

Portuguese nurses in national pay walkout and health workers at some German hospitals strike over pay and conditions; nurses strike as protests continue across Iran against poverty and social conditions; doctors walk out in Ogun State over pay, as hunger protests sweep Nigeria

## 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.*

### Portuguese nurses hold national strike over career progression and work conditions

Nurses in Portugal joined a one-day national strike on August 2, after the Portuguese Nurses Union (SEP) rejected an “intolerable” offer on pay and career progression from the Ministry of Health.

According to *Lusa*, the offer would have raised monthly salaries by only 52 euros for new or newly promoted nurses, while five unions (not including the SEP) made a counter proposal of a 400-euro pay rise over three years for all nurses.

The government claimed to sympathise with the “fair expectations” of striking nurses and withdrew its offer but claimed it needed to look at “the Government’s and the country’s ability to respond, from a budgetary point of view,” to the counterproposal.

According to the SEP, around 80 percent of nurses joined the strikes, while the government claims it was just under 50 percent. There was another one-day strike on July 4, and more escalating strikes are reportedly planned through August and September.

### Strikes at several German hospitals over wages and conditions

Workers at hospitals in Germany are fighting many individual battles over pay and working conditions in a fragmented healthcare system in which many workers are not covered by the national public-sector collective agreement (TVöD).

The unions have negotiated deals that only gradually or partially bring workers at outsourced services up to the level of the TVöD.

Doctors at the Helios private hospital in Dachau held a three-day strike

from Monday over their working conditions. The Marburger Bund union called for a pay rise to compensate for inflation and a restriction on weekly working time, which can be as high as 60 hours, *Merkur.de* reported.

United Services Union (Verdi) members at the Erlangen University Hospital held their forty-first strike last week in a long-running dispute over outsourcing. According to *Junge Welt*, the striking workers are employed by Klinik Service GmbH, a company 51 percent owned by the hospital and 49 percent owned by two multinational “services” companies, and are paid much less than those employed directly in the public sector.

Workers told *Junge Welt* that since the dispute began a year ago, 10 strikers were fired without notice and more reassigned to late shifts or lost weekend and holiday shifts, which they relied on for overtime pay.

Verdi also called off a planned warning strike last week at the Weimar Clinic, a large hospital in the city of Weimar mainly owned by the Sophienhaus Weimar Foundation, a Protestant religious organisation.

The union cited the Erfurt Labour Court’s scheduling of a hearing on the legality of the strike for one day *after* the strike. The hospital and several religious organisations went to court for an injunction, claiming workers in church-owned organisations had no right to strike. According to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, churches in Germany have their own labour laws.

### Stoppages in Italian tourism industry for renewal of national contract

Workers in the tourist industry throughout Italy joined short walkouts of a few hours this week, demanding renewal of the collective agreement with the Confindustria employers’ association.

According to ANSA, the collective agreement covering workers in hotels and tour companies expired six years ago, and the CGIL union says monthly pay is 200-250 euros lower than it would have been if the contract was renewed. A full-day strike for the thousands of workers affected is reportedly planned for September.

### **Irish criminal barristers strike to reverse austerity-era cuts**

On July 24, barristers working in criminal law across Ireland walked out to demand the reversal of fee cuts imposed following the 2008 financial crisis. Hundreds of court hearings were rescheduled during the strike, as during similar walkouts on July 9 and 15. According to the *Irish Independent*, fees for criminal barristers were cut by more than 40 percent over the past 20 years.

One prosecuting barrister told the *Sligo Champion*, “Like most public sector workers the pay rates for criminal prosecutors were reduced by 8 percent in 2009, another 8 percent in 2010 and a further 11 percent 2011.”

The Council of the Bar of Ireland, which called on criminal barristers to strike, reiterated that its demand was for “a binding mechanism... to determine our fees” and an “independent review.” Its chair said the strike “could be avoided if Government had considered the matter worthy of its timely attention” and met with the Council.

### **Miners in Trepça, Kosovo, continue strike over unpaid wages**

Miners at the Trepça mine complex in Kosovo have been on strike since July 10, demanding payment of their wages for June and July.

