

R T A



SENDİKADA BİRLİK, DENİZDE KARDEŞLİK

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WE CAN'T AFFORD ANYMORE

- Impact of the Economic Crisis on Life and Poverty of the Working People
- Food Inflation and Minimum Wage Struggle in Türkiye
- Fatigue And Hours Of Work/Rest For Seafarers
- 2023 was the Worst Year for Seafarers: 129 Ships and 1983 Seafarers Abandoned



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LIVELIHOOD PROBLEMS DEEPEN IN TÜRKİYE: EXECUTION FILES AND CREDIT CARD SPENDING ON THE RISE

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

İRFAN METE

PRESIDENT OF THE SEAFARERS' UNION OF TÜRKİYE



Dear Workers,

We are excited to meet with you again in the 3rd issue of the Turkish Seafarers' Union's ROTA bulletin.

We have put the economic crisis prevailing in Türkiye and the world on our agenda in this issue.

Rapid changes in the price tags and increases coming every day in the face of increasing inflation are causing the salaries of citizens to erode rapidly. While the purchasing power of the people is decreasing, poverty is becoming widespread day by day.

Unfortunately, the collective bargaining we make according to TÜİK data loses its effect in a short time in the face of inflation. Our workers are impoverished as they work, and face the danger of getting deprived of their most basic rights to housing nutrition and education.

As we have mentioned in our newsletter, citizens have to cover their essential needs by borrowing money on their cards. While banks' earnings are increasing the debt burden of our citizens is getting heavier and heavier. On the one hand, labourers are being hit by inflation while they are struggling with the unfair tax system on the other hand. Their wages are cut after 2-3 months.

This year, we celebrated 1 May with enthusiasm in Bursa under the leadership of our Confederation Türk-İş. The main emphasis of 1 May was on "justice in taxation" and we rose our voices in the squares with this demand.

In this issue, comes an important article from Nikolaos Koletsis, Senior Policy Officer for Maritime Transport, European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF) on "Fatigue and Hours of Work/Rest for Seafarers".

The news relating to the inspections and activities carried out by the Mersin Inspectorate of the ITF which we are an Affiliate of, are also included in our bulletin.

Together, we will continue to fight for a fairer future. Strong together, to a future full of hope together!

Stay in solidarity.

Impact of the Economic Crisis on Life and Poverty of the Working People

In recent years, the impact of economic crises in Türkiye and in the world in general is being felt more and more deeply. In our country, constantly changing price tags and daily price hikes result in the erosion of citizens' wages. While this situation diminishes the purchasing power of the people, it causes poverty to spread and the living standards of workers to fall.



Impact of the Economic Crisis in Türkiye

The economic crisis in Türkiye is affecting every segment. From basic foodstuffs to clothing, prices are rising rapidly, while salaries cannot keep up with this increase. Inflation reduces the real value of citizens' wages. As if this were not enough, high tax rates and deductions further reduce the net salary received by workers. As a result, workers find it difficult to live on their salaries and even fall below the poverty line.

Poverty of the Working People

Poverty of the working, i.e. the situation where a person is unable to meet his/her basic needs despite working full-time, has become a widespread problem in Türkiye. Individuals who go to work every day find it difficult to sustain their lives as their wages erode in the face of inflation. This leads to both physical and mental fatigue and a decrease in the quality of life.

Nutrition problem

One of the most brutal effects of economic crises is the deprivation of basic rights of workers. In particular, access to healthy food and the right to education have become luxuries for individuals in economic hardship. Rising food prices in Türkiye limit the ability of low-income families to have a balanced and healthy diet. Individuals who are forced to eat cheap food with low nutritional value face health problems, which negatively affect their overall quality of life.





Education problem

The right to education was also prejudiced severely under the shadow of economic crises. The high cost of education causes many families to have difficulty in sending their children to school. Expenses such as school fees, stationery and transport costs have become a huge burden for low-income families. This situation prevents children from receiving quality education and their hopes for better living conditions in the future fade away. As a result, economic crises have a negative impact not only on the present but also on equal opportunities for future generations and social development.

