

Airline pay strikes continue to sweep Europe in Spain, Romania, Germany, Portugal; civil servants, firefighters and teachers in one-day national walkout in Kosovo; rolling strikes by Dutch railway workers over conditions and cost of living begin; 2,700 teachers walk out in Norway over pay and staff shortage; waste and recycling workers' stoppages sweep Scotland as rubbish piles up in streets; Qatar government deports migrant workers after arresting them for protesting non-payment of wages; National one-day stoppage in South Africa against plunging living standards; One striker shot dead and three hospitalised by security guards at council in Middelburg, South Africa

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

25 August 2022

The World Socialist Web Site invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature

Airline and airport workers continue strike wave across Europe

Workers at airlines and airports throughout Europe continue a months-long wave of strikes, seeking to win back pay "sacrifices" made by the trade unions at the start of the pandemic. As well as reduced pay and high inflation, workers face intolerable working conditions as large numbers of passengers return to understaffed airports.

Pilots at the majority state-owned Romanian airline TAROM began a partial strike on Tuesday, stopping work for three hours. The TAROM Union (SUT) announced it would organise partial stoppages two days each week, and planned a full-day walkout at an unspecified future date.

Romania's transport minister denounced the strike, calling for workers to help "save" the company by supporting a restructuring plan agreed with the European Commission, saying absurdly, "There is a need for solidarity of those in the company who have high incomes with those who are still paid the minimum wage," *See News* reported.

The SUT said TAROM's pay offer was a mere six percent for pilots, and 350 lei monthly for workers on the minimum wage. Exposing the

government claims of "solidarity" with minimum wage workers, their pay rise amounts to 11 percent, an effective pay cut with inflation currently at 15 percent.

Cabin crew at Iberia Express, the Spanish subsidiary of the International Airlines Group, will also begin a 10-day strike from Sunday, demanding the new collective agreement includes adjustments for inflation, and additional rises to make up for a seven-year pay freeze, according to *Europa Press*. The USO union, which represents most Iberia Express workers, called the strike, while Spain's largest union, the Workers' Commissions (CCOO), opposed it and signed an agreement with the company.

The CCOO attacked the USO for not keeping workers in the airline industry sufficiently divided. Spanish Ryanair workers are also on strike, as are EasyJet pilots, but the CCOO denounced USO for "taking hostage the Iberia Express workers from the conflicts that [USO] has in other companies."

Workers at Iberia, the immediate parent company of Iberia Express, will also protest outside the company's headquarters on Friday to demand improvements in pay.

Airport workers in Bilbao protested on Thursday and continued their indefinite strike opposing job cuts. According to *Europa Press* this has continued for a month. The workers are responsible for providing information and directions to travellers, but after the service was re-tendered, the new company, the multinational Acciona, announced job

cuts.

Workers at four of Portugal's major airports also begin a three-day national strike on Friday, called by the Civil Aviation Workers' Union (SINTAC) against ground-handling company Portway. SINTAC accuses Portway of creating a "climate of psychological terror, where threats proliferate and disciplinary proceedings are instituted, creating social instability unparalleled in the company's history."

Portway is owned by the Vinci Group, a France-based multinational which also owns ANA, the company managing most of Portugal's major airports. The Portuguese government banned workers who assist passengers with reduced mobility from joining the strike.

Around 180 maintenance workers at Hamburg Airport in Germany will also walk out for 48 hours from Sunday night, demanding a real pay rise. According to the *Hamburger Abendblatt*, the United Services Union (Verdi) is demanding an 8.5 percent pay rise, after the airport's maintenance company offered 5.8 percent, below Germany's 7.5 percent inflation rate.

National public sector strike over pay and right to strike in Kosovo

On Thursday, public-sector workers including civil servants, firefighters and teachers joined a one-day strike called by the Union of Independent Trade Unions of Kosovo (BSPK) and other unions. As well as implementation of a new wage law, the BSPK called for a flat pay rise of 100 euros for all workers.

