

REPORT

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Das WSI ist ein Institut
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WSI INDUSTRIAL ACTION REPORT 2025

Strikes are indispensable

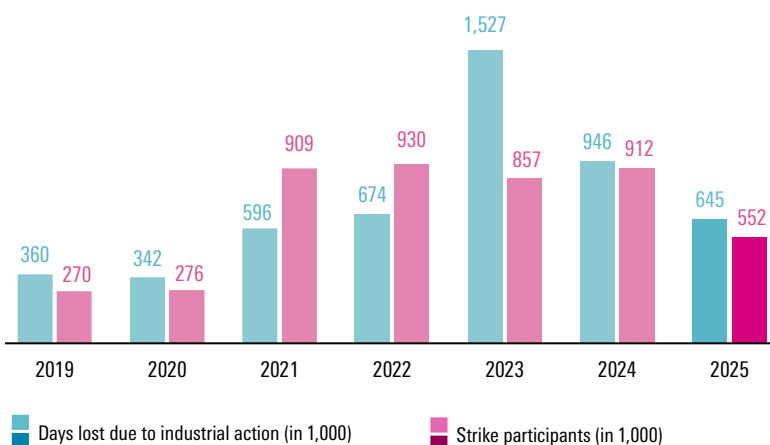
Thilo Janssen, Heiner Dribbusch

SUMMARY

The 2025 collective bargaining year in Germany was once again characterised by numerous strikes. The WSI recorded 261 industrial disputes in 2025, meaning there were fewer collective bargaining disputes accompanied by strikes than in the two previous years. However, the number of disputes remained at a high level compared to the long-term average. At the same time, the number of workplaces affected by strikes has risen sharply over the past two decades. In contrast, the volume of industrial action in 2025, estimated by the WSI at 645,000 days lost due to strikes, was significantly lower than in previous years and below the long-term trend. The same applies to the estimated number of 552,000 strike participants in 2025. These figures point to a change in the way trade unions conduct industrial action: single, temporary warning strikes predominate, while open-ended sector-wide strikes have become rare.

For the first time, the WSI has also quantitatively analysed the trade unions' industrial action objectives for 2025: in more than one in four industrial actions, workers were fighting for companies to be covered by collective agreements (for the first time); strikes over company-level collective agreements predominate. Accordingly, trade unions devote a significant proportion of their resources to prevent a further decline in collective bargaining coverage.

Industrial action statistics 2019 – 2025



Source: WSI Industrial Action Statistics

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1 INTRODUCTION

In Germany, the industrial disputes of 2025 took place against the backdrop of a very heterogeneous political and economic environment. Collective bargaining coverage amongst companies and workers is at an all-time low (Hohendanner/Kohaut 2025). Political support for trade union industrial action aimed at concluding collective agreements has most recently come from the EU level. Under EU law, the German government is obliged to actively work towards increasing collective bargaining coverage.¹ To this end, it must present an action plan that could both legitimise and provide practical support to trade unions in industrial action – at least if this plan is underpinned by effective measures (Müller/Schulten 2026). However, despite this obligation, the German government has not yet presented a plan. The Federal Collective Agreement Compliance Act (BMJV 2026), which has since been passed, is generally welcomed by the trade unions (DGB 2026a), but has been criticised as inadequate in parts and therefore ineffective (Jaehrling/Schulten 2026). Another aspect of the political reality is that some employers and certain political parties are once again pushing for a restriction on the right to strike in Germany, which is already comparatively restrictive (Gesamtmetall 2025; MIT 2024; Brandt/Klenget 2025; Janssen/Lübker 2025). Trade unions naturally reject this (e.g. IG Metall 2025a).

The economic context of industrial action in 2025 was also characterised by mixed signals: The losses in purchasing power of collectively agreed wages during the years of high inflation in 2022 and 2023 had still not been offset (Schulten/WSI

Collective Agreement Archive 2026). Consequently, there was still a need to recover lost purchasing power, which suggested an increased willingness to take industrial action – examples include the industrial disputes in Berlin's local transport system and in newspaper publishing (see [Section 3](#)). At the same time, the difficult economic situation had contrasting effects on the industrial and service sectors (Breuer et al. 2025), which was also reflected in a polarised labour market: in the manufacturing sector (and likewise in the construction industry), jobs were cut; industrial action was frequently of a defensive nature; examples include the printing industry, Ford and the forklift manufacturer Jungheinrich (see [Section 3](#)). At the same time, many service sectors continued to experience labour shortages and an increase in employment, particularly in the health and social care sectors and in public administration (Federal Statistical Office 2026); this allowed trade unions to adopt, in some cases, more offensive industrial action strategies.

This heterogeneous political and economic background was reflected in the industrial action of 2025. The following section first analyses the quantitative data on the number of industrial disputes, strike volume and strike participation, as well as – for the first time – the trade unions' strike objectives ([Section 2](#)). It then provides a brief overview of key industrial disputes ([Section 3](#)). An international comparison across various countries in Europe, as well as Canada and the USA, places industrial action in Germany within a comparative context ([Section 4](#)). The report concludes with a brief outlook on the current year of industrial action, 2026 ([Section 5](#)).

¹ Article 4.2 of Directive (EU) 2022/2041 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on adequate minimum wages in the European Union

2 INDUSTRIAL ACTION IN 2025 – THE FIGURES

2.1 Number of industrial disputes

WSI research estimates that 261 industrial disputes took place in 2025 in Germany (Figure 1).² This means that the number of industrial disputes has continued to decline since the record year of 2023 (312 industrial disputes) and of 2024 (286 industrial disputes). However, it remains above the average for the past ten years, which stands at 229 industrial disputes. This figure is, in turn, higher than that for the comparative period from 2006 to 2015, when the WSI recorded a ten-year average of 182 industrial disputes. While the number of industrial disputes is therefore falling in the short term in the wake of the 2022/2023 inflation crisis, the long-term trend is generally upwards.

Broken down by sector, the number of industrial disputes in 2025 was roughly balanced between the manufacturing sector (134) and the services sector (127), with a slight predominance of disputes in the manufacturing sector. It is not possible to specify how frequently strikes took place within these industrial disputes, i.e. how

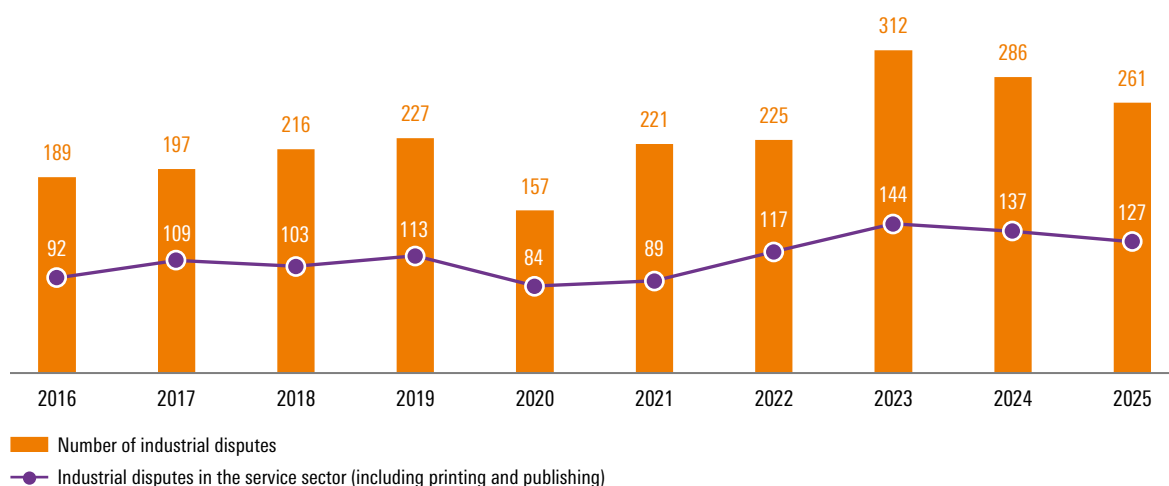
many individual work stoppages occurred at company level. Particularly in the case of sector-wide collective bargaining disputes, the number of individual work stoppages is usually unknown – for example, when, as part of the large waves of warning strikes in the metal industry, work is briefly suspended in several thousand workplaces, in some cases on multiple occasions. There is also a lack of precise information on how often and in how many establishments strikes took place during collective bargaining disputes in the public sector. This also applies to other sector-wide disputes.

