

Airline and airport workers across Europe hold strikes throughout the Christmas period over pay and conditions; French GPs extend indefinite strike for more health funding; New Year begins with week of strikes by UK rail workers over jobs, pay and conditions; protests in Iran over death of Mahsa Amini joined by protests against cost of living crisis

## Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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

### **Airline and airport workers across Europe hold strikes through the Christmas period over pay and conditions**

Workers at airlines and airports in Europe held numerous strikes over the Christmas and New Year holidays, a busy time in airports returning to pre-pandemic passenger levels.

Cabin crew at Ryanair in Belgium held a three-day strike from December 30, with another two-day stoppage planned for January 7, cancelling 128 flights according to *BRF*. Ryanair workers accused the company of violating Belgian labour law, including paying less than the minimum wage and pressuring Belgian workers to work at understaffed sites elsewhere in Europe.

One flight steward told *RTL* that when he and others noticed they were underpaid, “when we contact Ryanair, they say that they will pay it to us next month, then they forget. And the month after, they forget again... There are people who have been waiting for a year for a small part of their salary.”

The National Centre of Employees accused Ryanair of bringing in workers to break the strike from other European bases—where unions had shut down widespread strikes to reverse a pay cut pushed through during the pandemic—thus blocking a possible international strike at the airline in 2022.

Workers at Liège airport, the main cargo airport in Belgium, plan to strike on January 11, demanding an increase in activity and to protect jobs, *Crisis 24* reported.

On Monday, cabin crew at airline French Bee ended a walkout begun December 22. Workers were calling for a 12 percent pay rise. French Bee pushed through a 20 percent pay cut during the pandemic. Inflation in France is currently 5.9 percent.

In Spain, airline workers at Ryanair, Air Nostrum and Vueling are continuing strike action for pay rises to keep up with rising prices.

Spanish Ryanair cabin crew have accused Ryanair of failing to provide the legally required number of paid holiday days and minimum wage. They are demanding basic working rights and that the budget airline end outsourcing. They have been walking out between Monday and Thursday every week since August.

The PSOE-Podemos government imposed draconian minimum service requirements on Ryanair workers of between 57 and 82 percent of flights. Ryanair fired at least 11 workers whom it accused of defying the effective strike ban, and strikers are demanding their reinstatement.

Pilots at Air Nostrum stopped work on Monday and Tuesday, opposing the airline’s below-inflation pay offer of 10 percent over the next three years for captains and 13 percent for co-pilots.

At Vueling, Spain’s largest airline and a subsidiary of the International Airlines Group, cabin crew have stopped work every weekend since November, demanding a pay rise of 13.4 percent for 2022. Vueling, which described workers’ demands as “unfeasible,” is now even more profitable than before the pandemic.

Workers at state-owned Portuguese airline TAP will walk out for five days in January, although the National Union of Civil Aviation Flight Personnel has not yet announced the dates. Cabin crew demand the reversal of cuts to pay and working conditions imposed during the pandemic, including a 25 percent pay cut.

While imposing cuts to jobs and pay on workers, the state-owned airline paid out half a million euros in severance to its former head—now the Secretary of State for the Treasury. Two senior government officials resigned due to public outcry over the payment.

### **French GPs extend strike for more funding**

General practitioners (GPs) in France remain on strike, having begun a

walkout on December 26 to demand the doubling of consultation payments.

The stoppage of the self-employed doctors was called by “Doctors For Tomorrow,” a group of doctors outside the unions organised around a Facebook group with almost 16,000 members. The group extended the strike, initially planned to last only a week, until January 8, after accusing the government of having “not deigned to pay attention to us despite this first week of strike.”

According to a report by *20 Minutes*, the current 25 euro consultation fee is far below neighbouring Germany, where the fee is 76 euros, and the overall income of French GPs is 20-30 percent less than GPs in Germany.

GPs are also planning a demonstration in Paris on Thursday. One member of Doctors For Tomorrow told *France Bleu* that if the demonstration and strike are ignored by the government, “We are going to continue the movement and we will in particular carry out an operation called unlimited anti-burn-out, that is to say that we are going to reduce our professional activity.”

### **Teachers in Portugal strike against changes to recruitment rules**

Teachers in Portuguese schools begin several strikes this week, opposing changes to the rules governing recruitment. The Union of All Teachers called an indefinite strike from this week, and the Independent Union of Teachers and Educators (SIPE) called an indefinite partial strike of one class per day.

