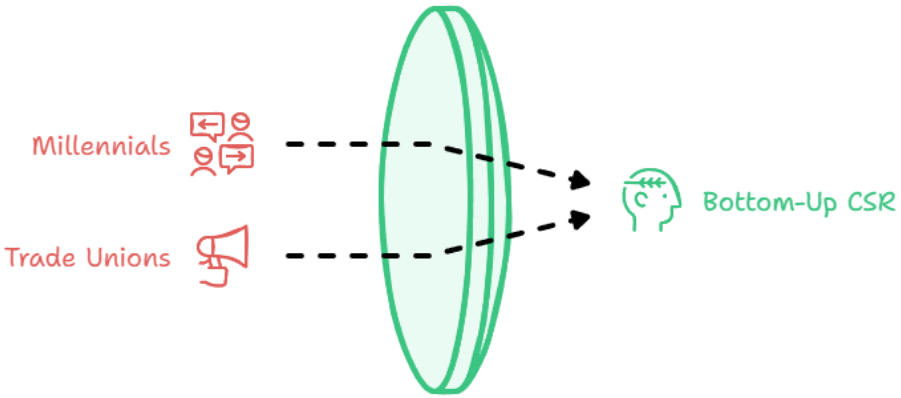


# REVITALISING RELEVANCE:

## HOW TRADE UNIONS CAN REALIGN WITH MILLENNIALS THROUGH CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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# Abstract

This thesis studies the relationship between trade unions and millennial workers. It specifically focuses on how trade unions can regain relevance among this demographic group and which topics should be used in the process of attracting potential new, young members. Historically, trade unions have experienced difficulties in engaging with young workers despite using trending topics among this age group. A current hot topic among millennials and other young workers is Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Millennials have shown far greater interest in topics related to CSR than their predecessors and rate the importance of CSR-performance by their employers highly. This study aims to uncover whether trade unions are using this heightened interest to engage with young workers and if so, why union density rates in the Netherlands are still declining year after year. Simultaneously, it studies the awareness of young workers regarding trade unions and their experiences with them. Through interviews with both trade unions and millennial workers, this thesis attempts to answer the question *''To what extent can trade unions use CSR in their recruitment strategies to overcome misalignment and bridge the gap between them and 25–30-year-old workers?"*

Using axial coding, themes were captured from these interviews which clearly demonstrated the invisibility of trade unions towards young workers. Despite trade unions claiming to put a lot of effort into engaging with young workers through online and offline channels, it appears that their initiatives do not reach the intended audience. Young workers are not aware of the trade unions that are connected to their places of work and have rarely been in contact with their respective trade unions. Moreover, CSR is rarely a topic that trade unions use to engage with millennials, as they would rather focus on negotiating primary benefits and seldom see CSR as a priority or even a topic of negotiation at all. This finding seems unfortunate, as the interviewed workers indicated to be content with their primary benefits and would rather see trade unions expand the topics of negotiating to include broader, collective problems such as sustainable employment, employee (mental) health and general bottom-up influence. Furthermore, the workers indicated that they experience a barrier of effort and time to gather information on trade unions. To the workers, the effort seems one sided and too time-consuming in their busy lives. The level of commitment that is needed to join a union or gather information on what a union does is perceived as being too high. One trade union has implemented the 'full-support model' which allows all workers to vote on decisions regarding their collective labour agreements whether they are a member of the trade union or not. This model drastically increased the visibility of this specific union and was also perceived in a positive way by the interviewed workers.

Overall, this study found that trade unions, despite their claimed effort to reach young audiences through relevant topics, are generally invisible to young workers. Young workers still have an old-fashioned view of trade unions and are unaware of any efforts they make for topics apart from primary benefits. CSR is largely not included in trade union recruitment, which might be causing them to miss crucial engagement with young workers who indicated that this is actually a topic they would like to see trade unions negotiate on more.

# Contents

# 1. Introduction

This chapter will introduce the topic and outline the problem statement. Afterwards, the research objective and research (sub-)questions will be posed. Lastly, the key concepts will be highlighted and defined in order to provide clarity and understanding to the reader.

## 1.1 Trade unions

Finding their origin in Mesopotamian times, trade unions have existed in a certain form for over four thousand years. A simple agreement on a standard wage of a few shekels in the ship-building industry would start a long history of trade unions (Sasson, 1995). In translations of the Code of Hammurabi, a Babylonian king reigning from 1792 B.C. until 1750 B.C., more of such agreements were found, this time in the form of specific laws and with respect to different industries (Sommer, 1903). Evolving over time, the modern trade union emerges in the United Kingdom during the Industrial Revolution where not only wages but also working conditions became part of the collective agreements that unions negotiated for with employers. With the spread of the Industrial Revolution to other parts of Western Europe and North America, unionism spread too. In 1786, an organised strike was performed by printers in the city of Philadelphia to obtain a minimum wage of $6 a week (Perlman, 2004). Again in Philadelphia, carpenters went on strike in 1791 to demand a 10-hour workday, indicating how not only wages but also working conditions had become part of the negotiations between employers and unionised labourers (Perlman, 2004). Over the next centuries, unions evolved and gained popularity. They became a strong force and managed to decrease wage inequality (Farber et al., 2021; Ahlquist, 2017), increase productivity (Barth et al., 2020), help create child-labour laws and unemployment insurances and many more admirable feats (California Labor Federation, 2023). Nonetheless, membership numbers have been steadily declining for some time, partially due to the repeating inability of trade unions to recruit young workers (Hodder & Kretsos, 2015).

### 1.1.1 Declining membership

Despite all of the aforementioned triumphs of trade unions, recent decades have shown a drastic decline in union-membership levels. The 38 member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) saw an average of 35.9% of all employees have a membership to a trade union in 1998 (OECD & AIAS, 2021). This organisation is composed of mostly European countries and other developed countries throughout the world. After 1998 a steady decline has set in, leading to an average union-membership percentage of under 28% in 2018. Whilst countries such as Iceland (90%), Norway (50%) and Italy (34%) have maintained steady levels throughout those twenty years, the majority of OECD member-

countries have seen a steady decline and none have experienced an increase except for Chile (from 11 to 16%) (OECD & AIAS, 2021). As one of the few countries that is part of the global south on this list, Chile's increase in membership levels can be explained by the economic and political uncertainty and instability in the country during this time as well as different levels of power relations between companies, trade unions and employees as compared to other countries (Ahumada, 2023).

The overall decline in membership numbers can be ascribed to several factors amongst which are globalisation, decrease of manufacturing jobs due to technological advancements and changes in geopolitical landscapes (Wallerstein & Western, 2000). Globalisation can add to the fact that employers seek for cheaper labour elsewhere, taking away power from the trade unions by threatening to outsource jobs to other parts of the world (Sano & Williamson, 2008). Another explanation, at least for a number of Western countries, could be the shift in the type of economy employers find themselves in. In most parts of the world, trade unions were historically powerful in industries in which physical labour and manufacturing were prevalent (Friedman, 2015). On top of this, with the liberalisation of the financial markets during the 1970's and 1980's in North America and Western Europe, focus shifted towards maximisation of shareholder value which negatively affected trade union power and density (Peters, 2010). The focus on shareholders took away power from trade unions as companies were more reluctant to give into union demands which could hinder financial performance. Consequently, trade unions became less influential leading to decreasing membership numbers (Peters, 2010).

With the decline of membership levels came several consequences for the trade unions, with the aforementioned increase in wage inequality being one of them. Also, Mellor (1990) shows in his study that members of unions with declining membership report less job satisfaction compared to members of unions with steady or increasing membership rates. This study also highlights that members of unions that are decreasing in numbers are more likely to go on strike as opposed to the members of stable unions. These findings are likely a result of the decreased level of influence that shrinking trade unions have on workplace related topics (Mellor, 1990). Another result of decreasing membership numbers is the fact that the income for trade unions will decrease, too. This results in less resources to organise meetings, pay salaries of their own employees, thus an overall decline in strength and opportunity to fight for the interests of labourers in the sector they are invested in.

### 1.1.2 Corporate Social Responsibility

Not only trade unions have felt the effects of changing geopolitical landscapes over the past few decades. Whereas the uncertainty for trade unions stems from decreasing membership

numbers and a loss of influence, the companies they are negotiating with are also facing new uncertainties. With climate change being one of the largest modern-day challenges, proposed action plans require businesses to be a large part of the solution as they are seen as large contributors to climate change. Mandal (2022) reported businesses to be responsible for more than a third of the world's total energy consumption and 36% of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. In this new situation, businesses are still expected to treat their internal stakeholders, such as employees, righteously. However, there is also a societal expectance of businesses to act in a socially responsible manner and act beyond their own interests and legal requirements (Dawkins & Youm, 2024) to increase the well-being of all affected stakeholders. This so-called Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become an important topic in politics, business, and society as a whole, and influences the strategic behaviour of business heavily.

However, investing in CSR and by doing so increasing a company's economic, social and governmental (ESG) score, generally does not grant any *direct* financial return in the European and North American markets (Cherkasova et al., 2023). If investing in CSR does not align with the financial growth strategy a firm adheres to, there must either be legally binding regulations or a call from inside the company to change its ways and invest in CSR initiatives (Sen, 2006). In their study, Cheah et al. (2011) highlight how a younger age has a positive influence on the degree in which a worker is concerned with CSR. These younger workers are seen as a generation which represents a look on business that is more sensitive to the way that business is performed in a social and environmental context (Cheah et al., 2011). Despite contesting definitions of exact dates, this study follows Cheah et al.'s (2011) definition of millennials (i.e. those born between 1979 and 2001). Since this generation has been entering the labour market over the last two decades, their interest in CSR is something that companies must keep into account. When looking for a (first) job, millennials are increasingly concerned about the CSR performance of the companies they are considering applying for (Klimkiewicz & Oltra, 2017). This view is also supported by McGlone et al. (2011), who state that 79% of millennials want to work for a socially responsible employer, as they are convinced that businesses as well as they themselves are responsible for creating a better world. From this, it can be suggested that to attract new talent, which is challenging these days, companies need to think about their CSR performance. To retain this talent and keep them satisfied, employers would be well-advised to listen to their employees and seriously consider their initiatives (Lin et al., 2022).

A crucial factor in job satisfaction, is feeling heard. Employees who feel listened to by their colleagues and managers experience a higher level of job satisfaction, score higher on creativity and are also less likely to experience a burn-out (Mecham, 2022). Despite numerous

studies indicating the positive effects of feeling heard at work, Mecham (2022) reports that employees rarely feel heard, indicating a lack of bottom-up approach to decision-making. Cropanzano et al. (2017) describe the importance of feeling heard through the social exchange theory. The authors show that the relationship between the two communicating parties is affected by the response of the listener to what was said by the initiator. If an employee initiates certain CSR ambitions but does not feel heard this can damage the relationship between employee and employer (Cropanzano et al., 2017). Lin et al. (2022) add to this notion by showing that CSR related attributions by employees are significantly related to an increase in commitment to the organisation. Their study concludes that an employee's engagement to the organisation decreases if they feel scepticism towards CSR commitment by their employers. Gotsch et al. (2022) also resonate the importance of such a bottom-up approach regarding CSR strategies, claiming it positively influences the outcome of these strategies. Through a bottom-up approach, employees feel more connected to the tasks that must be performed, thus are more likely to perform them in a successful manner (Chiaburu & Carpenter, 2013).

### 1.1.3 An opportunity for trade unions

As has been proven in history, trade unions can hold enough power over large businesses to force them into change (Webb & Webb, 2021). The increase in wages, decrease in wage inequality and decreased working hours are all examples of this. Besides this, trade unions were also responsible for unemployment insurances covering a substantial portion of labourers against the loss of their salary during times of unemployment (Van Leeuwen, 1997). However, as has become apparent in recent times, with the decline in membership numbers, trade unions are losing ground in negotiations and are lacking the resources they once had. Despite these issues, as times have changed and CSR issues are becoming more apparent to the public, there might be an opportunity for trade unions to gain back some of their historic power. With a new generation of motivated and engaged employees entering the labour market, trade unions might investigate ways for employees to share their ideas regarding CSR and possible additions to their employers' CSR strategies. These collective CSR-concerns present a possibility for trade unions to grab onto in order to bring new arguments to the negotiating table. These issues are, however, a challenge to the trade unions too. Whereas trade unions want the best for employees, tackling climate change creates tension between the short- and long-term interest of labourers, especially those in manufacturing industries (Räthzel & Uzzell, 2011). Long-term job security for as many people as possible might conflict with solutions towards a sustainable world if businesses decide on a degrowth strategy which cuts jobs, lowers production rates and waste, and increases efficiency in order to become more sustainable in the future. Nonetheless, with a multitude of studies (Cheat et al., 2011; Klimkiewicz & Oltra, 2017; McGlone et al., 2011) showcasing how engaged young

professionals are with CSR and how much it influences their choice for an employer, a large opportunity is created for trade unions to use this engagement and regain their relevance as being the voice of the employees.

## 1.2 Research objective

The objective of this research is to explore whether the topic of corporate social responsibility can offer opportunities to trade unions in attracting new members. The study attempts to discover CSR-related needs of employees which they would like to see implemented at their place of work but have not been due to a lack of opportunities for employees to contribute to the decision-making process in a bottom-up manner. Simultaneously, this study aims to uncover current strategies that trade unions employ to recruit new, young members and find out whether these attempts successfully reach their intended audience. Consequently, the research will use the forgone needs to identify ways in which unions can offer a united voice regarding CSR demands of young employees and by doing so regain popularity amongst a group of workers which has historically been underrepresented in trade unions.

## 1.3 Research question

This research dives into the relationship between young workers and trade unions. Historically, trade unions have found it difficult to appeal to a younger audience (Hodder & Kretsos, 2015). Nowadays, as trade union membership levels are at an all-time low, it is even more important for the continued existence of trade unions to attract new workers. The latest generation to have entered the labour market is mostly made up of millennials (people born between 1979 and 2001). This age group has shown great interest in the CSR performance of their possible employers and include this performance in their decision-making process when looking for a new job (Cheah et al., 2011). To tackle worldwide challenges with climate change and other societal obstacles such as inequality, businesses are needed to contribute to a solution, largely through CSR. Current CSR strategies might not always be in line with the ideas and values of younger employees, leading to a lack of motivation by employees to contribute to the tasks that are a part of said strategy. A united voice that conveys the CSR demands held by young employees could induce companies to reconsider their approach to CSR, for example in a bottom-up manner. Such an approach has been proven to increase motivation and meaningfulness amongst employees and can lead to a more successful implementation of a CSR strategy (Gotsch et al., 2022). Offering a united voice and a stronger stance in negotiations also poses an opportunity for trade unions to engage with a younger audience and possibly regain some popularity. Since little is known about union recruitment strategies involving CSR, this study explores the feasibility of young employees and trade unions joining forces for the sake of CSR. This will be done by means of the following research question:

*''To what extent can trade unions use CSR in their recruitment strategies to overcome misalignment and bridge the gap between them and 25–30-year-old workers?"*

For this question to be answered, it is necessary to split up the topic and approach both sides of the situation with separate sub-research questions.

## 1.4 Sub-research questions

As this study evaluates two sides of a situation, the sub-research questions will be divided between the side of the employees and the side of the trade unions. To understand how the two sides interact with each other, it is key to uncover the current situation. Understanding the current situation allows us to explore possible overlap in needs and desires which have gone undiscovered thus far. To gain insight into the trade unions' current strategies and view on CSR the following sub-research questions are posed:

1. ‘*'What topics do trade unions currently employ in their recruitment strategies to recruit members in the millennial age group?"*
2. *''To what extent do trade unions see corporate social responsibility as a part of collective negotiations?"*

Similarly, to understand millennials' current views of trade unions and to explore their views on CSR and how they think it should be implemented at their place of work, this study attempts to answer the following sub-research questions:

3. *''What value do millennials see in trade unions in general and regarding corporate social responsibility?"*
4. *''To what extent do millennials feel included in the CSR decisions made by their employers?"*

Finding answers to these four questions should lead this study to find concluding answers to the main research question that was posed. Initially, the trade unions will be interviewed to answer the first two sub-questions. The findings from these interviews will be incorporated into the interviews with employees. The findings from those interviews will be used to answer sub-questions three and four. Combined, the findings will uncover if and how the current gap between trade unions and young workers can be bridged.

