

Teacher stoppages across Europe to protest staff shortages, pay and conditions; journalists walk out at Italy's TV and radio broadcaster; protests continue across Iran by workers and retirees over increasing poverty; Kenyan health workers' funding strike begun March 14 continues

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.

Multiple teachers' strikes across Europe over staff shortages, pay and conditions

Teachers facing desperate conditions across the whole of Europe are holding strikes this week.

In Belgium, teachers held two regional strikes in Dutch-speaking Flemish provinces this week. More than 4,000 teachers in Antwerp stopped work on Tuesday, closing dozens of schools, *RTBF* reported. The next day, teachers in Ostend walked out, and 1,000 joined a rally. Strikes in three more provinces are planned on separate days next week.

The teachers are opposing an "expert" report published in December by the Flemish government. According to *Nieuwsblad*, this suggested dealing with teacher shortages by hiring educators with lower qualifications in their subject areas.

Regional strikes also began in Spain this week, with teachers walking out in Madrid on Wednesday and Catalonia on Thursday. *Europa Press* reported a large demonstration took place in Madrid, involving 30,000 people, according to the unions, while the government claims 7,000 were there.

Madrid teachers are calling for reduced teaching hours and class sizes as well as a reduction of bureaucracy by hiring professionals. Teachers' unions say that many teachers have left Madrid to work elsewhere in Spain, and call for salaries to be raised to retain them. Another strike is planned for May 21.

In Catalonia, educators in special schools as well as integration technicians who help children with disabilities attend mainstream schools and other education workers are calling for the government to properly recognise their qualifications and responsibilities, *El Periódico* reported. The USTEC and CGT unions say that 3,000 workers are covered by the wrong part of the collective agreement, which means they earn around 300 euros less each month than they should.

Teachers in Andalusia will also hold a one-day strike on May 14 to defend public education. Andalusian teachers are calling for enough resources and staffing levels to maintain state-sector schools. They said the education minister, who claims to have created 14,000 new posts, "is lying when she says that these positions are newly created, when they simply represent the replacement of civil servants who leave the system," *Europa Press* reported.

Portuguese teachers this week began strikes targeting national assessment exams, which run throughout May. The Union of All Education Professionals called for "the Government to pay attention to what is happening in public schools" and opposed the tests, which assess children as young as seven and take many hours from lessons as well as creating an enormous workload for teachers, *Lusa* reported.

In the small Croatian town of Slunj, the mayor filed a lawsuit this week attempting to ban a strike by kindergarten workers. According to *Dnevnik*, workers at the kindergarten are calling for a collective agreement and pay parity with primary school teachers. The mayor claimed the strike was "illegal" because the town had already met the union's demands, but then went on to say the pay rise was "planned" but not yet agreed.

On Friday, teachers in Turkey will hold a one-day national strike following the murder of headteacher ?brahim Oktugan on Tuesday by a student who had been expelled.

Teachers' unions called the strike and a one-hour stoppage on Thursday morning to denounce unsafe conditions in schools, and some called for a new law specifically covering violence against teachers. The government said it was preparing a law that would increase penalties for violent crimes by 50 percent if the victim is an education worker.

However, in a press statement, the E?itim-Sen union pointed to government anti-teacher rhetoric as a factor in violence, *Evrensel* reported. It said, "These violent incidents cannot be considered separately from the discrediting of education workers, which has been turned into a ministry policy." Teachers are blamed for chronic social conditions, including youth unemployment, recorded at 17.91 percent in 2023 and averaging around 20 percent since 2004.

Journalists at Italian broadcaster RAI strike against interference by Meloni government

Journalists at Italy's state-owned television and radio broadcasting company RAI held a 24-hour strike on Monday, with 80 percent of the editorial team reportedly stopping work.

The RAI Journalists' Union (Usigrai) accused the neo-fascist government of Giorgia Meloni of trying "to turn RAI into a mouthpiece for the government."

Among other acts of censorship, Usigrai criticised the cancellation of a speech by author Antonio Scurati, who has written a book on the coming to power of Meloni's idol Mussolini, on April 25, the anniversary of the defeat of the Mussolini regime. In a Facebook post after the speech was cancelled, Meloni claimed she "will never ask for anyone's censorship" but then accused her critics of thinking "that their propaganda against the government should be paid for with citizens' money."