Trepça’s management claimed it was trying to arrange a “sustainable” solution with the government. According to *Balkan Insight*, the Kosovan government provided 3.3 million euros in subsidies to the mines this year but demanded a reduction in costs and increase in production.

Last November, the Trepça Employees’ Union called off a 10-day strike and mine occupation after reaching an agreement with the government, which they claimed would end delays in paying salaries as well as improve working conditions and job security, *Balkan Insight* reported.

### **Long-running strike against low wages at Kristal Olive Oil in İzmir, Turkey**

Workers at the olive oil factory owned by Kristal Yağ in the Turkish city of İzmir have been on strike against low wages since June 11, after rejecting an offer below the minimum wage, the Tek Gıda işçi union told *Duvar*.

According to *Haberler*, a court ruled that Kristal illegally attempted to break the strike of around 90 workers by contracting another factory of the Tariş olive oil brand to replace the work that would be done by striking workers. Kristal workers protested outside the Tariş factory last week against the strikebreaking measures.

### **Partial strikes at wet wipes manufacturer in Guadalajara, Spain**

Around 230 workers at the Optimal Care factory in Guadalajara, Spain, which produces wet wipes, held partial strikes of two hours per shift on Monday and four hours per shift on Wednesday.

According to the Workers’ Commissions (CCOO) union, nearly every worker in the plant joined the walkouts. Workers are calling for their job classifications to be brought in line with the actual work they perform.

*Europa Press* reported that mass meetings rejected Optimal Care’s most recent proposal by a large majority, as it made any improvements conditional on meeting unachievable absenteeism targets. The CCOO said the fact absences caused by work accidents—around 40 percent of the total—were included in the target “not only prevents us from accepting your proposal, but also outrages the staff.”

### **GPs in England begin go-slow industrial action over funding crisis**

General Practice (GPs) doctors in England voted for the first time in 60 years for industrial action, beginning August 1, over lack of funding.

Of the 8,500 British Medical Association (BMA) members voting, 98 percent voted in favour after a new contract limited funding to a 1.9 percent increase for 2024/25. Many surgeries could become financially unviable as a result.

The BMA is encouraging surgeries to choose action short of striking, from options including limiting daily patient appointments to 25 per doctor.

The Labour government has just negotiating a 22 percent rise, over two years, with the BMA’s junior hospital doctor members. The deal falls far short of the 35 percent needed to offset historic pay erosion, and is yet to be voted on by the junior doctors.

### **Drivers at South West Buses in Somerset, England walk out over pay and conditions**

UK drivers employed by First South West Buses, Somerset walked out for 48 hours from July 23 over pay and conditions. An overtime ban is in place and further strikes are planned August 9 and 12.

The Rail Maritime and Transport union (RMT) members complain about low pay and working on buses that break down.

RMT Assistant General Secretary Eddie Dempsey said the company’s offer “proposed no new money into the contract” but “instead suggested members sell their terms and conditions to pay for their own pay rise, which is essentially moving money around.”

The company also put the offer to the workforce individually using a workplace app, in violation of collective bargaining.

The company is a subsidiary of the multinational FirstGroup, the UK’s largest bus operator, which also runs buses in Ireland.

### **Hundreds of healthcare assistants at several UK hospitals begin 26-day strike over back pay**

Several hundred UK healthcare assistants (HCAs) working for hospital trusts in Kettering, Leicester and Northampton began a 26-day stoppage on Monday over back pay.

The Unison union members took previous action over their payment bandings. They won their demand to be paid on band 3 level rather than the band 2 level they were on. HCAs on band 2 should provide personal care such as feeding and bathing only, but many were doing higher band

tasks like taking blood and inserting cannulas.

The dispute continues over back pay. HCAs at other hospital trusts won band 3 level pay backdated to 2018. The HCAs at Kettering, Leicester and Northampton are pushing for the same back pay date.

