

# Report

# Labor Protests in Jordan 2012

Labor Watch Reports

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In Cooperation With Friedrich Ebert Stiftung

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للدراستات 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.

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### **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.

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### **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.

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### **Disclaimer:**

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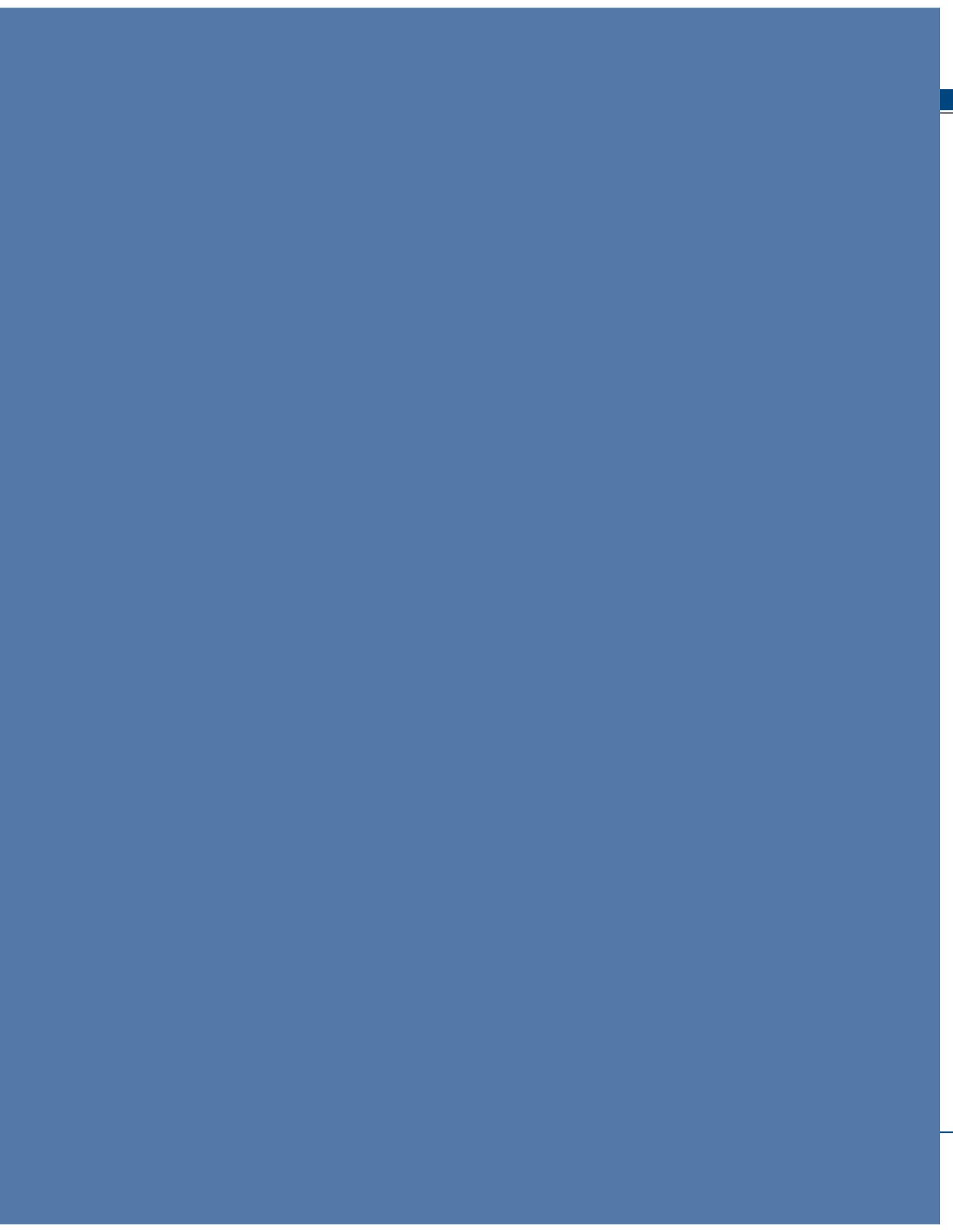
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# Contents

