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Opinions on unions and work

Trade Union Activities and Trade Union Work



The Swedish Trade Union Confederation

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Summary of the third report

*Some 157 000 LO members
have one or several trade union
assignments.*

Trade union work relies much on the time the members spend on and the commitment to their trade union assignments. There are, approximately, more than 200 000 assignments which the members of the LO national unions have assumed. Trade union activities and trade union work are the theme for the third report of the series “Opinions on unions and work”. In this report, an account is given of the answers from more than 5 000 wage earners regarding assignments, trade union meetings, contacts and reading of trade union magazines. The employees’ views on their own interest in union work and their affiliation regarding profession and class are also displayed.

LO, march 2007
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More than every tenth member has an assignment

Of the gainfully employed LO members, 12 per cent have trade union assignments, but the picture is quite different in the various LO national unions – 18 per cent within the Food Workers' Union and 5 per cent within the Commercial Employees' Union. Converted into figures this signifies that there are 157 000 LO members who have one or several trade union assignments. The white-collar workers have, to more or less the same extent, trade union assignments in their respective organisations as the blue-collar workers have. Within LO, the following three types of assignments are the most common: safety delegate, member on board at regional or local level and chairman of trade union club, union representative or union liaison officer. These together constitute 75 per cent of the total number of assignments.

The distribution of assignments is unequal in spite of the interest

Although the gaps have been greater previously, LO men still have assignments to a greater extent than women do. There is also a difference between which types of assignments are most common among women and men respectively. Women more often hold assignments such as union liaison officer or union representative while assignments like member of bargaining committee or similar almost exclusively are held by men.

Diagram 2.1a Members with trade union assignments

Per cent of members in respective central organisation

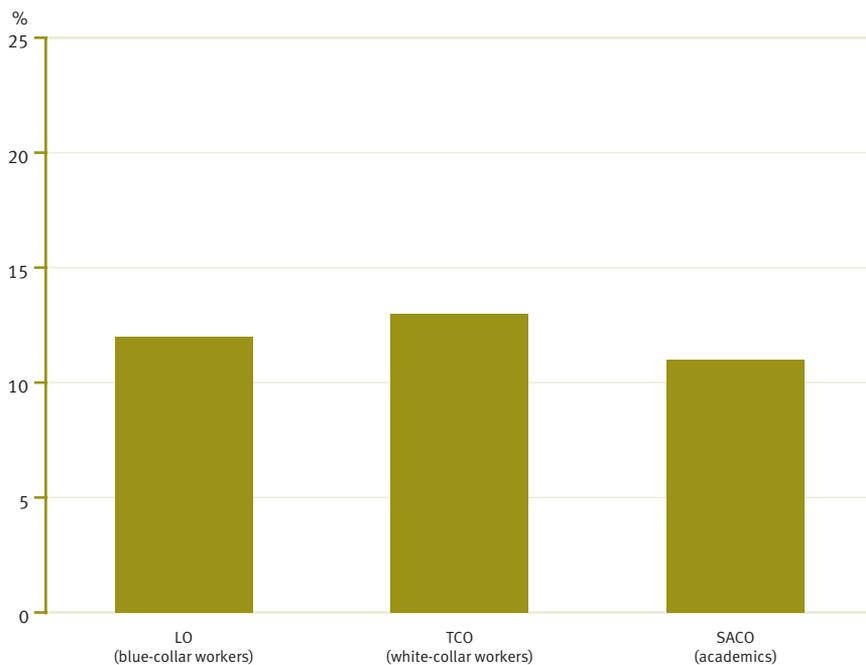
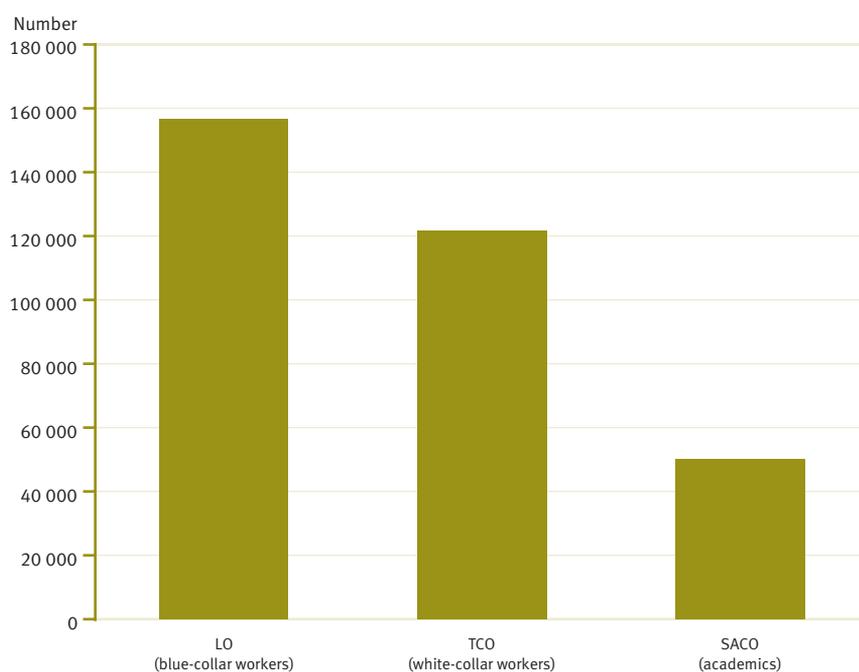