However, the strike statistics from the Federal Employment Agency (BA) provide a useful approximation here: while these do not record the number of industrial disputes, they do publish annually the number of ‘affected workplaces’ recorded by the agency, i.e. those workplaces where work was stopped at least once during the year in question. It is particularly striking to note the large number of workplaces affected by strikes when so-called ‘minor strikes’ are included; these are not included in the BA’s official overall statistics due to their limited scale, but have been listed for information purposes in the official statistics since 2008.³

This reveals that the number of workplaces affected by strikes has risen sharply since the mid-2000s. In 2023 and 2024 alone, more than 10,000

Figure 1

WSI estimate: Number of industrial disputes 2016–2025



Note:
Data for 2023 partly revised.

Source: WSI industrial action statistics

WSI

² The WSI would like to thank Prof. Stefan Schmalz from the University of Jena, as well as Piet Heinrich and Lydia Weiler from the ‘Streikmonitor’ project, for their support in conducting media research on labour disputes in 2025.

³ The official statistics cover only those strikes in which at least 10 workers per establishment were involved and which lasted at least one day, or which resulted in a loss of more than 100 working days per establishment (BA 1982).

Table 1

BA strike statistics: Workplaces affected by strikes 2008–2025

official statistics and 'minor strikes'

Period	BA statistics	BA: 'minor strikes'	Total
2008–2012	1,993	2,025	4,018
2013–2017	5,217	5,000	10,217
2018–2022	6,828	11,264	18,092
2023	5,217	5,189	10,406
2024	3,036	7,068	10,104
2025	2,611	2,295	4,906

Source: Federal Employment Agency (BA) number of 'workplaces affected', own calculations

WSI

2.2 Days lost and strike participants

The volume of industrial action estimated by the WSI, expressed in terms of days lost due to industrial action, continued to decline last year compared with 2023 and 2024 (Figure 2)⁴. The WSI estimates 645,000 lost working days, meaning that 2025 is once again below the average for the past 20 years. Comparing the periods 2006 to 2015 (an average of 734,000 lost working days) and 2016 to 2025 (682,000), the long-term trend is also slightly downward.⁵

The number of strikers is estimated at 552,000⁶ for the year 2025. This is the lowest figure since 2020, the year of the COVID-19 crisis. When comparing the longer-term periods from 2006 to 2015 (average 743,000) and 2016 to 2025 (average 704,000), the long-term trend shows a slight downward trend.

In 2025, four-fifths of the strike participants came from organisational sections of the United Services Union (ver.di). The largest disputes led by ver.di in terms of numbers concerned the public sector (the joint negotiations of the federal government and local authorities, as well as the collective bargaining round of the federal states), local transport and postal services. The fact that the total number of strike participants was again significantly lower than in the previous year is primarily due to the absence of warning strikes in 2025 in the metal and electronics industry, which employs 3.7 million people. In 2025, the IG Metall organised sector-wide industrial action in sectors with significantly lower numbers of workers: in the motor vehicle trade (450,000 workers), the textile and clothing industry (130,000), textile services (70,000) and the metalworking trade in North Rhine-Westphalia (58,000).

If one compares the individual work stoppages ('affected workplaces') with the volume of industrial action (number of working days lost due to industrial action), it is striking that the latter has not

workplaces were affected by strikes (see Table 1). By contrast, in 2025, the figure was 4,906 – only half as many workplaces affected by strikes.

It should be noted that the number of 'workplaces affected' represents only a lower limit, as, as the BA itself acknowledges, employers do not always report all strikes. It is not possible to quantify the extent to which an improvement in data collection – resulting from higher-quality reporting by employers – has contributed to the statistical increase in the number of 'workplaces affected' (see Dribbusch 2018, p.310). It can, however, be assumed that warning strikes in the metal industry have been recorded more comprehensively since the BA switched to collective reports from the metal employers' associations. Unaffected by this, the increase in warning strikes in the public sector, the transport sector, and also in the regional collective bargaining rounds of the food and beverage sector is reflected here.

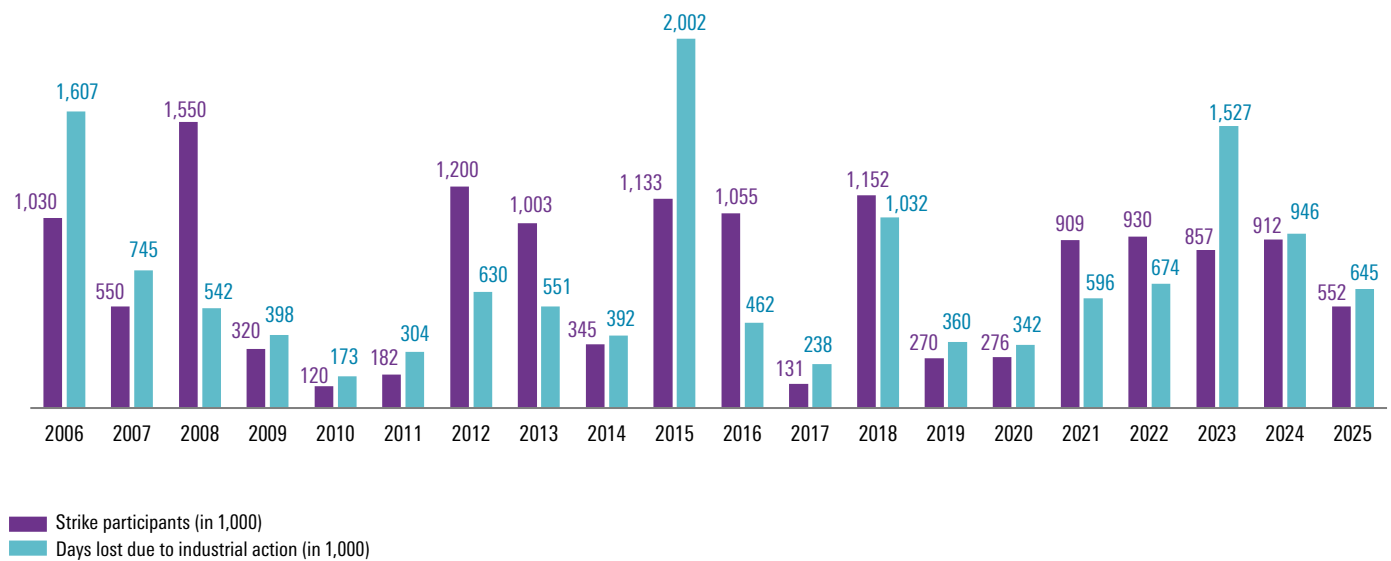
⁴ The term 'days lost', or as the Federal Employment Agency terms it, 'working days lost', refers to the days calculated as having been lost due to strikes or lockouts. When considering longer periods and making international comparisons, it is useful to express the number of days lost in relation to the number of workers. This is also referred to as the relative volume of industrial action and is usually expressed in days lost per 1,000 workers.

