



International Strike Report (2022)

The Inter-Union Department of Statistics and
Socio-Economic Studies (DIEESE)

Observatory of Labor Strikes


China Labour Bulletin

LABMOVE Labor Action Laboratory

Labor Studies Collective

The Labor Action Tracker

Preface



The origins of this report date back to V International Conference Strikes and Social Conflicts in the summer of 2022 in Rotterdam. The following fall, researchers from the Netherlands and Türkiye organized an online workshop that aimed to bring together scholars and activists who investigate contemporary working-class protests by using some form of protest event analysis. Almost a year later, in December 2023, we organized a second workshop and discussed the idea of preparing an international report on strikes. This time, the USA team was among the organizers. This report results from this second workshop and our collaborative work in the following months.

We aim to increase the visibility and provide a better understanding of workers' strikes throughout the world. Although creating this report involved a lot of work, we want to continue preparing it in the following years. The reason why we are focusing on strikes in 2022, rather than 2023, is due to the labour-intensive nature of the protest event analysis research method. We hope to release future reports closer to the calendar year we are researching next time.

We also hope to welcome new research groups from other countries to join our collective effort.

Long live the First of May!

Table of Contents

03

Introduction

12

Brazil

26

Chile

40

China

54

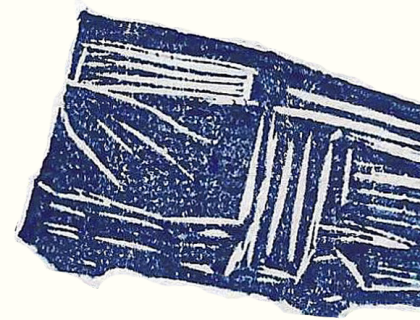
Italy

72

Türkiye

85

United States



Introduction

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Due to the considerable limitations in official data sources, scholars and activists from numerous countries have created alternative datasets to capture strike levels and labour unrest more comprehensively. Considering the prevalence of strikes in many countries across the globe, it is imperative that activists, policymakers, and scholars have access to reliable data on labour unrest. In this report, we bring together data on strikes in 2022 across six countries – Brazil, Chile, China, Italy, Türkiye, and the United States – to advance our knowledge of strikes internationally and document innovative efforts of activists and scholars to overcome limitations in official data sources. While these six countries represent a fraction of workers across the globe, we believe that this report represents an important contribution to understanding strikes from a comparative and international perspective.

Relying on official strike data is highly problematic in many national settings, as evidenced by the countries documented in this report. In Brazil, there are no official data on strikes. In Chile, the Labor Directorate Office produces high quality data, which nonetheless only capture legal strikes (i.e., strikes that take place as part of the collective bargaining process). Any other form of industrial action is not considered by the Labor Directorate Office. The Chinese government releases no data whatsoever on strikes, in part because such labor actions are not legally recognized. In Italy, the Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat) stopped collecting labor conflict statistics in April 2010. Official strike data are partially collected by the Strike Guarantee Commission (Commissione Garanzia scioperi CGS) that only covers those strikes affecting essential services and lacks coverage of

specific strike characteristics. In Türkiye, the Ministry of Labour provides data only on legal strikes. Because the union and collective bargaining law is extremely restrictive, legal strikes have become very rare, so that they amount to only 9% of all strikes in Türkiye 2022. In the United States, the Bureau of Labor Statistics only captures strikes that involve 1,000 or more workers that last for one shift or longer and occur on a weekday, defined as a non-weekend and non-federal holiday, a set of criteria that eliminates the large majority of strike actions.

A primary goal of the country-specific reports outlined in this report is to provide more accurate data of strike activity to better reflect the extent to which workers are collectively organizing. Because of the limitations in official data sources outlined above, these reports provide a more comprehensive account of strike activity in the selected countries. We also make an initial effort to compare strikes across these six countries, though we caution against drawing broader conclusions due to country-specific and methodological differences with each report. The only variable that we have on across all reports is the number of strikes. And because we work on country-specific reports that come with unique challenges to finding and reporting strikes, limitations exist even when comparing the number of strikes across countries. For example, the China data should be seen as a significant undercount since protest or strike activity is assiduously censored from local social media platforms (e.g. Weibo, WeChat, Douyin). Finally, we only provide a “snapshot” of strike activity in each country from 2022, we are not yet able to discern and compare the trends across time of labor unrest across these national settings.

Table 1 presents the populations and GDPs of six countries covered in this report. It reveals that this set of countries constitute over one-quarter of the world population and nearly half of world GDP.

Table 1. Populations and GDPs of six countries

	Population (million)	GDP (trillion USD)
Brazil	215	1.92
Chile	20	0.3
China	1,412	17.96
Italy	59	2
Türkiye	85	0.9
USA	333	25.4
TOTAL	2,124	48.48
World	7,951	101.3
Ratio	27%	48%

General Outlook

Strikes studies, in general, use three indicators to measure strikes: the number of strikes (frequency), the number of workers who participated in strikes (participation), and the number of working days lost to strikes (volume). Among these, the only indicator we have reliable data across all reports is frequency. We emphasize that these three indicators can give very different pictures and ratios. There is some correlation between participation and volume; however, frequency is not correlated with the other two.

In total, we documented 3,152* strikes across these six countries in 2022. To compare strike indicators of different countries, strike literature divides these indicators by the number of workers in those countries. Each country has different approaches for defining who counts as an employee.

Table 2 demonstrates the approximate number of wage workers, the number of strikes, the number of strikes per 1,000 workers and the average duration of strikes among six countries.

**This value reflects the total number of strikes from five of our alternative datasets plus the official count from Italy, which, for reasons explained below in Table 2 and in Chapter 4, counts more total strikes than the protest event analysis.*

There are two limitations of this comparison. China's data should be considered as a significant undercount since the country is vast and strike activity is assiduously censored. The Italy data also involves significant undercounting for methodological reasons. The official strike data on Italy (which has, however, some other weaknesses) includes a much greater number of strikes. The opposite is true for Brazil, Chile, Türkiye and USA.

Table 2. Number of strikes and average duration among six countries

	Brazil	Chile	China	Italy	Türkiye	USA
Number of wage-workers (ILO)	67,705,000	6,692,500	402,000,000	23,215,000	21,721,500	148,344,800
Number of strikes	1,068	177	155	148* (1,129)	197	426
# of strikes per 1,000 workers	0.016	0.026	N/A	0.006** (0.049)	0.009	0.003
Average duration (days)	6.7	10.4	N/A	4.1	5	13.7

*The first value is derived from the protest event analysis data, which refers to a sample of strikes but captures data on more variables than the official data. The value in the parenthesis is derived from official data sources (CGS), which more comprehensively documents the total number of strikes across Italy but only focuses on those that may threaten essential services. Please see Italy's country specific report for further clarification on the difference between these two.

** See note 1 above. If relying on official data (value in parenthesis) Italy becomes the most strike prone country in our report.

The data show a significant variation in duration. Strikes in the USA and Chile were almost twice as long as those in Brazil, Türkiye and Italy.

Table 3. Participation and volume among three countries

	Chile	Türkiye	USA
Number of strikers (participation)	34,038	84,088	224,000
Participation per 1,000 workers	5.1	3.9	1.5
Number of working days lost to strikes (volume)	378,402*	203,571	4,447,588*
Volume per 1,000 workers	56.5	9.4	30.0
The average duration of strikes (days)	10.4	5	13.7

*Values include all days (working days and nonworking days, like weekends), lost to strikes.

Because Brazil, China and Italy data do not include participation and volume yet, Table 3 compares strike participation and volume only for Chile, Türkiye and the USA. Chile once again leads the way on both indicators. Five of every 1,000 workers struck in Chile in 2022; the same number is four in Türkiye and two in the USA. The volume of strikes in the USA are much higher than the volume in Türkiye because strikes in the USA are considerably longer in duration.

Industries

Table 4 presents the industries of strikes in 2022 as detected by six research groups* in six countries according to the ISIC, rev. 4 (International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities Revision 4).

Education ranks first among the top 4 industries in all countries except China and Türkiye. Education was one of Silver's (2003) four likely successors of the automobile complex as the leading industry of world capitalism and, therefore, the leading industry of labour unrest.¹

*Below this point, for Italy, we use the protest event analysis data because the official data do not include certain variables that we compare.

[1] Silver, Beverly (2003) *Forces of Labour*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Table 4. Industries of all strikes in six countries

Education	23%
Transportation and storage	19%
Manufacturing	13%
Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	9%
Human health and social work activities	8%
Accommodation and food service activities	8%
Construction	4%
Information and communication	3%
Administrative and support service activities	3%
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	2%
Mining and quarrying	1%
Professional, scientific and technical activities	1%
Water supply, sewerage, waste management	1%
Other service activities	1%
Financial and insurance activities	1%
Arts, entertainment and recreation	1%
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	1%
Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	1%
Real estate activities	0%
Activities of households as employers	0%

Being consistently among the top 3 industries in all six countries, ‘transportation and storage’ industry ranks second. In her research on workers’ protests between 1870 and 1996, Silver (2003: 98) also found that transportation ranks top among other industries. Yet, the industry

has grown even further with the COVID-19 pandemic. The industry grew exponentially, drawing thousands of new workers, and couriers of various kinds have increasingly mobilised to improve their conditions.

Manufacturing is among the top 3 industries in only three countries: Chile, Italy and Türkiye. However, because Türkiye had a significant number of manufacturing strikes, the industry ranks third in the overall data.

The top three industries (education, transportation and manufacturing) account for the majority (55%) of strike activity in those countries in 2022.

Table 5. Top 3 industries and their shares (%) in six countries

	Brazil	Chile	China	Italy	Türkiye	USA
1. Ind.	Education (34%)	Education (29%)	Transport. (73%)	Transport. (37%)	Manufact. (65%)	Food services (31%)
2. Ind.	Public admin. (16%)	Manufact. (13%)	Construct. (18%)	Manufact. (17%)	Transport. (9%)	Education (16%)
3. Ind.	Transport. (15%)	Transport. (12%)	Retail (3%)	Professional (12%)	Construct. (7%)	Transport. (10%)

Other features

We also capture data on union involvement in strikes, and there is dramatic variation among the countries. Table 6 explores the ratio of strikes organised by a trade union. Workers without the help of a formal union organised the rest. Chile and Brazil are the frontrunners. Being the most authoritarian country on our list, China, trade unions organised zero strikes in 2022.

The USA data represent the percentage of strikes organized by unionized workers, meaning after the formal recognition of a union in the workplace. The nonunion category includes strikes organized by workers with the support or an existing union and those organized without support from any formal organization.

Table 6. Percentage of strikes organised by a trade union

Chile	95%
Brazil	89%
Italy	88%
USA	69%
Türkiye	42%
China	0%

Except for the USA, the research includes data on the legality of strikes, and once again, variation is quite significant among the countries. Every country has different union laws and definitions of legal strikes. Interestingly, in Chile, half of the strikes were non-legal. The extremely low ratio of legal strikes in Türkiye is striking, and gives another clue about the level of authoritarianization in the last couple of decades.

Table 7. Percentage of legal strikes

Italy	97%
Brazil	95%
Chile	53%
Türkiye	9%
China	0%

Except for China and the USA, we know the rate of public sector strikes. In general, unions are stronger in the public sector; therefore, one may expect more strikes to happen. Indeed, in Chile and Brazil, the ratio of strikes in the public sector is greater than 50%, which is way greater than the share of public employment. The meagre ratio in Türkiye is probably related to the fact that striking is forbidden for civil servants. They still do organise non-legal strikes, but they are riskier. On the other hand, when it comes to participation, five nationwide strikes of civil servants (one teachers' and four health professionals' strikes) account for more than half (54%) of the participation in Türkiye.

Table 8. Percentage of strikes in the public sector

Chile	64%
Brazil	59%
Italy	50%
Türkiye	13%



Brazil

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Context

In Brazil, president Jair Bolsonaro's term ended in 2022. He was unsuccessful in two important aspects. He failed in the legislature, and he could not implement his self-proclaimed "ultraliberal" projects. He also failed, in front of the judiciary, in its effort to politicize the lower ranks of the Armed Forces and the law enforcement agencies, aiming to extend Bolsonaro's government through an authoritarian regime.

Despite all of that, Bolsonaro's government arguably achieved some success. With an interest rate set by the Central Bank reaching 13.7%, the reliable official inflation index in the country ended 2022 at 5.8%, a modest percentage by national standards. The price of food, however, remained a prominent component in the inflation. In the last three trimesters of the year, its monthly variation ranged from 12% to 15%.

The 3% gross domestic product growth was not actually considered economic recovery. There was a decrease in agriculture (-1.7%), low growth in industrial activity (1.6%) and more substantial growth only in the service sector (4.2%). Nevertheless, 2022 ended with a historic reduction in the unemployment rate (5.5%) and a decrease in informal jobs. On the other hand, the average worker's income fell by 1%. From 2020 to 2021, the average worker's income had already declined by 7%.

In around 40% of Brazilian households — which represents about 125

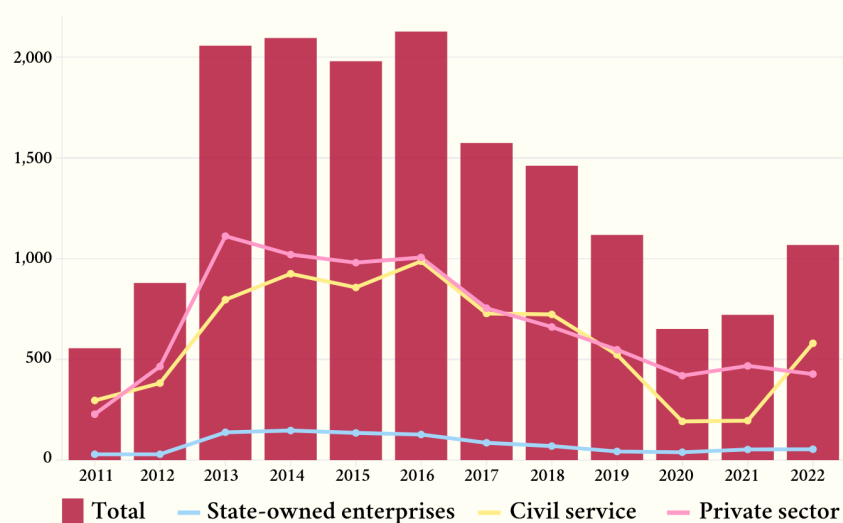
million people, more than half of the country’s population — there was some form of food insecurity. Approximately 33 million people — about 15% of Brazilians — live in starvation. 14 million of those fell into such condition in 2022.

Strikes in 2022

The Labor Unions Department of Statistics and Socioeconomic Studies (DIEESE, in Portuguese), an entity created and maintained by the Brazilian labor movement, has been collecting data on strikes in the country for over 40 years through news reported by mainstream media and the labor press. The production of information from this material became possible thanks to the development of an electronic system — the Strike Monitoring System (SAG, in Portuguese). Our data on the number of strikes are reliable, however, we only collect data on the number of striking workers in less than 10% of strikes.¹

In 2022, 1,067 strikes were registered — a 48% increase compared to the previous year. The hours spent in these strikes, about 59,000, also increased significantly, 81%.

Figure 1. Annual number of strikes (from 2011 to 2022)

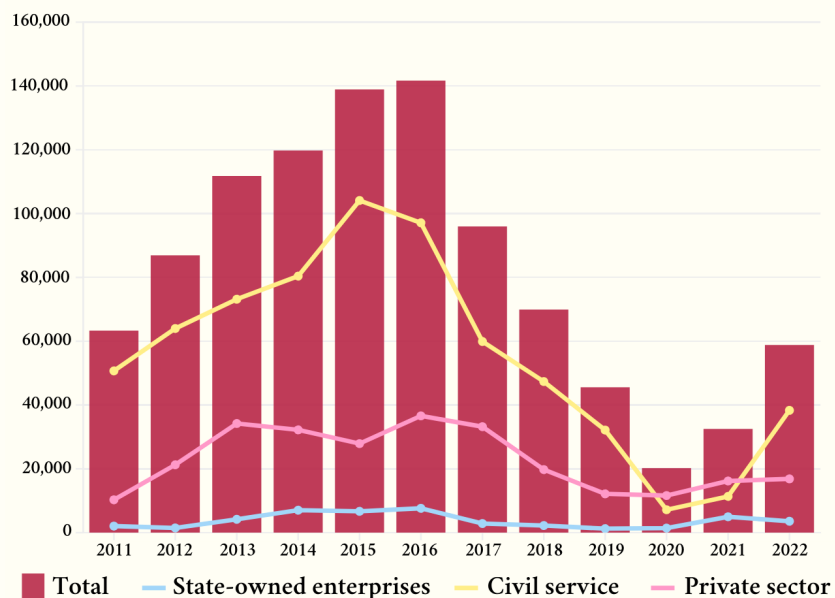


[1] This is due to the unions’ withdrawal of investment in their communication and journalism departments. In 2017, a change in labor union legislation made it even more difficult to finance these activities.

For civil servants, who stopped their activities on 580 occasions, the number of strikes increased 196%. Once the Covid-19 pandemic was under control, the two main categories of workers — education and nursery professionals — considered stopping their activities again. Claims regarding wage increase and the payment of the national minimum teaching wage (according to federal law) were the most frequent ones. About half of the strikes organized within the civil service (52%) ended on the same day. 19% of civil servant strikes lasted for more than 10 days.

