Bachelor Thesis

Young and Precarious – The Unionization of Young Workers across Europe

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Abstract

While studies have addressed the decline of trade unionism among young workers for several decades now, it rarely has been researched regarding precarity. The thesis explores the age-related gaps in trade union membership across European countries, by paying specific attention to the way employment precariousness impacts the union membership rates of young workers. This way a specific knowledge gap in the literature on trade unions is addressed. With micro-level data from the European Social Survey from 2018, a twofold question is asked. (a) To what extent is there an age gap between young and old workers in trade union membership in European countries, and (b) to what extent can this age-gap be explained by differences between young and old workers regarding precariousness of their working conditions? The results show that a sizable age-gap regarding membership exists in nearly all included countries. Furthermore, it is identified that the age-gap cannot be explained by accounting for employment precariousness.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Context

After the Second World War, Western trade unions grew substantially in size and influence. They became highly institutionalized political and economic stakeholders organized around their model of collective bargaining or collective action. With the ongoing erosion of the "Standard Employment Relationship" (SER) a rise in precarious, temporal, and informal labor was enabled. This has grave implications for labor movements and trade unions of "the West" as their approach of collective action was organized around the SER (Breman and van der Linden, 2014). Western trade unions entered a 'crisis' period around 1975 (Ebbinghaus and Visser, 1999) and research on a multitude of internal and external factors for trade union decline has been adopted in social science. Recent observations identify an almost universal decline of union membership rates in Europe (Vandaele, 2019). Some scholars suggest that, as trade unions are weakening, they fail to uphold the image of being an inclusive institution, leading to a discussion on lacking representation of the labor market 'outsiders' (Meardi et al., 2019; Oliver and Morelock, 2020). A related and highly discussed issue is the 'greying' of trade unions in Europe which is mirrored by a debate on revitalization and change (Vandaele, 2015, 2018). Central for this discussion is the issue of particularly low membership rates among young workers and the continuously rising median age of union members. The scientific debate revolves around the question of whether and how young workers can become an integral aspect of trade unions. In addition to this "problem-solving approach", extensive exploratory research on the reasons for detachment of young workers from trade unionism (Haynes et al., 2005; Hodder, 2015) was conducted. Some researchers adopted a focus on the youth regarding their confrontation with precarious working conditions. Kretsos (2010) coins the notion of a precarious generation, arguing that the working conditions for young people shifted strongly towards increased precariousness over the last 30 years.

The debate on precariousness has experienced heightened levels of attention after Guy Standing's book "The Precariat" (2011) was published. The term precariousness is often treated as a simple synonym for precarious working conditions, but it entails much larger complexity. It reflects the reality of declining labor security on an international scale. In the literature, different conceptualizations of employment precariousness are identified (Barbier, 2011).

Young workers appear to be a group particularly vulnerable to labor market insecurities. Historically, trade unions negated many labor market insecurities, suggesting significant merit of trade union membership for young workers. Seemingly paradoxical, membership rates among young workers are in a stronger decline than those of older workers (Vandaele, 2019). This raises questions on the underlying relationships forming this development. The phenomenon of precarious employment brings drastic societal implications with it. It coins the life of many people, especially of the youth. These are often people who are disadvantaged and left out by current political and economic developments. Contrary to popular belief the group effected by precariousness is by no means a minority and is rapidly growing. The erosion of traditional labor market security heavily impacts the lives of everyone either directly or indirectly but also our society as a whole. It is therefore necessary to examine these developments thoroughly. Only if the underlying processes are truly understood and made tangible, effective measures to support those who are currently disadvantaged can be implemented.

Analysis of membership trends is a largely adopted approach in research on trade unions (Bryson et al., 2011; Haynes et al., 2005; Schnabel, 2013; Visser, 2002). Many scholars have also formulated linkages between precariousness and trade unions (Keune and Pedaci, 2019; Meardi et al., 2019; Vignoli et al., 2016). However, the way precarious labor conditions influence trade union membership

rates in Europe is not yet extensively developed in the literature. By paying specific attention to the divergence between membership rates of young and older workers a new and narrow perspective is adopted. This thesis aims to fill and explore the knowledge gap on the relation between age and precariousness regarding trade union membership.

1.2. Research Question

To guide this endeavor a precise research question is required. With the aim of understanding and exploring the association between precarious employment conditions and the membership rates of young workers, the research question at hand is two-parted.

(a) To what extent is there an age gap between young and old workers in trade union membership in European countries, and (b) to what extent can this age-gap be explained by differences between young and old workers regarding precariousness of their working conditions?

The first part of the question (a) is descriptive. The objective here is to present the degree to which membership rates of young workers in trade unions vary from those of old workers. After the age gap in membership rates across Europe is constructed and presented the latter, explanatory, part of the question (b) can be addressed. In this step, we no longer are guided by a descriptive question and instead deal with an explanatory question about causality. It is explored whether and to what extent precarious working conditions are associated with the effect described in the first part of the question. To do so, a cross-sectional research design is employed in which we first map the age-gap regarding membership across countries and consequently establish a logistic regression model to determine the effect employment precariousness has on the observed gap.

2. Theory

2.1. Introduction to Micro-Level Trade Union Research

Scholars have addressed the growth and decline of trade unions for several decades forming an extensive body of literature. Ebbinghaus and Visser (1999) argue that after the "golden age of capitalism" (1950-73) trade unions entered a crisis period from 1975 to 1995. The study of this 'crisis' has since motivated many forthcoming studies on the subject. Ebbinghaus and Visser (1999) subsequently categorize three groups of main causes of union growth and decline. *Cyclical factors* which include political and economic changes (Ebbinghaus and Visser, 1999). More general social and societal changes are categorized as *Structural factors* (Ebbinghaus and Visser, 1999). *Configurational factors* relate to the institutional context (Ebbinghaus and Visser, 1999). This study prominently contributed to the understanding of trade unions, by only considering macro-level factors. The decline in trade union membership is persistent in the current millennia as recent observations confirm (Vandaele, 2019). This has given researchers incentive to expand their approach by asking who joins unions, why, and when. This demands a change of perspective from macro-level factors to micro-level determinants of union membership. In the last two decades, trade union research has answered this call shifting from a mainly institutional perspective towards a narrower view on the individual. This thesis aligns with this scientific tradition.

As initially mentioned, some research on trade unions takes adopts a 'problem-solving approach' where shortcomings in the current state of trade unions are observed and potential countermeasures are suggested. Here the supply side (the trade union) is the primary issue, whereas in this thesis the individual workers are studied emphasizing the demand side of the worker-union relationship. This distinction is crucial for the further development of the theoretical framework. To truly understand

the dynamics causing the decline of trade unions their members, and maybe even more importantly non-members, must be studied.

In the literature two main approaches to micro-level trade union membership research are evident. The classical economic angle on individual reasons for trade union membership utilizes rational cost-benefit calculations. Social custom theory provides an additional perspective by focusing on micro-level social dynamics. The development of a universal model for the unionization process has so far not been possible. Studies on micro-level determinants for union membership therefore mostly combine a set of both rational cost-benefit and social custom explanations and hypotheses (Schnabel and Wagner, 2005). This thesis covers a similar approach by applying these traditional explanations in modern context regarding young and precarious workers and including insider-outsider arguments. In the following sections, these explanations will be thoroughly developed and consequently used to form the relevant hypotheses and assumptions for the thesis.

2.1.1. Rational Cost-Benefit Considerations

At the core of rational cost-benefit considerations is a utility evaluation in which the attached values of joining a trade union or staying a member are pitted against the associated costs. In the case of trade union membership, such costs commonly include membership fees and the personal time invested into the organization. Benefits can be grouped into two categories. Personal benefits, which have a positive effect on the individual worker and collective benefits, which aggregate at a group level and are strongly associated with public goods. Personal benefits of trade union membership traditionally include assistance and advice in legal matters, insurance or other welfare services, availability of useful information on the labor market, and in some cases positions of power within the trade union. The most prominent collective benefit is the leverage gained for collective bargaining against employers, but it also includes lobbying effects. These benefits are, however, public goods. This means that they are readily available for the public and do not necessarily require union membership.

