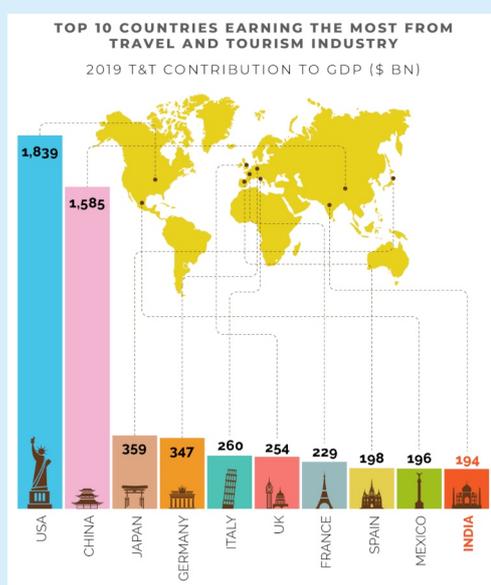


Workers connect...

Tourism at what cost?

The travel and tourism industry accounted for 10.3% of the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2019, amounting to \$8.9 trillion. Every fourth job in the last five years was in this sector, which employed more than 330 million people directly or indirectly employed in the sector till 2019. It was the world's third-largest export industry after chemicals and fuels — ahead of automotive products and food.



The tourism industry was looking forward to a bumper 2020: Major sporting challenges, including the Tokyo Olympics, and cultural events such as Expo 2020 Dubai were on the cards.

But then COVID-19 struck the planet; by May 2020 almost all countries imposed partial or full lockdown with strict restriction on movements.

Tourism, which relies on the same human mobility that spreads the disease, was subjected to the most stringent and lasting restrictions and suffered more than any other economic activity: The United Nations World Tourism Organisation estimated on 7 May, 2020 that earnings from international tourism might have shrunk 80% from 2019 and 120 million jobs could be lost.

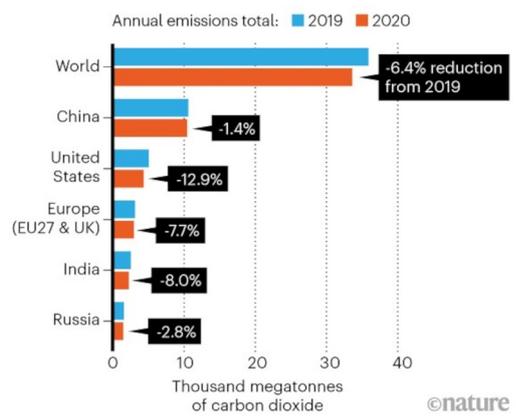
By end-May 2020, the novel coronavirus had begun to plague the travel industry: The top 20 airlines of the world reported an over-90% dip in passenger frequency. Hotels remained vacant while cruise ships were the worst hit. In early

February 2020, cruise ship Diamond Princess made headlines as over 700 people aboard contracted the virus; ultimately 14 people succumbed to the disease. Over 100 cruise ships and 70,000 crew members remained stranded around United States waters alone as the country's Department of Disease Control denied them entry.

As brakes were applied to all human economic and social activities due to COVID-19 our planet got to breathe. After rising steadily for

CARBON CUTS

The COVID-19 pandemic took a bite out of CO₂ emissions in many countries, but trends varied. China saw a minor decrease because its economy recovered after outbreaks in early 2020. The United States tallied the largest reduction, driven by outbreaks lasting throughout the year.



decades, global carbon dioxide emissions fell by 6.4%, or 2.3 billion tonnes, in 2020. Amid death and sorrow, people saw clear skies in some of the most polluted cities across the world, including New Delhi as smog gave way to clouds. Several photos of birds and animals rare to spot in the cityscape did the rounds on social media websites.

This was short lived. As COVID cases started to decline, countries eased lockdowns and activities started picking up, including in the travel and tourism industry. Recently, two news images have been doing the rounds: One of Manali — a small hill town in northern India — overcrowded with tourists without masks, violating all pandemic-related protocols. Another is from the USA where employers in the tourism and hospitality industry complain of a dearth of workers. The two stories from

different continents, miles apart, sum up all that is wrong with travel and tourism today.

The environmental cost of tourism

First, let us consider the case of Manali that has drawn the ire of netizens. For it is no different than what happened in Venice in 1989 when over 200,000 people flocked to the city to listen to famous rock band Pink Floyd. They left behind the stench of urine and streets strewn with empty alcohol bottles and cigarette butts, which had a long-term effect on the city life. Or, the impact on the Yamuna flood plains in New Delhi of godman Ravishankar's three-day-long World Cultural Festival in 2016; it was attended by over 3500,000 people, causing irreparable damage to the floodplain.

