

Modernizing the Federal Public Sector Labour Relations Act

A guide to deepen understanding,
spark discussion and support action
through the FPSLRA video series



Public Service Alliance of Canada
Alliance de la Fonction publique du Canada

How to use this guide

This guide is designed to support learning, reflection, discussion, and action around PSAC's *Federal Public Sector Labour Relations Act (FPSLRA)* video series.

Members may watch the videos on their own and use the guide to connect what they heard to their own workplace experience. Or, a local president or shop steward may use it to lead a discussion at a local meeting, lunch-and-learn, or AGM. You can work through one video at a time or watch the full series.

No matter how it is used, the purpose is to help members understand how the FPSLRA affects bargaining, grievances, and worker rights; to connect those issues to their daily experiences; and to build support for changing the legislation.

Each section of this guide is designed to move from understanding to discussion to action. It also includes practical ways to get involved, including sharing the campaign and contacting your Member of Parliament.



READY TO TAKE ACTION?



Click the image or scan the QR code to send an email to your MP and call for action to modernize the FPSLRA.

Video 1: What is the FPSLRA, and why does it matter?



This video introduces the FPSLRA as the legislation that shapes labour relations in the federal public service. It shows that many frustrations workers experience are not isolated problems. They are connected to a system that affects who is covered, what can be bargained, how disputes are handled, and how long it takes to resolve them.

Key takeaways

- The FPSLRA shapes bargaining, grievances, and access to workplace rights.
- Some workers are left with fewer protections because of how the FPSLRA defines who is covered.
- The legislation limits what can be negotiated and slows down how issues are resolved.
- Understanding the legislation helps explain why so many problems are connected.

Questions for reflection and discussion

- What part of the video felt most familiar to you, and why?
- Why does it matter to know that these problems are shaped by legislation?
- What is one workplace issue you now see differently after watching the video?
- Have you experienced a situation where the FPSLRA made it harder to move an issue forward?

Suggested actions

- **Share the video** with another member and ask what stood out to them.
- **Gather examples** of how delays, exclusions, or missing protections affect workers in your workplace and identify common patterns.
- **Choose one next step**, such as watching the next video, raising the issue at a local meeting, or sending an email to your MP.

A closer look at the legislation

The *Federal Public Sector Labour Relations Act* (FPSLRA) is the legislation that governs labour relations in the federal public service. It sets the rules for bargaining, dispute resolution, grievances, and employee rights.

Unfortunately, the FPSLRA no longer reflects the realities of today's workforce. It excludes some workers from union representation without good reason, creates barriers to fair bargaining and timely grievance resolution, and makes it harder to hold employers accountable for paying workers properly and on time. It also permits the use of replacement workers during labour disputes, which weakens workers' bargaining power and prolongs strikes.

Three ways the FPSLRA affects workers

1. It shapes how bargaining works

The FPSLRA sets out the rules for how workers negotiate with the employer. Those rules affect how long bargaining takes and how disputes move forward.

2. It limits what can be negotiated

Some important issues like staffing, pensions and systemic discrimination are excluded from bargaining altogether.

3. It leaves gaps in worker protections

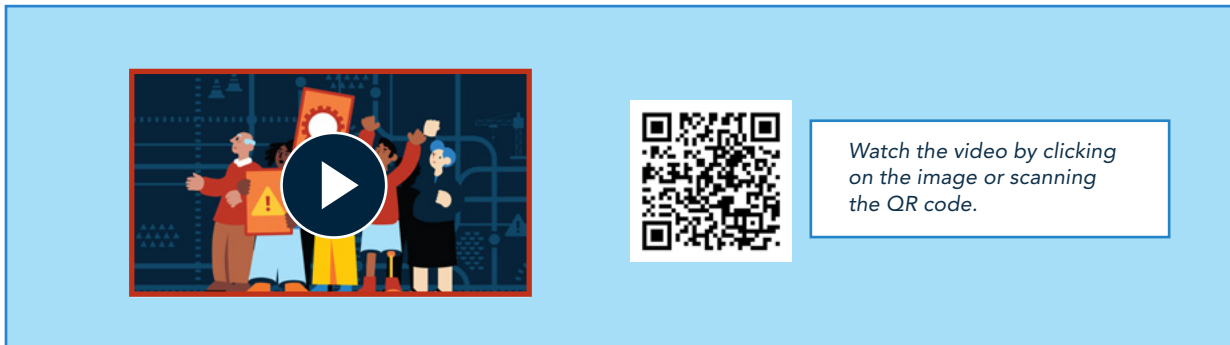
The FPSLRA falls short on issues like grievance delays, replacement workers, access to bargaining rights for some workers, and accountability for accurate and timely pay.

