

Labor Protests in 2011

Analytical Report

Prepared by

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Introduction:

Jordan witnessed an unprecedented escalation of labor protests in 2011 compared to the previous year. Labor protests reached 829 in 2011 against 139 labor protests in 2010.¹

This report revealed that the majority of protests were concentrated in the public sector totaling 485 protests and representing 58.8% of the total number of labor protests; while the private sector witnessed a total of 309 labor protests representing 37.3%; in addition to 35 labor protests which were carried out by the unemployed and represented 4.2% of the total number of labor protests.

The report also showed also that the officially recognized trade unions were completely distant from the labor motion at the protests sites and the work places; whereas the vast majority of the protests representing 98% were carried out by labor groups and trade unions who are disengaged with the 17 officially recognized trade unions and their General Federation; however, the officially recognized trade unions carried out 17 labor protests only.

These protests represented a clear expression of the economic and social crisis that Jordan is going through, and coincided with a number of factors which pushed a large number of workers to protest against their harsh working conditions. The Arab Spring which erupted in Tunisia by the end of 2010 is seen as the most important factor which prompted workers in Jordan to take to the streets in rejection of the awful work conditions of which they suffered for decades. The unprecedented protest of Mohammad Elboazizi, the Tunisian informal sector worker, when he set himself ablaze in rejection of poverty and unemployment and in challenge of a political, social and economical reality, which reached an intolerable limits by most of the Arab citizens, was the beginning of disintegration of the beads of the submission rosary as well as a declaration of launching a fresh stage in the region on all social, economic and political levels. Jordan was not an exception, whereby the motion started among the most marginalized segments in the society who were victims of the development patterns applied in Jordan during the past decades.

Many factors and conditions accumulated to prompt the motion; among these factors were the deterioration in employment terms and conditions for the majority of workers in Jordan in terms of the significantly low wage rates and the adopted minimum wage rate², as well as the fact that large segments of workers are deprived of their basic labor rights as set forth in the Jordanian labor legislations; including the daily working hours, annual leave, sick leave, public holidays, provision of occupational health and safety conditions, coverage of social security as provided by the Social Security Corporation, as well as the lack of health insurance and other decent work conditions.

In addition to depriving the majority of workers in Jordan of their right to organize in trade unions, either due to the labor legislations which prevent large segments of them to organize themselves for reasons related to the professional classification regulation issued by the Ministry of Labor which prescribed the specific professions allowed to establish and join trade unions and limited them to seventeen trade unions which have not been increased for nearly four decades, or due to the weakness of most of the existing Jordanian trade unions.

¹ Phenix center for Economic and Informatics Studies, Labor Watch report on Labor protests during 2010, February 2011.

² The minimum wages rose in Jordan from 150 JD to 190 JD since February 2012, but the decision excluded the migrant workers.

As a result of the weakness of the trade unions in terms of their legal and organizational structures, workers revolted against this situation and demanded acceleration of economic and social reform. Weakness and disengagement of most of the existing labor organizations increased the insistence of many labor segments to defend their labor rights giving no consideration to legal restrictions which forbid forming trade unions and gathering without prior consent by the Ministry of Interior or other relevant official authorities, which clearly indicate that these legal restrictions do not conform any longer with the nature of the transformations and changes undergone by the Jordanian society and its requirements.

Methodology:

This report aims to provide an analytical reading of all economic, social and political labor protests in Jordan during 2011. The analytical, descriptive method has been used for this purpose. All labor protests were monitored and documented through direct contact with the perpetrators of these protests to explore the details thereof; in addition to following up the press coverage by the Jordanian various printed and electronic newspapers, as well as audio video media means engaged in the labor affairs in Jordan.

It is noteworthy, that the mentioned labor protests in this report were monitored and documented on daily basis within the available resources to the Jordan Labor Watch team. This team believes that the vast majority of labor protests were monitored; however, there may be other labor protests which were not noticed, but the team believes that these are very few and should be declared accordingly.

