B2 Business English Speaking Class

Housing Costs, Cost of Living, and Labour Relations

Video: BBC News — General Strike in Spain: Housing Crisis and the Cost of Living
Video link: https://youtu.be/LRvSRV4WeOg
Duration: 45 minutes
Level: B2
Primary skills: Speaking, vocabulary development, critical listening, economic discussion, workplace communication

> ***Content note:*** *The video discusses a general strike, evictions, housing insecurity, political disagreement, and clashes between protesters and police. Present the report as one account of a complex situation. Specific figures and political claims should be checked against reliable official or independent sources before students treat them as established facts.*

Lesson Objectives

By the end of the class, students will be able to:

- explain how housing costs and stagnant wages can affect workers and businesses;
- use ten high-value business-English words and collocations;
- discuss strikes, labour relations, affordability, and economic pressure;
- distinguish between evidence, interpretation, and political opinion;
- suggest possible responses for employers, governments, and communities.

Video Overview

The BBC report examines a general strike in Spain linked to rising housing costs and broader cost-of-living pressures. The report describes disruption in major cities, concern about rent and food prices, and frustration that salaries have not kept pace with expenses.

It also presents the case of an elderly woman whose eviction became a powerful symbol for housing insecurity. Protesters argued that the political debate should focus more on everyday economic concerns, while critics questioned whether government reforms had been strong enough.

The video creates several business-English discussion themes:

- how rising living costs affect recruitment and employee retention;
- whether wages should be linked to inflation;

- the balance between property investment and affordable housing;
- how strikes affect productivity, customers, and public services;
- how companies communicate during labour disputes;
- the difference between a structural problem and a short-term crisis.

Top 10 B2 Business-English Words and Phrases

Word or phrase	Meaning	Business-English example
1. Cost of living	The amount of money people need for everyday expenses such as housing, food, transport, and energy	“The rising cost of living is making it harder for companies to attract employees in major cities.”
2. Stagnant	Remaining almost unchanged, especially when growth is expected	“Workers are frustrated because salaries have remained stagnant while rent has increased.”
3. Affordability	The extent to which people can pay for something without financial difficulty	“The company is reviewing salary levels because housing affordability has become a recruitment problem.”
4. Disparity	A significant difference between two groups, situations, or levels	“There is a growing disparity between property owners and people who rent.”
5. General strike	A strike involving workers across many industries or sectors	“A general strike can affect transport, public services, manufacturing, and retail.”
6. Disruption	A situation in which normal activity or service is interrupted	“The transport disruption caused many employees to work remotely.”
7. Eviction	The legal process of forcing someone to leave a property	“The eviction highlighted the risks faced by tenants with unstable incomes.”
8. Reform	An official change intended to improve a system or solve a problem	“The government proposed housing reforms to increase the supply of affordable homes.”
9. Investment fund	A pool of money collected to invest in assets such as companies or property	“An investment fund purchased several buildings and converted them into rental properties.”

Word or phrase	Meaning	Business-English example
10. Accountability	Responsibility for decisions, actions, and their consequences	“Citizens demanded accountability from the organisations involved in the housing policy.”

Useful Collocations

- **the rising cost of living**
- **stagnant wages / salaries**
- **housing affordability**
- **a growing income disparity**
- **call / organise / join a general strike**
- **cause major disruption**
- **face eviction**
- **introduce structural reform**
- **an institutional investment fund**
- **demand political accountability**

Additional Topic Language

- **rent burden** — the proportion of income spent on rent;
- **wage growth** — the increase in salaries over time;
- **purchasing power** — the amount of goods and services that income can buy;
- **labour dispute** — a disagreement between employees and an employer or employers;
- **collective bargaining** — negotiation between workers, usually through representatives, and employers;
- **housing shortage** — a situation in which there are not enough homes for the number of people who need them;
- **public pressure** — demands from citizens, workers, customers, or communities for action;
- **economic insecurity** — uncertainty about income, employment, housing, or financial stability.

45-Minute Lesson Structure

Time	Stage	Procedure
5 min	Warm-up	Ask: “Which expenses create the greatest financial pressure for workers today?” Students compare housing, food, energy, transport, and healthcare.
8 min	Video recall	Students summarise the report in pairs. Check the key sequence: general strike, rising living costs, housing pressure, public protest, political response, and calls for reform.
10 min	Vocabulary focus	Teach the ten target words. Students classify them as economic, social, political, or workplace language, then create business-related examples.
17 min	Speaking discussion	Students answer the ten questions below in pairs or groups. Require reasons, examples, and respectful disagreement.
5 min	Business response task	Groups design three actions a company could take to support employees during a cost-of-living crisis without creating unsustainable costs.

