



Trade Union Membership, UK 1995-2021: Statistical Bulletin

25 May 2022

National Statistics

Headline Statistics

- The proportion of UK employees who were trade union members fell to 23.1% in 2021 down from 23.7% in 2020. This represents the lowest union membership rate on record among UK employees for which we have comparable data (since 1995).
- Up to 2020, the rise in the percentage of UK employees who were trade union members since 2017 was driven by female membership. The downturn in membership rates this year has also been primarily driven by female membership. The female membership rate fell by 0.9 percentage points from 27.2% to 26.3% from 2020 to 2021. The male membership rate fell by just 0.3 percentage points in the same period from 20.3% to 20.0%, the lowest rate on record for male employees for which we have comparable data. Female membership rates fell to their lowest since 2018.
- The number of employees in the UK who were trade union members fell by 62,000 on the year to 6.44 million in 2021. Membership levels have fallen for the first time after 4 years of consecutive growth.

Public and Private Sectors

- The fall in trade union numbers among employees was driven by the decrease in public sector members, down 58,000 on the year to 3.9 million in 2021. There was a relatively small fall in trade union membership numbers among private sector employees of 4,000 to 2.56 million in 2021, its lowest level since 2011.

Characteristics

- Just under half of employees (47%) who were trade union members had been working for the same employer for 10 years or more, compared to 29% of employees overall.
- Over three quarters (76%) of employees who were trade union members were aged 35 or over, compared to 63% of employees overall.

Nations and regions

- The proportion of employees who were trade union members fell in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland in 2021. Membership density was down 0.8 percentage points to 21.6% in England (the lowest on record), down 0.7 percentage points to 28.4% in Scotland and down 2 percentage points in Northern Ireland to 31.4%.
- In contrast, the proportion of employees who were trade union members in Wales rose by 3.7 percentage points to 35.6%, its highest since 2014.

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Introduction

The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is responsible for publishing the National Statistics on trade union membership. The statistics are published on an annual basis.

An annual question on trade union membership was introduced into the Labour Force Survey (LFS) in 1989 and it has been asked in the fourth quarter (Q4) every year since 1992. Questions on trade union presence were added in 1993, and the question on collective agreements between an employer and a trade union was introduced in 1996. The LFS trade union questions have United Kingdom coverage from 1995 onwards. The publication primarily produces UK statistics for the period 1995 to 2021, with some headline Great Britain statistics going back to 1989.

The bulletin primarily reports statistics on trade union membership among employees estimated from the Labour Force Survey (LFS). It also reports on:

- Trade union membership among those in employment, from the LFS (tables 1.3a, 1.3b)
- Trade union presence in the workplace, from the LFS (Table 1.10, 2.4a and 4.3)
- Whether employee's pay and terms and conditions are directly affected by agreements between the employer and a trade union (Table 1.10, 1.11, 2.4b and 4.3)
- Administrative statistics on trade union membership collected by government (Table 1.1a)

Official government statistics on trade union membership have been collected on a regular basis since 1892 from administrative records. Coverage of the data relates to unions scheduled or listed in Great Britain but will include union members from outside the UK as well as union members not in employment.

The statistics provide a record of collective representation of employees in the UK workforce and how it has changed over time. The information is mainly reported as the proportion of employees that were trade union members (trade union membership density), but some data on membership numbers is included. These estimates are also presented by age, gender, ethnicity, income, major occupation, industry, full and part-time employment, sector, nation, and region.

The data reported in this bulletin are published in the accompanying spreadsheets.

About Labour Market Analysis

Labour Market Analysis is a multi-disciplinary team of economists, social researchers and statisticians based in the Labour Market Directorate of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. Members of the team are responsible for producing this bulletin.

Conventions

The statistics presented in this bulletin are based on fourth quarter estimates (October to December) from the Labour Force Survey unless otherwise specified. Members of the armed

forces are excluded from analysis. All tables and charts relate to employees (population aged 16 or over in paid employment) or those in employment in the United Kingdom with the exception of those specified in Chapter 1 (Long Term Trends).

More detailed information on the concepts, methods, and quality of data used in this bulletin is available in the technical information and concepts and definitions sections.

Symbols

The following symbols are used in the accompanying tables:

[u] - sample size too small for a reliable estimate

[x] - data not available

Weighting

This publication uses the latest available Labour Force Survey weights for each year for its statistics. For the datasets for the years 2020 and 2021, the latest available weights are the 2020 weights. The reweighting of 2020 data from 2018 to 2020 weights, suggest that last year's statistics were slight overestimates. For example, 2020 weights suggest membership levels among employees in 2020 was 6.51 million, compared to 2018 weighting estimate of 6.56 million, an overestimate of 51,000. However, the broad trends remain the same.

The ONS will be applying 2021 weights to the Labour Force Survey from data released in June 2022 onwards. The same method as used in 2021, applying information from the HMRC Real Time Information PAYE data, will be used. 2021 weights will also be provided for some LFS datasets released in the last two years.

Transformed Labour Force Survey

The ONS will move to a Transformed Labour Force Survey in September 2023. This will involve a larger sample of households each quarter, and the introduction of an online survey collection mode alongside face-to-face (if feasible) and telephone modes. More information can be found here: [Labour Force Survey Consultation](#).

Long term and recent trends

In the [data tables](#) accompanying this publication, Table 1.1 shows the long-term administrative data, Table 1.2a shows UK employee union membership levels and Table 1.2b shows UK employee union density levels.

Trade union employee membership levels fell but remain above 2019 levels.

The latest data shows that in 2021, trade union membership levels among UK employees fell by 62,000 on the year to 6.44 million, just 5,000 above levels in 2019. Gains in 2020 meant that levels had fully recovered after the significant fall in 2016, with growth in each year between 2017 and 2020. The decline in employee membership levels in 2021 puts a dent in this recovery.

The proportion of employees that were union members has also fallen this year, with a decrease of 0.6 percentage points to 23.1% in 2021. This follows a 0.2 percentage point increase to 23.7% in the previous year. Employee numbers overall rose in 2021, so this fall in employee union membership density is a consequence of both rising employee numbers and falling union membership among employees.

Union membership has declined in the past four decades, though the decline has slowed

Trade union membership levels as reported by the unions listed or scheduled in Great Britain reached their peak in 1979 (13.2 million) and declined sharply through the 1980s and early 1990s. From 1996 onwards the rate of decline slowed significantly, with occasional years of slight growth interspersed with the general annual reductions in membership. In 2019-20 unions reported membership at 6.67 million, down 16% from the 1996 level of 7.94 million.

The trend since 1995 for numbers of employees who are trade union members is similar. However, there are clearer periods of broad stability, between the mid-1990s and mid-2000s, and between 2011 and 2015, along with significant falls in the late 2000s and in 2016. Overall, between 1995 and 2021 union membership levels among UK employees fell by 668,000 (9.4%) from 7.11 million to 6.44 million.

Union membership as a proportion of employees has fallen from 32.4% in 1995 to 23.1% in 2021. This is due to overall UK employee numbers rising in the period by around 6.1 million to 28.1 million, while union membership among employees fell.

The decline in membership among employees primarily occurred in the public sector

Despite making up a smaller percentage of total employees, union membership is more heavily concentrated among public sector workers. Estimates from the LFS show that trade union membership among public sector employees decreased by 58,000 in 2021 to 3.89 million. This was the first annual decrease since 2017 where membership among public sector employees fell by a similar 53,000. Among private sector employees there was a smaller decrease in union membership by 4,000 to 2.56 million. Across all employees, the vast majority of the fall was among female employees. However, this is primarily due to the fall in female membership in the public sector, where membership decline by 71 thousand, but male membership increased by 13 thousand. Membership among females in the private sector increased on the year by 11 thousand, with male membership falling by 15 thousand.

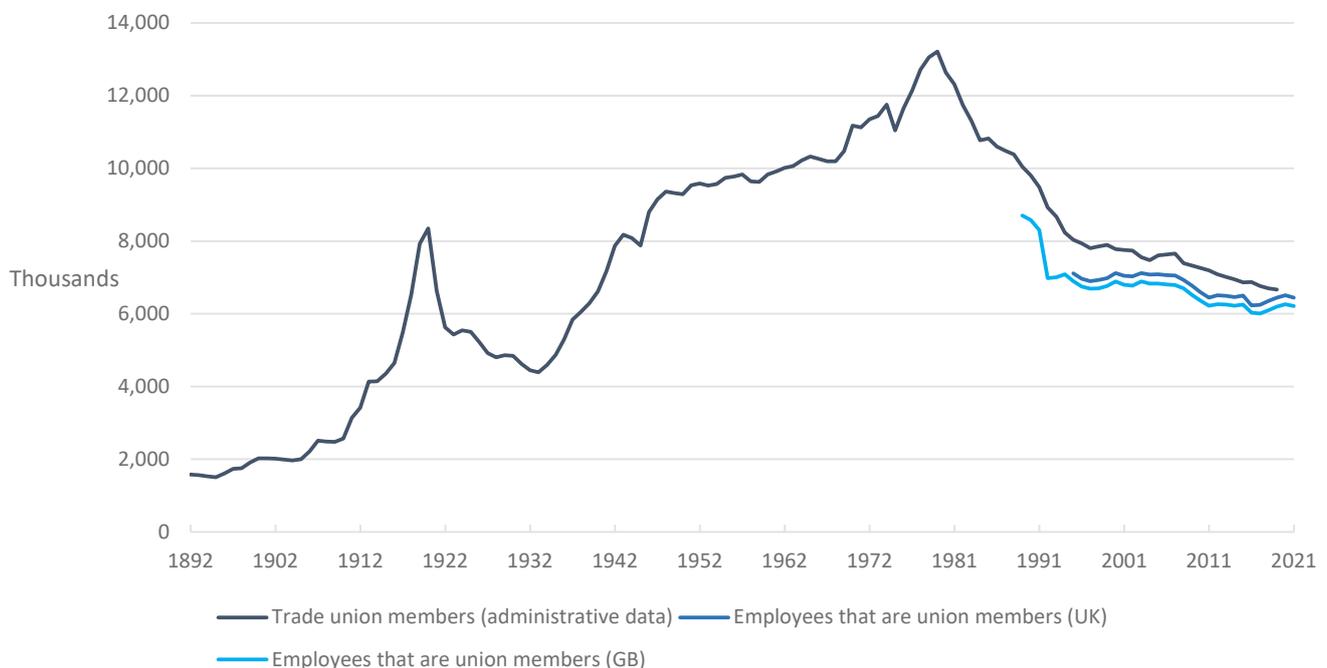
Since 1995, membership among public sector employees has stayed relatively steady compared to those in the private sector, where there has been a steady decline. Total trade union membership

in the private sector has declined by 835,000 since 1995, a fall of 24.6%. Whereas total membership in the public sector has increased by 166,000, an increase of 4.5%.

LFS estimates show that there was a decrease in both the proportion of private sector and public sector employees that were union members in 2021. Union membership density fell from 12.9% in 2020 to 12.8% in 2021 among private sector employees, and from 51.8% to 50.1% among public sector employees. This represents a second consecutive annual fall among private sector employees, and third consecutive fall among public sector employees. Whilst the number of public sector employees that are trade union members has increased since 1995, the proportion of public sector employees that are trade union members has fallen by 11.2 percentage points.

