

# THE FUTURE IS NOW!

## Building Youth Power in BWI Affiliates

BWI Youth Research Paper 2020



**BWI**  
Building and Wood  
Workers' International  
[www.bwint.org](http://www.bwint.org)



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BWI is the Global Union Federation grouping free and democratic unions with members in the Building, Building Materials, Wood, Forestry and Allied sectors.

BWI brings together around 351 trade unions representing around 12 million members in 127 countries. The Headquarters is in Geneva, Switzerland while the Regional Offices are in Panama, Malaysia, and South Africa.

Our mission is to defend and advance workers' rights, and to improve working and living conditions in our sectors. The BWI, above all, has a rights-based approach. We believe that trade union rights are human rights and are based on equality, solidarity and democracy, and that trade unions are indispensable to good governance.

BWI goals include 1) to promote and defend human and trade union rights; 2) to increase trade union strength; 3) to promote a stable and high level of employment in our sectors; and 4) to influence policy and strengthen the capacity of institutions and tripartite structures in our sectors.

## Introduction:

# The Youth and Trade Unions in the BWI sectors



This report aims to understand the tendencies of unionization among young members of BWI member organizations, the problems and challenges faced by the unions and their affiliates, and the strategies and good practices they use in organizing young workers. The data collection phase of the research was conducted between September 2020 - March 2021 and 64 BWI affiliates from 46 countries and 4 regions responded to the survey.

The study is based on descriptive research with an intention of contacting key contact young workers within the BWI network. This exploratory research gives an insight on basic tendencies and some content on campaigns who value youth as a subject for future strategies. Also, this report can be used as a benchmark for future works on young workers. The survey form was available online and paper forms in 8 languages: Arabic, English, French, German, Portuguese, Russian, Serbo-Croatian and Spanish. The survey was announced in the BWI website, and invitation letters were sent out to the affiliates on regional levels.

A sample of 64 affiliates represents this population with a  $\pm 11,05\%$  margin of error. The margin of error is high for a social research sample. It should be noted that 42 affiliates joined the first BWI Youth Research which was conducted in 2013 and 10 affiliates among them contributed 2020's survey.

The report relies on five sections. In the first section profile of the unions that participated in the survey is elaborated. In the second section, key findings on young people within the BWI network are discussed. The third section is allocated to the extent and content of campaigns and activities targeting youth. In section four, the presence of youth policy is discussed. Representation of youth within union structures is the focal point of the last chapter. It is important to note that the term "base" of each question refers to the "total number of valid answers received for the relevant question".

## Acknowledgements

This research was commissioned by the BWI as an input material for the 5<sup>th</sup> BWI World Congress in October 2022. Our sincerest thanks to BWI for trusting us the conduct of this research. Also, we thank BWI affiliates for joining the research by answering the survey questions.

We are also grateful to BWI Global Youth Coordinator and Regional Youth Coordinators and Regional Education Officers for encoding and processing the survey questionnaires.

## I. Profile of the unions surveyed

64 BWI affiliates from 46 different countries based in 4 BWI regions of Asia and the Pacific, Africa and Middle East, Europe and Latin America and Caribbean participated in the study. Country distribution is shared in the appendix.

When we look at the distribution of year of establishment, 42% of the respondents were unions established before 1980. 33 per cent of them were established between 1980-2000, and 24 per cent of unions established after 2000. In other words, majority of the unions that participated in the survey have experience of union work for more than 20 years. In addition, the 5 unions - GBH from Austria, IG BAU from Germany, INSHAAT-IS from Azerbaijan, SINDICONS from Moldova and HISTADRUT from Israel - that participated in the survey are more than 100 years old. The distribution of unions by year of establishment is shared in the appendix.

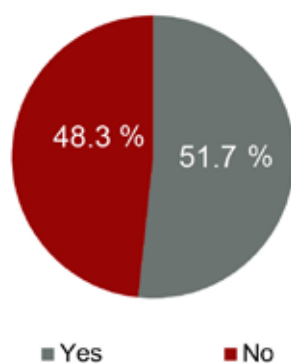
**Figure 1.** Percentage of total BWI and paid-up membership in BWI within total membership



Base: 57

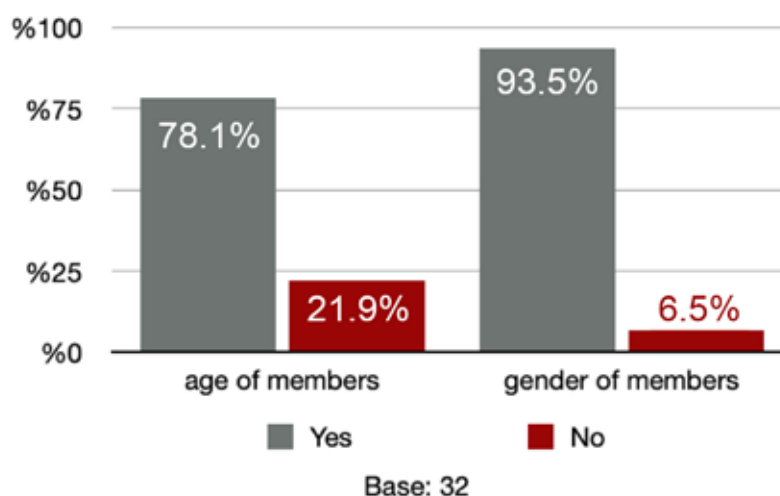
The unions participating in the survey represent a total of 2,214,093 workers. 77.8 per cent of these workers are from the BWI sectors (the building and construction, building materials, wood, forestry, and allied sectors) (see Figure 1 above). The rate of paid-up membership in BWI sectors among all members is 21.7 per cent. Moreover, 28 per cent of members in BWI sectors constitutes paid-up members.

**Figure 2.** Percentage of unions having an electronic membership system



Base: 60

In the scope of the survey, the unions were asked about their current membership systems. Only half of the unions (51.7%) stated that they have an electronic membership system (see Figure 2 above).

**Figure 3.** Percentage of the membership system provide information by gender and age

Among those who have an electronic membership system, 93.5 per cent of the unions collect gender data, whereas 78.1 per cent acquire the age data of their members. In this sense, acquiring information on the gender of members is more common than having age information (see Figure 3 above).

