

<b>Project Acronym:</b>	EGRUiEN
<b>Grant number:</b>	101178146
<b>Project Full Title:</b>	Encouraging a digital and Green transition through Revitalized and Inclusive Union-Employer Negotiations
<b>Call:</b>	HORIZON-CL2-2024-TRANSFORMATIONS-01
<b>Type of Action:</b>	HORIZON Research and Innovation Actions
<b>Project URL (temporary):</b>	<a href="https://sites.app.jyu.fi/egruien/en">https://sites.app.jyu.fi/egruien/en</a>
<b>Deliverable number:</b>	D2.1
<b>Deliverable name:</b>	Research protocol document for WP2
<b>WP number:</b>	2
<b>Type:</b>	Report
<b>Contractual delivery date:</b>	30.06.2025
<b>Actual delivery date:</b>	30.06.2025
<b>Dissemination level:</b>	Public
<b>Lead beneficiary:</b>	JYU
<b>Keywords:</b>	Social dialogue, twin transition, Poland, collective bargaining
<b>Author(s):</b>	Szymon Pilch, Jacek Burski, Adam Mrozowicki
<b>Contributor(s)</b>	

## Contents

I. Historical Background and The Case Study Report of the Social Dialogue and Twin Transition in the Automotive, Energy, Care and Transport On-demand Sectors in Poland .....	3
1. Socio-economical and historical background .....	3
1.1. Labour market characteristics and change .....	5
1.2. The social dialogue in Poland in 2000-2025.....	9
2. Overview of the selected cases in Poland .....	13
2.1 Automotive Sector.....	13
2.2. Energy Sector .....	17
2.4. On-demand taxi transport sector .....	23
3. Upper Silesia area as the case of deindustrialization in Poland.....	27
3.1. Social dialogue in Upper Silesia in 2015-2025.....	28
3.2. The case of the ‘decline’ of coal-mining sector – the ‘unfulfilled’ / ‘in the process’ case of transition (social dialogue mechanisms).....	31
3.3. The closures and restructuring of factories in automotive in Upper Silesia (2000-2024) 34	
4. Conclusions .....	38
<b>References</b> .....	39
II. The Dynamics of the Social Dialogue, Social Agreements and Negotiations in the Lignite- and Hard-coal Mining Industries: the Cases of PGE and PGG Companies.....	45
<b>1. Introduction to the case</b> .....	45
PGG Company .....	52
Successful and unsuccessful creative destruction?.....	55
<b>2. Description of the negotiation process and social dialogue dynamics</b> .....	56
Social Dialogue in Lignite Coal Sector: Case of the PGE (2015–2025).....	62
Social Dialogue in Hard Coal Sector: Case of the PGG (2015–2025) .....	65
Negotiation tactics.....	68
<b>3. Power and leverage</b> .....	71
PGE Case .....	71
PGG Case .....	73
The outcomes of negotiations:.....	74

**4. Analysis of local level social dialogue dynamics.....77**  
 The dynamics of social dialogue in the Bełchatów region (Łódź Province) and the Turoszów Basin (Lower Silesia Province) – the case of PGE .....77  
 The dynamics of social dialogue at the local level in the Upper Silesia region (Silesia Province) – the case of PGG .....82  
**5. Conclusions.....87**  
**Literature .....89**

I. Historical Background and The Case Study Report of the Social Dialogue and Twin Transition in the Automotive, Energy, Care and Transport On-demand Sectors in Poland

**Abstract**

The report analyses the economic transformation in Upper Silesia in Poland in 1990-2024. The first part briefly describes the historical background of the changes, namely the economic development of the country and the characteristics of industrial relations, social dialogue and the labour market in Poland, indicating also the relevance of Upper Silesia region for the analyses conducted in the report. The second part of the report presents: the course of economic transformation in Upper Silesia, including the transition from one monoculture (based on mining and energy sector) to a more diverse industrial setting with a crucial role played by automotive sector which is seen as one of the largest manufacturers of parts and car manufacturing in Europe); the course of social dialogue in the industries studied in the EGRUiEN project; the impact of technology on the transformation process (attempts to transform Upper Silesia into an area where the FIRE sector (finance, insurance, real estate), global shared services and IT outsourcing should play a more important role; the introduction of the European Green Deal policy, which means e.g., a gradual transition from the production of cars with combustion engines to hybrid and electric cars). The report also focuses on the role of employees and their impact on change, emphasizing that, in general, despite the limited influence of social dialogue institutions on their decision-making power in the transformation process, their voice counts. The report concludes with a conclusions.

1. Socio-economical and historical background

Period 1945-1989

Prior to World War II, Poland boasted a free-market economy characterised by a robust

agricultural sector and notable industrial and mining sectors. Following the communist takeover of the 1940s, however, the country shifted to a Soviet-style, state-controlled economy. From the mid-1970s onwards, economic growth slowed due to outdated industries, inefficient state-subsidised production and wages that were not linked to productivity. By the late 1980s, rising deficits and hyperinflation had led to a crisis. The collapse of communism and Comecon marked the start of a difficult transition to a market-based global economy.

### Period 1989 – 2004

In an effort to restore economic stability, the new state implemented a policy of "shock therapy", a strategy designed to curb inflation and accelerate Poland's shift to a market economy. This involved a range of economic policies, including wage freezes, the removal of price controls, the phasing out of subsidies for state-owned enterprises, and the promotion of large-scale private business.

Following the year 1989, Poland experienced a comprehensive economic and social transformation, thereby consolidating its economic strength and adopting Western models, with a transition from manufacturing to services. This period also brought significant turbulence, characterised by high unemployment (which peaked at over 20% in 2003), the dominance of foreign capital, and extensive privatisation (for example, the Balcerowicz plan and public service reforms).

This period is characterised by the emergence of a distinct Polish form of "patchwork capitalism" (Gardawski & Rapacki, 2021), which is shaped by the historically entrenched fragility of formal institutions and further exacerbated by the rapid collapse of state socialism. This approach encompassed a reduction in government intervention and a partial marketisation of public services (Kozek, 2011), culminating in the establishment of a hybrid socio-economic system that was receptive to novel institutional components characterised by diverse rationales.

Kliknij lub naciśnij tutaj, aby wprowadzić tekst.Kliknij lub naciśnij tutaj, aby wprowadzić tekst.

### Period 2004-2025

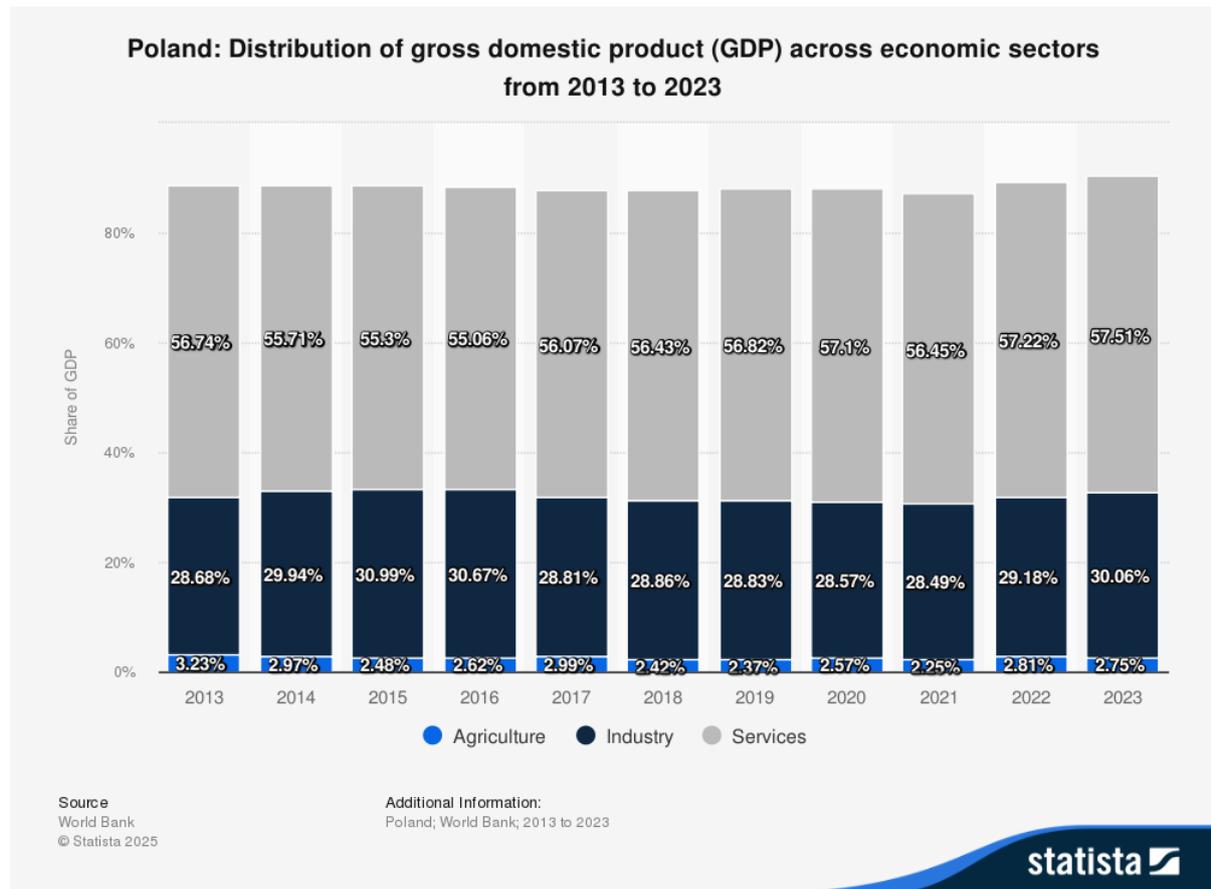
The accession of Poland to the European Union resulted in the country gaining access to substantial financial resources provided by the EU, which significantly contributed to the promotion of economic growth. Since 2004, Poland has received almost €250 billion in EU transfers, making it the largest net recipient after accounting for contributions. The country has experienced a doubling of its GDP, a continued low unemployment rate, and the allocation of its inaugural National Recovery Plan funds in the 2023–2024 financial year. The net financial benefit of EU membership is currently estimated to be approximately €175 billion<sup>1</sup>.

Participation in the Single European Market has also been crucial to Poland's GDP growth, placing it third in cumulative GDP growth among EU states, after Ireland and Malta. Over the past 15 years, Poland's real GDP has grown by an average of 3% per annum, thus exceeding the EU average, despite the economic crises experienced in 2008–12 and 2020–22.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.pl/web/funds-regional-policy/minister> [access: 26.06.2025]

Between 2013 and 2023, Poland's economic structure underwent significant transformation, with services contributing approximately 60% of GDP, industry accounting for 28–30%, and agriculture for 2–3% (see Table 1).

**Table 1 Distribution of GDP in Poland**



Source: Statista

### 1.1. Labour market characteristics and change

The labor market in Poland is characterized by employment flexibility, which is also shown by the data. Almost 19% of economically active persons (see Table 2) declare themselves as self-employed, and fixed term employed (excluding the gig / platform workers employed via other contracts than temporary, e.g., backpack rental etc.) amounts to about 15% (see Table 2). For the time being, neither Polish statistics nor Eurostat do not collect data on the employment of gig workers. It must be emphasized, however, that government actions over the last 10 years have led to a partial regulation of the labor market. Before 2014, 28% of workers declared themselves as temporary employees (see Table 2). The unemployment rate has been decreasing at a steady pace over the last 15 years. In 2012 and 2013 the unemployment rate was the highest in the period following the financial crisis of 2007/8, when the liberal government applied austerity measures in 2010 and 2011, which were

associated with labour market flexibilization and cutting labour costs and jobs while the GDP grew constantly as compared to the rest of the UE and countries in the region. Currently, the unemployment rate is one of the lowest in the EU and amounts to about 3% (see Table 2). Similarly, the youth unemployment rate is at a low level of about 10%, considering the last 15 years (see Table 2).

**Table 2 The main employment and macroeconomic characteristics of Poland**

Year	Unemployment rate <sup>1</sup>	Youth (15-24) Unemployment rate <sup>1</sup>	Long term unemployment rate <sup>2</sup>	Self-employed persons (%)	Temporary employees share (fixed-term) (18-64) <sup>1</sup>	Real GDP growth rate <sup>1</sup>	
						Poland	EU-27 (until 2020 EU-28)
2008	7,1%	17,3%	51,1%	18,7%	26,9%	4,2 <sup>3</sup>	0,5 <sup>3</sup>
2009	8,2%	20,6%	25,8%	18,7%	26,4%	2,8 <sup>3</sup>	-4,3 <sup>3</sup>
2010	9,7%	23,7%	29,1%	19%	27,2%	3,6 <sup>3</sup>	2,1 <sup>3</sup>
2011	9,7%	25,8%	34,6%	19%	26,8%	5,0	1,9
2012	10,1%	26,5%	35,4%	18,7%	26,8%	1,5	-0,7
2013	10,3%	27,3%	38,3%	18,4%	26,8%	0,9	-0,1
2014	9,0%	23,9%	41,6%	18,2%	28,3%	3,8	1,6
2015	7,5%	20,8%	37,7%	18,2%	28%	4,4	2,3
2016	6,2%	17,7%	40,7%	17,7%	27,5%	3,0	2
2017	4,9%	14,8%	40,5%	17,7%	26,1%	5,1	2,8
2018	3,9%	11,7%	39,6%	17,8%	24,3%	5,9	2,1
2019	3,3%	9,9%	38%	17,8%	21,7%	4,5	1,8
2020	3,2%	10,8%	49,3%	18%	18,4%	-2,0	-5,6
2021	3,4%	11,9%	56,6%	18,4%	14,8%	6,9	5,6
2022	2,9%	10,8%	51,7%	18,7%	15,2%	5,1	3,4

Sources: 1) Eurostat (Eurostat, 2025) (except for 3) – OECD (OECD, 2025b)); 2) Eurostat does not provide data for Poland, the gaps are explained as low level of reliability, the data in the table are given as a percentage of the unemployed over 12 months among the total unemployed. The source of the data is the annual reports of the Labour Market Department under the ministry responsible for labour (the name of the ministry has changed several times). What is worth noting is that, although unemployment is falling in Poland and the number of unemployed is decreasing, there is still a significant proportion of long-term unemployment

The extent of employee unionization is rather small and stays at stable rate. Recently, it tends to be on a downward trend as compared to the early 1990s when the unionization density was up to three times higher (Gardawski, 1992), around 25-30%, than it is now, at around 10% (see Table 2). The extent of employers' organizations' presence is much higher as compared to the unionization. Some sources quote as high as 50%, but assuming more realistic calculations one can speak of about 30% (see Table 2). In this regard, employer's density refers to 'membership in terms of all employees employed by member firms as a share of the total of

employees in the organisational domain of the organisations<sup>2</sup>.’ Due to the SME prevalence of, the majority of employers are affiliated in no such organisations.

In Poland, the number of collective agreements is limited and occurs most often in the public sector and at the company level. Overall, collective bargaining coverage is estimated at around 15% (see Table 3). The power of the social partners seems not significant; thus it is the government that has the most say and holds the “real” power in negotiations between the social partners (Gardawski & Towalski, 2019). In other words, research on employment and the labour market conditions in Poland points to several barriers for social partners to exert an influence on the shape of labour market and its policies. These obstacles include widespread temporary and precarious employment, low union density and low collective bargaining coverage (Gardawski and Towalski, 2019: 144). Furthermore, the weakness of the social partners creates an opportunity for the government to bypass the tripartite institutions in designing and implementing employment policies, This situation can be described in terms of 'illusory corporatism' (Ost, 2000, 2011). Social dialogue institutions such as the Social Dialogue Council are rather weak, and the industrial relations system itself was subject to intense pressure from the Polish governments implementing authoritarian innovations (A. Mrozowicki, 2024) which had a repercussions e.g. during the pandemic crisis.

**Table 3 The main industrial relations characteristics**

Year	Trade union density (ETUI) <sup>7</sup>	Trade union density <sup>1</sup> (ILO)	Trade union density (CBOS) <sup>2</sup>	Employer organisation density	Collective bargaining coverage <sup>5</sup>	Collective bargaining level
1990	36	-	-	-	-	-
1991	34	-	-	-	-	-
1992	30	-	-	-	-	-
1993	19	-	-	-	-	-
1994	26	-	-	-	-	-
1995	20	-	-	-	-	-
1996	21	-	-	-	-	-
1999	21	-	-	-	-	-
2000	17	-	-	-	25	Company (dominant), industry (existing, sporadic), national (not used)
2001	16	-	-	-	-	
2002	14	-	-	-	-	
2003	19	-	-	-	-	
2004	19,5	-	-	-	-	
2005	22	-	-	-	-	

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/en/resources/article/2008/decline-employer-organisations-density-rates>  
[accessed: March 28th 2025]

2006	17	-	-	-	-
2007	16	-	-	20 <sup>6</sup>	18,9
2008	-	15,7	16	-	18,7
2009	-	15,4	-	-	-
2010	-	17,4	15	-	18,6
2011	-	17,3	-	-	18,1
2012	-	16,6	-	20 <sup>6</sup>	17,7
2013	-	16,5	10	-	-
2014	-	-	-	-	-
2015	-	-	11	-	17,3
2016	-	14,1	-	-	-
2017	-	13,4	11	-	18
2018	-	-	-	20-30 <sup>3</sup> 55,6 <sup>4</sup>	-
2019	-	-	13	-	13,4
2020	-	-	-	-	-
2021	-	-	10	-	-
2022	-	-	-	50 <sup>4</sup>	-

Source: 1), 3), 5) – (OECD, 2025a); 2) CBOS F e l i k s i a k , 2 0 2 1 ) ; 4) (Eurofound, 2024) 6) (Czarzasty, 2014), 7) ETUI (Gardawski et al., 2012)

As far as the secondary data are concerned, the problem seems to be the unrecognized statistical field of the main macroeconomic indicators of the country. There is also a lack of and selectivity in statistical data. Therefore, we base further analysis on reports, articles, governmental documents, industry reports etc.

To show the social dialogue mechanisms as well as the worker’s influence on socioeconomic changes, and emphasis disruptive technologies and the problems it caused in Poland we decided to choose the Upper Silesia which we will elaborate in more details in section 3 of this report. It is a special region in Poland and the EU, as it has the largest number of coal mines and the highest number of employees in this industry. In addition, Upper Silesia is marked by social tensions caused by successive economic transformations (in the 1990s and related to the transition to renewable energy sources). For this reason, it was decided to look at the impact of disruptive technologies on changes in the economic structure of the region and the socioeconomic problems accompanying them, on the one hand. On the other hand, due to the high level of industrialisation and the number of employees in the sectors studied (automotive and mining as a part of energy sector), we looked at the impact of employees on change and the use of social dialogue. Upper Silesia, as an area typical of economic transformation in a post-socialist context, has been characterised by economic

monoculture since the early 1990s which was a moment of economic and political regime transition. The industrial monoculture (Suchacka, 2014) phenomenon is still the case today, with the mining and energy sectors continuing to retain its dominance (ca. 70% of the energy structure of country is based on coal), even though some mines are being closed every year and employment in this sector is also declining. Upper Silesia partially witnessed the transition from a monoculture of mining to a monoculture of the automotive industry, accompanied by, to some extent, similar structural problems related to the labour market, education and limited retraining opportunities for workers, etc. To tackle the structural problems in the mid-1990s and early 2000s, the economic transformation plan made by the Polish governments for Upper Silesia envisaged the creation of so-called special economic zones, thanks to which laid-off miners could find employment in the rapidly developing automotive industry (Szczepański, 2002) as well as IT services and knowledge-based services.

The next section will discuss the state of social dialogue in Poland in 2000-25 in order to show the impact of disruptive technologies on changes in the sectors studied and the main problems that these changes have generated, as well as the extent of the influence of employees in the context of use of social dialogue during these changes at both national and regional level.

## 1.2. The social dialogue in Poland in 2000-2025

At a more general level, the social dialogue in early 2000s could be described as partisan in Poland and has a rather distributive character with low level of trust on a more general level (Garaudel et al., 2008)<sup>3</sup>. It manifests in the transfer of parliamentary and, more broadly, political conflict to tripartite organisations. Simultaneously, one can observe consequent weakening of direct affiliation between the largest trade union organizations and political parties. The exception from this tendency has been constant cooperation between one of the main nationally representative union, “Solidarność” (Solidarity), with the Law and Justice government between 2015 and 2024, and this collaboration lasts until now, June 2025.

Collective bargaining agreements are one of the main mechanisms of negotiation between social partners in Poland. The social partners can set up, e, g., working conditions that differ from the provisions of the Labour Code. Thanks to such an agreement, the way in which employees are paid and rewarded can be better adapted to the specifics of the operation of a given company. However, the rules set up in the agreement cannot be less favourable for employees than the provisions of the Labour Code except for the emergence of economic crisis. Since 1995, there has been a division in Poland into company (dominant) and multi-employer collective labour agreements. A multi-employer (existing) agreement sets up

---

<sup>3</sup> In the years after 2000 we have several significant protests and strike actions including general strike of nurses in 2000, significant miners strike in 2000-2001 in Upper Silesia and strike 2007 in Budryk Mine (the longest underground protest run in post-War Europe); several protests of framers; general strike of teachers in 2019.

uniform working rules that apply to employees working in all the entities covered by the multi-employer agreement.

SD institutions can be divided into three main types in Poland:

The Social Dialogue Council (SDC, *Rada Dialogu Społecznego*) – is the central institution of the national social dialogue in Poland. It makes up a forum for tripartite dialogue in Poland and cooperation of the workers unions, the employers' side and the government's representatives. The SDC replaced the Tripartite Commission for Social and Economic Affairs working from 1994 to 2015. The most important goals of the SDC are to ensure conditions for social and economic development and to increase the competitiveness of the Polish economy and social cohesion, to implement the principle of participation and social solidarity in employment relations, to act for improvement of the quality of formulation and implementation of social and economic policies and strategies, as well as to build social agreement around them by conducting transparent and regular dialogue between organisations of employees and employers and the government, to support the conduct of social dialogue at all levels of territorial self-government units. In contradistinction to its predecessor, the SDC was distinguished by the implementation of a rotational chair, a notable departure from the conventional leadership structure characterised by the presence of government representatives. Furthermore, all members were required to be nominated by the President of Poland, based on recommendations from social partners, and the Council was granted the enhanced right to initiate legislation (Mrozowicki, 2024). Furthermore, SDC gained different prerogatives: the issuing of opinions on budgetary increases and the minimum wage level is to be undertaken. The SDC issues an opinion on the minimum income criterion for access to social assistance as well.

The Voivodship Social Dialogue Council (*Wojewódzkie Rady Dialogu Społecznego, WRDS*), it is SDC on the regional level. Creating and ensuring the functioning of the WRDS is a task delegated by the government to local authorities. The main task of WRDS is to take positions and express opinions on matters covered by the scope of tasks of trade unions or employers' organisations under the competence of government and self-government administration, to give opinions on drafts of the voivodship development strategy and other programmes in the scope covered by the tasks of trade unions and employers' organisations, to consider economic and social matters causing conflicts between employers and employees.

Tripartite sectoral teams, which were set up at various times, starting in 1989 after political and economic regimes transition, independently of the SDC established in 2015 and the Tripartite Commission for Social and Economic Affairs in 1994. They were set up to conduct sectoral dialogue to reconcile the interests of the parties and solving problems concerning the functioning of industries. And, in addition, the commissions aim to develop a model for socio-economic decision-making that considers the different interests of the social partners in the industries being restructured. In Poland, there are tripartite teams for, e.g., the automotive

industry (2016), the energy industry (1998), social safety of miners (1992 - the oldest), mining and sulphur processing (1998), lignite industry (2006), fuel and petrochemical sectoral subgroup of the Chemical Tripartite Team (2004), social care (2022), and road transport (2016). SDC has a right to establish specialised task forces to address specific issues, including the just transition<sup>4</sup>.

The main concern regarding everyday functioning and effectiveness of SDC is actual tripartite engagement from all sides of the dialogue: unions, employers' organizations and the government. The most common situation is bipartite cooperation between union and employers' sides which, in the end, has no political and legal power. For instance, as for the transformation and twin transition is concerned, the unions and employers organization in SDC adopted in 2016 joint position on EU climate and energy policy and the EU Emissions Trading Scheme (EU ETS) in the context of the draft amendment to Directive 2003/87/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a scheme for greenhouse gas emission allowance trading within the Community for the period from 2021 to 2030 and amending Council Directive 96/61/EC<sup>5</sup>. The overtones of the resolution are negative, while the social partners claim that the 'destruction of the Polish economy' and the energy industry by the 'instrumental nature' of the implementation of the EU ETS and a number of other EU directives, such as Best Available Techniques (BAT), the Industrial Emissions Directive (IED), and National Environmental Competent Authority (NEC).etc., is taking place.

Worth mentioning is the fact that the SDC works on establishing sectoral dialogue, but the process can be assessed as a time-consuming and, eventually, without creating significant impact on collective bargaining. However, besides the regular structures in SDC (like tripartite sectoral teams) the sectoral teams oriented on specific tasks are organized and working as well. We will shortly describe both types of sectoral teams focused on the fields of interests of our project: energy industry, automotive industry, social care industry and transport-related issues.

Under SDC we have four sectoral teams that we can assign to energy sector:

- Tripartite Sectoral Team for Mining and Sulphur Processing (established in 1998)
- Tripartite Sectoral Team for Social Security of Miners (established in 1992 – the oldest sectoral team in Poland)
- Tripartite Sectoral Team for Energy Industry (established in 1998)
- Tripartite Sectoral Team for Brown Coal (lignite) Industry (established in 2006)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cpsdialog.gov.pl/index.php/aktualnosci/108-z-zycia-dialogu/zespoly-problemowe-rds/1020-05-06-2025> (access: 30.06. 2025)

<sup>5</sup> Resolution nr 5 of the SDC

All sectoral teams have history of functioning before introducing SDC in 2015 and all of them has been maintained in new organizational circumstances. From one point of view, having several teams working on similar issues could be interpreted as sign of intensive social dialogue – in last 5 years especially team for energy industry and brown coal industry we regularly active (several meetings every year with agenda focused on state of the industry and concrete issues (i.e. discussing on energy transition, discussing agreements regarding situation of workers in energy sector (Porozumienie na Przedpolu (Agreement on the Frontline); evaluation of Social Contract (Umowa Społeczna) for transformation of the coal mining sector; etc.).