### **Union pushes through inferior deal after strikes by hospital ancillary workers at London hospital over pay and conditions**

After a total of five days of strikes at Northwick Park Hospital in the UK capital by ancillary workers, the union pushed through a deal that fails to address their main demand.

The GMB members are employed by contractor Medirest as caterers, cleaners, porters and ward hosts. They wanted parity of conditions with directly employed NHS staff who carry out the same roles as the Medirest-employed staff. They demanded to be paid the £1,300 lump sum paid to directly employed National Health Service (NHS) staff as part of last year's pay settlement.

The GMB said the deal represents up to a 25 percent pay increase. It failed to achieve parity with directly employed NHS staff, which is deferred to a later date. The union agreed these terms: "The trust to enter into negotiations with the GMB on equalising contractual terms when the contract reaches its end" and "Full recognition of the GMB."

The GMB suspended a planned two-day stoppage by Medirest-employed workers over the same issues at Newark Community Hospital, King's Mill Hospital and Mansfield Community Hospital in Nottinghamshire. The GMB said: "This is the first step on the road to equal pay, terms and conditions for contractors in our NHS." The website did not state the details of the offer to be voted on.

Medirest, an international company, recorded profits of £20 million last year.

### **UK packaging workers at Jiffy in Winsford further strike over pay and conditions**

Around 50 UK workers employed by the Jiffy packaging company plant in Winsford, Cheshire began a stoppage Monday until August 17.

They walked out previously in July for two weeks and have implemented an overtime ban since July 1. One of the products produced is the Jiffy padded envelope.

The Unite union members rejected a 1.5 percent pay increase, backdated to April 1. This represents a cut in real terms with RPI inflation at 4.3 percent. The workers are demanding an 8 percent pay rise and an increase in sick pay to 12 weeks from the current eight. They are also demanding a restoration of breaks and changes to bank holiday working arrangements.

The firm's latest profit figures were around £6 million.

### **Strikes at UK's Royal Fleet Auxiliary over pay and conditions**

UK seafarers on the Royal Fleet Auxiliary went on strike August 1, in their third stoppage this summer over pay and conditions.

The RMT members, who work as far afield as Australia, refused all duties bar safety protocols.

Royal Fleet Auxiliary officers will also strike for the first time ever on

August 15. The Nautilus International union members suffered a real-term pay cut of 30 percent since 2010, and an imposed below-inflation pay rise of 4.5 percent in November.

The Royal Fleet Auxiliary, owned by the Ministry of Defence, provides operational and logistical aid to the Royal Marines and Royal Navy, including in the Middle East, to support Israel.

The RMT, with other unions, ignored the appeal for solidarity action in October 2023 by the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions Gaza and 31 other unions and professional associations to their global counterparts: "An Urgent Call from Palestinian Trade Unions: End All Complicity, Stop Arming Israel."

### **Unrest continues across Iran, with nurses striking over wages and pensioners protesting poverty**

Strikes and protests continue across Iran, escalating economic and social hardship. Nurses at Imam Ali Hospital, Kermanshah, began a strike last week over poor management and unpaid wages. The hospital tried to use a scab workforce of nursing students. As the strike entered its third day, 31 of the hospital's 32 emergency and observation beds were empty, with only supervisors in attendance.

Nurses at Kosar Hospital in Alborz province also came out on ongoing strike for better conditions on August 1.

On August 2, workers of the state-owned Wagon Pars train manufacturer staged a protest in Arak over working conditions and delayed wages. Steel workers in Shadegan and sugar workers in Shush had protested poor conditions and unmet demands two days previously.

Worsening conditions are triggering various protests. Urban truck drivers in Isfahan have this week protested low fuel rations. This problem has affected all sectors, with farmers in Kermanshah and Bandar Abbas also protesting reduced fuel allocations for tractors.

Farmers in Isfahan have continued their protests at severe water shortages that are also affecting agricultural production. They say the ongoing crisis has been exacerbated by government inaction and demand immediate solutions.

Workers and workshop owners in Ardebil and East Isfahan have been protesting at the persistent power cuts which have disrupted their work.