⁵ The German Economic Institute (IW) arrives at a different conclusion based on the WSI data and identifies a long-term increase in the volume of industrial action in Germany (Lesch 2025, p. 49). This is due to the fact that the periods are divided differently for the calculation of the average figures (2004–2009, 2010–2019, 2020–2023).

⁶ When estimating the total number of strike participants, it should be noted that workers who have taken part in several work stoppages at different times are often counted more than once. The number of strike participants is therefore systematically higher than the number of individual workers who have stopped work once or several times during the year.

Figure 2

WSI estimate: Strike participants and days lost 2006–2025
in 1,000



Note:
Data for 2021 revised.

Source: WSI industrial action statistics

WSI

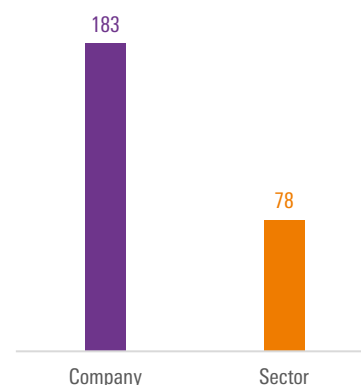
risen to the same extent; nor does the trend in the total number of strike participants correspond to the increase in individual work stoppages Figure 4). The reason for this decoupling lies not least in a change in the way trade unions conduct industrial action. Individual, relatively short temporary work stoppages predominate. In the public services sector in particular, ver.di involves a very large number of small workplaces and institutions in industrial action. The same applies to sectors such as chain restaurants and the beverages industry.

As sector-wide collective bargaining coverage has declined over recent decades, most industrial disputes now take place at the company or group level. This was also the case in 2025: a total of 183 (around 70 per cent) of the industrial disputes recorded by the WSI took place at company level, while 78 (around 30 per cent) occurred at regional sectoral level Figure 3). Trade unions are also endeavouring, in so-called 'Häuserkämpfe' (company-by-company organising campaigns), to bring individual companies back into the collective bargaining system (Lübker/Schulten 2024).⁷ This is reflected in the trade unions' strike objectives (see Section 2.3, Figure 4).

In this context, organising techniques adapted from the Anglo-Saxon world are increasingly being used (see Dribbusch et al. 2026). A successful example from 2025 is the industrial action at Charité Facility Management (CFM) at Berlin's Charité Hospital: through a 48-day enforcement

Figure 3

Level of industrial action, individual company or sector, 2025
(absolute figures)



Source: WSI industrial action statistics

WSI

⁷ Detailed information on the German collective bargaining system, such as trends in collective bargaining coverage, can be found at: www.tarifbindung.de

strike, workers organised by ver.di succeeded in gradually bringing CFM back under the public sector's regional collective agreement (ver.di 2025a). A counter-example is Amazon, where the industrial dispute over collective bargaining coverage has now been on-going for 13 years (ver.di 2025b). A similar case within IG Metall's organising remit is Tesla, another US-based multinational that does not recognise trade unions as negotiating partners.

However, industrial action to secure company-level collective agreements – which is extremely resource-intensive for the trade unions – can neither halt nor compensate for the loss of sectoral collective bargaining coverage in the short term. Consequently, in the conclusion to their study on trade union organising activities, Dribbusch et al. (2026, p.3) state “that the limited resources available to trade unions and their structural inferiority vis-à-vis employers mean that a stabilisation of the collective bargaining system ‘from below’ without institutional support ‘from above’ cannot be expected.” Effective collective agreement compliance regulations for the award of public contracts or simplified extension rules for collective agreements could be measures that improve the chances of success for trade union industrial action (Jaehrling/Schulten 2026).

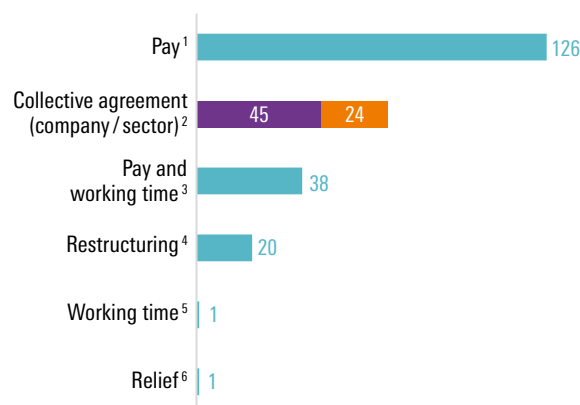
2.3 Strike objectives

For this 2025 industrial action report, the WSI has, for the first time, carried out a detailed quantitative analysis of the trade unions' industrial action objectives (Figure 4). Half of the industrial disputes analysed (126; 49 per cent) centred exclusively on pay-related provisions. This category includes, for example, pay rises affecting the pay scale, special payments or shift allowances.

It is noteworthy that more than a quarter of all industrial disputes (69; 27 per cent) were conducted with a view to concluding a collective agreement in companies or sectors where no applicable collective agreement was in place at the time of the dispute. The majority (45; around 17 per cent of all industrial disputes) in this category relate to trade unions' efforts to secure company-level collective agreements. In 24 cases – or just under one in ten industrial disputes – the aim was either for a company to join an existing sector-wide collective agreement or to conclude such an agreement for the first time.

While only one industrial dispute could be identified in which the conflict centred exclusively on working time issues (e.g. weekly working hours, holiday entitlement or rest periods), a further 38 industrial disputes concerned combinations of pay and working time arrangements (e.g. pay rises alongside a reduction in weekly working hours, or options to choose between higher pay or more leisure time). In 20 (eight per cent) of the industri-

Trade union objectives in industrial disputes in 2025*



Notes

Industrial disputes...

- 1 ... which relate exclusively to pay-related provisions.
- 2 ... whose primary objective is the (initial) conclusion of a company-level or sector-wide collective agreement, or the recognition of an existing sector-wide collective agreement.
- 3 ... which relate to both pay and working time provisions.
- 4 ... where the subject of the dispute is the consequence of restructuring within a company (e.g. a social collective agreement following a site closure or job cuts).
- 5 ... which relate exclusively to working time provisions.
- 6 ... where the subject of the dispute is collective agreements aimed at reducing workloads (e.g. higher staffing ratios).

* Six industrial disputes could not be categorised.

