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Opinions on unions and work

Summary and conclusions



The Swedish Trade Union Confederation

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Summary of the seventh and final report

The many issues regarding unions and work are illustrated in a final report but this time from two perspectives exclusively – i. e. class and gender.

LO, December 2007
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Summary of the report series

In six reports in the series “Opinions on unions and work” a number of issues regarding trade union work and conditions in working life have been illustrated. Opinions on trade union membership and the union’s work tasks as well as opinions on trade union activities and trade union work have been dealt with. Issues like opinions on wage setting and wage differences, privileges and benefits in work have also been displayed. Besides, two of the reports have had special aspects – *Young people and the union* and *The union in big cities*.

The seventh and final part of the report series is a retrospect of the extensive material which has been presented. The many issues concerning unions and work are summarized but this time it is made from two perspectives especially – *class* and *gender*. The objective of this review is to trace differences of opinions on unions and work, on the one hand, between blue-collar workers and white-collar workers, and, on the other hand, between LO women and LO men. This summary also makes a strict division into two parts of the many sets of issues included in the review. Issues concerning unions and trade union work are dealt with separately from issues concerning work and working conditions.

Views on the union

The rate of trade union organisation

The rate of organisation among women workers is, generally, somewhat higher than among men workers. However, young men are, to a higher degree, union members than women of the same age. LO women want, to a somewhat larger extent than LO men, increase the influence of the local union at the workplace.

Considering blue-collar workers and white-collar workers as separate groups, the differences of rates of affiliation are minimal, i.e. the rates of organisation of blue-collar workers and of white-collar workers are almost equal. Blue-collar workers, however, more often than white-collar workers, want the union at local level to have more influence. Nevertheless, this does not mean that white-collar workers want to confine the influence of the union, but are rather satisfied with the present influence.

The union in practice

In spite of LO women considering themselves more interested in trade union issues than LO men, women are underrepresented in union work. 10 per cent of the women, compared to 14 per cent of the men, have trade union assignments. Among women and men, who are married or live-in partners, the number of men with trade union assignments is considerably higher. There are also differences of the genres of women’s and men’s assignments. Furthermore, women to a lesser extent than men attend union meetings. On the contrary, women’s and men’s contacts with trade union representa-

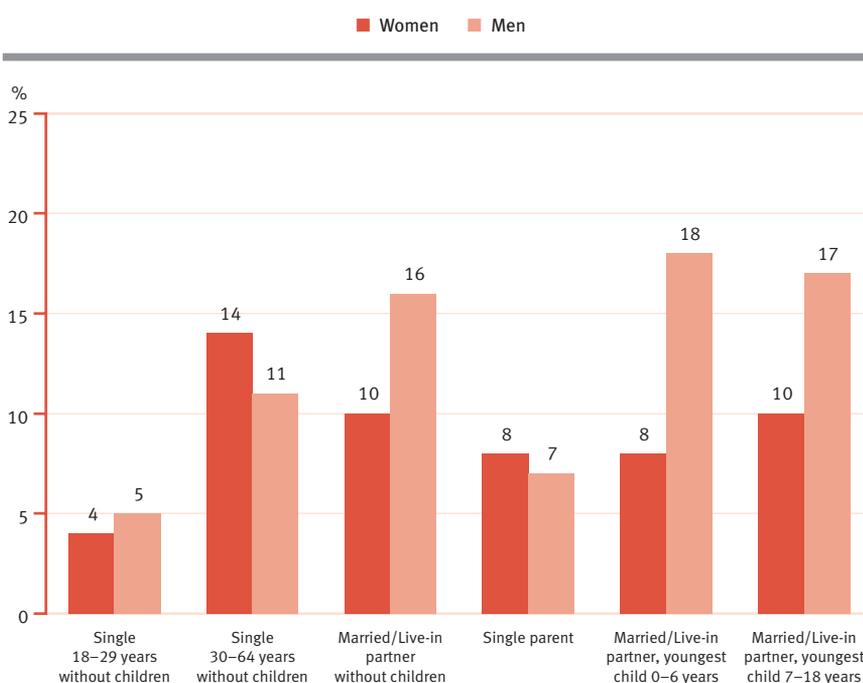
Diagram 50 Members with trade union assignments

Number of union members in respective confederation. Women and men



Diagram 16 Members with trade union assignments

LO members by family situation and gender



tives are equally frequent. As regards reading of union magazines, women are somewhat more frequent readers than men.

