



## Empirical Analysis

# ADAPTING IN CRISIS: SWEDISH AND LATVIAN LABOR UNION RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES (2020- 2022)

June 2024

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## Abstract

Labor unions play a vital role within organizations, with research indicating that larger firms are more likely to have union representation (Capuano et al., 2020). Furthermore, labor unions are more prevalent in Europe compared to the United States (Matthews, 2017). Over time, shifts in organizational structures, ethics, and culture have influenced the dynamics between labor unions, employees, and management. Recent crises, such as the migration influx in 2016 and the coronavirus pandemic from 2020 to 2023, have further influenced the landscape of labor unions within firms across various industries and nations. This article seeks to examine changes in hiring strategies and approaches in response to these crises in Sweden and Latvia.

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## 1. Introduction

Labor unions play a vital role within organizations, with research indicating that larger firms are more likely to have union representation (Capuano et al., 2020). Furthermore, labor unions are more prevalent in Europe compared to the United States (Matthews, 2017). Over time, shifts in organizational structures, ethics, and culture have influenced the dynamics between labor unions, employees, and management. Recent crises, such as the migration influx in 2016 and the coronavirus pandemic from 2020 to 2023, have further influenced the landscape of labor unions within firms across various industries and nations. This article seeks to examine changes in hiring strategies and approaches in response to these crises in Sweden and Latvia.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: Chapter 1 discusses the existing literature on the given subject, Chapter 2 offers an overview of statistical data concerning the prevalence of labor unions in two countries, Chapter 3 describes the evolution of hiring strategies adopted by labor unions in two countries over the last five years, Chapter 4 focuses on youth recruitment initiatives undertaken by these unions, and Chapter 5 concludes.

## 2. Literature Review

Posting vacancies, internal and external sources, on-line applications, college recruitment and job fairs are some of the existing ways of recruitment (Richardson, 2009). Recruitment in short would be “the set of activities and processes used to legally obtain a sufficient number of qualified people at the right place and time so that the people and the organizations can select each other in their own best short and long-term interests” (Schuler and Randall, 1987). However, different recruitment strategies would be more effective in some countries than others, especially for labor unions, where different types of economies have different approaches.

Frege and Kelly (2003) found that properties of industrial relations, in particular collective bargaining and corporatist arrangements, explain some of the major differences between union movements, especially in labor organizing and political activities. However, while union recruitment is important, retention of members is also a key topic, as people may not see the point of staying in a labor union due to various reasons, with the key ones being poor internal communication between unions and members, as well as lack of education and information from the union (Hatcher, 2017). The authors suggested that unions should try to modernize more to involve more members and explore their needs. Particularly in the development of artificial intelligence (AI), unions should try to modernize ahead of companies as AI will most likely exacerbate under-representation (Cazes, 2023). Unions should be the ones to facilitate the individual growth of their members, providing necessary skills and associated training to set them a part in the market. It is something that has plagued the Swedish trade unions since the 1980s, where the lack of focus on the needs of the newer generation and a lacking vision from the trade unions had a declining effect on the Swedish trade unions membership rate (Alivin and Sverke, 2000).

In Sweden, the decline in trade union density is exacerbated by the significant role of migrants, as highlighted by Bender (2023). Particularly in sectors traditionally dominated by unionized workers, the influx of migrants has contributed to a decline in union participation, resulting in socio-economic disparities between foreign-born and native populations. This trend has prompted Swedish unions to take action, such as posting adverts, to address the challenges posed by low union membership among migrant workers. Erik Bengtsson's (2013) research underscores the varying strategic approaches of unions towards migrant workers, influenced by factors such as institutional strength and sectoral dynamics. While some unions adopt administrative strategies focused on collective agreements, others emphasize outreach efforts, including the use of interpreters to engage with migrant workers effectively. This evolving landscape

reflects a shift towards innovative approaches, including those inspired by the US union movement, as unions seek to adapt to changing demographics and labor market dynamics. Johan Svanberg's (2011) insights underscore the historical significance of organizational efforts and political will in shaping the trajectory of Swedish trade unions, highlighting the need for ongoing collaboration and adaptation to effectively address the challenges posed by migration.

