



***TRADE UNIONS  
IN A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE:  
Membership, recruitment and informal  
work in 11 countries***

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# Key issues and objectives

## *Question marks*

- How trade unions are responding to the current process of globalisation?
- How to enhance trade unions empowerment?
- How to maintain and to enlarge the trade union representativeness and voice among the informal and atypical workers?

## *Pre-assumptions*

- differences do not preclude finding common threads in labour discourse,
- it is imperative that trade union debates about priorities and strategies be grounded on a better understanding of the crisis-prone tendencies of the dominant economic paradigm

## *Outcomes*

- to provide a comparative report with an overview of trade union membership and recruitment policies in different countries over the world

# Outcomes and methodology

11 country profiles: Sweden, Italy, Spain, the UK, USA, Vietnam, South Korea, India, Indonesia, Argentina, Brazil

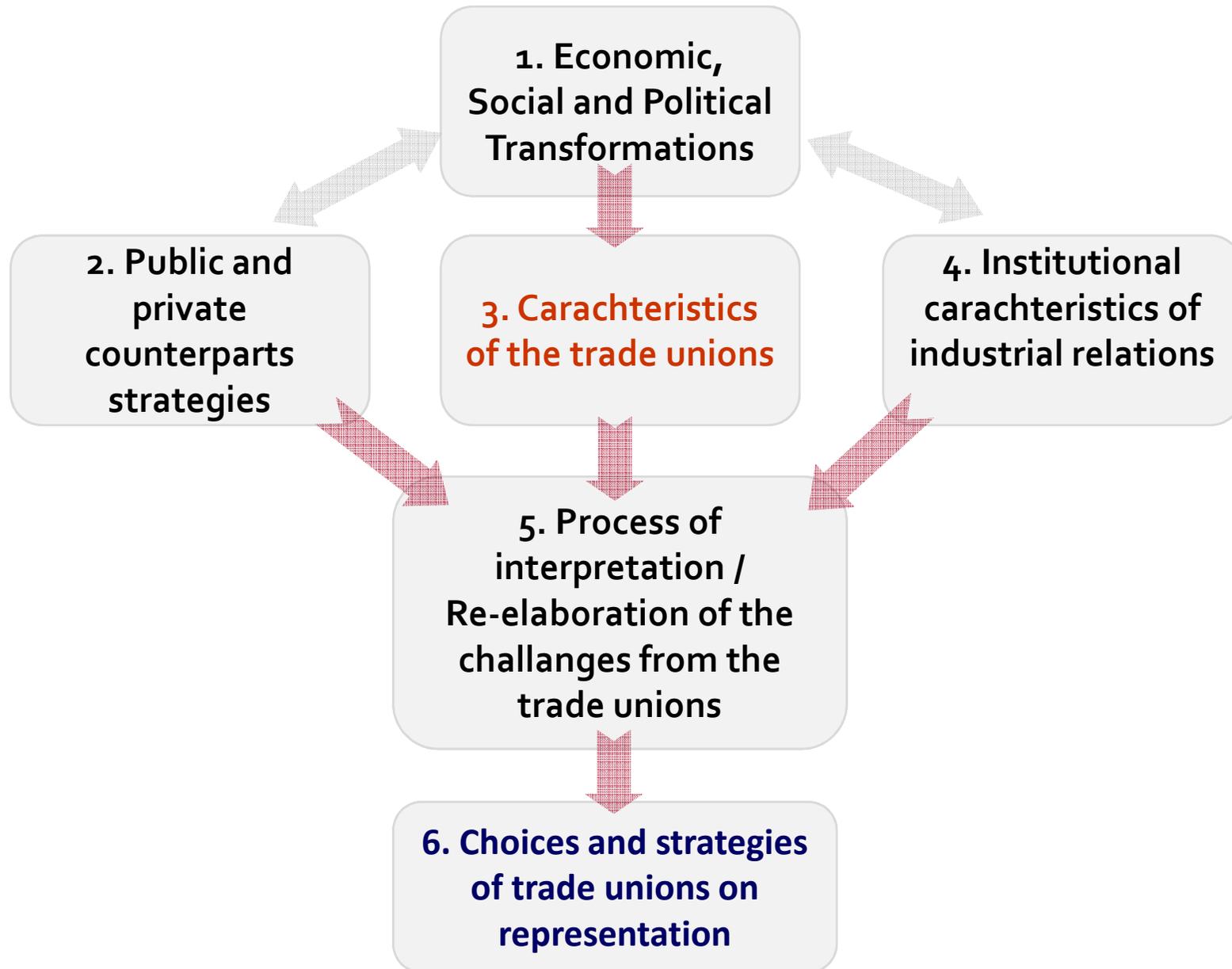
- Desk research on specialist literature, data and other documents
- A common framework for the country reports
- A grid or summary of chapters and items
- Editors: IRES - I, LMDT - F, IES - V



