



COMPARISON OF SWISS AND BRITISH TRADE UNIONS STRATEGIES TO ORGANISE POLISH MIGRANTS

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Industrial relations systems in Switzerland (neo- corporatism) and the UK (liberal market economy)

	Switzerland	United Kingdom
Population	8,112,200	63,256,141
Trade union density	21%	26%
Trade unions	Two trade union confederations representing Christian (Travail Suisse) and Socialist traditions (SGB). The biggest confederation is the SGB of which Unia is a member.	The TUC represents the vast majority of British trade unions.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unia: the biggest union in Switzerland: 200,000 members; mainly private sector including care. • Unia (GBI) at the forefront of supporting migrant workers inclusion – one of the first migrants’ committee in Swiss trade union. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unison, a public service union 1.3 million members is the second biggest affiliate of the TUC. • Unison (NAGLO) and the first committee of Black members in the UK.
Collective bargaining coverage	51%	29%
Collective bargaining	Negotiation mainly on sectoral level in the public and private sectors and also with individual companies.	Sectoral negotiations mainly in the public sector, where almost two-thirds of employees are covered.

Polish workers in the UK and Switzerland

- Poland one of the main sources of migration to Western European countries. From 2004 to 2014 more than 1.9 million Poles left Poland to live in Western Europe (Polish Statistical Authority).
- UK one of the first EU countries lifting labour restrictions for CEE migrants already in 2004.
- Switzerland (not part of the EU) opened its labour market for CEE citizens in 2011.
- According to the 2011 census, the largest non-UK-born ethnic minority group become white other (2.1 million people), with the majority of this group (71%) arriving in the UK between 2001 and 2011.
 - The migration from CEE countries was younger and more feminised than previous waves: 82% of workers were aged between 18 and 34, 47% were women and 93% had no dependents (Home Office, 2009).
- In Switzerland, there was a steady increase in numbers between 2004 and 2015. In 2004, the number of registered workers from CEE countries was 19,402, including 5,084 Polish citizens. In 2014, the number of Polish workers rose to 21,421; the number of CEE workers rose to 63,779.
 - Polish migration to Switzerland was more feminised than previous groups (Spanish, Albanian, etc).



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Comparison of unions' strategies: Unison (UK) and Unia (Switzerland)

- Two years projects (2008-2010 in Unison and 2012-2014 in Unia) aiming to integrate workers. Employment of Polish speaking organisers, co-operation with the Polish union OPZZ, with Polish community organisations and embassies.
- Unison: Migrant Workers' Participation Project: partly subsidised by the Labour Government.
- Unia's project fully financed by the union.
- Projects delivered from the head offices with a participation of regional structures.
- Both unions claimed their projects were successful.

Both projects put attention to education about the union to migrant workers and supporting shop stewards (organizing approach)

- Unia focuses also on identifying cases of social dumping to improve the legislation to protect workers rights in the construction and care sector.
- Electricians from hotel in Andermatt, Swiss Alps, holiday destination;
- **Bogus self-employed workers from Zurich central railway station;**
- Successful strike of Polish and Slovakian care workers in Zurich;
- Posted workers from Rocheturm in Basel – claimed by Unia to be the biggest case of workers' exploitation in Switzerland.



Identified challenges

Fragmentation of the workforce (agency employment, outsourcing, posting of workers)

Language barriers.

Trade unions structures identities

- *Autonomy of the regions;*
- *Project based approach;*
- *Precise definition of migrant workers vs ethnic minorities;*
- *Not enough Polish speaking organisers;*
- *Not recording membership nationality (only in Unison);*
- *Lack of special structures for Polish workers (only in Unison);*

Autonomy of regions & Project based approach

- The projects were in general not a priority for regional managers.
- Unions attempted to solve this problem by creating parallel informal structures in the form of the Polish Activists' Networks in Unison and Unia (also an organizing concept).
- Even though the unions set up a network for Polish workers, the network struggled to support activists after the departure of the Polish organizer (renamed to Polish Members Network). In contrast, the Filipino Activists Network, which was managed by a permanently employed officer, was able to sustain its activities.
 - Migrants Workers Project's legacy was continued in the project focused on outsourced workers (Hidden Workforce Project (2010- 2012))
- In 2016, Network of Polish Members transferred into Network of European Members (Brexit).
- At the end of the Unia's project, the union decided to create a permanent position for the officer responsible for CEE workers.

Precise definition of migrant workers

Unison defined migrants as those who were born abroad to non-British citizens;

- However, some migrant members could fall into other categories, for instance Filipino workers were primarily classed as Black, enabling them to participate in the relevant structures for Black members.

According to Unia's migration committee rules, a migrant was someone without a Swiss passport;

- However, a number of committee members were naturalised Swiss citizens or may even have been born in Switzerland and defined themselves as second-generation migrants.