Source: WSI industrial action statistics

WSI

al disputes analysed for these statistics, trade unions attempted to secure a collective agreement provision during a restructuring process. Of these, 14 disputes alone involved IG Metall, reflecting the difficult situation in some industrial sectors. These often take the form of social collective agreements, in which the trade union and the employer reach agreements on job security, severance pay or transfer companies in the case of collective redundancies. Only one recorded case in 2025 was aimed at relief (i.e. reducing staff work-load): the Education and Science Union (GEW) went on strike in the federal state of Berlin for a 'collective agreement on health and safety', which was intended to stipulate smaller class sizes in schools in order to reduce the workload of staff there (GEW 2026; see Section 3).

2.4 Distribution of industrial disputes by trade union

Most industrial disputes are led by the trade unions affiliated to the DGB (Figure 5). However, smaller profession-based trade unions also frequently attract public attention, as their specific position enables them to exert considerable influence with a small workforce — these include the German Train Drivers' Union (GDL) and, in the aviation sector, the Cockpit Association (VC) and the Independent Flight Attendants' Organisation (UFO). The trade unions belonging to the Civil Servants' Federation (dbb beamtenbund und tarifunion) usually negotiate jointly with ver.di in the public sector and are represented in these negotiations by the umbrella organisation dbb. The exception is the GDL, which conducts its negotiations independently and autonomously. Other trade unions outside the DGB that are regularly involved in industrial action include the Marburger Bund, the German Journalists' Association (DJV) and the German Bank Workers' Association (DBV).

As in previous years, the United Services Union (ver.di) topped the industrial action statistics in 2025 with 107 industrial disputes identified by the WSI. This reflects the shift towards the service sector in industrial action over recent dec-

ades (Dribbusch 2023). Ver.di has a particularly broad scope of representation. The industrial disputes recorded in 2025 include 42 conflicts within the framework of sector-wide collective agreements, including negotiations in the public sector, which frequently led to work stoppages. However, most industrial disputes were conducted by ver.di within the framework of company-level collective agreements. In just over 70 per cent of the industrial disputes, work was suspended for more than one day. The majority of these consisted of two or more short warning strikes on different days. This also includes longer work stoppages lasting several days, although the number of such cases is small.

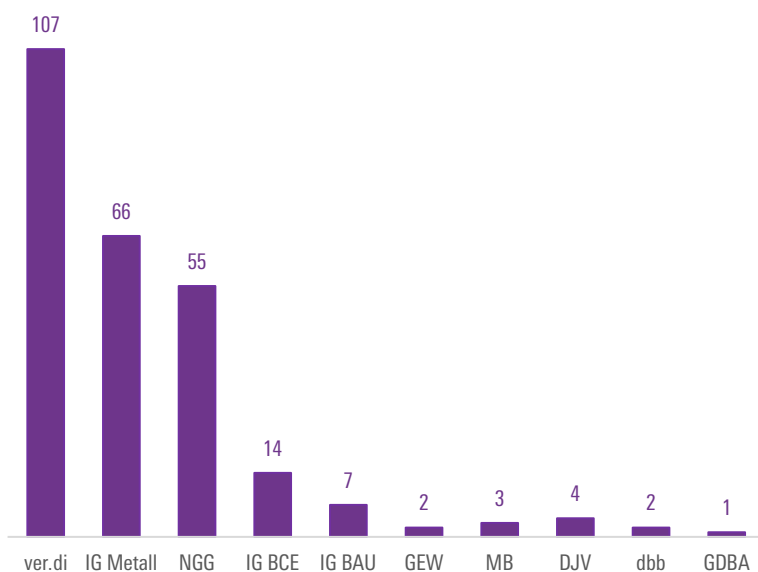
The WSI counted 66 industrial disputes organised by the industrial union IG Metall in 2025. Only one in six were sector-wide disputes, including the automotive trade and the textile industry. The largest company-level dispute in terms of the number of strike participants took place at the car manufacturer Ford. There were only eight instances of work stoppages lasting several days in IG Metall's industrial disputes; the vast majority were short warning strikes limited to a single day or a few hours.

As in previous years, the Food, Beverages and Catering Union (NGG) organised the most industrial disputes in 2025 relative to its membership (3.3 per cent of trade union members organised within the DGB in 2025), totalling 55 cases. This represented just under one in five industrial actions in 2025. As in previous years, there were a relatively large number of sector-wide disputes here — 19 in total — including those in chain restaurants, dairies, breweries and the bakery trade.

The remaining DGB trade unions accounted for a combined total of just 23 industrial disputes. The fact that the IG BCE leads here with 14, ahead of the IG BAU with seven disputes, shows that the IG BCE continues to pursue a more conflict-oriented course than in the past. The GEW carried out two independent industrial disputes and, like the GdP and the IG BAU, was involved in the industrial disputes in the public sector alongside ver.di. It is noteworthy that the EVG has now gone a second year in a row without staging any strikes at all. In total, the WSI recorded ten industrial disputes without the involvement of DGB trade unions; in 2025, these were led by the German Journalists' Association (DJV), which, however, conducts its industrial disputes on the ground in collaboration with the somewhat smaller German Union of Journalists (dju), which is part of ver.di. The medical doctors' union Marburger Bund (MB) conducted a total of three collective bargaining disputes accompanied by strikes in 2025. The member unions of the dbb beamtenbund und tarifunion (usually simply referred to as the Beamtenbund or dbb) were involved in the collective bargaining disputes in the public sector alongside ver.di;

Figure 5

WSI estimate: Industrial disputes by trade union in 2025*



* Industrial disputes involving multiple trade unions are attributed to the largest trade union involved

in addition, the WSI was able to attribute two independent industrial disputes to the dbb. The GdL, which belongs to the dbb, did not go on strike in 2025. The actors' and artists' union GDBA, together with other trade unions in the sector, organised a nationwide warning strike at German theatres in March 2025 as part of its dispute over better working hours.

2.5 Regional distribution

One in six industrial disputes in 2025 was supra-regional and affected several federal states (44 out of 258; three industrial disputes involving IG BAU could not be assigned to a specific region; Figure 6). The majority of the 33 industrial disputes in this category involved both western and eastern German federal states or were nationwide in scope. These included the disputes in the federal and municipal public services, the collective bargaining round in the printing industry, the IG Metall indus-

trial action in the textile services sector, as well as the large company-level dispute at Deutsche Post AG. Seven supra-regional industrial disputes were confined to western German federal states, while four took place exclusively in eastern German federal states.

A total of 214 industrial disputes in 2025 were confined to a single federal state, which shows that collective bargaining disputes in Germany are largely a regional matter. In first place, with 27 industrial disputes in 2025, is North Rhine-Westphalia, the most populous federal state, followed by Berlin with 26 industrial disputes; with a population of around 3.9 million in 2025, this made it the federal state with the most industrial disputes per inhabitant. Baden-Württemberg follows in third place with 21 industrial disputes. The eastern German state of Saxony is also noteworthy in 2025, where, with 20 industrial disputes among a population of around four million in 2025, collective bargaining disputes involving work stoppages occurred with above-average frequency.

Figure 6

WSI estimate: Regional distribution of industrial action in 2025



Source: WSI industrial action statistics

2.6 Women on strike

There is very little data available on the proportions of women and men among strike participants. The official statistics of the Federal Employment Agency, which are based on reports from employers, contain no information on this; it is not a question that is asked. Trade unions generally do not provide any figures on this either. In the case of warning strikes, where – as is often the case with IG Metall, for example – no strike pay is provided, no individual record of the strikers is kept, as this is not required. Nevertheless, given the composition of the workforces, it can be assumed that in industrial action in the metal and electronics industries, most strike participants are male workers. This applies equally to the construction sector, which falls within the remit of IG BAU, and to the chemical sector, which is covered by IG BCE.

