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Abstract

Unionization levels are far lower among young workers than for the workforce in general. How can trade unions become more responsive to their particular interests and needs? Union confederations, even in countries with decentralized union structures, have the potential to take effective initiatives to facilitate and support new organizing strategies targeted at young workers, for example by spreading knowledge, practical skills and vision of relevance for improving the representation and recruitment of young workers. Yet the survey findings reported here show that youth representatives across Europe find their confederations' responsiveness and commitment to organizing to be inadequate. Their dissatisfaction confirms previous research findings concerning young workers and their unfulfilled desire for unionization.

Keywords

confederations, organizing, recruitment, representation, trade unions, young workers

Introduction

Young workers are typically the first to be laid off in periods of economic decline, because in most countries they are more prone to be employed in precarious forms of employment (Kretsos, 2010). Thus unemployment among this category of workers has risen disproportionately during the current recession. This vulnerability should be of particular concern to the labour movement since young workers are the 'future of trade unions': unions need to become more responsive to the interests and aspirations of this new generation of workers (Ebbinghaus et al., 2009; Fievez, 2009). And yet across Europe, the new labour market generation seems to be 'the most problematic group of workers to unionise' (Pedersini, 2010: 13).

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Past research has concluded that young workers are a 'blank slate' in terms of their attitudes towards unions (Bryson et al., 2005; Gomez and Gunderson, 2004; Gomez et al., 2002, 2004; Tailby and Pollert, 2011), or even that they have a stronger belief in unionism than their older counterparts. To explain the discrepancy between young workers' positive attitudes towards unions and their low unionization rate, reference is generally made to labour market structure: young workers tend to work in sectors that are less covered by union membership, union representation and collective bargaining (Booth et al., 2010; Freeman and Diamond, 2003; Haynes et al., 2005; Payne, 1989; Waddington and Kerr, 2002).

A growing body of work has acknowledged the external constraints on unionization but has identified the independent effect of union tactics and activities on organizing (young) union members (Byford, 2009). Most of the studies that have set out to evaluate organizing campaigns have been focused on an individual union in a single country, often Anglophone, and have pinpointed (young) workers' own propensity for unionization.

This article adopts a different perspective by focusing primarily on the policies of the union confederations or peak associations for representing and recruiting young workers. The reason for this approach is a belief that the confederations' policies – in addition to those of their affiliated unions – are of relevance for raising union membership among young workers. I examine how union youth representatives across Europe perceive their confederations' responses to the problem of low membership density among young workers, on the basis of a survey carried out among representatives of the youth structures of the national affiliates of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). The survey, incorporating replies from 44 youth representatives, shows a demand for greater efforts. Hence, just as there is an unsatisfied demand for unionism among young workers, there is also an unsatisfied demand among youth representatives within the confederations for more effective attempts to organize young workers.

Are young workers less favourable towards unions?

Unionization rates are consistently lower for youths than for adults (Blanchflower, 2007; Pedersini, 2010; Serrano Pascual and Waddington, 2000). This is not a new challenge for unions (Payne, 1989), but there is evidence that the unionization of younger workers is today declining faster than among older workers. Hence in Germany, unions are noticeably ageing (Schnabel and Wagner, 2008), and a similar pattern is found in the Netherlands (Huiskamp and Smulders, 2010). In Sweden the recent membership decline – from an especially high initial level, it is true – is particularly pronounced among young workers, many of whom choose to remain outside the (union-run) unemployment funds, following the sharp increase in contribution rates imposed by the centre-right government (Kjellberg, 2009). The UK, like Germany, has seen an accelerated trend of workers that have never been union members, with the probability becoming particularly marked among young people since the mid-1990s (Bryson and Gomez, 2005): age has become 'a more important determinant of who joins trade unions now than it used to be' (Machin, 2004: 430).

Explanations for the relationship between age and union membership focus on age effects, cohort effects, or both (Blanchflower, 2007; Schnabel and Wagner, 2008). It is

unnecessary to provide an exhaustive overview of these explanations; but one cohort effect, the alleged increase in individualization, does call for particular attention, since it is relevant to the thesis of an unsatisfied demand for organizing among young workers themselves.