The National Federation of Teachers also called an overtime ban and delivered a petition to the ministry of education opposing the recruitment changes, signed by 45,000 teachers and other education workers. SIPE told Lusa that “[w]e will never accept direct hiring by the schools,” as well as opposing other measures proposed by the government.

### **National rail strikes in Portugal over pay continue**

Train drivers at Portuguese state-owned rail company Comboios de Portugal began a two-day strike on Wednesday over pay and working conditions. The National Union of Drivers of the Portuguese Railways called the stoppages, and a week-long overtime ban from Monday, following several shorter strikes last year.

### **Portuguese port workers continue strike over pay negotiations**

Workers at ports in Portugal, on the mainland as well as Madeira and the Azores islands, continue a campaign of stoppages begun in December, walking out on two 24-hour strikes on Monday and this Saturday.

The National Union of Port Administration Workers is demanding the port operators negotiate over pay, accusing them of a “total lack of availability” to discuss a pay rise for 2023, *Observador* reported. Seven more 24-hour strikes are planned throughout January.

### **Rail workers in southwest Germany continue strikes for equal contracts**

Rail workers at state-owned Southwest German Regional Transport (SWEG) and its subsidiary Bahn Stuttgart (SBS) held another walkout on Wednesday and Thursday, after a two-day stoppage last week called by the German Train Drivers’ Union (GDL).

GDL members demand pay and working conditions at both SWEG and SBS be determined by a single collective agreement. The union said it would be prepared to accept arbitration over the contract if this condition is met, but SWEG ruled out negotiating a single contract, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported.

SWEG insists on negotiating a separate collective agreement for SBS because it intends to re-privatise the subsidiary, which was acquired from Abellio after it ran into financial difficulties.

### **Home healthcare workers strike against pay freeze in Bizkaia, Spain**

Workers at the in-home healthcare service in Bizkaia, Spain began a four-day strike on Monday, calling for a new collective agreement seven years after the last agreement was signed.

According to the Basque Workers’ Solidarity union, the wages of workers in the service decreased by 11.2 percent relative to inflation since the last agreement.

### **Foundry workers in Antep, Turkey, strike over pay and increased workload**

Around 200 foundry workers in the Turkish city of Antep, near the border with Syria, walked out on Monday. Employers on the Küşet Industrial Estate announced a 3,000 lira pay rise would be conditional on agreeing a 10 percent increase in workloads, *Evrensel* reported.

One worker told *Evrensel* “So they didn’t give us a raise. They are recovering the raise they gave us by overworking us.”

Workers speaking to *Evrensel*, including one of the many Syrian refugees on the Küşet estate, emphasised the importance of Turkish and Syrian workers walking out together against the employers.

On Thursday, workers ended the strike after three days, when delegates agreed to a 3,000 lira pay rise without the productivity strings attached. However, this fell short of workers’ demands for a 50 percent pay rise, around 4,000 lira, to match the percentage increase in the minimum wage.

According to the government-controlled TurkStat, inflation is currently 64.3 percent, but the independent Inflation Research Group estimates it at 137.6 percent.

### **Turkish metal workers’ strike held in defiance of government ban ends with pay deal**

An indefinite strike by metal workers at multinational steel wire manufacturer Bekaert in İzmit, Turkey ended this week, as the Birleştik Metal-İş union and Bekaert agreed to an average 84.8 percent pay rise for the next six months.

Bekaert workers demanded a 130 percent pay increase for six months.

Around 400 workers walked out on December 13, in defiance of a government ban. Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan signed an order before the beginning of the strike imposing a 60-day postponement—an

effective strike ban—supposedly because it was “disruptive to national security.”

After the deal was signed, Birle?ik Metal-?? announced the “strike has ended successfully.” Bekaert workers, interviewed by *Evrensel*, were more reserved, as the pay demand was not met, while declaring they were proud to have defied the government’s ban.

### **New Year begins with week of strikes by UK rail workers over jobs, pay and conditions**

Around 40,000 rail workers at infrastructure company Network Rail and 14 train operating companies (TOCs) held a 48-hour national stoppage beginning Tuesday, with a further two day walkout scheduled to start Friday.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members have held a series of strikes over the last six months calling for improved pay and against attacks on jobs—including closure of ticket offices and full implementation of driver only operated trains—and working conditions.

On Thursday, train drivers at 15 TOCs struck over pay, not having had a rise since 2019. They have held a series of national strikes since July.

The strikes are expected to reduce services to around 20 percent of normal, with additional disruption resulting from the drivers’ walkout.

