

## FEATURE

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# International comparisons of labour disputes in 2006

## SUMMARY

This article continues a regular series on international labour disputes. It presents data on labour disputes in member countries of the European Union and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, between 1997 and 2006. Comparisons are made of overall strike rates between countries as well as strike rates by industry. The article also describes the differences in definitions and coverage of the statistics between countries and how they affect comparability.

This article continues a regular series of international labour dispute features and presents statistics on labour disputes in member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Union (EU) between 1997 and 2006. In 2004, ten countries joined the EU, increasing membership to 25 countries; statistics have been presented for these countries where available. Statistics for international comparisons are always a little behind those available for the UK alone. More recent figures for the UK are presented in Tables 6.29 and 6.30 in the electronic tables section of *Economic & Labour Market Review*. A detailed analysis of labour disputes in the UK in 2007 is expected to appear in the June 2008 edition.

A number of countries have been unable to supply statistics on labour disputes for 2006 as yet. These countries include France, Belgium, Iceland, Estonia, Japan and Cyprus. Thus, the OECD<sup>1</sup> comparisons for 2001 to 2006 are based on 24 countries, while those for the EU in 2006 are based on 18.

The statistics presented in this article are useful for showing relative levels of working days lost through disputes in each country and how they have changed over time. However, an exact comparison between countries is not possible because there are important differences in the methods used for compiling statistics on labour disputes in the individual countries. These differences in coverage are shown in the Technical Note, and are discussed in the

second half of the article.

Please note that, although these articles appear annually and cover ten-year periods, there are often revisions to previous years' figures in the current article. Generally, these revisions will only affect recent years, and will have arisen because either the statistics on working days lost, or those on employment, have been revised by the individual countries during the year. In some cases, the revisions can be quite large, and particular care should be taken when making comparisons between articles. Revisions have been made to the OECD total from 1999 onwards in the first table, although some revisions are small and may not be noticeable with rounded statistics. France, Spain, Finland, Malta, Australia, Canada and New Zealand have revisions in all three tables.

## Overall comparisons

Table 1 shows the number of working days lost through labour disputes per thousand employees (the strike rate) over the ten-year period 1997 to 2006<sup>2</sup> for each of the OECD and EU countries, where figures are available. This shows that the UK strike rate increased from six per 1,000 in 2005 to 28 in 2006, ranking it seventh highest out of 27. Over the OECD as a whole, ten countries saw their strike rate fall in 2006 and 11 showed a rise, the largest of which was Norway, increasing from a rate of five in 2005 to 68 in 2006. The OECD average strike rate has not changed this year, staying consistent at 24 days.

Figure 1 shows the strike rates in 2006

Table 1

Labour disputes: working days not worked per thousand employees<sup>1</sup> in all industries and services