Individualization could be defined as a process whereby attitudes are increasingly based on individual rather than group references and in accordance with which self-referential rather than collective behaviour is encouraged (Peetz, 2010). It is widely assumed that a weakening of collective frames of reference is the main reason for a general decline in youth engagement with forms of political activity and the lower identification of young workers with trade unions. It is often asserted that unions are 'out-moded institutions unable to reach a new generation of workers imbued with individualistic values – values that are at odds with the collective ethos underpinning unionism' (Gomez et al., 2002: 521). Yet it is not obvious that young people are no longer interested in society, although it might be that societal engagement is less likely to translate into membership of 'traditional' organizations like political parties and unions. The reason might be a failure of trade unions to engage with young workers, rather than a lack of collectivist attitudes (Peetz, 2010). Individualism and collectivism should, in any case, be regarded as part of a continuum of possibilities; and empirical results show that engagement in other forms of political activity seems to go hand in hand with unionism rather than replacing it (Goeres, 2010; Waddington and Kerr, 2002).

There is also very little consistent evidence to suggest opposition in principle to unions. Young workers tend rather to exhibit a somewhat neutral attitude, probably reflecting a lack of knowledge about unions. In the Netherlands, for instance, young workers have latent positive attitudes towards unions and do not believe that union membership is too expensive; quite simply, they have not thought 'in a serious way' about becoming a member themselves (Huiskamp and Smulders, 2010). More positively, a considerable number of studies point to young workers having a positive desire for unionization, with perhaps stronger preferences for unionization than shown by older workers. Such findings come from studies in Australia (Oliver, 2010), Canada (Gomez et al., 2002), New Zealand (Haynes et al., 2005), the USA (Booth et al., 2010; Bryson et al., 2005) and the UK (Freeman and Diamond, 2003). Nor is this pattern confined to anglophone countries: similar findings are reported in countries such as the Netherlands (Huiskamp and Smulders, 2010), Germany (TNS Infratest, 2008) and Belgium (Vendramin, 2007). A study using data from the European Social Survey also reports largely positive attitudes towards unions, irrespective of age, and the persistence and even strengthening of this conviction among employees since the early 1980s (D'Art and Turner, 2008). All these studies suggest that, because young workers tend to be employed in companies and sectors where union organization is weak or inadequate, and often on precarious contracts, they commonly lack the opportunity to join a union.

The 'organizing' approach, confederal pattern-setting and confederal authority

Since the 1990s, trade union research has become more focused on how unions can actively 'organize the unorganized'. The literature distinguishes between two simplified

models: the 'servicing model' and the 'organizing model'. The former involves a 'passive' form of union membership, since members are primarily dependent on support and services provided by the union, but the latter involves active efforts to recruit new members, encourage their participation in the union, and foster their empowerment. However, these models are neither theoretically grounded nor empirically falsifiable (Frege, 2000). In reality, unions select different organizing targets, use a plethora of organizing methods and allocate the resources for organizing activities in various ways (Heery and Adler, 2004). Divergence in terms of model has developed over time and between (local) unions and companies, economic sectors and, obviously, nations. Alongside employer and state strategies and industrial relations institutions, union structures, cultures and traditions are considered the main explanatory variables in accounting for the variation in organizing (Frege and Kelly, 2003).

Given this context-specific interpretation of the organizing model and the Europe-wide context of the survey undertaken, the model has been pragmatically reduced in this study to the degree of commitment and responsiveness shown by confederations to organizing, addressing specific recruitment and internal restructuring strategies for attracting young workers and letting them participate in the union. I concentrate on the confederation level, seeking to examine the degree of leadership-driven support for organizing young workers. The rationale for this focus is the assumption that the organizing policy followed by confederations is of significance for 'boosting and shaping recruitment activity at the workplace' (Heery et al., 2003: 56). This significance can be well illustrated by reference to the question of resource allocation. Since young workers are disproportionately employed in small workplaces with high turnover and non-standard forms of employment, their unionization is particularly cost-intensive. For this reason, financial resources might be more sensibly managed at the confederal level (through a central organizing fund) for the support of decentralized campaigns, rather than (only) locally.