### **UK-wide strike of railway cleaners over poor pay**

Around 1,000 cleaners employed by outsourcing companies to clean rail stations and trains in the UK held their first national stoppage on Saturday.

The RMT members work for outsourcing companies Atalian Servest, Bidvest Noonan, Churchill and Mitie. The companies provide cleaning services to TOCs, including Avanti West Coast, LNER, Northern and TransPennine as well as Eurostar.

The cleaners demand to be paid £15 as a minimum, plus improved sick pay and leave and pension provision. Many are on the minimum wage of £9.50 an hour. Planned action for December 22 and 23 was called off by the RMT. The union has not announced further action.

Cleaners employed by outsourcing company, ISS, contracted to clean trains and facilities for the London Docklands Light Rail network, walked out Friday and Saturday in a separate dispute. The RMT members are demanding improved pay and protesting roster patterns and working conditions.

### **Stoppage over pay by London bus workers**

Bus drivers working for Abellio in London were on strike Wednesday and Thursday this week.

The Unite union members are pushing for an improved pay offer. Abellio runs services in south and west London. The strike meant only a quarter of the normal number of buses ran on Wednesday. Previous strikes took place in December, and more are planned for this month.

### **UK highway workers strike over pay and conditions**

Around 100 National Highways workers across England began a two-day strike Tuesday.

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union members work as road traffic officers and control room staff, responsible for monitoring incidents on motorways and providing assistance. They want improved pay and are protesting cuts to jobs, pensions and redundancy terms.

The stoppages are part of a rolling programme of nationwide strikes by 100,000 civil servants in 124 government departments taking place in different sectors and areas of the country at different times.

### **UK civil servants walk out over pay, job cuts and attacks on redundancy terms**

Other PCS members are also striking for improved pay, and against attacks on jobs, pensions and redundancy terms.

Workers at the Rural Payments Agency based in Caernarfon, Newcastle and Worthington walked out on Tuesday until January 13.

Workers at the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA), responsible for conducting driving tests in the East of England, East Midlands, West Midlands and parts of London, began their stoppage on December 28 until Tuesday. Those working for the DVSA in London, southeast England, southwest England and Wales walked out from Wednesday until January 10.

PCS members at the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in Toxteth and Liverpool job centres are striking until Saturday, with those at Everton and Innovation Park joining the action Tuesday. DWP workers in Doncaster are also striking.

### **Pay strikes at UK logistics firm continues**

Around 350 logistics workers at Arrow XL based in Liverpool, England are continuing their strikes for better pay, which have been taking place for over 10 weeks.

The Unite union members have held stoppages each Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday since October 24. They demand improved pay. Working as drivers, warehouse and customer care staff, many are on the minimum wage. XL’s highest paid director earned nearly £540,000 last year.

XL workers are also striking at its depots in Enfield, Wigan and Worcester. On December 28, a rally was held outside the Wigan depot. Around 100 strikers and supporters attended.

XL workers make two-person deliveries for major companies such as Amazon, LG Electronics and Richer Sounds.

### **Further stoppages by teachers in Scotland over pay**

Teachers in Scotland are to walk out next week, demanding a 10 percent pay rise.

Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) members working in primary, special schools and early years will strike January 10, and those in secondary schools will walk out January 11. NASUWT union members

working in Scottish primary schools will strike January 10, and those in secondary schools will strike January 11. Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association members will join the strike on January 11.

From January 16, EIS members will walk out for 16 consecutive days, with teachers at two Scottish local authorities walking out each day.

### **Strike at Coventry UK, Amazon fulfilment centre announced**

Workers at Amazon's depot in Coventry, England are to strike on January 25. The GMB members voted by a 98 percent majority in the recent ballot to walk out.

It would be the first official strike by Amazon workers in the UK. They are protesting the 50p an hour pay rise proposed by Amazon. UK Amazon recorded pre-tax profits of over £200 million for 2021.

UK Amazon workers at sites in Tilbury, Coventry, Rugeley and Bristol staged unofficial walkouts in the summer, angry at Amazon's minuscule pay rises. Unions such as GMB only publicised the walkouts after the event. GMB is keen to offer its services to Amazon but only represents a minority of Amazon workers at the Coventry depot.

### **Further strikes by UK court workers over new computer system**

UK court associates and legal advisers working for the HM Courts and Tribunals Service will walk out on Saturday and again on January 14.

The PCS members oppose the introduction of a new computer court system, the Common Platform, because it increases their workload. They voted by a 97 percent majority for the stoppages.

