

Report

Labor Protests in Jordan

2015

Labor Watch Reports

Prepared by:

Phenix Center for Economic and informatics Studies
Jordan Labor Watch

In Cooperation with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

March, 2016



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 further 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.

Report

Labor Protests in Jordan 2015

Labor Watch Reports

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

March, 2016



Contents

Foreword	7
Introduction	9
The Labor Protests in Numerical Indicators	11
Types of Labor Protests	13
Between the Public and Private Sectors	15
Labor Protests: Causes and Objectives	16
Distribution by Economic Sector	18
The Role of Trade Unions in Labor Protests	19
Geographical Distribution of Labor Protests	21
Temporal Distribution of Labor Protests	22
Durations of Labor Protests	24
The Use of Force during Labor Protests	25
Conclusion & Recommendations	27

Foreword

The Phenix Center 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, in cooperation with FES, to observe and monitor all labor policies in Jordan. It also observes and monitors labor transformations and movements in the Jordanian labor market that express themselves as protests, as well as the different types of violations workers may be subject to, in terms of their rights to fair work conditions, and their rights to organize, collective bargaining, and peaceful assembly.

Following a noteworthy increase in labor protests since 2010, the Center has been preparing and publishing an annual report that monitors labor protests in Jordan, observing their trends, types and objectives. This is the sixth report in part of the series of annual reports that monitor all types of labor 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 Center's team, that labor protests, whatever their shape and size, express social imbalances in the working relations between workers, on the one hand, and employers and senior managements in the public and private sectors, on the other hand. This supposition also holds that labor protests are one of the most prominent types of social protests, which according to various theories of social change, are considered the main engine of social change and transformation.

The Center 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 labor protest movements in Jordan; their characteristics and their social, economic and political contexts. This contributes to the understanding of the real factors powering the social, economic and political changes Jordan is experiencing. It also aids in the development of legislation and policies that will contribute to mitigating social strains and imbalances.

Ahmed Awad

Director

Phenix Center for Economics and Informatics Studies

Introduction

Labor 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 basic social structures, which are usually determined by the characteristics of relations amongst the constituent parts of those societies. In general, the two basic social constituents of all societies are workers (in all their varieties) on the one hand, and employers and senior managements in the public and private sectors on the other hand. The interest of the Phenix Center 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 labor protests that occurred in Jordan during 2015. The Jordan Labor Watch team employed a descriptive analytical method in preparing it. All labor 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 labor organizations – which varied in their degree of development – to protest, the objectives of the protests, the role of labor organizations 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 printed electronic and audio-visual media coverage of the protests.

According to the literature of sociology, protest is an organized 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 labor 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 labor 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.

The right of workers to strike is protected and guaranteed by several international labor standards enshrined in international human rights law, and in particular in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. This right is also included in some of the covenants of the International Labour Organization (ILO), particularly Covenant No. 87 relating to the freedom of forming trade unions and the protection of the right to organize, 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 2015, labor protests as one form of social protest nonetheless remain visible, although they were fewer in number compared to the past years.

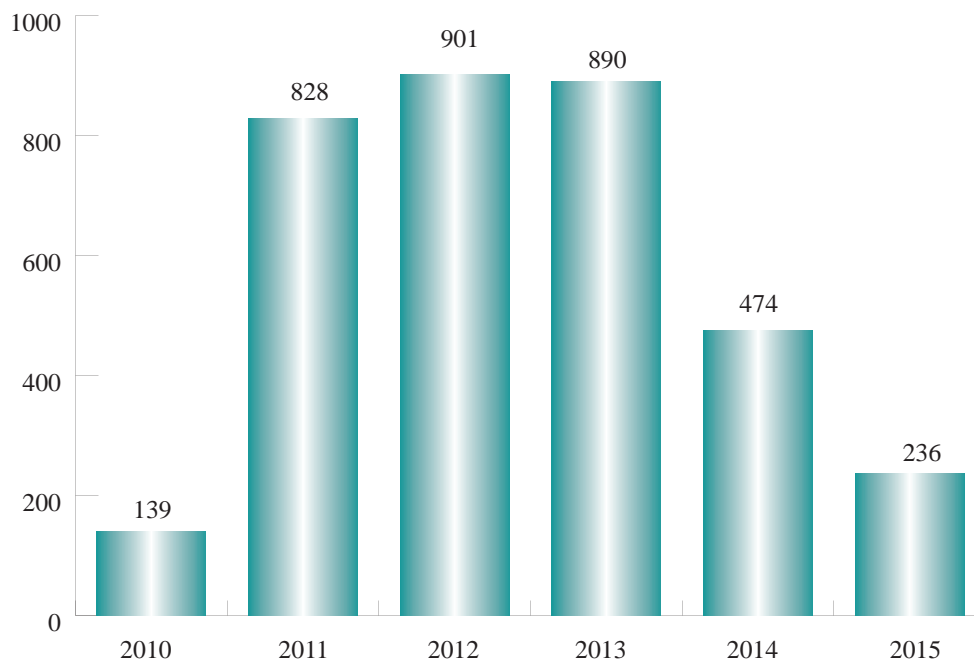
The Labor Protests in Numerical Indicators

