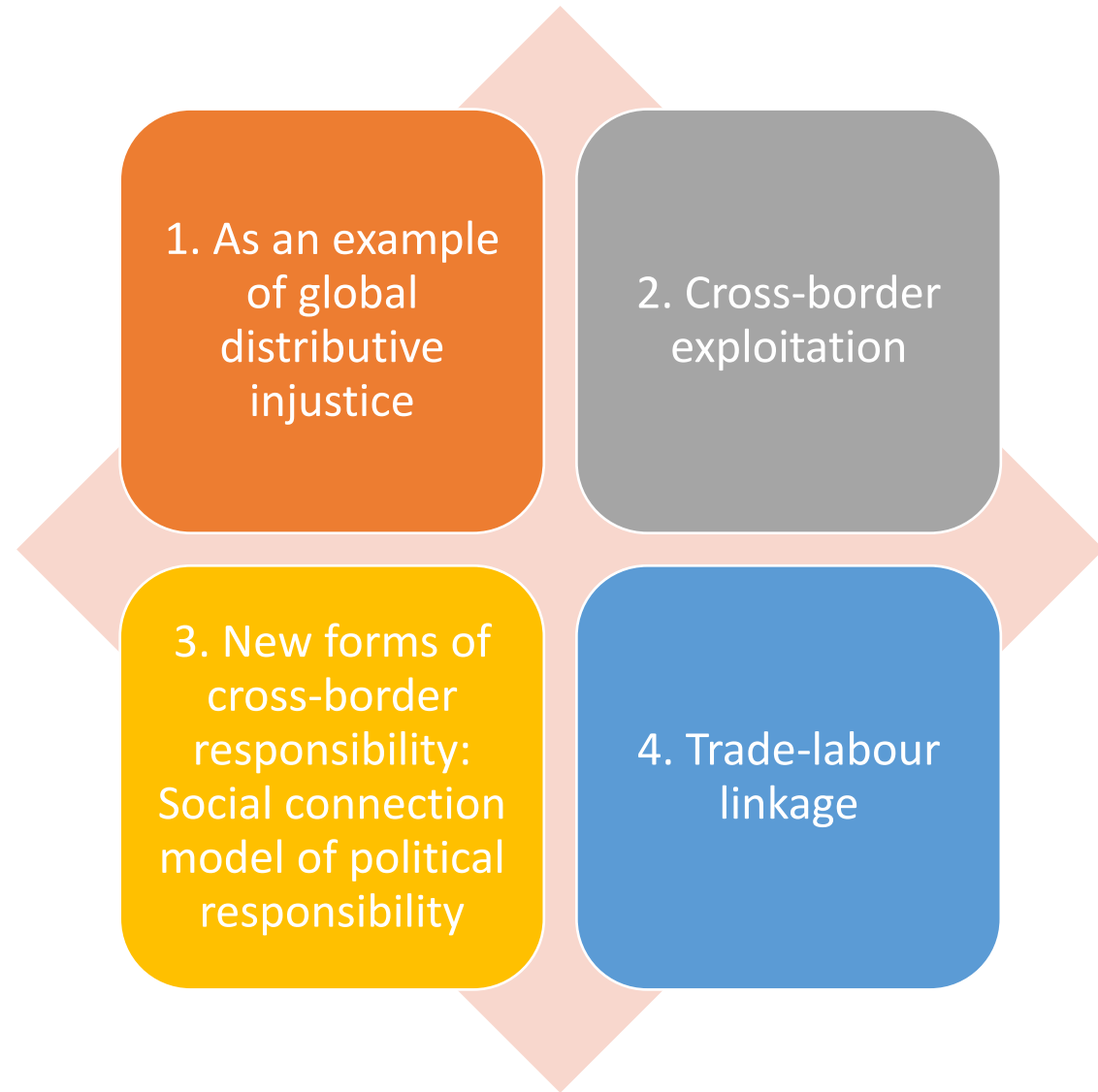


Week 10. Labour Rights as a Global Issue

Dr Lina Malagón

Labour Rights as a matter of Global Justice



1. As an example of global distributive injustice

Egalitarian accounts: dire poverty must not be allowed to proliferate in a world which knows unprecedented levels of affluence and wellbeing.