In Latvia, however, union membership faces significant challenges, as outlined by Jeremy Waddington, Torsten Müller, and Kurt Vandaele (2023). Factors such as the informal sector and migration have led to a decline in union membership, compounded by a rigid institutional framework. Additionally, institutional power dynamics and limited external funding have marginalized unions, exacerbated by a lack of adaptation and systematic organization. Furthermore, insufficient focus on youth engagement and a perceived disconnect from societal concerns contribute to decreasing youth participation in unions, highlighting the need for comprehensive strategies to address these issues and revitalize union membership in Latvia.

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) presents both opportunities and challenges for labor unions, as emphasized by Cazes (2023). While social partners play a critical role in guiding AI adoption and ensuring fair responses to technological changes, AI is likely to exacerbate existing disparities among under-represented employees and unions. The emergence of new skill requirements and the need for trustworthy AI use underscore the importance of proactive engagement by unions. Moreover, Jeremy Waddington, Torsten Müller, and Kurt Vandaele (2023) highlight the impact of AI on union dynamics, noting that the lack of expertise among social partners hampers effective adaptation strategies, particularly in addressing youth participation and the marginalization of unions in certain contexts.

### 3. General Statistics on Labour Union

#### 3.1. Sweden

According to research by Kjellberg & Nergaard (2022), in Sweden, 68 percent of workers were unionized in 2019, a decline from the peak of 83 percent in 1993. Eurostat (2021) ranks Sweden fifth in the European Union for industry-wide collective agreements, covering about 88 percent of employees (European Trade Union Institute, n.d.-a), translating to nearly nine out of ten workers eligible for negotiation. These agreements primarily address minimum wages, working hours, and other labor conditions, maintaining stability over time (OECD, n.d.).

By 2019, roughly half of companies with at least ten employees were formally represented by unions, increasing to approximately 80 percent for firms with over 250 employees (European Trade Union Institute, n.d.-a).

Sweden hosts three major labor unions: LO, representing manual workers with 1.4 million members; TCO, representing non-manual workers with the same membership count; and Saco, with about 700,000 members, advocating for graduate employees. Predominantly, women constitute the union membership, with the highest proportion in TCO (59 percent) and the lowest in LO (46 percent). Additionally, other unions cater to specific professions such as managers, pilots, firefighters, dockers, along with numerous smaller associations outside the major confederations (I&E Global, 2023).

#### 3.2. Latvia

As of 2017, Latvia had the lowest unionization rate since gaining independence in the 1990s, with only 7.1 percent of employees belonging to unions (down from 10.2 percent in 2017). Collective agreements covered 9.7 percent of employees and 15.4 percent of the total workforce (Preisa & Sukevics, 2023). The decline in union membership and

coverage by collective agreements has been ongoing, with figures dropping from 21 percent and 34.2 percent, respectively, in 2003 (according to the OECD).

In 2013, only 9 percent of establishments with at least 10 workers had some form of employee representation, rising to 31 percent for firms with at least 250 employees.

Latvia's primary labor union, Latvijas Brīvo arodbiedrību savienība (LBAS), encompasses 19 smaller member organizations with approximately 58,000 members as of the end of 2019. The largest individual unions within LBAS include those representing teachers, sailors, railway and transport workers, as well as health and social care workers (with others having fewer than 5,000 members). In total, the country boasts 345 registered labor unions as of 2021 (Preisa & Sukevics, 2023). According to the European Trade Union Institute (n.d.-b), 61 percent of union members are female, with the majority employed in the public sector.