The number of labor protests during 2015 decreased significantly, with only

236 protests carried out compared to past years, where there were 474 protests in 2014 and 890 in 2013. Table 1 below shows the number of labor protests for the period between 2010 and 2015:

Table 1. Distribution of labor protests during 2010 - 2015

Year	Number of Protests
2010	139
2011	828
2012	901
2013	890
2014	474
2015	236
Total	3468



Perhaps the fall in the number of labor protests in 2015 is not directly attributable to a weakening of the imbalances in work relationships, which are a form of social relations.

Rather, the fall was in response to the influence of several factors related to regional changes, such as increasing political and security tensions in several neighboring countries; the government's declared position of not responding to any labor demands made by public sector workers; and the government's request to the private sector to avoid agreeing to workers' demands made as part of labor protests. Another factor was the position of the General Federation of Trade Unions opposing the practice by workers of their right to strike. This position was declared and enforced more than once.

Additional factors that contributed to the decline in number of protests include interventions by various official bodies to prevent labor protests; the use of force to disperse protests, along with violence by some labor and senior management stakeholders in the public and private sectors. Moreover, many workers have been exposed to punitive actions, including being fired or experiencing the threat of being dismissed. Administrative penalties also included changing the

nature of the workers' jobs, being transferred from the place of work to another, and deduction of salaries.

Furthermore, there is direct intervention practiced through pressuring or enticing some protesting workers to withdraw from the labor protests, rewarding the employees who opposed the protests at the expense of their protesting colleagues, in addition to interventions by security agencies to prevent labor protests, and using force to disperse several of them.

These factors are coupled with the fact that the developing labor 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 organize 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 labor protests carried out over the past few years, prompting frustration on the part of several labor protest movements and their union activists regarding the usefulness of such protests. The current situation will necessarily lead to deepening social imbalances, and postponing their explosion.

It is worth mentioning that an estimated 180,000 workers participated in labor protests in 2015. They took part in 95% of the protests, a total of 225 actual labor protests out of an overall total of 236.

Types of Labor Protests

Four types of labor protests were carried out in Jordan in 2015: strikes, sit-ins, threats to carry out such measures and self-harm. Sit-ins were the main form of protest, constituting 54.2% of all protests, totaling 128 sit-ins. The second most common form of protest was strikes, with a total of 63 labor strikes, constituting 26.7% of the total number of protests. There were 23 threats of protest action, constituting 9.7% of all protests. There were 22 threats of self-harm or suicide, constituting 9.3%. Some protests were held to demand job opportunities, or to demand financial rights following termination of employment, or to complain about termination of employment. In this regard, three people had committed suicide during 2015; one was a young man in his thirties in the governorate of Tafileh, who burned himself to protest the lack of a job opportunity for himself. A female domestic help worker also committed suicide in Dahyyet El-Nakhil neighborhood in Amman, by hanging herself by a rope in a room at the house where she was working. The

third case was a Kenyan working woman who committed suicide in the Amman neighborhood of University of Jordan, by throwing herself from the second floor of a building.

There were also several suicide attempts or threats to commit suicide that did not lead to death. These include the case of self-immolation of one person demanding a job opportunity in the capital Amman, and a young man in his twenties tried to commit suicide for the same reason, threatening to jump from a communications tower in the town of Ghor al-Safi, in Southern Ghor (Karak governorate); another person threatened to commit suicide in Jabal al-Qala'a in Amman for the same reasons.

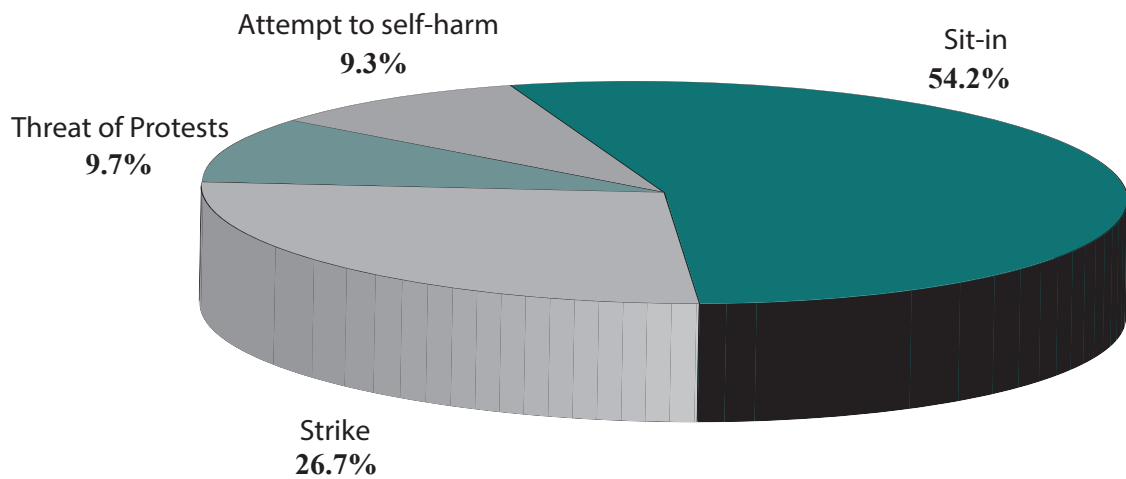
Also, two young men threatened to commit suicide by jumping from the top of the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority building in Aqaba; another person threatened to commit suicide by jumping from a communications tower in the town of Melih, in Dhiban District in Madaba. Another male in Karak threatened to set himself ablaze, along with his infant daughter (one and a half years old), because he had been fired from his job and needed to provide for his family; a Bengali domestic worker tried to commit suicide from atop an electric

