

Strikes by thousands of municipal workers in Germany over pay and conditions joined by Amazon and healthcare workers; week-long pay strike by municipal workers in Finland; cost of living strikes in Greece on May Day; thousands of teachers demonstrate in Iran over pay and conditions

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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Europe

Strikes in German municipal services over pay and conditions

Workers in municipal services throughout Germany held mass warning strikes this week, called by the United Services Union (Verdi) to demand improvements in pay, working conditions and staffing levels for the 330,000 workers in the sector.

Social workers walked out on Monday. On Wednesday, according to ZDF, around 26,000 workers in daycare centres and schools stopped work, and workers in disability services walked out on Thursday.

Local media also reported rallies of thousands of workers throughout the week, including 2,000 in Hamburg and 1,500 in Frankfurt. One demonstrator told the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, “There is a lack of staff and the prospects are bad,” and “the salary is not such that young people want to take up the profession.”

German Amazon workers continue warning strikes over collective agreement

Warehouse workers at seven Amazon sites in Germany joined various warning strikes over three days this week, as part of a long-running dispute between Verdi and the multinational retailer.

Verdi is calling for Amazon to adhere to the same collective agreement as the rest of the retail and mail-order sector, and has called numerous strikes since 2013 over this issue. The latest agreement signed in the retail and mail-order sector raised pay by three percent for 2021, and 1.7 percent in 2022, while prices have risen two percent since the start of the year.

According to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, around 2,500 workers will join the stoppages.

Workers at German university hospitals hold warning strike during collective bargaining

On Wednesday, 1,700 healthcare workers at six university hospitals in the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia joined a warning strike called by Verdi. The union is calling for collective bargaining negotiations with the state employers’ association.

According to *dpa*, 98 percent of workers voted in favour of industrial action, endorsing an indefinite strike if Verdi calls one. Verdi complained that the employers’ association has not responded to any of its requests to set a date for negotiations.

Finnish municipal workers join mass week-long strike

On Tuesday, municipal workers throughout Finland joined a week-long strike called by three unions to demand a 3.6 percent pay rise for each of the next five years. According to the *Finnish Broadcasting Company (YLE)*, 81,000 workers in ten cities are stopping work, including teachers, childcare workers, librarians, and transport and waste disposal workers.

They were due to walk out on April 19, following numerous strikes of several thousand workers in individual cities, but the government forced a two-week postponement while compulsory mediation continued. A strike of between 25,000 and 40,000 nurses for the same pay demand was called off that week due to the government’s threat to introduce a strike-breaking bill in parliament.

Widespread strikes over cost of living in Greece on May 1

On Sunday May 1, International Workers' Day, workers throughout Greece joined strikes and protests over the cost of living and attacks on the working class. Panhellenic Maritime Federation (PNO) members stopped work in ports nationwide for 24 hours, and in Athens all metro and tram services were cancelled as transport workers joined the strike.

An estimated 10,000 people joined a rally in Athens, and according to *ef.syn*, thousands of workers then went to the nearby port of Piraeus to support the one-day strike called by dock workers at the piers operated by COSCO. The strike there follows numerous walkouts at the two piers, which began after their colleague Dimitris Daglis was killed by a crane last October. Only last week COSCO workers stopped work for the day after one of their colleagues was hospitalised by a 12-metre fall when a rusty guardrail broke.

Spanish healthcare workers fight to protect pay, conditions and services

Workers in the Spanish health and social care system continue to fight for better working conditions and services, holding numerous protests and strikes against the degradation of both, and especially against the widespread use of casual employment.

On Wednesday, workers in hospitals and mental health services in the Basque health service, Osakidetza, joined rallies called by six unions in the autonomous community. They demanded increased hiring in a sector where nearly 60 percent of workers are on temporary contracts, according to *Europa Press*. A one-day stoppage is planned for May 16.

In the Canary Islands, doctors joined an indefinite campaign of partial stoppages last week, beginning with a one-hour walkout on Thursday April 28, and a two-hour stoppage the next day. According to *La Provincia*, the Canary Islands Medical Employees Union (SEMCA) called the campaign to demand the implementation of a 2021 law restricting the level of temporary employment permitted in the health sector. SEMCA says that 2,200 healthcare workers are employed via abuse of temporary contracts. The Ministry of Health reported that 231 workers joined the walkouts.