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Introduction	5
Methodology	6
Number of labor protests	6
Types of labor protests	7
Causes of labor protests	8
Role of the existing trade unions	10
Labor protests in economic sectors	11
Time span of labor protests	12
Mechanism of dealing with labor protests	12
Geographical breakdown of labor protests	12
Breakdown of labor protests by months	13
Conclusion	14
Recommendations	15



## Introduction

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The Phenix Center for Economics and Informatics Studies, through its program Jordan Labor Watch launched in the second half of 2009, and in cooperation with Friedrich Ebert Stiftung endeavors to monitor and follow up all details related to the Jordanian labor market, whether in relation to policies, transformations or labor related activities. One of the most important reports prepared by the team of Labor-Watch Jordan is the annual labor protests report covering the various types of protests: strikes, sit-ins and the threat thereby. Being the third report in this series, this report is intended to illustrate the outcome of the daily observations of labor protests which took place in Jordan during 2012.

The significance of drafting this report stems from our belief, as the team of Labor-Watch Jordan, that labor protests are the true and accurate indication of issues and concerns facing the Jordanian labor market, as well as the prevailing labor relations therein. Through this work, issues facing the labor market are thoroughly explored by analyzing the objectives of labor protests which took place, taking the chance to explore the economic sectors which suffered most of these issues; as well as exploring the depth of these issues, enabling us to assist in developing and creating solutions thereto through direct effort as to help laborers and employees to improve their working conditions, and to propose alternative labor policies to the presently adopted ones.

## Methodology

For the sake of achieving the objectives of the monitoring process represented in providing detailed information on the labor protests carried out by workers in Jordan in order to identify the causes thereof, in which economic sectors it is concentrated, its distribution over the Jordanian Governorates, the numbers of those taking part therein, their distribution over the business sectors (public sector and private sector), as well as its duration, the Labor-Watch team undertook a daily observation of the labor movements whereby all labor protests which took place in Jordan during 2012 were monitored and documented through two mechanisms: firstly: through direct contacts with the organizers who carry out these protests in order to investigate all the details, and, secondly: through analyzing the media coverage made by the various Jordanian printed, electronic, and audiovisual media means. All labor protest actions were classified as protests, no matter what form it took, including actions of threatening to strike or sit-in which were considered a form of protest. Afterwards, accumulated data is entered to Excel for organization and crosschecking; and later on the necessary statistical analyses are made using the SPSS application (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences).

### Number of labor protests:

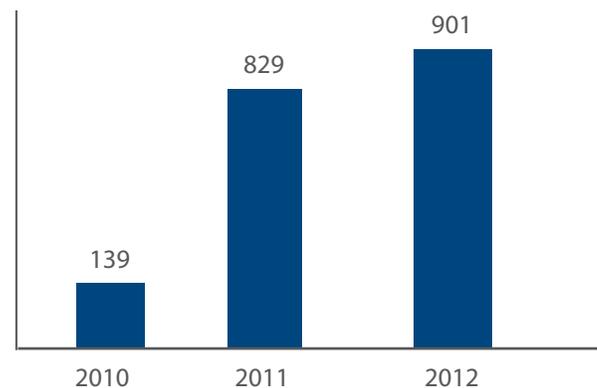
Labor protests reached a new high and unprecedented record in 2012 reaching 901 protests, marking an increase of 8% in comparison to the number of protests carried out in 2011, which reached 829 labor protests; that was a remarkable increase against the 139 protests which were carried out in 2010. The Labor-Watch team, however, was not able to determine the accurate

numbers of those who took part in all labor protests, but only in 339 of them representing 37.8% of the total labor protests, whereby the numbers of those who took part therein reached 288 thousand male and female workers, accordingly, (assuming that these 339 labor protests in which 288 thousand male and female workers took part represent a sample of the total labor protests), we can estimate that the number of participants in all labor protests during 2012 would have reached 760 thousand male and female workers.