pole in Al-'akomyieh neighborhood in Khraibet al-Souq in Amman. Also, a woman in her fifties also tried to commit suicide in Amman after being fired from

her job, in addition to several other suicide attempts and self-harm work-related cases that took place during 2015.

Table 2. Distribution of labor protests by type

Type of protest	Number of protests	Percentage %
Sit-in	128	54.2%
Strike	63	26.7%
Threat of protests	23	9.7%
Attempt to self-harm	22	9.3%
Total	236	100%



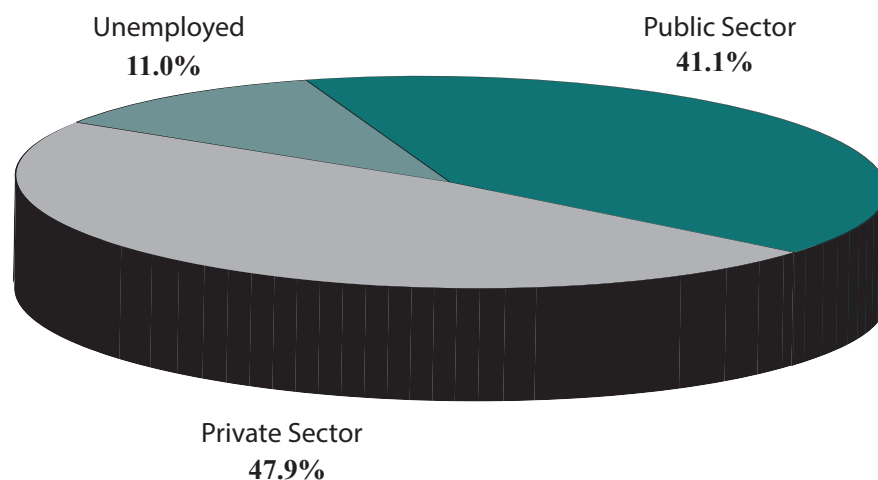
Between the Public and Private Sectors

The highest number of labor protests in 2015 was recorded in the private sector, comprising 47.9% of overall protests and coming to 113 protests. The situation during the previous three years was quite different, where labor protests in the public sector made up 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 97 protests in the public sector, constituting 41.1% of overall protests in 2015. There were 26 protests by unemployed persons demanding job opportunities and constituting 11% of all protests.

Table 3. Labor protests by employment sector

Employment sector	Number of protests	Percentage %
Public Sector	97	41.1%
Private Sector	113	47.9%
Unemployed	26	11.0%
Total	236	100.0%



Labor Protests: Causes and Objectives

Labor protests were carried out for several reasons, including demanding 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. During 2015, protests related to the implementation of new work regulations and guidelines that harmed workers were at the forefront of labor protests, reaching 78 protests, constituting 33.1% of all protests.

Protests aimed at increasing wages or additional allowances, or demanding extra salaries – such as thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth month salaries, reached 52 protests, constituting 22% of the total protests in 2015.

It should be noted that protests demanding increases and improvements of wages occurred amidst an increase in poverty rates; where the absolute per capita poverty line (nutritional and non-nutritional) in 2012 was 860 dinars per year. For the standard average household comprising 5.3 persons, the absolute poverty line is 380 dinars per month; adding to that a 10% inflation rate

during the years 2012-2015, this brings the monthly poverty line for a standard family to 417 dinars per month. Official figures indicate that 62% of workers and social security subscribers earn monthly salaries of 400 dinars or less. Additionally, the minimum wage in Jordan remains at very low levels, i.e. 190 JOD; in practice, less than half of the absolute poverty line.