The government spent weeks attacking the right of teachers to strike in statements to the media, clearly implying they were prepared to ban any teachers' strike by accusing teachers of committing a "violation of children's fundamental right to education."

Rolling strikes by Dutch railway workers over conditions and cost of living begin

Workers at Dutch state-owned railway company NS began a series of rolling strikes with a 24-hour walkout in the northern provinces on Wednesday, and in the west on Friday. Workers in the capital Amsterdam are expected to walk out next Monday.

NS workers are calling for automatic compensation for rising prices and improvements to the early retirement scheme, according to *Algemeen Dagblad*. However, in July, *NU.nl* reported comments from the director of FNV, the Netherlands' largest union with a million members, that they would not demand pay keep up with inflation: "We are in favour of decent wage increases, but we cannot pass everything on to the employers."

Indefinite bus strike continues in Zaragoza, Spain

Bus drivers in the Spanish city of Zaragoza remain on an indefinite partial strike, in a dispute with the company that has been running sporadically for a year and a half.

The works committee said it is prepared to negotiate with the private company which runs the bus services, Avanza, at the Aragonese Mediation and Arbitration Service.

Europa Press reported this week that Avanza said the works committee

should show "gallantry" and agree to its proposal of a three-year deal, which would increase pay by 15 percent. The current rate of inflation is 10.8 percent and rising, making the offer an enormous pay cut.

Norwegian Industri Energi union shuts down electrochemical strike for below-inflation pay rise

On Wednesday, the Norwegian Industri Energi trade union and Norsk Industri employers' association announced an agreement ending a strike of 2,500 workers in the electrochemical industry. The strike began on August 15 during pay negotiations, with Industri Energi calling for the employers to return the "good will" the union had shown by accepting pay freezes to save companies.

According to *FriFagbevegelse*, the deal increases the basic rate in the industry by only 4.5 percent, below the 6.8 percent rate of inflation. The employers also agreed to Industri Energi's "main demand" that additional pay negotiations could occur between the unions and individual companies.

Frankfurt University Hospital workers in Germany strike against overwork

Workers at the Frankfurt University Hospital in Germany walked out for a two-day warning strike on Thursday, called by the Verdi union to demand a "relief agreement" dealing with excessive workloads.

Several hundred workers walked out and protested outside the hospital. Workers speaking to the *Frankfurter Rundschau* described how the working conditions left many with problems sleeping or muscle pains, with many leaving or cutting back their hours out of exhaustion.

Publicly, Verdi is calling for measures to limit workload such as a limit on how many patients a nurse has to care for each shift. However, the "relief" agreement Verdi signed in the neighbouring state of North Rhine-Westphalia last month reinforced rather than eliminated understaffing. The NRW agreement established a "point system," where workers are made to work shifts in understaffed wards but are given a handful of extra days off as "compensation."

Strike continues at Technomix in Bursa, Turkey for collective agreement

Workers at the Technomix factory in the Turkish city of Bursa continue a strike, begun on August 5, to demand a new collective agreement.

Evrensel reported that members of the Türk Metal union voted to strike over pay, which is barely above the minimum wage. Workers also told the newspaper they were offered a bonus to leave their union, and one worker had her maternity leave cancelled because she was seen with striking friends. In the first week of the strike, *Ayd?nl?k* reported many other strike-breaking measures, including phone calls to each striking worker, demands they take down social media posts and a ban on conversations inside the factory.

Technomix workers provide quality control for manufacturing companies including Bosch, examining small parts for defects using microscopes.

National teachers' strike in Norway

Over 2,700 teachers and other school staff throughout Norway will be on strike from Monday, after an additional 1,400 join 1,300 teachers who walked out this week.

