

## **Unions and Union Membership in New Zealand – report on 2017 Survey**

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This report looks at the state of unions and union membership at 31 December 2017. Since 1991, the Centre for Labour, Employment and Work (formerly Industrial Relations Centre) at Victoria University of Wellington has collected data on union membership. When the Employment Contracts Act 1991 (ECA) ended the practice of union registration, it not only removed the distinct legal status of trade unions, but it also ended the official collection of data on trade union membership. In the absence of official data, the Industrial Relations Centre commenced undertaking a voluntary survey of trade unions. The first of these surveys was run in December 1991, and we have continued to collect union membership data each year since that time.

Neither union membership nor union density has come close to approaching their pre-1991 levels since enactment of the ECA in May of that year. While unions in most of the industrialised world suffered declines, the plunge in union membership and density experienced in New Zealand in the first few years of the ECA 1991 was far more pronounced than in virtually any other OECD member country. In the decade following enactment of the Employment Relations Act in October 2000 (ERA), union membership numbers increased by more than 21 percent, despite the 2007/08 global financial crisis. Yet, because total employment grew at virtually the same pace as union membership, union density stagnated over that period. Moreover, since December 2010, both union membership and density have both declined, by 6.4% and 21.3% respectively.

### **CLEW's Union Membership Surveys**

CLEW's union membership survey is distributed to all registered trade unions in New Zealand in February/March each year. Notwithstanding their voluntary status, our union membership surveys have always had a high compliance rate. In addition to aggregate membership, those surveys ask respondents to provide a breakdown of the union's membership (as a percentage) by gender, ethnicity and two-digit ANZSIC industry, as well as NZCTU affiliation status, as at 31 December of the previous year. CLEW asks respondents to its survey to account for their 'total financial membership', whereas MBIE asks only for 'total membership' by one-digit ANZSIC industry and for this to be broken down simply by gender.

At November 2018, the time of initial processing of CLEW's latest union membership survey, 75 unions had returned completed surveys to CLEW. Union membership data for a further 26 registered unions was sourced from the Registrar of Unions (the Registrar). All unions have a statutory obligation to

submit a return to the Registrar by 1 June each year of their membership numbers at 1 March in that year.

As at 30 November 2018, 15 registered trade unions had not submitted a return for 2017 to the Registrar or to CLEW, hence the membership tallies for these unions for the year ending 31 December 2017 are unknown. Two of those unions are known to have merged to a larger union and their numbers counted in the data for those unions. Those unions have possibly not been formally wound up and remain registered for the Registrar's purposes. The remaining thirteen unions for which we have no current membership data reported a total membership of 758 as at December 2016. While we expect that this has not changed significantly in 2017, that data has not been included in the data reported here.

For the purposes of interpreting our data it is important to note the following:

1. One union in education and training changed the way it categorises 'membership' for the purposes CLEW's survey in 2014. That union now includes only financial members in their survey return, whereas prior to 2014 included other categories of membership – student members and 'suspended' memberships – in its tally. This change in practice resulted in an apparent reduction of close to 5000 members in CLEW's accounting for December 2014.
2. Across the 40 unions for which membership data was sourced from the Registrar, the distribution of total membership across industries has been estimated from past survey returns or assumptions based on the industry coverage area(s) included in the Registrar's information.<sup>1</sup>
3. Where unions did not allocate 100% of their membership to an industry or where no industry was indicated on the union membership return to CLEW, those membership numbers have been added to the category 'no industry'.

### **Total union membership**

Total membership of unions as at December 2017 stands at to 361,660. The steady downward trend in union membership since 2010 appears to have reversed, what with total union membership increasing by just over one percent since December 2016 (Table 1 and Figure 1). This is the highest level of union membership since December 2013.

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.societies.govt.nz/cms/registered-unions/register-of-unions>.