Table No. 1 Number of labor protests 2010 - 2012

Year	Number of Labor Protests
2010	139
2011	829
2012	901

Number of labor protests 2010 - 2012



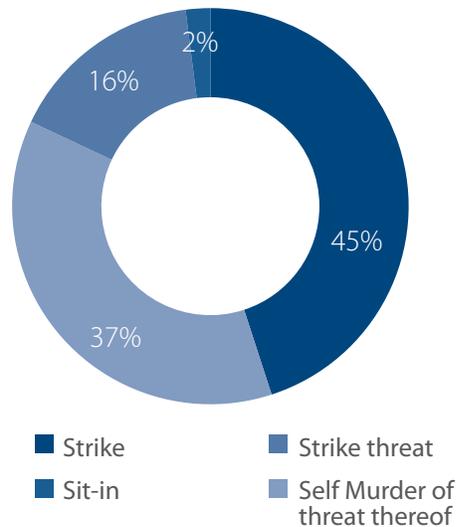
*Labor protests recorded an unprecedented number in 2012 reaching 901 protests*

*The number of workers who took part in labor protests in 2012 is estimated at 760 thousand male and female workers*

**Types of labor protests:**

According to the adopted methodology, many types of protest undertaken by the workers were treated as labor protests. Strike, which involves partial or total stoppage of work on the part of workers, affecting the workflow partially or totally; labor strikes, represented a percentage of 45% of the total labor protests. Sit-in, which involve a protest of a group of workers against the existing labor relations, and usually does not affect the work flow; sit-ins represented a percentage of 37% of the total labor protests. In addition, acts of threatening to carry out labor protests were classified as labor protests and represented 16% of the total number of protests. Furthermore, labor protests included some individual protests represented in acts of self harming-murdering and committing suicide in protest against certain labor issues; this type of protests, despite its significance, never exceeded 2% of the total number of protests. Ultimately, the breakdown of labor protests during 2012 is as follows:

Breakdown of labor protests for the year 2012 by type:



**Breakdown of labor protests by sector:**

Nearly half of the labor protests carried out during 2012 took place at public sector institutions, reaching 449 protests in number, and representing a percentage of 49.8%, which suggests two things: first: the sense on the part of wide segments of those working at the public sector that their salaries are low and not enough to cover their needs and the needs of their families to live a decent life, and second: workers at the public sector are more daring than workers in the private sector to express themselves through protests due to their feeling that the Government, as their employer, would not punish them for protesting. Protests carried out by workers at the private sector represented a percentage of 42.7%, while the unemployed demanded jobs through carrying out 7.5% of the total labor protests.

*Workers at the public sector are more daring to express themselves than those working at the private sector*

Table No. 2

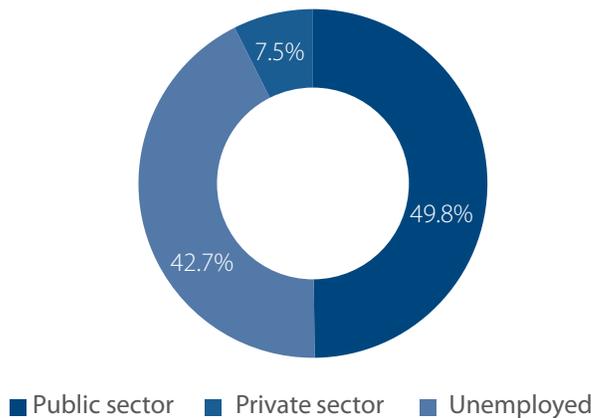
Breakdown of labor protests for the year 2012 by type

Type of protest	Number of protests	Percentage
Strike	410	45%
Sit-in	334	37%
Strike threat	140	16%
Self murder of threat thereof	17	2%
Total	901	100%

Table No. 3  
Break down of labor protests for the year 2012 by sector

Work sector	Number of protests	Percentage
Public sector	449	49.8%
Private sector	385	42.7%
Unemployed	67	7.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>901</b>	<b>100%</b>

Break down of labor protests for the year 2012 by sector



### Causes of labor protests:

Various reasons contributed to the increase of the number of labor protests during 2012, especially following the notable increase thereof during 2011. Upon a fast review of the figures listed in Table 4 below, obviously the question of low wages and salaries was the main cause which prompted workers to carry out their protests, whereas more than half of these protests took place due to low wages of workers; in addition to the fact that 42.7% of the protests sought wage and allowances increase, nearly half of them demanded a set of fringe benefits part of which was related to wages and allowances; which is not unusual due to the fact that the low rates of wages

