

Protests and strikes across Europe mark International Women's Day March 8; nurses and medical staff join continuing strikes and protests in Iran; municipal workers in eThekweni, South Africa continue wildcat stoppage over pay parity

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

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Strikes against inequality and discrimination across Europe on International Women's Day

International Women's Day, March 8, saw demonstrations across Europe, with workers in many countries holding strikes to support demands to eliminate inequality and discrimination against women.

Italian unions called a one-day strike in many sectors, including public transport, schools and universities, healthcare and the private sector. According to *ADN*, the state's Strike Guarantee Commission ruled the strike notice filed by all but one of the unions for rail, air, maritime and local public transport workers was invalid, banning many workers from taking part.

In France, many workers also joined rallies during a one-day strike called by most of the unions. According to the General Confederation of Labour, 200,000 people joined demonstrations throughout France, including 100,000 in Paris. Many denounced recent comments of President Emmanuel Macron in which he announced plans to increase the birth rate as a "demographic rearmament," echoing the rhetoric of the far-right National Rally.

Work stoppages were called for the day in cities across Spain. At rallies involving tens of thousands, expressions of opposition to the genocide in Gaza were also visible.

El Periódico reported on the minimum services imposed during the strike in Catalonia, including one teacher for every four classes in primary schools and one for every three classes in secondary schools, to ensure they remain open to warehouse children. Also, 85 percent of transport services were required to run. Even 50 percent of public television and audio broadcasting was included in the minimum service requirements.

The Greek Civil Servants' Confederation called a four-hour stoppage, both to mark International Women's Day and protest against the passing of a bill that day to allow private universities, which teachers, lecturers and students have opposed with strikes and occupations.

According to *ef.syn*, the government rejected a parliamentary motion to cancel the bill as unconstitutional, although Article 16 of the constitution

explicitly states, "The establishment of university level institutions by private persons is prohibited." The government's spurious reasoning spelled out by one MP is that the private universities will not be "established," but will simply be the "extension into our country" of universities in other countries.

In Portugal, the Unions of All Education Workers (STOP) called a national strike for the day, which it says closed some schools and left others "at half gas," *Lusa* reported. STOP says women, who constitute a majority of teachers and other school workers, still face discrimination for having taken maternity leave. It said that even supposed adjustments, such as fitting class times around breastfeeding, were used against teachers, as schools could unilaterally decide which classes should go ahead.

Public-sector workers in Basque Country, Spain, strike over pay and precarious contracts

Tens of thousands of public-sector workers in the Basque Country, Spain, held a one-day strike on Tuesday.

The strike, organised by five unions, called on the government to negotiate a new collective agreement over pay and working conditions, including the widespread use of precarious contracts.

According to *Europa Press*, the unions said real pay had fallen by 8 percent over two years, and the number of workers on a temporary contract was at an all-time high of 44 percent.

The Basque Workers' Solidarity union said around 65 percent of teachers, 75 percent of workers in kindergartens, 60 percent of catering and cleaning workers and other groups stopped work, comprising a large proportion of the 150,000 public-sector workers in the Basque Country. The government reported much lower figures, and very few healthcare workers were able to join the strike, as a high minimum service requirement was imposed, *EFE* reported.

Two-week strike begins in Finland against austerity and curbs on the right to strike

On Monday, a two-week strike called by Finnish trade unions began, involving 7,000 workers in manufacturing and transport of goods.

The walkout is the latest in opposition to the right-wing government's austerity measures and attacks on the right to strike. The stoppage was restricted to only a few thousand workers after the unions indicated they would compromise with the government's demands. A three-day strike in February over the same issues involved around 130,000.

The government, led by the right-wing Coalition Party and far-right Finns Party, plans to cut unemployment payments—including removing the increased rate for unemployed parents—introduce unpaid sick leave, reduce housing benefit, and prevent pay rises larger than in industries that export goods and services, according to *YLE*.

It also plans to restrict political strikes to only 24 hours, with fines for both unions and individual workers if a court finds a strike “illegal.” In a press release last week, the Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions (SAK) complained that the government had not accepted the “far-reaching compromises” offered by the unions.

The SAK claimed it would be happy for the government to “stick to its goals” as long as it emulated neighbouring Scandinavian countries where “changes have been made in a balanced way.” It suggested, for example, that it would accept allowing courts to rule on whether political strikes and even sympathy strikes in industrial disputes are “proportional” if the government also banned the use of scab labour. The SAK said it could also accept a ban on “revolutionary strikes” targeting the political system.