Monitored labor protests were classified according to the date it were carried out, its duration, its objectives and the labor groups according to the sectors they work in and whether they work in the public or the private sector. Data were then classified and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), whereby some of the relations between the objectives of the labor protests and the economic sectors where they are employed were measured.

Figures Overview:

The total labor protests carried out during 2011 reached 829 protests and were disbursed on the public and private sectors as well as the sector of the unemployed. Most of these protests were concentrated in the public sector, totaling 485 protests and representing a percentage of 58.5% of the total number of protests. While a total of 309 protests were carried out in the private sector representing a percentage of 37.3% of the total number of protests; the unemployed carried out a total of 35 protests during the same period, representing a percentage of 4.2% of the total protests.

The public sector, notably, witnessed the largest share of these protests, despite the fact that this sector is considered more stable than the private sector, most Jordanians race to work therein. The increase of labor protests in the public sector during 2011 over 2010 is very obvious. *(For details on labor protests in Jordan during 2010, please see the Labor Protests Report issued by Labor-Watch, Jordan in February 2011).* These high percentages of labor protests in the public sector were owing to the retreat in the working conditions of the daily workers and municipal workers, who carried out a series of protests demanding job permanence and improvement of

their living conditions, in addition to protests of teachers, doctors, nurses and pharmacists working in the public sector.

It is also noteworthy, that the vast majority of 98% of the monitored labor protests were carried out by labor and union groups who are not associated with the existing and officially recognized seventeen trade unions and their General Federation, as the labor protests carried out by the officially recognized trade unions totaled 17 labor protests only, and were limited to a few trade unions such as the General Trade Union of Workers in Electricity, the General Trade Union of Workers in Petrochemicals, the General Trade Union of Construction Workers, and the Trade Union of Workers in Banks, Accounting and Insurance, which show the extent of isolation experienced by the officially recognized trade unions and their General Federation.

With regard to the nature of the labor protests, they were divided, for the purposes of this report, into strikes, sit-ins and threats thereby. Whereas sit-ins represented 52.8% during 2011, totaling 438 labor sit-ins; labor strikes represented 35% totaling 290 labor strike; while the percentage of workers who threatened to carry out protests represented 12.2% totaling 101 labor threat, most of which were undertaken by trade unions such as the General Trade Union of Workers in Electricity, the General Trade Union of Workers in Petrochemicals, in addition to the General Trade Union of Workers in the Public Services and Free Vocations and the General Trade Union of Construction Workers whereby most of the demands were met before protests were launched.

Table (1):
Distribution of labor protests during 2011 according to work sector:

Sector	Number of Protests	Percentage
Public Sector	485	58.5
Private Sector	309	37.3
Unemployed Sector	35	4.2
Total	829	100

Upon viewing the labor protests in 2011 according to occurrence time, the highest percentage occurred in March totaling 137 labor protests representing 16.5%, significantly on account of the peak of protests in the Arab region whereby Tunisians and Egyptians were able to topple their regime heads.

Owing to the success of the Libyan revolution as well as the escalation of protests in each of Yemen and Syria, the labor motion in Jordan was affected; whereby protests totaled 98 labor protests in December representing 11.8%; it reached 89 protests in June representing 10.7% and 10.3% in April totaling 85 labor protests; followed by May totaling 75 protests representing 9%; while in February 66 labor protests were carried out representing 8%, and 61 labor protests representing 7.4% were carried out in October. In November the percentage reached 7.2% totaling 60 labor protests, followed by July where 54 protests took place representing 6.5%. In

September, August and January the number of protests were 39, 33, and 32 respectively, representing 4.7%, 4.0% and 3.9% respectively.