These considerations are naturally not of equal value for everyone. The utility evaluation heavily depends on the personal situation of each individual, meaning that the outcomes are equally distinct as the life of the individual. Membership fees would for instance be associated with higher costs when the person's income is low, but when the personal finances are proportionally higher, the cost decreases. External factors also play into the equation. If costs for alternative services like social welfare are lower the demand for trade unions decreases (Schnabel and Wagner, 2007). In this case, the benefits associated with trade union membership are comparably lower. Visser (2002) provides valuable observations in line with this argumentation by finding that the perception of a low cost-benefit ratio associated with joining indeed decreases the odds of joining.

The individuality of personal situations also implies that the demand of workers heavily differs. The assumption of interest heterogeneity within a group of workers has long been established (Ashenfelter and Johnson, 1969). Such factors are predominantly the conditions of one’s employment. Pragmatically this leads to the question of whether trade unions can cater to the needs of all workers equally. If not, certain demographics of workers will be disadvantaged while others are privileged. The ongoing discussion in the literature around the question of who joins unions shows that this is not merely a theoretical consideration. It also shows that it is a practical issue for many disadvantaged workers. The cause of this behavior by trade unions is that satisfying all demands equally would lead to excessive institutional costs for unions, so they choose to fulfill the demands of workers with a favorable cost-benefit ratio (Jansen and Lehr, 2019). Essentially the issue then revolves around the question of whether there is an insider-outsider divide and if so, how impactful it is.

Rational cost-benefit considerations have some limitations. The prominent issue is that the free-rider problem can only insufficiently be explained. At its core, the free-rider problem deals with the question of why individuals would participate in a cause which creates public goods they can freely consume (Olson, 1965). Becoming a trade union member when a union is already established at the workplace

can only be explained by the distribution of selective benefits to members in contrast to non-members (Schnabel and Wagner, 2007). Cost-benefit considerations reduce the dilemma of an economic issue limiting the perspective. Trade union membership is however also heavily dependent on the social dimension, which is why it must also be researched from this angle.

2.1.2. Social Custom Theory

Social custom theory is the second common approach to theorizing the dynamics of trade union membership. It expands the traditional view of rational choice by adding a different perspective. As the name suggests the social dimension is and introduced. Social ties, norms, and customs as well as socialization is considered for utility evaluations of membership decisions. Akerlof (1980) makes a significant contribution to this line of theory by suggesting that workers join unions that provide public goods because of reputational effects. Social customs would, therefore, cause reputational sanctions by the group in reaction to the non-membership of an individual within the group. This line of thought offers a much more practical explanation for the free-rider problem than economic explanations are equipped for. The model has since been expanded and empirically tested. Such empirical observations of social customs mostly use trade union density (or perceived trade union density) at the workplace as a proxy to measure the strength of these social customs and have found positive effects of trade union density on membership (Booth, 1985; Goerke and Pannenberg, 2004; Ibsen et al., 2017; Ingham, 1995). The idea here is that if more people at the workplace are unionized, the social custom to enforce reputational sanctions for non-membership also becomes stronger (Ibsen et al., 2017).

Enabling a social custom capable of sanctioning free-riding requires a certain number of workers willing to engage in second-order collective action, i.e. distributing the reputational sanctions (Visser, 2002). To achieve the necessary pre-existing degree of trade union density a separate few workers must take it upon themselves to establish the public good. This process is associated with high initial costs but it can be rewarded by sizable status gains within the group in the future (Ibsen et al., 2017). With increasing union density, the task of distributing reputational sanctions is shared by more members making it less costly and the benefit of joining is increased (Ibsen et al., 2017). The resulting implication is that establishing the social custom and a minimum level of unionization is the most critical part as reputational effects have no impact if the density is below a certain threshold (Booth and Chatterji, 1993). However, once a critical mass of participating workers is achieved the social custom and the second-order collective action becomes a self-sustainable process (Oliver et al., 1985). At this point even people who do not believe or partake in the custom might become a member because of reputational sanctions. But of course, several other social factors play a significant role. The visibility of coworker membership and the extent to which workers can interact are underlying factors shaping the conditions of social customs (Visser, 2002). Membership of a parent, being approached by a union and pro-union attitude has positive effects on the probability of joining (Visser, 2002).

2.2. Issue of Age in Trade Union Research

The ‘greying’ of trade unions is a dominant issue coining the scientific debate on trade union membership patterns. In this vein, ‘greying’ describes the trend that the median trade union member grows older. The median age for unionized workers lies between the age of 43 and 52 for most European countries in the year 2014. During the ten years from 2004 to 2014, the median age only decreased in Italy, Hungary, and Austria, while it is increasing for all other European countries (Vandaele, 2018). Continuously increasing median age of trade union members further amplifies the issue of greying trade unions. Blanchflower (2007) suggests that the effect of age on membership manifests as an inverted U-shaped pattern in most countries. The curve shows that older workers possess the highest membership rates, while younger and very old workers are less unionized (Blanchflower, 2007). This observation still holds after controlling for cohort effects. While trade union membership rates appear to decline almost universally, the effect is comparatively stronger for youth unionization (Vandaele, 2019). Raising the recruitment rates of young workers and the corresponding

goal of 'revitalization' has been identified as one of the most urgent challenges for trade unions (Schnabel, 2013; Vandaele, 2018). One underlying dynamic enhancing the problem of low membership rates is that of never-membership. Visser (2002) observes that workers tend to join within the first years of labor market entry. Afterward, the likeliness continuously decreases becoming extremely marginal. Ibsen et al. (2017) offer supporting evidence for this behavior by showing that young workers are particularly sensitive to reputational effects at low levels of workplace union density. In other words, if trade unions are unable to attract workers while they are young, they will likely not join at a later point, making the issue a "demographic timebomb" (Vandaele, 2018).