**Table 1: Trade Unions, Membership and Union Density 1991-2017**

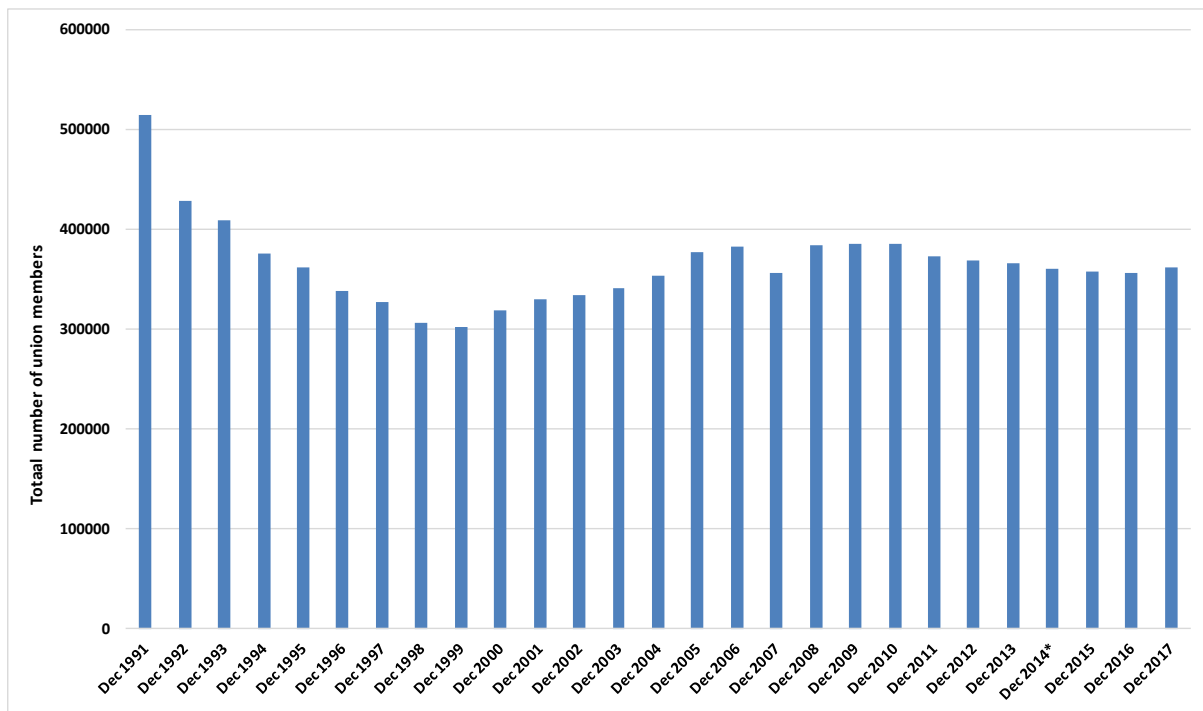
Year	Union membership <sup>1</sup>	Number of unions	Potential union membership		Union Density	
			Total employed labour force <sup>2</sup>	Paid Employees <sup>3</sup>	(1) / (3) %	(1) / (4) %
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<b>Dec 1991</b>	514325	66	1509400	1199000	34.1	42.9
<b>Dec 1992</b>	428160	58	1514200	1190500	28.3	36.0
<b>Dec 1993</b>	409112	67	1545400	1215300	26.5	33.7
<b>Dec 1994</b>	375906	82	1612000	1269600	23.3	29.6
<b>Dec 1995</b>	362200	82	1686600	1331700	21.5	27.2
<b>Dec 1996</b>	338967	83	1741200	1375100	19.5	24.7
<b>Dec 1997</b>	327800	80	1750600	1401700	18.7	23.4
<b>Dec 1998</b>	306687	83	1739300	1387000	17.6	22.1
<b>Dec 1999</b>	302405	82	1766400	1395600	17.1	21.7
<b>Dec 2000</b>	318519	134	1800000	1425200	17.7	22.3
<b>Dec 2001</b>	329919	165	1846100	1482200	17.9	22.3
<b>Dec 2002</b>	334783	174	1906500	1540100	17.6	21.7
<b>Dec 2003</b>	341631	181	1955900	1579700	17.5	21.6
<b>Dec 2004</b>	354058	170	2024100	1637900	17.5	21.6
<b>Dec 2005</b>	377348	175	2084800	1702100	18.1	22.2
<b>Dec 2006</b>	382538	166	2134700	1759700	17.9	21.7
<b>Dec 2007</b>	356439	147	2173000	1792000	16.4	19.9
<b>Dec 2008</b>	384777	141	2175900	1798000	17.7	21.4
<b>Dec 2009</b>	385280	145	2147000	1791800	17.9	21.5
<b>Dec 2010</b>	386276	145	2156600	1804100	17.9	21.4
<b>Dec 2011</b>	372891	134	2188200	1819100	17.0	20.5
<b>Dec 2012</b>	369200	133	2183500	1817000	16.9	20.3
<b>Dec 2013</b>	365927	126	2226900	1881400	16.4	19.4
<b>Dec 2014*</b>	361419	125	2305300	1951600	15.7	18.5
<b>Dec 2015</b>	358633	121	2357000	2005400	15.2	17.9
<b>Dec 2016</b>	357153	117	2465500	2021900	14.5	17.7
<b>Dec 2017</b>	361660	101	2567800	2088000	14.1	17.3

