordan that bar them from forming labor unions have not prevented them from doing so. Amendments should be made to the law in recognition of this reality.
6. The Civil Service Law should be amended to allow workers in the public sector to freely establish unions in a manner that guarantees their rights, as stipulated in the 2011 Constitutional Amendments and the decision of the Constitutional Court in Interpretation No. 6 of 2013, which guaranteed the right of workers in the public sector to form their own unions, and to bring it in line with the provisions of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, which Jordan has ratified and published in the Official Gazette, which allows for collective bargaining between government departments and their workers, since it is illogical to handle public sector labor protests as a work absence that deserves punishing.
7. The Labor Law relating to the concept of labor disputes and settlement mechanisms, that have proved their utter failure in finding just solutions to growing labor disputes, should be amended. New mechanisms and techniques, in line with the provisions of ILO Convention No. 98 concerning the right to organize and collective bargaining, should be used to settle labor disputes.
8. Article 58 of the Labor Law legalizing compulsory labor should be abolished, as it allows for the exclusion of employees in supervisory roles or

whose roles require travel or mobility from overtime pay.

9. The efficiency of labor market inspections carried out by the Ministry of Labor should be increased to ensure the proper application of the

provisions of the Labor Law. This will require increasing Ministry of Labor allocations in the public budget so that the Ministry can increase the number of inspectors and develop their inspection capabilities.