

Number of working days lost to strikes reaches highest for more than a decade

The number of working days lost to strike action hit the highest in more than a decade in October, as official figures also showed a widening gulf between pay growth for private and public sector workers.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) said that 417,000 working days were lost to labour disputes in October – the highest monthly level since November 2011.

The toll is set to surge as industrial action ramps up, with Tuesday marking the start of a month-long wave of rail disruption, with nurses also set to strike.

This comes on top of planned strikes being held this month by other emergency staff, such as ambulance crews and paramedics, as well as [Royal Mail](#) postal workers and driving examiners.

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The [ONS](#) data showed mounting wage disparity in the UK for the estimated 5.8 million public sector workers, with regular

private sector pay surging by 6.9% in the three months to October but increasing just 2.7% for those in the public sector.

The ONS said: "Outside of the height of the pandemic period, this is the largest growth rate seen for the private sector and is among the largest differences between the private sector and public sector growth rates we have seen."

With inflation running at 11.1% in October, wage growth in the public sector is falling desperately behind rising prices.

Frances O'Grady, general secretary of the [Trades Union Congress](#) (TUC), called for urgent action to help public sector workers as it said workers were losing £76 a month on average from pay failing to keep pace with inflation.

Ministers must act now to put money in people's pockets – starting with boosting the minimum wage and giving our public sector workers a pay rise to match the cost of living

She said: "2022 has been the worst year for real wage growth in nearly half a century.

"We are now on the brink of a damaging recession with the threat of one million lost jobs.

"Ministers must act now to put money in people's pockets – starting with boosting the minimum wage and giving our public sector workers a pay rise to match the cost of living.

"And the [Prime Minister](#) should stop attacking working people trying to defend their pay, and sit down to negotiate fair pay rises with unions."

Across both the public and private sector, the ONS said wages fell by 3.9% after Consumer Prices Index inflation is taken into account.

It comes ahead of official figures on Wednesday that are expected to show inflation remaining at eye-watering levels in November, but easing back to 10.9% from 11.1% in October.