



BRIEFLY ABOUT REPORT 3 OF 5 | 2011

# Opinions on Unions and Work

*Trade union mandate and interest in union work*



The Swedish Trade Union Confederation

## Summary of the third report

### The trade union mandate

The quintessence of trade union strength is having a large number of members who want to be organised in trade unions. But almost equally important is that a large number of members also want to assume trade union assignments and in their capacity as elected union representatives conduct daily trade union work at workplaces.

It appears from the third part of the 2011 edition of Opinions on Unions and Work that the readiness to assume trade union assignments is still significant. In spite of the fact that the number of members has decreased in recent years, the number of members with trade union assignments has increased slightly.

In 2011 there were in Sweden totally 325,000 trade union members with assignments. This figure exceeds the number of inhabitants in Malmö, the third biggest city in Sweden. Out of these, 158,000 had assignments within one of the 14 LO affiliated national unions. This is 1,000 persons more compared to five years ago. This means that 14 percent of the union members have trade union assignments (table 2.1).

Within TCO (The Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees) there are 119,000 and within SACO (The Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations – academics) there are 42,000 trade union members with assignments, which corresponds to 13 percent and 9 percent of the total number of members of the respective organisation.

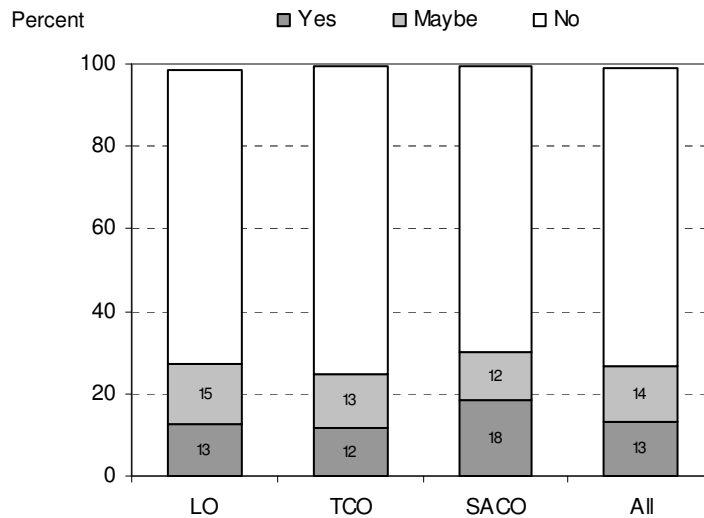
Men are, to a higher degree than women, elected representatives. 11 percent of the total number of women union members and 14 percent of men union members have union assignments. However, the division according to sex differs among LO, TCO and SACO in so far as it is more equal within TCO compared to LO and SACO.

The most common trade union assignments are safety delegate, board representative and contact/workplace representative.

**Table 2.1 Members with trade union assignments 2011**

		Number	Percent
LO	Women	61 300	12
	Men	96 900	16
	Total	158 200	14
TCO	Women	74 100	12
	Men	44 600	13
	Total	118 700	12
SACO	Women	20 900	8
	Men	21 200	11
	Total	42 100	9
Total	Women	156 200	11
	Men	169 600	14
	Total	325 800	13

**Diagram 2.6 May consider assuming trade union assignments**



**Members who may ponder the possibility of assuming union assignments**

28 percent of all trade union members, who do not already hold an assignment, are positive to or might contemplate assuming one. TCO members are almost just as positive, as 25 percent answer yes or maybe to this question. However, SACO members are the most affirmative as 30 percent could consider assuming a trade union assignment (diagram 2.6).

