

Industrial relations and social dialogue

Supporting regions in the just transition: Role of social partners



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Introduction

In its commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the EU introduced a series of legislative proposals aimed at achieving climate neutrality in the EU by 2050. Intermediate targets have been set for achieving at least a 55% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. The European Green Deal is a major EU policy initiative that emphasises the need for transforming our economies to attain a green way of life, in a fair and just way, leaving no one behind. The package of policy proposals that form the European Green Deal recognises that reducing greenhouse gas emissions entails significant social and economic costs at both national and regional levels.

At the same time, several initiatives put forward by the European Commission and the Council of the European Union also focus on the role of social dialogue in the just transition. The Commission communication on decent work worldwide (European Commission, 2022a) notes that the EU and Member States should contribute to global partnerships and multi-stakeholder initiatives that are, among other things, relevant to promoting a just transition. The communication also proposes scaling up support for social partners to launch initiatives around the just transition and decent work goals in supply chains. Similarly, the Commission communication on strengthening social dialogue sets out a number of measures to enable social dialogue and collective bargaining, including capacity building, and to provide access to relevant information and appropriate institutional support (European Commission, 2023a). The communication is accompanied by a proposal for a Council recommendation that recognises the role that social partners should play in anticipating and addressing the employment and social consequences of the twin green and digital transition (European Commission, 2023b). Furthermore, the Council recommendation on ensuring a just transition towards climate neutrality endorses the involvement of social partners at all levels, including in the design and implementation of transition pathways for industrial ecosystems (Council of the European Union, 2022).

The need to ensure a just transition is particularly urgent in regions that are heavily dependent on fossil fuels and carbon-intensive industries. Employer organisations and trade unions have been increasingly involved in national tripartite and bipartite forums discussing issues related to the just transition and the transformation of regions that are particularly affected

by it. Similarly, EU-level social partners, at both cross-sectoral and sectoral levels, have been engaging in debates to formulate a strategy to tackle climate change that puts people at the core of the ecological transformation. Ensuring a just transition means transforming the economy ‘in a way that is as fair and inclusive as possible to everyone concerned, creating decent work opportunities and leaving no one behind’ (ILO, undated). Such a transition needs to consider the views of all stakeholders, and it is critical that trade unions and employer organisations are consulted and that meaningful social dialogue takes place. The contribution of these groups to policy measures and the conclusion of collective agreements that provide effective solutions in managing the change can enormously benefit the regions and people affected.

Focusing on regions in transition: Territorial just transition plans

Undoubtedly, some regions, for example those heavily reliant on fossil fuel-based industries, are more vulnerable than others; social dialogue can play a major role in addressing the negative impacts of the transition on workers, businesses and communities early in the transformation process. It is therefore important that social partners are involved in the various stages of the formulation of territorial just transition plans (TJTTPs), which are plans that aim to protect the regions most negatively affected by the transition. Social partners can ensure that workers, businesses, sectors, regions and communities are protected in the following ways.

- Workers are protected through measures to ensure their employability, including retraining or reskilling for new jobs in the same or different sectors.
- Businesses, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and sectors are assisted through measures supporting their energy transition to low-carbon technologies so jobs can be created and transformed for the new production models based on the green transition.
- Regions and communities are supported to move away from production systems based on fossil fuels, for example by encouraging them to invest in infrastructure and skills in green sectors, transportation networks and protecting people from energy poverty.

The most affected regions have been targeted by the European Commission, through dialogue with the Member States, with support through the TJTPs and the Just Transition Mechanism. These tools were set up to address the socioeconomic impact of the transition and the specific challenges in each region while preparing the regions to meet their objectives by 2030. A participatory approach to designing and implementing plans is envisaged, with the social partners being recognised as stakeholders in the transition process.

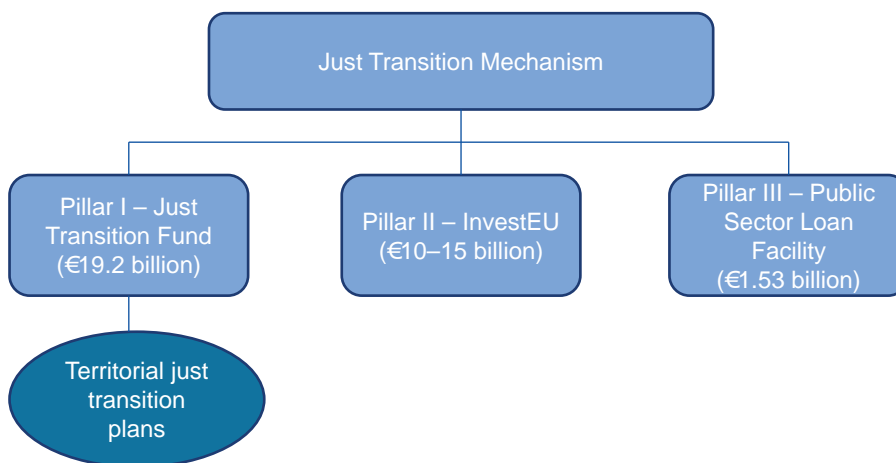
Just Transition Mechanism

As part of the European Green Deal’s objective to ensure that no one is left behind, in 2020 the Commission introduced the Just Transition Mechanism (see Figure 1) and associated funding in the context of the EU Cohesion Policy. The mechanism’s objective is to support the regions and people most negatively affected by the transition to climate neutrality. The Commission recognises that vast opportunities stem from the climate transition but that challenges to industries, individuals, households and communities also exist. Social and economic challenges are particularly apparent in regions dependent on coal, as the energy production supply chain is deeply intertwined in local and regional economies. Therefore, socioeconomic costs need to be addressed early in the process and with the participation of key stakeholders, such as national authorities, regional players, social partners, civil society, businesses and the research community. Undoubtedly, certain regions will be disproportionately affected by the transition; the goal of

achieving climate neutrality can be overwhelming for them and they may lack the capacity to deal with the transition effectively. The Just Transition Mechanism consists of three pillars: the Just Transition Fund (JTF), which will subsidise policy interventions aimed at alleviating the socioeconomic costs of the green transition in selected regions; the InvestEU scheme, dedicated to generating investments for just transition objectives; and the Public Sector Loan Facility, which will mobilise funding for the public sector through concessional loans.