The WSI has reliable data on the proportions of women and men among strike pay recipients only for workers organised by ver.di (Table 2). In 2025, the proportion of men receiving strike pay from ver.di stood at 57 per cent, significantly higher than that of women at 43 per cent. While women are generally over-represented in the public sector, this does not apply to the ver.di sectors also affected by industrial action in 2025, such as postal services, printing and paper, or local public transport.

The gender distribution among strike participants therefore primarily reflects the composition of the sectors affected by strikes. It is not possible to draw conclusions about general willingness to strike based on gender. Nevertheless, public perceptions of women on strike have changed considerably. Since the mid-2000s and the rise in strikes in essential public services, women have been perceived as strikers to a much greater extent than in previous decades and, in some cases, even shape the public image of industrial action (Artus/Pflüger 2015; Dribbusch 2020, 2023).

Table 2

Proportions of women and men among strike pay recipients in the United Services Union ver.di, 2006–2025
Figures in per cent*

	Women	Men
2006	42	58
2007	44	56
2008	43	57
2009	57	43
2010	37	63
2011	37	63
2012	38	62
2013	51	49
2014	39	61
2015	66	34
2016	41	59
2017	52	48
2018	42	58
2019	50	50
2020	40	60
2021	50	50
2022	57	43
2023	47	53
2024	67	33
2025	43	57

* People who do not identify with either gender are not currently recorded separately in the statistics.

2.7 Enforcement strikes as an exception

The WSI identified enforcement strikes in only seven cases, or just under two per cent, of industrial disputes in 2025. This continues the long-standing trend whereby indefinite strikes preceded by a ballot are the exception rather than the rule. The vast majority of strikes in Germany are limited-duration warning strikes (see Dribbusch 2023). Indefinite enforcement strikes generally take place in disputes over company-level collective agreements. In industrial action concerning regional collective agreements, however, they are extremely rare. It is

Table 3

Enforcement strikes in 2025

	Trade union	Company/sector	Duration (days)
1	IG Metall	Jungheinrich Norderstedt/Lüneburg	85
2	ver.di	Fresenius Health Services Germany – Operations Technology North	58
3	ver.di	Charité CFM Facility Management	48
4	ver.di	HELIOS Therapy East	43
5	IG Metall	TRIA Avnet	11
6	IG Metall	Wireco Germany GmbH	9
7	NGG	Birtat Döner Factory	1

often sufficient for trade unions to threaten an indefinite strike. It is not uncommon for agreements to be reached after a strike ballot has taken place, but before the indefinite strike action begins.

The seven enforcement strikes in 2025 were carried out by just three DGB-affiliated trade unions (Table 3). One case concerned a sector-wide collective agreement: Following a 48-day continuous strike, employees of Charité Facility Management successfully secured the gradual alignment of their working conditions with the public sector collective agreement (ver.di 2025a; see Section 3). The longest strike was carried out by workers of the Jungheinrich company in Lüneburg, organised by IG Metall: Faced with the closure of the site, IG Metall and management agreed on a social collective agreement after 85 days of strike (IG Metall 2025a). The NGG secured the first collective agreement in the kebab industry at the company Birtat through numerous warning strikes and an indefinite strike (NGG 2025a).

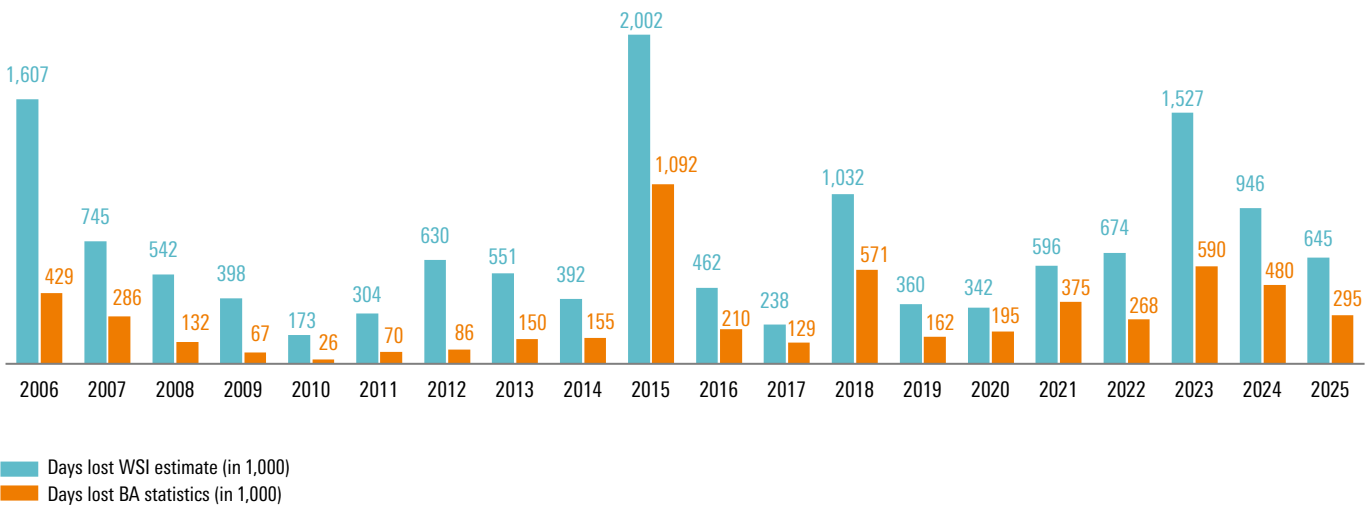
2.8 WSI estimate and official statistics

The official statistics of the Federal Republic of Germany are compiled by the Federal Employment Agency (BA) (BA 2026). The data from the WSI show higher figures than the official statistics in terms of both strike participation and days lost (Figure 7). The BA states that under-reporting is primarily attributable to incomplete reporting by employers⁸ (ibid., notes; Kalbitz 1972; Spode 1992; Dribbusch 2008). Furthermore, ‘minor strikes’ are not included in the statistics (see Footnote 3; BA 1982). Since 2008, these have been reported separately by the BA, meaning that a significant number of strike participants (‘involved workers’) are excluded from the statistics. In 2025, for example, 2,295 minor strikes (‘affected workplaces’) involving around 19,000 strikers and 16,500 days lost were excluded from the statistics.⁹

Figure 7

Comparison of WSI estimates and official strike statistics

Days lost due to industrial action 2006–2025 (in 1,000)



Sources: Federal Employment Agency, WSI industrial action statistics

⁸ The strike statistics published by the Federal Employment Agency are based on a statutory reporting obligation on employers, enforceable by fines (SGB II § 320). This obligation stems from the duty of neutrality incumbent on employment agencies, which are not permitted to place jobseekers in a workplace affected by a strike or lockout against their will and must therefore be kept informed of industrial action. The reporting obligation covers the start and end dates of strikes or lockouts, the number of ‘affected workers’ and the number of ‘lost working days’.

⁹ For further explanations on the comparison between official statistics and the WSI count, see Janssen et al. 2025, p. 30.

