

# Collective bargaining news from EPSU



News from Europe's public service unions on negotiations, pay and conditions, union rights, strikes and protests

## Collective Bargaining News

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## **Greece**

### Unions strike over train crash and public service cuts

Greek unions staged a 24-hour [general strike](#) on 28 February, marking two years since the country's deadliest train crash near Tempì, which killed 57 people. The strike brought rail and ferry services to a halt, grounded flights, and disrupted public services as unions, including [ADEDY](#) and GSEE, demanded accountability and safer transport infrastructure.

The protest comes amid wider discontent over the chronic underfunding of public services. Unions have long warned that austerity-driven budget cuts have weakened transport safety, healthcare, and other essential services. Despite repeated calls for investment, the Greek government has failed to address these structural deficiencies, leaving workers and the public at risk. This mobilization follows the general strike on 18 February, where unions also protested against the deterioration of public services and working conditions.

## **Portugal**

## Local government workers strike for wages and better conditions

Local government workers in Portugal staged a strike on 28 February, disrupting services such as garbage collection and school operations. The action was called by [STAL](#), an affiliate of CGTP-IN, to demand salary increases, career advancement, the revocation of SIADAP (the public administration performance assessment system), and a 35-hour workweek for all.

Thousands of workers joined a protest in Lisbon, marching from Praça da Figueira to the Ministry of Finance. [STAL](#) criticised the government's recent salary update of €56, arguing that it fails to address the cost-of-living crisis. While some public sector workers, including teachers, firefighters and other emergency service workers, have received improvements, many local government workers continue to face wage stagnation.

STAL highlighted that salaries in local government remain on average 35% lower than those in central administration. Since 2010, local government workers have lost the equivalent of three months' wages due to inflation and austerity measures. The union is demanding a salary adjustment of at least 15% (a minimum of €150) and an increase in allowances for arduous and unhealthy work, which have remained unchanged since 2021. The protest also called for fairer taxation and better redistribution of income to prevent the continued impoverishment of public administration workers.

## Europe

### Pact for European social dialogue signed

[The European Commission and cross-industry social partners](#), including ETUC, have signed a new Pact for European Social Dialogue with the stated objective to strengthen social partners' role in shaping labour market and social policies. The Pact builds on the 2024 Val Duchesse Declaration and follows the breakdown of cross-sectoral negotiations on telework and the right to disconnect, highlighting the need for renewed social dialogue. The Pact sets a framework to expand social dialogue and improve consultation at cross-sectoral and sectoral levels. Key measures include confirmation of appointing a European Social Dialogue Envoy, the introduction of a mechanism for submitting joint reports on EU social dialogue, developing a Quality Jobs Roadmap for 2025, and enhancing structured exchanges on the Commission Work Programme. Social partners will draft multi-annual work programmes to reinforce bipartite social dialogue, ensuring negotiations shape labour market policies. Although not very detailed, the Pact reflects EPSU's several objectives. It includes explicit references to sectoral social dialogue, despite employer opposition, and commits to consulting social partners on implementing agreements through EU law. The Pact also maintains political, financial, and administrative support for sectoral social dialogue, safeguarding commitments that were at risk during a recent review. Finally, the Pact includes steps to improve the implementation of social partner agreements—an area where EPSU and other unions have pushed for a clearer process, particularly for agreements requiring transposition into EU law.

## **Germany**

Health and care workers escalate strikes over stalled

## negotiations

The German public service union [Ver.di](#) has called for a nationwide warning strike in hospitals, care facilities, psychiatric hospitals, and emergency services on 6 March. The action follows growing frustration over stalled negotiations in the federal and municipal public service sector, where employers failed to present an offer in the second bargaining round in mid-February.

Ver.di is demanding an 8% pay rise, or at least €350 more per month, alongside higher bonuses for work during stressful and inconvenient hours. It is also calling for an increase of €200 per month for training allowances and internship wages, three additional days off, and the introduction of a personal time account to improve work-life balance. The union argues that these measures are crucial to addressing the worsening staffing crisis in healthcare and emergency services.

The strike action builds on growing mobilisation across the sector. On 26 February, trainees and students in the dual education system staged a [warning strike](#), with around 1,000 young workers from healthcare, administration, social and educational services, and other sectors gathering in Gelsenkirchen. They demanded better wages, job security, and improved conditions, warning that without fair pay and stable employment, many young workers will leave the sector.

Meanwhile, employers continue to reject key demands, including paid breaks during rotating shifts and a reduction in the maximum weekly working hours for emergency services from 48 to 42. Ver.di stresses that while some hospitals face financial difficulties, a political solution is needed rather than expecting further sacrifices from workers.

