



Opinions on unions and work

Views on trade union membership and the unions' tasks



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Summary of the first report

Irrespective of trade union affiliation, there is a strong support for the union commitments and the advantage of trade union membership.

LO, January 2007
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The most important trade union issues

Security of employment, working environment, protection in case of wage losses, wages and equality between women and men are by the members considered to be the most important issues for the unions. These are the opinions of the LO members (blue-collar workers) as well as TCO members (white-collar workers) and SACO members (academics). More than nine out of ten union members consider these to be important trade union issues.

A majority of union members is of the opinion that union work shall embrace considerably more issues than the five mentioned. Noticeably more than half of the LO members thinks that the union shall also deal with training at work, formation of public opinion, influence at the place of work, improvement of member benefits and European trade union co-operation. Development of work content, child care and taxes are considered to be of somewhat less importance. A considerably smaller number of LO members considers food costs and costs of living to be important trade union issues.

Contrary to union members, non-union members think that union work should embrace fewer issues. Those who are members of the unemployment insurance, but not union members, give priority to fewer trade union issues compared not only to union members but also in comparison to those who are neither union members nor members of the unemployment insurance system. This is probably due to the fact that they have actively declined trade union membership and only affiliated to the unemployment insurance system.

When comparing different groups of members, those considering themselves as being active within the union, are of the opinion that union work shall embrace more issues than those who are not active but still interested, or who are not interested.

However, irrespective of interest in trade union work and irrespective of being a member or not, everybody ranks, in principle, the same five issues as the most central trade union issues.

The view on the local union's influence

Almost all employees, who are union members, are positive to the local trade union work. Only a few wants today's influence of the local union to be reduced.

Almost fifty per cent of the LO members want the union to have a greater say. Women union members more often than men are of the opinion that the local union shall have more influence.

The advantage of trade union membership

Most people also believe that union membership brings forth many benefits. Besides the possibilities of attending trade union courses, most LO members agree that the membership delivers better insurance protection, support and assistance in case of disputes with the employer and security in event of strike and lockout. Less than 50 per cent think that the trade union membership provides greater possibilities of obtaining wage increases in negotiations at local level, better influence on the work situation or better likelihood to exert influence on politicians.

Diagram 2.1 Which are considered, by the LO members, to be the most important trade union issues?