The problem here is not the tourists but the overall profit-driven market model that promotes tourism in certain places. The jobs in this industry are exploitative, monotonous, draining and isolating.

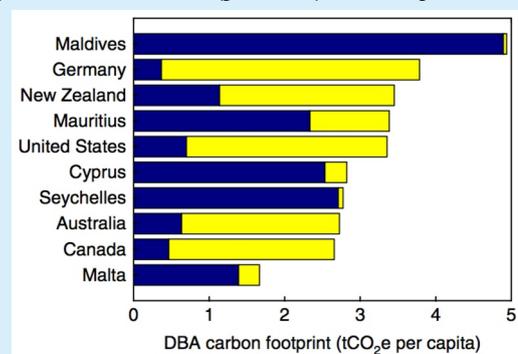
The idea of travel sold is of 'taking a break' for rejuvenation: One is supposed to shed all 'workload', responsibilities and be carefree on a vacation. Such vacations, however, are meticulously planned, often micro-managed by tour operators so much so that they are devoid of any sense of adventure or exploration — unlike the old times when travel was difficult, required grit and quite often ended up being dangerous. Current '#wonderlust', social-media-fuelled travel is driven by big capital ensuring that there would be no danger or difficulty if you can afford it.

For instance, consider the toughest peak to summit — Mount Everest — which remained unconquered till 1953. In 2019, there was a traffic jam on the way to the summit as over 300 climbers waited for their turn to summit the peak. The reason: Tour operators who sold the idea that a three-day window in May would be the best to climb. The environmental cost of that jam is unfathomable. Everest Summiters Association in 2011 collected 1.5 tonnes of garbage, including oxygen cylinders, ice pitons and scraps. This had to be flown to Kathmandu in helicopters.

No place is equipped to handle the

environmental impact of such high footfall. Tourism advertisements, however, promise the best of the place in terms of weather, views and experiences devoid of the nuisance that the locals have to bear who inhabit the place. The person paying for the tour therefore feels entitled to exploit the resources for the promised 'out-of-the-world experience' because it's an escape from their own exploitative work environment.

Most people like to believe that this is only true for the poor, 'budget travellers' — as the tourism industry likes to call them. Indeed, the rich harm more: Consider the following chart, showing carbon footprints for destination countries per person in 2013 for international (blue) and domestic (yellow) holidays.



The myth of trickle down effect

At this juncture one may want to throw in the travel and tourism industry's favourite 'trickle-down' argument. When the rich travellers spend it helps the local economy grow, creates jobs for locals and helps in preservation of travel destinations which are otherwise being ruined by the local population eg, ecologically sensitive areas. The hole in this argument is big enough to let the largest cruise ship and jumbo jet pass together.

First of all, the largest share of travel expenditure is towards long-distance air, rail, land or water travel. The rich definitely pay for the most expensive luxurious packages but the money is pocketed by airline or cruise companies. This money does not land-up in the destination country. In fact, the world's top three cruise companies — Carnival, Royal Caribbean and Norwegian — are incorporated in tax havens with benign environmental and labour laws: Panama, Liberia and Bermuda respectively.

This is not an anomaly but the norm in travel business. Tour operators are incorporated in tax havens where they enjoy low taxes and avoid 'irksome' labour legislation while continuing to pollute our air and water bodies.

The second major expenditure is accommodation. This again is pocketed by corporate hotel chains infamous for exploitative work environment and non-payment of even minimum wages. In 2018, around 8,000 workers at 23 properties run by Marriott Hotels across the US went on strike demanding better pay and working conditions.

This explains the second news piece regarding the dearth of workers willing to work in hospitality and tourism industry. Travel and tourism does create jobs, but of what kind? These jobs are mostly in the unorganised sector with meagre wages and no health benefit or social security. For example, the rack rent for a Maharaja Room with a view of the Taj Mahal in Agra, India can range between Rs. 8,000 and Rs. 20,000 per night. The monthly wage of a worker there tends to be at the lower end of the rack rent.