## 1.5 Key concepts and definitions

- **Trade union** – ‘’Association of workers in a particular trade, industry, or company created for the purpose of securing improvements in pay, benefits, working conditions, or social and political status through collective bargaining.’’ – Encyclopaedia Britannica (2024).
- **Recruitment strategy** – The actions a trade union performs to ensure the inflow of new members. Strategic choices that are made to attract new workers and ensure the continued existence of the trade union.
- **Corporate Social Responsibility** – In this study Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is defined as the actions by a business that further social good beyond firm-interest and legal requirements (Dawkins & Youm, 2024).
- **Latest generation of employees** – In this study the latest generation of employees is defined as employees with 1-5 years of working experience. These people are also part of the millennial age group, specifically 25–30-year-olds.

# 2. Literature review

This chapter gives theoretical background information on the most important topics at hand in this thesis. It will discuss trade unions, their engagement with young workers through recruitment strategies and go into more detail on CSR. The influence of trade unions on CSR will be highlighted as well as the importance of a bottom-up approach towards CSR.

## 2.1 Trade unions

Trade unions have existed in a certain form for thousands of years. Whilst initially standing up for worker's salaries and working conditions, the role of trade unions in industry and business in general grew far larger throughout the development of society (Farber et al., 2021; Ahlquist, 2017; Barth et al., 2020). Major growth for trade unions went combined with the Industrial Revolution in the late 18$^{th}$ century, as it spread across the globe.

Throughout the next two centuries trade unions gained in popularity and became a formidable force in ensuring better wages, working conditions and overall benefits for labourers of many industries. For one, union work resulted in a decrease in wage inequality (Farber et al., 2021). This effect was not only felt by members of the unions but also spilled over towards non-members and even towards industries in which unions did not hold much power (Ahlquist, 2017). Interestingly, almost simultaneously with the decline of union-membership amongst labourers in the United States, the wage inequality started increasing again, after years of decline (Western & Rosenfeld, 2011). An increase in 'union density' (the degree to which labourers are part of a trade union) also led to an increase in productivity (Barth, Bryson & Dale-Olsen, 2020). Besides these achievements, trade unions are also directly responsible for 8-hour workdays, child-labour laws, unemployment insurance and a number of health and safety regulations (California Labor Federation, 2023) which have led to a decrease in work-related fatalities (Zoorob, 2018). Other research shows that union workers in the U.S. are 25% more likely to have health insurance and a retirement plan (Schmitt et al., 2008). Overall, these achievements show that trade unions provided employees with a plethora of benefits since they came into existence.

### 2.1.1 Trade unions in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands, trade unions historically played a significant role in creating good working conditions, too. Similarly to the emergence of trade unions in the United Kingdom, unions in the Netherlands came into existence during a period of economic prosperity (Van den Berg, 1995). A large difference, however, is the fact that the first trade unions in the Netherlands actually formed surrounding more educated crafts rather than the less educated industrial jobs. Van den Berg (1995) claims this mostly had to do with the fact that the working-class labourers

were working and living in such adverse conditions that they had simply ‘’accepted their fate’’. During this time there were already attempts at creating a union federation, which would function as an overarching organisation for different unions representing different trades. The General Netherlands Workingmen’s Association (ANWV) was the first organisation of such kind to emerge in 1871. Its’ focus was not on organising strikes to get what they wanted from the employers, but rather to cooperate closely with the employers and come to fair understandings (Van den Berg, 1995). Up until 1900, neither Dutch trade unions nor the overarching union federations grew much. Through periods of slight growth and decline, around the turn of the century less than 10% of Dutch labourers were members of any sort of union (Van den Berg, 1995).

Up until the second world war, union membership levels in the Netherlands rose steadily and rapidly. With four main union federations (NVV, RKWV, CNV & NAS) leading the way, union density levels of over 30% were reached in the years just before the war (Van den Berg, 1995). Whereas unions typically negotiated on terms regarding salary and working conditions, they also ventured into insurance schemes which were meant to support union members in case of unemployment (Van Leeuwen, 1997). This idea was copied from British unions but never became as fruitful and never covered a similar percentage of members as it did in Britain (Van Leeuwen, 1997). Nonetheless, trade unions in the Netherlands continued growing in the first three decades after the war and their power in negotiations grew with it (Van den Berg, 1995). Van den Berg (1995) also ascribes this rise in power due to favourable economic conditions in which unions and labourers were able to voice steep demands, as employers were desperate for employees. This is not much different than the current economy in the Netherlands in which job vacancies are plentiful, and employees can set certain demands.

From 1945 up until 1975, union density rate in the Netherlands hovered around 40%. However, following a world-wide recession and an increase in inflation, government regulations started favouring the employers more to solve these challenges. With this loss in power for the trade unions, a slow decline in membership set in (Van den Berg, 1995). Since the start of the 21st century, this decline has continued, resulting in a union density rate of 15% in 2024 (CBS, 2024). This decline is not expected to stop, because of all employees under the age of 35 barely 10% have a union membership and of employees approaching their retirement age (55-65) almost 25% are connected to a trade union (CBS, 2024). With a large outflow and little accretion, trade unions will have to produce ways to regain relevance and power.

## 2.2 Trade union engagement with younger employees

In an attempt to regain popularity amongst young workers, trade unions need to step away from their original channels for communication. Carneiro and Costa (2020) studied the usage

of social media by trade unions to reach a younger audience. Their study concludes that new forms of communication do indeed reach a younger generation of employees, however, converting online attention to offline results (e.g. in the form of recruitment) remains to be a challenge. A similar study into the usage of social media to attract young people towards trade unions took place in Denmark. Geelan (2015) explains how changing the 'old-fashioned' image of trade unions has a considerable influence on the probability of a union membership of young workers. Geelan (2015) also points out that trade unions are often portrayed by the media as bureaucratic organisations which oppose any type of modernisation, which shows how media hold a vital role in the conception of trade unions. People start to associate strikes and their negative impacts on their own life with trade unions, as the consequences are blown up by media coverage. To combat this view, Danish unions attempted to use young union members to be the face of social media campaigns which attempt to persuade other young workers to consider a membership (Geelan, 2015). The campaigns focussed on mental health and targeted 15–39-year-olds. These attempts were moderately successful, especially through YouTube and other video-sharing media, which are most popular among a younger demographic (Geelan, 2015). These findings show that reaching a younger audience is possible for trade unions if they use the right themes and platforms to do so. Converting this attention to recruitment, however, remains to be a challenge (Carneiro & Costa, 2020).

Hodder and Kretsos (2015) too, describe the problems that trade unions have with recruiting younger members. They point out several factors contributing to this fact, amongst which are the inability of unions to engage with a younger audience and the attitude of young workers towards trade unions. The struggle to engage with youngsters is ascribed to both a lack of interest by young workers as well as the unions' failure to profile themselves well (Hodder & Kretsos, 2015). Unions tend to be seen, by youngsters, as a group of old people and not something they would be a part of themselves (Hodder & Kretsos, 2015). It does not help in this case, that the working population is getting older on average and so too will the average union member (Hodder & Kretsos, 2015). Historically, young workers have always been an under-represented demographic within trade unions. Despite calls for implementation of structural changes in UK unions to include more young labourers, it lasted until the 1970s for any of these calls to be answered (Hodder & Kretsos, 2015). Programmes were set up for union representatives to visit schools in order to introduce students to the work of trade unions and what they could mean for them in the future. This study also states that online communication channels are worthwhile for trade unions to explore if they want to reach young workers but are not necessarily the solution to ensuring an increase in membership levels among this group (Hodder & Kretsos, 2015). A report on young employees and trade unions by Keune (2015) highlights several more reasons why unions struggle to engage with young

workers. According to this report, young workers simply lack the awareness of unions and what they can mean for them and have based their attitude towards unions mainly on the old-fashioned and highly bureaucratic image. In places where young workers have more awareness of unions, such as Spain, they do not join because they find that unions do not represent young people well enough and are not democratic enough (Keune, 2015).

Cockfield (2005) once more highlights that merely investing in online communications with young workers and attempting to reach them through novel technologies, is not enough. The online strategy must be part of an overarching recruitment strategy specifically focused on recruiting young workers (Cockfield, 2005). Because of changes in power relations between unions and businesses, unions ought to understand better which powers they do still have and how these can be applied (Ellem et al., 2019). According to Ellem et al. (2019), union activities have been very limited and too focused on negotiating on workplace matters. The authors suggest a wider focus in order to encapsulate global problems more in their strategy could help in attracting young workers to join a union. In connection to the work that trade unions do, these global problems will be linked to workplace related topics such as sustainable employment.

## 2.3 Trade union recruitment strategies

Trade unions create action plans to form their so-called recruitment strategies. Throughout history, these recruitment strategies have largely been formed around actualities (Forrester, 2004). Examples of previous societal affairs that were incorporated into recruitment strategies are the appeasement policies by the British government in the 1930's (Croucher & Wood, 2017), life-long learning (Forrester, 2004) and technological advancements and innovations (Murray, 2017). In the 1930's, as the British government sought to invest heavily in the arms industries, this led to favourable situations for trade unions (Croucher & Wood, 2017). The trade unions used these circumstances, during which demand for labourers sky-rocketed, in their favour and formed their recruitment strategies around them. Unions organised strikes to strengthen their stance in negotiations over wages. These strikes worked, and the positive outcome led to an increase in union density in other factories and industries, showing how the incorporation of social concerns can lead to successful recruitment of new members (Croucher & Wood, 2017).

Another example of a societal trend being used by trade unions to attract new members, is life-long learning. Forrester (2004) says it is no longer viable to simply rely on the dissatisfaction of employees as a main factor in joining trade unions. According to this research, unions should put emphasis on 'capacity and capability building', which encourages new forms of participation and recruitment (Forrester, 2004). Through life-long learning

initiatives and training, trade unions can provide workers with an opportunity to develop themselves outside of the opportunities granted by their employers (Forrester, 2004). Technological innovations such as the internet and social media played a large role in the development of the economy. Because of the important role it held in society, trade unions used this in their strategies by means of membership engagement, exposing employer abuse in forms of underpayment and finding alternative forms of organising (Murray, 2017).

These examples show that trade unions' recruitment strategies can do well when they revolve around certain current affairs of which society recognises the importance. Ibsen and Tapia's (2017) comparative study showcases how the current social contexts are imbedded in the revitalisation attempts of trade unions. The authors describe how the 'organising' role that trade unions have taken on is not sufficient in and of itself and, according to them, what unions are organising for has become unclear and has not led to the empowerment of employees. It is stated that in order to compensate for the loss of individual power, trade unions should form (international) coalitions with social movements to have a greater impact and increase their bargaining power (Ibsen & Tapia, 2017). Moreover, Ibsen and Tapia (2017) predicted that recruitment strategies will start evolving more and more around campaigns that challenge businesses and governments in their handling of social concerns. The authors state that in these campaigns global societal concerns are a topic through which unions can engage with a new audience and possibly stop the membership decline they have been experiencing. This prediction begs the question which topic is of such global importance that complete union recruitment strategies can be based around it?

## 2.4 CSR

One such global topic which is appealing to young workers, and which is worthwhile exploring by trade unions, is CSR. Although the social responsibility of businesses has been a topic of debate for a long time, in its current form CSR can be traced back to the 1950s (Carroll, 1999). In this decade it became more apparent that the largest businesses held considerable economic, social, and political power and their actions affected the vast majority of society. This was the period in which the topic of discussion shifted from *whether* companies had certain responsibilities at all, to *what* responsibilities companies had (Latapí Agudelo et al., 2019). Based on the fact that the lives of so many were affected, businesses were expected to take more responsibility of their actions. This movement grew and in the 1970s two-thirds of respondents agreed that companies should have a moral obligation to ensure social progress even if it meant a decrease in profits (Carroll, 1999). Through changes in the global socio-political landscape as well as the impending and irreversible damage done to the climate, the calls for companies to act in a socially responsible manner have seen drastic growth in the last

few decennia (Latapí Agudelo et al., 2019). According to this same study, with the changing expectations that society has of businesses in taking responsibility, the very concept of CSR changed, too. Whereas in the 1970s CSR evolved mainly around making sure companies actually acted according to legislation (Latapí Agudelo et al., 2019), it has now evolved to society expecting businesses to act in a manner that furthers social good, beyond firm-interest and legal requirements (Dawkins & Youm, 2024).

Nowadays, business strategies without any mention of CSR-related topics are rarely heard of. Considering the social and political pressures demanding change, any company that wants to be economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable has to invest in CSR in some way (ElAlfy et al., 2020). This same study shows that investing in CSR ensures a better reputation, increased customer-loyalty and helps in maintaining a competitive position. Additionally, more recently it has also become apparent that well thought-out CSR investments cause businesses to financially outperform competitors and share-prices (thus shareholders) also benefit from CSR-minded investing (ElAlfy et al., 2020). Moreover, communicating a trustworthy and strong CSR strategy helps attract and retain employees (Stojanovic-Aleksic and Boskovic, 2017). Based on these results, it is fair to say that CSR is worth investing in, but to what extent depends on several factors. One of the factors that has influenced the degree to which companies commit to their CSR strategies, are the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs have also made it easier for society to hold companies to certain standards and targets, allowing for greater external pressure to be put in businesses (ElAlfy et al., 2020).

Stojanovic-Aleksic and Boskovic (2017) state that there are three main factors that influence the level and success rate of CSR that a business displays: instrumental, moral and obligatory motives. Instrumental motives are based on reaching certain pertained profits of CSR, such as the aforementioned increase in profits, share-price or other competitive advantages. Obligatory motives come from, as the term suggests, obligations a company has because of regulations or other legally binding forces. Lastly, moral motives come from the people inside the company. Depending on the degree of hierarchy it can come from committed employees or mainly from higher levels of management who feel it is the right thing to do for society (Stojanovic-Aleksic and Boskovic, 2017). In their empirical research these authors found that a moral motivation to invest in CSR leads to the most investment and results in CSR, especially in internal CSR which is focused on employee well-being and other workplace related topics such as diversity.

Of course, the implementation of CSR has its challenges, too. Implementing CSR initiatives can be a costly endeavour, which leads top levels of management to expect strong and quick results for both internal and external stakeholders (Radzi et al., 2018). This immediately sums

up the largest challenge that comes with realising CSR efforts: balancing the focus on social and environmental efforts whilst also keeping the (financial) performance of the business up to par (Radzi et al., 2018). Moreover, complicated policies as well as redundant bureaucracies lead businesses to be confused about the targets they should set for themselves and which topics the businesses should devote themselves to. Nave and Ferreira (2019) also state that a country's policies can often be confusing and challenging for a business to fully grasp, which makes it unclear what steps are to be taken.

In sum, the importance of CSR on the performance of companies has grown tremendously over the last decades. Motives for a business to invest in CSR efforts range from obligatory to moral reasons, in which morality leads to the highest level of investment. Investing in CSR efforts can lead to a great number of advantages amongst which are reputational and financial advantages. Like any change in business, CSR brings along difficulties as well. Bureaucracies, having to balance internal and external interests and confusing policies all affect the implementation of CSR strategies in their own way. Ultimately, many stakeholders play a role in the CSR strategy a firm chooses to employ, and it is up to these stakeholders to find out how they can sway a business towards the direction they would like to see it headed.