TJTPs should be part of operational programmes and can be supported by the European Social Fund Plus, the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund or the JTF, which are approved by the Commission. The JTF was established as part of EU Cohesion Policy, and will invest €19.2 billion in 2021–2027¹ for a wide range of policy interventions, aimed at supporting employment and the diversification of the local economy (by supporting enterprises and economic stakeholders, and supporting SMEs and start-ups to make productive investments); investment in training initiatives, including job search assistance; investments in research and innovation, including energy efficiency, renewable energy, smart and sustainable local mobility, digitalisation, soil regeneration and the circular economy; and investment in social infrastructure such as childcare and elderly care facilities and training centres, including local social services. The fund does not support investments in fossil fuel-related activities, the decommissioning or construction of nuclear power plants or investments in

Figure 1: Just Transition Mechanism and Territorial Just Transition Plans



Source: Authors’ own elaboration

1 The regulatory framework governing the EU’s Cohesion Policy is set for 2021–2027.

reducing energy costs during the energy transition process (European Commission, 2021).

To access support through the JTF, Member States must submit TJTPs, which can cover one or more eligible territories. Eligible territories and an initial set of measures that could be implemented in each Member State were detailed in the European Commission's 2020 European Semester country reports. Eligible regions were selected following a dialogue and agreement between the European Commission and the Member States.

The policy measures put forward aim to protect employment, boost skills and support the transition to a green and competitive local economy. The largest budget allocations under the JTF are for Poland (€3.85 billion), followed by Germany (€2.2 billion), Romania (€1.9 billion), and Czechia (€1.4 billion) (European Commission, 2021).

Governance structure of the territorial just transition plans

Regulation (EU) 2021/1056 establishing the JTF requires Member States to prepare TJTPs together with the relevant local and regional authorities of the territories concerned (Article 11). The regulation stipulates that 'Member States should prepare ... [these plans] in social dialogue and cooperation with the relevant stakeholders, in accordance with the relevant provision of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 on partnership' (recital 18). It also provides that the plans should follow the objectives of the European Pillar of Social Rights, at the heart of which is social dialogue. The regulation also emphasises that partnerships between stakeholders at various levels (national, regional and local) are a central principle in the design, implementation and evaluation processes of TJTPs and subsequent policy interventions. In recognition of the fact that the success of the interventions funded under the Just Transition Mechanism depends on the involvement and knowledge of relevant stakeholders, guidance provided by the European Commission requires such stakeholders to also be involved in operational aspects of interventions, including through membership of monitoring committees.

A review of the TJTPs in terms of structure and organisations involved shows that a majority of Member States managed the process through their monitoring committees, run by managing authorities (for the shared management of EU funds such as the European Social Fund Plus, the European Regional Development Fund and the JTF). While not all plans had been finalised at the time of data collection (December 2022), the Network of Eurofound Correspondents reported that monitoring committees, thematic groups or ad hoc groups consisting of representatives from a variety of organisations, including social partners, have discussed

draft and final plans, proposals for actions at regional and industry levels, monitoring mechanisms and budgets. Therefore, social partners at national level were involved in those committees in line with the European regulation on the implementation of the structural funds.

With regard to the governance structure of TJTPs, there is one leading ministry, usually the ministry of economic or financial affairs, and there are provisions in many countries for multi-level governance. Such multi-level governance systems encompass the following:

- national governance
- cross-departmental governance
- regional governance

At national level, a managing authority is responsible for the European funds (as mentioned above). Thematic subcommittees and working groups design the plans, enlist eligible projects and monitor developments while coordinating with bodies at regional level.

At cross-departmental level, several countries have set up or envisaged the creation of just transition platforms or just transition institutes (for instance, in Czechia and Spain) or other cross-departmental committees.

In accordance with existing regulations on structural funds, provisions about regional governance state that regional economy or development committees have a role in the implementation and monitoring of TJTPs. Countries have set up, or envisage the setting up of, regional just transition committees. In some countries (for example, Finland, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia and Spain), regulations specifically provide that the implementation of the plans is to be undertaken by regional organisations.

Objective and methodology

In the context of policies related to the just transition, the objective of this report is to shed light on the role of social partners in the design and implementation of the TJTPs and how just transition topics are integrated into social dialogue and collective bargaining in the EU. This topic is relevant to social partners and other policymakers at EU, national and regional levels, as it relates to the use of policy tools, such as TJTPs, through which social dialogue has provided input to the transformation of regions. The climate neutrality goals set and agreed at EU and national levels have a defined time horizon, and it is essential that key stakeholders, such as the social partners, contribute to the regional plans, conveying the views and positions of their members regarding the transformation of their economy. In this way, the process of achieving the goals becomes more inclusive. Furthermore, this research gives examples of how social dialogue supports the green transition in various Member States; this evidence

may assist further national social dialogue. Such practices can also inform the EU-level cross-sectoral and sectoral social dialogue initiatives. Finally, the report also investigates how the energy crisis has contributed to delays in the design and implementation of TJTPs in certain Member States.

This report is built on national contributions from the Network of Eurofound Correspondents. National inputs were provided in response to a questionnaire distributed to all national experts. In addition, in-house research has covered some gaps in knowledge regarding

social dialogue practices. Chapter 1 explores the involvement of social partners in the plans, their proposals and their influence on the TJTPs. The effects of the recent energy crisis on the plans are considered in chapter 2. The views of social partners regarding the just transition are discussed in chapter 3, along with some national debates on the energy crisis. In chapter 4, social dialogue and collective bargaining agreements containing just transition elements are examined to identify and illustrate practices. Finally, lessons learned from this research are outlined in the conclusions.

1 Social partners' role in territorial just transition plans

This chapter examines the involvement of social partners in the governance structure of the TJTPs. More specifically, it explores provisions for their involvement in the three stages of just transition plans: design, monitoring and implementation. The chapter also outlines the social partners' proposals to address the most critical issues of the just transition and their influence on the TJTPs.

Involvement in the governance structure of plans

As the plans concern specific regions affected by the green transition, social partners' involvement was examined at different levels: national, sectoral and regional. The report investigated provisions in the plans regarding the role of social partners in the various stages of plans (including future implementation). Therefore, the analysis considers, firstly, at what stage they are involved (design, monitoring or implementation) and, secondly, their level of involvement (national, sectoral or regional). As most of the plans are only in the design phase or at the beginning of their implementation, emphasis has been placed on the design phase, and the social partners' proposals and influence on them.

Member States incorporate the governance structures for the JTF into the existing governance structures set up for the running of EU funds, such as the European Social Fund Plus or the European Regional Development Fund. These structures already include the participation of social partners.

Overall, countries tend to put more emphasis on consultation with peak-level organisations and to some extent sectoral organisations (Table 1). Indeed, nearly all countries have provisions stating that social partners must be consulted in some shape or form at national level during the identification of territorial development priorities. A total of 18 Member States involve social partners at sectoral level and only 14 involve social partners at regional level.