Wage suppression is a norm in the hospitality industry defended with the argument that workers will make up for the deficit in tips. There are two problems with this approach. First, it shifts the responsibility of paying the worker a decent wage from the employer to the customer and rides on the guilt or large-heartedness of the latter. Second, it dehumanises the worker who at all times must please the customer to receive alms. Irrespective of the effort put in the task there is no surety of a stable income for the worker as wages are dependent on arbitrary factors such as the tipping capacity of the customer, the general mood or inclination of the customer to tip at that instance. It is no wonder then that workers do not want to get back to the old, rotten work culture in the tourism and hospitality industry.

Most other people who would come in contact with the tourist — a local guide or interpreter, taxi driver or shopkeeper would be self-employed and get no share in the money spent over travel or accommodation.

It is the same for cruise and airline operators, who digest large sums of money in either bailout packages or easy, interest-free loans without fulfilling any obligation towards cutting down on pollution or ensuring a decent working environment for their workforce. All major airlines in the Europe and the US benefited from the pandemic. They got to lay off workers en masse only to hire them back on sham contracts at considerably slashed wages and retain their profits. Furthermore, citing hardships due to lockdown, employers have lobbied hard for tax breaks and easing off of compliance to environmental and labour norms. Unsurprisingly big capital has succeeded.

A March 2021 research brief on 'Sustaining tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic' for the members of Lok Sabha propose:

- i) Relief from regulatory compliances
- ii) Relief from penal provisions for delays in clearing dues
- iii) Relief from excise duties
- iv) Relief from electricity tariff
- v) Relief from property tax

And these companies didn't even blink before forcing their workers to go on unpaid leaves and / or terminating their services amid the pandemic.

Third, tourism is a peculiar industry; it sells things that do not belong to it — the view of a monument, a hike, an under-water dive, the sighting of a rare animal, etc. Hence, it makes no business sense for the companies to invest in their preservation. The rarer the experience, the higher the price. Such firms hunt for rarer places, deplete them and move on when profits dwindle. While doing so, they often raise the prices of basic commodities, making them unaffordable for the local community.

The travel and tourism industry as it existed before the pandemic was parasitic, exploitative and insensitive not only towards the people it employed but the people it catered to. It must be held accountable for the depletion and pollution of common resources and exploitation

of people who rely on it for their livelihood before it slips into its pre-pandemic normal.

Policy News

Ordinance bars Ordnance Factory Board employees strike against corporatisation

30 June, 2021: The Union government notified the Essential Defence Services Ordinance 2021 to prohibit employees of the Ordnance Factory Board (OFB) from going on strike. All major federations of civil defence employees had announced an indefinite strike from July 26 against the government's decision to corporatise the Ordnance Factory Board into seven state-owned corporations.

Karnataka extends ESMA to prohibit roadways workers' strike

27 June, 2021: The Karnataka government extended the Karnataka Essential Services Maintenance Act (KESMA) through December 31, 2021 to prohibit workers of road transport corporations (RTC) from going on strike again this year. Roadways workers were on strike for 15 days in April despite KESMA being in effect; for this the government dismissed, suspended and arrested multiple workers.

ESIC notifies Rs. 1,800 monthly pension to families of those who died of COVID-19

23 June, 2021: Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) notified a pandemic relief scheme for families of employees covered under ESIC who died of COVID-19: The family pension will be equivalent to up to 90 per cent of the average wage of the deceased employee, subject to a minimum Rs. 1,800 per month.

Andhra announces compensation for kin of healthcare workers who died fighting COVID-19

14 June, 2021: The Andhra Pradesh government announced an ex-gratia compensation to the families of those healthcare workers who died while discharging their duties during the COVID-19 pandemic. It announced a compensation of Rs. 25 lakh for families of doctors, Rs. 20 lakh for those of staff nurses and Rs. 15 lakh to

those of FSOs / MSOs. This would be in addition to the Prime Minister's Garib Kalyan scheme paid by the central government.

Union labour ministry notifies draft employee's compensation rules under Code on Social Security, 2020

15 June, 2021: The Union Ministry of Labour and employment notified the draft Employee's Compensation rules under the Code on Social Security, 2020. They relate to provisions regarding the manner of application for claims or settlements, rate of interest for delayed payment of compensation, venue of proceedings and transfer of matters, notice and manner of transmitting money from one competent authority to another and arrangements with other countries for the transfer of money paid as compensation.

Punjab uses construction workers' welfare fund to vaccinate them

9 June, 2021: The Punjab government withdrew Rs. 7.5 crore from the Building and Other Construction Workers (BOCW) Welfare Board fund in order to vaccinate construction workers in the 18-45 years age group. State government hospitals, however, provided free vaccination to shopkeepers, their employees and street hawkers in the same age group.