# The problem of comparison

## Structure and evolution of trade union models and membership

- synchronic evolution (over space) and diachronic evolution (over time)
- historical background
- political and institutional framework
- socio-economic variables: position in the international chain of value, sector of activity, type of company, contract, professional group, etc
- weight of the informal/irregular work
- demographic variables: sex, age, qualification



# Differences

- I) Some countries are highly economically developed and industrial and post-industrial dominate the process of production (USA, Sweden, the UK, Italy, Spain, Korea). Labour markets are dominated by regular work. Most of them have well structured industrial relations institutions. Except Korea all of them have unions with a long and important history.
  
- II) Some others are economically very diversified, with some sectors technologically advanced and others dominated by rural and pre-industrial modes of productions (India, Brazil, Indonesia, Vietnam). The informal work and agriculture sector are still dominant. The institutions of industrial relations are quite weak. Most of the labour forces is not organized.

Political systems and role of the State are also very different. Some new emerging economies are living a phase of transition

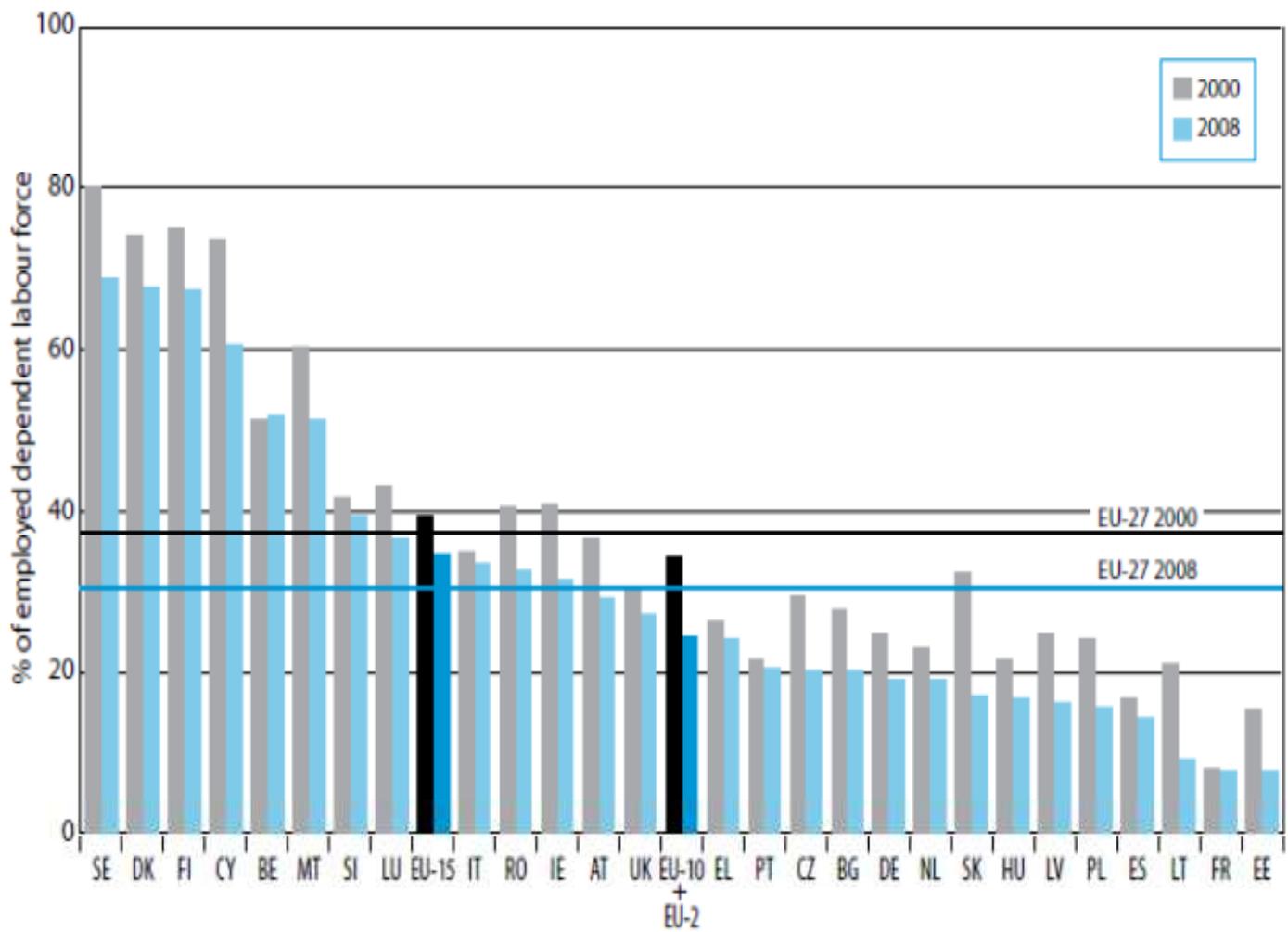
# Indicators of trade unions recognition and power