24-hour strike against overcrowding in Belgian prisons

On Thursday night, staff in all of Belgium's prisons will begin a 24-hour strike against overcrowding, which has led to unsafe conditions for prisoners and guards alike.

According to *belga*, at the start of March, there were 12,316 people in prisons but only capacity for 10,743, with some sleeping on mattresses on the floor.

A 24-hour strike was already held from Sunday night at the prison in Antwerp, where there are only 413 places but almost 800 prisoners, increasing by almost 100 since the start of the year, *RTL* reported. At the start of March, the staff in 10 prisons announced their refusal to accept any new prisoners, after which the government agreed to extend month-long prison leave to more people serving sentences of less than ten years.

Overcrowding in prisons has been exacerbated by the decision of the de Croo government to force all those given sentences of less than three years to serve them in prison, which was not the case before 2022. *De Standaard* reported that the government promised to build 15 new facilities for those serving short sentences but only two opened, and the unions are calling for prisoners with short sentences not to be jailed and more people to be released with ankle tags.

Strike over severance arrangements at suppliers of Ford Saarlouis, Germany

Around 500 workers at five auto parts suppliers of the Ford factory in Saarlouis, Germany, held a four-day strike ending this Thursday, *dpa* reported.

The strike was called by the IG Metall union during negotiations over a “social collective agreement” governing severance pay and potential redeployment for workers at the suppliers when the Ford plant closes in

November 2025.

Last month, IG Metall agreed to a “collective social agreement” at the Ford Saarlouis factory itself, signing off on 5,000 job losses by the end of 2025, presenting this as a victory because of the redundancy payments and 1,000 jobs which were “guaranteed” until 2032. IG Metall claimed the contract was ratified by more than 93 percent of workers in a vote, but this was after its nakedly undemocratic announcement that the contract would be accepted even if only 25 percent voted in favour.

Bicycle delivery workers continue pay strikes in Austria

Delivery cyclists in Austria continued a series of strikes over pay this week, with demonstrations in several cities on Tuesday.

In Vienna, Graz, Innsbruck and Klagenfurt, couriers and food delivery workers held a two-hour strike on March 7.

According to the *Kleine Zeitung*, full-time delivery cyclists earn only 1,730 euros per month before tax, less than half the national average. The Vida union is demanding an 8.7 percent pay rise for the 2,000 workers at Foodora and Lieferando covered by a collective agreement, to compensate for inflation over the past 12 months, but the employers offered only 5.8 percent.

Workers' strike at UK's Museum of Liverpool continues over COVID payment

Workers at the National Museum of Liverpool, England are continuing their strike into its fourth week for a COVID payment of £1,500 promised by the government.

The 230 PCS union members walked out on February 17. The highest paid workers earn no more than £30,000 a year, while museum director Laura Pye was paid between £105-£110,000 for 2021-22.

A planned strike from Wednesday to Friday also by PCS members at The Pensions Regulator against a below inflation pay offer was suspended following employer/union negotiations.

The PCS is conducting a national strike ballot across the civil service over pay and for a minimum wage of £15 an hour.

NHS ancillary workers at some UK hospitals continue fight for COVID payment

Around 300 UK cleaners, domestics, catering workers and porters walked out at three hospitals run by the Dudley Group National Health Service (NHS) Foundation Trust on March 8.

Contractor Mitie has reneged on a bonus of £1,655 agreed for the Unison and Unite union members. Doctors and nurses received the payment for working during the pandemic. Mitie said they cannot afford to pay despite making a profit of £162 million last year.

A stoppage over the same issue took place by Unison members at Prospect Park Hospital in Reading last week and again this Wednesday and Thursday. The NHS workers are employed by contractor ISS.

Directly employed NHS workers who were transferred from contractor Serco at Barts in London were also denied the bonus. They began a series of strikes last year.

Students at Leeds University, England, occupy Parkinson building to demand links with Israel cease

On March 8, more than a hundred students at Leeds University, England, began an occupation of the Parkinson building to protest the university's links with Israel.

The students' demands in an open letter include rejecting future research partnerships with UK defence company BAE systems, no invites to BAE Systems at career fairs, an end to ties with Israeli universities, and "no war criminals on campus," including the suspension of university chaplain Zacharia Deutsch. Deutsch served in Israel's army, the IDF. A further demand is to end the suppression of pro-Palestinian activism by the university authorities.

The university responded by saying they would not let anything, including food, into the building. Hundreds of protesters gathered outside and joined the pro-Palestinian march in Leeds town centre the next day.