3 INDUSTRIAL DISPUTES IN 2025 – A BRIEF OVERVIEW

The following summary provides an overview of major industrial disputes involving various trade unions in 2025.

United Services Union (ver.di)

Spring 2025 was marked by industrial action involving tens of thousands of people during the joint collective bargaining round for the approximately 2.6 million workers in **the federal and local public sectors (TVöD)**. Ver.di and the other unions involved in the negotiations had demanded, amongst other things, an eight per cent pay rise and additional days off. After two rounds of negotiations without an offer from the employers' side, ver.di organised numerous warning strikes across all sectors, regions and company sizes. It was only following arbitration that a compromise was finally reached (including a 5.8 per cent increase in two stages by May 2026, as well as an additional day's holiday). Although this was accepted by a narrow majority of 52.2 per cent of ver.di members who took part in the vote, the 'realistic outcome' shows that, following the intense industrial action, a large proportion of the workforce had hoped for more (ver.di 2025c).

The negotiations in **local public transport (TV-N)** were modelled on those for the TVöD. In Baden-Württemberg, Bremen, Hesse, Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia and Rhineland-Palatinate, the terms of the TVöD are applied directly to local transport. On 21 February, there was a major, sector-wide strike day here, in which, according to ver.di, 20,000 workers took part in North Rhine-Westphalia alone (ver.di NRW 2025). In other federal states, negotiations for local transport workers took place independently of the industrial action under the TVöD: following intense industrial action at **Berlin's BVG**, ver.di secured a 16.5 per cent pay rise after several warning strikes, an announced ballot on an indefinite strike and arbitration (ver.di BB 2025a).

In the **printing industry**, ver.di negotiated a new framework collective agreement with the Federal Association of Printing and Media (bvdM) in the spring of 2025. An agreement was only reached after the employees had gone on strike twice – initially for 24 hours across all shifts and, in a second strike, for as long as 48 hours. Due to the difficult situation in the sector, the industrial action was defensive in nature; employers had, for example, demanded longer weekly working hours and lower shift, weekend and public holiday allowances. In the end, workers had to accept that annual bonus payments would be reduced and that the framework collective agreement would once again be of limited duration (ver.di 2025d).

The largest company-level collective bargaining dispute within ver.di's organisational remit took place in 2025 at **Deutsche Post AG**. Between January and early March, thousands of workers went on strike at various times; the delivery staff in major cities and rural areas were followed by workers on late and night shifts at the parcel centres. Ver.di reports that 27,000 workers from all company sections took part in the final warning strike ahead of the third and final round of negotiations. As a result, the parties agreed, amongst other things, on a pay rise totalling five per cent and an additional day's holiday (ver.di 2025e).

Some **company-by-company organising campaigns** between ver.di and the respective employers over collective agreement coverage proved particularly intense. These industrial disputes are a prime example of the considerable effort and resources expended by the trade unions in their attempts to persuade employers to conclude collective agreements (see [Section 2.2](#)).

Years ago, Berlin's Charité Hospital had already outsourced activities outside the fields of medicine and nursing to **Charité Facility Management GmbH (CFM)**, not least to cut wage costs by circumventing the applicable public services collective agreement (TVöD). In 2019, the staff had won a company-level collective agreement through industrial action, which, while improving working conditions, still fell short of the standards set by the TVöD. Following years of ongoing industrial action with the support of ver.di, and after negotiations had recently stalled, the situation came to a head: the staff voted in favour of an indefinite strike, which began in April 2025. The employers attempted to challenge this through legal action – with some success. At the end of May, the strike was suspended to allow for further negotiations. These ultimately led to an agreement. By 2030, the pay of the 3,500 workers will be gradually brought into line with the TVöD applicable at the Charité. The 48-day enforcement strike was successful, despite legal restrictions, particularly regarding the (excessive) staffing of emergency services (ver.di 2025a; ver.di BB 2025b; ZEIT.de 2025a).

The strike by the approximately 50 nursing staff at the **Helios Clinic in Berlin-Buch** was similarly intense. Ver.di highlighted that staff there were earning up to 1,500 euros less per month than staff performing comparable duties at other Helios sites. After 76 days of strike action, including 43 consecutive days of enforcement strike action, the carers succeeded in securing their demand for equal treatment in a company level collective agreement. Full alignment is due to take place in April 2027 (ver.di BB 2025c).

If employers refuse to negotiate pay and working conditions with workers under a collective agreement, industrial action can sometimes drag on for years. The most prominent example re-

mains the US corporation **Amazon**: despite regular strikes and international coordination of industrial action, ver.di has still not succeeded, even in 2025, in forcing the world's largest mail-order retailer to sign a collective agreement (ver.di 2025b). The situation is similar at the online retailer **Zalando**, where, even in 2025, warning strikes were held in support of a collective agreement recognising the retail sector's collective agreements (ver.di 2025f; cf. Janssen et al. 2025, p. 12).

Industrial Union Metal (IG Metall)

In the IG Metall's area of organisation, no collective bargaining took place in 2025 in the key metal and electronics industry, but the union conducted industrial action over other sectoral collective agreements.

In **the automotive trade**, the employers' association had failed to table an offer even in the second round of negotiations in spring 2025. IG Metall organised nationwide warning strikes and industrial action, in which, as IG Metall reports, around 25,000 workers took part until a successful agreement was reached (including a 6.6 per cent pay rise and the choice between days off and pay) (IG Metall 2025b).

In **the locksmith trade in North Rhine-Westphalia**, too, the industrial action in 2025 was a success from IG Metall's perspective: the union states that warning strikes in 30 companies, involving around 2,000 strike participants, secured a 4.1 per cent pay rise in two stages for the sector's 58,000 workers (IG Metall NRW 2025).

In the industrial action of the workers in **the textile and clothing industry**, it took four rounds of negotiations and warning strikes involving, according to IG Metall, 22,000 strikers before the employers' association and the trade union agreed, amongst other things, on a two per cent pay rise and a one-off payment of 275 euros (IG Metall 2025c).

In the **timber and plastics industry**, IG Metall negotiated at regional level across ten collective bargaining areas. The first agreement was reached in Baden-Württemberg; the outcomes in Bavaria, Lower Saxony and Bremen, as well as Rhineland-Palatinate, Saxony, Hesse, Westphalia-Lippe, Thuringia and Saxony-Anhalt, are modelled on this. IG Metall reports that 7,500 workers took part in temporary work stoppages as part of the coordinated industrial action across different regions. Ahead of the negotiation rounds, the union mobilised, in some cases, several hundred workers outside the negotiation venues, such as around 500 demonstrators in Laupheim, Baden-Württemberg. The outcomes generally provide for two pay rises of 2 per cent and 2.2 per cent, as well as additional one-off payments (IG Metall 2025d).

The sector-wide collective agreement for **textile services** (industrial laundries) is negotiated by

IG Metall at national level. The union's industrial action in the summer of 2025 built on experience gained from the sector's first nationwide warning strike, which had taken place during the previous round of collective bargaining in 2023. Collective bargaining representatives acted as mediators between the Federal Collective Bargaining Commission and workers in the workplaces; as a result, in 2025 the union and workers succeeded for the first time in organising two waves of warning strikes involving, according to IG Metall, 7,500 participants. As a result, following the fourth round of negotiations, this led to a pay rise of 2.1 per cent (or at least 60 euros) and a higher supplementary payment for partial retirement (IG Metall 2025e).