Earlier in the year the three unions who called the strike agreed a pay deal with municipal employers' association KS. However, after being forced to call a strike to deal with teachers' anger at pay restraint during soaring inflation, they criticised the employers for giving teachers less of this sum than other workers and refusing to deal with a shortage of trained teachers. In Oslo, which is not covered by the KS deal, the unions agreed to a mere 3.71 percent pay increase for teachers, *FriFagbevegelse* reported.

The Education Association, one of the unions involved, has gone to great lengths to emphasise its reluctance to call a strike over wages. Its leader Steffen Handal said, "We have in no way demanded a substantial salary jump", and said they would have accepted the same pay increase as in Oslo, well below current 6.8 percent inflation.

Call centre workers in Angers, France on indefinite partial strike over pay and conditions

Around 300 workers at the Coriolis call centre in the French city of Angers continue a campaign of short one/two-hour walkouts called by the General Confederation of Labour (CGT) and Solidaires unions, *Ouest France* reported.

Workers are demanding a pay increase, and measures to deal with the working conditions, which led to a staff turnover of more than 100 percent, according to the CGT. They have been walking out on regular stoppages since July 9.

Bin workers' pay strikes across Scotland

Waste and recycling workers in Scotland's capital Edinburgh walked out August 18 over pay. The stoppage continues until August 30. Similar stoppages began August 24 in Scotland's other 13 councils, including Glasgow and Dundee, lasting until August 31.

The waste and recycling workers rejected an offer from Scottish local authorities' organisation Cosla of an initial two percent, increased to 3.5 percent, then five percent for the lowest paid. A further offer of eight or nine percent for the lower paid was also rejected. RPI inflation is 12.3 percent and expected to rise to 21 percent by next spring.

The streets of Edinburgh, which is hosting its annual festival, are strewn with overflowing bins and uncollected rubbish. The council advises people to keep their rubbish at home.

Pay strikes continue by UK staff at AQA exam board

UK staff at exam board AQA walked out on Wednesday until Sunday,

coinciding with the release of GCSE and A level results. This is the fourth round of action that began in July.

The 180 Unison members cannot make ends meet and rejected this year's three percent pay offer. They received 0.6 percent last year. In response, the company is threatening to "fire and rehire" them.

The stoppage affects customer services, re-marking inquiries and missing results. AQA sets and marks half the GCSE and A' level exams.

Criminal barristers in England and Wales vote for indefinite strike over pay and cuts to legal aid

Criminal barristers in England and Wales voted to strike indefinitely from September 5, over pay and cuts to legal aid. Their last working day will be Friday, as the strike merges with previous planned action on alternate weeks.

The 2,273 Criminal Bar Association members voted 80 percent to escalate their dispute. Between June 27 when the stoppages began and August 5, 6,235 court cases were disrupted.

Some junior barristers earn less than the minimum wage or £12,000. They demand the government increase legal aid by 25 percent. The government funds legal aid, which enables legal representation for those who cannot afford it, but cuts have led to quarter of criminal barristers resigning and overwork for those remaining.

Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer, former head of the Crown Prosecution Service and Director of Public Prosecutions under the Blair government, called on the government "to step in." Starmer has banned shadow cabinet members from joining any picket lines.

Further bus strikes at Arriva planned over pay in England's home counties

Bus workers will walk out on September 5 and September 7 in Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire, England over pay.

The Unite members, including drivers, admin staff, engineers, cleaners and shunters voted to reject the company offer of pay rises between four and six percent.

Around 800 bus workers at depots in Gillingham, Maidstone, Gravesend and Tunbridge Wells in Kent, and staff at depots in Colchester, Harlow and Southend-on-Sea in Essex voted to reject a 7.8 percent pay offer. The vote was 96.5 percent in a turnout of 83.2 percent. Drivers earn an average £12.12 an hour.

Unite recently agreed a below-inflation deal at Arriva Northwest of 11.1 percent, sabotaging unified action with other bus workers.

