

# Young and New Union Members: a Driver for Union Change? Survey evidence from Belgium

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Panel 14 - Youth Engagement and the Future of Work

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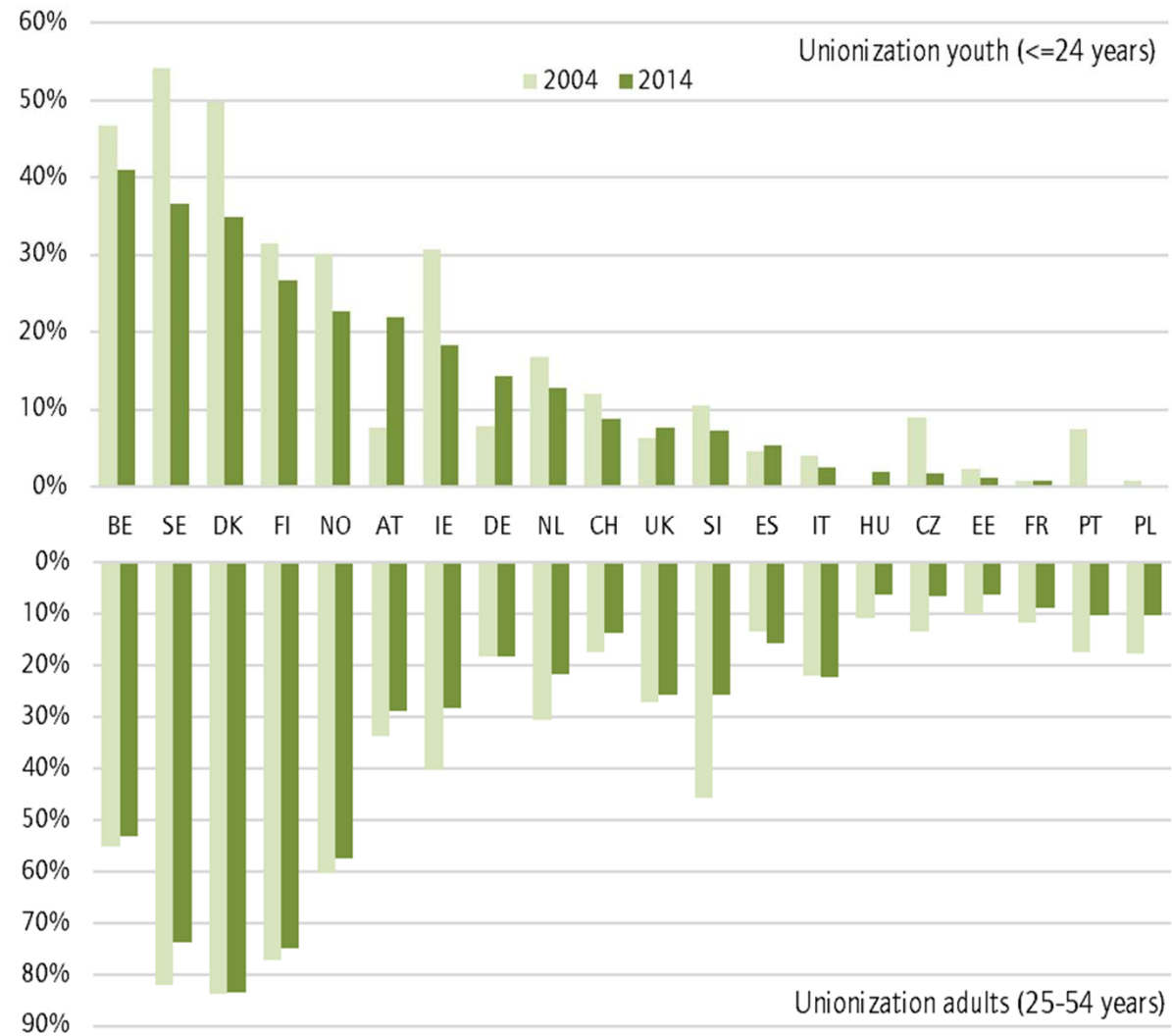
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## What could new (young) members bring to unions in Europe?