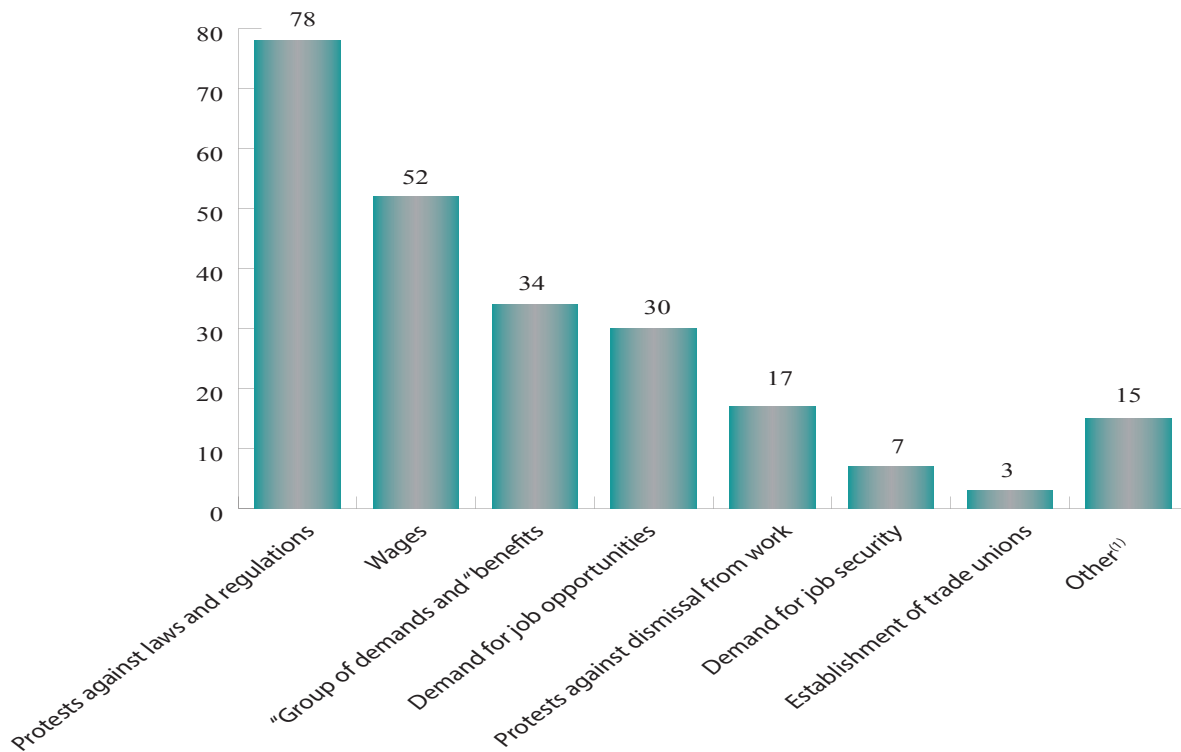
34 protests were carried out to demand combined groups of benefits, representing 14.4% of the total number of protests. The number of protests carried out by unemployed persons demanding employment opportunities were 30, representing 12.7% of the total number of protests.

There were 17 protests against dismissal from work, comprising 7.2% of the total protests. Other protests reflect absence of job stability and security for workers at their places of work, which entails an absence of the principles of just and fair work conditions; this resulted in 7 protests demanding confirmation of fixed employment, comprising the 3% of the total. There were three protests demanding the establishment of new trade unions, comprising 1.3% of the total. Furthermore, there were 15 labor protests, comprising 6.4% of the total demanding health and safety measures

at work places, to protest the arrest of health insurance and time off.
a number of workers, and to demand

Table 4. Labor protests according to cause

Causes of Protests	Number of protests	Percentage %
Protests against laws and regulations	78	33.1%
Wages	52	22.0%
Group of demands and “benefits”	34	14.4%
Demand for job opportunities	30	12.7%
Protests against dismissal from work	17	7.2%
Demand for job security	7	3.0%
Establishment of trade unions	3	1.3%
Other ⁽¹⁾	15	6.4%
Total	236	100.0%