As regards the degree of trade union interest, there are no great differences between blue-collar workers and white-collar workers, according to the inquiry. However, men white-collar workers show the least interest in union matters. It is equally common among blue-collar workers as it is among white-collar workers to have trade union assignments, but it is more common that blue-collar workers have more than one assignment.

Views on the benefits of being a trade union member and what the union ought to do

LO women do not, to the same extent, agree with men when it comes to assessing the benefits of union membership. When it comes to, for example, support and assistance in case of disputes or security in case of strikes, more men than women agree that this goes with the trade union membership. As regards issues the unions should deal with, women more often than men consider the issues to be *very* important. Women and men nonetheless agree as to *which* issues are important for the union to deal with. There are, above all, five issues which are considered important by almost everybody: *security of employment, working environment, protection in case of loss of income, wages and equality between women and men.*

Blue-collar workers and white-collar workers are fairly agreed on the benefits of trade union membership but some differences are apparent. Blue-collar workers, on the one side, emphasize five issues more than white-collar workers do: *better employment conditions, greater possibilities of wage increases in local wage negotiations, greater possibilities of influencing working environment, increased security of employment and improved insurance protection.* White-collar workers, on the other side, emphasize two issues more than blue-collar workers do: *support and assistance in cases of threats of being unemployed and support and assistance in case of dispute with the employer.* Both groups are agreed upon which are the top priority union issues.

Trade union – political cooperation and professional/class affiliation

As to the trade union – political co-operation between LO and the Social Democrats, LO women are considerably more irresolute than LO men are. More than every fourth woman answers that she has no standpoint as to the co-operation. As regards the individual awareness of professional and class affiliation, there is hardly any difference between women and men. Nine out of ten consider themselves to be workers, and six out of ten to belong to the working class.

Many of the white-collar workers join the blue-collar workers' group by answering the question of professional affiliation that they feel like workers, above all TCO women do so. The individual association to class shows, however, clear variations. Blue-collar workers (LO) regard themselves as part of the working class, while white-collar workers (TCO) regard themselves as lower middle class and academics (SACO) as upper middle class.