Why this matters to members

When the legislation limits bargaining and leaves gaps in workplace protections, members wait longer for fairness, improvements, and accountability. That is why PSAC is calling to modernize the FPSLRA.



Video 2: Why do federal workers wait years for a new deal?



This video focuses on why bargaining in the federal public service takes so long. Bargaining under the FPSLRA commonly takes two to four years, while many provincial public sector bargaining rounds conclude within a year.

Key takeaways

- Federal bargaining often takes far longer than it should.
- Some important issues cannot be meaningfully addressed at the table.
- The Public Interest Commission process adds delay without reliably helping the parties settle disputes.
- Replacement workers make disputes harder to resolve and can prolong strikes.

Questions for reflection and discussion

- What feels more frustrating: not being able to bargain key issues, or having bargaining drag on for years?
- How do long bargaining rounds affect morale, trust, and engagement?
- What issues do you think members most want to see dealt with in bargaining?
- What would a bargaining process that was designed to reach a resolution quickly and efficiently look like?

Suggested actions

- **Ask members how they feel** about bargaining delays, and how delays affect morale, trust, and engagement.
- **Talk with co-workers** about which issues feel unfairly kept off the table.
- **Identify one action**, such as raising the issue in a local meeting, sharing the video on social media, or contacting your MP about modernizing the legislation.

What is the PIC process?

A Public Interest Commission (PIC) is part of the dispute resolution process under the FPSLRA when bargaining reaches an impasse, and the union is on the conciliation/strike route. A PIC holds hearings and issues a report with non-binding recommendations for settlement.

The PIC process is one of the main reasons bargaining in the federal public service takes so long. It adds delay, rarely resolves the core issues, and can slow meaningful bargaining while the parties wait.

Three things to know about the PIC process

1. It introduces significant delays

Appointing members, holding hearings, and issuing a report can add many months to bargaining. In recent rounds, it took a year on average from PSAC's first conciliation request to receive PIC recommendations.

2. Its recommendations are non-binding

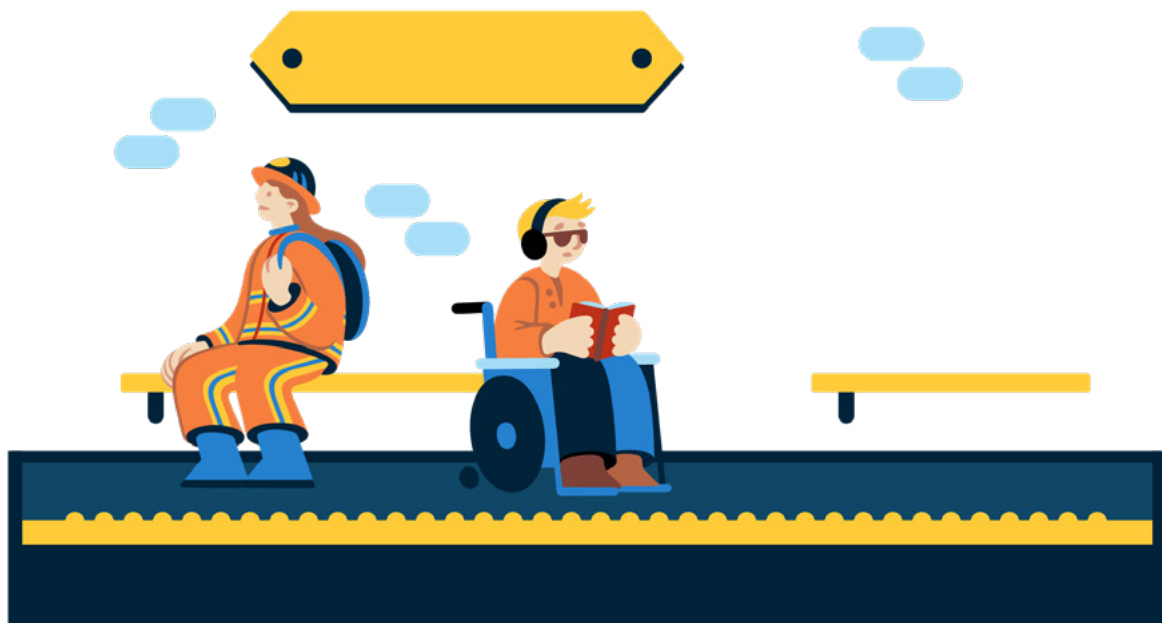
A PIC can make recommendations, but neither side has to accept them.

