

Report

Labor Protests in Jordan 2018

Labor Watch Reports

Prepared by:
Jordan Labor Watch
Phenix Center for Economic and Informatics Studies

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The Phenix Center for Economic & Informatics Studies is a non-governmental organization dedicated to independent policy research and measuring public opinions on impactful current and emerging issues in areas of economics, society, and its legislative environment in Jordan. The Center was founded in Amman, Jordan in 2003 under the registration number 142203. It works to promote a sustainable developmental paradigm in Jordan, rooted in human rights and the principles of democratic governance by focusing on reforming the labor policies, lifting of restrictions on freedom of association, and strengthening of social protection policies. The Center specializes in promoting inclusivity in development processes. It compiles databases of relevant actors and stakeholders, develops research, studies, papers and reports, conducts conferences and advocacy campaigns, and empowers several actors to take part in steering development through capacity building.

Is a German non-profit political foundation based on the principles of social democracy. FES was founded in 1925, it promotes international cooperation, education and research in Germany and abroad. The foundation opened its office in Amman in 1986 to support and enhance efforts of civil society organizations 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.

Jordan Labor Watch contributes to improving work conditions for all workers in Jordan in accordance with international labor standards. This is done through developing studies and reports covering various aspects of labor issues related to workers, uncovering violations and abuses to which workers are exposed in the work place. The program provides a comprehensive database covering various indicators related to the labor market, trade unions, labor organizations, laws and regulations, as well as governing performance. Furthermore, the program strives to present alternative policies that tackle challenges facing the Arabian and Jordanian labor market as well as conducting training programs that support upgrading skills and capabilities of advocates in the labor movement.

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Introduction

As part of the Jordan Labor Watch program, launched in the second half of the year, the Phenix Center for Economics and Informatics Studies has been monitoring political and practical developments in Jordan's labor market, as well as labor movements and transformations on the ground. The Jordanian Labor Watch team has prepared this annual report on labor protests in the country.

This report's importance stems from the Jordan Labor Watch team's belief that labor protests are among the most important indicators of economic and social crises, especially within the labor market itself. As such, they accurately reflect prevailing labor relations, which are characterized by an imbalance among various factors such as workers, employers, and the government.

This report aims to offer an analytical, social and economic reading of the labor protests which occurred in Jordan throughout 2018. The Jordan Labor Watch team monitored and documented all labor protests that occurred in Jordan in this year, both through direct contact with those who organized these protests and through an analysis of press reports in a variety of Jordanian media. The protests monitored in this report included all protest actions, regardless of their form or size, and included threats of strikes or sit-ins.

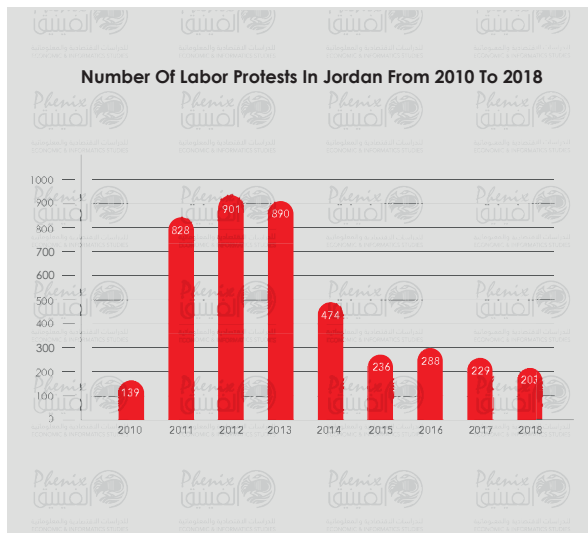
Social protest, according to social science literature, is a collective effort that aims to change the character of settled social relations within a specific society. Social movements are collective efforts seeking to establish a new mode of life. They are based on a feeling of dissatisfaction with the prevailing model and a desire to establish a new model that includes the basic components for survival and success—namely, continuity, organization, awareness and change. The conditions that cause people to resort to protest vary, but they typically include the failure or collapse of collective bargaining as a viable means of achieving workers' demands, or from a lack of available channels for negotiation with management and/or employers.

Numerical Indicators

Despite the notable decline in the number of labor protests in 2018 compared to previous years, the phenomenon of labor protests as a manifestation of social protest is still clearly apparent. Labor protests in 2018 declined by 11 percent from 2017, with 203 protests last year, compared with 229 in 2017.