"Home help" workers, who assist those with disabilities or complex healthcare needs living at home, continue an indefinite strike in the city of Ciudad Real, denouncing low pay and widespread abuse of part-time and precarious contracts. Last week, the local government effectively banned the strike, imposing the requirement that 100 percent normal services are provided. Although this restriction was partially relaxed this weekend, between 50 and 100 percent of services are still required, depending on the category of the clients. The Workers' Commissions union announced that 80 percent of workers able to join the strikes did so.

Another indefinite strike over temporary contracts is planned to begin in Madrid on May 9. A previous strike of over 5,000 Madrid doctors was called off after just one day last year, due to early regional elections.

French transport workers hold widespread strikes over pay and conditions

Workers in public transport throughout France held numerous strikes and protests the past few weeks to demand improvements to their pay and conditions, which have deteriorated throughout the pandemic and as a result of the NATO-instigated war in Ukraine.

Bus drivers in Aix-en-Provence, employed by the partially state-owned

Kéolis, began an indefinite strike on Monday, denouncing understaffing and poor working conditions. According to *France Bleu*, the General Confederation of Labour (CGT) is asking for these conditions to be improved as well as monthly salaries to be increased by 100 euros.

On the same day, maintenance workers at M'Tag, the transport company for the city of Grenoble partially run by Transdev, began another indefinite strike, scheduled to last until June 30. The Force Ouvrière union called the walkout of around 200 mechanics and other workers, telling *France Bleu* the company was struggling to hire enough workers as a result of the low pay and poor working conditions. Two weeks ago, bus and tram drivers at the company stopped work for a day after one of their colleagues was hospitalised when she was assaulted at the end of her route.

In the port city of Le Havre, the CGT reached an agreement with employers last Friday, ending an indefinite strike over understaffing which began on April 5. According to *actu.fr*, the strike of port workers cancelled 15 cruises. The CGT reports that they agreed 11 new workers would be hired, 10 posts would be replaced, and there would be a five percent pay rise and a 130 euro bonus.

French airline workers threaten strike

Flight crew workers at low-cost airlines with destinations to France, including Ryanair, Volotea and EasyJet, are threatening to strike over pay and working conditions. Workers are livid over Ryanair's firing of two flight attendants who drank two cans of soft drink and crackers intended for the passengers in March.

'Flight attendants are paid the minimum wage, and we don't get a meal allowance.' Damien Mourgues, a delegate for the SNPNC-FO flight attendants told the press. The union threatened to launch a 'very large, unlimited strike, with action on weekends and during holiday departures.'

France's main pilot union, the National Union of Line Pilots (SNPL), which called a several limited strikes in April, declared the Spanish carrier Volotea one of the worst low-paid airlines. Airline workers are in an advantageous position with the recent uptick in travelers to Europe, with France being one of the top destinations. The unions have said coordinated strikes across airlines would be a last resort 'nuclear option.'

Glass workers in Belgium occupy factory to oppose closure

On April 27, workers in the Belgian city of Fleurus began a strike and occupation at car window manufacturer AGC, after the announcement of a plan to close the local factory with the loss of 187 jobs.

Proposals from AGC to arrange the closure by September 2023 were voted down when they were put to the workforce. According to *RTL*, the strike and occupation ended after three days, when the company agreed to negotiate with the unions.

Tram drivers in Dublin, Ireland, balloting on below-inflation pay deal

Drivers on Luas, the tram network in the Irish capital, are currently voting on a pay deal which would raise pay by six percent over 2 years, while annual inflation is currently 6.7 percent.

The union representing the 212 drivers, Siptu, demanded a five-year deal which would increase wages by 3.5 percent each year, while the network's operator Transdev offered 2.5 percent per year for two years. Siptu recommended that its members accept the Labour Court's below-inflation "compromise" of 2.5 percent for 2021 and 3.5 percent for 2022.