Housing problem

Rent increases in Türkiye, especially in big cities, are a serious pressure on the citizens. Rental costs in metropolises such as Istanbul have become a great burden for individuals and families trying to make a living on minimum wage. As of 2024, although the minimum wage has been determined as 17 thousand TL, it has become almost impossible to find a suitable and liveable house in Istanbul with this wage. Rising rent prices force citizens to live in lower standards or move away from the city centre, making daily life even more difficult. While the housing problem comes up as one of the most tangible and striking reflections of the economic crisis, the difficulties people face in meeting their basic needs negatively affect social peace and welfare.



Unqualified Education and its Effects on Labour Force

As a result of improper education policies, significant inequalities emerge in society. This situation causes problems both in the careers of individuals and in the social structure.

Wages Inequality

Today, a master builder in Türkiye can earn a higher salary than a civil engineer thanks to his practical knowledge and experience. This paradoxical situation is a result of serious deficiencies in the education system and injustices in market dynamics. This imbalance reduces the motivation of young engineers and creates professional dissatisfaction.

University Abundancy and Unqualified Education

The rapid increase in the number of universities in Türkiye has led to a decrease in the quality of education. Many universities accept students without adequate infrastructure and academic staff, which causes graduates to receive unqualified education. In particular, young people graduating from universities, which are called apartment universities and do not have sufficient facilities, start to learn their professions only when they start their business life. This situation causes a serious loss of time and resources for both employers and employees.



Lack of Qualified Intermediate Personnel

These imbalances in the education system make it difficult to find qualified intermediate staff in the labour market. Especially in the industrial and service sectors, the need for intermediate labour is constantly increasing, but there are not enough graduates equipped to meet this need. The lack of adequate support for vocational and technical education further deepens the deficit in this field. Lack of qualified intermediate staff reduces labour productivity and negatively affects economic growth.

Global Economic Crisis and Strikes

In Europe and other parts of the world, economic difficulties and poverty of workers have become widespread. Especially in Europe, strikes and protests are increasing due to the economic crisis. Workers are taking to the streets and organising strikes to protect their living standards and defend their rights.

In countries such as France, Germany and Italy, workers are fighting for better wages and working conditions. These strikes aim to draw attention to the social and economic injustices caused by the economic crisis. These strikes in Europe show how fragile the global economy is and that the impact of crises crosses borders.



Germany

It is noteworthy that a wave of strikes has spread in Germany in recent years as employees demand higher wages to offset the rising cost of living against high inflation.

Especially the strikes of airport and railway employees stand out in Germany.

Spain

The strikes in Spain, which started with the increase in livelihood difficulties due to high inflation, are most effective in the health, courthouse and transport sectors.

Strikes are prominent in many autonomous administrations such as Madrid, Andalusia, Galicia, Catalonia and Basque Country.

Portugal

In Portugal, public employees in the education, health and transport sectors are most likely to demand salary increases. In recent years, teachers, health workers and railway workers have been going on strike and organising demonstrations to make their voices heard.





UK

In the UK, a wave of strikes in the public and private sectors, including health and transport workers, has started in recent months as inflation has reached the highest level in the last 40 years, exceeding 10 per cent.

Half a million people in the UK, including teachers, civil servants, firefighters, bus drivers and mechanics, went on strike demanding a pay rise in the face of inflation and the cost of living.

Greece

The Greek Confederation of Trade Unions (GSEE), the largest trade union in Greece, called for a one-day general strike to protest the rising cost of living. On 16 April, hundreds of thousands of workers and labourers participated in strikes and demonstrations in many cities, especially in Athens, and cried out their demands.