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

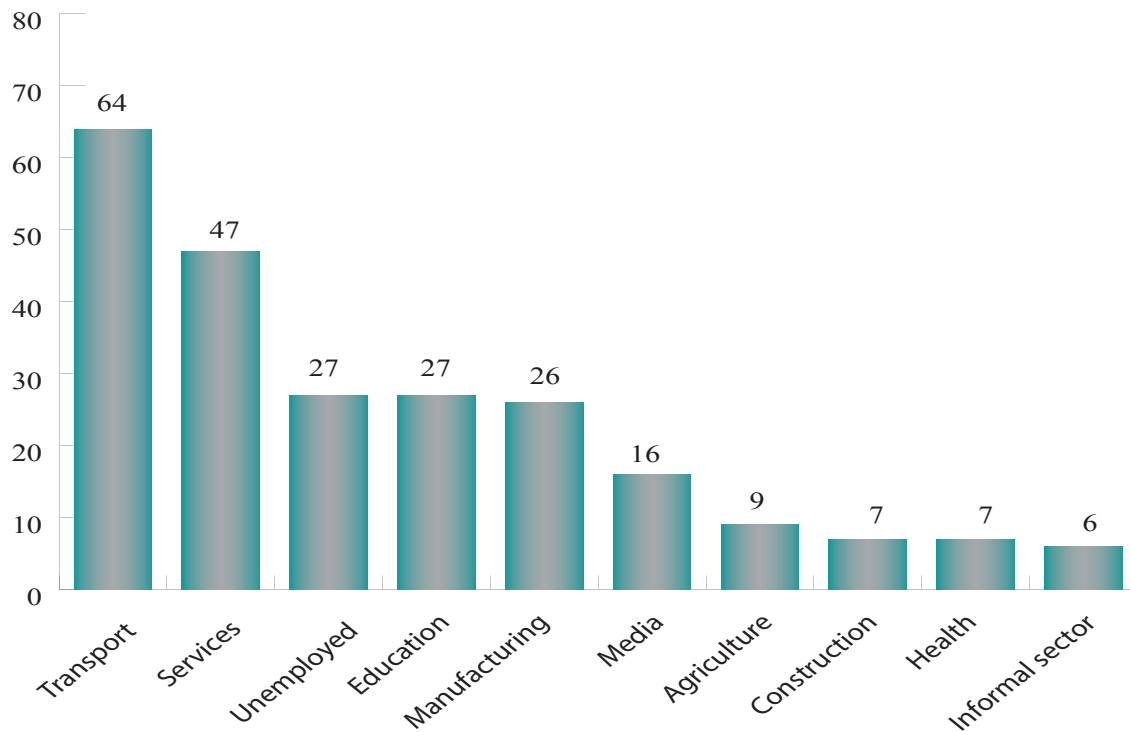
Distribution by Economic Sector

Labor protests in 2015 occurred across several economic sectors at varying degrees, with protests in the transport sector comprising the highest proportion of over one quarter. There were 64 protests in the transport sector, constituting 27.1% of the total; 47 protests have been carried out in the services sector, comprising 19.9% of the total. Unemployed persons

carried out 27 protests, constituting 11.4% of the total. Workers in the education sector carried out 27 labor protests, comprising 11.4% of the total. In the manufacturing sector, 26 protests been carried out, that is 11% of the total number of protests; followed by the media sector with 16 protests, constituting 6.8% of the protests. The table below shows protests distributed by economic sector.

Table 5. Labor protests by economic sector

Sector	Number of protests	Percentage %
Transport	64	27.1%
Services	47	19.9%
Unemployed	27	11.4%
Education	27	11.4%
Manufacturing	26	11.0%
Media	16	6.8%
Agriculture	9	3.8%
Construction	7	3.0%
Health	7	3.0%
Informal sector	6	2.5%
Total	236	100.0%



The Role of Trade Unions in Labor Protests

For the sixth consecutive year, labor protests were carried out by labor groups that are not organized within any trade union framework. 147 protests were carried out by such groups, constituting 62.3% of the total number of protests. Meanwhile, Trade and labor unions (official and independent ones) and their committees carried out 41 protests in 2015, a percentage of 17.4 of the total protests. The unemployed carried out 30 protests, comprising 12.7% of overall protests. Professional associations carried out 18 protests, comprising 7.6% of the total. In addition to the factors already

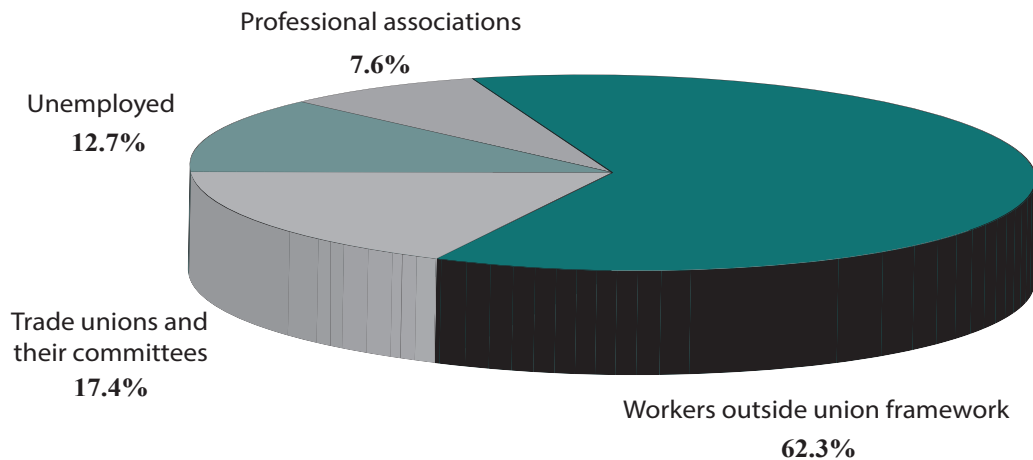
mentioned, this helps to explain why the majority of labor protests did not achieve their goals. Workers who are not allowed to organize themselves into unions usually lack the ability to engage in successful collective bargaining and to organize their protests in a manner that enables them to achieve their purposes. Perhaps depriving most workers in Jordan in the public and private sectors from organizing themselves into unions explains the high number of labor protests in general, and their persistent occurrence at high levels since 2010, 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 goals are more efficient. This, on the one hand,

leads to a decline in the number of labor protests, because they have other means of practicing collective bargaining; and on the other hand, it results in successful achievement of their demands.