Union suspends planned national walk out over pay by UK journalists at major publisher

At the eleventh hour, the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) suspended a planned strike for Friday by UK journalists at the national *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express*, and *Daily Star* and local papers. They will begin negotiations with employer publishing giant Reach.

The NUJ said that further strikes planned for August 26, August 31, September 14 and September 15 would go ahead if Reach does not

increase its pay offer of 3 percent.

Chief executive of Reach, Jim Mullen earned £4 million last year. Starting salaries for Reach reporters are just £22,000. Reporters on Reach's local papers like the *Manchester Evening News* can be below £20,000.

The British Association of Journalists members voted to accept the 3 percent.

Unite union suspends Isle of Wight ferry pay strikes

The series of strikes begun August 1 by ferry workers employed by Red Funnel on the service between the Isle of Wight and Southampton, England has been suspended by Unite.

Unite announced the news on August 22, instructing a return to work while workers ballot on a new deal, without making public details of the deal.

The 120 customer service staff, ratings and shunters rejected a pay offer of between 4.5 and 6.5 percent for the lowest paid. Many of the workers such as cleaners are on the national minimum wage of £9.50 an hour, compared to cleaners at another local firm, Wightlink on £10.99. Some resort to foodbanks.

All staff are responsible for passenger safety and undergo sea training. Time from home, sometimes for days, is awarded no expenses.

As strike wave hits UK, more sectors plan strike ballots over cost-of-living crisis

More sectors are threatening to join the growing UK strike wave over the cost-of-living crisis involving dockers, rail, bus, postal and telecom workers.

The GMB union is to ballot 100,000 local government workers over pay. This is a consultative ballot, not a formal strike ballot.

The Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) said it will ballot civil servants if the government does not respond to its demands over pay, jobs, pensions and redundancies by September 2. The PCS is asking for a 10 percent uplift, a living wage of at least £15 an hour, a two percent cut in pension contributions, no cuts to redundancy terms and job security.

A strike ballot of Unite members in the National Health Service against a four percent pay uplift closes September 11 in England and September 15 in Wales. A strike ballot by the Royal College of Nurses union opens September 15.

When school term commences, the National Education Union and ASCL will ballot members over a five percent pay increase. The ballot from September 24 to October 14 is only, according to the NEU, to ascertain "whether you will take part in industrial action," and "to show Government the strength of feeling within the profession and our resolve."

University and College Union (UCU) members at 151 universities will ballot from September 6 to October 21, in two ballots over pay, working conditions and pension cuts. Against the universities' three percent offer, the UCU put in for 12 percent or RPI inflation plus two percent, an end to insecure work practices and high workload.

The union bureaucracies are seeking to prevent strikes coalescing into a general strike by limiting action and keeping it divided, to demoralise workers into accepting below-inflation deals and cutbacks. Such is the strength of feeling, however, that this is becoming increasingly difficult.

As well as bringing in draconian anti-strike legislation, the government is drawing up contingency plans as they fear unrest on the scale of 1926 general strike, reported *The Telegraph*.

National one-day stoppage in South Africa against plunging living standards

Workers across South Africa stayed away from work in a legally protected strike on Wednesday, to protest the rising cost of fuel, food and continuous power cuts. Inflation rose to 7.4 percent in June, fuel prices rose 45.3 percent and oil and fats 32.5 percent. Half the population live in poverty.

The "stayaway" was organised by the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), which is affiliated to the African National Congress government. COSATU, an umbrella of 21 unions, is the largest union federation in South Africa.

One striker shot dead and three hospitalised by security guards at council in Middelburg, South Africa

South African council workers on pay strike in Middelburg, Mpumalanga have faced violence at the hands of security guards employed by the council.

The council suspended 100 workers who walked out on August 15 demanding an increase to salary scale level 5, which would mean an increase in pay.

When workers entered the council premises to collect their letters of suspension, security guards opened fire, leaving one dead and three needing hospital treatment.

