B2+ · ECONOMY & LABOUR · STUDENT WORKSHEET

Housing Costs, Cost of Living & Labour Relations

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

Name: Date:

1 Warm-up: pressure on workers

SPEAKING

1. Which expenses create the greatest financial pressure for workers today? Rank them 1–5: housing ___ · food ___ · energy ___ · transport ___ · healthcare ___
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? Facts only: what stopped, what continued.

2 Video: what did the report say?

LISTENING

BBC News: Spain sees widespread disruption in first general strike for 14 years — https://youtu.be/LRvSRV4WeOg
Make one note for each point. Then summarise the report in 90 seconds with 'The report says…' and 'According to the spokesperson…'.

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

Who speaks in this report? Who doesn't?

3 Fact, claim or opinion?

CRITICAL THINKING

Label each statement: FACT (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. _____

4 Vocabulary: costs, wages and disputes

VOCABULARY

Word	Meaning	Example
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.*
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.*

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

5 Vocabulary practice

VOCABULARY

Complete each sentence with a term from Exercise 4.

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.

Now write one sentence about your own project with three of the words:

6 Reporting contested figures

B2+ LANGUAGE

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

Useful: 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. Millions of workers joined the strike.
2. Nobody went on strike in our sector.
3. Housing prices have gone up 80%.
4. The strike was political.

KEY MOVES Name the source · give both sides · say what is still unverified

7 Discussion questions

SPEAKING

Give reasons and examples from your experience. Keep examples general. Tick the questions you discuss.

1. How does a rising cost of living affect employees' motivation, productivity and willingness to stay on a long project?

2. Should employers raise salaries when housing, food and transport costs rise, even if margins on a public contract are fixed?
3. What is the difference between stagnant wages and a temporary pay freeze? How would your crews react to each?
4. Can a project succeed if its workers can't afford to live near it? Think of recruitment, travel time and fatigue.
5. When is a strike an effective tool for workers, and when does it cause more harm than benefit?
6. How should a contractor communicate with its client, subcontractors and workers before and during a strike day?
7. What responsibilities should investment funds and property owners have towards tenants and local communities?
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?
9. How can we tell a real economic problem from a political message designed to influence opinion?
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?

Follow up: Who would pay for that? · What could be an unintended consequence? · Short-term or structural? · Who might disagree?

8 Useful language

FUNCTIONS

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…
Rather than raising salaries now, we could…

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.

9 Case study: the project nobody can afford to live near

CASE STUDY

An invented situation. Use at least five words from Exercise 4.

You manage a three-year rail project on the edge of a large city. Rents near the site have risen sharply. Many skilled workers spend almost half their income on housing, and several drive 90 minutes each way. Two track welders have left for a cheaper region. Your subcontractor can't find replacements. The contract price is fixed.

Immediate support (next three months)

Medium term (within one year)

Long term (pay, accommodation, shifts)

Who pays, and how will you measure whether it worked?

10 Role play: the housing allowance meeting

SPEAKING PREP

Same invented project. The workers' representative asks for a monthly housing allowance. You have a small budget and a handover date you can't move. Plan your side of the meeting.

Show you understand

What I can't do, and why

Two alternatives I can offer

My condition: 'provided that…'

Next step and date

11 Final reflection

SPEAKING

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

'The most effective response to a cost-of-living crisis is…

because…'

★ Homework

- Write a 150-word neutral report for a client: how the strike day affected an invented rail project. Include the facts, both sides' figures, the impact on the programme and the next steps.
- Find one official figure on rents or wages in Spain. Present it in one minute: the source, the number, and what it does and doesn't show.
- Prepare a one-minute answer: 'What would make skilled workers stay on a three-year project?'