For private sector workers, the number of strikes decreased 9% — from 468 to 426. The mobilizations in the service sector (67%) kept on predominating over the industrial sector (32%). Workers of concession companies for public road transportation were the biggest group.² These workers are mainly bus drivers, because railroad companies are mostly owned and ran by the state. For private sector workers, payment arrears are the most frequent claim. About 59% of the strikes organized in private companies ended on the same day and only 7% of them went on for more than 10 days.

Figure 2. Number of hours on strike (from 2011 to 2022)



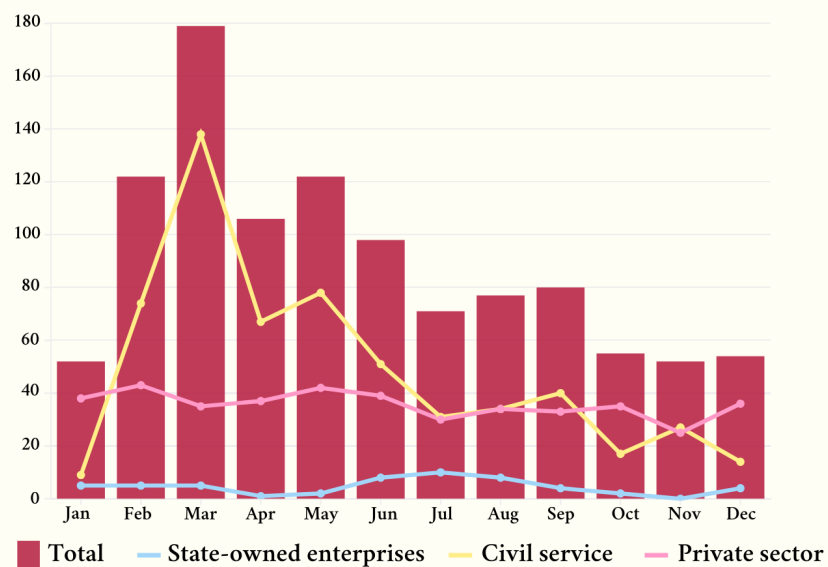
[2] The concession agreements are used by the governments to facilitate private sector's participation in infrastructure development. Such an agreement for urban transportation refers to an arrangement in which a national or local government transfers the construction, operation, and maintenance of transportation assets to a private company.

In state-owned enterprises, the number of strikes was practically the same — 53 in 2021, 54 in 2022. Urban utilities workers (those working in water, electricity and communication networks) have initiated the highest numbers of strikes within this group, mainly claiming wage increases.

Monthly evolution

The first trimester of 2022 witnessed a huge increase in initiated strikes: from 52 in January up to 179 in March. However, the strike frequency in the following months went in the opposite direction: from 106 in April to 53 in December.

Figure 3. Number of strikes per month

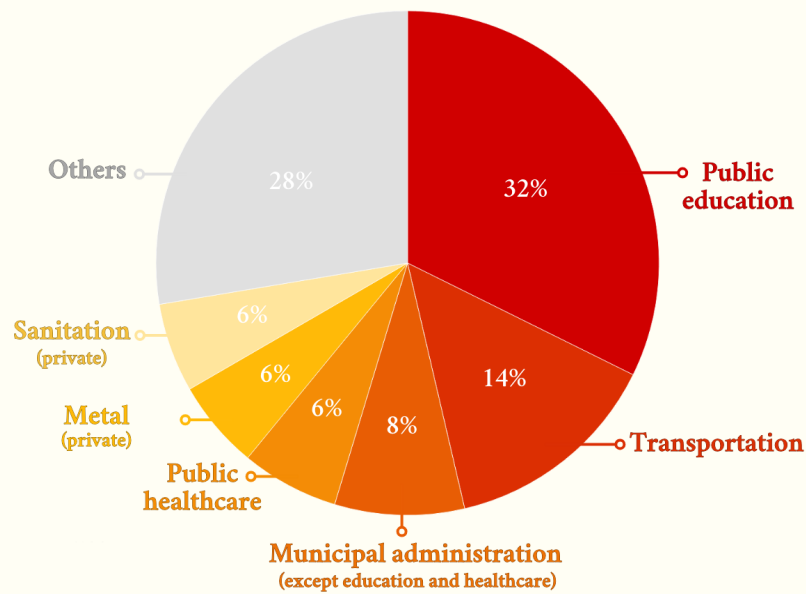


From January to March, the fast and simultaneous rise in wage increase and minimum teaching wage claims stands out within the agenda of the mobilizations. During the rest of the year, the presence of those two claims decreased.

Strikes organized by elementary education professionals demanding payment of the national minimum wage were prominent in the first half of 2022. In February 2022, the federal government announced that no elementary education teacher working in the public sector could be paid

less than R\$ 3,846 (\$731) for a 40-hour workweek. This was a 33% increase compared to 2021. In municipal governments, which did not apply the wage increase, teachers (sometimes together with other education professionals) struck and demanded minimum wage payment. The importance of the strikes in public education is highlighted in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Industries of strikes (2022)



Character of the strikes

We classified the characters of strikes under three categories according to their claims. Strikes that propose new achievements or the expansion of those already assured are considered to have an offensive character. The defensive strikes are characterized by the protection of work, healthcare and security conditions. They also stand against the noncompliance of rights established by laws and collective contracts. Lastly, those involve claims which surpass the scope of labor relations are classified as political strikes. In our categorization, these characters are not mutually exclusive. A single strike might have defensive, offensive and political claims. In such cases, we coded that strike as offensive, defensive, and political.

The demands of the private sector strikes were largely defensive (83%). The ratio of strikes with offensive claims is lowest among them (33%) compared to civil servants and workers of state-owned enterprises. Companies holding



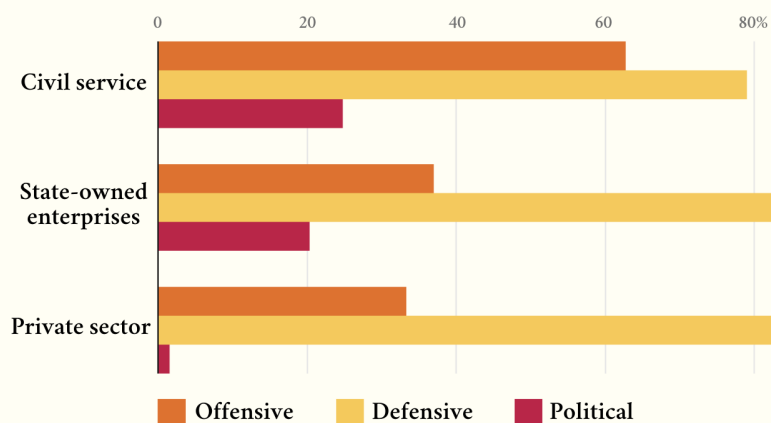
Public education teachers at a strike assembly in Minas Gerais
 (Photo credit: Lucileia Miranda)

public concessions for urban road transportation emerge as major offenders of existing rights.

On the other hand, the agenda of strikes organized by civil servants was the most complex. While they were as defensive as those organized by private sector workers (79%), almost two-thirds of these workers' strikes also included offensive claims (63%), and a quarter of them, political claims (25%). Civil servants, especially those who work in healthcare and education, often work in facilities that require urgent repairs, without regular supply of work materials and in situations of violence and harassment.

In state-owned enterprises, there is a predominance of strikes against the degradation of existing work conditions. The managements of these enterprises try to remove or undermine the fringe benefits such as food vouchers and health insurance. Labor unions organize strikes in response to such government offenses.

Figure 5. Character of the strikes (2022)



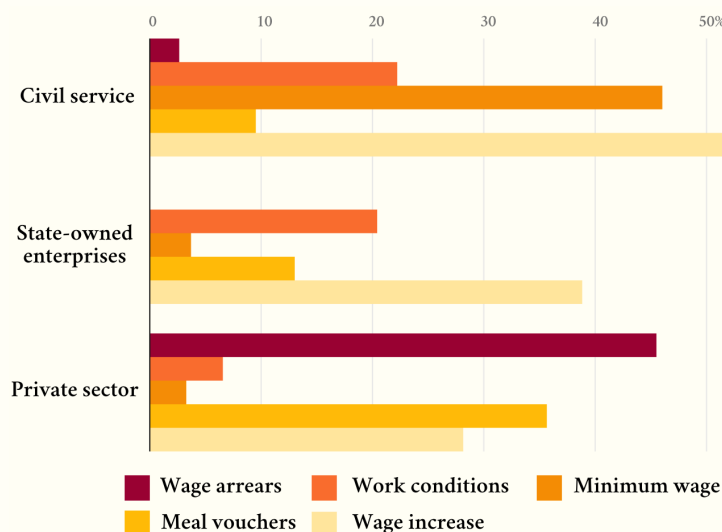


*Nursing professionals stop work at a hospital in Rio de Janeiro
(Photo credit: Federal Servants Union - Sinderf-RJ)*

Figure 6 presents the diversity of claims among different groups of workers. In the civil service, the demand for wage increase is dominant (54%). This claim also leads among state-owned enterprises (39%) and it came in third place in the private sector (28%). On the other hand, the issue of minimum wage payment, which occupies the second place in the civil service's agenda (46%), does not appear with the same intensity in any of the other categories of workers.

In the private sector strike agenda, the demand for wage arrears has an impressive ratio of 45%. This demand is absent among workers in state-owned enterprises and was observed in only 3% of strikes in the civil service. Also characteristic of the private sector is the importance attributed to demands related to food vouchers (36%). This item is also present in other categories but less often: 13% among state-owned enterprises' workers and 9% among civil servants.

Figure 6. Main claims (2022)



Strike leadership and legal actions

Labor unions lead most of the strikes. In the civil service and state-owned enterprises, 96% of strikes were led by labor unions, associations or federations / confederations. We should mention that in the civil service, labor unions are often referred to as associations. Federations and confederations are entities that operate at a higher level than the base level of the labor union — they are responsible for leading statewide or nationwide strikes. In the private sector, the share of strikes led by labor unions is slightly lower (79%), but still very significant.

In Brazil, none of the major categories of workers are deprived of the right to strike. Brazilian legislation imposes, however, some conditions: the strike must be initiated within an ongoing negotiation process, it must be announced with a three-day notice, and finally, in services considered essential — such as transportation, healthcare, among others —, a minimum of 30% of workers must remain in operation.

The judiciary plays a significant role in the development of workers' mobilizations. Some strikes are initiated without all legal preconditions. However, their irregular status, in theory, can only legitimize reactions from employers or governments after a judicial action declares the mobilization illegal. The judiciary can also act as a mediator in negotiations and, in the case of persistent deadlock, may decide the outcome of the strike through a trial.

More than one-third (36%) of strikes in state-owned enterprises were subject to some judicial action. This percentage was 19% in civil servants' strikes and 11% in private sector workers' strikes.

Strikes declared illegal by the judiciary, on the other hand, were more prevalent among civil servants (8%). Four percent of strikes in state-owned enterprises were deemed illegal, while this ratio was only 1% in the private sector.

Interview with Alda Fernandes, president of the Minas Gerais Subway Workers' Union

Since December 2021, the public transport on rails in Belo Horizonte - the administrative capital of the state of Minas Gerais - has been the subject of a tense dispute. On one side, the management of the company, initially a federal state-owned company (Companhia Brasileira de Trens Urbanos-CBTU), then a private company (Grupo Comporte). On the other, the workers who operate the Belo Horizonte Metro (Metrô-BH) and their union (Sindimetro-MG).

With the outbreak of the first strike, a process of struggle began that totaled five stoppages with huge adherence among the 1,600 or so workers - one at the end of 2021, three throughout 2022 and another at the beginning of 2023. In total, there were 209 days in which Metro traffic was interrupted or slowed down.



The first three mobilizations, which began in December 2021, March 2022 and August 2022 respectively, demanded the opening of effective negotiations with CBTU, with the aim of preventing the sale of Metrô-BH. Despite this, on December 22, 2022 - during the workers' fourth strike, which began in the middle of that month - the Comporte Group, through an auction held on the São Paulo Stock Exchange, bought the company for around US\$ 5 million. Workers accused the newly-elected government of deliberately supporting the Metrô-BH privatization project, since similar projects in other companies had been halted. Representatives of the government, in turn, claimed that the case of Metrô-BH was different, since the already advanced process of selling the company would make it difficult to stop.

The fifth and final subway workers' strike, which took place in February 2023, demanded that no dismissals be made, and that jobs and contracts be maintained - which would be possible with the transfer of workers from Belo Horizonte to other capitals where CBTU still operated or even to other state-owned companies. Negotiations with the federal government made no progress.

Grupo Comporte, for its part, is acting in a truculent manner. In addition to cutting the hours stopped during the last strike, in clear retaliation for the workers' mobilization, the company is disregarding the current collective bargaining agreement and imposing changes that are damaging to workers - changes to the work schedule and an increase in working hours, as well as a declared intention to reduce maternity leave.

Sindimetro-MG's access to workplaces is now restricted. When entry is granted, it is only in the company of a company representative. Dismissals are carried out arbitrarily and there are numerous reports of harassment.

Overloaded workloads, deteriorating working conditions and a lack of prospects for the future, in addition to directly affecting workers' health, greatly support the Comporte Group in implementing the restructuring in progress at Metrô-BH. By mid-2023, between dismissals and requests to resign encouraged by the company¹, around 600 workers, out of an initial total of 1,600, had already left their jobs. In April of this year, refusing to

[1] The so-called "Voluntary Dismissal Plan" grants some financial advantages to employees who decide to resign.

negotiate with the union, the group resumed its truculent course of action and announced the implementation of a dismissal program that aims to eliminate a further 270 jobs - 189 cuts were immediately made.

The Metro-BH workers' strike is significant. In Brazil, the turbulence caused by the pandemic has been deliberately used as an opportunity to advance projects that make workers' conditions more precarious. In the public sector, governments at all levels of administration have started selling off state companies and hiring private organizations to manage and operate hospitals and schools. The strike in Belo Horizonte stands out for the number of workers involved, its duration and its drama - but it is one case among many in the country.

To begin our conversation, what was the workers' relationship like with Sindimetroviários-MG during this long process of struggle?

The workers believed that by going on strike they would be able to reverse the process of privatizing the company. There was an enormous willingness to participate. In an action we took in Brasilia, we went in two full buses. We could feel how receptive the workers were to the union. And, in fact, the workers have always had a lot of confidence in the union. And this is a fighting union. We're the company's pain in the neck. The workers have confidence in the union. Our membership rate is almost 90%. In the assemblies, we had a topic to deal with and people went there to give their opinion on the best course of action. It was effective participation. It was very democratic.

In the post-privatization period, on the other hand, workers are cornered and afraid. The company obstructs our actions, our presence. We don't even have a collective bargaining agreement. The company's proposal is to reduce the document from 71 clauses to 17. We don't agree. The matter has gone to Justice. And it's the women who are suffering the most. We have clauses with advances in relation to the legal minimum for maternity leave, with two hours' daily leave for breastfeeding, with leave to accompany children to medical appointments. The company wants to remove them. There is discrimination. There are no more women in traffic control, for instance. There used to be, before.

Is it possible to say that the workers were really listened to during the negotiations?

The privatization question started under the Bolsonaro government [2019-2022]. We ran after our comrades. We had many interlocutors, but along the way they all abandoned us. The feeling was that we were alone. At the end of 2022, we had a meeting with Geraldo Alckmin [newly elected vice-president of the country, with Lula]. He talked to us and gave us hope that the company would not be privatized. The orientation of the new government team was to wait. But we have unofficial information that says that pressure from the Minas Gerais state government was decisive, and so the sale was authorized.

After the auction, the priority became to keep jobs, to transfer workers to other state-owned companies. In January 2023, we held a demonstration in Brasilia. There was a lot of police repression. We heard from politicians in the new government that it wasn't possible to stop privatization, but that jobs would be protected. But they did nothing! The federal government didn't want to listen to us. And on March 23rd, the privatization was made official with the signing of the contract with the new company, which soon announced the Voluntary Dismissal Plan and later started firing people. A study by the National Bank for Economic and Social Development, linked to the federal government, says that ideally Metro-BH should have around 900 workers. The current number of workers, however, is already below that, at between 750 and 850 employees.

Do you think there is an intention of retaliation in these dismissals?

The company fires in retaliation, but also because it's not in its interest to keep a worker on a civil servant contract. Who knows their rights and can complain? Who goes to the union? The civil servants. This happens less in private companies. Besides, the new workers are hired at lower wages. And they don't join the union.

Did you have support from other unions, politically close to Sindimetro-MG or not?

No. We don't feel supported. In the beginning, under the Bolsonaro government, there was some support. When the new government came in,

in 2023, it was understood that we were striking against the Lula government. People distanced themselves. But during the election campaign, the president had committed to stopping privatization and keeping jobs. He bears responsibility for this situation. People don't accept it, but we have to criticize, we have to question. We are left-wing workers. We took part in all the strikes called in Belo Horizonte. We expected recognition and support. But in reality we feel like we're walking alone. Some say that we should accept it, but we can't. We're talking about a company with 1,600 workers. Today, we are the thorn in the government's side.