France

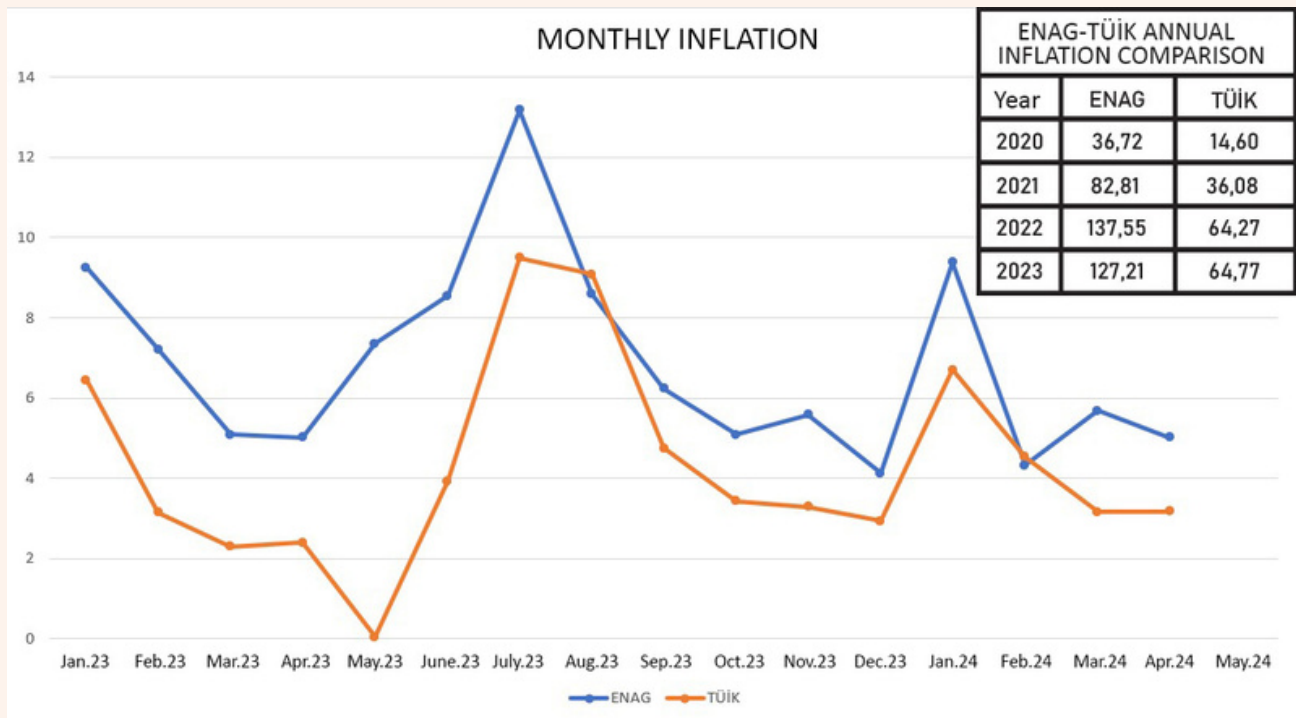
In France, strike decisions were taken due to insufficient wages determined for 2024. Strike decisions in the transport sector also came to the fore in France.



Food Inflation and Minimum Wage Struggle in Türkiye

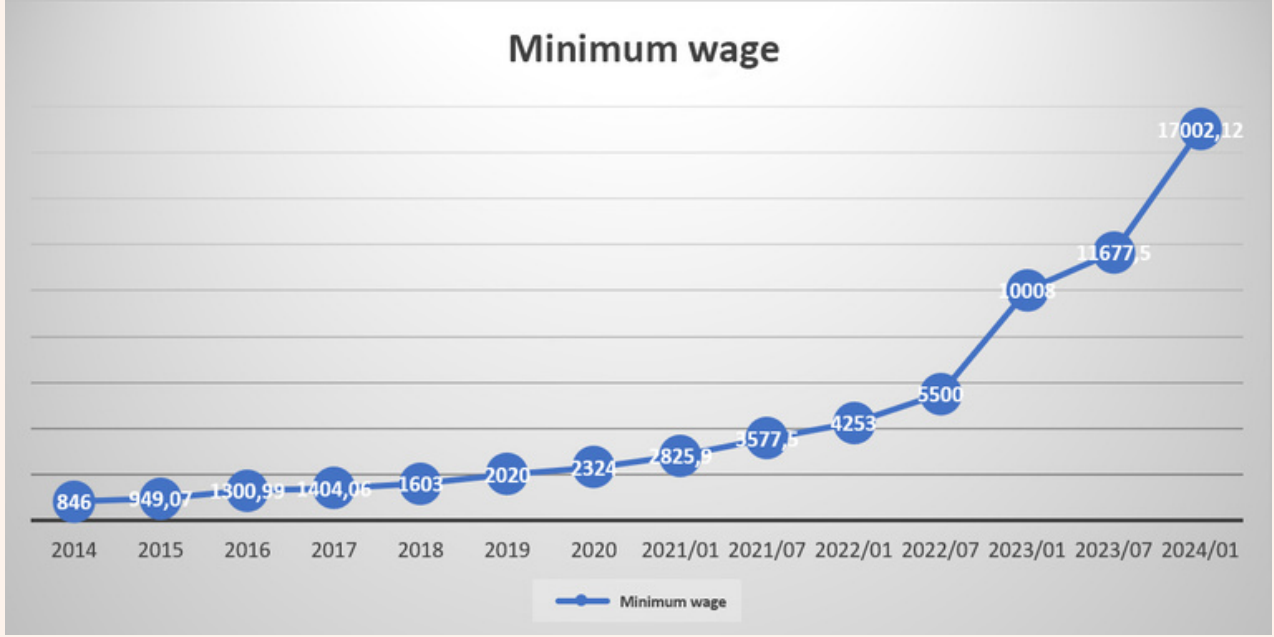
In recent years, Türkiye has struggled to balance rapidly rising food prices and rising minimum wages. While many countries around the world face similar economic challenges, the pace and impact of food inflation in Türkiye is particularly striking.

