



Trade union trends around the world

Trends in Europe

Throughout the developed world, with very few exceptions, trade union membership remains on a downward curve. Since the 1980's, net trade union density rates (including only those union members who are actively employed) have been declining in most European countries. Since the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, unionisation in many eastern European states has collapsed at an even more dramatic rate, down to below 5% of the working population in [Estonia](#), for instance. In [Poland](#), today's 12% level of unionisation is marked in contrast to that of the Soviet-controlled era, when almost all workplaces were unionised. Most of those who remain trade union members in Poland work for former state-owned companies.

In only eight out of the member states of the European Union (EU) are more than half of the employed population members of a trade union. In fact, the EU's four most populated states all have modest levels of unionisation, with Italy at 35%, the UK 24%, Germany 17% and France at only 8%. Furthermore, in every EU country outside Scandinavia (except Belgium, Italy and Portugal), trade union membership is either static or continues to decline.

Even in the [UK](#), where a clear formal procedure for trade union recognition was introduced through the 1999 Employment Relations Act, the unionisation of employees has gradually fallen. Membership is largely being sustained by older – particularly female – workers, those in the public sector and transport. Only one in ten of those at work in the 16–24 old age group are union members and around half the working population have never been union members. Even in [Sweden](#), one of the world's most unionised workforces, the concentration of union membership in the 16–24 age cohort is just 36% compared to an average of 70% across the national workforce as a whole.

However, union density is not necessarily an indication of union influence or power. In [France](#), unions continue to dominate the economy, yet overall union density is below 8%. Where unions are highly militant, workers may not often sign up, but stand back and let the unions win concessions for them. An anti-employer bias is also present in the courts where, in spite of being composed of nominees from both employers and employees, the *conseil de prud'hommes* finds in favour of employees in the vast majority of cases.

Trade unions have reacted to this trend by mergers and re-organisations and seeking both large multinational corporations and organisations such as the World Bank to adhere to ILO



core labour standards. They have also been pressuring multinationals to build in new standards for corporate governance — including higher standards for workplace equality and CO2 emissions.

Trends outside Europe

Whilst trade union membership has declined in Europe and North America, it has tended to grow in a number of other regions. Running with this trend have been Brazil (stable since 2006), New Zealand (stable since 2004), South Africa (stable since 1999), Costa Rica (since 2001), India (since 2004), South Korea (since 2005), Syria (since 2000), Canada, Chile, Columbia, (slight increase), Guatemala, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Taiwan (longer term major increases). Figures are also highly erratic for Peru — but an increase seems to have taken place since 2002. The other country which bucks the trend is [China](#) where the All-China Federation of Trade Unions claims to have 302 million members.

Many of the regions where trade unionism has grown have been production centres for outsourced goods and services. As the supply of available skilled labour in Asia and South America declines, workers have begun to assert their economic power. This has been strengthened by improvements in communications via the social media — which have made it much easier to organise industrial action. This has become such a problem that China has been forced to introduce legal restrictions on ‘the use of the Internet to disturb social order’.

Elsewhere the decline is either dramatic, as in [Israel](#), or just a gradual progressive decline, such as in [Australia](#). The principal trade union federation in the [USA](#), AFL-CIO, brings together 55 unions with a joint membership of over 12 million members. Nevertheless, trade unions membership – at 10% of the US workforce – is now half the level it was forty years ago. Its continual decline is forcing the Federation to cut around 10% of its current staff.

Although not as low as France, trade union membership in [Japan](#) is around the OECD average at 17%, yet they remain highly influential – largely because they are primarily company unions, formed at the enterprise level. However, unlike ‘protection unions’ in Mexico which are largely controlled by employers, Japanese unions remain largely independent of management and frequently challenge company decisions.

For the last three decades, the final demise of trade unionism has been widely forecast, however union mergers and retrenchment has enabled them to survive. As technology replaces people over the next two decades, they may well return to centre stage. Even in Trump’s America, unionisation can defy the overall trend if unions play the security card during company mergers and pursue popular employee goals, like parental leave to cover school activities.



Leading international bodies

[European Trade Union Congress \(ETUC\)](#): 90 member organisations from 38 countries and 10 industry federations, making a total of over 50 million members. The umbrella organisation for national trade union confederations in Europe, established in 1973.

[International Confederation of Free Trade Unions \(ICTFU\)](#): A campaigning body concerned about 'globalisation' and involved in monitoring the activities of multinational enterprises. It was set up in 1949 and dissolved in 2006, when it merged with the World Confederation of Labour (WCL) to form the International Trade Union Confederation.