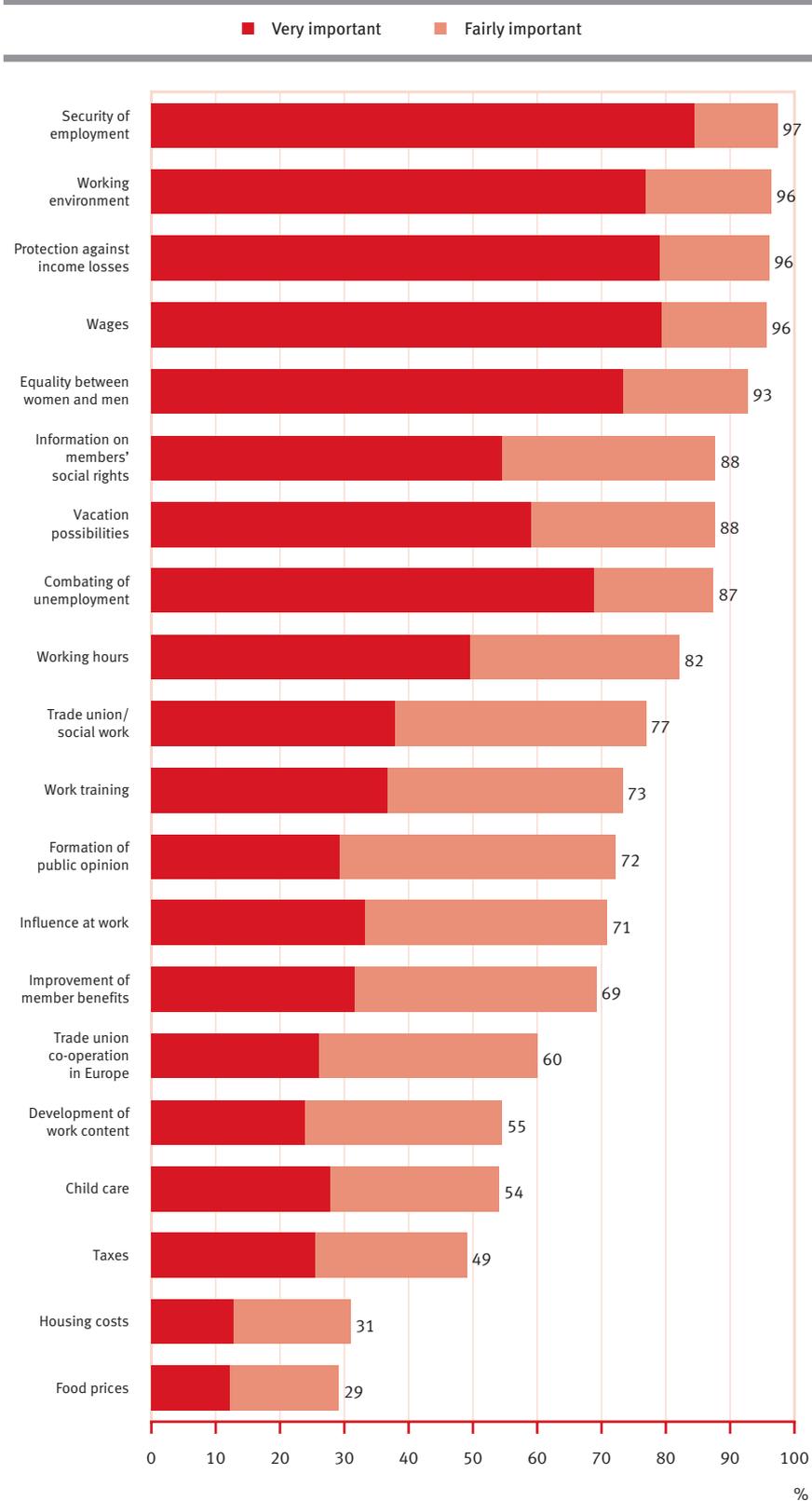


Diagram 2.37 Important trade union issues Workers according to union affiliation or membership in unemployment insurance system