Diagram 2.1b Members with trade union assignments

Number of members in respective organisation

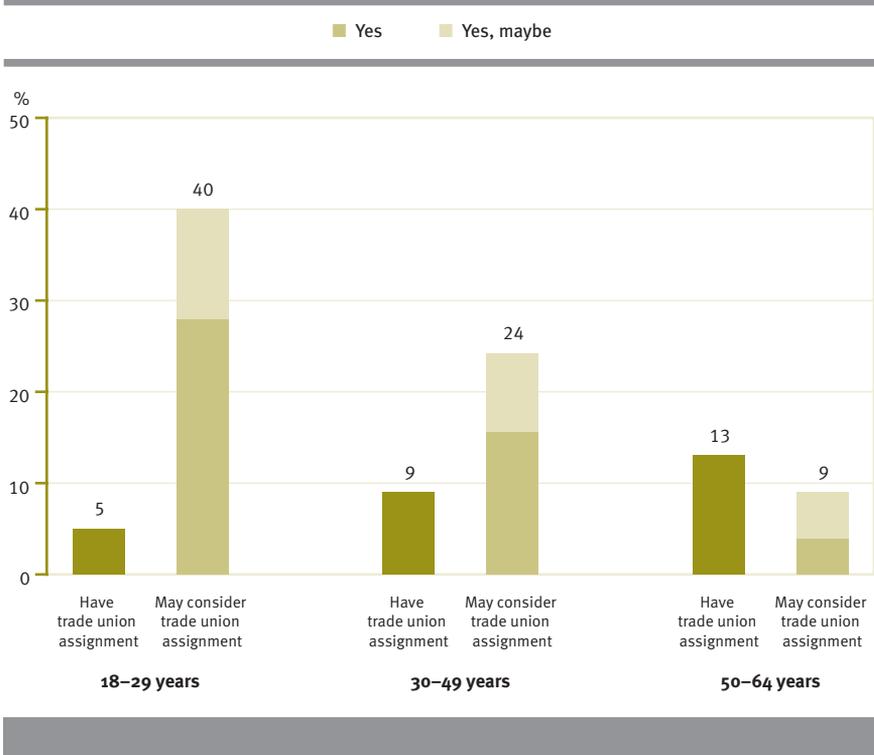


The number of LO members with trade union assignments is higher among older members than younger. Less than 6 per cent of members under the age of 30 have trade union assignments. Even women of foreign origin are underrepresented. Only 4 per cent of women born outside the Nordic countries have trade union assignments. Men born outside the Nordic countries have trade union assignments to the same extent as women born in Sweden.

Twice as many as those who today have trade union assignments may consider the possibility of assuming one, if asked. The interest is especially great among underrepresented groups – between 36 and 40 per cent of those under the age of 30 and women of foreign origin are interested in assignments. The fact that few members within these groups have assignments is thus not due to lack of interest.

The inquired members think that the most common reason for not being interested in assuming trade union assignments is, for one reason or another, lack of time.

Diagram 2.11a Have trade union assignment or may consider the possibility of assuming one LO women according to age. In per cent



Fewer members attend trade union meetings but contacts with the unions just as frequent

The attendance at union meetings has steadily decreased in the last 18 years, and in the last year only every third LO member, or 31 per cent, attended a union meeting. However, the variation is great between the LO national unions. Every other member of Food Workers' Union, and Forest and Wood Workers' Union attended a union meeting during the last year but only every-tenth member of Hotel and Restaurant Workers' Union did so. The difference is even great between men and women. 38 per cent of the LO men and 23 per cent of the LO women attended a union meeting.

