

Why join a union?

What is a union?

A union is like a team or club that you can join. Its main purpose is to get workers organised so they can look after and promote the interests of the union members. Unions are communities of workers, working together in the interest of the individual, the collective and the broader community. Their purpose is to secure jobs, improve terms and conditions of employment, and achieve a better quality of life for workers.

What unions have won

Through collective bargaining and by lobbying governments with other members of the community, unions have won minimum standards of pay, hours of work, overtime, holiday pay as well as health and safety regulations and human rights.

This has resulted in minimum standards legislation in many areas. Unions have also been involved in working towards human rights objectives and legislation. The benefits most workers receive today are largely the result of union gains in improvements to their members' wages, benefits and working conditions over the last 100 years.

Union values

Unions share a common set of principles which include collective action, worker engagement and participation, social justice, fairness, equity and workers' safety and wellbeing, and solidarity.

Organising unions

NZNO is an organising union. This means we work together to improve the lives of workers. We work together for a fair and just society by organising for strength, unity and power at work, in our industries, our communities and society as a whole. Through unions, workers have a voice at work and influence what happens in their society. When people come together with a common goal, they are far more powerful than when they try to reach goals as individuals.

Collective bargaining

Collective bargaining evens up the power imbalance between employers and individual workers.

Joining together to bargain as a group (collective bargaining) gives working people more influence and more power when negotiating with employers to determine their terms of employment, including pay, benefits, hours, leave, health and safety, redundancy entitlements, ways to balance work and family and more. Bargaining as a group helps to offset the power imbalance inherent when an individual negotiates an employment agreement with their employer.

Part of what gives union members more bargaining power when negotiating collective agreements is that they have the right to go on strike.

There are many situations where workers benefit from their collective power outside of bargaining for their employment agreements. Workers come together to improve health and safety, stop employers making unreasonable demands, prevent discrimination, respond to workplace restructuring and much more.

Strikes

A strike happens when a group of workers refuse to do their normal work for their employer. This can mean anything from refusing to work any extra hours (an overtime ban) through to a complete refusal to work. A strike is used to pressure an employer to shift their position in negotiations.

According to the Employment Relations Act 2000 (the Act), workers can legally strike when their union is negotiating a collective agreement, or when there is a serious health and safety issue. For the strike to be lawful it must not breach section 86 of the Act.

NZNO treats striking very seriously, and sees it as a last resort action after all else has failed. The decision to strike is made by the workers covered by the collective agreement, usually by secret ballot (this enables workers to make a free choice). As an NZNO member you are likely to find yourself working in what is defined by the Act as an ['essential industry'](#). If you work in an essential service and the strike is about a collective agreement, NZNO is required to notify your employer that you will be going on strike.

Advocacy

NZNO trains elected delegates (workplace representatives) to represent members in meetings with the employer. The meeting could affect an individual e.g. about a disciplinary matter, or a group of workers e.g. restructuring. If there is no delegate in your ward or area you may be represented by an NZNO employee. An organiser would advise about an employment issue or a professional nursing adviser if it is a clinical nursing issue. It is important to have a representative at meetings which affect your employment to ensure consultation requirements are followed and you are fairly treated. If the outcome is unfair NZNO may provide assistance to challenge the decision at mediation, or the Employment Relations Authority. Self-identified Māori NZNO members can be supported in employment disputes by a [Te Runanga](#) member or representative. NZNO has developed a marae based grievance resolution process called korero tahi where parties to the grievance can come together with kuia, kaumatua and whanau on marae to korero and resolve the grievance. See the NZNO fact sheet ['On the case'](#) for more information about representation.

NZNO's successful campaigning

Nurses were previously paid around 10 to 20% less than teachers and police. This historical discrimination was in part due to nursing being a feminised occupation. In 2003 NZNO launched a campaign called 'Fair Pay – Because we're worth it!'

NZNO members leafleted, demonstrated, and participated in collective activity to progress the campaign. They challenged the government's lack of funding and received strong public support. This campaign was successful in achieving the goal of pay parity with teachers and police in 2005 when nurses received 20 to 47% pay rises.

NZNO is continually campaigning on issues which affect members such as safe staffing and healthy workplaces, changes to the Employment Relations Act 2000; improved Parental Leave provisions, pay equity and equal pay for work of equal value.

Where can I find out more?

- Talk to the NZNO delegate at your workplace
- NZNO member support centre 0800 28 38 48
- [Council of trade unions](#)
- [Additional NZNO benefits](#)

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Mission statement

NZNO is committed to the representation of members and the promotion of nursing and midwifery. NZNO embraces Te Tiriti o Waitangi and works to improve the health status of all peoples of Aotearoa/ New Zealand through participation in health and social policy development.

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