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	Average <sup>2</sup>		Percentage	
											1997	2002–06	1997	1997–2001
											–2001	–2006	to 2002–06	
United Kingdom	10	11	10	20	20	51	19	34	6	28	14	28	21	100
Austria	6	0	0	1	0	3	398	0	0	0	1	80	41	7,900
Belgium	13	28	*	77	*	*	*	*	*	*	(41)	*	(41)	*
Denmark	42	1,317	38	51	24	79	23	31	21	34	292	38	164	–87
Finland	56	70	10	126	30	36	32 <sup>R</sup>	21	322	40	58	91	75	57
France	16 <sup>R</sup>	15 <sup>R</sup>	20 <sup>R</sup>	27 <sup>R</sup>	21 <sup>R</sup>	11 <sup>R</sup>	10	9	10 <sup>R</sup>	*	20	(10)	(15)	–50
Germany	2	1	2	0	1	10	5	2	1	13	1	6	4	500
Ireland	69	32	168	72	82	15	26	14	17	4	86	15	47	–83
Italy	84	40	62	59	67	311	124	44	56	27	62	111	88	79
Luxembourg	0	0	0	20	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	2	–100
Netherlands	2	5	11	1	6	34 <sup>R</sup>	2	9	6	2	5	11	8	120
Portugal	25	28	19	11	11	29	15	12	7	11	19	15	17	–21
Spain	182	121	132	295 <sup>R</sup>	150 <sup>R</sup>	370 <sup>R</sup>	56 <sup>R</sup>	306	62	58	178	164	170	–8
Sweden	7	0	22	0	3	0	164	4	0	1	6	34	20	467
<b>EU14 average</b>	<b>33<sup>R</sup></b>	<b>47<sup>R</sup></b>	<b>(29<sup>R</sup>)</b>	<b>48<sup>R</sup></b>	<b>(32<sup>R</sup>)</b>	<b>(93<sup>R</sup>)</b>	<b>(43<sup>R</sup>)</b>	<b>(49<sup>R</sup>)</b>	<b>(23<sup>R</sup>)</b>	<b>(24)</b>	<b>(38)</b>	<b>(47)</b>	<b>(42)</b>	<b>24</b>
Cyprus								27 <sup>R</sup>	*	*	*	(27)	(27)	*
Estonia								*	0	*	*	(0)	(0)	*
Latvia								0	0	0	*	(0)	(0)	*
Lithuania								0	1	0	*	(0)	(0)	*
Malta								11	9 <sup>R</sup>	19	*	(13)	(13)	*
Hungary				46	2	0	1	6	0	2	(24)	2	(8)	–92
Poland				7	0	0	1	0	0	3	(4)	1	(2)	–75
Slovakia				0	0	0	0	0	0	0	(0)	0	(0)	–
<b>EU22 average</b>								<b>(43)</b>	<b>(20<sup>R</sup>)</b>	<b>(21)</b>	<b>(37)</b>	<b>(41)</b>	<b>(39)</b>	<b>11</b>
Iceland	292	557	0	368	1571	0	0	1053 <sup>R</sup>	*	*	571	(353)	(486)	–38
Norway	4	141	3	239	0	72	0	68	5	68	78	43	60	–45
Switzerland	0	7	1	1	5 <sup>R</sup>	5 <sup>R</sup>	2	10 <sup>R</sup>	0	2	3	4	3	33
Turkey	19	29	23	35	28	4	14	8	15	13	27	11	18	–59
Australia	77	72	89	52 <sup>R</sup>	43 <sup>R</sup>	28 <sup>R</sup>	46 <sup>R</sup>	39 <sup>R</sup>	24 <sup>R</sup>	13	65	30	46	–54
Canada	296	196	190	126 <sup>R</sup>	163 <sup>R</sup>	220 <sup>R</sup>	123 <sup>R</sup>	223 <sup>R</sup>	283 <sup>R</sup>	54	192	180	186	–6
Japan	2	2	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	*	1	(0)	(1)	–100
New Zealand	18	9	12	8	37	22 <sup>R</sup>	12 <sup>R</sup>	4	18	17	17	15	16	–12
United States	38	42	16	161	9	5	32	8	10	20	54	15	34	–72
Mexico										24	*	(24)	(24)	*
Korea										77	*	(77)	(77)	*
<b>OECD average<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>39<sup>R</sup></b>	<b>44<sup>R</sup></b>	<b>(27<sup>R</sup>)</b>	<b>81<sup>R</sup></b>	<b>(23<sup>R</sup>)</b>	<b>(45<sup>R</sup>)</b>	<b>(33)</b>	<b>(31<sup>R</sup>)</b>	<b>(24<sup>R</sup>)</b>	<b>(24)</b>	<b>(43)</b>	<b>(31)</b>	<b>(37)</b>	<b>–23</b>

**Notes:**

1 Some employee figures have been estimated.

2 Annual averages for those years within each period for which data are available, weighted for employment.

3 From 2000, the OECD average includes Hungary, Poland and Slovakia.

R Revised

\* No data available

( ) Brackets indicate averages based on incomplete data.

Sources for working days not worked: ILO; Eurostat; National Statistics Offices

Sources for employees: OECD; National Statistics Offices

for the top ten EU countries that supplied statistics, with the UK having the fourth highest rate. Austria, Luxembourg, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovakia all had an average strike rate of zero for 2006. France, Belgium, Cyprus and Estonia did not supply figures and so have been excluded.

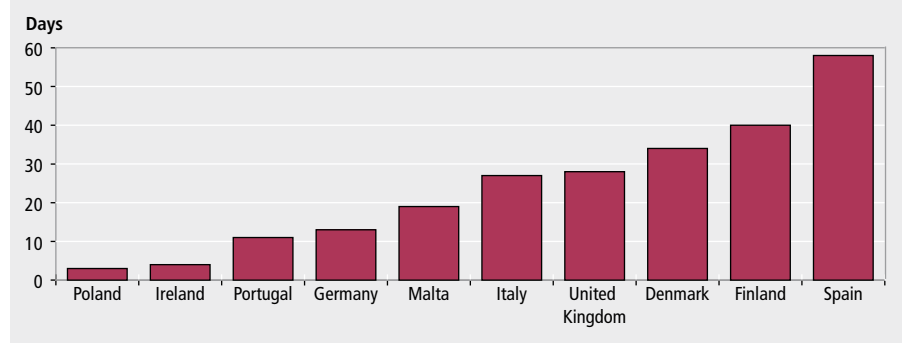
Figure 2 displays the UK strike rate against the EU average for each year from

1997 to 2006. The UK strike rate is above the EU rate for the first time since 1996. The EU strike rate has been stable for the last two years, whereas the strike rate for the UK has risen sharply. Within the EU, Germany and Luxembourg have shown low strike rates over the latest ten-year period, while Spain continues its trend of high strike rates, with an average of 58 in 2006.