South African public sector workers in strike ballot over pay

Public sector workers in South Africa are balloting until Friday over pay. The Public Servants Association (PSA), with more than 235,000 public servants, opened the ballot after talks between the government and public service unions failed.

If the deadlock is not resolved through mediation, workers will walk out.

The government's offer of 0 percent, revised to a two percent cost of living adjustment with a tax-free lump sum of R1,000, was rejected. The PSA, however, revised its demand of 10 percent down to 6.5.

Council workers in Pretoria, South Africa demand agreed pay increase

On August 19, South African council workers marched to protest outside the council offices in Pretoria, renamed Tshwane, over pay.

The South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) members oppose the non-payment of an agreed 3.5 percent wage increase for all council employees. The council claims it cannot afford the increase but is

negotiating a R26 million tender to refurbish the Pretoria West and Roolwai power stations.

Last week, SAMWU bus workers walked out over the same issue, and also to demand the renewal of licences for 70 municipal buses currently off the road.

Lecturers to continue indefinite strike as Nigerian president rules out settlement, vows not to pay them

University lecturers in Nigeria voted to continue their indefinite strike in a new ballot to demand better salaries and funding, and an end to problems with payroll software causing years of late payment of their salaries. They walked out on February 14.

An Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) leader, speaking anonymously said, “None of the branches, including the University of Abuja, voted for anything other than an indefinite strike.” The final decision on whether to extend or call off the strike will be reached at the ASUU National Executive Committee Meeting next week.

Similar issues led to walkouts by workers in polytechnics and colleges. The Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities, Non-Academic Staff Union of Educational and other Associated Institutions and the National Association of Academic Technologists, however, are on the point of demanding they return to work. This will leave ASUU members to continue their strike alone.

President Muhammadu Buhari “outrightly rejected the suggestion that the striking lecturers’ salaries in the last six months be paid,” according to Minister of Education Adamu Adamu. In Nigeria, non-payment of strikers is allowed only when a strike is deemed without foundation or illegal.

Nigerian politician calls for break-up of national grid after strike causes blackout

A strike by Nigerian workers, begun August 19, caused a total blackout. The National Union of Electricity Employees (NUEE) members demanded payment of their colleagues’ entitlements and to oppose poor working conditions.

The response of presidential candidate for the People’s Democratic Party, Atiku Abubakar, was to call for the break-up of the Nigerian national grid to “give states the power to generate, transmit and distribute electricity for themselves.” The move would cause the same kind of regional chaos in electricity supply that already grips many other aspects of Nigerian life.

Ugandan police break up protest by family of migrant worker who died in Saudi Arabia

The family of a Ugandan migrant worker who died in Saudi Arabia staged a protest at the Saudi embassy in Kampala, demanding a clear report on her death.

Caroline Kyomuhangi died on June 24 while working as a house help. She was employed in December 2021 by an external recruiting agency but started complaining about physical abuse from her employer six months later.

Since her death, her family say they received no information from the agency, nor from the government. They say that Saudi officials have not yet explained the cause of death, and neither Saudi nor Ugandan governments made plans to repatriate her body. Saudi officials say they cannot report as they are still investigating.

Protesting the delay in repatriating her body, Caroline’s family carried an empty coffin to the embassy. Police declared the demonstration illegal and broke it up, telling the public “to follow the law in regard to demonstrating at any embassy.” They arrested one man, who will be charged with “inciting violence,” and seized the coffin as evidence.

Migrant workers in Qatar arrested, deported after protesting non-payment of wages

At least 60 foreign workers, most of them Nepali, were arrested in the Qatari capital Doha after protesting the non-payment of their wages. Many were later deported.

On August 14, the workers protested outside the offices of the Al Bandy International Group, blocking Doha’s C Ring Road. According to labour rights advocacy group Equidem, some of the workers had not received wages in seven months.