Strike by university staff at Staffordshire University, England over proposals to introduce two-tier workforce

Academic staff at Staffordshire University, England held a one-day stoppage on April 27. It followed stoppages on March 28, 30 and April 7. They are opposed to the university's plans for newly appointed staff to be employed by a wholly owned subsidiary company on different contractual terms.

University College Union (UCU) members voted to strike by a 70 percent majority.

Newly appointed staff will be eligible not for the defined benefit Teachers' Pension Scheme but the inferior defined contribution Staffordshire University Pension Scheme. Staff fear the introduction of a two-tier system would be the prelude to an attack on the pay and conditions of all staff.

They are also taking part in action short of a strike by working strictly to contract and refusing to undertake voluntary activities.

UK street cleaners and refuse collectors in Rugby enter second week of pay strike

Refuse lorry drivers, loaders and street cleaning staff in Rugby working for Conservative-controlled Rugby council in England are nearing the end of their two-week strike begun April 26 over pay. The strike is reported to be effective, with hardly any domestic waste being collected.

The Unite union members are low paid. Street cleaners begin at £17,100 a year, rising to £19,200 after five years, while loaders begin at £19,200, rising to £21,300 after five years. The Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) drivers start at £21,300, reaching £23,400 after five years.

An ITV News website article of April 26 reported that some of the workers must resort to food banks to get by. Also, the council would not pay above the nationally agreed 1.75 percent rise. Unite and the council were taking part in a pay evaluation to report in May.

UK refuse collection workers in Wealden, Sussex begin strike over pay

UK refuse collection workers employed by waste management company Biffa contracted by Wealden council began a two-week strike Monday over pay.

The GMB union members were originally due to walkout on April 25, but this was suspended when Biffa made an improved pay offer. However, this was overwhelmingly rejected, and the stoppage began. Biffa then came back with a further pay offer, on which the GMB is balloting its members during the strike.

Further strike by workers at Hackney council in London over pay offer

The strike of rail cleaners employed by the Churchill Group which began on April 27 is due to end on Saturday. They previously held stoppages in February and March. They are calling for improved pay and working conditions.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members work for Churchill cleaning trains and stations on behalf of Govia Thameslink Railway, HS1, Southeastern Railway and Eurostar in the southeast of England. They are demanding £15 an hour, along with sick pay and travel benefits that are currently denied to outsourced workers.

Around 1,000 outsourced cleaners were balloted by the RMT, returning a clear call for action—two of the ballots registering a 100 percent strike vote. The cleaners are paid £8.91 per hour, far less than in-house cleaners who perform the same role. Churchill refused to raise wages, despite profits of £11.1 million last year and dividends of £12 million to its parent company and £3.8 million to company directors.

The RMT opposes joint action between outsourced cleaners and in-house workers, and participates in the Rail Industry Recovery Group, which plans £2 billion cuts a year at the expense of jobs and conditions.

First strike ever by UK financial regulatory body staff over jobs, pay and conditions

Staff working for the UK Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) began a 48-hour strike Wednesday, the first strike in the body's history. They voted by over 75 percent to strike.

The Unite union members, who oppose plans to cut jobs and pay and impose an appraisal system, walked out of the FCA offices in London and Edinburgh. They will also impose an overtime ban and do only contractual duties.

FCA staff are responsible for monitoring and regulating companies providing financial services in the UK.

Workers at UK drinks manufacturer to walk out over pay

Workers at Crown Bevcan in Carlisle, England plan to hold 24-hour stoppages on May 11 and 14. More stoppages could be announced.

The Unite union members rejected a three percent pay rise and one-off payment. With inflation at around nine percent the offer represents a real terms cut in spending power. Crown Bevcan is part of the American-owned Crown Holdings group, whose worldwide sales last year were £8.4 billion.

UK workers at Preston brewery to strike over inadequate pay offer

Around 220 workers employed by Budweiser Brewing Group (BBG) at its Samlesbury site near Preston in England voted to strike in opposition to an inadequate pay offer. Following months of discussion, BBG came up with a three percent increase for 2022 and for 2023, as well as increasing overtime rates.

The GMB union members will begin an overtime ban and refuse to take part in training. Strike dates are yet to be announced. The brewery brews several well-known brands, including Boddingtons, Budweiser and Stella Artois.