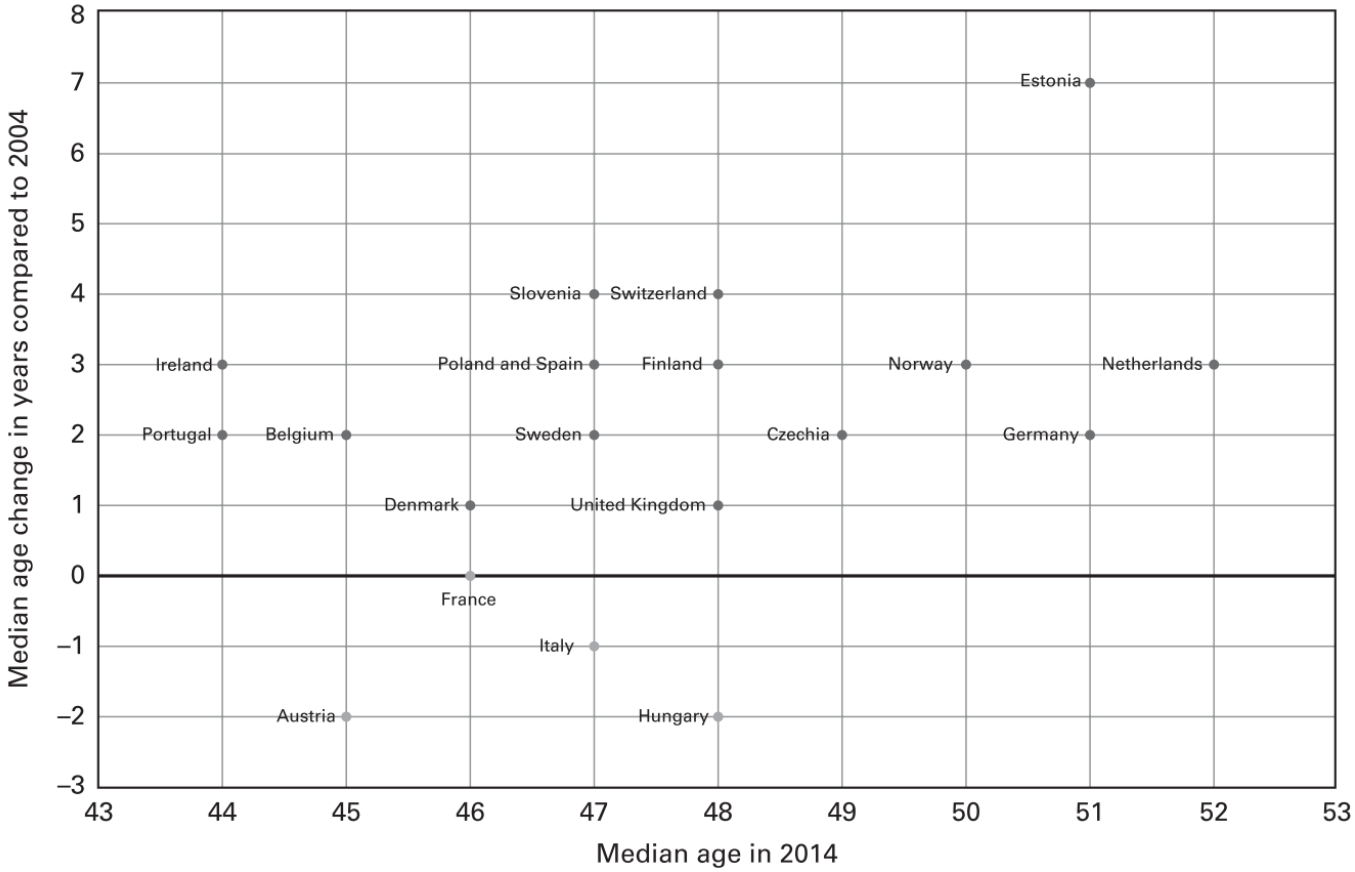

Figure 1. Median age of union members in 2014 and its change compared to 2004 in Europe.
Source: Vandaele, 2018.

Three common explanations for these dynamics can be identified in the literature. The first deals with macro-level and meso-level changes such as changing labor markets and demographic change. The second approach aims to identify macro-level shortcomings in the institutional behavior of trade unions (Vandaele, 2015). A micro-level perspective on attitudes and behavior of young workers is the third approach, which we will focus more closely on in the following segment.

2.2.1. Micro-Level Arguments for Union Membership of Young Workers

Why do young workers tend to be trade union members less frequently than their senior co-workers? Rational cost-benefit considerations explaining the behavior of young workers play a significant role. The goal here is to identify why the age of a worker affects the costs and benefits of trade union membership. One such reason is that young workers tend to explore new job opportunities more

frequently, resulting in more frequent labor market turnover (Haynes et al., 2005). If the young worker knows that he or she is unlikely to stay at this workplace for long the benefits of becoming a member decrease relative to the initial costs, as the benefits will only be used for a short duration. Younger workers also tend to have a comparatively low income as they have worked for less time than their older co-workers and thus more regularly occupy entry-level jobs. Having less freely available income also makes the costs associated with trade union membership weigh more. Traditional benefits like insurance and legal advice appear to be particularly valuable to financially insecure young workers, which would suggest that membership is associated with high benefits. The ability to identify these benefits depends on the knowledge about the services unions provide. Young workers are more likely to have had no previous encounters with unions, meaning they lack the necessary prior knowledge to join (Vandaele, 2018). Another explanation would be that younger workers have the perception of rigid structures within trade unions which discourage them from joining. This could be linked to the perception that collective benefits, which in theory should cater to all workers, are aimed at the interests of the core constituency of trade unions – older workers. Young workers as a marginalized group in the labor market would thus profit less from the goods of trade unions.

Social custom theory offers two lines of argumentation to explore this behavior. The first focusses on the way social ties impact membership decisions. The second approach will utilize assumptions on the socialization of young workers.

When looking at social ties the underlying assumption is that a certain degree of social embeddedness at the workplace must be given so that social customs can encourage the young worker to join the union (Jansen and Lehr, 2019). We, therefore, look to identify reasons negatively impacting the extent to which social ties at the workplace can be formed. One such reason is again the more frequent labor market turnover of young workers (Haynes et al., 2005). If young workers do not stay at a job long enough to become socially embedded in the workplace, it is less likely that they will face reputational sanctions and thus not become a member.

The line of explanations based on socialization primarily addresses attitudinal effects. It is argued that attitudes and values changed intergenerationally towards increased individualism (Hodder, 2015; Vandaele, 2018). This idea has sparked the suggestion that young workers are ideologically opposed to trade unions (Hodder, 2015). This could stem from the fact that young workers do rarely experience the impact of trade unions before entering the labor market implying a low amount of information on their services. As the Standard Employment Relationship erodes it also decreases in significance for the life of many young workers, making this type of employment less of a value-driven ideal. Vandaele (2018) points out that generalizations about the attitudinal effects of cohorts must be treated with caution. Instead, young workers might be more cautious about being victimized by their employers as a reaction to trade union membership (Vandaele, 2018). Furthermore, individualism itself does not necessarily imply opposition towards collective action and its institutions (i.e. trade unions) (Vandaele, 2018). They actually tend to have a positive attitude towards unionism but know very little about unions themselves (Vandaele, 2018). This allows us to derive the first general hypothesis.

H1: Younger workers are less likely to be a trade union member compared to older workers.

2.3. Labor in the Context of Precariousness

The explanations for the lower trade union membership rates among young workers as mentioned above assume that precariousness is a key driving force for this dynamic. In the next section, it is explored how precariousness impacts trade union membership. Ultimately, it will be argued that employment precariousness may explain the age-gap in trade union membership. Before that can be done, it is essential to discuss (employment) precariousness more in-depth.

Throughout centuries precarious work has been the norm for many workers. This was especially the case for marginalized groups such as immigrants (Vosko, 2006). In the late 20th century the notion of

precarious employment became increasingly associated with the antithesis of the SER. The SER gave the promise of consistent and secure full-time employment with social benefits. This relationship became manifest in the context of a specific family ideal where the man must provide for the family while the woman is the caregiver (Vosko, 2006). In the western world, this constellation was able to prevent precarious employment in many instances. During the 1970s labor market segmentation and flexibilization of work began to erode the SER (Barbier, 2011). In part, this development is linked to the changing heteronormative gender roles which defined who could participate in the labor market (Vosko, 2006). The literature on precarious work has addressed the issue for several decades now (Rodgers and Rodgers, 1989). Recently, however, the debate on precariousness has regained heightened levels of attention. On a global level, precariousness is forming as a result of neo-liberal policies and increasingly aggressive capitalism. As a response to this trend, many people have started to link their identification to their increasingly insecure life. Standing (2011) goes as far as to say that these people constitute a new social class – the 'precariat'. While the reemergence of increased precarity certainly dangerous to the quality of life for many workers it is important to note that these observations might be subject to Eurocentric bias as Munck (2013) points out. What is now described as precarious and alarming has been the ongoing reality of large parts of the southern world. Not only across the world has employment precariousness been disproportionately observed. Within Europe, employment precariousness has mainly been observed in the context of Latin countries until the 2000s (Barbier, 2011). One factor that has so far been able to decrease the magnitude of increasing labor market insecurity in Europe are trade unions. If trade unions are unable to uphold this role in the future, they neglect one of their initial purposes – safeguarding underprivileged workers.

2.3.1. Conceptualizing Employment Precariousness

For further theoretical considerations, it is imperative to define and conceptualize precarious employment. First, a necessary distinction must be made. In this thesis, precarious employment itself is researched and contextualized. Precarious employment in this sense is different from the concept of precarious workers. They are considered to be workers that not only are subject to employment precariousness but also suffer from the consequences of precarious employment in several aspects of their lives (Campbell and Price, 2016). A student with wealthy parents doing a job with precarious employment conditions might not be considered a precarious worker, as the insecurity of his employment does not transfer the security of other aspects of his life. While we do not research precarious workers as such, it is important to keep in mind how precarious employment can coin the lives of workers to formulate upcoming assumptions. In the literature, no universally applicable concept of employment precariousness emerged (Barbier, 2011). Yet there is agreement that it is a multi-dimensional concept that refers to objective criteria describing the insecurity of an employment relation (Campbell and Price, 2016). In this vein, Rodgers and Rodgers (1989) contribute prominently by formulating four dimensions of precariousness regarding employment. First, the degree to which the worker can be certain of job continuity is of importance. Here factors such as the risk of job loss, irregular work, or temporary contracts play a major role (Rodgers and Rodgers, 1989). Second, the extent to which the worker has the autonomy to control the conditions of his or her work. Third, the protection of workers is considered. The extent to which legal, social, and financial protection is available. This can come in the form of social security benefits, anti-discrimination policies, unemployment insurance, etcetera and is usually provided by the state and trade unions or similar organizations. The last dimension concerns the availability of sufficient income to not live precariously.