Although attendance at union meetings decreases, still most members have been in contact with a union representative. Some 60 per cent of the LO members themselves contacted a union representative in the last years. This figure is almost the same as that of 18 years ago.

In total, 66 per cent of the LO members have either attended a union meeting or contacted a union representative. Besides, 76 per cent of the LO members mention that they know a union representative at the place of work. This signifies, put together, that the majority of the LO members, in one way or another, have been in contact with their unions during the past year. This shows how important the trade union's presence at local level is for the members.

Diagram 2.11b Have trade union assignment or may consider the possibility of assuming one LO men according to age. In per cent

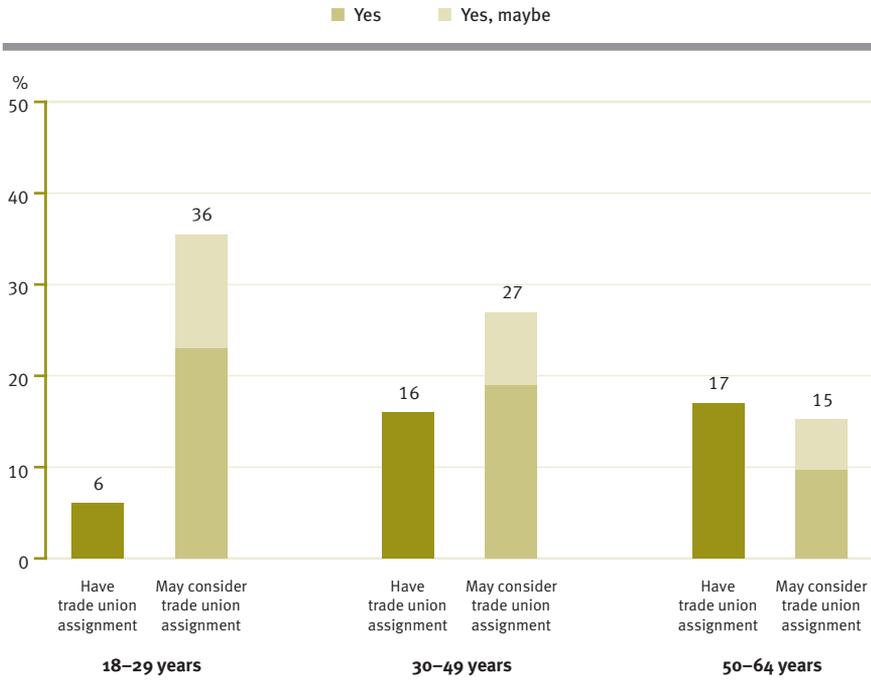


Diagram 4.5 Elected representatives, meeting attendance, contact with or know trade union representative LO members 1988-2006. In per cent