**Reasons for not assuming a trade union assignment**

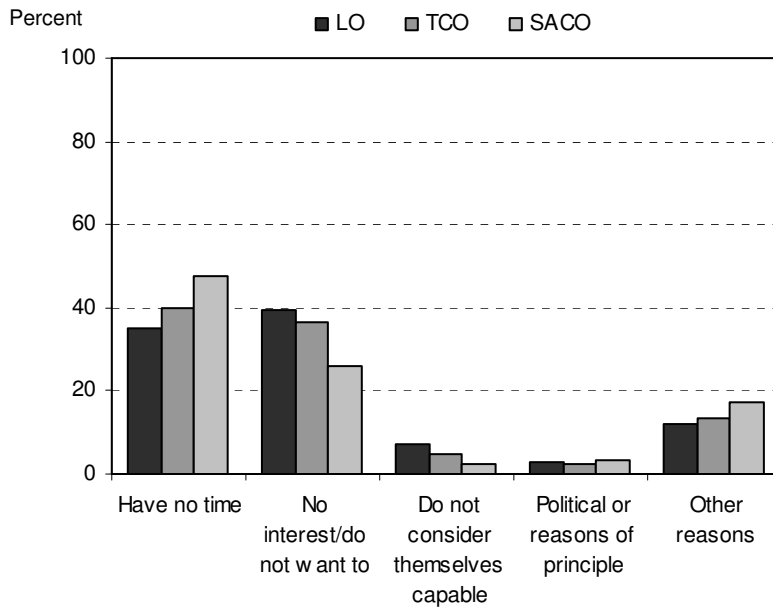
The main reasons quoted for not being ready to assume a trade union assignment are shortage of time and lack of interest. 35 percent of LO members state that they have no time and 39 percent that they are not interested (diagram 2.11).

Another 7 percent think that they are not capable of carrying out an assignment, while only some few percent think that such assignments would be disliked by the employer or workmates.

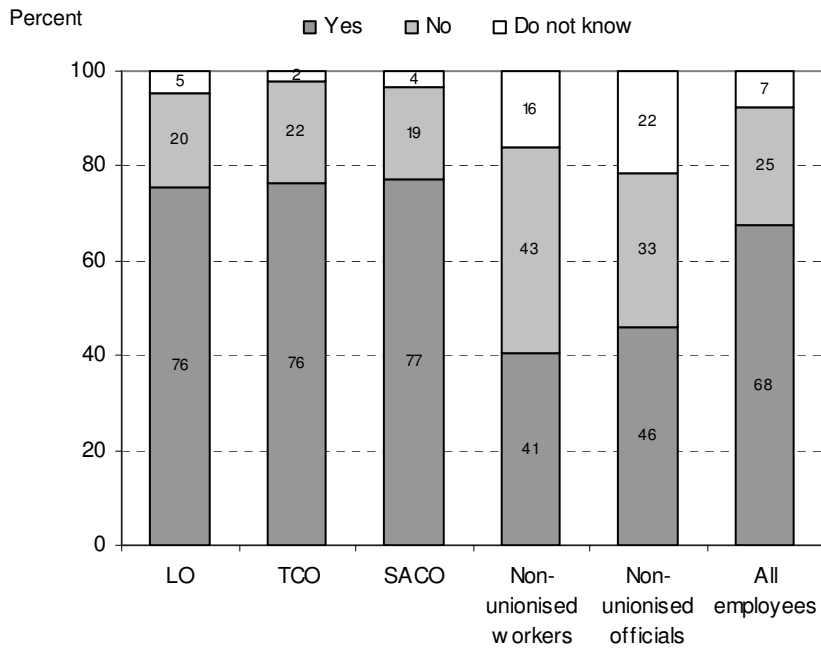
**Trade union club at the workplace**

Some 76 percent of all LO, TCO and SACO members have a trade union club or a trade union representative at their workplaces compared to only 41 percent of the non-union members. However, the number of non-union members who do not know if there is a trade union club or a trade union representative at the workplace, is rather large, i.e. 20 percent (diagram 3.1).

**Diagram 2.11 May consider assuming trade union assignments**



**Diagram 3.1 There is a union club or union representative at the workplace**



### Knows somebody who is elected trade union representative

At the places of work where there is a trade union club or trade union representative, most employees know a trade union representative. Of LO members, 91 percent know a trade union representative compared to 90 percent of TCO members and 83 percent of the SACO members.