[International Trade Union Confederation \(ITUC\)](#): 331 affiliated organisations from 163 countries, with a total of over 200 million workers.

The [South Asian Regional Trade Union Council \(SARTUC\)](#), established in 1988, brings together trade unions in South-East Asia. It consists of 17 national trade union organisations in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

[Union Network International \(UNI\)](#): A grouping of 900 trade unions in over 150 countries, representing a total of 20 million individual union members around the world.

The [World Federation of Trade Unions \(WFTU\)](#) was founded in 1945. It has been subject to several schisms — firstly in 1949 over the US Marshall Plan and then following the collapse of the iron curtain in 1989/90. It now has only 6 national affiliates and radical trade unions such as the UK's Rail Maritime Trade Union in membership.

Trade union organisations

This list covers national trade union densities as a percentage of the working population plus the principal national and international trade union confederations representing employees in private sector enterprises. Member numbers provided below are those estimated or claimed.

Argentina

Trade union density: 27.7% (2014)

- Central de Los Trabajadores de la Argentina (CTA): 4m members
- Confederación General del Trabajo de la República Argentina (CGT): 3m members



Australia

Trade union density: 14.5% (2016)

- Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU): 1.8m members

Austria

Trade union density: 26.9% (2016)

- Austrian Federation of Trade Unions (*Österreichischer Gewerkschaftsbund – OeGB*): Composed of 7 trade unions, the largest of which is the Union of Salaried Employees, Graphical Workers and Journalists (*Gewerkschaft der Privatangestellten, Druck, Journalismus, Papier*), with approximately 280,000 members.

Belgium

Trade union density: 54.2% (2015)

- Confederation of Christian Trade Unions (ACV / CSC): 187 trade unions with a total membership of 1.7 million members. Dominated by white collar unions and more pragmatic than its rival ABVV/
- Belgian General Federation of Labour (ABVV/FGTB): 14 trade unions with a total membership of 2 million members. Socialist body with strongly held commitment to a planned economy and codetermination in the workplace.
- General Confederation of Liberal Trade Unions of Belgium (ACLVB/CGSLB): Smaller and linked to the liberals, with approximately 280,000 members.

Brazil

Trade union density: 18.9% (2016)

- Central Unica dos Trabalhadores (CUT): 7.5m members
- Confederacao Nacional des Profissooes Liberais (CNPL): 280,000 members
- Força Sindical (FS): 2.1m members
- União Geral dos Trabalhadores Brasil (UGT): 1.4m members

Bulgaria

Trade union density: 13.7% (2016)



- Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria (CITUB/KNSB): 46 trade unions and federations with a total of 390,000 members. Founded after the fall of communism in 1990 and closely allied to the United Labour Block (OBT) political party.
- Confederation of Labour (CL Podkrepa): 150,000 members. Founded in 1989 as the Independent Association of Intellectuals in Bulgaria.

Canada

Trade union density: 28.4% (2016)

- Canadian Labour Congress (CLC/CTS): 3m members
- Centrale des Syndicats Democratiques (CSD): 73,000 members
- Confederation des Syndicats Nationaux (CSN): 300,000 members

Chile

Trade union density: 16.8% (2016)

- Central Autónoma de Trabajadores de Chile (CAT): 110,000 members
- Central Unitaria de Trabajadores de Chile (CUT): 500,000 members
- Union Nacional de Trabajadores de Chile (UNT): 90,000 members

China

Trade union density: 44.9% (2015)

- All-China Federation of Trade Unions: 302m members

Croatia

Trade union density: 25.8% (2016)

- Union of Autonomous Trade Unions of Croatia (SSSH): 27 trade unions with a total membership of 110,000. Founded after the end of communist rule in 1990.

Cyprus

Trade union density: 47.7% (2014)



- Cyprus Workers' Confederation (SEK-ΣEK): Consisting of 68 free labour associations (federations) with a total of 65,000 members. Established in 1944.
- Pancyprian Federation of Labour (ΠΕΟ-ΠΕΟ): 9 unions with a total of 64,000 members. Established in 1941.

Czech Republic

Trade union density 10.5% (2016)

- Czech-Moravian Confederation of Trade Unions (CMKOS): 34 trade unions with a total of 772,000 members.