- Levels of trade unions density (membership)
- Workers reps recognition at the workplace level
- Extention of the collective bargaining coverage
- Workers' participation  
(information/consultation/co-decision rights)
- Certainty / effectiveness of the workers rights
- Lobbying on political parties / Parliaments /  
Governments (social dialogue and pacts)

## Trade Unions Density

- **High:** over 50% (Sweden)
- **Medium:** between 50% and 20% (India, Italy, the UK)
- **Low:** between 19% and 10% (Brazil, Spain, USA, Vietnam, South Korea)
- **Very low:** under 10% (Indonesia; but also France; Thailand)

### Chart 1.3: Union density by country, 2000-08



Source: J. Visser, ICTWSS database 3.0, 2010; the averages for the EU-27, EU-15 and 12 new Member States are weighted.

# Trade Unionism in Asia

- Often organizationally decentralized and based on a company level
- Weak or completely absent centralization/coordination of collective bargaining
- Distinctions, somewhere and sometimes, between official and unofficial unionism (see the “wild” strikes actions)
- Under strong pressure because of the increased competition on the global market
- Important role played as a political actors in the process of democratization
- Cultural factors to explain union weakness. The importance of Confucianism and the low level of industrial conflict.

# Trade unionism in USA

- Traditionally low unionisation
- Market-based and oriented toward securing the narrow interest of their members more than developing a broad welfare state
- Not class-based and ideological individualism of the American society
- Lacking a central coordination and very much based at company level
- Weak in post-industrial and service workforce

# Trade Unionsm in Europa

- High degree of labour recognition, inclusiveness and integration as pillar of the political democratic systems;
- Oriented to a broad welfare state (pensions; unemployment funds; health and education), mixing and using conflict and participatory approach
- Higher levels of unionisation and collective bargaing coverage;
- Class-based, articulated in a relatively limited number of industrial federations, affiliated in one or more confederations (union pluralism). Company-level or craft unionism is very rare;
- Rooted into a well-established system of collective bargaining at all the level: multi-secotor, sector, company;
- Challanged by the new global and post-industrial economy (declining membership).