Source: <sup>1</sup>Centre for Labour, Employment and Work Survey 2017; <sup>2</sup>HLFS - Employed Persons, Full & part-time Status by Sex (Annual-Dec) Table reference: HLF025AA; <sup>3</sup>Persons Employed by Employment Status by Industry, ANZSIC06 (Annual-Dec) Table reference HLF196AA.

Notes: \*A change in union membership accounting for one union decreased membership by close to 5000 compared with previous years.

Following a period of expansion from the end of 1999 to December 2006 (Figure 1) during which union membership increased 26.5 percent, membership in unions effectively levelled off over the next four years, with a minimal 1 percent growth across the period. A small but incremental annual decline in union membership of around 7.5 percent occurred in the six years between December 2010 and December 2016. Nevertheless, with 1.3 percent growth in union membership in the year to December 2017, that trend appears to have been arrested.

**Figure 1: Trend in total union membership, 1991-2017**



Source: Industrial Relations Centre/Centre for Labour, Employment and Work Union Membership Surveys 1991-2017.

Despite the growth in union membership in the last year, the number of registered unions has continued to fall. Following the introduction of the ERA in October 2000, which allows only registered unions to negotiate collective employment agreements, many 'in-house' unions and staff associations set up to manage the bargaining for collective employment contracts under the ECA sought registration as a union. Hence, by the end of 2003, when all agreements settled under the ECA had to have been replaced, the number of registered unions swelled from a starting point of 82 in 1999 to 181 four years later.

Many of those small, employer-based unions have ceased operating or have not complied with requirements of the ERA to lodge an annual return to the Registrar and have been deregistered. Moreover, as both employment and union membership have declined in some parts of the labour market over the past decade, a number of unions have merged or have been absorbed by larger, more sustainable unions, resulting in a reduction in the number of registered unions. As at December 2017, there were 116 registered unions in New Zealand, down from 117 the previous year and 121 in the 2015 year.

### **Industry Spread of trade union membership**

As shown in Table 2, close to two-thirds of total union membership in New Zealand works in public and community services, which includes health care and social assistance, education and training and public administration and safety. Close to 30 percent of union members work in health care and social assistance, and just over a fifth work in education and training. Public administration and safety ranks fourth in terms of union membership, just behind manufacturing. Although the latter two groups have experienced a drop in union membership in the past two years, the substantial increase in union membership in health care and social assistance over that period accounts for the overall increase in membership in unions in the wider public sector between December 2015 and December 2017.

Apart from the health care and social assistance, manufacturing and arts, recreation and other services have experienced the largest increases in union membership in the past twelve months. Currently, there are 46,630 union members working in the manufacturing sector, compared to 45,165 in 2016, but less than the 47,906 in 2015. Although this may, to some extent, reflect variability in the way their unions classify them, it now appears that 10,709 union members work in arts, recreation and other services, compared with 8,408 in 2016. That is, as a result of their being employed in local or central government facilities, many of those working in libraries and recreation services may previously have been identified as working in public administration and safety, an industry group in which union membership appears to have dropped substantially in the last year.