Table (2):

Distribution of labor protests according to the months of 2011:

Month	Number of Protests	Percentage
January	32	%3.80
February	66	%8.00
March	137	%16.50
April	85	%10.30
May	75	%9.00
June	89	%10.70
July	54	%6.50
August	33	%4.00
September	39	%4.70
October	61	%7.40
November	60	%7.20
December	98	%11.80

Causes Overview:

Various causes prompted the labor protests carried out in Jordan in 2011; including demanding wage increases, objection against dismissal from work, demanding job permanence, improvement of benefits and incentives, demanding the establishment of new trade unions and combating corruption within the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions (GFJTU); in addition to other reasons related generally to demanding the improvement of work environment. Demanding wage increases, however, advanced all other labor demands, as 384 labor protests were carried out for this cause representing 46% of the total number of protests, most of which were witnessed in the public sector, such as the protests carried out by workers in the municipalities and the protests of the workers in the independent institutions and commissions. Protests demanding wage increases were distributed among many economic sectors, most important of which was the sector of municipalities, health, spinning and weaving, and industry, in addition to sectors of water, daily workers, electricity and services according to the following percentages respectively: 80.4%, 76.7%, 72.7%, 65.2%, 63.2%, 53.1%, 53.1%, and 42.3%.

The issue of low wages is viewed as a matter of priority in Jordan, as the Jordanian labor market is known of low wages; more than half of the workers in Jordan earn monthly salaries of less than JD

300, while three quarters of the wage earners earn less than JD 400 monthly³, noting that these figures are close to the absolute poverty line in Jordan according to the official statistics, whereas the standard family who cannot spend JD 350 is classified within the poor families⁴. Many studies and reports point that great many workers in Jordan earn monthly salaries lower than the minimum wage rate which is already low, an indication that most wage earners in Jordan may be classified amongst the poor labor⁵.

Multi benefits demanding protests represented 30% of the total labor protests totaling 248 protests, including demanding the improvement of occupational health and safety conditions, as well as the improvement of the general work and housing conditions; most of these protests were witnessed in the public sector, such as the doctors protest demanding a special regulation to improve their living standard, and the protests of workers in sectors of pharmaceutical, banks and transportation.

Most important economic sector demanding a collection of benefits was the health sector, followed by the sector of electricity workers and then the sectors of banks, daily workers and water.

Protesting against rules and regulations represented 11% of the carried out labor protests totaling 88 protests. This kind of protests was distributed among many economic sectors, most importantly the sectors of banks, education, transportation and media. While the labor protests demanding job permanence totaled 85 protests representing 10% of the total protests and were concentrated in sectors of daily workers, agriculture and municipalities; followed by protests against dismissal from work reaching a percentage of 6% and totaling 51 protests, most of these protests were carried out by dismissed workers from Miyahuna Company who totaled 28 dismissed workers and lastly the sectors of banks and media.

Protests prompted by dismissal from work reflect the loss of job stability resulting from arbitrary measures taken by some employers against workers; such measures, however, are made easy by the Jordanian Labor Law, article 31, which allows employers to dismiss workers individually or collectively within the so called "restructuring" framework.

Within protests monitoring activities of Labor-Watch, Jordan team during 2011, a new demanding case arose represented in demanding the creation of new job opportunities which totaled 40 protests, representing 5% and were carried out by the unemployed, in addition to workers demanding their employers to provide job opportunities to their fellow citizens; these demands were concentrated in a number of sectors such as the sector of the unemployed representing 88.6%.

As regards the protests demanding reform in the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions (GFJTU) or establishing new trade unions, it reached a percentage of 5% of the total protests totaling 38 protests and were carried out by workers in various sectors throughout the Kingdom; while the rest of labor protests were distributed among protests such as beating workers and demands of home returning which arose amidst foreign female house workers in addition to

³ Social Security Corporations, Annual report 2010.

⁴ It has calculated from the report of poverty figures issued by Department of Statistics 2011.

⁵ Phenix Center for Economic and Informatics Studies, Labor Watch Studies 2010 -2011.

protests against some mean treatment and improvement of occupational health and safety conditions.