Secondly, following decision of Minister of Development, Work and Technology in 2016, a task team was set up for the sectoral dialogue on the automotive industry due to the ‘unfavourable trend in the number of vehicles produced and the occurrence of other unfavourable phenomena’. The team’s main aim is to work on the development of joint positions on issues that are important from the point of view of state policy towards the industry and the interests of employees and employers. However, the important fact is that the sectoral team did not met or started work for 5 years until the pandemic. In 2020, the automotive industry recorded production losses due to factory closures, which reduced sales, but also the production of car parts and components which led to the first meeting of the sectoral team which happened in June 202. Nevertheless, effect of the teams’ work was based only on cooperation between employers’ organizations and unions side. The task team issued a number of recommendations for addressing the problems of the automotive sector<sup>6</sup> including: initiating the sectoral team, payment of remuneration during the stop of production period for employees, implementation of a programme of government support for demand for the purchase of new vehicles (including low- and zero-emission vehicles), implementation of support programmes for investments in the area of production of zero-emission vehicles and components for their production, implementation of support programmes for investments in the area of transformation of the automotive sector towards emission neutrality, limitation of the effects of the transition by supporting changes in the qualification of employees, introduction of regulations allowing more flexible organisation of production during the crisis, socially responsible pro-environmental reform of car taxation, temporary (6 months) postponement of the entry into force of selected technical regulations and refraining from imposing new obligations. Moreover, the SDC<sup>7</sup> initiated a call to the government side to urgently launch support for the industry in the form of assistance and protection of jobs and wages for entrepreneurs and employees under the rules introduced by the anti-covid law of 31 March 2020. Overall, the situation in the automotive sector on the industry level shows promising level of cooperation between unions and employers’ organization (tending to more integrative type of collective bargaining), however, as we will analyse it in further part of the

<sup>6</sup> Resolution nr 90 of the SDC

<sup>7</sup> Resolution nr 101 of the SDC

report, the latter ones are ineffective in having an impact on the company level of bargaining.

As for the other sectoral teams, special unit has been established regarding social care and its works concentrated on ‘ensuring the proper implementation of tasks related to social assistance in the broadest sense of the term, including tasks in the field of social and family policy as well as care for the elderly, disabled, dependent and homeless.’ This team was set up due to systemic and institutional problems in the field, but, again, assessment of the efficiency of work raises some questions as it has convened only the meeting for organisational matters in 2022.

The Social Dialogue Council has not set up a team for sectoral social dialogue in the passenger transport sector, but there is such a team for road transport concentrated on the poor state of social road infrastructure, social security of professional drivers and working and leisure conditions of this professional group and due to the strategic importance for the economy and security of the country. The first meeting took place in early 2017.

Overall, ‘the pandemic led to reinforcement of “illusory corporatism” in Poland, deepened mistrust among social partners and triggered a shift to informal channels of influencing policymaking. The weakness of the social partners and the strong position of the right-wing populist government meant that fears of recession and a health crisis were insufficient to develop “crisis” corporatism. While business interests were represented better than labour in policymaking, limited labour-friendly outcomes have been achieved because of workers’ mobilisation and unilateral decisions of the government rather than tripartite social dialogue’ (Czarzasty & Mrozowicki, 2023, p. 62).

## 2. Overview of the selected cases in Poland

### 2.1 Automotive Sector

The economic, social, and political crisis culminated in the 1989 transition to a market economy and liberal democracy. This shift triggered the privatization of car manufacturing plants, many of which failed to compete and either went bankrupt or were absorbed by larger firms. Key developments in the industry's partial revival included the privatization of the national carmaker FSM, and opening of Fiat (1992) as well as Opel (1996) plants, followed by Volkswagen, MAN, and Volvo facilities in 1993. In 1995, FSO was privatized by South Korea’s Daewoo, which became a major passenger car producer until its bankruptcy in the 2000s—accelerated by increased imports of cheaper Western cars after Poland joined the EU in 2004. Ursus suffered a similar fate, with production relocated to other EU countries. The late 1990s also saw the investment of Solaris Bus & Coach. Although the 2000s began with a production decline due to the global financial crisis, output later recovered, accompanied by the acquisition of bankrupt bus and tractor manufacturers such as Autosan and Jelcz). Since 2012 until now, the largest manufacturers of car parts for them have been the Volkswagen, Opel and Fiat brands (the latter two currently merged as a Stellantis group), ,

employing ca. 9500<sup>8</sup>, 3000<sup>9</sup> and 6400 (in 2019<sup>10</sup>) workers accordingly. There is 97% of unionized workers in Volkswagen (Stewart et al., 2016, p. 5). As of June 2025, two unions are active in VW – more radical Workers’ Initiative and NSZZ Solidarność which unionise ca. 60% of all workers in four plants.<sup>11</sup> Summarizing, most of the automotive industry, that is automotive assembly plants, except for the car components production in Poland is currently in the hands of foreign companies and investors.

Currently, in June 2025, the car industry in Poland is mainly based on the production of car components, such as gearboxes (including hybrid transmission ) and combustion engines. Fiat’s factories was located in Upper Silesia (in Bielsko-Biała), handled the production of combustion engines until 2024, and there are FCA/Stellantis plants in Tychy. This factory manufactures ICE parts such as engines, while Stellantis plans to open up production for EV parts in Bielsko Biała in the future (planned in 2025). Another crucial car component producer is Toyota Motor Manufacturing Poland, which employs around 3,000 people in south-western Poland (in Wałbrzych and Jelcz-Laskowice facilities), manufacturing both combustion engines, gearboxes and hybrid transmission.<sup>12</sup> A smaller combustion engine manufacturer in Poland is Volkswagen Motor Polska, whose factories are located in the western part of the country (Polkowice). There is also Mercedes-Benz plant opened in 2017 in Jawor near Polish-German borderlands which manufactures ICE components such as engines and batteries for car passengers, employing ca. 1500 workers.<sup>13</sup> In may 2025, NSZZ Solidarność union is established<sup>14</sup>. In total, there were 11 factories producing ICE cars or parts for them operating in Poland in 2023.<sup>15</sup> However, it is difficult to estimate their total number due to company bankruptcies (closure of production lines and entire factories), mergers and acquisitions. For comparison, in 2021 there were 16 such factories.<sup>16</sup>

Overall, the automotive industry (production of motor vehicles, trailers and semi-trailers) in Poland in 2021 accounted for 8.2% of industrial production in the national economy of Poland and additionally represented one of the highest percentages (second place) in

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.volkswagen-poznan.pl/o-nas> [accessed: 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2025]

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.opel.pl/o-oplu/fabryka-opla/> [accessed: 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2025]

<sup>10</sup> <https://fcagroup.pl/fca-w-polsce/fakty-i-cyfry/> [accessed: 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2025]

<sup>11</sup> <https://solidarnoscwvp.pl/> [accessed: 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2025]

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.toyotapl.com/> [accessed: 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2025]

<sup>13</sup> <https://mercedes-benz-jawor.com.pl/pl/fabryka-w-jaworze/o-fabryce#:~:text=Dostawca,Prywatno%C5%9B%C4%87%20Pierwsza%20w%20Polsce%20fabryka%20silnik%C3%B3w%20i.Jawor%2C%20na%20terenie%20Wa%C5%82brzyskiej%20Specjalnej%20Strefy%20Ekonomicznej> [accessed: 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2025]

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.solidarnosc.org.pl/w-mercedes-benz-manufacturing-poland-w-jaworze-powstala-solidarnosc/> [accessed: 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2025]

<sup>15</sup> <https://magazynauto.pl/porady/fabryki-motoryzacyjne-w-polsce-nie-tylko-auta-ale-tez-ciezarowki-autobusy-i-podzespolny.aid.3002> [accessed: 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2025]

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.auto-swiat.pl/wiadomosci/aktualnosci/mapa-przemyslu-motoryzacyjnego-w-europie-290-fabryk-z-czego-16-w-polsce/2vecsyt> [accessed: 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2025]

manufacturing (GUS, 2023b). According to International Organization of Motor Vehicle Manufacturers (OICA, 2023), Poland was ranked 21<sup>st</sup> in 2023 with change up to 27% as compared to 2022 in terms of cars and commercial vehicles manufacturing. It is also one of the biggest industries among CEE countries, ranking 3<sup>rd</sup> place. As of 2024, most of the cars manufactured are exported to the Western UE, and its value is estimated at around EUR 37,5 billion, amount to ca. 37% of the Polish import structure (GUS, 2025). Moreover, starting from the 1990s, it is pointed out that the car manufacturing companies are not centres of technological innovation but rather of export-oriented mass production, while the investors, i.e. the car producers, are focused on minimising labour costs, attractive tax breaks (Szczepański & Ślęzak-Tazbir, 2009a). Since 2010s, Polish automotive sector has been upgraded due to an integration into EU's single market by "transforming itself into one of Europe's largest transborder cluster of complex-manufacturing export industry" (Bohle & Greskovits, 2012, p. 138) and deploying a set of incentives for TNCs and FDI attractions, such as investments promotion agencies, expensive infrastructure development programs etc. Since 2024, Stellantis group, a MNC car producer, manufactures both hybrid and EV models of passenger cars and vans in Tychy and Gliwice facilities. Since 2020 there is also one model of EV car manufactured by Volkswagen Group Polska which might evidence the recent shift to EV car manufacturing in Poland. There are plans to initiate projects like Izera which was supposed to be manufactured by EMP<sup>17</sup>. This project was supposed to be the PiS government's (2015-23) flagship project (as a part of national economic development strategy) for the first Polish EV, but it was not implemented and was ultimately postponed indefinitely by the liberal government in 2024.

Average paid employment in manufacture of motor vehicles, trailers and semitrailers as well as manufacture of other transport equipment amounts to 256.000 workers in 2024 (GUS, 2025). Other data indicate the decline in employment in the sector. In September 2024, employment in the entire automotive industry in Poland amounted to 197,000 jobs, and with approximately 204,000 in 2023, this indicates a downward trend. In addition, 32% of the automotive plants surveyed expect that within 12 months, employment in their companies will fall, which is all the more significant because, compared to 2023, the percentage of responses indicating this has increased eightfold and is the highest among the countries surveyed (MotoBarometr, 2024). Union resistance in automotive sector seems to be strong as these organisations "develop innovative union strategies at the plant level" (A. Mrozowski & Kajta, 2016, p. 21). Furthermore, Polish unions in automotive are supported by their German counterpart, present in companies like Volkswagen (Bernaciak, 2010). Furthermore, the systemic transnational cooperation and solidarity between unions in Germany, Poland and UK exists within the frame of EWC, on the one hand, and bilaterally on a company level Volkswagen and GM (Pernicka et al., 2017). Density of unions in Polish automotive sector was about 30% in the case of car producers and 5% in parts manufacturers,

<sup>17</sup> <https://electromobilitypoland.pl/>

including TWA workers in 2013 (A. Mrozowicki, 2014a, p. 304). In the automotive sector affiliated to three main national representative union confederations are present as well as the National Automotive Industry Section of NSZZ “Solidarność”. The union confederations are NSZZ „Solidarność”, OPZZ (All-Poland Trade Union Alliance) and FZZ (Trade Unions Forum).

Unions in the Polish automotive industry have a strong position at the company level and are well organized across the sector, as confirmed by research indicating, on the one hand, cooperation between companies’ management and unions, including in negotiations on partial improving working conditions and wages (Stewart et al., 2019). Unions protest to a limited extent, although they have adopted a variety of often innovative organizing strategies in the past. (A. Mrozowicki, 2014b). The model of collective bargaining in the sector seems to resemble distributive bargaining (Garaudel et al., 2008), with a lack of trust in the employers and the achievement of particular goals through fierce competition using limited resources. Over the past 25 years, regardless of which parties and coalitions were in power, unions in this sector have organized regular protests and demanded from the government to protect jobs in the industry. However, the main tool, social dialogue, has not been used often in the automotive industry to resolve conflicts.

Based on available data concerning social dialogue in the automotive industry, at the central level dialogue in automotive was renewed after 2016 following the establishment of the tripartite sectoral team in this sector (as a part of SDC). However, this team began its work in June 2021. Earlier, within the framework of the Tripartite Commission (the former central social dialogue institution in Poland) in 2012, the presidium discussed the need to take measures to protect jobs in this industry in the face of a serious decline in new car sales for the entire European automotive market, proposing legislative solutions to mitigate the negative effects of the 2008 financial crisis. Subsequently, at the central level, it was not until 2020 and 2021 that the problem-solving tripartite team for economic policy and the labor market (it is a separate team), which led to a revival of social dialogue in June 2021 within the tripartite sectoral team in automotive. However, during the inaugural meeting, the tripartite team only established its composition, rules of procedure, and set the date for the next meeting. The problem of social dialogue in the industry may also be indicated by the fact that during the SDC plenary meeting in early 2022, calls were made to convene a tripartite team in the industry to propose solutions to the problems affecting automotive in Poland. This might stem from the fact that employers do not have a unitary position, and some car and component manufacturing companies do not belong to employers organisations at all,

The decision-making role of automotive sectoral team is very limited mainly due to its advisory role. One of the two meetings of the automotive sectoral team was held in 2022, at which employers proposed solutions such as subsidizing vocational training for employees of car and components manufacturing plants experiencing production downtime. It was also agreed that a team would be set up to adapt training mechanisms, taking into account public aid instruments.

A support program was also proposed, to be financed from the Guaranteed Employee Benefits Fund under the law commonly known as the “anti-crisis shield,” introduced in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and aimed at mitigating the effects of the contagion. In fact, it was suggested that the organization and working hours in automotive be made more flexible, with the intention of protecting jobs and wages during the crisis. The dialogue within the team continued at a meeting in 2024 devoted to green transition, the situation on the labour market and enterprises (layoffs, retraining, industrial competitiveness in the transformation process) and the role of Labor Fund subsidies for production stoppages caused by a decline in orders. The possibility of creating systemic solutions for voluntary retirement in connection with future job cuts in the industry was also discussed; these solutions would be plant-specific and supported by labor market instruments rather than the social security system at the central level.

Within the sectoral social dialogue, discussions on the transition to EVs do not seem to be conclusive at this stage. The issue was discussed during a tripartite industry team meeting in 2024, among others, and presented as a broader problem related to the green transition. The transition to EVs is seen more as a threat than an opportunity, and certainly not as a strength of the Polish automotive industry, which focuses mainly on the production of ICEs and ICE components. Only transmissions for hybrid cars are manufactured in Poland. Production lines for ICEs and ICE components are regularly closed down and liquidated / relocated to other EU states or elsewhere.

## 2.2. Energy Sector

Poland's energy supply continues to be heavily reliant on fossil fuels, which accounted for 85% of total energy supply (TES) in 2020 (*Poland - Countries & Regions - IEA*, n.d.) Coal remains the largest contributor at 40%, followed by oil at 28% and natural gas at 17%. Coal is a cornerstone of both Poland's energy infrastructure and its economy. In 2020, among IEA member countries, Poland recorded the highest coal shares in energy production, TES, total final consumption (TFC), and electricity generation, and ranked second in coal's share in heat production. This heavy dependence on coal places Poland second among IEA members for CO<sub>2</sub> intensity of energy supply and fourth for CO<sub>2</sub> intensity relative to GDP. While coal's role has declined over the past decade — with falling shares in TES, power generation, district heating, and TFC — coal production has also dropped, making Poland a net coal importer since 2017. Nonetheless, coal demand surged in 2021, with coal-fired power rebounding to supply 80% of total electricity generation.

Despite coal's ongoing dominance, Poland has made a progress in transitioning its energy system. Government initiatives supporting solar photovoltaics (PV) have propelled Poland into one of the EU's fastest-growing PV markets. Between 2016 and 2021, PV capacity expanded from just 0.2 GW to 7.7 GW, mainly through residential small- scale distributed systems totalling 5.9 GW. Poland also boasts a robust offshore wind strategy, securing agreements for 5.9 GW of capacity to be operational by 2027, with ambitions to reach

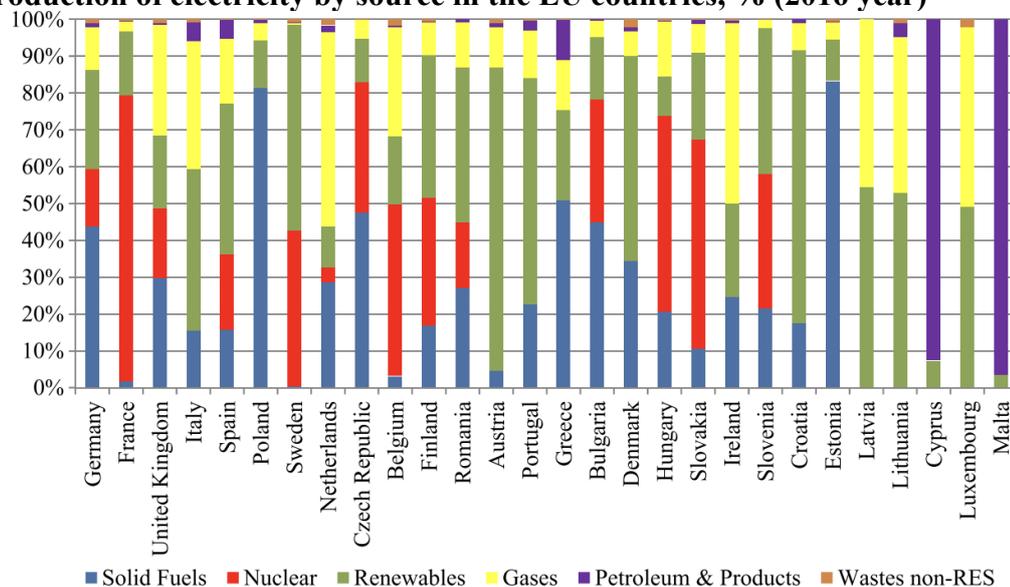
at least 11 GW by 2040.

State-owned enterprises play major roles across Poland's energy landscape, and some energy prices remain regulated. While the electricity market is largely liberalized and consumers are entitled to choose suppliers, most households still buy electricity at regulated prices from incumbent providers. Switching rates among both household and commercial consumers are among the lowest in Europe. The electricity generation, wholesale, and retail markets are highly concentrated, dominated by four state-run energy companies.

Poland is still in the midst of liberalizing its natural gas market, which remains heavily concentrated with limited competition. The state-owned PGNiG holds a dominant position across the gas sector. Although most gas price regulation ended in 2017, retail price controls for household consumers, originally set to expire in 2023, have been extended to 2027 due to concerns about price volatility. In contrast, Poland's crude oil and oil products markets are fully liberalized, though they are still marked by high concentration and limited competition. State-run firms control all domestic oil production and refining and accounted for nearly 75% of wholesale oil product sales in 2020. Similarly, the coal industry remains largely dominated by state-owned enterprises.

One of the obstacles to a transition in Poland's energy sector was the difficulty in achieving social consensus on the necessary industrial transformation both at national and regional level. This has not been achieved in other European countries, nor in Poland, mainly due to the concentration of mining in a few areas of the region and the dominance of their employment structure in the local economy (Mitrega, 1999). Also, the transition was not successful for economic reasons; it is cheaper to buy coal from countries outside the EU (Columbia, Russia until 2022) and at the same time close unprofitable mines.

**Table 4 Production of electricity by source in the EU countries, % (2016 year)**

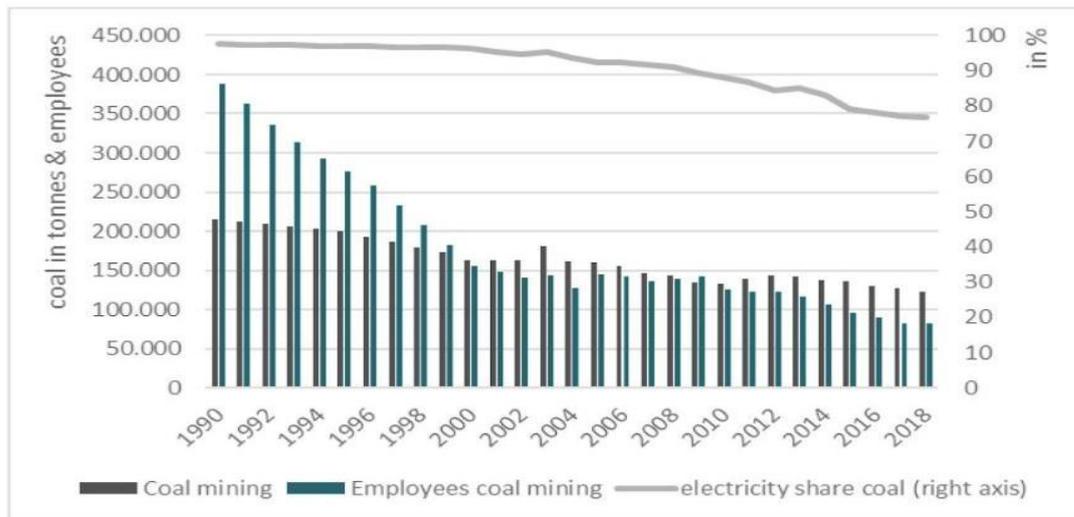


Source: (Gawlik, 2018, p. 231)

Our main focus is centred around mining industry as a crucial branch in ongoing transition process from fossil fuel-dependent energy industry into more green energy based on. Furthermore, it is a branch in which constant restructuring reforms have been implemented starting with early 1990s and had direct impact on the level of employment in the industry (Brauers & Oei, 2020).. In 1990 almost 400000 people worked in Polish coal industry. Through the last three decades the number had been limited to only less than 100000 in 2018. In 2018 was introduced eighth plan for transition of the industry after 1989 and none of the programmes were assessed as successful in terms of economic efficiency or social support (Kosiarz, 2022).

The reforms occurred not without strong opposition from the trade unions who lobbied, mobilized and protested during the last three decades. The collective bargaining model shifted few times after 1990 – changing from distributive to integrative bargaining (Garaudel et al., 2008) and backwards. The turns have been connected with current political situation in the country – simply saying, miners unions have had stronger position during the time in which conservative right-wing political parties were in power. It effected in better response from unions toward restructuring reforms of years 1998-2002 besides the fact its core change was closing 13 coal mines (Marszowski, 2015). However, the reforms in these years were implemented by the right-wing government strongly supported by NSZZ Solidarność (Independent Self-Governing Trade Union „Solidarity”) Strike actions intensified during the period when in power were Civic Platform (especially in 2015) and decreased (but not entirely as miners protested in 2019 and 2020) after taking control of the country by another party supported by NSZZ Solidarność – Law and Justice in 2015-2024. In the latter period coal mine industry underwent further reorganization Nevertheless, the government's primary objective was to safeguard the Polish coal industry and ensure the social stability including the consolidation of corporate entities combining economically effective mines with those which struggled and transferring financial support from public funds and state-owned companies from energy sector.

**Table 5 Coal mining, electricity generation and number of employees in Poland from 1990 to 2018**



Source: (Brauers & Oei, 2020)

On a more general level, collective bargaining in the energy industry is assessed ambiguously in research. On the one hand, the social dialogue mechanism seems to be assessed positively by some of authors who argue that it is worth creating sustainable bargaining order, treating it as a significant factor in economic development of the state and regions. As said by Gilejko and Towalski, the dialogue and cooperation in Poland are in the interest of the companies and the employees and contribute to increasing labour productivity and the competitiveness of the enterprise (Gilejko & Towalski, 2002).

On the other hand, some authors believe that social dialogue is weakened or even used to block some crucial decisions by the interest groups, as said by one of the authors, writing on the mining and energy sector in Poland:

*One of the essential mechanisms for the survival of mining as a system was the existence of a strongly developed network of clientelistic links and interdependencies between individual decision-makers, i.e., key actors in the mining sector, and its economic and political environment. Delaying the restructuring process was at the same time the result of classic mass clientelism, based on the bargaining power of large groups, in this case, miners, in relation to current and potential political patrons (Gadowska, 2002, p. 7).*

Other authors (Hausner, 2007, p. 81) indirectly referring to the social dialogue institutions in Poland, described the state of ‘intelligent parasitism’ of the mining sector – so as not to bring it to a complete collapse, but also not to allow its economic development. Despite constant attempts by successive governments to restructure the energy sector in Poland (based on the coal mining) and develop it economically, the sector suffered from recurring structural problems which could have been described as ‘a situation in which private profits were

*conditioned by public losses*' (ibid.). Losses are passed on to local governments and then to the national treasury. This might be shown also by research concluding that many Upper Silesian mines have struggled to become economically viable, but to no avail (Zientara, 2009). Their number is falling year by year even now, in 2025.

This phenomenon has been significant and evolving due to the high union density in this sector. This tendency has been observed among many European economies with regard to the strategic role of the industry and the collectivist culture of the workplace. Consequence of strong position of the unions in the industry was their crucial role in shaping the outcomes of restructuring (approach facilitating consensus-building and cooperation). To some extent the situation in some of the mines might resemble integrative bargaining, where both employers and workers with unions have the same goal, i.e., the survival of the workplace. Thus, the level of trust between both parties might be relatively higher as compared to the other sectors of national economy. However, the effectiveness of employee participation and union involvement in achieving successful restructuring outcomes in mining appears to be mixed. Kaczmarek et al. (2022) note a lack of consistency between restructuring efforts in coal mining companies and changes in the country's energy mix, as it still relies on the energy made of coal (ca. 70%).

### 2.3. Care sector

In 1989, Poland's healthcare sector was dominated by public entities, with legal reforms aimed at adapting it to a capitalist system. A 1993 regulation allowed public funds to be transferred to private medical providers, followed by the creation of independent health clinics in 1995. A major change came in 1997 with the introduction of universal health insurance, linking healthcare financing to mandatory taxpayer contributions. The most significant reforms occurred under Jerzy Buzek's government (1997–2001), including the creation of health insurance funds to align the system with market demands. However, these reforms fell short due to political changes. In 2001, the Democratic Left Alliance abolished the funds, replacing them with the National Health Fund, which still operates today. The healthcare system has since faced extensive criticism, notably in a 2019 Supreme Audit Office report highlighting issues in organisation, treatment quality, and staffing.