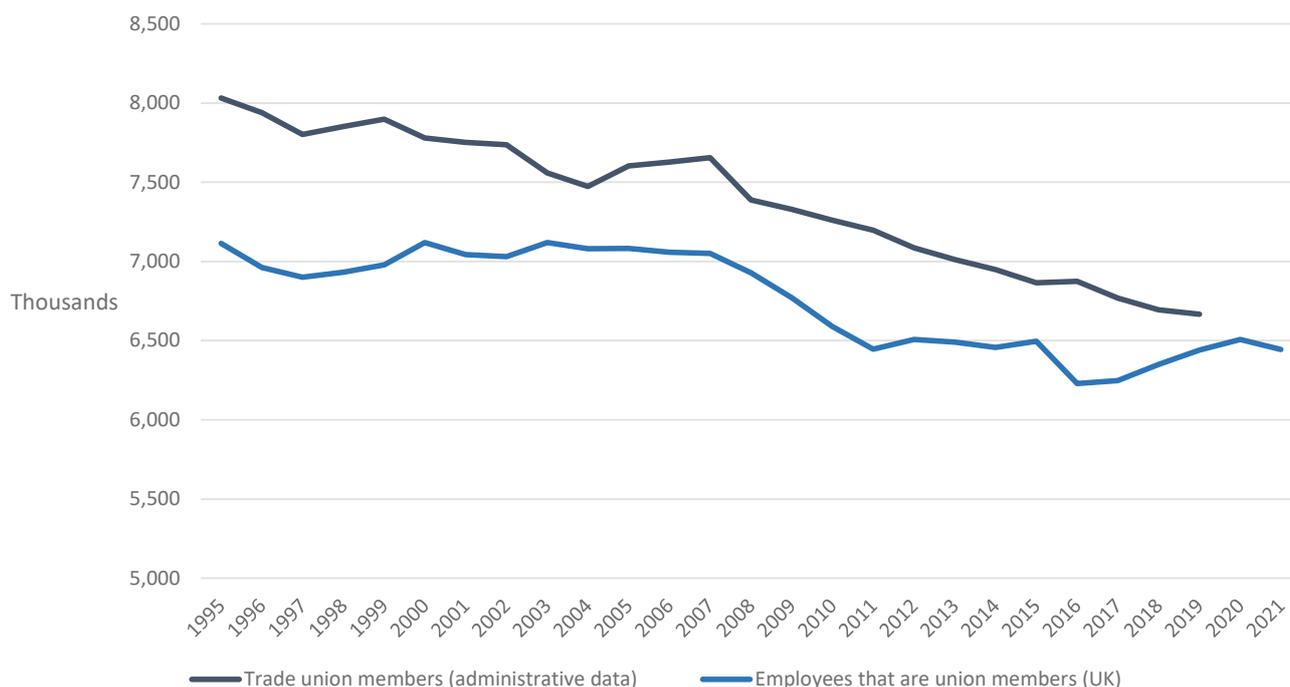
The LFS estimates for employees in the public and private sector differ from the Office for National Statistics Public Sector Employment statistical release. The LFS bases its definition of sector according to how individuals define whether the organisation they work for is a private company (private business or limited company) or some other organisation (and if so, what type of organisation, from central government to charity to public limited company to grant funded organisation etc). The ONS release is based on a survey of public sector employers in accordance with the UK National Accounts sector definitions. Overall, the LFS sector variable estimates public sector employment at around 7.7 million in 2021. This compares to a 5.72 million figure for December 2021 from the ONS April 2022 release.¹ It is the main public sector industries (Public Administration and Defence, Education and Human Health and Social Work) that predominantly account for the difference between the LFS public sector estimate and the figures reported in the ONS release.

Figure 1: Trade union membership levels among employees in the UK and Great Britain, 1892 to 2021



Source: Administrative data on union membership from Department for Employment (1892-1973); and the Certification Office (1974-2020). Data on employees that are trade union members in the UK and Great Britain is based on the Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics.

¹[ONS \(2022\) Public Sector Employment.](#)

Figure 2: Trade union membership levels in the UK, 1995 to 2021

Source: Administrative data on union membership from Department for Employment (1892-1973); and the Certification Office (1974-2020). Data on UK employees that are trade union members is based on the Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics.

Female employee union membership rates fall after three years of consecutive growth

The proportion of female employees who are members of trade unions decreased by 0.9 percentage points to 26.3% in 2021, its lowest rate since 2018.

The number of UK female employees who were union members fell by 60,000 to 3.66 million in 2021, falling from the record high of 3.72 million in 2020. The fall in female membership makes up 97% of the total fall across all employees.

Meanwhile, the proportion of UK male employees who were in a trade union in 2021 decreased marginally to 20.0%, representing a new low across comparable statistics going back to 1995. Membership levels for male employees decreased by 2,000 on the year to 2.78 million in 2021.

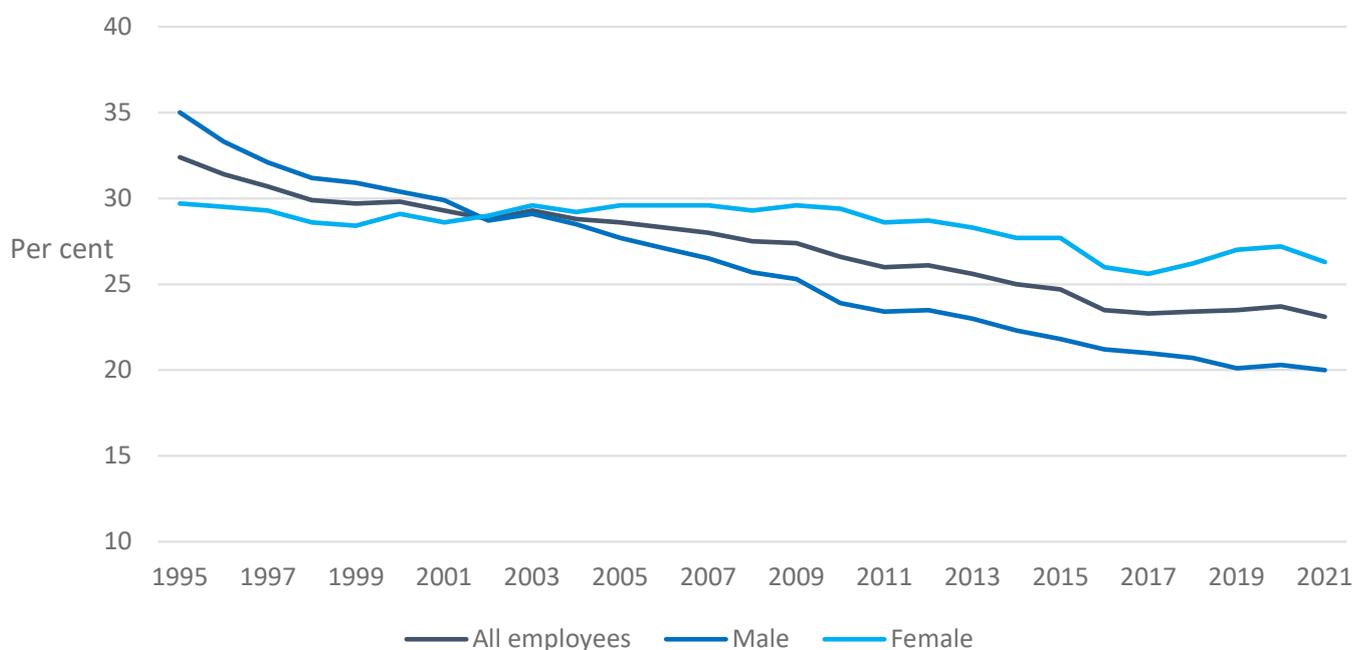
The long-term trend among the proportion of employees who are trade union members since 1995 is that the declining rates has been significantly weaker for women than men. In 1995, the proportion of male employees who belonged to a trade union was around 35%, compared with just below 30% for female employees. High falls in union membership densities among male employees narrowed the gap between males and females. In 2002, the proportion of employees who belonged to a trade union was around 29% for both sexes.

These trends have largely continued between 2002 and 2021, with union member densities among male employees falling from 28.7% in 2002 to 20.0% in 2021. Over the same period the proportion of female employees with union membership had remained comparatively stable, decreasing by 2.7 percentage points. The latest year's relatively high fall in female members compared to male members has closed this gap ever so slightly.

Membership levels among UK male employees have steadily fallen throughout the period from 1995, with a large dip between 2007 and 2011, returning to previous trends from 2011. UK female

employee membership levels increased between 2000 and 2007, then dipped slightly before stabilising at around (or just below) 3.6 million until 2015. They then fell sharply to close to 3.4 million in 2017, before rising again up to around 3.7 million where they broadly remain despite the fall in numbers in 2021. (Tables 1.2a and 1.2b).

Figure 3: Percentage of UK employees who are trade union members by gender, 1995 to 2021



Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

These changes may partly be explained by changes in the nature of labour market since 1995²:

- Female employees have increased as a proportion of overall employees
- There has been a substantial decline in the number of employees working in Manufacturing, where male employees account for just under three-quarters of the total
- There have been big increases in the number of employees in Education and Human Health and Social Care, where female employees comprise around three quarters of the total. Around two-thirds of the increase in the number of female employees was accounted for jobs in these relatively highly unionised industries.

UK born and Black ethnic group employees are more likely to be union members

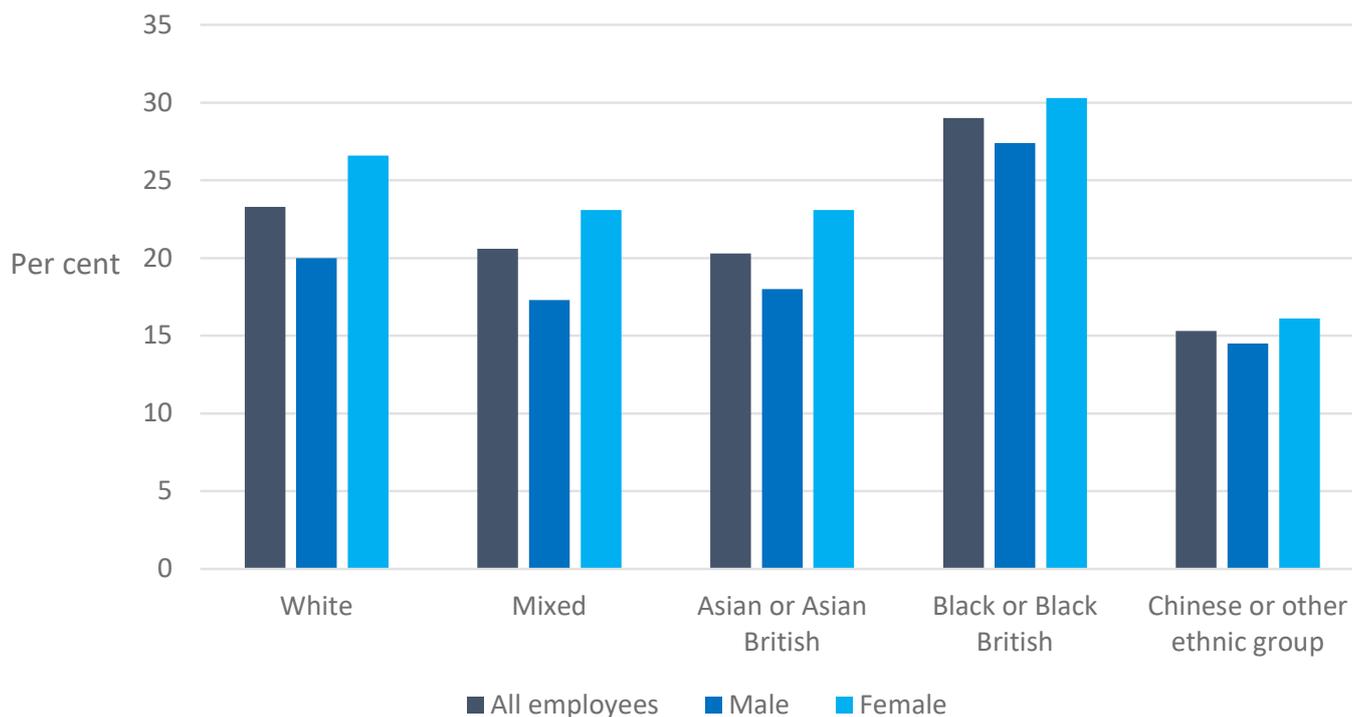
UK born employees are significantly more likely to be a member of a trade union than non-UK born employees. 24.1% of UK born employees were trade union members in 2021, compared with 18.6% of non-UK born employees (Table 1.5).

The proportion of employees who were trade union members was highest in the Black or Black British ethnic group (29.0%), followed by the White ethnic group (23.3%). Trade union membership density was lowest among the 'Chinese or other ethnic group' employees, at just 15.3%. Mixed and Asian and Asian British Employees made up the middle ground at 20.6% and 20.3%, respectively, but both were below the national average (23.1%).

² Based on BEIS analysis of the Labour Force Survey (excluding employees in the armed forces).

A higher proportion of female employees than male employees were trade union members in each of the ethnic groups. The largest disparity between the proportions of male and female employees who are members of trade unions was within the White ethnic group, with a difference of 6.6 percentage points. Although, trade union membership density was lowest among Chinese or other ethnic group, there is the lowest disparity between males and females within this group at 1.6 percentage points (Table 1.5).

