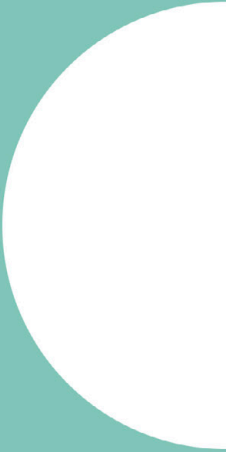
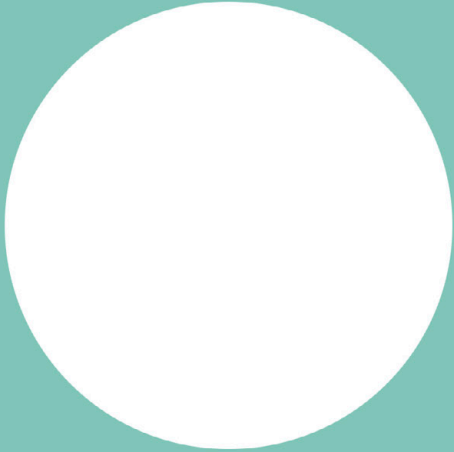
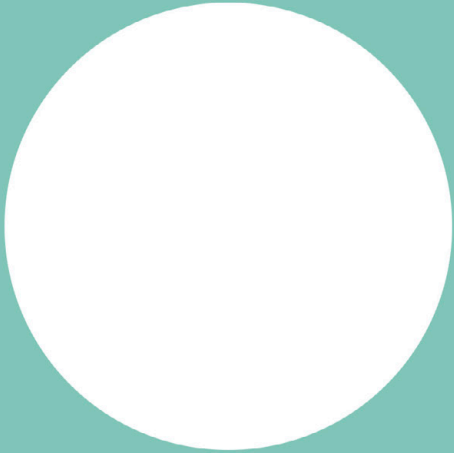


# Organising young workers: a report for EPSU

Nick Clark,  
December 2021







5	Preface
9	Introduction
11	Existing research on unions and young workers
13	Context – the European labour market and COVID-19
17	Trade union initiatives to recruit and organise young workers
18	The role of Confederations
19	Approaching students
20	Campaigning on young people's issues
21	Supporting entry into the labour market
21	Recruitment methods
22	Issues to address
25	Conclusions
26	Case studies



# Preface

COVID-19 has hit young people particularly hard. As so often in times of economic crises, the recession caused by the pandemic has aggravated the challenges young workers and jobseekers face entering the labour market. In the EU since the outbreak of COVID-19, youth unemployment increased from 14.9% to 17.1%. The Western Balkans and the UK have also seen loss of employment and a rise in inactivity amongst young people which has not, in general, been offset by a return to education.<sup>1</sup>

Following the 2008 financial crash, youth unemployment rates in Europe soared, and it took the best part of a decade for them to come down. Even in 2019, just before the pandemic, youth unemployment in the EU was three times higher than it was for over-55s. What is more, the job creation schemes for young people following the 2008 crisis did not focus on quality jobs. As a result, many young people took work with precarious contracts in less secure sectors such as hospitality. It is no surprise therefore that when the pandemic hit, young people once again were the first to lose their jobs.

Government policies aimed at tackling youth unemployment have also failed to ensure young people kept getting employed in public services. A 2012 EPSU report showed that under 25s represent an ever decreasing proportion of the public service workforce in the EU, and since then this trend has continued.

As we move into the recovery phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is clear that a different approach needs to be taken towards tackling youth unemployment. It is not enough to look at employment figures alone. Workers on precarious contracts may be employed, but they do not have adequate access to sick pay or social protection. Other young workers might end up taking low quality jobs, traineeships and internships, even if they are overqualified. EPSU youth network members in Russia and Central Asia pointed to the lack of affordable housing for young workers, a general problem in Europe that many EPSU affiliates are campaigning on. And finally, employment figures do not take into account the shortage of young workers in public services.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn05871/>

Recruiting and organising young people in trade unions helps with the many challenges they face in finding quality employment, and strengthens the voice of young workers. Collective bargaining and social dialogue increase the attractiveness of public services and lead to higher recruitment rates. Yet just as there are fewer and fewer young workers in public services, there is a widespread decline in trade union membership, especially amongst young people.

That is why EPSU commissioned this research, to understand different ways of increasing young workers' membership of and participation in trade unions. The report looks in depth at the European labour market, including the decline of young workers in public services and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. It then introduces and draws points of comparison from six union initiatives on recruiting and organising young workers. The report discusses the main issues which must be confronted by public service unions to improve the level of organisation of young workers within their sectors. The report concludes with observations and issues for further discussion

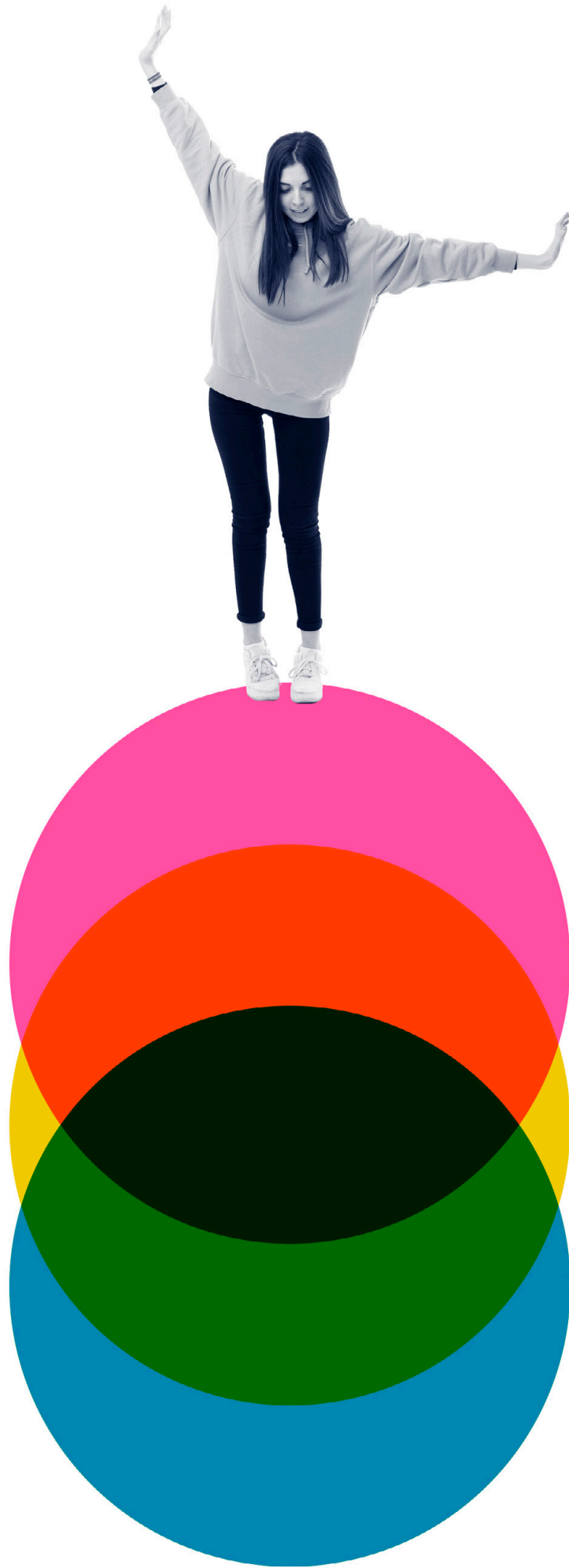
The report shows innovative trade union initiatives for recruiting and organising young workers, to ensure that they have a strong voice both at work and in our union structures. These examples can serve as inspiration as we continue to build our unions and increase our strength for future generations of workers. I encourage you all to read them, share them, learn from them, and increase youth membership in our unions. I thank the EPSU youth network members for undertaking this work. Together we will build a stronger European Federation of Public Service Unions!