Non-relational injustice. Certain inequalities or levels of poverty are unjust because they violate fundamental norms of equal respect, independently of the existence of global structures which cause such inequalities or deprivation in the first place.

Poor labour standards in distant parts of the world are likely to be considered an injustice which we all have a duty to redress *irrespectively* of whether they have domestic or global causes, for their very occurrence is a violation of equal respect.

1. As an example of global distributive injustice

Relational injustice: certain relevant socio-economic or political relationships have to hold among people for obligations of distributive justice to hold among them, and that such relations nowadays hold on a global scale.

We are implicated in the existence of inequality through the global economic and institutional order.

The abhorrent working conditions of many workers in the world's South – for which not only local governments, but also the system of global rules, are largely responsible – can be interpreted as one prominent aspect of such an injustice. (Poggie).

2. Cross-border exploitation

- Exploitation is understood as the act of taking advantage of both the weak bargaining power of workers in poor countries and the weak regulatory frameworks of the countries themselves.
- It is both transnational: exercised directly by private corporations over works in poor countries, and international: exercised by powerful over weak states in international negotiations.
- Miller: consumers in wealthy countries (who benefit from exploitative global labour conditions) have demanding duties to help poor workers break the cycle of exploitation.
- James: whether the global market is or is not organised according to the principles of structural equity (which require international trade to benefit everybody and its returns to be distributed in a robustly egalitarian way) labour exploitation could be justified since sweatshop workers would get fair returns by other means (poverty relief and redistributive policies).

3. New forms of cross-border responsibility: Social connection model of political responsibility

- Can citizens of affluent countries really be described as human rights *violators* proper with respect to dire labour standards in poor nations?
- Some have rejected the claim altogether, arguing that we only have a justice-based responsibility for the labour conditions of those who share sovereign institutions with us.
- Only factory owners and managers of sweatshops are responsible for exploitative labour conditions in terms of liability, but citizens and consumers in distant countries who reap the benefits of cheap labour are not thereby left off the hook. When we are implicated in forms of injustice with complex structures such as the global labour system, we are all politically responsible for such an injustice, even if we are not liable, and therefore to blame, for their existence. (Young, IM)

4. Trade-labour linkage

- Establishing a linkage between labour conditions and access to international trade in multilateral agreements, thus making the access of developing countries with poor labour standards records to free trade conditional on improving domestic working conditions. (Christian Barry and Sanjay Reddy).