We thus can use these dimensions to conceptualize employment precariousness and attach indicators. As we initially mentioned, the focus of this thesis is on the demand side of the relationship between worker and trade union. The third dimension by Rodgers (1989) deals with the supply side of the spectrum by looking at services provided by trade unions or other institutions and will therefore not be considered. This leaves the following three factors: a) Degree of employment stability, b) autonomy over work conditions, and c) income sufficiency. When looking at single dimensions some ambiguity

cannot easily be overcome as no single dimension can predict precariousness with certainty. Having an unstable job does not necessarily mean that the job is precarious. Yet it is one of the best indicators available. The same applies to dimensions b) and c). Low autonomy at the job or low income are good indicators but again do not allow for certainty. Employment precariousness is a multidimensional issue and defining it in binary terms does not prove to be fruitful. Instead, precariousness is ought to be presented as a continuum which represents the degree of precariousness (Koukiadaki and Katsaroumpas, 2017). Barbier (2011) also warns about the limitations of conceptualizing employment precariousness in binary terms. This would include only focusing on atypical employment. By not only looking at a single dimension this theoretical obstacle can be overcome.

2.3.2. Precarious Employment and Labor Market Outsiders

Barbier (2011) suggests that the conceptualization of precarious employment should be linked to the identification of the labor market 'outsiders'. Utilizing the distinction between insiders and outsiders has been a popular approach for both economists and political scientists. This 'dualization' approach treats the insider-outsider divide as a dichotomous issue. It must be noted that this conceptualization is innately prone to being reductionist as it tries to grasp the complexity of the labor market in binary terms (Barbier, 2011). Yet, it helps us substantially to formulate assumptions on the labor market dynamics coining the behavior of young and precarious workers. The key idea behind this concept is that different forces of social exclusion can make an individual an "outsider" in different aspects of social life (Davidsson and Naczyk, 2009). Literature on outsiderness provides two main approaches to determine outsiderness. Either the current labor market status or the occupational class group are used as determinants (Rovny and Rovny, 2017). The labor market is the key dimension in the case of this thesis which is why outsiderness regarding labor market status is considered. As a labor market outsider, you are excluded from access to the more secure and well-compensated jobs held by the insiders. The economic logic behind this is, that insiders possess skills or attributes which are valuable for employers. These skills are a source of power for insiders which enables them to be more autonomous in the labor market. They are thus treated better (e.g. receive protection) in comparison to labor market outsiders (Barbier, 2011). On the flip side, are the outsiders who are discriminated against. They tend to more regularly unemployed or trapped in low quality, insecure jobs. They do not possess the necessary skills or attributes to compete equally in a labor market which is shaped by insiders.

Rueda (2007) argues that labor market insiders and outsiders have juxtaposed interests. This interest heterogeneity, as previously introduced also plays a vital role in the insider-outsider divide. Insiders are defined as "workers with highly protected jobs." (Rueda, 2005, p. 62). Their secure employment allows them to not be affected by the risk of unemployment. Outsiders are the workers who "are either unemployed or hold jobs characterized by low salaries and low levels of protection, employment rights, benefits, and social security privilege" (Rueda, 2005, p.62). Insiders have an interest that their employment remains secure and that their advantageous labor market status is protected. Outsiders on the other hand are concerned about their own job security and do not care about the interests of insiders (Rovny and Rovny, 2017). At this point, it should be apparent that the labor market outsiderness has many similarities to employment precariousness. In fact, the definition by Rueda (2005) uses the same determinants as Rodgers and Rodgers (1989) do for the four dimensions of precarious employment. We can thus use the dynamics of the insider-outsider divide for further theoretical assumptions on the way precarious employment is related to trade union membership. The same applies to young workers, which also share attributes determining labor market outsiderness as they tend to have entry-level jobs more frequently. How the age of a worker and the precariousness of their employment are linked will be expanded on in the next section.

2.3.3. Trade Union Membership of Precarious Workers and the Age Relationship

After conceptualizing precarious employment and establishing the argument that it is linked to the insider-outsider divide, we now look at micro-level explanations for trade union membership of precariously employed workers. We again use the twofold perspective of rational cost-benefit considerations and social custom theory.

In line with rational cost-benefit analysis workers with precarious employment are likely to associate lower benefits or higher costs with trade union membership based on their employment precariousness. One such reason would be that the precariously employed perceive the services provided by trade unions to serve the interest of labor market insiders rather than the interest of outsiders. Trade unions would thus try to make services that are beneficial to their core constituency – the insiders. Providing services for outsiders who require stronger and more expensive support would come at the cost of higher tax expenses for insiders (Jansen and Lehr, 2019). If outsiders perceive trade unions to behave this way the gained benefit of membership decreases relative to the costs. Three causes for this dynamic can be theorized concerning the previously established dimensions of precarious employment. The insecurity and instability of precarious employment often results in a shorter stay at a workplace. If the worker thinks that a long and secure stay at a job is unlikely, long term benefits of trade union membership are of less value. Precarious employment is also more likely at workplaces with low unionization rates. This increases the cost of membership as the initial cost of establishing union density at a workplace is especially high. Additionally, the lower income of precariously employed increases all costs associated with membership relatively. Lastly, the low autonomy to shape their work environment implies that they have less influence over what services are provided and which policies are implemented. Where outsiders lack the necessary leverage to shape the measures which could benefit them, insiders possess the required power. They can thus shape their environment to their advantage to the detriment of outsiders. Outsiders thus profit less from the personal and collective benefits of trade union membership.

Similar to the social custom explanations found regarding young workers, precarious employment might also lead to weaker social embeddedness or social ties at the workplace. These social conditions are required to establish and uphold the social norms of trade union membership. Due to the job instability of precarious employment workers are likely to stay at the workplace for a shorter duration which hinders the development of social ties.

When looking at socialization-based explanations for low trade union membership it is fruitful to revisit Standing's (2011) conceptualization of the global 'precariat'. A new social class based on collective identification with the personal and collective experience of precariousness is pictured. While his theory is contested and by no means universal, it still shows that a significant and increasing amount of people reflect on their precariousness and link it to their identification. A key characteristic of the precariat is that "It consists of people who have minimal trust relationships with capital or the state" (Standing, 2001, p. 8). This juxtaposes their interests to those of the salariat. The precariat also is distinct from the proletariat as it is not determined by the underlying social contract of exchanging secure employment "for subordination and contingent loyalty" (Standing, 2011, p. 8), i.e. the conditions of the SER. Both the salariat and the proletariat have traditionally been regarded as core clienteles of trade unions. If the precariously employed are no longer socialized in accordance to the values present in the salariat or proletariat they will not aim to follow the norm of trade union membership. Or in other words, it is the absence of a labor identity which inhibits membership.

At this point the similarities between the struggle of the precariously employed and young workers become evident. They share many of the key labor market vulnerabilities and explanations for their membership behavior overlap significantly. This applies both for rational cost-benefit considerations where both groups are sensitive to the perception that trade unions cater to insiders and social custom explanations, where a lack of social ties and discontinuation from the SER can be observed. Young workers are described to constitute the core of the precariat (Standing, 2011). Above all, their lives

and chances on the labor market are coined most heavily by precariousness. Kretsos (2010) shows that the increase of precariousness related to the labor market is particularly grave for young workers. He finds that young workers across Europe are confronted with high rates of insecure employment (Kretsos, 2010). Stable employment, high income, and opportunity for upward social mobility is scarce for this demographic creating "a deep generational gap in the allocation of income and the allocation of secure jobs in the economy" (Kretsos, 2010, p. 8). On this basis, it is assumed that the *lower age of a worker has a positive effect on the likeliness of being employed under precarious working conditions.* This is a core assumption, necessary for the upcoming analysis in section 4. Therefore, it will be tested, but not treated as a distinct hypothesis. Rather, it paints the complete picture necessary to arrive at the key argument for this thesis. As the lives and chances on the labor market of young workers are so heavily determined by employment precariousness, we argue that the observation of lower membership rates of young workers can in fact be explained by accounting for employment precariousness. Based on the established arguments the final two hypotheses therefore are:

H2: People employed under precarious conditions are less likely to be a trade union member compared to workers with secure employment.