The continuing decline of labor protests over the years 2014-2018 can be attributed to a number of factors, most importantly the fact that the government and most employers were not serious in meeting worker demands. Just 25 labor protest demands were fully implemented and 13 were partially implemented out of all the protests carried out in 2018. The remaining 165 labor protests were suspended based on promises that the demands would be met. In addition, there was often direct and indirect pressure from senior management within business establishments or from the government and its various institutions.

In addition, most wage workers in Jordan are still deprived of the right to form unions to defend their interests. This issue has two main causes. The first is labor legislation, which deprives broad segments of workers from the right to organize a union. Jordan's regulations for professional categorization specify which professions are allowed to form unions, sets the number of trade unions at 17 and has not allowed any new labor unions to be established for more than four decades. The other cause is that existing Jordanian labor unions are already weak, isolated from their labor base, and lack interest in the real problems faced by workers in Jordan.



These labor protests serve as an expression of the depth of the economic and social crisis faced by Jordan, where a wave of price hikes and taxes have been implemented in a climate of already low wages. Due to a variety of factors, a large number of workers have been pushed to protest their difficult working conditions. Working conditions have declined for most workers, including a significant reduction in wage rates. Broad sectors of workers do not enjoy the basic labor rights stipulated by Jordanian labor law. These include daily working hours, annual, official and sick leave; occupational health and safety measures; a lack of social insurance benefits from the Social Security Corporation; a lack of health insurance, and other decent working conditions. Table 1 shows the number of labor protests carried out in Jordan over the last nine years.

Sectoral distribution of protests

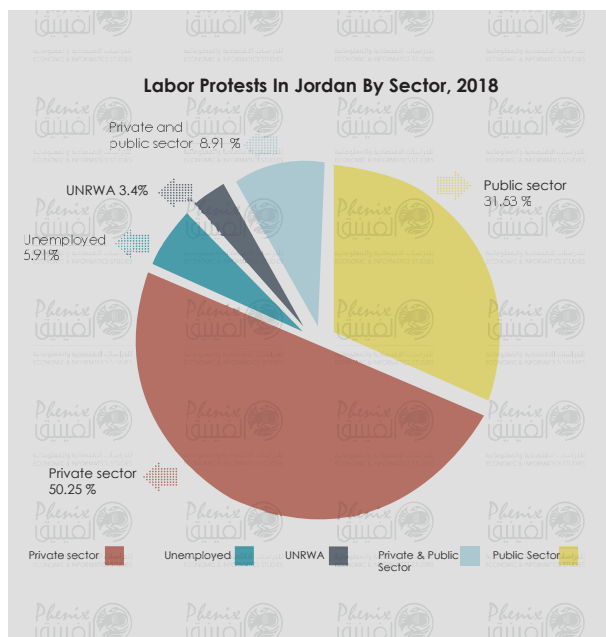
In terms of the sectoral distribution of the protests over 2018, workers in the private sector carried out a total of 102 labor protests, amounting to 50.2 percent of total protests. Workers in the public sector carried out 64 labor protests, amounting to 31.5 percent of total protests. There were also 18 protests carried out jointly between the private and public sectors, accounting for 8.9 percent. Unemployed persons carried out 12 protests, amounting to 5.9 percent of total labor protests. Workers in the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) carried out seven labor protests, comprising 3.4 percent of the total.

Notably, the number of labor protests in the public sector over the last few years has continued to decline. In 2011, they amounted to 58.5 percent, but in 2018 accounted for just 31.5 percent. This can be explained by a number of factors. These include the decline of

protest momentum generally; structural changes to salaries and public sector employees, which led to an increase in the wages of large segments of workers; as well as the punishments imposed on trade union activists in the public sector and increasing pressure on them. This has been accompanied by an increase in the rate of private sector labor protests, which can be explained by the continuing decline in various working conditions, especially the continuing stagnation of wages (which will be discussed further in another part of this report). Unemployed persons continued to increase the number of protests they carried out, which can be attributed in large part to increasing unemployment rates in recent years, which was 18.7 percent in the fourth quarter of 2018—a rate unprecedented for nearly 20 years. Finally, over 2018, the number of labor protests at UNRWA increased, with seven protests carried out, accounting for 3.4 percent of total protests.