Diagram 23 Views on the benefits of being a trade union member

LO members. Women and men

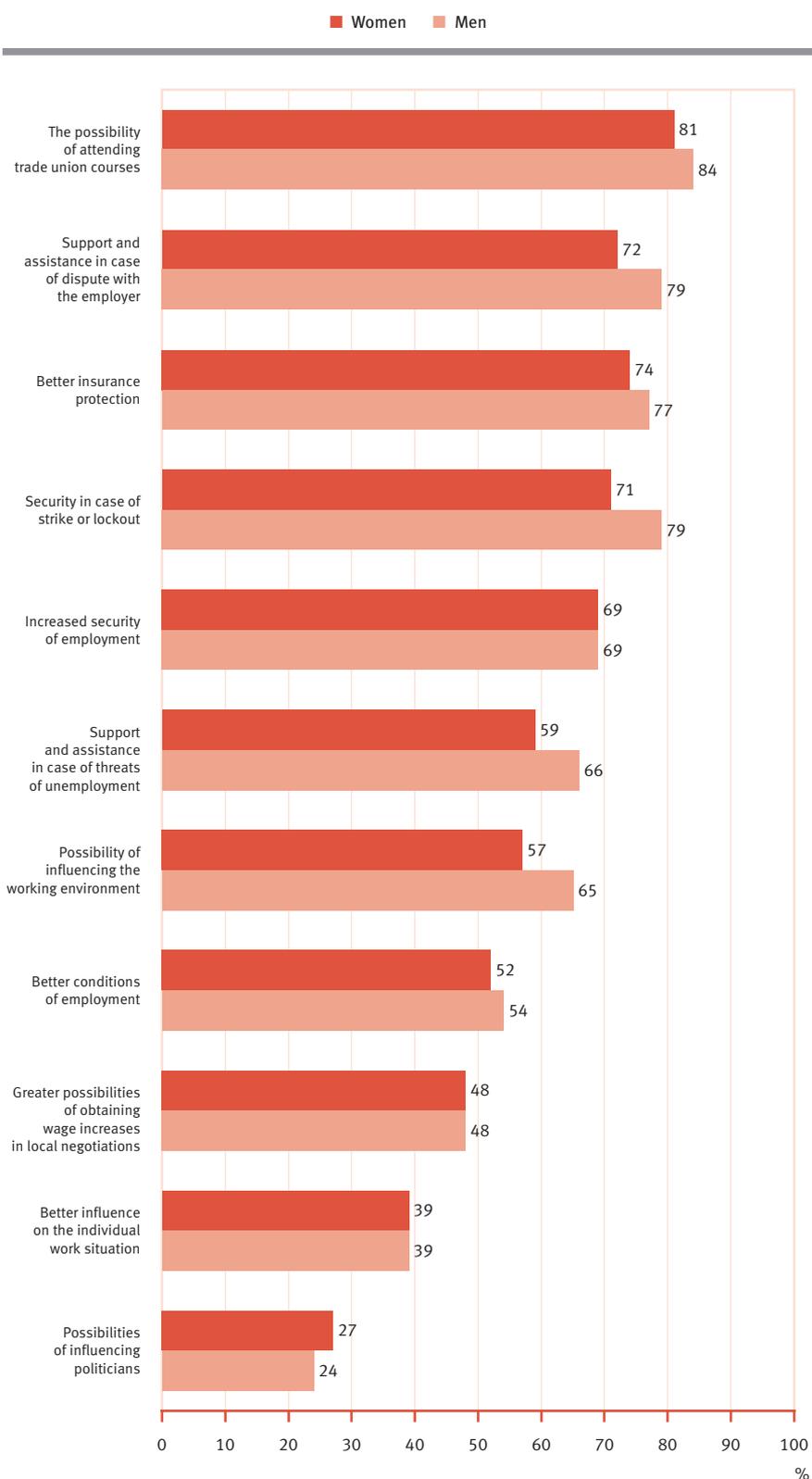
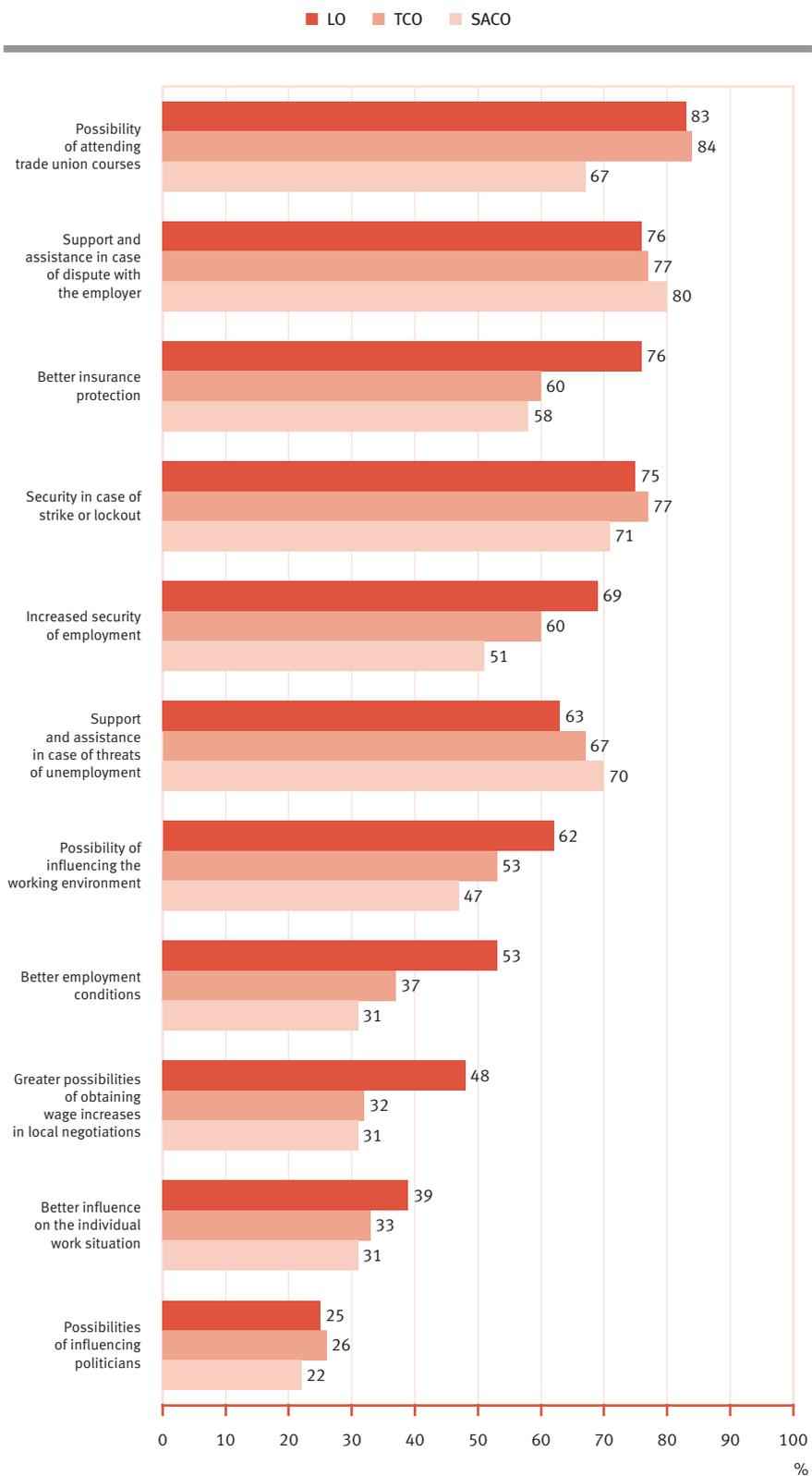