## Sweden

### Stronger protections for public sector workers

The Swedish government has presented a bill to strengthen protections for public sector workers against violence, threats, and harassment. [The Union for Professionals, Akademikerförbundet SSR](#) has welcomed the proposal, stressing that such protections are urgently needed, particularly in social services, where many workers face daily risks.

While the union sees the bill as a positive step, it argues that legislation alone will not resolve the problem. Authorities at all levels must take greater responsibility for improving both the physical and psychological work environment for public sector workers.

The union is also calling for further reforms, including making the employer, rather than the individual worker, the injured party in cases of threats and violence. This would help reduce the burden on affected workers, who currently face legal proceedings as individuals. Additionally, the SSR wants to end restrictions on preliminary investigations in cases of violence and threats against civil servants, ensuring that perpetrators are prosecuted.

Another key issue is the accessibility of civil servants' personal information, which can be used to target them with threats and harassment. The union is urging the government to review confidentiality protections for public sector workers.

## Italy

## Unions back magistrates' strike against judicial reform

On 27 February, Italian magistrates staged a nationwide strike to oppose a proposed constitutional reform that would separate the careers of judges and public prosecutors. [The National Association of Magistrates \(ANM\)](#) reported over 80% participation, reflecting strong resistance within the judiciary.

The reform seeks to establish distinct career paths for judges and prosecutors, with the government arguing this would enhance judicial impartiality. However, magistrates warn that the change could undermine judicial independence, making prosecutors more vulnerable to political pressure and weakening the justice system.

Trade unions, including [CGIL](#), supported the strike, framing it as a broader struggle for democracy and constitutional integrity. CGIL General Secretary Maurizio Landini warned that the reform threatens the judiciary's autonomy and could erode the separation of powers. The union reaffirmed its commitment to defending the rule of law and workers' rights against political interference.

## Slovakia

### Social service and healthcare workers protest low pay

On 13 March, [the Slovak Trade Union of Health and Social Services \(SOZ ZaSS\)](#) is leading a protest in Bratislava to demand fair pay and better working conditions for workers in social service and underpaid staff in the healthcare sector. The demonstration, held during the Conference of

Chairmen of Basic Organisations, will take place under the slogan “Our hands are full of work, our pockets are empty.”

The union is making it clear: workers have had enough. Inflation is driving up living costs, workloads are increasing, and wages remain too low for many to support their families. Staff shortages are worsening, with the average worker now over 50 years old. The expiration of “stabilisation” allowances risks triggering a mass exodus of workers, deepening the crisis. The protest will also highlight the ongoing neglect of non-healthcare staff in hospitals and care facilities, whose work remains undervalued.

## **Serbia**

### Strikes in social services and childcare

Workers at the City Center for Social Work (GCSR) in Belgrade, represented by the [GS ZSZ Nezavisnost trade union](#), went on strike on 24 February 2025 after months of unaddressed demands regarding working conditions, staffing shortages, and financial insecurity. Despite a significant increase in workload, there has been no corresponding rise in staffing levels, leaving workers overwhelmed. The union previously held a warning strike on 24 January, but management failed to engage in meaningful negotiations, prompting the escalation to a full strike.

The industrial action in Belgrade was part of a wider mobilisation of public service workers in Serbia. In the childcare sector, workers at preschool institution "Maslačak" in Sjenica and "Dečja radost" in Pančevo, represented by [the Serbian Union of Preschool Education \(SSPVIOS\)](#), protested worsening conditions and unpaid wages. Salaries for childcare workers in



Sjenica had been delayed for months, while in Pančevo, staff denounced chronic underfunding and the government's failure to invest in preschool services. Both actions reflected the broader struggle for fair pay and better working conditions in public services.

In Pančevo, workers also showed solidarity with students demanding broader social reforms, underlining the connection between deteriorating public services and wider inequalities. Despite government attempts to limit strike action in childcare, unions ensured that legal provisions were followed, with minimum staffing levels maintained in some institutions.

## **Austria**

### **Wage increases and new benefits for church-owned hospitals**

The collective bargaining negotiations for church-owned hospitals in Austria, led by the [union Vida](#), concluded in the fifth round, securing a 2.9 percent increase in wages and allowances. The agreement aimed at achieving higher pay so that the purchasing power of workers is maintained. Union members approved the agreement by a clear majority. The “transport ticket” was highlighted as a particular success, providing a monthly mobility allowance for public transport. Other improvements include increased on-call pay to €46.75, enhancements to the stand-in allowance, and adjustments in classification for surgical and medical assistants and nursing assistants. Partial retirement is now part of the agreement, requiring works council involvement in case of rejection. Sabbatical requests must also be justified to the works council, with the option to save time bonuses for future use.

