

UNION DENSITY

Union density in the following is defined as the ratio of union membership (employed wage and salary earners only) and civilian employment of wage and salary earners. The Table presents data on union density for 1970, 1980, 1990 and 2000–03 in 24 OECD countries. Union density rates in 2003 were lower than in 1970 in all but four small European economies (Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Belgium). These four happen to be the only ones in which unions are involved in the administration and execution of unemployment insurance. Also, each decade became progressively worse from the perspective of union organizing (except in Spain where the unions, facing a difficult start after the fall of the Franco dictatorship, managed to acquire organizing rights and succeeded in building a reasonably loyal membership base among permanent workers in large firms). Thus, even in countries in which unions made strong membership gains in the 1990s, as was the case in Ireland or the Netherlands, the rapid growth of employment led to a drop in the union share of wage and salary employment. Elsewhere in Europe – for instance, in Germany, France, or Aus-

tria – union density fell in spite of extremely slow employment growth.

The density statistics in the Table show a very large degree of variation – from very low rates in France, Korea, the United States, Poland and Spain to very high rates in Sweden, Finland and Denmark, closely followed by Belgium and Norway. Union density is twice as high in the European Union as in the United States, but trends are similarly downward and may be expected to converge somewhat when current membership trends in the largest European economy (Germany) and the largest of the new member states in Central and Eastern Europe (Poland) continue. Also, current levels of unionisation in Switzerland, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Germany and Australia – with just more than one-fifth of the employed wage-earning population joining a union – are located at the lower end of the spectrum.

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Reference

Visser, J. (2006), "Union Membership Statistics in 24 Countries", *Monthly Labor Review*, January, 38-49.

Union density in OECD countries, adjusted data, 1970–2003, in percent

	1970	1980	1990	2000	2001	2002	2003
Austria	62.8	56.7	46.9	36.5	35.7	35.4	n.a.
Belgium	42.1	54.1	53.9	55.6	n.a.	55.4	n.a.
Czech Republic	n.a.	n.a.	78.8	n.a.	27.0	n.a.	n.a.
Denmark	60.3	78.6	75.3	73.3	72.5	n.a.	70.4
Finland	51.3	69.4	72.5	75.0	74.5	74.8	74.1
France	21.7	18.3	10.1	8.2	8.1	8.3	8.3
Germany	32.0	34.9	31.2	25.0	23.5	23.2	22.6
Hungary	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	19.9	n.a.	n.a.
Ireland	53.2	57.1	51.1	n.a.	36.6	36.3	35.3
Italy	37.0	49.6	38.8	34.9	34.8	34.0	33.7
Netherlands	36.5	34.8	24.3	23.1	22.5	22.4	22.3
Norway	56.8	58.3	58.5	53.7	52.8	53.0	53.3
Poland	n.a.	n.a.	53.1 ^{a)}	14.7	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Slovak Republic	n.a.	n.a.	78.7	n.a.	36.1	n.a.	n.a.
Spain	n.a.	12.9	12.5	16.1	16.1	16.2	16.3
Sweden	67.7	78.0	80.8	79.1	78.0	78.0	78.0
Switzerland	28.9	31.1	24.3	19.4	17.8	n.a.	n.a.
United Kingdom	44.8	50.7	39.3	29.7	29.3	29.2	29.3
Australia	50.2 ^{b)}	49.5 ^{c)}	40.5	24.7	24.5	23.1	22.9
Canada	31.6	34.7 ^{d)}	32.9	28.1	28.2	28.2	28.4
Japan	35.1	31.1	25.4	21.5	20.9	20.3	19.7
New Zealand	55.2 ^{e)}	69.1	51.0	22.7	22.6	22.1	n.a.
Republic of Korea	12.6	14.7	17.6	11.1	11.2	11.1	11.2
United States	23.5 ^{f)}	19.5 ^{g)}	15.5	12.8	12.8	12.6	12.4

^{a)} 1989. – ^{b)} 1976. – ^{c)} 1982. – ^{d)} 1984. – ^{e)} 1971 – ^{f)} 1973. – ^{g)} 1983.

Source: Visser (2006).