Table 2.2: Industrial relations regimes or arrangements

	North	Centre-west	South	West	Centre-east
Production regime	Coordinated market economy		Statist market economy	Liberal market economy	Statist or liberal?
Welfare regime	Universalistic	Segmented (status-oriented, corporatist)		Residual	Segmented or residual?
Employment regime	Inclusive	Dualistic		Liberal	
Industrial relations regime	Organised corporatism	Social partnership	Polarised/state-centred	Liberal pluralism	Fragmented/state-centred
Power balance	Labour-oriented	Balanced	Alternating	Employer-oriented	
Principal level of bargaining	Sector		Variable/unstable	Company	
Bargaining style	Integrating		Conflict oriented		Acquiescent
Role of SP in public policy	Institutionalised		Irregular/politicised	Rare/event-driven	Irregular/politicised
Role of the state in IR	Limited (mediator)	'Shadow of hierarchy'	Frequent intervention	Non-intervention	Organiser of transition
Employee representation	Union based/high coverage	dual system/high coverage	Variable (*)	Union based/small coverage	Union based/small coverage
Countries	Denmark Finland Norway Sweden	Belgium Germany (Ireland) Luxembourg Netherlands Austria Slovenia (Finland)	Greece Spain France Italy (Hungary) Portugal	Ireland Malta Cyprus UK	Bulgaria Czech Republic Estonia Latvia Lithuania Hungary Poland Romania Slovakia

Source: J. Visser, extended on the basis of Ebbinghaus and Visser (1997); Crouch 1993; 1996; Esping-Andersen (1990); Schmidt (2002; 2006); and

# The logic behind membership

## Incentives to become unions members

### *material*

- protection, assistance, advices, services
- better wages and working conditions (hours; health and safety; benefits), labour rights, pensions, unemployment insurance

### *functional*

- reducing concurrence/dumping among workers
- reducing power asymmetry with management,
- limiting the company/management over-power/prerogatives (industrial democracy).

### *identity and sociability*

- values, sense of belonging and solidarity, political/religious ideologies
- will of participation and democracy

# What makes a movement move

*“The history of trade unions in the world is the history of struggles for greater social justice and against dictatorship, both in societies and in the workplace”.*

*In spite of all the accusations “there can be no doubt in retrospect that in most battles trade unions have been on the right side of history”.*

*ILO Report, Trade Unions and Global Crisis. Labour's visions, strategies and responses, Geneva, 2011*

leftycartoons.com

**1842**

IF WORKERS CAN LEGALLY STRIKE, NO BUSINESS WILL BE ABLE TO SURVIVE!



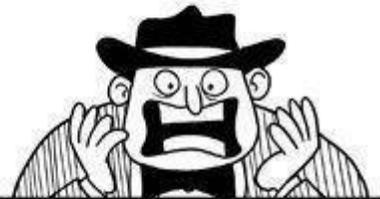
**1887**

GIVE BLACKS AN ENTIRE DOLLAR FOR A DAY'S LABOR? MIGHT AS WELL BURN MY BUSINESS TO THE GROUND!



**1912**

WORKER DEATHS ARE TRAGIC, BUT ANTI-SWEATSHOP LAWS WOULD BE THE DEATH OF INDUSTRY IN AMERICA!



**1915**

WHEN WORKERS CAN'T BE FIRED FOR JOINING A UNION, HOW CAN ANYONE STAY IN BUSINESS?



**1924**

BANNING CHILD LABOR WOULD DESTROY THE ECONOMY! RIGHT, LITTLE TIMMY?



**1938**

WE CAN'T HAVE A FORTY HOUR WORK WEEK, BECAUSE IF WE DO THERE'LL BE NO EMPLOYERS LEFT TO HIRE ANYONE!



**1964**

EQUAL PAY FOR WOMEN AND NEGROES? BUSINESS CAN'T STAY AFLOAT IF FEDERAL REGULATIONS STRANGLE US!



**1970**

HEALTH AND SAFETY LAWS ARE A FORMULA FOR MASSIVE PERMANENT UNEMPLOYMENT!



**NOW**

IF THE NEW LABOR RIGHTS LAW PASSES, THEN BUSINESS IS DOOMED! DOOOOOOMED!