This is not to say that local activism and member participation play no role in union renewal efforts, or the contrary. The encouragement of organization can be neither exclusively 'top-down' nor 'bottom-up': decentralized structures for workplace mapping and campaigning on local issues seem to be vital for successful organizing campaigns (Waddington and Kerr, 2009). A combination of mobilization from below and grass-roots strategies with strategic choices made by union leaders are both necessary for successful union renewal. Yet union leadership is indispensable for union renewal since it requires centralized coordination and articulation, (institutional) consolidation, knowledge dissemination with regard to failures and successes, as well as strategic capacity, in order to act in a more proactive way (Hyman, 1997). Moreover, for organizing issues, as one of the dimensions of union renewal, member activism seems to be less critical since the link with union renewal is 'neither clear nor consistent' (Hickey et al., 2010: 76). Top-down encouragement by the national leadership of unions to paid union staff and officers might be more significant for organizing union members (Heery, 2005).

Union confederations have diverse identities and objectives and operate in varying national environmental and institutional contexts, but my focus is not on the differences between confederations' organizing policies. The reason is the restricted nature of the small data sample for purposes of thorough quantitative analysis. It is certainly the case,

nonetheless, that the function and structures of confederations and their authority over affiliates differ across Europe. Table 1 provides an overview of the degree of authority of the confederations in the European Union and Norway and Switzerland grouped by similarities in industrial relations systems. Whereas confederal authority is traditionally small in anglophone and mediterranean countries and also in Central and Eastern Europe, affiliated unions are more likely to follow decisions taken by the confederal leadership in continental, Nordic and Southern Europe, some notable exceptions in each region notwithstanding. There is long-term stability in the authority indicator, although, on average, authority has relaxed slightly in Northern Europe and become somewhat stricter in Southern Europe. Apart from the presence of a confederal strike fund, authority indicators are mostly constructed from such indicators as the degree of confederal involvement in national socio-economic consultation (Visser, 2011). As such, the changes probably reflect, to a large extent, trends in collective bargaining levels in Northern and Southern Europe.

Confederations with an even low level of authority in the collective bargaining field can have considerable influence on their affiliates' organizing policies, for instance through union education, organizing academies or a centralized organizing fund. In the UK, for instance, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) established an 'Organising Academy' in 1998 to recruit and train specialist organizers (Heery and Adler, 2004; Nowak, 2009). Despite the absence of direct authority over affiliated unions, the TUC has successfully launched high-profile campaigns on organizing and 'has been able to cascade the objectives of these campaigns down to affiliated unions' (Behrens et al., 2004: 124). Similarly *Solidarność* in Poland, despite low authority and a fragmented union structure, set up a Trade Union Development Department in 1999 to encourage an organizing approach and carry out nationwide sectoral campaigns, and this was followed by the creation of equivalent departments at regional level (Krzywdzinski, 2010). These examples illustrate that current authority indices might be of little help as a control variable, insofar as they are generally biased towards the collective bargaining cycle and do not take into account organizing initiatives at confederal level. Nevertheless, it may be supposed that confederations with a more centralized structure and a closer control over affiliates have a stronger capacity to coordinate their organizing activities. Additionally, confederations active in economic sectors with predominantly young workers might have more incentives

Table 1. Varieties of confederal authority: mean (standard deviation), 1990–1999 and 2000–2009

Regions	1990–1999	2000–2009
Anglophone Europe and Mediterranean islands (CY, IE, MT, UK)	0.31 (0.22)	0.32 (0.22)
Central and Eastern Europe (BG, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, PL, RO, SK)	0.25 (0.06)	0.26 (0.07)
Central West Europe (AT, BE, CH, DE, LU, NL, SI ^a)	0.42 (0.26)	0.40 (0.23)
Northern Europe (DK, FI, NO, SE)	0.58 (0.14)	0.56 (0.11)
Southern Europe (EL, ES, FR, IT, PT)	0.36 (0.08)	0.39 (0.09)

Source: Visser (2011).