Table 2: Proportional Distribution Of Labor Protests By Labor Sector

Labor sector	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Public sector	58.5 %	49.8 %	54.2 %	37.6 %	41.1 %	23 %	34.5 %	31.5 %
Private sector	37.3 %	42.7 %	40.3 %	45.5 %	47.9 %	64.0 %	56.3 %	50.2 %
Unemployed	4.2 %	7.5 %	5.5 %	16.9 %	11 %	13 %	9.2 %	5.9 %
UNRWA	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3.4 %
Private and public sector	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	8.9 %



Types of protests

For the purposes of this report, the types of labor protests carried out were divided into strikes, sit-ins, threats of these measures, and threats of self-harm (suicide). In 2018, the number of labor sit-ins was 127, accounting for 62.6 percent of the total. There were 46 labor strikes, accounting for 22.7 percent. There were

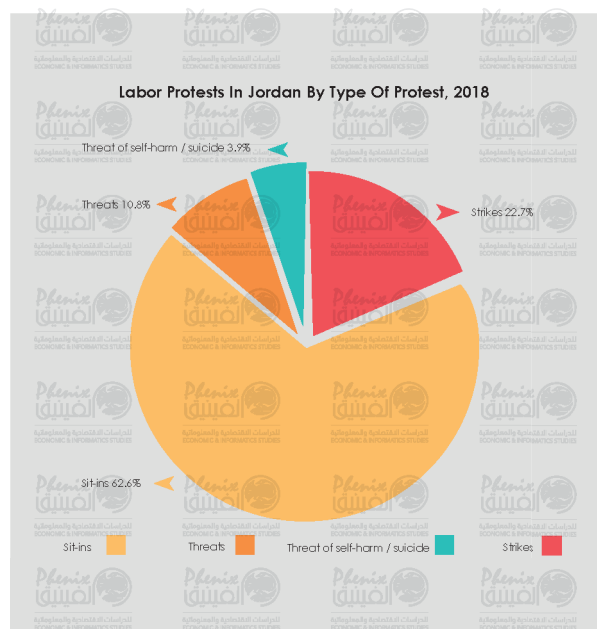
22 threats of these measures, amounting to 10.8 percent, while the threats of suicide amounted to eight protests, a rate of 3.9 percent.

With regard to the suicide cases, the Jordan Labor Watch team observed eight cases that were reported to be directly related to labor over the first nine months of 2018. However, Jordan recorded 91 cases of suicide. According to information provided to the Jordan Labor Watch team, half of suicide attempts and suicides were carried out by domestic workers. A worker also died in the Environment Department in the greater Irbid municipality when he set himself on fire during his shift. There were also three cases of suicides among people seeking work.

According to criminal information statistics in the General Security Directorate, suicide cases are concentrated among the ages of 18 to 27, and a significant number are for economic reasons indirectly connected to work. Specialists attribute suicide for economic reasons to increasing life pressures, and traits such as the inability to deal positively with pressure and to manage and resolve problems, as well as the concerned people being forced and pressured to meet certain demands. There are those who consider suicide attempts to be a cry for help.

Table 3: Proportional Distribution Of Labor Protests By Type

Type of protest	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Strikes	35%	45%	53.9%	26.2%	26.7%	25%	19.2%	22.7%
Sit-ins	52.8%	37%	31.7%	56.5%	54.2%	56%	66.4%	62.6%
Threats of strikes	12%	16%	11.9%	13.7%	9.7%	14%	9.2%	10.8%
Threats of self-harm (suicide)	—	2%	25%	3.6%	9.3%	5%	5.2%	3.9%