According to data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK), food inflation has risen rapidly over the past few years, well above world averages. There are many reasons for this sharp rise in food prices, including declines in agricultural production due to climate change, tensions in international trade and movements in the domestic market.



The minimum wage in Türkiye has shown significant changes over the last five years. The minimum wage, which was 2,020 TL in 2019, increased to 2,324 TL in 2020, 2,825/3,577 TL in 2021, 4,253/5500 TL in 2022, 10,008/11,677 TL in 2023 and 17,002 TL in 2024. Although these increases seem to be positive, the increase in food inflation has eroded the purchasing power of these salary increases. Price increases, especially in basic necessities such as food, constitute a significant burden on household budgets. Many minimum wage earners say that wage increases are not protective enough and that they are increasingly struggling to cope with the cost of living.

The social dimensions of food inflation are particularly evident for lower income groups. High food prices pose a serious threat to families living below the poverty line or at risk of poverty. Long-term impacts such as malnutrition, health problems and social exclusion are becoming more prevalent among communities struggling with economic hardship.



(According to the results of the research conducted by TÜRK-İŞ Confederation in March 2024; 12-Month Kitchen Inflation is 76.71%, Hunger Limit is 16.793, Poverty Limit is 54.700)

Food inflation and falling purchasing power in Türkiye require a reassessment of economic policies and social support mechanisms. Effective strategies to combat inflation and strengthen social protection networks should be developed. At the same time, measures to support agricultural production and price stabilisation are critical to tackling this economic and social crisis.

The ratio of the minimum wage to the first tax bracket of 15 percent over the years

Year	First tax bracket TL/Year	Minimum wage TL/Month	Rate
2000	2.500.000.000	114.300.000	21.8
2002	3.800.000.000	236.437.875	16.1
2005	6.600	488.70	13.5
2009	8.700	679,5	12.8
2010	8.800	744.75	11.8
2015	12.000	1.237,5	9.7
2016	12.600	1.647	7.65
2017	13.000	1.777	7.31
2018	14.800	2.029,5	7.29
2019	18.000	2.558,4	7.03
2020	22.000	2.943	7.48
2021	24.000	3.577,5	6.71
2022	32.000	5.737,5	5.78
2023	70.000	11.711	5.98
2024	110.000	20.000	5.5

Livelihood Problems Deepen in Türkiye: Execution Files and Credit Card Spending on the Rise



The economic difficulties in Türkiye are clearly demonstrated by concrete data such as the number of execution files and the amount of credit card expenditures. Although it is possible to show low inflation rates due to the products added to the inflation basket and not used intensively by the citizens, the number of citizens who cannot pay their debts and therefore legal proceedings are initiated against them clearly reveals the real economic crisis and increasing poverty.

In the first 11 months of 2022, the number of new files received by enforcement offices across Türkiye was 7 million 816 thousand, while in the first 11 months of 2023, this number reached 12 million 591 thousand, an increase of 61 per cent. As of 29 April 2024, a total of 21 million 831 thousand files are open in all enforcement offices. In the first five days of the New Year, 134 thousand new enforcement proceedings were initiated between 1-5 January 2024, and this rate tends to increase compared to previous years.

