

**Fafo**



# How do trade unions recruit members?

Experiences from Norway

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Increasing Capacity of the Trade Unions in the Czech Republic

30. April 2024

# Outline

- Short intro to the Norwegian labour market model
- How do Norwegian trade unions recruit new members?
- How to unionise freelancers and the solo self-employed?

# The Norwegian labour market

- Trade unions and employer organisations play important roles in the labour market
  - Regulating wages and working conditions through collective bargaining
    - There is no statutory minimum wage in Norway
  - Enforcing labour law regulations (assisting the members) and collective agreements
  - Influencing politics through extensive tripartite cooperation
- Being member of a union matters!



- Unionisation rate: 50%
- Great variety between industries
- Public administration 80%
- Retail trade 25%



- Collective bargaining coverage: 69%
- Great variety between industries
- Public sector: 100%
- Hotel and restaurants: 27%

# Trade union strategies

## **Servicing model**

Focuses on providing service to members, such as legal representation, bargaining, etc.

Relies more on automatic membership

Favour bargaining over confrontation

Typical for countries and industries where union rates are relatively high and stable

## **Organising model**

Emphasises member engagement and active participation

Active recruitment and grassroots initiatives

Encourages direct action, confrontations and public campaigns

Typical for countries and industries where trade unions see the need for revitalisation

# Servicing model with elements of an organizing model

- Recruitment through trade union representatives at the workplace
  - Representatives elected by and among the workers ask colleagues to become a member
  - Integrated part of their role as a firm level TU representative
  - Unions give out recruitment gifts
- In some industries supplemented with an organizing approach
  - Many workplaces do not have TU members, making the traditional approach impossible
  - Recruiting members part of the union activity – organisers visiting workplaces, but based on strategies and action plans developed by the union at national level
  - Recruiting becomes a specialist task for full-time organisers



# What do they offer?



Collective bargaining – setting standards and enforcement

Wages and working conditions  
Co-determination rights



Political influence

Through extensive tripartite cooperation at different levels and topics



Legal advice

Help with enforcing private law matters



Professional community

Identity and stamp of quality



Membership benefits

Cheaper insurance, better interest rates, discounts etc.





## Political influence: Lobbying for increased tax-deduction of member fees

- Because it is fair – employer may deduct taxes for fees to employer organisations
- To contribute to high union density
  - Seen as important for the Norwegian labour market model
  - The labour movement undertake tasks that otherwise had to be done by the state
- Given for fees not exceeding NOK 8 000 / € 670 (2024)
  - Effect 28% of this sum
- Analyses show that increasing the tax deduction of 10% will increase union density of 0.7 to 0.8% (Barth et al. 2020)





# Freelancers and the solo self-employed

- Challenges when it comes to unionising
  - Practical obstacles: Move between different workplaces
  - Political obstacles: Do not feel at home in (all) trade unions
  - Institutional obstacles: Access to collective bargaining
- Increased attention on 'freelance unionism'
  - Adjustments made by trade unions to represent freelancers and solo self-employed

# Initiatives supplementing the traditional approach

## Common identity approaches

- Of special value to this group as they often work alone or shift between different jobs
- Collegial help or stamp of quality

## Rational choice

- Costs benefits, e.g. administrative and economic assistance including accounting, help with contracts, insurances
- Advise on pay rates and other conditions
- Legal aid, training and conferences

## Institutional approaches

- Political influence
- Negotiate guiding terms for wages and working conditions