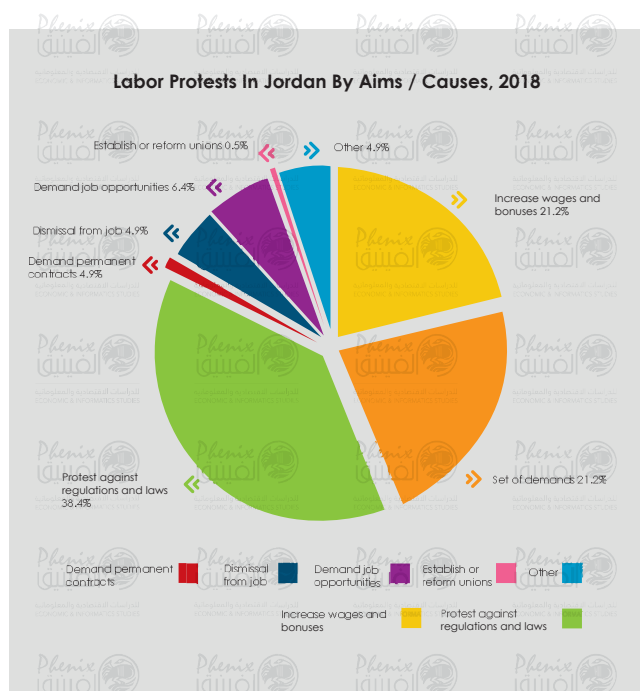
Reasons for the protests

The reasons for which the labor protests have been carried out have varied. They

have included demands to increase wages and bonuses, better benefits and incentives for employees, objecting to dismissal from work, demanding permanent contracts, as well as various other factors. The numbers indicate that wage workers' priorities in Jordan are concentrated on protesting the implementation of new instructions and regulations which have harmed workers—this was in first place, with 78 protests, or 38.4 percent of total protests. This was followed by protests with multiple aims, which included 46 protests, comprising 22.7 percent of the total protests. Demands for increased wages and bonuses were in third place with 43 protests, or 21.2 percent of the total. Demands to provide work opportunities accounted for 13 protests, comprising 6.4 percent of all protests. There were ten protests against dismissal from work, accounting for 4.9 percent of protests. Two protests were carried out to demand permanent contracts. Table 4 shows these indicators.

Table 4: Proportional Distribution Of Labor Protests By Reason

Protest reason	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Increase wages and benefits	46%	42.7%	49.7%	32.2%	22%	11%	12.7%	21.2%
A set of "benefits" demands	30%	16.8%	9.3%	11.2%	14.4%	30%	14%	22.7%
Protest against regulations and laws	11%	11.1%	21.5%	25.2%	33.1%	25%	53.2%	38.4%
Demanding permanent contracts	10%	7.2%	3%	2.5%	3%	1%	1.7%	1%
Protest against dismissal	6%	5.8%	9.8%	5.7%	7.2%	10%	9.2%	4.9%
Demanding jobs be provided	5%	7.4%	5.5%	17%	12.7%	13%	9.2%	6.4%
Establishing or reforming union	5%	1.1%	0.9%	1.5%	1.3%	—	—	0.5%
Other	3%	7.9%	—	4.4%	6.4%	10%	—	4.9%



What is notable here is that labor protests were primarily carried out by workers that did not have a union framework organizing them, or by workers who went outside their union frameworks and replaced these with self-organized bodies to defend their interests and demands. This is an indication of the weakness or the absence of channels for dialogue and negotiation between various classes of workers with management and with employers, which has fueled an increase in protests. This challenges us to continue thinking about the impact that the lack of active labor organizations has had on the worsening working conditions in Jordan. The labor sectors which enjoy decent working conditions in Jordan are the sectors in which workers enjoy their rights to union organization.

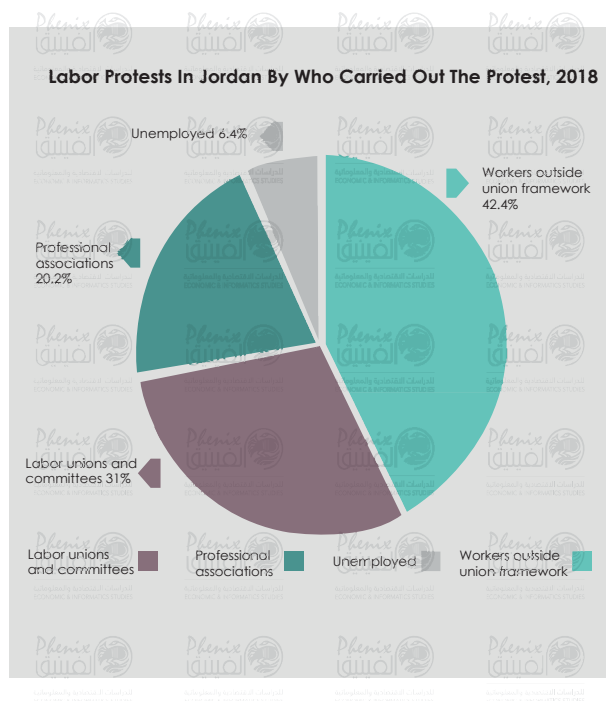
It is worth mentioning in this respect that the great majority of wage workers do not enjoy the right to union organization. The total number of workers who have union organizations does not exceed five percent, and the rest do not have the right to organize themselves into unions. This includes workers in the public sector, as well as most private sector workers, who are deprived by law of the right to organize themselves into unions. This comes in addition to the lack of democratic practices among the great majority of the recognized labor unions, which deprive hundreds of thousands of workers of the ability to participate.