3. It can stall real bargaining

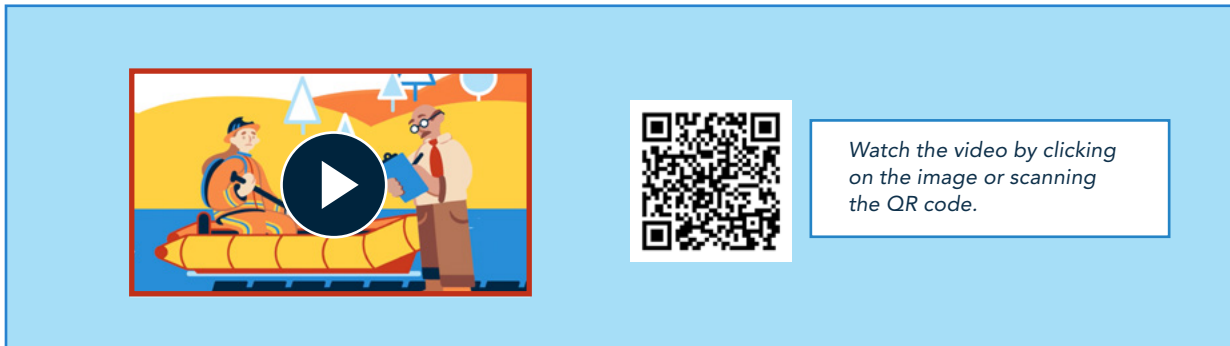
While the parties are waiting for the report, movement at the table often slows or stops.

Why this matters to members

A process that adds delay without resolving the core issues means workers wait longer for a fair contract. That is why PSAC is calling for the PIC process to be removed.



Video 3: Why do federal workplace grievances take years to resolve?



This video focuses on the grievance process and the harm caused by delay. In the federal public service, grievances are one of the main ways workers enforce their rights under the collective agreement and challenge discipline or other violations in the workplace. But when the process takes years to resolve, it can deepen conflict, prolong injustice, and leave workers carrying the consequences while they wait.

Key takeaways

- The current system does not provide timely access to justice.
- Delay can worsen the harm caused by discipline, discrimination, denied leave, harassment, and other workplace issues.
- Too few decision-makers are handling too many cases.
- Reform should include more capacity, stronger timelines, and access to interim relief.

Questions for reflection and discussion

- What happens to a worker when a grievance takes years instead of months?
- What kinds of workplace problems become harder to repair the longer a grievance remains unresolved?
- Why is it important that grievances move through each step of the process within clear timelines?
- What would a fairer and more effective grievance process look like?

Suggested actions

- **Start a conversation** about what grievance delays look like in real life and how they affect workers beyond the original complaint.
- **Talk about workplace issues** that may lead to grievances, and why early investigation and union support matter.
- **Choose one follow-up action**, such as raising the issue within your local or discussing what legislative change is needed.

How does the grievance process work?

A grievance is a formal process used to defend workers' rights when there has been a violation of the collective agreement or when a worker has been disciplined or terminated. For PSAC members, the grievance process is one of the main ways to enforce rights at work.

A grievance often begins when a member raises a workplace problem with a steward or union representative. The union investigates the facts, reviews the collective agreement, speaks with the member and any witnesses, and determines whether the issue is grievable. In some cases, the problem may be resolved before a formal grievance is filed.

If a grievance is filed, it usually moves through one or more internal levels. Only after those required steps are completed can an eligible grievance move forward to adjudication. If the case goes to adjudication, it is heard by an impartial third party, who can make a binding decision and order remedies where appropriate.

Three things to know about the grievance process

1. Union support is central to the process

PSAC helps members determine whether a matter is grievable, investigate what happened, identify the rights that may have been violated, prepare the grievance, and move it through the process. Members are not expected to navigate grievances on their own.

2. A grievance follows a step-by-step process

The grievance process usually includes an investigation, filing the grievance within the required time limit, internal hearings or responses at one or more levels, and possible referral to adjudication if the matter is not resolved.