Legal News

Supreme Court slams Centre's lackadaisical attitude towards migrant workers' welfare, directs states, UTs to implement 'One Nation One Ration Card' scheme

29 June, 2021: The Supreme Court came down heavily on the Centre for its "lackadaisical attitude" towards the welfare of migrant workers. It ordered the Union government to make the National Database of Unorganised Workers (NDUW) functional by 31 July. It also directed states and Union Territories (UT) to provide free dry ration to migrant workers and implement the 'One Nation One Ration Card' scheme by 31 July.

Karnataka: Bangalore court directs Wipro to reinstate employee forced to quit, pay full

back wages

25 June, 2021: A Bangalore court directed Wipro Technologies to reinstate an employee who was forced to quit in March 2018. The court ruled that the employee's resignation, obtained under duress and coercion was illegal and that the employee be reinstated to the original post with continuity of service, full back wages, arrears of pay and such other dues, benefits, etc from the date of termination until the date of reinstatement.

Uttarakhand: High court directs state to immediately pay wages of roadways workers

26 June, 2021: High Court of Uttarakhand slammed the state government for its repeated failure to pay the wages of thousands of roadways workers, pending since February. It directed the government to immediately resolve the issue, stating that the situation amounted to begari, or forced labour — in violation of Articles 21 and 23 of the Indian Constitution.

Karnataka: High court rules daily wage workers entitled to DA, paid leave, reprimands state for denying benefits

12 June, 2021: High Court of Karnataka ruled that daily wage workers are entitled to 100% dearness allowance under the Karnataka Daily Wage Employees Welfare Act, 2012, like all other government employees. It also held that daily wage workers working for various government departments are entitled to 30 days' paid leave. The court came down heavily on the state government for regularly curtailing the benefits by taking out government orders.

Chandigarh: HC dismisses regularisation plea of contractual municipal workers citing 2006 Supreme Court judgement

07 June, 2021: High Court of Punjab and Haryana dismissed a plea from over a dozen contract workers seeking regularisation of their services with the Municipal Corporation Chandigarh as they had been employed for more than 10 years. The court cited a lack of clarity regarding the proper process being followed during the appointment of the petitioners — inviting applications, giving

opportunity to others to apply. It also took note of the 2006 Supreme Court judgment, stating that directions on regularisation of services of temporary employees / daily wagers should not be ordinarily issued.

More NHRC advisories to Centre, states on COVID-19 impact on migrant and informal workers

01 June, 2021: The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) issued advisories to the Centre, states and UTs regarding the adverse impact of the pandemic on migrant and informal workers. It gave the governments four weeks to submit action-taken reports on the right to mental health; identifying, releasing and rehabilitating bonded labourers; and safeguarding the rights of informal workers during the pandemic.

Collective Bargaining

Over 150,000 steel workers go on strike across SAIL, RINL plants demanding wage revision

30 June, 2021: More than 150,000 workers of state-owned Steel Authority of India (SAIL) and Rashtriya Ispat Nigam (RINL) went on strike across all plants and mining operations throughout the country. They demand immediate implementation of wage revisions, pending since January 2017. The collective agreement is usually revised every five years by the National Joint Committee on Steel (NJCS). But this time the management has delayed the bargaining process and offered negligible wage revisions.

Maharashtra: ASHA workers' strike forces government to hike wages, COVID-19 allowance

23 June, 2021: The week-long strike by Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) across Maharashtra ended in success: The state government was forced to announce: a wage hike of Rs. 1,000 per month, COVID-19 allowance of Rs. 500 per month, Rs. 50 lakh compensation for kin of ASHA workers who died due to the pandemic and free COVID-19 treatment for the family members of ASHA

workers in state-run hospitals.

Maharashtra: Nurses across government hospitals go on strike over long-pending demands

23 June, 2021: More than 6,000 nurses across state-run hospitals went on a two-day strike to protest against poor wages, delayed promotions, long working hours and huge vacancies in hospitals. They are also demanding full paid medical leave in case they get infected with COVID-19 and a job for their kin in case they succumb to the disease. They had gone on a strike with similar demands last September.

Maharashtra: Bombay high court grants bail to Union leaders arrested under UAPA for organising contract workers of Reliance

21 June, 2021: High Court of Bombay granted bail to the last of the five Mumbai Electric Employees Union (MEEU) leaders falsely arrested under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) in December 2017. They were charged for sheltering a person accused of being a terrorist and for raising funds for a banned organisation — all because they organised contractual workers to fight for their regularisation against their mighty owner Reliance.