Turning to the characteristics of healthcare workers working in the industry, the level of employment in 2024 was 757 thousands of people. More than a half of them was employed in public part of the industry (51,67%) with almost one quarter being self-employed (23,26%) it is notable that the workforce is ageing, especially among doctors and nurses. According to data from the Central Statistical Office. more than half of Polish doctors (between 2019 and 2022, this figure remained virtually unchanged at 55%) are over 50 years of age (with more than 15% being over 70 in 2022). The situation is particularly problematic for nurses, with

over 65% of those working in the profession being over 50 years of age (a 6.4 percentage point increase compared to 2021, from 59.4% to 65.8%), with almost 10% being over 70 years of age. While the medical profession is more balanced in terms of gender (40.5% of professionals are male, 59.5% are female), in the nursing profession, women dominate (97.2% of those working are nurses) (GUS, 2019).

**Table 6 Employment in selected medical professions in 2016–2022**

Occupations	Number of employed <sup>1</sup>			
	Thousands			
	2016	2018	2020	2022
Medical doctors	46	40	38	41
Nurses	142	134	114	124

Source: Own study

A pivotal factor in the characterisation of the healthcare industry is the scale and nature of its unionisation. In 2019 the level of unionisation fluctuated around 17.5% (Eurofund 2022, COVWORK). The largest trade union organisations operating in the Polish healthcare sector include the All-Poland Trade Union of Nurses and Midwives (OZZiPP). According to information provided on the union's website, it has approximately 80,000 members, grouped into 16 provincial structures (regions). Another significant player is the Healthcare Section of NSZZ Solidarność. The National Trade Union of Doctors (1,350 members), which includes the Residents' Agreement, which has been active in recent years, and the Federation of Trade Unions of Healthcare and Social Welfare Workers (2,600 members) and the Confederation of Labour (no data on the number of members in healthcare) are the main trade unions in this sector. Healthcare is the fourth largest sector in terms of the number of trade union members among all unionised employees (11.4%), behind education (19.3%), public administration and national defence (14.7%) and manufacturing (13.3%) (GUS, 2023a). Regarding unionisation, the most recent data from 2014 demonstrate that 21% of employees are affiliated with trade unions within the health and social care sector (GUS, 2015). The findings of the present study indicate that this level is stable, with calculations based on GUS data from 2022 showing a figure of 20%. Important notion here is strong division between healthcare and long-term care sector. In the former trade unions are relatively strong albeit universal weakening tendencies in the whole union movement<sup>18</sup>. The latter are much more dispersed, decentralised and

<sup>18</sup> The main organizations here are nurses and midwives unions (Ogólnopolski Związek Zawodowy Pielęgniarek i Położnych) and medical doctors unions (Ogólnopolski Związek Zawodowy Lekarzy) in which important role played resident doctors section (Porozumienie Rezydentów).

politically less significant. However, one can observe increasing dynamization of union movement in this sector in last years.

Researchers dealing with the transformation of the public sphere after 1989 in Poland refer to the concept of New Public Management (Zawadzki 2002) as a source for new operating logics: flexibility and restructuring, which were to ensure the success of public enterprises understood as increasing efficiency, reducing costs, and a client-oriented approach (Kozek, 2011; Kubisa, 2016). From the perspective of healthcare professionals, the changes described were associated with the implementation of solutions that deregulated labor relations, reduced employment, and increased outlays on those who remained (Kozek, 2011). The dissatisfaction with working conditions that has been expressed on multiple occasions over the last three decades is indicative of a need for improvement in this area (Kubisa, 2014). For instance, nurses protested in 2016 (Zabdyr-Jamróz, 2021), and young doctors protested in 2017<sup>19</sup>, in 2021<sup>20</sup> during the pandemic and after in 2024<sup>21</sup>.

Following three decades of change, the Polish health service is facing various challenges and contradictions. On the one hand, access to free healthcare is a right guaranteed by the constitution. The distinction between the private and public medical sectors is becoming increasingly clear. Poles are distributing an enlarging proportion of their income to supplementary health insurance in large medical network (Poland: Country Health Profile 2023, 2023). Paradoxically, the scale of this phenomenon is so large that the private sector is also becoming inefficient, and its treatment options still do not match those offered by the public sector in case of severe illnesses, patients still go to public hospitals. It is not financially workable for private institutions to treat the most severe cases, as these generate the highest costs. In addition to this, emergency treatment is another area where private institutions are at a disadvantage. Public institutions are specialised in emergency treatment, have the proper infrastructure and staff, and are free. In case of a threat to life, they can perform complicated procedures immediately.

Overall, liberalisation and partial privatization, in contrary to the hopes of reformers, have not led to the improvement of their quality for users and job quality for workers and contributed to labour shortages, lowering or freezing wages, increasing workload and the fragmentation of collective employment relations (Kozek 2011). Thus, it can be argued the reforms have deepened the chronic crisis of public services understood because of “slow processes of deterioration, erosion and negative change” (Vigh, 2008, p. 9).

#### 2.4. On-demand taxi transport sector

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.dw.com/en/poland-krakow-doctors-join-nationwide-strike/a-41109794> [access: 04.07.2025]

<sup>20</sup> <https://ozzl.org.pl/uncategorised/about-us/> [access: 04.07.2025]

<sup>21</sup> <https://notesfrompoland.com/2024/11/20/healthcare-workers-protest-in-warsaw-for-higher-wages-and-more-staff/> [access: 04.07.2025]

Unions affiliated with NSZZ Solidarność operate in the industry. There are no collective agreements and no institutional social dialogue, e.g. within the tripartite sectoral team at the SDC. It is difficult to estimate the number of union members and taxi drivers in Poland, which may be related to the professional status of taxi drivers. Sources indicate as many as 50,000 registered companies in 2024 (Rzeczpospolita, 2025), but most of these are self-employed (most often affiliated with corporations or unions), which is associated with the extensive liberalization and privatization of the market, which began in the 1990s and seem to be a general problem in this sector. In addition, local data indicate that a total of over 566,000 taxi licenses were issued nationwide (in all municipalities) between 2017 and 2024 (Bank Danych Lokalnych (GUS), 2025), although it should be noted that there is high turnover in the sector and a significant level of deregistration or loss of licenses for various reasons (retirement, illegal behavior, etc.). As a result of fully liberalized and privatized market for on-demand taxi, the legal status of business activity in this industry is complicated, as many companies operate on the edge of the law or do so illegally (pretending to be legally operating companies), which leads to dissent among professional taxi drivers and the organization of regular protests by unions against the legal regulations in the industry, and since 2014 also against the operation of apps and the drivers (considered unprofessional taxi drivers) working for them.

In Poland, taxi transport is regulated primarily through licensing, driver qualifications, and vehicle standards. Key legal frameworks include the 1996 Regulation of the Minister of Infrastructure, requiring taxis to use legalized taximeters and meet safety standards, and the Road Transport Act of 2001, which governs licensing—issued by local municipalities for single or multiple areas. Additional provisions appear in the Road Traffic Act (technical standards), the Local Government Act, and the Act on Prices, which allow municipalities to set maximum fares. The law distinguishes licensed taxi services from occasional passenger transport, which lacks access to taxi stands, taximeters, and vehicle signage. However, in practice, many such operators ignore these restrictions and operate without proper licenses, creating regulatory challenges. This situation evidence that social dialogue in the sector is very limited, and almost non-existent.

The 2010 amendment to the Road Transport Act marked a shift toward deregulation in Poland's on-demand transport sector, aligning with global trends (Kantorowicz, 2011, p. 1). The removal of limits on taxi licenses sparked protests from taxi drivers, who called for stricter enforcement and the reinstatement of previous licensing controls. Deregulation, including a Senate bill lifting license caps, enabled widespread misuse of occasional transport, which for passengers often appeared indistinguishable from licensed taxis. Previously, obtaining a taxi license was costly and complex. Unlicensed operators, facing lower regulatory and tax burdens, offered fares up to 40% cheaper, undermining the traditional taxi sector. In cities like Warsaw, the only visible differences between licensed taxis and occasional transport vehicles are the absence of the city's coat of arms and the

“TAXI” roof lamp (the lack of it is illegal) (ibid.: 3), making enforcement and customers distinction difficult. Research indicates that excessive regulation (in the form of a limited number of licenses to provide transport services) has contributed to an increase in the practice of “illicit” taxi cars, which is typical in Warsaw. It should be noted that the scope of regulation in the taxi market varies in the given municipality. For example, In 2006, there were ca. 8,000 licenses in Warsaw, and 900 applications for new ones were registered. However, in 2006-2007, the issuance of new licenses was blocked, and they could only be obtained by transfer, i.e., when a taxi driver resigned or died. The situation improved since 2007, when the number of licenses granted was gradually increased, and in 2009, there were already almost 9,000 licenses in Warsaw (ibid.: 3). In some cities, such as Gdańsk, there is freedom to set transport tariffs and the number of licenses available is so high that in practice it is impossible to reach the limit (in May 2008, there were 1,700 taxis registered in Gdańsk, and the license limit was 4,500). In Krakow, official maximum prices for these services have been abolished (ibid.: 5).

The amendment to the Road Transport Act introduced in April 2012 was intended to regulate the market and, consequently, curb the illegal practice of offering occasional transport services. This change was welcomed by taxi companies, as it left taxi drivers with a monopoly on offering services and eliminated unfair competition from occasional transport services and operators offering rates lower than those available on the market. Ultimately, it turned out that the amendment revealed further legal loopholes and, as a result, thanks to the “entrepreneurship” of the unfair competitors, new forms of fraud emerged, impersonating licensed taxis. The same amendment abolished the limit on the number of taxis per city resident and additionally lowered the threshold for persons entering the taxi profession, which led to greater competition between taxi companies, undercutting prices to fight for customers, while increasing the number of taxi drivers fighting for a shrinking number of customers. This leads to further dishonest practices by taxi drivers, which ends up with customers being misled and unfair practices that inflate fares (Borucka, 2014).

The above analysis leads to the conclusion that the existing legal framework, and the lack of collective bargaining, generate legal loopholes that have created a situation in which, in practice, there are many abuses in the on-demand transport industry, while at the same time taxi companies are protesting against it, but with limited outcome. At the same time, there are companies (e.g., occasional carriers) operating in the informal area or even illegally, though it is hard to estimate the extent of such situation due to lack of data. This situation has further enabled platforms (as a part of platform economy which can be understood as a disruptive technology) such as Uber to enter the Polish market and entailed deterioration of working conditions. Since the introduction of ride-hailing platforms in 2014, taxi companies and drivers, together with trade unions operating in the industry have regularly protested against, among other things, unfair competition from platforms in the largest Polish cities. Labour platforms such as Uber are characterized by offering a precarious employment, e.g. salary and working hours depend on algorithms, contracts are signed with so-called fleet

partners acting as intermediaries (Polkowska & Mika, 2022) within civil law contracts at best, most often migrants work on apps (Polkowska & Filipek, 2020). Only recently, in 2018, the first attempts were made by the Ministry of Infrastructure to regulate the activities of these platforms, despite initial resistance and successful attempts to block this initiative from the US embassy, which pressured the Polish government to minimise the regulation of Uber's activities in Poland.

Companies such as Uber have been the target of inspections by the State Labour Inspectorate. In 2019 the latter conducted two inspections at Uber Poland and further 27 at entities cooperating with the Uber group. The inspections covered the areas of legality of employment, occupational safety and health, and compliance with the rights of persons performing gainful employment. Inspections uncovered numerous irregularities, e.g.: the issue of mandatory registering for social insurance, provisions on the minimum hourly rate, number of hours of performance of assignment etc.<sup>22</sup>

In late 2020, a new law was implemented in Poland. The amendment to the Road Transport Law (Journal of Laws of 2019, item 1180), known as 'LexUber', has been purposed to change the rules on the provision of services in passenger transport. Since the beginning, Uber drivers were not licensed as cab drivers, and the vehicles were not marked. Rides were arranged through the app and were cheaper than standard cabs. As a result of the 'LexUber', a law was introduced requiring vehicles from companies such as Uber and Bolt to be equipped with taximeters, markings on the cars, and it is mandatory for drivers to have licenses. New changes to the law implemented in June 2024, resulting in the requirement for drivers to hold a Polish driving license, has also resulted in an exodus of drivers from the platforms, which may contribute in the long term to the profits of taxi corporations with simultaneous layoffs of traditional taxi drivers due to the increase of transport prices, and the development of the informal market, according to employers' organization affiliating taxi companies (Pracodawcy RP, 2024).

Overall, social dialogue in on-demand taxi is almost non-existent, and unions most often organize protests or publish statements (addressed to government) to protect their services from competition from platforms and unfair entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, workers in the sector have found a way to engage in dialogue with the government. The NSZZ Solidarność Taksówkarzy Zawodowych (Solidarity Trade Union of Professional Taxi Drivers) has been participating in the Taxi Working Group at the Office of the Ombudsman for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises since 2019. The union intervenes in matters defending the legal rights of companies and professional taxi drivers, monitors the situation of companies in the sector, discusses problems and responds in cases requiring the

---

<sup>22</sup> [https://bip.brpo.gov.pl/sites/default/files/Odpowied%C5%BA%20G%C5%82%C3%B3wnego%20Inspektora%20Pracy%2021%20czerwca%202019\\_0.pdf](https://bip.brpo.gov.pl/sites/default/files/Odpowied%C5%BA%20G%C5%82%C3%B3wnego%20Inspektora%20Pracy%2021%20czerwca%202019_0.pdf) [accessed: 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2025]

Ombudsman's intervention (e.g., unfair competition), and provides opinions on draft legislation directly affecting the sector.

### 3. Upper Silesia area as the case of deindustrialization in Poland

The disruptive technological changes associated with the emergence of technoeconomic infrastructure mentioned posed challenges for the region. It was ill-prepared for economic and political transformation after 1989. Furthermore, it was ridden with problems of overconcentration of heavy industry with its spillover effect on high environment pollution and low (primary, secondary) education-skewed social structure. This situation has caused central government and scientists, with cooperation with regional administration, to take restructuring action, and allocate (and distribute locally) proper funds for the planned transformation. The voice of unions has been considered, though without satisfactory outcomes. Nevertheless, all parties involved were convinced of the need to build a new service-based economy in Upper Silesia. The socio-economic restructuring of the region assumed: 1) the planned closure and emergence of new service-related industries, 2) the modernisation of traditional industries in order to increase its competitiveness on the global market, 3) the creation in 2007 of the Upper Silesian Metropolis with the Upper Silesian Metropolitan Union, comprising dozens of cities located around its main centre, Katowice (this idea is a response to globalisation and the mechanisms governing the EU, the desire to create a unified region based on economic growth, technological innovation, investments, the FIRE sector, strengthening social capital and improving quality of life) (Suchacka, 2014).

The process mentioned resembles the process of Schumpeterian 'creative destruction' which in fact involved the closure of mines and steel mills and the development of new sectors, such as the automotive industry, or IT, high tech development and global shared / business outsourcing process services, since beginning of 2000s. However, this process has been uneven, causing serious social problems such as the marginalisation of labour and professional groups and the reduction of local employment opportunities (Muster, 2009).

As a result of the job cuts in heavy industry (mining, steelworks) in 2000-03, the employment fell by nearly 300.000 jobs (additionally, in 16 years – beginning in 1990s to 2006 – the numbers of mines fell from 65 to 30, see (Suchacka, 2009, p. 286) which increased the population covered by social assistance by more than 600.000 (ibid., p. 289). This decline resulted in the symbolic and economic degradation of miners who, due to a lack of professional opportunities, entered the informal labour market or started to work in neighbouring regions of Czechia. Secondly, poverty and deprivation appeared, particularly affecting single women and their offspring (in 2003, nearly 60% of women out of the number registered as unemployed, see: Labour Office in Katowice). Sociologists dubbed this phenomenon as feminization of poverty (Szczepański & Ślęzak-Tazbir, 2009b). Thirdly, extreme poverty particularly affected young people with numerous offspring, most often coming from broken

families of miners and steelworkers, with low education and characterised by functional illiteracy. This refers to 40% of people in families with 4 or more children, 21% in families with 3 children and 15% in families with one-parent. 2001-2004 was the most difficult period since the early 1990s. Despite everything, miners received quite good severance pay as a result of union action, which guaranteed that there was no social unrest.

There have been calls for active social policies based on adapting workers' skills to changing economic conditions and increasing reemployment opportunities after redundancy (Boni, 2006). Some authors point to the squandering of human capital and a part of the social infrastructure because of the first period of restructuring in the Polish mining industry in the 1990s (Mitręga, 1999). The failure of the restructuring of the Polish coal mining industry is related to the flawed conceptualisation of the method, which did not consider the social, political and economic complexity conditioning the functioning of the coal industry in Poland.

In summary, the economic transformation process in Poland's Upper Silesia resulted in the creation of the Katowice Special Economic Zone in 1995 and with it a whole ecosystem of universities, companies on the site of former mines and steelworks. The dynamic socio-economic development of the area has attracted the interest of numerous investors and developers who have decided to move or invest here. Although new economic and entertainment spaces for the middle class, workplaces, office buildings, technology companies etc. have been created, the speed of their creation and their quality seems not always satisfactory (Szczepański & Ślęzak-Tazbir, 2009b).

### 3.1. Social dialogue in Upper Silesia in 2015-2025

Social dialogue in Upper Silesia was one of key mechanisms for responding to the deindustrialization in the region. Institutions such as the WRDS (and Provincial Social Dialogue Committees in 1993-2015) played a key role in mitigating conflicts between workers, trade unions and employers. The process of mine closures is a case in point – negotiations between trade unions and the government resulted in, e, g, severance payments and retraining programs for workers. It resembled to some extent a process of integrative bargaining.

One of the outcomes of the WRDS in Katowice<sup>23</sup> was the signing of an agreement in December 2016 (Resolution no. 10) in favour of an integrated development policy for the Silesian Voivodeship, assuming, e.g., the creation of a low-carbon energy and emission-free coal-nuclear synergy, the reindustrialisation (development of areas and facilities) left over from mining, and the restoration of the investment value of degraded industrial areas. Another result of the agreement of the WRDS in Katowice was the adoption of a position paper in 2022 on the creation of a ministry responsible for energy transition in Poland.

---

<sup>23</sup> De facto, the Council set up a problem-solving group on the development of social dialogue in January 2017. In turn, in 2021 it decided to strengthen the systemic cooperation of the SDC with the provincial SDC

In 2018, the employee side, represented by NSZZ Solidarność, addressed the prime minister about the deteriorating economic situation in the Silesian Province, including Upper Silesia, as the scale of problems in various industries exceeded the capabilities and competences of the Provincial Social Dialogue Council. The employee side feared the liquidation of the energy industry in connection with the EU's climate and energy policy. In addition, employees were concerned about job insecurity and the future of the automotive industry (the Opel factory had promised to introduce a new model into production).<sup>24</sup> Ultimately, the unions managed to negotiate a bilateral agreement on mitigating the effects of EU climate policy on industry. Specifically, this involves a system of allowances and compensation for costs related to energy purchases.<sup>25</sup> The union's position is special here, as we mentioned at the beginning of the report, because by establishing a special relationship that goes beyond the framework of social dialogue, it is able to negotiate better agreements for the industries and companies in which it has its committees.

It is worth noting that in the case of Upper Silesia, the government is the initiator of strategic projects. Two economic development programmes for Upper Silesia were announced between 2017 and 2020. As part of the Strategy for Responsible Development, the “Programme for Silesia” was announced by the government in December 2017. Its main aim is to bring about a change in the economic profile of the region and gradually replace traditional economic sectors, such as mining and metallurgy, with new ventures in more productive, innovative and technologically advanced sectors.

Another goal of the “Programme for Silesia”, according to the social partners, was reindustrialisation, i.e., the preservation and development of industry in the Silesian Province with a view to keeping as many good jobs in industry as possible and creating new ones. The management of the implementation of the projects included in the programme was to take place both at the central level, in a specially created Subcommittee for the Programme for Silesia at the Ministry of Development, and at the regional level, i.e. in a steering committee at the Silesian Province Governor's Office and the Provincial Social Dialogue Committee.<sup>26</sup> In the opinion of the employee side, most of the measures and investments announced under the Contract for Silesia have not been started, with only infrastructure investments being implemented.<sup>27</sup>

In 2018, the WRDS in Katowice appointed its representative to the Steering Committee of the aforementioned “Programme for Silesia”, showing cooperation between the social partners and the government. Another programme is the Development of the Economic Area

<sup>24</sup> <https://solidarnoskatowice.pl/sytuacja-w-regionie-coraz-powazniejsza-bedzie-spotkanie-z-premierem/> [accessed: 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2025]

<sup>25</sup> <https://solidarnoskatowice.pl/pierwsze-efekty-rozmow-z-rzadem/> [accessed: 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2025]

<sup>26</sup> <https://solidarnoskatowice.pl/konkretne-inwestycje-konkretne-pieniadze/> [accessed: 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2025]

<sup>27</sup> <https://solidarnoskatowice.pl/program-dla-slaska-nie-jest-realizowany-solidarnosc-wzywa-rzad-do-dzialania/> [accessed: 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2025]

of the Katowice Special Economic Zone in 2019. An important resolution No. 32 issued (these resolutions are issued by the Presidents of the WRDS, de facto representing the government in regions) in 2021 by is the one concerning the implementation of the Fair Transformation Fund in the NUTS 3 area. Among other things, the social partners states that the lack of support from the Fair Transformation Mechanism (MST) - due to a planned but uncertain mining project in one municipality in Upper Silesia - is considered “highly unfair”. Such a decision could prevent a fair and effective transformation of the entire region and the achievement of development and environmental goals. In addition, WRDS in Upper Silesia, on the basis of Resolution No. 33 of 2022, asked the Prime Minister of Poland to take action on the suspension of the EU ETS due to the challenges and economic problems caused by the pandemic and the war in Ukraine (rising living and energy costs).

One of the recent resolutions in 2024 by WRDS in Katowice was the one concerning the modernisation of the vocational training system and support for businesses that engage in this process. Increasing the attractiveness of crafts and a better match between competences and labour market requirements is particularly important in the context of the demographic crisis and digital transformation.

In March 2025, one of the provincial social dialogue council's statements read that ‘for the Polish and EU economies, every month of operation of this system [ETS] in its current form means measurable losses, loss of competitive position, and the closure of more industrial plants and jobs. In view of the above, the Provincial Social Dialogue Council in Katowice recommends freezing the price of CO2 emission allowances at the level agreed through tripartite dialogue until a reform of the emissions trading system has been developed and adopted.’<sup>28</sup> This statement is a part of the Polish Presidency in the EU in the first half of 2025.

Another important initiative in 2021 was the announcement of the Silesian Province Just Transition Plan, initiated by the Silesian Province Management Board, and coordinated by the Provincial Labour Market Council in Katowice in consultation with social partners and local governments, among others, and aimed mainly at mining regions in the province. The roots of the team date back to 2019, when a regional team for mining region initiatives was established in the province and coordinated the region's work within the Mining Regions Platform created by the European Commission. The team and the initiative’s council have an advisory and consultative role. It uses funds from the Just Transition Fund and other EU sources. The starting point for the preparation of the Regional Just Transition Plan is the Silesian Province Development Strategy ‘Silesia 2030’, adopted in October 2020. The vision for the region's development presented in the strategy is in line with the objectives of the European Green Deal, which is focused on creating a competitive economy that takes into

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.wkatowicach.eu/informacje/w-katowicach/Wojewodzka-Rada-Dialogu-Spolecznego-wypracowala-wspolne-stanowisko-wobec-unijnego-Zielonego-Ladu/idn:8851> [accessed: 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2025]

account climate neutrality and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>29</sup> As part of this initiative, the provincial authorities are seeking to gain practical experience from successful mining region transformations, e.g. in Westphalia, Germany, and implement it in 7 mining subregions in Poland.

The next part of the report, based on the cases of the four largest companies in the energy and automotive industries in Upper Silesia, analyzes, on the one hand, regional socio-economic changes caused by both structural and social problems resulting from the restructuring of the local economy in the 1990s and early 2000s. On the other hand, these parts look at changes caused by the twin transition (the gradual shift to renewable energy sources and the gradual change in the profile of automotive companies from ICE to EV) that has been taking place over the last 15 years. Local cases also show the involvement and influence of employees and trade unions, as well as the use of social dialogue mechanisms during economic restructuring for more equal outcomes of the process of creative destruction.

### 3.2. The case of the ‘decline’ of coal-mining sector – the ‘unfulfilled’ / ‘in the process’ case of transition (social dialogue mechanisms)

In the section dedicated to the energy industry, emphasis was placed on the role of hard coal in the energy mix. It was also highlighted that the economic policy in this area is of paramount importance, with the majority of hard coal mines located in Upper Silesia. Following the year 1989, there have been numerous endeavours to reform this segment of the energy industry, with the region itself assuming a pivotal role in terms of its significance to the central authorities.

Following the year 2000, and more specifically, following the accession to the European Union, a series of reforms were implemented with the objective of separating the relatively well-functioning, albeit not necessarily profitable, mines (which essentially meant that coal mining in this region was not geologically threatened) and subsequently on attempts to consolidate them by merging them with other mines in order to establish companies with the capacity to compete and survive in the market. In consequence of the unprofitability of mining in Polish mines, there was an increase in coal imports, principally from the East. The import of hard coal from Ukraine and Russia was subject to interruption in the wake of the outbreak of full-scale warfare in Ukraine in February 2022. Paradoxically, therefore, in the case of Poland, the impetus for change is rooted in economic considerations rather than a deliberate effort to alter the energy mix. Coal has historically been a pivotal raw material for both industry and retail consumers. In following cases we are getting closer look to processes of transitions with

---

<sup>29</sup> <https://wupkatowice.praca.gov.pl/-/14884357-plan-sprawiedliwej-transformacji-województwa-slaskiego-nabiera-kasztalu> [accessed: 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2025]

focus on role and type of social dialogue on the company level. We can assume that we see passage from the distributive type of collective bargaining into more integrative one.

### The case of Jastrzębska Spółka Węglowa

Jastrzębska Spółka Węglowa S.A. (JSW) is the largest producer of high-quality hard coking coal in the European Union, used primarily in steel production. The company was established in 1993 and is headquartered in Jastrzębie-Zdrój, Poland. It became publicly listed on the Warsaw Stock Exchange in 2011. JSW operates several coal mines in Silesia Region, including key sites such as Budryk, Borynia-Zofiówka-Bzie, and Knurów-Szczygłowice. In addition to coal mining, the company is involved in the production of coke and operates coke plants through its subsidiaries.