### 2.4.1 Trade unions and CSR

The increase in CSR investment over the past decades is linked to a social and institutional demand for change (Boodoo, 2020). Although CSR consists of businesses acting in certain ways, trade unions can play a role in this process, too. With obligatory motivation being one driver of CSR within a business (Stojanovic-Aleksic and Boskovic, 2017), trade unions can influence a business' obligations through negotiation and collective agreements, thus possibly influencing CSR strategy if they can negotiate certain CSR targets to be included in the collective agreements they make with said business. Furthermore, not only by negotiating with but also by monitoring employers, unions can have an influence on the CSR strategy of a business (Boodoo, 2020). Of course, in a first instance, trade unions fight for their members' rights, benefits and other needs. In situations where union density is low, companies tend to prefer non-employee-oriented CSR over employee-oriented CSR, in order to cherish outside stakeholders' needs (Boodoo, 2020). However, as union density increases, employee-oriented CSR becomes more important, as unions gain the power to hold certain demands. Interestingly, as union-density increases even more, it has been observed that non-employee-oriented CSR and employee-oriented CSR start complementing each other, and both see an increase in the extent to which companies invest in them (Boodoo, 2020). This finding is also supported by Hermans et al. (2020), who report that an increase in density was positively related to an increase in external CSR policy such as committing to pollution reductions. On the contrary, Dawkins and Youm (2024) found evidence suggesting that an increase in union

density leads to a decrease in internal CSR efforts. They suggest this could be the case because trade unions compete for resources that could either be allocated to employee benefits or towards CSR initiatives. In essence, this comes back to an aforementioned conflict between striving for short-term interests of employees as opposed to broader long-term interests. According to Thomas and Doerflinger (2020), job concerns have the upper hand in this conflict as these are traditionally the most important to trade unions. However, external CSR issues are gaining attention amongst the population, especially among young workers (Cheat et al., 2011) and the majority of millennials take into account CSR performance when choosing an employer (Klimkiewicz & Oltra, 2017). It is specifically this group that unions are struggling to engage and connect with (Hodder & Kretsos, 2015), whilst trade unions need this generation to ensure their continued existence.

An interesting finding comes from research by Bernaciak and Trif (2023). These authors looked into revitalisation strategies of trade unions in different European countries and found that unions still focus mostly on (re-)establishing better working conditions and worker rights. These strategies did not grant the wished results, as membership decline continued (Bernaciak & Trif, 2023). However, interestingly, non-union organisations and alternative employee-voice initiatives gained popularity. This was achieved not by competing with unions for influence on collective agreements, but rather by focusing on specific needs the employees have and representing these needs as a united voice (Bernaciak & Trif, 2023). This finding poses as an interesting opportunity for trade unions. Instead of maintaining a focus on traditional union interests, it can prove to be valuable to tap into more specific needs of workers. With the aim to attract more young employees, the specific needs that unions might want to look into, could very well be CSR related.

### 2.4.2 Bottom-up approach to CSR

As organisational environments become more dynamic, the importance of employees proactively contributing to success has grown (Chiaburu & Carpenter, 2013). The authors distinguish two motivators for employees in the workplace: status and communion. Employees can either be motivated to get ahead of others or be motivated to create a stronger connection with their colleagues. Chiaburu and Carpenter (2013) found that people who are motivated by a combination of these two factors are most likely to be initiative-taking at work. Managers tend to be more stimulating towards an environment of achieving status and outperforming others, in the interest of increasing productivity. However, Chiaburu and Carpenter (2013) state that managers would do well in stimulating an environment in which both status and communion are important in order to encourage more employees to take initiative.

The success of a company's CSR efforts ultimately comes down to whether employees can execute the necessary tasks (Opuku-Dakwa et al., 2017). Therefore, it is important that these employees are engaged with the CSR topics and believe in what they are asked to do. Being competent at and feeling positive towards a certain task plays a key role in the degree of success the task is completed with (Opuku-Dakwa et al., 2017). Employees tend to be more invested in performing a task if it comes from their own initiative (Frese & Fay, 2001). Consequently, involving employees' CSR-related initiatives and ideas into a business' CSR efforts could prove useful in obtaining the set targets, as employees are more likely to believe in the effort and will work harder to achieve it.

Implementation of a CSR strategy through a bottom-up approach makes the employees feel more committed to the effort (Gotsch et al., 2022). Moreover, employees felt more motivated by their peers if a bottom-up approach is used and found the tasks to be more integrated into everyday working-life than when applied via a top-down approach. Nevertheless, the company that was studied by Gotsch et al. (2022) had a strong hierarchical culture in which a top-down approach prevailed. However, managers at this company stimulated employees to participate in sessions in which they could voice their own ideas and opinions by rewarding engaged employees with monetary grants and other rewards (Gotsch et al., 2022). In this way, management kept control over which direction the business would go in regarding CSR, but employees would feel included and more engaged because their ideas were considered and applied when useful (Gotsch et al., 2022).

Research by Cunha et al. (2022) also supports the importance of a bottom-up approach in a company's CSR strategy. These authors found empirical evidence that suggests including employees through a bottom-up approach positively influences their sense of meaningfulness at their job. An increased feeling of meaningfulness leads to better job engagement, thus better job performance (Cunha et al., 2022). Rodrigues et al. (2024) performed a similar study and also found a bottom-up approach to CSR to increase the meaningfulness felt by the employees. Moreover, for employees to experience this feeling of meaningfulness, the CSR efforts have to be embedded into the company's everyday work and identity. Therefore, it is more important *how* the strategy is implemented than what the actual efforts are (Rodrigues et al., 2024). Not only internal stakeholders benefit from a bottom-up approach towards CSR, the same goes for external stakeholders such as consumers (Kim et al., 2023). Usage of a bottom-up approach when implementing a CSR strategy increased the public's perception of a company. This resulted in a more positive attitude towards the company and an increased intention in buying their products (Kim et al., 2023).

As the theoretical background is not able to answer all questions and discussion exists regarding the steps that are to be taken by trade unions to engage with young workers, this research attempts to explore the unknowns of the misalignment between trade union recruitment strategies and young workers' interests. By interviewing both sides of this topic, the study hopes to inductively uncover ways for trade unions to adapt to the interests of the latest generation of workers.

# 3. Methods

This chapter highlights the technical design of the study. Starting with the research design which describes the way the research is set up. Afterwards, the way in which the data will be collected and analysed will be described. Following this, the complete research framework is shown.

## 3.1 Research design

This research focuses on uncovering the possibilities which trade unions have in engaging with a younger audience through CSR. To understand these opportunities, it is important to approach both sides of the case and gain insights into the views of the trade unions as well as the young workers they are hoping to connect with. Since little is known about specific strategies to engage with young workers amongst Dutch trade unions, this research will be performed in an exploratory manner, in which information and patterns are gathered inductively. An exploratory study is useful when attempting to uncover unknowns (Blumberg et al., 2014). An inductive research approach entails gathering data to explore a certain phenomenon. By doing so, certain themes and patterns can be uncovered which in turn can be used to generate theories (Saunders et al., 2012). The topic will be explored through semi-structured interviews with union representatives as well as young workers. Through the process of inductive coding (i.e. open coding, axial coding and selective coding) (Saunders et al., 2012), the most important concepts and the answers to the (sub-) research questions will be found.

## 3.2 Data collection, recruitment and analysis

In order to gather useful qualitative data, this study makes use of semi-structured interviews. To answer sub-question one and two, ‘*’What topics do trade unions currently employ in their recruitment strategies to recruit members in the millennial age group?”* and *‘’To what extent do trade unions see corporate social responsibility as a part of collective negotiations?”*, nine representatives of seven Dutch trade unions were interviewed. These interviewees represented trade unions with close to a million members but also smaller unions with just under a thousand members. The unions ranged from organisations that are involved in hundreds of collective agreements to organisations that were specifically focused on one single sector or even company. The representatives were asked about the recruitment strategies of their respective unions and their approach to young workers. The spokespeople were also questioned on any CSR-related initiatives their unions have invested. Furthermore, the trade unions were asked about their general stance towards CSR and whether they include it in their negotiations with employers and why they have or have not done so.

The trade unions that were interviewed were handpicked by the researcher from a list of Dutch trade unions. In total thirteen different trade unions were approached of which eleven answered and seven agreed to be interviewed. In the Netherlands there are several large union federations, which are overarching organisations representing employees in many different trades. These trade organisations represent employees in many different industries such as government, IT, finance, processing industries and many more. It could occur that multiple people belonging to one such federation but representing different industries were contacted and interviewed.

To answer the third and fourth sub-question, *'What value do millennials see in trade unions in general and regarding corporate social responsibility?"* and *''To what extent do millennials feel included in the CSR decisions made by their employers?"*, eight employees of different Dutch companies were interviewed. More specifically, eight employees with 'white collar' jobs between the ages of 24 and 29 were interviewed. They worked in different sectors ranging from healthcare to aviation and government work. It was decided to interview workers with 'white collar' jobs as trade unions in the Netherlands originally came into existence in sectors that required higher education (Van den Berg, 1995), which shows that trade unions in the Netherlands have not merely been a way for 'blue collar' workers to unite their voices. Moreover, from subjective experiences of the author and their network, the selection of 'white collar' workers allowed for increased feasibility in finding qualitative and inductive answers to the posed research questions. Lastly, as CSR plays an influential role in this study's aim, white collar workers were selected as they are generally more aware of and concerned about CSR-performance (Karabasevic et al., 2016).

Additionally, this group of young workers has recently begun working, thus could be asked about their CSR considerations when looking for employment, assuming these considerations still come to mind easily. Moreover, this group is also part of the millennial age-group as they were born before 2001 and after 1979. The millennial age-group has been proven to be more concerned with CSR than their predecessors (Cheat et al., 2011; Klimkiewicz & Oltra, 2017; McGlone et al., 2011).

The employees that were interviewed were both handpicked by the researcher as well as selected through snowball sampling. Initially, the researcher approached people in the 25–30-year-old age-group from their own second-order network, of whom it was known they had started working in the last five years. Furthermore, these interviewees were asked if they knew of other people in their surroundings who fit the description and would also like to participate in the study. Through chain-referral sampling via the author's network, the study attempted to include interviewees who do not share as many similarities with the initially approached group

of people. This was done to overcome potential bias and find more generalisable answers to the research questions. All eight interviewed workers worked in different sectors, increasing the generalisability of this study.

Overlap exists between the interviewed trade unions and workers. Four out of eight interviewed workers were covered by collective labour agreements that at least one of the interviewed trade unions represent.

### 3.2.1 Interviews

The interviews that were conducted are semi-structured, which allowed for flexibility in the way the questions were asked as well as the order they were asked in (Saunders et al., 2012). This allowed for an open discussion but also ensured that the interviewer guided the interview to include the most important topics. Semi-structured interviews allow for the interviewer to dive deeper into some topics if interesting answers or statements are given, which increases the depth of the information that is revealed (Blumberg et al., 2014). Moreover, as this study is exploratory in nature, a semi-structured approach helps in encouraging interviewees to speak their mind which could uncover details which were not previously studied. The interview guides that were set up for both sets of interviews can be found in the appendices, the reasoning behind why certain questions were asked can be found there as well. As all contributors to this thesis and all interviewees are Dutch, it was decided that the interview guides would be set up in Dutch as well.

### 3.2.2 Data analysis

To be able to uncover the most important themes, patterns and answers to the research questions, the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were coded using inductive coding. This style of coding follows several steps which dissect the recorded answers to find similarities in the answers given by different interviewees (Saunders et al., 2012). The first step in inductive coding is called open coding. During open coding, raw data from the transcripts is used and pieces of text are labelled according to their essence. By labelling, or coding, the pieces of text, themes can emerge which show similar answers that could be linked to each other later (Saunders et al., 2012). The next step in this process is axial coding, which takes the created themes from open coding and starts linking the pieces of text with similar codes to each other. By connecting related codes, categories and sub-categories can be created which can reflect broader patterns (Saunders et al., 2012). Lastly, selective coding is applied to the created (sub-)categories. Selective coding identifies the core category and uses the other categories to build a theoretical concept around the key findings.

## 3.3 Research framework

In figure 1, the research framework for this study is visualised. This framework shows the order in which the steps of this study were taken and what was done to maintain coherence and clarity throughout the course of this research. The study started with a literary background on both trade unions as well as CSR and their respective relations to millennials. Following this, interview questions were created for the trade unions, to answer sub-research questions 1 and 2. The interview questions for the young workers were created both with background information from the literature search as well as with the answers given by trade unions during their interviews. The interviews with the workers were used to answer sub-questions 3 and 4. The two stages of the empirical research followed each other up shortly, after which the interviews were transcribed and coded through inductive coding. By means of coding the transcripts, the study hoped to identify the most important themes and patterns in the answers of both sides and create categories in which the most important findings could be placed. Ultimately, these categories were used to form conclusions and answer the main research question.

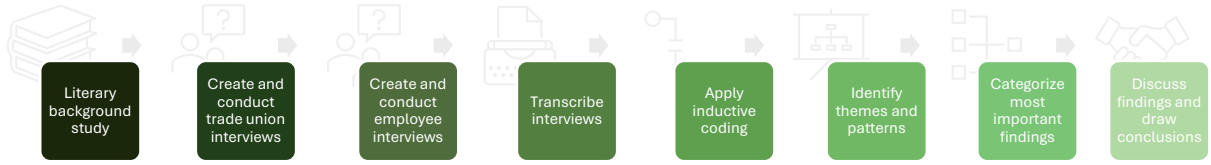


*Figure 1. Research Framework*

# 4. Findings

This chapter discusses the findings from the semi-structured interviews that were conducted amongst trade union representatives and employees aged 24-29. The interview transcripts were coded using axial coding. The most important findings will be shown with the use of tables in which quotes, and their respective codes are highlighted. These quotes will support the created themes and patterns that arose from the interviews. The most important themes and patterns will be discussed and used to answer this study's research question and sub-research questions.

## 4.1 Recruiting millennials

To answer sub-question 1: ‘*’What topics do trade unions currently employ in their recruitment strategies to recruit members in the millennial age group?”*, the interviewees were asked about their current recruitment strategies in general, and more specifically about their focus on a younger age group. On top of this, they were asked how these strategies were formed, who were involved in the decision making and through what channels the unions attempt to come into contact with possible new members. The responses to these questions uncovered vast differences in the ways that the interviewed unions approached new generations. Table 4.1.1 shows some of the most common answers and highlights several quotes attesting to the codes that were linked to the answers.

*Table 4.1.1 – Common topics used to approach young workers*

| Themes | Codes | Associated quotes |
|---|---|---|
| | Youth topics (housing, parental leave, job security) | *‘’One of the greatest things, as an example, and I do think this is really specific to young people or that's actually young adults, is parental leave.”* – Interviewee #9 |
| | | *‘’I mean, student debt, you can't buy a house anymore, just temporary contracts. You know, who stands up for those young people? I honestly think that's a really bad thing…”* – Interviewee #7 |
| | Providing knowledge on job-related topics | *‘’I do quite a lot of training-sessions with employees and I'm already saying, I'm not going to teach you what to think about the whole sustainability or climate agreement. But how you can think about it.”* – Interviewee #5 |
| | | *‘’Then we're going to work with them on the spot. Check what your salary is, have you ever checked this and that, and then we're just going to help explain it. So it's also very much especially doing things together, not mothering but discussing.”* – Interviewee #7 |
| | | *"We can point you to, well, things you need to consider as an employee. If you're going to have a job interview or if you're going to have a performance review, how do you get the most* |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Specific focus on recruiting youth | | *out of it? How do you make sure you get a good review? How to deal with illness during vacation?"* – Interviewee #6 |
| | Advocacy | *''we think it's important that your voice is also heard and also at that bargaining table."* – Interviewee #1 |
| | | *''Would you consider it important for the employer to pay attention to that, should it be at the expense of other working conditions? Because in the end, of course, it is also often a trade-off, where do you put the priorities?"* – Interviewee #6 |
| | Internships | *''...we also have a hotline for things like internship abuse. If you have problems at your internship you can call someone or you can send someone a whats-app."* - Interviewee #3 |
| | | *''We are somewhat the forerunners of campaigning for mandatory internship compensation. That's something we do campaign on very much"* – Interviewee #3 |
| No specific focus on recruiting youth | Focus on the whole constituency | *"…we are just very much focused in that on listening and analysing in a professional way, the opinions and views of our whole constituency."* – Interviewee #6 |
| | | *"We don't have a proactive push of certain topics that we think young people find interesting, or certain target groups find interesting, to use that in our strategy."* – Interviewee #6 |
| | Youth is approached through same topics as all others | "*… specifically focused on the youth, no. That is just part of the general strategy."* – Interviewee #9 |

As becomes obvious from the table, five out of the seven interviewed trade unions have specific strategies aimed at recruiting young workers, whilst two trade unions have general recruitment strategies which lack a focus on one certain demographic. The trade unions who do focus on the younger demographic specifically, use different topics to stimulate interaction and create awareness among millennials. An example of this was given by interviewee #9, who said that parental leave is one of the topics they use to approach a younger audience. Similarly, interviewee #7 mentioned student debt as something that is used to trigger a response in a younger demographic. Furthermore, three unions mentioned the provision of knowledge through specific training-sessions to workers as a way to gain popularity among a younger audience. These unions said that they attempt to share information during training-sessions or recruitment-sessions which workers often do not know about. These topics reach from an explanation about salary and taxes to helping them prepare for performance-reviews. The interviewees who mentioned these topics argued that young and inexperienced workers often lacked this knowledge or were insecure about discussing these topics at work. The unions who did not have a specific focus on recruiting young workers said that they focus on their constituency as a whole. This meant there was no proactive push of topics that might interest young workers more than older workers.