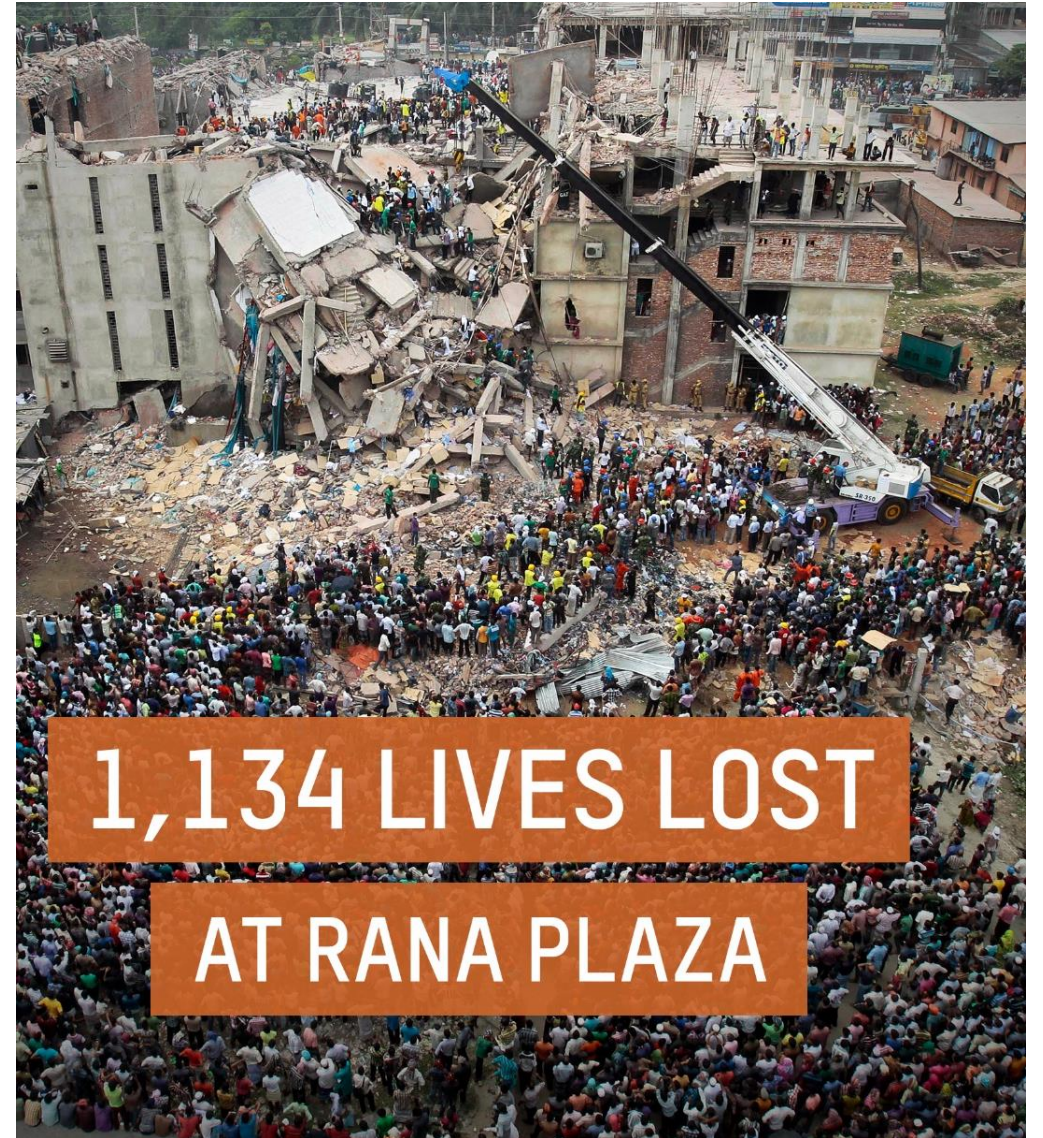


Labour conditions worldwide

- The past two decades have witnessed a significant drop globally in the estimated number of working poor, (living on less than US\$2 for each household member per day).
 - over half of the world's workers -more than 1.5 billion people – still work in contingent jobs: low-paid; their fundamental rights are not protected; and have little or no social security.
 - 75% of the workers are employed in contingent labour in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.
 - The reduction in poverty rates has not been accompanied by a parallel decrease in the rate of informal employment.
 - Some 2.3 million workers die annually from workplace-related accidents and illnesses.
 - In 2020, worldwide, 160 million children are engaged in child labour; 79 million of them are performing hazardous work. ILO.
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Rana Plaza building

- On Tuesday, April 23, 2014, workers at the eight-story-high Rana Plaza building near Dhaka, (Bangladesh), were asked to evacuate the premises, as cracks had appeared in the walls of the upper floors.
- These factories manufactured clothes for European and American brands such as **the US-based Wal-Mart, Italian Benetton, Spanish Mango, and British Primark and Bonmarche.**
- Despite still-visible cracks in the building's walls, the workers in the garment factories were told to come in to work the next day, some even threatened with pay cuts if they refused.



1,134 LIVES LOST

AT RANA PLAZA

Labour Conditions in Bangladesh

- Minimum wage for garment workers standing at \$37 per month.
- Bangladesh is the second-leading garment exporter in the world.
- It has the world's lowest labour costs in this area of production.
- In 2013, there were more than 5000 garment factories operating in Bangladesh, employing over 3.2 million workers – many of them women.
- Labour unions are almost non-existent in Bangladesh, with labour activists suspiciously subject to persecution and torture.
- In 2005, 64 workers had died and eighty others had been injured in the collapse of the Spectrum garment factory near Dhaka;
- in 2012, 29 workers had died in an electrical fire in a sportswear factory that supplied clothing for Western brands including Target, Gap, and JC Penney.
- Only five months prior to the Rana Plaza incident, 112 workers had died in a fire in the Tarzeen garment factory in Dhaka, which manufactured products for Wal-Mart and Sears.