Generally, it can be seen from the statistics, where available, that the strike rate for the most recent EU member countries is low.

The estimates show that the incidence of labour disputes is erratic and year-on-year comparisons should be made with caution. Norway's high 2006 strike rate of 68 days is due to this year's biennial bargaining round for pay. High figures such as those

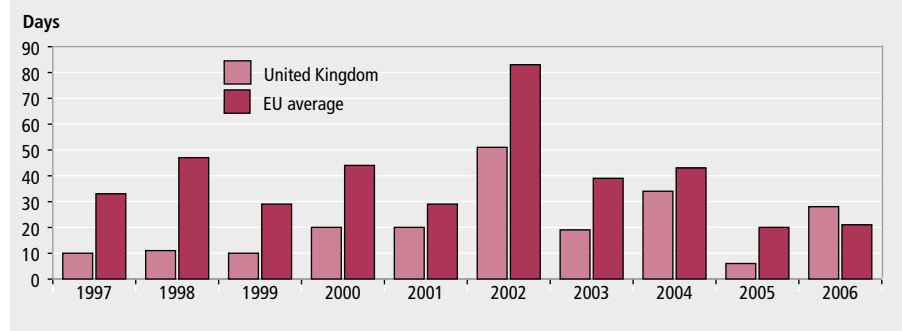
**Figure 1**  
**EU<sup>1</sup> top ten strike rate, 2006<sup>2</sup>**



**Notes:**

- 1 Excludes France, Belgium, Cyprus and Estonia.
- 2 Austria, Luxembourg, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovakia have a strike rate of zero in 2006.
- 3 Hungary, Netherlands and Sweden have a strike rate above zero but lower than that of the top ten.

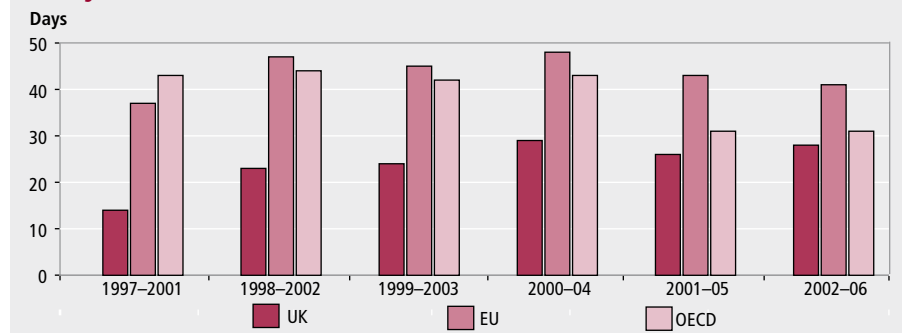
**Figure 2**  
**Annual strike rates**



**Note:**

From 2004, ten new EU members were included.

**Figure 3**  
**Five-year strike rates**



**Note:**

From 2000, OECD figures include Hungary, Poland and Slovakia.

for Norway are usually down to one large stoppage. An example of this is Finland's large 2005 figure, where 98 per cent of the working days lost were as a result of one stoppage in the manufacturing industry. Other examples include the public sector strike in France in 1995, the large private sector strike in Denmark in 1998, the health sector strike in Ireland in 1999, the transport, storage and communication group strike in Finland in 2000 and the

general strikes in Spain and Italy in 2002. The high level of industrial disputes in Austria in 2003 was in reaction to the Government's plans to introduce a fundamental pension reform. Eight EU countries have shown increased strike rates in 2006, six have shown a decrease and four have shown no change.

In order to lessen the effect of a single year's statistics, comparisons can be made over a number of years. **Figure 3** shows

average strike rates in the UK, the EU and the OECD over rolling five-year periods from 1997.<sup>3</sup> The OECD and EU strike rates have remained relatively stable over this period, although both OECD and EU strike rates have fallen again this year. The UK strike rate is consistently below both the EU and OECD averages. The average rates for the periods 1997 to 2001 and 2002 to 2006 are also shown in Table 1. Over this period, excluding the ten new EU members for 2004, the average rolling five-year EU strike rate increased by 24 per cent. Across the OECD, the equivalent strike rate fell by 23 per cent for the same period. Sixteen OECD countries have shown a decrease in their strike rates.