Despite making use of different topics in their approach towards young workers, the ways in which the different trade unions attempt to reach the workers are mostly similar, as can be seen in table 4.1.2 below.

*Table 4.1.2 – Platforms used to approach young workers*

| Themes | Codes | Associated quotes |
|---|---|---|
| Online recruitment | Recruitment through social media | *''In communication, we have a separate style for young people. (…) We are much more engaged with Instagram and TikTok channels that young people use."* – Interviewee #3 |
| | | *''We need to make good content all around to get employees in touch with the work we do as unions in a positive and constructive way. (…) On LinkedIn and through Instagram you can obviously target employees within certain companies or sectors much more specifically with messages that are more tailored to them."* – Interviewee #5 |
| | | *''We said, we're just going to invest a lot on those socials. We're just going to create a lot of content."* – Interviewee #8 |
| | Recruitment through other online channels such as their website or commercials on other websites | *''In that case online is a better environment, but it's also much easier to do that now. You know, if we organize something online, think of webinars and information sessions, (…) there are 4,500 people participating. So online that barrier to participate is much lower."* – Interviewee #6 |
| | | *''Putting things out, we do that in our trade magazine, we do that on our website. Well, we recently had a whole rebranding now with different colours, a bit more abstract, a lot more videos."* – Interviewee #7 |
| Offline recruitment | Face-to-face recruitment | *''That means that we are allowed to show ourselves within the company and then the employer pays the first year of dues for a membership. And those are very good strategies to, well, to introduce people to the work of the union in a very approachable way."* – Interviewee #3 |
| | | *''In terms of membership recruitment, we made the move to physical membership recruitment 1.5 years ago. So we go to workplaces, to be physically present with a large group of people of different ages. (…) That's actually been the most profound change."* – Interviewee #1 |
| | Recruitment through workplace representatives | *''We also have on-site representatives and that group of representatives has also grown in recent years. They are actually your eyes and ears on the shop floor and in the work organization. And you notice that the moment you have local representation, people quickly find their way to that representation and the threshold to become a member is much lower."* – Interviewee #1 |
| | | *''But what we also still do is work through all those works councils, put out that vote, so say to them, listen the vote is open, go on your shop floor, go say to EVERYONE you can vote, because EVERYONE can vote with us."* – Interviewee #5 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Recruitment through schools | *''So that's really a team of guest teachers in each province one or two, so to speak. And yes, they have a lesson in citizenship or social studies somewhere almost every day."* – Interviewee #8 |
| | | *''On the other hand, we as an organization are really growing among young people for example through guest lectures, that has just helped a lot so far."* – Interviewee #3 |

Both online and offline recruitment are used in approaching new potential members. Especially guest lectures at schools and universities, and workplace recruitment through physically meeting workers are popular options which five trade unions make use of. During these offline recruitment sessions, the trade unions visit a place of work and introduce themselves to employees. In these conversations they explain what the trade union stands for and how workers could join and profit from the advantages offered by a union membership. The online channels that are being used, differ per sector and target group. The trade unions that focus on recent graduates and young professionals tend to lean towards the usage of LinkedIn, whilst unions that also seek to represent students and young adults with part-time jobs, opt for more fast-paced social media channels such as TikTok and Instagram. To reach these specific audiences, trade unions created separate social media accounts which have a sole focus on young workers. On these channels they publish content, which according to them adheres to trending social media topics among young people. Moreover, the content is said to be created in such a way that it feels more relatable to young workers and holds onto their attention longer. According to one interviewee, recruitment through LinkedIn was more useful in sectors in which workers saw themselves as young professionals. They claimed that aligning with the way these workers see themselves, helps in creating a bond early on and making the worker feel respected.

Other forms of online recruitment were mentioned several times as well. Interviewee #6 said that their union organises webinars and information sessions for workers that are part of a collective agreement on which they are negotiating. More than four thousand people would attend these sessions to hear about what changes would be made in the upcoming agreements. These sessions were a recent addition which has been made easier since the Covid-pandemic, during which the online infrastructure for such events was created. Promotion through their own website, the trade magazine and with short, fast-paced videos were also mentioned as other ways to reach young workers.

However, what seven out nine representatives mentioned was the importance of offline recruitment through face-to-face meetings with potential members, word-of-mouth by local representation or recruitment through schools. Interviewee #1 explained how their trade union

had shifted their strategy towards an almost complete focus on in-person recruitment. With a group of representatives, they would visit different workplaces to meet with potential members and explain the advantages of becoming a member of the trade union. This was mostly explained as initiating conversations with employees at their place of work and get to know them and discuss labour agreement-related topics they found important, and the trade union could possibly look into. According to them, this change has been fruitful, as their membership numbers were increasing. Other unions also had agreements with businesses to visit offices and other workplaces to talk to potential members. Guest lectures at schools are also a popular form of engaging with a younger demographic and informing them about the role of trade unions. Smaller unions had more difficulty in setting up these types of lectures due to budget or personnel constraints. They decided to focus specifically on people following an education that made them more likely to work in the sector the trade union is invested in. Larger unions take a broader approach and also give guest lectures at a high-school level already, during social studies classes for example, to create awareness about the fact that trade unions exist at all.

One of the most important ways in which new members are being recruited is through local representation of members who speak to their colleagues about the trade union. This takes place in the form of union members who voluntarily take some time to talk with colleagues about the advantages of joining the trade union. Especially the smaller trade unions focused a lot on this point, as it is a cost-effective form of recruiting new members, but also the bigger unions expressed that this is an important way to get more people engaged with their organisation. An interesting finding regarding increasing engagement, came from the interview with trade union #3 who mentioned and explained their usage of the so-called ‘’full-support model’’. This model entails that all workers who are covered by a specific collective agreement, are allowed to vote on the decisions and topics proposed by the trade union, whether they are a member or not. In this way, the trade union that has approximately 1500 members, has a reach of over 12.000 workers who are voting on topics and decisions that concern them. Implementing this model takes away a barrier for people to get engaged with the union, as becoming a member is not necessary to still have an influence and feel heard. Later, this barrier of perceived effort that comes with joining a trade union will be highlighted again in the findings from the interviews with workers.

Although four out of the seven trade unions expressed that they realise the necessity of having to recruit young workers in order to guarantee a continued existence, as can be seen in table 4.1.3, they do not appear to be willing to thread too far from their, often self-proclaimed, main task: primary benefits, shown in table 4.1.4.

*Table 4.1.3 – Trade unions realise change is needed*

| Themes | Codes | Associated quotes |
|---|---|---|
| Unions realise the necessity of change | Unions think they should work harder | *'… you may have to work even harder or put even more effort into making it clear that a trade union is not there for itself, it is there for its members."* – Interviewee #9 |
| | Unions think the way they work should change | *''So the people who shout the loudest are the ones on whom policy is set. Well, we specifically within TRADE UNION #5 have actually said some time ago, we have to do things differently."* – Interviewee #7 |
| | | *''People don't join unions these days anyway. I mean, that development has been going on for 50 years and the view is that at some point in 20 years somebody is going to turn off the lights at other big unions, so we have to look at things differently."* – Interviewee #4 |

*Table 4.1.4 – Trade unions hold on to primary benefits as their main focus-point*

| Themes | Codes | Associated quotes |
|---|---|---|
| Main focus on primary benefits | Primary benefits put centrally by union | *'As a union, we choose to focus mainly on work and income and everything that is then broadly associated and linked to it."* – Interviewee #7 |
| | | *''Money is always the main theme, always, anything to do with money or holiday/leave. Those have always been the important themes."* – Interviewee #8 |
| | Primary benefits put centrally by members | *''Because you ask people: "what do you think is important?", well number one will always be salary, we all think that is important, at the end of the day groceries just have to be paid."* – Interviewee #9 |

Even though the realisation that change is necessary to survive was mentioned by four unions, it appears that unions still cling onto primary benefits as their sole focus. Salary and leave are still seen as the most important factors that the trade union has to focus on by the unions themselves and a part of their constituency. This focus is formed partially through questionnaires amongst members but also decided on by leading figures within the trade union.

Another finding that came forward, is the fact that three trade unions mentioned temporary increases during the covid-pandemic. Interviewee #6 mentioned that trade unions became 'top-of-mind' again during the pandemic and the energy-crisis that followed a few years later. ''*These periods caused an increase in concerns about health and safety, as well as salary, among employees who, as a result really saw the added value of union membership.*'' Other unions who witnessed similar trends also stated that they believed this to be a temporary rebound originating from different forms of crises.

Overall, to answer the first sub-question, five of the seven trade unions *do* have a focus on specific topics that are meant to attract a younger demographic. Topics such as parental leave, job security and general advocacy are used in their approaches towards young workers. Nevertheless, these topics are not necessarily seen as marketing tools that can be used to approach young workers. Trade unions are convinced that primary benefits are their most important task and should be their main commitment. The involvement of trade unions in CSR and their use of it as a recruitment theme was not mentioned in this first part of the interviews.

## 4.2 Trade unions and CSR

An answer to sub-question 2: *''To what extent do trade unions see corporate social responsibility as a part of collective negotiations?"*, can already partially be derived from the previous chapter. When asked which themes and topics trade unions use to attract young members to their organisations, six unions did not mention CSR. When asked about it more directly, five trade unions acknowledged its' importance and potential, as can be seen in table 4.2.1.

*Table 4.2.1 – CSR is seen as an important topic by members and unions*

| Themes | Codes | Associated quotes |
|---|---|---|
| CSR is a topic of discussion during negotiations | CSR is discussed within the union and opinions are sometimes expressed in negotiations | *''I also think that the union could really deal with such issues, especially If you have the capacity as an organisation."* – Interviewee #3 |
| | | *''Yes, what you see, of course, is that it is the sectors where the employment conditions are already well in place and where things are going well, that there is room to think a bit more about themes such as sustainability and to express an opinion on them."* – Interviewee #6 |
| | | *''Okay yes, we do also really focus on sustainability. We also have a 'TRADE UNION #6 global' team, which also deals with global issues. In the whole essence we are, a heavily social organisation, so to speak."* – Interviewee #8 |
| | | *''One of the items that comes up most often in CAO queries is that something has to be done for social safety or something like that."* – Interviewee #9 |
| | CSR has become part of collective agreements | *''One of the things that came out of that is the right of a green job, (…). Those are some small things they wanted addressed. We managed to get that into the collective labour agreement in a few sectors."* - Interviewee #5 |
| | | *''You see that employers are also much more concerned with mental wellbeing. (…) So you see, especially in terms of diversity, that quite a few successes have been achieved in this area in recent years."* – Interviewee #7 |
| | | *''What opportunities do we actually see with regard to sustainability that can in some way come back in the in the* |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | *collective agreements? Well, that's where the lease-bicycle came from, among other things."* – Interviewee #9 |
| CSR within the trade union through investments | Sustainable investments | *''And that that can also be of how does the employer handle his equity, right? What shares does he put it in? I don't notice any of that as an employee, but I do have an opinion about it."* – Interviewee #6 |
| | | *''A few years ago, for instance, we discussed our pension funds, which were still investing heavily in fossil fuels, and at the request of members we finally said, yes, we should do less of that or not do it at all."* – Interviewee #7 |
| | | *''We are now, since this year we did start really looking to invest sustainably. Because we also think it's important that our money makes good and social impact, as the board."* – Interviewee #1 |

Based on these quotes it becomes apparent that, when asked about it directly, five out of seven unions do see the importance of CSR. The level of importance granted to CSR differs per union, as does the way in which it is dealt with and communicated to the outside world. CSR within their own organisation was not necessarily a topic of discussion, but four unions explained how they started investing their own money sustainable to have a more positive impact on society. This focus on sustainable investments either came forward through members' demands or from the unions' own boards of directors. The focus on sustainable investments also translated to the investments of the pension funds that are connected to the interviewed trade unions and which the trade unions have a say in. Four unions recognised that their constituents were sometimes worried about CSR, especially younger members, and agreed that there is a role to be played by trade unions in representing these worries during collective negotiations. Unions also explained how these worries appeared to come from more developed sectors in which the collective agreements on salary and leave are steady and workers have fewer complaints about their compensation. Moreover, these worries mostly originate from industries with a higher density of highly educated workers as compared to industries with lower educated workers in which other themes, such as salary, were deemed more important.

However, examples of worries or complaints about CSR being formed into actual results that were imbedded into collective agreements were meagre or not specific. There was mention of strides having been made in terms of diversity or social safety, but what this meant exactly remained unclear. Furthermore, some achievements were made with travel allowance for people coming to work by bicycle or public transport, but these agreements were low-hanging fruit.

Despite four unions recognising the importance of CSR and trying to implement these topics into negotiations, other interviewees also found CSR to be something in which trade unions play no role. Whilst they did not necessarily deny its' importance, they were convinced that other topics were more relevant for the union to focus on. Quotes supporting this narrative are stated in table 4.2.2, below.

*Table 4.2.2 – CSR is not a point of discussion during collective negotiations*

| Themes | Codes | Associated quotes |
|---|---|---|
| CSR is not a topic of discussion in collective negotiations | CSR is not the responsibility of trade unions | *''I see it as a responsibility for the union to just give people influence over their own socio-economic position, most of all. (…) And I think it's up to other organisations to really focus on other issues."* – Interviewee #3 |
| | | *''That is actually not our job as a union, so our job, our primary job is representing those workers."* – Interviewee #5 |
| | | *''In particular, that is also in the characteristics of us as a union and that will be slightly different than it may be in other unions. We don't have a very pronounced social agenda. So we don't have a particular view on well, for example, on the topic of sustainability."* – Interviewee #6 |
| | CSR is not among trade union priorities | *''The young people you really appeal to incorporate social responsibility are not really engaged in direct issues that concern them, and that's where our focus is more."* – Interviewee #3 |
| | | *''But I still experience it as a, yes, a bit of a luxury topic to talk about that, which can quickly fall apart when people say, yes, you know, if I have to exchange with other terms of employment, yes, I especially want those primary terms of employment to be well regulated."* – Interviewee #6 |
| | | *''And then the pay just has to be right, and the basics as well, then of course it creates space to give that more priority. But yes, sustainability still needs some run-up to really become a priority, so to speak."* – Interviewee #6 |

As these quotes show, three different trade unions appeared to be convinced that investing in CSR and negotiating about CSR-related topics is not their responsibility. Interviewee #3, for example, said that they thought it was the responsibility of other organisations to focus on such issues, as the trade union is meant to give people influence on their own socio-economic position through, amongst other things, increasing wages. Similarly, interviewee #6 mentioned that whilst CSR might sometimes be a topic of discussion, it is not ranked highly on the lists of priorities that trade unions have. According to them, only if the basic needs are met, meaning if salary, leave and other primary and secondary benefits, are in order, then there will be space and time to focus on topics such as CSR.

Interestingly, despite its' societal impact and overall importance, CSR is often not used in communication towards the outside world or as a way of recruiting young members. Five trade unions indicated that despite their stance on CSR and the CSR-related topics they have discussed during collective negotiations, this is not something they would advertise with or approach possible new members with.

*Table 4.2.3 – CSR not used to approach potential members*

| Themes | Codes | Associated quotes |
|---|---|---|
| Not approaching potential new members through CSR | CSR is given attention out of principle | *''That is not something we think of as a union like: OK, we're going to raise our profile with that, because with that we can attract people. It's more out of principle that we deal with it."* – Interviewee #5 |
| | CSR-related achievements are not used to attract new members | *''So we also deliberately choose not to bring up the theme, just so we can go on strike, for example, or just get things to come to a halt. That is not our intention."* – Interviewee #7 |
| | | *''But it's not so much that we really use it as a marketing tool. We focus very much on inclusion, diversity and sustainability, but we care more about 'show, don't tell', you know, because you can say everything, but go and show it."* – Interviewee #8 |

These quotes show that trade unions are hesitant to use their stance on CSR and the few successes they have booked on this topic as a marketing tool. Trade unions claimed they discuss these topics ''*out of principle*'' and care more about ''*showing instead of telling*''.