[In Upper Austria](#), after six rounds, wages and allowances will rise by 3.5 percent from January 1, 2025. Workers will also benefit from an extension of the time bonus regulation, which allows them to transfer up to 48 hours of unused overtime into the following year for later use as paid time off. December 31 is now a full day off. The right to a sixth week of vacation will be granted earlier, as workers aged 51 and over will qualify after completing five years of service instead of ten. Additionally, from May 1, 2025, all workers will be subject to a uniform four-month reference period for calculating overtime and additional hours, ensuring more predictable work schedules and compensation.

## **Montenegro**

### Public administration workers protest over pay

#### [The Trade Union of Administration and Judiciary of Montenegro \(SUPCG\)](#)

launched a series of protests after the government failed to respond to their demands for improved pay, housing support, and fair labour laws. Despite submitting their demands to Prime Minister Milojko Spajić on 7 February 2025, no negotiations were initiated by the 20 February deadline.

The first protest is scheduled for 6 March in front of the government building, with further demonstrations planned until their demands are met. Key demands include signing an annex to the housing cooperative agreement, a 10% increase in job complexity coefficients in 2024 and 2025, the withdrawal of controversial labour legislation, and amendments to the strike law to restore the right to industrial action.

The union is also calling for the dismissal of Labour Minister Naida Nišić,

citing allegations of unlawful actions and failures in handling labour issues. Another key demand is the introduction of a seven-hour working day, which they argue is necessary to align with modern labour standards and improve working conditions.

Housing remains a central issue, as workers struggle with low wages and limited access to affordable housing. The government had previously agreed to establish a housing cooperative, but implementation has been delayed, raising suspicions of political interference.

SUPCG also criticises the government's selective approach to wage increases, noting that while education, military, and parliamentary staff have received raises, public administration and judiciary workers continue to face stagnant wages and declining purchasing power. The protests mark a growing frustration with economic policies that undermine workers' living standards.

## **Ireland**

### **A vote for strike in private health and social care**

Healthcare workers in Section 39 organisations have overwhelmingly voted in favour of strike action in a ballot initiated by [SIPTU](#). The ballot saw 96% support for industrial action on a 70% turnout, highlighting strong backing for the union's demands. Section 39 organisations, which are privately owned charities and agencies contracted by the State employ thousands of workers who will be affected by the action. The dispute involves 21 organisations that provide essential health and social care services, including disability services, elder care, home support, mental health services, and social

inclusion programmes.

SIPTU has stated that it will take this mandate to negotiations at the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC), aiming to reach a resolution. The union accuses the Government of failing to implement a pay agreement reached at the WRC in October 2023, which included an 8% pay increase and a commitment to restoring pay parity with the public sector. Other unions, including the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation (INMO) and Fórsa, are also engaged in the talks. INMO had previously run a ballot that resulted in a vote for strike action.

Following lengthy discussions with the Government, SIPTU has warned that if no progress is made, a formal notice of industrial action will be served, with strike action expected to begin in the next couple of weeks.

## **Europe**

### **EPSU joins protest against omnibus package**

On 2 February, 2025, [EPSU](#) joined over 170 civil society organisations and trade unions in a demonstration outside the European Commission, opposing the Omnibus package, which threatens workers' rights and corporate accountability. EPSU signed a joint letter urging the Commission to uphold EU sustainability laws and ensure transparent, inclusive policymaking.

Introduced in November 2024, the Omnibus proposal seeks to amend key pillars of the European Green Deal, including the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CS3D) and the Corporate Sustainability Reporting

Directive (CSRD). The changes prioritise corporate interests over sustainability, accountability, and workers' rights.

The Commission's simplification roundtable on the proposal, held on 2 February, was dominated by corporate lobbyists. Of the 57 business representatives present - including ExxonMobil and Total Energies - only two were trade unionists, and just 10 represented NGOs. The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) attended to voice concerns over corporate influence in policymaking. The Omnibus proposal does not ease burdens on small businesses but instead weakens essential protections for workers and the environment. EPSU urges policymakers to maintain democratically agreed laws and uphold sustainability commitments.

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EPSU - EUROPEAN FEDERATION OF PUBLIC SERVICE UNIONS

[Rue Joseph II 40](#), Box 5,  
1000 Brussels - Belgium  
+3222501080 - <https://www.epsu.org/>



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