Denmark

Trade union density: 65.4% (2015)

- Danish Confederation of Trade Unions (LO): Five principal unions representing 1m employees. The organisation for blue collar employees, which has severed links with the Danish Social Democratic Party. Responsible for negotiating the 'basic agreement' that establishes a framework for national employee terms and conditions. At an international level, the LO is pressing for a system of general rules for European collective agreements and a European dispute resolution system.
- Danish Confederation of Salaried Employees' and Civil Servants' Organisations (FTF): Unions representing 371,000 members in both the public and private sectors.
- Danish Confederation of Professional Associations (AC): 22 organisations representing 247,000 highly qualified employees in the principal professions.

Estonia

Trade union density: 4.5% (2015)

- Estonian Trade Union Confederation (Eesti Ametiühingute Keskkliit – EAKL): Manual workers' union confederation, founded in 1990, with a total of 21,000
- Estonian Employees' Unions' Confederation (Teenistujate Ametiliitude Organisatsioon – TALO): White-collar workers' union confederation, with a total of 37,000

Finland

Trade union density: 64.6% (2016)



- Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions (Suomen Ammattiliittojen Keskusjärjestö – SAK): 21 trade unions with a total membership of over 1m. An effective representative body, which negotiates a periodic incomes policy with employers. The union claims that its membership consists of 46% women, with 25% of all members being under the age of 30.

France

Trade union density: 7.9% (2014)

- French Democratic Confederation of Labour (Confédération française démocratique du travail – CFDT): Consolidated union with 875,000 Closely affiliated with the French Socialist Party.
- General Confederation of Labour (Confédération Générale du Travail – CGT): Consolidated union with over 700, 000 members. Closely affiliated with the French Communist Party.
- General Confederation of Labour, Workers’ Force (Force Ouvrière – FO): Consolidated union with 17 branches and 300,000 members. Founded in 1948 as a breakaway group from the CGT. FO does not have ties with any political party.

Germany

Trade union density: 17% (2016)

- German Federation of Trade Unions (Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund – DGB): 16 affiliated unions with over 6m Dominated by the engineering union IG Metall and the services union Ver.di.

Greece

Trade union density: 21.7% (2013)

- Greek Confederation of Labour (GSEE-ΓΣΕΕ): 62 union federations and 75 labour centres with a total of 450,000 members. Umbrella organisation representing private sector workers. Although founded in 1918, GSEE was reformed after the Greek Civil war in 1950. The strength of the Greek trade union movement owes much to the Ergatiki Estia (OEE) system of compulsory union dues and contributions to trade union funds by a levy on social security payments.



Hungary

Trade union density: 11% (2014)

- Confederation of Hungarian Trade Unions (MSzOSz): 465,000 General body for unions representing private sector employees.
- Autonomous Trade Union Confederation (ASzSz): 120,000 Employees in public transport, railways, air traffic, chemical industry, catering, tourism, water supply, police and fire service.

Iceland

Trade union density: 90.4% (2016)

- Icelandic Confederation of Labour (ASI): Six national federations and five major unions with a total membership of 104,000.

India

Trade union density: 33%

- Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS): 3m members
- Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC): 3m members
- Self-employed Women's Association (SEWA): 9m members

Irish Republic

Trade union density: 24.4% (2016)

- Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU): 57 unions representing around 555,000 members in the Irish Republic and in Northern Ireland.

Italy

Trade union density: 34.4% (2016)

- Italian General Confederation of Labour (Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro - CGIL): Composed of 15 national trade federations and 134 labour chambers with a total of 5.5 million members, of which only 2.6 million are employed. Communist and socialist aligned organisation.



- Italian Confederation of Trade Unions (Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori - CISL): Consists of 14 union federations and nine other union bodies with a total membership of 4.2 million. Traditionally aligned with the Roman Catholic church.
- Italian Union of Labour (Unione Italiana del Lavoro - UIL): Consisting of 16 unions with a total membership of 2 million workers. Formed in 1950 through a split from CGL. A liberal and republican union which nevertheless co-operates quite closely with the larger CGIL and CISL.

Japan

Trade union density: 17.3% (2016)

- Japanese Trade Union Confederation (JTUC — Rengo): 6.6m members

Latvia

Trade union density: 12.6% (2015)

- Union of Independent Trade Unions of Latvia (Latvijas Brīvo Arodbiedrību Savienība – LBAS): Founded in 1990. Over 20 unions with a combined membership of 165,000.