Who is carrying out labor protests

For the eighth year running, most labor protests were carried out by workers who were not organized by a union framework. There were 86 protests carried out by workers outside a union framework, for a share of 42.4 percent of total protests. Labor unions and their committees (official, independent) carried out 63 protests, at a rate of 31 percent of the total. Professional associations carried out 41 protests, at a rate of 20.2 percent of the total protests. Unemployed people carried out 6.4 percent of the protests—a total of 13 protests. Table 5 displays these figures.

Table 5: Proportional Distribution Of Protests By Body Carrying Out Protest

Labor category carrying out protest	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Workers outside framework of any union organization	98%	85.2%	89%	62.4%	62.3%	60%	72.5%	42.4%
Labor unions and their committees	2%	7.3%	5.5%	14.8%	17.4%	22%	10.5%	31%
Professional associations	—	—	—	5.9%	7.6%	5%	6.5%	20.2%
Unemployed	—	7.4%	5.5%	16.9%	12.7%	13%	9.2%	6.4%



Distribution of labor protests by economic sector

Labor protests in 2018 were distributed across a number of economic sectors. Labor protests in the transport sector accounted for 23.6 percent of the protests, with a total of 48 protests, putting this sector in first place. This was followed by the education sector, which comprised 16.3 percent of the total protests, with a total of 33 protests. The service sector and unemployed persons accounted for 7.9 percent, with 16 protests each. The municipalities sector came in fifth place, comprising 6.9 percent of the total protests, with 14 labor protests. This was followed by the health sector with 5.9 percent of total protests, comprising 12 protests. The agricultural sector accounted for 5.4 percent of the total protests with 11 protests, followed by both the textile and industrial sectors, with five percent of the total protests, or 10 protests each. In tenth place was the commercial sector, accounting for 4.4 percent with nine protests, followed by the tourism sector, accounting for three percent with six protests. The

construction, media, judicial, and electricity sectors were at the bottom of the list of sectors carrying out labor protests. Table 6 shows these figures.

Table 6: Labor Protest Distribution By Economic Sector

Labor sector	Number of protests	Percentage
Transport sector	48	23.6%
Education sector	33	16.3%
Service sector	16	7.9%
Unemployed	16	7.9%
Municipalities sector	14	6.9%
Health sector	12	5.9%
Agricultural sector	11	5.4%
Textile sector	10	4.9%
Industrial sector	10	4.9%
Trade sector	9	4.4%
Tourism sector	6	3%
Construction sector	4	2%
Media sector	3	1.5%
Judicial sector	3	1.5%
Electricity sector	2	1%
Several sectors (combined)	6	3%
Total	203	100%

Geographic distribution of the protests

The capital Amman was in first place in terms of the number of labor protests in 2018, with 94 protests, accounting for 46.7 percent of the total. This was followed by the Irbid governorate in second place, with 27 protests, accounting for 13.3 percent. Protests carried out in multiple governorates were in third place, with 20 protests, accounting for 9.9 percent. Mafrqa governorate was fourth, with 12 protests, or 5.9 percent of the total, followed by Aqaba with 11 protests, or 5.4 percent. These distributions did not vary greatly from labor protest distributions in 2017, as the labor sector is concentrated in the capital Amman. Table 7 shows these figures.