Every aspect of the social crisis is triggering protests. Parents of high-school graduates held a demonstration in Tehran last week over final exam grading procedures. This is part of ongoing protests demanding a fair evaluation system. On August 1, merchants protested outside the governorate in Ilam against low-quality competitive expositions they say are damaging their businesses.

Pensioners and retirees are also continuing protests and demonstrations across the country, demanding better pensions and necessities. Protests have taken place in cities including Tehran, Kermanshah, Ahvaz and Shush. Telecommunications pensioners protested in multiple cities at the government's failure to implement fair pension adjustments. Slogans included "Neither Parliament nor Government cares about the people" and "Justice is a lie, we have heard enough."

The protests are increasingly tense. In Souteh Kesh in Qazvin province, security forces attacked and injured villagers protesting a mining company operating only 300 metres from their homes. In Marivan, border guards shot dead a Kurdish freight carrier in the Siyanav border area, one of several recent killings of workers engaged in such trade from economic necessity.

The economy is collapsing, exacerbated by US sanctions, with an inflation rate of 35 percent. President Masoud Pezeshkian favours rapprochement with the US. None of the competing factions in the ruling

elite can answer US war plans against Iran. As the assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran and the targeting of Iranian-aligned Hezbollah leader Mushin Shukr in Beirut show, NATO is intent on expanding war in the Middle East against Iran, Russia in Ukraine and ultimately China.

### **West Bank protests at Israeli detention of Palestinians and genocidal war in Gaza**

There were protests in the West Bank on Saturday at the continued Israeli detention of nearly 10,000 Palestinians. In Ramallah and Nablus demonstrators held photos of prisoners. The demonstrations protested the treatment of the prisoners amid recent reports of abuse and torture.

Demonstrators were also protesting the genocidal Israeli war on Gaza, the spearhead of an offensive that has also targeted the occupied West Bank. Around 600 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank since the war on Gaza began, and Palestinians are constantly harassed by settlers. Nassif Al-Deek, a demonstrator, told press, “We must continue to support each other in these increasingly difficult times for all Palestinians, in Gaza, in Israeli prisons and here.”

### **Africa**

### **Doctors in Ogun State, Nigeria begin indefinite strike over pay as thousands protest cost of living crisis**

Doctors in Ogun State, Nigeria, walked out on indefinite strike August 6, demanding an end to the disparity in pay between doctors employed by the state government and those working for the federal government.

The local chair of the Nigerian Medical Association, Kunle Ashimi, said the Consolidated Medical Salary Structure should be introduced by the Ogun State government to stem the flow of medical professionals out of the state. He said Ogun State “is losing a lot of doctors daily because of the pay disparity.”

On August 1, thousands began 10 days of planned protests organised on social media across the country against hunger, impoverishment and lack of electricity. Police shot dead 13 protesters. Inflation has hit 35 percent, while half the 210 million population lack access to the electricity grid. The protests follow similar action in Kenya, Uganda and Ghana.

### **Staff and students protesting management corruption arrested at Federal College of Education in Akota, Nigeria**

Police arrested 32 members of staff and students alleging vandalism at the Federal College of Education (Technical), in Akota, Nigeria on July 29. Protests have been ongoing since May over allegations of misappropriation of college funds by management.

The office of Provost Wahab Azeez has been kept locked since May by workers demanding he vacate his office in accordance with a rule established in 2023.

The crisis escalated after the minister for education informed the Senior Staff Union of Colleges of Education that Azeez’s tenure was legal and

would continue.

### **Youth in Gauteng, South Africa protest at 32,000 teaching assistant job losses**

Since the beginning of August, young people employed as teaching assistants by the Gauteng Department of Education have protested outside the provincial government offices after the loss of their contracts.

The Gauteng Youth Brigade members represent 32,000 young people employed by the department as part of the Presidential Youth Employment Initiative (PYEI) and are now demanding permanent employment. The PYEI, a youth employment drive accused of being a political gimmick, ended due to a lack of funding.

Unemployment in South Africa is currently at record levels. Officially running at 32 percent, it is far higher among young people, more than half of whom have no regular jobs.



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