Liechtenstein

Trade union density: N/A

- Liechtenstein Federation of Employees (Liechtensteinischer ArbeitnehmerInnenverband - LANV): 1,300 members

Lithuania

Trade union density: 7.7% (2016)

- Lithuanian Trade Union Confederation (Lietuvos Profesinių Sąjungų Konfederacija – LPSK / LTUC): Formed through merger in 2002. 124,000 members.
- Lithuanian Labour Federation (Lietuvos Darbo Federacija – LDF): Christian trade union confederation founded in 1919. 20,000 members.
- Solidarumas (Lietuvos Darbininkų Sąjunga): Founded in early 1990s. 52,000 members.



Luxembourg

Trade union density: 32% (2016)

- General Confederation of Labour of Luxembourg (Confédération Générale du Travail de Luxembourg – OGB-L): 15 trade unions with a total of 50,000 members.
- Luxembourg Christian Trade Union Confederation (Lëtzebuerger Chrëschtliche Gewerkschafts-Bond – LCGB): Represents over 40,000 members.
- White-collar Union Federation (ALEBA/UEP-NGL-SNEP): A body formed in February 2003 following the break-up of the Federation of Private Sector White-collar Employees. It is an alliance of the Luxembourg Association of Banking and Insurance Staff, the Union of Private Sector White-collar Employees, the Neutral Union of Luxembourg Workers and the National Union of Private Sector White-collar Employees.

Malta

Trade union density: 51.4% (2015)

- Confederation of Malta Trade Unions (CMTU): One principal and several minor unions with a total of 36,000 members.
- General Workers' Union (GWU): Comprises eight trade sections and two associations. Operates independently of the CMTU and is closely allied to the Maltese Labour Party. 43,000 members.
- Malta Workers' Union (UHM): 26,000 members. Clerical and craft union. By far the largest union in the CMTU.

Mexico

Trade union density: 12.5% (2016)

- Confederación de Trabajadores de México (CTM): 1.5m members
- Confederación Revolucionaria de Obreros y Campesinos (CROC): 1.3m members
- Union Nacional de Trabajadores de México: 180,000 members

Netherlands

Trade union density: 17.3% (2016)



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- Dutch Trade Union Federation (Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging – FNV): 14 unions with a total of 4m members.
 - National Federation of Christian Trade Unions in the Netherlands (Christelijk Nationaal Vakverbond – CNV): 11 trade unions with a total of 350,000
 - MHP: Managerial and professional staff union with 160,000 members.

New Zealand

Trade union density: 17.9% (2015)

- New Zealand Council of Trade Unions(NZCTU): 360,000 members

Nigeria

Trade union density: 11%

- Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC): Formed in 1978 and represents trade unions with a combined membership of 4 million.
- Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUCN): represents 300,000 workers.

North Macedonia

Trade union density: 28% (2010)

- Federation of Trade Unions of Macedonia (SSM): ~~The federation~~ has 18 affiliated sectoral unions.

Norway

Trade union density: 52.5% (2015)

- Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO): 28 unions with 850,000 Principally blue-collar unions.
- Confederation of Vocational Trade Unions (YS): A politically independent umbrella organisation. It was formed in 1977 and consists of 21 trade unions.
- Federation of Norwegian Professional Associations (UNIO): 15 unions with 300,000

Poland

Trade union density: 11.8% (2014)



- Independent and Self-governing Trade Union — Solidarity (NSZZ Solidarność): 16 branches with a total of 722,000 members. Founded during worker protests in Gdansk, in 1980, it was a major factor in the collapse of the Soviet regime in 1989/90.
- All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions (OPZZ): Confederation with a membership of 500,000. Formerly the state-run trade union body.

Portugal

Trade union density: 16.2% (2015)

- General Confederation of Portuguese Workers — Intersindical (CGTP): Affiliated unions with a total of 800,000 Formed after the end of the military dictatorship in the 1970's. Communist orientated body with strong commitment to 'international solidarity'.
- General Workers' Union (UGT): 60 unions with total of 400,000 Formed in 1978 through merger of social democratic and socialist trade union groups.

Romania

Trade union density: 25.2% (2013)

- National Confederation of Free Trade Unions (CNSLR-Fratia): 44 union federations with a total membership of 800,000 members. Plans to merge with the National Trades Unions' Bloc (BNS) which has 13 union federations with a total of 375,000 members were announced in 1994, but never materialised.
- National Trade Union Confederation – Cartel Alfa (NTUC): 40 union federations and two associate organisations with a total membership of 325,000.
- Democratic Trade Union Confederation of Romania (CSDR): 22 federations with a total of 350,000 members in the education, food, cement and textiles sectors. Established in 1994 because of a split in the CNSLR. Allied to the Christian Democratic party.
- Meridian: 170,000 members, largely in mining, metalworking, the chemicals and rubber industry, transport, media and communications.