Outside of the public sector and community service industries and manufacturing, union membership remains highest in transport, postal and warehousing, although this industry group continues to experience declining numbers of union members, as it has over the past three years. Along with manufacturing, this industry group comprises the traditional stronghold of union organisation in the private sector. Despite a slight increase in union membership in the year to December 2017, manufacturing as a whole has experienced a decline of 40.4 percent in union membership since its peak of 78,187 in December 2005, with most of that drop occurring between 2005 and 2011. Although manufacturing employment has also fallen over that period, union membership has fallen at a more precipitous rate, hence resulting in union density dropping from 31 percent in December 2005 to 21 percent in December 2017.

Despite these declines in some parts of the labour market, union membership has increased over the past two years in the primary industries (66 percent), albeit off a low base, information, media and communications (13.4 percent), the arts and recreation services (6.6 percent) and health care and social assistance (4.3 percent). Nevertheless, in electricity, gas, water and waste services, wholesale trade, and property services, all of which have witnessed growth in the number of jobs over the past year, union membership has either declined or increased only minimally.

**Table 2: Distribution of union members and employees across industry sectors at December 2017**

Industry grouping	Union membership in 2017	Union membership in 2016	Change in membership 2016/2017 (No.)	Change in membership 2016/2017 (%)	Change in employees 2016/2017 (%)	Paid employees 2017 (000)	Paid Employees 2016 (000)
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	1955	1755	200	11.4%	-4.2%	86.7	90.5
Mining	1184	1170	14	1.2%	-2.3%	4.2	4.3
Manufacturing	46630	45165	1465	3.2%	3.3%	222.7	215.5
Electricity, gas, water and waste services	2907	3774	-867	-23.0%	10.9%	21.3	19.2
Construction	5491	6043	-552	-9.1%	5.8%	165.0	156.0
Wholesale trade	592	560	32	5.7%	8.2%	101.6	93.9
Retail trade and accomodation	19855	19357	498	2.6%	1.5%	330.5	325.7
Transport, postal and warehousing	31933	32527	-594	-1.8%	6.2%	92.5	87.1
Information media and telecommunications	3067	2704	363	13.4%	-0.3%	34.9	35.0
Financial and insurance services	3730	3929	-199	-5.1%	2.2%	65.6	64.2
Rental, hiring and real estate services	217	213	4	1.9%	14.7%	29.6	25.8
Prof'l, scientific, technical, administrative and support services	6109	6040	69	1.1%	4.9%	223.7	213.2
Arts, recreation and other services	10709	8408	2301	27.4%	-3.4%	103.9	107.6
Public and community services	227281	225472	1809	0.8%	-4.4%	546.3	571.2
<i>Public Administration and Safety</i>	44961	47166	-2205	-4.7%	6.4%	140.6	132.1
<i>Education and Training</i> <sup>1</sup>	75402	75761	-359	-0.5%	4.5%	214.5	205.3
<i>Health Care and Social Assistance</i>	106918	102545	4373	4.3%	-0.3%	233	233.8
<i>No industry</i> <sup>2</sup>		36	-36	-100.0%		17.7	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>361660</b>	<b>357153</b>	<b>4507</b>	<b>1.3%</b>	<b>3.3%</b>	<b>2088.0</b>	<b>2021.9</b>

Source: Persons Employed by Employment Status by Industry, ANZSIC06 (Annual-Dec), 2016 and 2017, Table reference HLF196AA.;

Centre for Labour, Employment and Work Union Survey 2016 and 2017.

Note: <sup>1</sup> The large decrease in membership in 2014 is largely a result of one Union changing the way in which they categorise 'membership' so that only 'full' members are reported.

<sup>2</sup> Union Members not allocated to particular industries on the Union Survey return

## **Union density**

Union density in New Zealand continues to slowly decline and at 31 December 2017 sits at 17.3 percent of all paid employees, which compares to the 17.7 we reported last year and the 17.9 percent in 2015. This year's figure marks a continuation of the downward trend since the 2008/09 global financial crisis. Both total union membership and union density are higher in the public sector than in the private sector. Three-fifths of employees in public sector belonging to a union, but only one-in-10 in the private sector is a union member.