THE UGLY SIDE OF THE BEAUTIFUL GAME

EXPLOITATION OF MIGRANT WORKERS ON A QATAR 2022 WORLD CUP SITE

Being forced to live in squalid and cramped accommodation

Being required to pay large fees (\$500 to \$4,300) to recruiters in their home country.

Being deceived as to the pay or type of work on offer

Not being paid for several months, creating significant financial and emotional pressures on workers already burdened with heavy debts

Employers not giving or renewing residence permits, leaving people at risk of detention and deportation as “absconded” workers

Employers confiscating workers’ passports and not issuing exit permits so they could not leave the country

Being threatened for complaining about their conditions.

► Labour reforms in the State of Qatar

Coming together around
a shared vision

ILO & Qatar

► Progress report on the technical cooperation programme between the Government of Qatar and the ILO

ILO Project Office for the State of Qatar

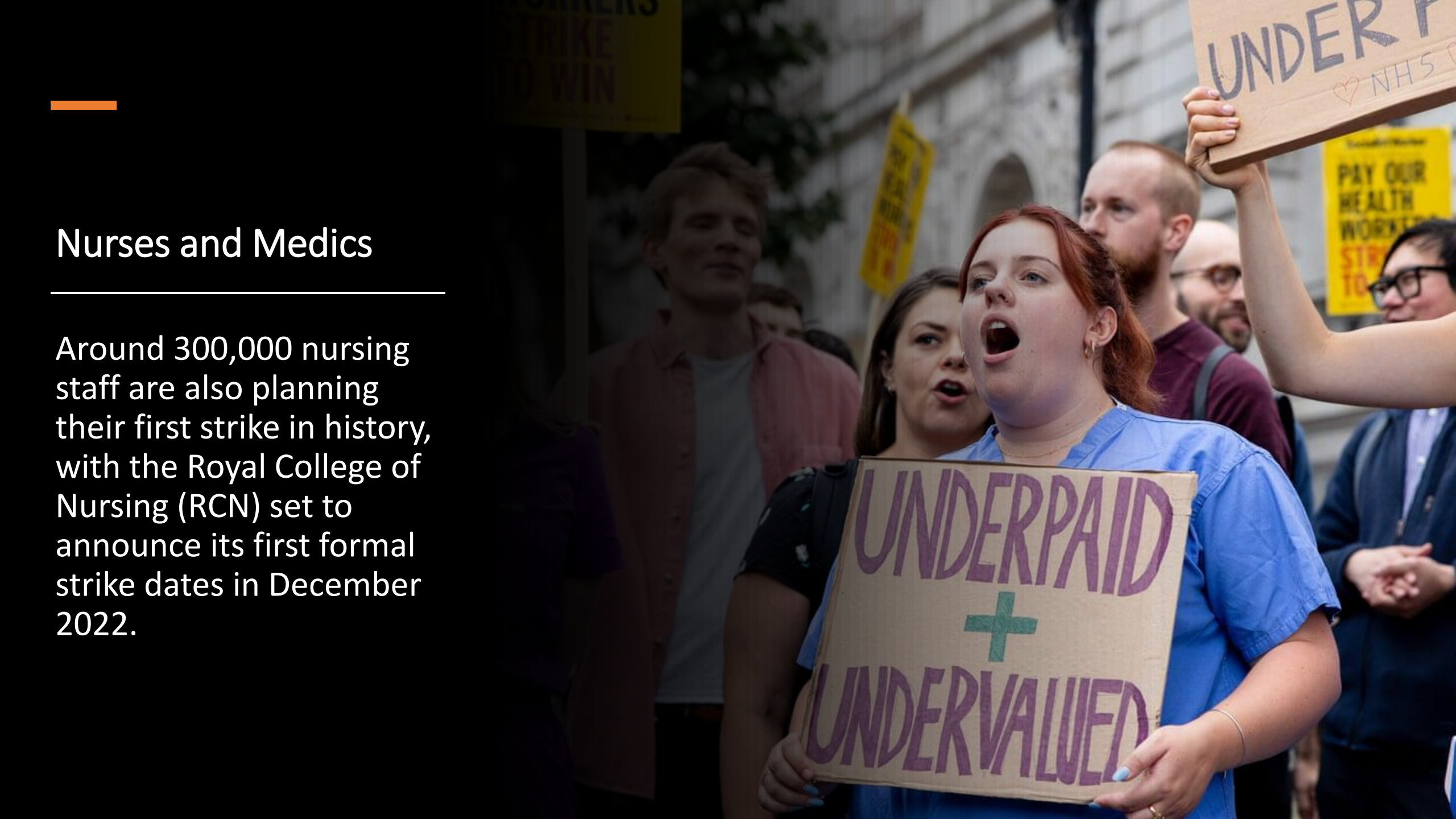
The ILO in Qatar (Arab States)

November 2022

UK Rail Workers

Long-running dispute
over pay, jobs and
working conditions.