Russian Federation

Trade union density: 30.5% (2015)

- Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR): Claims to have over 28 million members and includes managerial employees. Much reformed successor to the former Soviet labour movement.



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- All-Russian Confederation of Labour (VKT): 3 million members. Established through an initiative by the Independent Miners' Union.
 - Confederation of Labour of Russia (KTR): 1.2 million members. Well established in docks and sea transport.

Saudi Arabia

Trade union density: N/A

Severe legal constraints are placed on trade unions in Saudi Arabia. Only one workers' committee is allowed in each enterprise.

There is no trade union affiliated to the ITUC operating in the country.

Slovak Republic

Trade union density: 11.2% (2015)

- Confederation of Trade Unions of the Slovak Republic (KOZ SR): 38 trade unions with a total of 570,000

Slovenia

Trade union density: 21.3% (2013)

- Association of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia (ZSSS): 20 trade unions and 19 regional organisations with a total of 300,000. The majority of its employees in affiliated organisations work in the manufacturing sector.
- KNSS, KSS Pergam, Konfederacija 90: Three smaller independent confederations with a total membership of 170,000.

South Africa

Trade union density: 28.1% (2016)

- Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU): 21 affiliated trade unions with 8m members.
- Federation of Unions of South Africa (FEDUSA): 27 affiliated trade unions with 555,000 members.



- National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU): Formed in 1986 by the merger of the Azanian Confederation of Trade Unions (AZACTU) and the Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA). 400,000 m

South Korea

Trade union density: 10.1% (2015)

- Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU): 955,000 members
- Korean Confederation of trade unions (KCTU): 1m members

Spain

Trade union density: 13.9% (2015)

- Trade Union Confederation of Workers' Commissions (Confederación Sindical de Comisiones Obreras – OO): 1m members. Formerly closely associated with the Spanish Communist Party, but now a largely independent body. Favours large-scale collective bargaining structures covering whole sectors.
- General Workers' Union (Union General de Trabajadores – UGT): 960,000 members. Socialist trade union traditionally linked to the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE). Favours workplace representation, rather than sectoral initiatives.

Sweden

Trade union density: 66.8% (2015)

- Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO): 14 unions representing 5 million members, mainly blue-collar workers. Closely aligned with the Swedish Social Democratic Party.
- Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees (TCO): 18 unions representing 3 million members.
- Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations (SACO): Organisation for union covering graduate-level employees. 26 independent professional associations, 556,000

Switzerland

Trade union density: 15.7% (2015)



- Swiss Federation of Trade Unions (SGB/USS): Founded in 1880, 17 unions with a total membership of 385,000.
- Swiss Workers' Federation (Suisse): Formed in 2002 through the merger of CNG and VSA. 13 trade unions with 170,000 members.

Turkey

Trade union density: 8.2% (2016)

- Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions (TURK-IS): Established in 1952, it is the oldest of the four main trade unions in the country and the only one that survived the 1980 military coup. It claims to have 1.75m members.
- Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey (DISK): Founded in 1967, with 327,000 members.
- Confederation of Turkish Real Trade Unions (HAK): Founded in 1976, with 340,000 members.
- Confederation of Public Employees' Trade Unions (KESK)

Ukraine

Trade union density: 43.8% (2015)

- Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FPU): Umbrella organisation with origins in the Soviet era. The largest trade union confederation in the country, with 44 national trade unions, 27 regional unions and 4.8 million members.
- National Confederation of Trade Union Organisations of Ukraine (NKPU): 5 million members. Includes several independent trade unions.
- Confederation of free Trade Unions of Ukraine (KVPU): 18 trade unions with a total of 148,000 members. Sectors include mining, shipping, air transport and railways.

United Kingdom

Trade union density: 23.5% (2016)

- Trade Union Congress (TUC): Federation of trade unions in England and Wales. 50 unions representing 6 million members. The TUC has close links with the UK's Labour Party.



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USA

Trade union density: 10.3% (2016)

- American Federation of Labour and Congress of Industrial Organisations (AFL-CIO): 55 national and international unions, representing 12.8m members. Formed in 1955 by the merger of AFL and CIO.