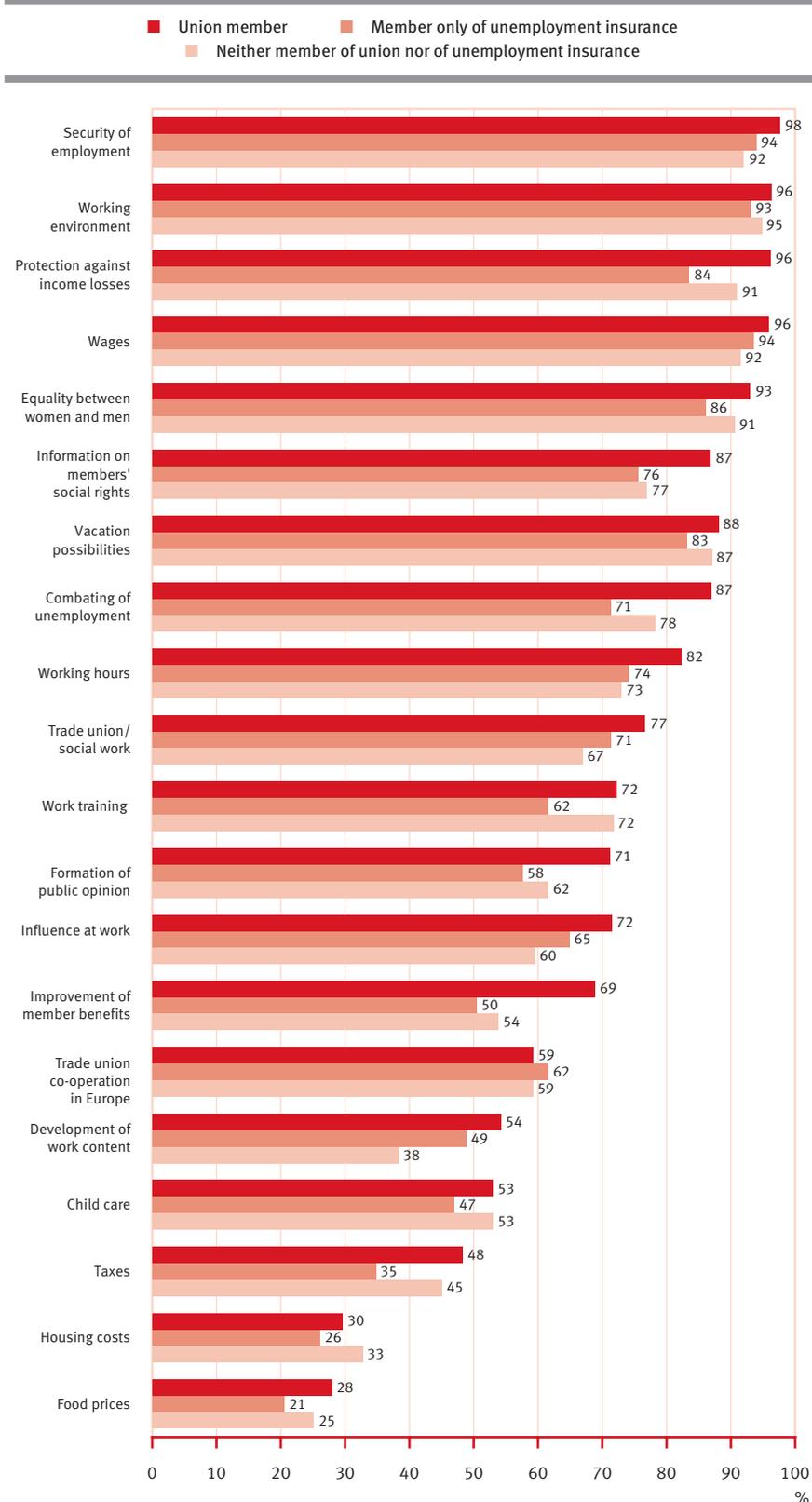


Diagram 3.1 The view on the local union's influence on the place of work
Women and men members of different trade union central organisations

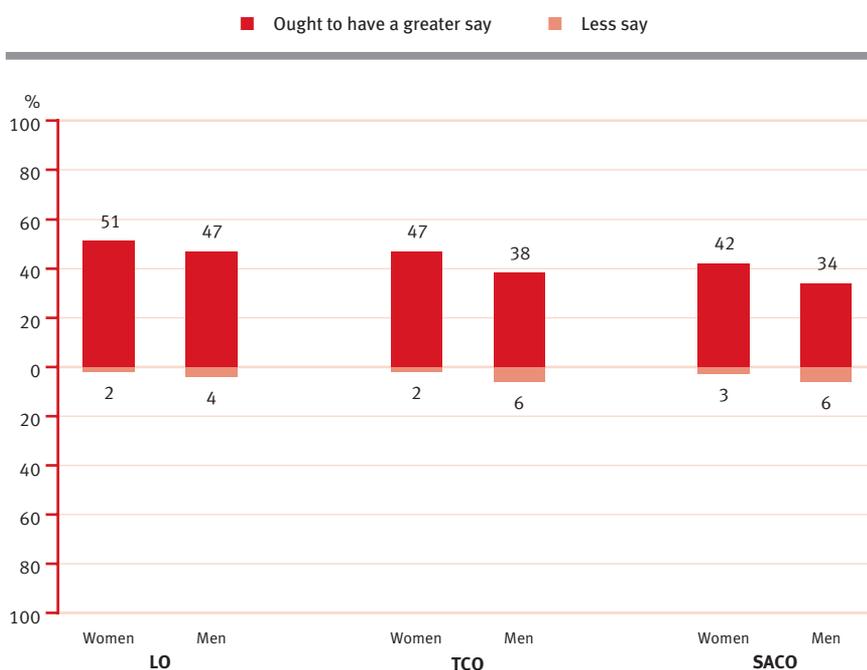
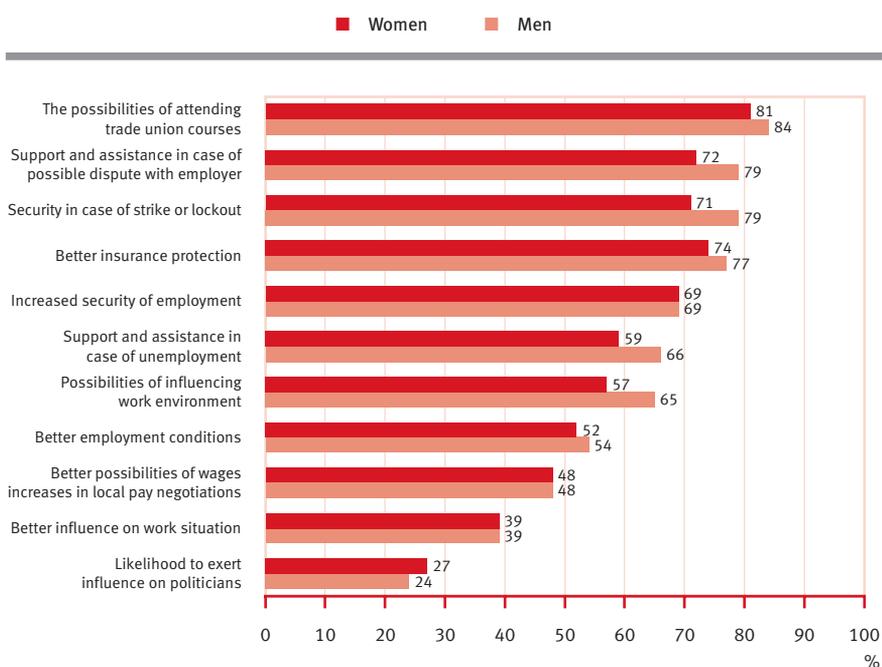


