



# Opinions on unions and work

*Young people and the union*



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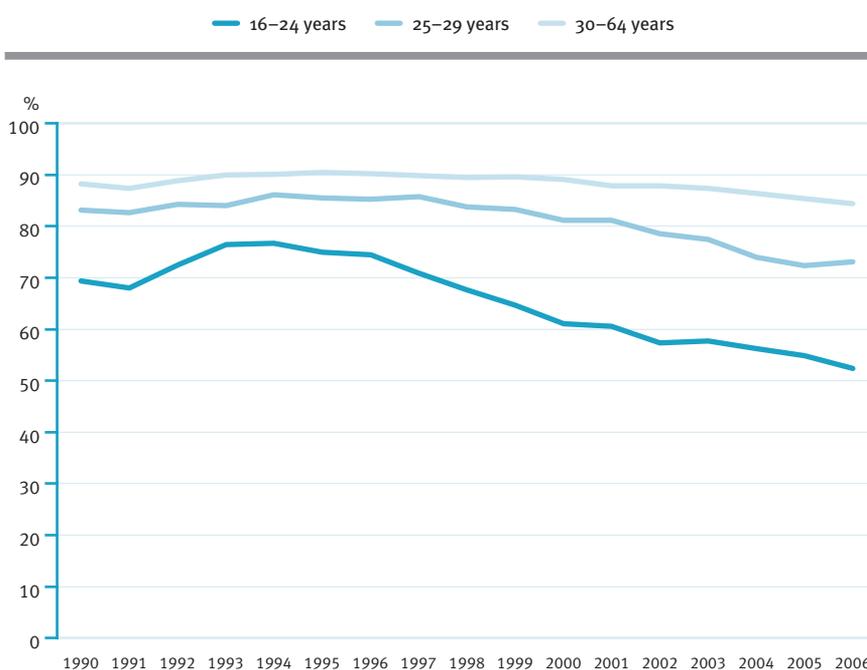
## Summary of the fifth report

*The size of trade union dues, temporary employment and doubts about the benefits of trade union membership are the most common reasons for young workers not to become union members.*

LO, August 2007  
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**Diagram 3.3** Rate of unionization 1990–2006

In per cent



### The rate of unionization among young workers continues to fall

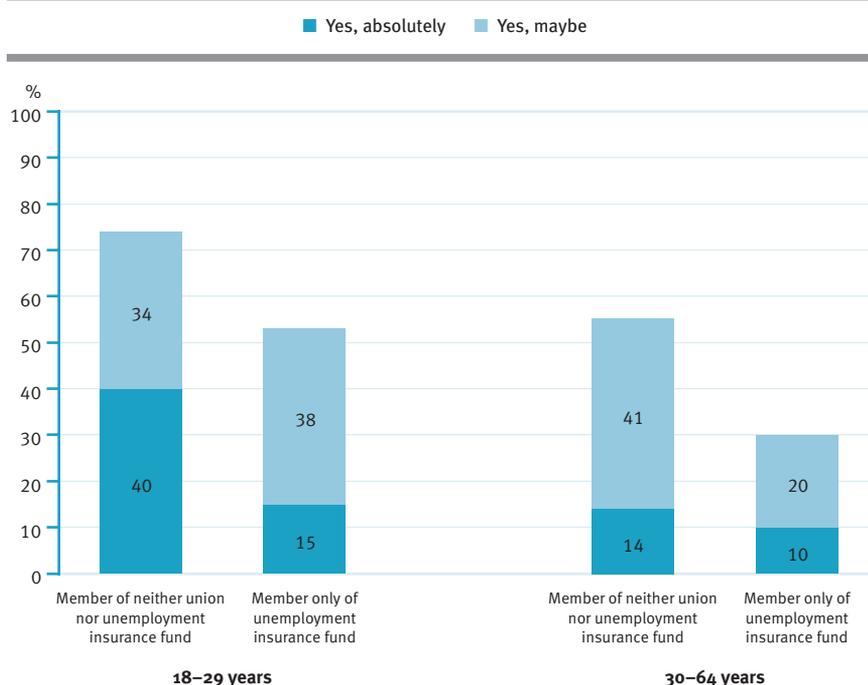
The rate of unionization is considerably lower among young workers than among older workers. Only 52 per cent of workers aged 16–24 are unionized. The rate of unionization then increases swiftly with age, and among those aged 30–64 the rate is 84 per cent. The rate of unionization among young people has decreased drastically in the last fifteen years. Much of the decline is due to ‘structural change’ which means that fewer people are working within the industrial sector, where the unionization rate is high. More people are working within the service and private sectors, where unionization rates are lower and where the number of young people with permanent positions has declined significantly.