The five-year on five-year comparisons need to be interpreted carefully, as both rises and falls may be determined by high values in single years: Denmark's public sector strike in 1998, the US's large strike in the telecommunications industry in 2000, and strikes in Austria and Finland in 2003 and 2005, respectively. Also, percentage change comparisons for countries with very low strike rates (under five days) may not be informative. Between 2002 and 2006, the average number of working days lost per thousand employees in the UK was 28, an increase of 100 per cent over the 1997 to 2001 period. Sweden has shown a sharp rise of 467 per cent during the same period. The increase of 7,900 per cent shown by Austria has been caused by the 2003 statistics, and the rise of 120 per cent shown by the Netherlands is a large percentage increase, but only from an average rate of five days between 1997 and 2001 compared with a rate of 11 days between 2002 and 2006.

**Comparisons by industry**

One particular characteristic of labour disputes is the variation between industries in the incidence of strikes. Some industries such as manufacturing and transport have consistently high strike rates, while others like agriculture have very low ones. The industrial composition of employment can vary quite significantly between countries and this can sometimes explain why one country has a particularly high or low ranking compared with another.

**Table 2** shows working days lost per thousand employees for the production and construction industries,<sup>3</sup> for each country where figures are available, for 1997 to 2006. Six countries saw a fall in their strike rates for these industries between 2005 and 2006 and six countries also saw a rise. Norway reported a large strike rate of 130 working days lost per thousand employees

Table 2

**Labour disputes: working days not worked per thousand employees<sup>1</sup> in the production and construction industries**

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	Average <sup>2</sup>		Percentage	
											1997 –2001	2002–06	1997 –2001 to 2002–06	
United Kingdom	19	9	20	20	15	8	16	8	5 <sup>R</sup>	9	17	9	13	–47
Austria	0	0	0	0	0	*	*	0	0	0	(0)	(0)	(0)	0
Belgium	48	26	*	24 <sup>R</sup>	*	*	*	*	*	*	(32)	*	(32)	*
Denmark	99	3215	94	112	70	124	60	97	45	23	726	70	412	–90
Finland	48	37	20	280	16	107	70 <sup>R</sup>	43	1,185 <sup>R</sup>	92	81	298	189	268
France	51 <sup>R</sup>	44 <sup>R</sup>	60 <sup>R</sup>	84 <sup>R</sup>	49 <sup>R</sup>	25 <sup>R</sup>	29 <sup>R</sup>	24 <sup>R</sup>	*	*	58	(26)	(46)	–55
Germany	3	1	6	0	2	27	15	5	1	8	2	11	7	450
Ireland	45	29	81	43	41	22	8	7	9	13	48	12	29	–75
Italy	164	62	116	62	126	83	80	49 <sup>R</sup>	118	60	106	78	92	–26
Luxembourg	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Netherlands	7	2	15	2	6	159 <sup>R</sup>	1	8 <sup>R</sup>	13 <sup>R</sup>	4	6	37	21	517
Portugal	56	39	20	11	15	40	18	12	12 <sup>R</sup>	*	27	(17)	(22)	–37
Spain	349	253	135	500 <sup>R</sup>	345 <sup>R</sup>	59 <sup>R</sup>	103	174	71	108	323	103	201	–68
Sweden	2	2	2	0	9	1	26	17	0	0	3	9	6	200
<b>EU14 average</b>	<b>(69)</b>	<b>(97)</b>	<b>(47<sup>R</sup>)</b>	<b>(83<sup>R</sup>)</b>	<b>(69)</b>	<b>(44<sup>R</sup>)</b>	<b>(40<sup>R</sup>)</b>	<b>(40)</b>	<b>(58<sup>R</sup>)</b>	<b>(35)</b>	<b>(73)</b>	<b>(43)</b>	<b>(59)</b>	<b>–41</b>
Cyprus								123	*	*	*	(123)	(123)	*
Estonia								*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Latvia								0	0	*	*	(0)	(0)	*
Lithuania								0	0	*	*	(0)	(0)	*
Malta								2 <sup>R</sup>	3	*	*	(3)	(3)	*
Hungary				0	2	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0
Poland				3	0	0	2	0	0	5	1	1	1	0
Slovakia				0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>EU22 average</b>								<b>(34)</b>	<b>(48<sup>R</sup>)</b>	<b>(30)</b>	<b>(69)</b>	<b>(37)</b>	<b>(53)</b>	<b>–46</b>
Iceland	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	0	*	*	(0)	(0)	*
Norway	13	12	8	842	0	129 <sup>R</sup>	1	241	25	130	173	105	140	–39
Switzerland	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	12	1	*	*	(10)	(10)	*
Turkey	39	31	53	55	68 <sup>R</sup>	6	35 <sup>R</sup>	21	35	34	49	27	38	–45
Australia	237	235	250	186	220 <sup>R</sup>	127 <sup>R</sup>	164 <sup>R</sup>	109 <sup>R</sup>	93	*	225	(123)	(178)	–45
Canada	319	336	272	187 <sup>R</sup>	229 <sup>R</sup>	199 <sup>R</sup>	239 <sup>R</sup>	225 <sup>R</sup>	176 <sup>R</sup>	116	268	191	228	–29
Japan	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	*	1	(0)	(0)	–100
New Zealand	42	7	7	27	66 <sup>R</sup>	14 <sup>R</sup>	51 <sup>R</sup>	5	12	*	30	(20)	(26)	–33
United States	78	137	62	54	14	11	4	4	37	*	69	(13)	(46)	–81
Mexico										77	*	(77)	(77)	*
Korea										*	*	*	*	*
<b>OECD average<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>(67)</b>	<b>(97)</b>	<b>(53<sup>R</sup>)</b>	<b>(62)</b>	<b>(44)</b>	<b>(30)</b>	<b>(29)</b>	<b>(28)</b>	<b>(41<sup>R</sup>)</b>	<b>(44)</b>	<b>(65)</b>	<b>(33)</b>	<b>(50)</b>	<b>–49</b>