After the privatization and the lack of interest in maintaining jobs, how is the health of the workers?

It's very bad. The workers are getting sick. There are many workers who take leave due to mental illness and we've had five suicide attempts. The workers are exhausted and there are several cases of burn-out. That's why many are joining the company's dismissal program. The workers can't stand this situation of overwork and bullying.

Today the rail system in Belo Horizonte is in chaos. Not that there weren't problems before at CBTU, which was state-owned. There were plenty. But now it's worse. We've already denounced this. In the past we had the preventive maintenance, which tries to anticipate problems and avoid their consequences. Then the new company cut the preventive maintenance and only does the corrective maintenance. If something breaks, they go and replace it. Five trains that were running normally have been immobilized and are only used to supply spare parts. It's not a company with expertise in the activity, the sale of Metrô-BH was just a matter of business.

This interview will be alongside others from workers in different countries. To finish our conversation, is your message one of desolation or hope?

A message of hope. I believe in the fight, in the trade union movement. I believe that the unity of the working class, everywhere, has to happen. We are the majority, we can change a lot. But for that to happen, we need to think: are we one category among others or are we one united class of workers? When we manage to bring about this movement of unity among

workers, we'll be able to win. I don't think we should give up. We have to be persistent. It's a big fight, it's not easy. It's difficult. But we will always be the resistance.



*Metrô-BH workers protest during legislative session
(Photo credit: Minas Gerais Subway Workers' Union- Sindimetro-MG)*

The Inter-Union Department of Statistics and Socio-Economic Studies (DIEESE)

The Inter-Union Department of Statistics and Socio-Economic Studies (DIEESE) was created in 1955 and has been maintained by the Brazilian trade union movement ever since. It develops research, consultancy and educational activities for union members and workers. Rodrigo Linhares, who works on the research team and focuses on collective bargaining, is a sociologist with a degree from the University of São Paulo. He is responsible for the Strike Monitoring System, the only source of data and information on the subject in the country.

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Chile

Pablo Pérez-Ahumada

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Observatory of Labor Strikes (OHL)

Context

Like in other Latin American countries, the Covid-19 pandemic hit Chile's economy hard. Between 2018 and 2020, Chile's GDP annual growth rate declined from 4% to -6.1%. During the same period, inflation increased from 1.6% to 9.6% and unemployment from 7.6% to 11% (World Bank, 2024). Compared to the 2020 context, the Chilean economy witnessed a slight improvement in 2022. The GDP annual growth rate reached 2.4%, and inflation and unemployment dropped to 6.6% and 8.3%, respectively. Furthermore, in 2022, Chile's percentage of informal employment continued to be one of the lowest in the region—27%, according to ILO's estimates (ILO, 2024). (In countries such as Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru, the informal employment exceeds 60-70%).

Despite this slight recovery and the comparatively low levels of informal employment, Chilean labor unions are mostly weak. Chile's industrial relations system is based on several laws enacted during the neoliberal dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet (1973 – 1990). These laws were designed to decentralize collective bargaining and weaken unions' bargaining power by promoting inter-union competition within companies. Although the country returned to democracy in 1990, no democratic government has yet repealed these laws (Pérez Ahumada, 2023). As a result, for decades trade union density and collective bargaining coverage have been low. For

example, between 2010 and 2019 the trade union density and collective bargaining coverage rates were, on average, 15% and 7%, respectively (Pérez Ahumada & Ocampo, 2023, p. 462). Likewise, labor union organization has been characterized by extremely high levels of fragmentation: in the same period, there were more than 11,000 active unions and they had on average just over 90 members each (Pérez Ahumada & Ocampo, 2023, p. 462).

In spite of this, starting in the late 2000s, the union membership rate grew slowly but consistently to reach 19 percent in 2020 (Dirección del Trabajo, 2022). Likewise, between 2006 and 2019, Chile witnessed a wave of strikes and renaissance of union mobilization. Data produced by the Observatory of Labor Strikes (Observatorio de Huelgas Laborales, OHL) show that company and sector-level strikes grew from 186 in 2005 to around 430 in 2019, and general strikes grew from only one strike recorded between 1990 and 2010 to 12 in the 2011–2019 period (four of which took place between October and December 2019, in the context of Chile’s “social uprising”) (OHL, 2021). In this period, other indicators of strike activity exhibited similar trends. For instance, in years of intense mobilization such as 2011 and 2019, the number of worker days lost to legal (official) or extra-legal (unofficial) strikes quadrupled the numbers of the early 2000s (Pérez Ahumada & Ocampo, 2023).

Key findings from 2022

The Observatory of Labor Strikes (OHL) data are collected using the protest event analysis methodology. Based on the coding of news from 18 national and regional newspapers, the OHL data collects any form of industrial action (e.g., firm-level or sector-level disruptive actions) registered in the media. Then, the data are merged with official data from Chile’s Labor Directorate, which collects information on enterprise-level official strikes. Thus, unlike official statistics, the OHL data gathers information on official and unofficial strikes.

In 2022, the OHL documented 177 strikes. These strikes involved approximately 34,000 workers and resulted in approximately 378,400 working days lost to strikes. On average, each strike lasted 10.4 days. The 2022 numbers are lower than those of 2021. As Table 1 shows, in 2021

there were 248 strikes, which involved around 220,000 workers, resulted in around 766,000 working days lost, and on average lasted 11.4 days.

Table 1 also suggests similarities between 2021 and 2022, in terms of the number of official/unofficial strikes, the number of strikes organized by formal unions, the number of strikes in the public/private sector, the size of strikes (measured as the number of strikes involving less than 100 workers), the duration of strikes (measured as the number of strikes lasting less than five days), and the type of demand (wage-related or not) that caused the strikes. The table shows, for example, that in 2022 half of the strikes (53%) were official strikes. Additionally, most strikes (95%) were organized by formal unions, a third of the strikes (36%) took place in the private sector, two-third of the strikes (67%) involved less than 100 workers, and half of the strikes (48%) lasted fewer than 5 days. Finally, in half of the 2022 strikes (50%) the main demand was wage increase.

These numbers are consistent with prior findings by the OHL. In several reports, the OHL has shown that in the last decade and half unions have played a crucial role in organizing strikes, and that unofficial strikes are an important share of the total number of strikes in the country (OHL, 2021). Likewise, the OHL data suggest that the proportion of strikes caused by wage demands presented in Table 1 are an expression of a larger change in strike patterns in Chile, namely, one in which non-economic strikes are becoming increasingly important. In the early 2010s, for example, nearly 75% of strikes were caused by wage demands, whereas in the early 2020s that share decreased to 50% (OHL, 2022).

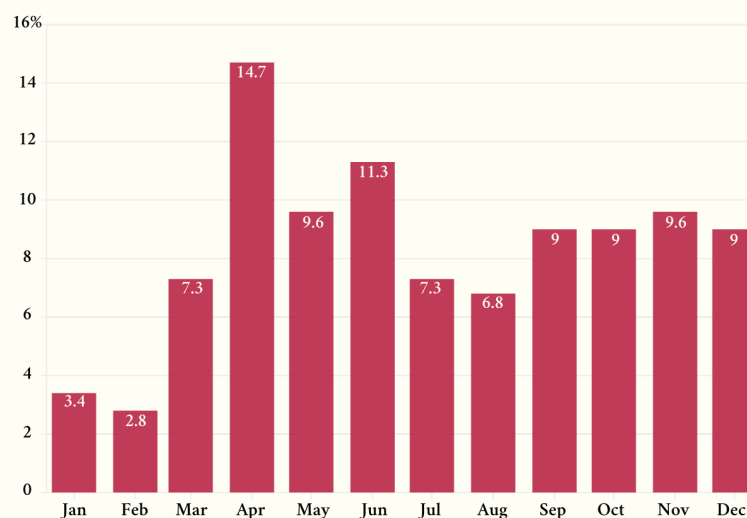
Table 1. Main indicators of strike activity (2021 – 2022)

	2021	2022
Number of strikes	248	177
Number of strikers	220,054	34,038
Number of working days lost to strikes	766,624	378,402
Average duration of strikes (days)	11.4	10.4
Official strikes (percentages)	50	53
Strikes organized by formal unions (percentages)	85	95
Strikes in the private sector (percentages)	36	36
Strikes involving less than 100 workers (percentages)	62	67
Strikes lasting fewer than five days (percentages)	56	48
Strikes in which the main demand is wage increase (percentages)	52	50

Monthly strikes in 2022

Figure 1 shows that, in 2022, April was the month when most strikes took place (15%). Unsurprisingly, the months that recorded the lowest numbers of strikes were the summer months of January and February, with around 3% of total number of strikes in 2022.

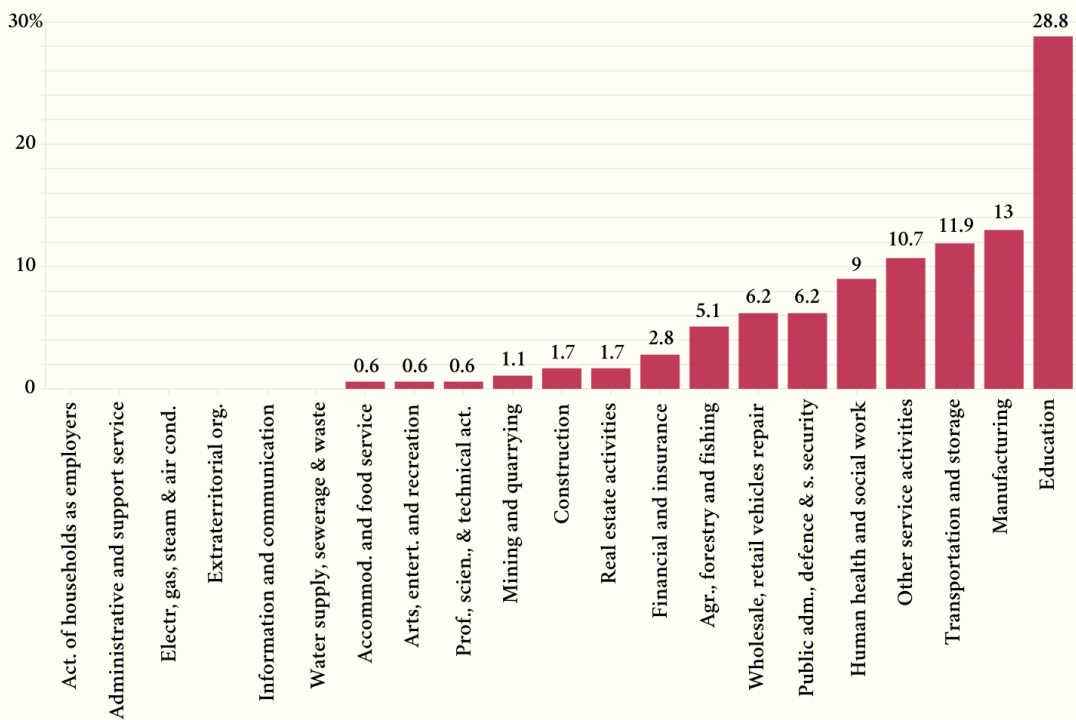
Figure 1. Number of strikes per month (in percentages). N = 177



Strike action by industry

Finally, figure 2 shows the number of strikes by economic industry. The figure shows that in 2022 most strikes were organized in education activities (29%) and, to a lesser extent, in industries such as manufacturing (13%), transport and storage (12%) and other service activities (11%). In the other extreme of the figure can be found industries such as administrative and support services, information and communication, and water supply and sewerage and waste activities, with zero strike actions in 2022. In this latter case, the results are not surprising; the Chilean legislation defines those activities as “strategic”, so workers do not have the right to strike.

Figure 2. Number of strikes by industry (in percentages). N = 177



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Interview with Ivonne Ravello – Private Health Services Union Leader

In 2022, a significant portion of strikes occurred in the service sector. One such strike took place at a private clinic in Santiago. Despite being located in Las Condes, one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in the city, this clinic used to have poor working conditions and an administration that often refused to meet the demands of the union led by female worker Ivonne Ravello. In a context of high inflation, collective bargaining between union and management reached an impasse when the company refused to respond to the union's main demand: that wages be increased in line with projected inflation for the coming months. As a result of the company's refusal, more than 90% of the union members decided to go on strike.

In this interview, Ivonne Ravello tells us about her experience in the strike and the lessons to be learned from it.



There it is. Well, to begin with the interview, I'd like you to tell briefly how the strike came about. What was the point that generated or triggered the idea of going on strike?

Well, we had a... we proposed the collective-bargaining agreement to the company. At the negotiation table with the company, we did not reach an agreement, so we went to the Labor Directorate's regional office, as established in the collective bargaining laws. And at the last negotiating table, together with the director of the regional Labor Directorate office, this person (the manager) received us, and we did not reach an agreement.

What we were requesting more than anything else was a salary increase equal to the 100% of the CPI (consumer price index) adjustment. The company said that it could only give us 5% because at that time they were in a bad situation, due to the problem of the ISAPREs (health insurance companies), and all that. In other words, they told us a story that we knew was not true, because we saw the company's financial statements and they had profits of almost 7 billion Chilean pesos that year. Do you understand? So, we knew that what they were telling us was not reliable.

Besides... What was the argument they were also giving us? That the CPI that year was very high, it reached 12% (which is very high for Chilean standards). And we said we did not accept, that we knew that the company had profits, because they got millions in bonuses as managers, and because the workers did not. Then, after we had the last negotiation table, which in fact was via Zoom... We as a union were hopeful that they were going to say yes, because they asked for a moment to think about it. And the strike had already been voted (but not materialized). And the strike had been voted with 95% in favor. We were in the five-day period (between a strike is declared and it materializes).

However, as I tell you, we were at this negotiation table, and the manager, who is one of the managers who was at the negotiation table, just said that they acknowledged receipt of the notice of strike action. So, so, that was the only thing they answered us. And they closed their doors. And that's it, So, I

said: “Let’s communicate with our members, let’s call our members, because at 12 o’clock at night the strike becomes effective”. I told the workers, “Let’s get organized. Even if we are hungry or if it’s cold outside, because we are not going to give the company a favor”. And we organized and had a very positive reception from the rank and file.

That’s what I was going to ask you. When the idea of the strike began to emerge, how do you think it went? How did that process go? How did you begin to put forward ideas?

During the collective bargaining process, we used to hold assemblies almost every week to report on how we were progressing. And at the last assembly we had our lawyers, who are excellent advisors, and they also communicated with the rank and file. The workers at this clinic had long wanted to be heard by the company. And they were willing to follow his union leaders to the last. In other words, I have never seen workers as determined as the ones I saw on that occasion. And they were tremendously empowered.

Were they younger workers?

We had all kinds of ages. And there were a lot of migrant workers, which I was very afraid of, because they are very scared. But believe me it was the opposite. The migrants were the first ones who were there in the strike. They were the first ones who said, “yes, we are going on strike. I can cook, I can do this and that”. The workers themselves approached us. “Mrs. Ivonne, I have this contact. I can bring this stuff to the strike. I can bring this camping cook”. Oh, how nice!

Moreover, we also received a lot of support from a neighborhood association from the Las Condes, which lent us the awnings, to set them up outside the clinic.

And how many people went on strike?

We were lucky because at the time we presented our proposal for a collective bargaining agreement, the company transferred all the workers to the same RUT (tax identification number)¹. In addition, they made a huge mistake: they thought that the minimum services were inherited (set) from past bargaining process². And minimum services are not inherited. They must be defined before the bargaining process begins. And we kept quiet; it was a strategy of ours. So later, when we went on strike, the 270 workers had to go on strike because there were no minimum services! ... When the company realized their mistake, they sued us, they reported us to the labor authorities. And the labor directorate office said that we were right. Obviously, the managers were furious, because more than half of the workers were on strike. Besides, we are a single union. So, thanks to the strike, there were services that were completely empty. Without coverage. Because, for example, in the X-ray area that I represent, everyone is unionized.

How long did the strike last?

Eight days. The workers were tremendously empowered. Everyone said, “we are going to fight this fight because they (the company) are going to give up at some point. And they are going to have to call us to talk.”

And of course, that’s when our real struggle began, because they, on the sly, began to bring in workers to replace the strikers. So, I communicated with

[1] In Chile, large enterprises usually split the company by assigning different tax identification numbers (RUTs) to their operations. Although this is merely formal division, it has important implications for unions: workers under different RUTs are usually covered by different collective agreements, even if they work in the same workplace. Since 2014, the legislation has tried to restrict this practice. However, it continues to exist. To counteract this practice, union leaders usually form “multi-company unions” (sindicatos interempresas), i.e., unions that can operate in several companies at the same time. However, since most these companies are only formally independent from each other, most multi-company unions are, in practice, company-level unions. The union described in this report is, in fact, a multi-company union.