, and:

H3: The age-gap in trade union membership is explained by the degree of precarious employment.

3. Data Selection and Operationalization

3.1. Data Selection

Before the data analysis can be approached the data selection and operationalization of the relevant variables must be discussed. The data with which the hypotheses will be tested stems from the ninth wave of the European Social Survey (ESS). The ninth wave is the most recent one being published in 2018. Utilizing the rich secondary survey data from the ESS a country comparative dataset with relevant information on all variables is derived. The ESS is widely utilized and heavily controlled which negated possible issues of generalizability or scientific integrity in the context of data collection. Data of participants is collected via face-to-face interviews conducted under strict specifications (EuropeanSocialSurvey, 2020a).

In the case of this thesis, the individuals in the European countries included in the ESS are our target population. We wish to generalize the findings to the general working population of those countries. The countries themselves are the spatial variation of the unit. The sampling is therefore conducted regarding the survey's methodology. The survey consists of samples "representative of all persons aged 15 and over (no upper age limit) resident within private households in each country, regardless of their nationality, citizenship, or language" (EuropeanSocialSurvey, 2020b). As working conditions are a key variable for our analysis only individuals currently doing paid work are selected.

We aim to include the largest number of countries possible, to increase the merit of the cross-country comparison. We use the most recent iteration of the survey from 2018 and must, therefore, limit our sample to the countries on which data is available for that year. Our sample thus consists of these 19 countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Serbia, Slovenia, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Unfortunately, the data on some interesting countries such as Spain or Sweden is yet to be released. Data from an earlier wave can be used to compensate for this. As a change in trade union membership does not occur rapidly it is valid to carefully include data with temporal variation.

3.2. Variable Measurements

The main dependent variable we are analyzing is 'current trade union membership'. The measurement of this variable is based on the question of whether the participant is or has been a member of a trade union or similar organization and whether that is currently or previously. The possible response categories include: 'Yes, currently' (1), 'Yes, previously (2), and 'No' (3). The numbers indicate the attached values to each category. Participants were also able to choose the categories: 'Refusal' (7), 'Don't know' (8), and 'No answer' (9). For the analysis, the variable 'current trade union membership' is re-coded as a dichotomous variable. Current trade union members, i.e. participants who answered 'Yes, currently', are coded as '1', and participants who answered with 'Yes, previously' or 'No' are coded as '0'. By coding union membership as a dichotomous variable, the most established approach of operationalization is adopted.

To measure 'Age', data on the age of the participants the variable "Year of birth" is utilized. The participant is asked in which year he or she was born. This numeric variable will be used in the analysis to construct the age gap regarding membership within trade unions. To do this the current age of the participant (at the moment of questioning in 2018) is determined by subtracting the year of birth from 2018. Consequently, the numeric variable is transformed into a categorical variable by forming three groups. In doing so the differences between different age groups are clearly emphasized. The first group includes people aged 27 and below. It is labeled 'young' and coded as '1'. The second group includes the age from 28-54, is labeled 'medium', and coded as '2'. The third group includes people aged 55 and higher, is labeled 'old', and coded as '3'. This variable is used as a set of dummies. 'Medium' age serves as the reference category as it is expected to find the highest trade union membership rate among this demographic. This categorization of age is taken from the OECD, which describes the group 'young' as those people who have just entered the labor market, 'medium' as those people "in their prime working lives" and 'old' as "those passing the peak of their career and approaching retirement" (OECD, 2020). However, by including people up to the age of 27 in the category 'young' it is slightly modified, as the OECD uses the age of 24. This also implies that the lower end of the 'medium' category is increased. This modification is done to ensure that the sample size for young workers remains statistically relevant across countries.

The other main independent variable is 'degree of employment precariousness'. It is based on the three indicators related to the previously established dimensions of precarious employment: a) 'employment stability', b) 'autonomy over work conditions' and c) 'income sufficiency'. This means that no separate variable for the 'degree of employment precariousness' is created. Instead, the three items it consists of are analyzed distinctly.

'Employment stability' is measured by looking at the contract type of each participant. They are asked about the type of work contract they currently have. Possible answers consist of the categories: 'Unlimited' (1), 'Limited' (2), and 'No contract' (3). The numbers indicate the attached values to each category. Participants were also able to choose the categories: 'Not applicable' (6), 'Refusal' (7), 'Don't know' (8), and 'No answer' (9). The question is only asked if the participant answered a preceding question on their employment relationship with either of the following categories: 'Employee' (1), 'Working for own family business' (3), 'Refusal' (7) or 'Don't know' (8). Self-employed participants are therefore excluded from our variable on precariousness. Based on the previously established theory, a limited contract (2) or no contract (3) implies comparatively higher precariousness of working conditions to unlimited contracts (1). To construct our variable, it is recoded into a dummy variable with 'limited contract' and 'no contract' as '1', while 'unlimited contract' is coded as '0' and serves as the reference category.

Measuring the 'autonomy over work conditions' is achieved by utilizing a variable on the degree to which the participant feels he or she had control of how daily work is organized. The participants are asked to assess their influence on an increasing scale from '0' to '10'. The value '0' is linked to the category 'I have/had no influence', while '10' indicates 'I have/had complete control'. Further possible responses include (66) 'Not applicable', (77) 'Refusal', (88) 'Don't know', and (99) 'No answer'. These values were set to missing. The question is only asked if the participant previously indicated to have engaged in paid work during the last seven days. In alignment with the established theory, a value of 0 indicates the highest degree of employment precariousness. A '10' respectively indicates the lowest employment precariousness regarding autonomy at the workplace.

The last variable used to determine the 'degree of employment precariousness' captures the dimension of 'income sufficiency' by looking at the participant's current feeling about their household's income. They are asked to indicate which category describes their situation best and consequently a value ranging from 1 to 4 is attached. The possible categories are: (1) 'Living comfortably on present income', (2) 'Coping on present income', (3) 'Difficult on present income', and (4) 'Very difficult on present income'. Further possible answers include (7) 'Refusal', (8) 'Don't know', and (9) 'No answer'. The value (4) indicates the highest degree of employment precariousness and declines with lower values. Consequently, the scale is grouped into a dummy variable. The values '3' and '4' are transformed into '1', indicating income insecurity. The values '1' and '2' are transformed to '0', indicating the absence of income insecurity. The value '0' serves as the reference category.

To control for other standard predictors which might impact or determine differences in trade union membership 'education' and 'gender' are included as control variables. 'Gender' is coded as a binary dummy variable with 'male' coded as '0' and 'female' coded as '1'. For 'education' a categorical dummy variable with three categories is constructed. These categories include 'low', 'medium' and 'high' education.

3.3. Descriptive Statistics

In Table 1 the descriptive statistics for all variables included in the analysis are shown. Most notably 21% of workers included in the sample are current trade union members. When comparing the average percentage to other recent studies the average is slightly lower. Vandaele (2019) estimates the average union density in European countries to be at 28%. However, in his selection, the three countries with the highest union density are included (Iceland, Denmark, and Sweden). The ESS dataset, unfortunately, does not include this data and the average across countries is therefore lower. The distribution of the three age categories also is rather uneven as the 'medium' category is wider. The 'medium' category makes up 65.4% of the case selection, while the category 'old' only has 23% and the 'young' group is the minority with 11.6%. Interestingly two of the precariousness items almost match in their frequency. Income insufficiency and having a limited or no contract are both rather uncommon appearing with a regularity of respectively 15.6% and 17.0%. The item workplace autonomy behaves differently compared to the two previous items. The mean of the scale (from 0 to 10) lies at 6.48 which means that workers perceive their autonomy to be above the average. This trend aligns with the previously described frequencies by showcasing that the majority of the sample is not employed under precarious conditions.

3.4. Methods

Now that the measurements have been established and the descriptive statistics are presented the main analysis can be approached. First, the Age-gap of union membership will be constructed, discussed and summarized. This way the stage is set to explore the bivariate relationships between the key predictors of this thesis. In doing so H1 and H2 can be tested, as well as the underlying assumption that younger workers are more likely to be employed precariously. The correlations are tested for their statistical significance in a one-tailed test. Finally, the logistic regression model is established in two steps. The dummy variables for the respective age groups are introduced first and modeled in relation to the trade union membership rates for each included country. Here education and gender are introduced as control variables. In the second step, the model is expanded by including the three items measuring employment precariousness. With the full model, it can then be tested whether the main hypothesis (H3) is true or whether it must be falsified.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics.