Restructuring processes in several companies in 2025 meant that IG Metall had to engage in industrial action and, in some cases, organise enforcement strikes to defend the interests of the workforce (see [Section 2.7](#)). In contrast to the enforcement strikes in the service sector (see above), these industrial actions were mostly defensive in nature; in the face of restructuring involving job cuts, the workforces, with the support of the trade union, sought to secure agreements that were as socially acceptable as possible. This reflects the diverse economic situation across the sectors, which has a decisive influence on industrial action.

At **Ford-Werke GmbH** in Cologne, IG Metall organised the first cross-shift, full-day strike following a ballot in the site's 100-year history in May 2025. The American car manufacturer had previously announced plans to cut 2,900 jobs by 2027. The agreement reached in July 2025 provides, amongst other things, for a social collective agreement and a ban on redundancies for operational reasons until 2032 for the remaining workers (IG Metall 2025f).

The forklift manufacturer **Jungheinrich** is ceasing production in Lüneburg in March 2027. This affects 160 workers. In an 85-day enforcement strike, the workers secured a social collective agreement (DGB 2026b; IG Metall 2026).

The wire rope manufacturer **Wireco** in Kirkel-Limbach also decided, as part of a restructuring programme, to cut almost half of its 300 jobs. IG Metall organised an enforcement strike which lasted for nine days. The agreement between management and the union stipulates that job cuts will be limited to 100 posts and that a transfer company (a temporary company funded by the Federal Employment Agency (BA), in which affected individuals receive further training and are placed in new jobs) will be set up. In addition, an agreement on a guarantee to keep the site operating for at least 30-month was reached, and IG Metall members were granted protection against redundancies on operational grounds (SR 2025).

Workers and IG Metall were engaged in industrial action at the electronics manufacturer **Tria Avnet** in Eschbach, Baden-Württemberg, which

continued in 2026. Following the split of the company, large sections of the workforce were no longer covered by the collective agreement. The IG Metall attempted, amongst other things, to regain collective bargaining coverage through an enforcement strike at Tria Technologies and Avnet Integrated Solutions in July 2025. IG Metall complaint that the company responded by offering a strike-breaking bonus and, for a time, barred IG Metall representatives from entering the premises (IG Metall 2025g; IG Metall 2025h).

Food, Beverages and Catering Union (NGG)

In 2025, the NGG waged numerous industrial disputes, both over sector-wide and company-level collective agreements. The industrial action against the **Federal Association of Chain Restaurants (BdS)** – which represents McDonald's, Burger King, Starbucks, Pizza Hut, Autogrill and Nordsee – had been dragging on since July 2024 and only ended in March 2025 following arbitration. The NGG organised several warning strikes in 2024 and 2025, including in connection with an 'SOS System Catering' day of action in Hamburg in January. An agreement was only reached through arbitration in March 2025. From the NGG's perspective, the industrial action was successful: the wages of the approximately 120,000 workers will rise by between 9.8 and 18.73 per cent, depending on their pay group; there is also a provision regarding the minimum difference of collectively agreed minimum pay to the statutory minimum wage (NGG 2025a).

The NGG also waged industrial action, in some cases intense, at regional level within the **brewing sector**. One example is the Saxony-Thuringia collective bargaining area: an agreement in the collective bargaining dispute was only reached following a continuous two-week strike (totalling 1,300 strike hours, as figures of the NGG suggest) at the breweries. At Radeberger, for example, wages will rise gradually by a total of 6.3 per cent by the end of 2026, whilst the weekly working hours will be reduced from 38.5 to 38 hours (NGG 2025b).

In August 2025, workers at the kebab meat producer **Meat World SE (Birtat)** in Murr near Ludwigsburg conducted a successful strike at company level that attracted significant media attention. Through warning strikes and an enforcement strike, the NGG succeeded in persuading the company to sign the sector's first collective agreement. The collective agreement fixes the starting wage at 2,600 euros, and wages will be increased by up to 17 per cent in two stages by the end of 2026 (NGG 2025d).

From the summer onwards, the NGG organised numerous warning strikes involving prolonged work stoppages at various **Lieferando** sites. This began with a three-day warning strike by Liefer-

ando riders in Hamburg. The NGG is calling for a collective agreement for the workers, higher wages and an end to outsourcing to so-called shadow fleets – which undermine social standards. The nationwide industrial action continued into 2026 (NGG 2025c).

Industrial Union Mining-Chemicals-Energy (IG BCE)

In 2025, the IG BCE organised several industrial actions accompanied by warning strikes, most of which concerned company-level collective agreements. In the **East German energy sector** – the only sector-wide industrial action at regional level – the IG BCE (in some cases together with ver.di) organised several warning strikes, including at the nuclear waste disposal facility in Lubmin and both the Magdeburg and Potsdam municipal utilities. As a result, wages, amongst other things, were increased in two stages by a total of seven per cent (IG BCE 2025a).

In the company level collective bargaining dispute at the energy producer **LEAG** in Brandenburg and Saxony, the IG BCE led a three-hour warning strike in March 2025 involving around 230 strikers at four sites. This led to a successful outcome in the third round of negotiations on 19 March. Among other things, pay was increased in two stages by a total of 7.5 per cent; there was a one-off payment of 1,000 euros and a choice of two days' leave or 500 euros per year (IG BCE 2025b).

Industrial Union of Construction, Agriculture and the Environment (IG BAU)

Following the major wave of strikes in the construction sector in 2024, IG BAU's strike year in 2025 was characterised by a series of smaller industrial disputes. Of particular note is the ongoing industrial dispute over the conclusion of the first-ever company level collective agreement at **Deutsche Saatveredelung (DSV)**. The first warning strike in the company's history was carried out by workers organised with IG BAU in April 2025, with 70 participants across five sites. Further warning strikes followed in the summer; a collective agreement had not yet been signed (at the time of going to press) (IG BAU 2025).

Education and Science Union (GEW)

The only industrial action identified by the WSI that focused exclusively on reducing the workload of workers through organisational measures was the GEW's industrial action over the so-called **'TV Gesundheitsschutz'** in Berlin. The GEW's key demand was for a collective agreement stipulat-



ing the ratio of students to teachers. The industrial action began as early as 2021. In total, staff went on strike twenty-one times since the start of the industrial action. Most recently, in May 2025, the GEW called on non-civil-servant staff (staff with the special civil servant status are not allowed to strike) at schools and childcare centres to take part in a three-day warning strike. From the GEW's perspective, the protracted industrial action ultimately led to success. Following structured talks between GEW BERLIN and the Berlin Senate Department for Education, Youth and Family Affairs (SenBJF), a binding agreement was signed in May 2025. The GEW reports the creation of 493 additional full-time posts with a budget of 40 million euros based on the agreement (GEW Berlin 2026).

German Journalists' Association (DJV) and German Journalists' Union (dju in ver.di)

The industrial action taken by the DJV and dju (organised within the ver.di trade union) over the salaries of editors at **daily newspapers** was intense and protracted: it was only successfully resolved following strikes at 36 publishing houses and ten rounds of negotiations. A total increase of 10.5 per cent was achieved in several stages up to 2027; the new collective agreement also applies, at least in part, to the fees of freelance staff with employee-like status (BDVZ 2025; ZEIT.de 2025b).