Diagram 4.2a Views of LO members on the benefits of trade union affiliation



Men LO members respond that they receive more benefits thanks to their membership than women trade union members think they do. This pattern recurs irrespective of sector.

Why are certain workers not union members?

The most common reasons for not being a member is the doubtfulness about the benefits of the membership and the belief that the member fees are too high. At the same time, the understanding among union members of why certain people are not members is obvious.

Former union members mention the discontent with the union as the main reason for not being members any more, although the high member fee and change of employers or professions are quite common reasons. More than fifty per cent of the workers not being members today have previously been members.

Is it likely that they will become members?

The possibilities of increasing the membership of the LO national unions are good according to the replies of the inquiry. Half of those questioned, who are not members today, may consider the possibility of becoming members in the future. Women are, more often than men, positive to become members.

Non-union members' top priority to make them become members is lowered member fees.

The rate of organisation

The rate of organisation in Sweden, i.e. the number of wage earners who are trade union members, is among the highest in the world. This figure has steadily been over 80 per cent since the end of the 1970s. During the 2000s, the rate of organisation has, however, fallen slowly and 2005, this figure was less than 80 per cent for the first time in over thirty years. This decrease is, to a great extent, due to structural changes taking place in the labour market and this signifies that the number of employees within industry, where the rate of organisation is close to 90 per cent, decreases. At the same time, the number of employees increases within the private service sector, where the rate of organisation is hardly 70 per cent.

Thus, the rate of organisation varies between different sectors and groups of employees. This figure is, for example, higher among women, 81 per cent, than among men, 75 per cent. The rate of organisation is also higher for older employees than for younger, and it is higher in the provinces than in the cities. On the other hand, the difference between blue-collar workers and white-collar workers is insignificant.