In solidarity,

**Jan Willem Goudriaan**

*EPSU General Secretary*







# Introduction

The necessity for the trade union movement to renew itself in order to survive may seem obvious, but it is not always reflected in trade union strategies. To remain relevant and become more effective, unions must reflect in their membership the composition of the workforce they seek to represent. In most cases, however, trade unions in Europe are becoming older as the proportion of young workers in their membership falls.

Methods of addressing this worrying trend are being developed in some unions, however, and this report is intended to assist others in the development of their own strategies.

The following section discusses the recent work of Kurt Vandaele of the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI) on unions and young workers. After that, there is a section which examines the European youth labour market in which unions must operate, and the way in which the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on young workers. The report will then go on to describe and discuss initiatives undertaken by national union confederations and EPSU affiliates to address the challenge of organising young workers. Six case studies are presented throughout the report as examples of good or innovative practice.

There is then a discussion of the issues which must be confronted by public service unions wishing to improve the level of organisation of young workers within their sectors. The report concludes with a brief summary of the issues identified by the researcher.

The definition of a young worker varies widely, from the Eurostat Labour Force Survey category of 16-24, to union definitions which might go as high as 35 (within some professions the lower floor is likely to be 21 or 22 owing to the need to become appropriately qualified). This report uses whatever definition is used by the organisation being discussed, and clarified where necessary with the age range in question.



Acknowledgements: this report would not have been possible without the support and guidance of EPSU officers and the youth network. Particular thanks are due to those who took part in interviews for the case studies: **Joe Lahoud** of Vision (Sweden); **Clare Coatman** of the TUC (UK); **Frank Bennekom** of the FNV (Netherlands); **Line Peterson** of Kommunal (Denmark); **Andrea Mosca** and **Fabrizio Rosetti** of CGIL (Italy); **Jonas Schmit** and **Marcel Vogels** of Ver.Di (Germany).

# Existing research on unions and young workers

This section draws heavily on the work of Kurt Vandaele of the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI). In 2018 he wrote a chapter on unions and young workers for a book on young workers in Europe<sup>2</sup>. It took the form of an extensive review of recent research and evidence regarding this key relationship. It is very detailed and contains much which is of value. There is an English version available online<sup>3</sup>. His key conclusions and arguments are summarised below and have been used as a framework for this report.

Vandaele shows that the decline in young trade union members is both widespread and a long term trend. Between 2004 and 2014, only 3 European countries showed a decline in the median age of union members (Austria, Italy and Hungary) with all others showing an increase. In other words, trade union members are, for the most part getting older. But young labour market entrants are not homogeneous, and national conditions are very important in determining the actual level of membership among young workers - where adult union membership is higher than the European average, so too is youth membership (even if it is at the same time lower than amongst older workers in the same country).

The national contexts which must be considered include demographics. So for example smaller birth cohorts and later labour market entry due to expansion of tertiary education are likely to result in there being fewer potential young members (at least so long as unions restrict their efforts to recruiting those who have settled on a career). At the same time, there is a countervailing tendency for those continuing their education to work during their studies, but there are very large differences between countries in the extent to which this occurs (see table 00 below).

There is also the institutional context, particularly the extent to which trade unions are embedded in national structures, for example through generally applicable sectoral collective

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<sup>2</sup> "How can trade unions in Europe connect with young workers?", in *Youth Labor in Transition: Inequalities, Mobility, and Policies in Europe*, eds Jacqueline O'Reilly, Janine Leschke, Renate Ortlieb, Martin Seeleib-Kaiser, and Paola Villa, Oxford University Press

<sup>3</sup> <https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/oso/9780190864798.001.0001/oso-9780190864798-chapter-22>

bargaining, or involvement in the administration of unemployment benefits or occupational training. These tend to correlate with higher overall levels of union membership than in those countries where unions do not have these roles.

Finally, there is the extent to which trade unions constitute part of the social norms within each country – through the membership and attitudes of peers and family or more generally through the national discourse (such as in news media).

Vandaele argues against casting young people themselves, through their attitudes (sometimes said to be self-centred and individualistic) as the problem. Instead, he points to contextual issues, such as attitudinal differences between those with very little experience of paid work (because of age or prolonged unemployment) and those who have had more, either during or after their full-time education.

He also points to younger generations' participation in anti-austerity and pro-democracy movements (to which we might also add environmental issues) as evidence of critical political engagement. In terms of attitudes, in fact, there is considerable evidence that young workers may have a more favourable attitude towards unions than immediately preceding generations, although again context matters, and this will not be a uniform picture. However, this appears to be combined with young people having only limited knowledge regarding unions and their role.

In summary, Vandaele's conclusion is that building a pro union consciousness amongst young workers is both possible and necessary, but that it is best developed within their peer groups when they first enter the labour market. In many cases this will be during their full-time education, which is of particular relevance to those who enter public service professions, who are likely to do so having undergone tertiary education. But there is a co-dependent relationship between unionisation and 'demonstrating the effectiveness of unions'. Those working in sectors in which union organisation is weak may find it difficult to see the potential benefits of union membership, and at the same time organisation in those areas will remain weak unless young workers become trade union members (and activists).