Cooperative of German Theatre Workers (GDBA)

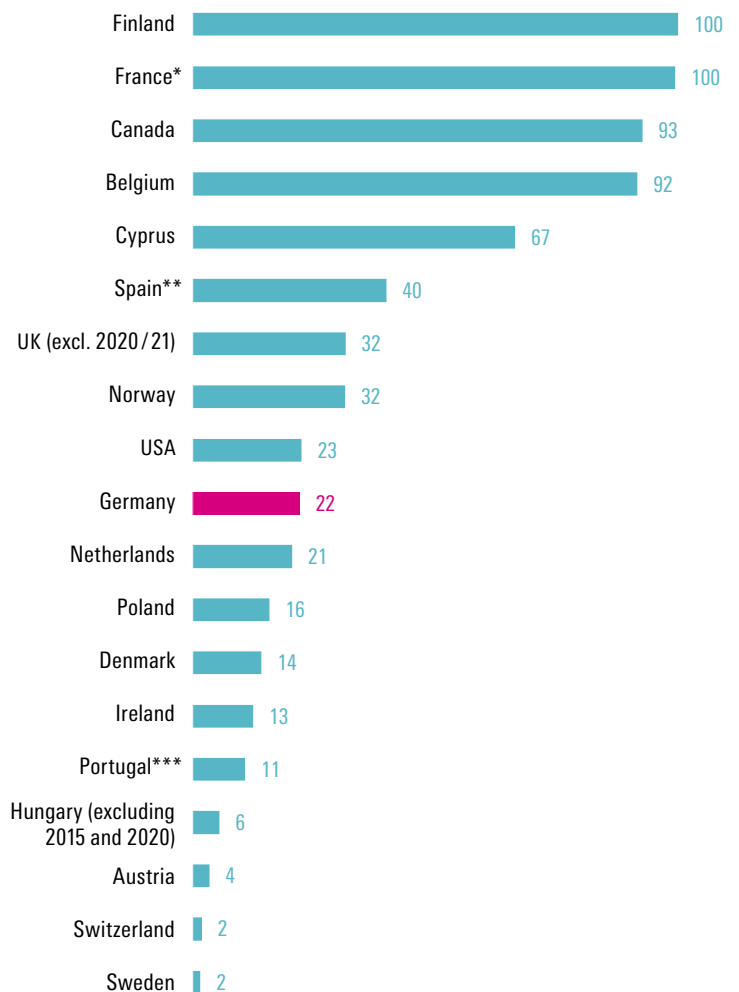
In March 2025, the GDBA, the Federal Association of Actors (BFFS) and other artists' unions organised the first nationwide warning strike by **theatre** staff, in which, according to the unions, hundreds of employees at 100 venues took part. A second wave of strikes followed in June 2026, with walk-outs at 80 venues. The artists' unions called above all for better working conditions and reduced workloads within the framework of the collective agreement for stage workers. The industrial action led to new agreements in various areas; the unions were able to achieve successes, for example, in reducing working hours (GDBA 2025a; GDBA 2025b; GDBA 2025c).

4 STRIKES IN A EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

By international standards, Germany continues to rank in the middle of the field in terms of the number of days lost due to industrial action per 1,000 workers (Figure 8). The WSI estimates that in the ten years between 2015 and 2024 – the most recent year for which sufficient international comparative data is available – industrial action resulted in a calculated loss of 22 working days per year per 1,000 workers.

Figure 8

Working days lost due to industrial action: an international comparison Figures per 1,000 workers, annual average 2015–2024



- * France: private sector only
- ** Spain excluding general strikes
- *** Portugal: excluding public administration

Sources: Days lost: WSI, national statistics; employment: Eurostat, OECD (USA, Canada); own calculations.

The international comparison published annually by the WSI includes not only European countries but also the two non-European OECD countries, Canada and the USA.

As in the previous year, the leading group is made up of Finland, France, Canada and Belgium, which have merely swapped places on the podium but, in the current ten-year comparison, remain well ahead of the countries below them with between 100 and 92 days lost, as in the previous year. In fourth place is Cyprus, which owes its position to the years 2019 and 2023 which were marked by major industrial action.

Spain, whose strike statistics do not consider the general strikes permitted in the country, marks the start of the mid-table, which also includes the UK, Norway and the US, as well as Germany and the Netherlands. Poland, Denmark, Ireland and Portugal make up the lower mid-table. At the bottom of the table, as in previous years, are Hungary, Austria, Switzerland and Sweden. Strikes in Slovakia do not even amount to one day's loss of working time on average per year and were therefore omitted from this overview.

In the wake of the purchasing power crisis of the past few years, trade unions in all European countries have sought to offset losses due to inflation through appropriate collective agreements. As a result, the volume of strikes has increased significantly on average across Europe, particularly in 2023 and 2024

The increase in strike activity is therefore largely attributable to more intense distribution conflicts against the backdrop of the inflation crisis. In a long-term comparison, the trend in strikes in Europe continues to decline, even though individual years stand out with a higher volume of strikes. It is often countries with particularly high levels of strike activity that push up the European average (see the 'Strike Map Europe' by the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI 2026); Janssen et al. 2025; Janssen/Lübker 2025; Eurofound 2024).

It must be noted that international comparisons in the field of industrial action statistics are of limited explanatory power. The relative volume of industrial action varies widely. There are significant differences in the respective methods of data collection and the scope of the statistics (cf. Janssen et al. 2025, p. 29).

5 OUTLOOK FOR 2026

Just as the year 2025 had ended with industrial action in the public services sector, so too did 2026 begin with warning strikes by tens of thousands of public-sector workers covered by the Collective Bargaining Association of German States (TdL, excluding Hesse; ver.di 2026a). ver.di had also already organised several work stoppages in the retail sector's collective bargaining dispute (ver.di 2026b).

The WSI Collective Agreement Archive calculated that collective agreements covering around 10 million workers are due to be renegotiated this year. This is significantly more than in 2025, when the figure stood at around 6.3 million. This includes sectors with very large workforces, such as the metal and electronics industries and the retail sector (WSI Collective Agreement Archive 2025). It cannot therefore be ruled out that the number of strike participants and days lost will be higher again in 2026. Whether major industrial disputes will arise in the respective sectors – and in particular in the metal and electronics industries – and how intensely workers will engage in strike action will also depend on international political and economic developments, which are currently almost impossible to predict. The war that began in February between Iran, Israel and the US, the closure of the Strait of Hormuz and the resulting sharp rise in world market prices for fossil fuels are driving up consumer prices (Deutsche Bundesbank 2026). At the same time, the catch-up trend in collectively agreed wages is stalling (Janssen/Lübker, forthcoming). If trade unions come under pressure to seek higher wage settlements to compensate for inflation-induced losses in purchasing power, this could – as was the case in 2023 and 2024 – also have an impact on the development in industrial action.

In the manufacturing sector, the transformation pressure and the international economic climate will continue to play a decisive role in industrial action. If companies relocate or close sites and cut further jobs, defensive industrial action – including indefinite enforcement strikes – is to be expected. However, scenarios such as those recently seen in the chemical sector are also possible: against the backdrop of the difficult situation in the chemical industry, the IG BCE and the employers' association reached a compromise in March 2026 without the trade union calling for warning strikes (IG BCE 2026).

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