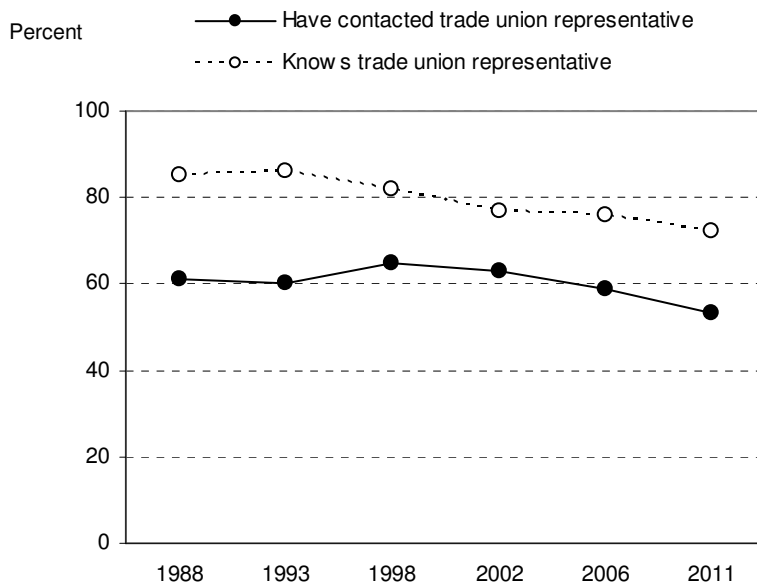
But even employees, who are not union members, often turn out to know a trade union representative. Out of non-union members, 68 percent of workers and 75 percent of officials state that they know a trade union representative at the workplace (diagram 4.7).

### Been in contact with an elected trade union representative

In the last few years, more than half the number of all employees have been in contact with a trade union representative seeking assistance or information. Members of LO and TCO are those who most frequently have contacted their trade union representatives, i.e. 56 percent in both organisations, compared to 49 percent among the SACO members.

But also many of those who are not union members have contacted a union representative, i. e. 25 percent of workers and 35 percent of officials.

**Diagram 4.7** Have contacted or know a trade union representative 1988-2011  
LO members



### Satisfied with the assistance

Most employees who have been in contact with a trade union representative turn out to be satisfied with the assistance or information given at that occasion. Out of all LO, TCO and SACO members who have been in contact with a union representative, some 78 percent state that they are satisfied with the assistance provided.

Even the majority of non-union members who have been in contact with a union representative is satisfied with the assistance, i. e. 57 percent of workers and 72 percent of officials respectively.

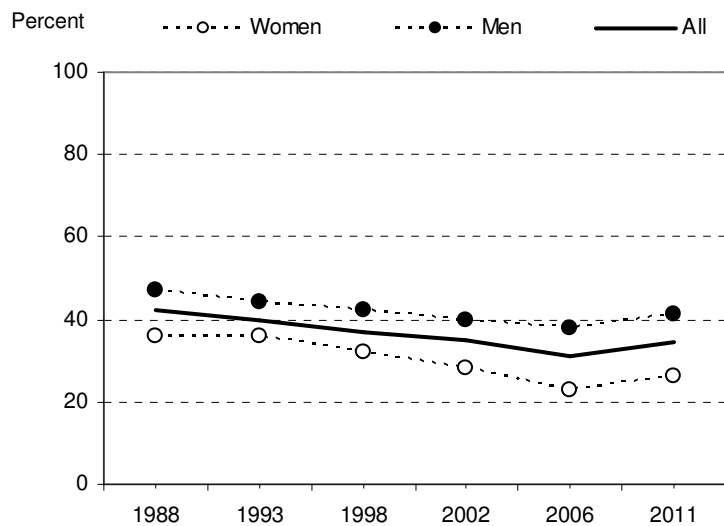
### Trade union meetings

Members' attendance at trade union meetings is an important element of trade union democracy. However, members' interest in attending trade union meetings seem tepid as only 35 percent have attended a meeting in the last year, although this is an upswing compared to the 2007 inquiry (diagram 5.5).

### Expressed their views at the meeting

It turns out that those who nevertheless attend union meetings also participate actively at the meeting by expressing their opinions on trade union issues. More than half the number, precisely 57 percent, of those who attended a union meeting in the last year, also expressed their views. Women more often than men express their opinions.

**Diagram 5.5 Attended trade union meetings**  
LO members 1988-2011



### Read trade union papers

The most common way to distribute trade union information is by doing so in the trade union papers. This is an effective method as almost everybody read their trade union paper – however, to a varying degree (diagram 6.1).

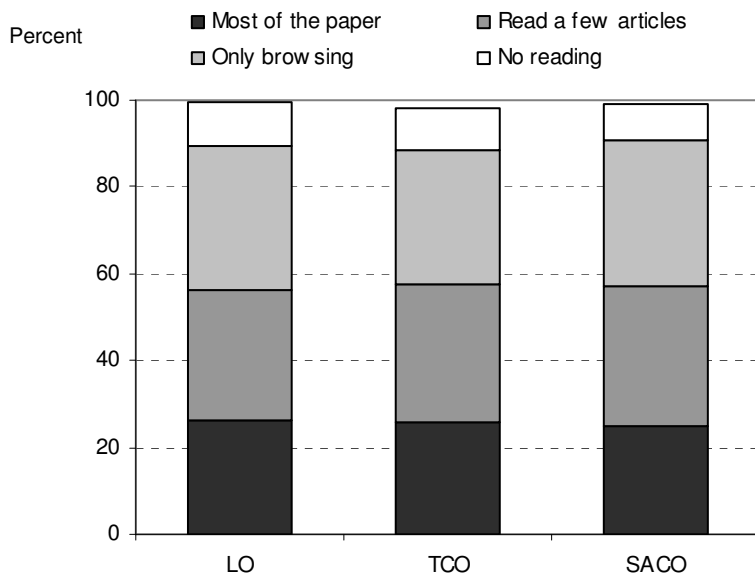
More than every fourth trade union member, 26 percent, read most of the contents of their trade union paper. 31 percent read a few stray articles, while 33 percent are content with just browsing through and eye the headlines. The remaining 10 percent does not read their trade union paper.

### Searched for trade union information on Internet

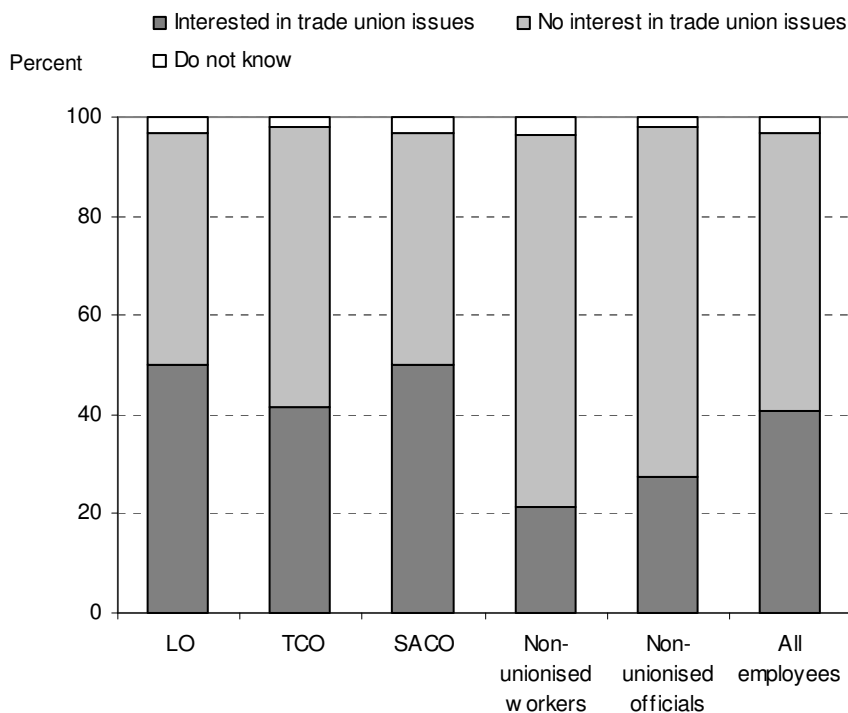
All national unions nowadays have well informative websites and it turns out that a great number of wage earners use Internet to search for trade union information. Out of all employees, 56 percent have searched for trade union information on Internet.

The difference is, however, essential between workers and officials. 44 percent of LO members have searched for trade union information on Internet, while some 70 percent of TCO and SACO members have done so.

**Diagram 6.1** Read trade union paper



**Diagram 8.1 Trade union interest**



**Trade union interest**

When asked straightforwardly, almost half the number, 47 percent, of the trade union members answer that they are interested in union issues. The number is somewhat higher among LO and SACO members, 50 percent, compared to 42 percent among TCO members (diagram 8.1).

There is, however, also an interest for trade union issues also among non-union members. Every fourth person, who is not unionised, states that they have an interest in union issues.

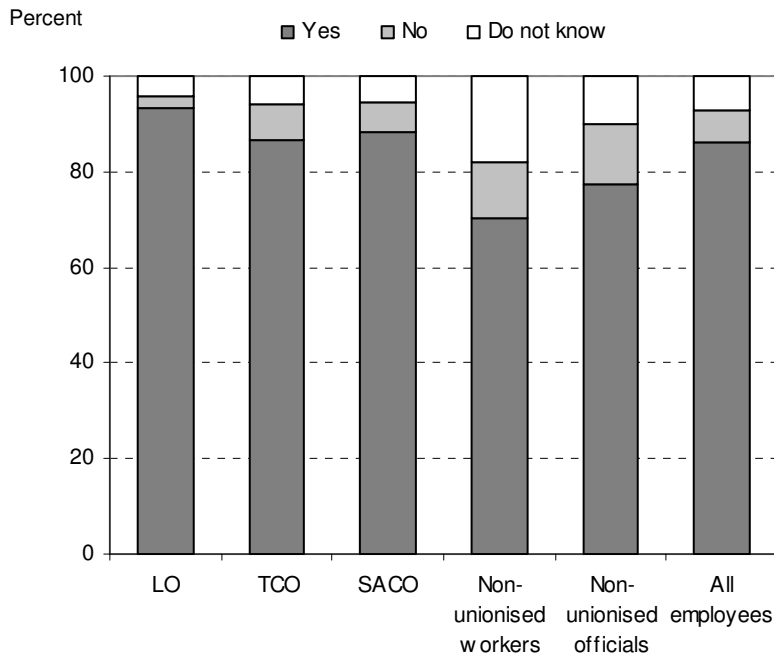
**Knowledge of collective agreements**

The third part of the 2011 edition of Opinions on the Unions and Work is concluded by asking some questions regarding wage earners’ knowledge of their collective agreements. It turns out that almost everybody, 93 percent, have knowledge in the sense that they are aware of the existence or not of collective agreements at their workplaces. Although 7 percent does not know if there is a collective agreement (diagram 9.1).

Almost all of those who are unionised know if there is a collective agreement or not. 96 percent of LO members, and 94 percent of TCO and SACO members, know if there is a collective agreement at their places of work.



**Diagram 9.1 Collective agreement at the place of work**



But also the majority of the non-union workers knows if there is a collective agreement or not, as 70 percent respond that they have a collective agreement and 12 percent that they do not have one. The remaining 18 percent, almost every fifth non-union member, states that they are unaware of the existence of a collective agreement at their workplace.

#### **Knowledge of the contents of the collective agreement**

It is naturally an advantage to know whether there is a collective agreement or not, but still more advantageous is to know the contents of the collective agreement. Those who have replied affirmatively that there is a collective agreement at their workplace, received a resulting question regarding the knowledge they themselves consider to possess of the contents of the collective agreement.

Almost half the number of all employees, i.e. 46 percent, states that they have substantial or rather substantial knowledge of their collective agreements. Almost as many, 45 percent, state that they have little knowledge of the contents, while 8 percent state that they have no knowledge. Thus, more than 90 percent have at least some minimum knowledge of the contents of their collective agreements.

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