Figure 4: Trade union density by gender and ethnicity, 2021



Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

Around 50% of Black or Black British employees worked in the Human Health and Social Work, Education or Public Administration and Defence industries in 2021. These industries accounted for around 80% of union members in this ethnic group. However, within these industries Black or Black British employees only had higher union membership density compared to the average across all employees in Human Health and Social Work activities³.

Higher educated employees are more likely to be union members

The proportion of employees who were trade union members was greater for people with higher qualifications, such as a degree, compared with those with lower-level qualifications, or no qualifications (Table 1.5).

The proportions of employees with a degree or equivalent, or another form of higher education qualification ('Other higher education') who were trade union members in 2021 were 27.5% and 28.9%, respectively. This was significantly higher than all other employees with lower levels of qualification. The lowest proportion was among employees with 'Other qualifications' (those with qualifications that were not A-Level or GCSE grades A-C equivalent) at 15.7%. Those with A-level

³ BEIS analysis of October to December 2021 Labour Force Survey

or equivalent, no qualifications, or GCSE grades A-C equivalent sit in the middle at 19.5%, 18.1% and 17.9%, respectively.

The size of the disparity in trade union membership density between those with higher education qualifications and those with lower level or no qualifications differs substantially between men and women. Among women employees, 33.7% with a degree or equivalent and 34.6% with 'other higher education' qualifications were union members, compared to 16.8% and 14.9% for those with no qualifications or "other qualifications", with a gap of 19.7 percentage points between the highest and lowest densities. However, among male employees the difference was only around 6.1 percentage points between the 22.4% of those with an 'other higher education' qualification and the 16.3% of those with an 'other qualification' who are union members.

Employees in larger workplaces are more likely to have a union presence in their workplace

Employees who worked in larger workplaces (with 50 or more staff) were more likely to be members of a trade union and to have a trade union presence in the workplace. They were also more likely to have their pay directly affected by a collective agreement between their employer and a trade union (Table 1.10).

The proportion of employees who belonged to a trade union in larger workplaces was 30.0% in 2021, compared to 14.9% of employees who are employed in a smaller workplace (less than 50 employees). 69.1% of employees working in larger workplaces had a trade union presence in the workplace, compared to 32.1% of employees based in smaller workplaces. The proportion of employees whose pay was affected by a collective agreement between their employer and a union was 35.4% in larger workplaces and 14.7% in smaller workplaces (Table 1.10).

The proportions of employees who belong to a trade union were highest in the Education sector at 49.4%. Followed by Human health and social work activities (39.2%), public administration and defence (38.6%) and transportation and storage (36.6%) all being significantly higher than membership density across all employees (23.1%).

Generally, the industries with high membership among employees also have a high proportion of union presence in their workplace (85.5% in Education, 83.4% in Public Administration and Defence, and 72.1% in human health and social work). One exception is the transport and storage with a union presence rate of 62.0%, lower than other sectors with a high membership density. Similarly, these industries also have a higher proportion of employees had their pay influenced by collective agreements between their employer and a trade union (56.2% in Public Administration and Defence, and 49.2% in Education). Despite being 6th in membership density and 4th in union presence, the Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply sector comes a close third with 44.2% of employees pay being affected by collective agreements between the employer and unions (Table 1.10).

Northern Ireland was the nation with the highest proportion of employees whose pay was affected by collective agreements between their employer and a trade union (44.7%), whereas Wales had the highest membership density and trade union presence. Among English regions the North East had the highest proportions of employees that were trade union members, had presence in their workplace, and who's pay was affected by collective agreement between their employer and a union (Table 1.10).

Alternative information on collective agreements suggest they are more widespread

The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) also collects information on collective agreements. ASHE collects information from employers about around 180,000 workers each year in April (around 140,000 in 2021). It asks if the worker's pay was set with reference to an

agreement covering more than one employee (for instance pay may be agreed collectively by a trade union or workers' committee). The question is slightly broader than the LFS question and covers jobs rather than individuals (as individuals can have more than one job, so the employer can only provide information on the job rather than comprehensive information on the worker).

For 2021, the ASHE data shows that around 41.0% of jobs had pay set by an agreement covering multiple employees (primarily through National or industry agreements, followed by organisational agreements), much higher than the 26.0% estimate on employees through the LFS. In the Public Sector around 91.0% of jobs had pay set by such agreements according to ASHE, compared to around 21.4% of jobs in the Private Sector and 46.8% in the non-profit sector. As discussed in the technical information section below, one factor in the difference between the LFS and ASHE figures is likely to be a lack of awareness among some individuals about how their terms and conditions are set.

Employees in permanent jobs and full-time jobs are more likely to be trade union members

Overall, 23.7% of employees in permanent positions belonged to a trade union in 2021, compared to 15.1% of employees in temporary positions (Table 1.4).

A higher proportion of full-time employees (23.9%) compared to part-time employees (20.7%) had trade union membership in 2021. This trend was reflected across the majority of industries and occupations, the exceptions being:

- Professional occupations (32.1% full-time, compared to 49.5% part-time),
- Sales and customer service occupations (14.5% full time, 15.5% part-time),
- Wholesale and Retail Trade (10.9% full-time, 13.9% part-time),
- Financial and Insurance Activities (12.3% full-time, 17.9% part-time) (Table 1.4).

78.2% of employees that are trade union members work full-time, higher than average across all employees at 76.4% (Table 3.1).

Middle-income earners are more likely to be trade union members

Employees that earn less than £250 per week and employees earning more than £1000 per week were less likely to be members of a trade union compared to those with middling incomes (Table 1.5). The proportions of employees who were trade union members by weekly earnings in 2021 were:

- 12.0% of those earning less than £250
- 22.0% of those earning between £250 and £499
- 30.4% of those earning between £500 and £999
- 18.2% of those earning £1,000 and above

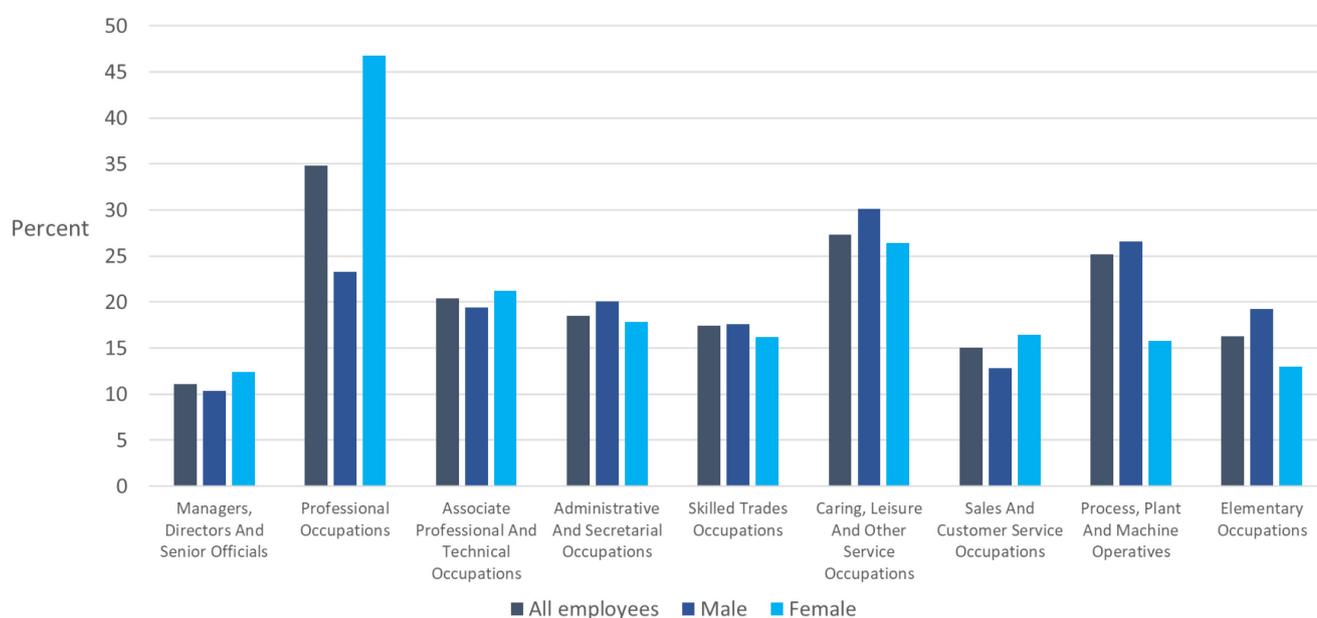
Employees in professional occupations are more likely to be trade union members

Those working in Professional occupations accounted for over four-in-ten (41.8%) of employees who were trade union members in 2021, but only 26.6% of UK employees overall, indicating that this occupational group is relatively highly unionised. The other occupations which accounted for a higher proportion of employees who were trade union members than employees overall were Caring, Leisure and Other Service occupations (9.4% compared to 8.2%) and Process, Plant and Machine Operatives (5.5% compared to 5.3%) (Table 3.1).

This was reflected in the high proportion of employees in Professional occupations that were trade union members in 2021 (34.8%). However, this was 3.9 percentage points lower than in 2020 (38.7). This difference may be partly explained by the change in Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) definitions introduced to the LFS in 2021. Comparisons of employees in the 2021 dataset using 2010 SOC codes and 2020 SOC codes show that the largest movements were into Professional Occupations, with over 500,000 employees newly in this group, predominantly from Associate Professional and Technical occupations. This was primarily due to degree level qualifications becoming increasingly important in providing the required knowledge to perform some jobs competently. As Associate Professional and Technical occupations have a comparatively low union density rate, this is likely to have impacted on membership density among professional employees (Table 1.7b and 1.7c).

Male employees had higher union membership proportions in five of the nine occupation groups in 2021: Managers, Directors and Senior Officials, Professional Occupations, Associate Professional and Technical and Caring, Leisure and Other Service Occupations (Table 1.7c).

Figure 5: Trade union density by gender and occupation, 2021



Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

Employees in public sector and utility industries more likely to be in a trade union

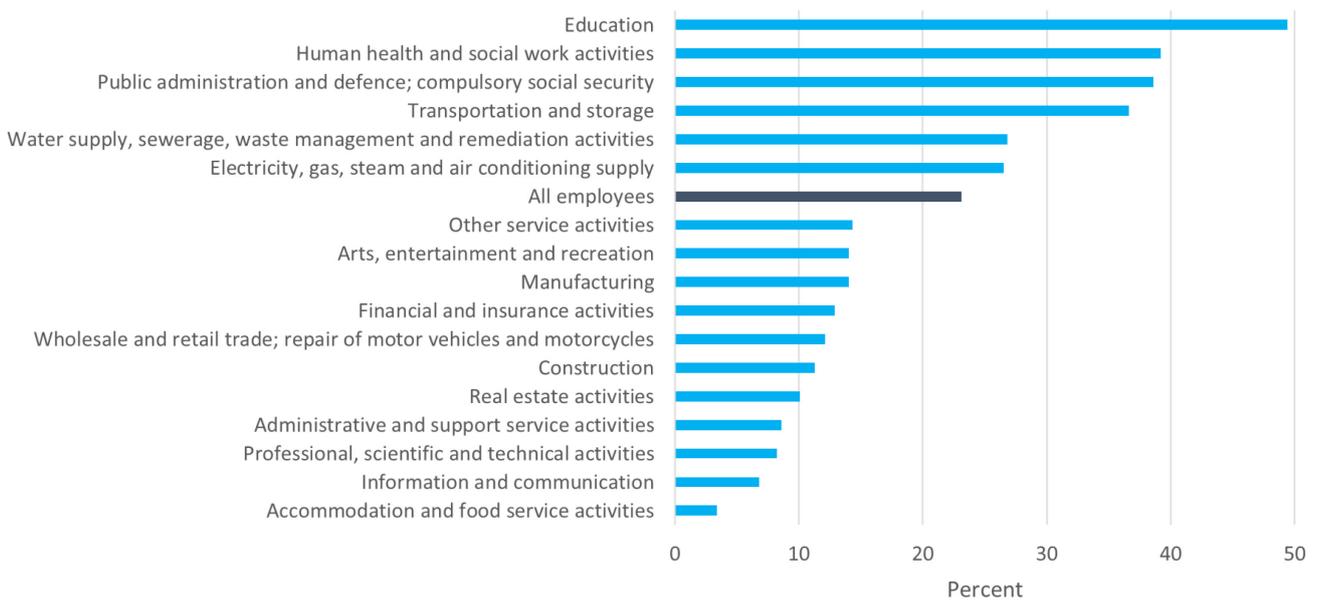
The likelihood of belonging to a trade union varies substantially by sector. Employees in industries with higher proportions of public sector workers are more likely to belong to trade unions, including the Public Administration and Defence and Education industries. The rate of union membership in many industries has been in sharp decline since 1995.