The Stuart Hall Building at Goldsmiths University, London, was occupied on February 20 against the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

UK Drax power station canteen workers continue pay strike

Canteen workers at Drax power station in England are continuing their pay strike after rejecting an offer by employer Baxter Storey.

They voted on March 8 to reject the company's agreement to enter pay talks with Unite and a one-off sum of £380.

The workers previously walked out for two weeks from January 22, from January 8-14 and initially from December 4-18.

Nurses and medical staff in Iran join protests and strikes against cost-of-living crisis

Protests began March 10 by nurses and medical staff across Iran against the cost-of-living crisis.

Workers in Bushehr protested low wages, overwork and compulsory overtime, demanding officials resign. Nurses at the Farvardin 12 Kohnuj Hospital resigned en masse. In Shiraz, nurses and medical staff at the city hospitals held similar protest demonstrations March 10.

Strikes and protests, including by oil and sugar workers, as well as retirees, have swept across the country last year against rising poverty as well as the authoritarian regime. Iran has been hard hit by US sanctions and is in the crosshairs of NATO's expanding wars in the Middle East and against Russia in the Ukraine.

Municipal workers in eThekweni, South Africa, continue wildcat strike despite court order and union pleas

Hundreds of public sector workers from eThekweni municipality, South Africa, are continuing their unofficial strike begun 27 February—defying a Durban court order and union pleas to end the action.

The workers want wage parity with municipal workers in other provinces, who earn 3,900 R a month more than those in eThekweni.

On Wednesday, 13 workers, in court for a second time facing charges of public violence and damaging essential infrastructure, were granted R2,000 bail each.

The South African Municipal Workers Union is urging a return to work, pending the outcome, in two weeks, of union negotiations begun March 11 with the municipality administration, which said they cannot afford the strikers' demands.

South African Community Health Workers in Eastern Cape march to demand employment rights and personal protective equipment

On March 8, community health workers marched to the health offices in East London, Eastern Cape Province in South Africa, to demand permanent employment by the Eastern Cape Department of Health as well as adequate .

The National Union of Public Service and Allied Workers (NUPSAW) members, who do not receive the benefits received by permanent government employees, play a critical role in primary health in poor communities.

NUPSAW's Eastern Cape secretary, Mzikazi Nkata, said of community workers: "They walk through informal settlements and townships to track and trace TB and HIV treatment defaulters. Government is now threatening not to renew their contracts. Department officials have been going to various regions of the

Eastern Cape, threatening the community health workers that they won't have jobs after the end of March. This is why we are marching."

The union accused the provincial department of forcing the workers to survive on month-to-month contracts.

The workers want adequate protective wear, such as uniforms and gloves. They also want assurances for their personal safety, having to work in the poorest communities and areas with high rates of violence and crime.

Hundreds of workers face disciplinary action. Currently, 81 employees are on precautionary suspension for misconduct, 1,781 employees have been given notices of misconduct, and 88 employees were dismissed.

Nigerian electricity workers begin indefinite strike over pension arrears

Electricity workers in four Nigerian states—Kaduna, Sokoto, Zamfara, and Kebbi— began indefinite strike action on March 11 to demand the payment of pension arrears accumulated over several years.

The Nigerian Union of Electricity Employees (NUEE) members are employed by the Kaduna Electricity Distribution Company (KAEDCO).

The CEO of KAEDCO "held [a] series of meetings with NUEE to get their buy-in into his plans to turn the company around," according to KAEDCO's head of corporate communications.

Over 1,500 sacked Nigerian health workers hold protest outside hospital

Following the dismissal of over 1,500 Nigerian health workers at the Obafemi Awolowo University Teaching Hospital in Ile-Ife, sacked workers held a protest at the hospital on March 9.

Protesters blocked the main gates of the hospital, preventing entry and exit.

The staff members were laid off by the Federal Government after the claim there were irregularities in their recruitment. A circular had been sent out by hospital managers to conduct an examination of individuals they wanted to consider for employment.

University lecturers in Sierra Leone in pay stoppage

Lecturers at public universities in Sierra Leone walked out on March 4 until March 8 over arrears of severance benefits, clearing a backlog of payments for promoted staff and for increased rent and medical allowances.

The University Academic Staff Association (UASA) issued a 21-day strike notice on November 18, with the strike to begin the day after the notice expired, but the union delayed the beginning of the strike. The UASA had been in talks with university and polytechnic authorities since August.



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