UK traffic wardens in Wiltshire to strike over cuts to unsocial hours pay

Traffic wardens in the English county council of Wiltshire will hold a one-day stoppage on Saturday. A demonstration in support of the wardens will take place the same day in Salisbury.

The GMB members voted by a 100 percent majority on a 92 percent turnout to strike in protest at the council's proposal to cut unsocial hours payment by between 10 and 20 percent. The GMB has yet to announce dates for stoppages.

The proposal will also affect other Wiltshire council staff, including highway, leisure centre, care and social work staff. The cuts would mean social workers losing around £7,000 a year, while the traffic wardens will lose around £2,000 a year.

The council intended to begin the cuts in overtime rates in April, but following the opposition by workers suspended the plans. However, the plans have not been withdrawn, and the council now intends for them to come into effect in June with some minor cosmetic changes.

Further strikes planned by teachers at Pocklington School, UK over pension threat

UK teachers at independent (private) Pocklington School, Yorkshire scheduled a further nine days of strikes following a one-day stoppage on March 22.

The NASUWT members are protesting management's threat to withdraw teachers from the Teachers Pension Scheme and replace it with an inferior one. The teachers face the threat of being sacked unless they agree to contracts with the inferior pension. A NASUWT press release announcing the additional stoppages gave no dates for them.

Management at the GDST Trust's 23 independent schools recently withdrew similar plans after strike action. The NEU, however, accepted the trust's proposal to enrol newly employed staff into its alternative inferior pension scheme.

Aerospace workers in Crumlin, Northern Ireland vote to strike over pay

Workers at the Lanford Lodge aerospace and defence company in Crumlin, Northern Ireland voted by an 86.5 percent majority on a 90 percent turnout to strike.

The Unite union members are calling for increased pay and for an equal pay audit. Langford Lodge recorded a £2.7 million pre-tax profit in its latest accounts. Announcing the vote result, Unite stated it had written to the company asking it to make a "fair offer" or a strike notice will be served.

UK telecom workers to ballot over pay offer

Delegates at the Communication Workers Union (CWU) voted unanimously on April 28 to hold a ballot of telecom workers employed by BT, Openreach and EE. BT offered a £1,500 pay rise, which was rejected as inadequate. BT is threatening compulsory redundancies among its supply chain workforce.

Bus workers in Yorkshire, UK ballot for strike over pay

Around 650 drivers and engineers working for Arriva bus company in Yorkshire are balloting for strike action over a 4.1 percent pay offer, well below the rate of inflation.

The Unite union members are based at depots in Castleford, Dewsbury, Heckmondwike, Selby and Wakefield. The ballot closes on May 23.

Unite and GMB unions call off scheduled strike of refuse collection workers in Manchester, England after they accept new pay offer

The Unite and GMB unions have called off a two-week stoppage of around 200 refuse workers in Manchester, England due to begin Tuesday.

The drivers, loaders and environmental operatives work for outsourcing company Biffa on a Manchester City Council contract. They voted to walk out after rejecting a 1.75 percent pay offer from Biffa. Biffa's offer was the same offer made to council workers. It would have meant being paid only 64 pence above the hourly minimum wage rate.

The union press releases announcing the two-year deal claim it will mean a 22 percent increase for HGV drivers, an 11 percent rise for refuse loaders and an 8-11 percent rise for street cleaning staff.

Council staff in Norwich, England to ballot over pay

Around 200 UK workers employed by Norwich City Services Ltd (NCSL) are to ballot for industrial action over pay.

The Unite union members voted in a consultative ballot to reject a 4.2 percent pay offer. The NCSL is a wholly owned Norwich City council company providing gravedigging, house maintenance, park maintenance and street cleaning services. No dates for the ballot were given in a press release May 4.

Unite union calls off planned stoppages by baggage maintenance engineers at London Heathrow airport after improved pay offer

Around 160 engineers working for Vanderlande Industries at London Heathrow airport have accepted a company pay offer. The workers' planned walkout on April 7-10 was postponed by the Unite union after an improved pay offer.