[2] While formally prohibiting the replacement of strikers, Chilean legislation authorizes employers to make modifications to non-strikers’ tasks and shifts to ensure the firm’s provision of “minimum services”. The key issue here is how broadly the company’s minimum services are defined before the bargaining process begins: if employers have the capacity to define them in broad terms (which usually occurs), they will be able to make bigger modifications to non-strikers’ tasks and shifts to minimize the impact of the strike.

many of the workers who at the time also went to replace the strikers and I said: “Please support us, don’t work.” Many of the strikebreakers were former workers whom the company called to come to work, or colleagues who came from other clinics. I communicated with many of them and asked the representatives of each of the units (where they would go to work) to please communicate with the strikebreakers to tell them that this could not be the case.

But in Chile, strike replacement is not supposed to be legal.

Yes, but the company did it anyway. We began to see the strike replacements and simply did not allow them to enter the clinic. In fact, we stopped the doors several times, we closed the parking lots, and we stopped several strikebreakers from entering the clinic. In addition, other workers (non-strikers) at the clinic informed us, they told us who were coming as strike replacements. So, there were many strategies that we used to prevent strikebreakers from working.

And were these strategies planned or were they developed along the way?

On the road. We never thought we would go on strike. It was like a blow to us by surprise; it was like a blow to the company’s table. When we woke up from that blow they gave us, because it is a blow to have to prepare for a strike, we started preparing for the strike. The strategies began to take shape the next day and so we went into battle.

And how did the strike impact you personally?

It was a great experience for me. I had participated in other strikes at another clinic (where I had worked years ago), but this strike specifically had a great impact on me, and it was a tremendously enriching experience. As a union leader, I knew many names of workers, I had many names of workers on the list of union members, but I didn’t know what their faces looked like. In the strike, I managed to put a face to those names, do you understand me? We got to know each other among the workers because we had breakfast together, we had lunch together, then we said goodbye, we laughed, we shouted, we released tensions. So, there was unity, we united as workers, and we are still very united to this day.

Do you think that helped the union?

Very much. Very much. The strike strengthened our union tremendously. In fact, I said to the manager: “Why are you spending money on Focus Groups and coaching, when I can call a strike and I can talk directly to all the workers?” And I tell him: “Believe me, because we achieve much more unity than you do with all the money you spend”. Now (since the strike), the workers greet each other in the corridors of the clinic. I call an assembly and all the workers are there. Additionally, we have grown a lot as a union. We started with only 126 workers, went on strike with 260 members, and now have 320 members. And even the managers recognize this growth because they are concerned about the way this union is growing. I say to them: “you, the company, strengthened us, because you forced us into a strike that we did not want”. They forced us to strike, and they thought that with the cold days and the rain we were going to fail. But no, we became much stronger as workers. We united and that is what they did not want and never wanted. Now, every time there is a dismissal we continue to unite more as workers. I said (to the managers): “You fired 10 workers (after the strike) and all 200 of us left in support of those workers. You have not succeeded in separating us, you have succeeded in uniting us more and more”.

And, on a more general level, do you think that strikes help unions to grow? I don't know, what can you tell me from what you have seen in your experience?

I think there is a bit of everything. But I think we union leaders play a fundamental role. We have to be credible to the rank and file. We must agitate and empower the workers because we need to empower the workers. You don't get anything if you go to the struggle and don't have workers to back you up. The union is made by all of us, do you understand? So, it will also depend on how these strikes are handled. Sometimes strikes work against us and sometimes they work for us. The key is not to lose them, because the strike is the only tool that we have to fight.

And in the case of this strike we are talking about, did you get the readjustment you demanded?

Yes, we achieved the 100% readjustment to 100%, relative to the CPI. In that sense, we had a successful strike. We also managed to increase the bonus for the fourth shift, the vacation bonus and we were able to include in the collective contract many of the benefits that the company wanted to remove. So, for example, now we have to bargain next year and the fact that we already went on strike sets a precedent and demonstrates that we are not afraid of the company, that the workers are not afraid and that they are willing to go on strike again. In fact, in many of the assemblies the workers have said it: "if we have to go on strike, we will go on strike again". This is because the fear of talking about the strike has been broken, because before 2022 talking about the strike was like a taboo subject. Did we pay for the consequences of the strike? Yes, we did, because ten workers were dismissed after the strike.

So, to finish this interview, I'd like to remind you this interview is part of an international project on strikes. Would you like to send a message to union leaders in other countries?

Mmm. There are so many things I would like to say, both as a leader and as a female worker. Because, apart from being a union leader, I am also a female worker. I think that as leaders, we always must put the interests of the workers above our personal interests. We must educate by example. We must be persistent and determined. We have to be... consistent. And we also have to be... honest, do you understand? Because if not, it is not good for us to be leaders. I believe that unity among workers, now, has to be achieved in a complete way. I would love to be able to change certain things. For example, in Spain, there is sectorial collective bargaining. I hope that in Chile we will be able to take that example from Spain and have the sectorial bargaining that we need so much here. I believe that trade unionism must unite at the international level. I wish we could unite as workers and labor unionists... I wish we could unite and build a strong working class.



Workers of the private clinic protesting during the strike in Santiago

The Observatory of Labour Strikes

The Observatory of Labour Strikes (Observatorio de Huelgas Laborales, OHL) is an initiative funded by the Centre for Social Conflict and Cohesion Studies (COES) and Alberto Hurtado University's School of Economics and Business (UAH-FEN). The author of this report, Pablo Pérez-Ahumada, is an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Chile (pabloperez@uchile.cl). Other members of the OHL are: Francisca Gutiérrez-Crocco (Austral University, Chile), Rodrigo Medel (Andrés Bello University, Chile), Domingo Pérez (University of O'Higgins, Chile), and Diego Velázquez (Central University, Chile).

China

*Aidan Chau
China Labour Bulletin*

Context

The challenges China's workers confronted in 2022 may already seem distant, but the strict pandemic restrictions, regional lockdowns, and economic downturn of that period have had a lasting impact on workers' lives and struggles.

Two years ago, the economy saw an annual GDP real growth rate of 3 percent, which was half the average rate of 6-7 percent before the pandemic. The inflation rate had been stable, ranging between 1.5 percent to 2 percent, until it began to decline in 2023. Meanwhile, the urban unemployment rate rose from 5.1 percent in 2021 to 5.5 percent in 2022. The slower economic growth, coupled with a rising unemployment rate, means that workers were in a vulnerable position, with many accepting jobs with unsatisfactory labour conditions.

The weakening economy is best symbolized by the crisis in China's real estate sector in 2022. The country's debt crisis, expansion of the real estate industry, and subsequent property market free fall have increased the incidence of protests for unpaid wages, especially in light of corporate bankruptcy. But the logistics industry, which saw exceptional growth during the pandemic and profited at the expense of workers, has also seen a rising number of strikes. Protests in the manufacturing industry in 2022 were few, but there were signs that discontent was brewing, particularly in the increasing scale of some protests late that year.

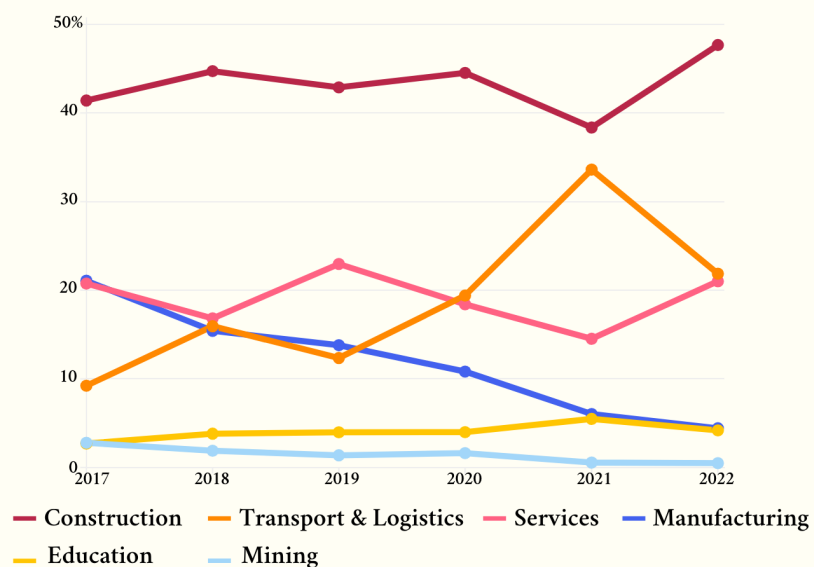
In this piece, China Labour Bulletin broadly analyzes the data from our Strike Map database, conducting sector-by-sector analysis of issues affecting China’s workers and their labour rights.

Broad trends of Chinese workers’ collective actions

The total number of incidents collected by the CLB Strike Map in 2022 was 831, about the same volume as during the first year of the pandemic in 2020, and about 24 percent fewer than the 1,091 incidents recorded in 2021. In 2022, over 87 percent of the incidents were over unpaid wages.

Although the total number of incidents collected in the Strike Map decreased in 2022, the industry distribution of the incidents is in line with the proportions and trends seen over the past few years. In 2022, the construction industry again led with the most collective actions by workers (48 percent), followed by transportation (22 percent), services (21 percent), manufacturing (4 percent), education (4 percent), and mining (0.5 percent).

Strike Map Incidents by Industry (2017-2022)



Between 2017 and 2022, a few trends are worth noting. The proportion of incidents in the construction industry has remained steadily above 40 percent, other than a slight drop in 2021. Incidents in the transport industry have risen as the services and logistics industries thrived, accompanied by rising dissatisfaction over working conditions. Incidents in China's manufacturing industry were in decline after a wave of factory relocations from the Pearl River Delta after 2015. The country's transition to renewable energy sources is also evident in the low levels of unrest in the mining industry.

Construction workers protested unpaid wages amid industry contraction

Among the protests by construction workers in 2022, the highest concentration of protests occurred in China's northern provinces of Shaanxi, Shandong, and Henan, followed by Jiangsu and Guangdong. This reflects that most of the protests in the construction industry are related to the expansion of real estate companies and related infrastructure projects to second- and third-tier cities in recent years.

In the construction industry, protests for unpaid wages can be intense, revealing the depths of the property market woes. For example, on 28 January 2022, more than 100 workers went to the headquarters of Chongqing Jinke construction company to demand their wages. During the process, workers rushed the office building and smashed items in the office lobby.

According to online news reports, Jinke's business was struggling at the beginning of the year, and, in order to get rid of housing stock, the company asked its employees to buy property at a 3.3 percent discount. To keep their jobs, management personnel were essentially forced to purchase the company's properties. On top of that, the employees were required to utilise the company's wealth management products to come up with the funds. After the workers staged their protest, the company held consultations and promised to pay workers their wages.



*Strike of Huolala drivers against the new pricing model
(Photo credit: a worker's post on Weibo)*

A rise of strikes in express delivery and online ride-hailing

Protests in the transport and logistics industry were focused on express delivery and online ride-hailing. Out of 179 incidents in the industry in 2022, 73 involved couriers in the express delivery sector and 83 for workers for taxi and ride apps.

The express delivery industry in China has engaged in fierce price wars during the pandemic to compete for market share. The unit price per delivery has declined since 2021, and companies have responded by controlling operating costs and improving their ability to expand their markets. For example, Yunda competed through the price-for-volume method, but the company's expense ratio was the highest among competitors, leading to outlet management conflicts. STO Express fell into a loss in 2020 and has not been able to return to profitability.

The number of courier strikes and protests logged in 2022 correspond to the market conditions: Yunda saw 19 incidents after outlet closures, in which workers sought wages; STO and ZTO Express had 14 incidents each.

Another pattern is that platform drivers going longer distances have been shorted income through changing algorithms and pricing models. In the case of Huolala, a domestic platform transport company, this pricing model change led to strikes across China from 16-18 November 2022. Workers protested the high commission rates of the platform, and how "multi-factor" orders calculated pay rates for variable conditions. Drivers in Shenzhen, Dongguan, and Foshan came out en masse at the Huolala offices

in those cities, and drivers in Wuhan, Changsha, Quanzhou, Wenzhou, and Zhengzhou also staged actions in response.

City lockdowns and changing patterns of citizens' movement habits have reduced demand for the services of the taxi and ride-hailing industry. For years, taxi drivers have protested against car rental fees and other cuts from their rates, and in 2022 ride-hailing drivers likewise joined in protests requesting to return the vehicles they had leased from these platform companies.

From February to September 2022, drivers at a company named T3 Mobility in Suzhou, Hangzhou, Chengdu, and Zhuhai all went on strike and demanded they be able to return their cars. On 21 February 2022, hundreds of T3 drivers gathered in Suzhou. One driver who participated noted that his daily income is only about 100 yuan, which is not enough to pay the leasing fee on the vehicle to T3.

Factory workers revolt against pandemic prevention arrangements and wage disputes

Two large-scale protests in the manufacturing industry occurred in late 2022 at Quanta Computer in Shanghai, and at Apple's major iPhone supplier, Foxconn in Zhengzhou. In each of these incidents, workers were dissatisfied with pandemic prevention arrangements in factories that were designed to keep production going during regional lockdowns to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

Other collective worker actions have been linked to the downturn in the manufacturing industry. In September and October of 2022, the decline of the electronics, toy, and clothing industries attracted media attention. The China and Foreign Toys Network reported that five traditional toy companies showed a loss in net profits in 2022. Due to the unsatisfactory performance of the iPhone 14 market, Zhengzhou Foxconn announced in late 2022 that it would dismantle at least five production lines. The factories in Guangzhou's garment village were producing intermittently or even shutting down altogether, which affected the income of workers. The average monthly salary became only one-third or one-half of their previous income.



*Medical students in residency in a hospital demanded equal pay for equal work
(Photo credit: 李老师不是你老师)*

Medical workers in the public sector demand improved protections and pay

Most of the protests in the public sector came from the medical industry (14 incidents). These protests were related to the management of hospitals during the pandemic, as well as a shortage of funds in some hospitals that led to wage arrears.

The pandemic led to a labour shortage in hospitals, with medical staff working overtime for extended periods, and medical students being required to fill in without adequate compensation or labour guarantees. In many cases, management could not arrange for adequate staffing, so medical workers who contracted the virus were required to continue to take care of patients and work in the quarantined sections of the facilities. Nine strikes in the medical industry involved medical students in residency demanding equal pay for equal work, better workplace protection measures, and the right to go home after Covid-19 outbreaks in the workplace.

China's workers need better union representation

China's workers have a pressing need for better representation of their interests within enterprises, local governments, and the legal system. As CLB predicted in 2022, without adequate representation for even the most basic of rights such as being paid in full and on time, labour crises like those at Foxconn would certainly escalate in the near future. In fact, CLB has continued to note the rise in worker strikes and protests in China's manufacturing sector through the present (for more information, see our

latest report* on the rise of workers' protests in China's manufacturing sector), and other industries have likewise not seen the type of recovery necessary to quell workers' concerns.

In our investigations on the role and effectiveness of China's official trade union in incidents both large and small, we consistently see that the union is unaware of the conditions affecting workers on the ground. The All-China Federation of Trade Unions needs to understand and anticipate the needs of China's workers in various industries, and to actively intervene and stand on the side of workers in disputes caused by wage arrears, mass layoffs, and other fundamental labour rights challenges. The union should understand workers' demands, negotiate with enterprises on behalf of workers, and involve other stakeholders such as government actors in reaching a speedy and just resolution.

For more in-depth coverage, see China Labour Bulletin's Strike Map analysis of 2022 data:

<https://clb.org.hk/en/content/china-labour-bulletin-strike-map-data-analysis-2022-year-review-workers-rights>



** CLB's latest report on workers' protests in China's manufacturing sector in 2023 can be found below:*

<https://clb.org.hk/en/content/bridging-workers-rights-china's-manufacturing-sector-global-supply-chain-tools-case>

Interview with workers in the Foxconn protests

As the operating environment has become more restrictive inside China, China Labour Bulletin (CLB) increasingly relies on workers' prolific social media posts, domestic media reports and official sources. CLB's programs do not currently involve directly contacting workers in China, but there is a wealth of data available about two major instances of worker unrest at Foxconn's Zhengzhou factory in October and November 2022, respectively. This piece draws heavily on our own translations of worker interviews conducted by the Gonglao Xiaobao (Labor Info China)¹ - used here with permission - that were published one year after the Foxconn incidents to commemorate and reflect on them.



Foxconn workers confronting the police in the protest

[1] The original Chinese interviews conducted by the Gonglao Xiaobao (Labor Info China) can be found below:
<https://feeds.laborinfozh.com/foxcon-worker-1year/>

Introduction to the 2022 Foxconn Incident

The Foxconn factory in Zhengzhou, Henan province, saw one of the largest protests and strikes in China in 2022. On 22 November, thousands of workers protested over both wages and health and safety issues under the closed-loop production system, as Covid-19 cases rose within the factory and outside it in the city of Zhengzhou. Video footage showed workers confronting police wearing white hazmat suits, and police returning with tear gas, water cannon, and other physical means of suppression. Workers were injured while the police made arrests. The following paragraphs will introduce the background and the development of the protests. Characteristics of workers' organizing and the tensions between different kinds of workers will also be briefly discussed.

Background: Mass exodus in October

One interviewee, Liu, was a temporary hourly worker at Foxconn. His interview focused on workers fleeing the factory in October 2022, which set the stage for the protests in November:

Many people tested positive and were then left unattended, as the production output could not keep up. Why did many people feel insecure? If I test positive, I get quarantined and no one cares. I can't even buy things, so I feel very helpless. When you get home, at least your family takes care of you, gives you medicine, and treats you.