Ten B2 Speaking Questions

1. **How does a rising cost of living affect employees’ motivation, productivity, and ability to remain with an employer?**
2. **Should employers increase salaries when housing, food, and transport costs rise, even if the company’s profits are falling? Why or why not?**
3. **What is the difference between stagnant wages and a temporary pay freeze? How might employees react to each situation?**
4. **Can a company be successful if its employees cannot afford to live near their workplace? Discuss the effects on recruitment and retention.**
5. **When is a strike an effective tool for workers, and when might it cause more harm than benefit?**
6. **How should companies communicate with customers and employees during major disruption caused by a labour dispute?**

7 **What responsibilities should investment funds and property owners have towards tenants and local communities?**

8 **Which housing reforms could improve affordability: rent controls, more construction, higher wages, public housing, tax changes, or another solution?**

9 **How can we distinguish between a genuine economic crisis and a political message designed to influence public opinion?**

10 **If you were a business leader in a city with rapidly increasing rents, what three actions would you take to support employees and protect the organisation's future?**

Follow-Up Prompts for Longer B2 Answers

Use these prompts to encourage developed answers:

- **Who would pay for that solution?**
- **What could be an unintended consequence?**
- **Would this work in a large city and a rural area?**
- **How would employees respond?**
- **What evidence would support your position?**
- **Would this be a short-term or structural solution?**
- **How could the company measure whether the policy worked?**
- **Which stakeholders might disagree with you?**

Functional Language for Economic and Labour Discussions

Expressing cautious opinions

- "The report suggests that ___, although the figures would need to be verified."
- "One possible explanation is ___, but other factors may also be involved."
- "I would distinguish between the political argument and the economic evidence."
- "It is difficult to draw a firm conclusion without more data."

Discussing cause and effect

- "Higher rents can lead to greater pressure on wage levels."
- "If salaries remain stagnant, employees may look for jobs in more affordable locations."

- “The housing shortage contributes to economic insecurity.”
- “A prolonged strike could disrupt supply chains and reduce customer confidence.”

Negotiating and proposing solutions

- “A realistic compromise might be ___.”
- “The company could introduce a housing allowance, provided that ___.”
- “Rather than increasing salaries immediately, employers could ___.”
- “Any reform should consider both tenants and property owners.”
- “The long-term solution would require cooperation between government, business, and communities.”

Discussing strikes and accountability

- “Workers have the right to protest, but the effects on essential services must also be considered.”
- “The company should communicate openly instead of blaming employees.”
- “Accountability should be based on evidence and clearly defined responsibilities.”
- “A labour dispute is more likely to escalate when communication breaks down.”

Mini Case Study: The Cost-of-Living Challenge

Situation

A technology company operates in a city where rents have increased sharply. Many employees now spend almost half of their income on housing. The company is finding it difficult to recruit junior staff, and experienced employees are considering moving to cheaper regions. At the same time, the company has limited funds and cannot give everyone a large salary increase.

Student Task

In groups, create a three-part plan:

11. **Immediate support:** What can the company do within the next three months?
12. **Medium-term response:** What should change within one year?
13. **Long-term strategy:** How should the company adapt its location, pay structure, or working model?

Students may consider:

- salary adjustments;
- housing or transport allowances;
- remote or hybrid work;
- flexible working hours;
- relocation support;
- partnerships with local housing providers;
- office locations outside the most expensive areas;
- transparent communication with employees.

Success Criteria

Students should:

- use at least five target words;
- identify the interests of employees, managers, customers, and investors;
- explain the cost and benefit of each proposal;
- distinguish immediate relief from structural reform;
- present a realistic compromise.

Final Reflection

Ask students to complete this sentence:

> ***"The most effective response to a cost-of-living crisis is _____ because _____."***

Possible example:

> *"The most effective response to a cost-of-living crisis is a combination of fair wage growth, flexible work, and long-term housing reform because no single policy can solve both immediate financial pressure and the structural shortage of affordable homes."*

Teacher Notes

- Treat the report's statistics and political interpretations as claims made within the video, not as automatically verified facts.

- Keep the lesson focused on transferable business topics: employee wellbeing, compensation, labour relations, retention, operational disruption, stakeholder management, and public policy.
- Avoid reducing the housing crisis to a conflict between only tenants and investment funds. Encourage students to consider supply, interest rates, zoning, tourism, wages, migration, and public housing.
- The topic may be politically sensitive. Require students to support opinions with reasons and distinguish evidence from assumptions.
- For a stronger B2 class, ask students to compare a general strike with other forms of labour action, such as work-to-rule, a partial strike, a walkout, or collective bargaining.

Reference