To conclude, five out of the seven of trade unions recognise the significance of CSR in today's business-context and three of them have made reasonable efforts to include arrangements on CSR-related topics such as equality, sustainable transportation, and sustainable investing into collective labour negotiations. Nonetheless, trade unions seem to put CSR far below other topics on their list of priorities and have said these arrangements might be the first to go if basic salary and leave needs are not met. Furthermore, despite having put some effort into negotiating CSR-related terms, these achievements or topics are not used by any of the trade unions in approaching and recruiting new, young members. The next chapters will show the findings from the interviews with the workers. These findings will show whether the way in which trade unions use CSR at this moment, should be changed.

## 4.3 Millennials and trade unions

To answer the third sub-question: *What value do millennials see in trade unions in general and regarding corporate social responsibility?* eight young workers were asked about their experiences with trade unions. They were asked about their knowledge on the trade union that

was relevant to their job and whether they had considered joining this union. The interviewees were also asked about their general consensus on trade unions, how trade unions could best approach them if they had not done so yet, and which themes they would like to see trade unions deal with. The semi-structured interview allowed for flexibility in the ways these questions were asked and ensured for in-depth answers.

The first significant finding from these interviews is the fact that none of the eight interviewees had a trade union membership. In fact, six interviewees had no idea which trade union was connected to their place of work. Table 4.3.1 shows the most striking quotes that support this finding.

*Table 4.3.1 – Young workers are not aware of trade unions*

| Themes | Codes | Associated Quotes |
|---|---|---|
| Trade unions are invisible to young workers | Trade unions are invisible to young workers | *''I'm not a member of anything. In fact, I don't even know what the union related to our industry is."* – Worker #3 |
| | | *''I haven't joined yet, and I have to be honest, I haven't thought about joining either. And frankly, I didn't know it was possible either"* – Worker #6 |
| | | *''So I know that there is always hard work being done by people to get a few per cent increase every year, but that there is a union that I can join, I am not aware of that."* – Worker #5 |
| | | *''I must also say that I don't really know much about unions at all either and what they stand for and what you can join."* – Worker #1 |
| | | *''No, I actually hardly knew about the existence of trade unions. I have no idea what it entails (...)"* – Worker #7 |

As becomes obvious from these quotes, the interviewed workers are hardly aware of the existence of trade unions, let alone the specific trade union(s) that are connected to their job. Worker #3 mentioned how they had no idea which union was related to their industry and worker #6 was not even aware of the possibility of joining a trade union. Moreover, worker #7 also lacked knowledge on what trade unions stand for and how they could join one. Aside from these five quotes, many other responses also showed a lack of awareness about what it is that trade unions do exactly. All eight workers knew about the collective bargaining that trade unions do, not because they were informed about the ongoing negotiations but because they had seen news articles about other, non-related trade unions. However, the individual benefits of joining a trade union were almost completely unknown. Only one out of eight interviewees knew about the legal aid that trade unions offer whilst the other seven had no idea that trade unions do anything else besides negotiating about primary benefits.

The consensus on trade unions that arose from these interviews seemed to be quite negative. Young workers see the trade unions as old-fashioned organisations and doubt whether they are there for the interests of young people. Despite the trade unions indicating they are attempting to reach young workers through separate themes and different channels, this is not reflected in the findings from the interviews with the workers. The workers said they were not being reached at all and did not recall hearing from trade unions through the themes that the trade unions claimed to be working on. Table 4.3.2 shows quotes relating to these findings. The views that the interviewed workers have of unions are largely based on media coverage of trade unions, as a lack of direct experiences with the unions themselves has prevented them from creating their own image.

*Table 4.3.2 – Trade union efforts to reach a younger audience are not successful*

| Themes | Codes | Associated quotes |
|---|---|---|
| Trade union is not attractive to young people | Trade unions are old-fashioned organisations | *''My view of trade unions is fairly stuffy, so when I think of trade unions, I think of well, more like post-war practices or even pre-war practices, so to speak."* – Worker #1 |
| | Trade unions are stuck in older demographic | *''You would say that the union should reflect what it represents. The average age at COMPANY X is quite high, but it's getting younger and younger, and I don't feel that the union is going through that same transformation. I feel that they are very much stuck in the older demographics, while there is actually a lot of young inflow into the company itself."* – Worker #4 |
| Young audience is not being reached | Trade unions struggle to actively approach workers | *''And when I look in general, I do really see a kind of visibility problem, unions are just not visible."* – Worker #1 |
| | | *''I must also say that I almost never heard of it myself. Never actively, maybe got a brochure from somewhere once, but I was never actively approached myself."* – Worker #3 |
| | | *''People are just not aware of it and I think that is more down to invisibility than the people themselves."* – Worker #4 |
| | | *''I cannot remember ever being actively approached by a union."* – Worker #8 |
| | Workers not aware of union efforts beyond primary benefits | *''I do sometimes feel a bit like unions are demanding more and more wage increases, and in that sense that is always very much the focus."* – Worker #2 |
| | | *''The primary focus, I think, is purely on those salary scales and those fringe benefits such as holidays."* – Worker #5 |
| | | *''But beyond that (primary benefits), I don't know very specific things that they do or don't do and what exactly those organisations entail."* – Worker #8 |

The quotes in this table tell two stories on the relationship between trade unions and young workers. First, the image that the interviewed workers have of trade unions, is that of an old-fashioned organisation that is not representing their interests. Worker #4 reflected this well by

stating that even though the company they work at is becoming younger at a fast rate, the union that is connected to it seems to only be representing the interests of older workers. They explained how the union was looking into freezing salaries for five years to get more favourable early retirement deals and they had not even heard about this from the union itself but only read about this in the media. Secondly, whereas trade unions mentioned themes such as job-security, student-loan debt and parental leave as topics that they fight for to be more attractive to young workers, the intended audience had no idea that these are things that trade unions work for. Five out of the eight workers were convinced that trade unions focus solely on the primary benefits of pay and time off and were not aware of any themes that relate to them as young workers specifically. Lastly, every interviewed worker said they had never been actively approached in any way by the trade union that represents their collective agreements. The lack of direct contact with the constituency and the complete invisibility of trade unions among millennials are the most mentioned factors for young workers to not consider a union membership.

Because of the perceived invisibility of trade unions, another interesting finding came up. Four workers indicated that they thought all the effort to learn about trade unions and to find out which trade union to join and why, had to come from their side of the table. Three workers indicated that too much effort had to go into finding out what trade union is related to their job and what advantages come from joining a trade union. When asked directly, three other interviewed workers agreed that it seemed to be a one-sided affair if they were to be interested in gathering information on their respective trade unions. Because of this, people who are at the start of their career and have busy lives are less likely to put in the time and effort to find out more about trade unions. Table 4.3.3 shows four workers mentioning this problem.

*Table 4.3.3 – Workers feel like effort has to come from them to gather information*

| Themes | Codes | Associated quotes |
|---|---|---|
| Having to find out about the trade union yourself | Effort seemingly only comes from one side | *''Generally speaking, I think people still sometimes see it as a big investment of time and effort to figure it out with a union and what they do exactly."* – Worker #3 |
| | | *''That immediately feels like you have to put a lot of energy into it yourself instead of getting something out of it."* – Worker #3 |
| | | *''So when I have to look for unions specifically in my sector, I initially have no idea where to look. The fact that I've never been approached by such a union at all either, perhaps also says something about reachability of those parties."* – Worker #5 |
| | | *''So yes, it still feels like a bridge too far right now because I have no contact with them yet, but maybe when you* |

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|---|---|---|
| costs too much effort | Effort and time are a barrier to try to get in contact with union | *know a bit more about what they do and you have personal contact with someone, I would."* – Worker #7 |
| | | *''Just because you don't really know what exactly the benefits are. I'm just busy with work, everything besides work. It's one of those subjects you forget about and then you hear about it again and you think, oh yes, I should look into it again, but the time and effort are a barrier."* – Worker #8 |

This table reflects how four of the workers felt about the visibility of trade unions and the amount of effort that was required from them. Because of the general invisibility of the trade unions to this group of workers, they felt like gathering any information on the union or how to join it was too one-sided. On top of that, with their busy lives it is hard to bring up the energy to look into trade unions as the topic is not high up on their list of priorities. A lack of knowledge and engagement with the trade union is yet another reason for young workers to not become a member.

The 'full-support model' that was mentioned earlier by trade union #3, was included into the interviews with workers to evaluate its' feasibility. This model does not require workers to be a member of a trade union whilst still allowing them to vote on important topics regarding their collective agreements. Because of the perceived amount of effort it would take to find out about and join a 'regular' trade union, it was useful to question the workers on this model which seemingly should cost less of an effort to them. Table 4.3.4 shows the responses to the idea of the 'full-support model'.

*Table 4.3.4 – Young workers respond positively to the idea of the full-support model*

| Themes | Codes | Associated quotes |
|---|---|---|
| Young workers are positive about the full-support model | Full-support model takes away a barrier for young workers | *''Yes, I do think that for a lot of people it can cause that there is not really a commitment or something like that.. But yes, that way, you can vote, but not necessarily a lot of time is involved. That could help."* – Worker #6 |
| | | *''Yes, I think so, because then indeed you can just think and decide on things without being attached to being a union member."* – Worker #7 |
| | | *''Well, I think if it gets brought to your attention quicker, then I would vote. And I think it would lower the threshold to delve into it, you might be more inclined to contribute."* – Worker #8 |

As these quotes highlight, the full-support model was interpreted in a positive manner by the young workers. According to them, it takes away a certain barrier in terms of time and effort, as shown in table 4.3.3, but still allows workers to contribute to the collective agreements that are related to them. Three workers, amongst which worker #6, mentioned that being attached to a trade union seemed to be too much of a commitment in their already busy lives. The full-support model takes away this commitment whilst still enabling workers to influence decisions that are made on their behalf. Simultaneously, the model also makes it easier for trade unions to get a better understanding of their constituents and the opinions among all demographics. Worker #7 also named one pitfall of this model, who despite favouring this model over the current system, did mention that the incentive to become a member of a trade union is taken away even more by this system. The trade union that applies this model stated that they think people will only become a member because of philanthropical reasons or if they want to support the union financially, so to them this incentive of becoming a member just to vote was irrelevant. This trade-off between reaching more members and becoming more representative by taking in the opinions of a more diverse constituency but possibly lowering the incentive to join the trade union is a consideration that trade unions need to think about.

As has been mentioned multiple times, trade unions simply do not seem to be reaching their intended audience even though the trade unions implied to have specific ways to engage with young workers. To find a solution to this problem, the interviewees were asked in which way they thought connecting with a trade union would be most accessible. Table 4.3.5 shows the findings regarding this topic.

*Table 4.3.5 – How young workers would like to be approached by trade unions*

| Themes | Codes | Associated quotes |
|---|---|---|
| | Contact through e-mail | *'' I think through my mail, because that's what I read the most in terms of work."* – Worker #6 |
| | | *''Yes, maybe via an email. I would think that if my details are known there as a student, that they could still send an email with maybe just some benefits to catch your attention."* – Worker #8 |
| | | *''If you're specifically targeting young people, you could also use, for example, a podcast like 'jong beleggen'. Mostly younger people listen to that and before an episode is played you always have advertising."* – Worker #5 |
| | | *''There is also one very well-known podcast that I also think almost every student has listened to at least once.* |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Preference for online approach | Advertise in relevant podcasts | *They mainly explain medical things. I can quite imagine that if you put that on there, people really do listen to it."* – Worker #8 |
| | | *''And there is also another podcast, students have a conversation with medical specialists. I think that if you have a conversation with someone from the union itself, you don't really have to actively look into it yourself."* – Worker #8 |
| | Advertise on social media | *''Surely that is such a classic but I think with social media engagement."* – Worker #2 |
| | | *''I myself am not into social media much, or at least not TikTok and things like that. But I think that would be a place to at least reach people already as well."* – Worker #3 |
| | | *''Something could be posted on social media, for example. A campaign, for example, on Instagram or LinkedIn, I am on there quite often. If they want to reach young people, that might also be good."* – Worker #6 |
| Preference for offline approach | Information through employer | *''Suppose you get a new job, that you would be informed about which unions are affiliated to it and what the benefits are, so that that comes up in the onboarding process."* – Worker #1 |
| | | *''I would also think, once you become a permanent employee that at such an introduction day, a representative comes and says: we are the union and this is what we do for you."* – Worker #7 |
| | | *''I can also imagine that at work it could also be promoted more, because I haven't noticed that now at all."* – Worker #8 |
| | Information through school/university | *''Then you would think that unions should also come and speak at universities. It could be interesting for unions that young people who are about to work are aware that there are unions."* – Worker #5 |
| | | *''So throughout the study, those names do keep coming back at an intro market or on magazines, which means you are at least familiar with names and organisations."* – Worker #8 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Direct/personal contact with trade union | *''Yes I, I would still say, personal always works best."* – Worker #4 |
| | | *''Send someone from the union to a project and then go and ask if they are interested in hearing a very brief story about who you are and what you can do for these people over coffee."* – Worker #3 |
| | | *''Or go to one of those trade fairs or something, right? You just have to be in places where your target audience is."* – Worker #2 |

As can be seen from the previous table, the interviewed workers were quite evenly split between preferences for online or offline approaches, with eight quotes from five workers looking for online engagement and eight more quotes from six different workers stating a preference for offline engagement. The workers who preferred an online approach exclaimed that they would either like to be approached through e-mail or through social media. E-mail was seen as a work-related approach which is fitting to the role that a trade union has. The way in which the interviewees would like to be approached through social media is broader. Two workers mentioned that podcasts are an effective way of targeting a young audience. There are multiple podcasts that are aimed specifically at a younger demographic, even students at times, in which trade unions could either join in or advertise their organisation before or during the podcast. Other forms of social media such as LinkedIn, TikTok and Instagram were also mentioned numerous times. On these platforms the workers would like to see campaigns involving infographics or merely just information on what advantages trade unions have to offer.

There were also workers who would prefer an offline approach by trade unions. Five workers expressed that they would have liked to receive information on the trade union relevant to them during their onboarding period, either through a short presentation or through a brochure. Employers might be hesitant to allow trade unions to speak at their office, but worker #5 said that if employers want to show that they really care about their employees, they would agree to let trade unions show themselves at their company as these unions could offer advantages to the employees which the employer themselves might not. Half of all workers thought that informing students about the existence of trade unions through their education would also work well. By informing students who are nearing the end of their education, unions could be able to pick up young members early on in their careers. Lastly, seven out of eight interviewees stressed the importance of personal contact with the trade union. Because they had no idea about anyone in their vicinity being part of the trade union, they said the threshold to join was

too high, or trying to approach the union with a problem was less likely. A familiar face, through local representation, which can explain how things work and what could be done in certain situations, would take away this barrier, according to the workers.

To conclude this chapter, the trade unions' biggest problem according to the workers is their invisibility to young workers. None of the eight interviewees are a member of their respective trade union and only one had ever considered joining a union. Moreover, the other seven barely had an idea about which union was linked to their place of work. Astonishingly, no worker reported to have been approached by a trade union during their career and five workers had no idea about the things trade unions do, apart from negotiating for salary and the amount of days-off they get. On top of this, three workers were convinced that trade unions mainly represented the older demographic and fought for collective agreements that favoured that group over young workers. This contradicts with the findings from the interviews with trade unions, who claimed to use several different themes to approach young workers. Another interesting finding came from individual comments on the perceived time and effort that the workers experienced in finding out about trade unions. In their opinion, the time and effort seemed one-sided, as if they had to do all the work to learn about the trade unions and what they can do for them. When the workers were asked about the 'full-support' model, in which they can vote about negotiations relevant to them without becoming a member of a trade union, the workers were generally positive and could imagine themselves participating in these votes. Lastly, there was no real distinguishment between an offline or online approach, both are preferred by a part of the interviewees. Online advertising could perhaps be done through podcasts or infographics on professional social media sites such as LinkedIn. Several forms of offline contact were also suggested, for example during the onboarding process at a new employer or at an earlier stage of life through guest lectures at schools and universities. Local representatives who can have a personal bond with the workers were also stated to be an opportunity to lower the threshold towards trade unions that young workers experience now.