The action follows walkouts at courts in England between December 2 and 5, and again at courts across England and Wales on various dates from December 24 to January 4.

### **Unite union suspends strike by waste site workers in northwest England**

The Unite union suspended a scheduled strike by waste and recycling workers employed by Veolia at 22 sites across Merseyside after the firm made a new pay offer.

The workers were due to walk out Monday until Saturday, but the strike was suspended while they are balloted on the offer. Should it be rejected, a stoppage scheduled for January 15-21 will go ahead.

### **Protests in Iran over death of Mahsa Amini join strikes against cost of living crisis**

On Saturday, workers at Iran's largest refinery, Abadan, went on strike protesting the killing of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini in September. Press accounts Tuesday reported the strike was continuing.

Protests have been taking place for more than 100 days over the death of Amini, affecting nearly 300 cities.

Mahsa Amini was arrested by the morality police for wearing the hijab

"improperly." She suffered injuries in police custody resulting in her admission to hospital, where she fell into a coma and died three days later. According to the Iran Human Rights Organisation, Iranian state forces have killed at least 469 people, including 63 children, in protests against the death of Amini.

Also on Saturday, protests took place in cities across Iran, including Javanroud, Najafabad, Sanandaj, Semirom and Tehran. The protests in Tehran included those at the Grand Bazaar where merchants went on strike and protestors clashed with security forces.

The protests over the killing of Amini have coalesced with protests against increasing poverty, high prices, the ending of subsidies and corruption.

The Iranian currency has lost a quarter of its value since the protests began. Economic boycotts led by US imperialism are exacerbating the economic crisis.

### **Protests in Israel following inauguration of right-wing government**

Protests took place at the end of last week over the inauguration of the new Israeli government, the most right-wing in Israel's history.

The former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is back in government after 18 months in opposition. He formed a coalition after doing deals with the fascistic Religious Zionism Party and the ultra-orthodox religious parties, Shas and United Torah Judaism.

The protests took place in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. The issues raised by protestors included allegations of corruption against Netanyahu and incitements against LGBT+ people and left-wing dissidents.

### **Tunisian public transit workers strike to protest non-payment of salaries and bonuses**

Public transport was brought to a halt in Tunis, Tunisia on January 2, when workers walked out on indefinite strike due to non-payment of salaries and bonuses.

Striking transport workers gathered outside the prime minister's office in Kasbah square in protest. The strike, called by the UGTT trade union, had a big impact in the capital Tunis on the first day back for schools and universities after the holiday.

Tunisian workers and their families have been suffering for months due to the deteriorating economy causing shortages in many basics. The government is currently trying to secure an International Monetary Fund loan.

### **Health workers in Abia State, Nigeria, walk out to demand unpaid salaries**

Nigerian health workers employed by the Abia Health Management Board (HMB) held a strike and protest on December 29 at the offices of the Executive Officer and Director of Finance. They demand payment of 13 months' salary arrears.

Chidinma Wokoma, chairperson of the HMB Medical and Health Workers Union, said the protests lasted about a month. "We are picketing their offices today and they shall remain shut until they pay the salaries,"

she said. Wokoma said the union would accept payment of only five months' arrears, while threatening an indefinite strike on January 14.

### **State-employed workers in Malawi to strike over wages**

State-employed workers in Malawi are to strike over the rising cost of living, not matched by wage rises.

A statement signed by the leaders of the Civil Servants Trade Union (CSTU) and Teachers Union of Malawi says, "We (CSTU) and [the] Teachers Union of Malawi would like to notify government of our intention to call for a nationwide industrial strike for all civil servants in Malawi from 9 January 2023 that shall [not] be called off until government addresses all concerns we presented during the recent GNT [Government Negotiating Team] Meeting."

### **Teachers in Zimbabwe register readiness to strike**

As schools are set to reopen following the Christmas and the New Year break, teachers in Zimbabwe say they ready for strike action over pay.

The Amalgamated Rural Teachers Union of Zimbabwe reported results of a survey: "99 percent of the 52,340 teachers we interviewed are supporting the idea of going on a job action. The majority of the teachers still demand the US\$540 they used to earn pre-October 2018."

Teachers currently earn ZW\$40,000 and an additional US\$200 in allowances, taking their gross income to US\$250 a month.

Teachers have suffered from low pay for years, with previous strikes betrayed by the unions. In many cases, parents are paying extra to cushion teachers suffering from low pay. They have also been arrested and prosecuted for protesting their plight.



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