Compulsory Needs are met with Debt

A similar increase is also seen in credit card expenditures. In February 2023, card payments made over the internet were 106 billion TL, while in the same period of 2024, this amount reached 293.7 billion TL and increased by 177 per cent. The 177 per cent increase in credit card shopping in just 12 months shows that citizens borrow to meet their compulsory needs and work to pay their debts to banks throughout the month.



While the struggle of citizens with financial difficulties, execution files and credit cards continues, the economic situation of banks is quite good, unlike citizens. While the asset size of Türkiye's 10 largest banks increased by 65.8 per cent in 2023, these banks made a profit of 506.8 billion liras in the same year. While banks increased their revenues, the increase in citizens' debts reveals that only citizens are experiencing the economic crisis and the economic crisis, while institutions are not affected by the crisis and increase their revenues.



While Banks' Earnings Increase, Citizens' Debt Burden Increases

Another reason for the livelihood problems and poverty of workers is the tax bracket system. While the salaries of gross salaried workers start to decrease from the first months of the year, the decrease in purchasing power with inflation towards the end of the year leads to a great victimisation. In previous years, only those who received high salaries entered the tax bracket after the second half of the year, but now all workers are affected by the tax bracket and since the limit is not updated, workers pay a large part of their salaries to the state as taxes before they even receive them.

All of these data appear as the biggest problems of the working class and labourers and are among the most important issues to be solved. The heavy effects of the economic crisis on citizens are becoming even more evident with the increase in execution files and credit card expenditures.



1 May Labour and Solidarity Day was celebrated in Bursa under the leadership of TÜRK-İŞ

Our General President İrfan Mete and our executive board and the executive board of directors and members of our branches took their places in the meeting area. The march started at Fatih Sultan Mehmet Boulevard in Nilüfer district and ended at the hospital area. In his speech, TÜRK-İŞ President Ergün Atalay stated that they are always on the labour's and workers' side.



We were also in the field in Izmir

Thousands of workers in Izmir gathered in Gündoğdu Square to celebrate 1 May. Members of our union also formed a cortege and entered the square. The 1 May celebrations in Izmir ended with speeches and a concert.



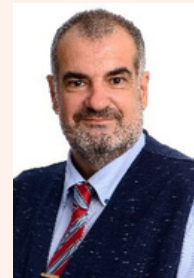


FATIGUE AND HOURS OF WORK/REST FOR SEAFARERS

In the shipping industry, a 14-hour workday system exists, breaching the universal 8 hour principle land standards, established a century ago.

The decision to establish a separate maritime section of the ILO ensured that this convention would not apply to seafarers unless decided otherwise.

The justifications put forward for this in 1919 were much the same as the spurious arguments used by present day shipowners to avoid improving working conditions at sea: seafarers are competing in a global labour market; 'customary rules' govern the sector; and the seafaring profession has no land equivalent.



Nikolaos Koletsis

ETF Senior Policy Officer
for Maritime Transport

All the ILO endeavors to anchor the 8-hour workday principle in maritime conventions on working time and to ensure compliance by quantifying manning levels failed in the past.

It was not until 1995 that legislation was introduced at the International Maritime Organization – not the ILO – which limited the working day to 14 hours. This was handled strictly as a safety measure rather than for workers' welfare.

Working beyond 48 hours per week has proved to have detrimental effects on the safety and health of workers and work-family relationships, but still today the seafarers in accordance with the current legislative standards:

A seafarer is legally accepted to work for 14 hours in any 24-hour period or 72 hours over 7 days.