Ampersand by B. Deutsch

**A BRIEF HISTORY OF CORPORATE WHINING**

# Quality of working conditions and quality of the industrial relations

- 1) The quality of industrial relations comes first than quality of work and employment relationships
- 2) More **equity** in the employment relationships Vs. more **efficiency** in the company's performances

# Trade unions in crisis.

## Explanatory factors: 1. external

### Structural

- globalisation and relocation of jobs
- changes in the sectorial and occupational distribution of work
- segmentation of the job market (centre/periphery)
- contractual deregulation (atypical; precarious; informal work)
- reduction of the public sector employment
- growing levels of unemployment and precariousness

### Institutional

- erosion of collective bargaining coverage
- individualisation of industrial relations
- difficulties of trade union action within the company

### Cultural

- pre-eminence of individualistic values
- delegation strategies

# Explanatory factors:

## 2. internal

### Heterogeneity of the new labour world

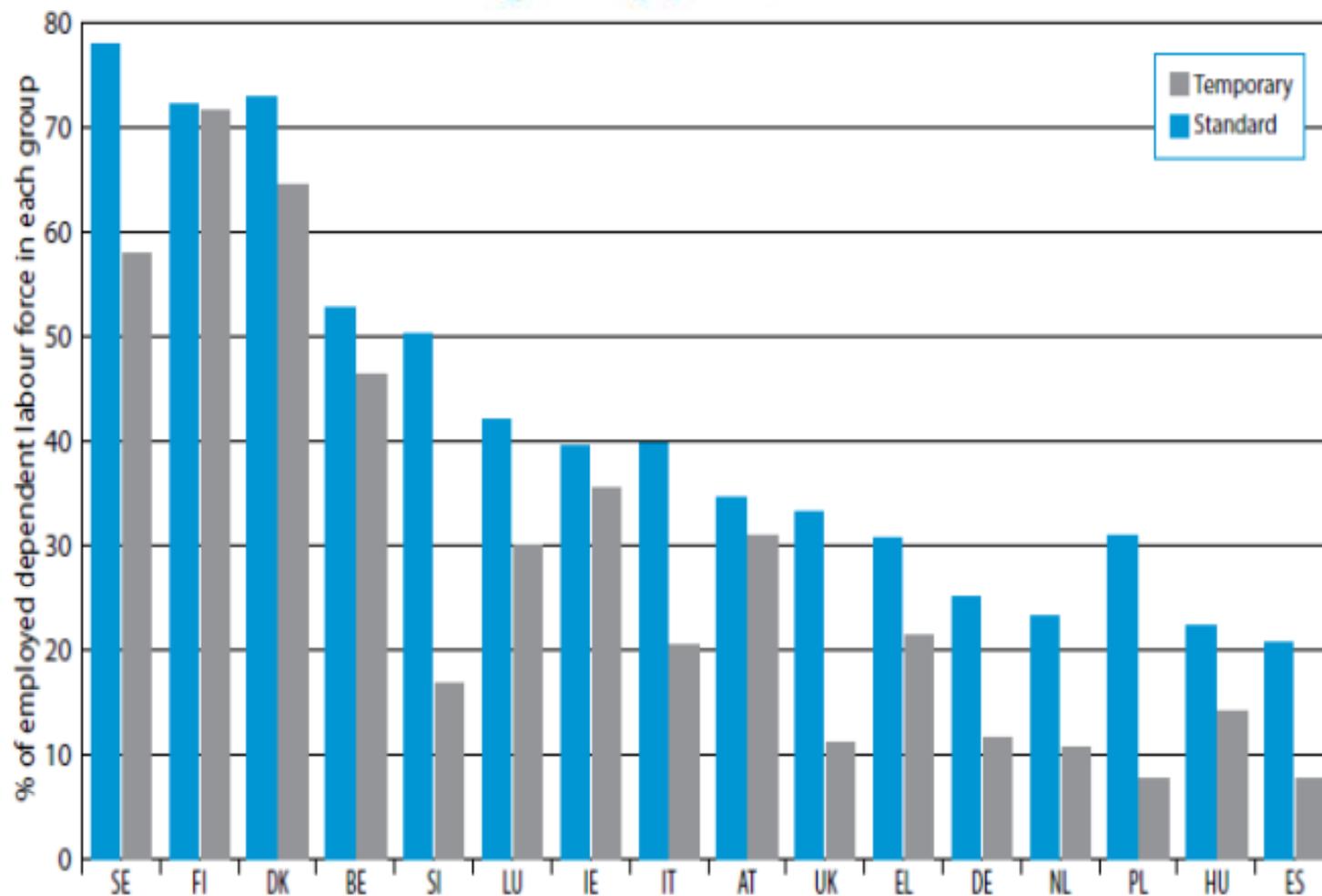
Difficulties in pooling together the growing heterogeneity of interests and demands