# Context – the European labour market and COVID-19

Well before the COVID-19 pandemic struck, young people were faring badly in European labour markets, facing higher levels of unemployment and insecure work than those in older cohorts. While governments across Europe pursued ‘supply side’ solutions which focussed on training, job search assistance and work experience, they did not, as was pointed out in the EPSU 2012 report<sup>4</sup>, seek to ensure young people were employed in public services. Consequently the proportion of the public service workforce who were aged under 25 was steadily declining. In fact, their over-representation in insecure jobs had meant that the youngest workers were often the first to be terminated in the aftermath of the 2008-9 financial crisis.

The COVID-19 crisis has again hit youth employment harder than that of older adults. According to data from the European Labour Force Survey published in November 2020, employment levels among 15–24-year-olds fell from 33.3% to 31.2% (most of this cohort are in full time education). This two percentage point drop compares with much smaller falls for those aged 25 to 54 (1.2%) and 55 to 64 (0.4%). Youth unemployment in November 2020 varied enormously, ranging from 6.1% in Germany to 40.1% in Spain, with the EU average standing at 17.7% (Eurostat data).

Much of the disproportionate effect on young workers has been attributed to the fact that they are more likely to be found in the hard-hit retail, hospitality and leisure industries than in manufacturing and public services. As Vandaele points out, many (perhaps most) students work during their studies, and are likely to be working in these vulnerable sectors. This is not true of all countries, although the tendency to work and study is on the increase in most. The graph below was published by Eurostat, compares the trend between 2009 and 2016, and (rather confusingly) shows the proportion NOT working while studying. Overall, the proportion reporting doing no work during their studies fell from 75% to 53%.

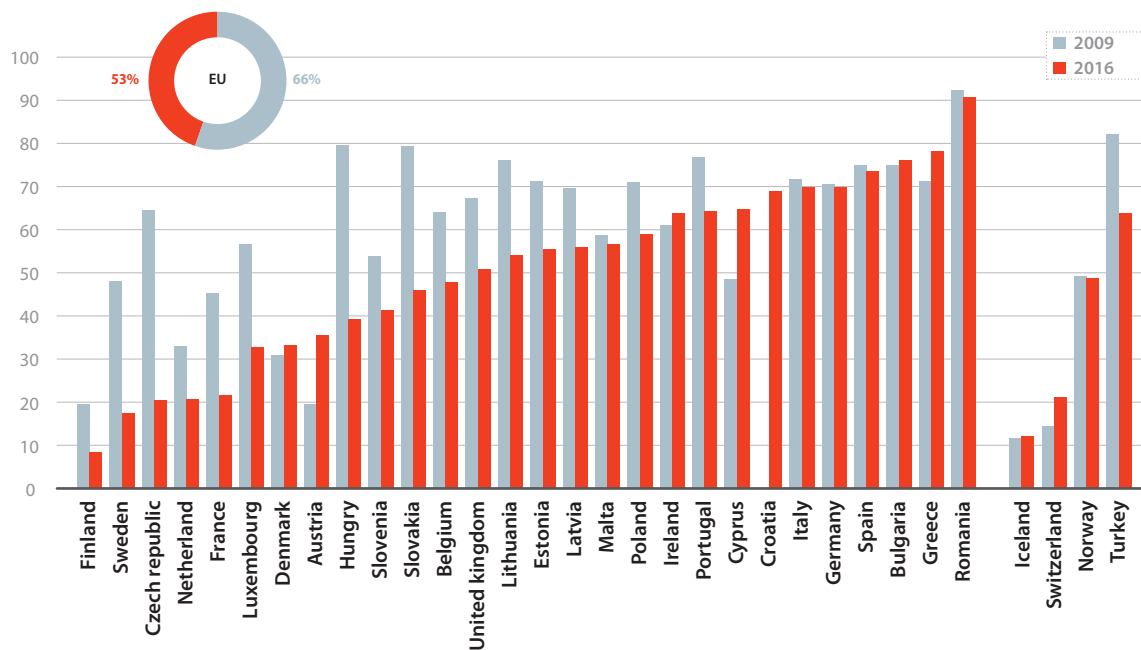
Within this there are massive differences between countries, with almost all Finnish students reporting working, but almost none in Romania. These differences will be driven by for example, differences in the age at which compulsory education ends, funding arrangements

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<sup>4</sup> Clark, N. (2012) *Training, jobs and decent work for young people*, EPSU

for tertiary education and the state of national labour markets. This is of significance to public service unions because strategies for organising young workers may need to focus not only on where they are going in terms of careers, but on where they are in the labour market now.

**Proportion of people aged 15-34 with some form of education who did not work during their studies in 2009 and 2016**



Source: Eurostat<sup>5</sup>

If the trend identified in this data has continued, we can conclude that most full-time students are now also workers – at least until the shake out of jobs related to COVID-19. This will include many of those destined later in their working lives for public services.

At the same time, the tendency of public services to employ ever reducing proportions of young workers appears to have continued, analysis of official statistics suggests.

<sup>5</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Young\\_people\\_on\\_the\\_labour\\_market\\_-\\_statistics](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Young_people_on_the_labour_market_-_statistics)

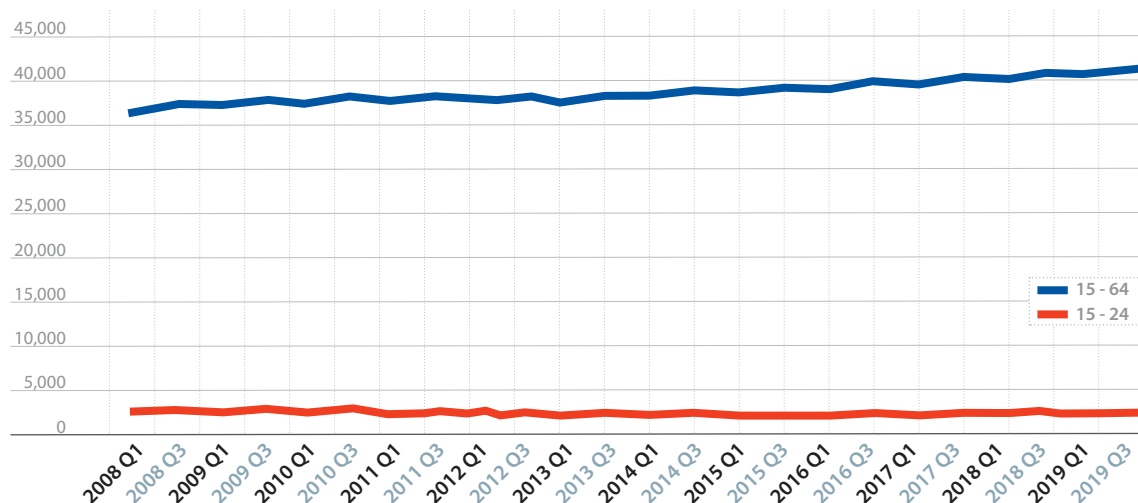
To demonstrate this, I aggregated Eurostat employment data for five key public service sectors:

- public administration, defence and social security;
- human health activities; residential care;
- social work activities (without accommodation), and
- libraries, archives & museums.