JSW is of critical importance to Poland's industrial sector, playing a pivotal role in the metallurgical supply chain, particularly with regard to the European steel industry. The company has also initiated investments in contemporary technologies, safety enhancements, and sustainable development initiatives, encompassing the reduction of its environmental impact and the exploration of diversification beyond coal. In comparison to next case (PGG Company), the company has been proven to exhibit the qualities of a market-efficient entity, thus justifying its designation as a valuable resource.

In 2017, the Company made a record profit of PLN 2,543.3 million. At the beginning of 2018, the 2018-2030 strategy was presented, which envisages a gradual increase in coal production from 14.9 million tons in 2017 to 18.2 million tons in 2030. From 2020, the share of coking coal production in total production will increase from the current 72% to 85%. The level of coke production and sales is planned to be more than 3.4 million tons. Ultimately, a high-capacity blast furnace coke is expected to account for up to 78% of the Group's production. The Group's total capital and investment expenditure during the strategy period will amount to approximately PLN 18.9 billion. Jastrzębska Spółka Węglowa is committed to renewable energy sources and ecology, which is why the strategy provides for up to a fivefold increase in the production of electricity from methane extracted from the mines.

It is estimated that there are as many as 80 trade unions operating at JSW, including structures of NSZZ Solidarność. A new company collective agreement is currently being negotiated<sup>30</sup>, but an examination of the history of relations between the trade union side and the company reveals a pattern of conflict and protest. Notably, in 2015, employees staged a 17-day protest, leading to riots with the police, among other consequences<sup>31</sup>. We can assume

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.bankier.pl/wiadomosc/JSW-rozpoczela-rokowania-ws-nowego-zakladowego-ukladu-zbiorowego-8938463.html> [access: 06.07.2025]

<sup>31</sup> <https://tvn24.pl/biznes/rynki/podsumowanie-strajku-w-jsw-dziesiec-faktow-ktore-musisz-znac-ra515248-ls4453779> [access: 06.07.2025]

that in the JSW case we observed transition from distributive to integrative type of collective bargaining, however, not without importance of political context (more militant protests occurred before 2015 and retaking the government by Law and Justice party – a political ally of NSZZ Solidarność).

### The case of Polska Grupa Górnicza (PGG)

Polska Grupa Górnicza S.A. (PGG) is the largest coal mining company in the European Union. The company's area of expertise is the extraction of thermal coal, which is utilised for the purpose of power and heat generation (which is different field than in case of JSW which operates as source of high-quality hard coking coal for steel industry). The company is headquartered in Katowice, Poland, and was established in 2016 following the restructuring of Kompania Węglowa. The objective of the merger was to ensure the survival of the former company and to protect it from the threat of bankruptcy. It is currently state-owned. The company operates several major mining complexes in Silesia Region, including the ROW, Ruda, Piast-Ziemowit, and Staszic-Wujek units. In 2017, PGG absorbed Katowicki Holding Węglowy, a state-owned company which at that time owned four still-operating mines (out of the original 11). PGG's primary function is the supply of coal to the Polish energy sector and industrial customers, thus playing a pivotal role in the nation's energy security.

There are four representative trade union headquarters operating within PGG: NSZZ Solidarność, the Miners' Trade Union (ZZG) in Poland, "Sierpień 80" and "Kadry". The period from the establishment of PGG in 2016 to the present day has been characterised by ongoing social dialogue between employees' organizations, the company's management and the government. Throughout the duration of the process, there have been intermittent periods of both regular negotiations and the signing of agreements<sup>32</sup>, in addition to open protests by the trade unions<sup>33</sup>. The primary negotiations pertain to the protection of employment and the augmentation of remuneration for employees.

Generally, the coal industry in Upper Silesia has undergone a series of transformations over the past three decades, involving the intermittent closure of mines and a reduction in the number of jobs, while maintaining limited number but high-quality jobs in comparison with other branches of Polish economy. One example of is the adoption of the Mining Social Package in 1998. The law guarantees a number of social protections, such as mining leave, social allowance, one-off free training and cash severance, a loan, and counselling assistance. The primary objective of the initiative was not necessarily to generate employment opportunities of a high calibre within the mining sector, but rather to ensure social stability.

<sup>32</sup> <https://energetyka24.com/gornictwo/wiadomosci/protest-gornikow-w-katowicach-pgg-zapewnia-ze-nikt-nie-straci-pracy> [access: 06.07.2025]

<sup>33</sup> <https://nettg.pl/gornictwo/188479/fiasko-rozmow-w-pgg-protest-zostanie-zaostrzony> [access: 06.07.2025]

While certain measures of modernisation were implemented, the majority of the allocated funds were utilised for the purpose of severance payments. This approach was generally effective; however, it resulted in a shortage of miners due to the suspension of recruitment to mining vocational schools for several years (the process has been reversed in last years<sup>34</sup>).

### 3.3. The closures and restructuring of factories in automotive in Upper Silesia (2000-2024)

#### The cases of Fiat (FCA) and Opel in Upper Silesia region

In general, the automotive industry in Poland is experiencing waves of layoffs and companies restructuring, specifically during economic downturns in 2008-2012 and 2020-2024; the latter is linked also to the recent introduction of EV car and car components production. Overall, the situation in Fiat and Opel differs in terms of workers bargaining power, although currently belonging to Stellantis group. In Fiat, due to prior privatization of facility by multinational car producers, it resembles distributive one with antagonism between employees and employers and distrust between social partners, starting from the 1990s with the strike of workers and competing unions (NSZZ Solidarność and more radical union Sierpień '80). Unions in Opel factories seems to be more compromising while workers bargaining resembles the integrative model.

The examples of Opel Polska and Fiat may well illustrate the transformation process that has taken place in Upper Silesia since the mid 1990s. This process has been linked to the wider investments plan for economic and social development strategy of the region, mainly envisaged by the Polish governments. Changes associated with disruptive technologies, such as the shift in political emphasis and the EU's industrial and energy policy (European Green Deal) towards the production of electric cars and their components (not only in Poland), have partially contributed to social and economic changes in Upper Silesia. The region was affected mainly by the strategies of regional development and focusing on the rise of automotive sector.

One of the key processes was the attraction of foreign investors and the development of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) since 1995, which aimed to diversify the region's economy. The SEZs, although they created new jobs, tended to offer worse wages and working conditions than the core sectors of Polish national economy.

The first factories of the companies analysed were established on the periphery of the Katowice Special Economic Zone in 1998 (Opel in Gliwice – a city near Katowice) and Fiat as a brownfield (on the site of the former large manufacturer FSM, which in practice meant privatization of the former state car producer) investment in 1992 in cities located close to each other (about 50 km): Bielsko-Biała and Tychy. At the beginning of the 2000s, passenger

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.portalsamorzadowy.pl/edukacja/miliony-na-szkoly-gornicze-na-slasku-szykuje-sie-nowe-otwarcie.510297.html> [access: 06.07.2025]

car production was transferred to the Tychy plant (which later became the largest Fiat factory in Europe), while only the production of components (engines, gearboxes, etc.) remained in Bielsko-Biała since early 2000. According to some estimates, approximately 40% of the factory workforce in Gliwice was unionized in 2010s (Stewart et al., 2016, p. 5). In total, FCA employs ca. 6000 workers in Bielsko-Biała and Tychy, while Opel in Gliwice employs ca. 3000 workers, though the numbers are hard to estimate due to constant turnover and layoffs which are described below.

Over the years, both factories produced, e.g., passenger cars under licences from, e.g., GM and Stellantis brands such as Opel, Suzuki, Ford, Lancia, Alfa Romeo, Fiat, Jeep etc. The cars were sold on the EU and Russian markets, among others. Factory in Bielsko-Biała stopped producing passenger cars in 2000s leaving only car components production. It also affected workers and some of them were laid off.

In 2012, around 1,500 employees<sup>35</sup> have been laid off because of production cuts and the discontinuation of the Fiat Panda model and its relocation to facilities in Italy. The company did not notify the workers' side of the layoffs well in advance, as determined by the Labour State Inspectorate audits: 'instead, the procedure consisting, e.g., of notifying the competent district labour office, consultation and agreement with the trade unions was not followed in this regard'. The unions, in turn, reported that the employer had not renewed the contract of 1,600 employees since 2010, but the agreement with the unions limited the number of layoffs to 1,450 with the severance pay due to the employees.

In 2015, only the Solidarność union at the Opel factory managed to develop a model of cooperation with the employer based on dialogue: 'At the Opel factory in Gliwice, relations between the employer and trade unions are based on long-standing agreements regulating, among other things, wage increases, and other issues related to working conditions. In January this year [2015], under the terms of one such long-term agreement, factory workers received basic wage increases of over 4%.'<sup>36</sup> In the following years, especially after the factory was taken over by Stellantis Group and the assembly lines were switched to commercial vehicles, relations between the unions and the employer deteriorated, which reignited protests against worsening working conditions.

In 2018, due to the decline in General Motor's sales and the losses the car producer was incurring in Europe, production and therefore employment at Opel facility in Gliwice fell. As a result, around 300 people took voluntary redundancy. At that time, the unions were already appealing to the government for help 'The prospects for the Polish Opel and Fiat plants do not inspire optimism,' wrote the 'Solidarity Sierpień '80' union to Prime Minister Morawiecki.

---

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/wiadomosci/artykul/zwolnienia;w;fiacie;pip;firma;powinna;powiadomic;w;polowie;2012;roku,65,0,1229633.html> [accessed: 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2025]

<sup>36</sup> <https://solidarnoskatowice.pl/solidarnosc-w-branzy-motoryzacyjnej/> [accessed: 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2025]

It appeared that 250 workers had been transferred as temporary workers to an Opel plant in Germany for up to six months as part of the company's restructuring. The transfer of workers between factories has been in place even earlier and it is a part of employees training. During the 2020 pandemic<sup>37</sup> due to the temporary suspension of production, the company again took the opportunity and urged employees to make voluntary departures, of which 180 people took advantage (employees with the most seniority can count on the equivalent of 21 monthly wage as a part of severance pay). The company also offered the possibility to take up employment in factories in Tychy (in Poland) or in Germany. At the same time, there was a conflict over the rules for the transfer of workers to the new factory. Trade unionists wanted guarantees of employment and the transfer of bought rights after the change of employer. Representatives of the Gliwice (Opel) plant stressed that the seniority in Opel of all employees hired in the new PSA MP company and the salary amount are included in the entitlements in the new company.<sup>38</sup>

As of 2021, the Opel plant was taken over by the new Stellantis group (which also owns the Polish Fiat factories in Bielsko-Biała and Tychy), which started producing vans, thus phasing out the production of passenger cars. In turn, the car producer decided to invest based on a French platform allowing technological exchange between the car brands mentioned that make up Stellantis. As a result of these actions, first in 2021 and then in the following years, several more car models were scheduled for manufacturing in the factory in Tychy. Since 2024, Stellantis manufactures both hybrid and EV models of passenger cars (at least 7) and vans (at least 5) in Tychy (cars) and Gliwice (vans) facilities.

Further redundancies at both factories took place in September 2024 due to falling sales and 'EU emissions regulations', according to the company and unions. The Opel plant has introduced a two-shift operation, involving up to 500 redundancies. Fiat, on the other hand, has announced 300 job cuts at its component plant (engines, for which demand is declining due to the upcoming ban on internal combustion car production on the EU territory), an agreement on which the unions have signed, assuming voluntary departures. One possibility is to start working at another factory of the same group for at least two years. Ultimately, the Bielsko-Biała factory is to be liquidated, and its entire workforce have lost their jobs by the end of 2024. The unions have undertaken severance negotiations with the company, assuming, e.g., a voluntary redundancy plan and proposals for employment at other plants of the group.<sup>39</sup>

In summary, as early as the early 2000s, researchers (Barczak, 2000, pp. 19–20)

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/wiadomosci/arttykul/opel-gliwice-psa,126,0,2399102.html> [accessed: 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2025]

<sup>38</sup> <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/slask/zwolnienia-w-oplu-w-gliwicach/tmh07> [accessed: 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2025]

<sup>39</sup> <https://businessinsider.com.pl/technologie/motoryzacja/fabryka-fiata-w-polsce-do-likwidacji-prace-straci-kilkaset-osob/6k7xzzk> [accessed: 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2025]

warned that the automotive industry was not a ‘locomotive of development’ in the region due to cyclical periods of boom and bust resulting in job losses, despite numerous investments by foreign investors.

From the employees’ point of view, protests and strikes most often occur in these two companies, Opel and Fiat (and their subcontractors) due to employers’ failure to follow the law and the principles of social dialogue. These actions are supported by unions from other industries, such as mining and public education, according to unions operating in the factory. Ultimately, employers in automotive industry offer severance pay or the possibility of transferring to distant factories, e.g., in Germany, as the number of jobs in the automotive industry is limited. Government measures that could mitigate the effects of technological and economic transformation are limited, despite appeals from employee representatives: ‘Here, government representatives say that people laid off from Fiat in Tychy can look for work in the Czech Republic.’<sup>40</sup> The unions are also appealing to the government, in the context of industrial layoffs caused by EU policy (the ban on the sale of cars with combustion engines), to take measures to maintain jobs during periods of declining production.<sup>41</sup> Overall, it appears that the social dialogue mechanisms in automotive in Upper Silesia seems rather limited.

**Table 6 layoffs in Fiat and Opel**

<b>Case and industry</b>	<b>Local actors</b>	<b>Employer participation</b>	<b>Number of laid-off workers (in tota since 2010s-2025l)</b>	<b>Severance package for workers</b>	<b>Offering jobs elsewhere for the unemployed</b>
FCA (automotive)	Local social dialogue council (only statements), Employer and employees’ representatives, State Labour Inspectorate	Yes, offered only severance pay	1750	Yes	No

<sup>40</sup> <https://solidarnoskatowice.pl/trudne-miesiace-trudny-rok/> [accessed: 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2025]

<sup>41</sup> <https://solidarnoskatowice.pl/stellantis-likwiduje-trzecia-zmiane-w-giwicach-setki-pracownikow-do-zwolnienia/> [accessed: 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2025]

Opel Polska (automotive)	Local social dialogue council (only statements), employer and employee's representatives	Yes, offered jobs in other plants on "equal working conditions"	980	Yes, amounts to 21 monthly wages in some cases	250 workers transferred to other Opel's factories in Germany or in Tychy (the other city in the region)
--------------------------	--	---	-----	--	---

Source: own elaboration

#### 4. Conclusions

The Polish economy is characterised by economic growth and relatively low unemployment, with industry remaining important despite the dominance of services in the domestic economy. The level of unionisation has fallen but remain on a stable level of 10-15% due to unions organising, while the level of employer organization density has still been stable in recent years at 30%. The level of collective bargaining is gradually declining and is most common at company level, with multi-employer agreements existing.

For years, social dialogue on a national level seems to be politicised and subordinated to party politics and government interests. Over the past 30 years, there have been two changes in the central institution of social dialogue – the last time was in 2015 as a result of three years bilateral negotiations between employers and unions after boycotting the previous institution by unions, and earlier in 1993 as a result of strong protests and strikes by workers following economic changes and the transition to a liberal economic model. The strongest side of the dialogue is the government, which has the final say and makes decisions (e.g., setting the minimum wage, the organisation of work etc.). The role and importance of social dialogue in the industries studied (except for very limited existence in taxi sector) seem to be significant but to limited extent when it comes to sectors we studied in detail, especially over the last 10 years. Some of the tripartite sectoral teams set up in the automotive, care, and energy sectors (on-demand transport lacks such institutions) did not start meeting for several years after their official establishment. In some cases, dialogue only began after the onset of the pandemic in 2020 (sectoral team in care), and the changes brought about by the Green Deal (automotive). Employees interests are not usually treated as a priority, and trade unions most often use protests and strikes as tools to influence political decisions in order to secure employees' rights. Employers, in turn, try to circumvent social dialogue mechanisms in order to impose their interests on social partners, which is met with resistance from employees. Ultimately, bilateral agreements are reached between employees and employers as can be seen, e.g., in the automotive sector.

Overall, the transformation in Upper Silesia was supposed to bear the hallmarks of Schumpeter's 'creative destruction' process, i.e. the Polish governments plan assumed that new jobs would be created in place of the closed mines and steelworks, including in the production

of car parts and in car manufacturing factories, opening of special economic zones. In the automotive industry, despite regular layoffs, unions are active, as shown by the top-down organisation and mobilisation of new members. The NSZZ ‘Solidarność’, Sierpień ‘80 as well as OPZZ unions are particularly active. However, there is limited functioning of social dialogue mechanisms in this industry, and workers need to bargain with employers without the help of the government. In the automotive sector, there is a prevalence of distributive bargaining, characterised by pervasive antagonism among social partners and a mutual mistrust between them. Conversely, distributive bargaining is predominantly observed in the energy sector, wherein employees receive severance pay guaranteed by the government, which offers minimal opportunities for retraining or other ALMP tools. The strongest party of the social dialogue is the state with its agenda, using social partners for its political and economic ends. In general, a zero-sum game can be observed between the workers and employers especially in the automotive sector in Upper Silesia. In mines, there has been no long-term and fair transformation, and in both sectoral cases in Upper Silesia the employees have been the side with minimal gains (severance pays, limited opportunities for work in other plants), with most of all loss of jobs, limited opportunities to find work in other employers, although it seems that in mining the situation was slightly better than in automotive.

There are “lessons learnt” from the transformation of the Upper Silesia in terms of the effect of the social dialogue. Research indicates that the use of social dialogue in Polish steelworks sector might offer a good solution in the case of twin transition, namely the long-term unions involvement in sectoral social dialogue, as well as organizing the actions of the former at the company and inter-company level to influence wages and working conditions of precarious workers (A. Mrozowicki & Maciejewska, 2016, p. 46).

## References

- Bank Danych Lokalnych (GUS). (2025). *Liczba licencji na taksówki*.  
<https://bdl.stat.gov.pl/bdl/metadane/cechy/3741>
- Barczak, A. (2000). Wielka gra o przyszłość. *Gospodarka Śląska*, 1.
- Bernaciak, M. (2010). Cross-border competition and trade union responses in the enlarged EU: Evidence from the automotive industry in Germany and Poland. *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 16(2), 119–135. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959680110364827>
- Bohle, D., & Greskovits, B. (2012). *Capitalist diversity on Europe’s periphery*. Cornell University Press.
- Boni, M. (2006). Dylematy rynku pracy w Polsce. In S. Golinowska & M. Boni (Eds.), *Nowe dylematy polityki społecznej* (p. 386). CASE.
- Borucka, A. (2014). Przewóz osób w Polsce w świetle zmian legislacyjnych. *Logistyka: Czasopismo Dla Profesjonalistów*, 6, 468–475.
- Brauers, H., & Oei, P. Y. (2020). The political economy of coal in Poland: Drivers and barriers for a shift away from fossil fuels. *Energy Policy*, 144.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2020.111621>

- Czarzasty, J. (2014). *Rokowania zbiorowe w cieniu globalizacji. Rola i miejsce związków zawodowych w korporacjach ponadnarodowych* (J. Czarzasty, Ed.). Scholar.
- Czarzasty, J., & Mrozowicki, A. (2023). The nail in the coffin? Pandemic and social dialogue in Poland. *Employee Relations*, 45(7), 62–78. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ER-06-2022-0289>
- Eurofound. (2024). *Living and working in Poland*.  
<https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/en/country/poland#actors-and-institutions>
- Eurostat. (2025). *Home - Eurostat*. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/>
- Feliksiak, M. (2021). *Związki zawodowe w Polsce. Komunikat z badań nr 140/2021*.  
[https://cbos.pl/PL/publikacje/raporty\\_tekst.php?id=6350](https://cbos.pl/PL/publikacje/raporty_tekst.php?id=6350)
- Gadowska, K. (2002). *Zjawisko klientelizmu Politycznego-Ekonomicznego*. UJ.
- Garaudel, P., Noël, F., & Schmidt, G. (2008). Overcoming the risks of restructuring through the integrative bargaining process: Two case studies in a French context. *Human Relations*, 61(9), 1293–1331. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726708094913>
- Gardawski, J. (1992). *Robotnicy 1991 : świadomość ekonomiczna w czasach przełomu*. Fundacja im. Friedricha Eberta. <https://tezeusz.pl/robotnicy-1991-swiadomosc-ekonomiczna-w-czasach-przelomu-gardawski-juliusz-2919126>
- Gardawski, J., & Towalski, R. (2019). Labour market and industrial relations. In R. Rapacki (Ed.), *Diversity of Patchwork Capitalism in Central and Eastern Europe* (pp. 84–101). Routledge.
- Gardawski, Juliusz., Mrozowicki, Adam., & Czarzasty, J. (2012). *Trade unions in Poland*. ETUI.
- Gawlik, L. (2018). The Polish power industry in energy transformation process. *Mineral Economics*, 31(1–2), 229–237. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13563-017-0128-5>
- Gilejko, L., & Towalski, R. (2002). *Partnerzy społeczni. Konflikty, kompromisy, kooperacja*. Poltext.
- GUS. (2015). *Związki zawodowe w Polsce w 2014 r.*
- GUS. (2019). *Zasoby kadrowe ww wybranych zawodach medycznych na podstawie źródeł administracyjnych w latach 2019–2020*. <https://stat.gov.pl/statystyki-eksperymentalne/kapital-ludzki/oszacowanie-zasobow-kadry-medycznej-w>
- GUS. (2023a). *Partnerzy dialogu społeczno-organizacje pracodawców i związki zawodowe w 2022 r.*
- GUS. (2023b). *Rocznik Statystyczny Przemysłu*. <https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/roczniki-statystyczne/roczniki-statystyczne/rocznik-statystyczny-przemyslu-2023,5,17.html>
- GUS. (2025). *Zatrudnienie i wynagrodzenia w gospodarce narodowej w 2024 r.*  
<https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/rynek-pracy/pracujacy-zatrudnieni-wynagrodzenia-koszty-pracy/zatrudnienie-i-wynagrodzenia-w-gospodarce-narodowej-w-2024-r-,1,57.html>
- Hausner, Jerzy. (2007). *Pętla rozwoju : o polityce gospodarczej lat 2001-2005*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe “Scholar.” <https://scholar.com.pl/pl/ksiazki/751-petle-rozwoju--o-polityce-gospodarczej--lat-2001---2005.html>
- Kaczmarek, J., Kolegowicz, K., & Szymła, W. (2022). Restructuring of the Coal Mining Industry and the Challenges of Energy Transition in Poland (1990–2020). *Energies 2022, Vol. 15, Page 3518, 15(10)*, 3518. <https://doi.org/10.3390/EN15103518>
- Kantorowicz, J. (2011). Law and Economics Conference. *Regulacje Rynków Taksówkarskich - Rekomendacje Dla Polski*. <http://lawandeconomics.pl/>
- Kosiarz, E. (2022). Nieefektywna restrukturyzacja górnictwa węgla kamiennego. *Kontrola i Audyty*. <https://doi.org/10.53122/ISSN.0452-5027/2022.1.44>
- Kozek, W. (2011). *Gra o jutro usług publicznych w Polsce*. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.