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For more information about the above please contact
Katarzyna Widiak on 07508 080 337 or k.widiak@unison.co.uk
Marta Chaba on 0750889765 or m.chaba@unison.co.uk



UNISON Polish members Seminar Application Form

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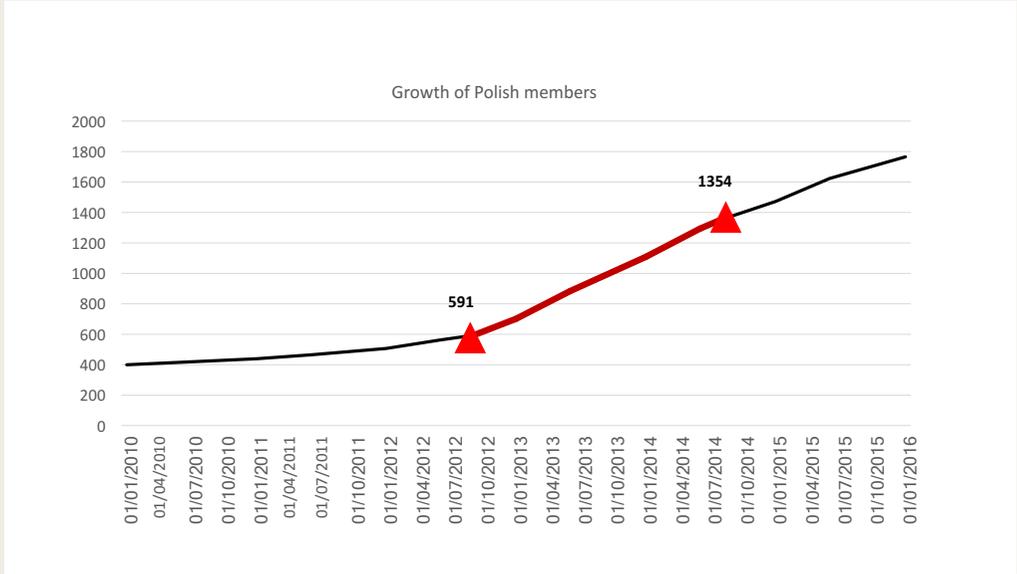
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Question to the project manager in Unison on the number of Polish workers:

The answer I can say with absolute confidence, is that we haven't got a clue. We didn't have a clue when we asked the question in 2008 or 9, and we still don't have a clue, because we keep statistical information about members in terms of gender and race and pay and job information but **we do not have information who migrants are, and if we did – the question would be: how would we identify it?** So how would you ask people to define themselves as migrants? So these definitional issues were one of the biggest challenges to us in terms of target.

Some estimation of number of Poles in Unions based on the Polish sound surnames in 2014 approx. 3000.



(Left) Growth of polish members in Unia from 1 January 2010 to the 30 June 2016

Unison Annual Report from 2016 shows that there were more than 67,000 members who were EU citizens or members of families of EU citizens in Unison.

Lack of special structures for migrant workers

- Unison rulebook states:
 - *Unison is committed to a policy of proportionality and fair representation to ensure that our members are properly represented at all levels of the union. **Unison monitors participation and membership of all national and regional conferences and committees.***
- **Definition of Black members** is a political one in Unison not based on ethnicity. But:
 - *Someone is Black if they define themselves as Black. So, I as a white UK citizen, in Unison terms, could identify myself as Black. I know it doesn't make much sense, I'm not recommending it, but this is part of the problem (Unison Project Manager).*
- The proposal to enlarge the membership for CEE rejected by Black workers' committee :
 - *Black workers' issues in the workplace go beyond discriminative practices experienced by the A8 Nationals [CEE workers] and cover a load of issues from immigration to housing and this negates the view that both groups should be organised **under the same banner** (Unison, 2008).*
- **Unison not interested in setting up a special committee for migrant workers who are not Black.**
- Unia's structures based on migration background were more accomodating for all migrants.
 - In 2016 two Polish members were delegates of the Unia congress one was as a co- president of a regional migrant workers' committee.

Polish workers attitude towards unions

- Members in both countries had quite a deep sense of labour agency and union consciousness, even though they may not have been fully aware of this.
 - A Polish organiser in Unia: *Poles have a high level of trade union awareness without consciously knowing that this is the case. I don't know if I am explaining this well, but Poles know what they can demand as employees, what should be the work conditions (...) as such, Poles have expectations and a high level of awareness as employees but low awareness as unionists.*
- Significant number of interviews informants explained that their willingness to be active in the union was not recognised. With a number bigger in Unison:
 - A Polish shop steward in Unison: *If the whole idea is that I should pay membership fees and just be there as a member, great, just let somebody tell me that and this is what I will do. And if they want me to be very active, absolutely, I can do that, I would like to know that my activity has some sort of direction, that we are creating something great, something that will be beneficial to me as well and in some way will fulfil my dreams (...) and will be good for the union.*

Summary: Why Unia's approach was more sustainable?

Existing unions structures for all migrant workers that can include Polish workers.

- Unia adopted a special **treatment approach** (Penninx and Roosblad, 2000) or **particularistic methods** of organising migrants (Alberti et al., 2013);
- Focusing on migrants' national background rather than their ethnicity (important in the context of EU intra mobility)

Polish migrants were more important for trade union's revitalisation and increasing the industrial power in Unia than in Unison.

- Victorious cases of social dumping in construction.
- In a growing care sector, Polish migrants vital to increase union presence.

Displacement goals (Zald and Ash, 1966) between members' expectations and unions' strategies were smaller in Unia.

Moving from the project -based to a long -term approach to include new members.