3. The goal is to obtain a remedy

A grievance is meant to correct a violation and make the worker whole as much as possible. Depending on the case, remedies may include reinstatement, back pay, compensation, or other corrective action. But when the process takes too long, even a successful outcome may come too late to fully repair the harm.

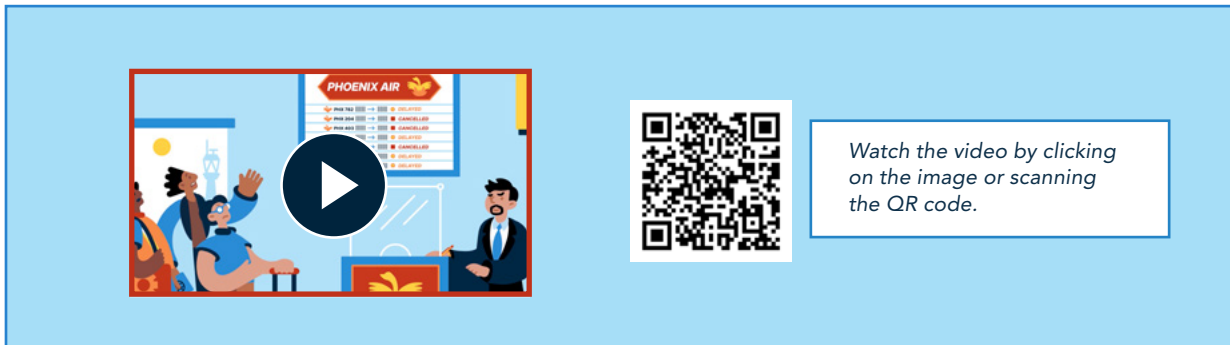
Why this matters to members

A grievance process is supposed to give workers a real way to enforce their rights. That means the process must be accessible, fair, and timely.

When grievances move too slowly, workers can be left waiting months or years for answers while the effects of discipline, discrimination, denied leave, harassment, or other violations continue. Delay can also discourage workers from coming forward and weaken confidence in workplace justice.

That is why PSAC is calling for reforms to make the grievance system more effective and better able to deliver meaningful remedies when workers' rights are violated.

Video 4: Who gets left out under federal public sector labour law?



This video focuses on what the FPSLRA leaves out. It shows how the legislation creates a two-tier system in which some workers doing similar work have fewer rights, less security, and lower pay. It also highlights the lack of accountability for paying workers properly and on time.

Key takeaways

- Casual and short-term workers are excluded from unionization and the important protections that accompany it.
- The legislation has serious gaps when it comes to bargaining rights and recourse.
- Workers can be left without protection when the employer fails to pay them properly and on time.
- Reform should expand access to protections and create real accountability on pay.

Questions for reflection and discussion

- What does a two-tier workforce do to solidarity in a workplace?
- How are casual or short-term workers affected differently by the current system?
- How do pay problems affect workers beyond the workplace?
- What would a fairer system look like for workers who are currently excluded?

Suggested actions

- **Talk with casual or short-term co-workers** about how they experience the workplace differently.
- **Ask members how pay problems have affected them** and what accountability should look like.
- **Identify one next step** to support broader access to rights and stronger pay protections, such as emailing your MP.

What rights do casual and short-term workers have?

In the federal public service, short-term and casual workers do not all have the same rights. That creates a two-tier system in which workers doing the same work can have less security and fewer rights than their indeterminate colleagues.

Three things to know about short-term worker rights

1. Term employees may have more rights than casual workers

If a term is for three months or more, or if a series of consecutive terms totals three months or more, the term employee is represented by the union and has access to certain benefits and protections. However, their rights remain limited by legislation.