- Kubisa, J. (2014). *Bunt białych czepków. Analiza działalności związkowej pielęgniarek i położnych*. Scholar.
- Kubisa, J. (2016). Gendered division of trade union protests? Strategies, activities and outcomes of union activity among miners and nurses in Poland. *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research*, 22(3), 331–345. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1024258916650409>
- Marszowski, R. (2015). Działania restrukturyzacyjne wobec górnictwa węgla kamiennego i ich wpływ na otoczenie społeczno-gospodarcze. Stan i perspektywy. *Humanum Międzynarodowe Studia Społeczno-Humanistyczne*. [www.humanum.org.pl](http://www.humanum.org.pl)
- Mitrega, M. (1999). *Restrukturyzacja umiejscowiona. Socjalne i regionalne aspekty przemian w górnictwie węgla kamiennego*. UŚ.
- MotoBarometr. (2024). *MotoBarometr 2024. Nastroje w automotive w Europie*. <https://motobarometer.com/>
- Mrozowicki, A. (2014a). Varieties of trade union organizing in Central and Eastern Europe: A comparison of the retail and automotive sectors. *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 20(4), 297–315. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959680113519314>
- Mrozowicki, A. (2014b). Varieties of trade union organizing in Central and Eastern Europe: A comparison of the retail and automotive sectors. *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 20(4), 297–315. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959680113519314>
- Mrozowicki, A. (2024). Authoritarian innovations in the Polish industrial relations: from liberal to illiberal illusory corporatism? *Journal of Industrial Relations (Forth.)*.
- Mrozowicki, A., & Kajta, J. (2016). *Trade Union Strategies in a Time of Economic Crisis: the Case of a Car Assembly Plant in Poland* | Center for Policy Studies. <https://cps.ceu.edu/publications/working-papers/car-assembly-plant-poland>
- Mrozowicki, A., & Maciejewska, M. (2016). *The rise of the dual labour market: fighting precarious employment in the new member states through industrial relations (PRECARIR) Country report: Poland*. <https://www.celsi.sk/en/publications/research-reports/detail/13/the-rise-of-the-dual-labour-market-fighting-precarious-employment-in-the-new-member-states-through-industrial-relations-precarir-country-report-poland/>
- Mrozowicki, Adam. (2024). Authoritarian innovations in the Polish industrial relations: From liberal to illiberal illusory corporatism? *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 66(4), 558–577. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00221856241278563>
- Muster, R. (2009). Rynek pracy województwa śląskiego – stan obecny oraz trendy zmian. *Studia Socjologiczne*, 4, 191–211.
- OECD. (2025a). *Collective bargaining coverage*. [https://data-explorer.oecd.org/vis?lc=en&df\[ds\]=dsDisseminateFinalDMZ&df\[id\]=DSD\\_TUD\\_CBC%40DF\\_CBC&df\[ag\]=OECD.ELS.SAE&dq=..&pd=2000%2C&to\[TIME\\_PERIOD\]=false&vw=tb](https://data-explorer.oecd.org/vis?lc=en&df[ds]=dsDisseminateFinalDMZ&df[id]=DSD_TUD_CBC%40DF_CBC&df[ag]=OECD.ELS.SAE&dq=..&pd=2000%2C&to[TIME_PERIOD]=false&vw=tb)
- OECD. (2025b). *OECD Economic Surveys: Poland 2025* (OECD Economic Surveys: Poland, Vol. 2025). OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/483D3BB9-EN>
- OICA. (2023). *International Organization of Motor Vehicle Manufacturers*. <https://www.oica.net/category/production-statistics/2023-statistics/>
- Ost, D. (2000). Illusory Corporatism in Eastern Europe: Neoliberal Tripartism and Postcommunist Class Identities. *Politics & Society*, 28(4), 503–530.
- Ost, D. (2011). “Illusory Corporatism” Ten Years Later. *Warsaw Forum of Economic Sociology*, 2(1), 19–49.
- Pernicka, S., Glassner, V., Dittmar, N., Mrozowicki, A., & Maciejewska, M. (2017). When does

- solidarity end? Transnational labour cooperation during and after the crisis – the GM/Opel case revisited. *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 38(3), 375–399.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0143831X15577840>
- Poland - Countries & Regions - IEA. (n.d.). Retrieved June 26, 2025, from  
<https://www.iea.org/countries/poland>
- Poland: Country Health Profile 2023 (State of Health in the EU). (2023). OECD.  
<https://doi.org/10.1787/f597c810-en>
- Polkowska, D., & Filipek, K. (2020). Grateful Precarious Worker? Ukrainian Migrants in Poland. *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 52(3), 564–581.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0486613419857295>
- Polkowska, D., & Mika, B. (2022). Is it possible to outsmart Uber? Individual working tactics within platform work in Poland. *European Societies*, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2022.2156578>
- Pracodawcy RP. (2024). *Droga donikąd. Koszty nadmiernych regulacji rynku przewozów taxi*. <https://pracodawcyrp.pl/raporty/prezentacja-raportu-droga-donikad-koszty-nadmiernych-regulacji-rynku-przewozow-taxi-2>
- Rzeczpospolita. (2025). *Taksówkarze wracają do pracy. Uber i Bolt będą mieć problem z kierowcami*. <https://pro.rp.pl/raporty-ekonomiczne/art41954831-rynek-taxi-lapie-oddech-nie-na-dlugo>
- Stewart, P., Mrozowicki, A., Danford, A., & Murphy, K. (2016). Lean as ideology and practice: A comparative study of the impact of lean production on working life in automotive manufacturing in the United Kingdom and Poland. *Competition & Change*, 20(3), 147–165.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1024529416636192>
- Stewart, P., Pulignano, V., & Mrozowicki, A. (2019). ‘Lean Production is Dead, Long Live Lean Production’: Lean, Neo-Liberal Crisis, Turbulence and the Consolidation of Regimes of Subordination. *Warsaw Forum of Economic Sociology*, 10, 7–33. <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1994-1102>.
- Suchacka, M. (2009). Syndrom śląskiej kotwicy – wokół dylematów tworzenia klimatu innowacyjnego. *Studia Socjologiczne*, 195(4), 273–294.
- Suchacka, M. (2014). *Transformacja regionu przemysłowego w kierunku regionu wiedzy : studium socjologiczne województwa śląskiego*. Uniwersytet Śląski.  
<https://opus.us.edu.pl/info/book/USLc196b0e774274f798c854576ed3bd608/>
- Szczepański, M. S. . (2002). *Opel z górniczym pióropuszem : województwa katowickie i śląskie w procesie przemian*. "Śląsk".
- Szczepański, M., & Ślęzak-Tazbir, W. (2009a). Górnośląskie metamorfozy. Region przemysłowy w procesie zmian: od osady fabrycznej do metropolii? - Prolib Integro. *Studia Socjologiczne*, 7–42.  
[https://bib.gwsh.edu.pl/ici/recorddetail?id=oai%3Abibliotekanauki.pl%3A2137899&\\_lang=uk](https://bib.gwsh.edu.pl/ici/recorddetail?id=oai%3Abibliotekanauki.pl%3A2137899&_lang=uk)
- Szczepański, M., & Ślęzak-Tazbir, W. (2009b). Górnośląskie metamorfozy. Region przemysłowy w procesie zmian: od osady fabrycznej do metropolii? - Prolib Integro. *Studia Socjologiczne*, 7–42.  
[https://bib.gwsh.edu.pl/ici/recorddetail?id=oai%3Abibliotekanauki.pl%3A2137899&\\_lang=uk](https://bib.gwsh.edu.pl/ici/recorddetail?id=oai%3Abibliotekanauki.pl%3A2137899&_lang=uk)
- Vigh, H. (2008). Crisis and Chronicity: Anthropological Perspectives on Continuous Conflict and Decline. *Ethnos*, 73(1), 5–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00141840801927509>

Zabdyr-Jamróz, M. (2021). “All they want is money!” The deliberative theory approach to the inclusion of nurses’ self-interests in the 2016 strike in the Children’s Memorial Health Institute in Warsaw. *Social Theory & Health*, 19(1), 68–91. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41285-019-00123-y>

Zientara, P. (2009). Restructuring the Coal Mining Industry: Unionism, Conflict, and Cooperation: Evidence from Poland. *Eastern European Economics*, 47(1), 41–59.

<b>Project Acronym:</b>	EGRUiEN
<b>Grant number:</b>	101178146
<b>Project Full Title:</b>	Encouraging a digital and Green transition through Revitalized and Inclusive Union-Employer Negotiations
<b>Call:</b>	HORIZON-CL2-2024-TRANSFORMATIONS-01
<b>Type of Action:</b>	HORIZON Research and Innovation Actions
<b>Project URL (temporary):</b>	<a href="https://sites.app.jyu.fi/egruien/en">https://sites.app.jyu.fi/egruien/en</a>
<b>Deliverable number:</b>	D2.2
<b>Deliverable name:</b>	Historical case study
<b>WP number:</b>	2
<b>Type:</b>	Report
<b>Contractual delivery date:</b>	31.12.2025
<b>Actual delivery date:</b>	31.12.2025
<b>Dissemination level:</b>	Public
<b>Lead beneficiary:</b>	JYU
<b>Keywords:</b>	Social dialogue, twin transition, Poland, collective bargaining
<b>Author(s):</b>	Szymon Pilch, Jacek Burski, Adam Mrozowicki
<b>Contributor(s)</b>	

## II. The Dynamics of the Social Dialogue, Social Agreements and Negotiations in the Lignite- and Hard-coal Mining Industries: the Cases of PGE and PGG Companies

### Abstract

This case study examines the dynamics of social dialogue and collective bargaining in Poland's hard coal and lignite industries during the green transition, focusing on two companies: PGE (lignite mining) and PGG (hard coal mining). Making use of secondary data, media sources, institutional documents, and an expert interview with a union leader, the analysis reveals contrasting trajectories of transition. PGE pursued a *managed transformation*, integrating decarbonisation strategies with the Social Agreement signed in 2023 that provided employment protection, including severance pay, energy and miners' leaves. Conversely, PGG exemplifies *disrupted adaptation*: while the 2021 Social Agreement set a closure schedule to 2049 and guaranteed social protections, implementation remains partial, reflecting strong union leverage and politicized governance. Both cases illustrate oscillations between distributive and integrative bargaining, with attitudinal structuring evident in union-led negotiations in PGG in 2020-2021 period. Outcomes underscore the critical role of state ownership, political alliances, and EU conditionalities in shaping transition governance. The study concludes that effective policy must combine long-term planning, robust social safeguards, and active labour market policies to mitigate risks of "passive transition" and ensure socio-economic stability in mono-industrial regions.

### 1. Introduction to the case

We have decided to focus our analysis on the coal mining industry in Poland, with particular emphasis on the hard coal and lignite sectors. This division is not only due to technological issues, but also to our desire to show the different paths of social dialogue development in both parts of the industry with particular focus on shifts between integrative and distributive bargaining. We decided to select two companies for the comparative analysis: Polska Grupa Górnicza (PGG) (Polish Mining Group), a joint-stock company operating in the hard coal mining industry, controlled by the State Treasury and located in Upper Silesia. It is a key organisation in the transformation processes of the Polish mining industry, and, at the same time, it is at the centre of major disputes between workers and trade unions and employers and, in the longer term, the state, represented here by successive governments. The organisation we focus on in the lignite mining industry is PGE Górnictwo i Energia Konwencyjna (PGE

Mining and Conventional Generation), part of the PGE capital group, a Polish energy giant which, since 2020, has been implementing a strategy of transition to renewable energy sources with a significant (albeit less visible) role for digitalisation.

As the mining industry is divided into two subsectors (hard coal mining and lignite coal mining) and both have their own characteristics of transition processes, as well as the company cases that we study, we propose focusing on comparisons between them. Main rationale behind this decision is as follows:

- Ability to observe shifting between integrative to distributive bargaining as the social dialogue in each industry can be assessed ambiguously.
- The green transition embedded not only in structural transformation of the country's energy mix and employment in the mining sector, but also related to the political conflict (climate policy),

We have conducted desk research and literature review using tools such as Google Scholar, Scopus etc. We used mainly secondary data focusing on public reports and statistics (Polish Statistics, Eurostat), materials prepared by the unions, government, companies, employer organisations etc., as well as press releases and other media sources including the database „Monitoring of Social Conflicts”<sup>42</sup> managed by the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy (which was an important source of data on the course of negotiations between trade unions, employers and the government especially in the years 2020-2025). We also conducted a problem-centred interview (Döringer, 2021) in November 2025 with the leader of one of the trade union organisations in Upper Silesia.

Below we include a data table with empirical material in which we describe shortly the types of data as its use in the analysis in our case.

---

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.gov.pl/web/dialog/monitoring-konfliktow-spoecznych> [Accessed December 6th 2025]

**Table 7 Empirical material**

Types of material	Use in analysis
<p>Interviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A pilot interview with the leader of the regional branch of nationally representative trade union (N=1)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Collecting complementary information necessary for the insights on negotiation process and social dialogue, as well as the power and leverage and the outcomes of the negotiations in the PGG case and other hard coal mines</li> </ul>
<p>Literature review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- studies searched for in Google Scholar and Scopus databases using keywords such as transformation, Poland, Upper Silesia, social dialogue</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Desk research on the restructuring processes in hard coal and lignite mining in Poland</li> <li>- Obtaining secondary data on the reconstructed cases: opinions on transformation of workers and local citizens</li> </ul>
<p>Media material</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Daily nationwide newspaper articles online versions</li> <li>- Local daily newspapers release online versions</li> <li>- Monitoring of Social Conflicts (issued by the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy)</li> <li>- Examples of keywords used to search: PGG, hard coal, transformation in Upper Silesia, PGE, lignite, transformation in Bełchatów and Turoszów regions</li> <li>- Overall ca. 71 news items</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Collecting complementary information on the basic information (revenues, employment etc.) of the reconstructed cases of hard coal and lignite mining, as well as events in the social dialogue and transformation in mining industries.</li> <li>- Collecting information on the cause, outcomes and course of protests and strikes in mining and energy industry in Poland in 2021-2024.</li> </ul>
<p>Social partners reports and documents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Companies, unions, industry, governmental reports</li> <li>- overall ca. 46 documents, reports etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Collecting information on social partners public statements and actions</li> <li>- Collecting complementary information necessary for the reconstruction of the key events of</li> </ul>

	social dialogue, economic context, and transformations in the reconstructed cases of hard and lignite mines
Public institutions documents <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- statements, resolutions of WRDS (provincial social dialogue councils) and (SWD) Lower Silesia Provincial Assembly in Wrocław</li> <li>- 26 documents issued in 2015-2025</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Collecting information on institutions public statements and actions</li> <li>- Understanding the political context of actions of public institutions</li> </ul>

Source: own elaboration

To proceed in detail with divisions between hard coal and lignite coal industries, we decided to compare cases of two companies: PGE and PGG. PGE Company<sup>43</sup>

PGE Polska Grupa Energetyczna S.A. (Polish Energy Group) is a stock exchange, state-controlled energy company in Poland, with the State Treasury holding 59% of shares and the rest owned by institutional and retail investors. This structure makes PGE both a market-oriented enterprise and a strategic national energy player. The company aims to supply 100% renewable electricity by 2050 while maintaining energy security during the transition. According to its *Strategy of the PGE Group until 2030 with an outlook to 2050*, about 85% of generation capacity will come from low- or zero-emission sources by 2030, with renewables providing roughly half of total output. Key investments include 6.5 GW of offshore wind by 2040, 3 GW of solar by 2030, and 0.8 GW of energy storage. PGE is also modernizing its grids and district heating systems, replacing coal with gas, biomass, and heat pumps under its *Decarbonisation Plan to 2050*. With planned expenditures of PLN 235 billion by 2035 (around 53 billion EUR), mostly for renewables and low-emission technologies, PGE's program is one of the largest in Central and Eastern Europe. The strategy aims to boost efficiency, reduce risk, and align with EU climate goals, positioning PGE as a key driver of Poland's low-carbon transformation and climate neutrality by mid-century.

<sup>43</sup> <https://sprawozdaniefinansowe2020.gkpgge.pl/en/strategia-grupy-kapitalowej-pge-do-2030-roku-z-perspektywa-do-2050-roku> [Access 9.12. 2025]  
<https://raportzintegrowany2021.gkpgge.pl/en/direction-pge-2050/strategy/direction-climate-neutrality> [Access 9.12. 2025]  
<https://raportzintegrowany2023.gkpgge.pl/en/strategy/direction-climate-neutrality> [Access 9.12. 2025]

Another important context for PGE's operations is the National Energy and Climate Plan until 2030, i.e. the climate plan for Poland, published by the government. This document provides for a gradual phase-out of fossil fuels, including hard coal and lignite, and according to the best-case scenario contained in the plan, electricity production from renewable energy sources would increase by 22% by 2030 (from actual 30% to some estimates), and by 2040, almost 80% of energy would be produced from renewables (mainly wind and solar farms).<sup>44</sup>

The actual structure of company shows that the focus of the organization lays in different industries than conventional generation which is only one of eight energy and mining activities run by the whole PGE Group:

- PGE Górnictwo i Energetyka Konwencjonalna S.A. GiEK (Conventional Generation)
- PGE Energetyka Odnawialna S.A. (Renewables)
- PGE Dystrybucja S.A. (Distribution)
- PGE Obrót S.A. (Supply (retail sales))
- PGE Energetyka Gazowa (Gas-Fired Generation)
- PGE Energetyka Kolejowa (Railway Energy Services)
- PGE Ciepłownictwo (District Heating)
- Gospodarka Obiegu Zamkniętego (Circular Economy)

The lignite coal mines held by the PGE Conventional Generation are in: Bełchatów (Central Poland) and Turów / Turossów region (South-West Poland).

In 2023, employment in PGE was 43,644 people in all sub-companies of the group<sup>45</sup>. In Bełchatów mine and energy plant in 2025 around 7000 people worked (however, in this year was introduced voluntary redundancy scheme by the employer, meaning workers are eligible for severance pays if they decide to leave)<sup>46</sup>. The plan is a consequence of the upcoming reduction in production and closure of the mine and power plant located in Bełchatów in 2038<sup>47</sup>. Despite plans to expand mining operations to include lignite deposits in Złoczew, which were indicated by the trade unions and PGE itself, the decision was ultimately made in

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.gov.pl/web/klimat/krajowy-plan-na-rzecz-energii-i-klimatu> [Access: 22.11.2025]

<sup>45</sup> <https://raportzintegrowany2023.gkpgge.pl/pge/kapitaly-organizacyjne> [access: 22.11.2025]

<sup>46</sup> <https://ddbelchatow.pl/wydarzenia/kopalnia-i-elektrownia/pge-redukuje-liczbe-gornikow-i-energetykow-ile-proponuja-za-odejscie-z-pracy/bOiABzbzedJXPiwaazcD> [access: 21.11.2025]

<sup>47</sup> <https://pgegiiek.pl/aktualnosci/grupa-pge-sprawiedliwa-transformacja-regionu-belchatowskiego-staje-sie-faktem> [access: 23.11.2025]

2021 to abandon them due to protests by local residents (the construction of the deposit would have required the liquidation of 33 villages and the resettlement of over 3,000 people)<sup>48</sup> and environmentalists. However, some sources indicate that lignite may become the strategic resource (rather than natural gas and hard coal) with new investments potentially planned in the future, although this is not concluded and the rights of the owners of land are restricted due to indecision of policy makers.<sup>49</sup> According to the territorial just transition plan for the Łódź Voivodship (introduced in 2021 – the same moment when decision on Złoczew was taken) employment in the Bełchatów part of PGE is to fall by 40% in 2030 (to around 4,500 employees). Investments in renewable energy sources are to be made in place of the mine and power plant (Terytorialny Plan Sprawiedliwej Transformacji Województwa Łódzkiego, 2023). Furthermore, the above plan envisages that the response to the closure of mines and power plants will be investment in renewable energy sources, logistics centres, the automotive industry, medical and rehabilitation services, and digital skills. The development of Industry 4.0, circular economy, and mechanical engineering is also envisaged. However, it should be emphasised that these announcements are declarative in nature, and the main activities are to include investments in the SME sector, startups, and business incubators. More than 4,000 people from closed plants are to be retrained, and emphasis is to be placed on activating women in the labour market (Terytorialny Plan Sprawiedliwej Transformacji Województwa Łódzkiego, 2023).

In Turów case the employment is lower than in Bełchatów – it is approximately 5000 jobs with 2400 workers in the Turów mine<sup>50</sup>. The main problem for Turów is similar to Bełchatów – plans for closing the mine, however, here the reference is conflict with Czechia on extension of its operation from March 2020 to 2026 without a cross-border environmental impact assessment, according to the Czech authorities who „argued that the exploitation of the mine caused both an outflow of groundwater from Czechia to the extent endangering the supply of drinking water there, as well as subsidence of buildings, while the residents of the border

<sup>48</sup> <https://odpowiedzialny-inwestor.pl/2021/06/09/zwyciestwo-mieszkancow-ekologow-kopalnia-zloczew-powstanie/> [access: 23.11.2025]

<sup>49</sup> [https://next.gazeta.pl/next/7,172392,32184310,schylek-wegla-czas-na-oze-rewolucyjny-dokument-ws-energetyki.html#do\\_w=484&do\\_v=1316&do\\_st=RS&do\\_sid=1728&do\\_a=1728&do\\_upid=1316\\_ti&do\\_utid=32184310&do\\_uvid=1755515879480&s=BoxOpMT](https://next.gazeta.pl/next/7,172392,32184310,schylek-wegla-czas-na-oze-rewolucyjny-dokument-ws-energetyki.html#do_w=484&do_v=1316&do_st=RS&do_sid=1728&do_a=1728&do_upid=1316_ti&do_utid=32184310&do_uvid=1755515879480&s=BoxOpMT) [access: 23.11.2025]

<sup>50</sup> <https://turow2044.pl/najwickszy-pracodawca-w-regionie> [access: 22.11.2025]

area were exposed to noise and dust”<sup>51</sup>. Czechia filed a lawsuit against Poland at the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) in February 2021, claiming Poland violated EU law (notably the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA Directive) by permitting the extension without proper assessment or public participation<sup>52</sup>. In May 2021 the CJEU granted interim measures ordering Poland to cease mining operations and later imposed a daily penalty of €500,000 for non-compliance. On 3 February 2022 Poland and Czechia signed an agreement in which Poland committed to payments and environmental safeguards, and Czechia agreed to withdraw its complaint from the court<sup>53</sup>. While the mine’s operations continue, the dispute highlighted tensions between Poland’s energy-security and jobs arguments and the Czech concerns over cross-border groundwater depletion, subsidence and environmental harm.

Currently, because of decisions by Polish courts, the mine in Turów has the right to operate after 2026 (the date previously set as the deadline for closing mining operations). Some estimates indicate that lignite suitable for extraction and conversion into electricity may last until almost 2044, but a more realistic scenario indicated by the PGE management points to 2035, when renewable energy (wind farms) will be able to replace the power generated by lignite in Turów, and thus mines will be liquidated starting from 2030.<sup>54</sup> Despite assurances from the government and the employer about environmental investments, in 2025 unions protested: continuous cost cutting, lack of renovations and investments, staff shortages, and a situation of over-planned mining. "We do not agree to yet another “optimization” whose costs and effects are borne exclusively by the employees, and which results in an increased accident rate due to excessive workloads and rush, causing increased sick leave”<sup>55</sup>. The lack of a clear and convincing vision from the government regarding the economic future of the Turów region results in a lack of acceptance of the changes associated with the transformation (and climate policy, which is perceived by local residents as a conspiracy theory) not only by the company's

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.pism.pl/publications/poland-and-czechia-reach-agreement-on-turow-mine> [access: 23.11.2025]

<sup>52</sup> [https://www.climatecasechart.com/document/czech-republic-v-poland-mine-de-turow\\_1bd9](https://www.climatecasechart.com/document/czech-republic-v-poland-mine-de-turow_1bd9) [access:23.11.2025]

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.gov.pl/web/climate/polish-czech-dispute-over-the-turow-mine-has-ended> [access: 23.11.2025]

<sup>54</sup> <https://inostat.pl/wegiel-brunatny-na-sciezce-krytycznej-plan-sprawiedliwej-transformacji-turow/>, <https://wroclaw.tvp.pl/86444459/jaka-przyszlosc-czeka-kopalnie-i-elektrownie-turow> [access: 23.11.2025]

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.solidarnosc.org.pl/zwiazki-weszly-w-spor-zbiorowy-i-oflagowaly-zaklad-kwb-turow> [access: 23.11.2025]

employees, but also by local stakeholders. This situation makes it impossible for social dialogue institutions to resolve it (Żuk & Szulecki, 2020).

## PGG Company

Polska Grupa Górnicza (Polish Mining Group) was officially established on 1 May 2016 as a successor to Kompania Węglowa (Coal Company), taking over most of its mines (7 facilities in the Upper Silesia) and assets. The creation of the company was made possible through capital investments from state-owned energy utilities, including PGE, Energa, and PGNiG Termika.

The context of creation the PGG was another attempt at reforming Polish hard coal industry. Its predecessor, Kompania Węglowa had been struggling with maintaining financial liquidity, and the restructuring plan was introduced by the government – divide the assets (mostly mines) and create basing on the most proficient of them new company with funds coming from state-owned companies (including PGE company)<sup>56</sup>.

PGG is organised around a central head office (Katowice) and seven primary mining production facilities (underground hard-coal mines) plus auxiliary and service units. At the operational levels, the mines are grouped into integrated units (for example, the “Ruda” unit combines “Bielszowice”, “Halemba-Wirek” and “Pokój”)<sup>57</sup>. Employment at PGG at the end of 2022 was approximately 36,800 people, of whom around 34,000 worked in primary production (mining operations) and about 2,800 in auxiliary/service functions<sup>58</sup>. Underground mining jobs account for roughly 77% of production-staff employment<sup>59</sup>. In 2024, the statistical average wage for the entire workforce oscillated around 3,500 EUR (with highest earnings in case of engineering and technical staff)<sup>60</sup>.

<sup>56</sup> [https://nettg.pl/gornictwo/205011/gornictwo-osiem-lat-temu-dzialalnosc-rozpoczela-polska-grupa-gornicza?utm\\_source](https://nettg.pl/gornictwo/205011/gornictwo-osiem-lat-temu-dzialalnosc-rozpoczela-polska-grupa-gornicza?utm_source) [access 21.11.2025]

<sup>57</sup> [gsm.min-pan.krakow.pl/pdf-134184-63186?filename=Managing+a\\_mining.pdf](https://gsm.min-pan.krakow.pl/pdf-134184-63186?filename=Managing+a_mining.pdf)

<sup>58</sup> <https://nettg.pl/gornictwo/200021/sprawdzamy-zatrudnienie-w-najwiekszej-polskiej-spolce-weglowej> [access: 21.11.2025]

<sup>59</sup> <https://nettg.pl/gornictwo/200021/sprawdzamy-zatrudnienie-w-najwiekszej-polskiej-spolce-weglowej> [access: 21.11.2025]

<sup>60</sup> <https://nettg.pl/gornictwo/209495/ci-pracownicy-kopaln-zarabiaja-najwiecej> [access 20.11.2025]

The crucial context for choosing the PGG company is the importance of the green transition agenda and plan to close the hard coal mines owned by the company. This has been the main frame of development of social dialogue in the company and in the industry in the last ten years. As the period between 1989 and 2015 can be understood as driven by market-related restructuring and achieving competitiveness, from 2016, and especially in last 5 years, the European Green Deal become main strategic reference for the actions taken by all social partners involved in the social dialogue. The main document around which the activities of trade unions, employers and the government have focused, and which has a direct impact about employees at PGG, is the social agreement signed during the Law and Justice government in 2021<sup>61</sup>. However, its implementation is not complete, as it requires notification to the European Commission (EC), which must approve the conditions for state aid to companies in the mining sector. This process has not yet been completed. Poland, on the other hand, has begun to implement its provisions<sup>62</sup>.

One of important provisions of the social agreement is the use of the Just Transition Fund program for the Silesian Province Transformation Fund, which provides for both support for traditional enterprises in the hard coal mining industry and the transformation of their economic profile, as well as the conversion of unused and decommissioned post-mining areas and industrial infrastructure for the purposes of new economic investments in Upper Silesia.<sup>63</sup>

Below we show the two timeline tables outlining the key events and characteristics of the negotiation process in both cases analysed.