Regarding the involvement of peak-level organisations, most countries plan for them to participate in the design stage of TJTPs. Only six countries (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Luxembourg and Poland) indicated that they had structures in place for including social partners in all three stages of the plans. Spain assigns representatives of peak-level social partners a role as members of the Advisory Council of the Just Transition Institute.² The members discuss the impacts of just transition policies and can set up working groups to focus on specific issues linked to the progress of the just transition in the country. At sectoral level, social partners are more likely to participate in the design stage than any other stage. Social partners in Estonia, Finland, Germany, Poland and Spain have the opportunity to make use of existing structures at all stages.

At regional level, representatives of trade unions and employer organisations participate less, and they are involved mostly at the design stage. Finland, Germany and Poland use their EU fund structures to involve relevant social partners at all levels. It is noteworthy that in some countries social partners' involvement in regional structures was still not entirely clear when information was collected at national level (December 2022). Considering that the plans affect regions, wider participation of social partners is expected at that level. However, this needs to be examined in the context of the organisation of social partners at various levels: they are more likely to be organised at peak and sectoral levels (and of course company level). The following section sheds some light on the actual involvement of social partners in the design phase. Nevertheless, it remains to be seen how regional consultations will be carried out in the future, particularly during the stages of monitoring and implementation of the various approved projects.

² The Spanish Just Transition Institute is the main governance structure at national level. It is an autonomous body whose objective is to identify and adopt measures that guarantee an equitable and supportive treatment of workers and regions affected by the ecological transition. Through its two bodies, the Advisory Council and Governing Council, the institute oversees the development and implementation of the Spanish Just Transition Strategy and supports regions in their drafting of just transition agreements.

Table 1: Countries with provisions for the involvement of social partners in the governance structures of TJTPs, 2022

Member State	Peak-level organisations			Sectoral organisations			Regional organisations		
	Design	Monitoring	Implementation	Design	Monitoring	Implementation	Design	Monitoring	Implementation
Austria	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓
Belgium		✓					✓ ^a		
Bulgaria	✓			✓ ^b			✓ ^b		
Croatia	✓								
Cyprus	✓			✓					
Czechia	✓			✓ ^c			✓ ^c		
Denmark	✓	✓	✓	✓					
Estonia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Finland	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
France	✓			✓ ^b			✓ ^b		
Germany	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Greece		✓							
Hungary				✓ ^d			✓ ^e		
Ireland	✓			✓ ^a					
Italy	✓						✓ ^b		
Latvia	✓	✓		✓	✓				
Lithuania	✓	✓					✓		
Luxembourg	✓	✓	✓						
Malta	✓			✓ ^f			✓ ^f		
Netherlands	✓	✓		✓ ^f			✓ ^f		
Poland	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ ^f	✓ ^f	✓ ^f
Portugal	✓								
Romania	✓			✓			✓		
Slovakia	✓			✓ ^d					
Slovenia	✓								
Spain		✓		✓	✓	✓			
Sweden	✓	✓		✓					

Notes: ^a Sharing of information. ^b Provision of opinions in the consultation phase. ^c Advisory role. ^d Participation through monitoring committees for EU funds. ^e Participation through other projects, such as LIFE in Hungary. ^f Participation through councils (for example, focusing on socioeconomic development), monitoring committees/forums or other associations.

The national governance structure of EU funds provides for extensive social partner involvement, so it is very likely that all Member States consult them when formulating their TJTPs. Therefore, on the finalisation of the few pending plans, some of the data may be revised. In some countries, different representatives of social partners participate in different stages of consultation (for example, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal and Slovakia); in other Member States, social partners' participation in the design stage of the plans means their views are collected during an open consultation phase, for instance Bulgaria (at all levels), France, Ireland and Italy (at peak and regional levels). In certain cases, social partners participate in consultation through tripartite institutions (for example, in Malta and the Netherlands at regional level through the councils for economic and social development; in the Netherlands, social partners are consulted at sectoral level through Techniekpact, an association in the technology sector bringing together trade unions and employer organisations).

Source: Network of Eurofound Correspondents, 2022

The Network of Eurofound Correspondents sought to identify organisations that are part of TJTPs' governance structure at three levels. There was an expectation that the social partner organisations usually consulted at all levels would be involved in some way. This was in fact the case in nearly all Member States. In addition, it is interesting to note that other

tripartite bodies were also involved (Table 2). A few other social partner organisations also participate in sectoral-level consultation. These include, for example, trade unions of semi-public municipal employees, community employees and semi-public organisations (Cyprus). Other trade union partnerships in relevant sectors are also observed in Sweden. These unions,

Table 2: Social partner organisations and institutions involved in TJTPs

Level	Type of organisation
Peak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peak-level organisations, such as country institutions, including SMEs, crafts, tripartite bodies, agricultural organisations
Sectoral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sectoral social partners in various industries, such as energy and mining, oil, electricity, electronics, metalworking, engineering, shipping, ports, forestry and peat Other social partners, for example, the Trade Union of Semi-public Municipal and Community Employees, affiliated to the Pancyprian Federation of Labour, and the Federation of Semi-public Organisations of the Cyprus Workers Confederation; and trade union partnerships (involving trade unions in various sectors, such as wood, forestry, food, industrial and metalworking, and trade unions for graduate engineers and white-collar workers, for example as seen in Sweden) Tripartite bodies (including social partners) Other organisations, including mechanical and electrical contractor associations, chemical industries, bioenergy associations, agricultural producers, forest owners, business associations and (large) companies in the energy sector, associations or partnerships involving various producers or workers in selected sectors
Regional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional branches of employer organisations and trade unions; and social partners representing certain industries at regional level, including commerce, transport, tourism, culture and services, and artisans, crafts, SMEs, cooperatives, regional entrepreneurs and contractor associations Indirect participation through councils (economic and social) Others, for example regional agricultural producers, forest owners and companies (for example, dealing with cement, energy and chemicals)

Source: Network of Eurofound Correspondents, 2022

together with other business associations (for instance, representing iron, steel and other metal producers, as well as mineral producers and the mining sector in general) are involved in the shaping of TJTPs, as mentioned previously. Individual companies affected by the transition (in the energy sector or other sectors) are also to be included in various stages. At regional level, branches of social partners (where those exist), and again tripartite bodies, are consulted. Italy provides an interesting example of the variety of organisations involved at regional level; these include social partners representing artisans, craftworkers, cooperatives, regional entrepreneurs, contractor associations, and trade unions in the commerce, transport, tourism, culture and services sectors.