According to the statements of the unions participating in the survey, there are a total of 298,480 young members. 15.5 per cent of the young members are women while 84.5 per cent are young men. It is possible to indicate that the trend of low number of female workers in the BWI sectors seems to be similar among the young members.

**Table 1.** Distribution Of Unions by Having Youth Data

	Frequency	Valid Percentage %
Yes	35	54.7
No data available	18	28.1
No youth in the union	5	7.8
Total	64	100

Additionally, 54.7 per cent of the respondents keep youth data while 28.1 per cent of the unions answered that they do not keep data on young members, mainly related to the lack of sufficient membership system to keep such a data. It was stated that 7.8 per cent of the respondents do not have young members at all. This result can be interpreted as instead of having zero young members, some affiliates were not able to extract an exact number of young members from their membership data system and thus, preferred to answer the question by writing zero (please see Table 1 above).



## About Organizing and Recruitment

The BWI affiliates were asked about the changes in the number of their memberships, whether it was increased or decreased from July 2019 to June 2020.

**Table 2.** Increase Or Decrease in Membership in The BWI Sectors Between July 2019 – June 2020

	Frequency	Valid Percentage %
Decreased	31	48.4
Increased	33	51.6
Total	64	100

According to the responses, 48.4 per cent of the unions stated a decrease in their memberships while 51.6 per cent stated an increase. The total increase in membership among the total of participant unions is 2.7 per cent whereas there was 1.4 per cent decrease in the last year (please see Table 2 above).

Besides during the timeframe, 10,621 new young members (under 35) joined unions who participated in the survey. The average number of new members is 332 whereas the standard deviation is 560. This means while some unions gain much more youth (maximum is 2,100, minimum 5 new young members) than others. Therefore, the median gives us a clearer vision on gaining young members in unions which is 53. In other words, the unions who participated in the survey have a very low levels of new young member subscriptions. It is estimated that around 50 young workers join BWI affiliates each year.

## II. Young Workers in BWI Membership

The share of young workers (under 35) within total membership in the BWI sectors is calculated to understand the estimated youth ratio within BWI affiliates' membership. The results of the BWI 2020 global survey on youth are compared to the data of 2013 BWI youth report as below.

**Table 3.** Estimated proportion (%) of young workers in BWI affiliates' membership

Share range to total membership	Frequency (2021)	Percentage % (2021)	Frequency (2013)	Percentage % (2013)
15% and below	25	52.1	5	14.3
16% to 30%	7	14.6	14	40.0
31% to 45%	8	16.7	7	20.0
46% to 60%	1	2.1	7	20.0
61% and above	7	14.6	2	5.7
Total	48	100	35	100

According to the findings showed in the Table 3 above, young workers still account for a small share among BWI's membership. Currently, young workers make up to 15 per cent or less of the unions' members. Survey results show that more than half of the unions have 15 per cent or fewer young workers' memberships (52.1%). This ratio was 14.3 per cent in 2013. 14.6 per cent of the respondents indicated that young workers count between 16 per cent to 30 per cent whereas these data were 40% in 2013. 18,8% of the unions stated that young members comprise between 31 per cent to 60 per cent while this share was 40 per cent in 2013. 14.6 per cent of unions stated that the proportion of young people in BWI members is more than 61 per cent. This data used to be 5.7 per cent in 2013. Despite the low participation in the survey, these findings give us a clue that those young workers in BWI affiliates' membership remain low for the



past eight years as it was indicated similarly in the 2013 research report.

In the report of 2013, it was stated that majority of young members within the BWI were from the construction sector. When we look at the share of young members by sector, it is seen that this finding coincides with the 2020 data as well. Among all young members, 57 per cent are from the construction sector, while 11 per cent are from wood and forestry and 7 per cent are

from cement and building materials sector. Therefore, construction sector keeps its presence as the dominant sector among BWI young workers.

The total share of young members by trades was asked within the scope of the survey as well. Among the total young members, 32 per cent of youth are in blue-collar construction trades (including carpenters, electricians, painters, plumbers, cleaning, etc.). Young members who are in the white-collar construction trades (architects, engineers, administrators, etc.) comprise only 1 per cent of all young members. This trade has the smallest share. Wood industries trades (forest workers, wood processing, furniture, etc.) on the other hand, make up 8 per cent of all youth.

**Table 4. Gender Profile Among Young Workers**

	Frequency	Valid Percentage %
Men are majority	35	89.7
Men Women equal or almost equal	3	7.7
Women are majority	1	2.6
Total	39	100

Gender profile among young workers shows us that the majority of youth has consisted of young men. According to the statements of the union representatives, 89.7 per cent of young members are men.

7.7 per cent of the unions have almost equal share among young women and men where both three cases are close to 55 per cent - 45 per cent whilst men are more than women (please see Table 4 above). Only one affiliate which is a Myanmar-based organization stated that young women are the majority among their young members.

To sum up this chapter, it can be pointed out that young workers consist of a small share among BWI members. When we mention young workers of BWI, we are still referring to young men mostly based in construction sector and within blue-collar trades.

### III. BWI Perception and Activities on Organizing and Winning Young Workers

In this section, perceptions of BWI affiliates towards young workers' motivation to join or not to join a union will be investigated. Additionally, the extent of recruitment campaigns and the strategies that affiliates followed will be presented. The data will be discussed in comparison to the 2013 BWI Youth Survey throughout the section.

#### BWI perception on young workers' motivations to join a union

Unions have general assumptions on the perceptions and motivations of young workers towards joining or not joining a union. The content and the extent of campaigns targeting young workers are mostly based on these assumptions. In this sense, it is important to understand unions' assumptions to point out the logic behind the campaign ideas and strategies to organize young workers.