### Temporary employment – one common reason for not being unionized

There are three main reasons for young people not to join unions. Firstly, doubt about the benefits of union membership is the most common reason given by young people who are members of neither the union nor the unemployment insurance fund. In second place come the size of the membership dues together with the fact that they only have a temporary position. The decline in the rate of unionization among young people also seems to depend largely on the fact that fewer young people today have permanent employment contracts than earlier. Among gainfully employed young people aged

**Diagram 4.2 Would consider unionization**

Non-unionized workers by age. In per cent



16-19, three out of four have temporary employment contracts. Among those between 20-24 years, 50 per cent have temporary employment contracts.

### 74 per cent would consider joining the union

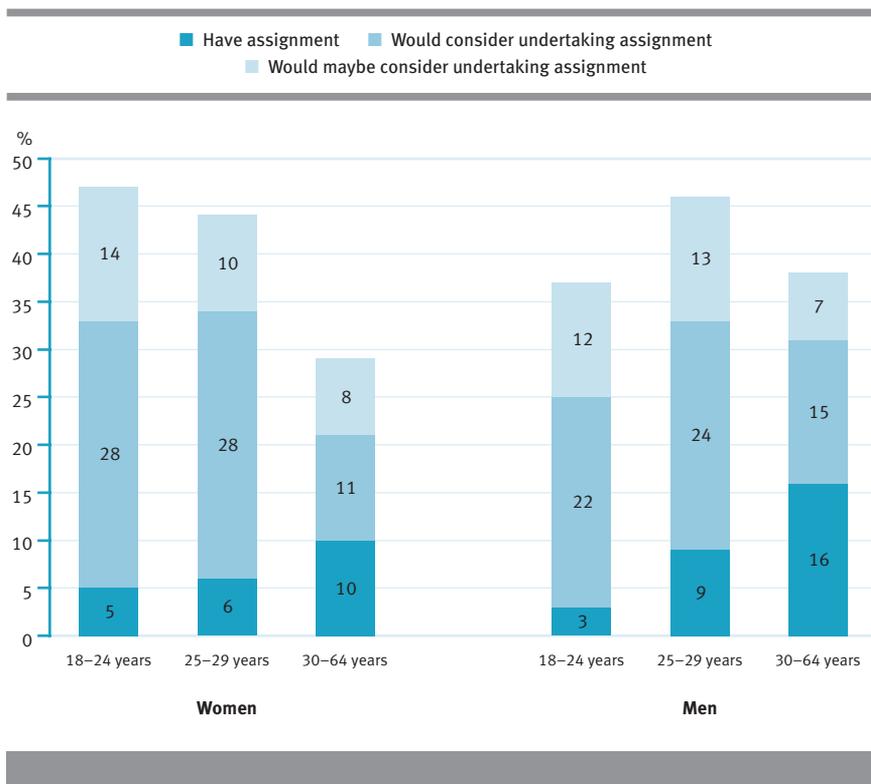
Among young people of 18-29 who are members of neither the union nor the unemployment insurance fund, as many as 74 per cent would consider the possibility of becoming union members. 40 per cent would do so seriously. This number is considerably higher than for other age groups.