- blue collars/white collars,
- low skilled/highly skilled;
- centre/periphery;
- insiders/outsideers;
- locals/migrants

### Organisational weaknesses

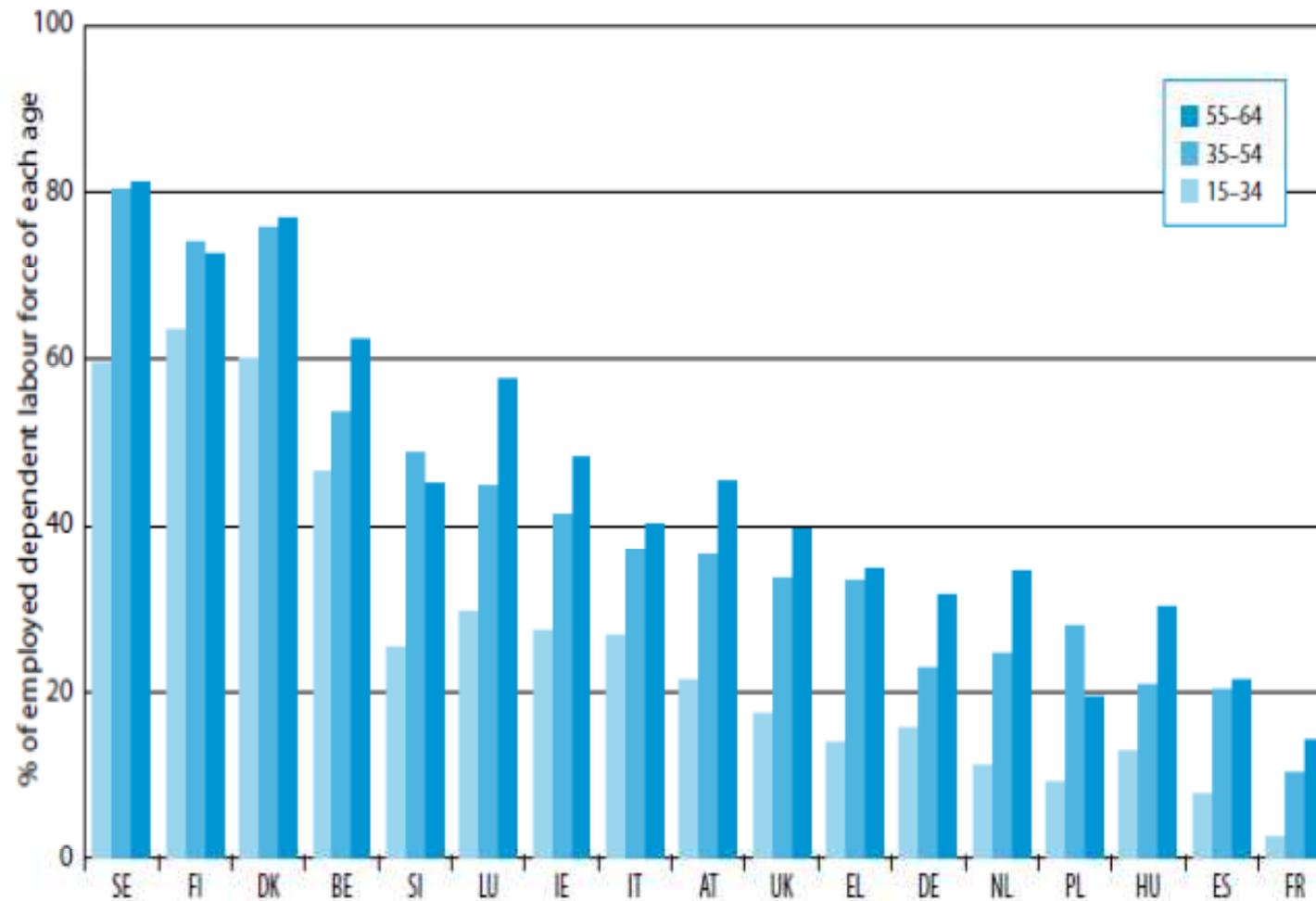
- organisational plurality (sectors, firms, territories)
- low penetration in the SMEs and informal work
- representation gap: women, youth, professionals, etc.