The engineers responsible for maintaining baggage handling systems had voted by a 97 percent majority to strike.

They have now voted by a 74 percent majority to accept a new deal. A Unite press release announcing the result gave no details of the deal, but described it as raising pay with an improved holiday entitlement.

Unite calls off strike by bus workers in Glasgow, Scotland after pay offer

The Unite union has called off the 48-hour strike of around 60 drivers, cleaners and shunters working for the First Glasgow bus company in Scotland, due to begin Wednesday. They voted by a 96 percent majority to strike over pay. The strike was called off after First Glasgow made an improved pay offer.

They rejected a two-year pay deal, which would mean some workers being paid £9.48 an hour backdated from August 2021 to April 2022. As of April, the adult minimum wage is £9.50.

The workers accepted the new offer in a ballot by an 89 percent majority. It was described by Unite as a “significant pay increase.” Sick pay will be increased by 50 percent.

Strike of UK petrol delivery drivers called off as they accept improved pay offer

A proposed strike of 57 UK petrol delivery drivers employed by logistics firm XPO under contract to deliver fuel to Tesco forecourts was called off.

The Unite union members voted by 100 percent to walk out to improve their pay. The stoppage was cancelled after the drivers accepted a new offer, which according to Unite will give them a 27 percent two-year deal. Pay for most drivers will increase by around £12,000.

GMB union calls off strike by refuse workers in Northampton, UK after they accept new pay offer

Proposed strike action by around 70 UK refuse collection workers employed by Veolia to provide services to around 95,000 houses on behalf of Northampton council was called off after they accepted a new pay offer.

They voted to walk out after rejecting a 2.5 percent pay offer. Veolia upped its offer, which was accepted by the refuse workers. Under the two-year deal, pay will increase to £10 an hour for loaders and £12 an hour for drivers. According to the GMB, under the deal pay will increase next year in line with inflation.

Unite union calls off stoppages by supermarket giant warehouse staff in Bristol, UK after new offer

Unite called off planned stoppages by around 250 UK staff employed by DHL at a warehouse on Emerald Park distribution centre in Bristol. DHL is under contract to Sainsbury’s for its stores in southwest England and west Wales.

After negotiations, DHL came back with an improved offer which was accepted by the workers. A Unite press release of April 28 claims the offer “secures a pay increase of between 10.68 per cent and 15.64 per cent depending on the worker’s contract.”

GMB union suspends strike ballot at healthcare logistics firm in Coventry, UK as employer makes new offer accepted by workforce

The GMB union suspended a strike ballot of healthcare logistics workers at DHL Life Sciences and Healthcare warehouse in Coventry. It did so as DHL offered an 8.5 percent pay rise to its workforce, bringing their hourly rate to £10.35 an hour. The workers voted by a 100 percent majority to accept the new offer.

GMB and Unite unions suspend scheduled strike of bus workers in Northern Ireland after new pay offer

A week-long strike by bus workers working for Translink in Northern Ireland due to begin April 25, and a one-day strike on May 6, were suspended by the GMB and Unite unions.

Bus workers including cleaners, drivers and shunters rejected a three percent pay offer, but Translink made an improved offer which the workers are currently voting on. The result is expected to be announced on May 9.

If the new offer is accepted, strike action will be cancelled.

Protest outside HSBC bank UK annual general meeting over pension clawbacks

Former and current bank giant HSBC UK employees protested outside the bank’s annual general meeting in London on April 29.

The Unite union members were protesting HSBC’s ongoing practice of clawing back pension payments from its retired employees. It can lead to the loss of up to £2,500 a year, and disproportionately affects lower paid former staff, in particular women who may have had a career break to have children.

College lecturers in northwest England set to strike over pay

Lecturers at six colleges in the northwest of England are due to hold a one-day strike on May 18.

The 900 UCU members are demanding pay be increased by a minimum 8.5 percent. The colleges due to be taking part in the industrial action are Burnley College, Bury College, City of Liverpool College, Hopwood Hall, Nelson and Colne College Group and Oldham College. Following the strike, the lecturers will work to contract and refuse to cover for vacancies or absent colleagues.