Diagram 57 Views on the benefits of being a trade union member
Members by trade union confederation



Opinions on the job

Privileges and benefits at work

LO men have, compared to women, more privileges and benefits through their employment contracts. There are differences when it comes to minor things but the gaps increase when it comes to more generous privileges and benefits.

Considering the privileges and benefits of blue-collar workers and white-collar workers, the pattern is the same as when comparing LO women and LO men, i.e. the divergences of entitlement to privileges and benefits increase concurrently with the proportions of privileges and benefits in question. White-collar workers have, to a greater extent, more generous privileges and benefits.

There is a ladder clearly showing class and gender, where the LO women are at the bottom step and the LO men enjoy privileges and benefits to the same extent as women white-collar workers do. Men white-collar workers are at the top step of this ladder.

Wage setting and wage differences

LO women are more critical to wage differences than men are, both as regards differences between different professions and differences between women and men. The wage policy of solidarity is nonetheless backed equally by men and women. When questioned about the importance of various factors significant for wage setting, women mention more factors, and women, more often than men, consider them *very* important.

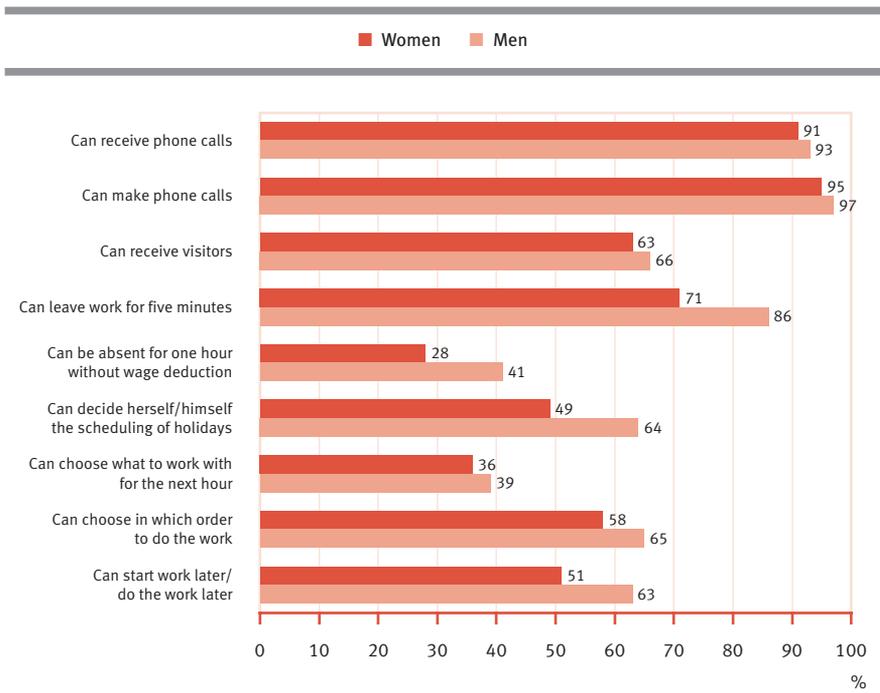
As regards opinions of all blue-collar and white-collar workers on wage differences between different professions, SACO members are the *least* critical. The wage gaps between women and men are conceived as too wide by more than 80 per cent, but members of TCO are the *most* critical.