**Notes:**

1 Some employee figures have been estimated.

2 Annual averages for those years within each period for which data are available, weighted for employment.

3 From 2000, the OECD average includes Hungary, Poland and Slovakia.

R Revised

\* No data available

( ) Brackets indicate averages based on incomplete data.

Sources for working days not worked: ILO; Eurostat; National Statistics Offices

Sources for employees: OECD; National Statistics Offices

in this sector for 2006. **Table 3** shows the equivalent for the service industries.<sup>4</sup> Between 2005 and 2006, within the service industry group, five countries saw a fall in their strike rates and seven saw a rise, with Norway experiencing the most significant rise and Canada the most notable fall. In fact, the strike rate for Canada in this sector

dropped from a rate of 322 working days lost per thousand employees in 2005 to just 34 in 2006.

Over the average ten-year period from 1997 to 2006, the EU14 strike rates in the production and construction industries were almost three times those of the service industries. Over the same period, OECD

countries also showed a consistently higher strike rate in production and construction than services, with 22 more working days lost per thousand, though the production and construction industries rate in the UK was 43 per cent lower than the service sector rate. Between 1997 and 2006, 17 of the 26 OECD countries, where figures were

**Table 3**  
**Labour disputes: working days not worked per thousand employees<sup>1</sup> in the service industries**

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	Average <sup>2</sup>		Percentage	
											1997	2002–06	1997	1997–2001
											–2001	–2006	to 2002–06	
United Kingdom	7	12	7	20	22	62	20	40	6	31	14	32	23	129
Austria	9	0	0	1	0	*	*	0	0	0	2	(0)	(2)	200
Belgium	0	30	*	1	*	*	*	*	*	*	(10)	*	(10)	*
Denmark	20	494	5	14	5	9	3	6	4	4	106	5	54	–95
Finland	62	75	5	51R	36	9	11	13	9	22	46	13	28	–72
France	4 <sup>R</sup>	5 <sup>R</sup>	7 <sup>R</sup>	8 <sup>R</sup>	10 <sup>R</sup>	5 <sup>R</sup>	3 <sup>R</sup>	4	*	*	7	(4)	(6)	–43
Germany	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	16	1	4	2	300
Ireland	85	34	214	88 <sup>R</sup>	103 <sup>R</sup>	12	33	17 <sup>R</sup>	20 <sup>R</sup>	1	106	16	56	–85
Italy	33	22	33	57	35	43	37	42 <sup>R</sup>	24 <sup>R</sup>	10	36	31	33	–14
Luxembourg	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Netherlands	1	6	11	1	7	4	2	0	1	2	5	2	3	–60
Portugal	8	21R	10	11	9	20	13	13	5	*	12	(13)	(12)	8
Spain	116	39	61	185 <sup>R</sup>	37	48 <sup>R</sup>	25	46 <sup>R</sup>	56 <sup>R</sup>	37	89	43	62	–52
Sweden	9	0	29	0	1	0	208	0	0	0	8	41	25	413