2. Non-renewal is not treated like a layoff or dismissal

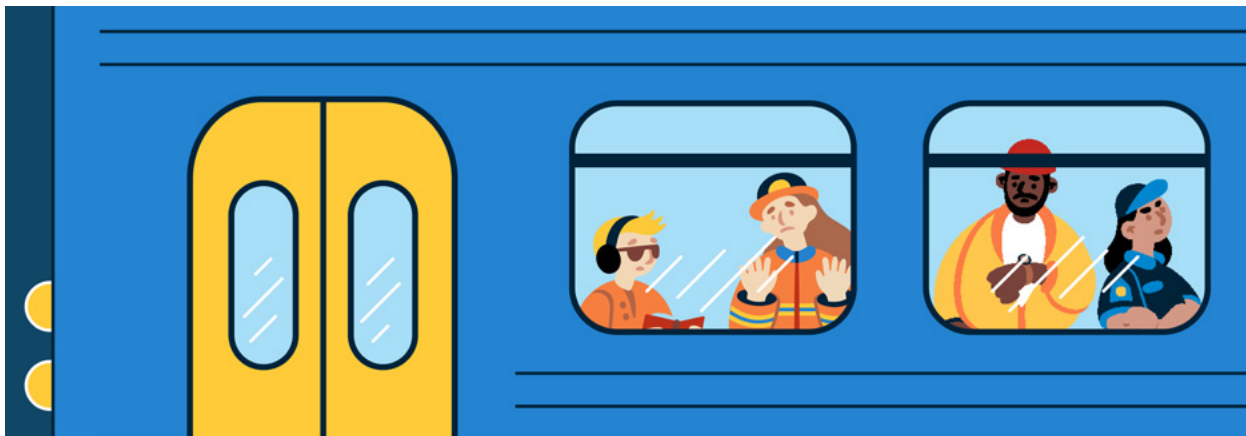
When a term longer than three months ends, the worker ceases to be an employee in the public service. Term employees are only entitled to 30 days' written notice if their term is not renewed or is ended early.

3. Formal recourse is limited

The Federal Public Sector Labour Relations and Employment Board does not have jurisdiction over grievances based on the expiry or non-renewal of a term contract. Where there is evidence of discrimination, the member should speak with their union representative about whether a grievance or human rights complaint may be possible.

Why this matters to members

Casual and short-term workers are often the first to be affected when budgets are cut. If workers doing similar work are left with fewer rights, weaker recourse, and less security, the system is not fair.



Video 5: How can workers help make federal bargaining fairer?



This video shows that the FPSLRA can be changed, but only if workers build pressure together. It also emphasizes the importance of member education, engagement, and political action.

Key takeaways

- Change is possible, but it will take collective action.
- Workers have won important rights before and can do it again.
- Elected officials need to hear directly from the people affected.
- Small actions matter when they help build awareness and participation.

Questions for reflection and discussion

- What gets in the way of members taking action on an issue like this?
- Which actions feel most realistic for you?
- What would help encourage more members to get involved?
- What is one step you are willing to take after watching this video?

Suggested actions

- **Choose one action you are willing to take** after watching the video. Share a social media post, talk to your co-workers, attend a union event, or have a conversation with your MP.
- **Share the video series** with co-workers to grow awareness and bring more people into the conversation.
- **Plan one next step**, such as planning a lunch-and-learn, having a workplace discussion, or planning a screening of one of the FPSLRA videos at a union meeting. Use that opportunity to identify more members who want to get involved.

Why can lobbying your elected official make a difference?

Lobbying is one of the ways PSAC pushes for legislative and policy change. That can include meeting with politicians, appearing before committees, and submitting briefs and recommendations during government consultations.

For members, lobbying is a way to turn workplace concerns into political action. The point is not only to raise awareness, but to persuade elected officials to act.

Three reasons lobbying matters

1. Elected officials can help move issues forward

MPs can raise concerns with government, speak publicly, ask questions, and help build pressure for change.

2. Personal stories can be powerful

Members do not need to know every detail about an issue. What matters most is being able to explain how it affects workers and communities in a clear, human way.

3. Lobbying helps build pressure

Meetings, letters, calls, and follow-ups all show that people care and are paying attention.

Why this matters to members

When members lobby together, workers' concerns become harder to ignore. It strengthens PSAC's voice and reminds elected officials that their decisions affect real people in their communities.



What comes next is up to us

Many of the frustrations federal public service workers face are connected to a labour relations system that is outdated, restrictive, and in need of change.

That is why modernizing the FPSLRA matters so much for:

- workers who wait years for a new collective agreement.
- members whose grievances take too long to resolve.
- casual and short-term workers who are left with fewer protections.
- everyone who believes workers should be paid properly, treated fairly, and have real access to justice at work.

Meaningful change will take members learning about the issue, talking with their co-workers, sharing their experiences, and taking action together.

EMAIL YOUR MP

One of the most important things you can do is contact your Member of Parliament and urge them to support changes to modernize the FPSLRA.

Click the image or scan the QR code to send an email to your MP.





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