ECONOMY & LABOUR · SPEAKING · 1-ON-1

B2+

Business English Training Series

Housing Costs, Cost of Living & Labour Relations

When your people can't afford to live near the project, whose problem is it?

TODAY'S JOURNEY

Warm-up
Pressure on workers

Video
Fact, claim or opinion?

Vocabulary
Costs, wages, disputes

Discussion
10 questions

Case & role play
Your project · your crew

B2+ · One-to-one · Economy and labour relations · 45–60 minutes

Adapted for a project or site manager

Lesson Outcomes

By the end of today's lesson you will be able to…

CONTENT NOTE *The video covers a strike, arrests, an eviction case in which an elderly woman died, and political disagreement. We use it as a business case. Its figures are claims to check.*

1

Explain the pressure on workers and firms

cost of living · stagnant wages · affordability · purchasing power

At work: explain why skilled people leave a project.

2

Talk precisely about labour relations

general strike · walkout · collective bargaining · minimum services

At work: discuss a dispute without taking sides.

3

Separate fact, claim and opinion

according to · the unions put it at · it is disputed whether…

At work: report contested figures to a client or a board.

4

Propose a realistic response

A project case study and a negotiation with your crew's representative.

At work: negotiate support with a limited budget.

Warm-Up: Pressure on Workers

Start from your own experience

Teacher Note

1. Which expenses create the greatest financial pressure for workers today: housing, food, energy, transport or healthcare? Rank them.

2. On a rail project, where do the crews live during the works? How do housing costs near the site affect who you can hire?

3. How did the general strike on 11 November affect work in your sector? Describe the facts only: what stopped, what continued.

Tutor: first check he is happy to use this topic. Ask for facts and business effects, not his vote.

Video: What Did the Report Say?

BBC News · Spain sees widespread disruption in first general strike for 14 years (5:30)

▶️ **Watch:** https://youtu.be/LRvSRV4WeOg

Summarise the report in 90 seconds. Cover these six points, in the order of the report:

1. the strike and the disruption
2. the protests and the arrests
3. the election in the background
4. the eviction case that started the protests
5. rising prices and salaries
6. the fear of investment funds

Use: 'The report says…' · 'According to the spokesperson…' · Then: who speaks in this report, and who doesn't?

B2+ Skill: Fact, Claim or Opinion?

Label each statement: FACT · CLAIM · OPINION · CHECK IT

FACT = it can be checked · CLAIM = one side says it · OPINION = a value judgement · CHECK IT = may be true, needs data

1. A general strike took place in Spain on 11 November 2026. _____
2. Housing prices have risen by more than 80% in ten years. _____
3. People spend, on average, half their pay on housing. _____
4. Everyone fears that an investment fund will buy their flat. _____
5. The strike was a failure. _____
6. Working only to survive makes no sense. _____

➡️ **Answers on the next slide. Decide first, and say why**

Fact, Claim or Opinion? Answer Key

A good analyst labels the statement before agreeing or disagreeing

🔑 **ANSWER KEY — Do not show until the student has completed the exercise on the previous slide**

1	A general strike took place in Spain on 11 November 2026.	**FACT**	*it happened and can be checked*
2	Housing prices have risen by more than 80% in ten years.	**CHECK IT**	*the speaker's figure; needs official data*
3	People spend, on average, half their pay on housing.	**CHECK IT**	*an average of whom? needs a source*
4	Everyone fears that an investment fund will buy their flat.	**CLAIM**	*'everyone' is the speaker's word*
5	The strike was a failure.	**CLAIM**	*the employers' verdict, not in the video*
6	Working only to survive makes no sense.	**OPINION**	*a value judgement*

Vocabulary 1: Costs, Wages & Disputes

10 key words · money (teal) · gaps (blue) · labour (green) · policy (amber)

cost of living

money needed for housing, food, transport, energy

'The rising cost of living makes hiring harder.'

stagnant

almost unchanged when growth is expected

'Wages have been stagnant for years.'

affordability

how easily people can pay for something

'Housing affordability is a recruitment problem.'

disparity

a significant difference between two groups

'There is a growing disparity between owners and renters.'

general strike

a strike across many sectors

'A general strike affects transport and sites.'

disruption

an interruption of normal activity

'The disruption delayed two deliveries.'

eviction

legally forcing someone to leave a home

'Tenants with unstable incomes face eviction.'

reform

an official change to improve a system

'The reform aims to increase housing supply.'

investment fund

pooled money invested in assets

'An investment fund bought the building.'

accountability

responsibility for decisions and results

'Citizens demanded accountability for the policy.'

