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Social Dialogue Indicators

International Statistical Inquiry 2008-09

Technical Brief

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1. Introduction

Freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining are fundamental principles and rights at work. They are the bedrock of sound industrial relations and effective social dialogue. Indicators of trade union representation and collective bargaining coverage can assist in monitoring progress toward the realization of these rights. They also provide valuable information on the quality of industrial and employment relations and its role in labour market governance.

The ILO frequently receives requests for statistical information related to trade union membership and the coverage of collective agreements from governments, researchers, international organizations and other users. An inter-departmental project was established to develop and collect social dialogue indicators (DIALOGUE Data). The aim of the project is threefold: first, to assess the degree to which statistics on trade union density and collective bargaining coverage are available and can be used as an indicator of the strength and quality of social dialogue; second, to use the information to improve the collection and dissemination of such data at both the country and international levels; and third, to provide the ILO with information that might help it develop international guidelines for the collection of these statistics, and so enhance their comparability. An international statistical inquiry was conducted by the Industrial and Employment Relations Department and the Department of Statistics of the International Labour Office in 2008-09.[1]

The present note (i) defines the major social dialogue indicators; (ii) describes the methodology used for collecting the data, and (iii) summarises the main findings of the 2008-09 inquiry. This Technical Brief is accessible from the web sites of both the Industrial and Employment Relations Department and the Department of Statistics.[2]

2. Social dialogue indicators

Social dialogue is defined as all types of negotiation, consultation or simply the exchange of information between representatives of governments, employers and workers on issues of common interest. It covers tripartite processes and institutions of social dialogue, such as social and economic councils; institutions, such as trade unions and employers' organizations; and processes such as collective bargaining.

Autonomous, independent and strong workers' and employers' organizations are critical for effective social dialogue. The quality of that dialogue is determined by the extent to which the social partners are able to negotiate collective agreements that govern terms and conditions of employment and regulate labour relations. The emphasis of this particular inquiry is therefore on primary industrial relations indicators, that is, membership of organizations and the coverage of collective bargaining agreements.

Quantitative data on the membership and density of employers' organizations (measured in terms of both the number of companies and the number of employees) is difficult to collect. With the exception of Europe where the European Industrial Relations Observatory published data on the subject (EIRO, 2004), there is very little available information on employers' organizations' membership strength, density and representativeness. Employers' organizations are reluctant to publish membership figures, and often lack data on the number of employees employed by their members (Traxler, 2000). The 2008-09 inquiry thus focussed on the collection and computation of data on trade union density and collective bargaining coverage.

[1] The project team consisted of Susan Hayter (DIALOGUE), Valentina Stoevska (STATISTICS) and Thobile Yanta (STATISTICS).

[2] http://www.ilo.org/ifpdial/information-resources/dialogue-data/lang--en/index.htm and http://laborsta.ilo.org

2.1 Trade union density

Trade union membership, that is the total number of workers that belong to a trade union, can be an indicator of trade union strength. However, it is important to also have a picture of how significant the level of trade union membership is relative to all those who could join a trade union. What proportion of all those earning a wage belong to a trade union? How do we assess the degree of unionization in highly segmented labour markets where a significant number of workers are counted as own-account workers or work in the informal economy?

Trade union density expresses union membership as a proportion of the eligible workforce and can be used as an indicator of the degree to which workers are organized. However, union density only measures the extent of unionisation and tells us very little about the influence or bargaining power of unions. Trade union density rates should always be interpreted within the particular political and social context and according to the legal and institutional framework. Trade union density does not reflect the bargaining power of unions. In some countries, such as France, trade union density rates may be considered comparatively low, however collective bargaining plays a significant role in regulating terms and conditions of employment and the coverage of workers by collective agreements is high. On the other hand, in countries such as those of the former Soviet Union and in regimes where a single union system prevails, trade union density rates may be comparatively high, but this is neither a reflection of the strength of the union nor a measure of freedom of association.

2.2 Collective bargaining coverage

Collective bargaining is the process through which the social partners arrive at an agreement that regulates both terms and conditions of employment and labour relations. It is important to understand the role that collective bargaining plays in labour market governance. To what degree do collective agreements govern the terms and conditions of all those in employment?