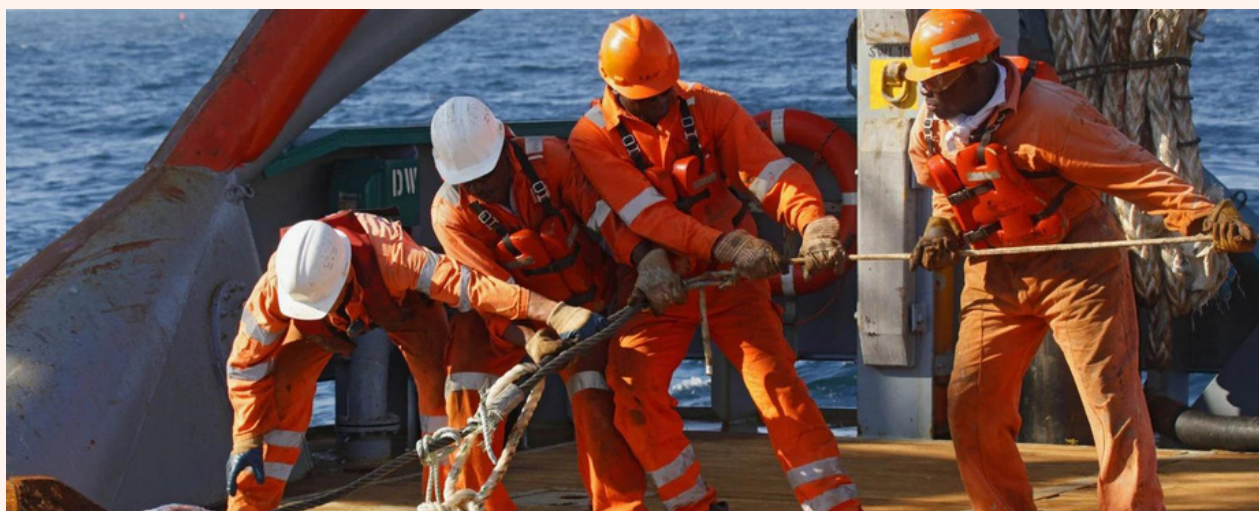
So, the seafarers may work 6 days per week and on an average of 12 hours per week ($72 \text{ hours} / 6 \text{ days} = 12$)[1]

It is time this to be changed and also it is time to ensure adequate rest periods and adopt roster patterns[2] that take into account route intensity, fatigue, mental health, safety, welfare, and operational manning (this is one of the main elements of the voluntary UK Seafarers' Charter, part of the UK government's nine-point plan in response to P&O Ferries' mass-sacking of British seafarers in March 2022 and was launched in 24 July 2023, but also of the recently adopted French Minimum Wages Act targeting Social Dumping on the Channel to block law-wage ferry companies from French ports that enters into force on 1st of July 2024 and includes beyond others 2 weeks on and 2 weeks time off).

[1] Daily standard: A minimum of 10 hours in any 24 hour period - This standard allows (by subtraction) up to 14 hours of work per day, without interruption (i.e. it is above the 8-hour workday and the maximum 12-hour per day for sea worker as adopted in 1936 ILO Convention No.57 and suggested in Convention No.109);

Weekly standard: A minimum of 77 hours in any seven day period- This weekly threshold allows up to 91 hours of work per week.

[2] A roster pattern for shipping vessels refers to a structured schedule that determines the rotation, duties, and rest periods of crew members, e.g., 4 weeks on, 4 weeks off. It ensures adequate staffing, regulatory compliance, and crew fatigue management, while maintaining operational efficiency and the safety of the vessel and its crew during shipping operations.



The International Maritime Organization (IMO) Maritime Safety Committee's recent decision to set up a scoping exercise on 'enhancing the effectiveness of provisions on seafarers' hours of work and rest hours, and on fatigue' could be the initiation for this change.

ITF reports and the World Maritime University (WMU) report: “A culture of adjustment” that are clearly pointing to the work-rest hours adjustment, the seafarers’ fatigue and the deterioration of seafarers mental and physical health.

The adjustment of rest and working hours records is a reality and there is a need for systematic verification of these records to have accurate records of rest and working hours.



Thanks to the World Maritime University's Culture of Adjustment report, which showed that despite the extremely long hours permitted by international regulations, the recording of hours of rest is developing into a mere 'paper exercise', with seafarers regularly required to work beyond the maximum limits, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) Maritime Safety Committee's recent decision to set up a scoping exercise on 'enhancing the effectiveness of provisions on seafarers' hours of work and rest hours, and on fatigue' could be the initiation for this change.