A photograph of a group of healthcare workers, including nurses and doctors, participating in a protest. In the foreground, a young woman with red hair, wearing blue scrubs, is shouting with her mouth open and holding a large cardboard sign that reads "UNDERPAID + UNDERVALUED". Behind her, other protesters are visible, some holding signs that say "UNDERPAID", "PAY OUR HEALTH WORKERS", and "STRIKE TO WIN". The background shows a city street with buildings.

Nurses and Medics

Around 300,000 nursing staff are also planning their first strike in history, with the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) set to announce its first formal strike dates in December 2022.

Ambulance workers

On December 6, it was announced that more than 10,000 ambulance workers across nine trusts in England and Wales have decided on strike action.



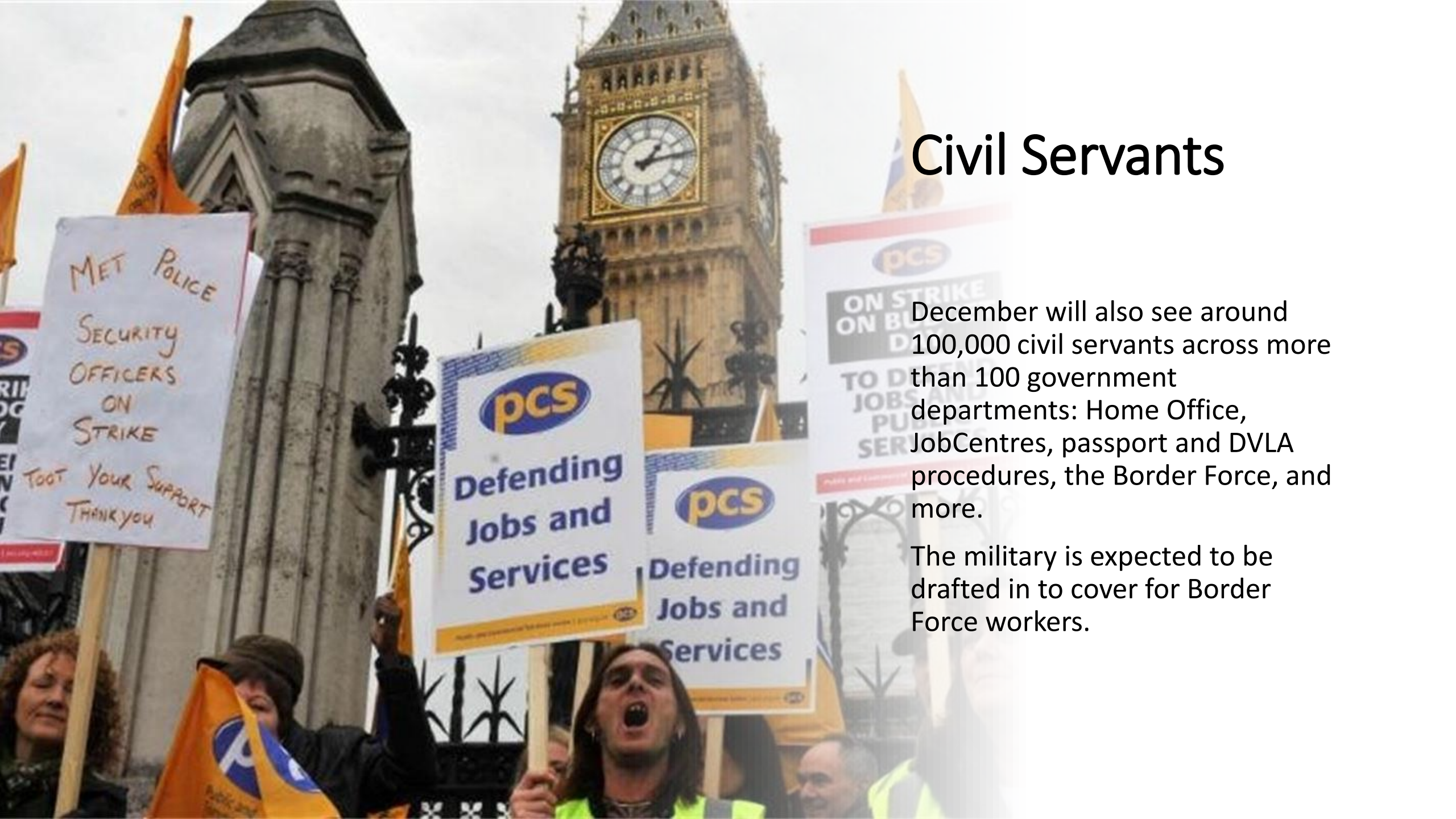
The background of the slide is a photograph of a multi-story building with a white-framed window. Overlaid on the image is a large banner for the University and College Union (UCU). The banner features the UCU logo in large, bold letters, with 'UCU' in dark blue and 'OFFICIAL DISPUTE' in pink. At the top of the banner, it says 'University and College Union'. At the bottom, the website 'www.ucu.org.uk' is printed in white on a pink background. In the top left corner of the slide, there is a decorative pattern of white dots on a dark background.