Collocations: the rising cost of living · stagnant wages · face eviction · cause major disruption · introduce structural reform

Vocabulary 2: B2+ Labour & Pay Terms

8 more terms for managers who run projects and people

purchasing power

what your income can really buy

'Inflation has reduced workers' purchasing power.'

rent burden

the share of income spent on rent

'A rent burden above 40% is hard to sustain.'

labour shortage

not enough workers with the skills needed

'There is a labour shortage of track welders.'

retention

keeping your employees

'Retention is cheaper than recruitment.'

collective bargaining

negotiation between worker representatives and employers

'Pay is set by collective bargaining.'

labour dispute

a disagreement between workers and employer

'The labour dispute delayed the project.'

walkout

a sudden stop of work as a protest

'The walkout lasted two hours.'

minimum services

the essential service kept running during a strike

'Minimum services kept some trains running.'

Also useful: wage growth · pay freeze · housing allowance · per diem · subcontractor · work-to-rule · economic insecurity

Vocabulary Practice

Complete each sentence with a word from Vocabulary 1 or 2

purchasing power | collective bargaining | minimum services | labour shortage | stagnant | disruption | retention | disparity

1. Prices rose 4% and pay rose 1%, so workers lost _____.
2. Wages in the sector are set by _____ between unions and employers.
3. During the strike, _____ kept one train in three running.
4. We can't find machine operators: there is a serious _____.
5. Pay has been _____ for five years, while rents have gone up.
6. The strike caused major _____ to our deliveries.
7. A housing allowance would improve _____ on long projects.
8. The _____ between pay in the capital and in the regions is growing.

➡️ **Answers on the next slide — do not look until you have attempted all questions**

Vocabulary Practice: Answer Key

Then make one sentence about your own project with three of the words

🔑 **ANSWER KEY — Do not show until the student has completed the exercise on the previous slide**

1	✔ **purchasing power**	*income buys less*
2	✔ **collective bargaining**	*negotiated together*
3	✔ **minimum services**	*the essential service*
4	✔ **labour shortage**	*not enough skilled people*
5	✔ **stagnant**	*almost unchanged*
6	✔ **disruption**	*normal activity interrupted*
7	✔ **retention**	*keeping your people*
8	✔ **disparity**	*a significant difference*

B2+ Language: Reporting Contested Figures

Two sides, two numbers. Rewrite each statement so it doesn't take a side

according to · X put the figure at · Y disputes that · estimates vary widely · critics argue that · it is disputed whether · would need to be verified

1 **One-sided:** 'Millions of workers joined the strike.'

2 **One-sided:** 'Nobody went on strike in our sector.'

3 **One-sided:** 'Housing prices have gone up 80%.'

4 **One-sided:** 'The strike was political.'

➡️ **Model answers on the next slide. Rewrite yours first**

Reporting Contested Figures: Model Answers

Other correct versions are possible

🔑 **ANSWER KEY — Do not show until the student has completed the exercise on the previous slide**

1 *'According to the unions, millions of workers joined the strike; the employers' confederation disputes that figure.'*

2 *'Participation in our sector appears to have been low, although we don't have official figures yet.'*

3 *'According to the tenants' union spokesperson, housing prices have risen by more than 80% in ten years; the figure would need to be verified.'*

4 *'Critics argue that the timing was political; the unions say their demands apply to any government.'*

Key moves: name the source (according to…) · give both sides · say what is still unverified

Discussion Questions (1/2)

Give reasons and examples from your experience. Use the word in the tag.

🎓 Teacher Note

1	How does a rising cost of living affect employees' motivation, productivity and willingness to stay on a long project?	cost of living
2	Should employers raise salaries when housing, food and transport costs rise, even if margins on a public contract are fixed?	purchasing power
3	What is the difference between stagnant wages and a temporary pay freeze? How would your crews react to each?	stagnant
4	Can a project succeed if its workers can't afford to live near it? Think of recruitment, travel time and fatigue.	affordability
5	When is a strike an effective tool for workers, and when does it cause more harm than benefit?	general strike

Follow up: Who would pay for that? · Unintended consequence? · Short-term or structural? · Who might disagree?

Discussion Questions (2/2)

Give reasons and examples from your experience. Use the word in the tag.