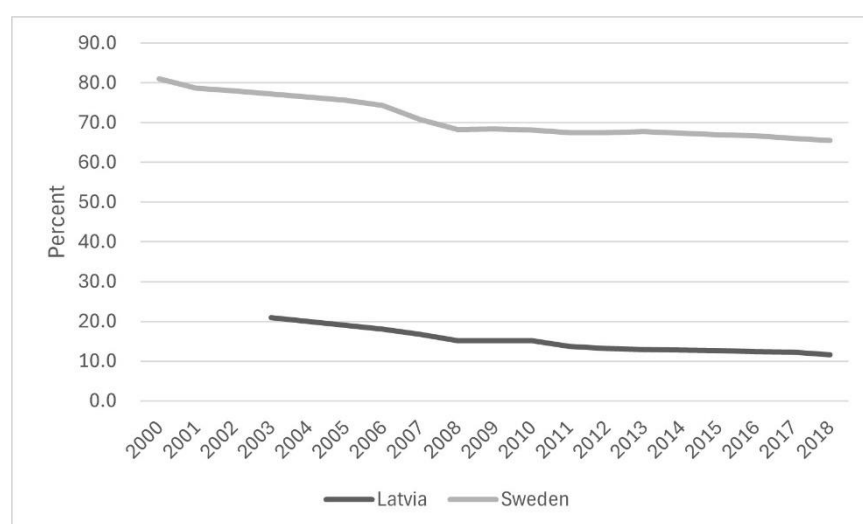
The development of labor union density and collective bargaining coverage in Latvia and Sweden over time can be seen in Figure 1. The numbers above are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1. Summary statistics**

	<i>Sweden</i>	<i>Latvia</i>
Labor union density (% of employed)	68 (2022)	7.1 (2017)
Collective bargaining coverage (% of employed)	88 (2021)	15.4 (2023)
Percent of firms with at least 10 workers having employee representation	50 (2019)	9 (2013)
Percent of firms with at least 250 workers having employee representation	88 (2019)	31 (2013)
Number of smaller labor union organizations	110 (2023)	345 (2021)

Note: a number in parentheses indicates the year the data was last updated.

Figure 1. Labor union density



Note: the figure shows the number of labor union members in each country as a share of the total employed count in each country.

Source: OECD (Retrieved 2/27/2024, from <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=TUD>).

#### 4. Recruitment strategies in Latvian and Swedish labor unions

This section describes what approaches were used by labor unions in Latvia and Sweden in most recent times, when economies in these countries experienced range of significant shocks, starting from coronavirus crisis in 2020 – 2023 and ending with a massive migration inflow in 2016 and 2022.

##### 4.1 Coronavirus crisis

Coronavirus crisis, same as any health-related massive shock, represents a significant challenge for the economy of any country, and for the labor of such country in particular. Labor unions were not an exemption in addressing this challenge and they had to adapt accordingly, not only by protecting legal rights of workers of their member associations, but also attracting new members so as to collect enough membership fees and maintain a sustained work. This chapter collects and summarizes information regarding tendencies in activity taken by labor unions in Latvia and Sweden during the coronavirus crisis.

Most of the information used and referred to in this section is retrieved from the media in the corresponding country.

##### 4.2 Latvia – strikes among state employees

Following the outbreak of the coronavirus crisis in 2020, it quickly became a focal point for politicians, states, and international organizations worldwide. Many European nations implemented partial or complete lockdowns, leading to heightened demands on healthcare workers amidst constraints on hospital capacity. Consequently, the actions of labor unions in Latvia, particularly the association of medicine workers, garnered significant attention due to its status as one of the country's largest workers' associations. Because of high pressure and workload resulting from a massive inflow of new patients to the hospitals, nurses and doctors called for an increase in wages ([Bremze, 2021](#)). For the context, it should be noted that the remuneration of medical workers in Latvia is one of the lowest in Europe and it stagnates for the long time (see Figure 2). It was reported that the medical workers' unions reached an agreement with the responsible ministry that an additional 75 million euros will be used for an increase in wage of medical workers. Next year (i.e., 2022), however, the Cabinet decided to assign only 35 million euros. Regarding any active and objectively targeted measures of attempting to attract new members to the labor union, they were absent in times of the crisis. In the labor union's website, one can find only publications about another strike and call for wage increase addressed to the Ministry of Health. While media appearances can indeed serve as a means to attract new members through newspapers or popular journals, they often represent a passive approach. However, it is important to recognize that garnering attention in the media is not typically the primary objective of a labor union in its efforts to recruit a significant number of new members. According to the information provided by the labor union, there are 6200 members of the union (by 01.01.2024) out of around 14687 medicine workers (by 01.01.2024, according to the official data collected by the [Veselības Ministrija \(Ministry of Health\)](#), which is about 40 percent. It should be noted that the number of medicine workers include those certified and officially employed.