As an indicator of social dialogue, the collective bargaining coverage rate measures the number of workers in employment whose pay and/or conditions of employment is determined by one or more collective agreement(s) as a proportion of all those who are eligible to conclude a collective agreement. A collective bargaining coverage rate is an indicator of the degree to which wages and working conditions are regulated by collective agreements. It is also a function of the particular features of the industrial relations system. For example, centralized collective bargaining structures tend to be associated with high coverage rates. Coverage rates will also be high in countries which extend the terms of a collective agreement to enterprises and workers that may not be parties to the agreement. The collective bargaining coverage rate thus does not necessarily reflect the direct outcome of negotiations. Collective bargaining coverage rates should be analysed within the national context and interpreted according to the particular legal and institutional framework.

3. Methodology for deriving social dialogue indicators

There are no international guidelines for the collection of social dialogue indicators at the country level. The only statistical standard on this issue dates back to October 1926, when the Third International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) approved the "Resolution concerning statistics of collective agreements."[3] This recommended that each country collect information concerning collective agreements including their coverage and contents. While this resolution provides the basis for this inquiry, it is unclear to what extent national statistical agencies and governments follow these guidelines. There is a high degree of methodological variation and data are not comparable. The absence of a methodological basis for comparability is compounded by the fact that industrial relations frameworks differ from country to country. Indicators on trade

[3] http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/stat/download/res/collagr.pdf

union density or collective bargaining coverage thus need to be interpreted in the context of the prevailing industrial relations framework and labour market characteristics.

There have been a number of efforts to collect statistics on trade union membership, trade union density and collective bargaining coverage. In 1997 the ILO collected trade union density and collective bargaining coverage estimates for 92 countries. These were published in the ILO World Labour Report (1997/98). However, while widely cited, these estimates were subject to significant methodological difficulties. These are described in the 'Technical notes' at the end of the study. Other researchers and organizations have also attempted to collect this information (see databases in Annex 1). However, they all suffer from similar methodological limitations which mean that the rates are not comparable across countries. The lack of international statistical guidelines for collecting these indicators and the significant methodological variation also mean that data for a particular country differ across these databases.

Following extensive consultations with experts in the area, the ILO launched a pilot project in 2003-04 to collect this information (see Ishikawa and Lawrence, 2005). A questionnaire was sent in two subsequent rounds to 68 countries selected on the likelihood that these countries might collect such data. Whereas the questionnaires were sent to Ministries of Labour, National Statistical Offices, trade unions and employers' organizations in 17 countries in the first round, trade unions and employers' organizations were excluded from the second round (51 countries) as a result of their poor response rate. On the basis of the replies to the questionnaire, trade union density rates were computed for 36 countries and collective bargaining coverage rates for 34 countries.

The 2008-09 inquiry built on the methodology and definitions used during the pilot project in 2003-04. It was conducted on the basis of a significantly improved and simplified questionnaire and country coverage is extended. The questionnaire sought to collect sex-disaggregated data on collective bargaining coverage (including by economic sector), bargaining levels, length of collective agreements, information on the extension of collective agreements, trade union membership (including by economic sector) and other information that would assist in harmonizing data. It was sent to the National Statistical Offices and Ministries of Labour in over 200 countries and territories. While responses were received from 97 countries, some sent incomplete questionnaires whereas others reported that they did not collect these statistics. Statistical indicators on trade union density for 77 countries are reported in Table 1 and statistical indicators on collective bargaining coverage for 62 countries are reported in Table 2.

Comparability of data

The inquiry again revealed significant variation in the methods used to collect the information, in the statistical sources for the data, and in the coverage of the data reported. While many countries reported data for all workers, some countries only reported data for the public sector and others only for the private sector. The coverage of the economic activities also varies to some extent across countries. As a result, data are not directly comparable between countries.