Assam: Majan Tea Estate workers protest demanding repair of residences, appointment of doctors and teachers, and promotion of staff

15 June, 2021: Workers at Majan Tea Estate in Dibrugarh, owned by the Assam Company India (ACIL), staged a protest demanding repair of their residential quarters, appointment of doctors and teachers at the plantation, timely supply of firewood, and the promotion of senior fourth-grade staff. The workers threatened to launch an indefinite strike from June 21 if the garden management fails to solve their long-pending issues.

Uttar Pradesh: Famed Lal Imli Mill's workers protest in Kanpur over non-payment of salaries for 3 years

10 June, 2021: Hundreds of workers of the 145-year-old Lal Imli Mill in Kanpur held a protest

demonstration demanding the release of their salaries which have been pending for three years. The mill has been non-functional but its official closure hasn't been announced by the Central government, which has led to their payment and other perks not being released. Due to this, nearly 400 families have reached the verge of starvation, more than 50 workers have died in the last few years due to financial crises and at least eight workers have died due to lack of treatment during the pandemic period.

Madhya Pradesh: Thousands of junior doctors resign to continue strike after high court rules it illegal

03 June, 2021: Thousands of junior doctors working at six government medical colleges of the state resigned en masse, submitting their resignations to the deans of their respective colleges after the Madhya Pradesh high court termed their strike illegal and directed them to resume duties within 24 hours. The junior doctors demanded a hike in stipend and free treatment for them and their families if they contract the deadly coronavirus infection.

Andhra Pradesh: Doctors, med students go on one-day strike demanding implementation of pay hike

1 June, 2021: Nearly 1,500 senior resident doctors and final-year postgraduate medical students went on a one-day strike demanding an increase in the monthly stipend, pending for the last two years. They stated their frustration with the fact that their counterparts in Telangana hospitals and central hospitals like AIIMS earn double or even more than them. They were forced to go on strike after months of appeals to the authorities fell on deaf ears.

Workplace Safety Watch

1 June: Ebadul Momin (27) and Aminul Momin (45) died and six others labourers were injured when a building in which they were sleeping collapsed on them. The Goenka Hostel was being demolished as part of PM Narendra Modi's pet Kashi Vishwanath Corridor project in Varanasi. Around 30 labourers were forced to sleep in the dilapidated building by the local

administration and project contractors.

05 June: Manjunath (29), Rajesh (40), and Manjunath (32) were asphyxiated to death after entering a 20-foot-deep manhole in Karnataka's Ramanagara without any safety gear. The police arrested the contractor and an aide after the families of the deceased filed a complaint.

07 June: Eighteen workers were killed and several injured in a massive fire at SVS Aqua Technologies factory near Pune that produces chlorine dioxide tablet for water purification. The Centre announced Rs. 2 lakh in compensation to the kin of the deceased and Rs. 50,000 to the injured; the Maharashtra government announced Rs. 5 lakh compensation to the kin of the deceased.

14 June: Sabzar Ahmad Lone died and two others were critically injured after falling unconscious while digging a borewell in Bijbehara in south Kashmir's Anantnag district.

20 June: At least three labourers died and five others sustained injuries after an under-construction building collapsed in Ganga city, Bikaner (Rajasthan).

20 June: Prabhat Chand Sharma died and two others were severely burnt due when steam leaked from a boiler at a factory on Nagina road in Uttar Pradesh's Bijnor.

20 June: Pradeep Godh (40) and Ramnath Mahato (45) from Bihar died and three others were severely injured in a furnace blast at a factory of Jagadamsa Steels in southern Nepal's Bara district.

21 June: A. Selvamani (33), Karpagam (34), T. Surya (25) and Regabiya Solmon (5) died and another was injured in a blast in an illegal fireworks unit at Thayilpatti, Sattur near Sivakasi. V. Gurusamy (45) was killed in another accident reported at Chidambaram Fireworks at Tiruvengadapuram near Sivakasi.

21 June: Six workers rescued and six missing in shoe factory fire in Delhi's Udyog Nagar. Police have filed a case against the owner, who is absconding, under Section 308 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

21 June: Two workers were killed and two others injured after a portion of earth collapsed on top them while constructing an irrigation well under MGNREGS in Jharkhand's Ramgarh district.

