

Croatian doctors, nurses strike over benefits cuts

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Thousands of hospital workers went on strike in Croatia on Wednesday in protest at cuts to benefits introduced in response to the economic crisis.

Trade unions said some 46,000 nurses and doctors, representing around 70 percent of the sector's workforce, were expected to walk off the job although doctors in primary care and emergency services continued to work.

The strikers were demanding the restoration of previous benefits scrapped earlier this year, notably regarding pay for overtime and for when they are on call.

Health Minister Rajko Ostojic warned their demands could not be met given the country's [budget deficit](#) which stands at 3.8 percent of gross domestic product.

The stoppage was the first doctors' strike in Croatia, the European Union's newest member, since 2005.

The average salary of a doctor in Croatia is some 60 percent higher than the country's average wage of 5,486 kunas (721 euros, 962 dollars).

Croatia, which joined the EU on July 1, is struggling to overcome a recession that started in late 2008.

The government is attempting to undertake a reform of the country's huge and inefficient public sector in a bid to revive the ailing economy, expected to contract by 0.4 percent this year.

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