Notwithstanding that the number of employees in the sector who are union members has increased by 5.6 percent, because employment growth has outstripped that in union membership over that period, public sector union density dropped since December 2008. In particular, the share of paid employees who are union members has declined substantially in both public administration and safety and education and training over the last decade. In 2008, with nearly 85,000 union members, education and training was the only industry group where union density exceeded fifty percent. Currently, there are 75,402 union members working in education and training, and union density stands at just 35.2 percent, down from 75,761 and 36.9 percent in 2016. At 45.9 percent, union density in health care and social assistance far exceeds that in education and training. Across the whole of public and community services, while union membership increased from 218,575 to 227,281, union density fell from 49.3 percent 41.6 percent between December 2008 and December 2017.

The only private sector industry group where union density approaches that in the public sector is transport, postal and warehousing, where union density currently stands at 34.5 percent. One reason for this is perhaps that, what with a large public transport sector and publicly owned postal and courier services, there was in the past a strong public sector component to this part of the private sector. Union density in this industry group has declined since December 2011 when it sat at 40.7 percent. Currently, union density in transport, postal and warehousing sits at 34.5 percent.

Mining (28.2 percent), manufacturing (20.9 percent), and utilities services (13.6 percent), the latter group also having had a strong public-sector history, are the only other areas of the private sector where union density is greater than one in ten. Nevertheless, these industries have experienced a decline in union density in the last five years. Yet, union density in the utilities services – electricity, gas, water and waste services – has fallen by 15 percentage points since 2011. Union density in manufacturing, though, has decreased only slightly in this time, suggesting a stabilisation at the 20-22 percent level.

## **Union membership in the public and private sectors (Table 5)**

Union density is on the decline in both the public and private sector in most English-speaking countries, with Canada being the one exception. Currently, although ahead of the US and Australia, New Zealand's overall union density lags that in Canada and the UK. At the end of 2005, more than one-fifth of paid employees in New Zealand belonged to a union. Although varying a bit around that level, overall union density remained constant at 20 percent through to 2010, higher than that in Australia (18 percent) and the US (12 percent) but lower than in the UK (27 percent) and Canada (30 percent). Currently, while just under a quarter of employees in the UK and three-in-ten employees in Canada are union members, union density

levels in both New Zealand and Australia have fallen to well below their 2010 levels, with New Zealand’s union density sitting at 17.3 percent and Australia’s at 15.5 percent. In those countries having experienced declining union densities over the past seven years, this has occurred in both the public and private sectors, although more so in the latter.

**Table 5: Public/private sector union density – international comparisons 2017**

Country	Union density	Public sector	Private sector
New Zealand <sup>1</sup>	17.3%*	59.5%	10.3%
Australia <sup>2</sup>	15.5%	38.0%	9.0%
UK <sup>3</sup>	23.2%	51.8%	13.5%
USA <sup>4</sup>	10.7%	34.4%	6.4%
Canada <sup>5</sup>	30.4%	75.5%	16.4%

<sup>1</sup>Statistics NZ, QES, Table Filled Jobs by Sector by Status in Employment (Qrtly-Mar/Jun/Sep/Dec) 2017Q4 Table reference: QEX018AA; Centre for Labour, Employment and Work Survey 2017;

<sup>2</sup>Australian Bureau of Statistics, 6333.0, Characteristics of Employment, Australia, August 2018. Sector data - Australian Bureau of Statistics, 6333.0 Characteristics of Employment, Australia, August 2016.

<sup>3</sup>Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (May 2017), *Trade Union Membership 2017, Statistical Bulletin*

<sup>4</sup>United States Department of Labour, Bureau of Labour Statistics, News Release: Union Members 2016, 26 Jan 2017

<sup>5</sup>Statistics Canada, Table 14-10-0070-01: Union coverage by industry, annual (x1000), 2017.

\*NOTE The denominator used to calculate overall union density in New Zealand is ‘paid employees’, rather than ‘filled jobs’.

Underscoring the fact that union membership in New Zealand – much like in most other OECD countries – remains primarily a public-sector phenomenon, 60 percent of wage-and- salary employees in the country’s public sector currently belong to a trade union, while only 10 percent of private sector employees are unionised. Public sector union density, while much lower than the 70 percent in 2011, has remained reasonably consistent in the last four years. Whereas union density in the private sector experienced a gradual decline between 2011 and 2015, this appears to have rebounded slightly in the past two years and now sits at just over 10 percent.