^aSI is included in this group because its industrial relations system closely matches the Central West European countries.

for encouraging their affiliates to step up their efforts to develop an effective organizing approach.

Survey design and sample composition

In mapping and examining confederal organizing policies for young workers, a survey was conducted among the members of the ETUC's Youth Committee. Established in 1985, the Committee consists of a delegate, who should not be older than 35, from each national member organization of the ETUC that has a youth structure. At the end of 2008 not all ETUC national member organizations had a representative, and the Committee consisted of 35 members from a total of 29 European countries. It meets at least twice a year and has its own Executive Committee to prepare the meetings and coordinate activities.

In November 2008, questionnaires were dispatched by email to the Youth Committee members and to union officers of the 47 ETUC member organizations that have no representation in the Committee but who are responsible for youth issues in their confederation. It was assumed that the correspondents would be qualified to assess the representation and recruitment policies adopted by their confederation vis-à-vis young workers, and could present an informed and aggregate view of the organizing efforts and outcomes of their confederation with regard to young workers.

A total of 44 responses were received, from confederations in 29 countries, representing a response rate of 53.7 percent. There were 21 female youth representatives, while the average age of respondents was 30.4 years ($n = 42$; $SD = 6.4$), with an average experience in representing young workers of 4.0 years ($n = 40$; $SD = 5.2$). The majority of the respondents (37) are youth representatives; in four cases the position was not stated, while three further questionnaires were filled in by union officials in charge of dealing with young workers but without formally being a youth representative. Although this was not asked, it can be assumed that most respondents are paid union officers since they make up most of the ETUC Youth Committee. The geographical distribution of the 82 ETUC national member organizations and their membership size was cross-checked against the distribution of the confederations from which the 44 questionnaires were returned by the youth representatives; this showed that 71.4 percent of the overall ETUC membership is covered, based on the membership figures declared to the ETUC in 2008. While the data indicate that the ETUC national member organizations in English-speaking and continental Europe are somewhat over-represented within the survey sample (100% and 90% respectively), most of the important confederations in terms of membership size are included. The lowest coverage was in Southern Europe (47%).

It should be noted that comparing union density of young workers within the confederations could prove difficult, since differing age definitions of 'young workers' are used. Accordingly, respondents were asked to state the maximum age for (still) being considered a young union member according to the statutes of their confederation. Overall, the age specified is without doubt higher than the maximum age commonly used in the academic literature: two-thirds of the confederations in the survey ($n = 27$) set the maximum age at 35 years. A minority ($n = 6$) place the maximum age lower than 30 years, but this maximum is still higher than 24 years; the rest of the respondents ($n = 8$) indicate the maximum age as between 30 and 34 years. Since the maximum age is set at

a lower level, and it can be expected that the pool of potential young union members is smaller, it comes as no surprise that the (un-weighted) average percentage of young union members within the confederations with a maximum level below 35 years ($n = 13$; $SD = 7.0$) is lower compared with those confederations with a maximum level of 35 years ($n = 23$; $SD = 7.0$), namely 12.3 percent against 17.1 percent ($t = 1.98$; $p < 0.10$).

Survey results

Structures for representing young union members

The 'median voter' theorem would suggest that internal union politics favour the preferences of the median union members. In most countries these are middle-aged workers in manufacturing industry, although their dominance is clearly reduced by the decline in traditional industries (Visser, 2012). If their preferences predominate, unions might not be attractive to young workers. The priority given in many European countries in recent years to the defence of the pensions of older workers, and to the protection of the jobs of (older) 'core' workers, might feed into this view. An example is the formation in the Netherlands in 2005 of *Alternatief voor Vakbond* (AVV, Alternative to the Union), which accused the 'traditional' confederations of not catering for the specific interests of young workers in non-standard forms of employment.