## 4.4 Millennials and corporate social responsibility

The second part of the interviews with millennial workers revolved around corporate social responsibility. Firstly, interviewees were asked about the degree to which they found CSR-performance important when choosing an employer. Afterwards questions were asked about the CSR strategy within their company, and to what extent they were a part of this. These questions were asked to discover whether the workers were included in decision making, whether they were able to give feedback which was taken seriously and to find out if there were any dissatisfactions regarding this topic in which a trade union could possibly be helpful. The first questions are used in answering the fourth sub-question: *''To what extent do*

*millennials feel included in the CSR decisions made by their employers?"*. The discussions about topics which could be improved that followed afterwards, are used to find another part of the answer to the third sub-question.

When asked about the importance of CSR to the interviewees as employees, most answers confirmed previous research that claimed millennials hold significant value to this topic when it comes to their employers. Only two interviewees did not consider the CSR-performance of their employers before starting their job. Table 4.4.1 shows the most significant quotes to attest to these findings.

*Table 4.4.1 – CSR-performance is an important factor for millennials when looking at future employers*

| Themes | Codes | Associated quotes |
|---|---|---|
| CSR-performance affects employment decisions | Workers care about the CSR-performance of their employer when looking for a job | *''For sure, sustainability is important to me and I also think it's important that my employer thinks about that and acts ethically in a way that I support. That is also one of the reasons that I have chosen a new employer, to be more involved with sustainability."* – Worker #1 |
| | | *''I did choose this job consciously because it has to do with the energy transition and with sustainability and with just working for a better future."* – Worker #3 |
| | | *''That is also why I started working at COMPANY X, it is one of the Airlines in Europe that is doing the most on sustainability at the moment."* – Worker #4 |
| | Workers do not care about the CSR-performance of their employer when looking for a job | *''Well, I must say, I am not very much into it. I do think that it is important, but for me it is not necessarily a decisive factor in where I want to work."* – Worker #6 |
| | | *''I have to say that I didn't really think about it and mainly went with looking at what do I think is a nice job and what would I like to get into."* – Worker #8 |

As shown, six workers stated that the performance of their employer regarding CSR was a key factor when deciding where they wanted to start their careers. Worker #1 even switched employers recently because they wanted to be more involved with sustainability. Most workers stated that they consciously chose a certain employer or a certain branch because it would

allow them to make a positive impact on society. Only two workers did not keep CSR into account when looking for an employer, but they still said that they find CSR important and were glad to work at company's who took this topic seriously.

The interviews went on to discuss employers' CSR-strategies and the extent to which the workers felt included in the decision making and output of such strategies. A stark difference came forward from these discussions. Interviewees who worked at smaller-scale companies were much more directly involved in the decision-making process as opposed to interviewees who worked at larger organisations. The following table, 4.4.2, shows the quotes stressing these differences.

*Table 4.4.2 – Level of involvement of workers on CSR-related decisions*

| Themes | Codes | Associated quotes |
|---|---|---|
| CSR-strategy is directly influenced by employees | Employees mostly included in CSR-related decisions | *''Yes, they were very open to that, so if you had preferences on certain topics, they were open to that. And they also sent out a monthly feedback form where you could submit ideas and feedback."* – Worker #1 |
| | | *''Yes absolutely, you are directly steering the organisation, so to speak."* – Worker #2 |
| | | *''There are quite a lot of opportunities to make a direct impact on the way the company works. So in that sense, you do make a direct contribution to the way things are done within the energy transition."* – Worker #5 |
| | | *''So they are very much engaged in innovating and changing things and trying to make it future-oriented. So I think they are very actively working on it, and also very much in collaboration with employees."* – Worker #8 |
| CSR-strategy is barely influenced by employees | Employees sometimes included in CSR-related decisions | *''So yes, I do hear a lot of it, but that's also because of the people I consciously look out for these topics, yes."* – Worker #4 |
| | | *''It's more things that we are told, I should add. 40,000 people work here, so it's not very strange that not everyone can have a say. However, there is a lot of room for criticism which is taken seriously."* – Worker #6 |
| | | *''Sometimes news items are posted on message-boards and you can comment* |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Employees rarely included in CSR-related decisions | *below them, but it doesn't seem like you really have an influence with that either."* – Worker #7 |

Overall, half of the interviewees felt strongly involved in the decision-making or were convinced that their opinions and proposals were taken seriously by their employers. Workers #2 and #3, who both work at smaller companies, claimed to be directly involved in the way business was done at their place of work, including CSR-related actions. Workers #1, #5 and #8, who all work for larger companies, also said they felt very included in the decision-making process and felt that their input was valued highly by their employers. These larger employers work with interest-groups in which people can make themselves heard. The interviewed workers highly appreciated this type of bottom-up approach. Several workers also reported to have a bit less influence than they would like. Workers #4 and #6 said they were mostly informed about decisions and only comment on them afterwards, which was often too late to make real change. Worker #7 found themselves in a comparable situation, but their comments on decisions did not seem to have any influence at all. This lack of influence came forward several times. Three workers stated that they would like to see changes being made regarding this situation, these are shown in table 4.4.3.

*Table 4.4.3 – Young workers would like to have more influence on CSR-related decisions*

| Themes | Codes | Associated quotes |
|---|---|---|
| Young workers want more influence on (CSR-related) decision-making | Workers do not always agree with decisions and would like more influence | *''Yes, I actually think it would be good to involve employees a bit more in what choices are being made and why. And also during the preliminary stage you can provide your own ideas as well."* – Worker #7 |
| | | *''What I have an opinion on is about how we communicate to the outside world as a company, (...) the way we express things in the media doesn't really come across well."* – Worker #5 |
| | | *''I personally am part of that, but I am one of thousands who are in my department, so I have to say that COMPANY X does not really involve employees in decision-making."* – Worker #4 |

As shown by these quotes, not all workers were satisfied with the amount of influence. Even though worker #4 is part of a group that thinks about certain projects and initiatives, they stated

that they are only one of several thousands of employees and that the company they work for definitely does not include the majority of the employees in the decision-making process. Worker #5 had several ideas on their employer's communication strategy which they felt like were not really heard and he had no influence on. Worker #7, who already expressed in an earlier stage that employees have almost no influence on the decisions that are made at their place of work, also supports the idea of including the employees in this process more often.

As three interviewees have stated, a higher level of influence on their employers CSR-strategy would be preferred. One viable way to realise this, is through the collective negotiations. During these negotiations, trade unions could strive for arrangements which ensure a more bottom-up approach towards decision-making regarding the topic of CSR. When this idea was proposed to the interviewed workers, they responded positively and indicated that it would increase the attractiveness of trade unions to them.

*Table 4.4.4 – Trade unions would become more attractive to young workers if they include CSR in their negotiations*

| Themes | Codes | Associated quotes |
|---|---|---|
| Including more CSR into collective agreements is attractive to young workers | Trade unions should focus on sustainable employment of personnel | *''I think that if you as a union think the sustainable employability of staff is important, you will notice an increased interest. Of course, that is also totally hot topic."* – Worker #2 |
| | | *''I think there needs to be more focus keeping employees healthy. Now, initiatives last for a month, then we don't do anything for a long time, so people start falling ill again. I think that the trade union could do more, for instance by getting us a bigger budget or by getting us vitality days to work on it."* – Worker #6 |
| | Trade unions should fill CSR gaps wherever necessary | *''Companies have the initial responsibility for CSR, but if they fail to do so, then there should be another party, the trade union could be ideal for that, because in my view it is a collective problem."* – Worker #5 |
| | | *''Then I would still say, sustainability in the broadest sense, so also talking about safety and quality. It would be great if our industry could be a forerunner there." - Worker #3* |

Certain CSR-related topics were mentioned more often than others. The sustainable employability of employees is a topic that was mentioned by four different interviewees.

According to them, trade unions should strive to include more agreements to ensure the vitality and (mental-)health of employees. According to these workers, devoting time and effort to these types of agreements would make the trade unions much more attractive to young workers. On top of this, most interviewees also agreed that when a company was failing to perform well on CSR, trade unions should step in to negotiate boundaries and ensure a better working environment for their constituents. Worker #5 argued that since sustainability is a collective problem, trade unions are the ideal solution to such struggles.

If trade unions decide to include these topics into their negotiations, it would suit them well if they were to communicate this to their constituents actively. As was mentioned earlier, the biggest obstacle for young workers to even consider joining a trade union is the invisibility of said trade unions. When asked in how and what should be communicated by trade unions for them to be more open to joining, the following answers were given:

*Table 4.4.5 – Trade unions should focus on communicating their CSR achievements to young workers*

| Themes | Codes | Associated quotes |
|---|---|---|
| Unions should communicate CSR-related achievements to attract a younger demographic | Demonstrating achievements enthuses young workers | *''And actually since then I thought, oh yeah, that's nice. So yes, then I did see a bit of the importance of a union, because they helped make that possible."* – Worker #7 |
| | | *''I think that a union should actually then also be able to demonstrate, especially to an employee, that they have achieved something."* – Worker #2 |
| | Unions should communicate their efforts regarding work-life balance and other CSR-related topics | *''Yes what they should mention, I think, something with work-life balance, mental wellbeing is important, that is a theme that is very prevalent among our age group."* – Worker #1 |
| | | *''I think today's generation finds that more and more important to have a good work-life balance and so that is an important issue that the unions should address and communicate about."* – Worker #8 |

As the findings in the table above highlight, young workers want to be informed about the efforts that trade unions put into CSR. Worker #7 was made aware of an achievement by the trade union connected to their job and was instantly more positive about the trade union and its importance. Worker #2 made a similar comment, saying that to them it was mostly important to hear about the actual work that trade unions are doing and the things they are achieving.

According to them that would be the most influential factor in deciding whether to join a trade union or not. Worker #1 and #8 also resonated with these findings, claiming that if a trade union were to achieve something on the topic of work-life balance this would both be an important improvement to their job as well as a marketing tool that would increase their likelihood of joining a trade union.

To conclude this last part of the interviews with workers, it has become clear that, in general, the interviewees were quite satisfied with the extent to which they are included in the decision-making processes of their employers, both in general and with regards to CSR. However, three interviewees mentioned that this is not always the case, and they would like to have more influence on things that concern them, one of those topics being CSR. According to these workers, if employers fail to include their personnel and fail to create concrete CSR strategies, trade unions could be the ideal parties to step in and negotiate a solution, as these issues are seen as collective problems. An important condition, however, is that the workers want to hear about these initiatives. Trade unions indicate that they would rather ‘’show than tell’’ about the achievements they make regarding this topic, but the interviewed workers claim that they specifically want to hear about these achievements in order to have an idea about what it is exactly that trade unions can do for them regarding CSR.

# 5. Discussion and conclusions

This chapter discusses the most important findings and compares them to the literature that was introduced earlier. The most striking differences or similarities are highlighted. Moreover, the full-support model that was introduced during the findings from the interviews will be discussed in depth. Finally, conclusions of the findings will be drawn and the answers to the four sub-research questions and the main research question will be given.

## 5.1 Discussion

This study aimed to uncover ways for trade unions to engage with and recruit young workers through CSR. Through interviews with trade unions, this research wanted to gain an insight into their possible recruitment strategies and find out which themes are being used to engage with millennial workers. It was hypothesised that incorporating CSR into these recruitment strategies would be a useful topic to approach millennials, as they are much more concerned with CSR than their predecessors (McGlone et al., 2011; Cheat et al., 2011; Klimkiewicz & Oltra, 2017). The interviews that were conducted among young workers reflected these expectations and showed that CSR is indeed a hot topic among this demographic. The interviews that were conducted among trade unions showed that CSR is not often seen by trade unions as their responsibility and is rarely included in collective labour negotiations on a large scale. Moreover, initiatives or achievements related to CSR are never used in trade union recruitment strategies, even though most trade unions did claim to have strategies specifically focused on recruiting young workers. The workers indicated a preference for the complete opposite and stated that hearing about initiatives and achievements by trade unions regarding CSR would make trade unions more attractive. However, the most important finding is the sheer invisibility of trade unions to this group of workers. The vast majority of the interviewees had never been in contact with the trade union connected to their job in any way. If trade unions want to ensure a new influx of members, or at the very least gain attention from young workers, their failure to reach this group needs to be solved first, before trade unions can start adjusting their recruitment strategies. As the young workers experienced a perceived barrier to come into contact with trade unions and felt the effort to join forces seems to be one-sided, it is of key importance for trade unions to lower this threshold and take away the high level of commitment that millennials think is required. During this busy stage of their lives, young workers are looking for easily accessible and personal contact. One of the interviewed trade unions has possibly provided a solution to this dilemma through their ‘full-support model’.

### 5.1.1 Trade union invisibility

As Hodder and Kretsos found in their 2015 study, young workers have been under-represented in trade unions for a long time. This under-representation mostly stems from the unions' inability to reach a younger demographic efficiently (Hodder & Kretsos, 2015). One factor that has played a role in this according to Geelan (2015), is the imagery of trade unions in the media. Trade unions are often portrayed as old fashioned and bureaucratic in the media. Even in recent decades, in which social media has allowed for more direct contact with their constituency, trade unions fail to convert online attention to recruitment (Carneiro & Costa, 2020). The findings from the conducted interviews reflect these statements. Several young workers stated their doubts about trade unions representing their needs. They saw trade unions as old-fashioned organisations. Moreover, none of the interviewed workers were members of a trade union and seven out of eight had never even considered joining a trade union. Most interviewees could not remember ever having been in contact with the trade union that is connected to their job, indicating that their view of trade unions was indeed mostly based on externally obtained information such as media coverage.

Especially Carneiro and Costa's (2020) finding about converting online attention to recruitment appears to hold true. The interviewed trade unions claimed to have invested in their online representation and create content aimed purely at a younger audience. Despite their social media accounts gaining followers and views, thus attention, this trend is not reflected in the membership numbers which continue to decline yearly. Research by Keune (2015) concluded that young people do not join trade unions, largely due to a lack of awareness. That conclusion holds true in this study as well, the lack of awareness among young workers and the inability of trade unions to reach them became apparent throughout this research.

### 5.1.2 CSR incorporation by trade unions

To overcome the invisibility and attract young workers, trade union activities should be less focused on only negotiating workplace matters but instead focus on a wider range of (global) problems, according to Ellem et al. (2019). This wider focus seems to be lacking in most of the interviewed trade unions' recruitment strategies. Although several trade unions mentioned the importance of CSR and its related activities and gave small examples of this topic being included in collective negotiations, none of them used this in their attempts to engage with potential members. The trade unions claimed that their role is to negotiate workplace topics and other parties should be responsible for broader problems. Moreover, according to two trade unions, CSR-related initiatives should be performed 'out of principle' and not with the idea that it can be used to gain attention among young workers. Ibsen and Tapia (2017) suggested something similar to Ellem et al's (2019) finding, stating that in order to stay relevant

and ensure young workers join trade unions, the handling of social concerns by businesses and governments needs to be challenged by the unions. However, what this entails specifically and how it should be communicated to possible new members is not mentioned by either paper. This study found that these suggestions fit the current sentiment among young workers. Rather than focusing on primary benefits, as trade unions appear to continue doing and communicating, young workers would like to see them focus on larger, broader problems such as mental health and sustainability. Moreover, hearing about the actions and negotiations that trade unions initiate on these issues, is also important to the young workers who currently hear extraordinarily little from the trade unions connected to their jobs.