- Intersectionality
- Trans-connectivity
- Tech-savvy generation
- Making unions aware of new market developments and new union busting tactics
- New creative energy, fresh ideas and forging a culture of less 'traditional' activism

# Unionization rates among youth and adults in Europe, 2004 and 2014

1. Almost general decline
2. Country-ranking is stable
3. Early unionization is key



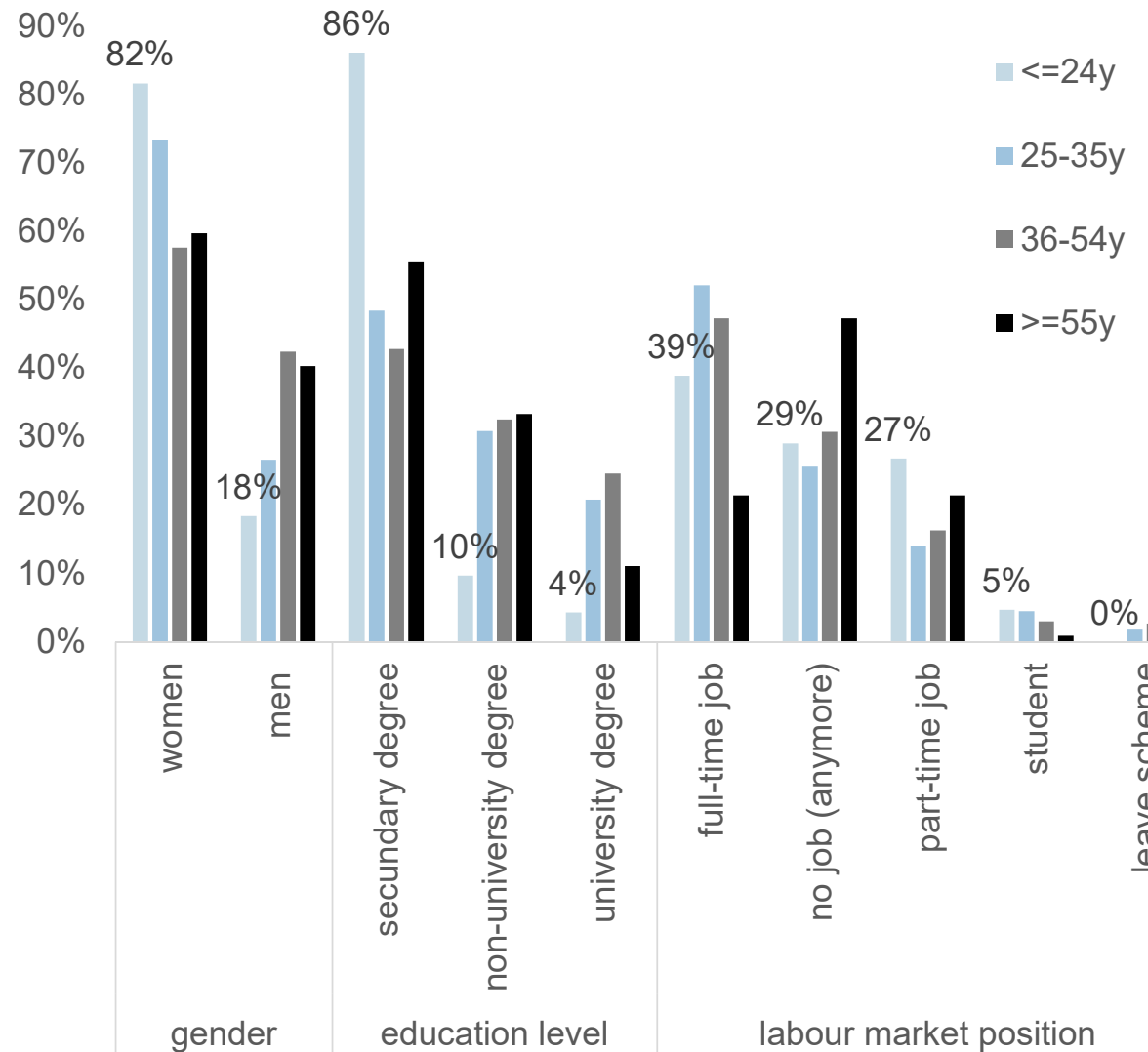
Source: based on European Social Survey

## Belgian context and method

- High (youth) unionization via institutional embeddedness
- Union membership – (at least two) challenges
  - Recent decline
  - Marked by instrumentalism and passiveness/union apathy – how to encourage union commitment and activism?
- e-survey of ‘new’ union members in local Y of union X (September 2015)
  - Union activists are excluded
  - No formal youth structures
  - 1,094 usable questionnaires; median age 31 years; average member duration 2 years and 5 months

More women among youngest new members. Young members are more likely to have a secondary degree.

