



University College Dublin  
Ireland's Global University

# Union voice in Ireland

First findings from the UCD  
Working in Ireland Survey, 2021

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## Report Headlines

### UNION DENSITY

Despite the decline in union density, **trade unions remain an important means of representing employees** in Irish workplaces.



### UNION MEMBERSHIP

On the whole, **Irish trade union members are positively disposed towards union membership**, value being members, and are generally committed to retaining union representation. **Four out of every five** unions members would vote to maintain the union in their workplace.



### COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

We estimate the **coverage of collective bargaining to be 43%**. A previous estimate derived from a similar employee survey in 2003 found it to be 53%. **This represents a decline of almost 19% over a period of 18 years.** (Using other data sources, the OECD estimated that collective bargaining coverage in Ireland in 2017 was 34%).





## REPRESENTATION GAP

Support for union representation among non-union employees is noteworthy: as many as **four out of every ten non-union workers would be willing to vote to establish a union** in their workplace.



## YOUNG WORKERS

Young workers are particularly well disposed to seeking union representation. Over **two thirds of non-union members aged 16-24 would vote to establish a union** in their workplace.



## LAPSED MEMBERSHIP

**Sixteen per cent** of the national workforce were union members in the past but are no longer.

## FEMALE MEMBERSHIP

The growth in female participation in the labour market is matched by **growing numbers of women joining trade unions**. Indeed, union membership is increasingly becoming a female phenomenon. There are now more women than men in trade unions.



## UNION CONCENTRATION

The **highest concentrations** of union membership are in the **public sector**. The hospitality sector has the lowest levels.