When workers started to flee the factory in late October, the number of workers in Liu's workshop decreased by half. Hourly workers were the first to cut their losses and go home, often leaving on foot. Some regular workers also followed suit and left the factory. Throughout this incident, Liu said there was no direct communication with the management, as workers were not organized.

The trigger: Sole emphasis on production while disregarding workers' grievances

With a shortage of workers after many left in October, the pressure to meet the production quota at Foxconn did not stop. Wang, a worker who was recruited to catch up with production targets, recalled the two events that finally triggered the protests in November:

At first, they said the subsidy would be given along with the salary, but after a few days, they changed the policy, saying that you must work until 15 March [2024] before receiving it... Foxconn probably changed this contract around the 20th or 21st, and they kept making changes.

There were also issues with work, like making new and old employees work together. At first, they said everything had been thoroughly disinfected and all precautions had been taken, but when we arrived, we found that everyone was just lumped together.

Wang also highlighted the inability to ensure work safety in the factory:

Some people were told to work with those who tested positive. An employee said he tested positive. He avoided doing the nucleic acid tests after that for several days, for fear that the test would confirm that he was still positive, so he wouldn't be able to work and earn money.

The protests: a night of worker discontent

Wang recalled some episodes of the protest:

People first tried to find someone [managers] downstairs to talk to, but when no one responded, more and more people gathered... Those in hazmat suits stood there and didn't allow people to move around freely. Then the conflict broke out, and many people rushed in. Originally, they just wanted to go to the office in the factory area to ask for an explanation, but it slowly evolved into a fight.

On the night of 22 November, a riot broke out across the factory complex.

Wang described the scene:

There were too many people, all rioting. Some were smashing things, some were fighting - it was too dangerous, so they asked everyone to go back first. The smashing was because people were too angry, and they [management] often didn't keep their word.

Workers who were not in the crowd were beaten by police, while some other workers fought the police with stones and wooden sticks. Security cameras, cars and some testing stations were damaged.

Soon, people representing management announced that they would provide a solution and asked workers to return to their dormitories. Wang described the offer:

The solution they later provided was to give each person 10,000 yuan. Those who wanted to go home could go home, and those who wanted to stay could continue working there.

According to Wang, some workers were not satisfied with the arrangement. However, the 10,000 yuan was effective to bring workers over to management's side, and most workers accepted the pay. Wang described how the funds were distributed:

It's not like you get 10,000 yuan when you resign. They first give you 8,000 yuan, then send the remaining 2,000 yuan after you get on the bus... There are broadcasts in the hallways outside saying that this money is for quarantine subsidies, fees for labor days lost, and other expenses for returning home.

On 24 November, Foxconn issued a statement blaming the pay problem on a "technical error." It did not mention issues of work safety and pandemic prevention that also led to workers' protests.

Employment status and labour relations: How different categories of workers responded to the labour rights challenges

As these worker interviews show, those taking part most readily were the hourly and short-term workers. Hourly workers were the first to leave the factories in October, since they did not have a formal employment relationship. The newly-recruited short-term workers were mostly lured by the high subsidy promised for their labour, so they had the most intense reaction after the change of policy. As Wang put it:

They said that we would be given a high salary, around 16,000 to 17,000 yuan a month, so I decided to come... Everyone who is willing to come here hopes to earn some money before the Chinese New Year... I think they changed the contract to make the workers work for a longer period. However, according to the changes, if the workers leave before completing the required time, they won't get a 3,000 yuan subsidy. It's just a bit deceptive.

On the other hand, regular workers and fixed-term workers - who typically receive a subsidy after their term ends - were more distant from the protests. A worker named Sanqi, who had a contract with Foxconn that offered a subsidy for completing the contract terms, said that although he joined an online group to protect workers' rights, he felt that members in that group were not united:

We have not been able to discuss a specific plan. Some people just hope that others will take the lead, while they enjoy the benefits.

The government was also actively preventing regular workers from taking part in protests. Sanqi said:

Many workers have received messages or calls. The community or village people tell workers not to cause trouble and that they need to seek legal means to protect their rights.

Meanwhile, the factory management tried to pacify regular workers by offering bonuses such as a 400 yuan award for full attendance.

The company also wanted to resolve disputes through proper channels.

Sanqi described how he tried this:

Last night, I called a legal hotline for consultation, and the response was that because the improper management of the epidemic led to COVID-19, it could be considered an occupational injury.

Although some regular workers were actively defending their rights through established channels, their actions were more individualized in nature.

Worker organizing in the absence of representation by the official union

The worker interviews reveal that the protests at Foxconn were largely disorganized. The hourly and short-term workers were the most active in staging the protest in November, after the formal channels to voice their grievances failed them. However, precisely because of their status as temporary workers, they were loosely organized, and their actions quickly ceased after accepting a lump sum payment. However, management did not publicly address the various complaints raised by workers.

The regular workers were in a better position to fight for long-term changes in the factory. But, although they had their own chat groups which were likely active in exchanging opinions, the discussions did not result in collective action. One reason is that the local government and the factory management used various strategies to break down solidarity and encouraged workers to consider the personal impacts of taking collective action.

This leads us to the question of whether China's official union took up any role to represent the workers collectively. CLB interviewed the local union and found that in October² they were off in the community checking residents' health codes as part of the national pandemic-prevention effort, rather than organizing Foxconn workers to negotiate for safer working

[2] For more, please check the article "Worker protests at Zhengzhou Foxconn highlight labour-capital problems in global supply chain", <https://clb.org.hk/en/content/worker-protests-zhengzhou-foxconn-highlight-labour-capital-problems-global-supply-chain/>

conditions. An official union news release likewise stated that union officials were concentrating on Covid testing and community disinfection work before the protest and riot broke out.

The lack of representation and bargaining from the official union contributes to the absence of systemic improvement of working conditions in the Foxconn factory. Regular workers had long observed the lax pandemic prevention measures and a disregard for workers' health before the situation escalated in late 2022. The union should have been aware of these concerns and bargained with the company to solve these issues in advance. Instead, it was the short-term workers who tried to redress the issues. When their peaceful methods failed, they protested and were met with police violence.

China Labour Bulletin

Based in Hong Kong since its founding in 1994, China Labour Bulletin (CLB) aims to support the labour movement in China and ensure that the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) represents and serves their members effectively. CLB also provides the most up-to-date and reliable information about worker activism in China with the Strike Map, the only database that systematically documents workers' strikes and protests in China.

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Italy

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Context

Economic output in 2022 in Italy has returned to its pre-pandemic level but was hindered by trade disruptions and a surge in commodity prices. Following the sharp recession triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, real GDP rebounded swiftly during 2021-22. However, the prospects for further growth were dampened by the fallout of Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

While the direct impact was limited due to Russia and Ukraine constituting only a small share of Italy's export markets (combined, approximately 1% of goods export value and foreign tourist income in 2022), demand also slowed for goods manufactured elsewhere in the EU with Italian-made inputs and components. This, coupled with unfavorable international trade dynamics, resulted in a decline in net exports, thereby impeding GDP growth in 2022. Inflation has primarily been fueled by soaring energy prices, disproportionately affecting low-income households. Towards the end of 2022, energy prices started to decline, notably for gas.

According to data from the European Commission (2022), labour demand surged in 2021-22, yet the unemployment rate continued its downward trend for the eighth consecutive year, reaching 8.1%. Although the unemployment rate among young people (aged 15-24) is declining, standing at nearly 24%, it remains one of the highest in the EU. The activity rate rose to 70.4%, returning to 2019 levels, yet still lagging behind Italy's EU counterparts. Similarly, the employment rate remains 10 percentage points below the

EU average, with even larger gaps for women and young people. The risk of poverty and social exclusion remains high. While nominal wages saw a 4.5% increase in 2022, real wages fell by 2.8% due to high inflation and the weakness of the Italian collective bargaining system in addressing it (Maccarrone 2023). This downturn has significantly impacted the living standards of lower-income earners.

Data sources

Analyzing the strikes that unfolded in Italy in 2022 within the described context presents considerable challenges. The National Institute of Statistics (Istat) stopped publishing statistics on labour conflicts in April 2010. As of 2024, the only official data that is available in Italy concerns data on strikes collected by the Commissione Garanzia Sciopero (CGS) (Strike Guarantee Commission), a public body that ensures compliance with regulations regarding strikes, by identifying the essential services that need to be ensured during strikes, along with how they are to be maintained. It also defines “other measures” such as break times, maximum duration of strike actions, conciliation procedures, and the determination of staff quotas exempted to ensure service continuity through essential services (not exceeding one-third of the employees typically involved in service provision). This aligns with the principle of balancing the exercise of the right to strike with respect for citizens’ constitutional rights to life, health, liberty and security, freedom of movement, social assistance and security, education, and freedom of communication. The number of strikes according to CGS in 2022 were 1129. However, we cannot use this source as the CGS does not cover all strikes nor the specific characteristics of strikes¹.

In this context, to provide a more comprehensive analysis of strike characteristics in Italy, we engage with a new method of data collection. Data on strikes in Italy presented in this report focus on work-related collective actions in Italy. The data set was built using protest event analysis (PEA), a well-known method in the field of contentious politics that draws on media

[1] For the purpose of the report, CGS does not have information, for instance, on the issues claimed.

sources to collect and analyze data on the quantity and characteristics of protests across geographical areas and over time, and focused on diverse types of labor-related collective action, both protest and less contentious actions such as negotiations².

To collect information on strikes, and more broadly on work-related collective actions, we specifically collected data from 1 January 2022 up to 31 December 2022 using both the national and ten local editions of *La Repubblica*. We selected articles every other day, applying the following strategy: “Monday-Wednesday-Friday-Sunday”/ “Tuesday-Thursday-Saturday”. Focusing on the selected days, we considered all labor-related collected actions relying on a keyword-based search in the electronic archives. The string included words such as some forms of labor conflicts, some of the major unions, and more general words such as workers and work. The data collection resulted in a sample of 626 collective actions that occurred in 2022. Out of this sample, we selected strikes and our final sample results in 148 strikes for 2022. Because our PEA data source only covers 10 local editions of *La Repubblica* in addition to the national one, our dataset does not capture all cases of regional and local strikes. The number of strikes collected through PEA data is, therefore, a sample and does not cover the whole population of strikes. Albeit partially, this data set compensates for the absence of data from official statistics on strikes and other forms of protest in Italy³.

[2] *The data set more specifically covers collective actions in Italy since 2008 (Pilati et al. 2024)*

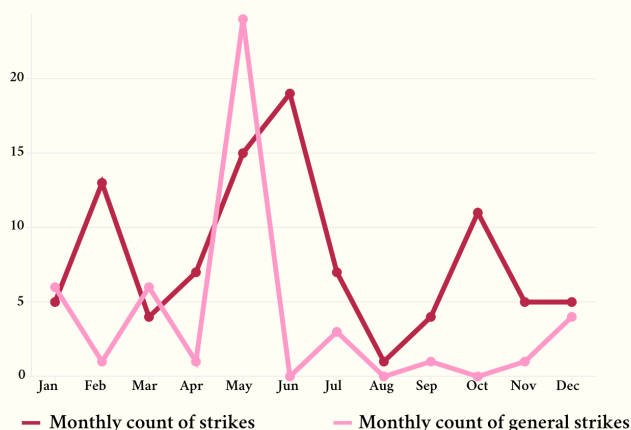
[3] *When comparing our PEA data on strikes with the official CGS data, we find the following consistencies: in 2022, our dataset records 47 general strikes like the CGS does. Both our dataset as well as the official record register 5 cases of illegal strikes.*

The characteristics of strikes in Italy, 2022

According to our PEA data, the majority of the 148 strikes that occurred in Italy in 2022 involved work stoppage (68.2 percent), while 31.8 percent were general strikes (Figure 1)⁴.

May and June recorded the highest number of strike actions, with 15 instances of work stoppage and 24 actions associated with general strikes in May. More than half of these strikes were related to a national strike by legal professionals and a general strike in education on May 30, 2022. In June, there were 19 strikes involving work stoppage including those related to an airline companies strike and to a taxi drivers strike.

Figure 1. Number of strike actions occurred between January 1st 2022 and December 31, 2022 in Italy



A third of all strikes, irrespective of the type, involved transportation (Table 1). Manufacturing was the second most active economic activity in strikes, followed by professional, scientific and technical and the education-related activities.

[4] Among all actions that may occur during general strikes (such as public demonstrations or sit-ins), we only included those identified as work stoppage. The high number of general strikes that both the CGS and the PEA data record, is partially due to the fact that in the case of CGS some strikes are counted more than one time based on the number of regions requesting authorization. This may be due to variations in regional rules governing strikes, such as the hours designated for strikes. Likewise, for PEA data, general strikes may occur in more than one location.

Table 1. Main economic activity affected by strikes (percentages, Italy 2022)⁵

	Strike	General strike	Total
Transportation and storage	36.5	37	36.6
Manufacturing	24	2.2	16.9
Professional, scientific and technical activities	1	34.8	12
Education	9.4	10.9	9.9
Accommodation and food service activities	6.2	-	4.2
Administrative and support service activities	4.2	2.2	3.5
Arts, entertainment and recreation	5.2	-	3.5
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	3.1	2.2	2.8
Human health and social work activities	1	6.5	2.8
Information and communication	4.2	-	2.8
Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	1	4.3	2.1
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	3.1	-	2.1
Other service activities	1	-	0.7
Total N	96	46	142

While transportation is associated with both types of strikes, other economic activities significantly differ between the two types of strikes.

Industry strikes predominantly involve manufacturing, with transportation as the next major sector. Indeed, the local public transport sector remains one of the most conflictual in Italy. The year 2021 was affected by the

[5] This information derives from the code of International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities (ISIC), the international reference classification of productive activities. In this table we only consider the first economic activity that was mentioned. Only in less than 10 percent of all cases, the presence of more than one economic activity was reported.

proclamation and subsequent implementation of seven “national strike” actions in this sector. However, during 2022 the dispute continued, leading to three national strikes⁶. The dispute ended with the signing of a renewed National Collective Bargaining Agreement (Contratto Collettivo Nazionale di Lavoro - CCNL) on May 10, 2022. One of the effects of the national strikes mentioned above was undoubtedly the greater attention that workers received from local political actors. Unions in these regions felt empowered to take concrete supportive actions by aligning local grievances with the broader context for the renewal of the National Collective Bargaining Agreement for the bus and train workers.

In contrast, the economic activities affected by general strikes included, in addition to transportation, professional activities, education, and health. Therefore, general strikes primarily involve workers in the public sector, including nurses, those in transportation, and legal professionals.

This is also in line with the analysis of the sector in which strikes occurred, as general strikes mostly affect the public sector, representing 81.58% of all general strikes (Table 2)⁷. General strikes included both national and regional general strikes, and 5 multi-sector strikes i.e. strikes involving a plurality of national sectors that occurred in 2022.

Table 2. Percentage of strikes in private and public sectors by types of strike (Italy 2022)

	Strikes	General strikes	Any strike
Private sector	62.6	18.4	50.4
Public sector	37.4	81.6	49.6
Total N	99	38	137

[6] Strikes in 2021 include February 8, March 26, May 12, June 1, June 21, July 23, and October 11, 2021. They were called by both CCNL-signatory established union federation and autonomous trade union organizations. Those in 2022 include January 14, February 25, and April 28, 2022.

[7] There are some cases in our sample which are difficult to classify as either public sector or private sector. For example, there are cases of healthcare assistants or nurses within the public health sector whose work is outsourced to private companies or cooperatives.

The majority of strikes in Italy adhere to legal regulations. The Italian Constitution recognizes the right to strike, albeit with restrictions if it infringes upon other constitutional rights such as health, education, or mobility. Organizers of strikes are required to notify public authorities, and the CGS can intervene to ensure compliance with strike regulations. In recent years, the CGS has often intervened to request unions to modify their strike procedures. In 2022 CGS issued 13 preventive actions, which resulted in 11 adjustments of strike procedures by the unions, and 2 revocations.

In the Italian context, unauthorized strikes (wildcat strikes) or those rejected by the CGS are thus classified as illegal strikes because through their conduct they compromise the essential rights of citizens and rules regarding strikes. Overall, our data show that 5 out of 148 strikes were illegal strikes, in line with CGS data that also show that 5 national strikes were not authorized. Three illegal strikes include the cab drivers' general strike against the liberalization of cab driving licenses and the entry of Uber in June 2022. The taxi drivers' strike limited public transportation and restricted the mobility of citizens. For this reason, the authorities precepted cab drivers and restricted their right to strike. The other two national strikes were promoted in March 2022 by truckers and harbor workers who went into non-stop assembly for five days, blocked trucks and restricted food distribution in some Italian regions. In both cases, the local authorities and the CGS precepted, again, workers and restricted their right to strike.

Unions and workers' occupations involved in strikes

CGIL, the largest union confederation in Italy, is the union that most actively promoted or participated in the majority of strikes in the country, being present in nearly half of them (Table 3). The other two major established unions, CISL and UIL, are usually less confrontational and participated in general and industry strikes, but promoted fewer strikes.