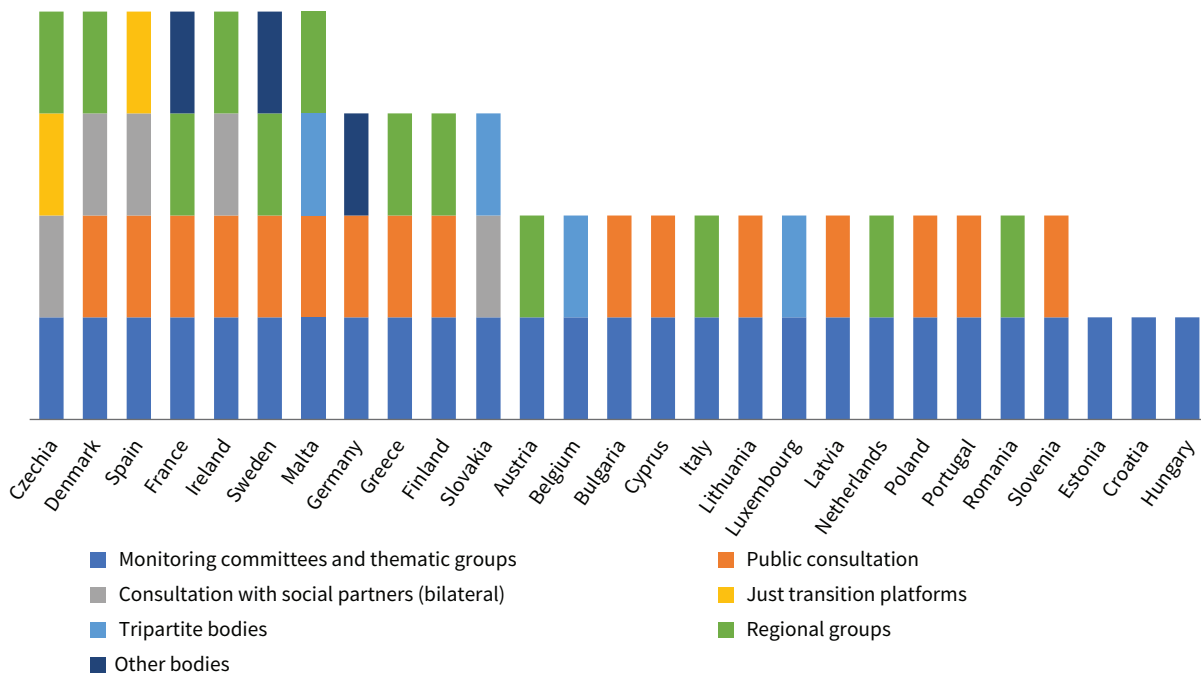
Seeking input on plans: Involvement in the design phase

The previous section explored provisions for the participation of the social partners in the various phases of the inception and implementation of TJTPs. As previously discussed, the involvement of various organisations is suggested by the European Commission's guidelines for the drafting of the plans,

and Member States are requested to document the governance structure they put in place. This section investigates how the social partners have been invited to contribute to the consultation process for designing the TJTPs, which is the stage at which the policy measures are shaped. It is also important to look into the proposals the social partners submitted or promoted for the plans. An emphasis is placed on design because most of the plans are only beginning to be implemented, and policymakers could use information on this first stage to improve the following stages of the plans (monitoring, implementation and evaluation).

Starting with the process of seeking inputs, it is notable that this usually takes different forms (Figure 2). Most countries have used a couple of forums for collecting views, monitoring committees for the shared management of EU funds and public consultation, or a combination of discussions with monitoring committees and consultation with regional groups and tripartite bodies. A limited number of countries use more than two forums for collecting views. Finally, in a few countries the monitoring committee was reported to be the main vehicle for collecting inputs from the social partners (Croatia, Estonia and Hungary).

Figure 2: Forums and opportunities for social partners' involvement in the design phase of TJTPs, EU Member States, 2022



Note: On the finalisation of the few pending TJTPs, some of the data in the figure may be subsequently slightly revised.

Source: Network of Eurofound Correspondents

As TJTPs are administratively guided by EU regulations, Member States should use the existing governance structure of cohesion funds. This should ensure the meaningful participation of social partners and civil society organisations. As a result, the relevant monitoring committees and/or subcommittees (thematic or otherwise) have held discussions with social partners to gather their input. Often, the plans are among other topics of discussion within these committees unless a subcommittee or session is being dedicated to them. If the plans are discussed along with other important topics they run the risk of not being fully deliberated or their importance may be diluted. This becomes more evident if the regions concerned are responsible for a small part of all national economic activities (and if other policy areas are receiving more public attention at the time). Bringing the plans to the attention of a subcommittee that can dedicate time to their discussion results in a more thorough examination of the topic and attracts the undivided attention of social partners and civil society organisations.

Involvement through existing structures and bodies

It should be noted that countries with a history of strong engagement with just transition policies and climate action plans, for example Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain and Sweden, have used existing structures and bodies in which social

partners are represented to obtain their input. For instance, if tripartite or multilateral institutions are in place to deal with climate neutrality issues, and have provided input to various national environmental, energy and climate policies, then that input is also considered. In Germany, the social partners participate in the governance structure of the state's programme for the just transition in the five hard coal regions (*5-Standorte Programm für die Steinkohlekraftwerksstandorte im Ruhrgebiet*), along with representatives of the affected municipalities, competent state ministries, district governments, chambers of commerce/chambers of crafts, employment agencies, universities and research institutions. The German Trade Union Confederation and the German Chambers of Commerce used their internal sectoral or regional structures to convey their views through the working groups of the monitoring committee. Therefore, peak-level social partners may consult with sectoral organisations (for example, in the metal sector), whose positions could be included in the peak organisation positions submitted through the monitoring committee's working groups. The French social partners have held discussions at sectoral level (with the national industry council and sectoral strategic committees). Another example comes from Sweden, where social partners are organically involved and consulted on various policies without the need to set up separate structures. Swedish social partners have been active in finding local

solutions and concluding agreements securing jobs and conditions for relocated miners. However, generally, there is no major threat to jobs in the country, and the main focus of industries is on integrating green technology to reduce pollution (essentially through investments, research and innovation).

Bilateral discussions were held between state authorities and social partners, and input from tripartite bodies was provided in a few cases (provided from four Member States). Finally, input through dedicated structures, such as just transition platforms, was provided by social partners in two Member States (Czechia and Spain).

Public consultations and forums

In public consultation and at the stage of deliberating on the various policy measures or seeking advice on measures to be included, it was not always clear whether social partners had indeed participated and shared their own views. Sometimes the consultation plans grouped the proposals without clearly distinguishing between stakeholders. In a few instances (Cyprus, Hungary, Latvia and Slovenia), the consultation process was contracted out to a consultancy firm. Some social partners (for example, in Hungary, Italy, Lithuania and Romania) felt that the process was rather formal and therefore less meaningful.

Undoubtedly, more forums are provided for peak-level social partner organisations than for regional ones. Perhaps the national industrial relations structures, with the social partners acting mainly at peak and sectoral levels, may explain some of the differences (as mentioned earlier). Peak-level organisations participated in monitoring committees, steering committees, advisory councils or advisory committees for TJTPs (for example, the Advisory Council for the Spanish Just Transition Institute in Spain and the transformation platform in Czechia), public consultations, bilateral meetings and so on.