	Valid N	Mean/Frequency	Std. Deviation
Age group (dummies)	18909		
Young		11.6%	
Medium		65.4%	
Old		23.0%	
Trade union membership (dummy)	18894		
Non-member		79.0%	
Member		21.0%	
Contract type (dummy)	16285		
Unlimited contract		83.0%	
Limited & no contract		17.0%	
Work autonomy	18794	6.48	3.26
Income sufficiency (dummy)	18792		
Sufficient income		84.4%	
Insufficient income		15.6%	
Gender (dummy)	18999		
Male		51,3%	
Female		48,7%	
Education (dummies)	18929		
Low education		11.8%	
Middle education		56.4%	
High education		31.8%	
Valid N (listwise)	16285		

4. Analysis

4.1. Age-Gap of Trade Union Membership across Countries

Table 2 and Figure 2 present the mapping of trade union membership across the 19 countries included in our sample for all three age categories. The main interest in this step is to pay specific attention to the percentage of the membership of young workers and how large the gap to the medium-aged and older workers is. We find that across countries the age group 'young' consistently has the lowest trade union membership rate with 14,34% on average. The 'medium' category has the second-highest percentage with 21,25% on average, which is a difference of 6,91 percent points (pp). For the category 'old' a difference of 9.04 pp to 'young' can be observed. With 23,38%, older workers have the highest average membership rate. Bulgaria is an exception as it is the only country where young workers have the highest unionization rate with 6,35%, while 'medium' and 'old' have 4,64% and 4,73%, respectively. The number of cases for young workers is comparatively low (N = 63). Therefore, an additional Chi-Square test was conducted to evaluate the statistical significance of each country. And indeed, the case of Bulgaria does not seem to be statistically significant. The lowest membership rate of young workers is found in Czechia (1,59%) but it is closely followed by Poland (1,60%), Estonia (2,19%), and Italy (2,78%). On the other end of the spectrum are Norway (36,72%), Belgium (40,88%), and Finland (52,94%). This shows that across countries the share of trade union members differs significantly. In the most extreme cases by over 50 pp.

As previously shown the average age-gap between the 'young' and 'old' group is averagely at 9.04 pp. Some countries however highly exceed this value. The Netherlands have an age-gap of 19,87 pp, Norway of 26,24 pp, and Slovenia has the largest gap with 27.54 pp. These "flat" values do not paint the whole picture yet as large gaps are only possible with a high general presence of union membership in a country. The age-gap of Norway itself is already larger than the average trade union membership rate. Therefore, it is useful to put some of the lower numbers into perspective by looking at relative numbers. When doing so Poland actually has the largest age-gap. The membership rate of older workers in Poland is 8.4 times higher than the rate of young workers. In Norway, it is only 1,71 times higher. Slovenia is an interesting case as it has one of the highest age-gaps in both relative and absolute numbers. Here old workers are 6,03 times more likely to be a member than their young counterparts. Cyprus also has a high age-gap with 23.35 pp. Here older workers are 3.8 times more likely to currently have trade union membership. Cyprus is an interesting case as it has a very low population (N=24 for 'young') but is nonetheless statistically significant.

Table 2. Membership Age-Gap by Country.

Country	Age Group	Membership %	N
Austria (AT)	Young	28,96%	183
	Medium	32,28%	914
	Old	33,60%	247
Belgium (BE)	Young	40,88%	137
	Medium	48,17%	629
	Old	44,63%	177
Bulgaria (BG)	Young	6,35%	63
	Medium	4,64%	604
	Old	4,73%	275
Switzerland (CH)	Young	5,59%	143
	Medium	12,58%	596
	Old	13,50%	200
Cyprus (CY)	Young	8,33%	24
	Medium	30,86%	256
	Old	31,68%	101
Czechia (CZ)	Young	1,59%	126
	Medium	6,43%	964
	Old	7,03%	313
Germany (DE)	Young	10,36%	193
	Medium	14,85%	808
	Old	18,80%	351
Estonia (EE)	Young	2,19%	137
	Medium	5,30%	679
	Old	7,10%	324
Finland (FI)	Young	52,94%	102
	Medium	64,05%	587
	Old	66,39%	238
France (FR)	Young	4,35%	92
	Medium	10,18%	678
	Old	15,69%	204
United Kingdom (GB)	Young	9,09%	132
	Medium	19,68%	752
	Old	21,60%	324
Hungary (HU)	Young	4,31%	116
	Medium	5,61%	659
	Old	9,38%	192
Ireland (IE)	Young	17,65%	85
	Medium	22,99%	683
	Old	25,38%	264
Italy (IT)	Young	2,78%	108
	Medium	14,65%	792
	Old	14,39%	271

Country	Age Group	Membership %	N
Netherlands (NL)	Young	8,23%	158
	Medium	18,52%	594
	Old	28,10%	242
Norway (NO)	Young	36,72%	128
	Medium	59,72%	571
	Old	62,96%	216
Poland (PL)	Young	1,60%	125
	Medium	9,35%	524
	Old	13,48%	141
Serbia (RS)	Young	10,77%	65
	Medium	20,76%	501
	Old	16,92%	130
Slovenia (SL)	Young	5,48%	73
	Medium	21,26%	508
	Old	33,02%	106

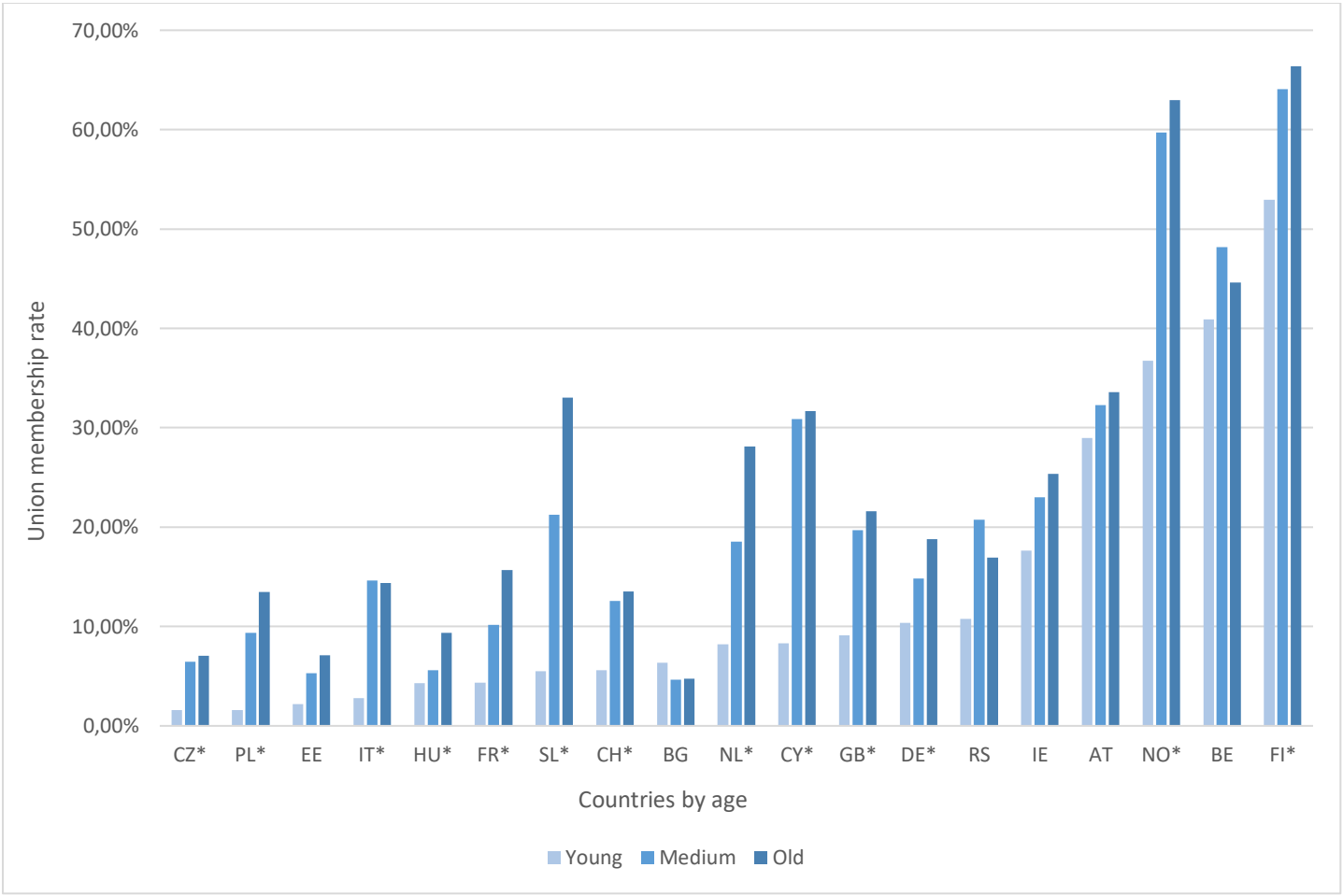

Figure 2. Bar chart of trade union membership by age group across countries. (* = Pearson Chi-Square < 0.1).