Relatively smaller labor union than the medical workers' association is pilots' union which primarily consists of those working for the national airline company Airbaltic. In Spring 2021, the media drew attention to that Airbaltic was ready to lay off around 400 people in order to minimize costs which increased due to the economic downturn in light of the coronavirus crisis. The labor union, in turn, said that there were already around 130 people laid off even before the company applied for a collective layoff, and calls from an employees' side for an unpaid leave were rejected ([Bērtule, 2021](#)). In total these numbers correspond to around 50 percent of the total number of Airbaltic employees ([airBaltic](#),

2021). The labor union of Airbaltic refused to disclose how many employees are members of the union referring to commercially sensitive information.

One of the largest labor unions in the country is Latvian Trade Union of Education and Science Employees (LIZDA). By 1 January 2023, there were 21103 members in that union which is around 40 percent of total number of employed in that sector. This association consistently raises awareness among the public and policymakers about the inadequate wages in their profession. In Latvia, teachers are the only group funded by the state budget whose average salaries fall below the national average. Amid the coronavirus crisis, the organization's leader consistently offered remarks to the media on a variety of topics, extending beyond just the health crisis and the heightened workload for teachers. The association's website stands out for its highly developed and user-friendly interface, which is regularly updated. It offers comprehensive information on member benefits in both Latvian and English. Following each round of negotiations with the government regarding changes in working conditions and wages, the association publishes detailed reports on the outcomes of these negotiations. In summary, the organization's frequent television appearances and ongoing communication with its members contribute positively to its overall strength and influence, potentially enhancing its prospects for future support from the general public.

Sweden – individual court cases, broad media presence and coronavirus as not an exceptional time

A lot of attraction to Swedish labor unions during the coronavirus crisis and in light of the economic downturn caused by the Ukraine war was drawn to large extent by media presence. Namely, a lot of court cases regarding unlawful and inappropriate attitude of Swedish employers to members of labor unions were enlightened in press. Figure 3 depicts a number of web searches of three major labor unions by their corresponding names and “*fackförening*” (“labor union” in Swedish). It can be seen that peaks of searches were observed in the second half of 2019, several times throughout 2020 (except SACO and LO), beginning of 2022 (except SACO and LO), and end of 2022 – beginning of 2023 (except Unionen and *fackförening*). Surprisingly, there were much less news in times of coronavirus exposure (highlighted with grey color, between 1/1/2020 to 5/1/2022, when coronavirus was no longer classified as dangerous and all safety measures in Sweden were abolished) regarding the labor unions than in any other period, especially for SACO, LO, and *fackförening*. In total, we observe five peaks in period of coronavirus and five after the Russian invasion of Ukraine (highlighted with red, starting from 2/20/2022). We will briefly outline possible reasons for exposure of audience interest to these labor unions exactly at each of these periods. We identify the peak date of Google search activity for the name of the labor union, then search for news articles around that peak date in Google news and on the websites of labor unions. From those, we select the most relevant news article that potentially corresponds to the reason for the surge in activity on that day. The chosen news articles are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of media coverage around selected peaks in search engines

Date	Title of the article	Article description	Link to the article
<b>LO</b>			
October 25, 2019	LO: Workers who are not needed should not work here <i>[translation from Swedish]</i>	LO regrets that the Employers do not seem to have understood the LO unions' positions in the ongoing debate on labor immigration. <i>[translation from Swedish]</i>	<a href="https://www.aftonbladet.se/debatt/a/50kABz/de-som-inte-behovs-ska-inte-jobba-har">https://www.aftonbladet.se/debatt/a/50kABz/de-som-inte-behovs-ska-inte-jobba-har</a>
December 12, 2022	Agreement signed on establishment jobs <i>[translation from Swedish]</i>	The Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO), the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise and the Union have entered into an agreement on establishment jobs, a special employment that gives all long-term unemployed a new opportunity to enter the labour market. <i>[translation from Swedish]</i>	<a href="https://www.lo.se/start/pressmeddelanden/avtal_klart_om_etableringsjobb">https://www.lo.se/start/pressmeddelanden/avtal_klart_om_etableringsjobb</a>

However, based on this overview, it remains uncertain whether the Ukraine war prompted any notable response from labor unions in Sweden during this period. They continued to be mostly focused on resolution of issues related to protecting workers' rights.