### *Law wages and salaries are the main causes which prompted workers to carry out their protests*

are among the major challenges and defects experienced by the Jordanian labor market, as the wages of approximately three quarters of workers fall below the absolute poverty line according to official figures released by the Department of Statistics and the Social Security Corporation. The absolute poverty line (food and non-food) in Jordan reached in 2010 an amount of JOD 813.7 annually for each individual. However, the absolute poverty line (food and non-food) for the standard family of 5.4 persons reached an amount of JOD 366 monthly. Moreover, if we take into account the inflation rate during the last two years 2011 and 2012, which reached a percentage of 4.4% and 4.8% respectively, the poverty line for the standard family reaches an amount of JOD 400 monthly. The official figures, however, suggest that 72% of workers and Social Security inscribers earn monthly salaries of less than JOD 400, while the gross wage rate in Jordan is standing at JOD 412. Official figures released by the Department of Statistics by the end of 2012 affirm this harsh reality advising that 44.6% of the Jordanians earn less than JOD 300 monthly; and that the percentage of those who earn less than JOD 500 reaches 89.4% of Jordanian workers; while the percentage of those who earn more than JOD 500 reaches 10.6% only, indicating that the majority of the Jordanian families are incapable of securing their basic food and non-food needs. Nonetheless, a closer review of these figures is enough to explain the intensity of labor protests seeking improvement of wages. Add to that the low minimum wage rate applicable in Jordan and standing at a monthly amount of JOD 190 which is below half the absolute poverty line.

In addition to the retreat of the working conditions of most workers in Jordan to an extent that broad sectors of workers are deprived of the basic labor rights as stipulated in the Jordanian

labor legislations which include daily working hours, annual leaves, sick leaves, official holidays, availability of occupational safety and health means, social security coverage, as well as the lack of health insurance and other work conditions. Ultimately, 44% of wage earners in Jordan do not benefit from any form of social security.

The next protests, in terms of the causes, were those demanding a set of fringe benefits including, in addition to the wages and allowances increase, determination and organization of the working hours, job permanency, end-of-service award, change of job titles for workers in some sectors, protest against lack of job stability, and protest against the delay in payment of salaries and financial dues.

Moreover, labor protests against some laws, regulations and instructions maintained the same percentage of the year 2011 standing at 11%; it included protesting against decisions related to organizing work mechanisms, and restructuring schemes which were considered by workers as an assault against their rights. Next, also in terms of the causes, were these labor protests carried out by the unemployed demanding job opportunities which counted 67 protests and represented 7.4% of the total number of protests; it is noted, however, that this type of protests showed an increase in number than that of 2011 when it counted 40 protests only. Looking at labor protests seeking job permanency (change of the labor contractual status); it counted 65 protests representing 7.2% of the total number of protests, showing a clear retreat in comparison with last year where it reached 85 protests; in addition to protests against the mass dismissal of work which maintained the same level of the year 2011 counting 51 protests.

It is noted, however, that labor protests demanding the establishment of new trade unions and reforming the present trade unions retreated to 10 protests in comparison with 38 protests carried out during the year 2011; this retreat is referred to two reasons: the first: the fact that workers who

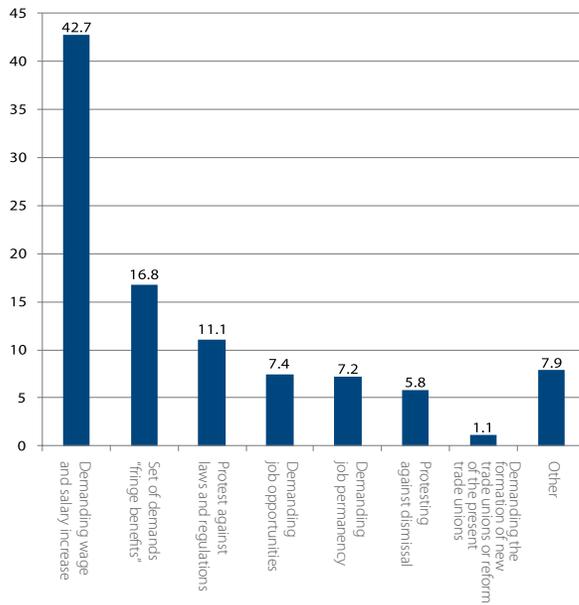
wish to form new trade unions do that without the need to carry out a strike, and the second: part of the protests carried out in 2011 for this purpose were carried out by the preparatory committees of the Teachers Trade Union who had finished the formation of their trade union in the meantime. In this regard, it is noteworthy that most workers in Jordan are deprived of the right to organize due to labor legislations which ban trade unions formation for reasons related to the labor legislations itself. The Labor Law as well as the Professions Classification Act issued by virtue thereof determined the professions allowed to form trade unions and limited them to seventeen trade unions which were not increased since four decades; in addition, the Civil Service Act forbids the formation of trade unions for the civil servants.