Table 3. Percentage of strikes in which unions were present by type of strike (Italy 2022)

	Strikes	General strikes	Any strike
Main established unions			
Cgil	53.5	34.0	47.3
Cisl	31.7	25.5	29.7
Uil	33.7	27.7	31.8
Main autonomous unions			
Cisal	2	12.8	5.4
Cobas	6.9	12.8	8.8
Cub	3	19.1	8.1
Other unions	28.7	31.9	29.7
Total (N)	101	47	148

Over the last few years, autonomous unions (Cobas, Cub as well as Usb, Usi-Ait, Usi Cit, Usi, Sgb) have been quite active in organizing workers in specific sectors, such as logistics, but register lower membership data overall. In 2022, their participation in strikes is primarily concentrated in general strikes including local general strikes.

As Table 4 shows, workers participating in strikes predominantly consist of professionals - legal, social, and cultural professionals, teachers, and science and engineering associate professionals - with drivers also playing a significant role. However, a notable difference arises when comparing industrial actions to general strikes. Industrial actions involve a more varied array of occupations, including drivers and teaching and science professionals, who are among the most active workers, along with traditional manufacturing roles like metalworkers or stationary plant and machine operators. Conversely, general strikes exhibit less diversity in the types of occupations involved, with over one-third comprising legal, social, and cultural professionals, and one-fourth involving drivers, highlighting a narrower range of occupational profiles among participants.

Table 4. Main occupation involved in strikes (percentages, Italy 2022)⁸

	Strikes	General strikes	Any strike
Drivers and Mobile Plant Operators	23.5	28.6	25.2
Legal, Social and Cultural Professional	2.4	38.1	14.2
Science and Engineering Associate Professionals	12.9	7.1	11.0
Teaching Professionals	10.6	11.9	11.0
Metal, Machinery and Related Trades Workers	10.6	-	7.1
Hospitality, Retail and Other Services	9.4	-	6.3
Stationary Plant and Machine Operators	8.2	-	5.5
Market-oriented Skilled Forestry, Fishery workers	4.7	2.4	3.9
Health Professionals	1.2	7.1	3,1
Other occupations	16.5	4.8	12.6
Total (N)	85	42	127

Finally, workers mobilize around a variety of issues. If we consider the first mentioned issue, Table 5 shows that contract renewals, production costs such as increased energy or fuel costs, reforms, working conditions, and wages are the primary issues raised in strikes (Table 5). However, once more, the nature of these claims varies significantly depending on whether we consider general strikes or industrial actions. In contrast to other countries, the Italian legislation allows for political strikes. In line with this, general strikes are mainly motivated by concerns about reforms, thus encompassing political demands, while one-fifth of industrial actions are focused on production costs, followed by working conditions.

[8] This refers to the first occupation mentioned identified through the ISCO08 code (International Standard Classification of Occupations) as the main category of workers involved in strikes. Less than 40 cases included a second category of occupation; therefore, we did not examine them, and even fewer for the third and fourth category involved.

Table 5. Main issues by type of strikes (percentages, Italy 2022)

All strikes		General strikes		Strikes	
Contract renewal	12.9	Reforms	36.2	Production costs	18
Production costs	12.9	Contract renewal	17	Working conditions	16
Reforms	11.6	Wage	14.9	Contract renewal	11
Working conditions	10.9	Government policies	10.6	Wage	8
Wage	10.2	High living costs	6.4	Government policies	8
Government policies	8.8			Layoffs	9
Layoffs	6.1			Other	30
Other	26.5	Other	14.9		
N	147		47		100

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Interview with a striker

Between the end of 2021 and the beginning of 2022, workers of Saga Coffee in Gaggio Montano, Bologna, Italy, went on a 100-days strike to save their production site from being closed. Eventually, the plant was bought by a new company, a majority of workers were retained, while others chose to leave. We interviewed G., a union delegate and currently a worker at the plant, to ask her about the strike.

We selected the interviewee by considering one of the strikes that were reported in our PEA dataset. The interview was conducted online by one of the authors, Vincenzo Maccarrone, on March 20, 2024 and lasted 30 minutes. The name provided is fictitious to ensure the interviewee's anonymity.



*Demonstration during the 100-days strike of Saga Coffee
(Gaggio Montano, Bologna 2022)*

VM: Can you tell us what were the reasons that led to your strike between the end of 2021 and the beginning of 2022?

G: Well, the strike started after the company declared that by March our production site would be closed. Their explanation was that we were operating at a loss. False, it wasn't true. It's important to note that our parent company is in Bergamo. So they decided to sacrifice us, a small company in the mountains.

It was November 4, 2021. Two of our colleagues intercepted an email stating that two trucks would load the last pre-assemblies, spare parts, and finished products and then take them to another production site. It was a normal day, I was working. These colleagues couldn't reach me. But one of my colleagues immediately called our union delegate in Bologna, who promptly said 'stop the trucks, everyone go outside, start a strike, I'm coming'. Meanwhile, our union delegate was trying to contact human resources and the company's management, but couldn't reach them, also because, even days before, they always told us that things were going well, even though we had a feeling that something was wrong because we could see changes, we were emptying the warehouse, everything, but they always gave us some kind of explanation. And on November 5, the next day, we already had a meeting scheduled at the Regional Authority [*Regione Emilia Romagna*] where they would give us explanations.

Instead, on November 4, we all went out - with a lot of effort, I can assure you - I was trying to make the workers understand that something was wrong, they had to go out. I couldn't give explanations because I had to go around the whole warehouse and say 'girls come out, we have to stop the two trucks because they leave by 14:30', at 14:30 they were supposed to leave. Most of them came out hesitantly, because the company manager was saying 'Guys, stop, I'll give you a warning, what's going on', and I was behind them saying 'come and then we'll deal with the officials, don't listen to the company because something is going on, then we'll explain everything'

Meanwhile, my colleague from the FIM [*another metalworking union*] went to get his camper because he lives right near the Gaggio Montano company. We parked it in front of the barrier so that the trucks couldn't exit. We stood in front of the barriers and said that nothing would move until our

union delegate arrived. Meanwhile, he had arrived. It didn't take long, even though none of us could understand what to do. It was exactly one o'clock. I wasn't in the canteen yet, I had just gone to the canteen, so people were still eating. The company manager was also there. They knew but pretended not to understand. When we went out, our union delegate arrived, we held a strike assembly where we communicated 'guys they said here that there's an email where they were loading trucks. We need to understand what's happening, no one is answering us.' The company manager left with his car and went to the Mayor, who we later found out had been informed that the company would be closed.

VM: How many workers were there at the time in the factory and then who came out?

G: 220. We were all active, all productive, working. Almost all of us came out - those close to the employers are always a bit more hesitant - but I think we made it, indeed that evening we finished at six pm, it was freezing cold, I can't tell you how much the fear was that the trucks were leaving. We left the camper with our colleague there, went home still with that fear, someone stayed with our colleague to avoid any issue. On the morning of November 5th, we had the meeting with the region, where they informed us that the production site of Gaggio Montano, Saga Coffee, would be closed. From then on, I can't tell you the crying, the words: "jackals, servants of the masters" - because we were in Confindustria [*the main employer confederation*]. We had seen briefcases and they thought they were coming there and giving us a little gift. We didn't even let them finish talking. We went back to Gaggio Montano, from Bologna to Gaggio Montano, and we stood on a ramp where the trucks load the stuff. And on that ramp on November 5, 2021, the union delegated announced, "Guys, the company wants to close the production site." From there, everyone understood that things were very serious. That evening everyone was there, absolutely everyone, even husbands, partners. That evening we said: "girls, we need to decide what to do, what do you think you want to do?". The idea of a sit-in immediately came up, but not everyone was very supportive because in 2015 it had already happened in our sister factory. But in the end we succeeded, we organized it.

VM: What did the sit-in mean to you?

G: The solidarity that came from the citizens, from the SPI [*the retirees' wing of the CGIL*], from family members, from shopkeepers. Also because they had already experienced that story. Those who stand by you, who support you, support you for the cold, for hunger, for patience, they came, spent time with us. We started putting stoves where we could cook something to eat because we didn't move from there, a drum with wood inside to warm ourselves. And then slowly a tent arrived so we wouldn't get wet. Civil Protection brought us tents to put things in. They never left us alone, both economically and for food. And also the human aspect, because there were days when we thought of giving up, because it was hard to leave the family, to spend hours and hours there without earning. And then in the end it went well too [*with respect to earnings*], we made an agreement that we would be covered by a short-time working scheme [*known as cassa integrazione, similar to the German kurzarbeit*] even during the sit-in. It wasn't obvious but we also managed to do this. People were a bit calmer knowing that we were covered by the scheme.

VM: How long did the sit-in last?

G: 100 days, then we kept three days to sign the agreement. 100 days in the cold, in the snow, in the rain...

VM: In addition to these difficulties, I also wanted to ask you if there were some good moments even in a difficult context or even some even funny moments?

G: Of course, also because we had organized the sit-in as if we were at home. Each one of us was in charge of something, someone was in charge of cooking, someone of cleaning, someone had to organize for Covid prevention, whoever came to visit us had to be safe. Elementary school children would come and when they saw us they would stand there with their eyes wide open saying "where are we, what's going on?". Then we would do songs and then we would feed them snacks and we would spend the day like that then. In those days we felt embraced by the community of Gaggio Montano. We had so many difficulties organizing the shifts, how to make our colleagues not to give up. Also, because doing 24-hour shift is not

easy, but we organized ourselves by having assemblies where it had to be decided that all 220 workers had to do their part, even if it was not always the case, but with solidarity we made it.

The biggest difficulty was to remain united. Then there were good moments. Everyday trade unionists came to visit us, we vented with them, they brought us their support, even psychological support, in front of this fire in the bins, they gave us money to face the winter. The CGIL [*the main union confederation*] of the territory made possible to make the sit-in work for 24 hours on all fronts, on all fronts, they gave everything. The shopkeepers were at our side, the elderly, the SPI with their two campers to keep us warm at night because we were in the cold, the Civil Protection with tents, cots, the school children who asked us not to close the factory since it was their future.

Then Christmas came. We bought little gifts for Santa Claus for the children. Made the Christmas tree, Bishop Zuppi [*the bishop of Bologna*] also came and did the celebration of mass. We also prepared food, drinks to spend an evening together, also because we had to be there with our families. Daily we organized something, or some cyclists would come visit, someone would come and entertain us, bring us their experience, the roasted chestnuts. I mean there was everything, we were never alone. Then journalists, who were always present, even slept at the sit-in, because they were talking about our story. That was also very important.

VM: What response did you get from the government? How did the strike end? What was its outcome?

G: The local government was always by our side and they supported us, they did their part, even human, let's say, because they took to heart our situation, and especially us women - because eighty percent of us working there are women. The institutions were there for us until a new company was found to take us over. There were requests from new companies that wanted to come to our mountain, knowing how we worked, the owners of the new company had worked with us before. We struggled to make sure to get a good deal [*with the new owners*], because you know they are masters, they only want to be in charge, they want to hire who they say and how many they said. The good agreement we reached is that 137 workers will

have to be re-hired within three years, by March 2025. In the meantime, Evoca [*the old ownership*]- the party that harmed us - has to support the new owners for three years, because they [*the new owners*] have to organize, otherwise you couldn't come in to work, because they have to bring new machinery they have to make sure everyone gets training.

Let's say we are well on our way. As of today, the machinery is there, 80 workers – most of them women – have already been re-hired, we do rotations, 28 alas we are still out. The agreement is that we kept our salary as it was, with all the terms set by previous collective agreement, however for three years these terms are frozen, so the salary even for those who work was about 1200 euros, and we who are outside - I say we because I am still one of those who did not enter - with the short-time work scheme around 960, although our union delegate managed to get us a one-off raise to 1100. Now the INPS [*Italian social security institution*] has increased the cassa integrazione and so we asked to receive the one-off raise in a different form. VM: In short, can we say that the strike led to a positive outcome?

G: Positive yes. Our union, our unity, our stubbornness, the struggle that we did and especially its visibility it meant that we reached a good agreement... And we managed to get the old company to give us some money, because in the end we also talk about the fact that almost 50 of our colleagues left with some money or early retirement, voluntarily. It was not the company that decided who or how they should leave, it was the workers who chose so who left, and the company took notice and gave them either a lump sum for those not old enough to retire, or a payment until retirement for those about to retire.

VM: another question I had was whether you think that the strike in addition to this a positive impact that it had on your dispute, had an impact in some way on other sectors or in the Emilia Romagna region.

G: You mean whether our example has helped others? I think so, yes because now lately the Crevalcore affair happened [*a similar situation in the province of Bologna*]. The guys in Crevalcore who also had ...[*the company*] wanted to take the production site somewhere else. Our agreements that we made let's say also serve to help make good agreements for these other companies where there are sit-ins, where we went to see them, we were able

to give them advice how to deal with what the critical moments would be, how to support each other together and avoid unconstructive discussions, because discussions during these times then lead you to think differently. Also to resist with families, because the problem with sit-ins is that you create divisions even in families, estrangements, and you lose the family. I as a woman and many other colleagues also had to struggle to make sure that the family did not crack, because okay you talk about it, okay you do it for the family, but they can't understand it completely. However, we made it.

VM: This interview will be part of a report about strikes in 2022 in other countries as well: the United States, Türkiye, Brazil, China. And so to conclude the interview I wanted to ask you if you would like to send a message to the workers in other countries and to everyone who will read this report?

G: So first of all, to the female workers especially: It's hard the battle that you face these days, if these things happen, because we have on our shoulders the organization of the sit-in, staying to help, everything that needs to be done, because we organize, we make everything go like a family. Even for the family you have at home it's hard, but resisting and knowing that you can achieve a good goal you have to resist. To the RSU [*rappresentanze sindacali unitarie – the firm level worker representatives*] colleagues and workers I would like to say and advise to always be united, even if you have different ideas, but in order to achieve the goal you want to achieve, that is dignity and freedom, always be united, never leave the R.S.U., the union officials alone, they are the ones who put their face with the looters, that is the employers. They [*the employers*] spend millions to get what they want, and they certainly don't want the freedom and dignity of workers, also because they consider us numbers but not human beings.



*Demostration during the 100-days strike of Saga Coffee
(Gaggio Montano, Bologna 2022)*

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Türkiye

*Alpkan Birelma
Labor Studies Collective*

Context

With a population of 85 million, Türkiye is the 19th largest economy globally. It ranks 48th among 191 countries in the 2022 Human Development Index. It is an upper middle-income economy with 10 thousand US\$ GDP per capita. Since 2002, AKP (Justice and Development Party) and its leader, Erdoğan rules the country.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the AKP focused on keeping the wheels turning and state subsidies at the minimum. The Turkish economy grew 11.4% in 2021 – 4.2 points higher than the World's growth. In 2022, the growth of Türkiye was 5.5%, while the global growth was 3.1%.

On the other hand, Türkiye has been experiencing an ongoing currency and debt crisis, resulting in high inflation. In January 2022, inflation was running at 36%, according to the government, but estimates made by independent researchers went higher, such as 83%. The annual inflation in 2022 was 64%, according to the government, and 138%, according to independent researchers. The wage share has sharply declined since 2019 because of inflation. Unemployment has been above 10% since 2015.

Türkiye has experienced a significant level of authoritarianization in the last decade. The aggregate scores of civil rights and political liberties given for Türkiye by the Freedom House civil liberties index decreased sharply since the mid-2010s, from 61 in 2013 to 32 in 2022.

Workers' unions in Türkiye have not always been weak; however, since the second half of the 1990s, they have been losing their potency. There are nearly 3 million informal Turkish citizen workers and 1 million informal migrant workers in Türkiye. Among all private sector workers (including informal ones), union density is as low as 6%, while collective bargaining coverage falls to 4%.

The right to strike has been further restricted in recent years. Between 2015 and 2022, the government has prohibited 230 lawful strikes covering more than 170,000 workers. This meant that 94% of legal strikes (measured in terms of the number of strikers involved) were prohibited in this period.

The Ministry of Labor and Social Security (MoLSS) provides data on legal strikes in Türkiye, while there is no official data on nonlegal strikes. As the law permits strike action only under strict conditions—namely when a collective bargaining process fails to reach an agreement—the MoLSS strike data does not record wildcat and (other) nonlegal actions. All strikes staged by civil servants are nonlegal because they are not allowed to strike at all. Labor Studies Collective collects data on all forms of working-class protests in Türkiye since 2015, which includes nonlegal strikes. For the years between 2015 and 2021, we detected 742 nonlegal strikes, while MoLSS detected 127 legal strikes. In other words, the frequency of nonlegal strikes was six times as many as that of legal strikes.

Strikes in 2022

Our data were mainly obtained via a systematic review of online news sources using a four-step data collection process. First, three left-wing news sources which specialize in labor issues, Evrensel (a national newspaper), Kızıl Bayrak (a news portal), Sendika.org¹ (a news portal) were utilized. These sources have special sections in their websites focusing on labor issues. All the news reports under the labor sections were manually scanned. In the second step, the 'worker' keyword was searched in all local and national printed newspapers via the search engine of a professional

[1] We did not systematically scan sendika.org in 2018 and 2019.

media monitoring agency. All the news headlines were examined, and those containing information on protest events were used for data aggregation. In some cases, the news reports failed to capture all the salient data (such as the duration). In the third step, we made a targeted Google and social media (Twitter and Facebook) search to complete the missing data. Finally, in cases where the salient data were still incomplete, we contacted the unions involved to gather the missing information.