**Table 5.** Reasons/factors motivating young workers to join a union

Main Reasons	Frequency (2020)	Valid Percentage % (2020)	Valid Percentage % (2013)
Improved working conditions	49	76.6	58.5
Accessing union-related education/trainings	43	67.2	46.3
To attain some level of job security	41	64.1	53.7
Obtaining legal assistance on labour-related problems	40	62.5	63.4
Gaining more benefits	39	60.9	48.8
Union membership enables to address grievances at the workplace	38	59.4	48.8
Receiving higher pay	35	54.7	46.3
Ensuring OHS conditions at the workplace	32	50.0	51.2
Being a union member reduces employers' arbitrary action against workers	31	48.4	34.1
Training for job-related skills	21	32.8	29.3
Career (Career Advice in 2013)	10	15.6	22.0
Gaining access to unemployment insurance schemes	9	14.1	17.1



As indicated in the Table 5 above, respondents believe that the major factors/reasons motivating young workers to join a union are improved working conditions (76.6%), accessing union-related education/training (67.2%), to attain some level of job security (64.1%), obtaining legal assistance on labour-related problems (62.5%) and gaining more benefits (60.9%). In 2013, obtaining legal assistance on labour-related problems used to be seen as the major motivation to join unions by almost two thirds of the unions.

These perceived reasons of the respondents have slightly changed since 2013. Affiliates think that career and gaining access to unemployment insurance schemes have less impact on young workers' motivation to join a union. Only less than 15 per cent of the respondents think that those factors play a role in young workers' motivation. These factors were seen as the least impactful in the youth motivations in 2013 as well. Training for job-related skills (32.8%) and the positive impact of a union in reduction of employers' arbitrary action (48.4%) is started to be seen as factors that motivate young people to join a union more compared to 2013 findings. Membership's function to address grievances at the workplace (59.4%), receiving higher pay (54.7%), and ensuring OHS conditions at the workplace (50%) are the other reasons that are perceived as the factors for youth inclusion to the unions.

**Table 6.** Main reasons of why young workers do not join a union

Main Reasons	Frequency (2020)	Valid Percentage % (2020)	Valid Percentage % (2013)
Limited knowledge about unionism	52	81.3	83.3
Fear of losing job	45	70.3	52.4
Employers do not allow organising or recognise unions	35	54.7	47.6
Perception among young workers that unions are outdated and not useful	32	50.0	33.3
Young workers are predominantly working in nonstandard, often precarious employment which blocks union membership	30	46.9	21.4
No union organising efforts targeting young workers at workplace	26	40.6	-
No union organising efforts at workplace	20	31.3	40.5
Majority, if not all, people at work are not union members	17	26.6	28.6
Perception among young workers that unions are instruments of political parties	13	20.3	19.9

When affiliates were asked about the possible reasons why young workers avoid joining a union, as seen on Table 6 above, 81.3 per cent of the respondents still think that the youth's limited knowledge about unionism is the major factor which prevents young workers to join a union which was pretty similar to the responses of the 2013 survey (please see Table 6 above). Therefore, it can be concluded that the main perceived reason has not changed within 8 years since the first youth research conducted in 2013. On the other hand, it is interesting to see that within 8 years, more affiliates began to see fear of losing job as a determinant factor of

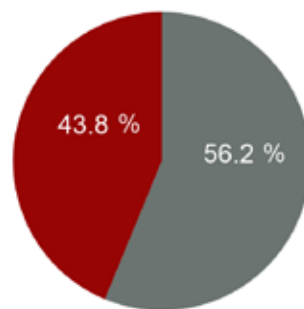
young workers' avoidance to join a union. Another change in perceptions was of the issue on young workers' working conditions. More affiliates began to think that working in non-standard precarious employment which blocks union membership (46.9%) is one of the major reasons explaining young workers' non-participation in unions. The response rate was 21.4 per cent in 2013 for this factor. On the other hand, respondents reported other reasons such as employers do not allow organizing or recognize unions (54.7%), no union organizing efforts targeting young workers at the workplace (40.6%), and no union organizing efforts at the workplace (31.3%). The negative perception among young workers on unions/unionization is seen as a determinant as well. More affiliates believe that young workers perceive unions as outdated and not useful organizations. This share is 50 per cent in 2020, while it was only one-third of the respondents in 2013.

### Recruitment campaigns for young workers

The representatives of the unions were asked about whether their unions organize campaigns targeting young workers. If they do so, what kind of activities they organize for recruiting youth has been asked, along with the reasons why they do not organize campaigns towards youth. 56.3 per cent of the respondent stated that they have organized such campaigns whereas 43.8 per cent have not.

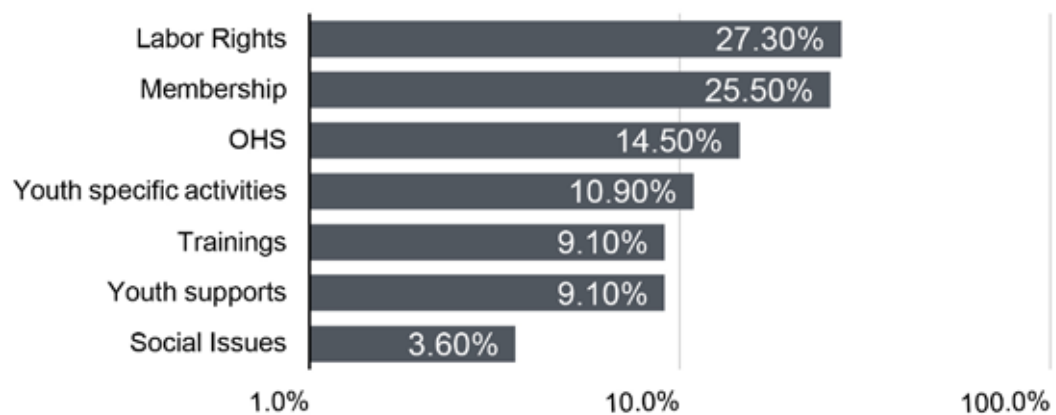
**Figure 4.** Percentage of unions having specific organizing campaigns targeting young workers

**Do you have specific organising campaigns targeting young workers?**



**Base: 64**

The 2020 survey shows that 56.2 per cent of the respondents conduct campaigns targeting young workers. In comparison to 2013, this rate is lower which was 78 per cent in the particular year (please see Figure 4 above). At this point, it should be noted that among those affiliates who are interested in youth work, campaigning might be losing its frequency.