Table No. 4  
Breakdown of labor protests for the year 2012 by cause

Cause of protest	Number of protests	Percentage
Demanding wage and salary increase	385	42.7%
Set of demands "fringe benefits"	151	16.8%
Protest against laws and regulations	100	11.1%
Demanding job opportunities	67	7.4%
Demanding job permanency	65	7.2%
Protesting against dismissal	52	5.8%
Demanding the formation of new trade unions or reform of the present trade unions	10	1.1%
Other*	71	7.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>901</b>	<b>100%</b>

\* including provision of occupational safety and health means, health insurance, decent work conditions, assault on fellow workers, conflict of interests with third parties, and justice in promotions....etc.

Breakdown of labor protests for the year 2012 by cause



**Role of the existing trade unions:**

In view of the weakness of most of the official trade unions (the officially recognized), and its isolation from the majority of wage earners in Jordan; and due to the fact that the Labor Law only allows those working in the private sector to inscribe to the seventeen trade unions listed in the Professions Classification Act; as well as the lack of any chance to reform these existing trade unions, and the significant decline in the living standards of hundreds of thousands of workers in the various economic sectors resulting from the adoption of economic policies which led to growing price increases of basic commodities and services to levels that are significantly higher than the levels of wage increases; in addition to the high unemployment rates, especially among the youth,

*Most workers in Jordan are deprived of the right to organize due to labor legislations*

all these factors prompted tens of thousands of wage earners both in the public sector and the private sector to organize themselves spontaneously to defend their rights ignoring the legal restrictions which ban the formation of new trade unions as well as the restrictions on carrying out labor strikes, which clearly indicates that these legal restrictions do not suit any longer the transformations and changes witnessed by the Jordanian society and its needs.

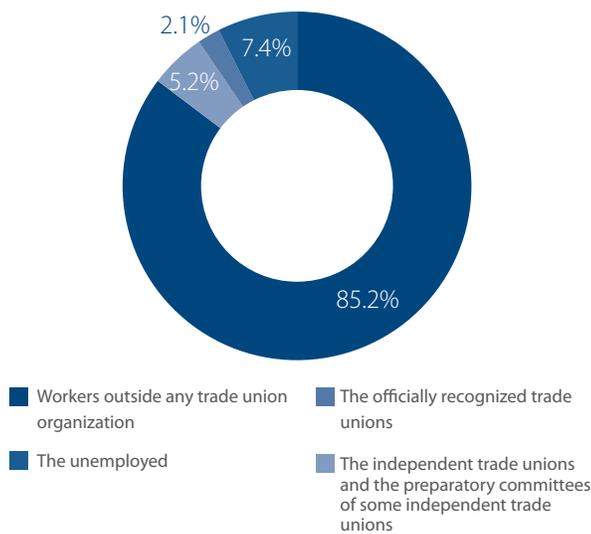
Therefore, it is noticed that 85.2% of the labor protests carried out during the year 2012 took place without the involvement of the existing trade unions; the labor protests or threats thereof carried out by the officially recognized trade unions represented only 5.2%, while the recently formed independent trade unions and their preparatory committees carried out a percentage of 2.1% of the protests, and the remaining protests were carried out by groups of the unemployed who demanded job opportunities.