Involvement at sectoral level

There are fewer forms of involvement at sectoral level; the main types are sharing information, collecting views and conducting bilateral or multilateral meetings. However, there are some interesting cases of sectoral-level involvement. It is worth mentioning the cooperation of social partners and the government in Spain in drawing up and implementing the Framework Agreement for a Just Transition of Coal Mining and Sustainable Development of Mining Regions for 2019–2027. The Spanish Just Transition Institute, together with the social partners involved in the framework agreements, oversees the monitoring and implementation of these framework agreements and

TJTPs. Similarly, in Sweden a trade union partnership involving several trade unions in diverse sectors (such as wood, forest, food, industry and metalworking) and business associations are invited to shape the TJTP at sectoral level. Furthermore, sector-specific trade unions (in industrial sectors) and employer and business associations (in the bioenergy, agriculture and forestry sectors) are involved in working groups concerned with specific regional plans in Finland. Sectoral employers and companies (but not trade unions) in Poland are members of the regional team working on the just transition of the Silesia region. Undoubtedly, climate neutrality projects are not solely funded through TJTPs; other national (or regional) initiatives are run at the same time. It is therefore possible that sectoral organisations may have been consulted on those (but it is not clear how the various levels and inputs are coordinated).

Involvement at regional level

Finally, at regional level, apart from inviting social partners to public consultations (which were open to all stakeholders) and sharing drafts of TJTPs, there are few other significant forms of involvement. Plans were prepared regionally in Austria and Finland with the participation of social partners. In Spain, the representatives of the six autonomous communities where the Just Transition Institute carries out its activities provide their input. Additionally, at regional level there are just transition agreements in place where one or more companies in the energy sector are scheduled to close. Traditionally, just transition issues are discussed at various regional levels in Sweden, involving (among other actors) social partners, who convey their views on regional just transition plans.

Regional tripartite forums (Czechia, Malta and the Netherlands) or regional growth teams (also seen in Denmark) were used to collect the views and suggestions of social partners. In Greece and Ireland, the president of the coordination committee and the Just Transition Commissioner, respectively, held local meetings and sought the input of social partners (among other groups). However, despite the establishment of partnership schemes, it was noted that in Greece two regional councils (West Macedonia and Peloponnese) did not agree with the preparatory work and timetable. In Germany, the regional branches of trade unions and employer organisations are consulted through their own structures. In Poland, such input varies by region, so there is no consistency in the way views and input were sought. In Hungary, such input is only gathered through a single vehicle, the LIFE project. In some countries (just a few cases), social partners were asked to provide guidance on strategies for regions.

In conclusion, overall, social partners have been invited to comment and submit proposals in the design phase through various national channels, mainly using existing structures. Their experience of involvement varies, as countries treated the plans as part of the administrative process of running similar funds, in certain cases the budgets dedicated to the plans were rather small (compared with other nationwide projects or funds) and the affected regions accounted for a small share of the economy. In addition, the timing of drawing plans up and submitting them for approval was not always amenable to traditional social dialogue consultation. Finally, countries with strong social dialogue structures may have relied heavily on local (company or workplace) agreements, and the social partners themselves determined the terms and conditions for workers' and companies' transitions.

Social partners' proposals

Public documents collecting the views of various socioeconomic actors on the TJTPs do not always distinguish between stakeholder groups. In certain instances, the numbers of groups and actors involved (for instance, in Spain more than 1,400 actors submitted proposals) are so large that it is difficult to discern the social partners' views. Furthermore, as the process of consultation on the TJTPs was handled through the national monitoring committees for the EU funds, the working groups discussed and amended drafts while considering the results of public consultations. In cases where certain social partners were not present in the meetings, drafts of plans were processed without their views.

Through discussions with the Network of Eurofound Correspondents and their contacts with national-level social partners, this report identified some of their priority areas, as reflected in the plans. It is noteworthy that some social partners have conducted their own studies on the transition to climate neutrality in the affected regions to assist in shaping their positions.

The most critical issues raised by social partners are:

- employment and quality of work
- reskilling, upskilling and career guidance
- education
- subsidies and support for businesses
- research and innovation, and digitalisation
- the circular economy
- the management of the funding and process of the just transition (non-thematic focus)

Undoubtedly, the topic most social partners across Member States have placed emphasis on is the **employment or re-employment of workers** whose jobs are at risk. Job security, the within- or cross-sector mobility of workers, and social plans for workers and their families are at the heart of their proposals. Both trade unions and employers agree on the importance of good plans for jobs at risk and managing the transition of employees to new jobs in the same or similar sectors. A particular interest of trade unions is the quality of new jobs created. For example, the Federation of Dutch Trade Unions emphasised the importance of good working conditions, ensuring health and safety, but also good-quality and meaningful jobs that give employees control over their work. It also argues that, when implementing job schemes in the relevant regions, attention should be paid to so-called bogus self-employment³, which can affect wages, working conditions and taxes. The federation points to the right of employees and their union representatives to information and consultation regarding the transition of their workplace in their region but also more widely. Similarly, the German Trade Union Confederation supports decent work (*Gute Arbeit*), collective agreements and co-determination in companies as cross-cutting issues.

Employer and business organisations (for instance, the chambers of commerce of North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany) agree on the need to secure skilled labour. Moreover, for the efficient planning and implementation of job transitions, employers (for example, the Konin Chamber of Commerce in Eastern Greater Poland) insist on having transparent information on the number of jobs likely to be lost (and in what time span) and the current qualifications of the employees occupying the jobs. They argue that if training is to be provided by the employers themselves they should have access to dedicated funds. Often this information is missing, and ultimately it is in the hands of the relevant national or regional authorities to coordinate such actions.

Equally important is the topic of **reskilling and upskilling** workers affected by the closing of mines, coal-operated plants, peatlands and so on. There is a broad-based consensus among employers and trade unions across Europe on the prioritisation of skills acquisition and retraining employees. Social partners in Denmark have highlighted the impact of their tripartite dialogue on reskilling and upskilling on the TJTPs. This shows that continuous exchange between trade unions and employer organisations on the transition to climate neutrality paved the way for an agreement on training measures and other social actions included in the plans.

3 When direct subordinated employment is disguised as self-employment, it is termed 'bogus'.

Employer organisations targeted training for specific industries, such as electricity (for example, the Employers' Confederation of Latvia), or required complete skills mapping as part of the country's green transition efforts (for example, the Irish organisation Ibec). Suggestions, however, are not always very specific, and these would need to be further specified in the implementation phase of the plans. For instance, highlighting the need to train more engineers in green industries is vaguer than suggesting the number of engineers to train, the type of training, the specialisation in which they should be trained and so on. Finally, suggestions have been made for **improving or adapting the education system** to help in the transformation of sectors and the regional economy.