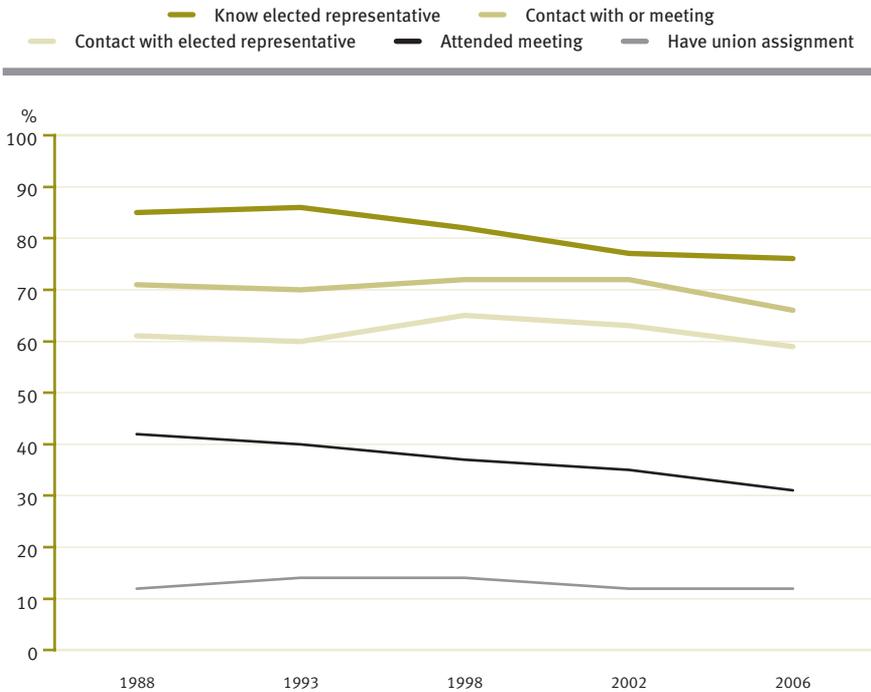
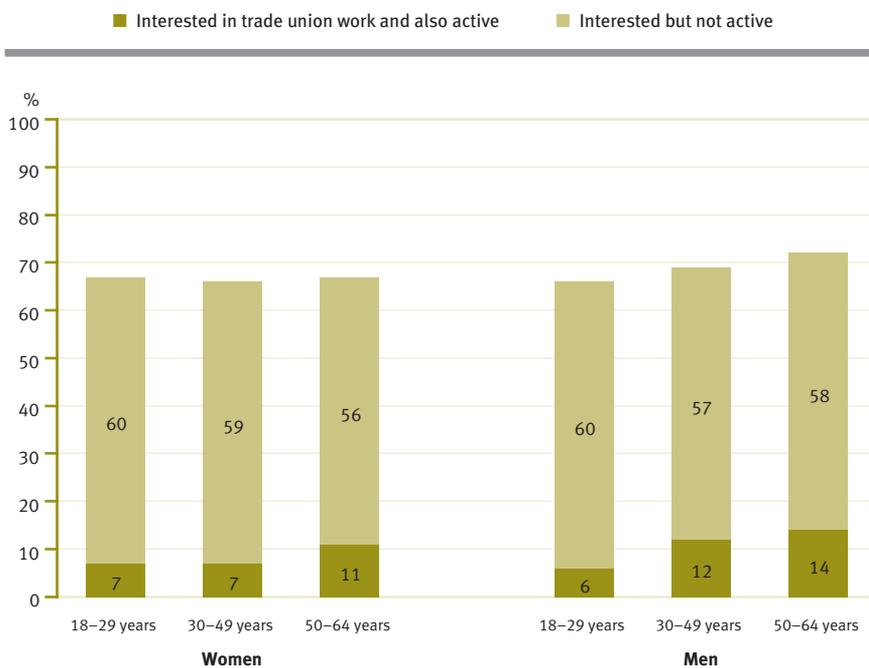


Diagram 6.3 Own apprehension of interest in trade union work

LO members according to sex and age



Two out of three read their trade union magazines

Two out of three LO members read their trade union magazines. 50 per cent read most of the contents of the magazine, and the other 50 per cent read at least parts of it. Women read more than men, and the Building Workers' Union and The Municipal Workers' Union have the most frequent readers. The interest in union matters is of importance to the reading of union magazines, but also among those not having an interest in union matters, 40 per cent read at least part of their trade union magazines.

Seven out of ten interested in union work

Seven out of ten LO members consider themselves interested in union work. Between older and younger LO women there are minor differences as regards those who consider themselves interested in union work. Among men, on the other hand, the interest seems to increase with age.

Every tenth LO member considers herself/himself to be active, which may be compared to the circumstances that 12 per cent have trade union assignments. Thus, not everybody having trade union assignments, consider themselves active, and parallelly, there are those who are active without assignments. More older members, compared to younger members, consider themselves active, which is well in concordance with the extent to which different age groups have trade union assignments.

Table 7.4 Views on co-operation between LO and the Social Democratic Party
LO members according to union interest in trade union matters

	Trade union active	Interested in trade union work, but not active	Not interested in trade union work	LO members in total
Ought to increase	31	19	7	17
Ought to be unchanged	34	26	17	24
Ought to decrease	7	9	9	9
Ought to cease	15	14	19	15
Don't know	14	32	48	36

The number of LO members with an interest in union work has decreased somewhat since 1988 (from 74 to 68 per cent). Among white-collar workers, the number has, on the other hand, increased somewhat. The number of LO members who consider themselves active amounted to 10 per cent during the entire period.

Two out of five are positive to the co-operation between LO and the Social Democrats

More than 40 per cent of the LO members are positive to the LO co-operation with the Social Democratic party and want it to increase or to be unchanged, while one out of four is negative. The rest are uncertain. Active members and those who are interested in trade union matters more often have a positive attitude towards this co-operation than LO members who consider themselves uninterested in union matters.