4.2. Bivariate Relationship between Age and Employment Precariousness

In Tables 3 and 5, the frequencies and correlation measured by Cramer's V of the bivariate relationships for the contract type, income sufficiency, and the three age categories are presented. In addition, a 2-sided Chi-Square test is conducted to evaluate the significance of these relationships. In Table 4 the means for 'autonomy' are compared. Here a different approach is required as it is a scale instead of a categorical variable. Therefore, the mean for each age group is compared and tested for statistical significance with an ANOVA-Test.

For the bivariate relationship between the contract type and age overall, a small to moderate positive correlation (0.19) can be observed. Young workers are the age group that is most commonly employed with limited contracts or no contracts at all (35.4%). With 14.3% and 14.4% respectively, medium-aged workers and older workers are significantly less often employed with such contract types. This means young workers are over 20% more likely to have a precarious contract than the rest of the workforce. All the observed values are statistically significant.

When looking at the average value of autonomy for each age group we find that for young workers the autonomy at the workplace is the lowest of the three groups with a mean of 5.55. Medium aged workers are more likely to have autonomy with a mean of 6.52. Older workers have the highest autonomy and averagely indicate a value of 6.85 on the autonomy scale. Between the 'young' category and the others, the biggest difference can be observed. Between 'medium' and 'old', only a small change is shown. Again, statistical significance is given for all observations.

When looking at the relationship between income sufficiency and age the observed correlation only shows a very small effect (0.02). Across the three age groups, the frequencies for insufficient and sufficient income do not vary much. Young and old workers indicate to possess insufficient income in 14.5% of cases. For medium-aged workers, it is a bit more common with 16.3%. The reversed dynamic for the relationship between age and income sufficiency comes as a surprise. Previously is was theorized that young workers would be most insecure regarding income. The underlying assumption that the age of a worker has a negative effect on employment precariousness is therefore only partially fulfilled.

Table 3. Bivariate Relationship between Age Categories and Contract Type (Cramer's V).

	Young	Medium	Old	Correlation
Unlimited contract	64.6%***	85.7%***	85.6%***	
Limited & no contract	35.4%***	14.3%***	14.4%***	
Cramer's V				0.19***

**p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001 (2-sided Chi-Square Tests)*

Table 4. Autonomy by Age Category (Comparison of Means on a Scale from 0 to 10).

	Young	Medium	Old
Autonomy	5.55***	6.52***	6.85***

**p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001 (One-way ANOVA-Test)*

Table 5. Bivariate Relationship between Age Categories and Income Sufficiency (Cramer's V).

	Young	Medium	Old	Correlation
Sufficient Income	85.5%**	83.7%**	85.5%**	
Insufficient Income	14.5%**	16.3%**	14.5%**	
Cramer's V				0.02**

**p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001 (2-sided Chi-Square Tests)*

4.3. Regression Model

For the final step of analysis logistic regression is utilized to approach the main goal of the thesis: testing whether employment precariousness indeed explains the effect age has on trade union membership. To achieve this two Models are separately created and consequently compared. For both Model 1 and Model 2 trade union membership functions as the dependent variable. Model 1 includes the dummy variables for the age categories, the control variables gender and education, as well as the country variables. In Model 2 these variables are kept and the three items on employment precariousness (contract type, autonomy, and income sufficiency) are added. This way the differences which occur as a result of adding these predictors can be observed clearly.

The pseudo-R-Square (Nagelkerke) of Model 1 is somewhat low (0.235) indicating that the model is only partially able to explain trade union membership. In Model 2 the pseudo-R-Square only increases by 0.007. Therefore, the addition of the three variables on employment precariousness does not improve the model in a meaningful way. In Model 1 we find that young workers are 1.996 times less likely to be a current trade union member compared to old workers. Medium aged workers are only 1.26 times less likely. This estimate supports the hypothesis (H1) that young workers are less likely to be trade union members than their older counterparts. For the control variables, the model shows that male workers are 1.16 times less likely to be union members than females. With increasing education, the likeliness of being a member also rises. The countries also show sizeable differences in union membership. As this has been extensively discussed in section 4.1 the precise effects are not listed again.

In Model 2 we find weak evidence for the hypothesis (H2) that precariously employed workers are less likely to be trade union members. Workers with limited contracts or no contracts are 1.37 times less often union members. This finding would support H2. For autonomy, we find a similar but still small effect. With each one-point increase on the autonomy scale (indicating higher autonomy) the likeliness of being a union member decreases by 1.06 times. This observation is in line with the hypothesis. The last indicator for employment precariousness also yields favorable results for H2. Workers with insufficient income are 1.17 times less often union members than those with sufficient income. All three effects are small, the observations suggest that H2 is true and must not be rejected.

We can now turn to the key hypothesis (H3) of the thesis that the previously established age-gap in trade union membership is explained by employment precariousness. When comparing the effect age has on the dependent variable after including items on employment precariousness only a marginal difference can be identified. In Model 2 young workers are 2 times less likely to be union members than old workers. The size of the negative effect thus only increased by 0.004 after including the items for employment precariousness. For medium-aged workers, the change is a bit more notable. In Model 2 medium-aged workers are 1.28 times less likely to be union members than old workers. The size of the negative effect increased by 0.02.

Accounting for employment precariousness did not lead to the hypothesized effect, and the hypothesis must, therefore, be rejected. After the results for the bivariate relationships between age and employment precariousness indicated that the core assumption of younger workers being most effected by employment precariousness was not fully satisfied it is unsurprising that no strong results were found. That almost no change occurred for the effect of young workers on trade union membership suggests that either the analytical approach lacked some other key components or that the items for employment precariousness simply have no notable effect on the aforementioned dynamic between age and union membership.

Table 6. Logistic Regression Analysis of Trade Union Membership (N=18708).

	Model 1 Exp (b)	s.e.	Model 2 Exp (b)	s.e.
Constant	2.262***	(0.08)	3.822***	(0.10)
Age Group (Old = ref.)				
Young	0.501***	(0.06)	0.500***	(0.06)
Medium	0.792***	(0.04)	0.782***	(0.04)
Gender (Female = ref.)				
Male	0.865***	(0.04)	0.863***	(0.04)
Level of Education (Middle = ref.)				
Low	0.694***	(0.07)	0.689***	(0.07)
High	1.157***	(0.04)	1.197***	(0.05)
Country (Finland = ref.)				
Austria	0.285***	(0.09)	0.254***	(0.09)
Belgium	0.526***	(0.10)	0.496***	(0.10)
Bulgaria	0.028***	(0.17)	0.022***	(0.18)
Switzerland	0.081***	(0.12)	0.077***	(0.12)
Cyprus	0.241***	(0.13)	0.239***	(0.14)
Czechia	0.037***	(0.13)	0.033***	(0.13)
Germany	0.105***	(0.10)	0.102***	(0.10)
Estonia	0.032***	(0.15)	0.030***	(0.15)
France	0.070***	(0.13)	0.067***	(0.13)
United Kingdom	0.136***	(0.10)	0.131***	(0.10)
Hungary	0.039***	(0.15)	0.032***	(0.15)
Ireland	0.174***	(0.10)	0.170***	(0.10)
Italy	0.096***	(0.11)	0.087***	(0.11)
Netherlands	0.143***	(0.11)	0.137***	(0.11)
Norway	0.776***	(0.10)	0.760***	(0.01)
Poland	0.062***	(0.14)	0.054***	(0.15)
Serbia	0.139***	(0.12)	0.130***	(0.12)
Slovenia	0.158***	(0.12)	0.147***	(0.12)
Contract Type (Unlimited Contract = ref.)				
Limited & No Contract			0.729***	(0.06)
Autonomy			0.942***	(0.01)
Income Sufficiency (Sufficient Income = ref.)				
Insufficient Income			0.853**	(0.07)
Nagelkerke R^2	0.235		0.242	