**Table 8 Key events for the lignite company case (PGE)**

Key events for PGE case (lignite)	Characteristics of the negotiation process
2007	PGE is being established – consolidation of the energy sector
2010	PGE consolidates lignite mines in Bełchatów and Turów regions
2018	Collective agreement and wage agreement at PGE GiEK (Conventional Generation) Bełchatów

<sup>61</sup> <https://solidarnosckatowice.pl/umowa-spoleczna-parafowana> [access: 23.11.2025]

<sup>62</sup> <https://www.pgg.pl/strefa-korporacyjna/aktualnosci/2042/Rzad-przyjal-projekt-nowelizacji-ustawy-gorniczej> [access: 23.11.2025]

<sup>63</sup> <https://ftws.pl/> [access: 23.11.2025]

2019 – 2021	A protracted dispute over the proposed Złoczew lignite deposit (ultimately rejected)
2021	Legal conflict between Turów and the Czechia; ruling issued by the Court of Justice of the European Union
December 2022	Signing of the Social Agreement for the energy and lignite sector
2023	Nationwide protests across the lignite industry; subsequent wage-related agreements
2024 – 2025	Accelerated schedule for the closure of the Bełchatów and Turów mines; expansion of Just Transition Fund and Competence Development Centre programmes

Source: own elaboration

**Table 9 Key events in the hard coal company case**

Key events for PGG case (hard coal)	Characteristics of the negotiation process
2016	Establishment of PGG company (as the successor to Kompania Węglowa - a predecessor company)
February 2020	Warning strike across all mines (6% increase and government commitments regarding imports/stock levels)
September 2020	Framework agreement on the future of the mining sector between trade unions, company management and the government.
May 2021	Signing of the 2021–2049 Social Agreement (the key document governing the transformation process)
2022 – 2023	Cyclical wage negotiations and initial implementation measures
2025	Launch of retraining programmes (including cooperation with Silesian Railways) and consolidation of mining operations

Source: own elaboration

The next part of the report shows an overview of the creative destruction (CD) process in the case of PGE and PGG.

Successful and unsuccessful creative destruction?

The main rationale for the choice of PGE and PGG is that both companies play important (if not crucial) role in Polish energy sector<sup>64</sup>. Their emergence, development and transformation are useful to understand specifics of Polish energy sector transition processes.

Strona | 55

- 1) The main assumption here is that PGE Company will be closer in transition process to successful creative destruction with dominance of integrative type of collective bargaining (with notable exceptions when protests happened in Bełchatów and Turów mines in the last years – the events we describe later in the text)
- 2) PGG Company (operating in hard coal mining) will be exemplification of opposite tendencies – with façade type of social dialogue (more distributive than integrative one) and with consequent problems in successful transition.

However, the overall picture of changes is complicated as in both cases, we can observe some more integrative and distributive phases of social dialogue.

From a more general perspective, the reforms implemented in the coal mining industry after 1989 occurred not without strong opposition from the trade unions who lobbied, mobilized, and protested during the last three decades. The collective bargaining model shifted a few times after 1990 – changing from distributive to integrative bargaining (Garaudel et al., 2008) and backwards. The turns have related to current political situation in the country – simply saying, miners' unions have had stronger position during the time in which conservative right-wing political parties were in power due to avoidance, downplaying and opposing the issue of climate change. Other reasons were historical links between Solidarność and Law and Justice (in 2005-2025), and the conservative political parties originating from Solidarność in earlier years. Furthermore, research indicates that in order to avoid conflict with trade unions,

---

<sup>64</sup> As we specified in t2.1 (p.14): “Poland's energy supply continues to be heavily reliant on fossil fuels, which accounted for 85% of total energy supply (TES) in 2020 (*Poland - Countries & Regions - IEA*, n.d.). Coal remains the largest contributor at 40%, followed by oil at 28% and natural gas at 17%. Coal is a cornerstone of both Poland's energy infrastructure and its economy. In 2020, among IEA member countries, Poland recorded the highest coal shares in energy production, TES, total final consumption (TFC), and electricity generation, and ranked second in coal's share in heat production. This heavy dependence on coal places Poland second among IEA members for CO<sub>2</sub> intensity of energy supply and fourth for CO<sub>2</sub> intensity relative to GDP. While coal's role has declined over the past decade — with falling shares in TES, power generation, district heating, and TFC — coal production has also dropped, making Poland a net coal importer since 2017. Nonetheless, coal demand surged in 2021, with coal-fired power rebounding to supply 80% of total electricity generation.”

successive governments in the 2000s limited the debate on decarbonisation of the economy and mine closures – this was the opinion of 67% of respondents (a representative sample of 1,001 adult residents of Poland aged 18 and over) (Żuk et al., 2021). The union's response toward restructuring reforms of the years 1998-2002 involved less strikes and protests, vis-a-vis closing 13 coal mines (Marszowski, 2015). However, the reforms in these years were implemented by the right-wing government strongly supported by NSZZ Solidarność. Strike actions intensified during the period when in power was Civic Platform and decreased after taking control of the country by another party supported by NSZZ Solidarność – Law and Justice in 2015-2023 (but not entirely as miners protested in 2019 and 2020). Protests, strikes and social tensions surrounding the closure of hard coal mines in 2005–2007 – during the first Law and Justice government – were also visible in Upper Silesia (e.g. “Budryk” in March 2007) and took place in the context of further restructuring of the energy sector. The worker unrest was not as large-scale as in later years and took place in the context of the Polish government's adjustment of its climate and energy targets to EU requirements, without creating a coherent strategy. In the period of 2015 and onwards, the coal mine industry underwent further reorganization. Nevertheless, the government's primary objective was to safeguard the Polish coal industry and ensure the social stability including the consolidation of corporate entities combining economically effective mines with those which struggled and transferring financial support from public funds and state-owned companies from energy sector. Research indicates that 94% of respondents (a representative sample of 1,001 adult residents of Poland aged 18 and over) are in favour of the social consensus that the government should financially support the region such as Upper Silesia in energy transition to clean energy sources and help create companies that will employ miners after the mines are closed (Żuk et al. 2021).

The following part in which we will describe public discourse regarding the organizational level will be divided according to the situation in both cases analysed in the report: PGE and PGG.

## **2. Description of the negotiation process and social dialogue dynamics**

The section devoted to negotiation process and social dialogue dynamics focuses on outlining the prospects for changes in the coal industry in (both hard coal and lignite) with

particular emphasis on the period after 2015. The framework for the analysis is set by successive transition plans and the role of social dialogue in their preparation and, if it ultimately came to that, implementation. One of the main issues covers both transitions: green and digital. However, as the green transition is important frame of transition of Polish energy sector (especially in the last decade, but the process has longer history, for instance, Poland signed Kyoto Protocol already in 2002 in which 6% decline in CO<sub>2</sub> emission was declared in 2008-2012 period<sup>65</sup>) in case of digital-related shifts it is more complex and less present in the public discourse.

It should be emphasised that crucial collective bargaining processes took place not as much as between the workers represented by strong industry and nationally representative unions such as NSZZ Solidarność and employers (understood as companies, in analysed cases: PGE and PGG companies), but between unions, companies' boards and the government as the ultimate decision-maker (both companies are under state control as the majority stakeholder). It has a significant impact on understanding the processes of change as strongly politically dependent. Protests and negotiations at the workplace played an important role not only in a formal sense as a place for articulating the employees' demands and later negotiating them at a governmental level. Particularly important here seem to be the protests both in the lignite industry (protests at the PGE-owned Bełchatów mine during the period of deciding on a possible expansion of mining in Złoczew<sup>66</sup>) and in the hard coal industry (regular collective disputes and protests at successive mines in Upper Silesia<sup>67</sup>). From this perspective, the transition between distributive and integrative bargaining involves not two, but three parties (trade unions, employers, and the state). The additional assumption is that key decisions (e.g. signing social agreements) are made during negotiations with government representatives who

---

<sup>65</sup>[https://www.kobize.pl/uploads/materialy/Inwentaryzacje\\_krajowe/NIR\\_2023\\_raport\\_syntetyczny\\_PL.pdf](https://www.kobize.pl/uploads/materialy/Inwentaryzacje_krajowe/NIR_2023_raport_syntetyczny_PL.pdf) [access: 24.11.2025]

<sup>66</sup> <https://ddbelchatow.pl/wydarzenia/kopalnia-i-elektrownia/gornicy-i-energetycy-protestowali-w-stolicy-bez-zloczewa-region-belchatowa-umrze/AghCNnG8XT4WQYZ08BEP> [access 21.11.2025]  
<https://belchatow.naszemiasto.pl/strajk-ostregawczy-w-kopalni-belchatow-zwiazkowcy-napisali/ar/c1-7959501> [access 21.11.2025]

<sup>67</sup> <https://solidarnosc.pkw.pl/index.php/artykuly/artykuly-2015/juz-kilka-tysiecy-gornikow-prowadzi-protest-pod-ziemia/> [access: 21.11.2025]  
<https://www.cire.pl/artykuly/rynek-paliw/118855-podziemny-protest-w-kopalni-makoszowy-srk-kazdy-ma-oferte-pracy> [access: 20.11.2025]  
<https://energetyka24.com/gornictwo/trwa-podziemny-protest-gornikow-zespoły-robotnicze-omawiają-sytuację-kopalni> [access: 20.11.2025]

have direct or indirect control over the company. Period between 1989-2015: from decentralization to concentration of the capital in the coal sector.

For a better understanding of the context, before we move on to describing the history of social dialogue in both selected cases (including the main social actors involved), we will focus on outlining the historical perspective (from 1989 to 2025 with special attention paid to last ten years) for changes in the mining sector in Poland.

Polish coal mining sector has been the sphere being consecutively under political and economic pressure – from the 1990s and economic drive to effectiveness connected with employment reduction and closing the mines to last decade and implementing (to some extent) green-oriented (climate policy) agenda and preparing for depletion of coal deposits. The transformation of the Polish coal mining industry since 1989 has been marked by cyclical reforms, alternating phases of decentralization, recentralization, and restructuring<sup>68</sup>. Each stage reflected the broader socio-economic and political context of post-socialist transition, European integration, and global energy market fluctuations. The early 1990s brought the dismantling of the centrally planned system of the Polish People’s Republic. Between 1990 and 1992, the mining industry underwent decentralization and commercialization which was followed by the transfer of management to newly established, regionally (both private and state controlled) based enterprises. In the mid-1990s, the sector experienced a partial recentralization under market logic which is understood as a process of merging the mines into larger stock companies. The first coal mining companies were created, and several programs sought to rationalize production and protect employment. Despite these initiatives, the mining industry continued to suffer from financial collapse, requiring large-scale state subsidies (Lis & Kotelska, 2022).

The government’s “Hard Coal Mining – State Policy for 1996–2000” and related adaptation programs aimed to align the sector with market economy conditions and international competitiveness. None of the objectives were met; instead, production increased,

---

<sup>68</sup> We understand the processes of decentralisation as mechanisms for transferring direct control over the management of the mining sector from the state to other (public and private) entities at the local level. This is followed by processes of regaining control by the state (recentralisation), which can include the creation of state-managed companies, as seen in the analysed cases of PGE and PGG.

mine closures slowed, and sectoral debt deepened. A new reform program initiated the closure of unprofitable mines and introduced the Mining Social Pact, which was focused on social benefits for miners (funds for miner leaves) and programs of occupational activation. The definitive liquidation of mines in Lower Silesia in Wałbrzych and Nowa Ruda in 2000 confined hard coal extraction to Upper Silesia, consolidating the industry geographically. Further restructuring included the closure of seven mines and a reduction of 35,000 jobs. Massive trade union protests forced the government to revise its strategy, leading to the establishment of Kompania Węglowa and the adoption of a new Mining Act aimed at reducing sectoral debt—then estimated at 18 billion PLN (app. 4,5 billion EUR) (Lis & Kotelska, 2022, p. 116). These measures were also designed to meet EC expectations before and after Poland’s EU accession in 2004. The main expectation from the EU was focused on preparing the plan on the role of coal in Polish energy sector in the future years and plan of closing part of the mines (Lis & Kotelska, 2022, p. 119). New policy documents, including the 2007–2015 strategy for hard coal mining, introduced plans for gradual privatization via the stock exchange, successfully realized in the case of the “Bogdanka” mine<sup>69</sup>. The process was overturned by the state-owned company ENEA in 2015 which took control over the “Bogdanka” mine<sup>70</sup>. However, a report by the Supreme Audit Office (NIK, 2017) criticized the superficial nature of the strategy and highlighted persistent problems—low productivity, overstaffing, and an inflexible wage system. Despite favorable market conditions, no coherent post-2015 plan was developed. The restructuring of KW culminated in the creation of PGG in 2016.

PGG Company was formed through the merger of restructured entities, with energy companies as shareholders. In 2017, Katowicki Holding Węglowy was absorbed due to financial distress. In 2019, the EC launched proceedings regarding state aid for PGG. The 2021 government–union agreement established a roadmap for mine closures by 2049, guaranteeing social protection for workers.

<sup>69</sup> <https://forsal.pl/artykuly/429179.kopalnia-bogdanka-doskonale-radzi-sobie-po-prywatyzacji.html> [access: 24.11.2025]

<sup>70</sup> <https://www.money.pl/gielda/wiadomosci/artykul/przejecie-bogdanki-po-szesciu-latach.75.0.1942859.html> [access: 24.11.2025]

Poland's Energy Policy until 2040 (PEP2040)<sup>71</sup> envisioned a reduction of coal's share in the energy mix to 20%. However, the 2022 energy crisis triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine temporarily revived hard coal demand, prompting increased imports from Colombia and South Africa. In 2023, the EC approved public aid worth several dozen billion PLN to support sectoral restructuring and social safeguards. The Russian full-scale invasion on Ukraine in February 2022 impacted the energy-related policy in regard to: increasing importance of energy security; refocusing on the coal as energy source and in case of coke coal as an crucial element in the process of steel production; the broader framing was linked to cutting of the Russian import of energy sources (including oil, gas and coal).

The lignite coal mining in Bełchatów and Turoszów regions had to some extent a separate history of transition. The important date was 2007 and creation of the PGE company which eventually, in 2010, merged with the company (PGE Mining and Energy) that owned two lignite coal mines in Bełchatów (Central Poland) and in Turów (South-East Poland). PGE was formed on 9 May 2007 through the merger of several Polish energy companies, including the state-owned transmission and generation firms<sup>72</sup>. Since its beginning, the group has been a dominant player in Poland's electricity sector, especially via fossil fuels: by 2021 it controlled two large open-pit lignite (on surface extraction) mines and was a leader in lignite mining in Poland. The lignite segment has been particularly important to PGE's conventional generation portfolio, supplying a significant share of its electricity output and underpinning Poland's energy security. For example, in 2020 the Polish Ministry of Climate extended the operations of PGE's Turów lignite mine by six years, reflecting the strategic role of lignite in PGE's business and in national supply<sup>73</sup>. More recently, in 2020, the PGE capital group has published a decarbonisation pathway setting out plans to reduce its reliance on coal and lignite, shift toward low-carbon generation and renewables, and aim for climate neutrality by 2050<sup>74</sup>. Thus,

<sup>71</sup> <https://www.gov.pl/web/ia/polityka-energetyczna-polski-do-2040-r-pep2040> [access 9.12.2025]

<sup>72</sup> [https://www.gem.wiki/Polska\\_Grupa\\_Energetyczna](https://www.gem.wiki/Polska_Grupa_Energetyczna) [access 21.11.2025]

<sup>73</sup> <https://www.mining.com/web/poland-allows-pge-to-extend-brown-coal-production-in-turów> [access: 22.11.2025]

<sup>74</sup> [https://www.gkpgge.pl/en/content/download/4d745bcd68a224568d36dc7c4227398e/file/pge\\_2023\\_decarbonisation-pathway.pdf?contentId=127798&inLanguage=eng-GB&version=2&](https://www.gkpgge.pl/en/content/download/4d745bcd68a224568d36dc7c4227398e/file/pge_2023_decarbonisation-pathway.pdf?contentId=127798&inLanguage=eng-GB&version=2&) [access 23.11.2025]

PGE's development is marked by an early and strong dependence on lignite as a cornerstone of its power production, followed by an ongoing transformation toward cleaner energy sources.

As we focus on two types of coal mining (hard coal and lignite industries) and regarding the perspective of social dialogue, the most important processes related to introducing social agreements in both parts of the coal mining sector. In August 2023 Polish Parliament voted on the act on social protection measures for employees in the power generation sector and the lignite mining industry which sets out the conditions for miners' leave for those who have fewer than five years remaining until they become eligible for retirement benefits, as well as one-time severance payments for employees who leave their jobs amounting to 12 times of monthly wage calculated as a salary paid on annual leave<sup>75</sup>. This type of support is provided in the form of budget subsidies, which will be used to cover cash benefits paid to employees of companies in these industries. It is estimated that approximately 23,000 employees of companies undergoing transformation in the lignite mining industry are eligible to apply for energy and mining leave, which is voluntary. During the period of leave, the employee receives a social benefit amounting to 80% of the employee's monthly remuneration calculated as remuneration for annual leave. An employee is entitled to mining leave provided that an agreement has been concluded to terminate the contract by mutual consent as part of collective or individual redundancies for reasons beyond the employee's control, the use of annual leave or the acquisition of pension rights.<sup>76</sup> For the hard coal sector, the social agreement signed in 2021 concerning the mining sector and the economic transition of the Silesian Voivodeship encompass guarantee of social protection and job security for employees until retirement, as well as guarantee of a wage indexation mechanism for workers, despite the planned decline in employment. The social agreement includes also social benefits package for employees of liquidated mines, similar as in previous case, such as mining leave, one-off severance payments, a system for transferring employees from liquidated units to other units that will continue to operate<sup>77</sup>. Both acts and social dialogue mechanisms standing behind their preparations and implementation will be discussed in further part of the report, but we

<sup>75</sup> [https://orka.sejm.gov.pl/proc9.nsf/ustawy/3482\\_u.html](https://orka.sejm.gov.pl/proc9.nsf/ustawy/3482_u.html) [access 23.11.2025]

<sup>76</sup> <https://www.cire.pl/artykuly/gornictwo/10-maja-wchodza-nowe-przepisy-dotyczące-urlopu-energetycznego-i-urlopu-gorniczego> [access 23.11.2025]

<sup>77</sup> <https://solidarnosckatowice.pl/umowa-spoleczna-parafowana> [access 23.11.2025]

understood them as the peak moments of integrative bargaining preceded by periods of intensive distributive bargaining characterized by conflicts between all engaged social actors.

## Social Dialogue in Lignite Coal Sector: Case of the PGE (2015–2025)

Social dialogue in the lignite coal sector within PGE in 2015–2025 revolved around the operations of PGE Conventional Generation (PGE GiEK), which manages the Bełchatów and Turów mines and power plants – responsible for around 20% of Poland’s electricity production.

In the second half of the 2010s, social dialogue focused mainly on collective disputes and wage negotiations in individual branches. At Bełchatów, PGE GiEK and several unions (including NSZZ „Solidarność”, „Solidarność 80”, electricians and maintenance unions) signed an agreement in June 2018 that ended a long-running dispute and regulated pay and some working-time issues. Management presented this as proof that regular talks with trade unions are an effective conflict-resolution mechanism<sup>78</sup> which can be understood as an example of integrative type of bargaining.

In contrast, the distributive type of collective negotiations arose around 2020–2021 when social dialogue increasingly centered on decarbonization and the future of lignite mining and the Turów conflict. EU climate policy and the CJEU’s 2021 interim order to halt mining at Turów triggered strong reactions from lignite unions grouped in the Federacja Związków Zawodowych Górnictwa Węgla Brunatnego (The Federation of Lignite Mining Trade Unions) and the “Kadra” union, which protested potential rapid closure and job losses<sup>79</sup>. At the same time, protests were held by trade unions operating at the Bełchatów mine, which aimed to ensure the continued operation of the mine by opening a new deposit in Złoczew (see the first part of the report), which ultimately did not happen<sup>80</sup>. These disputes pushed the government, the PGE, and unions towards a more strategic format of talks about long-term transition<sup>81</sup>.

<sup>78</sup> <https://pgegiiek.pl/aktualnosci/pge-giek-podpisala-w-belchatowie-porozumienie-z-nszz-solidarnosc-nszz-solidarnosc-80-zz-elektrykow-i-mzz-remontow-energetyki> [access: 24.11.2025]

<sup>79</sup> <https://www.kadra.org.pl/rece-precz-od-turowa-mowia-gornicy> [access: 25.11.2025]

<sup>80</sup> <https://businessinsider.com.pl/wiadomosci/protesty-gornikow-z-kopalni-węgla-brunatnego-pge-belchatow/6m93885> [access: 25.11.2025]

<sup>81</sup> <https://biznesalert.pl/umowa-spoeczna-dla-gornictwa-węgla-brunatnego-bedzie-pozniej-niz-rzad-planowal> [access: 25.11.2025]

The crucial outcome was the Social Agreement for the Electricity Sector and Lignite Mining, signed on 22 December 2022 by government, employers (including PGE GiEK) and trade unions<sup>82</sup>. The document sets principles for operating and gradually closing lignite mines and power plants, links them to the creation of the National Energy Security Agency (NABE), and introduces extensive social protections: mining leave for workers approaching retirement, one-off severance payments, retraining and support for employment in new projects. Implementation of these measures is subject to EU state-aid notification, which is still not completed, but the EC has conditionally approved state aid for a social package for employees in the industry<sup>83</sup>. The link between the period of distributive bargaining, characterised by conflict and protest, and the subsequent transition to a phase of cooperation between the parties involved to reach a compromise is worth emphasising.

In 2023–2025, social dialogue in PGE’s lignite segment oscillated between strategic transition issues and immediate wage demands. The Federation of Lignite Mining Trade Unions organised a large protest in Warsaw in October 2023 over stalled pay talks and delays in implementing the Social Agreement guarantees<sup>84</sup>. At the same time, PGE GiEK and unions in subsidiaries concluded a series of wage agreements providing permanent raises and one-off bonuses, framed as part of responsible transition in high-inflation conditions<sup>85</sup>. Recent analytical reports on Bełchatów and Turów underline that social dialogue with unions and local governments is now one of the main instruments for managing the socio-economic risks of coal exit in these mono-industrial regions (Smoleń et al., 2025). There are several representative unions at both Turów and Bełchatów lignite mines. We listed them below to show the unions’ bargaining power and to emphasize their role in social dialogue: There are several

---

<sup>82</sup> <https://www.soltur.eu/new/1223-umowa-spoeczna-podpisana.html> [access: 25.11.2025],

Act of 17 August 2023 on social protection for employees in the electricity sector and the lignite mining industry: <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU20230001737> [access 9.12.2025]

<sup>83</sup> <https://nettg.pl/gornictwo/202795/map-ustalono-kontynuacje-prace-nad-programem-i-dalszym-procedowaniem-wniosku-opartego-o-gornicza-umowe-spoeczna-i-zlozony-wniosek-notyfikacyjny> [access: 25.11.2025]

<sup>84</sup> <https://www.opzz.org.pl/aktualnosci/kraj/2023/10/manifestacja-pracownikow-spolek-zaleznych-i-oddzialow-pge-gornictwo-i-energetyka-konwencjonalna-s-a> [access: 25.11.2025]

<sup>85</sup> <https://www.cire.pl/artykuly/serwis-informacyjny-cire-24/porozumienia-placowe-w-spolkach-zaleznych-pge-gornictwo-i-energetyka-konwencjonalna> [access: 25.11.2025]

representative unions at both Turów and Bełchatów lignite mines. We listed them below to show the unions' bargaining power and to emphasize their role in social dialogue:

- At PGE Conventional Generation, the following trade unions operate at both mines analysed by us: NSZZ Solidarność, 'Kadra'.
- In addition, the following local trade unions operate in Bełchatów: WZZ Solidarność 80, ZZPRC KWB Bełchatów, ZZ Odkrywka Związek Zawodowy Górnictwa Węgla Brunatnego KWB Bełchatów In Turów: Niezależny Związek Zawodowy Górników, Niezależny Samorządny Związek Zawodowy „Solidarność’80”, Związek Zawodowy Pracowników KWB Turów

Employees in both locations are covered by the Multi-Company Collective Labour Agreement, the Company Collective Labour Agreement<sup>86</sup> signed in 2023 and the Social Agreement (in fact it is an act of law) for energy and lignite workers. Additionally, collective labour agreements also apply at PGE EO (Energia Odnawialna, Renewable Energy), where the following two unions operate: Confederation of Trade Unions at PGE EO S.A. and Trade Union of Employees of PGE EO S.A., branch in Czymanów. In 2020, an agreement with PGE was signed ending the collective dispute between the unions and PGE EO (it also included the withdrawal of these unions from the Protest Committee of Unions in PGE), followed by the introduction of a remuneration and HR policy in the company. In addition, a commitment was made to engage in constructive dialogue on the development of investments in renewable energy. The current collective bargaining agreement signed in 2023 guarantees the regulation of salary and the granting of social benefits also in PGE EO.<sup>87</sup> The signing of the document proves the bargaining power of unions in social dialogue at workplace, as the previous collective labour agreement at PGE was terminated in 2013 due to, according to the unions,

<sup>86</sup> <https://www.solidarnosc.org.pl/zakladowy-uklad-zbiorowy-pracy-dla-pracownikow-pge-gornictwo-i-energetyka-konwencjonalna-s-a-oddzialu-kopalnia-wegla-brunatnego-turow> [access: 24.11.2025]

<sup>87</sup> <https://raporty-branzowe.cire.pl/files/portal/186/news/344651/c5f7a6f4b0421beac5013a93148b358f686d58c7e053236ec63abcbcd4639b89.pdf> [access: 24.11.2025]

“conflict management directed against the trade union becoming the main method of operation of the current management board of the company”<sup>88</sup>.

#### Social Dialogue in Hard Coal Sector: Case of the PGG (2015–2025)

Social dialogue in the hard coal industry, and especially in PGG, in 2015-2025 was closely linked to restructuring of Polish mining and the gradual move towards coal phase-out. PGG was created in May 2016 as a rescue vehicle for the collapse of Kompania Węglowa. Its establishment was made possible through an agreement between management, government and trade unions, which combined public and energy-company capital investments with far-reaching concessions from workers, including temporary suspension of the “14th salary” (an additional annual bonus; its amount is similar to the average monthly salary in the company), pay reductions and consolidation of mines, in exchange for maintaining jobs and production in 11 mines and 4 plants taken over by PGG<sup>89</sup>.

In the following years social dialogue focused on day-to-day survival of the company: unions negotiated to limit outsourcing, defend employment levels and restore frozen social benefits, while the owner (the state) and company’s management pushed for cost cuts and productivity gains. Tensions culminated in February 2020, when falling coal demand and large stockpiles triggered a warning strike that covered all PGG mines<sup>90</sup>. The dispute ended with a wage agreement on 20th February 2020 granting a 6% pay rise beginning on 1st January 2020 and promising joint action to limit coal imports and reduce stockpiles – an example of social dialogue combining distributive and industrial-policy issues<sup>91</sup>.