**Table (3):
Distribution of labor protests during 2011 according to their objectives:***

Objectives of Protests	Number of Protests	Percentage
Demanding wage increases	348	%46
Demanding multiple benefits	248	%30
Protest against rules and regulations	88	%11
Demanding job permanence	85	%10
Protesting against dismissal from work	51	%6
Demanding the creation of job opportunities	40	%5
Establishing new trade unions and reforming the existing ones	38	%5
Other demands	27	%3

**The total number of protests in this table does not equal 829 protests because some protests aimed to achieve more than one demand and they were dismantled for mythological purposes to identify the most repeated objectives.*

Labor Protests Durations:

Durations of labor protests in Jordan vary according to their perpetrators and their demands as well as the means of handling. Generally, protests lasted between one day and sixty nine days; those lasted for one day reached 477 in number, representing 57.5%, while protests which lasted for two to three days reached 122 protests representing 14.7% of the total number of labor protests, and those which lasted for four to five consecutive days reached 38 protests representing 4.6%, and the protests which lasted for six to ten consecutive days counted 42 protests representing 5.1%, followed by protests which lasted from eleven to fifteen consecutive days which counted 25 at a percentage of 3%; the labor protests which lasted from sixteen to twenty days counted 7 protests and represented 0.8%, and the protests which lasted for more than 20 days counted 17, at a percentage of 2.1%, and lastly the labor threats which counted 101 representing 12.2% of the protests.

Table (4):

Distribution of labor protests during 2011 according to days of duration:

Duration (in days)	Number of Protests	Percentage
One day	477	%57.50
From 2 to 3 days	122	%14.70
From 4 to 5 days	38	%4.60
From 6 to 10 days	42	%5.10
From 11 to 15 days	25	%3
From 16 to 20 days	7	%0.80
More than 20 days	17	%2.10
Threats	101	%12.20

Distribution of labor protests over economic sectors:

The labor protests carried out during 2011 were disbursed over most of the economic sectors to various degrees. Protests of workers in the services sector represented the highest percentage of 21.1% of the total protests counting 175 protests, and were carried out by workers in different courts as well as workers in the social security and the various services institutions who suffer hard working conditions and, therefore, workers took the initiative to protest and demand the improvement of their living conditions in light of the difficult economic conditions.

The next protests were carried out by workers in the transportation sector representing 15.1% and counting 125 protests demanding the activation of specific instructions such as moving and changing their lines, as well as the increase of fares.

In the education sector a number of 69 protests were carried out representing 8.3% and mainly demanding the establishment of a teachers' union as well as objecting against a number of decisions issued by their management. Protests in the industry sector followed in size, reaching 66 protests and representing 8% demanding the improvement of living conditions, wage increases and realization of some intensives and allowances.

In the municipalities sector, protests represented 6.8% counting 56 protests whereby workers demanded wage increases, job permanence and a special hazards allowance. The next protests were carried out in the health sector at a percentage of 5.2% and counting 43 protests demanding mostly the adoption of a special regulation such as the demands of doctors and pharmacists working in the public sector.

The workers in the water sector carried out 38 labor protests in 2011 representing 4.6% of the total protests and demanded a special hazards and overtime allowances. The next sector was the unemployed, who carried out 35 labor protests representing 4.2% and demanded the creation of job opportunities; these protests extended to all Governorates throughout the Kingdom.

Next protests in size were carried out by workers in the sectors of construction and agriculture representing 4.14% and counting 34 labor protests which demanded salary increases and increasing the selling prices of their agricultural products; while in the sector of the daily workers 32 labor protests were carried out representing 3.9% of the total protests and demanded the improvement of their living conditions and the achievement of various incentives and allowances as well as job permanence.

In the next sector, protests of workers in the media counted 24 protests and represented 2.9% of the total protests and were demanding the improvement of living conditions as well as objecting against many policies and administrative decisions; the longest of media sector protests was the sit-in carried out by workers in Alrai daily newspaper. In other sectors, protests of workers in the sectors of spinning and weaving, banks and electricity which represented percentages of 2.7%, 1.9% and 1.6% and counted 22, 16 and 13 protests respectively. Finally, the protests carried out demanding reforming the Jordanian General Federation of Trade Unions and its member trade unions as well as amending their by-laws, and establishing independent trade unions which counted 47 protests and represented 5.7% of the total protests.