Electricity, Gas, Steam and Air Conditioning Supply has seen the proportion of workers belonging to a trade union fall by 45.4 percentage points since 1995 and by 9.1 percentage points since 2020. Industries such as Water Supply, Sewage, Waste Management and Remediation Activities and Financial and Insurance Activities have also witnessed large decreases in union density among employees since 1995 but have seen the largest rises since 2020 (along with Transport and Storage). However, some industries have experienced modest growth in union membership density between 1995 and 2021: Wholesale and Retail Trade, Repair of Motor Vehicles and

Motorcycles industry saw an increase of 1.1 percentage points (despite a fall in 2021 itself) and Other Service Activities, up 1.5 percentage points.

In line with historical trends, Education had the highest proportion of employees who were trade union members in 2021 at 49.4%, with Human health and social work activities overtaking public administration and defence as the second most unionised industry. Outside of the public sector dominated industries, the transport and storage sector had the highest proportion of employees who were trade union members at 36.6%, it was also the industry with the largest increase since 2020 (Table 1.8).

Figure 6: Trade union density by industry, 2021



Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

Public and Private Sectors

In the [data tables](#) accompanying this publication, tables 2.1a and b show employee numbers split by union membership and sector, table 2.2 shows union membership densities by sector, tables 2.4 a and b cover union presence and collective agreements

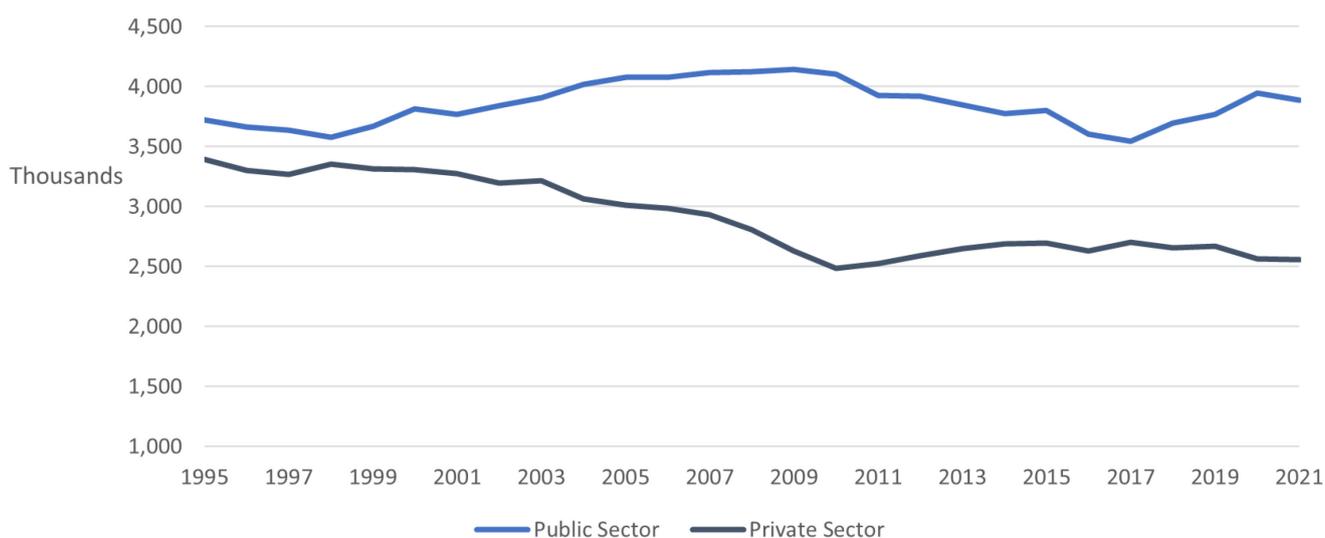
This section is based on analysis of the Labour Force Survey. Therefore, it differs from the statistics published by the ONS in its Public Sector Employment Release, as discussed on page 7.

Fall in Trade union membership levels fall was driven by public sector employees

In 2021, the number of public sector employees belonging to a trade union decreased by 58,000 on the year to 3.89 million, falling for the first time after three consecutive increases. In 2021, private sector trade union membership levels fell, down by 4,000, to 2.56 million. Overall, employee union membership levels have increased by around 3% in the private sector from its series low in 2010, while falling by around 5% in the public sector over the same period. These changes may be at least in part due to transfers of jobs from the public sector into the private sector.

This contrasted with the previous decade, when public sector union membership accounted for an increasing proportion of overall union membership among employees in the period up to 2010. This was driven by a steady rise in the public sector membership levels in the 2000s up to 2005, followed by a period of stability until 2010. Public sector membership levels rose by 381,000 between 1995 and 2010. Over the same period, private sector union membership levels declined by 905,000 (Table 2.1a).

Figure 7: Trade union membership levels among employees by sector, 1995 to 2021

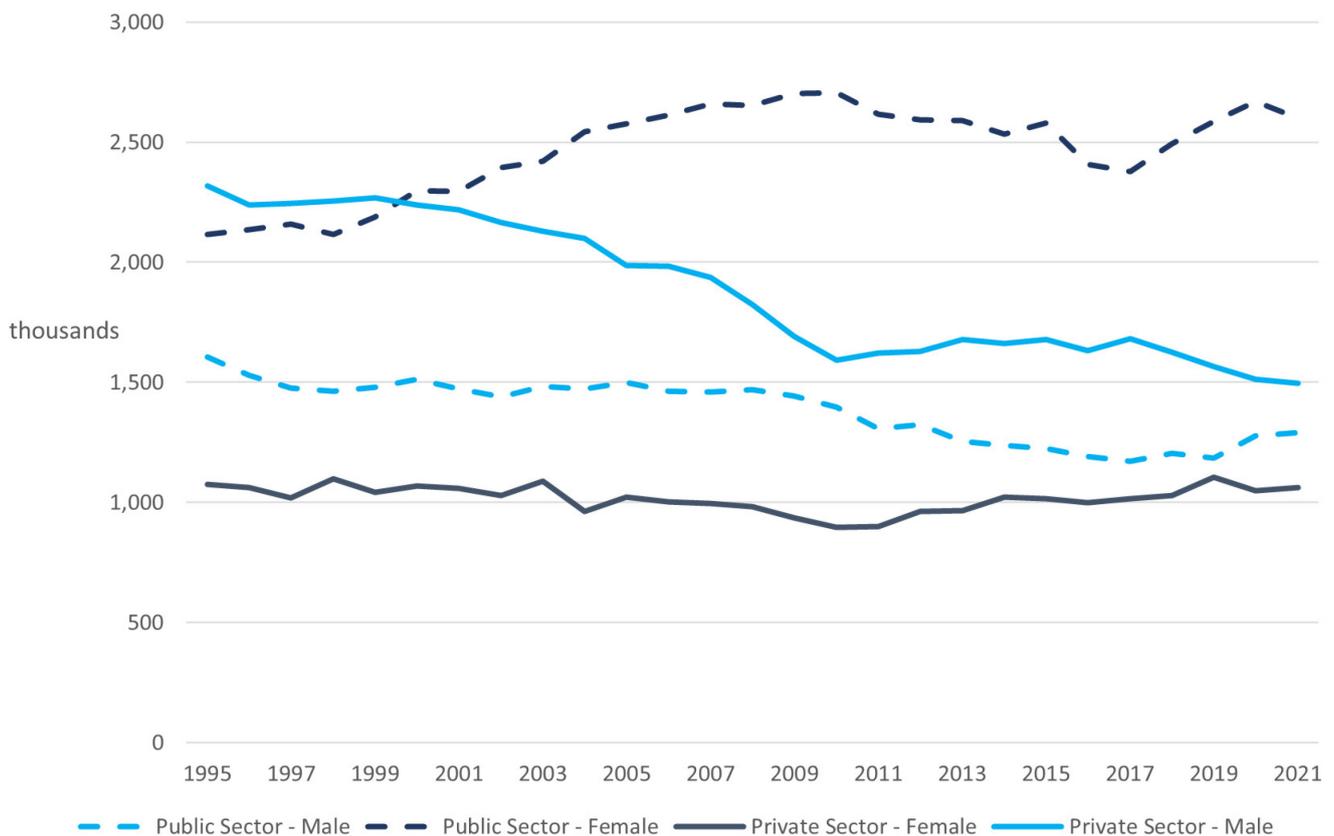


Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics.

Relatively strong trade union membership in the public sector has been upheld by trade union membership among females. Since 1995, membership among female public sector employees steadily increased up until 2010, then seeing a slight downward trend until 2017, before rising in

the three years to 2020. Conversely, membership levels among male public sector workers have seen a slow generally downward trend over the period 1995 to 2019, before increasing in the last two years. Whilst total membership levels among female private sector employees has remained broadly steady since 1995, membership among male private sector employees has seen a steep decline, with a levelling off from 2010, but falling off again from 2018 onwards. Figure 8 shows that since 2020, the bulk of the decline in membership is driven by a fall in membership among female public sector employees, whereas other groups remain relatively similar.

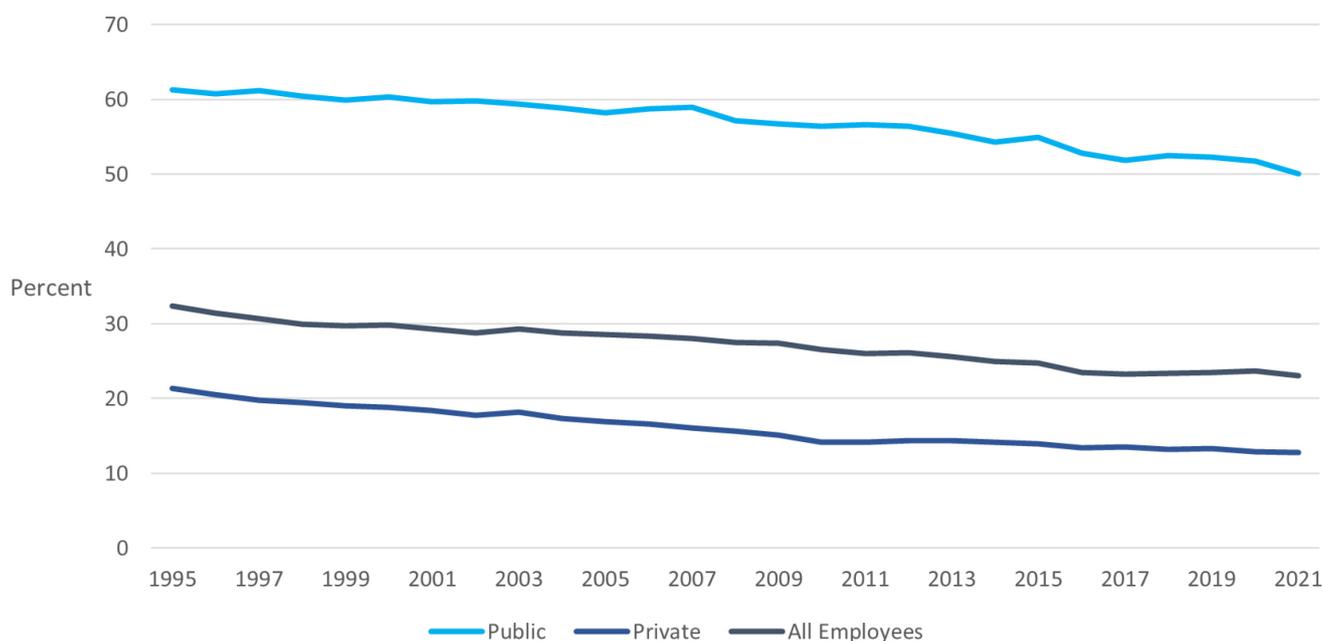
Figure 8: Trade union membership levels among employees by sector and gender, 1995 to 2021



Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics.