**Figure 5.** Distribution of specific issues of campaigns toward youth

The content of the campaigns for youth by the unions can be summed up in seven categories. The most common campaign focus is on labour rights. 27.3 per cent of the unions, which organise such campaigns, put their focus on this subject (please see Figure 5 above). In terms of labour rights, these campaigns promote and target increasing awareness on the issues such as:

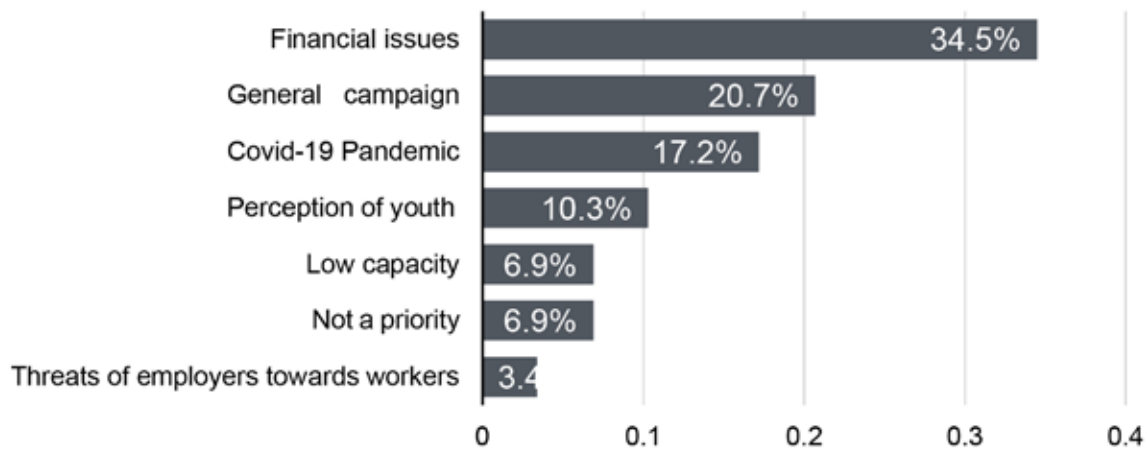
- eliminating precarious work,
- abolition of piece work,
- promoting labour rights,
- apprentice compensation,
- unconventional salary,
- unchecked and unpaid working hours,
- over time payment for extra working hours.
- false employment contracts,
- lack of social protection,
- labour Law & Networking Development,
- Permanent Jobs,
- Minimum Wages,
- fixed working hours,

Membership and the Union Promotion is the second popular content of the campaigns targeting youth. One-fourth of the respondents, who conduct such campaigns, organise inclusion meetings to make union promotion, and sharing information about their unions. Occupational health and safety is another topic of the youth campaigns as 14.5 per cent of the respondents run their campaigns on OHS topics including health, safety, and hygiene. These campaigns include trainings and information dissemination activities. Youth-specific activities in workplaces consist of 10.9 per cent of the campaigns targeting youth. These campaigns are mostly in the forms of sports, school camps, holiday camps, international youth day celebrations, and festivals.

Trainings are another common practice for youth campaigns. These are mostly in form of vocational trainings or leadership trainings as they are stated by the participants. The target groups can be students at secondary schools, universities, and colleges. These trainings aim at participants to learn a profession or hold a professional tracking for foreman training. Campaigns targeting youth on internships also exist in this category. 9.1 per cent of the unions who conduct youth campaigns use trainings as their campaign strategies.

Youth supports and youth engagement is another strategy for conducting youth campaigns (9.1%). These activities involve youth committee formation, mobilizing youth, leadership development, networking, organizing projects, and advocacy culture programs. Youth supports also involve activities of organizing young workers. The last category of youth campaigns is conducted as awareness rising or informing activities on social issues including immigration or human rights. This campaign strategy is less common (3.6%) than others.

**Figure 6.** Distribution of opinions on What has prevented the union to conduct a campaign targeting young workers



Those who do not organise campaigns targeting young workers, were asked the reasons for it. As indicated in the Figure 6 above, financial restrictions and lack of funding were stated as the main reason. Additionally, 34.5 per cent of the unions put forward financial issues as justification for not campaigning towards young workers. Conducting a general campaign for workers is seen as another reason for not organizing a specific youth campaign as 20.7 per cent of the respondents identify youth campaigns as unnecessary since they conduct one targeting all workers.

Moreover, COVID-19 pandemic is an expected reason for not conducting campaigns. This reason is stated by 17.2 per cent of the respondents. Negative perceptions of youth towards unions (such as being outdated), are also presented as a reason for not organizing a youth campaign. This was cited as a reason by the 10.3 per cent of the respondents.

Furthermore, insufficient experience in organizing campaigns is another fact of not organizing a youth campaign. While 6.9 per cent of the affiliates joined the survey indicated their low capacity for not organizing a youth campaign for young workers, the same number of unions said that conducting a youth campaign is not a priority in their agendas. Threats of employers towards workers can also be the obstacle against conducting a youth campaign as it is stated by the 3 per cent of the unions.

Besides these responses of the affiliates, it should be noted that the unions have no sufficient capacity to include new staff and tasks to their general agendas and often struggles with the possibility to protect young members from employers' negative attitude towards active and young members as they often have precarious contracts.

To sum up, youth campaigns are at the agenda of half of the affiliates who joined the youth survey. Through this finding, the number of the BWI affiliates who conduct campaigns targeting young workers, has been increased in years, even though campaigns targeting only young workers have still not become a priority of union agendas.

## Targeted recruitment campaigns

The survey shows that the dominant target of recruitment campaigns has been in a specific workplace, as indicated by the majority (75%) of the affiliates/respondents.