Table 6. Breakdown of Labor protests by group

Group of protest	Number of protests	Percentage %
Workers outside union framework	147	62.3%
Trade unions and their committees	41	17.4%
Unemployed	30	12.7%
Professional associations	18	7.6%
Total	236	100.0%



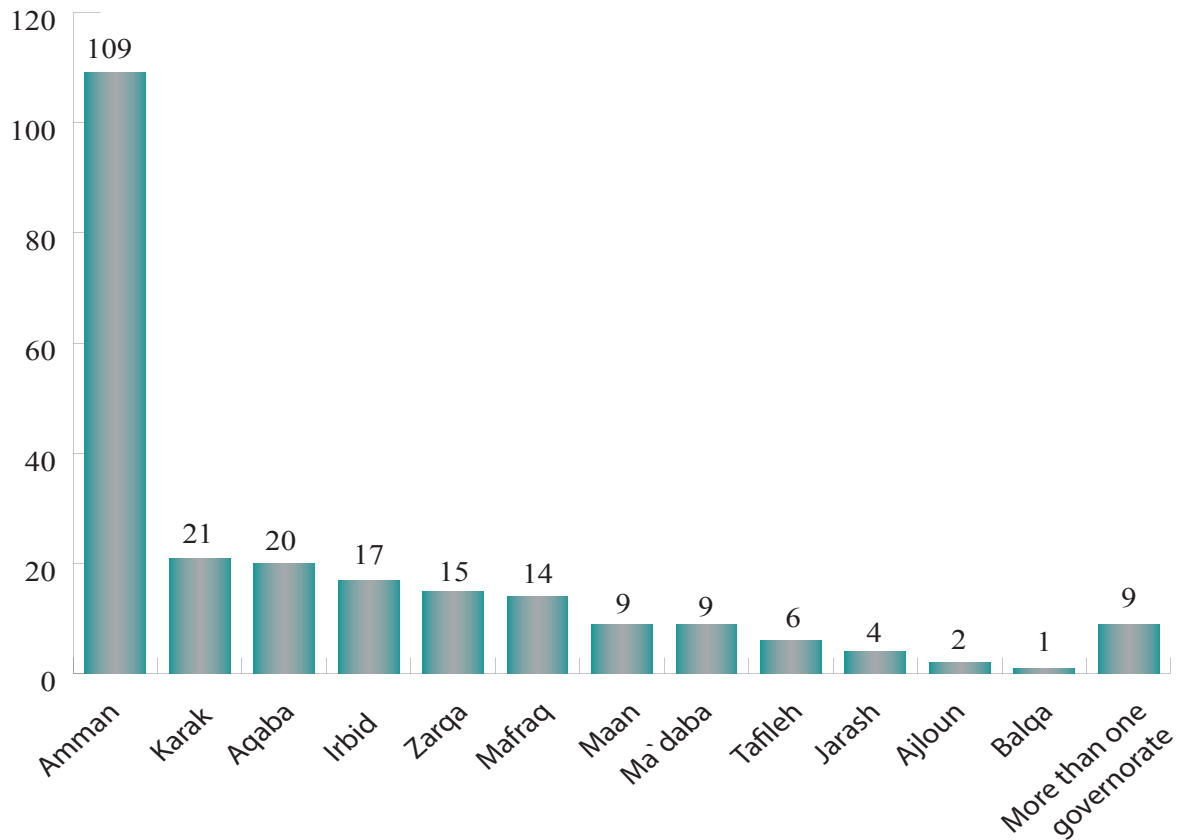
Geographical Distribution of Labor Protests

The highest proportion of protests, i.e. 109 and comprising 46.2% of the total, occurred in the capital, Amman, because most business sectors and their institutions are based there, and hence, most workers work in Amman. Furthermore, the largest proportion of the population lives in the city; this is why most of the protests were concentrated in Amman. Karak came second, with 21 protests, comprising

8.9% of the total, followed by Aqaba with 20 protests, constituting 8.5% of the total protests. The economic importance of Aqaba is growing year after year in Jordan; protests there were concentrated in the ports sector, be it the official port, the containers port or other institutions. Labor protests in Irbid reached 17, with a percentage of 7.2% of the total protests. The table below shows the distribution of protests by governorate.