Our research detected 197 strikes in 2022. Only 15 of them were legal strikes; the rest were nonlegal². Nearly 84 thousand workers participated in those strikes, and the number of working days lost was about 225 thousand. The primary demand in almost 80% of these strikes was wage increases. Only 13% were staged in the public sector, while the rest were in the private sector. The average duration of strikes was five days. On the other hand, only 20% of them lasted longer than five days.

As the Labor Studies Collective, we have explored working-class protests in Türkiye since 2015. According to our data on nonlegal strikes and MoLSS data on legal strikes, Türkiye's average annual strike frequency between 2015 and 2021 was 123. Therefore, 197 strikes in 2022 was indeed a record since 2015 in terms of frequency. This finding contradicts the image of Turkish workers, which is somewhat popular among scholars and the general public, as relatively restrained and pacified by the authoritarian and clientelist measures of the powerful governing party. On the other hand, this increase should not be romanticized because the super-high inflation probably explains most of the phenomenon. From a broader point of view, the 2022 uptick is primarily defensive against the incredible erosion of wages due to inflation.

[2] MoLSS detected 16 legal strikes in 2022.



The strike by couriers at Trendyol e-commerce platform, January 2022

Figure 1 below tracks the monthly trajectory of the strikes, and it clarifies that Türkiye witnessed a strike wave in February. The strike by couriers at Trendyol, an e-commerce platform bought by Alibaba in 2018, has attracted the most public attention. Around 1,000 couriers, which the firm hires on a self-employed basis, “switched off” their vehicles for three days and won a pay raise towards the end of January. This case was arguably the stimulus strike creating a diffusion effect. As the most public case, the Trendyol couriers’ victory proved that striking was possible and very effective. Others have followed: Textile workers in Gaziantep, the industrial center of southeastern Türkiye; shipbreaking workers in Izmir; sock workers in Istanbul; and other couriers around the county, who are the most notable.

Facing an election in the summer of 2023 (at the latest), the government has been forced to increase the minimum wage by nearly 50 per cent in January 2022. Indeed, in almost all nonlegal strikes in the first two months of 2022, the workers’ primary demand was higher pay raises than those offered by their employers at the beginning of the new year. They wanted their wages to be increased at least as much as the minimum wage was raised.

Figure 1. Monthly strike frequency in 2022

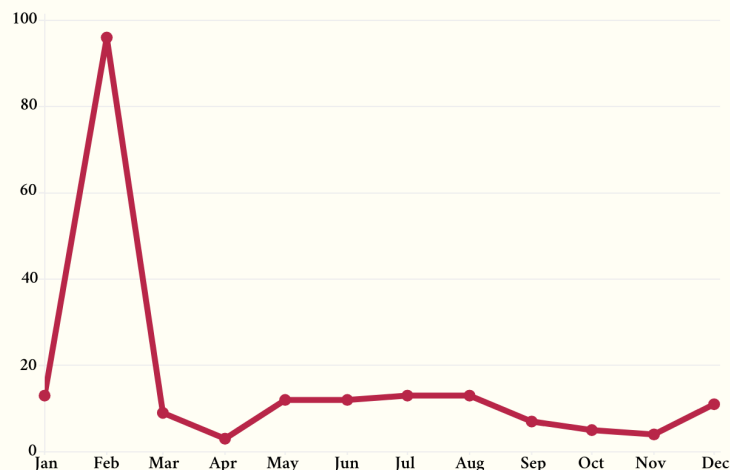
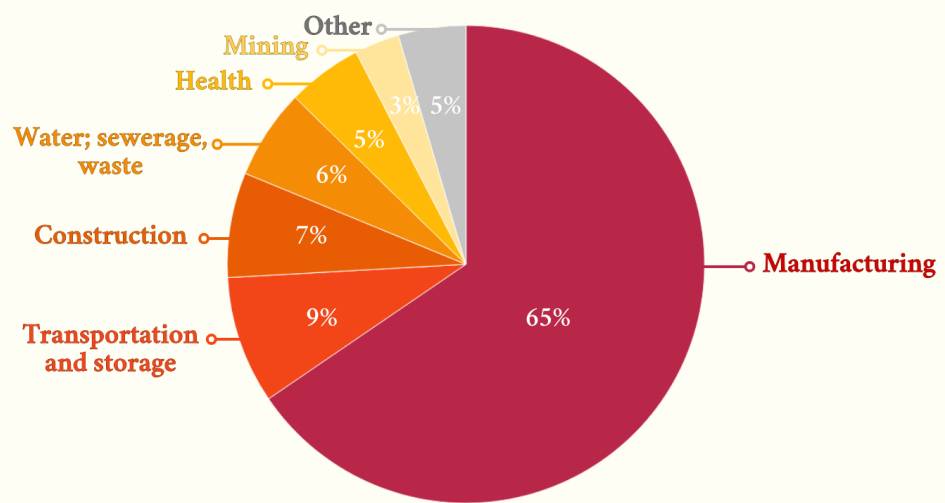


Figure 2 below presents the industries of the strikes according to ISIC (Rev. 4). Having a 65% share, manufacturing is by far the leader among others. Textile manufacturing by itself amounts to 28% of all strikes in 2022, followed by shipbuilding (14%) and metal manufacturing (11%). As a peripheral country, Türkiye has not experienced deindustrialization. Manufacturing employment is around 20% of total employment. This ratio is only lower than that of a few countries, such as China, Vietnam, and Hungary.

Figure 2. Industries of the strikes



Transportation and storage include courier strikes who work for online retail companies. This is followed by construction, in which working conditions are harsh and wage arrears are common. The industry called “water supply; sewerage, waste management and remediation activities” points at the municipality workers in Türkiye, who are public workers with a greater tendency to protest.

Health and education may seem low based on the frequency; however, they have a much greater share in terms of participation. Five nationwide strikes of civil servants (four strikes of health professionals and one strike of teachers) account for more than half (54%) of the participation.

Only 18% of the strikes were organized by unions that have authorization/ recognition at the workplace. Only 42% of the strikes were organized by a

formal union. The difference between the two figures points to the cases where the union is not authorized in the workplace but organizes the strike. Workers themselves, without the initiative or involvement of any formal union, staged a clear majority of the cases (58%).

Among unions, the members of the left-wing worker union confederation DİSK (the Confederation of Progressive Workers' Unions, established in 1967) organized most strikes (16%). DİSK was followed by the members of the mainstream worker union confederation TÜRK-İŞ (the Confederation of Turkish Workers' Unions, established in 1952), who organized 13% of the strikes. To better interpret these ratios, we should note that TÜRK-İŞ membership is six times as many as that of DİSK. DİSK Genel-İş, a union of municipality workers, organized more strikes (eight) than any other union. It was followed by DİSK Birleşik Metal-İş (metal workers' union) and TÜRK-İŞ Petrol-İş (petrochemical workers' union), both of which organized seven strikes in 2022. The strike with the greatest participation (about 20 thousand) was the national, one-day strike of public sector teachers organized by KESK Eğitim-Sen, BİRLEŞİK KAMU-İŞ Eğitim-İş and several other civil servant unions to protest a new law about their working conditions.

Interestingly, independent unions organized 10% of all strikes in 2022. The impact of newly established, independent, militant unions was especially notable during the strike wave at the beginning of the year. With its high visibility and significant victory, the Trendyol strike was, arguably, the stimulus strike that inspired the wave's emergence, and independent, socialist unions (together with a DİSK union) had some influence in it. Similarly, the strike in a warehouse of Migros (a retail chain) led by DGD-Sen, an independent, militant union, was another highly visible case that ended with a great victory. The strikes in Gaziantep were encouraged and supported by a newly established, independent union, Birtek-Sen. Most independent unions are very small regarding their membership base; however, this base and their efficacy have grown recently. Their militancy found a fertile ground to spread at that particular moment (culminating in early 2022).

Interview with a striker

One of the most prominent groups in the strike wave that took place in Türkiye in February 2022 were the strikes of textile workers in Antep, an industrial city in southeastern Türkiye with an Organized Industrial Zone employing some 200 thousand workers. In recent years, there has been a shift in the textile sector to the eastern provinces due to state incentives. Süleyman was a worker at one of the textile factories in Antep, Şireci Tekstil, and there were two strikes at Şireci Tekstil in 2022. We got in touch with Süleyman through Birtek-Sen, of which he is a member. Birtek-Sen is an independent and combative union that was founded in Antep in early 2022.



Can you introduce yourself?

I was born in 1988. I'm from Antep. I am married, I have two children. One is nine and the other is twelve years old. My wife works as a clerk in a bakery. After dropping out of high school, I went into shoe manufacturing, that's my real profession. We actually entered the profession so that we could have our own workshop. My brother is also a shoemaker. We said we would open a workshop but it was not meant to be.

After working in the shoe business for 15 years, I found myself in a textile factory because of the bad business and lack of social rights in the shoe manufacturing. I joined Şireci Tekstil and worked there for about five years. Şireci is a big factory. There are three shifts, each with about 80 people. Şireci has nine factories in total.

They recently fired me. I took all my rights and left. Now I am back to shoemaking. Since there is no social security in shoemaking, I will probably return to factory life. I'm very tired of the shift system in textile, it's unhealthy. You change your shift every week, it wears you out. I may enter another sector.

What exactly did you do at Şireci? Did you like your job?

I was a bobbin operator there. We were producing sweater yarn from acrylic. I liked my job. Acrylic first goes into preparation, where it is colored and coded. It goes step by step. The machine winds it on the bobbin. I looked at the machine, and if there were mistakes, I corrected them. I liked my job. I would also have liked to continue the struggle in the factory.

There was a huge wave of strikes in dozens of textile factories in Antep in February-March 2022. How did your strike in February take place?

I couldn't actually participate in the February 2022 strike, because I was working at night shift that week. There was a spontaneous stirring. Workers were talking about the wage raise. The strike happened when the day shift (between 7:00-15:00) left and the middle shift (between 15:00-23:00) arrived. The day shift left, the middle shift arrived, they joined together, and people waited as there was a crowd. That strike lasted about two hours.

Workers went back to work with a small raise. Previously, the employer had offered 5,000 liras and a 300 lira attendance bonus. They were not going to give 300 liras to everyone, but on the condition of a certain performance. In the end, we got 5,300 liras (\$390). The attendance bonus was abolished, it was included in the salary.

I was getting around 3,500 at the end of 2021. At the beginning of 2022, the minimum wage was raised to 4,250 liras (\$312). After the action in February, my wage went up to 5,300. But here's the thing, there used to be child allowance. They abolished it in 2022, so we lost something there. When we took this into account, our increase was lower than the increase made by the state. The state had raised the minimum wage by 50%. Our raise was around 35%.

In July 2022, you went on another strike. How did that happen?

Before 2022, there were some benefits. We had religious holiday allowances. In Ramadan 2022, they didn't give us holiday allowance. We talked to people there. We said, "If they don't give it to us on Eid al-Adha, they will never give it again, we have to oppose." I was talking about these issues all the time in my shift. That's why people started to fill up. Eid al-Adha came. We were on the day shift. The middle shift came, we united, and we went on strike again because of the holiday allowance. That strike lasted almost two days. In the last minutes, some workers started to leave the strike. But we stood firm. In the end, we received something like a thousand liras for the holiday allowance.

In the summer of 2023, you went on strike again. What happened then?

They broke their promises again. In 2023, they did not give any holiday allowance for Ramadan or Eid al-Adha. They said, "We reflected the holiday allowance to the monthly salaries, we added it into monthly salaries." But nothing like that happened. On top of that, the raise in July was too little. Because inflation was high, the government had raised the minimum wage both in January and July in 2023. In July 2023, the minimum wage was raised by 35%. However, our raise was not even 32%. That was why we rebelled. I was on the middle (15:00-23:00) shift. We merged with the day shift and went on strike. I was the leader there. We took our friends out of

the factory. We were also in contact with Birttek-Sen. Şireci also has a cotton yarn factory within walking distance. They were also waiting for a spark, and we created the spark. When we started, they came to us. It was the union that made this happen, the union was in contact with them too. They joined us with enthusiasm.

We came out of that strike with a huge gain. There has never been such a raise in the history of Şireci Tekstil. We worked very hard, and the union worked very hard. We took the strike to the end without breaking. We acted by taking lessons from previous worker resistances. Seeing our previous mistakes, we acted more carefully to overcome them. I was one of the pioneers among 2000 people. I said “friends, there are workers trying to break the resistance. If we prevent this, we will get what we want.”

In the shoe industry I worked in small workshops, there were two of us. I didn't see any collective actions there. When I came here, I asked, I researched. I asked about previous strikes, how did they go wrong, and I was learning. The shortcomings were this: Strikes were being broken, morale was deteriorating. Morale is very important. A manager or a supervisor were calling the workers and taking them in. I also saw these with my own eyes in the strikes in 2022. In the third strike, in 2023, I warned my friends, I said “let's learn our lesson, let's not allow it. It is necessary to keep the doors especially to prevent the strike from breaking. It is a spontaneous strike after all, there is no union.” There was a union, but it was not authorized, it had few members. The resistance could break at any moment, we needed to be very careful.

The strike in 2023 lasted 4-5 days. We raised wages to 15,500 liras (\$575), when the minimum wage was 11,400 liras (\$424). We also won our holiday money and shopping vouchers. Our collective action was not legal. The employer had the right to dismiss us after the third day. In fact, at the third day, the factory fired all of us, two thousand people. We explained it to our friends there again. We overcame the demoralization and in the end we won a historic victory. We had older brothers who had been working in the factory for 20 years, they had never received such a right in their lives. We provided an example of resistance to the Başpınar Organized Industrial Zone. The mayor had to come because of our strike. Our union was always with us, our MP Sevda Hanım came. We learned from the mistakes of the

past and that's how we won. We did our best not to break the strike. If the strike was broken, they would have fired us all without compensation.

Why were you recently fired?

My role in the strikes didn't bother the foremen or the supervisors too much. In fact, they also got a raise because of us. But in the shopfloor, I always defended my friends against bad behaviors of the superiors. That's why they fired me. I'm a socialist, I'm with the working class. I don't have the luxury of not defending my coworkers.

Didn't you feel the need to organize some resistance when you were fired?

They gave me all my rights. I couldn't say to my friends "stand up for me, organize a protest for me." Of course, I would if they didn't give me my rights. Then maybe my friends would defend me. I say maybe, I can't guarantee it. I did what I did unconditionally. I didn't expect anything in return.

Were you politicized during this process or before?

I became politicized in my 20s, I became a socialist, but I was not a member of any socialist organization. When I became organized, my worker consciousness started to develop. We read books, we live in practice, we are workers. Sometimes they say, "what you read in books doesn't happen in practice, life is different" and so on. But it actually does happen. Everything is as they say, like what is written in the books. In this process I became a party member.

Let's go back to February 2022. There was a huge wave of strikes in Türkiye in February, in and beyond Antep. Couriers, sock workers, ship breaking workers, doctors, and many others went on strike. Were you aware that you were part of such a strike wave at that time? Were you talking about it?

We were telling other friends about those strikes. We were saying, "Look, there's a strike here, there's a movement." I worked hard in Şireci for 3-4

years to try to explain my coworkers. I tried to make these people learn something, to develop consciousness. I realized there that no socialist had ever been there in that factory. A socialist is very useful in such a context. It's a socialist's job to mobilize those people, to give morale, and to guide.

What impact did your strikes in 2022 have on textile workers in Antep?

Of course, they had a very positive effect. It already had a great impact in Şireci. The strike in 2023 happened thanks to those in 2022. But of course, there was also a lot of management intervention. I was dismissed. They also closed one of their factories due to low production. I still kept my eye on the factory, I thought maybe something would happen at the beginning of this year, but it didn't. I think the reason why it didn't happen is that there are not many people like me left inside. Workers are waiting for a hero. They feel lonely and are looking for a hero. They are unorganized, that's why they do that. There are members of our union, but we were few. There were some people who abstained due to political reasons.

But if we go back to the general impact on Antep, for example, we saw the effect this year as well. There were strikes and gains in Melike Tekstil, Zafer Tekstil, and a few carpet factories. Especially the Şireci strike in July 2023 was a great morale booster for the workers of the organized industrial zone. There was a strike at a big factory called Kimpak Plastik in February 2024.

Have these strikes expanded the influence of your union, Birttek-Sen?

Of course they did. But there is the problem of industry threshold¹. It is very difficult to cross that threshold. We have difficulties there.

[1] Union law in Türkiye establishes twenty industry sectors and unions can be established at the industrial level only. A given union may only organize in one of those defined sectors. Every workplace officially operates under a specific industry and all workers of a workplace officially work under the industry assigned to that workplace. A union has to represent at least 1% of the total number of registered workers in the relevant industry to be authorized for collective bargaining. This is the so-called industry threshold in Türkiye.

This interview will be published in a report exploring strikes in Türkiye, the US, China, Chile, Brazil and Italy in 2022. It will be translated into the languages of these countries. Would you like to send a message to the workers in these countries, to your class brothers and sisters?

