

Unionization rate stands at 10.3% in 2016 up 0.1%p from previous year

Dec. 7, 2017

Korea's unionization rate stood at 10.3% at the end of 2016, up 0.1%p from a year ago.

* Unionization rate: total number of trade union members (1,966,000)/number of workers eligible to unionize (19,172,000)*100

* Number of workers eligible to unionize: number of wage earners excluding public servants (public officials of grade V or above, military personnel, police officers, etc.) and teachers (principals, vice principals, etc.) who are barred from joining a trade union

According to the union membership statistics for 2016 released by the Ministry of Employment and Labor (MOEL), the total number of union members increased by 28,000 (1.5%) to 1,966,000 in 2016, compared with 1,939,000 in the previous year.

The number of workers eligible to unionize also increased by 145,000 (0.8%) year-on-year to 19,172,000. As a result, the unionization rate went up compared to the previous year.

As for union membership by upper-level organization, the Federation of Korea Trade Unions (FKTU) made up the largest share, representing 42.8% (842,000) of all union members, which was followed by the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) with 33.0% (649,000), the Federation of Korean Public Industry Trade Unions (FKPITU) with 1.0% (20,000) and the Nation Labor Unions Confederation (NLUC) with 0.7% (13,000). Trade unions not affiliated to any upper-level organization accounted for 22.5% (442,000) of the total.

A close look at the union membership statistics reveals the following details.

By sector, the unionization rates for private-sector workers and public officials were 9.1% and 67.6% respectively, which shows that the unionization rate for

public officials was considerably high compared with that for private-sector workers.

By size of workplace, the unionization rates for workplaces with 300 employees or more, workplaces with 100~299 employees and workplaces with 30~99 employees were 55.1%, 15.0% and 3.5% respectively, which suggests that the smaller the size of workplace the lower the unionization rate.

By type of organization, of all union members, 1,088,000 or 55.3% were members of non-enterprise-level unions, which implies that more than half of trade unions were non-enterprise-level unions.

The unionization rate, which continued to decline after peaking at 19.8% in 1989, fell to a single digit (9.8%) in 2010 for the first time. But it went back up into the 10% range in 2011 as establishing multiple unions at the enterprise level was allowed. The rate has since stayed around 10%.

* Number of union members: 1,781,000 in 2012 → 1,848,000 in 2013 → 1,905,000 in 2014 → 1,939,000 in 2015 → 1,966,000 in 2016

The results released this time came from the analysis that the Korean Society of Comparison Labor Law was commissioned to conduct using the union membership data at the end of 2016 which were submitted to competent administrative authorities, such as local employment and labor offices and local governments, by trade unions whose establishment had been reported.