Older workers who are not union members are more likely to state that they would consider the possibility of becoming union members if the union started to operate in a different way or to deal with other issues. Young people more often assert that they could consider unionization if the risk of becoming unemployed were more imminent or claim that they cannot give any reason for becoming members.

### Fewer trade union assignments among young people in spite of ample interest

It is not as common among young workers to have trade union assignments as it is among older workers. LO women above the age of 30 more often have trade union assignments than those below the age of 30. Among LO men, the difference between younger and older workers is even more prominent.

**Diagram 6.1** Have or would consider undertaking trade union assignments  
LO members. In per cent



40 per cent of the young women would consider undertaking a trade union assignment. Among young men, this figure is 30 per cent. Fewer workers now state that the reason for not undertaking a trade union assignment is that they feel it is beyond their capabilities.

More younger workers would consider undertaking trade union assignments than older workers. This is a reason for the unions to be self-critical, if in fact young workers are willing to undertake trade union assignments but are not given any opportunity to channel their energies.

### Age and gender decisive for attending meetings

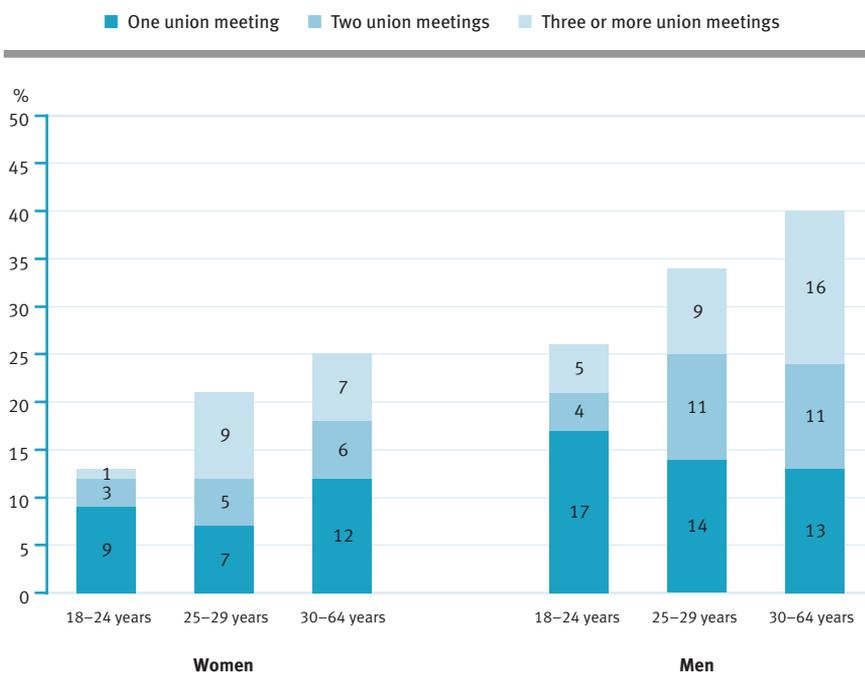
Compared to older workers, twice as many young LO members declare that they do not know any union representative or that there is no local branch. Attendance at meetings is, to a great extent, dependent on gender and age. Men attend meetings more often than women and older workers more often than younger ones. The number of LO women below the age of 30 who have attended a union meeting in the last six months has declined by almost 50 per cent since 1988.

### Union membership provides young people with job security, wage increases and influence

Young workers more often than older workers consider that union member-

**Diagram 6.4** Number of trade union meetings

LO members. In per cent



ship provides greater job security, better chances of wage increases, and more influence on the work situation. Fewer young workers than older workers consider that the union membership provides support and assistance when redundancy is threatened, security in cases of strikes and lockouts or the possibilities of participating in trade union courses.

Women below the age of 30 are more likely than older women to claim that union membership provides better employment conditions. Considerably more of the youngest women (18-24 years) than those above the age of 25 state that union membership offers greater influence on the individual work situation.

