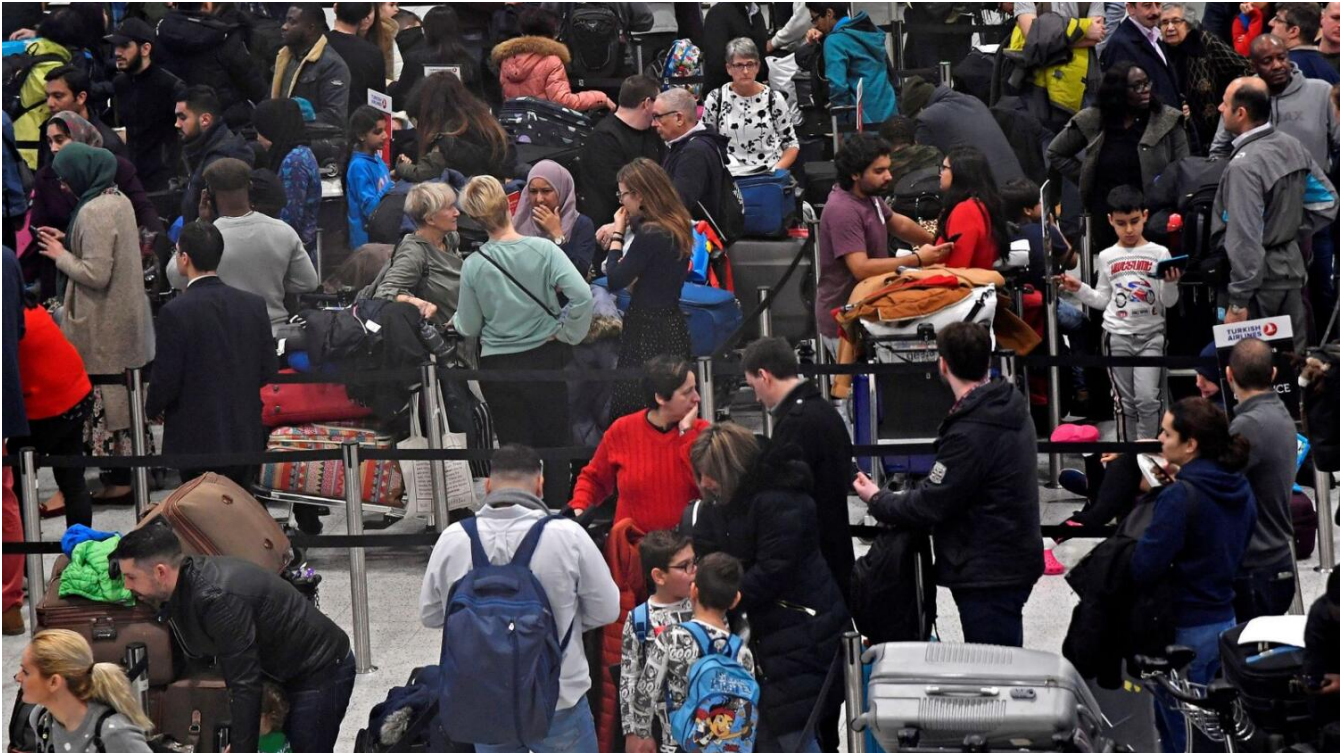


250,000 travellers stranded in Europe as airport and airline staff in strike

- A Monitor Desk Report

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Rome : Strikes by airport and airline staff have grounded hundreds of flights and left thousands of travellers stranded in Europe at the height of the busy summer tourism season.

In Italy, about 1,000 flights, both domestic and international, were cancelled as a result of the strike by ground crew, according to airport and airline authorities.

Another 120 flights due to depart and arrive from Belgium's Charleroi airport were cancelled on Saturday and Sunday, triggered by a stoppage of budget carrier Ryanair pilots over working conditions.

Italy's strike alone left 250,000 travellers stranded in one of the world's top tourist spots.

It comes amid a record heatwave, described by the national weather service as "one of the most intense of all time", that would bring temperatures of at least 40C (104F) to Rome and 48C to the islands of Sicily and Sardinia.

The strike by ground crew, who are demanding a new collective contract six years

after the previous one expired, was due to last from 10am (0800 GMT) to 6pm (1600 GMT).

The airport in Rome had 200 flights cancelled, authorities said.

Flights by Malta Air, which handles transfers for Ryanair and fellow budget airlines Vueling and Ita Airways, were also affected after pilots joined the strike.

There were 150 flight cancellations at Milan's airports, while dozens of others were grounded in Turin and Palermo.

The transport minister, Matteo Salvini, called for the strikers to exercise "common sense" so as "not to harm millions of other workers and tourists".#

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