<b>EU14 average (17<sup>R</sup>)</b>	<b>(22<sup>R</sup>)</b>	<b>(15<sup>R</sup>)</b>	<b>(29<sup>R</sup>)</b>	<b>(16<sup>R</sup>)</b>	<b>(26<sup>R</sup>)</b>	<b>(19<sup>R</sup>)</b>	<b>(20)</b>	<b>(13<sup>R</sup>)</b>	<b>(21)</b>	<b>(20)</b>	<b>(20)</b>	<b>(20)</b>	<b>(20)</b>	<b>0</b>
Cyprus								8	*	*		(8)	(8)	*
Estonia								*	*	*		*	*	*
Latvia								0	0	*		(0)	(0)	*
Lithuania								0	1	*		(1)	(1)	*
Malta								16	2R	*		(5)	(5)	*
Hungary				78	3	0	1	9	0	3	40	3	13	–93
Poland				10	1	0	0	0	0	2	5	0	2	–100
Slovakia				0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	*
<b>EU22 average</b>							<b>(18)</b>	<b>(11<sup>R</sup>)</b>	<b>(18)</b>	<b>(20)</b>	<b>(18)</b>	<b>(19)</b>	<b>(19)</b>	<b>–10</b>
Iceland	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	0	*	*	(0)	(0)	*
Norway	0	185	2	67	0	57R	0	22	0	53	51	26	38	–49
Switzerland	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	11	0	*	*	(6)	(6)	*
Turkey	4	30	2	24R	3	3	1	1	3	1	13	2	7	–85
Australia	32	28	47	28	8	9	27	30 <sup>R</sup>	10 <sup>R</sup>	*	28	(19)	(24)	–32
Canada	294	102	158	97 <sup>R</sup>	145 <sup>R</sup>	228 <sup>R</sup>	83 <sup>R</sup>	227 <sup>R</sup>	322 <sup>R</sup>	34	158	178	169	13
Japan	3	3	2	1	1	0	0	0	0 <sup>R</sup>	*	2	(0)	(1)	–100
New Zealand	9	9	13	2	29R	25R	0	3	14	*	12	(10)	(11)	–17
United States	25	12	2	198	8	4	41	9	6	*	50	(15)	(34)	–70
Mexico										1	*	(1)	(1)	*
Korea										*	*	*	*	*
<b>OECD average<sup>3</sup>(29<sup>R</sup>)</b>	<b>(20<sup>R</sup>)</b>	<b>(14<sup>R</sup>)</b>	<b>(91<sup>R</sup>)</b>	<b>(15<sup>R</sup>)</b>	<b>(20<sup>R</sup>)</b>	<b>(27)</b>	<b>(21)</b>	<b>(21<sup>R</sup>)</b>	<b>(17)</b>	<b>(34)</b>	<b>(22)</b>	<b>(28)</b>	<b>(28)</b>	<b>–35</b>

**Notes:**

1 Some employee figures have been estimated.

2 Annual averages for those years within each period for which data are available, weighted for employment.

3 From 2000, the OECD average includes Hungary, Poland and Slovakia.

R Revised

\* No data available

( ) Brackets indicate averages based on incomplete data.

Sources for working days not worked: ILO; Eurostat; National Statistics Offices

Sources for employees: OECD; National Statistics Offices

available, had a higher average rate in the production and construction industries than in the service industries.

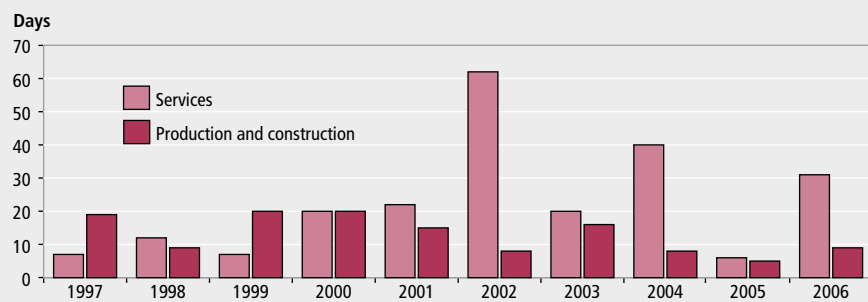
Figure 4 and Figure 5 show, respectively, the UK strike rates in the two industry groups for each year from 1997 to 2006 and the equivalent figures for the OECD. In the UK, the strike rates in the production and construction industries have been fairly

consistent, but in the service sector there were three noticeable increases, in 2002, 2004 and 2006. In the production and construction industries, the UK rate has been substantially below the OECD average since the early 1990s. In the OECD, the strike rate in this sector has been higher than that for the service sector since 1996, with the exception of 2000. This was due