Looking at the period from the beginning of 2008 to the end of 2019 (so before the COVID-19 pandemic), the total number of workers aged 15-64 is compared with the number of workers aged 15-24.

As the table below shows, while overall employment in these sectors increased, from 36.5 million workers to 41.5 million, there was no significant increase in the number of young workers – in fact, if anything the number declined.

**000s workers in five public service sectors, EU 28, Q1 08 - Q4 19, by age**



During this period the proportion of under 25s in these sectors fell from 7% to 6%, and while this may not at first seem a huge change, it suggests that an additional 415,000 young European workers could have been working in public services, had the proportion simply stayed the same in 2019 as in 2008.

To some extent this decline may be related to the tendency for public service posts to require tertiary qualifications, often at degree or postgraduate level. This will tend to result in later

entry into public service careers. This is also likely to mean that young workers' early experience of employment is in private service sectors, during their studies, and only in later years do they enter public services.

However, the decline also represents the consequence of the neoliberal turn against state provision of services and public spending which began before the 2008/9 crash and continued afterwards. As the supply of entry level jobs dried up, the remaining public service workforce grew steadily older. Two of our case studies report some change in public policy and its effect on opportunities for young entrants (Denmark and Italy). In Italy, where student working is relatively uncommon, recruitment into public services has recovered very recently. In Denmark there has been an increase in the availability of part time public service jobs which are suitable for students and other young workers.





# Trade union initiatives to recruit and organise young workers

Working with the EPSU secretariat, six examples of trade union initiatives aimed at increasing young workers' membership of and participation in trade unions have been identified and investigated in detail. Some involve unions with public service memberships while others have been mounted by national Confederations. In each case, the national context is important, since the most appropriate strategies will be determined by factors such as the national status of trade unions. While few countries will have the intimate relationship between trade unions, employers and universities described in the Danish case, varying degrees of union engagement are reported in Germany and Sweden, while in Italy, engagement with recent graduates' career paths has taken place as a solely union initiative.

The degree to which collective bargaining influences workers' pay and conditions of employment will also impact on the degree of relevance that unions can present to young workers. Education funding systems (for example the presence of tuition fees), the extent to which students are also workers, and the level of youth unemployment are all relevant to the choice of union strategies.

The table below compares the six countries in which our case studies are located showing national trade union penetration, collective bargaining coverage, youth unemployment and student employment. As can be seen there is wide divergence between countries with low youth unemployment (Germany) and those with very high levels (Italy), those with high union membership *and collective bargaining cover (Denmark and Sweden)* and those with low levels of both (UK).

## Case study summary

Country/trade union organisation	Trade union membership (% of employed workforce)	% workers covered by collective bargaining	Youth unemployment (%)	% students working regularly (plus occasionally)
<b>ITALY</b> CGIL	34	80	33.7	11 (+13)
<b>GERMANY</b> VER.DI	17	62	6.0	54 (+17)
<b>DENMARK</b> KOMMUNAL (HK)	67	80	12.3	36 (+25)
<b>NETHERLANDS</b> FNV	17	81	8.8	45 (+32)
<b>UK</b> TUC	23	29	12.0	36
<b>SWEDEN</b> TCO/VISION	66	88	25.2	28 (+21)

Level of trade union membership for 2017 or most recent taken from Visser (2019) <http://www.uva-aias.net/en/ictwss>; most recent collective bargaining coverage from ETUI database ([www.etui.org](http://www.etui.org)); youth (16-24) unemployment for 2020, from Eurostat Labour Force Survey (except UK, ONS Labour Force Survey Jan-Mar 2021); working student data from 2016 Eurostudent survey (except UK – working in term time 2019, NUS data).

*While each case study stands as an example in its own right, the following sections address some of the points of comparison.*

## The role of Confederations

Several of the initiatives examined have been organised at the Confederal (rather than sectoral or union) level. This can result in higher profile and better resourced activities than might be possible for a union on their own. It may also generalise the relevance of unions to workers in one sector (hospitality, for example) who may then go on to work in public services, such as healthcare. The drawback might be that campaigns are less focussed on matters of relevance to workers in specific sectors (public services for example), and therefore be less effective in demonstrating positive outcomes in terms of membership.

Two of our case studies (FNV in the Netherlands and TUC in the UK) deal with such interventions. They differ in key respects. The FNV are able to offer a special membership category in

conjunction with student unions, which enables them to monitor the outcomes in terms of new members, but the TUCs relationship with affiliated unions does not permit this. Instead, the TUC's project had as one of its aims the trialling of new means of interacting with young workers which might be adopted by affiliated unions.

In a similar way, the CFDT confederation in France published in December 2020 the results of a survey of over 2000 young people (aged between 16 and 30), dealing with issues of concern to them. In part this served to inform sectoral level unions about the priorities of young workers, but was also used to demonstrate that on some key issues, such as opposition to precarious contracts, the CFDT was in tune with young workers<sup>6</sup>. The CGTP confederation (Portugal) chose National Young People's Day in March 2021 to mount a demonstration and campaign focused on opposition to precarity amongst young workers who were also essential workers<sup>7</sup>.

How effective these activities are is difficult to gauge, but to be successful they should form part of a broader strategy which focuses on drawing young workers into unions in a manner which permits them to influence strategy.

## Approaching students

Given the growing number and proportion of young people going into tertiary education across Europe, combined with the general (but not universal) tendency for them to also work during their studies, it is no surprise to see this reflected in a number of our case studies (such as FNV, Vison and Kommunal).

Relatively low levels of students working during their studies might suggest union interventions which were targeted at prospective members (e.g. free membership for students); while high levels might lead to interventions aimed at an audience of those needing current representation/organisation as well as those needing it at the point of graduation and employment, as in the case of the FNV campaign and to some extent in the Kommunal case. In these examples recruitment into a union can provide the young workers with union support in the employment they take on during their studies. This is addressing the point made by Kurt Vandaele that many young workers' first experience of the world of work is likely to be in the private service sector jobs that predominate in student employment.

In Kommunal's case, this is an assertion of the union's role in public services and in the strong system of social dialogue that exists in the sector. But it is also a defensive measure designed

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<sup>6</sup> [https://www.cfdt.fr/portail/outils/autres-outils/enquete-focus-jeunes-les-resultats-srv1\\_1152074](https://www.cfdt.fr/portail/outils/autres-outils/enquete-focus-jeunes-les-resultats-srv1_1152074)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.cgtp.pt/cgtp-in/organizacoes-especificas/interjovem/15686-dia-nacional-da-juventude>

to protect the relevance of the union which is competing for members with smaller but more occupation or profession specific unions who focus exclusively on graduates.