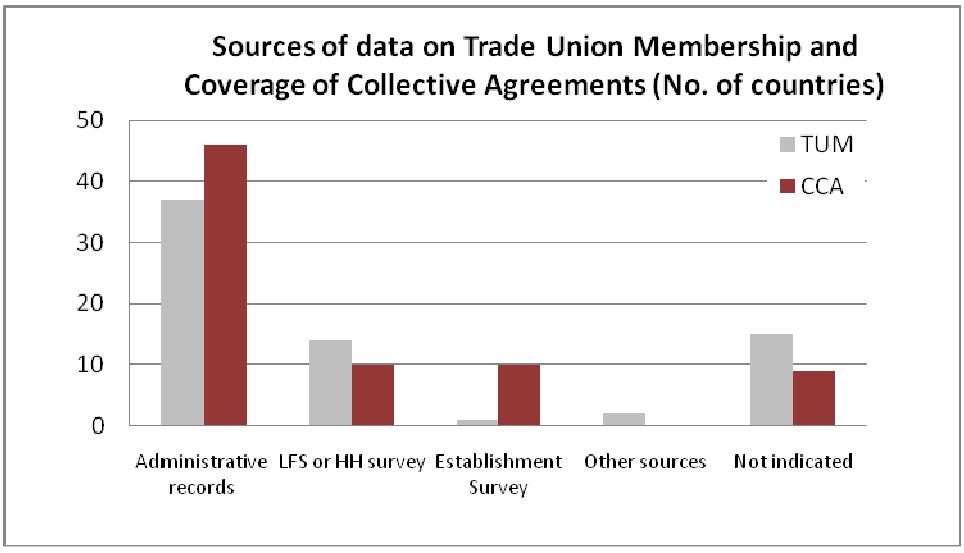
Sources of statistics on trade union membership and coverage of collective agreements

Administrative records: Statistics on trade union membership and coverage of collective agreements can be obtained from administrative records maintained by trade unions, government agencies, registrars of associations and collective agreements or the registers of other organizations such as bargaining councils. Since this information is collected for administrative purposes, it is imperfect as a source of statistics.

Labour force or household survey: Some labour force and other types of household surveys include questions on trade union membership and coverage by a collective agreement. These surveys collect information directly from workers or other members of the household. While this is a preferred source of statistics, the number of countries that request this information is still rather limited.

Establishment survey: Surveys of enterprises or establishments collect information on the number of workers belonging to a trade union and the number of workers covered by collective agreements. While a good source of statistics, these surveys tend to be limited to non-agricultural formal sector establishments and the number of countries with establishment surveys that collect this information is rather small.

The most frequently reported source of information on both trade union membership and collective bargaining coverage was administrative records. The second most important source was a labour force or household survey for data on trade union membership, and an establishment survey for collective bargaining coverage. Very few respondents reported data from other sources. For a number of countries the sources of the data were not available.



Social dialogue indicators and their computation

In order to improve comparability of data, in regions with more homogenous industrial relations frameworks and where similar methodologies are used to collect information, databases have been developed that adjust the denominator to include only those workers eligible to join a trade union or eligible to bargain (e.g. see Visser, in Annex 1). In computing the rates for the 2008-09 inquiry, data has not been adjusted due to a lack of information about non-eligible workers in many countries.

Given that the inquiry included countries at very different levels of development, two different denominators were used in the computations. The first rate computed used the total number of employees as a denominator. This indicator is called the narrow density rate. The second rate used total employment as a denominator, and is called the comprehensive density rate. To ensure maximum comparability, labour market information was drawn from the ILO LABORSTA database (http://laborsta.ilo.org/). Three rates are reported in Tables 1 and 2. The first rate is a proportion of employees, the second rate is a proportion of total employment and the third rate is the rate reported by the government, based on their own computations.

Steps were taken to check the consistency of the data. Where computed rates differed from the rate reported by the government, special care was taken to check labour market information being used as the denominator and to validate numerical values reported by the countries. The general consistency of the statistics was also checked against the databases contained in Annex 1.

3.1 Trade union density rates

For the purpose of this indicator, a trade union is defined as an "independent association of workers, constituted for the purposes of furthering and defending the workers' interests" – (Art. 10, Freedom of Association and the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87)).

The rates in Table 1 are computed as follows:

A. Proportion of employees: Narrow density rate

This rate expresses the number of trade union members as a proportion of employees. It is calculated using data provided by a Statistical Office or Labour Administration and persons in paid employment from the ILO's LABORSTA database. Ideally, only trade union members in paid employment are included in the numerator. Thus, it is important to know the composition of the union (i.e. whether its membership includes unemployed, retired, or self-employed members) and to exclude these from the numerator. However, it is sometimes difficult to estimate which trade union members are in paid employment. In these cases the numerator uses total trade union membership. These data are indicated by an asterisk in Table 1.