The industry remains vehemently opposed to meaningful reform, as employers fear being required to place more people onboard. However, the IMO initiative provides a good opportunity to make improvements to seafarers' working conditions



2023 was the Worst Year for Seafarers: 129 Ships and 1983 Seafarers Abandoned



The International Transport Workers' Federation's (ITF) global network of inspectors ensured that seafarers' unpaid wages totalling USD 57.1 million were paid to seafarers in 2023.

2023 was the worst year in view of seafarers' abandonment. ITF inspectors identified 129 abandoned ships and 1983 abandoned seafarers.

9,530 Ship Inspections were carried out and in 1,188 cases Remote Support was provided

Throughout the year, inspectors carried out a total of 9,530 ship inspections in every region of the world. They also provided remote support to ship crew in 1,188 cases.

ITF Inspectorate Coordinator Steve Trowsdale said: "The number of cases and amount of backpay is worrying, but we couldn't be prouder of the work undertaken by our inspectors every day, all around the world. They're an emergency service for seafarers, always ready to do what they can to stand up for seafarers' rights and hold exploitative shipowners to account."

Noting that 2023 was the worst year on record for seafarers, Trowsdale said: " But the sad reality is that the increasing amount of work our inspectors are doing shows just how much labour rights are under attack on ships right now."

There are ITF Inspectors in more than 110 ports in 55 countries

The ITF has a global network of more than 125 inspectors working in more than 110 ports in 55 countries around the world. Inspectors are trained by the ITF to look for signs of exploitation, overwork and forced labour and modern slavery. On many ships, they have the right to inspect wage accounts, labour contracts and review recorded hours of work and rest. Emphasising that inspections will continue to increase, Trowsdale said: "Our inspectors are on the ground every day. The ITF and our affiliated unions are sending the message that seafarers will never allow their rights to be usurped."

(According to the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) definition of abandonment, a seafarer who has not been paid for two months is considered "abandoned")



ITF intervention has paid off: 10 crew members repatriated

ITF Inspector Dinç visited 13 Syrian crew members on board the ship Alraqueem, which was banned from sailing by a court decision in Mersin Port. Noting that the crew was trapped on board due to the poor conditions on board and the shipowner's debts, Dinç provided psychological support to the crew and informed their families about their situation. He stated that Turkish laws make it difficult for Syrian seafarers to pass through ports, but due to the humanitarian crisis, a special permit was requested and the release process was initiated. Dinç pressed for water and rations to be supplied to the ship and the crew's needs were met.

The ITF's efforts paid off and 10 of the 13 crew members returned to their country.

Mr Dinç said: "We made all our efforts and endeavours against the difficulties of the bureaucratic procedures. Ten of the ship's employees returned to their countries. The remaining three personnel are expected to return to their countries in the near future."



Wages below ILO Standards on St Kitts Nevis Flagged NJ Pluto

ITF Inspector Kenan Dinç, during his visit to the St Kitts Nevis flagged NJ Pluto within the scope of routine inspections, found that the ship's employees were paid below international standards. Dinç stated that this situation is common especially on ships in the Eastern Mediterranean with a predominantly Arab crew and emphasised that they are making efforts to improve the working conditions of the ship's crew. Dinç explained that as a result of intense efforts, pressure and negotiations, the wage scale on the NJ Pluto ship was raised to ITF/ILO standards and stated that this is an important achievement for the seafarers.

ITF London Training Program

ITF Inspector Kenan Dinç participated in the training programme held at ITF's London Headquarters with the participation of 13 Inspectors from nine different countries. Mr Dinç explained the work of the ITF around the world and the problems of seafarers from his own perspective. He particularly drew attention to the strategic position of Türkiye and the role played by the ITF here. The inspector training programme lasted one month.



ITF Inspector Kenan Dinç Attended MLC Workshop in Turin

ITF Inspector Kenan Dinç attended the MLC Workshop organised by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in Turin in May. Dinç emphasised that the sector has an international dynamism and that every country needs each other, and stated the importance of such activities. He also stated that Türkiye should become a party to MLC 2006 and that he discussed this issue with the Course Teachers. Dinç emphasised that it is a great loss for the seafarers and the sector that Türkiye is keeping it on the shelf and stated that they are following the process. After the workshop, he successfully received the MLC 2006 Course Certificate.

