

Union workers more likely to get benefits of every kind

Union members are much more likely than nonunion workers to have retirement and health benefits, according to a July 17 report by the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS).

Fully 89 percent of union workers have an employer-provided retirement plan of some kind — compared to 48 percent of nonunion workers. Union members are both more likely to have

access to a retirement benefit (95 to 63 percent) and more likely participate in it when they do have access (93 to 76 percent.) Meanwhile, 79 percent of union workers have employer-provided medical benefits, compared to 50 percent of nonunion workers. Again, union workers are more likely to have access to the benefit (95 vs. 68 percent) and more likely to participate (83 vs. 73 percent).

Employers also pay a bigger share of

the health insurance premium in union workplaces: On average, union employers pay 87 percent of the premium for single coverage, compared to 79 percent in nonunion workplaces. And for family coverage, union employers pay on average 80 percent of the premium, compared to 65 percent for non-union employers.

The union edge holds up, too, for other benefits, like paid sick leave: 84 percent of union workers have it, compared to 62 percent of nonunion workers. The difference is narrower for paid vacation (81 to 75 percent) and paid holidays (75 to 74 percent.)

For each category of benefit, the difference between union and nonunion is greatest in the private sector. In general, public sector workers in state and local government are more likely to have benefits than private sector workers, and the difference between union and non-union workers in the public sector isn't as great.

The BLS report uses data from a March 2013 survey of 11,893 employers. Besides union and nonunion, the report also breaks down the benefit data by industry sector, size of employer, and whether workers are full- or part-time. Benefits are more common at large employers and among full-time workers.

It's not clear in the report to what extent union membership — by itself — is

responsible for the difference, since unionization is more common at large employers and among full-time workers.

But the survey and the report are conducted annually, and the data — and the differences — are pretty consistent year to year. The data show that employers are about as likely today to offer health benefits as they were five years ago, but that the employer share of health premiums has dropped a percent or two for both union and nonunion

workers on average. Meanwhile, non-union workers are 3 percentage points less likely to have retirement benefits than they were five years ago, while union workers are actually three percentage points more likely to have the benefits. The survey doesn't distinguish between traditional defined benefit retirement plans, which are in decline, and the 401(k)-style "defined contribution" retirement plans, which have become more common.

Benefits of belonging


Union beats nonunion for every kind of benefit

Category of benefit	union workers	nonunion workers
Retirement	89%	48%
Medical	79%	50%
Paid sick leave	82%	62%
Paid vacation	75%	74%
Paid holidays	81%	75%


Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, National Compensation Survey, March 2013.

Sheet Metal Workers Local 16
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Members, Officers and Staff of Local 16 wish the Men, Women and Families of Labor a Happy and Safe Labor Day



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