**Table 7.** Areas to conduct targeted recruitment campaigns for young workers

	Frequency (2020)	Valid Percentage % (2020)	Valid Percentage % (2013)
specific workplace/company	27	75.0	-
specific geographical area with union presence	12	33.3	64.5
specific profession with union presence	10	27.8	38.7
university campus	6	16.7	13.0
specific profession without union presence	6	16.7	16.1
specific geographical area without union presence	5	13.9	35.5

Specific geographical area with union presence is the other target of campaigns which is stated by the one third (33.3%) of the respondents. Targeting specific professions with union presence lost its share compared to 2013 as 27.8 per cent of the respondents stated this item as the target of their recruitment campaigns, while it was 38.7 per cent in 2013. The other less cited targets of the recruitment campaign include university campuses (16,7%), specific professions without union presence, and specific geographical areas without union presence (please see Table 7 above).

**Table 8.** Union's Intentions to conduct targeted recruitment campaigns for young workers

	Frequency	Valid Percentage
Belief in trade unions and its values	19	52.8
Lobbying of confederations/federations to influence government policies;	11	30.6
Employee financial assistance / bonuses (for sickness/hospitalisation, for death in the family, emergency situations, maternity, education, having a child, etc.)	7	19.4
Because majority of workers at the workplace are union members	6	16.7



When we look at the campaigns, most of them are about promoting belief in unions and their values (52.8%). This is an expected result since many of the respondents believe that the perceptions of young people towards unions are negative. It can be point out that unions design their campaigns to compensate for this perceived obstacle. Other main intentions of the campaigns are for lobbying of confederations/federations to influence government policies (30.6%), Employee financial assistance/bonuses (19.4%) is the reason why the majority of workers at the specific workplace are union members (16.7%) (please see Table 8 above).

Affiliates were also asked on unions' cooperation with other organizations in recruiting young workers or not.

**Table 9. Cooperation with other organizations**

	Frequency (2020)	Valid Percentage % (2020)	Valid Percentage % (2013)
Yes, with other organisations	30	46.9	71.4
Yes, with non-government organisations	19	29.7	31.0
Yes, with action groups for the unemployed	12	18.8	23.8
Yes, with student organisations	11	17.2	19.0
Yes, with youth section of political parties	5	7.8	21.4
Other	3	4.7	-
Not at all	21	32.8	-

As seen above in Table 9, 46.9 per cent of the respondents replied that they had cooperation with other organizations. This share was higher as 71.4 per cent in 2013. Almost 30 per cent of the affiliates cooperated with non-governmental organizations, while 18.8per cent with action groups for the unemployed, 17.2 per cent with student organizations, and 7.8 per cent with the youth section of political parties. Even though the respondents indicate that young people perceive unions to be associated with political parties, the responses show that the unions' cooperation level with political parties is low.

Affiliates were asked how effective they perceive the recruiting activities. Respondents scored each item on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means very ineffective and 5 means very effective. The results are compiled for those who have scored 4 and 5 (effective and very effective). The findings are shared below in comparison to 2013 data.

**Table 10.** Perceptions on the effectiveness of the recruiting activities (Percentage of the answers as Effective + Very effective)

	Valid Percentage % (2020)	Valid Percentage % (2013)
Providing further training	89.1	80.7
Using social media to recruit young	82.8	82.9
Providing special services for young workers	79.7	84.3
Establishing and maintaining informal networks of young workers	76.6	93.9
Young workers doing the recruitment or youth organising themselves	76.6	78.8
Helping young workers to apply for a job	68.8	75.0
Providing advice on career development	65.6	71.5
Providing a magazine or newsletter for young workers	51.6	73.2

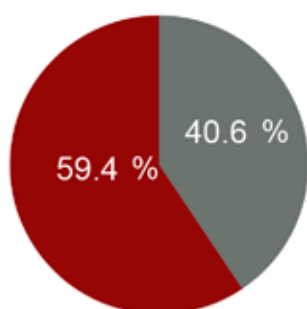
As indicated in Table 10 above, activities that were considered very effective or effective by the largest number of respondents include providing further training (89.1%) and using social media (82.8%). In 2013, establishing and maintaining informal networks of young workers and providing special services for young workers were seen as the most effective tools for recruiting activities. However, in 2020 fewer affiliates think so. Although they can still be considered effective, the share of the responses fell from 85-94 per cent to 76-79 per cent. Helping young workers to apply for a job (68.8%) and providing advice on career development (65.6%) are seen as the less effective tools compare to others. Providing a magazine or newsletter for young workers is no longer seen as an effective tool for recruiting activities towards youth. Only half of the affiliates believe it is effective.

## IV Youth Policy of the Unions

The survey aimed at understanding the extent of youth policy adopted by unions. Union representatives were asked several questions about whether they had a written youth policy, whether they included youth on their agenda, and whether they included issues related to young workers in their bargaining processes.

**Figure 7.** Percentage of the unions have a youth policy in their by-law/statutes

**Does your union by-law/statutes have a youth policy?**

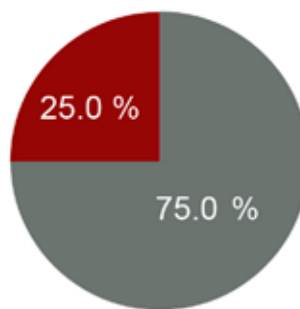


■ Yes ■ No

Base: 64

**Figure 8.** Percentage of unions who include youth agenda in their statutory meetings.

**Does your union's statutory meetings include youth in the agenda?**



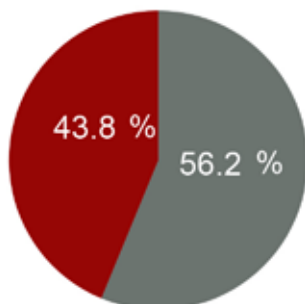
■ Yes ■ No

Base: 64

The survey revealed that 59.4 per cent of the affiliates who joined the survey, do not have a youth policy included in their by-laws or statutes (please see Figure 7 above). This finding can be considered as an indicator of the extent that unions' prioritisation level of youth official inclusion in union processes. According to the statements of the respondents, 75 per cent of the affiliates include youth work in their agenda at statutory meetings (please see Figure 8 above).