One means of countering such a view is to develop and strengthen adequate representation and participatory structures for involving young members in internal union policy-making (Kahmann, 2002), making confederations more responsive to the concerns of young workers. In the same way that trade union women's structures can support union revitalization (Parker and Douglas, 2010), youth representative bodies can offer the ability to influence union leadership to organize young workers and address their interests. This might be more effective, in particular, in those confederations that exercise strong authority over their affiliates. How and to what extent have confederations across Europe adopted (new) representation and participatory structures as a response to a (grassroots) consciousness of better serving young union workers' interests and needs?

A large majority, 39 out of 44 respondents, report the existence within their confederation of one or more formal structures for young workers; more informal structures, such as youth networks, were not included in the questionnaire. This is not a surprising outcome since the existence of such a structure is a prerequisite for ETUC Youth Committee membership. A national youth committee was the most common body, reported by 25 out of 38 respondents (66%). Such committees at branch or sectoral level existed in 21 cases (53%). Specialist full-time officers for young union members at confederation level were also reported in 21 cases (53%). Only 15 of the confederations (40%) have regional youth committees (which are probably relevant only for confederations that have adopted regional structures). National departments (eight cases) and separate national union organizations for young union members (five cases) are less common. Just under half of the confederations (18) combine youth committees, at the branch, sectoral, regional or national level, with a youth structure that has a more than purely representative function, such as a full-time officer, a national department or a separate union. Again about half of the confederations (21) currently combine decentralized and national forms of youth structures.

Most of the youth structures in the sample are supported by one or more paid staff; but not in seven of the 36 confederations with a youth structure (19%). Nineteen out of 31 responding (61%) have a dedicated budget. Possessing such a budget is significantly associated with having support staff (Cramer's $V = 0.45$; $p < 0.05$). However, 24 out of 36 respondents (67%) consider that the number of staff is insufficient; only three of them (8%) explicitly agree that the number of staff is adequate, and no respondent expresses 'strong agreement' on this point. A similar but somewhat less negative pattern appears for the dedicated budget of the youth structures, with 19 respondents (53%) considering it insufficient; only six respondents (17%) consider the budget satisfactory.

The importance of organizing campaigns targeted at young workers

Respondents were asked to rank four priorities of youth representation, from a list of 10 policies; Table 2 shows the cumulative percentages for each item, and the average rankings. The results show a very clear emphasis on 'youth employment' and 'organizing young workers'; all other issues rank far behind.

Respondents were also asked to rank seven channels through which young workers joined a trade union. The youth representatives broadly confirm the empirical findings of other studies, according to which the actual decision concerning union membership is significantly influenced by (union-active) family members, peers and co-workers and the availability of the union in the workplace (Blanden and Machin, 2003; Byford, 2009; Griffin and Brown, 2011; Gomez et al., 2002). The union representative is considered the most important (ranked first or second by 50%), followed by colleagues at work (41%) and family or friends (32%). But youth organizing campaigns were listed next (27%); this result coincides with research findings from Australia which report that 'the need to adopt an organizing approach' was a common theme among the young union officials interviewed (Bailey et al., 2010: 50). Joining a union as a student is not considered a principal channel by most respondents (only 11%), although there is evidence that young workers who have sampled union membership during student employment are more likely to become union members subsequently (Oliver, 2010).

Table 2. Policy priorities of youth structures, cumulative (%) ($n = 39*10$)

Policy priority (average ranking)	1	2	3	4
Youth employment (1.9)	44	69	82	85
Organizing young workers (2.2)	36	72	74	80
Life-long learning (5.3)	3	8	28	33
Social exclusion (5.3)	0	3	15	33
Sustainable development (5.8)	5	13	15	28
Globalisation and international solidarity (5.2)	0	8	21	31
Demographic challenges (5.9)	0	0	10	26
European Union (5.8)	0	3	10	23
Gender (6.1)	0	3	8	13
Other	3	3	5	5

Responsiveness of the confederations

While almost all confederations in the survey have established formal representative bodies for young members, the participation of young unionists in the systems of confederal government might be (at least) equally important. Such participation, especially when youth representatives have voting rights on the executive committee or council, facilitates influence on the confederal policy on youth issues. The survey results show that while 26 of the confederations in the sample (62%) have a reserved seat on the national executive committee or council for young union members, the status of these seats differs: 13 provide a right to vote, nine a right to speak and three observer status only (there is one missing value). Thus, despite administrative reforms undertaken by confederations, there are only limited possibilities for youth representatives to have a voice at the level of the umbrella organization.