The higher level of union density in the public sector is common across the four comparator countries<sup>2</sup> to which we refer in Table 5. In Australia, while public sector density declined only slightly to 38 per cent over that period, the share of employees that are union members in the private sector fell from 11.1 percent to 9.3 percent between 2015 and 2016. Among this group, with more than three quarters of such employees belonging to a union, Canada has the highest concentration of union members in the public sector. Nevertheless, none of those countries that we monitor currently has private sector union membership greater than 20 percent, and in all but New Zealand, union density has declined across the private sector in the past two years.

<sup>2</sup> We were unable to locate sector data on union membership for Australia in 2017.



## Size of Unions

Table 6 breaks down union membership according to union size. It appears very little has changed in the last 12 months, and the distribution of membership across the four size categories remains much the same as in the year to December 2015. Given the omission of currently registered unions which have not submitted a membership return, all of which fell into the 'under 1000 members' category in 2016, it is surprisingly that the total number of union members included in that category has increased in the past year. Nonetheless, close to half of the 75 unions in this category recorded an increase in membership in the year to December 2017, albeit many of those unions added fewer than 10 members in that time.

At the other end of the scale, unions with a membership greater than 10,000 have also increased in average size, adding a total of 1.9 percent or 5100 members since the end of 2016. There are, however, fewer unions with membership of 1000-4999. This, though is not surprising in light of the fact that it is this category that has experienced the largest decline in union membership numbers in recent years, largely a result of union amalgamation.

**Table 6: Membership by union size 1991 – 2017, selected years**

Membership range	Dec 1991			Dec 1999			Dec 2005			Dec 2015			Dec 2017		
	#	Members	%	#	Members	%	#	Members	%	#	Members	%	#	Members	%
Under 1000	4	2750	1	48	12703	4	140	19436	5	89	14803	4	75	15706	4
1000 - 4999	39	87119	17	22	43709	14	23	56801	15	21	48319	13	16	42915	12
5000 - 9999	9	76489	15	3	19669	7	4	30050	8	3	23888	7	3	24223	7
10000+	14	347967	68	9	226324	75	8	271061	72	8	271623	76	8	278818	77
<b>Totals</b>	66	514325		82	302405		175	377348		121	358663		102	361662	
<b>Av. Size</b>		7793			3688			2156			3014			3546	

Source: Industrial Relations Centre Surveys 1991, 1999, and 2005; Centre for Labour Employment and Work Survey 2015 and 2017.

In December 2005, 80 percent of the unions surveyed had a membership of less than 1000 and 68 percent had a membership of less than 200. This year's survey suggests the number of unions with less than 1000 members has dropped to just 75 or 4 percent of total union membership in New Zealand. We also find, though, that 77 percent of union members belong to a union with greater than 10,000 members. Among the 8 unions in this size category, four have less than 30,000 members and four boast a membership of more than 40,000.

Despite the significant number of relatively small unions and increasing proportion of union members in New Zealand belong to one of eleven unions. This now sits at 84 percent and suggests that the vast majority of employees who belong to a union in this country are members of unions with a solid membership base and which are likely to be well-resourced organisations. As would be expected from the earlier discussion of dominance of the public sector with regard to union membership, of the four unions with a membership greater than 40,000 members, only one is in the private sector.

In the last ten years, there has been very little change in the number of unions with 10,000 or more members. There has been a consistent eight or nine unions in this category. Some larger unions have amalgamated in recent years. Also, while some in the public sector have experienced growth in membership, most large private sector unions have experienced a considerable decline in membership over that period. The amalgamation of the Service and Food Workers Union (SFWU) and the NZ Engineering Printing and Manufacturing Union

(EPMU), in particular, has created the largest private sector union, membership in E tū is much less than that of the combined membership of the SFWU and the EPMU ten years ago.

## Gender

The gender composition of union membership has remained at a similar level over the last six years and a majority of union members in New Zealand (59.7 percent) are female. This is not surprising when we see that female membership is largely concentrated (59.5%) in the three large state sector unions – the Public Service Association, the NZ Nurses Organisation (NZNO) and NZEI (primary teachers union).