Other initiatives address students as potential workers in specific professions. This is the approach adopted by TCO/Vision in Sweden, and to some extent by CGIL. A meeting of the EPSU organising committee in 2020 also heard from the Royal College of Nursing (UK) about their system of lay 'ambassadors' to promote the union and free pre-qualification membership. This method is essentially building a pre-employment relationship with a group of students who are highly likely to enter the occupations organised by the relevant union.

By no means all public service jobs are so clearly identified with specific qualifications or educational institutions, so there is a need for better research into the trajectories followed by young workers into particular occupations. It is noteworthy that HK and the FNV have targeted their activities at a limited number of universities where they can have maximum impact.

The TUC on the other hand chose to exclude working students from their research and initiatives, as they specifically wanted to find workers likely to remain in the relatively low-paid sectors they were already working in, since these are particularly poorly organised sectors.

## **Campaigning on young people's issues**

One way of presenting unions as relevant to younger workers is to be seen as campaigning over issues which are of concern to them. This might take the form of regular, formal events such as Vision's webinars to mark International Women's Day, or the CGTP holding campaign events on National Young People Day.

The FNV's involvement firstly with the campaign over youth rates of the national minimum wage and then fighting for improvements to the student finance system (by replacing loans with grants) were high profile but importantly were carried out in conjunction with student unions. Perhaps more importantly, the minimum wage campaign did lead to an improvement, and as Vandaele points out, there needs to be a credible prospect for unions to win improvements for them to attract large numbers of fresh recruits. As the TUC representative pointed out during their interview, many young workers felt there was no way for them to bring about improvements in their working conditions, so unions need to be able not only to argue for change, but to show that they are capable of winning it.

Ver.Di's example, where there is in place a widespread system of youth committees which can influence the union's policy and bargaining strategy, highlights the importance of continuous engagement with young members after they have been recruited. This requires a certain amount of 'joined up thinking' which matches organising strategy with the decision-making structures of the union. This is also likely to promote activism (as distinct from simply membership) amongst young members.

A useful lesson is also presented in the HK (Denmark) example. The demand for more part time public service jobs suitable for students (and other young workers) to be made available arose from student unions, but was adopted by HK.

## **Supporting entry into the labour market**

The unions in our case studies are clearly positioning themselves as partners in the transition from education into work, a point made clear by Vision (Sweden). The online services being developed by them offer advice on employment rights, contracts and pay. But they also provide guidance on cv writing, job search, interview techniques and in the advanced case of the CGIL, training for passing entrance exams.

Where unions have clear role in the delivery of vocational training (as in Denmark and Germany), this is a natural development, although CGIL are very clear on their preference to maintain independence from the state in their project.

Some also offer limited amounts of mentoring and job shadowing, but since these rely on the participation of existing activists they will always be in a limited supply, realistically speaking.

## **Recruitment methods**

Special subscription rates for students appeared in several cases, some offering limited services for free membership which would convert into full subscriptions when employment in the young workers' chosen profession was obtained. This is likely to be most effective where career pathways are clear – as in nursing generally, or in public administration in Denmark.

Other efforts seem to be aimed at establishing the union's 'brand', through branded promotional items, social media presence, stalls at job fairs and privileged access in schools, colleges and universities.

Using 'ambassadors' who are tasked with promoting the union with peers (usually at universities) was quite common, the RCN reported this, but it was also used by FNV and TCO/Vision (although they do not use the term ambassador).

## Issues to address

In developing effective plans to attract more young members (and activists) winning support from sectoral union and confederation leaderships is crucial. A key question to address is 'what happens if we do nothing?' In the case studies we have examined, the option of doing nothing had clearly been rejected as unacceptable by those leaderships.

But guessing at the best strategy should be avoided. The techniques chosen must be appropriate to the national contexts in terms of trade union status, education and economic prospects. But they must also be targeted appropriately taking into account what young workers themselves say they want, and the level of knowledge about unions.

Clearly there is a widespread acceptance that unions need to know more about what concerns young workers have, as well as the extent to which they see unions being able to respond to those concerns. The TUC, FNV and CFDT have all engaged in survey or less formal interviews to assess this. In the Ver.Di case we see a continuing process of engagement with young workers (albeit largely in workplaces where there is already some union presence).

In seeking to understand the demands and views of young workers, surveys based on pre-determined, closed questions are less likely to provide useful answers than more open and less structured processes. These are more challenging to analyse, but are nevertheless vital to understanding the variety of experiences and viewpoints.

Labour market data can also help. The more unions understand about the trajectories followed by young workers into the areas in which those unions organise, the better they can identify the best points at which to approach them.