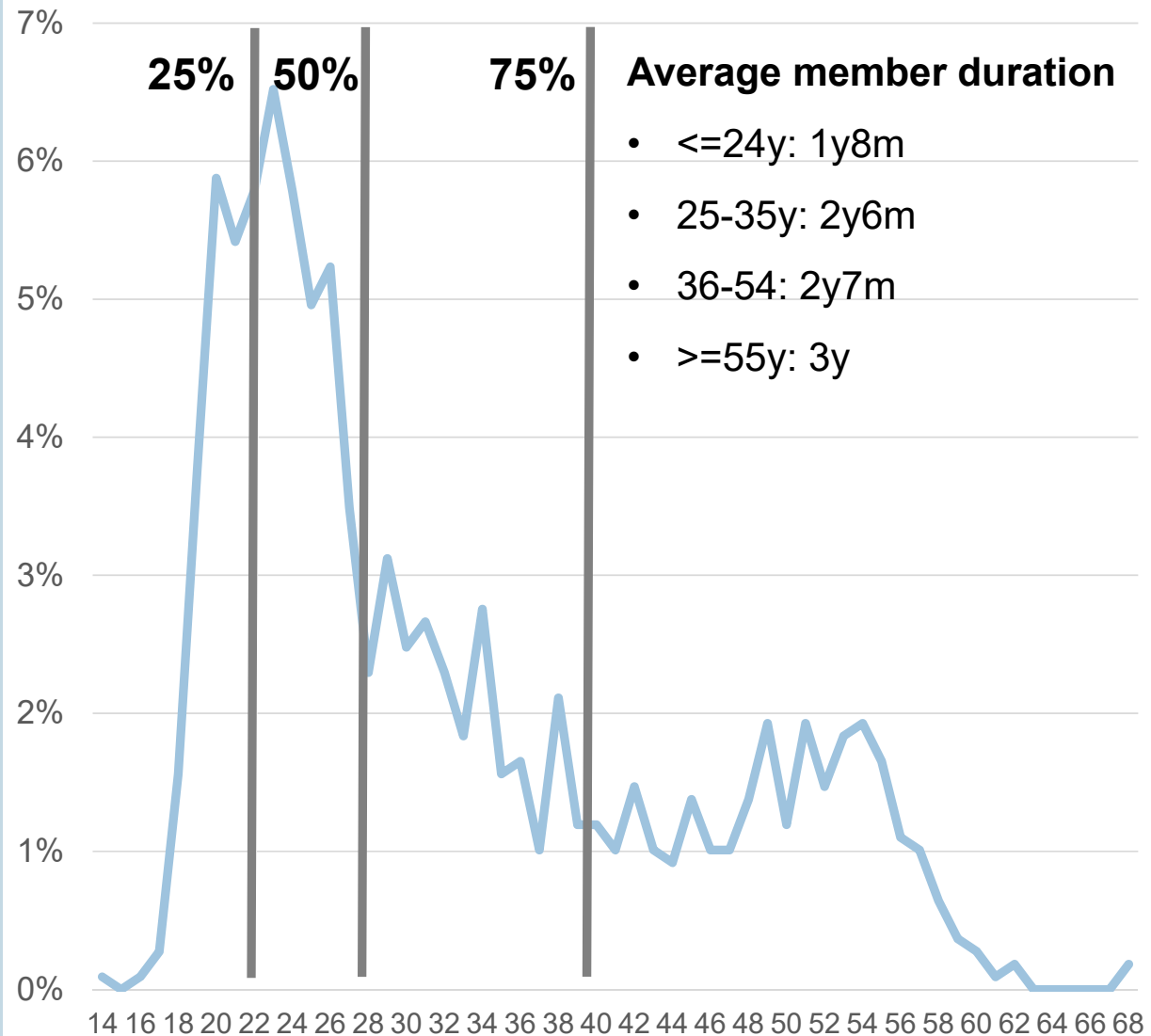
The labour market position is most diverse among youngest new members. They are overrepresented in small companies and in retail.