Diagram 5.2 Reasons for not being affiliated
 Number of workers not affiliated in %. Women and men

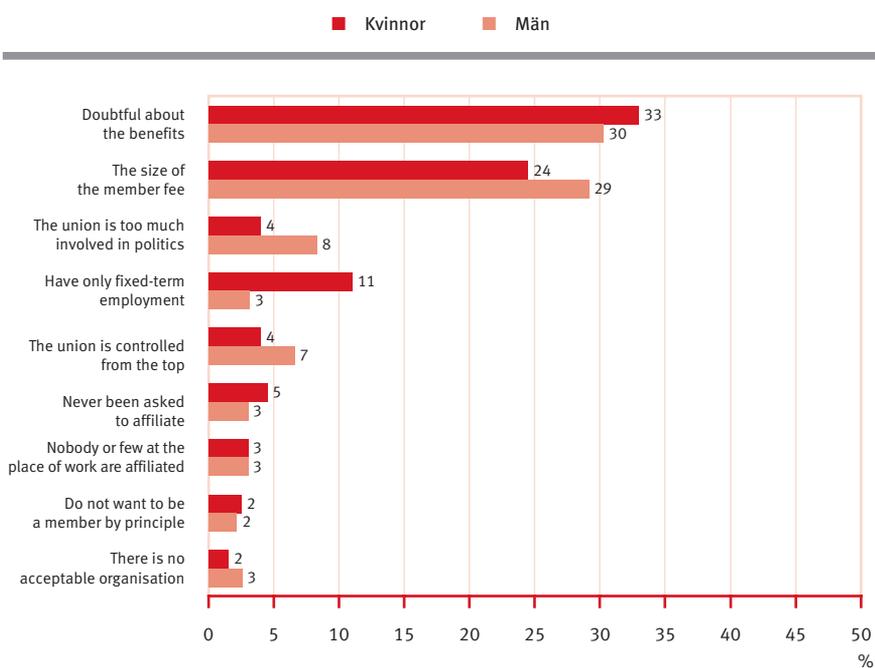


Diagram 5.6 Reasons for withdrawing from the union
 Number of non-unionised workers but members previously. Women and men.