Table No. 5  
Breakdown of labor protests for the year 2012 by groups

Group	Number of protests	Percentage
Workers outside any trade union organization	768	85.2%
The unemployed	67	7.4%
The officially recognized trade unions	47	5.2%
The independent trade unions and the preparatory committees of some independent trade unions	19	2.1%
Total	901	100%

*Figures issued by the Department of Statistics by the end of 2012 suggested that 44.6% of the Jordanian workers earn less than JOD 300*

Breakdown of labor protests for the year 2012 by groups



**Labor protests in economic sectors:**

As regards the economic sectors where labor protests were carried out, the figures show that the labor protests covered all economic sectors to various degrees, with a notable increase in the services sector where a percentage of 23.6% of the total protests took place; which points out that the work relations in most economic sectors witness defects, and lacks a state of balance which secures the rights of both its parties. The table below shows the breakdown of protests by economic sector.

*85.2% of the labor protests carried out during the year 2012 were outside the framework of the existing trade unions*

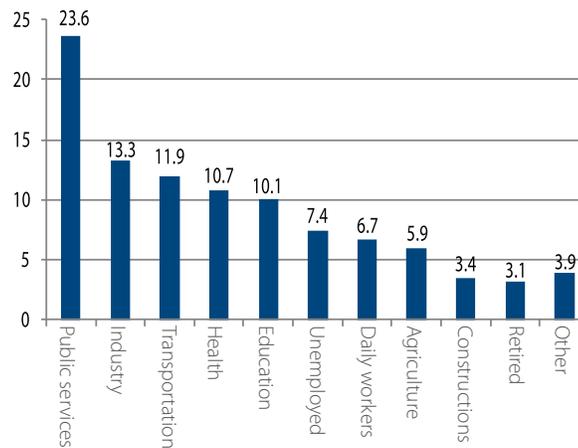
Table No. 6  
Breakdown of labor protests for the year 2012 by economic sector

Economic sector	Number of protests	Percentage
Public services	213	23.6%
Industry	120	13.3%
Transportation	107	11.9%
Health	96	10.7%
Education	91	10.1%
Unemployed	67	7.4%
Daily workers	60	6.7%
Agriculture	53	5.9%
Constructions	31	3.4%
Retired	28	3.1%
Other*	35	3.9%
Total	901	100%

\*Including protests in the media sector and the expatriate workers against instructions of recruiting workers in commercial shops, trade unions and charities.

*Time span of the labor protests ranged between one to more than twenty days*

Breakdown of labor protests for the year 2012 by economic sector



### Time span of labor protests:

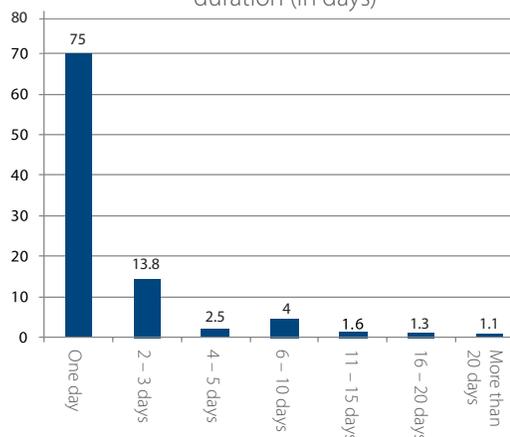
Labor protests duration ranged between one day and more than twenty days. More than 75% of them, however, lasted for one day; followed by protests which lasted for two to three days representing 13.8%; while the protests which lasted for four to five days represented 2.5%; and those which lasted for six to ten days represented 4%; followed by the protests which lasted for eleven to twenty days representing 2.9%, and finally the eight protests which lasted for twenty days or more and represented 0.9% of the total number of protests.

Table No. 7  
Breakdown of labor protests for the year 2012 by duration (in days)

Number of protest days	Number of protests	Percentage
One day	568	75.6
2 – 3 days	104	13.8
4 – 5 days	19	2.5
6 – 10 days	30	4.0
11 – 15 days	12	1.6
16 – 20 days	10	1.3
More than 20 days	8	1.1
<b>Total*</b>	<b>751</b>	<b>100</b>

\*The total here is not the total number of protests which counted 901 because the table contains the carried out protests only excluding those threatened to be carried out.