Table 7. Labor protests by governorate

Governorate	Number of protests	Percentage %
Amman	109	46.2%
Karak	21	8.9%
Aqaba	20	8.5%
Irbid	17	7.2%
Zarqa	15	6.4%
Mafraq	14	5.9%
Maan	9	3.8%
Tafileh	6	2.5%
Jarash	4	1.7%
Ajloun	2	0.8%
Balqa	1	0.4%
More than one governorate	9	3.8%
Total	236	100.0%



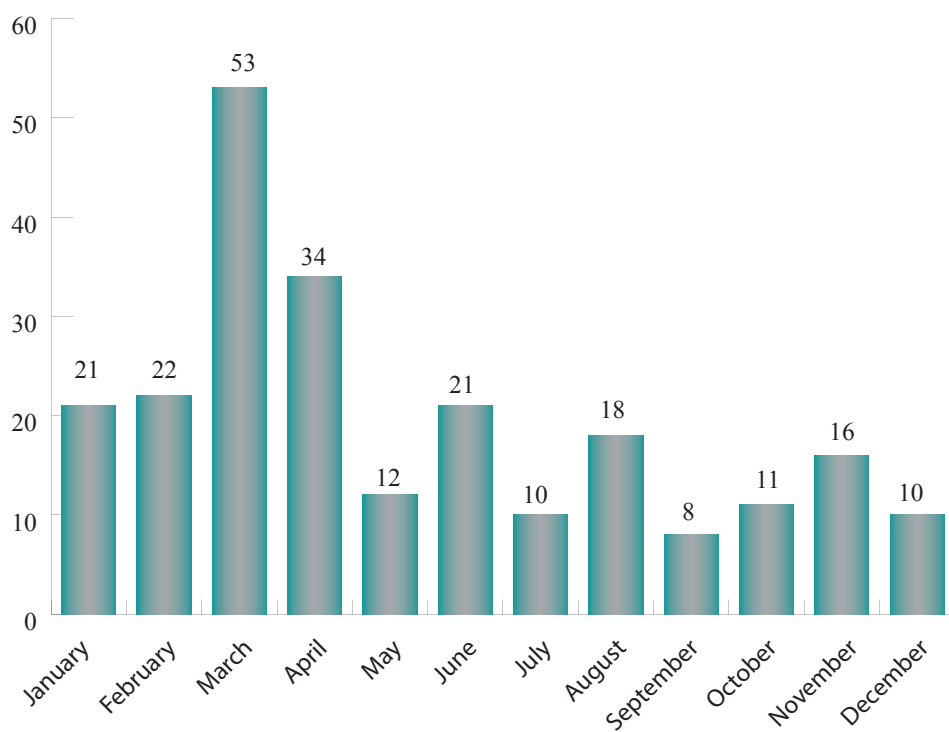
Temporal Distribution of Labor Protests

Labor protests were concentrated in the first months of 2015, with protests occurring in the first quarter of that year comprising 40.5% of the total. March saw the highest number of protests, which came to 53, comprising 22.5% of the total, followed by April, which saw 34 protests comprising 14.4% of the total, followed by February, when 22 protests occurred comprising 9.3% of the total. This is mainly because workers' expectations of obtaining additional

benefits, particularly when it comes to wages and wage increases, are high in the early 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 beginning 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. The table below shows protests distributed by month.

Table 8. Labor protests by month

Governorate	Number of protests	Percentage %
January	21	8.9%
February	22	9.3%
March	53	22.5%
April	34	14.4%
May	12	5.1%
June	21	8.9%
July	10	4.2%
August	18	7.6%
September	8	3.4%
October	11	4.7%
November	16	6.8%
December	10	4.2%
Total	236	100.0%