Nevertheless, there is no great dissatisfaction with the confederations' responsiveness to the specific interests and needs of young workers. Respondents were asked to score their organization's performance regarding eight items on a Likert-type scale. For almost all functions listed in Table 3, very positive assessments were recorded. 'Organizing campaigns' are the single and remarkable exception to the overall pattern, even though the average is overall positive: only 17 out of 42 respondents (40%) are satisfied, while nine (21%) are dissatisfied. A rank order correlation test shows that there is no association between the confederation's responsiveness on organizing campaigns and its degree of authority (Kendall's tau-a = 0.07; $n = 40$; $p > 0.10$).

The findings are fairly counter-intuitive if one controls for the presence of reserved seats for young workers on the executive committee or council. Respondents from confederations with reserved seats rate their organizations' responsiveness lower than do those without such seats, except for 'lobbying the government' where the ratings are equal. Only for 'improving health and safety', however, is the difference significant ($t = 2.56$; $p < 0.001$). With regard to 'organizing campaigns', the result might be partly explained if the percentage of young workers within the confederations is taken into account.

Table 3. How good is your union confederation at taking into account the interests and needs of young workers? (Scale 1–5)

Union function (average score)	Bad	Neutral	Good	<i>N</i>
Providing legal advice (3.9)	7	21	72	43
Providing education and training (3.7)	7	28	65	43
Providing specialist services (3.6)	14	29	57	42
Collective bargaining (3.5)	10	36	55	42
Lobbying the government (3.5)	12	36	52	42
Providing union benefits (3.4)	7	43	50	42
Improving health and safety (3.5)	10	41	50	42
Organizing campaigns (3.2)	21	38	41	42

Note: Cronbach's alpha: 0.77.

Confederations without reserved seats have an average percentage of young workers of 18 percent ($n = 14$; $SD = 9.7$), while the average percentage is 14 percent ($n = 21$; $SD = 5.3$) for those with reserved representation in the committee or council. Although the difference is not significant by conventional criteria, it might hint at the fact that confederations without reserved seats but on average a higher percentage of young union members have fewer incentives to set up youth organizing campaigns – though the standard deviation points to large differences in the level of young workers for those confederations without reserved seats. Thus, 56 percent ($n = 9$) of the 16 confederations without reserved seats have launched youth organizing campaigns in the last two years, while this is the case in 69 percent ($n = 18$) of confederations with a specific youth representation in the committee or council. Given the lower average score on ‘organizing campaigns’ for these latter confederations, it may be concluded that youth representatives see the organizing efforts of their confederation as insufficient, or the effects of the campaigns as disappointing, or both.

Attracting and recruiting young workers

Unions can use various channels outside the workplace, deploy a number of activities and introduce several special measures to stem the sharp decline in unionization among young workers. One such measure is the introduction of lower youth subscription rates. This could be particularly significant for young workers since they are frequently employed in low-paid jobs with non-standard employment contracts and associated with job uncertainty and high turnover (Bailey et al., 2010; Byford, 2009). Twenty-six respondents (61%) report that their organization, either the confederation itself or (most of) its affiliates, have introduced a special arrangement of this kind; the actual level of such youth rates was not asked. Some but not all confederations have a similar arrangement for the unemployed, important also because of the high youth unemployment rates in most countries. Such an arrangement is particularly common in those confederations able to exercise a stronger authority over their affiliates ($t = 2.42$; $p < 0.05$). Yet a considerable number of confederations or their affiliates (17, or 40%) have still taken no initiative to introduce such an arrangement either for unemployed workers or for students or young workers. A partial explanation might be that it is not feasible for some unions to recruit and to represent the interests of students or unemployed workers. Alternatively or additionally, if one controls for the percentage of young members in the confederations, those without special youth subscription rates may not feel the ‘need’ to introduce such a measure. The proportion of young members stands at 14 percent in those confederations with a special arrangement ($n = 23$; $SD = 6.3$), whereas those without special arrangements have a slightly higher level of 18 percent of young members ($n = 14$; $SD = 8.9$). This difference is however not significant in the context of the survey sample ($t = 1.28$; $p > 0.10$).