**Figure 9.** Percentage of unions who had negotiated on young workers' issues

**Has your union had negotiated on young workers' issues?**

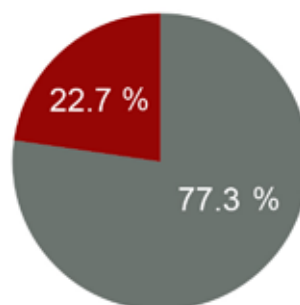


■ Yes ■ No

Base: 64

**Figure 10.** Percentage of Unions where youth committee/network/group is a recognized union constitutional structure

**Is the youth committee/network/group a recognised union constitutional structure?**



■ Yes ■ No

Base: 64

Besides, more than half of the unions (56.2%) have negotiated on young workers' issues (please see Figure 9 above). Moreover, 77.3 per cent of the respondents have a youth committee/network/group which is recognised as union's constitutional structure (please see Figure 10 above).

These findings show that only moderate number of affiliates have a youth policy to define areas to work on young workers' issues and to act on defending their rights. Despite they do not include specific clauses and items regarding youth policy in their by-laws and or statutes, the survey results pointed out that the majority of the respondent affiliates have formed officially recognised youth structure.

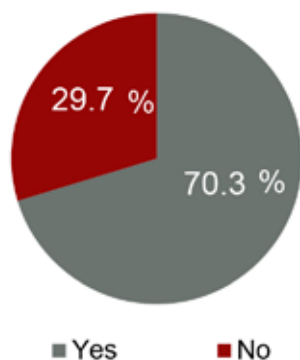
## Young workers in union structures of representation and leadership

In the scope of the survey, the main tools of youth involvement were aimed to be surveyed. To do so, the affiliates were asked about the presence of youth committee, activities for youth, and the engagement of youth in particular union activities.

Findings show that 70.3 per cent of the unions do have a youth committee, youth network, or a group at a national level (please see Figure 11 below). Interpreting this finding is tricky because depending on their country of residence each union has a different level and type of bodies and structures related to youth. However, this finding shows that more than 2 out of 3 unions are interested in forming such entities within their organizations.

**Figure 11.** Percentage of unions who have a Youth Committee/ Network/Group at national level

**Does your union have a Youth Committee/Network/Group at national level?**

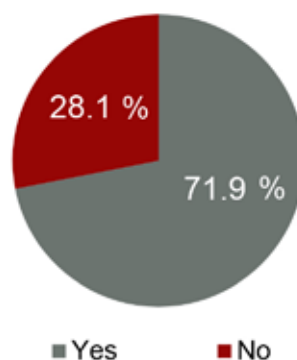


■ Yes ■ No

Base: 64

**Figure 12.** Percentage of unions where young workers included in the bargaining groups

**Are young workers included in the bargaining groups?**



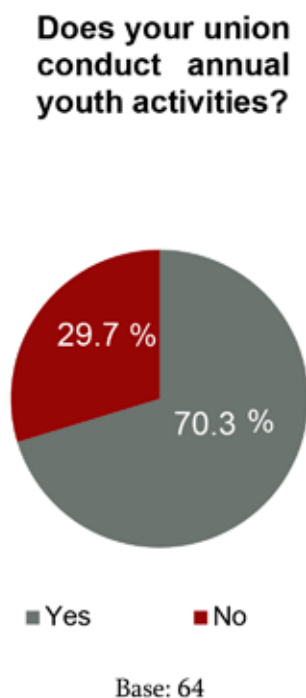
■ Yes ■ No

Base: 64

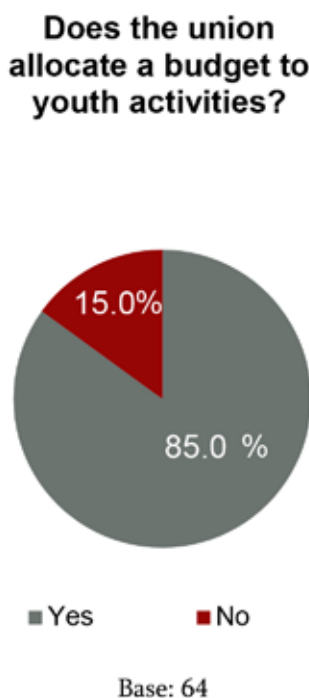
When it comes to bargaining, young workers were less involved. 2013 data show that only less than half (48.7%) of affiliates/respondents reported that young workers are always or often involved in bargaining. In 2020, 71.9 per cent of the affiliates stated that young workers were included in the bargaining groups (please see Figure 12 above). There is more information needed to understand the extent of this inclusion.



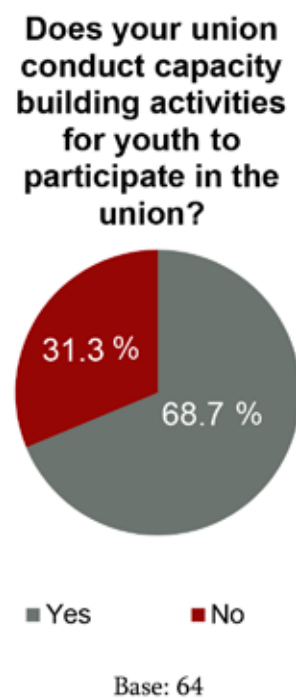
**Figure 13.** Percentage of unions who conduct annual youth activities



**Figure 14.** Percentage of unions who allocate a budget for youth activities

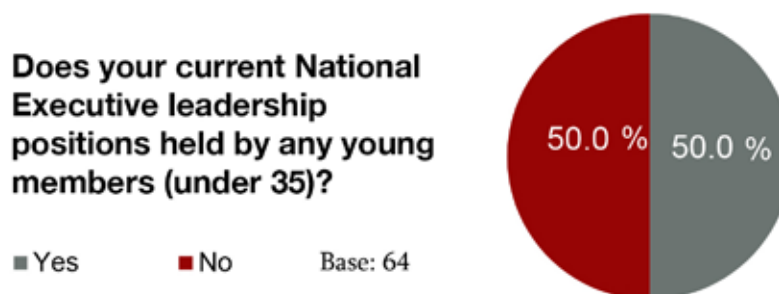


capacity building activities for youth to participate in the union



In terms of activities, 70.3 per cent of the respondents stated that their organizations conduct annual youth activities (please see Figure 13 above), as 85 per cent of them allocate a budget for those youth activities (please see Figure 14 above) and 68.7 per cent of them conduct capacity building activities for youth to participate in the union (please see Figure 15 above).

