

# EMPLOYMENT

## FACT SHEET

# Women Overrepresented in Union Membership Decline

February 2013

*In 2012, the rate of union membership sunk to a new low since the Great Depression, and a decline in union membership for women drove this drop. While men are more likely than women to be members of unions, the gap between men's and women's union membership rates has narrowed over time. Yet last year it grew – only the fourth year in nearly three decades in which it has done so. The decline in women's union membership is cause for concern, because, while union membership provides many important protections, it is particularly important for women because the wage premium for being a union member is larger for women than for men and union members have a lower gender wage gap than workers who aren't represented by unions.*

### Key Facts

- Women account for 72 percent of the decline in union membership from 2011 – 2012.
  - The gap between men's and women's union membership rates grew between 2011 and 2012, and did so by the largest margin since at least 1983.
  - The rate of union membership in the public sector workforce in 2012, where women are more heavily concentrated, was more than five times higher than in the private sector, but it declined more sharply than the rate of private sector union membership last year.
  - Women workers who are union members earn higher wages and experience a 37 percent smaller gender wage gap than women workers who are not represented by unions.
- The gap between men's and women's union membership has narrowed over time. Last year it grew for the first time since 2008 and for only the fourth time since 1983, by 25 percent:
    - Women's rate of union membership (11.2 percent) was 1.2 percentage points lower than men's (12.4 percent) in 2011. In 2012, women's rate (10.5 percent) was 1.5 percentage points lower than men's (12.0 percent).
    - The growth in the gap between men's and women's union membership rates was the largest increase in this gap since at least 1983, the earliest year of data available from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

### Women's decline in union membership drove overall decline between 2011 and 2012

- Between 2011 and 2012 the number of union members dropped by 398,000. Women were less than half (46 percent) of union members in 2011– but they accounted for 72 percent of the losses.
- **Union membership is critical for women's wage equality**
    - Women workers who belong to unions earn more.
      - Women experience more of a wage premium from union membership than men, both in terms of absolute dollars and percentage increases. In 2012, the typical full-time female worker who was a union member made \$877 per week – 32.3 percent more (\$214) than the typical full-time female worker not covered by a union (who made

\$663 per week).

- In contrast, the typical full-time male worker who was a union member made \$997 per week – 21.4 percent more (\$176) than the typical full-time male worker not covered by a union (who made \$821 per week).
- Hispanic women workers experienced particularly high financial benefits from union membership. The typical Hispanic female union member who worked full time was paid 52.5 percent more than the typical Hispanic woman who worked full time and was not represented by a union—or \$264 more per week.
- The typical black female union member who worked full time was paid 29.7 percent more than the typical black woman who worked full time and was not represented by a union, or \$173 more per week.
- Women workers who belong to unions experience a smaller gender wage gap.
  - The gender wage gap among union members was 12 cents in 2012: in other words, the typical full-time woman union member had weekly earnings that were 88 percent of her male counterpart's.

- The gender wage gap among workers who were not represented by unions was 19 cents in 2012: in other words, the typical full-time woman not represented by a union had weekly earnings that were 81 percent of her male counterpart's.
- Put another way, the wage gap for full-time women workers who are union members was 37 percent smaller than it is for full-time women workers who are not represented by unions.

### **Women's concentration in the public sector likely played a key role in their declining union membership from 2011-2012**

- It's likely that women's concentration in public sector jobs (women comprised 57 percent of the public sector workforce in 2012) was a key factor in women's decline in union membership.
- The rate of union membership in the public sector workforce in 2012 was more than five times higher than in the private sector (35.9 percent as compared to 6.6 percent). Public sector workers comprise just over half (51 percent) of union members in 2011, but they accounted for 59 percent of the declines in union membership between 2011 and 2012.

#### **Technical note:**

Unless otherwise noted, all data come from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Union Members 2012 release (<http://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.nr0.htm>). BLS data on union membership include all employed wage and salary workers 16 and older. Figures are 2011 and 2012 annual averages. Data are not available broken down by gender and sector. Data and trends on union representation (workers who do not report union affiliation but whose jobs are covered by a union contract or an employee association contract) are not reported here but are similar to those for union membership.

- i James B. Kelleher, Lisa Lambert, Bernie Woodall, "Union membership falls to lowest percentage in 76 years" (Jan. 23, 2013), available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/01/24/us-usa-unions-membership-idUSBRE90M1MQ20130124>.
- ii NWLC calculations from BLS unpublished data, Union affiliation of employed wage and salary workers by sex, annual averages 1983-2012.
- iii Data on the wage gap differ slightly from the often-used measure of median annual earnings for full-time, year-round workers. Using this figure, the typical woman makes 77 percent of what the typical man makes. See National Women's Law Center, The Wage Gap is Stagnant in the Last Decade (September 2012) available at <http://www.nwlc.org/resource/wage-gap-stagnant-last-decade>.
- iv NWLC calculations from BLS, Current Employment Statistics, available at <http://data.bls.gov/pdq/querytool.jsp?survey=ce> (last visited Jan. 30, 2013).