To convince young people of the benefits of union membership, unions may also provide free advice to students or young workers regardless of their union status. A large majority, 34 confederations (79%), do provide such free advice. It is clear that a union membership arrangement is closely linked with the provision of advice, irrespective of union status. While advice to students or young workers is dependent on membership in

eight of the confederations (89%) without a special membership arrangement, 25 of those confederations (74%) with such an arrangement provide advice irrespective of union status.

Since young workers are more likely to work in small, non-unionized workplaces, it is also important for unions to raise awareness of the benefits of union membership through alternative channels, external to the workplace. Various examples of such channels are listed in the first half of Table 4; respondents were asked to evaluate their effectiveness on a scale ranging from one to five. In the questionnaire no explicit reference was made to the confederal or union level since the emphasis was on the respondents' perception of effectiveness of these channels as such (even though the level might influence the effectiveness). First of all, job information conventions are considered very effective. Furthermore, web-based services could inform potential young union members of the nature of union services and the internet technology could enable them to 'sample' union services before becoming a union member (Diamond and Freeman, 2002). Yet research outside Europe reports that young union officials 'felt that unions needed to engage with technology much more intensively' (Bailey et al., 2010: 52). This seems to be the case also in Europe. While the internet is widely applied for raising awareness about trade unions, and its effectiveness is acknowledged, 43 percent of the confederations ($n = 19$) have still not set up a dedicated or specific website for young workers.

Youth camps and concerts are perceived as additional helpful channels, albeit to a lesser extent. Even though there are, in some countries, limits to the extent to which

Table 4. Raising awareness about the union and attracting young workers (Scale 1–5)

How useful are the following channels for raising awareness about the union?				
Channel (average score)	Ineffective	Intermediate	Effective	N
Job information conventions (4.0)	6	21	73	33
Websites (3.8)	3	27	70	37
University campus (3.7)	12	23	65	26
Youth camps (3.6)	14	28	59	29
Music concerts (3.4)	17	33	50	36
Ad in youth magazine (3.3)	16	64	36	25
Youth television channel (3.0)	33	47	20	15
How useful are the following activities for attracting young workers into the union?				
Activity (average score)	Ineffective	Intermediate	Effective	N
Special services (3.9)	0	31	69	29
Building and maintaining informal networks (3.7)	8	33	58	36
Providing further training (3.7)	3	41	56	39
Helping with applying for a job (3.8)	0	50	50	22
Providing advice on career development (3.4)	13	47	40	30
Magazine/newsletter (3.4)	8	54	39	26
Providing help with studies (3.0)	35	30	35	20

Note: Channels: Cronbach's alpha: 0.70; Activities: Cronbach's alpha: 0.69.

union activity is allowed on university campuses, this channel, together with youth camps, seems to have potential for raising awareness. Advertisements in youth magazines and the use of a youth television channel are less frequent measures and considered less useful. This might partly reflect the difficulties encountered by respondents in judging the effectiveness of these channels, insofar as direct feedback from young people and direct interaction with them is less feasible in these cases. At the same time, the low effectiveness ratios might indicate that union membership is better 'disseminated via personal recommendations, rather than through formal advertising channels' (Gomez and Gunderson, 2004: 107). The importance of informal channels, as acclaimed by the 'experience-good model' of union membership, could also explain why 'building and maintaining informal networks' is perceived by more than half of the youth representatives as (very) effective. In the second half of Table 4, which provides an overview of the diverse activities that unions could deploy for attracting young workers, positive effectiveness ratios are also reached for 'special services', 'providing further training' and 'help with applying for a job'.