Trade union density as a proportion of employees: Narrow density rate

$$\textbf{Narrow density rate} = \frac{union\ \ members\ \ in\ \ paid\ \ employment}{total\ \ number\ \ of\ \ employees} \times 100$$

or

$$\textbf{Narrow density rate} = \frac{total\ union\ members}{total\ number\ of\ employees} \times 100$$

B. Proportion of total employment: Comprehensive density rate

Since developing economies may have missing data and/or large informal sectors, taking employees as the denominator may not provide a realistic picture of the union density rate. For this reason, we also calculate the number of trade union members as a proportion of all those in employment (whether in the formal or informal economy). This is calculated using data provided by a Statistical Office or Labour Administration and total employment from the ILO's LABORSTA database.

Trade union density as a proportion of total employment: Comprehensive density rate

$$\textbf{Comprehensive density rate} = \frac{union\ members}{total\ employment} \times 100$$

C. Reported proportion

This reflects the rate reported by the National Statistics Office or Labour Administration in the surveyed country. It was often difficult to establish the basis on which this rate was calculated since figures of total union membership were not provided.

3.2 Collective bargaining coverage rate

For the purpose of this indicator, collective bargaining encompasses *"negotiations which take place between an employer, a group of employers or one or more employers' organizations, […] and one or more workers' organizations, […] for determining working conditions and terms of employment*." (Article 2, ILO Promotion of Collective Bargaining Convention, 1981 (No. 154)). This should include the determination of remuneration.

The rates in Table 2 for collective bargaining coverage are as follows:

A. Proportion of employees: Narrow CBC rate

This rate expresses the number of employees covered by collective agreements as a proportion of the total number of employees. This is calculated using data provided by a Statistical Office or Labour Administration and persons in paid employment from the ILO's LABORSTA database.

Collective bargaining coverage as a proportion of employees: Narrow CBC rate

$$\textbf{Narrow CBC rate} = \frac{workers\ in\ paid\ employment\ covered}{total\ number\ of\ employees} \times 100$$

B. Proportion of total employment: Comprehensive CBC rate

Since developing economies may have large informal sectors, taking the total number of employees as the denominator may not provide a realistic picture of the role that collective bargaining plays in labour market governance. For this reason, we also calculate the number of workers covered by collective agreements as a proportion of all those in employment (whether in the formal or informal economy). This is calculated using data provided by a Statistical Office or Labour Administration and total employment from the ILO's LABORSTA database.

Collective bargaining coverage as a proportion of total employment: Comprehensive CBC rate

$$\textbf{Comprehensive CBC rate} = \frac{workers\ covered}{total\ employment} \times 100$$

C. Reported proportion

This reflects the collective bargaining rate reported by the National Statistics Office or Labour Administration in the surveyed country.

4. Observations

Tables 1 and 2 provide data on trade union density and collective bargaining rates, both computed by the ILO and reported by the National Statistics Office or Labour Administration in the responding country. As noted above, indicators on trade union density or collective bargaining coverage need to be interpreted within a particular industrial relations and labour market context. The ILO has indeed done this as part of a more comprehensive review of trends and developments.[4] However, some observations can be made.