The overall proportion of employees who are members of trade unions is significantly higher in the public sector relative to the private sector. 12.8% of private sector employees belonged to a trade union, compared to 50.1% of public sector employees, in 2021. The proportion of private sector employees in a union fell slightly from 12.9% in 2020 to 12.8% in 2021. Across the same period union membership density among public sector employees fell from 51.8% to 50.1%.

Trade union membership is higher among female employees in the public sector (51.6% of females compared to 47.4% of males), whereas a trade union membership is higher among male employees within the private sector (13.3% of males compared to 12.0% of females) (Table 2.1a, 2.1b and 2.2).

Figure 9: Trade union density by sector, 1995 to 2021

Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

The trade union wage premium has increased

The trade union wage premium is defined as the percentage difference between the average gross hourly earnings of employees who are union members and non-members. The trade union wage gap increased by 0.6 percentage points. However, this small change is due to the relatively large increase in the wage premium in the public sector, where on average trade union members had gross hourly earnings 14.8% higher than non-members in 2021, 5.5 percentage points more than the wage premium in 2020. In contrast, the private sector trade union wage premium decreased on the year by 1.4 percentage points. On average, trade union members in the private sector earned 4.7% less an hour than non-members (Table 2.3).

Several factors influence this figure, and the size of the premium is likely to be strongly influenced by other differences in the characteristics of unionised and non-unionised employees. It should also be noted that where pay is determined by collective agreements, these are likely to apply to both unionised and non-unionised employees in the bargaining unit (Table 2.4b).

Personal and job characteristics

In the [data tables](#) accompanying this publication, Table 3.1 compares the personal and job characteristics of employees who are union members, not union members, and employees overall.

Older employees comprise a higher proportion of trade union members

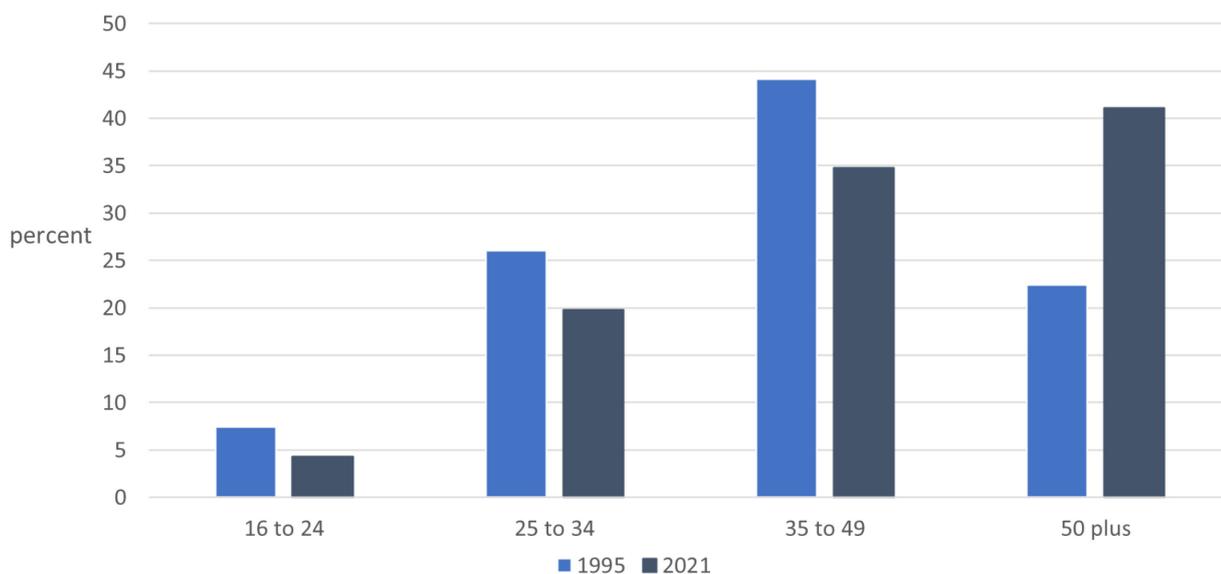
Older employees make up a larger proportion of trade union members than younger employees (Table 3.1). Of employees who were trade union members in 2021:

- 4.3% were aged between 16 and 24.
- 19.8% were aged between 25 and 34
- 34.8% were aged between 35 to 49, and
- 41.1% were aged 50 or older

That the likelihood of an employee being a trade union member increases with age accords with the data showing that employees who have longer lengths of service with an employer are more likely to be a member of a trade union. 24.9% of employees who were trade union members in 2021 had between 10 and 20 years of service, while those with tenure of 20 years or more accounted for 22.5% of total employee union membership. These are significantly higher than the percentages comprised of those with less than 1 year and between 1 and 2 years of service tenure at 7.4% and 6.4%, respectively (Table 3.1).

The distribution of trade union membership across age groups has changed since 1995. In 1995, those aged 35 to 50 were the most likely to be trade union members, whereas in 2021 it was those over the age of 50.

Figure 10: Age distribution of trade union members, 1995 and 2021



Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

Employees with disabilities are more likely to be a member of a trade union

28.0% of employees who have a disability under the Equality Act 2010 were members of a trade union in 2021, above the 22.2% membership rate for employees who do not have a disability (Table 1.5).

Employees who have a disability under the Equality Act 2010 are disproportionately trade union members. Employees with a disability comprised 18.9% of trade union members in 2021, whereas employees with a disability account for 15.0% of all employees (Table 3.1).

Foremen or supervisors are more likely to be trade union members

The LFS has a variable that identifies three levels of managerial status for employees: manager, foreman or supervisor, and not a manager or supervisor. Employees who are foremen or supervisors are more likely to be members of a trade union relative to those more and less senior than them. 33.6% of foremen or supervisors were trade union members, compared to 21.9% of managers and 22.0% of those who are not managers or supervisors (Table 1.5).

Country and Regional Trends

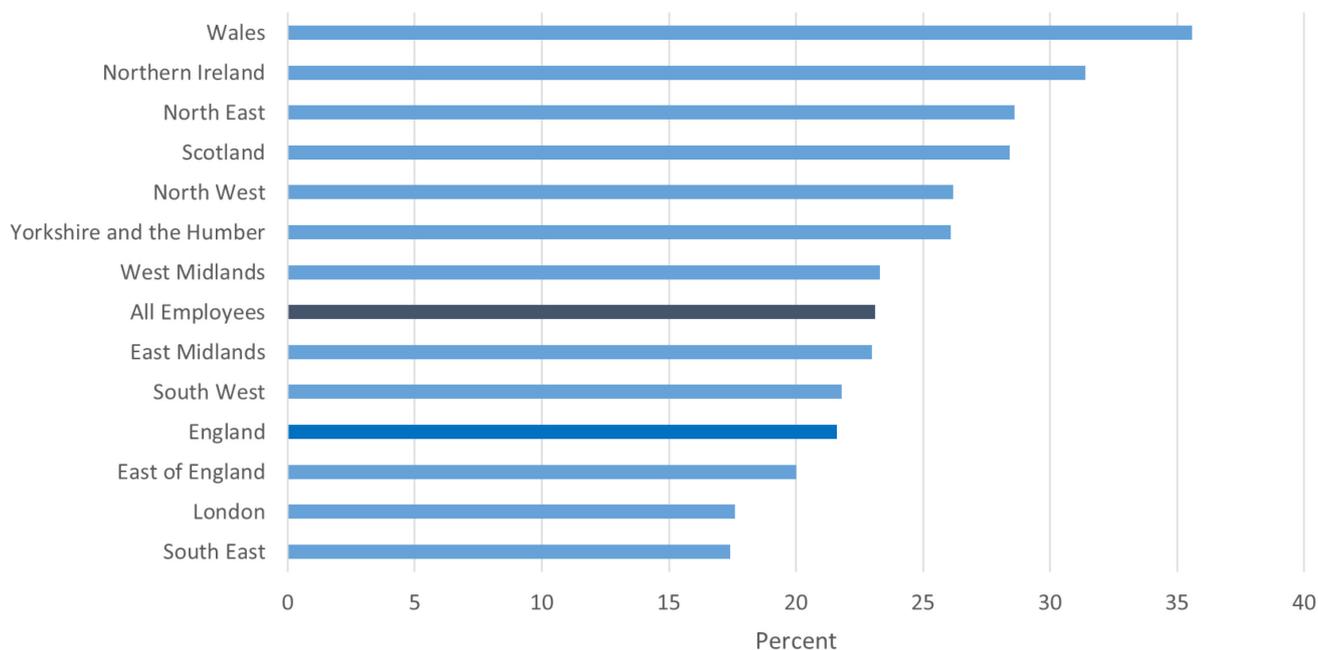
In the [data tables](#) accompanying this publication, Table 4.1 shows trade union membership density in the UK nations and English regions, while Table 4.2 shows their membership levels, for 1995 to 2021. Table 4.3 shows data for 20 UK regions for 2021.

Employees in the English northern regions and other Nations more likely to be trade union members

In 2021, across England, without exception the more northern regions had higher proportions of employees with trade union membership compared to Southern regions. The North East (28.6%), North West (26.2%) and Yorkshire and the Humber (26.1%), had higher densities of trade union membership than the other English regions. The East Midlands (23.0%), West Midlands (23.3%), and South West (21.8%) were above the England average of 21.6%. Meanwhile London (17.6%), the South East (17.4%) and the East of England (20.0%) were all below the England average (Table 4.1).

Wales (35.6%) and Northern Ireland (31.4%) had higher proportions of employees in unions than all the England regions, with Scotland (28.4%) having higher union membership density than all English regions apart from the North East. Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland had much higher trade union membership relative to England as a whole.

Figure 11: Trade union density by nation and region, 2021



Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

Wales was the only country within the UK that saw an increase in the proportion of employees that were members of a trade union. England, Scotland and Northern Ireland all saw a decrease between 2020 and 2021. In Wales, union membership density rose by 3.7 percentage points to

35.6%, the largest increase across any of the nations or regions. Trade union membership density fell the most among nations in Northern Ireland, by 2 percentage points, whereas Scotland and England fell by 0.7 and 0.8 percentage points, respectively.

Between 2020 and 2021, two English regions experienced an increase in the proportions of employees that were union members, with the biggest increase being in the East of England, up by 0.9 percentage points, followed by the West Midlands, up by 0.5 percentage points (Table 4.1 and Table 4.2). Employee membership density remained unchanged in the South West. Membership density among employees fell across all other English regions, with the largest declines of 2.0 percentage points being in the South East and the North West.

Since 1995, Northern Ireland has recorded the largest percentage point fall in the proportion of employees who are trade union members, closely followed by Scotland at 10.8 and 10.6 percentage points respectively. Wales has had the lowest decrease of 8.7 percentage points, but this is largely due to the large increase in trade union membership density since 2020.

Trade union membership levels increase in Wales

Trade union membership levels increased in Wales by 33,000 between 2020 and 2021, the only nation to see an increase. Of the nations, England experienced the largest change in membership levels, decreasing by 84,000 to 5,113,000. This was primarily driven by decreased membership levels in the South East, where membership fell by around 92,000, equivalent to a 12% decrease in membership in the region. Trade union membership numbers increased in 4 of the 9 regions, predominantly in the East of England and West Midlands. Yorkshire and the Humber was the only region that had a decline in the membership density of trade unions, but an increase in the overall level of members (Table 4.2).

Figure 12 shows the proportion of employees who are members of a trade union broken down by 20 geographical regions and nations across the UK in 2021. Wales had the highest proportions of employees that were trade union members at 35.6%, followed by Merseyside (32.6%), Northern Ireland (31.4%) and South Yorkshire (31.3%). Inner London had the lowest proportion of workers affiliated to a trade union at just 14.7%, with the South East (17.4%) and Outer London (19.9%) not far behind (Table 4.3).