Business support and subsidies are among the measures most often suggested by employer organisations. Employer organisations in all affected regions (for example, in Germany) argued that funds should be used in such a way that businesses remain competitive and adopt digitalisation practices (IHK NRW, 2020; Forum, 2022; IHK zu Leipzig et al, 2022). Overall, such support should help industries to develop in the context of the new green industrial policies (suggested by the Estonian Chemical Industry Association, for example) and green entrepreneurship (suggested by social partners in Estonia and employer organisations in Cyprus). At the same time, organisations in some countries (particularly trade unions in Belgium, Cyprus and Greece) have suggested that support for the agriculture sector be included in the plans. **Investments in research, development and innovation** to assist with new technological solutions for clean energy and green technological solutions are mainly advocated by employer organisations but also supported by trade unions.

Trade unions and employer organisations seem to agree that the **circular economy** should have a future in the green economy. Trade unions emphasise that investments that consider the full lifecycle of materials should be part of national climate policies (for example, the peak-level trade union organisation in Sweden (the Swedish Trade Union Confederation), which organises several sectoral-level industry workers). This aim is shared by the employer organisations in Sweden but also in other EU Member States (for example, Belgium and Cyprus).

Beyond the thematic focus, trade unions and employer organisations have provided suggestions on the **management of just transition funding and the just transition process**. Their proposals included criteria for selecting projects, the evaluation of projects, the setting of priorities, the process of accessing funding and so on. It is worth mentioning that social partners see TJTPs as a tool, similar to national energy and climate plans and climate agreements. This means that their goals should

converge. This convergence is not always very clear at all levels, including national, sectoral, regional and interministerial. The point is illustrated by the Dutch social partners who, through discussions in the social and economic committee of North Holland region, provided their advice on the organisation and focus of an integrated programme to promote broad prosperity. Other organisations requested the setting up of a just transition task force (for example, Ibec in Ireland) or a just transition committee or a special fund for the just transition (for example, the Union of Autonomous Trade Unions of Croatia), which could be managed through a tripartite form of governance. They argue that this form of governance would give industry and trade unions the opportunity to conduct studies jointly on the economic and employment implications of the transition and be fully equipped to support displaced workers. A just transition task force or committee could gather data on basic indicators associated with the just transition for each region, to enable regular evaluations to take place and shorten the policy response to unforeseen events.

Social partners pleaded for more meaningful exchanges through formal social dialogue structures. Finally, beyond the discussions in monitoring committees or other coordination structures, no further proposals were submitted by social partners, and the number of proposals varies between regions (in Belgium, Croatia, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg and Portugal). This needs to be examined in the context of the just transition process, the use of existing structures and connections between levels of collective bargaining, collaboration between states and social partners, the timing of requests for input and the competence of social partners to deal with these issues in geographically defined areas (sometimes marginal to the entire economy).

Influence of social partners' proposals on plans

This research sought to study whether the proposals submitted by social partners found their way into the various TJTPs. The views of the social partners, as reported by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents, are split between those that respond that their views have to some extent been reflected in the plans (11 countries) and those that consider the situation to be unclear (9 countries). Another small number of social partners, mainly on the trade unions' side (in Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Italy and Romania), consider that their proposals have not been seriously considered in the plans. In the Italian region of Sardinia, the trade unions recognised that they were invited to contribute to the consultation phase but not to the design of the plan (ADAPT, 2022). Some Portuguese trade unions (including the Portuguese Commerce and Services Confederation) felt that they had not been given an opportunity to submit their own proposals.

Social partners reporting that at least some of their proposals have been included in the plans have contributed through monitoring committees, thematic groups and transformation platforms. Their proposals have also been channelled through tripartite bodies (for example, in Malta, the Netherlands and Slovakia). In Spain, social partners are reportedly happy with the plans; however, they flagged delays in the implementation of just transition agreements and are concerned about the difficulties in relocating redundant workers. In Denmark, tripartite social dialogue on reskilling and upskilling of workers led to an agreement whose provisions are also reflected in the TJTP. In Finland, the national just transition plan programme was first commented on by the social partners; then the regional cooperation groups, which include the social partners, had the opportunity to assess and approve it before sending it back to the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment. Experiences vary by region, but this is exemplified by the practice in the Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia (2022), whereby the working group sets regional goals in the TJTPs for the indicators determined at national level. The allocation of funding by the regional council must be approved by the cooperation working group.

National social dialogue structures and traditions play a major role in the way the plans are implemented; for instance, in Germany (but also in other countries) social partners are members of various bodies, and their input (and influence over decisions) is part of the process. In addition, collective bargaining (at company or workplace level) is even more significant in determining the terms and conditions for workers whose jobs and tasks are transformed or under threat in industries needing to phase out fossil fuel-based production.

In countries where social partners reported that it is unclear how their proposals have been considered, it was often the case that the plans did not distinguish between stakeholder groups. In other cases, such information was not provided by the government at the time of data collection, or the plans were incomplete for some regions. In Germany, an overall picture is missing since not all plans had been finalised as of March 2023. Similarly, in France, pending the completion of plans, the influence of social partners on the plans is still unclear. Discussions of the French national industry council and the sectoral strategic committees, as mentioned earlier, have taken place, but as plans are drawn up at regional level the situation is rather unsettled. As anecdotally reported, in the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region, no concrete suggestions had been submitted, and the plans were still being finalised. In Luxembourg and Portugal, employer associations feel that regional issues are in the purview of the regional associations. The trade unions in Luxembourg plan to get involved in the next stages of the TJTP. In Poland, the situation varies hugely between regions, with Eastern Greater Poland providing an example of a truly participatory and transparent process. In Romania, employer organisations are less concerned about the plans because they only target the oil and gas industry, which is largely state owned.

In this group of countries, trade unions tended to be more critical, recognising their involvement in the consultation stage but less so in the actual design of the plans. Although the input and influence of other actors, such as civil society, regional authorities and the research community, is equally important (those will be investigated in the Eurofound report to be published in 2024 (Eurofound, forthcoming)), the current research aimed to focus on the social partners as a group of organisations whose members are seriously affected by the transition. Trade unions and employer organisations play a key role in shaping policies and conditions regulating employment relationships.

2 | Impact of the energy crisis

The European efforts to address the negative social impacts of the transition to a carbon-neutral economy through a series of policy initiatives, and particularly through actions funded by the JTF, were all planned prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Coal regions made plans (or are in the process of having them finalised) to draw up a roadmap to reducing emissions (by 55% by 2030), diversifying the local economy, protecting employment and so on. However, the Russian war and the resulting pressure on energy sources have stretched some of the countries' capacities and potentially challenged the TJTPs.