**Figure 16.** Percentage of unions who have young members (under 35) to hold National Executive leadership positions



On the issue of youth leadership, half of the respondents indicated that their current national executive leadership positions are held by young members who are under 35 (please see Figure 16 above). This can be interpreted as a bright and promising sign that young workers have been taking a higher level of leadership positions which will enhance unions' capacity to build sustainable management structure ensuring a future for the labour movement.

# Conclusion and Discussion

The main purpose of the BWI Global Youth Survey is to define the current state of the youth agenda in the eyes of its affiliates and to contribute to the youth agenda by revealing the current situation. Another aim of doing such a study is to make the youth agenda a priority for BWI affiliates, especially, to ensure that they recognise youth work and structures in their statutes and action plans. According to the survey findings, 70 per cent of the affiliates have a youth committee. However, having a youth committee is not enough to secure active youth engagement in union structures and actions. There is a need to develop a specific youth agenda and a youth-specific action plan and policy to ensure young workers active engagement. Therefore, with this research, the BWI aims to encourage its affiliates to fulfil the basic requirements to ensure effective youth participation at all levels.

The BWI defines the youth below the age of 35 as noted in the survey form. However, the findings remarks that the affiliates tend to use their own youth definition within different range of ages. Some of the respondents include members above 35 as youth mainly concerning their years of experience. This shows us the lack of a common definition of youth among unions.

Half of the respondents have an electronic membership system. However, it is understood that age data are recorded less than gender data. This shows that only some of the unions do classify their members based on their age and do able to extract information on number of young members as 28 per cent of unions do not have youth data. Overall, young workers still account for a small share of BWI's membership. Compared to 2013 data on young workers in BWI affiliates, youth membership remains low for the past eight years. When we look at the profile of young workers by gender, we see that men are in the majority. Also, looking at trades shows us that young workers are mostly in the construction area. So, when we talk about BWI's young members, we are still mainly referring to young men who are mostly working in the construction industry and blue-collar jobs.

It is reflected that the affiliates have general assumptions about young people's perceptions and motivations towards joining unions or not. The content and scope of campaigns targeting young workers are mostly based on these assumptions. In the view of the unions, young people perceive unions as structures with certain political engagement and 20 per cent of these unions stated this perception as the reason why young workers do not join a union. On the other hand,



the perception that unions should act independently and separately from politics is valid in the general attitude. In fact, the level of cooperation of affiliates with political parties is low as only 8 per cent of the respondents stated that they cooperated with youth organizations of the political parties. This rate was 21.4 per cent in 2013. This finding shows us that unions are reluctant to be seen as part of political parties.

Furthermore, the BWI affiliates still think the youth's limited knowledge about unionism is the major factor that prevents young workers to join a union. When we look at the figures, 81.3 per cent of the affiliates think that young people have limited knowledge about unionism, while it



was pretty similar to the responses of the 2013 survey (83.3%). However, we see that the unions' campaigns are generally on labour rights as mentioned below paragraph which arises the need to increase number of campaigns and trainings to raise young workers' awareness on unionism.

Campaigns are also based on the views reflecting how young people perceive unions. When we take a look at the main content of campaigns targeting youth, we see that the campaigns are mostly related to labour rights (27.3%) and to the aim of increasing membership (25.5%). Campaigns on occupational health and safety (14.5%) and

some youth-specific activities (10.9%) are other common contents of the existing campaigns. Youth-specific activities are mostly in the forms of sports, school camps, holiday camps, international youth day celebrations, and festivals.

According to the affiliates, the most effective recruiting activities are the ones providing further training (89.1%) and using social media to recruit young workers (82.8%). It shows that unions seek more digitalized and innovative ways to reach out to young people, particularly along with the impact of pandemic. We see that those who campaign for young people, try to reach out to young people with new methods by leaving the old ways. For instance, a magazine newsletter for young workers is seen as the least effective method. Only half of the affiliates believe it is effective in the survey of 2020 while in 2013, 73.2% were seen these tools as effective. Therefore, compared to 2013 data, it can be interpreted that unions lose interest in using magazines and newsletters to reach out to young workers within the last 8 years.

Perceived factors which can motivate young workers to join a union are pragmatic ones. Respondents believe that the major factors/reasons motivating young workers to join a union are improved working conditions (76.6%), accessing union-related education/training (67.2%), to attain some level of job security (64.1%), obtaining legal assistance on labour-related problems (62.5%) and gaining more benefits (60.9%). On the other hand, career consultancy (15.6%) and gaining access to unemployment insurance schemes (14.1%) are the factors perceived as less motivating for the youth. It was interesting to see that, within 8 years more affiliates began to perceive fear of losing job as the major determinant of young workers' avoidance to join a union. In 2020 70.3 per cent of the unions indicate this factor as the main reason why young workers do not join a union while it was 52 per cent in 2013.

Based on the findings, it should be noted that organizing recruitment campaigns targeting young workers cannot be identified as a common practice as 43.8 per cent of unions have not organized such campaigns. One of the major reasons for not conducting a youth campaign is shown as the difficulty based on financial issues (34.5%). The preference of running general campaigns targeting all workers (20.7%) is another major factor for not conducting a youth





campaign. This finding shows that campaigns targeting only youth are seen as non-essential by the affiliates. Even 7 per cent of the respondent explicitly stated such campaigns as not a priority. General campaigning is considered sufficient to reach out to and recruit all workers. However, young people should particularly be determined as a target audience to be reached out efficiently.

As it is expected COVID-19 pandemic (17.2%) was another reason of not conducting youth campaigns. Along with the financial shortages, the low capacity of the unions is another factor that prevents unions to conduct a campaign targeting young workers. In this sense, continuation of capacity-building activities to support unions are seen as a necessity.