Boodoo (2020) found that the increase in CSR investment by companies seen over the past decades are heavily linked to social and institutional demand for change. Trade unions, thus, can strongly influence companies' CSR investments through institutional force by setting demands during collective negotiations. As was shown in the findings section, trade unions tended to disregard negotiations on CSR since they claim it to be the responsibility of other parties, as their main task according to them remains to be negotiating for primary benefits. Based on the findings among the interviewed workers, this stance seems illogical and dooming for trade unions' futures. Young workers *want* trade unions to focus on CSR and incorporate this into their collective negotiations. Not only the findings from this study support this change, but previous literature does so, too. Bernaciak and Trif (2023) found that trade unions that only focused on establishing better working conditions in the sense of primary concerns, kept seeing membership numbers decline whilst other organisations that also functioned as a united voice for employees gained popularity. These other initiatives deliberately chose not to compete with unions by demanding better primary benefits, but instead focused on specific needs by employees that unions did not represent well enough (Bernaciak & Trif, 2023). Whereas CSR is largely ignored by trade unions and disregarded as other parties' responsibilities, young workers are simply not interested in hearing about primary benefits again and again. These workers want to see trade unions negotiate on topics like mental health, sustainable employment, and other CSR-related topics. Especially the workers who have suggestions for their employers but find themselves without the possibility to be heard at work can be a target for trade unions to approach. Based on all these findings, it is suggested that trade unions put effort into uncovering which specific needs are dismissed or unheard, and include these (often CSR-related) topics into their negotiation- *and* recruitment-strategy

This suggestion is strengthened by the answers of the interviewed workers who said to be content with their primary benefits but do see need for change elsewhere. Despite the general invisibility of the trade unions, the perception that the young workers *do* have of trade unions revolves around negotiations for primary benefits. Most workers indicated that, to them, these

benefits were not much of a worry, which contradicts Thomas and Doerflinger's (2020) finding that employees mostly care about short-term individual job concerns instead of long-term collective problems. However, the interviewed workers claim to be more concerned with the way in which their employers manage social topics or fail to include workers in the decision-making process surrounding these topics. This finding is in accordance with McGlone et al. (2011), Cheat et al. (2011) and Klimkiewicz and Oltra (2017) who all found that millennials care much more about companies' CSR-performances than older generations. This study's findings combined with the aforementioned studies' findings, show that CSR-related topics are to be used much more by trade unions if they want to engage with a younger audience.

It is therefore interesting to discover that trade unions who do put effort towards CSR and creating circumstances in which CSR-related actions are included into collective agreements, do not use these topics as a means of showing their potential constituency that they do not merely exist to fight for better primary benefits. The view of trade unions mainly negotiating for wage increases is what is causing young workers to be less motivated to join the trade unions, as they state the collective agreements on salary and leave are fine as they are, and they will profit from the yearly increases anyways. Therefore, it is suggested that trade unions should start looking into ways to incorporate CSR into their negotiations as well as recruitment-strategy. Both the literature and this study have shown that young workers are intrigued by CSR-related topics and choose or even change jobs because of employer CSR-performance. Moreover, as indicated by the interviewed workers, there are plenty of ideas that go unheard within the companies they work at which they would like to see implemented. Despite their lack of knowledge on what it is exactly that trade unions do, the interviewed workers agreed that trade unions can play a key role in integrating bottom-up CSR-initiatives into collective negotiations and agreements, especially when companies ignore these initiatives at first. Currently, trade unions are seen by young workers as old-fashioned organisations that negotiate mainly for primary benefits. However, as the interviewed workers indicated, these primary benefits are already satisfactory and with the current socio-economic context in which jobs are plentiful, this topic will not become relevant until a new crisis might arise. During these prosperous times, the relevance of trade unions decreases even more, which asks for change for them to ensure their continued existence. Based on literature and findings from the interviews, becoming more involved with CSR and communicating this to possible new members in an efficient manner can be the change that trade unions so desperately need.

### 5.1.3 Full-support model and commitment issues

That change is necessary, is not only based on the invisibility of trade unions to young workers but also becomes obvious form the declining union density rates (CBS, 2024). Surprisingly, from the interviews it appeared that most trade unions realised that, indeed, change is

necessary for them to continue in the long-term. What also stood out, is the trade unions' continued focus on primary benefits which goes against the idea of change, as this has been their focal point for a long time. When asked how it is decided which themes and topics trade unions decide to focus on, the interviewed unions indicated that this was done partially through questionnaires among members and partially decided by higher level management. A problem with the results from these questionnaires is the fact that these might not be representative of the whole constituency. As was mentioned before, the average trade union member continues to become older and older, meaning the interests of current members and possible new members drift further apart. By only holding on to the interests of current members, change seems to be a distant hope without the input of the unheard and underrepresented part of the constituency: the young workers.

The minor changes that have been made in their communication, negotiation, and recruitment strategies so far, do not seem to be successful. Although specific content surrounding themes that should trigger a response among young workers is being created and communicated through platforms that should help the trade unions reach young workers, the continued decline in membership numbers tells a different story. This finding echoes Carneiro and Costa's (2020) conlusion that trade unions struggle to convert online attention to recruitment. The themes that trade unions claim to be communicating towards young workers simply do not reach this audience or at least do not persuade them to join a union nor change their view of trade unions as old-fashioned, bureaucratic organisations. This lack of awareness also creates another barrier for millennials to join trade unions: perceived effort. Multiple interviewed workers claimed that to them it felt like getting in contact with a trade union or finding out what they can mean for them required too much one-sided effort from their side. The perceived effort that would have to go into acquiring information regarding the trade union was mentioned multiple times as being a barrier, stopping the workers from committing.

Of all the interviewed trade unions, one union stood out in their willingness to change in order to survive. They made use of a so-called 'full-support model' in which all employees influenced by a certain collective labour agreement can vote on matters regarding these negotiations, whether they are a member of the union or not. This model increased the reach and visibility of this union tremendously. The union itself only has around 1500 members, but over 12.000 workers vote on important decisions. Through word-of-mouth, employees would encourage other people at their place of work to vote on these matters and voice their concerns without having to commit to a trade union through membership fees or other barriers they might experience. Seeing as the commitment to join a union was perceived to be too high by the interviewed workers, this model offers a solution to get young people increasingly involved in the trade union's decision-making as it lowers the amount of commitment that is needed and

at the same time increases the degree of influence that young workers can have on decisions. If young workers were to be more involved, the old-fashioned image could perhaps be turned around as themes that are truly important to young workers will be given more attention and young workers might actually feel represented.

As one worker rightfully stated, this model does take away even more incentive to join a trade union. If one can vote without joining a trade union, there seems to be little reason left to become a paying member of said union. This statement holds true but does not worry the trade union that applies this model. They claim that the inflow of money from membership contributions is not their main form of income but rather they make use of subsidies to cover most of their costs. For this reason, membership fees at this trade union are relatively low and people who become members are considered to do this out of altruism rather than with the idea that becoming a paying member brings any more advantages. The idea of the full-support model revolves around becoming more accessible to workers and involving them more in decisions that influence their working conditions. By doing so the threshold that currently exists is lowered and the trade union becomes more representative of its constituents. Although membership numbers might not increase by implementing this model, the reach of a trade union will increase, and the acquired attention can undoubtedly help in changing the union's image among young workers.

However, the possible success of implementing this model requires a different problem to be addressed first. As Hodder and Krestos (2015), Keune (2015) and Carneiro and Costa (2020) all concluded before and this study can conclude once again, trade unions are not managing to reach a young demographic. Whether it is through social media, through schools or through employers, the activities that trade unions have claimed to be performing to reach young workers are simply not fruitful. Moreover, the interviewed trade unions claimed to approach young workers through topics that were especially relevant to them such as parental leave, student loan debt and housing. The fact that five out of eight interviewed workers had no idea which trade union was connected to their place of work and the fact that most workers were convinced that trade unions only focus on primary benefits and have little else to offer, goes to show that trade unions are drastically failing in reaching their constituency at all. The trade unions are misaligned with the current generation in the themes they find important during collective negotiations and are unable to connect with and recruit young workers. It is therefore crucial for trade unions to investigate the way they communicate towards possible new members first, before they can implement this model.

If trade unions manage to reach possible new members and at least create some visibility among young workers, it is suggested that they strongly consider implementing the 'full-

support model.' This model can help create a more representative union and take away the old-fashioned perception of unions that currently exists among young workers. Simultaneously, it drastically lowers the existing barriers that workers perceive when wanting to join or be informed about their trade union. The model has proven itself to be useful at the trade union that already implemented it and has been reacted to in a positive manner by the interviewed workers.

## 5.2 Conclusion

This thesis started out by asking the question: *"'To what extent can trade unions use CSR in their recruitment strategies to overcome misalignment and bridge the gap between them and 25–30-year-old workers?".* To come to an answer, four sub-research questions were posed. These sub-research questions asked how unions are currently attempting to recruit millennials and whether CSR is or could become part of this strategy and collective labour negotiations. Moreover, the study aimed to uncover workers' views on trade unions, their role in CSR and the extent to which the workers desired to be involved in the decision-making process surrounding CSR at their place of work.

According to the interviewed trade unions, they attempt to recruit young workers through specific themes such as parental leave, job security and housing. Nevertheless, according to these same trade unions, their main role and focus remained to be the primary benefits such as salary and leave. Trade unions make use of both an online and offline approach, focussing on providing information and content through social media whilst simultaneously visiting places of work with representatives or recruiting via word-of-mouth at work by union members.

Corporate social responsibility does not play a role in the recruitment strategies of the trade unions. Although some trade unions recognised the importance of CSR, especially to a younger demographic, the majority of unions found CSR not to be the responsibility of trade unions or at least not to be among their priorities. Interestingly, the trade unions who did achieve collective agreements involving CSR, do not use these achievements or topics as a recruitment tool to target millennials. This has resulted in the millennials having an old-fashioned and bureaucratic view of the trade unions, and them thinking that trade unions mainly negotiate for primary benefits. However, most workers indicated to be content with their primary benefits and they would like to see trade unions invest and negotiate on other benefits, one of which being CSR. Despite some workers being highly involved in the decision-making process at their jobs, a majority of workers would like to see certain changes implemented which they did not manage to implement through their employers. The workers agreed that trade unions could negotiate for these changes.

Overall, trade unions were invisible to these workers as they were not being reached at all. Because of a lack of knowledge and awareness, the perceived time and effort needed to contact or even join a union is considered to be too much. Trade unions might therefore look into a different model in which the commitment to participate is lowered, for example through the ‘full-support model’, which allows workers to vote on decisions affecting their collective negotiations whether they are union members or not.

If trade unions want to appeal more to millennial workers, CSR should become a more central topic in their negotiations as well as their recruitment strategy. As CSR is a broad topic, there are certain CSR-related topics that are more important to millennials than others. One topic that came forward frequently is sustainability, both in the form of environmental sustainability as well as social sustainability. Workers indicated that they find it important their company does its best to look for ways to lower emissions and other external impact, but they should also focus on internal sustainability through investing in employee (mental-) health and sustainable employment. Another important topic which trade unions could use in their battle for survival is bottom-up decision making within companies. Some of the interviewed workers felt deeply involved in the decision-making process, which satisfied them a lot. Several other workers indicated that they would like to be more involved in this process as it makes one feel more included and motivated to perform well. These workers stated that if trade unions were to be more invested in this topic and could accomplish increased involvement of employees in decision-making, then this would increase their allurement. Trade unions should look for ways to negotiate for more bottom-up engagement by employers in an effort to become more attractive to millennial workers who want to be included in the decision-making process at their place of work. This might be done through negotiating certain agreements on employee-involvement in the decision-making process or by negotiating for the unheard employee-initiated changes to be incorporated into the agreements directly.

Should trade unions opt to invest in incorporating CSR more into their negotiations, it is of utmost importance to communicate this well to their constituents. The current old-fashioned view that young workers have of trade unions might be changed if they realise that the unions are also negotiating on topics that are relevant to them. The question that was posed originally assumed trade unions and their efforts to be at least somewhat known to young workers. However, as the findings have shown, trade unions seem to be completely invisible to this demographic. So, yes, CSR should be used to engage with this group of workers and enthuse them about what a trade union could do for them, but only after trade unions solve the existing invisibility problem they have. Trade unions have said to use themes such as housing and parental leave, in attempts to reach young workers. However, the interviewed workers claimed to have no knowledge of trade unions doing anything else besides negotiate for primary

benefits. Therefore, merely switching to using CSR-related topics in their communication towards young workers does not seem to be the solution. Visibility will initially have to be regained through changes in the way young workers are approached, as current methods of both on- and offline communication are not reaching their intended audience.

If they are not able to reach young workers in any way, it will not matter which topics they invest in as the lack of awareness among millennials will pertain. Future research might focus on communication strategies that could work in solving this problem. One possible outcome is the usage of the ‘full-support model’, which allows for a much broader representation of the constituents whilst taking away the perceived barrier of time and effort that young workers now experience.

# 6. Limitations and recommendations

This closing chapter discusses the limitations regarding the research that was performed. Wherever possible, the limitations are countered by recommendations for future research to delve into. Lastly, the most important recommendations for trade unions are named.

A limitation regarding the findings amongst the trade unions arises when looking at the positions of the interviewed representatives. Several interviewees were the directors of their respective trade union with a lot of insight on general communication, negotiation, and recruitment strategies. These interviewees were able to tell a lot about the topics that would or would not be considered important by the trade union in its negotiations and have extensive knowledge on the trade unions recruitment strategies. A few other trade union representatives were lower ranked within their respective trade unions and had specific knowledge on certain topics but lacked the information to answer questions on, for example, a general stance towards CSR or recruitment practices. Future researchers might consider only interviewing people at the top of trade unions who have the necessary oversight to comment on all union-wide strategies and activities.

Another limitation lies within the scope of this research, namely its location. As discussed in the introduction, trade union density varies significantly per nation. Even between the Netherlands and its neighbour Belgium, there are stark differences in union density and the image that trade unions have among the population (OECD & AIAS, 2021). The findings of this study are only generalisable in its national context. Similarly, worker opinions on the importance of CSR will also differ per country, meaning that the generalisability of this study is restricted to the Dutch national context. Future research that aims to study similar phenomena should keep the socio-economic context of its geographic location in mind. On top of this, the eight interviewed workers all worked ‘white collar’ jobs and were highly educated, which makes them more likely to be concerned with employer CSR-performance (Karabasevic et al., 2016). With eight interviewed ‘white collar’ workers, this study’s findings are mostly generalisable to workers with similar educational and career backgrounds.

As this study was explorative, with little to no similar prior research, it was deemed necessary to perform qualitative research. This needed to be done to allow for more open discussion during the data collection, to gain a deeper level of insight into the opinions and experiences of the interviewees. Whilst this was indeed more useful than gathering more quantitative evidence of already proven hypothesis, it does lead to several possible biases. The researcher’s interpretation of the interviewees answers as well as the researcher’s voicing of the questions could affect both the outcome of this study and the conclusions that are made. Moreover, inductive research encourages the exploration of undiscovered knowledge but limits

the possibility to test existing theories and might fall short of answering (all of) the posed research questions.

Furthermore, future research might build on several findings from this study. Firstly, the most important finding is the sheer invisibility of trade unions to millennials. Despite indicating to have altered their marketing strategies and recruitment activities towards a younger audience, it does not appear that these initiatives are fruitful. More research should be done to find out how and why trade unions are failing to reach their constituencies at all. Secondly, the possibilities for the implementation of the 'full-support model' at other trade unions should be studied more extensively. This model was perceived positively by the interviewed workers and seemed to be working well for the trade union that used it. Future research might study the model's specific contents and discover whether it can be applied in other trade unions as well, to help increase the union's visibility and represented constituents.

Finally, regarding the trade unions, this study has discussed and concluded that change is necessary, something that trade unions claimed to agree with. Not only are current communication strategies simply not reaching the intended audience of young workers, the themes that are being used to attract them are also not aligned with their actual interests and needs. Young workers are barely aware of the existence of trade unions and have largely formed their image of them based on information they have gained through the media. This has led them to think that trade unions are old-fashioned and bureaucratic organisations that do not hold their specific interests in mind. Besides negotiating for primary benefits, workers were not aware of other topics that trade unions include in their negotiations. The workers indicated that they would like to see trade unions focus on other topics as well, most importantly CSR-related topics such as mental-health and sustainable employment. On top of this, the workers want to hear about the effort that trade unions put into these topics. The current 'showing, not telling' mentality that trade unions have towards CSR-related achievements is not working, as workers are not at all aware of unions' (albeit very minor) accomplishments in this area. On top of this, because of the lack of awareness that exists among young workers, they experience a threshold preventing them from putting time and effort into coming in contact with and joining trade unions.