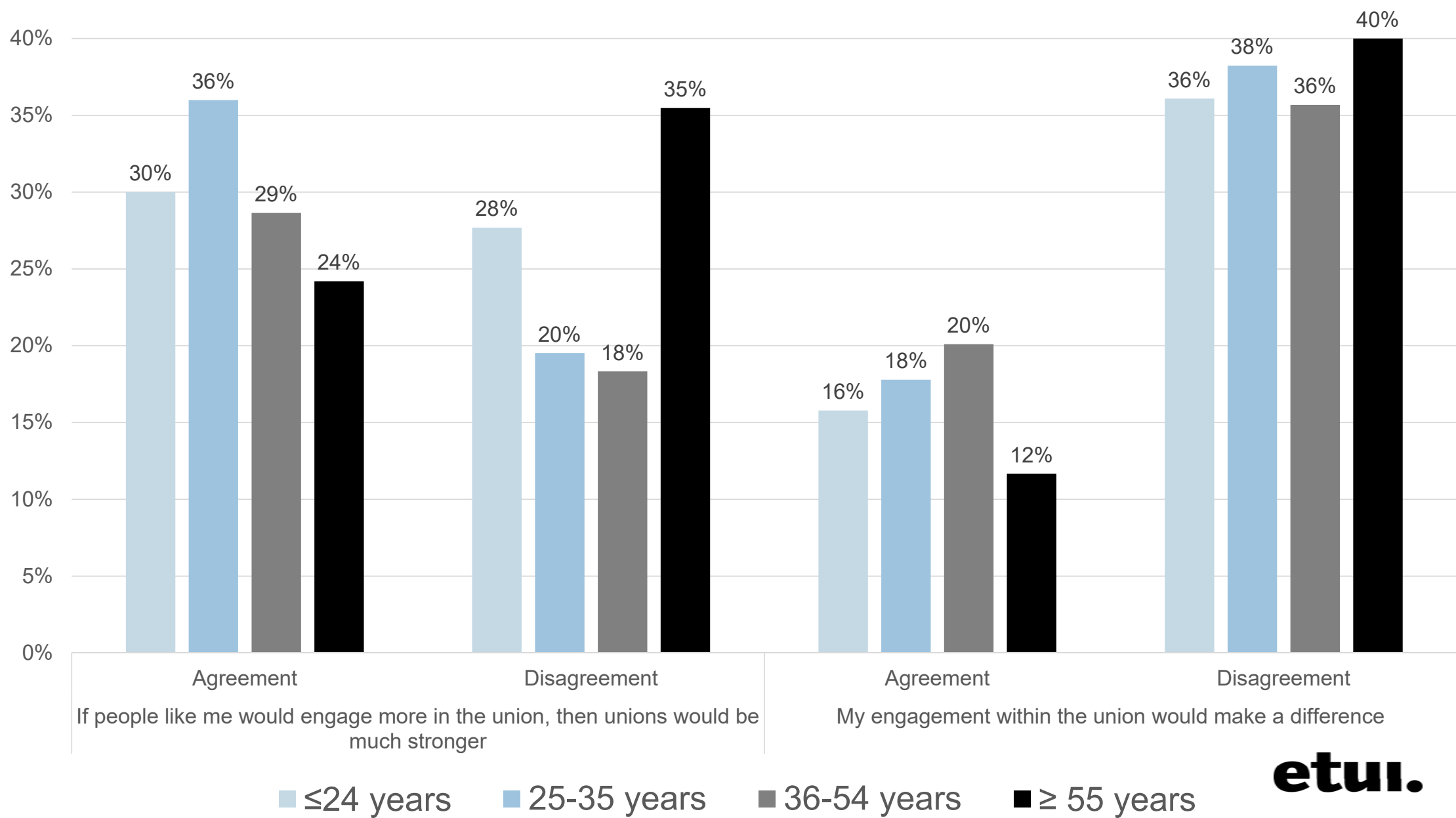
Most members join the union at an early stage.