Table 7: Protest Distribution By Governorate

Governorate	Number of protests	Percentage
Amman	94	23.6%
Irbid	27	16.3%
Multiple governorates	20	7.9%
Mafrqa	12	7.9%
Aqaba	11	6.9%
Zarqa	8	5.9%
Ma'an	6	5.4%
Al-Karak	6	4.9%
Madaba	6	4.9%
Tafilah	5	4.4%
Balqa	3	3%
Ajloun	3	2%
Jerash	2	1.5%
Total	203	100%

Temporal distribution of the labor protests

With regard to the distribution of the labor protests by month, April was in first, with 25 labor protests, for a share of 12.3 percent of the total. This was followed by January, with 24 protests, or 11.8 percent of the total. The months of August and October were in third place with 19 protests, accounting for 9.4 percent each. June had the fewest, with 3.9 percent of the total protests, which is due to the dip during the month of Ramadan, which occurred during this month. Table 8 shows these figures.

Table 8: Labor Protest Distribution By Month

Month	Number of protests	Percentage
January	24	11.8%
February	17	8.4%
March	17	8.4%
April	25	12.3%
May	18	8.9%
June	8	3.9%
July	10	4.9%
August	19	9.4%
September	16	7.9%
October	19	9.4%
November	17	8.4%
December	13	6.4%
Total	203	100%

Achievement of labor protest demands

The numbers indicate that a majority of the labor protests did not have their demands met. Company management and government departments did not respond to 81.3 percent of the total labor protests, accounting for 165 protests. There were 25 protests whose demands were met in full, accounting for 12.3 percent, while 13 protests had their demands partly met, accounting for 6.4 percent of the total. Table 9 shows these figures.

The main reason that so many protester demands are not met can be attributed to the position taken by the government and the private sector to not respond to labor protesters in order to prevent them from expanding. It can also be attributed to the lack of sufficient experience among most labor protesters in the skills for carrying out labor protests and the mechanisms and tools of collective bargaining, due to weak and ineffective labor unions.

Table 9: Labor Protest Distribution By Achievement Of Demands

Were the demands met?	Number of protests	Percentage
Demands met	25	12.3%
Demands partially met	13	6.4%
Demands not met	165	81.3%
Total	203	100%

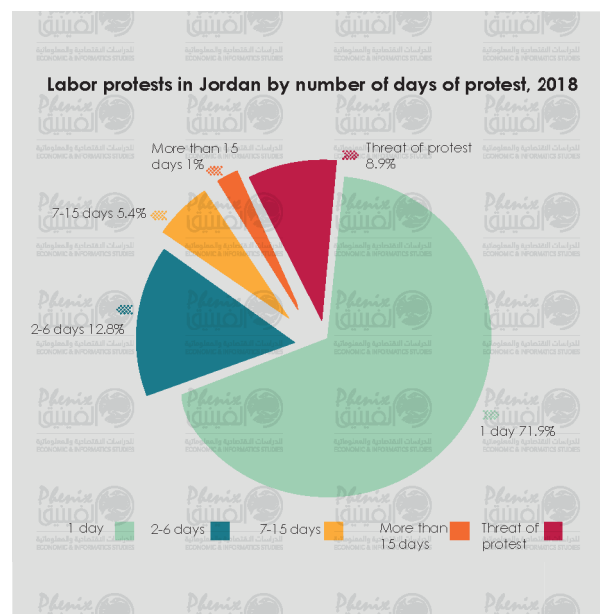
Number of days of labor protests

The length of the labor protests varied according to those involved, their demands, and how the protest was dealt with. The protests ranged between one and 31 days. Most one-day protests were halted for a variety of reasons, including pressure applied by the government and employers against protesting workers, as well as to give time to employers and government departments to consider the protesting workers' demands.

Furthermore, most of the labor protests were staged without prior planning and occurred suddenly to protest specific measures. Labor protests that lasted for one day accounted for 71.9 percent of the total protests, with a total of 146 protests. These were followed by 12.8 percent of protests, which lasted between two and six days, and then protests that lasted seven to 15 days, which accounted for 5.4 percent with 11 protests. Protests lasting for more than 15 days accounted for one percent of the total protests. Table 10 shows these figures.

Table 10: Labor Protest Distribution By Number Of Days

Number of days of protest	Number of protests	Percentage
One day	146	71.9%
2-6 days	26	12.8%
7-15 days	11	5.4%
More than 15 days	1	1%
Threats of protest	19	9.4%
Total	193	100%



Number of participants in labor protests

The number of participants in labor protests varied in accordance with the type of protest and those involved. Labor protests with 1-100 participants were in first place, with 60.1 percent of the total protests, comprising 122 protests. Protests in which between 101-500 protesters participated accounted for 29.6 percent of the total protests, with 60 protests. The protests in which 501-1,000 protesters participated accounted for 4.9 percent, with 10 protests. Protests in which more than 1,000 participated accounted for 5.4 percent of protests, with 11 protests.