This thesis closes by stating that if trade unions want to ensure their continued existence and recruit young workers, they must find different ways to reach young workers. This can be done through collaboration with benevolent and cooperative businesses, as workers indicated to prefer, or by speaking to them on a personal level in a face-to-face setting, as workers also indicated to prefer and one union has shown to be fruitful. Additionally, reaching young workers could also be done through the 'full-support model' that lowers the aforementioned

commitment-threshold and provides workers with a non-committal way to help trade unions shape into modern, democratic and more representative organisations. Once trade unions figure out how reach the younger part of their constituencies, they need to inform them about topics that matter to them. Information on the ever-expected yearly percental wage increase has become unremarkable and does not intrigue young workers like it used to do. This new generation looks beyond their own interests and places value in sorting out larger, collective issues, the types of issues that made trade unions emerge hundreds of years ago. The time has now come for trade unions to return to their origin and focus on the issues that the workers they want to represent are telling them to focus on.

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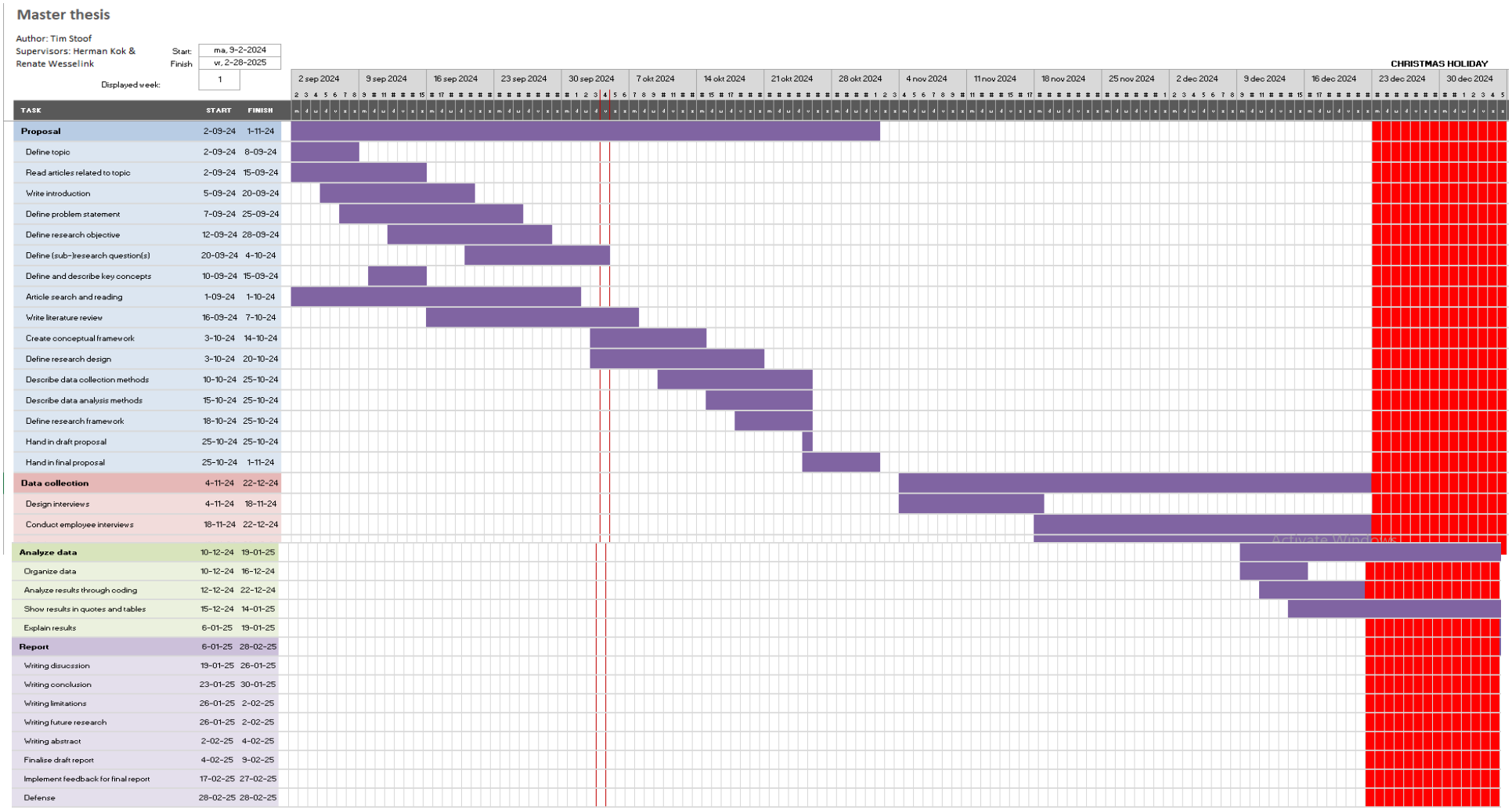
# 8. Appendix

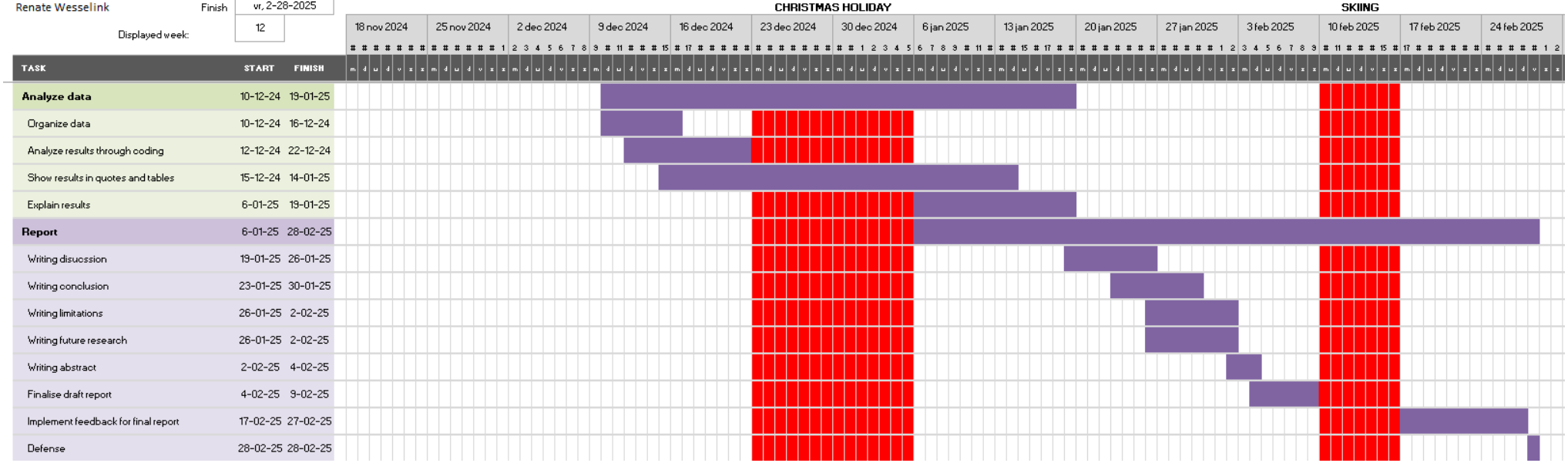
## 8.1 Gantt Chart



## Master thesis

Author: Tim Stoof
Supervisors: Herman Kok & Renate Wesselink

Start: ma, 9-2-2024
Finish: vr, 2-28-2025
Displayed week: 12




| TASK | START | FINISH |
|---|---|---|
| **Analyze data** | 10-12-24 | 19-01-25 |
| Organize data | 10-12-24 | 16-12-24 |
| Analyze results through coding | 12-12-24 | 22-12-24 |
| Show results in quotes and tables | 15-12-24 | 14-01-25 |
| Explain results | 6-01-25 | 19-01-25 |
| **Report** | 6-01-25 | 28-02-25 |
| Writing disucssion | 19-01-25 | 26-01-25 |
| Writing conclusion | 23-01-25 | 30-01-25 |
| Writing limitations | 26-01-25 | 2-02-25 |
| Writing future research | 26-01-25 | 2-02-25 |
| Writing abstract | 2-02-25 | 4-02-25 |
| Finalise draft report | 4-02-25 | 9-02-25 |
| Implement feedback for final report | 17-02-25 | 27-02-25 |
| Defense | 28-02-25 | 28-02-25 |

## 8.2 Interview guides

As the interviews were conducted in Dutch, and the author and both supervisors speak Dutch, it was decided that the interview guides should be created in the Dutch language and included in the final thesis report as such.

### 8.2.1 Interview guide trade unions

Om achtergrondinformatie over de geïnterviewde te krijgen, worden eerst enkele algemene vragen gesteld. Deze vragen worden gesteld om inzicht te krijgen in de rol van de persoon binnen hun vakbond en de mate van ervaring met veranderende omgevingen en strategieën binnen de vakbond:

1. Wie bent u en wat is uw rol binnen vakbond X?
2. Hoe lang werkt u al bij vakbond X en wat is er volgens u het meest veranderd in die periode?

Vervolgens is het belangrijk om te achterhalen hoe de huidige vernieuwingsstrategieën van vakbonden eruit zien. Forrester (2004) legt uit dat vernieuwingsstrategieën van vakbonden grotendeels zijn gevormd op basis van de actualiteit door de geschiedenis heen. Inzicht in welke onderwerpen op dit moment worden opgenomen in vernieuwingsstrategieën geeft inzicht in wat vakbonden op dit moment belangrijke situaties vinden. Deze informatie is cruciaal om een antwoord te vinden op deelvraag 1: ‘’*What topics do trade unions currently employ in their recruitment strategies to recruit members in the millennial age group?”*. Deze vraag wordt deels beantwoord door middel van een literatuurstudie en deels beantwoord door middel van de empirische bevindingen. Het vinden van overeenkomsten tussen de empirische bevindingen en de bevindingen uit de literatuur helpt dit onderzoek bij het verifiëren van de uitkomsten. Om een overzicht te krijgen van de huidige strategieën die de geïnterviewde vakbonden toepassen, worden de volgende vragen gesteld:

3. Recentelijk zijn de ledenaantallen van vakbonden gedaald, grotendeels als gevolg van een uitstroom van ouderen leden en een gebrek aan instroom van jongere werknemers, waar komt dat volgens u door?
4. Hebben jullie specifieke plannen om nieuwe leden te werven, zo ja, maken deze deel uit van een grotere strategie?
5. Wie zijn er betrokken bij het creëren van deze strategieën?

6. Welke specifieke kwesties en onderwerpen worden benadrukt in jullie poging om jonge werknemers te werven als nieuwe leden?
7. Hoe probeert u een jonger publiek te bereiken, op welke platforms probeert u met hen in contact te komen?

Om deelvraag 2: *''To what extent do trade unions see corporate social responsibility as a part of collective negotiations?''* te beantwoorden, zullen de ondervraagden vervolgens vragen krijgen over verschillende MVO-onderwerpen. In eerste instantie zal een woordassociatievraag worden gesteld om erachter te komen wat het eerste in de geïnterviewde opkomt wanneer hen wordt gevraagd aan MVO te denken. Daarna worden deze antwoorden gebruikt in de vervolgvragen. Deze vragen zijn bedoeld om de vakbondsmedewerker te laten nadenken over mogelijke manieren waarop de onderwerpen die ze hebben bedacht, kunnen worden opgenomen in een vernieuwingsstrategie. Cheat et al. (2011) hebben aangetoond dat millennials zeer betrokken zijn bij MVO en dat een meerderheid van de millennials MVO hoog in het vaandel heeft staan wanneer zij een keuze maken voor welke werkgever zij willen werken.

Als vakbonden de MVO-prestaties van bedrijven kunnen beïnvloeden door middel van onderhandelingen of andere vormen van invloed, zullen millennials misschien meer waarde in vakbonden zien en eerder overwegen lid te worden. Ten slotte zullen de geïnterviewden worden gevraagd of zij vinden dat deze punten deel kunnen uitmaken van de collectieve onderhandelingen met werkgevers. De vragen die gesteld zullen worden zijn als volgt:

8. Waar denkt u aan wanneer u de woorden Maatschappelijk Verantwoord Ondernemen hoort?
9. Zijn er antwoorden die u op de vorige vraag heeft gegeven, die onderdeel uitmaken van de huidige manieren waarop jullie nieuwe leden proberen aan te trekken? Waarom wel of waarom niet?
10. Hoe zouden deze onderwerpen kunnen worden opgenomen in de CAO-onderhandelingen die uw vakbond aangaat?

### 8.2.2 Interview guide employees

Om informatie over de geïnterviewde te krijgen, worden eerst een aantal inleidende vragen gesteld. Deze vragen worden gesteld om inzicht te krijgen in de algemene achtergrond en werkgever van de geïnterviewde. De volgende vragen worden gesteld:

1. Wie ben je en wat voor werk doe je?
2. Hoe lang werk je al bij jouw huidige werkgever?

Na inzicht te hebben gekregen in hun achtergrond, gaat het interview verder naar hun kennis van en ervaringen met vakbonden. In eerste instantie is het waardevol om gegevens te verzamelen over hun algemene kennis over vakbonden. Door hen te vragen naar een mogelijk vakbondslidmaatschap, is het mogelijk om het huidige beeld van vakbonden onder jonge werknemers te begrijpen. Hodder en Kretsos (2015) hebben de uitdagingen belicht waarmee vakbonden worden geconfronteerd bij het aantrekken van jonge leden. Een van deze uitdagingen is het onvermogen om via de juiste kanalen met hen in contact te komen en het ouderwetse beeld dat jonge werknemers van vakbonden hebben. Deze vragen kunnen ook duidelijk maken welke andere mogelijke nadelen er momenteel bestaan die jonge werknemers ervan weerhouden lid te worden van een vakbond. Deze nadelen kunnen later gebruikt worden als suggesties voor vakbonden om zich op te richten in hun vernieuwingsstrategieën. Ten slotte verschuift de aandacht naar de combinatie van vakbonden en MVO. De geïnterviewden zullen worden gevraagd naar hun ideeën over hoe vakbonden MVO zouden kunnen integreren in hun strategieën en welke MVO-gerelateerde onderwerpen zij graag betrokken zouden zien bij deze verandering. De antwoorden op deze vragen zullen helpen bij het beantwoorden van de derde deelvraag: *''What value do millennials see in trade unions in general and regarding corporate social responsibility?"*

3. Ben je op de hoogte van de vakbond die verbonden is aan jouw werkplek? Hoe komt dat?
4. Ben je lid van deze vakbond of overweeg je lid te worden? Waarom of waarom niet?
5. Welk beeld heb jij van vakbonden in het algemeen? En in relatie tot jongeren?
6. Wat zou een vakbond jou te bieden moeten hebben om te overwegen lid te worden?
7. Zou het opnemen van MVO-gerelateerde onderwerpen in onderhandelingen de kans vergroten dat je lid wordt van een vakbond? Waarom wel of waarom niet?

8. Welke MVO-gerelateerde onderwerpen zou jij vakbonden graag voor zien onderhandelen?
9. Welke andere onderwerpen zouden vakbonden kunnen behandelen waardoor jij eerder zou overwegen om lid te worden van een vakbond?

Om het denkproces van de werknemer achter het kiezen van hun werkgever te begrijpen, en om na te gaan of MVO voor de ondervraagde zo belangrijk is als de literatuur suggereert (Cheat et al., 2011), zullen vragen worden gesteld over hun besluitvormingsproces. Bovendien wordt de ondervraagden gevraagd naar hun mening over het belang van MVO en of ze MVO-gerelateerde acties op het werk ervaren. Gezien de invloed van een bottom-up benadering op MVO-prestaties, zullen de geïnterviewden gevraagd worden of ze betrokken zijn bij de vorming van de MVO-strategie en of ze de kans krijgen om zelf acties voor te stellen. Betrokkenheid bij deze acties blijkt het succes ervan en de motivatie van de werknemers voor deze zaak te vergroten (Gotsch et al., 2022). De antwoorden die dit deel van het interview oplevert, worden gebruikt om deelvraag 4 te beantwoorden: : *''To what extent do millennials feel included in the CSR decisions made by their employers?"*. Om de benodigde informatie bloot te leggen, worden de volgende vragen gesteld:

10. Waarom heb je ervoor gekozen om bij je huidige werkgever te werken?
11. Heb je tijdens je zoektocht naar een baan rekening gehouden met de MVO-prestaties van de bedrijven die je op het oog had? Waarom wel of niet?
12. Wat heb je ervaren omtrent de MVO-strategie van je werkgever sinds je hier werkt?
13. Voel je jezelf betrokken bij de beslissingen die worden genomen over de MVO-strategie of -activiteiten? Waarom of waarom niet?