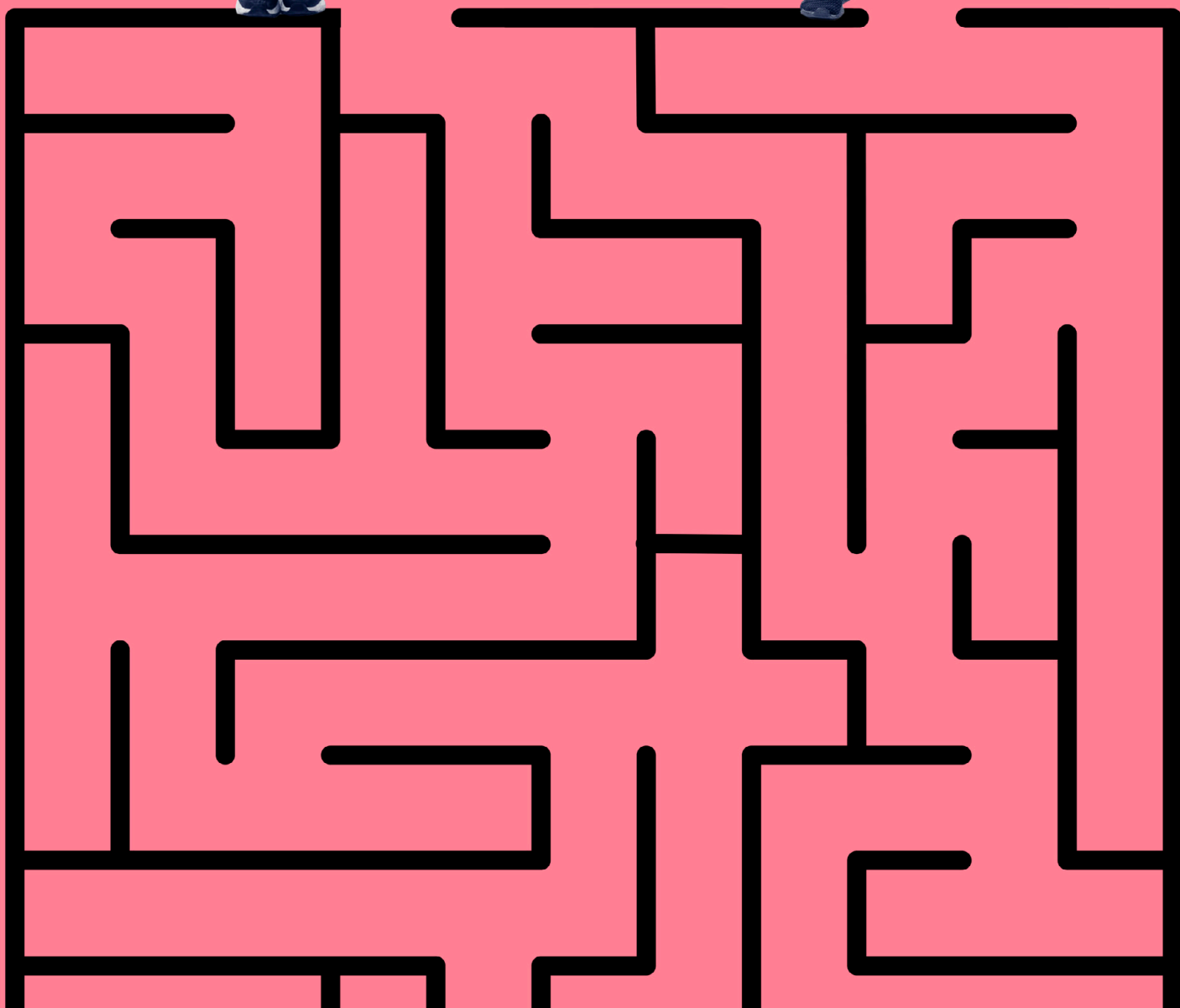
Unions may find they need to develop relationships with potential allies – student unions being one obvious example. These need to go beyond formal relations between officials, however, and lead to direct engagement with young people. There is also scope for developing trade union engagement with the movement against climate change in ways which draw potential recruits towards the union movement.

The temptation to try for quick wins should be avoided. It is significant that some of our examples have already been running for some time (Kommunal and Ver.Di for example), while others have at the least medium-term objectives (and funding) – for example CGIL and FNV. Sustained practices, with appropriate dedicated staff and funding are all needed. This is why confederations may be best able to carry at least some of the resource requirements on behalf

of groups of members (the Vision case, for example was launched after an initiative by the TCO confederation, involving its three largest affiliates).

Outcomes need to be evaluated in order to determine whether the chosen intervention(s) are making a difference. The type of measure needs careful consideration. Membership levels may fluctuate for many reasons not least, in the public services, political decisions over public spending, recruitment and staff levels. It may therefore be important to design means of measuring the impacts directly attributable to the chosen intervention. Aims other than simple membership growth may be harder to evaluate, for example CGIL's efforts to counter the negative stereotyping of public servants, but nonetheless be valuable, only showing up in membership figures after some time.







# Conclusions

When carrying out social research of any kind, one can frequently encounter the problem of the apparent absence of data. Preparing this report was no exception, and it took considerable effort to locate the six case studies, illuminating as they are.

But the absence of data is, in itself, data. In this case it suggests either that initiatives aimed at organising young workers are exceptional, or that efforts which are being made are taking place at a more local level and not widely shared - even within their own organisations. It is to be hoped, therefore that this report may play some part in encouraging the development of new organising efforts aimed at young workers as well as greater sharing of experiences.

To this end, it will be vital for unions to understand not only where young workers are now, but where they hope (or are likely) to be. The life course of young workers now has changed significantly from how it was even 20 years ago, and this may be even more marked for those entering public services.

The neoliberal tide which swept Europe over recent decades was often accompanied by the denigration of public servants, and a decline in the quality of employment in those services. While the COVID-19 pandemic has re-emphasised the importance of the state, it has also led in some cases to politicians blaming public servants for their own failings. This means that union defence of the public service ethos, as well as of public service employment as a benchmark for decent work has become more important. It will certainly be of importance to young workers coming into the sectors organised by EPSU affiliates.

Increasing the efforts made to attract younger workers into unions will not only help to revitalise and grow those unions, but also help in the defence of the public services on which we all rely. These efforts should take into account national, institutional and social context. However, as the case studies in this report show, there are many different ways to approach young workers. The main thing is to be active, to take initiative, and to reach out to young people in environments they are in, through platforms they use, and on issues they are engaged with.

# Case study 01: FNV, Netherlands

<b>Trade union membership (%)</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Collective bargaining cover (%)</b>	<b>81%</b>
<b>Youth unemployment (%)</b>	<b>8.8%</b>
<b>Working students (% of all tertiary students)</b>	<b>45% regularly, 32% occasionally</b>

## Young & United

<https://www.youngandunited.nl/home>

The FNV trade union confederation launched their recent work targeted at young workers with a campaign opposing the national minimum wage regulations which meant that workers were only entitled to the full adult rate at age 23. This campaign was judged successful when the qualifying age was reduced to 21 years. It had succeeded in mobilising young workers (in some cases through their student unions) and threw up a group of young activists. However, it did not result in demonstrable growth in youth membership, and the FNV lost contact with the activists when the campaign was over.

Nevertheless, the success of this campaign in policy terms led to a more systematic approach to young workers being developed. This began with visits to universities during 2019 to talk to students about their concerns. With most students working, 25% of them for more than 16 hrs per week, dealing with work-related issues was high on their list. So too were student loans resulting in debt and government underinvestment in education.

This led to the 'Not my debt – not my fault' campaign, which was launched in partnership with several student unions. Before 2015 student loans were written off after 10 years, but this had been changed so that the debt could remain in some circumstances up until age 65. With average debt standing at €30 thousand many students were working for 20 hours



per week to keep their debts down. The campaign demanded replacement of loans with grants in the longer term, but for 12 hours work per week to be sufficient for students to be debt free.

In developing closer relationships with students and student unions, the FNV found that students would bring their work-related problems to them. In agreement with the participating student unions, a joint membership scheme was developed where students could join at a special rate of €2.80 per month. Almost 5,000 students joined in the first year of the project in selected universities in seven Dutch cities.

It is hoped that this will help in a longer-term project aimed at recruiting workers in 'strategic' companies which are both large employers and have a high proportion of young workers. This activity has been supported by a team of three staff at FNV together with 7 student organisers (one in each of the chosen cities).