Strike in Palermo, Italy, after latest industrial catastrophe kills five

On Tuesday, hundreds of workers in the Italian city of Palermo held a four-hour strike and protested in the city centre, after a toxic gas leak killed five people repairing a sewage system on Monday and hospitalised one more. Workers in the construction sector stopped work for eight hours.

The CGIL union denounced subcontracting in construction and maintenance, which leads to safety standards being cut to maximise profits, saying, "A business model founded on contracts, subcontracts and precariousness is a model that kills."

This played a role in this case. Three of the victims were employees of the Quadrifoglio Group, which was subcontracted by the company Tek, which was awarded the contract to maintain sewers in the local municipality by the state-owned Palermo Municipal Aqueduct Company (AMAP). One of the victims was an owner of the Quadrifoglio subsidiary, and another was a temporary worker hired directly by AMAP.

However, the CGIL's militant rhetoric is at odds with its actions, which have remained the same through years of industrial massacres. They call a strike for a few hours to capture workers' anger, then divert it into the dead end of appealing to the government.

Glass manufacturing workers oppose job losses in Avilés, Spain

On April 30, workers at the Sekurit toughened glass plant in the Spanish town of Avilés began strikes against a planned plant closure and the loss of 125 jobs.

The plant, owned by French multinational Saint-Gobain, manufactures car windshields, among other toughened glass products.

Saint-Gobain claims that the factory is making a loss, but the works committee at the plant replied to a consultants' report, "We cannot accept being told that the automobile market is in decline, when in reports published by [industry bodies] there is talk of exponential growth, reaching pre-pandemic figures."

Manufacturing workers strike in Izmir, Turkey

Workers at the Purmo factory in Izmir, Turkey, began a stoppage Wednesday after the company rejected their demand for a 120 percent pay rise in the first six months of a new contract.

According to *Evrensel*, the factory employs more than 100 workers and produces towel warmers.

Purmo, a Finnish multinational, offered only a 72 percent pay rise, barely above the official inflation rate of 69.8 percent. According to the independent Inflation Research Group, consumer prices increased by 124.4 percent in the last 12 months.

In a sure sign that it is preparing to betray its own demands, the Birleşik Metal-İş union's press release said it had "achieved important gains that will compensate the losses experienced by metal workers to some extent, with the successful collective labour agreements signed all over the country, especially the MESS [Turkish Employers' Association of Metal Industries] Group Collective Labour Agreement signed at the beginning of this year." The WSWS reported in February that the "victory" in the MESS dispute was a 98 percent pay rise, below inflation and the unions' own demands.

Dutch court bans bus drivers' strike at Arriva in Twente in the Netherlands

Bus drivers in the Dutch region of Twente were due to hold a strike on Monday, but on Friday, a judge approved multinational Arriva's request for a ban.

According to the *Noordhollands Dagblad*, drivers in Twente have been opposed to their high workloads since Arriva took over public transport in the region from Kéolis last year.

The Dutch Federation of Trade Unions reportedly reached an agreement in March over new schedules with longer breaks, but Arriva later claimed they were "unfeasible."

Further strike by workers at London hospital over pay

Around 700 workers at Barts National Health Service (NHS) Trust in the UK capital employed by contractor Synergy went on strike Tuesday and are scheduled to stay out until May 19. The walkout follows previous stoppages over the same issue.

The Unite union members are demanding to be paid the £1,655 COVID bonus paid to directly employed NHS staff as part of their wage settlement. The Synergy employees clean and prepare bed linen for the Trust. The workers currently work as porters, cleaners and facility staff. At the time of the wage settlement, they had worked for contractor Serco and were not offered the bonus.

A series of rallies have been called in support of the strikers—at Royal London Hospital on Wednesday, outside the NHS England Offices on May 13 and outside the Department of Health on May 15.

Strikes continue by National Museum Liverpool workers over withheld cost-of-living payment

Workers at the National Museum Liverpool (NML) in England began 30 days of stoppage from May 4, after a previous three-day strike.

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union members have already carried out 56 days of stoppage, after voting by a 94 percent majority. They are protesting NML's withholding a £1,500 cost-of-living payment made to civil servants as part of a pay agreement. The NML is the only one of more than 200 employers to have withheld the payment.

The NML workers are based at seven sites across Liverpool, including the Museum of Liverpool and the International Slavery Museum. The new stoppage beginning May 4, a bank holiday weekend, coincided with a new ticketed exhibition at the World Museum.