However, it is clear that through increased media visibility and the raising of critical questions concerning workers' rights, unions have undoubtedly captured the attention of potential new members. This would lead to a hypothesis that the more attention the labor union draws throughout the media, the higher is its membership growth. This hypothesis was discussed on the example of education union using the social media tools in the UK by [Barnes et al. \(2019\)](#). They argue that media appearance creates a sense of belonging of labor union members and this could potentially increase a number of members in future. This notion is supported by [Trenerry et al. \(2022\)](#) who conclude that the use of digit tools does benefit workers' organization because "they create fresh possibilities for organising while offering inroads to revitalise existing membership structures and strategic goals".

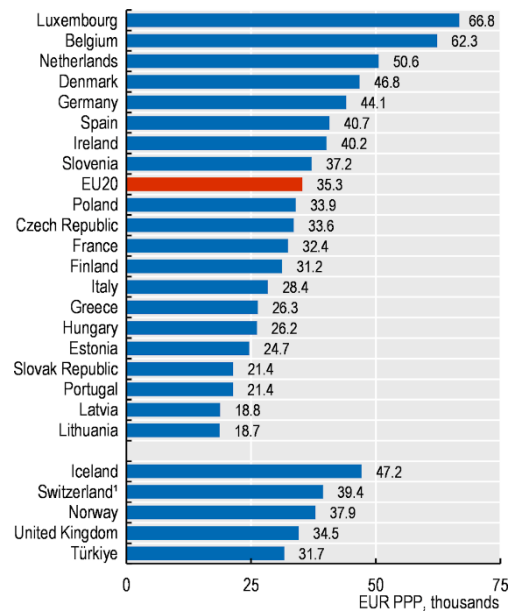
<b>SACO</b>			
November 29, 2023	Saco Student Fairs attract thousands of high school students <i>[translation from Swedish]</i>		<a href="https://www.saco.se/opinion-fakta/pressmeddelanden/2023/saco-studentmassor-lockar-tusentals-gymnasieelever/">https://www.saco.se/opinion-fakta/pressmeddelanden/2023/saco-studentmassor-lockar-tusentals-gymnasieelever/</a>



<b>Unionen</b>			
March 18, 2020	Unionen and the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise have agreed on a central collective agreement on short-time work <i>[translation from Swedish]</i>	Unionen and the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise have agreed on a central collective agreement regarding short-time work. We have been calling for a new system for short-time work for a long time, and the serious consequences of the coronavirus for Swedish companies and jobs have made this even more urgent. <i>[translation from Swedish]</i>	<a href="https://via.tt.se/presmeddelande/3275164/unionen-och-svenskt-naringsliv-har-enats-om-centralt-kollektivavtal-om-korttidsarbete?publisHerId=20109&amp;lang=sv">https://via.tt.se/presmeddelande/3275164/unionen-och-svenskt-naringsliv-har-enats-om-centralt-kollektivavtal-om-korttidsarbete?publisHerId=20109&amp;lang=sv</a>
<b>TCO</b>			
October 22, 2020	Provide unemployment insurance to students who are looking for a job <i>[translation from Swedish]</i>	Give job-seeking students a reasonable opportunity to finish their studies and look for a job at the same time. Higher education must be encouraged. Therefore, we want to see that the unemployment insurance fund is modernized in such a way that those who have completed post-secondary studies will have the chance to apply for a job for a few months and with a basic benefit for which they have acquired training, TCO writes together with SFS in UNT. <i>[translation from Swedish]</i>	<a href="https://tco.se/fakta-och-politik/a-kassa/ge-a-kassa-till-studenter-som-soker-jobb">https://tco.se/fakta-och-politik/a-kassa/ge-a-kassa-till-studenter-som-soker-jobb</a>
January 16, 2023 - January 23, 2022 -	No specific news article or statement by the labor union.		
October 18, 2023	TCO sells union holiday paradise <i>[translation from Swedish]</i>	After a year-long process, Riva del Sole gets new owners when TCO leaves. "Doesn't see that it is an important member service that we want to prioritize". <i>[translation from Swedish]</i>	<a href="https://www.arbetsvarden.se/tco-saljer-fackligt-semesterparadis-%E2%88%92-de-tar-over/">https://www.arbetsvarden.se/tco-saljer-fackligt-semesterparadis-%E2%88%92-de-tar-over/</a>
<b>Fackförening</b>			
March 24, 2019 - April 7, 2019	No specific news related to the labor unions.		