**Table (5):
Distribution of labor protests during 2011 according to economic sectors:**

Economic Sector	Number of Protests	Percentage
Services Sector	175	21.1
Transportation Sector	125	15.1
Education Sector	69	8.3
Industry Sector	66	8
Municipalities Sector	56	6.8
Health Sector	43	5.2
Water Sector	38	4.6
Unemployed Sector	35	4.2
Agriculture Sector	34	4.1
Construction Sector	34	4.1
Daily Workers Sector	32	3.9
Media Sector	24	2.9
Spinning and Weaving Sector	22	2.7
Banks Sector	16	1.9
Electricity Sector	13	1.6
Other	47	5.7

Government handling of labor protests:

Although most of the labor protests carried out during 2011 were not cracked down as was the case in previous years such as the assault on the seaport workers in 2009 and on the daily workers in 2009 and 2010 which is seen as a significant development in the government agencies handling of social protests in general and the labor protests in particular, some government measures, however, were taken against some labor protests which spoiled the image of some protests such as the interference of security forces to prevent many buses coming from the governorates to participate in the teachers' sit-ins during the teachers' protests which demanded the establishment of the teachers' union; as well as the pointless government interference to hamper the strike of workers in the Social Security Corporation which was carried out in protest against their inclusion in the restructuring scheme through replacing workers of the Social Security Corporation by government employees from other government agencies and was accompanied by threats of penalties and dismissal if the strike continued.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

Summary of the results of this report:

1. The number of labor protests carried out in Jordan during 2011 reached (829) protests, compared with (139) protests in 2010.
2. Most labor protests were concentrated in the public sector, totaling 485 protests and representing a percentage of 58.5% of the total number of protests. While a total of 309 protests were carried out in the private sector representing a percentage of 37.3% of the total number of protests; the unemployed carried out a total of 35 protests during the same period, representing a percentage of 4.2% of the total protests.
3. The isolation of the officially recognized trade unions was noted, as a vast majority of 98% of the labor protests were carried out by labor and union groups who are not associated with the existing and officially recognized seventeen trade unions and their General Federation while the labor protests carried out by the officially recognized trade unions totaled 17 labor protests only.
4. Nearly half of the labor protests (46%) demanded wage increases, followed by the multi benefits demanding protests, and those objecting against rules and regulations, demanding job permanence, objecting against dismissal from work and finally those demanding the creation of job opportunities.
5. The duration of labor protests extended from one to sixty nine days. Those lasted for one day counted 477 protests representing a percentage of 57.5%.
6. The labor protests carried out during 2011 were disbursed over most of the economic sectors to various degrees. Protests of workers in the services sector represented the highest percentage of 21.1% of the total protests, and were followed by protests in the transportation sector representing 15.1%, the education sector 8.3%, the industry sector 8%, the municipalities sector 6.8%, and protests in the health sector which represented 5.2%; while the rest of protests were distributed among other sectors.

Recommendations:

In conclusion, the following recommendations, if adopted, would alleviate the violations to which workers are subjected and which prompt them to protest:

1. Reconsidering the development patterns applied during the past decades to direct the development methodologies toward creation of new job opportunities both in the public and private sectors as well as improvement of the work conditions to become decent.
2. Tightening the inspection by labor inspectors on all sectors to unveil and reduce violations against workers, and to ensure that workers obtain their rights as provided for in the Jordanian labor legislations and the relevant international conventions.
3. Raising the wage rates both in the private and public sectors to conform with the high prices in Jordan taking into account the poverty indicators.
4. Amending the articles of the Jordanian Labor Law related to arbitrary dismissal of workers to force the companies to return the arbitrary dismissed workers to their work and increase the amount of compensation to the worker in case the arbitrary dismissal is proven.
5. Ratification of the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention No. (87), concerning freedom of association and allowing the workers to form their own trade unions.
6. Ratification of the international standards issued by the International Labor Organization (ILO) covering the various social security issues and in particular the ILO Convention No. 102 for 1952 related to the minimum social security standards.