From autumn 2020 social dialogue shifted from crisis management to negotiating the long-term transformation of hard coal mining. On 25 September 2020 unions and the

<sup>88</sup> [https://www.sgie.pl/skgwb/2018/Odpowiedz\\_na\\_stanowisko\\_nr%201\\_6.pdf](https://www.sgie.pl/skgwb/2018/Odpowiedz_na_stanowisko_nr%201_6.pdf) [access: 24.11.2025]

<sup>89</sup> <https://tvs.pl/informacje/26-kwietnia-2016-najwazniejsza-data-w-polskim-gornictwie-powstaje-polska-grupa-gornicza/> [access: 24.11.2025]  
<https://www.gov.pl/web/aktywa-panstwowe/porozumienie-ze-strona-zwiazkowa-w-sprawie-utworzenia-pgg-podpisane-2> [access: 24.11.2025]

<sup>90</sup> <https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/protest-ostrzegawczy-gornikow-strajki-objely-wszystkie-kopalnie-pgg-6479535230023297a.html> [access: 24.11.2025]

<sup>91</sup> <https://www.gov.pl/web/aktywa-panstwowe/osiagnieto-porozumienie-z-organizacjami-zwiazkowymi-dzialajacymi-w-pgg> [access: 24.11.2025]

government signed a framework agreement on the future of the sector, including PGG, which foresaw drafting a detailed Social Agreement regulating the functioning and winding-down of hard coal mining<sup>92</sup>. The Social Agreement was signed in May 2021 after months of bipartite talks with representatives of government, mining companies and unions. It set a timeline for closing individual coal mines up to 2049, mechanisms of state aid for loss-making companies and a broad social-protection package (mining leave, severance payments and redeployment schemes)<sup>93</sup>.

The key context for the implementation of the provisions of the Social Agreement is reaching a consensus with the EC which must accept the document as compliant with EU law prohibiting the transfer of state aid. This process is still ongoing, but despite the EC's lack of consent, some provisions of the agreement are being implemented<sup>94</sup>.

In the hard coal sector, we are therefore dealing with a situation like that in the lignite sector. Pressure related to the threat of mine closures is forcing trade unions to adopt a more confrontational stance, with union members and leaders resorting to radical forms of protest due to the high stakes. This, in turn, makes the government and companies more willing to compromise, allowing a phase of integrative collective bargaining to begin and end with the signing of a social agreement.

After 2021, social dialogue in PGG has been dominated by two themes: annual wage negotiations in the context of high inflation and implementation of the Social Agreement. In 2022, the company and unions agreed a 7.5% wage increase, with average pay in PGG mines reaching 8,815 PLN (ca. 2000 EUR) and employment at about 36,800 jobs<sup>95</sup>. At the same time, joint bodies and ad-hoc negotiations have addressed mergers and closures of specific

<sup>92</sup> <https://www.pgg.pl/pobieranie/168/PGG202010.pdf> [access: 24.11.2025]

[https://www.solidarnosc.gorzow.enea.pl/wiadomosc/2457/porozumienie\\_ws\\_transformacji\\_gornictwa\\_polityka\\_energetyczna\\_panstwa.html](https://www.solidarnosc.gorzow.enea.pl/wiadomosc/2457/porozumienie_ws_transformacji_gornictwa_polityka_energetyczna_panstwa.html) [access: 24.11.2025]

<sup>93</sup> <https://www.clientearth.pl/media/dxioob1r/2021-03-10-niewykonalna-umowa-spoleczna-ce-pl.pdf> [access: 24.11.2025]

<sup>94</sup> <https://www.pulshr.pl/przemysl/co-z-umowa-spoleczna-dla-gornictwa-staramy-sie%2C111640.html> [access: 24.11.2025]

<sup>95</sup> <https://www.pgg.pl/strefa-korporacyjna/aktualnosci/976/porozumienie-placowe-2022> [access: 24.11.2025]

operations (for example, the 2024 talks on combining the “Halemba” and “Bielszowice” mines according to the Social Agreement’s schedule)<sup>96</sup>.

In updating the Agreement and amending the mining law show that social dialogue in PGG has seemed to evolve from short-term conflict management to a continuing process of negotiating the pace and social conditions of coal mines liquidation in Upper Silesia<sup>97</sup>. However, the union leader interviewed (EX\_01\_EN\_Solidarność) points out that the unions, mine management and the government are failing to meet certain commitments contained in the Social Agreement. This concerns, e.g., the closure of mines, such as the “Wujek” hard coal mine, which was supposed to be closed in 2023, but ultimately did not happen. The long timeframe for closing the mines was the union's strategy to wait out the unstable political situation in the country, which indicated that the mines would ultimately be able to operate for longer period (coal deposits could last until 2080 according to the union leader’s estimates). By signing the Social Agreement, the rightwing populist government hoped that such a move would show the EC that Poland wants to implement the EU's climate policy. Poland was thus counting on securing funds from the Next Generation EU post-pandemic recovery fund established in 2020, which includes a green energy and energy efficiency component, for which the country has been allocated approximately €15 billion in loans and grants.

The following trade unions operate at PGG Company:

- NSZZ Solidarność (Solidarity Trade Union)
- Związek Zawodowy Górników w Polsce (Miners' Trade Union in Poland)
- Międzyzakładowy Związek Zawodowy „Kadra” Górnictwo (Inter-company Trade Union ‘Kadra’ Mining)
- Związek Zawodowy Pracowników Dołowych (Underground Workers' Trade Union)
- Wolny Związek Zawodowy „Sierpień 80” (Free Trade Union ‘August 80’)
- Związek Zawodowy Pracowników Zakładów Przeróbki Mechanicznej Węgla w Polsce (Trade Union of Employees of Coal Processing Plants in Poland)

<sup>96</sup> <https://www.pgg.pl/strefa-korporacyjna/aktualnosci/1777/Przyszlosc-ruchow-Halemba-i-Bielszowice> [access: 24.11.2025]

<sup>97</sup> <https://www.bankier.pl/wiadomosc/Trzeba-aktualizowac-harmonogram-zamykania-kopalni-9010739.html> [access: 24.11.2025]  
[nettg.pl/gornictwo/216269/prezes-pgg-potrzebna-konsolidacja-spolek-weglowych-objetych-publicnym-wsparciem](https://www.bankier.pl/wiadomosc/Trzeba-aktualizowac-harmonogram-zamykania-kopalni-9010739.html) [access: 24.11.2025]

- Związek Zawodowy „Kontra” (Trade Union “Kontra”)
- NSZZ „Solidarność 80” (Trade Union “Solidarity 80”)
- NSZZ „Solidarność 80” RP (Trade Union “Solidarity 80” Poland)
- Związek Zawodowy Maszynistów Wyciągowych Kopalń w Polsce (Trade Union of Mine Hoist Operators in Poland)
- Związek Zawodowy Jedności Górniczej (Mining Unity Trade Union)
- Międzyzakładowa Organizacja Związkowa „Kadra XXI” Górnictwo (Inter-company Trade Union Organisation ‘Kadra XXI’ Mining)

There is no official data on the level of unionisation in the company, although the activity of unions suggests that the level is rather high and there is a long-standing tendency of membership to more than one union at the same time (Gardawski et al., 2012) . Despite the strong union presence, the union leader of Solidarność interviewed for this report stressed that unions agreeing to limit employee protection expose themselves to internal conflicts between union leaders and members, as was clearly demonstrated by the negotiations in 2015-2016, which ultimately led to the creation of PGG and the extension of the mines' operations, but at the same time introduced restrictions on wages. Union leaders were then attacked by union members:

It even came to the point where people destroyed cars, for example, of union leaders, called them traitors, threw eggs at union offices, and so on and so forth. And that's just the way it is, those are simply human reactions, aren't they? (EX\_01\_EN\_Solidarność)

The next part of the report presents the negotiation strategies used by the social partners in both cases studied.

#### Negotiation tactics

In 2015-2025, unions and employers in both the hard-coal (PGG) and lignite (PGE GiEK) industries used a wide repertoire of negotiation tactics shaped by the strategic importance of coal in Polish energy mix, high union density and the political, as well as socioeconomic sensitivity of mining regions. Unions relied heavily on disruptive instruments—strikes, protests, demonstrations. In PGG, the warning strike in 2020, pickets in front of the

company's headquarters, and coordinated mine-level work stoppages were used to pressure management during wage disputes and restructuring talks<sup>98</sup>. In PGE's lignite mining industry, unions organised large demonstrations in Warsaw in 2023, signaling that failure to secure job guarantees and transition protections would trigger broader industrial action. In both cases, the threat of strikes often proved sufficient to force the employer and the state to move back to the bargaining table.

Employers, although less willing to use explicit threats, repeatedly invoked the possibility of closures, mergers, or mines restructuring. PGG management warned of insolvency risks during the 2016 formation of PGG, framing concessions as necessary to avoid bankruptcy. Later, mine-level reorganisation—such as the proposed consolidation of “Halemba” and “Bielszowice” mines—were used as leverage to obtain productivity agreements. In PGE, management rarely issued direct closure threats but consistently highlighted the economic and regulatory pressure on lignite operations, especially after EU climate rulings affecting Turów mine near Czechia border. These arguments served as a soft form of threat: signaling that without agreement, maintenance of employment could not be guaranteed.

Argumentation strategies evolved over time. Early in the period, unions emphasized fairness, respect for collective labour agreements, and the protection of employment in regions. Employers stressed financial efficiency, cost control and “technical necessity.” As the energy transition accelerated after 2019, the argumentative landscape shifted. Unions reframed their demands in terms of responsible transition, community stability, and the social consequences of premature closures:

However, even now, when we meet with the government, we say it like this: “listen, if we are to transform fairly and we know that in two years time we will lose 1,500 jobs in the mines, then show us that in two years time there will be 1,500 jobs. We still have jobs in the industry in some modern technologies, even in companies like

---

<sup>98</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/markets/miners-at-polands-biggest-coal-group-protest-over-pay-energy-plans-idUSL8N2AH2UM/> [access: 25.11.2025]  
<https://energy.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/coal/polands-biggest-coal-producer-approves-6-per-cent-pay-rise-to-appease-miners/74234773> [access: 25.11.2025]

Amazon, so that someone is investing here [Upper Silesia region]. But unfortunately, this did not happen. A striking example of this is the attempt to build a factory of an EV ‘Izera’ here. Several hectares of forest were cleared, and then the forest was replanted, but unfortunately, such absurdities did occur (EX\_01\_EN\_Solidarność)

Employers and the state began invoking regulatory compliance, EU climate obligations and the need for long-term investment certainty. Thus, the debate moved from short-term distributive issues (wages, social benefits) toward broader structural questions (timelines of mine closure, social protections, public aid).

Relations with external actors played a critical role. Unions leveraged strong ties with local government and national political parties (Law and Justice, PiS) and authorities, emphasising the socio-economic dependence of mining municipalities on employment in hard-coal mining. They also appealed to national political actors, knowing that governments facing elections were risk-averse to large-scale unrest in mining regions. Employers, in turn, used government backing—especially during negotiations on the Social Agreement in both industries—to reinforce arguments about financial constraints and policy obligations. In lignite mining, international and foreign actors (EU institutions, Czech government in the Turów mine dispute) indirectly shaped negotiation tactics by raising the cost of inaction.

The shifts between integrative and distributive bargaining are the consequences of three overlapping factors: firstly, the state of the Polish political scene at the moment of negotiations and the possibility of using the bargaining power of unions in dialogue with the government. The key achievements of social dialogue (social agreements for lignite and hard coal mining) were developed during integrative bargaining but preceded by a wave of workers’ protests. This was possible because of the political alliance between the Law and Justice government ruling the country at the moment and Solidarity trade union, who in exchange for political support, was able to force the social agreements. Moreover, the information provided by a union leader (EX\_01\_EN\_Solidarność) paints a picture in which unions played a crucial role in the negotiation processes by preparing key provisions of social agreements. Secondly, it is the influence of the current economic situation on the form of collective bargaining—depending

on the condition of the company (PGG is a particularly important case here), unions become active – either in relation to improving working conditions (especially pay rises, as in the case of PGE in 2023) or in the context of job protection (if there is a risk of mine closures, as in the case of Turów and Bełchatów mines in 2020 or PGG in 2025). Thirdly, it is the issue of international politics and conflicts related to the EU green transition agenda. In the first context, a good example is the Polish-Czech dispute over Turów mine, and in the second, the plans to phase out mines in Bełchatów (lignite mining) and Upper Silesia (hard coal mining).

A good example of attitudinal structuring (Kochan & Lipsky, 2019) seems to be the process of developing a social agreement in the hard coal industry. Union leader (EX\_01\_EN\_Solidarność) described how the unions took control of the proposed changes while the government remained passive. In other words, it could be assumed that the government trusted unions in elaboration of a solution which could be acceptable to both social partners. This is interesting because it suggests that a strong negotiating position can be built on expert knowledge, resulting in a compromise that satisfies all parties (the unions agree to increase production, which the government views as a success, and in return they receive an extensive social package that secures employees in the long term).

In the next section of the report, we outline the course of negotiations between the social partners and the ways in which unions, employers and the government exercised their power during the negotiations in order to achieve their own goals and the solutions proposed by these parties regarding the transformation of lignite and coal mining regions in Poland.

### 3. Power and leverage

#### PGE Case

Social dialogue in PGE's lignite mining (Bełchatów, Turów and other PGE GiEK mines) in 2015–2025 was impacted by the differentiated sources of power by unions, company management and the state. Unions leverage relied on high union density, concentration of employment in mono-industrial regions and the strategic role of lignite mining in Poland's energy mix (fossils). They could credibly threaten mass protests and strikes and repeatedly used this tool – for example the Federation of Lignite Mining Trade Unions organised large

demonstrations and a picket in Warsaw in 2023 over wages and delayed implementation of the Social Agreement<sup>99</sup>.

PGE's management-controlled information about the company's economic situation, investment plans, and restructuring scenarios. Non-financial and integrated reports emphasise that PGE shapes a "just energy transition" through structured stakeholder and employee dialogue but also describe a series of collective disputes resolved via company-level collective labour agreements, showing how management used negotiations to secure acceptance for reorganisation and transfers of assets<sup>100</sup>.

The state – as owner, regulator and party to EU climate negotiations – had the strongest structural and institutional power. The 2022 Social Agreement, signed by government, PGE and unions, defined guarantees of employment, rules for mine and plant operation and access to public aid; later, a law on social protections published in 2023, translated these into concrete instruments such as severance payments and energy and miners leave<sup>101</sup>.

"The walk-away power" of social partners was uneven. The state could, in principle, abandon negotiations and legislate unilaterally, but political dependence on coal regions and the need for union consent to ensure social peace limited that option. PGE management had moderate walk-away power: without agreement it could delay decisions yet could not close mines or reduce employment at a greater scale without state backing. Unions had the weakest formal walk-away power – they could not force the company to continue operations if state aid was withdrawn – but their capacity to disrupt and their embeddedness in local communities made non-agreement costly for government and company management alike. This mutual dependence pushed all sides back to the table whenever talks broke down, as seen before the 2022 Social Agreement, and in subsequent wage disputes<sup>102</sup>.

<sup>99</sup> <https://www.opzz.org.pl/aktualnosci/kraj/2023/10/manifestacja-pracownikow-spolek-zaleznych-i-oddzialow-pge-gornictwo-i-energetyka-konwencjonalna-s-a> [access: 25.11.2025]

<sup>100</sup> <https://raportzintegrowany2022.gkpgge.pl/en/esg-foundation-of-development/governance/dialogue-with-stakeholders/> [access: 25.11.2025]

<sup>101</sup> <https://www.polsatnews.pl/wiadomosc/2022-12-22/jacek-sasin-podpialismy-umowe-spoleczna-to-zielone-swiatlo-dla-historycznego-projektu/> [access: 25.11.2025]

<sup>102</sup> <https://slaskaopinia.pl/2023/08/18/bedzie-protest-w-pge-zwiazkowcy-zazadali-podwyzek-dla-pracownikow-ale-do-porozumienia-nie-doszlo-mozliwy-strajk/> [access: 25.11.2025]

Proposed solutions by social partners evolved over time. Unions initially demanded long operation of mines, job guarantees and inflation-proof wage rises; the state proposed asset spin-off to NABE (National Energy Security Agency, which finally was not implemented) combined with temporary public aid; PGE management sought restructuring and clarity on coal mines liquidation timeline. The final Social Agreement and implementing legislation represent a compromise: gradual phase-out of lignite aligned with EU rules (the EC accepted the plan in 2024<sup>103</sup> strong social protections for workers.

### PGG Case

One of the main PGG's leverages is the fact that it is the largest hard coal mining company in Poland (as well as in EU), bringing together most of the hard coal mines (a total of 16 located in Upper Silesia). The company's management together with unions operating in mines hold high bargaining power vis-a-vis the state apparatus when it comes to negotiating decisions on the future of the company and its mines in the Upper Silesia region.

In 2021, unions, local government, ministries and mines management (PGG but also other companies such as JSW, Węłokoks etc.) signed a Social Agreement on the transformation of the hard coal industry and selected transformation processes in the Silesian Province (in which Upper Silesia is the part of). The document describes the process of transformation of the hard coal mining industry and the related processes of social and economic change in the Silesian Province. The document was developed with the participation of representatives of the Ministry of State Assets and social partners, as well as representatives of the Ministry of Finance, Funds and Regional Policy, the Ministry of Family and Social Policy, the Ministry of Development, Labour and Technology, and the Marshal of the Silesian Province (a representative of government).

PGG used the opportunity of negotiating the Social Agreement (the same Agreement that we described in the "Social Dialogue in Hard Coal Sector" part of this report) to gain subsidies for reducing production capacity (financing mechanism for hard coal mining companies); unions gained guarantee of social protection and job security for employees until retirement, as well as guarantee of a wage indexation mechanism for employees (3.8% in 2022,

<sup>103</sup> <https://www.rmfm24.pl/fakty/polska/news-jest-zgoda-brukseli-na-pomoc-z-polskiego-budzetu-dla-sektora.nId,7313601#:~:text=Komisja%20Europejska%20zatwierdziła%20polski%20program%20wsparcia%20dla,i%20brunatnym.%20Mowa%20o%20300%20milionach%20euro.> [access: 09.12.2025]

3.5% in 2023, etc.), despite the planned decline in employment in mining; unions also gained social benefits package for employees of liquidated mines (mining leave, one-off severance payments, ). Both company and unions negotiated a schedule for closing mines – most of the deadlines concern PGG mines (the last one will be shut down in 2049).

The parties signing and negotiating the social agreement in 2021 have different levels of withdrawal power, which influenced the outcome. The government must implement EU targets (climate neutrality, CO<sub>2</sub> reduction) but depends on EC approval for state aid , which means that its withdrawal power is at a medium/low level. In addition, failure to sign the agreement threatened workers' unrest and economic destabilisation of the region and country, so the government was willing to make some concessions. Unions can organize workers to resist the decisions which in the past have effectively influenced the companies and government (in 2015 unions effectively protested decision on the reduction of employment and labor costs cuts made by companies, e.g. JSW). Moreover, unions used their influence on the government, reflecting the political (electoral) agreements between Solidarity union and Law and Justice ruling coalition, to sign a favourable agreement, obtaining employment guarantees and social protection (miners' leave, severance pay etc.). Without financial support, PGG was threatened with bankruptcy, so the company was motivated to sign the agreement. However, the importance of the company for the country's energy security (as the largest hard coal mining company in the country) gave them an advantage in the negotiations to secure public aid from the EU.

The strong position of the unions and PGG meant that the mine closure schedule is extended (until 2049) and the social protection package is favourable to employees, while public aid (from the EC), provided it is allocated, would be advantageous to PGG.

How did these proposals change during the negotiation process? Initially, the government planned to close the mines sooner, but the deadlines were ultimately postponed until 2049 due to the unions' high bargaining power (high union density, political leverage and structural leverage due to Poland's energy system high dependency on coal).

The outcomes of negotiations:

The outcome of the social dialogue on the transformation of PGE and PGG is the guarantee, through Social Agreements signed in 2021 and 2022 (and the Act on social

protection for employees in the electricity sector and the lignite mining industry published in 2023) of a set of compensation packages (social benefits) and employment guarantees for PGG and, to some extent, PGE employees. For both cases, these include the one-off severance payments, energy and mining leave, additional social benefits, salary indexation (for PGG), etc.

Retraining programmes apply to PGG miners; this is guaranteed in the Social Agreement as well as in the Silesian Province Transformation Fund. PGG employees are also entitled to one-off retraining entitling a change of industry and profession; such provisions are not included in the Social Agreement for lignite mining, to the best of our knowledge. In addition, in November 2025, PGG and Koleje Śląskie (KŚ) (Silesian Railways, state-owned company) signed a letter of intent regarding a programme to retrain miners as KŚ employees, under which up to 200 employees of the liquidated mines may find employment in the railway industry as train drivers, mechanics or electrical engineers. The programme is scheduled to run until December 2030, with the possibility of extension. Training for employees is to be funded by the EU.<sup>104</sup> In this context, it is worth noting that during the amendment of the Act on social protection in hard coal mining signed in 2025, the workers' side often pointed out the need to include projects to retrain employees for work in other industries. However, this was ignored by the government, as this aspect is to be addressed by the Silesian Province Transformation Fund (as part of the Just Transition Fund - EU programme), which provides for the possibility of submitting ideas by, e.g., companies, entrepreneurs or local government units and receiving a grant for the implementation of a programme concerning, e.g., the retraining of employees. This fund also provides an opportunity to create new companies or start-ups.<sup>105</sup> Furthermore, public-private initiatives to retrain miners appear to be important from the point of view of transformation in the Silesia region. Program the 'Wind - a mine of opportunities' (Program „Wiatr - kopalnia możliwości”) aims to support miners from, e.g., the Upper Silesia region, and other workers in the mining sector in acquiring the skills and knowledge that will enable them to change careers and gain competence in the operation and maintenance of onshore wind farm installations. The programme is scheduled to run for six editions starting in 2023, and in

<sup>104</sup> <https://www.slaskie.pl/content/nowe-tory-kariery> [access 9.12.2025]

<sup>105</sup> <https://ftws.pl/zglos-projekt-transformacyjny-otwieramy-sciezke-zglaszania-pomyslow/> [accessed: 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2025]

2025 (the fourth edition), several dozen miners took part in the programme and many have already received job offers in the renewable energy industry. The programme is implemented in cooperation with private companies and public institutions such as: EDF Renewables Polska (private entity), Vulcan Training & Consultancy (private), Spółka Restrukturyzacji Kopalń (The Mining Restructuring Company which is a state-owned company)..

It is also worth mentioning the PGE (Bełchatów lignite mine) employee retraining programme, which is to be financed by the Just Transition Fund for the Bełchatów region (one of 35 regions). Approximately EUR 350 million has been allocated for its implementation as part of the support for energy transition in the New Energy Area programme. The programme provides for the retraining of miners for jobs in sectors such as IT, electromobility, and renewables. There is no information on specific numbers, but the Territorial Just Transition Plan for the Łódź Province assumes that 2,858 PGE Bełchatów employees should be retrained by 2030, which is further reinforced by the fact that 67% of all employees at this mine are under 45 years of age. In addition, the New Energy Area programme also provides for the construction of R&D centres for new energy technologies, where, in theory, miners will be able to work after acquiring the necessary skills.<sup>106</sup>

In the context of PGE and the Bełchatów lignite mine, it is also worth noting that since September 2021, the Łódź Province Competence Development Centre (funded by the EU) has been operating, coordinated by the local government and PGE. The centre aims to help miners acquire skills that will enable them to work in the renewable energy sector.<sup>107</sup>

As for the relocation schemes, the social agreement in hard coal mining included a system for transferring employees from liquidated units to other units that will continue to operate.

When it comes to the new economic investments promises that has been realized, as well as those which has been unfulfilled, the unions in PGG proposed investments in clean coal technologies (CO<sub>2</sub> capture etc.) as an alternative transitional solution before nuclear power-based energy sector (or in parallel with nuclear power). However, these investments are not realized due to the lack of political will as well as treating natural gas (LNG) as a priority provisional source of energy during the transition to nuclear energy and renewables. Moreover,

<sup>106</sup> <https://klaster.one/transformacja-regionu-belchatowskiego> [accessed: 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2025]

<sup>107</sup> <https://crklodzkie.pl/> [accessed: 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2025]

the government proposed Silesian Province Transformation Fund (at least EUR 120 million + guarantees of EUR 250 million) for investments in new technologies (startups, electromobility, renewables), support of local companies in energy sector, rearrangement of industrial and mining facilities etc. Additionally, government has decided to include the amount of funds from the Just Transition Fund (min. EUR 2.066–2.750 billion) to the Transformation Fund in the social agreement signed.

#### 4. Analysis of local level social dialogue dynamics

At the local level, one of the most important institutions shaping the dynamics of social dialogue are provincial social dialogue councils (WRDS, Wojewódzkie Rady Dialogu Społecznego), whose functions and activities were described in report T2.1. In the case of the PGG and PGE companies, these will be the WRDS in Katowice, Łódź and Wrocław. Łódź Province includes Bełchatów region, while Wrocław (Lower Silesia Province) – Turoszów. In this section, we will focus mainly on the level of discourse, where we will show the evolution of the dynamics of energy transition in the region and companies, the practices used by social partners and their expectations regarding the consequences of the transitions in the three regions undergoing transitions.

The dynamics of social dialogue in the Bełchatów region (Łódź Province) and the Turoszów Basin (Lower Silesia Province) – the case of PGE

The case of PGE is characteristic due to its variable course, the expectations of social partners, and the outcome of the transformation of the Turoszów and Bełchatów regions, which are dominated by the lignite mining industry. However, we will focus more on the latter region due to the more advanced local social dialogue activities in transformation. Below we summarise the dynamics and outcomes of the social dialogue in the lignite mining regions, while in the next part of the text we analyse positions and resolutions of WRDS in Łódź and Wrocław.

\*\*\*

WRDS in Łódź and Wrocław consistently emphasized the need to protect socio-economic stability of lignite regions, framing lignite mining as essential for preventing unemployment

and economic collapse in Bełchatów and Turoszów region. The push for Złoczew lignite mine (Bełchatów region) in 2016–2019 was justified as a strategic investment for regional economic development and national energy security. Later, the narrative shifted toward a “just transition” with WRDS in Łódź supporting nuclear power to ensure responsible economic, social, and environmental change.