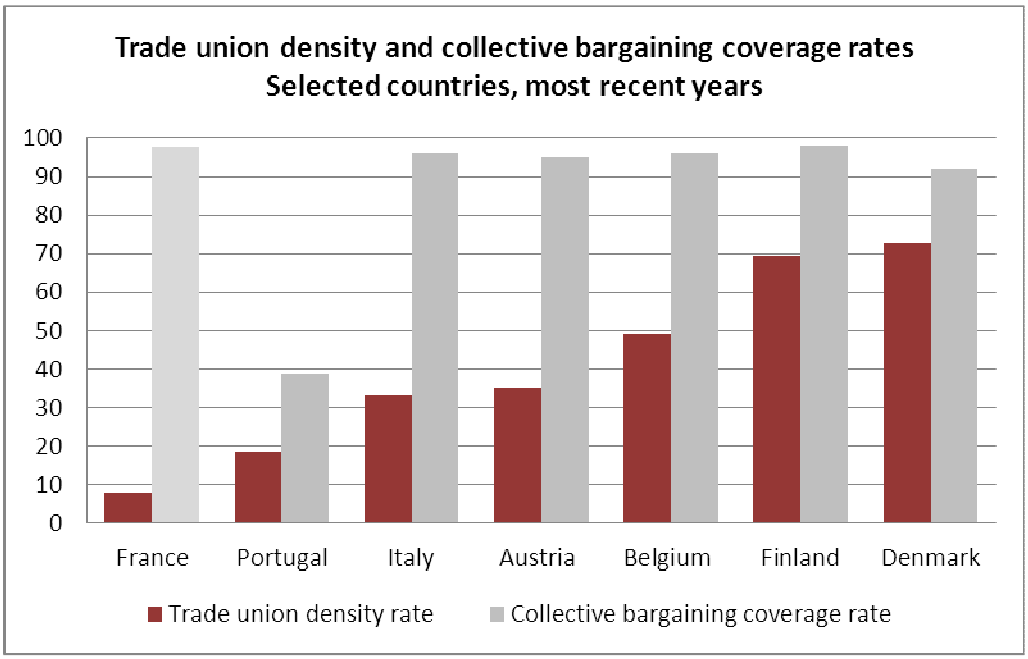
The first concerns the difference between countries according to their level of development. The capacity to collect these data and the quality of the information provided is more limited in

[4] See ILO, 2009, "Negotiating for Social Justice" and the various country studies available at http://www.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/ifpdial/events/tripartitemeeting.htm

developing regions and countries. Where statistics are available, these show that in general, trade union density and collective bargaining coverage in developing countries are significantly lower than those of higher income countries. In developing countries with highly segmented labour markets, there is also a significant difference between trade union density and collective bargaining coverage rates for employees and the rates for total employment (which include own-account workers and workers in the informal economy).

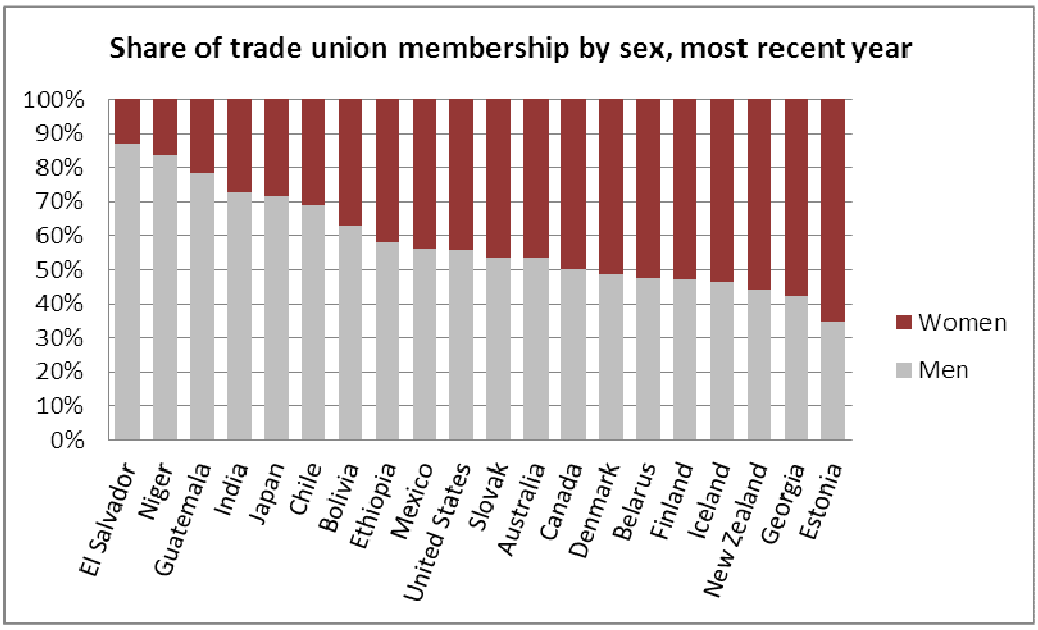
Institutionalized industrial and employment relations do play an important role in some developing countries in determining the terms and conditions of employment in formal, wage employment, however, from these indicators it appears that the role that collective agreements play in regulating the terms and conditions of all those in employment tends to be limited. For example, whereas collective bargaining agreements cover 20.8 per cent of employees in Malawi, this only represents 2.7 per cent of all those in employment (see Table 2). Of course these social dialogue indicators should be interpreted with caution, since trade unions may influence labour market policies through their representation on national tripartite social dialogue institutions and many are involved in organizing informal economy workers.