### Chart 1.6: Union density, employees in standard and temporary jobs, mid-2000s



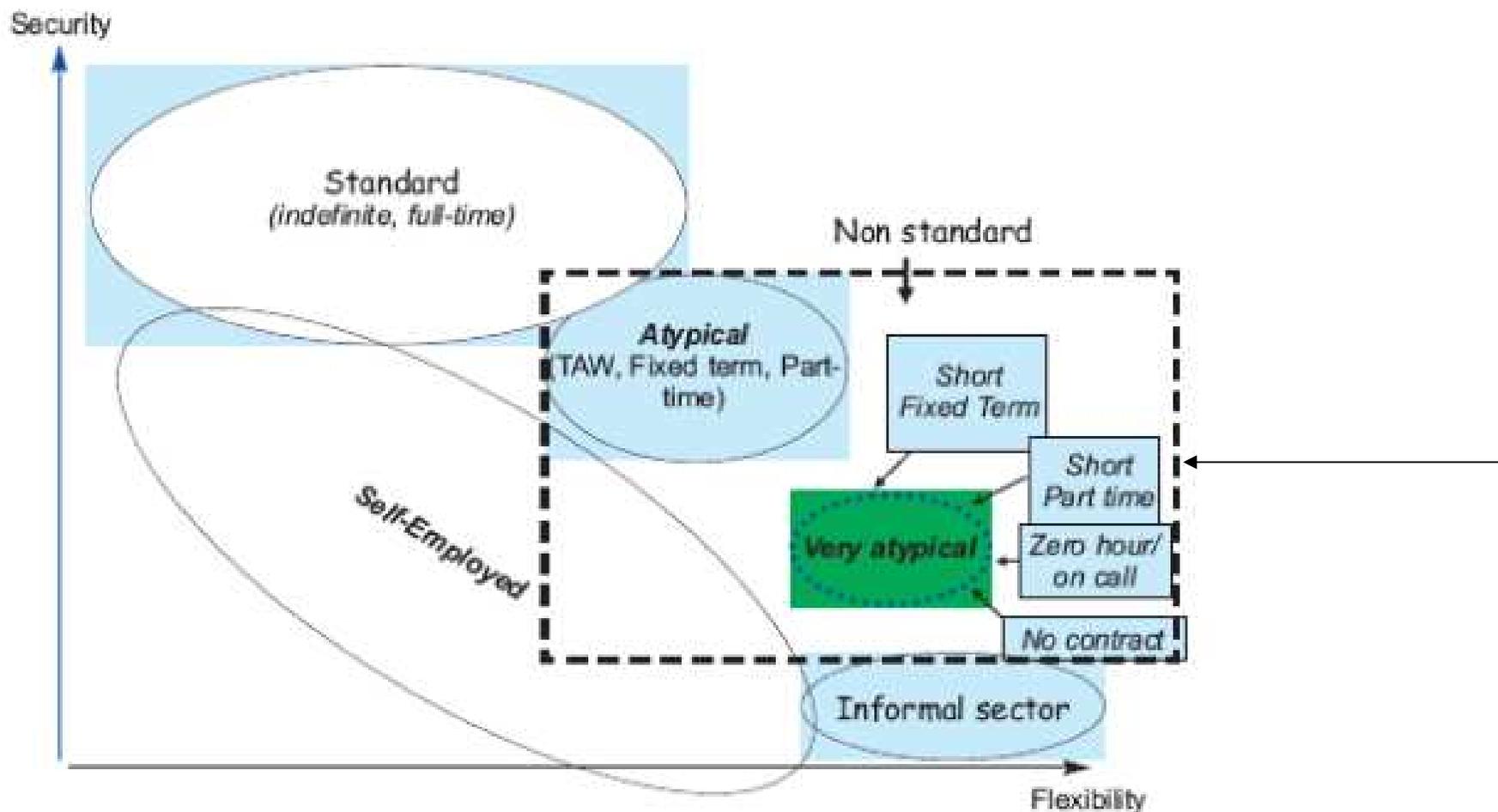
Source: J. Visser, ICTWSS database 3.0, 2010, based on estimates from ESS and ISSP surveys.