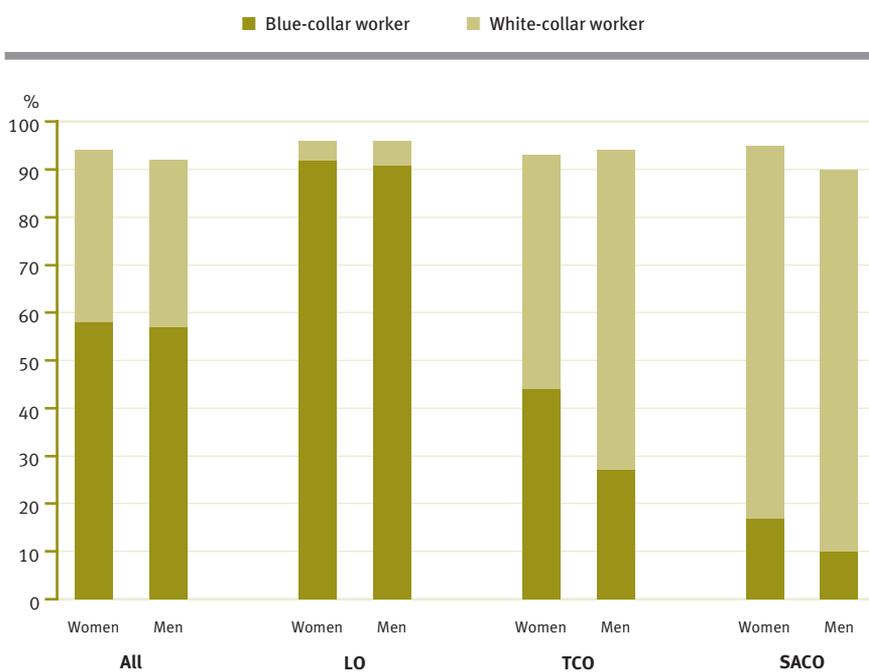
The views of LO members on the trade union–political co-operation have not changed since the last report in 2002. But compared to the year 1998, more members have become uncertain and fewer members are positive to the co-operation.

Many members consider themselves workers and this figure increases among white-collar workers

57 per cent of all employees consider themselves to be workers. Among LO members, nine out of ten do so. As many as 44 per cent of the TCO women consider themselves to be workers, which is a striking increase since previous inquiries. Among the members of The Swedish Association of Health Officers and The Swedish Teachers' Union, the majority of members consider themselves, in the first place, to be workers.

Within the private sector, the question whether the members consider themselves blue-collar workers or white-collar workers is more decisive of affiliation to respective central organisation as compared to the situation in the municipal or state sectors. One explanation might be that within the private sector, the distinction between blue-collar workers and white-collar workers is more distinct.

Diagram 8.1 Consider themselves to be blue-collar workers or white-collar workers
Women and men according to union affiliation



Fewer members feel that they are part of the working class

At the same time as nine out of ten LO members consider themselves to be workers, only six out of ten LO members consider themselves to belong to the working class. The number of LO members who consider themselves working class has decreased somewhat since the first edition of “Opinions on unions and work”, from 66 per cent in 1988 to 60 per cent in 2006.

Men of the age 50–64 more often consider themselves to be working class than other groups. Among these other groups, the number of members who consider themselves to belong to the working class is more or less the same irrespective of age or sex. Workers who are union members, more often consider themselves to be working class compared to those who are not union members.

Trade Union Activities and Trade Union Work

The third report of the series “Opinions on unions and work” deals with trade union activities and trade union work. How many and who holds the various trade union assignments? Is there a great interest to assume assignments? How often do the members attend union meetings and which other contacts are there with trade union representatives? Are the trade union magazines read? The report also gives an account of how the employees regard themselves in certain aspects. Do they consider themselves active?

Interested in union matters? Do they consider themselves as blue-collar or white-collar workers and which social class do they belong to? The LO members' views on the trade union–political co-operation are also illustrated.

It is important to know the opinions of people both in various issues and the actual state of conditions in order to improve and develop the trade union activities. This is the reason why the inquiry “Opinions on unions and work” was carried out in 2006. More than 8 000 employees from the whole country were inquired. This is the fifth time “Opinions on trade unions and work” has been effected since 1988. The report is the third in a series of seven which displays the employees' views on different topics but also their views on working conditions.

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