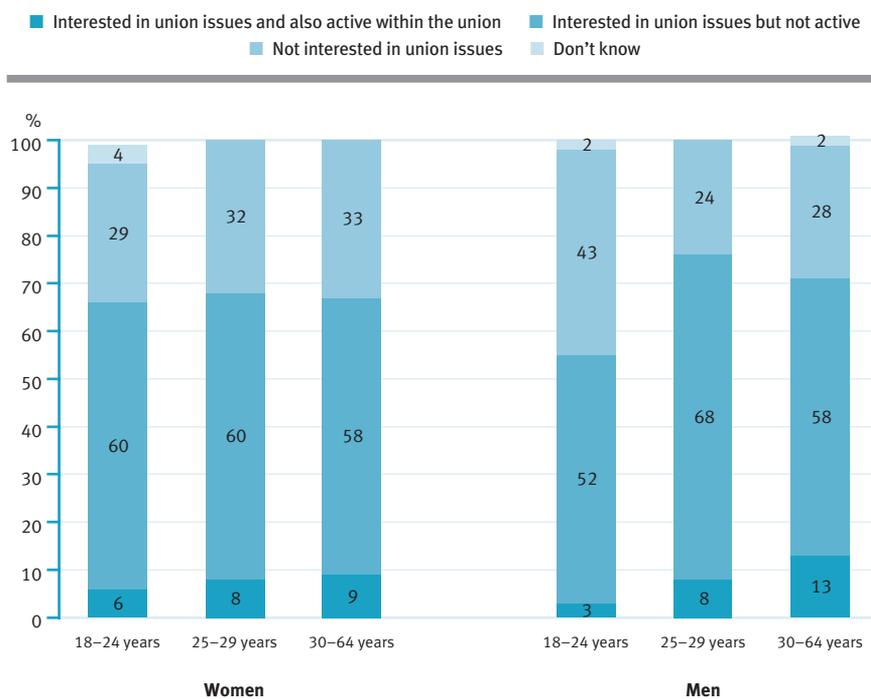
The youngest men (18-24 years) consider more often than older LO members that trade union membership provides better insurance protection, increased job security and better employment conditions.

### Younger workers agree with older workers on which issues the union should deal with

The differences between the different age groups are insignificant with regard to the main trade union issues. For young workers as well as for other age groups, 90 per cent or more consider job security, the working environment, wages, protection in case of loss of income and gender equality to be issues that the union should deal with.

**Diagram 6.6 Interest in trade union issues**

LO members. In per cent



On the other hand, more young workers than older workers list several other issues than the alternatives referred to in the inquiry as being important trade union issues. These are skill enhancement, improvement of member benefits, food and housing costs, child care and taxes. Young women more consider – even more often than young men – that housing costs, food prices and child care are important trade union issues.

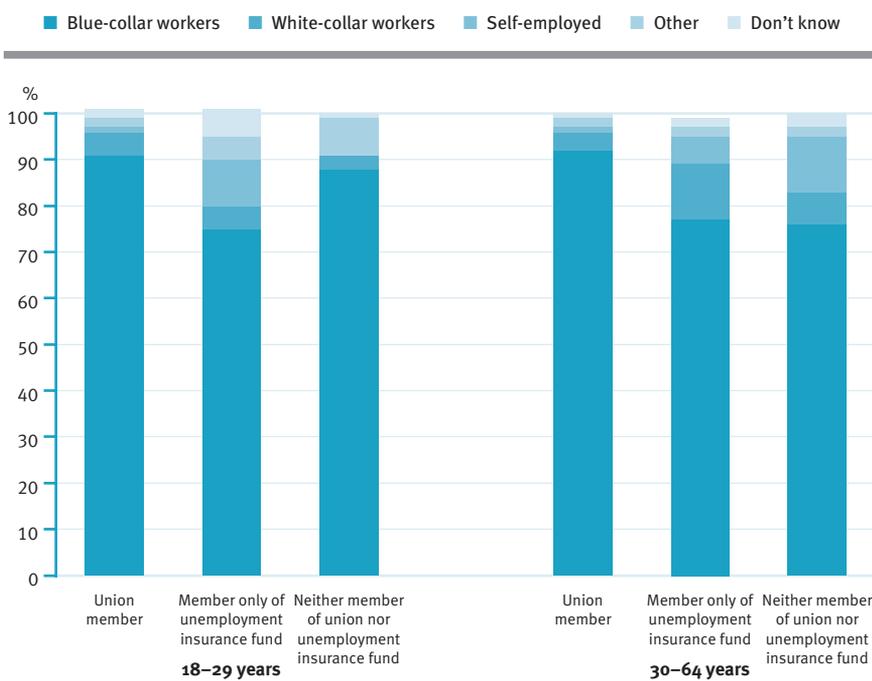
It appears from the inquiry that young people, regardless of whether they are union members or not, members only of the unemployment insurance fund or members of neither, consider the same five union issues to be the most important. There are larger differences among older workers, depending on whether they are union members or not.