March 23, 2020	The union: "Feels worried about the future" <i>[translation from Swedish]</i>	20,000 employees are laid off and all of AB Volvo's factories in Sweden are stopped completely from next week. The reason is the coronavirus, which puts an end to trade. <i>[translation from Swedish]</i>	<a href="https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vast/facket-kanner-oro-for-framtiden">https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vast/facket-kanner-oro-for-framtiden</a>
January 19, 2022	Unions were inspired by new strike bans <i>[translation from Swedish]</i>	Blå-Gul Fackförening has signed a collective agreement that contains a far-reaching ban on strikes and has been called a "yellow" union. <i>[translation from Swedish]</i>	<a href="https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&amp;rcct=j&amp;q=&amp;esrc=s&amp;source=newssearch&amp;cd=&amp;cad=rja&amp;uact=8&amp;ved=2ahUKEwiGmJyQrYWFAXWcPxAIHSIHC_sQxfQBKAB6BAgKEAE&amp;url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.arbetaren.se%2F2022%2F01%2F19%2Ffack-inspirerades-av-nya-strejkforbud%2F&amp;usg=AOvVaw3hxma_mbDVQrBqFhmxdLFV&amp;opi=89978449">https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&amp;rcct=j&amp;q=&amp;esrc=s&amp;source=newssearch&amp;cd=&amp;cad=rja&amp;uact=8&amp;ved=2ahUKEwiGmJyQrYWFAXWcPxAIHSIHC_sQxfQBKAB6BAgKEAE&amp;url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.arbetaren.se%2F2022%2F01%2F19%2Ffack-inspirerades-av-nya-strejkforbud%2F&amp;usg=AOvVaw3hxma_mbDVQrBqFhmxdLFV&amp;opi=89978449</a>

Figure 2. Remuneration of hospital nurses, EUR PPP, 2020 (or nearest year)



Source: OECD Health Statistics 2022.

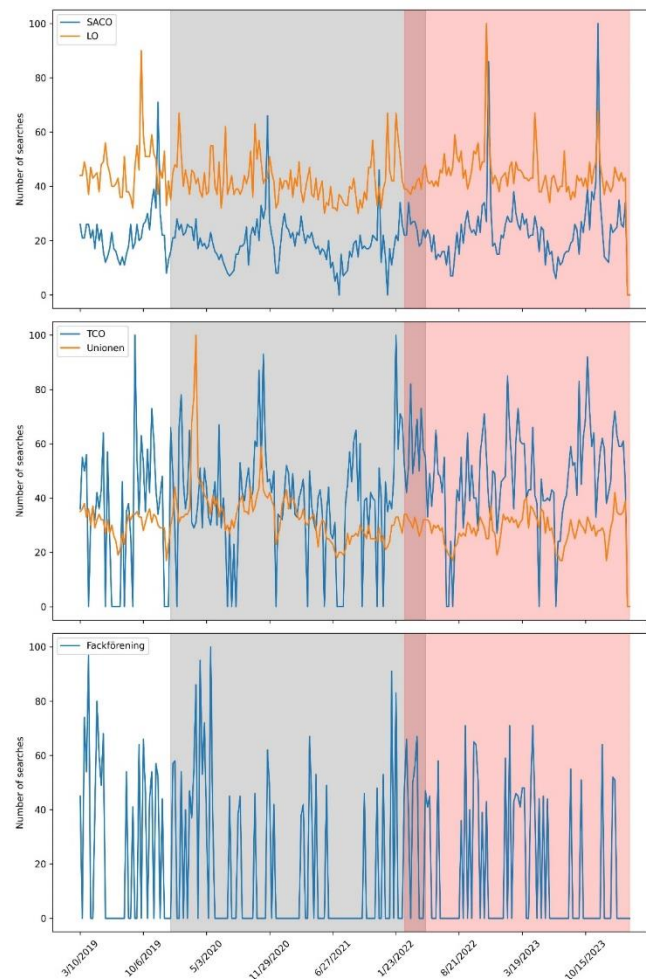


Figure 3. Number of web searches of three labor unions and “*fackförening*” between 2019 and 2024

Note: Numbers represent search interest relative to the highest point on the chart for the given region and time.