28 June: Jamuna Nayak and Barsha Nayak died and three others were seriously injured after a guard wall collapsed at Fasiguda village in Odisha's Ganjam district.

28 June: Jeevraj Jat and Khem Bahadur died while working after they were hit by a boulder and were buried under the rubble during a blast at the Hindustan Zinc mine in Rajasthan's Bhilwara.

29 June: Panna Lal Yavad (50), Basant (29) and Mangal Prasad Singh (26) were killed and another injured after an elevator malfunctioned and came crashing from the seventh floor of an under-construction Delhi Development Authority housing society in Dwarka Sector 14, Delhi. The Police registered a case under Sections 304A, 287, 288 and 337 of the IPC.

World News Update

Iran: Oil, gas, petrochemical workers strike work demand wage revision, paid holidays

30 June, 2021: Workers across Iran's oil, gas and petrochemical sectors struck work on 19 June, 2021 against stagnation of wages amid rising inflation and discrimination against contractual workers. The industry employs around 154,000 temporary and contractual workers who earn \$300 per month. Workers have been demanding \$500 per month as inflation in the country has jumped 50% per year since the US imposed sanctions on Iran. The resistance has been growing and permanent workers have joined their peers in over 60 companies.

UK: Court of Appeal holds delivery company Deliveroo's workers as self-employed

24 June, 2021: Britain's Court of Appeal has held that delivery company Deliveroo's riders are not workers employed by the company but independent contractors who are self-employed. This is the fourth case in which Deliveroo workers have been denied the status

of works by courts. Earlier, the central Arbitration Committee and the High Court have held Deliveroo workers as self-employed in three separate cases. The loss has come as a big blow to workers and the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain (IWGB), which was refused permission in 2017 for collective bargaining rights for a group of Deliveroo riders on the basis that they were not workers under the terms of legislation on labour relations.

USA: Seattle labour standards office finds Uber violating labour laws, orders \$3.4 mn for workers

24 June, 2021: Seattle's Office of Labor Standards began investigating Uber after drivers complained that they were not receiving the benefits from Uber as per law. Seattle's law allows workers paid sick leave and paid time off for other reasons, such as to seek help in domestic violence cases or to care for children whose schools were closed because of the pandemic. Though Uber has refused to admit liability in the matter, it will pay \$1.3 million in back pay, interest, damages and civil penalties for 2,329 workers, as well as nearly \$2.2 million in advance payment of unused paid time off to 15,084 workers.

Lesotho: Garment workers emerge victorious after long strike, government to revise minimum wages

22 June, 2021: Workers have registered major victory in Lesotho with their long and militant strike between 10 May and 7 June for wage increments. The government there notified new minimum wages, effective from next month, with 14% wage hike for garment workers who currently earn M 2,000 per month. Workers in other sectors outside the civil service have been awarded a 9% salary increment. In May, the government was unsuccessful in stifling the workers' strike despite brutal police action, including firing live bullets that killed 2 workers and left many severely injured.

Greece: Government passes anti-worker labour law amid protests from unions

17 June, 2021: Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis' conservative government bulldozed the new labour reform Bill with 158 votes in a

300 member parliament; it allows employees to opt for a longer working day in exchange for their time off, thereby increasing working hours from the existing eight hours per day to 10. It raises yearly overtime to 150 hours and introduces a digital work card from next year, which would help employers track workers in real time. Unions and workers held several strikes across the country against the Bill up until the final day when the bill went to vote. On the day of the voting over 9,000 workers in Greece were on a general strike.

France: IKEA fined €1mn for spying on workers, illegally gathering personal information

15 June, 2021: A French court has held Swedish furniture firm Ikea guilty of spying on its workers and illegally collecting as well as storing their personal and financial information. The firm was also found guilty of storing customer information and propping up fake employee accounts to report on workers. The matter dates back 2009-12, when the cases first came to light. Several store managers and employees in human resources and a private investigator and police officers were held guilty of actively supporting the spying programme.

Brazil: Court fines meat processing co JBS \$194,000 for lack of health, safety measures

2 June, 2021: A labour court found JBS Foods guilty for the outbreak of COVID-19 cases indoors at its plant in Caxias do Sul and fined it 1 million Rias (\$194,000) for failing to implement health and safety measures. It also ordered that workers be provided with protective masks, individual lockers and that they should stay at least two meters apart while working. The world's largest meat producer was also found guilty of similar charges in the US and fined \$15,615 in September 2020 by the Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration.