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Workshop: Turning the tide? The effects of the pandemic on union membership in Sweden

15 June 2021

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**Table 1. Active union members and members of union unemployment funds +
union density and density of unemployment funds 2006-2020**

		Raised fund fees		Financial crisis				Pandemic	
SWEDEN	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010		2018	2019	2020
Union members	-30 700	-181 200	-64 000	-11 900	-15 800		+1 300	+ 8 700	+75 000*
	-1.0%	-5.8%	-2.2%	-0.4%	-0.6%		0.0%	+0.3%	+2.5%
Union density**	77%	73%	71%	71%	71%		68%	68%	69%
	-0.9	-3.5	-2.2	0	0		-0.6	-0.2	+1.1
Members of union unemploy- ment funds	-33 400	-345 200	-53 800	+28 000	+13 500		+14 200	+32 200	+234 000
		-9.8%	-1.7%	+0.9%	+0.4%		+0.4%	+0.9%	+6.8%
Density of unemployment funds (employees)***	87%	76%	74%	74%	75%		74%	74%	79%

The pandemic year 2020

- In 2020 Swedish **union density increased from 68% (2019) to 69%**.
Among blue-collar workers from 60% to 61%.
Among white-collar workers from 72% to 73%.
- In 2019 **union density was stabilized** (the decline ceased): 68% in both 2018 and 2019.
- During the year 2020 did the number of **active union members increase by about 75 000**. Both the blue-collar union confederation LO and the white-collar confederations TCO and Saco expanded their membership considerably.
- In one case, the Hotel and Restaurant Workers' Union, did the number of union members **decrease** at the same time as union density **increased**.
- How to explain this? The hotel and restaurant industry lost a very large number of jobs during the pandemic. The share of workers on temporary contracts was very high. **To get access to the state-subsidized short-time jobs a precondition was that a company had no workers on temporary contracts left.** Union density increased due to the declining share of this low-density category among the employees in the hotel and restaurant industry.

Financial crisis: no membership increase
Pandemic crisis: considerable membership increase

- In a Ghent country like Sweden (state-subsidized union unemployment funds) tend union density to increase during recessions.
- In contrast to **the pandemic crisis** did union density not rise at all during **the financial crisis**. That was an effect of the close linkage of the fees of unemployment funds to the rate of unemployment among the members of each fund. During an economic crisis like the financial crisis does the unemployment increase particularly rapid among blue-collar workers. As late as at the end of 2010 did the members of the IF Metall unemployment fund have to pay SEK 390/month (about Euro 39) to their unemployment fund while the members of the academic fund AEA, for example graduate engineers, paid SEK 90 and the members of the Unionen fund SEK 196. Consequently, **the total fee to the union and the union unemployment fund could be very high for many blue-collar workers**.
- The number of members of unemployment funds increased only slightly during the financial crisis but considerably during the year 2020 – see the points above and below to explain this. .
- In 2020 the government made the **unemployment insurance much more generous** than before and introduced **short-time jobs** saving hundreds of thousands of jobs. The fund fees had been restored already in 2014.

Important policy changes and developments 2007-2014

- From 1 January 2007 did the centre-right government **considerably raise the fees to unemployment funds** and **abolish tax reduction** for union fees (25%) and fund fees (40%). By that the net fee to the hotel and restaurant fund increased from about SEK 60 at 31 December 2006 to SEK 360/month at 1 January 2007. Union density of hotel and restaurant workers declined from 52% in 2006 to 40% in 2008 and 36% in 2009 and 2010. The shares of fixed-term jobs and foreign-born is very high in this industry.
- From July 2008 did the **fund fees become more closely linked to the unemployment among the members of each fund**. By that, the gap between the fees paid by blue-collar workers and white-collar workers increased.
- As a result of the changes of the unemployment insurance in 2007 and 2008 did the unions and unemployment funds lose large number of members. From being equal in 2006 (77 per cent) did **the blue-collar union density successively diverge more and more from the white-collar density**. That was reinforced by the more frequent and attractive **union income insurances** provided by white-collar unions.
- In 1 January 2014 the government **restored the fund fees** to about the same level as before 2007.

Figure 1. Union density of white-collar workers (*tjänstemän*), blue-collar workers (*arbetare*) and employees (*löntagare*) 2006-2020 (per cent)

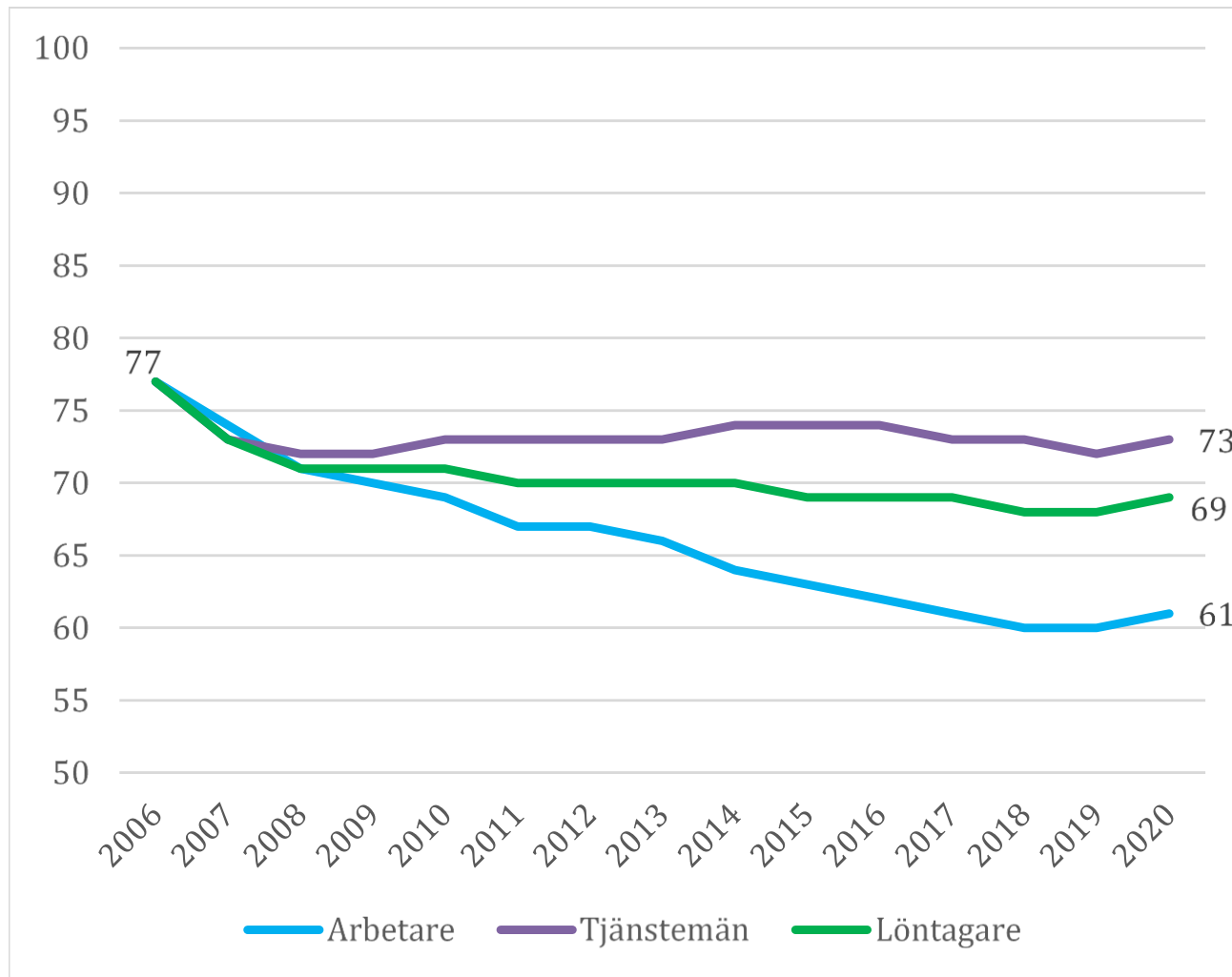


Table 2. Union density of white-collar workers, blue-collar workers and employees in Sweden 2006-2020 (per cent)

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Blue-collar															
Private sector	74	70	67	66	65	64	63	62	61	59	59	58	57	57	57
Public sector	87	85	83	82	83	80	80	79	77	77	74	72	71	72	72
Both sector	77	74	71	70	69	67	67	66	64	63	62	61	60	60	61
White-collar															
Private sector	69	65	63	65	65	65	67	67	68	68	69	68	67	67	69
Public sector	89	86	85	85	86	85	84	84	84	83	82	82	82	81	81
Both sector	77	73	72	72	73	73	73	73	74	74	74	73	73	72	73
All employees															
Private sector	71	68	65	65	65	65	65	65	64	64	64	64	63	63	64
Public sector	88	86	84	84	85	83	83	83	82	81	80	79	79	79	79
Both sector	77	73	71	71	71	70	70	70	70	69	69	69	68	68	69

Table 3. Union density among foreign-born och domestic-born blue-collar workers in Sweden 2006-2020 (per cent)

BLUE-COLLAR	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
<i>Private sector</i>											
Foreign-born	75	69	64	63	62	51	51	49	46	47	48
Domestic-born	74	70	68	67	66	62	62	61	61	61	61
Private sector in all	74	70	67	66	65	59	59	58	57	57	57
<i>Public sector</i>											
Foreign-born	85	84	80	79	80	71	68	64	61	65	64
Domestic-born	87	85	83	83	83	78	76	75	75	75	76
Private sector in all	87	85	83	82	83	77	74	72	71	72	72
<i>Blue-collar in all</i>											
Foreign-born	77	73	68	67	66	56	55	53	50	51	52
Domestic-born	77	74	71	71	70	65	65	64	64	64	64
In all	77	74	71	70	69	63	62	61	60	60	61

Table 4. Share of foreign-born among blue-collar workers in the labour force in Sweden 2006-2020 (per cent and percentage points)

BLUE-COLLAR	2006	2008	2010	2013	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2016-2020	2006-2020
Private sector	16	17	18	21	23	25	27	28	28	+5	+12
- of which private services except trade	17	24	25	29,5	33	34,5	36	37	38	+5	+21
Public sector	16	18	19	20	26	29	32	33	34	+8	+18
All sectors	16	18	18	21	24	26	28	29	29	+5	+13

Table 5. Membership development in the first and second halves of 2020 in selected Swedish white-collar unions (TCO, Saco) and blue-collar unions (LO)

Union	31 Dec. 2019	30 June 2020	First half of 2020	31 Dec 2020	Second half of 2020	2020 in all	2020 %
Unionen (TCO)	566 331	596 141	+29 810	596 077	-64	+29 746	+5,3
Teachers' Union (TCO)	166 498	163 780	-2 718	163 290	-490	-3 208	-1,9
Vision (Municipal) (TCO)	139 603	142 100	+2 497	143 087	+987	+3 484	+2,5
Graduate Engineers (Saco)	127 429	131 116	+3 687	132 037	+921	+4 608	+3,6
Akavia (Saco)	97 173	98 646	+1 473	100 415	+1 769	+3 242	+3,3
Municipal Workers' Union (Kommunal) (LO)	500 560	509 390	+8 830	518 769	+9 379	+18 209	+3,6
IF Metall (LO)	241 951	242 884	+933	241 649	-1 235	-302	-0,1
Commercial employees (LO)	122 274	128 725	+6 451	129 271	+546	+6 997	+5,7
Hotel & Restaurant (LO)	26 562	28 249	+1 687	26 468	-1 781	-94	-0,4
LO in all	1 217 205	1 237 917	+20 712	1 241 419	+3 502	+24 214	+2,0

Why did the membership of the Municipal Workers' Union increase during the whole of 2020 but *Unionen* only during the first half of the year? (1)

- As can be seen table 5 did the number of members in the private sector white-collar union *Unionen* (TCO), Sweden's largest union, **increase by about 29 800 during the first half of 2020 but not at all during the second half of the year.**
- In contrast, the blue-collar Municipal Workers' Union (LO), the second largest Swedish union, **increased by about 8 800 members during the first half of 2020 and about 9 400 during the second half of the year.** This union (*Kommunal* in Swedish) recruits members also in the private sector, among them health care assistants (*vårdbiträden*) and practical nurses (*undersköterskor*). In Sweden both these occupations are classified as *arbetare* (*blue-collar workers*).
- *Unionen* has recruited very many members on its income insurance, which in case of unemployment provides the members with supplementary unemployment benefits (in addition the benefits from the union unemployment fund). To get the supplementary benefits you must be a member of both the union and the unemployment fund. To get the benefits from the unemployment fund you must not be a member of the union (only of the fund).

Why did the membership of the Municipal Workers' Union increase during the whole of 2020 but *Unionen* only during the first half of the year? (2)

- In 2020 the unemployment insurance became more generous. The ceiling for benefits corresponding to 80% of the previous wage was raised from a monthly wage of SEK 25 025 to SEK 33 000. By that, the union income insurance became less attractive. That does probably explain why the number of Unionen members did not increase at all during the second half of 2020. The initial increase (above all in March and April 2020) was caused by enormous uncertainty associated with the pandemic and a new type of economic crisis.
- The membership increase of the Municipal Workers' Union was also caused by the powerful struggle of the union to protect its members against the unsatisfactory working conditions in for example home care and elderly care (see the next pages).

The fight of the Swedish Municipal Workers' Union for safe working conditions during the Covid-19 pandemic (1)

- During the Covid-19 pandemic the Municipal Workers' Union (*Kommunal*) and its safety representatives very actively fought to get the employers remedy the **dangerous and mentally stressful working conditions** to which many members in elderly care, home care service and of bus operators were exposed.*
- A substantial share of these workplaces is run by private companies. Among them are **employees on hourly contracts** (= “day labourers”) overrepresented. The union recruits members in both public and private sectors.
- The union considered that wearing a face shields (*visir*) together with a face mask (*not including the nose*) was insufficient and demanded access to **breathing masks** (*andningsskydd*).
- In several places did the **safety representatives use their right to stop dangerous work** but the Swedish Work Environment Authority **repealed** the stops as they had found no evidence that Covid-19 was airborne, but infected only by contagion (*droppsmitta*).

* Lisa Pelling (2020) *Att stå längst fram. En skildring av villkoren för medlemmar i Kommunal under coronakrisen våren 2020*. Stockholm: Arena Idé.

The fight of the Swedish Municipal Workers' Union for safe working conditions during the Covid-19 pandemic (2)

- More than a year later, May 7 2021, when the personnel already was vaccinated, did the Work Environment Authority issue **new guidelines** as new research showed that the virus also is airborne (aerosol). Now breathing masks are required in home care service in case of Covid-19 or suspicion of the disease (“Vid arbete i någon annans hem, där personer har misstänkt, eller konstaterad covid-19, ska andningsskydd och visir användas” AMV 7/5 2021)* and in elderly care after risk assessment after taking into account the state of knowledge.
- The union was rewarded for its efforts to improve the working environment during the pandemic by a substantial **membership growth** in 2020. Most unions grew only during March and April when people were worried over what would happen with their lives when a previously unknown pandemic and a new kind of economic crisis suddenly broke out.

* <https://www.av.se/nyheter/2021/andningsskydd-kan-behovas-vid-arbete-i-nagon-annans-hem/>

The fight of the Swedish Municipal Workers' Union for safe working conditions during the Covid-19 pandemic (3)

- In 2020 the number of members in the Municipal Workers' Union increased from 500 600 to 518 800, that is by **18 200 members**, of which 8 800 during the first half of the year and **9 400 during the second half of the year**.*
- To explain why the Municipal Workers' Union could recruit very large numbers of members also during the second half of 2020 it is necessary to consider **the union's intensive efforts** both at the local and the central level to improve the working conditions of its members in at least three respects:

- (1) *Physical protection from infection,*
- (2) *To alleviate anxiety about getting infected,*
- (3) *To get rid of the frustration caused by employers and authorities not prepared to satisfy the demands of the union and the employees.*

- Many members compare the **cost of membership** with the **utility of being a member**. Unions successfully working for good and secure jobs can therefore be expected to be successful in recruiting new members.

* A. Kjellberg (2021) *Den svenska modellen 2020: pandemi och nytt huvudavtal*. Stockholm: Arena Idé.

[https://portal.research.lu.se/portal/sv/publications/den-svenska-modellen-2020-pandemi-och-nytt-huvudavtal\(bf71341d-dc03-4983-9287-4093d2a47e4c\).html](https://portal.research.lu.se/portal/sv/publications/den-svenska-modellen-2020-pandemi-och-nytt-huvudavtal(bf71341d-dc03-4983-9287-4093d2a47e4c).html) p. 51

Table 6. Active members: LO, TCO and Saco 2017-2020

Year	LO	TCO	Saco	Independ.	In all
2017	1 248 390	1 085 136	533 500	102 300	2 971 051
2018	1 232 815	1 097 415	538 947	103 177	2 972 354
2018	-15 575 -1,2%	+12 279 +1,1%	+5 447 +1,0%	+877 +0,9%	+1 303 +0,0%
2018	1 232 815	1 097 415	538 947	103 177	2 972 354
2019:1	1 222 830	1 109 766	546 515	101 927	2 981 038
2019	-9 985 -0,8%	+12 351 +1,1%	+7 568 +1,4%	-1 250 -1,2%	+8 684 +0,3%
2019:1	1 222 830	1 109 766	546 515	101 927	2 981 038
2020:1	1 241 799	1 144 080	561 274	103 762	3 050 915
2020	+18 969 +1,6%	+34 314 +3,1%	+14 759 +2,7%	+1 835 +1,8%	+69 877 +2,3%
2019:2	1 217 205	1 109 766	546 515	101 927	2 975 413
2020:2	1 240 998	1 144 080	561 274	103 762	3 050 114
2020	+24 214 +2,0%	+34 314 +3,1%	+14 759 +2,7%	+1 835 +1,8%	+75 122 +2,5%
"Swing"* 2019-2020	+34 199	+21 963	+7 191	+3 085	+66 438

**Table 7. Membership development in selected LO unions
2006-2020 (active members)**

Year	Muni- cipal	IF Metall	Retail	Building	Commu- nication	Trans- port	Graphi- cal+ wood	Hotel restau- rants	Main- tenance
2006	563 700	337 700	146 200	93 900	102 600	65 800	89 300*	54 500	37 300
2007	529 100	316 000	129 000	86 200	94 600	58 400	78 100*	44 100	33 600
2008	511 700	304 500	124 100	83 700	91 700	55 900	56 400*	36 300	32 600
2009	506 300	286 500	123 300	82 300	88 700	56 600	52 800	33 500	31 700
2010	503 400	275 100	120 500	80 700	86 200	57 400	49 400	31 600	30 800
2011	500 400	273 600	117 300	79 200	83 200	56 600	47 500	30 500	29 200
2012	502 500	266 300	122 200	78 000	81 300	56 800	45 600	28 700	28 500
2013	506 100	254 000	127 500	76 500	80 200	56 300	43 200	27 400	27 100
2014	509 700	248 400	125 700	76 300	78 600	56 000	42 200	28 000	27 400
2015	517 500	248 400	127 800	75 600	76 800	54 400	41 400	27 400	27 300
2016	506 500	246 100	125 400	75 700	75 200	54 200	40 600	28 100	27 200
2017	507 500	247 100	124 300	75 200	73 100	51 700	39 900	27 900	27 000
2018	500 200	246 800	123 300	75 700	72 200	49 800	38 800	27 000	26 300
2019	500 600	242 000	122 300	74 800	70 800	48 700	37 600	26 600	25 600
2020	518 800	241 600	129 300	75 600	70 900	48 800	37 000	26 500	25 100
2006- 2019	-63 100 (-11%)	-95 700 (-28%)	-23 900 (-16%)	-19 100 (-20%)	-31 800 (-31%)	-17 100 (-26%)	-51 700 (-58%)	-27 900 (-51%)	-11 700 (-31%)
2006- 2020	-44 900 (-8%)	-96 100 (-28%)	-16 900 (-12%)	-18 300 (-19%)	-31 700 (-31%)	-17 000 (-26%)	-52 300 (-58%)	-28 000 (-51%)	-12 200 (-33%)

Table 8. Membership development in selected TCO unions 2006-2020
(active members)

År	Unionen	Teachers	Vision	Nurses	Civil servants	Finance	Police
2006	443 000*	180 100	133 700	94 300	75 400	31 500	16 900
2007	412 400*	177 000	127 400	91 700	70 200	30 100	17 400
2008	403 600	175 200	123 100	93 200	66 800	30 600	17 700
2009	410 200	175 600	122 100	92 500	65 400	30 600	18 100
2010	413 100	177 100	121 300	92 300	65 000	29 900	19 100
2011	422 100	176 100	121 900	91 200	64 100	29 500	19 600
2012	450 100	177 300	122 100	89 800	64 200	28 900	19 400
2013	472 300	176 800	123 200	90 600	63 800	28 600	19 100
2014	500 300	175 000	125 200	91 000	64 500	28 500	19 200
2015	517 900	172 500	127 900	90 600	65 800	28 000	19 100
2016	537 700	170 200	133 800	90 000	67 100	27 100	19 100
2017	538 800	168 400	137 100	91 300	66 900	26 400	18 800
2018	551 500	167 300	138 500	92 100	66 100	25 600	19 300
2019	566 300	166 500	139 600	91 200	65 600	25 200	19 400
2020	596 100	163 300	143 100	92 400	67 100	26 000	19 700
2006-2019	+123 300 (+28%)	-13 600 (-8%)	+5 900 (+4%)	-3 100 (-3%)	- 9 800 (-13%)	- 6 300 (-20%)	+2 500 (+15%)
2006-2020	+153 100 (+36%)	-16 800 (-9%)	+9 400 (+7%)	-1 900 (-2%)	-8 300 (-11%)	-5 500 (-17%)	+2 800 (+17%)

**Table 9. Membership development in selected Saco unions 2006-2020
(active members)**

Year	Graduate engineers	Akavia	Law- yers	Teachers	Social workers	Medical doctors	Scientists	Econo- mists
2006:1	93 100*	(73 500)	52 900	58 200	36 000	27 600	22 500**	22 600
2006:2	95 300*	(78 300)	55 100	58 200	37 100	29 000	23 200**	23 200
2007	93 500		52 000	56 900	36 400	27 600	22 900**	22 800
2008	95 100		53 400	56 900	37 900	28 100	24 400**	23 800
2009	101 700		54 800	57 400	40 300	29 100	26 200	25 000
2010	104 600		56 300	57 900	42 500	29 800	26 700	25 500
2011	106 800		58 800	58 600	43 900	30 600	26 300	26 000
2012	108 700		58 000	58 500	46 000	31 200	26 600	26 100
2013	110 200		59 200	58 100	47 800	31 700	27 000	26 600
2014	113 100		59 400	62 000	49 500	32 500	27 300	27 100
2015	118 700		60 600	60 500	51 000	34 300	28 500	28 400
2016	120 600		63 200	60 500	53 400	35 700	29 100	28 300
2017	122 500		66 000	62 000	55 000	37 200	30 200	28 700
2018	125 000		67 100	63 100	55 800	37 200	30 700	28 800
2019	127 400	97 200	-	63 800	56 800	37 200	30 800	-
2020	132 000	100 400	-	64 600	59 400	38 400	31 500	-
2006:1- 2020	+38 900 (+42%)	+24 900 (+33%)	-	+6 400 (+11%)	+23 400 (+65%)	+10 800 (+39%)	+9 000 (+40%)	-
2006:2- 2020	+36 700 (+39%)	+22 100 (+28%)	-	+6 400 (+11%)	+22 300 (+60%)	+9 400 (+32%)	+8 300 (+36%)	-

The importance of union presence at the workplace

- The existence of a **union workplace club** facilitates the recruitment of members as the union directly at the workplace can ask people if they want to become members or union representatives and also offer union education (**social contact function**).
- The presence of a union club can **reinforce social norms on union membership**.
- Many individuals weight the costs of membership (the fee) against the utility of being a union member. An active workplace club can demonstrate that the union makes a difference by **concrete resultats at workplace level**, for example with respect to working environment, the prospects for competence development or securing the jobs for the future (**utility function**).
- Workplace clubs are needed to **balance the employers' advantage in organizational strength and knowledge** by the enterprise or administration itself.
- The union workplace clubs is a cornerstone in the Swedish model of industrial relations by their ability, together with the employer, **adjust the sectoral collective agreements to the local cicumstances**.

Notes to Table 1.

* Adjusted for the changed calculation method used by the Swedish Building Workers' Union.

** Employees yearly averages labour force surveys 16–64 years (i.e. unemployed excluded). Excluding full-time students working in addition to the studies. Percentage (%) and percentage points.

*** Density of union unemployment funds + the Alfa fund referring to employees (blue-collar + white-collar workers). Calculated on data on membership in unemployment funds (16-64 years) by 31 December from IAF and labour force surveys (AKU) 4th quarter of the year employees and unemployed 16-64 years. Unemployed in the fund of small enterprises (from the Swedish Employment Service) subtracted from the total number of unemployed. For the years 2019 and 2020 are 11 000 members of the *Unionen* unemployment fund subtracted as they previously were members of the unemployment fund of employers which merged with the *Unionen* fund in 2019. Share of employees including unemployed (16-64 years). Union unemployment funds + the Alfa fund.

Two reports published in 2021 about union density and union strength and the Swedish model of industrial relations

Två rapporter våren 2021 om facklig organisering och styrka samt den svenska partsmodellen

- *Den svenska modellen 2020: pandemi och nytt huvudavtal* (Arena Idé 2021) [https://portal.research.lu.se/portal/en/publications/den-svenska-modellen-2020-pandemi-och-nytt-huvudavtal\(bf71341d-dc03-4983-9287-4093d2a47e4c\).html](https://portal.research.lu.se/portal/en/publications/den-svenska-modellen-2020-pandemi-och-nytt-huvudavtal(bf71341d-dc03-4983-9287-4093d2a47e4c).html)



- *Vad är facklig styrka? Arbetsplatsfacket centralt i den svenska partsmodellen* (Futurion 2021)

https://portal.research.lu.se/portal/files/94464595/Futurion_Vad_r_facklig_styrka_Anders_Kjellberg_2021.pdf



Selected publications by Anders Kjellberg (1)

A. Kjellberg (2021) “The shifting role of unions in the social dialogue”, *European Journal of Workplace Innovation. Special Double Issue: European Approaches to Sustainable Work*, vol. 6 Issues 1-2, March 2021, pp. 220-244.

https://portal.research.lu.se/portal/files/94935911/Unions_in_social_dialogue_Kjellberg_Workplace_Innovation.pdf

A. Kjellberg (2021) *Workers, co-determination, social partners and quality of work:*

[https://portal.research.lu.se/portal/en/publications/workers-codetermination-social-partners-and-quality-of-work\(244cc06c-0514-4a57-ab4b-14b783254b63\).html](https://portal.research.lu.se/portal/en/publications/workers-codetermination-social-partners-and-quality-of-work(244cc06c-0514-4a57-ab4b-14b783254b63).html)

A. Kjellberg (2021) *Kollektivavtalens täckningsgrad samt organisationsgraden hos arbetsgivarförbund och fackförbund*, (The Coverage of Collective Agreements, Union Density and Density of Employers’ Associations), Department of Sociology, Lund University: Studies in Social Policy, Industrial Relations, Working Life and Mobility. Research Reports 2020 (updated in 2021).

Appendix 3 in English. [https://portal.research.lu.se/portal/en/publications/kollektivavtalens-tackningsgrad-samt-organisationsgraden-hos-arbetsgivarfoerbund-och-fackfoerbund\(384bb031-c144-442b-a02b-44099819d605\).html](https://portal.research.lu.se/portal/en/publications/kollektivavtalens-tackningsgrad-samt-organisationsgraden-hos-arbetsgivarfoerbund-och-fackfoerbund(384bb031-c144-442b-a02b-44099819d605).html)

A. Kjellberg (2021) *The Membership Development of Swedish Trade Unions and Union Confederations Since the End of the Nineteenth Century*. Lund University: Studies in Social Policy, Industrial Relations, Working Life and Mobility. Research Reports 2017:2. **Updated in 2021.**

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