We see that youth initiatives are workplace specific. The survey shows that the major target of recruitment campaigns has been focused on a specific workplace (75%). There are also school visits, but these are the activities conducted less. Training-focused youth campaigns in schools and universities are conducted by 9 per cent of the affiliates. It is recommended to conduct campaigns targeting potential young people who will become a workforce in the future. However, the representation of reaching out to the schools is low. Unions are expected to change the perceptions of young people towards trade unions as early as possible. Campaigns targeting youth are expected to direct young people towards unions by creating their dynamics. On the other hand, unions are expected to make room for young people. We expect the young people participating in the training to join the unions in the future and embrace the youth agenda within the unions. In this respect, youth campaigns for schools are significant.

When we look at the youth policies of and youth representation within the affiliates, the framework we encounter is as follows:

Even though youth representation is mostly not secured by union by-laws, it is possible to talk about the presence of active youth networks. The survey revealed that 59.4 per cent of the respondents do not have a youth policy officially involved in by-laws or statutes. On the other hand, according to the statements of respondents, 75 per cent of the unions include youth in their agenda at statutory meetings. Furthermore, 70.3 per cent of the unions do have a youth structure such as a youth committee, youth network, or a group at a national level. These findings

can be considered as an indicator that unions should be encouraged to prioritise and to officially realise youth structures to empower youth work.

Participation of young people in bargaining groups is relatively high as 72 per cent of the respondents stated that young people participate in these processes. At this point, it is worth remembering the intensity of Latin American unions and the unions from construction industry participating in the survey. This finding can be explained by the weight of these unions, where the representation of young people is high. In this respect, it is necessary to make a more detailed study on participation of young workers in the bargaining groups.

Moreover, 85 per cent of the respondents stated that they allocate budgets for youth activities. However, the high rate of this ratio suggests that unions transfer resources to young people from a budget rather than a specific youth budget which is more of an activity-based resource transfer. It is possible to say that they allocate a budget, when necessary, in cases of conducting trainings for young people, communication activities for young people or sending young workers to trainings. However, this does not provide information that a special budget has solely been allocated to young workers' activities. It is necessary to define these dynamics by conducting qualitative research on this subject.

When it comes to “youth activity”, affiliates were asked whether they are developing the capacity building activities for young workers. In this, 70.3 per cent of the respondents stated that their organizations conduct annual youth activities, while 68.7 per cent of them conduct capacity-building activities for youth to participate in union structures. These proportions are very close to each other. This shows that unions do not differentiate activities aimed at young people in a detailed manner. Therefore, there is a need to understand the definitions of youth activity more thoroughly. Because it is as simple as for the affiliates that, if they have young participants, the activity might be considered as a youth activity.

In the issue of youth leadership, half of the unions stated that their current national executive leadership positions are held by young members who are under 35. When it was asked whether there are young workers on the board of directors of the union, we see that the union







representatives pointed the youth secretaries and those who lead the youth committee, regardless of whether they are board members or not. Therefore, it is possible to evaluate that this rate seems high. In addition, when we look at the shared profile of the young leaders of the unions, we see that the affiliates include members a little over the age of 35 in some cases.

This research shows us that there is still no consensus on the definition of youth. Although in the context of the research the youth is specified under the 35-year-olds, some of the affiliates tended to use their own definition. It is possible to say that the definition of youth by unions overlaps with the perception of youth in respective societies. At the country level, the socio-demographics of the population also affects the definition as in countries with relatively high level of young population, union members are also young. Moreover, years of experience is one of the factors that define the definition of youth. To find out more on this, a further study is required for understanding the dynamics behind this perception in each BWI region.

To summarise, the BWI has been encouraging its affiliates to increase their attention on youth work by establishing official regional and international youth committees, by conducting youth-specific activities and actions and by creating platforms to amplify young workers' voices. The BWI young members began leading several global events and actions to build insights to raise their problems and demands and to involve in discussions to further the BWI youth work by suggesting innovative ways. However, as it is reflected by the survey's findings, BWI should continue its support and engagement with affiliates to enhance their youth policies, to ensure the active participation of young people within union structures, and to prioritise youth work. Affiliates should be reminded that creating a specific youth agenda should become a common practice. It should be noted that, the BWI should continue building platforms and conducting capacity building activities and trainings at all levels for young workers who should also come together and interact among themselves and put pressure on the unions to prompt them to have a space to voice their demands and to make them reconsider about their structures and future.

# Appendix

## Unions by Country

Country	Count	Column Valid N %	Country	Count	Column Valid N %
Brazil	6	%9,4	El Salvador	1	%1,6
Malaysia	4	%6,3	Finland	1	%1,6
Zimbabwe	2	%3,1	France	1	%1,6
Turkey	2	%3,1	Gabon	1	%1,6
Rwanda	2	%3,1	Germany	1	%1,6
Nepal	2	%3,1	Guatemala	1	%1,6
Moldova	2	%3,1	Israel	1	%1,6
Kenya	2	%3,1	Italy	1	%1,6
India	2	%3,1	Kyrgyzstan	1	%1,6
Ghana	2	%3,1	Macedonia	1	%1,6
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2	%3,1	Mauritius	1	%1,6
Argentina	2	%3,1	Montenegro	1	%1,6
Austria	1	%1,6	Myanmar	1	%1,6
Azerbaijan	1	%1,6	Namibia	1	%1,6
Bangladesh	1	%1,6	North Macedonia	1	%1,6
Belgium	1	%1,6	Panama	1	%1,6
Bermuda	1	%1,6	Peru	1	%1,6
Burkina Faso	1	%1,6	Serbia	1	%1,6
Cambodia	1	%1,6	Spain	1	%1,6
Colombia	1	%1,6	Sweden	1	%1,6
Costa Rica	1	%1,6	Switzerland	1	%1,6
Croatia	1	%1,6	Tanzania	1	%1,6
Dominican Republic	1	%1,6	Uganda	1	%1,6
			Total	64	%100,0

#### Unions by Year Founded

Year Founded	Frequency	Valid Percentage %
1980 and before	23	42.6%
1981-2000	18	33.3%
After 2001	13	24.1%
Total	54	100.0%

#### Unions by Year Since the Establishment

Year since the union founded	Frequency	Valid Percentage %
Less than 20 years	12	22.2%
20-50 years	23	42.6%
More than 50 years	19	35.2%
Total	54	100.0%



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**Building Youth Power in BWI Affiliates**  
**BWI Youth Research Paper 2020**

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