**Table 7: Female union membership 2004-2017, selected years**

Year	% Female
2004	52.0
2006	54.9
2008	55.3
2011	58.8
2012	57.0
2013	57.8
2014	57.6
2015	58.8
2016	59.0
2017	59.7

Source: Industrial Relations Centre Surveys, selected years 2004 to 2012. Centre for Labour, Employment and Work Survey 2013 to 2017

Nevertheless, in addition, smaller unions tend to have higher male membership. Only twenty-seven of the sixty-six unions who returned their union membership survey and with less than 500 members have a majority of female members, and only 42 percent of the total membership in unions with less than 500 members is female. In contrast, seven of the eleven unions with more than 5000 members have a majority of female members and 64 percent of the total membership of these unions is female.

## NZ Council of Trade Unions (NZCTU) affiliation

The proportion of union members who belong to unions affiliated to the NZ Council of Trade Unions has varied only slightly in the last 15 years, but has fallen consistently from a high of 90 percent of union members in 2010 to 87 percent at December 2017 (Table 8).

The number of unions affiliated to the NZCTU remains at twenty-five but there has been a nine percent increase in the total number of union members in NZCTU affiliated unions. This increase follows a prolonged period – 2010 to 2016 - of continued decline in total membership for NZCTU affiliates but has not been sufficient to arrest the continued decline in the proportion of union members who are affiliated to the NZCTU by way of their union.

Of the 75 unions with less than 1000 members only nine are affiliated to the NZCTU. With the exception of one union, all the unions with membership over 5000 (a total of 11 unions) are affiliated to the CTU.

**Table 8: NZCTU affiliation 1991 – 2017**

Year	NZCTU Affiliate unions	Members	Percentage of total m'ship in CTU affiliates
1991	43	445116	86.5
1992	33	339261	79.2
1993	33	321119	75.8
1994	27	296959	78.9
1995	25	284383	78.5
1996	22	278463	82.2
1997	20	253578	77.4
1998	19	238262	77.7
1999	19	235744	78.0
2000	26	273570	85.9
2001	32	289732	87.8
2002	34	293466	87.7
2003	36	297440	87.1
2004	38	310451	87.7
2005	37	333395	88.4
2006	39	340281	88.9
2007	38	330130	89.0
2008	37	343017	89.4
2009	41	341637	89.4
2010	39	347453	90.0
2011	34	333956	89.6
2012	35	326753	89.6
2013	36	325412	88.9
2014	34	315927	87.6
2015	28	313315	87.4
2016	25	311570	87.5
2017	25	314466	87.0

Source: Industrial Relations Centre Surveys 1991- 2012; Centre for Labour Employment and Work Survey 2013 to 2017.

One strategy to address decline in unions has been to build stronger better resourced unions through amalgamation. This has primarily occurred amongst NZCTU affiliated unions and it seems that future amalgamations are unlikely to impact small unions. That is, it will likely be the mid-sized and larger unions which look to amalgamate.

## Conclusion

As we noted in earlier reports, the challenge for the NZCTU and all unions is to maintain a level of union density that supports collective bargaining and the advantages this brings for wages and conditions of work. But recent research suggests that the consequences of a decline in

union density and collective bargaining are not limited to unions and their members but impact broadly by increasing inequality and social disparity (Lee and Sobeck, 2012) and slowing growth overall. (Onaran et al, 2015)

To this end it is concerning that while total union membership has increased slightly in the past year, union density has continued to decline in the last ten years, apart from a slight rise during the global financial crisis (2008 and 2009) when the number of persons employed dropped. Of particular note is the very low levels of union density in key employment industries in the private sector such as retail and accommodation, agriculture, forestry and fishing, and business services, most of which have low average wages and/or high levels of casualization of employment. In the private sector only transport, postal and warehousing along with manufacturing and mining have reasonably high levels of union density but in the case of the latter both a low employment base and reducing levels of employment.

The public sector remains the stronghold for union membership in New Zealand as in other countries and health care and social assistance is a key industry for growth in union membership. This is likely due to the increase in employment in aged-care facilities and home-based care.

So while the Employment Relations Act 2000 was an attempt support union organisation and the role of unions in collective bargaining, as commented earlier, the damage done to these important institutions in the 1990's under the Employment Contracts Act, when the government moved away from a centralised bargaining system to one focused on enterprise bargaining, appears to be irreversible by union action alone.

## **References**

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