Relative differences between gender, education level and sector.

Colleagues, friends or family are a more important channel for (de-)unionization among the youngest union members.



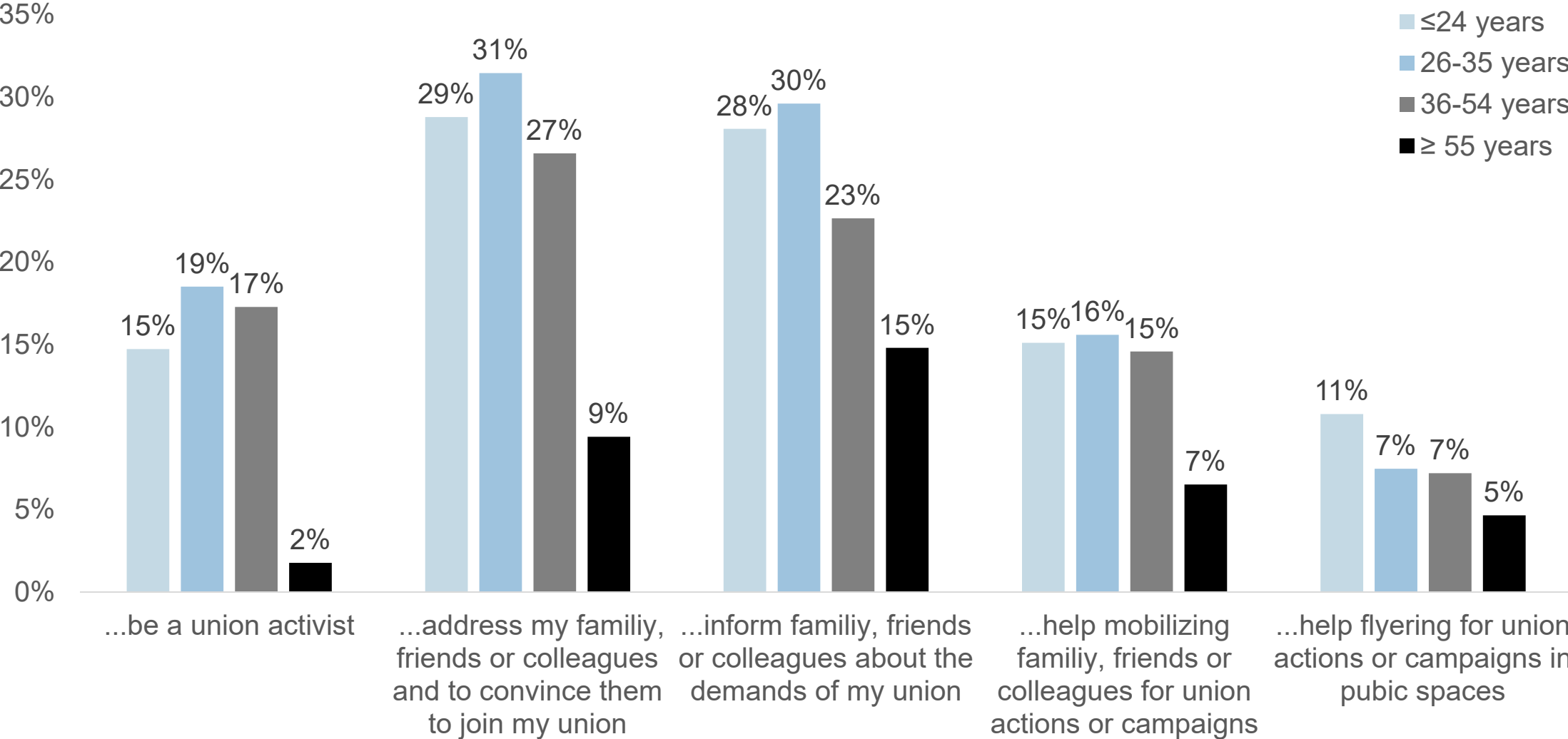
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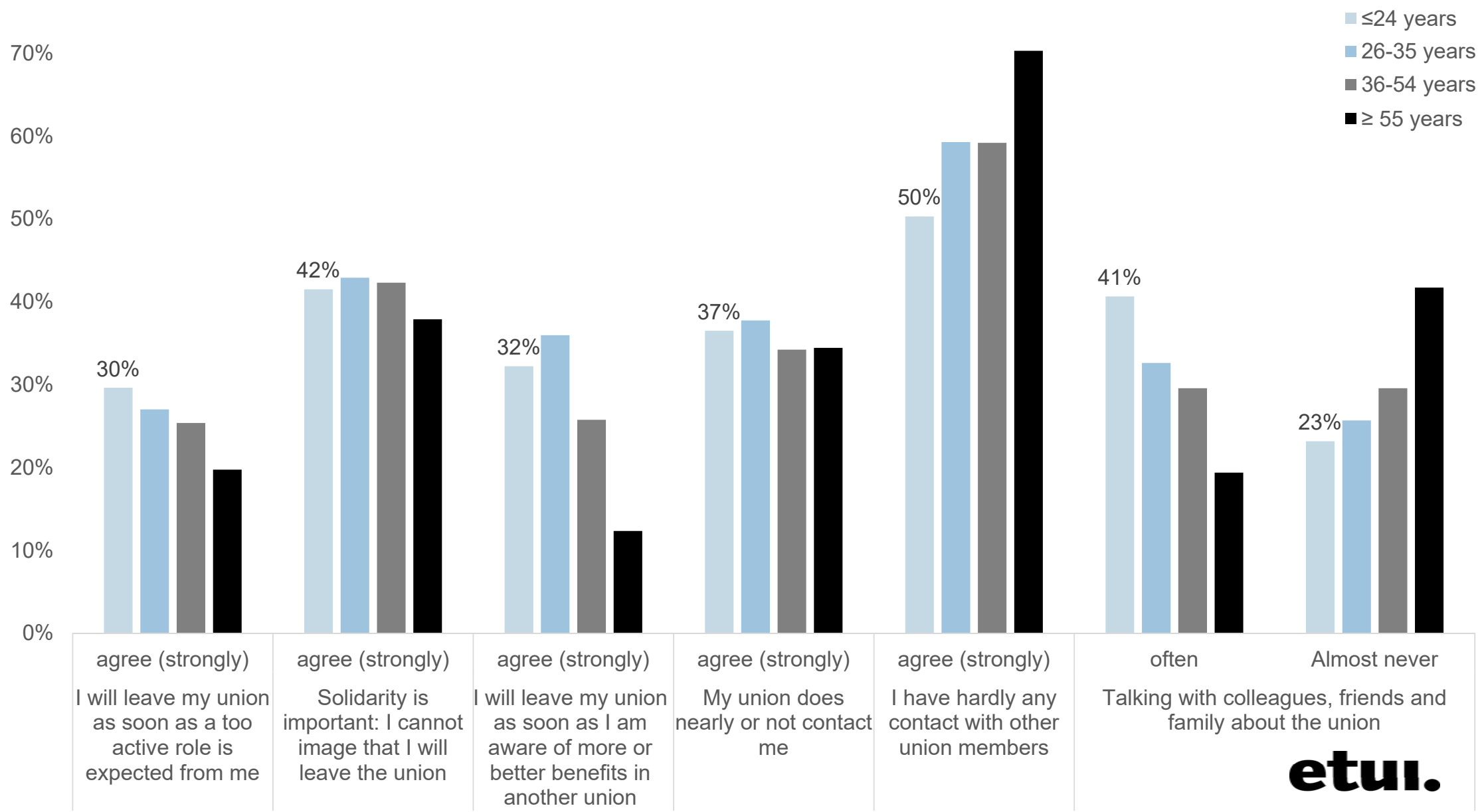
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I'm willing to...

- ≤24 years
- 26-35 years
- 36-54 years
- ≥ 55 years







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## Conclusions

1. Demonstrate the added value of union membership and make a positive impression
2. Strengthen union commitment to increase the organizational power and mobilization capacity of unions
3. Focus especially on the school-to-work transition of young people and early stages of union membership
4. Stimulate and tap into vertical networks for connecting a dispersed young workforce via using mass self-communications networks (in combination with offline meetings)
5. Involve the young people themselves via performing unpaid union work and direct action; there is an unused critical mass for union change and bottom-up union revitalization
6. Start with small-scale experiments, then scale up if successful