The wage policy of solidarity causes certain disunity. The support for this principle is most prevailing among LO members and least among SACO members. There is also certain discordance between blue-collar workers and white-collar workers concerning different factors' importance for wage setting. White-collar workers consider supervisory tasks to be the main issue while blue-collar workers lay stress on the physical environment.

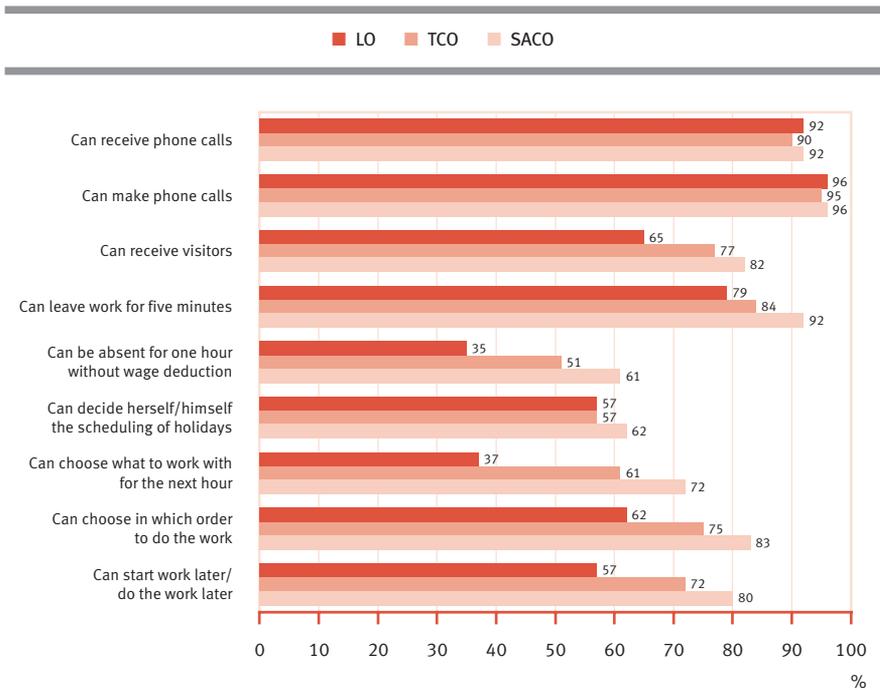
Conclusions

Many of the differences made visible in this report between LO women and LO men, and between blue-collar workers and white-collar workers derive, without doubt, from the structure of the Swedish labour market. As regards LO women and men, for example, it is visible that women, to a less extent than men, agree with the advantages of trade union membership. Women are also of the opinion that many of the issues that the unions should deal with are *very important*. May this depend on the fact that women, with regard to their position in the labour market, are more dependent on the union's achievements? Women, more often than men, are of the opinion that the influence of the local union should increase. Women are also more criti-

Diagrams 27+28+29 Minor, average and extensive privileges at work
LO members



Diagrams 61+62+63 Minor, average and extensive privileges at work
Members by confederation



cal to the existing wage gaps. Maybe it is the place of work that, in the first place, is decisive of the differences which at times become visible between women's and men's attitudes and not the fact that it is a woman or a man giving the answer?

When it comes to actual privileges and benefits at work, it is clearly obvious that different preconditions are prevailing in sectors dominated by women and men respectively. In this respect, the different preconditions for blue-collar workers and white-collar workers are also the most obvious. In many other areas, covered by the review "Opinions on unions and work", there are very small differences between blue-collar workers and white-collar workers.

Summary and conclusions

This seventh and final report of the series “Opinions of unions and work” is a summarized report. The extensive material which has been presented in the series is reviewed for final conclusions. There are two perspectives – class and gender.

The report is divided into two parts. The first part deals with the opinions of women and men in LO professions on the union and work. The second part is concentrated on blue-collar workers’ and white collar workers’ opinions on the union and work. Both parts deal with the many issues which the review covers and in both parts the results have been divided into two sections. Issues concerning the union and the union work are summarized separately from issues concerning work and working conditions.

In order to improve and develop the trade union activities, it is important to find out the opinions of people regarding different issues as well as to map the actual conditions. This is the reason why the review “Opinions on union and work” was carried out in 2006. More than 8 000 employees in the whole country participated in the inquiry. This is the fifth time since 1988 that this review has been carried out.