As for the outcomes, the social partners' approval of a nuclear power plant in Bełchatów (2025) reflects an attempt to secure future jobs and regional development. Inclusion of retraining programs and hydrogen infrastructure in Zgorzelec County (it includes Turoszów region) shows efforts of the social partners to create new employment opportunities in the region. However, the apparently limited involvement of Wrocław's WRDS in the future of KWB Turów (in Turoszów region) and negotiations suggests uneven inclusivity across regions of workers interests. It appears that the local governments are more focused on investments in alternative energy sources rather than protecting jobs or retraining which is not of priority importance.

Practices of the WRDS in Łódź and Wrocław as local social dialogue institutions shaping expectations and regional interests in transformation of local economy show the long-standing reliance on lignite mining. This situation is reflected in WRDS resolutions supporting Złoczew mine investment and National Energy Security Agency HQ in Bełchatów region. In the latter region, WRDS in Łódź expected government alignment with Poland's Energy Policy (PEP) 2040 and the lignite sector program (2018–2030), reinforcing resistance to rapid coal phase-out. The aim of the PEP 2040 is „[Poland's] energy security – while ensuring economic competitiveness, energy efficiency and reducing the environmental impact of the energy sector – taking into account the optimal use of own energy resources.”<sup>108</sup> While the local WRDS welcomed the policy proposal, representative unions, including Brown Coal Mining Trade Union and OPZZ (All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions), protested against it, arguing that "people are losing their jobs [in hard coal mining], and we are not being told anything, and the same fate awaits us. Let us not be misled by any promises

<sup>108</sup> <https://www.gov.pl/web/ia/polityka-energetyczna-polski-do-2040-r-pep2040> [accessed 9.12.2025]

that are unfounded, mean nothing and will not guarantee us anything.”<sup>109</sup> In the former lignite sector program (published in 2018), it was planned to create conditions conducive to the production of energy from lignite based on modern technologies, including the use of coal to produce liquid and natural gas-based fuels, also in Bełchatów and Turów<sup>110</sup>. The union representatives (the National Mining and Energy Section of Solidarity Trade Union, the “Kadra” Trade Union of KWB Bełchatów) took part in a meeting of the tripartite team for the lignite industry, during which they joined a working group tasked with developing the programme.<sup>111</sup>

The evolution of practices and expectations shows that WRDS in Łódź shifted from defending lignite mining (2015–2021) to endorsing mainly nuclear-based energy, and renewables to a limited extent (2025), reframing transition as “strategic” and “just”. WRDS practices evolved from lobbying for lignite mining investments, and retraining programs for workers, to supporting innovation in renewables (green hydrogen, solar. WRDS expectations moved from prolonging lignite mining to securing alternative energy projects (hydrogen in Turów<sup>112</sup> and nuclear based in Bełchatów) and regional investment guarantees.

When it comes to the trust, communication and local leadership, WRDS Łódź resolutions and government assurances (e.g., National Energy Security Agency HQ promise) were critical for maintaining trust, though unmet promises (NABE not launched) caused concerns for the social and economic stability of the region, and misgivings of social partners. In Bełchatów, WRDS Łódź demonstrated a proactive attitude by creating a transformation task force and pushing for nuclear investment. In Turossów region, relatively weaker WRDS Wrocław engagement (the institution published one resolution on green transition in the region, compared to WRDS Łódź, which published a total of approximately 15 resolutions and positions) and reliance on Lower Silesia Provincial Assembly in Wrocław resolutions

<sup>109</sup> <https://i.pl/zwiazki-zawodowe-protestuja-w-stolicy-przeciwko-projektowi-polityki-energetycznej-polski-do-2040-roku-stop-likwidacji-miejsc/ar/c1-15211762> [accessed 9.12.2025]

<sup>110</sup> <https://www.gov.pl/web/aktywa-panstwowe/rada-ministrow-przyjela-program-dla-sektora-gornictwa-wegla-brunatnego-w-polsce> [accessed 9.12.2025]

<sup>111</sup> [https://orka.sejm.gov.pl/opinie8.nsf/dok?OpenAgent&390\\_20170705](https://orka.sejm.gov.pl/opinie8.nsf/dok?OpenAgent&390_20170705) [accessed 9.12.2025]

<sup>112</sup> A team of experts has developed a concept for implementing green hydrogen at the Turów lignite mine. The analysis confirms the possibility of replacing fossil fuel-based energy generation with renewable sources, including a pumped storage power plant, which will be built after the mine's reclamation and will serve as an energy storage facility. <https://klastry.org.pl/wodor-w-turowie-zamiast-kombinatu-pge/> [accessed 9.12.2025]

suggest less effective local leadership. Although the implementation of Social Agreement for lignite mining in 2023 phased out mine's closure and included job protection for workers, this seems to be rather the outcome of unions' actions at the national level rather than WRDS at the local level. Below we analyse the WRDS in Łódź and Wrocław positions and resolutions.

\*\*\*

In 2015-2021, the WRDS in Łódź reflected the positive attitude of the social partners towards the continued operation of the PGE Bełchatów mine. Since 2021, the WRDS narrative has focused more on the search for new alternatives (in connection with PGE and the government abandoning further exploitation of coal deposits in Bełchatów and Złoczew), culminating in the approval of a plan to build a nuclear power plant in the region which was approved in 2025.

In statements published in 2016 and 2019, WRDS advocated for the construction of an opencast lignite mine in Złoczew, which meant continuing lignite mining in the region until 2040, i.e. shortly after the end of operations at Bełchatów mine. This investment was seen as strategic both from the point of view of the socioeconomic development of the region, which is struggling with problems such as unemployment and economic collapse, and from the point of view of national interests (maintaining the country's energy security in line with Poland's Energy Policy until 2040 and the National Climate Plan for 2021-2030). These WRDS positions were in line with the government's policy and the Programme for the lignite mining sector in Poland for 2018-2030. In 2019, the WRDS in Łódź adopted a resolution on the development of the PGE mine in Bełchatów and the establishment of another mine in Złoczew. The WRDS's voice in support of the continued exploitation of lignite in the Bełchatów region is also expressed in the WRDS's 2021 opinion on the transformation of the energy sector in Poland. The WRDS proposed that the National Energy Security Agency – NABE - (which ultimately did not commence operations) be established by PGE GiEK S.A. and based in Bełchatów region. This would guarantee the continued exploitation of coal and, consequently, the development of the region. This opinion was adopted by the WRDS in June 2021. At the same time, this is important to point out that WRDS established in 2021 a task force for the transformation of the Bełchatów region, whose objectives include *'developing,*

*stabilising and expanding jobs and the situation of energy sector employees in the region, as well as transforming the national and regional coal and energy sector in the context of the introduction of the Green Deal and climate policy, taking into account the restructuring of the region*. In this context, the opinions of employees and employers on the Territorial Just Transition Plan for the Łódź Province, and in particular the future of the Bełchatów mine, are also important. The unions pointed out that the data from the Ministry of State Assets on lignite mining and employment are underestimated in relation to the information provided by PGE. Also, the objectives related to climate neutrality and European Green Deal policy need to be specified. Therefore, the unions called for their involvement in the creation and monitoring of the Plan, like the Social Agreement for Silesia Province in which industrial monoculture prevails. Employers, on the other hand, had concerns about the schedule for phasing out the PGE mine in Bełchatów, whose closure may be accelerated in 2025, and therefore called for advance planning of innovation and investment in green hydrogen technologies<sup>113</sup> and the development of the renewables industry, as well as the inclusion of the SME sector in this process.

Yet, the HQ of the NABE was not determined, which caused concern among the WRDS members in 2023 (the WRDS then published a resolution calling on the presidium to take action to determine the seat of the NABE). The government assured that the NABE would be in the region. This is important because it would seal the future of the region for which the Social Agreement described earlier was envisaged. NABE ultimately did not commence operations (the plan to create it was abandoned by the new centre-liberal government in power since 2023) while the mine in Bełchatów, according to information from November 2025, will cease operations in 2026. However, the Bełchatów mine (KWB Bełchatów) is effectively divided into two opencast fields – the second of these, Szczerców, is to be closed in 2038, but information indicates that this may happen even earlier.<sup>114</sup> In 2025, WRDS supported the idea of creating a nuclear power plant in the Bełchatów region in a statement and then in a resolution, which completely changes the narrative of the social

<sup>113</sup> Resolution No. 8/2021 of the Provincial Social Dialogue Council of the Łódź Province of 17 June 2021 on expressing the opinion of the Provincial Social Dialogue Council of the Łódź Province on the Territorial Just Transition Plan for the Łódź Province,  
[https://www.lodzkie.pl/files/297/uchwa%C5%82a\\_nr\\_8\\_WRDS\\_TPST\\_W%C5%81.pdf](https://www.lodzkie.pl/files/297/uchwa%C5%82a_nr_8_WRDS_TPST_W%C5%81.pdf) [accessed 9.12.2025].

<sup>114</sup> <https://spidersweb.pl/2024/02/belchatow-koniec-wydobywania-wegla-planu.html> [accessed 9.12.2025]

partners that has so far supported the activities of PGE and fossil fuels energy. The WRDS recognises the transition to atom-based energy as ‘a strategic step towards (...) a just transition (...) aimed at responsible economic, social and environmental change’. Support for the idea of building the power plant is very broad and includes, in addition to the WRDS, municipal and county local government units, as well as the Łódź Provincial Council (as a body representing the government). In addition, investments in renewable energy sources are also planned. Some of the investments are to be completed by the end of 2026, and those carried out in post-mining areas should be completed by 2030.

The situation is different in the Turoszów region (Lower Silesia, near Czechia border), where PGE also operates a lignite mine. However, there is little information coming from the local WRDS. What we know is that the WRDS in Wrocław expressed its support for the resolution of the Lower Silesian Provincial Assembly (body representing the government) of April 2021 on supporting efforts to include the Turoszów Basin in the Just Transition Fund support area. The local government opposes the sudden closure of the PGE mine, as requested by the Czechia to the Court of Justice EU. As stated by the Assembly: ‘in our opinion, demanding the immediate closure of the mine is discrimination against one of the EU Member States and its citizens’. At the same time, the local government supports the idea of creating new jobs, including investments in the renewables industry (the construction of hydrogen infrastructure in the region which is taking place) and employee retraining programmes.

The dynamics of social dialogue at the local level in the Upper Silesia region (Silesia Province) – the case of PGG

Social dialogue on the transition and negotiating socioeconomic change in the Upper Silesia region is extensive and multifaceted. While there is not much information available on PGG in the context of WRDS, as well as the situation in the company’s mines, there is much more data on national and EU programmes concerning the transition of hard coal mining in the region. As in the previous case, below we summarise the dynamics and outcomes of the social dialogue in the lignite mining regions, while in the next part of the text we analyse the discourse of positions and resolutions of, e.g., WRDS in Katowice.

\*\*\*

The WRDS emphasizes maintaining employment in hard-coal mining and mitigating regional inequalities. Initiatives such as the Programme for Silesia (2017) aimed at “preservation and development of industry... and creating new jobs,” while resolutions on vocational training (2024) sought to align skills with labour market needs amid demographic challenges. Concerns about fair and just transition were explicit in WRDS 2021 resolution, which criticized the exclusion of Upper Silesia from the Fair Transformation Mechanism as “highly unfair”, highlighting the need for taking care of protection of social partners interests (jobs and investments).

Established social dialogue structures like WRDS and strong bargaining power of local unions shaped expectations by reinforcing the narrative of state-led industrial protection. The WRDS’s advisory role and bilateral union-government agreements (2018) reflected practices directed at securing employment and economic stability.

Initially focused on hard coal mining industry preservation and reindustrialisation, WRDS gradually embraced the transition narratives, including Just Transition planning (2021) and support for vocational programmes (2024). Expectations shifted from resisting EU climate policy to advocating reforms, such as freezing ETS prices (2025), signaling adaptation rather than outright opposition.

Communication was mediated through WRDS resolutions, positions, and participation in steering committees (e.g., Programme for Silesia). Local leadership was evident in proactive initiatives like the regional Just Transition Plan and lobbying for institutional reforms (e.g., creation of the Ministry of Energy, realized in 2025). However, perceived delays in implementing promised projects weakened confidence among social partners.

Below we analyse the WRDS in Katowice positions and resolutions concerning the local social dialogue on transition process.

\*\*\*

In the case of Upper Silesia, the government is the initiator of strategic projects. Two economic development programmes for Upper Silesia were announced between 2017 and 2020. As part of the Strategy for Responsible Development, the “Programme for Silesia” was announced by the government in December 2017. Its main aim is to bring about a change in

the economic profile of the region and gradually replace traditional economic sectors, such as mining, with new ventures in more productive, innovative, and technologically advanced sectors. Another goal of the “Programme for Silesia”, according to the social partners, was reindustrialisation, i.e., the preservation and development of industry in the Silesian Province with a view to keeping as many good jobs in industry as possible and creating new ones. The management of the implementation of the projects included in the programme was to take place both at the central level, in a specially created Subcommittee for the Programme for Silesia at the Ministry of Development, and at the regional level, i.e. in a steering committee at the Silesian Province Governor's Office and the WRDS in Katowice. According to the unions, most of the measures and investments announced under the Programme for Silesia have not been started, with only infrastructure investments being implemented, although not in coal mining or in other energy industries in the region, but in, e.g., transport (roads, highways etc.)<sup>115</sup>

The WRDS in Katowice<sup>116</sup> signed a resolution in December 2016 in favour of an integrated development policy for the Silesian Province, assuming, e.g., the creation of a low-carbon energy and emission-free coal-nuclear synergy, the reindustrialisation (development of areas and facilities) left over from mining, and the restoration of the investment value of degraded industrial areas. Another resolution of the WRDS in Katowice was the adoption of a position in 2022 on the creation of a ministry responsible for energy transition in Poland. However, this did not happen, but in August 2025, the Ministry of Energy was established, which is responsible, e.g., for energy transition, including the development of renewables, nuclear energy and the security and diversification of energy supplies. However, this might be the effect of the current political situation (tensions in ruling coalition and falling public support) of the liberal cabinet elected in 2023 rather than actual concerns about local transition.

In 2018, the employee side, represented by NSZZ Solidarność, addressed the prime minister about the deteriorating economic situation in the Silesian Province, including Upper

---

<sup>115</sup> <https://www.pois.gov.pl/strony/wiadomosci/program-dla-slaska-kolejne-inwestycje-napedzaja-gospodarke/> [accessed 9.12.2025]

<sup>116</sup> De facto, the Council set up a problem-solving group on the development of social dialogue in January 2017. In turn, in 2021 it decided to strengthen the systemic cooperation of the SDC with the provincial SDC.

Silesia, as the scale of problems in various industries exceeded the capabilities and competences of the WRDS. The unions feared the liquidation of the energy industry in connection with the EU's climate and energy policy:

“The Presidium of the Silesian Region Board of NSZZ Solidarność expresses its deep concern about the deteriorating economic situation in the Silesian Province and the sluggishness of Polish government representatives in taking actions and decisions that are crucial for our region (...). In February 2018, together with the National Section of Hard Coal Mining of NSZZ Solidarność and the National Secretariat of Mining and Energy of NSZZ Solidarność, we sent a letter to the Prime Minister in connection with the adoption by the European Parliament of the so-called ETS Directive in a form that is extremely unfavourable to Poland. At that time, we pointed out the threats to our country's economy posed by the further tightening of the EU's climate and energy policy. We also requested a meeting with the Prime Minister to discuss measures to mitigate the effects of the ETS Directive on Polish energy-intensive industries.”<sup>117</sup>

Ultimately, the unions managed to negotiate a bilateral agreement with the government on mitigating the effects of EU climate policy on hard coal mining. Specifically, this involves a system of allowances and compensation for costs related to energy purchases.<sup>118</sup> The union's position is special here, because by establishing a special relationship that goes beyond the framework of social dialogue, it can negotiate better agreements especially in the hard coal mining industry.

In 2018, the WRDS in Katowice appointed its representative to the Steering Committee of the “Programme for Silesia”, showing cooperation between the social partners and the government. Another programme is the Development of the Economic Area of the Katowice Special Economic Zone in 2019. An important resolution issued (these resolutions are issued by the Presidents of the WRDS, de facto representing the government in regions) in 2021 by WRDS in Katowice is the one concerning the implementation of the Fair Transformation Fund in the NUTS 3 area. Among other things, the social partners state that

<sup>117</sup> <https://solidarnosckatowice.pl/sytuacja-w-regionie-coraz-powazniejsza-bedzie-spotkanie-z-premierem/> [accessed: 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2025]

<sup>118</sup> <https://solidarnosckatowice.pl/pierwsze-efekty-rozmow-z-rzadem/> [accessed: 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2025]

the lack of support from the Fair Transformation Mechanism (MST) - due to a planned but uncertain mining project in one municipality in Upper Silesia - is considered “highly unfair”. Such a decision could prevent a fair and effective transformation of the entire region and the achievement of development and environmental goals. In addition, WRDS in Katowice, based on resolution published in 2022, asked the Prime Minister of Poland to act on the suspension of the EU ETS due to the challenges and economic problems caused by the pandemic and the war in Ukraine (rising costs of living and energy).

Another important initiative in 2021 was the announcement of the Silesian Province Just Transition Plan, initiated by the Silesian Province Management Board, and coordinated by the Provincial Labour Market Council in Katowice in consultation with social partners and local governments, among others, and aimed mainly at helping the mining regions in Upper Silesia. The roots of the team date back to 2019, when a regional team for mining region initiatives was established in the province and coordinated the region's work within the Mining Regions Platform created by the EC. The team and the initiative council have an advisory and consultative role. It uses funds from the Just Transition Fund and other EU sources. The starting point for the preparation of the Regional Just Transition Plan is the Silesian Province Development Strategy ‘Silesia 2030’, adopted in October 2020. The vision for the region's development presented in the strategy is in line with the objectives of the European Green Deal, which is focused on creating a competitive economy that considers climate neutrality and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>119</sup> As part of this initiative, the local government seeks to gain practical experience from successful mining region transformations, e.g. in Westphalia, Germany, and implement it in 7 mining subregions in the region.

In March 2025, one of the WRDS statements read that ‘for the Polish and EU economies, every month of operation of this system [ETS] in its current form means measurable losses, loss of competitive position, and the closure of more industrial plants and jobs. In view of the above, the WRDS in Katowice recommends freezing the price of CO2 emission allowances at the level agreed through tripartite dialogue until a reform of the

---

<sup>119</sup> <https://wupkatowice.praca.gov.pl/-/14884357-plan-sprawiedliwej-transformacji-województwa-slaskiego-nabiera-kształtu> [accessed: 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2025]

emissions trading system has been developed and adopted.’<sup>120</sup> This statement was a part of the Polish Presidency in the EU in the first half of 2025.

## 5. Conclusions

### 5.1. What was the technological disruption, and how did it affect the local context?

The Polish coal mining industry faced the following disruption:

- Green transition encompasses EU climate policy (mainly European Green Deal) and Poland’s Energy Policy 2040 which mandated a gradual phase-out of coal and lignite, pushing companies from conventional generation (based on fossils) toward renewables and low-carbon technologies as in the case of PGE company.

As for the local impact of technological disruption:

- Lignite Regions (Bełchatów region, Turoszów region) characterized by mono-industrial dependence made transition socially and economically very difficult. Closure plans of PGE Bełchatów and Turów mines triggered fears of unemployment and economic collapse in the region, leading to strong union resistance and local government lobbying for alternative investments (e.g., nuclear-based, hydrogen).
- Upper Silesia (hard-coal industry region) is historically strongly unionized and politically influential; the region experienced prolonged negotiations on transition and delayed closures of mines. Despite EU pressure, mine liquidation timelines were extended to 2049, reflecting strong local (and national) bargaining power of unions.

### 5.2. How does the disruption alter established industrial relations or negotiation practices?

- Shift in the bargaining – from distributive to integrative and back; early negotiations (2016–2020) between social partners were distributive, focused on wages, protecting employment and financial survival of companies. Post-2020, talks incorporated structural issues—negotiated closure schedules, as well as social protections of workers and retraining—signaling a move toward integrative bargaining. However, trust deficits between partners and political change (right-wing populist vs. liberal cabinets) often reverted dialogue to

<sup>120</sup> <https://www.wkatowicach.eu/informacje/w-katowicach/Wojewodzka-Rada-Dialogu-Spolecznego-wypracowala-wspolne-stanowisko-wobec-unijnego-Zielonego-Ladu/idn:8851> [accessed: 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2025]

distributive ones. The presence of attitudinal structuring, whereby one party shapes the other's perceptions and attitudes to advance their own or a mutual advantage, can be observed in the case of hard coal sector negotiations focused on a social agreement in 2020–21. During these negotiations, trade unions utilised their expert positions in talks with the government, becoming the core source of the main solutions implemented in the final form of the social agreement.

- The state of political affairs and industrial relations on national level: IR in this context were deeply politicized. Due to its power, the government acted as ultimate decision-maker, balancing EU obligations, national energy security issues, on the one hand, with workers' interests and business (mining companies) goals. Unions leverage increased, seemingly, under right-wing and populist governments (2005-2007, 2015-2023), which sought to delay decarbonization mostly in 2015-2020, while liberal cabinets (2007-2015, 2023 onward) pushed faster transition but faced social partners resistance.
- The impact of disruption on negotiation practices varied in the companies studied; in PGG social dialogue was more crisis-driven, which is evidenced by the warning strikes (2020) and protests that forced wage concessions and delayed mine closures. The 2021 Social Agreement introduced in hard coal mining phased plants shutdowns and social benefits implementation but remains partially introduced. In PGE negotiations seemed more strategic, culminating in the 2023 Social Agreement for lignite mining and energy industry. Despite protests (e.g., Warsaw 2023), agreements included severance pay, miners' leave, and retraining programs. However, concerns about the economic future of mining regions persist.

### **5.3. What is the overall direction of change?**

- On the one hand, the transition trajectory in PGE could be characterized as a managed transformation. PGE adopted a decarbonization strategy, investing mostly in renewables infrastructure. Closure of Bełchatów and Turów mines is scheduled for 2026–2038, with retraining, social benefits for workers, and regional economic development plans (hydrogen, nuclear-based, employment in IT industries etc.).
- On the other hand, PGG could be described as a disrupted adaptation. While formal agreements exist, their implementation is slow, and political uncertainty fosters expectations of prolonged operating of the hard-coal mining industry. Mine closures

postponed to 2049, reflecting unions' success in securing employment, but structural change is delayed also by the politicization of IR.

#### **5.4. How might these insights inform future social dialogue or policymaking around technological transition?**

- Integrate long-term planning with local context: transition strategies must address mono-industrial dependence through concrete investment in alternative energy industries (renewables, hydrogen, nuclear-based). Declarative plans without visible implementation erode trust and fuel social resistance.
- Enhance transparency: WRDS councils played a role but showed uneven effectiveness (e.g., proactive in Bełchatów, weak to some extent in Turów). Strengthening local social dialogue institutions and ensuring timely communication can mitigate social conflict.
- Link social protections to Active Labor Market Policies: mining leave and severance payments provide short-term relief but risk creating “passive transition.” Retraining programs (e.g., Wind – a mine of opportunities, partnerships with Silesian Railways in Upper Silesia) and agreements with private sector could be a good starting point, but crucial is the democratic dialogue between social partners.
- Reduce political instability in transition governance: frequent shifts in government stance undermine credibility of agreements. Institutionalizing transition frameworks (e.g., through politically independent agencies) and securing EU notifications early can stabilize social partners' expectations.
- Balance speed and “social justice” during the transition period: accelerating closures of facilities without robust social safeguards risks backlash and delegitimizing climate policy. Conversely, excessive delays (as in PGG) lock regions into declining industries. A calibrated approach—phased closures tied to measurable progress in alternative job creation—is desirable.

#### **Literature**

Döringer, S. (2021). ‘The problem-centred expert interview’. Combining qualitative interviewing approaches for investigating implicit expert knowledge. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 24(3), 265–278.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2020.1766777>

- Garaudel, P., Noël, F., & Schmidt, G. (2008). Overcoming the risks of restructuring through the integrative bargaining process: Two case studies in a French context. *Human Relations*, 61(9), 1293–1331. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726708094913>
- Gardawski, Juliusz., Mrozowicki, Adam., & Czarzasty, J. (2012). *Trade unions in Poland*. ETUI.
- Kochan, T. A., & Lipsky, D. B. (2019). 1. Conceptual Foundations: Walton and McKersie's Subprocesses of Negotiations. In *Negotiations and Change* (pp. 15–19). Cornell University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501731686-003>
- Lis, M., & Kotelska, J. (2022). *Restrukturyzacja górnictwa węgla kamiennego w Polsce w perspektywie oceny interesariuszy*. Akademia WSB.
- Marszowski, R. (2015). Działania restrukturyzacyjne wobec górnictwa węgla kamiennego i ich wpływ na otoczenie społeczno-gospodarcze. Stan i perspektywy. *Humanum Międzynarodowe Studia Społeczno-Humanistyczne*. [www.humanum.org.pl](http://www.humanum.org.pl)
- NIK. (2017). *Funkcjonowanie górnictwa węgla kamiennego w latach 2007-2015 na tle założeń programu rządowego*. <https://www.nik.gov.pl/kontrola/P/15/074/LKA/>
- Poland - Countries & Regions - IEA. (n.d.). Retrieved June 26, 2025, from <https://www.iea.org/countries/poland>
- Smoleń, M., Kubiczek, P., & Warsaw, J. R. (2025). *The decline of coal in Turów The region needs a Just Transition Plan*. <https://instrat.pl/en/decline-of-coal-in-turow/>
- Terytorialny Plan Sprawiedliwej Transformacji Województwa Łódzkiego (2023).
- Żuk, P., & Szulecki, K. (2020). Unpacking the right-populist threat to climate action: Poland's pro-governmental media on energy transition and climate change. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 66, 101485. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.ERSS.2020.101485>
- Żuk, P., Żuk, P., & Pluciński, P. (2021). Coal basin in Upper Silesia and energy transition in Poland in the context of pandemic: The socio-political diversity of preferences in energy and environmental policy. *Resources Policy*, 71, 101987. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.RESOURPOL.2021.101987>