Other support offered to student members includes career advice, help on improving CVs and a 'contract checker'

## Case study 02: TUC (UK)

<b>Trade union membership (%)</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Collective bargaining cover (%)</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Youth unemployment (%)</b>	<b>12.0</b>
<b>Working students (% of all tertiary students)</b>	<b>36</b>

In 2016, the TUC trade union confederation launched the 'Reaching Young Workers' programme aimed at raising the profile of unions amongst young people, as well as changing trade unionism more generally to make it effective for young workers.

This began with a detailed analysis of what they termed 'Britain's young core workers', namely those aged 21-30 but not in full time education. 80% of these worked in the private sector, but only 6% were trade union members. It was followed by a detailed study of similar workers who were not union members. A small group completed a WhatsApp diary recording their experiences at work, while a larger group were interviewed.

These identified several issues of concern to the workers – such as lack of training and progression, low pay and problematic working hours, and unmet desires for work that was rewarding (not just in monetary terms). Also revealed was the extent to which poor (and often unlawful) treatment by employers had become 'normalised' amongst these workers, as had the fear that speaking up or objecting might result in loss of their jobs or other disadvantage.

The research was used to propose four categories of young worker – those who were 'desperate', feeling they had to accept poor treatment for fear of losing their job; those wanting 'progress' in their workplace or sector; those seeing their current job as a 'stop-gap' while they found something better; and those who were 'too comfortable' in that the job was not central to their lives, nor particularly oppressive. Unions, it was thought, could have something to offer the first three groups, but each one had differing priorities.



An app for smart phones was developed as a first way of opening a relationship with these young workers ('Worksmart'). This offered users access to basic information on employment rights, guidance on work-related matters such as how to ask for promotion or check how your salary compares with others, and online coaching - for example on work-life balance. The TUC cannot offer membership, but has a union finder to assist users find the appropriate union for them. All this is also available on a website (<https://worksmart.org.uk/>).

The original intention of this project was to assist affiliated unions improve their recruitment of young workers, and the site is less frequently updated than in its early days.

## Case study 03: TCO/Vision (Sweden)

<b>Trade union membership (%)</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Collective bargaining cover (%)</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>Youth unemployment (%)</b>	<b>25.2</b>
<b>Working students (% of all tertiary students)</b>	<b>28 + 21 occasionally</b>

Over past few decades, young workers (considered in the union to be those aged under 35) had become less keen to join unions, but more recently this seems to be changing. This may partly be because of union actions, but also because following the 2008/9 financial crisis, what had previously been thought of as secure (employment, conditions of work) was seen as more precarious. Interventions in universities during 2006/7 had found a lack of knowledge of unions, or the need for them. Union membership in the private sector had gone from a low level of about 30% to closer to 60%.

The TCO confederation had brought the three main affiliates (including Vision) together to present themselves at universities in the same way that big corporations did, as a part of the labour market. This has now been running for almost 15 years.

Regular events and stalls are held at universities where it is thought that potential members will be studying, for example where political science is taught. Union branded material is distributed, and incentives (such as cinema tickets and discounts on other purchases) are offered to those signing up for membership. This succeeds in recruiting about 3,000 new members each year. At present 10% of the total membership of 200,000 are student members. Those who become full members after having been student members, and those who are aged under 30 when joining are entitled to reduced membership fees (100SKR) for their first year of membership.

Members can access VisionDirect which can deal with membership queries, but also advice on employment rights. This also offers advice on CVs, LinkedIn profiles and job interviews.



The union also holds regular competitions for essays on subjects such as political science or human resources, the prize being a 300 euro 'scholarship'. In addition, it offers 'work shadowing' where existing activists can register their availability for students interested in their particular areas of employment to follow them at work for defined periods. During the recent period of closure due to COVID-19, online webinars were held to mark International Women's Day. In the future these would be held at the universities, featuring more branded give-aways and educative games.

## Case study 04: Kommunal (Denmark)

<b>Trade union membership (%)</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>Collective bargaining cover (%)</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>Youth unemployment (%)</b>	<b>12.3</b>
<b>Working students (% of all tertiary students)</b>	<b>36+25 occasionally</b>

HK, the largest union in Denmark has been running interventions at universities for 12 years, but this case study focuses on the municipal sector.

In the process of social dialogue employers and union in this sector had agreed that the traditional two-year vocational training was no longer adequate for many jobs. In its place a three-and-a-half-year professional bachelor's degree in public administration was established, which mixed vocational and academic content and included one or two (unpaid) internships within municipalities.

Using the strong relationship that exists between Danish unions and Universities, HK can arrange access to the students on these courses. At the point students move from one year to the next, older students introduce them to the next stage. At this point HK intervenes explaining their role in the genesis of the qualification and in their prospective employers. In all the union aims to visit each cohort three or four times during the course of the degree.

Some of the visits take the form of workshops, for example on the choice of elective element of the course or assisting with finding intern placements. This reflects the close involvement of the union with all types of vocational education (which is a general feature of the Danish system in general), an involvement that HK is keen to emphasise to the students.

Students can join HK for free, which entitles them to access to advice, events, conferences and online courses. However, it does not entitle them to representation and support in their paid work, which is only available to those paying 95DKR per month. Most students do some paid





work, as the student grant (of between 4000 and 6000DKR per month) does not cover all living costs (tuition is free), so this possibility is important.

HK's close involvement with students, employers and universities enables them to identify problems affecting the students. For example, during their internships (which can last up to 5 months), there is no time for additional (paid) employment -although there is a small additional grant available during such periods. It is also the case that the public sector as a whole was offering few part-time jobs which might be undertaken by students and other young workers. This was raised initially by student unions, who mounted campaigns for the years 2014-2017, and has now been supported by trade unions. This has led to employers changing their employment policies.

## Case study 05: Ver.Di (Germany)

<b>Trade union membership (%)</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Collective bargaining cover (%)</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Youth unemployment (%)</b>	<b>6.0</b>
<b>Working students (% of all tertiary students)</b>	<b>54 + 17 occasionally</b>

Ver.Di has developed a programme for approaching young workers/trainees in medium and large enterprises which reflects the widespread system of apprenticeships and similar vocational training schemes. The union has youth secretaries in each region (youth is considered in Ver.Di to be those aged under 27). At present there are 70 in post with some regions having specific secretaries for particular sectors such as municipalities or Lander (state level governments). The better organised a sector or region is in terms of adult membership, the more likely that there will be good youth representation.

