

Strikes

Going on strike is a type of industrial action where workers refuse to work.

An official strike is when a trade union has followed all the legal rules. This includes holding a ballot for members to vote.

A strike is unofficial if a trade union does not follow the rules, or workers take action that's not authorised by a union.

In an official strike, workers are protected by [industrial action law](#).

Who can strike

Most people who take part in a strike are likely to be trade union members. But some other people might be protected by law if they choose to strike.

Trade union members

Trade union members who were asked to take part in the ballot can choose to join an official strike. It does not matter if they voted in the ballot or how they voted.

Workers who are not trade union members

Workers can join an official strike if they're in the same 'bargaining unit' as the trade union members. This sometimes just means working for the same employer.

If someone is not sure if they're allowed to strike, they can check with:

- their employer
- the trade union who called the strike

Shift workers

If a shift worker is due to work on a strike day, they can choose whether to work or go on strike.

Agency workers

Anyone working through an agency would not usually strike, because their employer is the agency.

They can choose to strike if they want to, for example if they do not want to cross a picket line.

If the agency or the hiring organisation are considering action against a striking agency worker, they should [get legal advice](#).

Agencies must not provide workers to cover work that people taking part in lawful strike action would usually do.

Agency workers already in place as part of normal business can carry on their work.

Workers in other organisations

If someone goes on strike in sympathy with people who work for a different employer, this is called 'secondary action'.

Secondary action is unofficial action. If someone takes unofficial action they are not protected by industrial action law. However, they'll still have their usual employment rights.

[Find out more about unofficial action](#)

Giving notice to strike

Before a strike starts, a trade union must:

- give an employer at least 10 days' notice in writing, for example in a letter or email
- tell an employer the category of workers taking action, for example the job role or the bargaining unit
- tell the employer the total number of workers concerned

Asking workers and telling employers about striking

Employers can ask their workers if they intend to take part in a strike.

Workers do not need to tell their employer they're going on strike in advance. They also do not need to contact them on a strike day.

When they return to work, they should tell their employer they've been on strike.

A worker can change their mind at any time about striking.

Pay

Employers do not need to pay anyone who is on strike.

Workers who go on strike will not usually get their pay or other contractual benefits like pension contributions.

In some circumstances, they might get money from their union. This is sometimes called strike pay. The amount of strike pay is up to each union.

Holiday

Employers must pay if someone is on annual leave during a strike.

An employer could choose to cancel leave. They must give the worker notice. The notice must be at least the same number of days as the leave that's been booked.

[Find out more about asking for and taking holiday](#)

If an employer cancels leave, the worker can choose whether to work or go on strike.

Sickness

If someone is off sick during a strike, the employer must pay them their usual sick pay.

If an employer feels a worker took sick leave without being sick, they could consider looking into it. If they're considering disciplinary action, they must investigate and follow a full and fair [disciplinary procedure](#).

[Find out more about sick pay](#)

Other types of leave

Someone's leave and pay must not be affected by strikes if they're on:

- maternity leave
- paternity leave
- adoption leave
- parental leave
- shared parental leave

Length of service

Going on strike does not break someone's length of service. But it does reduce it by a day for each day they're on strike.

For example, someone might get extra holiday entitlement after 3 years of continuous employment. If they strike for 4 days, they might need to wait for 3 years and 4 days.

Pausing strike action

A trade union might choose to pause strike action to try to resolve the dispute in a different way. In some cases the strike might continue later.

Get advice and support

As a worker, you can talk to your trade union representative, if you're a member.

If you're a member of an employers' association like the CMI or FSB, you can contact them for advice.

Employers and workers can [contact the Acas helpline](#). We can talk through:

- any questions about strikes and industrial action
- your dispute and how we might help find a solution

Find out more about strikes and industrial action on GOV.UK:

- [holding a ballot](#)
- [taking part in industrial action and strikes](#)
- [if your business faces industrial action](#)