Table 11: Labor Protest Distribution By Number Of Participants

Number of participants in protest	Number of protests	Percentage
1-100	122	60.1%
101-500	60	29.6%
501-1000	10	4.9%
More than 1000	11	5.4%
Total	203	100%

Conclusion

The report shows that although labor protests have continued to decline in the years since 2011 to 2013, there are still a large number of them. This reflects fundamental imbalances in Jordanian labor relations, and therefore tensions in the country's labor market. These protests reflect the depths of the economic and social crisis which Jordan faces. The indicators of decent working conditions are continuing to decline, while wages continue to be low and show significant disparities, resulting primarily from the implementation of unfair economic policies. As a result of these and other factors, thousands of workers have carried out dozens of protests, amounting to 203 protests in 2018.

The view of this report is that Jordan's labor market still suffers from a major gap in the implementation of decent work standards and various fundamental labor principles and rights in terms of legislation, policies and practices. This is clear in the inability of the national economy to provide enough decent jobs and a social protection system for workers, to enable all workers to exercise their right to union organization and collective bargaining, and to strengthen national dialogue regarding the policies impacting the various interests of the parties to production.

This report's view is that continuing to neglect and deny the real gaps from which the labor market suffers in Jordan will deepen social imbalances and necessarily lead to a lack of social, economic and political stability that will negatively impact Jordan's stability in general.

Recommendations

1. The Principles and standards of decent work and the basic principles and rights for work need to be implemented for all wage workers in Jordan.
2. Wage policies in the public and private sector need to be reviewed with an eye to being increased, as their very low levels are not in line with price levels in Jordan, which are the highest in the Arab region, according to a number of international reports.
3. Maximum wages need to be set. While the salaries of two-thirds of wage workers in Jordan are under 500 dinars per month, a number of high-level employees are working in the same public and private sector institutions and obtaining very high salaries, which is increasing social disparities and tensions.
4. Article 31 of the Jordanian Labor Law, pertaining to the restructuring of institutions and which allows collective dismissals, needs to be amended.
5. Labor Law provisions related to the formation of labor unions need to be amended, and all wage workers in Jordan should be allowed to freely form unions. The

monopoly of worker representation by the current labor unions, which lack the most basic rules for democratic action, must be ended. The law's provisions should be compatible with the Jordanian constitution, to harmonize the process of establishing labor unions with the provisions of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, which was ratified by Jordan and promulgated in the Official Gazette. The International Labor Organization Convention 87 pertaining to union freedom and the right to organize should also be quickly ratified. The restrictions imposed on workers in Jordan and denying them the ability to form labor unions has not prevented them from forming such unions, and amendments should be made to the law acknowledging this fait accompli.

6. Provisions of the Civil Service Code should be amended to allow public sector employees to establish unions freely and ensure their rights. These rights are set forth in the constitutional amendments of 2011 and the ruling of the Constitutional Court in its Interpretation No. 6 for the year 2013, which guarantees public sector workers the right to form unions. Amending the Civil Service Code should bring it into line with the provisions of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, which Jordan ratified and which was promulgated in the Official Gazette. Among other changes, this should include allowing collective bargaining between government departments and workers, because it is unreasonable for labor protests in the public sector to be dealt with as absences that deserve punishment.

7. The provisions of the Labor Law relating to the concept of labor disputes and settlement mechanisms should be amended. These have proven a failure in finding just solutions for escalating labor disputes. It has become necessary to use new mechanisms and techniques to resolve these disputes in a way that is in line with the provisions of the International Labor Organization Convention 98 pertaining to the right to organize and bargain collectively.

8. Article 58 of the Labor Law must be repealed, as it legitimizes forced labor by exempting those working in supervisory jobs and those whose jobs require travel and transport from overtime pay.

9. The effectiveness of the inspections carried out by the Ministry of Labor in the labor market to ensure the implementation of the Labor Law's provisions needs to be strengthened. This requires an increase in the allocations for the Ministry of Labor in the public budget so that the ministry can increase the numbers of inspectors and develop their inspection capacity.