### Privileges and benefits depend on wages and gender

Minor privileges, such as short breaks for five minutes without asking for permission, become more common with mounting age. Four out of ten young LO women cannot leave work for five minutes to take a short break without asking for permission or getting somebody to replace them. Seven out of ten young LO men cannot decide themselves what work to do for the next hour. But it seems to be the reverse with major privileges. Young people respond, more often than other age groups to several of the alternatives that they have the possibility to decide themselves, for example on

**Diagram 10.1** Affiliation to union and unemployment insurance fund by occupation

In per cent



the scheduling of their vacations or being able to start work somewhat later and then making up for lost time.

Two benefits, subsidized lunches and health care, are being curtailed for young LO members. In 1988, about half of the young LO members had subsidized lunches. Today, only one third of the members have that benefit. Subsidized health care has also been curtailed, somewhat more for young LO women than for young LO men.

### Young people less concerned about wage differences

Young people are less concerned about wage differences between different occupations and between the genders than older people. One third of the younger men consider the wage differences between women and men to be correct. At the same time it is just as common for young men to consider gender equality to be a burning trade union issue as women do.

### Workers and working class – not only for the old-timers

Nine out of ten young workers, union members and those who are members of neither a trade union nor the unemployment insurance fund, feel like workers. Among young LO members six out of ten consider themselves to be working class. This figure is the same among older workers irrespective of social class and occupation.

## Summary

In the survey “Opinions on the union and work” there are no signs to indicate that young people’s attitudes to the union have become more negative. The explanation for the decreased rate of unionization among young people does not seem to lie with the young people themselves but with the reality they face in their workplaces. The decline in young people’s rate of organisation can mainly be explained by two factors which are not directly linked to the trade union work. On the one hand, there is the structural change. More and more people work within sectors where the rate of unionization is lower than in the manufacturing industries and public sector. On the other hand, fewer young people have permanent employment contracts than used to be the case.

This implies that union efforts to recruit young people need to focus on raising the rate of unionization as a whole within occupations where it is low. The union also needs to succeed more in getting across the message that the union can benefit those with temporary employment contracts as well as those with permanent employment. The union needs to strive even more to ensure that permanent employment is the predominant form of employment – also for young people. This is an important issue not only for the members of the unions affiliated to LO but it is also a strategic union issue.



## *Young people and the union*

The fifth report in the survey “Opinions on unions and work” is devoted to young people and their views on trade union membership and trade union work. The rate of unionization among young people is falling – among those aged 16–24 it is now about 50 per cent. Why are many young people not trade union members? How does the interest in trade unions look among young LO members? Young people’s views on wage differences, what privileges they are entitled to at work and how they see their occupational and social class belonging are also issues dealt with.

In order to be able to improve and develop trade union activities, it is important to learn what views people have on many different issues as well as what the actual conditions look like. In order to find out, the survey “Opinions on the union and work” was carried out in 2006. The survey includes interviews with over 5,000 employees throughout the country. This is the fifth time that “Opinions on unions and work” has been conducted since 1988.