6	How should a contractor communicate with its client, subcontractors and workers before and during a strike day?	disruption
7	What responsibilities should investment funds and property owners have towards tenants and local communities?	investment fund
8	Which reform would improve affordability most: rent controls, more construction, higher wages, public housing or tax changes? What is the construction sector's role?	reform
9	How can we tell a real economic problem from a political message designed to influence opinion?	accountability
10	If you ran a company in a city with fast-rising rents, which three actions would you take to keep your people and protect the business?	retention

Follow up: Who would pay for that? · Unintended consequence? · Short-term or structural? · Who might disagree?

Language for Economic & Labour Discussions

Phrases for the case study and the role play

Cautious opinions

'I would distinguish between the political argument and the economic evidence.'

'It is difficult to draw a firm conclusion without more data.'

Cause and effect

'If salaries remain stagnant, people will look for jobs in cheaper regions.'

'A prolonged strike could disrupt the supply chain and delay the handover.'

Proposing solutions

'We could introduce a housing allowance, provided that it is linked to attendance.'

'Rather than raising salaries now, we could cover accommodation near the site.'

Strikes and accountability

'Workers have the right to strike, but essential safety cover must be kept.'

'A dispute is more likely to escalate when communication breaks down.'

Challenge: use one phrase from each box in the next two tasks

Case Study: The Project Nobody Can Afford to Live Near

An invented situation on a rail project

Teacher Note

THE SITUATION

You manage a three-year rail project on the edge of a large city. Rents near the site have risen sharply. Many of your skilled workers now spend almost half their income on housing, and several drive 90 minutes each way.

Two track welders have left for a project in a cheaper region. Your main subcontractor says it can't find replacements. The contract price is fixed, so you can't give everyone a large pay rise.

1. Immediate support: what can you do in the next three months?
2. Medium term: what should change within one year?
3. Long term: how should the company adapt pay, accommodation or shifts?
4. Who pays, and how will you measure whether it worked?

Use five: affordability · retention · labour shortage · rent burden · purchasing power · collective bargaining · reform

🟢 ROLE PLAY · LABOUR RELATIONS

The Housing Allowance Meeting

SCENARIO Same invented project. The workers' representative asks to meet you. The crew wants a monthly housing allowance. You have a small budget and a handover date you can't move.

Role A: You (site manager)

In about four minutes:

- Listen first and show you understand
- Say what you can't do, and why
- Offer two alternatives
- Attach a condition: 'provided that…'
- Agree the next step and a date

Role B: Workers' representative (teacher)

Push back with:

- 'Rents went up 30%. Pay went up 2%.'
- 'Three more people are thinking of leaving.'
- 'The company made a profit last year.'
- 'What can you put in writing?'

Model meeting on the next slide →

🟢 ROLE PLAY · MODEL

One Possible Meeting

B	Rents near the site went up 30% and pay went up 2%. The crew wants a housing allowance.
A	I understand the pressure, and I don't want to lose good people. Let me be honest about what I can do.
A	I can't offer a general pay rise: the contract price is fixed, and pay is set by collective bargaining.
B	Three more people are thinking of leaving.
A	Then retention is my problem too. I can propose two things: shared accommodation near the site, or a transport allowance.
B	What can you put in writing?
A	A three-month trial, provided that we keep the current shift pattern until the handover.
A	I'll send the proposal to head office today and give you an answer by Friday.

Checklist: ✔ listen first · ✔ clear limit with a reason · ✔ two alternatives · ✔ a condition · ✔ next step and date

🧭 FINAL REFLECTION

The Most Effective Response

Complete the sentence. Then explain it for one minute with an example from your sector.

'The most effective response to a cost-of-living crisis is _____, because _____.'

Use 3 words from today.

MODEL EXAMPLE

'The most effective response to a cost-of-living crisis is a mix of fair wage growth, practical support such as accommodation near the site, and long-term housing reform, because no single measure solves both the immediate pressure on workers and the structural shortage of affordable homes.'

Your teacher will note two strengths and one thing to work on.

Wrap-Up & Homework

Today's language and what to do before next lesson

TODAY'S LANGUAGE

Core: cost of living · stagnant · affordability · disparity · general strike · disruption · eviction · reform · investment fund · accountability

B2+: purchasing power · rent burden · labour shortage · retention · collective bargaining · labour dispute · walkout · minimum services

Neutral reporting: according to · X put the figure at · Y disputes that · estimates vary widely · would need to be verified

HOMEWORK

Write a 150-word neutral report for a client: how the strike day affected an invented rail project. Facts, both sides' figures, impact on the programme, next steps.

Find one official figure on rents or wages in Spain. Present it in one minute: source, number, what it does and doesn't show.

Prepare a one-minute answer: 'What would make skilled workers stay on a three-year project?'

Next lesson: review his client report + the official figure he found