The level of commitment of youth organizing at the confederal level

Alongside the targets and methods used, resource allocation or the level of commitment is a third important component of organizing (Heery and Adler, 2004). Such a commitment can be expressed through three dimensions: formalization, specialization and the degree of centrality accorded to organizing in union strategies for revitalization.

Table 5 summarizes several selected indicators for assessing the extent to which confederations have committed themselves to youth organizing. First of all, the low

Table 5. Depth of organizing policies for young workers

Formalization: Plan and target	Percentage	N
Plan agreed with affiliates to maintain or increase membership among young workers	39	44
Targets agreed with affiliates for recruitment of young members	9	44
Specialization		
Provide courses and training sessions	91	43
Provide specialist personnel	69	42
Organize recruitment campaigns for affiliates	56	43
Financial support	45	42
Centrality: Organizing issues concerning young workers discussed		42
At each meeting	10	
At every other meeting	17	
Every six months	19	
Annually	50	
Never	5	

formalization of organizing campaigns targeted at young workers is apparent: under half the respondents report that the confederation has a plan agreed with affiliates to maintain or increase membership among young workers. Only four confederations have agreed recruitment targets with affiliates. Forms of specialization are more widespread, although it is uncertain whether the various forms of support point towards a more extensive development of a formal recruitment policy targeted at young workers. Almost all confederations in the survey provide courses and training sessions on organizing young workers, and well over half provide specialist personnel as well. Just over half currently support the affiliates with recruitment campaigns. Financial help from the confederation is forthcoming in under half the cases. Only nine confederations provide all four forms of support, but 23 provide at least three.

The degree of centrality assigned to organizing young workers is measured by the frequency of discussion of such issues in the executive committee or council, as this reflects the union's interest in exchanging information and best practices on youth organizing campaigns. Compared to the specialization dimension, centrality shows a less positive picture, since in half the cases the councils or committees discuss organizing issues regarding young workers only once a year. The frequent discussion of organizing issues is linked to the effective launching of youth organizing campaigns (Cramer's $V: 0.27$; $p < 0.10$). While nine of the eleven confederations that have set up organizing campaigns discuss organizing issues very frequently (at every meeting or every other meeting), roughly half of those confederations that have not initiated campaigns discuss these issues only rarely (every six months at most). While part of the explanation for the level of commitment at the confederal level might be the degree of authority exercised by the confederation over its affiliates, additional tests yield no significant results between the degree of authority and the dimensions of commitment to organizing.

Conclusion

Recently the youth–adult unionization differential has been rising significantly in several countries, in other words union membership has fallen more rapidly among young workers. Yet there is no serious evidence that young workers have negative attitudes towards trade unionism. There is indeed good reason to believe that there is an unsatisfied demand for unionism among young workers. The survey results among youth representatives which are reported in this article have demonstrated that a similar unsatisfied demand might be present when it comes to the confederations' responsiveness to the representation and recruitment of young workers. For instance, youth representative bodies lack financial and personnel resources, a shortcoming which may make it more difficult for the voice of youth to make itself heard. Among representatives there is not only a demand for the launching of youth recruitment campaigns, but also an apparent belief in such campaigns as a channel for joining a union. Yet a formal, more systematic and proactive organizing policy targeted at young workers seems to be rather underdeveloped at the confederation level, which might also explain why organizing young workers has turned out to be no more than moderately successful so far.

The confederal level is frequently underestimated in the literature on the organizing model, given the rather biased notion of this model as requiring an exclusively decentralized

recruitment strategy. Apart from the fact that an organizing policy necessitates the input of knowledge and (financial) investments, the degree of authority exercised by the confederation over its affiliates might partly explain why some confederations are more likely than others to support their affiliates in their organizing efforts. Yet in the union policy field of organizing, it looks as if even those confederations with notably decentralized traditions in union structures have the transformative potential to take effective, centralized initiatives for facilitating and supporting new organizing strategies targeted at the younger audience. Even so, if unions continue to fail to connect with young people, it will be very challenging to reverse the de-unionization trend; and other organizational forms might well come to replace unions for the representation and service of the next generation of workers.

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