

Nationwide strike for better pay brings Greece to standstill



Demonstrators shout slogans during a protest, marking a 24-hour strike over low wages, in Athens, Greece, April 9, 2025 [Stelios Misinas/Reuters]

Public and private workers stage a 24-hour walkout for a full return of collective bargaining rights.

Athens, April 9 (RHC)-- A nationwide general strike disrupted public services across Greece, with ferries tied up in port, flights grounded and public transport running only part-time as labor unions press for

higher wages to cope with rising living costs.

The 24-hour strike on Wednesday was called by the two main umbrella unions covering the public and private sectors, seeking a full return of collective bargaining rights which were scrapped as part of international bailouts during Greece's financial crisis.

Greece has emerged from a 2009-18 debt crisis, which saw rolling cuts in wages and pensions in turn for bailouts worth about 290 billion euros (\$319bn) and economic growth seen at 2.3 percent this year, outpacing other eurozone economies.

Tapping on the country's progress, the conservative government increased the monthly minimum wage by a cumulative 35 percent to 880 euros (\$970). But many households still struggle to make ends meet amid rising food, power and housing costs, the labour unions say. The country braces for further global financial turmoil triggered by U.S. tariffs.

"Our confederation's wage demand is to bring back collective wage bargaining. Before 2012, half of Greek workers had collective wage agreements. But there was also a national wage agreement signed by employers and unions which meant more than 90 percent of workers enjoyed maternity leave," Yiorgos Christopoulos, from the General Confederation of Workers (GSEE), told Al Jazeera.

"Now the government has put individual contracts at the heart of its policy. But individuals are powerless to bargain [with] their employers," he said. "Prices have gone so high that we're buying fewer goods by 10 percent compared to 2019," GSEE, which represents more than two million private workers, said in a statement. "We're striking for the obvious. Pay rises and collective labour contracts now!"

Striking protesters have taken to the streets in central Athens where buses, trolleys, trains, trams and the subway system are operating only for part of the day. Similar demonstrations were organised in other towns and cities.

Meanwhile, commercial flights to and from the country and between domestic destinations have also been cancelled from midnight Wednesday until midnight Thursday.

Greece's minimum salary in terms of purchasing power was among the lowest in the European Union in January, behind Portugal and Lithuania, data from the EU's statistics office Eurostat showed.

At 1,342 euros (\$1477.28) a month, the average salary still stands 10 percent lower than in 2010, when the financial crisis broke out, data from the Greek Ministry of Labour shows.

The country is, however, outperforming its 2 percent primary surplus targets, leaving some room for wage increases, but the government says it must be fiscally prudent to limit interest levied on its debt, which is still the highest in the eurozone.

The government has promised to raise the minimum wage further to 950 euros (\$1,047) as it targets an average monthly salary of 1,500 euros (\$1,654), closer to the EU average.

"It's a gap that keeps getting bigger because of price hikes and inflation that affects energy and medicines," Angelos Galanopoulos from the Seafarers Union told the Reuters news agency.

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