University Lecturers and Teachers

- On Monday, November 24, 70,000 lecturers, librarians, and researchers across 150 UK universities kicked off three days of strike action over pay, working conditions, and pensions.

www.ucu.org.uk

Civil Servants



December will also see around 100,000 civil servants across more than 100 government departments: Home Office, JobCentres, passport and DVLA procedures, the Border Force, and more.

The military is expected to be drafted in to cover for Border Force workers.

Other sectors

- Physiotherapists and midwives are also being asked if they want to take industrial action.
- Almost 1,000 bus drivers in London employed by Abellio are to stage 10 days of strike action in the coming weeks over pay.
- More than 50 security guards and CCTV operators at Harrods are set to walk out for 12 days in the build-up to Christmas.
- The workers in food factories that make Twiglets and Jacob's Cream Crackers have been on indefinite strike since September.
- G4S workers, who deliver cash to big names like Barclays, HSBC, Tesco, and Asda.

Labour Conditions in Ukraine

- Ukraine is a lower middle-income country. It is the poorest country in Europe (World Bank).
- Signed a political and economic association agreement with the European Union (EU) with a free trade zone (2016).
- Ukraine has had a weak economic growth and employment creation, wage arrears, high share of informal economy and undeclared work, weak labour market governance and burdensome regulation (ILO).
- After a modest recovery from the global financial crisis, Ukrainian economy recorded zero growth in 2012 and 2013.
- Sharp economic downturn in 2014, when the GDP fell by 6.8 % and then plummeted by 9.9 per cent in 2015.
- Ukraine's economic growth rate was 2.3% in 2016, ending the recession (World Bank)
- Despite these improvements, Ukraine remains the poorest country in Europe, which some journalists have attributed to high corruption.
- In April 2020, the World Bank reported that economic growth was solid at 3.2 percent in 2019, led by a good agricultural harvest and sectors dependent on domestic consumption.
- Household consumption grew by 11.9% in 2019, supported by sizable remittance inflows and a resumption of consumer lending, while domestic trade and agriculture grew by 3.4 and 1.3 percent, respectively.
- In 2020 GDP fell by 4.4 percent due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Due to the war the country's economy could shrink up to 35%/45%, according to the IMF.

Debates on labour rights

July 2022. MPs voted to legalise zero-hours contracts and made moves towards removing up to 70% of the country's workforce from protections guaranteed by national labour law.

A worker should be able to regulate his relationship with an employer himself. Without the state,' Hetmantsev, head of the Ukrainian parliament's finance committee.

'This is what happens in a state if it's free, European and market-oriented. Otherwise, the country will be travelling with one leg on an express train to the EU, and with another inside a Soviet-era train going in the other direction.'

Key Questions

Is employability expanding the category of citizens?

Could global citizenship contribute to social justice and labour rights?

What are the challenges in achieving better working conditions under the notion of global citizenship?