## 5. Youth Recruitment

### 5.1. Latvia

Youth recruitment within labor unions stands as a pivotal aspect for ensuring the sustained relevance and vitality of these organizations, while also safeguarding the representation of younger generations in the evolving workforce landscape. However, in countries like Latvia, trade unions encounter significant challenges in effectively engaging the youth, especially when juxtaposed with more successful models such as those seen in Sweden.

The Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia (LBAS) has acknowledged the pressing need to address this issue, yet their efforts thus far have fallen short in effectively resonating with the younger demographic. One glaring inadequacy lies in their outdated approach to outreach, particularly evident in their negligible social media presence, with only a token youth account on Facebook. In today's digital age, where social media platforms abound and serve as primary channels for communication and engagement among the youth, LBAS's limited online footprint represents a missed opportunity to connect with this vital demographic where they are most active.

Moreover, LBAS's methods for recruiting the younger generation lack adaptation to the modern world. For instance, their reliance on the "PROFS" competition, primarily targeting technical school students, illustrates a disconnect from the broader youth population, especially those attending traditional high schools. While PROFS may align with the union's core focus on worker safety, its efficacy in attracting young members remains dubious, compounded by the absence of concrete data on its impact. LBAS's failure to tap into alternative recruitment channels or tailor their approach to high school students further exacerbates the disconnect.

Despite attempts to diversify outreach, LBAS's response to inquiries regarding their recruitment programs and their effectiveness has been notably lacking. The absence of transparency regarding their initiatives reflects a broader organizational shortcoming in adapting to contemporary recruitment paradigms. While initiatives like radio shows and regional TV programs dedicated to youth recruitment may exist, the lack of documented outcomes or measurable impact raises questions about their efficacy and reach.

Addressing these deficiencies requires a multifaceted approach that transcends mere educational efforts aimed at existing union members. While educating prominent union members, as advocated by Hatcher Nina, undoubtedly holds value in fostering clarity and cohesion within the union, it does not directly tackle the root issue of youth recruitment. Instead, LBAS must heed the advice of experts like Margaret A. Richardson (2009), who emphasizes the importance of college recruitment as a potent strategy for engaging younger individuals.

College recruitment represents an untapped opportunity for LBAS to connect with a demographic ripe for union membership. By establishing partnerships with educational institutions and actively participating in career fairs and campus events, LBAS can effectively communicate the benefits of union membership to students on the cusp of entering the workforce. Moreover, engaging with student organizations and offering internships or apprenticeship programs can further solidify LBAS's presence within college communities, fostering long-term relationships with potential future members.

Furthermore, LBAS must embrace a holistic approach to youth recruitment that extends beyond traditional methods. Leveraging digital platforms beyond Facebook, such as Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn, can broaden LBAS's reach and appeal to diverse segments of the youth population. Creating engaging and informative content tailored to the

interests and concerns of young people, such as job security, career advancement, and workplace rights, can help demystify the union and resonate with prospective members.

In addition to digital outreach, LBAS should explore innovative approaches to community engagement and youth empowerment. Collaborating with local schools to incorporate labor education into curricula or hosting workshops on workplace rights and advocacy can foster greater awareness and interest among young people. Moreover, establishing mentorship programs pairing experienced union members with youth advocates can provide invaluable support and guidance, nurturing the next generation of union leaders.

LBAS must also prioritize data collection and analysis to inform their recruitment strategies effectively. By systematically tracking the outcomes of various outreach initiatives and soliciting feedback from target demographics, LBAS can refine its approach and allocate resources more efficiently. This evidence-based approach not only ensures accountability but also fosters a culture of continuous improvement within the organization.