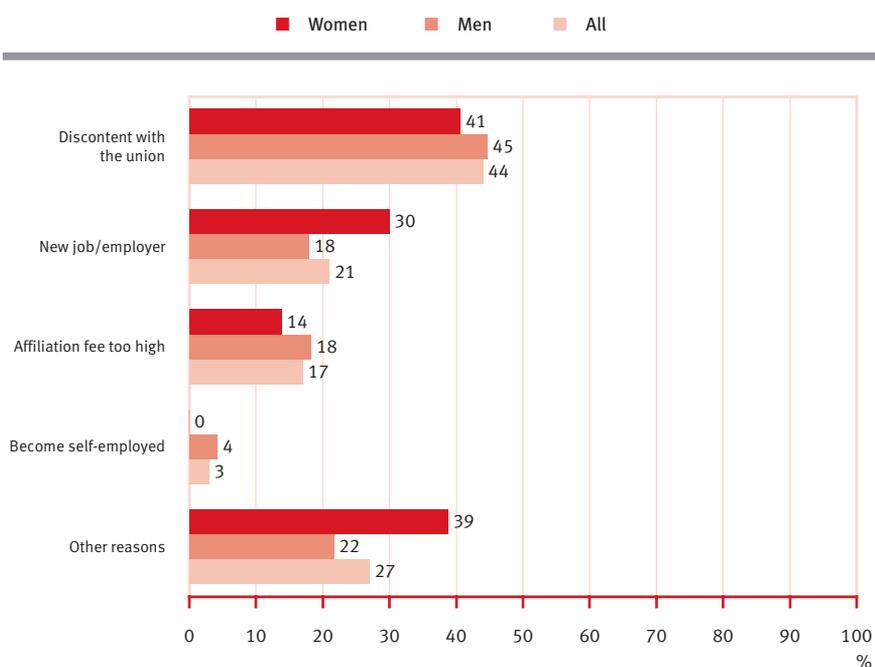


Diagram 6.1 Might consider the possibility of becoming members

Number of non-unionised members. Women and men

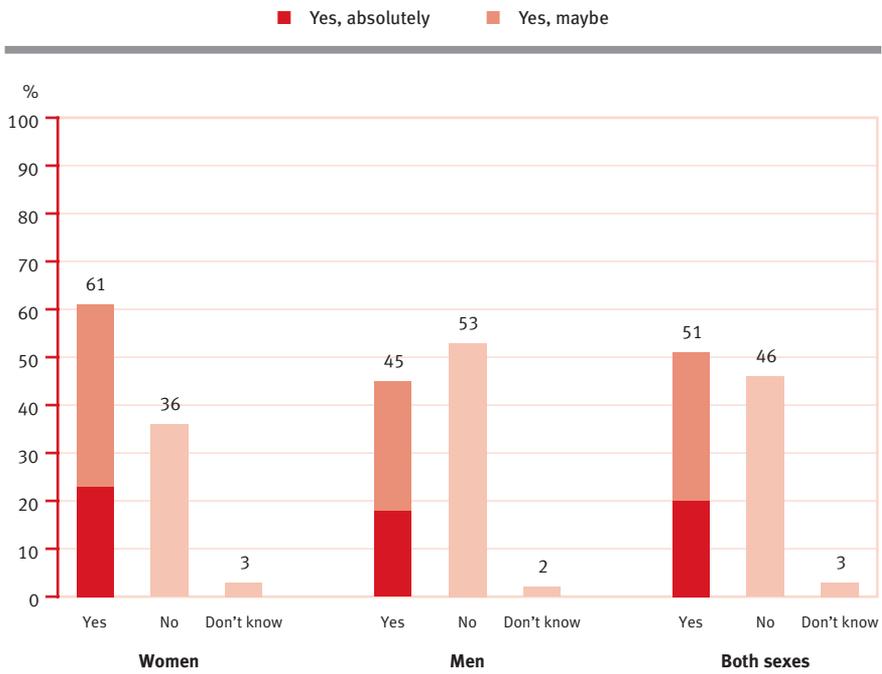
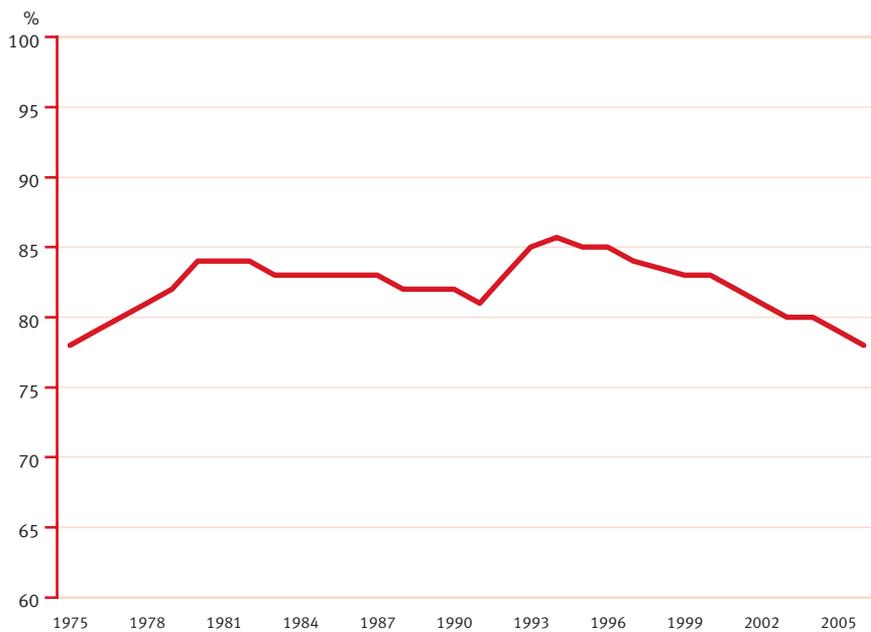


Diagram 7.1 Rate of unionisation between 1975–2006

All employees



Views on trade union membership and trade union tasks

In order to improve and develop the trade union activities, it is important to find out people's opinions on various issues as well as the real situation.

In order to find out, an extensive inquiry has been carried out during the year 2006 with random sampled employees from the whole country. This is the fifth time this inquiry is carried out since 1988. This implies that the review covers a period of 18 years. This report is the first in a series of seven, which reflects the employees' approaches to certain issues as well as conditions at work.

This report deals with the trade union role in a wider sense. What do the members and others consider to be the union's priority work tasks? What are the employees' opinions on the trade union influence? What benefits do the members think the union membership brings forth? Why do some people choose not to become members? What could induce them to become members? How many of the employees in various sectors of the labour market are unionised, and how is the trend over the years?