The remaining planned strike dates are May 11-12, 18-19, May 25 to 2 June, June 8-9, 15-16, 22-23, 29-30, July 6-7, 13-14 and 20-21.

Tram engineers in Croydon, London, walk out over pay

Around 60 engineers working on the Croydon Tramlink in south London began a five-day stoppage Sunday.

The Unite union members are seeking pay parity with engineers working for London Underground, who are paid around £10,000 a year more for doing similar work. They were scheduled to strike in March, but the action was postponed to allow for further negotiations.

Those taking part in the stoppage include tram, stores and infrastructure engineers. As they perform safety-critical emergency repairs and maintenance, the action could lead to disruption.

Social workers in Belfast, Northern Ireland strike over staff shortages

Around 40 social workers employed by the Belfast Health Trust, Northern Ireland in family and childcare services began a 48-hour strike Wednesday.

The Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (Nipsa) members are protesting staff shortages, with staff levels 30-50 percent below what they should be. The BBC reported one Belfast social work office, which should have 10 staff, having only two. The article said the number of looked-after children in the province had reached an all-time high of over 3,800.

A Nipsa press release noted the action could spread to other trusts, with preparations for action in Northern and Southern trusts if the staff shortage issue is not addressed.

Strike by helicopter pilots at UK firm over pay

Helicopter pilots working for multinational Bristow Helicopters walked out on strike Tuesday over pay.

Bristow Helicopters has UK bases at Aberdeen airport, the Shetland airport of Sumburgh and Norwich providing services to offshore oil and gas facilities. It also has bases in Inverness, Prestwich and Stornoway with search and rescue crews.

The British Airline Pilots' Association (BALPA) members voted by a more than 96 percent majority on a nearly 93 percent turnout back in February to strike, demanding a pay rise. BALPA turned to government mediation service Acas to try and resolve the dispute but to no avail.

The pilots have had several years of pay restraint. Now, with the company seeking to expand its business, the pilots are demanding a pay rise.

Further stoppages are planned over the next five weeks, running into June.

Job centre security staff in England strike over pay

Around 1,000 security staff employed by security firm G4S to provide security at Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) job centre offices in England held a 24-hour strike Wednesday.

The GMB members are protesting a below-inflation pay offer, which, according to the GMB, would mean around 70 percent of the security staff only being on the minimum wage.

Further 24-hour stoppages are planned for May 13 and 20, with a 48-hour stoppage planned for May 28. PCS members working in G4S on the DWP contract are currently balloting for strike action, with the ballot closing May 15.

The strike of security staff may lead to closure of some job centres if there are fears over security.

Staff at London airport to strike over outsourcing threat

Around 800 staff at London's Heathrow airport are set to walk out Thursday until May 13. They were due to strike Tuesday and Wednesday, but the union Unite suspended the action for two days to allow further negotiations.

The Unite members are protesting plans by Heathrow Airport Ltd (HAL) to outsource some roles from June 1. Among those affected and due to take part in the stoppage are workers in passenger services (helping passengers make connecting flights, etc), operating trolley services and security staff. Unite members in firefighting and airside services are also due to walk out, as they fear they could be next for outsourcing.

HAL is looking to save around £40 million through the outsourcing plans.

Unite union suspends strike by controllers at Transport UK London Bus company over pay

The Unite union has suspended the strike of around 40 bus control staff working for Transport UK London Bus (formerly known as Abellio) over pay.

The action, due May 8-10 and 13-17, was suspended after the company made a new offer, which is being put to the members.

The controllers have held a series of walkouts since January after the company failed to improve a pay offer. They are responsible for controlling 12 routes across south London. Transport UK Bus pay their controllers around £10,000 less than staff performing the same role at other bus companies.

Protest march by UK retired miners over pension scheme funds being siphoned off by government

Hundreds of retired UK miners marched from Trafalgar Square in London to Downing Street to protest the UK government siphoning money from the Mineworkers' Pension Scheme.

The scheme was originally set up as a 50/50 split between the miners and the government. Despite making no contribution since 1987, successive governments have taken around £8 billion from the scheme, including over £420 million over the last three years.

The retirees carried placards and wore T-shirts saying "Stop The Pension Theft." The scheme currently benefits around 110,000 retired miners and their dependents.