Al Bandy is a privately owned conglomerate, chiefly known for construction and engineering.

Qatar, like other Gulf states, is heavily reliant on foreign labour, and limits the right to assembly and union organisation to Qataris.

Police arrested the protesters for “breaching public safety laws.” They were held in a detention centre, with around 50 Nepali workers “who failed to remain peaceful” later being deported for having allegedly “breached security laws.”

One protester told Equidem of seeing up to 300 foreign workers—from Bangladesh, Egypt, India, Nepal and the Philippines—detained there, although this could not be corroborated. Qatar is one of the top labour destinations for Nepali workers.

Protesters reported being held in stifling heat without air-conditioning. Doha’s temperature reached nearly 106 degrees this week. Protesters said they were told by police that if they could strike in hot weather, they could sleep without air-conditioning.

The government later confirmed that Al Bandy was already under investigation for non-payment of wages, and the Nepali workers took the matter to the labour court, where they received two months’ salary. According to the Nepali government, the workers were paid their full arrears before being deported.

A Nepali spokesman insisted the deported workers “were not forcefully expelled,” although they were apparently handcuffed while collecting their belongings and receiving their wages. They were also photographed and fingerprinted by authorities.

Palestinian workers protest new banking arrangement for wages

Tens of thousands of Palestinians employed in Israel staged a one-day strike on Sunday, in protest at new wage payment arrangements. Under an agreement between the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Israeli government, wages will be deposited into bank accounts rather than paid in cash.

Most of the 200,000 Palestinian workers who cross into Israel or Jewish settlements for employment do not have bank accounts. They earn on average more than twice the wages of those employed by Palestinian

authorities and businesses.

Putting their salaries on the books is a new revenue source for the cash-strapped PA that will create a windfall in bank service fees. Workers fear that hidden fees and new taxes will cut into their salaries. Workers told Reuters that the arrangement will see wages paid weekly, with a \$1 bank fee per transfer.

Workers are angry that they were not consulted, and that they are being blackmailed into the arrangement. Mohammad Khaseeb, an aluminium factory worker, told press, "Either a worker agrees, or he loses his work permit."

If the decision is not cancelled, workers said they will escalate their protest.

Iranian firm punishes workers protesting overdue wages with the lash

Iran's AzarAb construction company—which employs more than 2,500 people—began punishing workers who participated in strikes and protests for overdue salaries earlier in the year.

After protests at the end of May, nearly 20 workers were suspended from work for a year. A local court sentenced them to 30 lashes and three months' imprisonment for their protests.

Workers at the company say they have been paid regularly in the last two months, but the managerial team is constantly changing, and the situation is insecure.

Iran is wracked by an economic crisis exacerbated by US sanctions. The country has seen regular nationwide protests and strikes, centred around pensioners, demanding better working conditions and higher salaries to meet rising commodity costs.

At least 10 workers committed suicide in the last three months as a result of the economic crisis.

The government is clamping down on dissent. Teachers were prominent in the protests, demanding an end to low salaries, poverty and oppression, and calling for free education for all children. It is reported that more than 240 teachers were kidnapped, arrested and imprisoned since May, with prisons operating special teachers' wings. Some were released, but under heavy bail conditions with cases still open against them.

Lebanese judges on second week of strike over wages and conditions

Strike action by around 400 judges in Lebanon entered a second week and is likely to continue.

The judges are protesting "the difficult financial, social and health conditions" they face. More than half the country's 560 judges stopped work in protest when the Central Bank reneged on a decision to pay their salaries at a US dollar exchange rate of 8,000 LL.

The original decision sparked fury across the public sector, which operates at the official exchange rate of only 1,507.5 LL. The Central Bank reversed the decision on July 28.

Public sector workers are continuing an indefinite strike, begun June 13, over the collapse of social and economic conditions. Almost 80 percent of the country's civil servants earn 1.5-2 million LL a month, equivalent to \$1-2 per day.





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