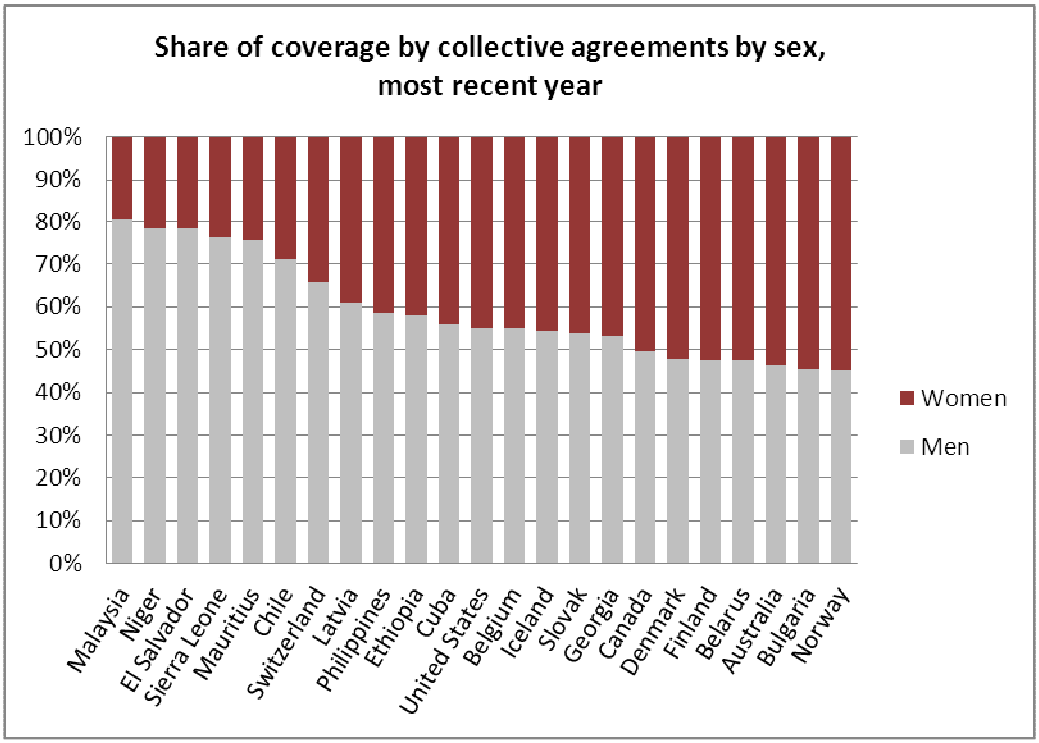
Second, the results of the inquiry confirm evidence to date on the interaction between collective bargaining, administrative regulations and labour law. For example, countries with multi-employer bargaining systems and extension mechanisms have higher collective bargaining coverage rates (Traxler et al, 2001). Indeed in countries such as Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Finland, Italy and Portugal, collective bargaining coverage is not only significant, but also substantially higher than the union density rate as a result of multi-employer bargaining and the extension of collective agreements.[5]



[5] Either through 'erga omnes' extension, enlargement or functional equivalents. See http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/2002/12/study/tn0212102s.htm

Third, where data was disaggregated by sex, most countries report more men than women belonging to a trade union and higher coverage of men than of women by collective agreements. Of course, women also make up a smaller share of paid employment in many countries.





5. Conclusion

The statistics collected during the 2008-09 inquiry do provide a useful basis for assessing the strength and quality of social dialogue and organized labour relations within a particular country context. However, the inquiry again highlighted the need to develop statistical guidance that can facilitate the comparability of statistical outputs. This needs to emphasise the importance of disaggregating data according to sex and economic sector, or at least institutional sector (public and private).