Some of the first indications obtained through the Network of Eurofound Correspondents show that there is a group of countries whose plans have not been significantly affected (Table 3). There are various reasons for this. One is that the production of certain fuels was discontinued prior to the energy crisis (for example, Ireland and Latvia stopped producing peat). In other cases, where plans have not been approved by the European Commission, deviations from the plans were not evident (for example, in Belgium, France, Portugal and Slovakia). Other countries are of the opinion that the energy crisis makes it imperative to reduce the use of fossil fuels and has accelerated the transition (for example, Denmark and Lithuania). In addition, some plans include provisions for adjustments in the event of crises such as increasing gas prices, energy poverty and threats to the energy security of the state, while the long-term goals are still maintained (in Croatia, Czechia and the Netherlands).

In a second group of countries, the uncertainty about future developments in the energy markets has led some national governments to take the following short-term measures to tackle the immediate energy demands of households and industries (Euractiv, 2022a):

- delaying or extending the operations of coal-fired power stations (Czechia, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands and Romania)
- halting early retirement plans for employees (Germany)
- extending the licences of peat producers, establishing a peat reserve (Finland)
- increasing the domestic production of lignite, continuing or restarting lignite power plant operations and extending the timetable for the phasing out of coal mines (Hungary and Poland)

In Bulgaria, recent political debates (The Sofia Globe, 2023) pointed to the possibility of extending the deadline for meeting the 40% CO₂ emissions target from 2025 to 2038. In Hungary, plans to decommission the Mátra lignite power plant by 2025 were brought to a halt in 2022. The new calendar suggests that the plant, and the mines that supply it with raw material, will operate until 2029 (Euractiv, 2022b). In Czechia, coal mining operations that were initially planned to cease by 2033 were extended until 2035 (Greenpeace, 2022). In Poland, the impact of the energy crisis is more mixed and varies by region. While in Eastern Greater Poland the phasing out of coal is planned for 2030, with carbon neutrality to be achieved by 2040, in other regions the ceasing of coal mining operations is scheduled for 2049 and is linked to the start of electricity generation through nuclear power sources (Visegrad Insight, 2023).

Table 3: The effect of the energy crisis on national TJTPs, 2022

The energy crisis has not (significantly) affected TJTPs	The energy crisis has brought about short-term changes in the implementation of TJTPs
Croatia, Denmark, Ireland, Latvia, Malta, Lithuania, Spain, Sweden	Austria, Bulgaria, Czechia, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovenia

Note: Belgium, France, Portugal and Slovakia had not had their plans approved at the time of data collection in December 2022.
Source: Network of Eurofound Correspondents

The effect of the energy crisis on the national just transition plans and efforts can be seen in:

- investments
- increased prices
- acceleration of the debate on energy policies and energy self-sufficiency
- disruption of social dialogue on the just transition
- re-examining the timing of the decarbonisation timetable

A number of countries have voiced their concerns regarding the impact of the energy crisis on **investments** for renewable energy infrastructure, the move to green forms of production, reskilling of the workforce, regeneration of regions and so on. More concretely, countries are considering reprioritisation of investments (for example, Austria) and reassessment of funding required for the various large projects involved with the just transition (Latvia, Lithuania). Furthermore, a likely effect of the energy crisis is a slower pace of investments and lower volumes (in terms of euro) as far as the private sector is concerned. However, this may be compensated by the stimulus provided through the TJTPs. As many of the plans will launch calls for grants and investments in projects in 2023, there will be a clearer view on the rate of investment in 2024.

Increased prices are another effect of the energy crisis. The combined effect of the pandemic and the war in Ukraine has led to unpredictability and inflation. Construction materials, essential for the energy transition, have become more expensive and this may affect the number of projects to be implemented (Cyprus), as well as increase prices in other products (Slovenia). Recalculation of costs are also signalled by other countries (Luxembourg). In Sweden, a country which has not been hugely affected by the energy crisis, expansion of the electrification of businesses in the north in the near future would require a massive energy investment and there is a danger that companies may pass their input-driven increase in costs on to their customers (SVT, 2022).

Acceleration of the debate on energy policies and energy self-sufficiency could be considered a side effect of the energy crisis. Countries have become more acutely aware of the socioeconomic risks associated with energy poverty, energy challenges to industrial production, and the need to seek alternative energy sources (with the EU driving strategic decisions in this area) and support renewable energy sources. More self-sufficiency in energy policies is also discussed at various national and European forums. While some countries are top of the list in terms of using energy

from renewables (Austria, Denmark, Finland, Sweden), several other Member States have become more ambitious in that regard (Cyprus, Estonia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Slovakia) and have further promoted the debate on energy policies (Eurostat, 2022).

The energy crisis has also led to some **disruption of the social dialogue process** on just transition plans. The crisis shifted public attention to the immediate hike in the cost of living and the overall impact on the economy. Some countries reported that this may have obstructed procedures for extensive social dialogue on the just transition plans (Greece) or raised concerns of some trade unions regarding the closure of plants and the risk of unemployment (Bulgaria, Estonia, Italy).

Finally, the energy crisis has resulted in a **re-examination of the timing of decarbonisation**. The high energy costs inflicted on households, workers and businesses triggered discussions about the time horizon for the closure of plants and the feasibility of the existing plans. Some trade unions raised concerns about the employability of workers. For example, trade unions in Bulgaria asked for the TJTP to be revised during a protest (BNR, 2022). However, in Hungary and Poland, the timetable for decarbonisation seems to have affected the scope and timetable of the plans, with Poland suggesting that mining operations be phased out by 2049.

An assessment of the plans in the context of the current energy markets, affected by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, would probably result in a temporary 'diversion' or an (agreed) extension of the (intermediary) deadlines for full decarbonisation. However, the plans for transforming industries and regions need to get off the ground and ensure that workers are retrained and relocated, that environmental biodiversity is restored and that communities thrive. Overall, it appears that the energy crisis has triggered more intense dialogue among Member States about energy policies and has highlighted the urgency of the problem. It has certainly complicated the launch and implementation of the TJTPs in several countries. Private investments in transition projects may take longer to take off and be made at a slower pace. In certain cases, costs need to be calculated due to increasing prices. The energy crisis has affected the short-term actions for reducing emissions, while the long-term goals are expected to be maintained if European funds are disbursed. The end of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and its destabilising effect on the energy markets, and investments in alternative sources of energy, will be important in achieving the decarbonisation targets set out in European plans.

3 Views of social partners

Social partners across countries have been active in developing proposals on the just transition and also in participating in discussions and national debates. Overall, they support the transition to climate neutrality and actions related to it. The social partners' support for the green transition is well illustrated in the joint statement of the Finnish peak-level organisations (STTK, the Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions, the Confederation of Unions for Professional and Managerial Staff in Finland and the Confederation of Finnish Industries) in an open letter to the political leaders of the EU and its Member States in March 2022 emphasising the importance of speeding up climate action and rapidly reducing the EU's dependency on fossil fuels.