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; *** p<0.01 (two-tailed test)

5. Conclusion and Discussion

In this thesis, we addressed the question to which extent an age-gap between young and old workers regarding trade union membership exists across European countries and whether this age-gap can be explained by differences in employment precariousness between young and old workers. To test these assumptions three hypotheses were formulated. These hypotheses were derived from two key theoretical micro-level approaches to explaining trade union membership present in the literature. Thus, explanations were structured along social custom theory, which emphasizes the effect social norms and interactions have on membership dynamics (Akerlof, 1980; Ibsen et al., 2017; Visser, 2002) and rational cost-benefit considerations, where utility evaluation of the associated costs and benefits for union membership are considered to be the driving force (Ashenfelter and Johnson, 1969; Rueda, 2007; Schnabel and Wagner, 2007).

After conducting the analysis to test the hypotheses the main conclusions can be drawn. First, we find that an age-gap between young and old workers can consistently be observed across most European countries. Bulgaria seems to be the only exception as here young workers are most often union members. Statistical significance is however not given for this observation. The age-gap varies heavily across the included countries. We find the largest relative age-gaps in eastern European countries such as Poland, Czechia, and Slovenia. Here union membership is extremely rare. Large absolute age-gaps can be observed in Nordic countries such as Norway or Finland, but as these countries have some of the highest overall union membership rates these findings are unsurprising. The age of a worker, therefore, plays a vital role in determining how likely he or she is to be a trade union member. Our results are mostly consistent with previous studies on age-gaps in union membership and age-related dynamics across countries (Vandaele, 2019).

When testing the effect employment precariousness has on union membership, mixed results were found. Across the three included dimensions for employment precariousness generally, a small negative impact on trade union membership could be observed. The type of contract a worker has seems to be most impactful. For the factor of autonomy at the workplace, we also found a small negative effect on union membership, as well as for the last indicator – income sufficiency. All three indicators were closely related to the dimensions of employment precariousness as theorized by Rodgers and Rodgers (1989). The type of contract deviated most from its original dimension of certainty of job continuity but still yielded the clearest results. In this regard, the findings resonate with other studies that tested for contractual differences determining union membership (Jansen and Lehr, 2019; Keune and Pedaci, 2019; Oliver and Morelock, 2020; Schnabel and Wagner, 2007). Whether a worker has autonomy at the workplace or sufficient income has a very small but nonetheless significant effect on union membership. Here previous studies have also signaled the low impact of autonomy (Schnabel and Wagner, 2007) and income sufficiency (Jansen and Lehr, 2019).

The second part of the research question hinges strongly on the assumption that young workers would be more commonly affected by employment precariousness than their older coworkers. During the analysis of bivariate relationships, it was revealed that this assumption only partially holds as young workers appear to experience income insecurity less often than older workers. The consequential findings of the analysis show no support for the claim that employment precariousness is the driving force behind the age-related gap in trade union membership. The main hypothesis of the thesis must therefore be rejected. While it is true that young workers and precarious workers are more commonly non-members, it is not the case that young workers are more often non-members because they are more precarious. Instead, other age-related dynamics are likely to be the driving force behind the gap. Vandaele (2018) attributes the age-gap to a significant lack of knowledge about trade unions and their services commonly present among young people. This heavily limits the ability to construct the

instrumentality of union membership. Socialization-based explanations could include a more general perspective on a potential intergenerational disconnect between young people and institutional structures established by previous generations such as unions. Young workers and precariously employed workers might be coined by distrust towards the established labor market and its institutions. They wish for upward social mobility but if they do not perceive unions to improve their lives in meaningful and sustainable ways, membership among young people will continuously decline.

This thesis contributed to the understanding of the specific interaction employment precariousness has regarding trade union membership of young workers. The extent of the present age-gap was addressed and whether the age-gap stems from the employment precariousness of young workers by using country comparative micro-level data. Despite the contribution towards closing a specific knowledge gap made with this thesis, a critical reflection of the employed research design and other limitations is required. First, the thesis exclusively focusses on whether the theorized effects can be observed but does not expand on the findings by researching why employment precariousness does not explain the effect of age on membership. Or for instance which other factors might instead of employment precariousness be able to account for the age-related gap in union membership. A loss of potential for this study lies in its country-comparative aspect. The ESS dataset would allow for more sophisticated country related analysis. When combined with more specific country related hypotheses valuable insights could have been gained along with explanations for the observed age-gap in the respective countries. If in the future data for more countries becomes available, the country-comparative aspect could be enhanced even more. For the item 'income sufficiency' indicating employment precariousness and its measurement potential weaknesses are given. This variable on employment precariousness is the only one where the assumption that young workers would be most often precariously employed was not observed. The ESS grasps perceived income insufficiency at a household level. This makes the measurement vague and subjective as sufficiency depends heavily on the current situation of one's life. A medium-aged worker is more likely to be in a position where more income is required, for example when providing for a family. A young worker might more often be in a situation where he or she can rely on other household members and thus have a financial safety net or simply live in a less expensive way. The income sufficiency at a household level thus does not necessarily match individual income sufficiency and warp the measure of employment precariousness. The analysis would have also profited from including more control variables like occupational groups or union membership of family members.

Finally, it is important to note how this thesis contributed to the body of knowledge on trade union membership and what consequentially the implications for further research are. The most significant implication is that future research can rule out in advance that an age-related gap in trade union membership essentially is a gap in employment precariousness. This holds true for the items on employment precariousness which were used for this analysis. More nuanced and expanded measurements might yield interesting additional results. Furthermore, our observations helped by disentangling the dimensions of employment precariousness regarding trade union membership. Especially the way income sufficiency influenced the analysis can serve as a useful warning to learn from and strive to improve the measurement. Operationalizing employment precariousness as close as possible in relation to the dimensions as formulated by Rodgers and Rodgers (1989) proved beneficial. Given that young workers and workers that are precariously employed share many labor market-specific characteristics, trade union research with the aim of understanding both groups better could focus more on the perspective of labor market outsiderness and structure analysis along the divide between insiders and outsiders. The labor market rapidly evolves and with-it new challenges for trade unions follow. The life of more and more workers is being coined by precariousness. As precarious employment increasingly becomes the norm, discussion about shifting social classes and

collective identification based on the shared experience of precariousness arise (Standing, 2011b). Distrust towards established labor market institutions and increasing employer opposition demands new approaches by unions. This is reflected in the emerging attention paid to particularly vulnerable sections of the labor market such as the gig-economy or platform workers. So far unions have not been able to sufficiently advocate the needs of these workers but the awareness for this sensitive issue is rising. Here unions face sector-specific challenges that cannot be fixed with a 'one size fits all' approach.

Never-membership appears to also be an ongoing issue (Schnabel and Wagner, 2005). This is especially true for the countries where we observe drastically low numbers of young trade union members such as Poland and Czechia. If young workers do not join unions and workers rarely become members a few years after entering the labor market, trade unionism might be a lost social norm when the current generation of young workers becomes the core of the workforce. If unions are to overcome this challenge, two things are vital. First, they need to convey the necessary knowledge about their services to young people, preferably even before entering the labor market (Vandaele, 2018). And secondly, unions must offer appealing services that cater to the needs of vulnerable workers just entering the labor market which encounter strong entry barriers and lack of security. With future cohorts, new demands and challenges for unions will emerge. This requires more flexible structures and approaches if unions are to not steadily diminish in size and influence. The debate on the revitalization of unions should therefore not limit itself to age-related challenges but instead concern the general role trade unions are ought to have for the future of work.

6. References

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