Table 1. Trade union density

Country	Year	Trade union density rate			
		A. Proportion of wage and salaried earners	B. Proportion of total employment		C. Reported proportion
Africa					
Cameroon	2005				3.5
Egypt	2007	*26.1	16.1		
Ethiopia	2007	12.9	1.0		
Ghana	2006	70.0			
Kenya**	2007	35.5	4.1		31.2
Malawi	2006	*20.6	2.7		2.5
Mauritius	2007	28.2	14.8		
Niger	2008		1.1		
Sierra Leone	2008	46.8	3.6		
South Africa	2008	39.8	24.9		25.0
Tanzania	2009	*18.7	2.2		2.0
Uganda	2005		1.1		
Americas					
Antigua & Barbuda	1998		55.6		
Argentina	2006	37.6			
Bermuda	1995	*24.6			
Bolivia	2006		26.6		
Brazil	2007	20.9	17.8		18.0
Canada	2007	31.4	26.6		31.5
Chile	2007	11.5	13.6		13.6
Colombia	1997	*28.7			
Cuba	2008	81.4	70.6		97.0
El Salvador	2008	11.9	6.7		10.0
Guatemala	2006	*12.9	2.5		2.8
Mexico	2008	17.0	11.2		15.6
Nicaragua	2006	*4.1	2.1		
United States	2007	11.4	10.7		12.0
Uruguay	2006	19.0	13.3		
Asia and the Pacific					
Australia	2008	19.1	17.1		18.9
Hong-Kong	1999	*21.5			
India	2005		2.4		
Japan	2007	*18.0	15.5		18.1
Korea	2006	*10.0	6.7		10.0
Malaysia	2007	*10.3	7.6		
New Zealand	2008	*20.8	17.2		17.3
Pakistan	2001	*15.7			
Philippines	2007	*3.2	1.7		
Singapore	2007	31.7	33.3		
Sri-Lanka	2003	*6.0			
Taiwan, China	2006	*35.9			
Thailand	2007	2.1	1.4		

Country	Year	Trade union density rate			
		A. Proportion of wage and salaried earners	B. Proportion of total employment		C. Reported proportion
Europe					
Armenia	2006	56.2	27.4		
Austria	2008	*35.1	26.6		
Belarus	2007	79.7	90.5		90.5
Belgium	2004	93.2	79.2		49.0
Croatia	2008				40.0
Cyprus	2006	68.4	54.5		58.1
Czech Republic	2006	*20.8	17.3		21.0
Denmark	2008	99.2	71.5		72.6
Estonia	2007	7.6	6.9		7.6
Finland	2006	68.0	63.5		69.5
France	2005	7.9			8.0
Georgia	2007	40.7	14.9		
Germany	2007	*19.9	17.5		19.9
Greece	2007	*30.6	19.6		28.0
Hungary	2004	19.9	14.0		16.9
Iceland	2002	*88.7	74.0		85.0
Ireland	2007	31.5	20.8		31.5
Italy	2007	97.1	24.0		33.3
Latvia	2007	13.0	11.6		14.8
Lithuania	2007	10.0			10.0
Luxembourg	2008	*43.6	39.0		
Malta	1999	*60.8			
Moldova	2007	40.0	26.8		
Netherlands	2007	*20.5	17.7		19.8
Norway	2006	52.9	65.5		53.0
Portugal	2003	*19.5	14.7		18.7
Romania	2007	32.3	21.4		22.8
Serbia	2007	29.1	19.0		
Slovak	2007	12.9	13.6		
Spain	2006	*14.5	11.9		14.6
Sweden	2007	*73.6	65.8		85.1
Switzerland	2007	*23.7	18.6		22.8
Turkey	2007	*25.1	14.6		58.4
United Kingdom	2007				28.0
Middle East					
Israel	2002				35.0
Kuwait	2002		2.3		
Syria	2003		16.9		

* Rate calculated using total trade union membership as a proportion of wage and salary earners.
** Private sector only.