Widespread protests continue across Iran by workers and retirees

Telecom retirees held protests Monday in several cities across Iran, including Tehran, Rasht, Tabriz and Isfahan.

Their demands include raising their pensions above the poverty line, free health care, education and a right to housing. The previous day, steel and social security retirees held rallies in several cities over the same demands.

Monday also saw a strike by truck owners in Shiraz. They are protesting lack of fuel, increases in municipal transport fines and poor living conditions. Protests by truck drivers, which began at the end of April in Sistan and Baluchestan provinces, are spreading.

Monday also saw protests by gold vendors in Tehran, Tabriz, Shiraz and Mashhad at new tax laws.

Workers employed by the Tirage construction company in Chabahar were on strike the same day, protesting the non-payment of wages over several consecutive months.

With inflation currently at 35 percent and its economy near collapse due to US sanctions, Iran is being drawn into NATO's widening wars in the Middle East, in Ukraine against Russia, and prospectively on China.

Kenyan health workers' strike continues while union agrees to conciliation talks

Kenyan doctors and clinicians are continuing their national stoppage, begun March 14, to protest the government's broken promises made to end a 100-day strike in 2017.

Despite many attempts to force them back to work, including declaring the strike illegal, the doctors are refusing to back down until their demands—health insurance, postings for interns, and resolving staff shortages—are addressed. Kenya spends just 4.5 percent of GDP on health.

On May 6, the Employment and Labour Relations Court ordered striking doctors and the government to reach an agreement within 48 hours. The Kenya Medical Practitioners Pharmacists Dentists Union (KMPDU) said in the past it would not honour court orders to suspend the strike. However, union chairman Abi Mwachi said, "Our KMPDU national advisory council held a meeting to plan on how to comply with the orders. It is incumbent upon both teams to rise to the occasion and show leadership, especially at such a time where the stakes are rising with every passing day."

Kenya National Union of Nurses deputy secretary general Maurice Opetu threatened that nurses would join the doctors' strike, reversing the union's earlier position that it could achieve its demands through negotiations. Opetu gave the government seven days to respond to union demands.

South African health workers in Gauteng demonstrate for permanent contracts

Health workers from across Gauteng province in South Africa held a May Day march through Johannesburg on May 1, then gathered overnight to protest outside the provincial Department of Health offices.

The National Union of Public Service and Allied Workers members are demanding permanent jobs, with all accompanying benefits, for over 2,000 workers employed on short-term contracts or on the Extended Public Works Programme (EPWP).

The EPWP is a discredited African National Congress government scheme in which unemployed people do temporary work in the public sector but without the salary or benefits afforded to direct employees.

School transport drivers in Eastern Cape, South Africa strike over wage losses

South Africa taxi drivers, contracted to provide services for the Eastern Cape school transport system, stopped work on May 2 and blocked major roads in the province to protest non-payment of wages.

The drivers say they have been unpaid since January and are struggling financially, with many at risk of having their taxis repossessed.

South African municipal workers strike for salary increase

Workers for Rustenburg Local Municipality in North West province, South Africa have been on strike since Monday over a shortfall in their salary.

The South African Municipal Workers' Union members say their Grade 5 salaries should be higher, as pay is graded according to city size and Rustenburg, the most populous city in the province, is classed as a Grade 7 municipality. They have been pressing for this since 2017, and complain that municipal executives are already paid at the higher grade.

Protest against sacking of Nigerian water workers in Lagos

A protest was held on May 8 by workers opposed to the sacking of 391 staff at the Lagos State Water Corporation in Nigeria.

It was called by the Amalgamated Union of Public Corporations Civil Service Technical and Recreational Services Employees, the National Association of Nigerian Nurses and Midwives, Senior Staff Association of Statutory Corporations and Government Owned. Workers on the protest carried placards bearing slogans like "Probe water sector contracts, leave staff alone," "Sanwo-Olu go after contractors, leave staff alone," and "Water corporation needs more staff not sack."

Health workers in Malawi set to protest over lack of increase in

allowances

Nurses, midwives, doctors and other health workers in Malawi planned protests around the country on May 9, to demand increased allowances.

The leaders of the main unions, the National Organisation of Nurses and Midwives of Malawi and Physicians' Assistants Union of Malawi, were holding a private meeting with the Minister of Health in the hope of finding a pretext for calling the action off.



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