Figure 12: Trade union membership as a proportion of employees, by region, UK employees, 2021

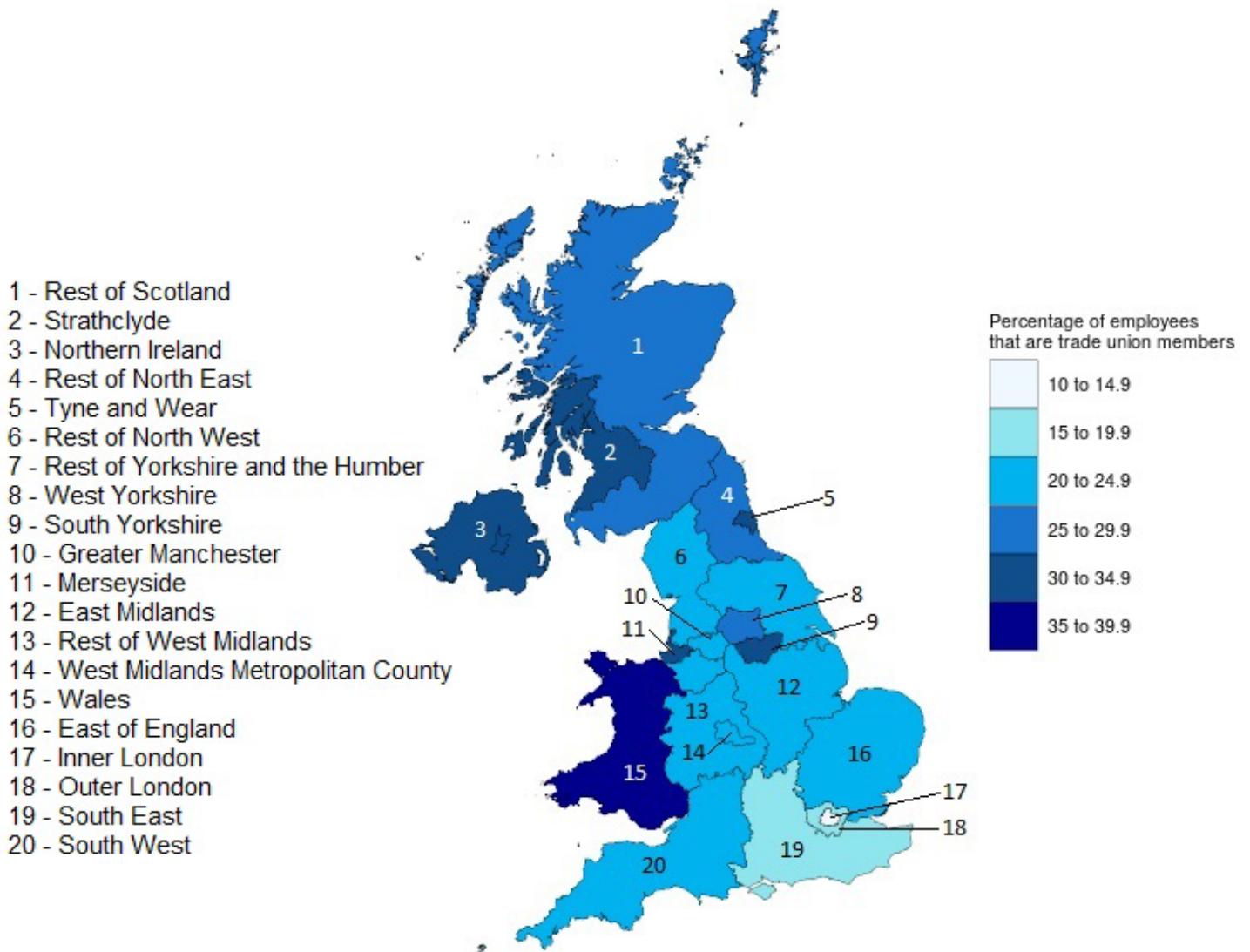


Figure 13 shows the percentage of employees with a trade union presence in the workplace in the 20 geographical regions. South Yorkshire had the highest percentage of employees with a trade union presence of 63.2%, followed by Wales (63.0%) and Strathclyde (61.7%). Inner London had the lowest rate of employees with a trade union presence in the workplace at 41.8%. Unsurprisingly, 4 of the regions in the top 5 for trade union membership are also in the top 5 regions for trade union presence. The same is also true for those with the *lowest* membership rates.

Figure 13: Employees with a trade union presence in their workplace by region, per cent, 2021

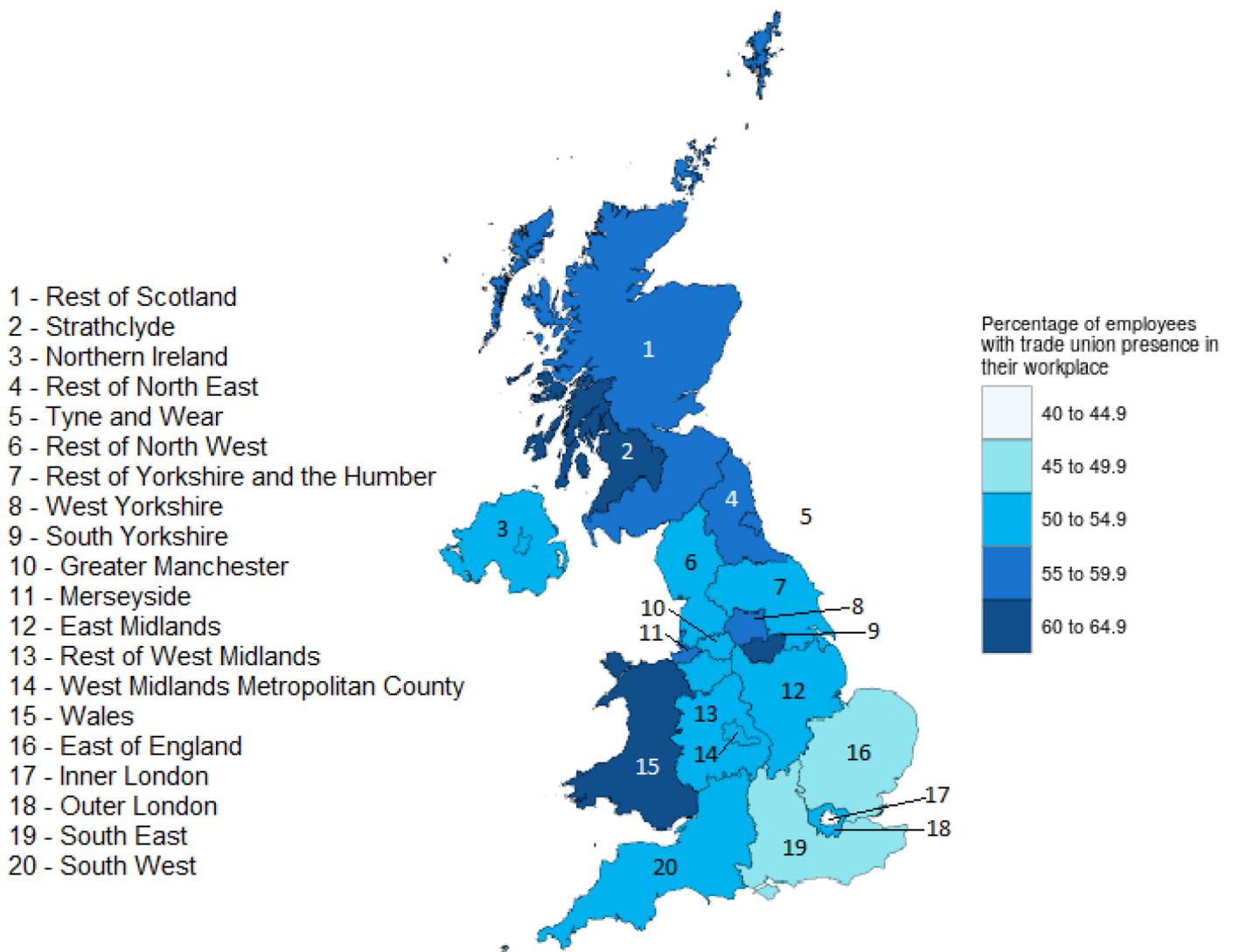
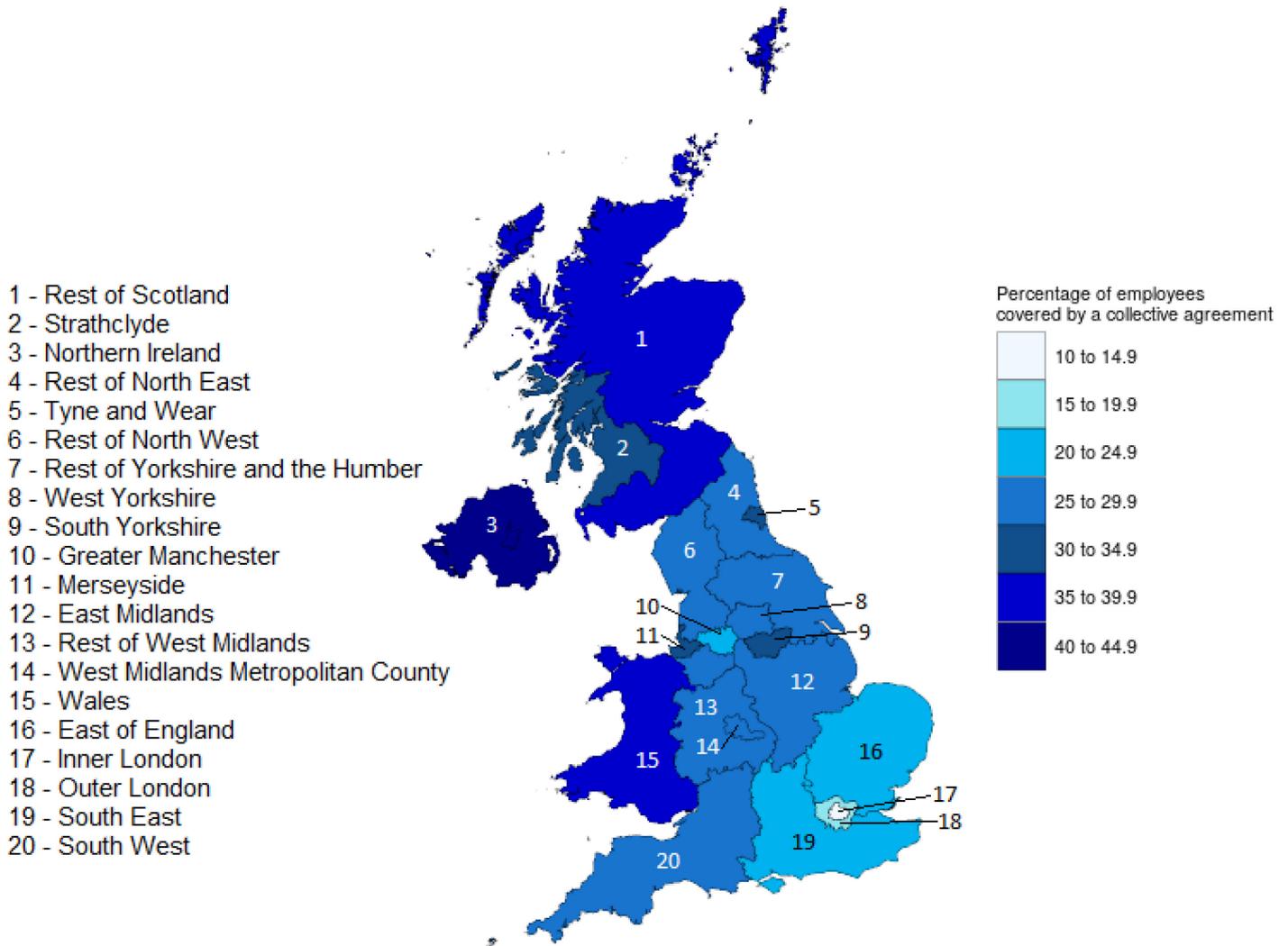


Figure 14 gives an overview of the proportion of employees whose pay was affected by a collective agreement between their employer and a trade union. Northern Ireland (44.7%) had the highest proportion of employees whose pay was affected by such a collective agreement, followed by the 'Rest of Scotland' at 38.8%. In comparison, both areas in London had the lowest rates at 14.8% and 18.6%, respectively.