Mitie workers at St Georges Hospital in London in pay ballot

GMB members working for Mitie as domestics and hostesses at St Georges Hospital in south London are currently balloting for strike action over delays in pay. The ballot closes on May 13.

The union held a rally on Tuesday in support of the workers during their lunchtime. According to the GMB, Mitie management intervened in an intimidatory manner against those attending the rally.

Middle East

Demonstrations by Iranian teachers over working conditions

Demonstrations by thousands of teachers took place across Iran on Sunday, in 21 provinces including Ardabil, Bushehr, Fars, Kurdistan and Isfahan. The demonstrations are part of an ongoing series of protests by teachers.

Their demands include higher pay, improved working conditions, improved pensions and to maintain free public education. Iranian security forces arrested dozens of teachers on the day of the protest and the days leading up to it.

Fast-food delivery workers in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates strike over pay cuts

Hundreds of fast-food delivery drivers working for Deliveroo in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates held a 24-hour strike on Sunday, May Day. They were protesting the company's cuts in pay and changes to working hours.

After the strike, the company reversed its measures. Deliveroo was hit financially as the strike coincided with the end of Ramadan, normally an extremely busy period for them. The delivery drivers made a brave stand, as striking in Dubai is illegal.

Africa

Striking South African farmworkers continue angry protests over pay

Over a thousand farmworkers in the citrus-growing region of Sundays River Valley Municipality, Eastern Cape, South Africa are entering the second week of strikes and protests in the towns of Kirkwood and Addo. They are demanding a pay increase from R23.19 to R30 an hour.

Hundreds of residents, demanding improvements in local infrastructure, joined the protests and petitions were presented to the municipality and police at a public meeting. However, anger flared when the Sundays River Valley Citrus Producers Forum, representing 200 farm owners, failed to attend.

Owners were later granted an interdict from the High Court in Gqeberha, prohibiting strikers coming near their farms. Since then, a farmworker was shot by private security guards, later dying from his wounds.

Health workers' wildcat strikes over understaffing spread in Eastern Cape, South Africa

Health workers in Nelson Bay Metro Municipality, Eastern Cape, South Africa are backing up their protests over staff shortages with further wildcat strikes.

Last week, 100 protesting health workers shut down clinics in Motherwell, Gqeberha, demanding the national government put the Eastern Cape provincial health department into administration.

Workers say clinics and health centres are critically understaffed and were better managed by the Nelson Bay Metro municipality before 2012 when they were taken over by the Eastern Cape province.

Workers in two municipalities in South Africa strike over pay

Workers at the Sol Plaatjie Municipality in Kimberley, Northern Cape, South Africa stopped work April 29, when they failed to receive their monthly salaries.

In a separate dispute in Mogale City Municipality, Krugersdorp, Gauteng, workers walked out on April 28, causing disruption to frontline services including sanitation and waste collection. Both groups of workers are South African Municipal Workers' Union members.

Pharmaceutical industry in South Africa deemed an essential service which prohibits workers from legally striking

On April 14, after an investigation, South African statutory body the Essential Services Committee decided to classify the pharmaceutical industry as an essential service, and therefore exempt from protected strikes. The committee asked for input from the unions during the investigation but did not receive a response.

Academic staff at Kaduna university in Nigeria continue strike while polytechnic lecturers threaten walkout

University teachers in Kaduna, Nigeria are continuing their strike. The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) members walked out over salaries, the delay in release of revitalisation funds for universities and the adoption of new payroll software.

The union called the strike as a four-week limited action from February 14, then extended it for another two months. The union cited the federal government's lack of seriousness in addressing the issues that motivated the strike.

The Kaduna university authorities claimed the strike was coming to an end without any attempt to address the grievances. The government threatened to stop paying the strikers' salaries, which in Nigeria means the strike was called for invalid reasons. It called on the ASUU to "seek the path of dialogue."

Members of the Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics, the union umbrella body for polytechnic lecturers in Nigeria, threatened to join striking university lecturers unless the government acts on promises that ended last year's strike. That strike was 61-days long, starting June 10.

The grievances include non-payment of promised revitalisation funds, non-payment of arrears for the new minimum wage, and broken promises on improvements to institutions and management.



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