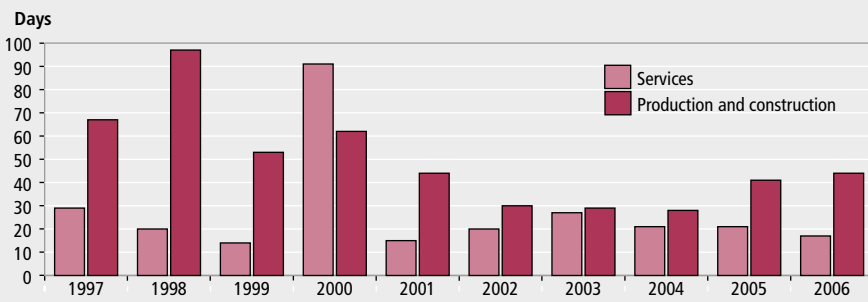
to the US's high strike rate, resulting from action in the renting, real estate and other business activities sector.

Table 2 and Table 3 also show average rates by industry for the five-year periods 1997 to 2001 and 2002 to 2006. Between these periods, the OECD saw a 49 per cent reduction in the production and construction industries rate. The EU14

**Figure 4**  
**Strike rates, United Kingdom**



**Figure 5**  
**Strike rates, OECD average**



estimates for production and construction also show a fall, but in services there was no change. Over the same period, the UK saw a fall of 47 per cent in the production and construction industries and a rise of 129 per cent in the service sector. The Netherlands showed the greatest proportionate rise (517 per cent) in its production and construction industries rate over the period, while Denmark showed the biggest fall (90 per cent). Four countries in addition to the UK saw a rise in their service sector rates: Germany, Portugal, Sweden and Canada.

### Coverage and comparability

Because of the differences in coverage and definitions, international comparisons of labour dispute statistics need to be made with care. In particular, differences in rates in Tables 1 to 3 may not be significant when coverage is taken into account. Most countries rely on voluntary notification of disputes to a national or local government department, backed up by media reports.

None of the 33 countries mentioned in this article aim to record the full effects of stoppages of work. For example, most countries do not measure working time lost at establishments whose employees are not involved in the dispute, but are unable to work because of shortages of materials supplied by establishments that are on strike. Similarly, other forms of industrial action, such as go-slows, work-to-rule and

overtime bans, are not generally reported.

There are significant differences between countries in the criteria that exist to determine whether a particular stoppage will be entered in the official records. Most countries exclude small stoppages from the statistics, the threshold being defined in terms of workers involved, the length of the dispute, the number of working days lost, or a combination of all or some of these. These are summarised in the Technical Note. The UK, for example, excludes disputes involving fewer than ten workers or lasting less than one day, unless the aggregate number of days lost exceeds 100. Germany, for example, adopts the same criteria but has other exclusions that make direct comparisons with the UK difficult. A number of other countries' thresholds are similar, but any differences in thresholds affect the number of working days lost that are recorded.

There are two countries where the thresholds used are particularly high: the US and Denmark. The US includes only those disputes involving more than 1,000 workers. In Denmark, the threshold used is 100 working days lost. Hence, the strike rates for the US and Denmark are clearly not directly comparable with those for the UK, Germany and other countries with similar thresholds.

There are a number of other important differences that may be significant when making international comparisons. Some

countries exclude the effects of disputes in certain industrial sectors. For example, Portugal omits public sector strikes and general strikes and Japan excludes days lost in unofficial disputes. Political stoppages are not included for the UK, Turkey, Hungary, Cyprus, Malta and the US. In the UK this is insignificant. The last identified political strike in the UK was in 1986, with fewer than 1,000 working days being lost.

The inclusion or omission of those workers indirectly involved in a stoppage (those unable to work because others at their workplace are on strike) varies between countries. Almost half of the countries listed in the Technical Note, including the UK, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Australia, New Zealand and the US, attempt to include them. Germany, Canada, Italy and Japan are among the countries that exclude them. This causes these countries to record a lower number of working days lost than countries that include indirectly affected workers in their statistics. Consequently, even though Germany, for example, has a similar threshold for inclusion of disputes to that used in the UK, comparisons between the two countries' records should be made with care. It is worth noting, however, that evidence from the UK suggests that few working days are lost by workers indirectly affected by strikes. From the total number of working days lost in 2005, less than 1 per cent were lost by workers indirectly involved in strike action; in 2006 the equivalent figure was around 3 per cent.