Figure 14: Coverage of collective agreements between employers and trade unions by region, 2021



Accompanying tables

The following tables are available in open-source format on the department's statistics [website](#)

Table 1.1	Trade union membership, unions registered, listed or scheduled in Great Britain, 1892 to 2019-20
Table 1.2a	Trade union membership levels, employees, UK and Great Britain, 1989 to 2021
Table 1.2b	Trade union membership as a proportion of employees, UK and Great Britain, 1989 to 2021
Table 1.3a	Trade union membership levels, in employment, UK and Great Britain, 1989 to 2021
Table 1.3b	Trade union membership as a proportion of those in employment, UK and Great Britain, 1989 to 2021
Table 1.4	Trade union membership as a proportion of employees by gender, full/ part time and permanent/ temporary status, UK, 2021
Table 1.5	Trade union membership as a proportion of employees by personal characteristics, and work and job characteristics, UK, 2021
Table 1.6	Trade union membership as a proportion of employees by age group and gender, UK, 1995 to 2021
Table 1.7a	Trade union membership as a proportion of employees by major occupation group and gender, UK, 2005 to 2010
Table 1.7b	Trade union membership as a proportion of employees by major occupation group and gender, UK, 2011 to 2020
Table 1.7c	Trade union membership as a proportion of employees by major occupation group and gender, UK, 2021
Table 1.8	Trade union membership as a proportion of employees by industry and gender, UK, 1995 to 2021
Table 1.9	Average hourly earnings by union status, UK, 2021
Table 1.10	Trade union membership proportions, union presence and coverage of collective agreements between employers and trade unions, UK, 2021
Table 1.11	Coverage of collective agreements between employers and trade unions by full/ part time and permanent/ temporary status, UK, 2021
Table 2.1a	Trade union membership levels by sector and gender, UK, 1995 to 2021
Table 2.1b	Trade union non-membership levels by sector and gender, UK, 1995 to 2021
Table 2.2	Trade union membership as a proportion of employees by sector and gender, UK, 1995 to 2021
Table 2.3	Average hourly earnings by union status and sector, UK, 1995 to 2021
Table 2.4a	Trade union presence by sector, UK, 1999 to 2021
Table 2.4b	Coverage of collective agreements between an employer and trade union by sector, UK, 1996 to 2021
Table 2.5	Trade union membership levels by Industry, UK, 1995 to 2021
Table 3.1	Characteristics of union members and non-members, UK, 2021
Table 4.1	Trade union membership as a proportion of employees by nation and region, 1995 to 2021
Table 4.2	Trade union membership levels by nation and region, 1995 to 2021
Table 4.3	Trade union membership proportions, trade union presence and collective agreement coverage by regions, 2021

A1-A13	Individual tables for the nations and regions, covering trade union membership as a proportion of employees by various characteristics, 2021
A14	Trade union membership as a proportion of employees, by 2-digit Standard Industrial Classification and gender, 1995-2021
A15	Trade union membership as a proportion of employees, by 2-digit Standard Industrial Classification and gender, full/part time and permanent/temporary, 2021
A16a	Trade union membership as a proportion of Polish national employees in the UK by gender and full/part time status, 2021
A16b	Trade union membership as a proportion of Polish born employees in the UK by gender and full/part time status, 2021
A17	Age distribution of employees who are trade union members, UK, 1995 and 2021
A18	The percentage of jobs where pay is set with reference to an agreement affecting more than one employee (collective agreement), by sector – Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, 2021

Trade Union Membership Confidence Intervals Tables 2021

Technical information

Trade union questions in the Labour Force Survey

A question on the LFS on trade union membership has been asked annually since 1989 of all individuals in employment. Questions on trade union presence and recognition were introduced in 1993 and the question on collective agreements was introduced in 1996. The questions relating to trade union membership were reordered and reworded in 1999; these changes affect the time-series for trade union presence and collective agreements.

The union questions were altered in the 1999 questionnaire. The exact wording and sequence of the questions as they are now and as they were previously are shown below. The following should be noted:

- The wording of the question that asks respondents whether they are a member of a trade union remains the same, only its place in the sequence has changed.
- The question that asks whether any of the people at the respondent's place of work are members of a trade union or staff association is designed to measure trade union presence. The wording, routing and sequence of this question have changed. Previously, it was asked of all in employment; now it is only asked to those who say that they are not union members.
- Before 1999, the question on whether the respondent's pay and conditions were directly affected by collective agreements between their employer and a union (TUCOV) was only asked where the respondent first identified unions as being present at the workplace (TUPRES), and then whether it was recognised (TUREC). This meant that the number of people whose pay and conditions were affected by collective agreement was an underestimate. For this reason, the routing of the question was changed in the 1999 LFS and is now asked of all in employment. Users must therefore be aware that data derived from the TUCOV variable in the 1999 dataset are not directly comparable with those of previous years due to the change in the question's coverage.
- It is possible that some non-sampling error arises in the series of questions on trade unions because of measurement problems. Around a third of the sample are proxy respondents, and the data show that this group are less likely to be identified as union members than those responding on their own behalf. An estimate of the extent of bias is provided below.

On the question of coverage of collective agreements, it is known from surveys of employers that only a small proportion of public sector workplaces are not covered, and that these arrangements are generally made at head office level or across many organisations. It is therefore likely that some employees who are not union members and/or who work in small workplaces in the public sector may be unaware that collective bargaining arrangements apply to their organisation. There is potentially a similar affect among workers in the private sector. In addition, because sector is self-reported in the LFS, there may be a number of respondents wrongly classifying themselves as public sector workers. Consequently, there may be a downward bias to this measure. Also, it should be noted that the question in the Labour Force Survey specifically refers to negotiations between the employer and a trade union that affect an employee's pay and conditions.

The [Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings](#) conducted by ONS collects information on the number of employee jobs where pay is set with reference to an agreement affecting more than one employee (such as agreed collectively by a trade union or a workers' committee). As the information is collected from employers it may give a more accurate picture of the coverage of such agreements. The achieved sample in 2021 was around 140,000. The question asked is broader than that asked in the LFS.

Table A1: Structure of trade union questions in Labour Force Survey

Previous union questions	Current union questions
All in employment: TUPRES At your place of work, are there any unions, staff associations or groups of unions?	All in employment: UNION Are you a member of a trade union or staff association?
If yes: TUREC Is it/are any of them recognised by management for negotiating pay and conditions of employment?	If no: TUPRES Are any of the people at your place of work members of a trade union or staff association?
If yes: TUCOV Are your pay and conditions of employment directly affected by agreements between your employer and any trade union(s) or staff association?	All in employment: TUCOV Are your pay and conditions of employment directly affected by agreements between your employer and any trade union(s) or staff association?
All in employment: UNION Are you a member of a trade union or staff association?	

Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

Northern Ireland 1997 data issue

In Autumn 1997, incorrect routing of Northern Ireland respondents meant that only those who answered yes to TUPRES were asked UNION. Therefore, there was under-response of unknown size to UNION. Those who should have been asked UNION were instead coded as not having answered the question. BEIS analysis indicates this may mean that there is an undercount of up to 10,000 in 1997 levels or 0.1 percentage points in 1997 proportions.

Variables in the LFS

Most of the classifications used to place respondents in different categories are based on a direct question relying on the person's self-assessment of their circumstances. Some are based on a combination of more than one question, and others are coded by the ONS based on standard conventions. Details are provided below.

The classifications used in this publication are generally self-defined. This includes gender, age and ethnic group. Two types of employment status – full-time or part-time, and permanent or temporary – are based on direct questions and do not rely on any set criteria (e.g., number of hours worked). The classification for flexible working hours only includes those who work under such arrangements. Region and whether an individual is an employee are both self-defined variables. Highest qualification is principally based on a question asking individuals to nominate what qualifications they have from a list of around 50 categories. These have then been aggregated for the analytical purposes. The categories for ethnic groups have been

changed in the LFS in both 2001 and 2011 to be consistent with those used in the 2001 and 2011 Censuses, respectively.

Industry and occupation variables in the LFS are produced by coding textual open-ended survey answers to standard classifications, the Standard Industrial Classification and Standard Occupation Classification (SOC).

The occupation figures for 2021 are based on SOC20, which was introduced to the Labour Force Survey in 2021. The revised occupation codes primarily move occupations into the Professional Occupation major group. This reflects ONS findings that “an increasing number of occupations require the application of knowledge and expertise that is associated with a tertiary level of education”. More information can be obtained from the ONS [SOC20 page](#).

Defining whether people work in the public or private sector is based on two questions first introduced in 1993. These ask, first, if they worked in a private firm or business, a limited company, or some other kind of organisation; and second, if other, what kind of non-private organisation. The LFS defines public sector as that owned, funded or run by central or local government and the private sector is everything else. Some respondents may not know whether their industry is in the public or private sector and, for certain types of activity, there may be no clear answer and the interviewers are given some guidelines to help sort out some common confusion. There is no indication that the temporary reclassification of some banks to the public sector by the ONS in its Public Sector Employment statistics had any impact on how people working in these organisations classified their sector in the LFS. The estimates produced in this bulletin from the LFS data show a higher level of employment in the public sector, and a lower level in the private sector, than the ONS Public Sector Employment statistics.

Revised method for estimating union presence

Prior to the 2017 Bulletin, prompted by correspondence with Rhys Davies of the Wales Institute for Social and Economic Research at Cardiff University, BEIS reconsidered the calculations used to estimate union presence in the workplace from the Labour Force Survey data. Previously, all those who answered ‘no’ to the ‘UNION’ question (about whether the respondent was a union member) were included in the population of employees used to estimate trade union presence, even if they did not provide a valid response to the ‘TUPRES’ question (on whether any people in the workplace were members of a trade union). This included people who said they used their home as their place of work or main base for work. This makes an underlying assumption that those who did not provide a valid response to ‘TUPRES’ would not have others in their workplace who were members of a trade union. After examining the data, on balance BEIS decided that it would be more appropriate to exclude those who did not provide a valid response to the TUPRES question from the population used to estimate union presence. The revised method introduced for the 2017 Bulletin excludes this group from the estimates of union presence.

Change of disability variable

ONS introduced a variable, DISEA, into the LFS in 2013 to reflect disability as defined in the Equality Act 2010. The figures for disability in Tables 1.5 and 3.1 are now estimated using this variable.

A comparison between the figures based on DISEA and those based on the DISCURR variable that was previously used is available in Table A19 in the 2020 bulletin.

Sample size and standard errors

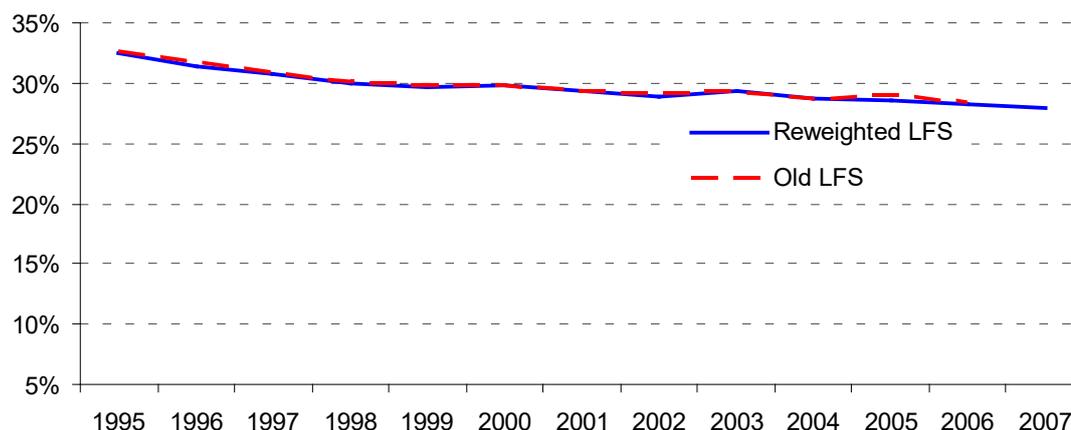
The cell sizes in some tables in this publication are too small to provide reliable estimates and have been marked with an asterisk. In this publication data fewer than 10,000 have not been published because standard errors are likely to be larger than the estimates themselves. Although the ONS has lifted its protocol of not releasing data under the 10,000 threshold, it is now the statistician's discretion whether to release anything under this threshold. For wage related data, the threshold used is 30,000.

As an indication of the standard errors in the trade union estimates, the standard errors around the total employment and employee union membership proportions are likely to be around 0.3 percentage points. Standard errors for union membership proportions by gender are likely to be around 0.4 percentage points. Standard errors for union membership proportions by region average around 1.0 percentage points.