Breakdown of labor protests for the year 2012 by duration (in days)



*Labor protests were carried out in Governorates throughout the Kingdom, but concentrated in those of high population density*

### Mechanism of dealing with labor protests:

Unlike previous years, change was introduced to the way how the government and some employers treated some labor protests through using force to disperse them. Gendarmerie forces were used to break up the sit-ins of the unemployed in each of Tafilah and Ma'an, tear gas was used to break up their protests, the gendarmerie forces justified the use of force against these protests because the unemployed had lit tires and caused sabotage in public properties. In another incident, the sit-in of the daily workers in front of the Ministry of Agriculture was dispersed by force. Moreover, fire was exchanged during a sit-in carried out by some workers in one of the Al-Manaseer group of companies; in addition to arresting some officials and workers of the Electricity Workers Trade Union during their sit-in in front of the United Cables Company; as well as the mass dismissals which were carried out by the management of Nafiz Logistic Services Company against striking employees through the non-renewal of their employment contracts; in addition to tens of punishments undertaken by the Government against employees of the Department of Statistics due to the strike they carried out. The number of protests which were dispersed by the Government and its agencies using force reached 31 protests which represented a percentage of 3.5% of the total number of protests.

*The definition in the Labor Law of the "labor dispute" is short of absorbing the social transformations in the labor market*

### *Labor protest intensified during the month of January 2012*

### **Geographical breakdown of labor protests:**

Labor protests were carried out in Governorates throughout the Kingdom, but concentrated in those of high population density, where economic sectors and Government institutions are concentrated. Hence, the Capital Governorate witnessed the biggest share of protests representing 36.4% of the total protests, while the other Governorates witnessed protests as follows:

Table No. 8  
Breakdown of labor protests for the year 2012 by geographical location

<b>Governorate</b>	<b>Number of protests</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Amman (the Capital)	328	36.4%
Irbid	99	11.0%
Karak	81	9.0%
Ma'an	78	8.7%
Aqaba	60	6.7%
Madaba	39	4.3%
Tafilah	33	3.7%
Ma'raq	32	3.6%
Zarka	26	2.9%
Balqa'	26	2.9%
Ajloun	17	1.9%
Jerash	7	0.8%
More than one Governorate simultaneously	75	8.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>901</b>	<b>100%</b>

### **Breakdown of labor protests by months:** *Labor protests which were dispersed by the Government and its agencies using force counted 31 protests*

Labor protests intensified during the month of January 2012 reaching a percentage of 14.3% of the total number of protests, while August 2012 witnessed the least number of protests as shown in table No. 8 below:

Table No. 9  
Breakdown of labor protests for the year 2012 by months

<b>Month</b>	<b>Number of protests</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
January	129	14.3%
February	77	8.6%
March	96	10.7%
April	94	10.4%
May	95	10.5%
June	80	8.9%
July	45	5.0%
August	25	2.8%
September	55	6.1%
October	48	5.3%
November	58	6.4%
December	99	11.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>901</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Conclusion

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The report suggests that labor protests are still on the upward track for the third year in a row; which indicates that the imbalances in the labor relations are still deep, and that these imbalances exist in most economic sectors both in the public sector and the private sector. In addition, it is obvious that part of these imbalances resulted from many labor policies represented in depriving most workers of the right to organize themselves in trade unions aiming at streamlining the relations with employers on balanced basis. Accordingly, most workers are prompted to carry out their protests quickly, spontaneously, and without prior notice to the employers, no matter if the employer were a public sector or a private sector institution; this is mainly due to the lack of trade unions experience on the part of most of the workers resulting from denying them the right to organize in trade unions in accordance with the provisions of the prevailing Labor Law, as well as the Civil Service Act both of which forbid that kind of activity.

Furthermore, the vast majority of labor protests (85%) were carried out by workers who belong to no trade union, which refutes the circulated claims now and then that labor protests carried out in Jordan were perpetrated by the new and independent trade unions.