I would like to say this: First of all, the friends who participate in the strike need to be organized, they need to be unionized. Even if they are not in the union, they need to form a solid organization among themselves. They need to resist, they need to give a lot of morale to their friends. Morale must be given so that the resistance is not broken. If there is anything that can help our friends there, we need to help. Conscious friends need to take the lead and not hold back. Whatever can mobilize the masses, marches, slogans, they need to do it. In the end, they need to resist; if they resist they will win. If they don't, there is nothing to do. Because there are two classes in the world. One is the bourgeoisie and one is the working class. There are no other classes beyond that. Let them look after their class, let them take care of each other. Don't cheat each other, don't sell each other out. I believe they will win if they do that. That's all I have to say. Let the working class look after each other.

Labour Studies Collective

Labor Studies Collective (LSC) was established in 2014 by a group of academics, researchers, and trade union experts in İstanbul, Türkiye. LSC aims to institutionalize a platform for researchers who want to support the labor movement and increase the visibility of the working class and workers' struggles in Türkiye. Among doing other activities, since 2015, LSC publishes annual reports on working-class protests in Türkiye. The author of this report, Alpkın Birelma is an assistant professor at Özyeğin University in İstanbul (alpkın.birelma@gmail.com). Other members of the working-class protests research team are H. Deniz Sert, Betül Kocaaslan and Ebru Işıklı.

United States

Deepa Kylasam Iyer, Johnnie Kallas, and Kathryn Ritchie

The Labor Action Tracker

Context

Like the rest of the world, the United States was battling the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, and broader political and economic challenges abroad in the 2022. While the US economy remained relatively stable, some of the macroeconomic variables were volatile and showed a marked variation from previous years.

The inflation rate as calculated by the consumer price index of all urban consumers and seasonally adjusted started off at \$282 in the beginning of the year and ended at \$298 by December 2022, according to the data released by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS, 2022). The annual inflation rate was 8.3 percent in 2022 and compared to the previous year's relatively severe. Nevertheless, the Federal Reserve System of the US described the relatively high inflation rate as "transitory". Due to these same concerns, the GDP growth rate was lower at 2.6 percent in 2022 according to the third estimate of data released by the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA, 2023).

The unemployment rate in the country began at a high of 4 percent at the beginning of the year and remained fairly steady and ended at 3.5 percent in December, according to the data released from the current population survey by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2022.

Key Findings from 2022

A group of researchers from Cornell University's ILR School started the Labor Action Tracker (LAT) in 2021 to create a comprehensive database of strike activity across the US. The LAT documents strikes of all sizes regardless of unionization status, overcoming limitations in many other existing databases. The LAT employs a team of research assistants who manually collect data on strikes and other variables – like employer, labor organization, industry, size, demands, and unionization status – through google news alerts, social media searches, and labor movement contacts. The tracker is now a joint project between Cornell University's ILR School and the University of Illinois' LER School and its full methodology is available at striketracker.ilr.cornell.edu.

The Labor Action Tracker documented 433 work stoppages (426 strikes and seven lockouts) involving approximately 224,000 workers in 2022. These 433 work stoppages resulted in approximately 4,447,588 strike days* this past year. Several important findings emerge from our 2022 data. First, the total number of work stoppages increased by ~55% (279 to 433) and the total number of approximate workers involved in work stoppages increased by ~60% (~140,000 to ~224,000) from 2021 to 2022. Second, workers in the accommodation and food services industry organized more work stoppages in 2022 (144) than any other industry, accounting for over one-third of all events. However, these work stoppages involved approximately 7,000 workers, or ~3% of the total workers involved in work stoppages in 2022. The vast majority (131, or ~91%) of work stoppages in the accommodation and food services industry were led by either Starbucks workers organizing with the Starbucks Workers United campaign or fast-food workers organizing

**We calculate strike days as the duration of a work stoppage multiplied by the approximate number of workers involved.*



Starbucks workers on strike in the US in 2022

with SEIU’s Fast Food campaign, primarily driven by the now California Fast Food Workers Union. Third, the majority of all workers involved in work stoppages came from the educational services industry (~135,380, or ~60%). Fourth, non-union workers continued to organize a high proportion of strikes (~32%) in 2022, though these strikes were considerably smaller than work stoppages by unionized workers. Fifth, most work stoppages in 2022 were relatively short in duration, with ~47% lasting one day or less and two-thirds lasting fewer than five days. Table 1 shows the main variables of work stoppages, approximate workers involved and strike days for 2022 and compares it with the data from the preceding year. Note that we calculate strike days as the duration of a work stoppage multiplied by the approximate number of workers involved.

Table 1. Key findings

Variables	2022	2021
Work stoppages	433	279
Approx. workers involved	224,000	140,000
Strike days	4,447,588	3,269,186

Monthly Work Stoppages

In 2022, approximately 224,000 workers were involved in 424 work stoppages (417 strikes and seven lockouts), for a total of 4,447,588 strike days. The number of work stoppages each month stayed relatively consistent, except for a slight increase in stoppage activity between July 2022 and October 2022.

Table 2. Monthly work stoppages in 2022

Month	Number of work stoppages	Approximate number of workers
January	42	53,067
February	35	24,089
March	50	18,741
April	49	28,657
May	52	14,248
June	41	7,571
July	54	8,576
August	60	16,516
September	57	33,590
October	66	13,555
November	47	58,321
December	49	59,649

The number of workers involved in the monthly work stoppages showed greater variability. There was an uptick in the number of workers involved in the beginning and end of the year. For the rest of the year, the number of workers stayed relatively consistent except for a slight increase in April and September.

Labor Action by Industry

Table 3. Industry of Work Stoppages

Industry	Work Stoppages	Approximate Number of Workers	Strike Days
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	4	230	1,250
Mining	4	2,020	456,200
Utilities	1	24	8,760
Construction	4	1,060	38,560
Manufacturing	40	10,108	583,078
Wholesale Trade	12	2,868	49,604
Retail Trade	9	9,152	94,738
Transportation and Warehousing	45	6,023	50,440
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	5	702	1,002
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	4	350	550
Management of Companies and Enterprises	0	0	0
Educational Services	73	135,380	2,503,443
Information	43	8,012	242,253
Finance and Insurance	0	0	0
Health Care and Social Assistance	40	42,304	333,795
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	11	1,752	107,996
Accommodation and Food Services	144	6,971	22,648
Public Administration	14	1,140	22,509
Administrative and Support and Waste Management	8	897	11,681
Other Services (except Public Administration)	3	183	3,587

Note: A work stoppage may include workers from multiple industries.



More work stoppages occurred in the accommodation and food services sector than any other industry in 2022 (34% of all work stoppages), illustrating the importance of the union campaign at Starbucks and ongoing mobilization of fast-food workers across the country. The majority of workers on the picket line in 2022 were in the educational services industry, accounting for 60.4% of all workers involved in work stoppages. The educational services sector also made up the majority of strike days, accounting for 56.3%. Large strikes by both K-12 public sector educators and graduate student workers largely fueled these strikes in education, particularly the strike by 48,000 University of California graduate student workers and postdocs, which represented the largest strike in 2022.

Table 4. Duration of work stoppages in 2022

Variable	1 Day or Less	2 to 4 Days	5 to 9 Days	10 to 30 Days	31 plus Days
Work stoppages	204	85	52	40	52
App. number of workers involved	23,226	23,924	87,698	27,126	66,792
Strike days	22,734	70,105	583,452	416,675	3,354,622

Most strikes in the US were of a relatively short duration. Rather than bitter, indefinite conflicts, many workers in the US organize shorter duration strikes to protest injustices and advance demands. Many of these shorter duration strikes are of a fixed duration, in which workers and unions predetermine strike length in advance and unconditionally return to work at the conclusion of a strike.

Table 5. Approximate Size of Work Stoppages in 2022

Variable	2-49	50-99	100-249	250-999	1,000 plus
Work stoppages	197	49	66	55	37
App. number of workers involved	3,775	2,993	8,366	21,018	188,000
Strike days	52,417	81,566	89,962	369,243	3,854,400

Most work stoppages involved relatively few workers, as a majority of strikes included fewer than 100 workers. Our data noticeably differs here from official data sources, as the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) only includes work stoppages involving 1,000 or more workers lasting at least an entire shift that occurs on a weekday (Monday-Friday excluding federal holidays). Because of these narrow inclusion criteria, we also document several strikes involving over 1,000 workers not tallied by the BLS.

Table 6. Authorized Versus Unauthorized Work Stoppages in 2022*

Variable	Unionized	Non-unionized	Unknown
Work stoppages	266	25	4
App. number of workers involved	179,742	1,856	130
Strike days	3,945,121	2,640	170

**Note: This only includes strikes by unionized workers. By unionized, we mean after formal recognition of a union.*

We define unauthorized work stoppages as strikes organized by unionized workers in opposition to local union leadership, or whether the local union actively supported the action. We do not consider strikes by nonunion workers as unauthorized, or wildcat, strikes. Despite an upsurge in wildcat strike activity during the 2018 #RedforEd strikes that involved hundreds of thousands of K-12 educators across multiple states, our data demonstrate a very low level of wildcat strike activity in 2022.

**Table 7. Union vs Nonunion
Unionized vs Nonunionized work stoppages in 2022**

Variable	Unionized	Nonunionized
Work stoppages	302	131
App. number of workers involved	217,278	6,874
Strike days	4,370,681	76,907

Nonunion workers organized almost one-third of all strikes in 2022. By nonunion, we mean before formal recognition of a union. Unionized strikes tend to be considerably larger than nonunion strikes, as unionized workers accounted for ~97% of all workers on strike in 2022.

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Interview with Sarah Mason, Graduate Student Worker

In 2022, ~48,000 University of California graduate workers and postdocs went on strike in the largest strike in the US that year. Workers across higher education have increasingly organized and went on strike over the past few years in response to low pay and poor working conditions throughout the US. Deepa Kylasam Iyer spoke with Sarah Mason, a graduate worker who helped lead the strike at UC Santa Cruz, one of the many locations on strike.



UC graduate workers on strike in 2022

D: Thank you once again for agreeing to talk to us for the interview! How did you get involved in the California graduate workers strike of 2022?

S: I am the head steward, which is an officer in our campus unit and in 2022. I was also an alternate on our bargaining committee. I got involved in my union on day one of starting my graduate program. It was like the first thing that I did. A lot of my work has been focused in my department, so building up different issue fights around problems that me and my coworkers are facing. I've also put a lot of time into cultivating an organizing committee, made up of people from across segments of the department workforce so people like staff, faculty, lecturers. People are pretty siloed, and so this is something that myself and others have been trying to combat over the last 7 years that I've been there. I've also done typical steward work like filing grievances or you know, offering guidance to coworkers who are trying to take medical leave or parental leave.

D: I'm just wondering how the decision to start a strike was made because it should not have been an easy decision at all. Could you walk us through the process of actually deciding to go on a strike?

S: I think there's a lot to say about this. When was the decision made? I think this is it's a hard question to answer because it's hard to really say. You could say that the strike begins on November 14th, which is the official start of the work stoppage, the start of the picket. You could say that the strike begins in late October, which is when workers overwhelmingly vote to authorize the strike, and mobilization begins to really ratchet up on our campus. Some people would say that the 2022 strike actually begins in 2019 with this many months long wildcat strike that began in in December of that year. And it's true that the sole demand of the wildcat strike, which was the demand for a cost of living adjustment that is indexed to the local rental market, really does become the central demand of the 2022 contract fight and the central demand of that strike.

In terms of how the decision was made? Was it spontaneous? Was it planned? It was both. A lot of planning went into the strike, right. Picket signs had to be printed. Strike pay needed to be coordinated. We did a lot of preparation with undergraduate students in our classes, inoculating them, preparing them for how administrators would try to enlist them in

in a fight against us. So there was a lot of planning. You know, months of planning that that really went into it. But there were also and I think this is important to say - different tendencies organizing for different kinds of strikes and doing different kinds of planning. This was a massive strike. Our unit contains 48,000 workers. We didn't have 100% of our unit on strike, but we certainly had tens of thousands of people. One tendency, I think within this mass was imagining a very short strike where our campus administrators were kind of like overwhelmed by the number of people on the picket line. And so the kinds of preparations that they were making flowed from this vision of what the strike would be. Another tendency, I would say that I am a part of, understood that we needed to be prepared for a really long fight. We understood that the nature of work in the university is unique in that pressure takes longer to accumulate because deadlines and deliverables are longer and they can be adjusted by administrators. So like the grading deadline, for example, administrators can choose to continue to push that back. And so this is different from other work sites. Like a port for example, where you know shutting down a port on day one, you're able to do hundreds of millions of dollars in damage to the employer on day one. A university is just different.

D: I am very intrigued by you saying that there were different segments within the union. Considering the different strands which had different visions of what the strike should accomplish could you please walk us through how that impacted the internal cohesion of the union and your relationship with the University and the state at large?

S: This is a really important question. What does it take to build and sustain? One thing that I want to highlight here is the importance of the 2019-2020 wildcat strike that happened on our campus UC Santa Cruz. It's not just a straight line between the wildcat and 2022, but I think on our campus, this is a formative event and it shapes the demands that that we end up making statewide, and comes to shape the kinds of organizing structures that emerge on our campus. One of the things to come out of the wildcat strike here was a really strong organizing structure that was rooted in the department, where workers tend to be organized organically during the wildcat, we had a solid core of departments who consistently were holding meetings to discuss and deliberate.

Next steps to talk through problems and concerns to deal with intimidation and fear. We had developed this kind of practice of regular department meetings where issues that people were dealing with could be discussed or strategy and tactics could be debated, and then we're decisions about how to move forward could be made collectively. And I think this kind of practice, really ends up laying the foundation for a few of the issue fights that we were able to win in the interim between 2019 and 2022, but more importantly, it really becomes the backbone for building and sustaining the strike. For example, in the lead up to the 2022 strike, we were able to use this department organization that was already in place to map out who was teaching what classes, what undergrad enrollments were, who faculty instructors were, and whether or not these faculty were planning to pick up struck work. We did all of these things in the lead up to the 2022 strike so that we could have a really granular picture of how strong our strike was at any given moment.

I think the other thing that this practice of department level organizing did was that it habituated people to start thinking in terms of collective decisions and collective actions. So when we posed the question of a strike authorization vote, for example, we posed it in terms of a department decision. It wasn't like a one-on-one ask are you going on strike as an individual here, fill in your ballot. Are we going on strike as a department? Are we the people who work together, who see each other in the halls every day, going to commit to go out and stay out for as long as it takes to win? This really is the key takeaway. If we've if we've learned anything from the strike and if we've learned anything from our struggles over the last 4 years, it's that the most robust and committed form of labor action is grounded in collective strategic decisions made at the level of the department and developing a practice around that I think is key to maintaining internal cohesion.

D: When did the strike end? What were the outcomes?

S: The strike officially ended after 6 weeks. The bargaining teams for both the teaching assistants and the researchers voted to accept a tentative agreement. Then we had a week long ratification vote on that agreement. I think it ended on Christmas Eve. Our campus voted overwhelmingly to reject the tentative agreement. 81% of those who voted on our campus

voted against it. There were other campuses that voted to reject it, too. UC Merced, for example. But we're both small campuses within the UC system. UCLA and UC Berkeley and UC San Diego voted to approve the tentative agreement. I think on those campuses between 60 and 70% of people who voted to approve it. The gains that we made were 20 to 80% wage increases, 80% for the lowest paid workers over the course of the contract, we won expanded parental leave, an expanded childcare subsidy, a grievance process for harassment and bullying and fee remission. Those are just a few examples of the gains that we saw and they're not insignificant gains. But there was definitely a debate within our union about whether or not we were in a position to win more. Even though the strike is over the struggle continues.

D: The UC graduate worker strike was massive. What was its impact on the US labor movement?

S: I'm not sure, it seems like we are part of this growing ecosystem of higher education unions who are learning from one another and kind of like picking up from where the last strike left off. This is this is probably the impact that I can see most directly going through a fight, extracting these lessons and then transmitting them to the next round of strikers at universities elsewhere.

D: What was your personal takeaway having been a participant, a leader, a steward of this particular struggle?

S: You learned so much from being in this kind of struggle that you learn so much that you cannot just learn by reading a book. You know, you have to live it. In some ways, a strike is such a life affirming experience. You feel yourself as part of something bigger. You feel this overwhelming sense of solidarity. There's really nothing like it. I think for me that's personally how I was affected by the strike.

D: Do you have the message for the workers elsewhere who may be reading this report?

S: I do. My message is very simple. Solidarity forever. Your struggle is our struggle. This world is ours to win. Let's go.



UC graduate workers on strike in 2022

The Labor Action Tracker

The Labor Action Tracker is a collaborative project by academic researchers at Cornell University's ILR School and the University of Illinois' LER School. The project, launched in 2021, attempts to create a comprehensive database of strike activity displayed on a publicly accessible interactive map. Deepa Kylasam Iyer (PhD student, Cornell University ILR) serves as project coordinator, Johnnie Kallas (Assistant Professor, University of Illinois LER) serves as project director (jkallas@illinois.edu), Eli Friedman (Associate Professor, Cornell University ILR) serves as faculty advisor, and Kathryn Ritchie (Cornell University BSILR'24) serves as senior research fellow.