Switch from seasonal to calendar quarters

In 2006, the structure of the Labour Force Survey switched from a seasonal quarter basis to a calendar quarter basis. The last set of published LFS seasonal results covered December 2004 to February 2005. In accordance with European Union regulations, all subsequent quarters have been published on a calendar quarter basis. In 2008, the Office for National Statistics carried out an extensive reweighting programme and all quarterly Labour Force Survey data are now published on a calendar quarter basis back to 1992. This has eliminated the structural break into the trade union membership time series associated with the change from seasonal to calendar quarters.

Figure A1 shows the trade union density of UK employees from 1995 to 2007, as shown in Table 1.2b and trade union density from the previous LFS. The chart gives evidence that the reweighting of historic LFS datasets has not materially changed the trade union densities from those that were previously published.

Figure A1: Trade union density of UK employees, 1995-2007

Per cent

Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics.

Estimating union membership levels

Each household agreeing to take part in the LFS is interviewed on five consecutive quarters (or waves). However, there are cases on subsequent waves when households are not contactable or do not agree to continue taking part so further responses cannot be recorded. When this happens, current data may be imputed by carrying forward answers given by them in the previous interview. However, for questions that do not appear every quarter, as with trade union membership, there is no previous response to carry forward, and a 'does not apply' (DNA) response is therefore recorded.

There are two possible methods of estimating union membership levels. One method relies on calculating an adjusted weight, whereby cases with missing data are assumed to have the same distribution as valid responses. Consequently, missing data is included in the estimates by allocation of their weight along the same distribution as valid respondents. Unfortunately, due to the restructuring of the LFS to calendar quarters (described earlier) this produced too much missing data in the seasonal quarter series to produce reliable estimates. Information was lost for September in converting seasonal to calendar quarters and no information was available to be brought forward from December. Therefore, it was not possible to display a consistent time series including the data originally collected on a seasonal quarter basis using the adjusted weight method.

In order to mitigate these issues a second method was developed to closely approximate the results from an adjusted weights approach (see Table A2) but also allow a consistent time series with the calendar quarter information to be estimated. It consists of union density multiplied by the population (as estimated by the LFS). The method is improved by making the same calculation but by detailed age, gender and regional disaggregations and then aggregating them back up to national and regional levels. Age, gender and region were specifically chosen as they are the basis on which the LFS is weighted (see the Labour Survey User Guide Vol 1.). This approach is further supported by the fact that union density figures are produced on a valid response basis and do not consider any missing data. Furthermore, union densities show a great deal of robustness under change. These estimates of union

membership levels are now provided as the headline figures in this publication (see Tables 1.2a, 1.3a, 2.1a, 4.2).

To produce trade union membership broken down by public/ private sector, a further step was applied. It consists of union density split by public and private sector multiplied by the union membership population (estimated as above). The calculations involved are similar to that of the second method described above, apart from the fact that a further breakdown by sector was used. A comparable method was used to calculate membership levels by industry with a breakdown by industry used rather than a breakdown by public/ private sector. The table below (produced in 2011) gives a comparison of the estimates from the two methods between 2006 and 2010 by gender and employment status.

Table A2: Estimated trade union membership levels, United Kingdom, 2006 to 2010

Thousands, not seasonally adjusted

	Employees			In employment			
	Density Population	× Adjusted Weights	Difference	Density Population	× Adjusted Weights	Difference	
All employees							
2006	7,021	6,992	29	7,359	7,315	44	
2007	7,005	6,978	27	7,334	7,292	42	
2008	6,878	6,857	21	7,219	7,188	31	
2009	6,715	6,696	19	7,054	7,017	37	
2010	6,536	6,530	6	6,854	6,818	36	
Males							
2006	3,430	3,400	30	3,649	3,611	38	
2007	3,379	3,355	24	3,606	3,574	32	
2008	3,278	3,254	24	3,522	3,487	35	
2009	3,121	3,099	22	3,344	3,311	33	
2010	2,976	2,967	9	3,188	3,162	26	
Females							
2006	3,591	3,591	-	3,710	3,702	8	
2007	3,625	3,621	4	3,728	3,716	12	
2008	3,599	3,601	-2	3,697	3,697	-	
2009	3,593	3,596	-3	3,709	3,704	5	
2010	3,560	3,562	-2	3,666	3,654	12	

Table source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

To provide the levels estimates in these statistics, BEIS uses the GOVTOR LFS variable for regions. If this variable is not available to analysts trying to replicate the results, then GOVTOF, or URESMC would provide a reasonable alternative. However, it would produce marginally different results.

The levels figures presented in the bulletin are rounded to the nearest thousand and the percentage figures to one decimal place. The year-on-year changes reported are calculated on the unrounded data (so may differ slightly from the difference between two years calculated from the published tables).

Differences between administrative data and LFS estimates

Another official source of trade union membership data is provided by the Certification Officer and can be seen in Table 1.1. Data collected annually from trade unions by the government, including the Certification Officer (CO) from 1974, provide a long and consistent back series of the number of trade unions and the number of union members. The LFS has a shorter back

series, from 1989 onwards, but can provide extensive information on the respondent's individual and workplace characteristics, allowing more detailed analysis.

There are differences in how the two sources report union membership. For example, the CO membership count includes all members of unions having their head office in Great Britain (unions that are listed or scheduled by the CO), including those members in Northern Ireland, the Irish Republic and 'elsewhere abroad'. These figures may also include union members who are unemployed, inactive or retired. The LFS asks questions on the union status of all those in employment, thus excluding the unemployed and retired. The LFS also only covers those who are resident in the UK (or in Great Britain for the years 1989 to 1994).

The LFS union questions have United Kingdom coverage from 1995 onwards. The LFS estimates the number of individuals who are union members, rather than the individual memberships. Hence those belonging to two unions would appear twice in the CO data, but only once in the LFS data.

In 2021, the LFS estimate for UK individuals in employment who are trade union members was 6.72 million. This was above the figure for 2019/20 of 6.67 million collected from the trade union's annual returns. However, the difference is well within the margin of error for the LFS estimate of around +/- 235,000.

Concepts and definitions

Employee	People who regard themselves as paid wage and salary earners. People with two or more jobs are counted only once.
In employment	The number of people with jobs is measured by the Labour Force Survey and includes people aged 16 or over who did paid work (as an employee or self-employed), those who had a job that they were temporarily away from, those on government-supported training and employment programmes. For this publication, the numbers in employment exclude those doing unpaid family work.
Labour Force Survey	The main source for information on the labour market in the United Kingdom. It is a random household survey of approximately 37,000 households (87,000 individuals) conducted every three months by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). As well as private households, the survey includes people living in communal establishments (student halls of residence, National Health Service accommodation, etc.). The survey was conducted once every two years between 1973 and 1983 and annually from 1983 until 1991. It has been conducted quarterly since 1992, with a change to calendar quarters from seasonal quarters made in 2006. The LFS is a sample survey and consequently estimates are subject to both sampling and non-sampling error. Due to difficulties collecting data for instance through face-to-face interviewing during the pandemic, the LFS has achieved a lower response rate than previously during this period – and has partly mitigated this impact by increasing the initial sample of households to keep the number of achieved interviews relatively high.
Trade Union	The Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 defines a trade union as an organisation which consists wholly or mainly of workers of one or more descriptions and whose principal purposes include the regulation of relations between workers and employers or employers' associations.
Trade union member (LFS)	A person in employment who self-defines that they belong to a trade union or staff association when asked in the Labour Force Survey (for the question please see table above).
Union density	The rate or proportion of employees or those in employment who are a trade union member. Expressed as a percentage.
Union presence	Whether or not there are trade union or staff association members working at a workplace. In this publication, this statistic is presented as the proportion of employees who have trade union members (which could include themselves) working at their workplace.
Collective agreement (LFS)	Whether the pay and conditions of employees are directly affected by an agreement between their employer and a trade union. This is presented as the proportion of employees affected by such an agreement
Occupation	Defined using the Standard Occupation Classification (SOC). From 2021, the SOC 2020 is used. Prior to that we have used SOC 2010 for data from 2011 to 2020, and SOC 2000 for earlier data.
Industry	Defined using the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC). SIC 2007 has been used throughout. However, data prior to 2009 was reallocated using the agreed ONS approach from SIC 1992 codes.

Further information

Future updates to these statistics

The next update of these statistics will be in May 2023.

Past Trade Union Membership bulletins

[Trade Union Membership 2020](#), Ivan Bishop

[Trade Union Membership 2019](#), Ivan Bishop

[Trade Union Membership 2018](#), George Williams

[Trade Union Membership 2017](#), Pierre Baustert

[Trade Union Membership 2016](#), Kirsty Chapman

[Trade Union Membership 2015](#), Cara Maguire

[Trade Union Membership 2014](#), Connor Russell

[Trade Union Membership 2013](#), Andrew Rowlinson

[Trade Union Membership 2012](#), Andrew Rowlinson

[Trade Union Membership 2011](#), Nikki Brownlie

[Trade Union Membership 2010](#), James Achur

Trade Union Membership 2009, James Achur

Trade Union Membership 2008, Craig Barratt

Trade Union Membership 2007, Sally Mercer and Richard Notley

Trade Union Membership 2006, Heidi Grainger and Martin Crowther

Trade Union Membership 2005, Heidi Grainger

Trade Union Membership 2004, Heidi Grainger, Heather Holt

Trade Union Membership 2003, Tom Palmer, Heidi Grainger, Grant Fitzner

Trade union membership articles in Labour Market Trends

1. Analysis in brief: Trade union membership: estimates from the autumn 2003 Labour Force Survey, by Stephen Hicks and Tom Palmer. March 2004.

2. Labour Market Spotlight: Trade union membership. July 2003.

3. Article: Trade union membership: an analysis of data from the autumn 2001 LFS, by Keith Brook. July 2002.

4. Article: Trade union membership 1999-2000: an analysis of data from the Certification Officer and the Labour Force Survey, by Abby Sneade. September 2001.

5. Article: Trade union membership 1998-99: an analysis of data from the Certification Officer and Labour Force Survey, by Stephen Hicks. July 2000.

6. Article: Trade union membership and recognition 1997-8: an analysis of data from the Certification Officer and the Labour Force Survey, by Paul Bland. July 1999.

Trade union membership: additional analysis

7. [Use and users of BIS statistics on trade union membership](#), April 2013.
8. [Trade union membership statistics: Measuring bias in the Labour Force Survey](#), March 2013
9. [Sampling variance in the trade union membership statistics](#), March 2013
10. [Trade union membership statistics: 2012 to 2013 user survey report](#), March 2013

Related statistics

The [Certification Officer's Annual Reports](#) includes statistics from the annual returns from scheduled and listed trade unions.

Revisions policy

The [BEIS statistical revisions policy](#) sets out the revisions policy for these statistics, which has been developed in accordance with the UK Statistics Authority [Code of Practice for Statistics](#).

Uses of these statistics

Trade union membership statistics are used within government to help inform on worker representation within industries and occupations, and to help develop policies on employment relations.

The statistics are also used by non-government organisations such as think tanks, trade unions and employer organisations to analyse union membership and the extent of collective worker representation.

User engagement

Users are encouraged to provide comments and feedback on how these statistics are used and how well they meet user needs. Comments on any issues relating to this statistical release are welcomed and should be sent to: lm.correspondence@beis.gov.uk

The BEIS statement on [statistical public engagement and data standards](#) sets out the department's commitments on public engagement and data standards as outlined by the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#).

National Statistics designation

National Statistics status means that our statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value, and it is our responsibility to maintain compliance with these standards.

The continued designation of these statistics as National Statistics was confirmed in June 2013. This followed a full [assessment](#) against the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) in 2012.

Since the latest review by the Office for Statistics Regulation, we have continued to comply with the Code of Practice for Statistics, and have made the following improvements:

- Example A – Added more value by providing breakdowns previously requested as freedom of information requests as annexed tables.
- Example B – Revised the method of estimating trade union presence in the workplace following advice from an academic
- Example C – Published analysis investigating examining the potential for bias in the trade union membership statistics arising from LFS methodology.

Pre-release access to statistics

Some ministers and officials receive access to these statistics up to 24 hours before release. Details of the arrangements for doing this and a list of the ministers and officials that receive pre-release access to these statistics can be found in the [BEIS statement of compliance](#) with the Pre-Release Access to Official Statistics Order 2008.

Contact

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