Furthermore, LBAS should consider adopting a more inclusive and participatory decision-making process that actively involves young members in shaping the union's agenda and priorities. By empowering youth voices and integrating their perspectives into strategic planning and policy development, LBAS can cultivate a sense of ownership and belonging among this demographic, fostering long-term engagement and commitment to the union.

Revitalizing youth recruitment within LBAS demands a comprehensive overhaul of outdated methods and a concerted effort to embrace contemporary strategies. By prioritizing digital engagement, expanding outreach efforts to encompass college campuses, and fostering community partnerships, LBAS can position itself as a relevant and inclusive advocate for the rights and aspirations of the younger generation. Only through proactive adaptation, data-driven decision-making, and genuine commitment to youth empowerment can LBAS ensure its continued relevance and effectiveness in shaping the future of labor advocacy in Latvia.

## **5.2. Sweden**

Sweden, on the other hand, stands as a prominent example of a nation with a robust trade union system, known for its high union density and proactive engagement with various segments of society, including the youth. Over the years, Swedish trade unions have implemented diverse strategies to recruit and engage young people, recognizing the importance of nurturing future generations of workers.

Sweden's approach to youth recruitment within trade unions is characterized by its proactive engagement with educational institutions and various youth-oriented initiatives. One notable program is the SFS (Sveriges Förenade Studentkårer), which assists university students in navigating the higher education system and provides internship opportunities post-graduation. Additionally, specialized unions cater to school students, offering guidance and support as they transition into the workforce. These efforts have contributed to Sweden's low average age of young people leaving their parental homes (Eurostat, 2023), indicating the success of trade union initiatives in empowering youth to become independent and active members of society.

Research by Alivin and Sverke (2000) emphasizes the importance of focusing on youth recruitment as a means of ensuring the continued relevance and representation of trade unions. By engaging with younger demographics, trade unions can cultivate a sense of purpose and solidarity among future generations of workers, thereby strengthening the

labor movement. Furthermore, decentralization and a common goal are highlighted as essential factors in bridging the generational divide within trade unions and fostering a sense of belonging among members.

Despite the successes of Swedish trade unions in youth recruitment, challenges persist, particularly concerning migrant workers. Historical case studies, such as the recruitment of Yugoslav workers to Svenska Flåktfabriken in the 1960s, shed light on the complexities of labor migration and its impact on trade union dynamics. Political factors and regulatory frameworks influenced the recruitment processes, with trade unions playing a crucial role in ensuring fair labor practices and representation for migrant workers.

The Swedish trade union approach to youth recruitment reflects a proactive and inclusive strategy aimed at fostering solidarity and representation across generations. Through targeted programs and initiatives, Swedish unions have successfully engaged with young people, empowering them to become active participants in the labor movement. However, challenges remain, particularly concerning the integration of migrant workers and the need to address issues of exploitation and discrimination. Moving forward, Swedish trade unions must continue to adapt and evolve their strategies to ensure the continued relevance and effectiveness of the labor movement in an ever-changing socio-economic landscape. By embracing diversity and inclusivity, Swedish trade unions can uphold their core principles of social justice and collective bargaining, paving the way for a more equitable and sustainable future.

## 6. Conclusion

The objective of this study was to examine how Swedish and Latvian labor unions navigated challenging times during the coronavirus pandemic and wartime, and their efforts to engage a younger audience. Our analysis, drawing from a variety of sources including mass media and qualitative analysis of web searches, suggests that Swedish labor unions employ more sophisticated recruitment strategies aimed at enhancing membership appeal. Key strengths of Swedish labor unions include proactive engagement in diverse activities with the goal of attracting new members, as well as user-friendly website interfaces highlighting membership benefits. Ancillary activities such as media appearances on topics like workers' rights and law enforcement further contribute to drawing attention to the labor unions.

In contrast, Latvian labor unions show potential for improving their external communication with prospective members. They appear to prioritize the vigilance of current members' rights over active recruitment, likely due to resource constraints within larger unions and a relatively cheaper alternative for that purpose, namely the use of mass media. Their primary channel for reaching potential members is through the media, advocating for improved working conditions.

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