Works Councils in large organisations have specific role of ‘trainee representatives’. Youth secretaries attempt to meet with these representatives at the beginning of each training year, and to meet all new trainees advertising the events with flyers, posters and other advertising. In some circumstances breakfast might be offered, although the union does not want to be seen as conducting high pressure sales techniques. Nevertheless these meetings have recruitment as their aim. The union has the legal right to such access, and the trainees the right to attend, but may not always see the value of doing so. In addition, in some cases, the union will organise sporting and other cultural events to attract young participants.

Organising these activities is approached in a very systematic way, with youth representatives provided with checklists of actions to be carried out. In some cases they may be assisted by other (adult) union representatives. Topics which may be discussed are determined on the basis of likely concerns of the young workers at the specific enterprise. It has also to be borne in mind that employers themselves may attend these events, and in some cases may be opposed to union membership, so local representatives are prepared for any arguments they might put



forward. They are also prepared for handling difficult audiences – who are hostile to the union, or simply silent, for example.

The meetings tend to last about 50 minutes, and sometimes will involve group discussions, but will always be evaluated afterwards to identify 'hot topics' for future events.

Once recruited, young members are represented through a variety of committees for young members. In some sectors these may be concerned with collective bargaining issues, ensuring that matters of concern to young members are included in bargaining agendas. In the public sector the youth committee has a more political role. These committees also have as their aims attracting new members, organising localised campaigns, increasing (where appropriate) participation in strikes and other industrial action.

During particular campaigns, union branded materials such as hoodies and t-shirts have been produced. Paying attention to using contemporary designs proves to be effective, and the recent 'TarifRebell' one proved particularly popular (see <https://www.wegewerk.com/en/projects/verj/collective-agreement-rebels-campaign/?cookieLevel=not-set&cHash=5330df3f7276b4ca451710fded7e3f76>). It is thought that during the months of activity over public service contracts, recruitment in public services rose by 32% over the previous year. Subscribers to the union's social media were also up by 33%.

## Case study 06: CGIL (Italy)

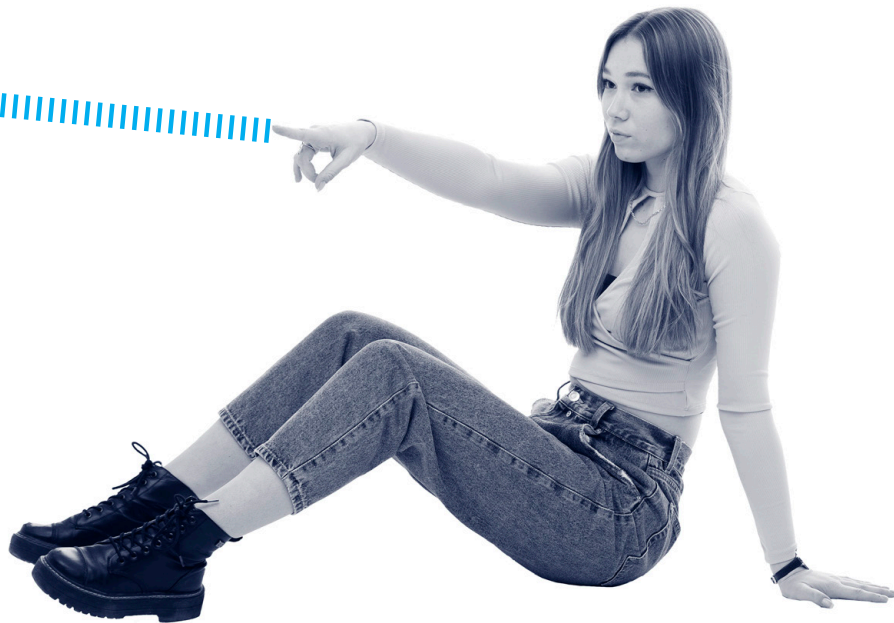
<b>Trade union membership (%)</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Collective bargaining cover (%)</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>Youth unemployment (%)</b>	<b>33.7</b>
<b>Working students (% of all tertiary students)</b>	<b>11+ 13 occasionally</b>

CGIL's project came after a 20-year crisis in public services, with widespread privatisation and cuts in public spending. Public discourse had been aimed at criticising public servants – who were often presented as being privileged over other workers. Governments implemented a cessation of recruitment, but also the termination of pay, progression and training agreements. By the end of the last decade, the average age of the remaining public service workers was 56.

The crisis became so marked that in 2019 the seriousness of the situation was recognised, and ministries began to talk of need to recruit up to 500,000 new workers in public services. This will present considerable problems in the training of a new cohort, but also presented a challenge to the unions.

The previously promoted hostility towards public service was one of the issues which CGIL felt it had to confront. So, it determined that it had to offer a robust defence of the public service ethos, as well as guidance to recent graduates wishing to find work in the sector, and support for passing entrance exams. In order to do so it would be necessary to identify those who might consider working in public services.

Together with a long standing private organisation (Forum PA), a 'Quality partnership' was established with a 5-6 year plan. The realised an ambitious plan to draw together on one interactive website all public service vacancies so that job seekers could come to one place. Originally they had hoped to have physical events for such young graduates, but due to COVID-19 have had to develop the online platforms as a stand-alone.



The training and job search platform that was developed (<https://concorsipubblici.fpcgil.it/>) included a detailed job search function showing vacancies by sector, contract type, closing date etc. But given that there will be exams for each type of job, the site also offers access to some training in how to succeed. Furthermore, it features union activists discussing and promoting the role and function of public administration.

For members only (those seeking jobs can join at a reduced rate of 50 euros per year) there is further, specialised, training relating to specific exams (for example for nursing, or for a particular municipality). There are 7 such modules already available, and CGIL intends there to be 12 in all.

This has been developed with union funds, as CGIL does not want to rely on state funding which might be withdrawn.

Since the platform has been operating there has been considerable interest, with 1.5 million page views in 2020. In April 2021 there were 400,000 visits, with the average visit being 3 minutes so the usage is definitely increasing, but it is too early to measure its success in recruiting new members.







**EPSU** is the **European Federation of Public Service Unions**. It is the largest federation of the ETUC and comprises 8 million public service workers from over 250 trade unions across Europe. EPSU organises workers in the energy, water and waste sectors, health and social services and local, regional and central government, in all European countries including the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood. It is the recognised regional organisation of Public Services International (PSI).

[www.epsu.org](http://www.epsu.org)



The **Competence Centre on the Future of Work** was founded in 2021 by the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation and it is based in Brussels. It aims to promote the debate on the future of work by bringing progressive approaches into the forefront based on social democratic values.

The Competence Centre addresses multidimensional aspects of the work itself by focusing on digital transformation, new forms of work, new technologies at the work place and social responses to digitalisation.

[www.fes.de](http://www.fes.de)