Table 2. Collective bargaining coverage

Country	Year	Collective bargaining coverage rate			
		A. Proportion of wage and salaried earners	B. Proportion of total employment		C. Reported proportion
Africa					
Egypt	2008	3.4	2.1		
Ethiopia	2007	22.7	8.3		
Ghana	2006	70.0			
Kenya	2007	*3.7	0.4		*3.2
Malawi	2006	20.8	2.7		2.5
Mauritius	2008	16.5	9.9		
Niger	2008		#0.2		
Sierra Leone	2008	46.8	3.5		
South Africa	2008	27.3	17.1		17.0
Sudan	2008		*0.2		
Americas					
Argentina	2006	60.0			
Brazil	2006	60.0			
Canada	2007	29.3			31.5
Chile	2007	9.6	6.5		11.5
Costa Rica	2008	16.2	11.8		
Cuba	2008	81.4	67.7		98.3
El Salvador	2008	4.1	2.2		
Honduras	2007	5.6	2.6		5.2
Mexico	2007	10.5	6.9		
Nicaragua	2007	3.9	2.0		
United States	2007	12.9	11.8		13.3
Uruguay	2007				*89.0
Asia and the Pacific					
Australia	2008	38.2			39.8
Bangladesh	2006	5.0	1.1		
French Polynesia	2007	52.0	46.4		60.3
Indonesia	2005	14.0	4.0		
Malaysia	2007	*2.4	1.8		
New Zealand	2007	17.8	14.6		21.7
Philippines	2008	2.2	1.1		1.7
Singapore	2007	17.3	14.6		
Thailand	2007		1.4		
Europe					
Armenia	2007	21.0	10.3		
Austria	2006				95.0
Belarus	2007		95.6		95.6
Belgium	2007				*96.0
Bulgaria	2006	38.2			37.8
Croatia	2008				50.0
Cyprus	2006	72.3	66.1		67.0

Country	Year	Collective bargaining coverage rate			
		A. Proportion of wage and salaried earners	B. Proportion of total employment		C. Reported proportion
Denmark	2006		95.6		92.0
Estonia	2007	11.3	11.1		*11.3
Finland	2006				98.0
France	2004				*97.7
Georgia	2008	25.9	9.5		17.0
Germany	2006	35.8	35.1		48.0
Hungary	2007	35.4			40.6
Iceland	2008		100.0		99.0
Italy	2004	*98.2			*96.0
Latvia	2006	34.7			39.9
Lithuania	2007				10.0
Luxembourg	2007	49.8	46.7		*53.9
Norway	2004	75.1			74.0
Poland	2008	*14.4	11.0		
Portugal	2007	38.7	29.2		
Romania	2006	82.5			100.0
Slovak Republic	2007	24.5			24.5
Spain	2006	68.6			70.0
Switzerland	2008	46.9	36.9		32.0
Turkey	2007				26.0
Ukraine	2007	84.1	45.9		
United Kingdom	2007				34.6
Middle East					
Israel	2002				50.0
Syria	2007		24.7		

*Denotes private sector coverage only.

#Denotes public sector coverage only.

Annex 1. Sources of quantitative indicators of social dialogue

Source	Social dialogue indicators	Adjustment	No. of countries reported	Period	Data source
ILO World Labour Report 1997-98	Trade union membership Trade union density Employers' organization membership Collective bargaining coverage Strikes and lockouts	Unadjusted	98	1980 - 1996	Various, see "Technical notes"
ILO Social Dialogue Indicators 2005	Trade union density Collective bargaining coverage	Unadjusted	35	Circa 2004	Questionnaire (Send to: Ministries of Labour, National Statistical Offices, trade unions and employer organizations)
ILO UNIONS2011	Trade union membership	Unadjusted	63	1980-2010	National publications (yearbooks, statistical bulletins)
Rama and Artecona 2002	Trade union membership Collective bargaining coverage Strikes and lockouts	Unadjusted	106	1945-99	Various, see "Appendix"
OECD Employment Outlook 2004	Trade union density Collective bargaining coverage	Adjusted	30	1970-2000	Ebbinghaus and Visser, 2000; OECD governments; surveys.
Visser 2011	Trade union membership Trade union density Collective bargaining coverage	Adjusted	49	1960-2010	OECD, 2004; Ochel, 2000; Visser, 2002; Bureau of Labour Statistics for the United States; Statistics Canada for Canadian data; ILO World Labour Report (1997) and ILO UNIONS2006

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