In addition, the mechanisms of labor disputes settlement applicable in Jordan in accordance with the provisions of the Labor Law never succeeded in alleviating the intensity of labor protests; as it deals only with disputes occurring between the existing and officially recognized trade unions and employers of the private sector; therefore, the number of labor disputes handled by the Ministry of Labor during the period covered by this report reached 100 labor disputes, while the labor disputes expressed in form of protests counted

901 disputes; even if we excluded the very limited number of individual disputes covered by the report, which counted 14 protests, the collective labor disputes would have counted 887 disputes, which indicates that the definition in the Labor Law of the "labor dispute" is short of absorbing the social transformations in the labor market, as it covered only 11.3% of the total labor disputes.

It is noteworthy, however, that the phenomenon of killing oneself or threatening thereby for reasons related to work has grown dramatically, as four citizens did set themselves ablaze leading to their death. There were 13 attempts of self harming-murdering for labor related reasons. Furthermore, among the important conclusions of this report is that half of the labor protests were carried out by workers in the public sector in expression of the deterioration of their career conditions; and that most of the labor protests sought increase of wages and allowances.

Moreover, it is noted that most economic sectors witness imbalances in labor relation as indicated by the fact that labor protests were carried out in nearly all of the said sectors. In addition, labor protests were carried out in Governorates throughout the Kingdom, however, in various proportions. It is also noteworthy that three quarters (75.6%) of the labor protests lasted for one day, the rest lasted form more than one day, and some lasted for more than 20 days.

## Recommendations

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1. All elements of the decent work principles and standards are to be applicable on all workers in Jordan.
2. The very low level of wages, in view of the declared absolute poverty line, both in the public sector and the private sector are to be reconsidered towards an increase; and to be linked to the annual inflation rate.
3. The minimum wage rate, which is lower than half of the absolute poverty line, is to be reconsidered, and also to be linked to the annual inflation rate.
4. The need to set a maximum wage rate as well, for at the same time where salaries of nearly two thirds of wage earners in Jordan are too low, there is a group of high ranking employees working in the same institutions both in the public sector and the private sector who earn very high salaries in comparison with their fellow employees leading to an increased social tension.
5. It is strongly recommended to expand the umbrella of social security to include all workers in Jordan without any exception, for 44% of workers in Jordan do not enjoy any kind of social protection. It is also necessary to include all social security inscribers by an umbrella of health insurance, because nearly half of the workers in Jordan do not enjoy health insurance, and nearly one third of the citizens do not enjoy any kind of health insurance.
6. Article No. 31 of the Jordanian Labor Law related to the restructuring of institutions and which permits the mass dismissal of laborers is to be reconsidered.
7. There is a serious need to amend the provisions of the Labor Law related to the formation of trade unions in order to allow all wage earners to freely form their trade unions to invalidate monopoly of laborers representation by the existing and officially recognized trade unions which lack the simplest democratic action principles, not allowing any reform in its leadership. Provisions of the said law are to be amended in line with the constitutional amendments introduced lately, and in order for the process of establishing trade unions to be inline with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights ratified by Jordan and published in its official gazette; in addition to the speedy ratification of the International Labor Organization (ILO) convention No. 87 related to the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize. Such actions are being proposed in order to overcome the restrictions imposed on workers in Jordan which did not succeed in preventing them of forming their own trade unions, therefore, amendments are required to recognize the status quo.
8. The need to amend the provisions of the Civil Service Act to allow workers in the public sector to freely form their trade unions in line with their rights as stipulated in the constitutional amendments introduced lately, and inline with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights ratified by Jordan and published in its official gazette allowing collective bargaining between Government institutions and employees,

for it is not conceivable any longer that labor protests in the public sector are treated as a punishment deserving absence.

9. It is necessary to amend the provisions of the Labor Law related to the definition of the labor dispute as well as the mechanisms of labor disputes settlement which have proved so far catastrophic failure in securing just settlements to aggravated labor disputes. Therefore, it has become vitally required to use new mechanisms and means for labor disputes settlement to be in line with the provisions of ILO Convention No. 98 on the Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining.
10. The inspection campaigns by the Ministry of Labor are to be made more effective to ensure the enforcement of the provisions of the Labor Law; this implies an increase of the allocations of the ministry in the general budget to enable the ministry to increase the number of inspectors and upgrade their inspection capabilities.