### Notes

- 1 OECD averages include statistics (where available) only from member countries presented in the tables.
- 2 From 2000, OECD figures include the Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. EU figures from 2004 onwards include ten new EU members. Also, from 2006, the OECD average now includes Korea and Mexico.
- 3 Production and construction industries include mining and quarrying; energy and water supply; manufacturing; and construction.
- 4 Service industries include retail sales; wholesale; hotels and catering; transport, storage and communication; finance; business services; education; health; social services; and public administration.

### CONTACT

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## TECHNICAL NOTE

## Labour disputes: comparisons of coverage and methodology

	Minimum criteria for inclusion in statistics	Are political stoppages included?	Are indirectly affected workers included?	Sources and notes
United Kingdom	Ten workers involved and of one day duration unless 100 workdays not worked	No	Yes	Office for National Statistics collects information initially from press reports, and then contacts employers and trade unions directly
Australia	Ten workdays not worked	Yes	Yes	Information gathered from Industrial Relations Department, employers, unions and press
Austria	No restrictions on size	Yes	No	Trade unions provide information
Belgium	No restrictions on size; excluding public sector stoppages	Yes	No	Questionnaires to employers following police or media coverage
Canada	Half a day duration plus 10 workdays not worked	Yes	No	Reports from Canada Manpower Centres, provincial Labour Departments, conciliation services and press
Cyprus	Three-quarters of a day duration	No	Yes	Private sector – voluntary reports from employers, Industrial Relations mediators and trade unions; public sector – compulsory report to the Department of Labour
Denmark	100 workdays not worked	Yes	Yes	Voluntary reports submitted annually by employers' organisations
Estonia	Not known	Not known	Not known	No information
Finland	One hour duration	Yes	Yes	Principally, returns from employers (+90%) some reports from employees and press
France	One workday not worked; excluding agriculture	Yes	Yes	Labour inspectors' reports
Germany	Ten workers involved and of one day duration	Yes	No	Compulsory notification by employers to local employment offices unless 100 workdays not worked; excluding public administration; from 1993, data cover the entire FRG – earlier data represented West Germany only
Hungary	Ten workers involved	No	No	Compulsory questionnaires to employers following media coverage
Iceland	Restrictions on size	Not known	No	No information
Ireland	Ten workdays not worked or one day duration	Yes	Yes	Reports from Department of Enterprise and Employment, Department of Social Welfare and press
Italy	No restrictions on size	Yes	No	No information
Japan	Half a day duration; excluding unofficial disputes	Yes	No	Legal requirement to report to Labour Relations Commission
Latvia	Not known	Not known	Not known	No information
Lithuania	Not known	Not known	Not known	No information
Luxembourg	No information	Not known	Not known	No information
Malta	No restrictions on size	No	No	Questionnaires to employers following media coverage
Netherlands	No restrictions on size	Yes	Yes	Questionnaires to employers following a strike; National Dutch Press Bureau collects relevant news items on a contractual basis for Statistics Netherlands
New Zealand	Ten workdays not worked; prior to 1988 excluding public sector stoppages	Yes	Yes	Information initially from press reports, employee and employer organisations, and labour inspectors, and subsequently from employer report forms

## TECHNICAL NOTE continued

## Labour disputes: comparisons of coverage and methodology

	Minimum criteria for inclusion in statistics	Are political stoppages included?	Are indirectly affected workers included?	Sources and notes
Norway	One day duration	Yes	No	Employers' reports to the Ministry of Labour and Government Administration, and press
Poland	Duration of at least one hour	Yes	Yes	Compulsory report from employers
Portugal	Strikes only; no restriction on size; excluding general strikes at the national level; excluding public administration	Yes	No	Legal obligation on trade unions to notify Ministry of Labour and Social Security
Slovakia	No restriction on size	Yes	Yes	Compulsory report from employers
Spain	Strikes only prior to 1990; one hour duration; prior to 1989, excluding the civil service	Yes	No	Legal obligation on party instigating strike to notify competent labour authority
Sweden	Eight hours not worked	Yes	No	Information gathered following press reports
Switzerland	One day duration	Yes	Yes	Federal Office for Industry, Crafts, Occupations and Employment requests returns from employers and unions following press reports
Turkey	No restriction on size; excluding energy services and most public services; excluding general strikes	No	Yes	Legal obligation on the part of trade unions to notify Regional Directorates of Labour
United States	One day or one shift duration and one thousand workers involved	No	Yes	Reports from press, employers, unions and agencies

Source: ILO sources and methods: *Labour Statistics, Vol 7. Strikes and lockouts (Geneva, 1993)* and ILO's Statistical web site: [LABORSTA.ilo.org](http://LABORSTA.ilo.org)