### Chart 1.5: Union density by age group, mid-2000s



Source: J. Visser, ICTWSS database 3.0, 2010, based on estimates from ESS and ISSP surveys.

Figure 1: Overview of standard and non-standard forms of work



Note: TAW = temporary agency work

Source: Authors' own compilation (Biletta and Kullander), 2009

# European unions and atypical work

*“Their traditional reaction has often been to oppose atypical work in all its forms, and as a consequence to avoid or exclude precarious workers.*

*But in recent years most have accepted that precarity is a reality that will not go away, and have recognised the need to represent the interests of this group of workers”*

Rebecca Gumbrell-McCormick, 2009.



***“Labour movement is becoming dangerously close to being too small to matter”***

SEIU’s leader Gerry Hudson

**Trade unions today face a wide range of tasks**

**They need to change, and are changing, in order to meet both new and persistent challenges to their advancement of social justice, income security, and industrial democracy”**

**Trade Unions need to act strategically**

# Representation and organisational dilemmas

- the whole working class (wage earners) / just the members
- horizontal (territory) / vertical (sector-firm)
- centralised (national) / decentralised (territorial / company)

**How to give voice and representation,  
melting together diversity and unity?**

# Recruitment strategies and union revitalisation

- **Servicing**
- **Organising no-unionised workers (informal; atypical; migrants)**
- **New Unionism (USA; Korea)**
- **Improving communication**
- **Better use of human and financial resources (trade unions education/training; new leaders; mergers)**
- **Heighten the presence of the trade union in the workplace as a independent, contractual partner**
- **Developing democracy**
- **Increasing the international co-operation on the issues of solidarity and decent work**

# Recruitment strategies initiatives: servicing

## 1) Collective bargaining and shop floor representation

## 2) Assistance individual and collective

- Legal and fiscal advice (*also on line*)
- Advice on legislation and contracts
- Trade union education
- Social/Economic research about labour market
- Information about work opportunities

## 3) Integrative welfare

- Unemployment insurance
- Vocational training
- Housing
- Leisure
- Other social benefits

# Recruitment strategies initiatives: organising

- General membership plan: action programme for specific target-groups plans: youth, informal/atypical workers, migrants, women, professionals, SMEs...
- Organising the no-unionised workers ( “Justice for Janitors” in US; NIdIL in Italy )
- Mobilisation and campaign for a decent work
- New Unionsim: (“Change to win”, US; “KTUC”, Korea)

# **Recruitment strategies initiatives: improving communication**

- widespread offices,**
- forums and researches**
- organisational marketing**
- specialised organisation for recruitment,**
- presence in the media,**
- call centres,**
- websites e social networking,**
- magazines,**
- leaflets**

# Recruitment strategies new initiatives: cultural

## Cultural:

- Adapt the discourse, the iconography and action to the current composition of the working class
- Integrated management of the workers' collective and individual demands and interests.
- Trade union education / Identity (values, history, goals)
- Advertising and image campaigns: get rid of the negative associations, and highlight the positive dimension of trade union action/membership:
  - from risk to security
  - from problem to solution
  - from protest to proposal
- Learning from the others and dissemination of good practices

## What the workers ask for:

- inclusion,
- empowerment,
- participation,
- transparency,
- democracy

## The value of the PLA realised in Vietnam

- union autonomy,
- fighting for social justice and decent works

*A union can be said representative when in its exercise of representation, decision processes are rich of participation and achieve results - both material and symbolic - which can strengthen the bond of trust and confidence that bind unions to their social bases of members and supporters*