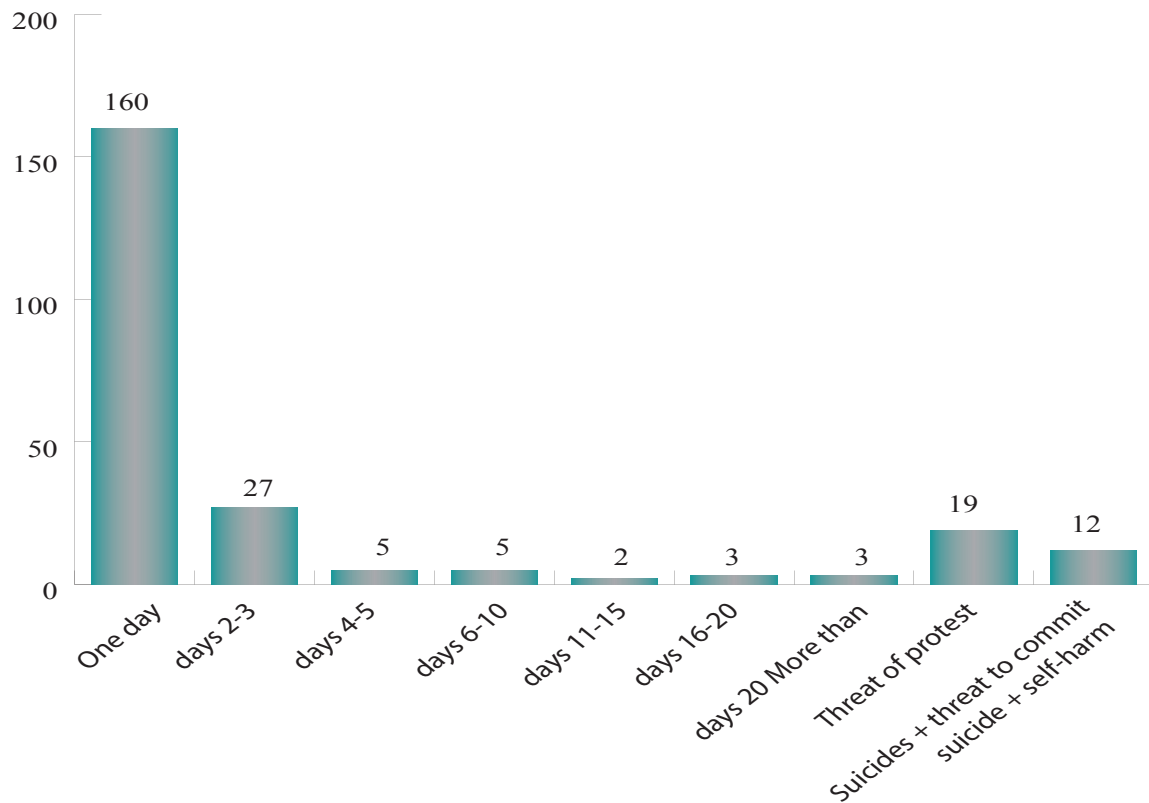
Durations of Labor Protests

The analysis of the durations of labor protests that occurred in Jordan in 2015 showed 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 27 protests comprising 11.4% of protests in that category. The remaining protests lasted for various periods of time.

Table 9. Labor protests by duration

Governorate	Number of protests	Percentage %
One day	160	67.8%
2- 3 days	27	11.4%
4- 5 days	5	2.1%
6- 10 days	5	2.1%
11- 15 days	2	0.8%
16- 20 days	3	1.3%
More than 20 days	3	1.3%
Threat of protest	19	8.1%
Suicides + threat to commit suicide + self-harm	12	5.1%
Total	236	100.0%



The Use of Force during Labor Protests

The protest scene in 2015 witnessed a change of tactics by the government and its various apparatuses in dealing with labor protests. The government position became more biased in favor 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, which carried out almost one-third of protests. In addition, the government prompted some security apparatuses to intervene and to

forcibly end some labor protests, such as a workers' strike in Al-Safi garment factory in Madaba, and the arrest of a number of that strike organizers who were trade union members. Similarly, during a strike at the container port in Aqaba, 20 trade union activists, including members of the administrative board of the General Union of Port and Clearance Workers, were arrested and a number of them were detained for nine days. Furthermore, a strike by workers at Amman's slaughterhouses was put to an end by force, and other similar resolutions have been adopted against

protests carried out by groups of young people in the Khalidiya district (Northern Badia), where protesters demanded job opportunities. The same goes for the forceful disperse of sit-ins carried out by stall owners (in the informal sector)

in Wehdat and Baqaa camps. This is in addition to dozens of union activists who have been threatened of being fired by employers or government departments or the government itself because of their participation in various labor protests.

Conclusion & Recommendations

It is clear from the report that there was a tangible drop in the number of labor protests carried out in 2015 compared to the previous four years. The number of workers participating in such protests was estimated at 180 thousand, including both males and females. Most protests took the shape of sit-ins, and the number of labor protests in the private sector was greater than in the public sector. Around one-third of protests focused on protesting work-related regulations and guidelines, and 20% of labor protests occurred in the services sector. The majority of protests were carried out by labor groups that were deprived of the right to organize themselves into unions. Just half of the protests were carried out in the capital, Amman, while the lowest number of protests occurred in Balqa governorate. More than 40% 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 labor principles and standards must be applied to all waged earners 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 redefined in terms of average inflation rates;
4. There is an urgent need to cap maximum wages, because the wages of two-thirds of workers in Jordan are below 400 dinars per month, while many senior employees working in the same public sector and private sector institutions earn very high salaries. This exacerbates social discrepancies;
5. Article 31 of the Jordanian Labour Law, which relates to the restructuring of institutions and allows collective dismissals from work, must be amended;
6. 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 organize must be speedily ratified. The constraints placed on workers in Jordan that prevent them from forming labor unions have not prevented them from forming such unions, and it is necessary to amend the law to recognize this reality;
7. 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 labor protests in the public sector to be treated as absences from work that incur penalties;
 8. Articles of the Labour Law relating to the concept of a labor dispute and the mechanisms for settling labor disputes must be amended. They have proved to be a resounding failure in finding just settlements of worsening labor disputes, and it is necessary to employ new mechanisms and tactics to settle labor disputes in a manner that is consistent with ILO Convention 98 relating to the right to organize and to engage in collective bargaining;
 9. Inspections of the labor 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.