Views and proposals of social partners are mainly related to the green transition at national level or within economic sectors and less so (at least in some Member States) to the just transition in the specific regions covered through the TJTPs. The plans, being rather recent initiatives and specific to certain regions, require more local knowledge and wider experience than those from previous energy transformations. Business organisations and trade unions have been gradually forming more complete views about the development needs of the just transition regions. While there is a lot of common ground between the two groups, they place different emphases on certain topics, with trade unions stressing the importance of jobs, and employers emphasising the need to provide support to businesses and the importance of investments. Employment security becomes a critical issue for trade unions, which are even more heavily involved than employer organisations in national debates. In countries where TJTPs concern just one industry (or sometimes one large company, often state run, whose share in the national economy is rather small), peak-level employer organisations may rely more on regional or local chambers of commerce due to their expertise and experience. Both employer organisations and trade unions, however, invite public authorities to closely review the feasibility of plans, and assess the timetable for meeting the climate neutrality goals and the steps required to do so.

Employer and business organisations

Employer and business organisations support the climate neutrality goals and they are, overall, happy with the TJTPs' goals. Some organisations argue that there is a need to better coordinate the various programmes, policies and funding mechanisms at national level to maximise their impact. Industries affected by the transition have been involved in consultations at various levels; however, employer organisations stress that their involvement in the design, monitoring and implementation of the plans should be more systematic. Some peat producers (in Finland and Latvia) are concerned about the shrinking of the peat industry and the transition process. In contrast, in Sweden, where there has been no loss of industry or jobs, employers and business associations are satisfied with the plans. The principal concern of industries affected by the transition is securing the right technological solutions to enable 'green production'.

Attainment of climate neutrality goals and funding of transition projects

Employers invite the relevant authorities and JTF committees to apply rules for funding projects in a flexible and business-friendly manner. The Belgian and German employers maintained that funds for projects should be used in a timely and non-bureaucratic way. More specifically, in drafting guidelines for funding projects, the German North Rhine-Westphalian chambers of commerce and the Brandenburg employers suggested that a broad-based approach to project selection should be adopted and that just transition funding should be accessible to all sectors (Forum, 2022; IHK zu Leipzig et al, 2022). The Employers' Confederation of Latvia agree that a more holistic view should be applied in assessing the attainment of climate neutrality goals. This means examining the impact on sectors at national level (beyond regional level), employment and the efficient use of resources. In the same vein, the Malta Employers' Association and the Malta Chamber are in favour of supporting the transport, automotive and maritime sectors.

Other employer organisations have been discussing the size of the companies receiving support. The Entrepreneurs of Finland (*Suomen Yrittäjät*) are happy with the direct support provided to small businesses.

Similarly, the German North Rhine-Westphalian chambers of commerce say that the needs of SMEs, which are usually not familiar with EU-funded projects, should be considered. More support for small businesses is advocated by the Lithuanian Confederation of Employers, while the Malta Employers' Association highlights the contribution of small businesses to inclusive and green growth. However, other organisations, such as the Estonian Association of Electrical Enterprises, maintain that large companies should be prioritised. They argue that the transformation of the regional economy requires businesses to make large investments in advanced technologies and that those can chiefly be made by large companies. Furthermore, large businesses are key players in the energy sector.

Employers in Saxony, Brandenburg and North Rhine-Westphalia agree that competitiveness is key and that funding through just transition funds should support the transition to alternative energy sources, the development of new storage and transportation facilities for new energy sources, and the phasing out of coal-fired power in the long run. They argue that criteria related to job losses, while important, should not be the leading criteria (IHK zu Leipzig et al, 2022). Affected businesses need to be supported in developing alternative business models (IHK NRW, 2020; Forum, 2022; IHK zu Leipzig et al, 2022). The Saxon employers highlighted a need for more generous state aid rules for the transformation of the lignite mining regions at European level (IHK zu Leipzig et al, 2022). Other proposals include just transition funding to be used for investments to restructure industrial areas, restructuring local transport and infrastructure, and supporting human resource development and digitalisation at company level (IHK zu Leipzig et al, 2022).

Agreeing with the goals of the TJTP, the Slovakian employer organisations the Association of Industrial Unions and Transport, the National Union of Employers, and the Association of Employers' Unions and Associations of the Slovak Republic insist on more clarity regarding its implementation. The Greek employer organisation the Hellenic Federation of Enterprises, through a study it conducted, found that if essential resources are committed to the TJTP then it is possible for the affected areas to absorb the economic shock of decarbonisation.

Support for companies and removal of barriers

More broadly, employers in Saxony, Germany, support more generous EU-level support for lignite mining areas. The Belgian employers requested a reduction in barriers to accessing permits (for investments in renewables and related infrastructure) for companies,

and the acceleration of the process of providing permits. The topic receives broad support from business and employer organisations across Europe. Recognising that in some Member States the entire permit-granting process for large renewable energy projects can take up to nine years, the European Commission introduced a new temporary emergency regulation to accelerate the deployment of renewable energy sources (European Commission, 2022b).

Investments, green technologies and innovation

Discussions involving employers, but also trade unions, in Swedish industry strongly centre around investments in greening technologies. Such investments, for example in producing carbon-free steel, will enable industries to retain jobs. A failure to develop relevant technologies will require Swedish industries to readjust. In addition, certain minerals in Swedish mines (cobalt, nickel, graphite and copper) are important raw materials for solar panels and wind energy parks; however, some movements oppose the reindustrialisation of northern Sweden. Belgian employer organisations (for example, Verbond van Belgische Ondernemingen Fédération des Entreprises de Belgique) agree that technological innovation is key to regional transformation and the just transition. To facilitate such innovation, they maintain that investments in the relevant sectors should be supported. The Portuguese employer organisation the Confederation of Portuguese Business (CIP) believes that the Portuguese TJTP should support investments in industrial transformation (transforming existing industries) and creating alternative jobs. Finally, the Maltese employer organisations the Malta Chamber of SMEs and the Gozo Business Chamber strongly support the prioritisation of grants for hybrid maritime vehicles for the Gozo region and for electric commercial vehicles more widely.

Involvement in territorial just transition plans

Employer organisations across Europe have an expectation that their organisations will be involved in TJTPs. Regional employer organisations in France (for instance, CPME Hauts-de-France and CPME Sud) are critical of their current lack of involvement and hope that they will be invited to participate in other phases of the regional plans, such as monitoring. A similar concern was also shared by the Portuguese employer organisation CIP in a statement issued in 2020. It called on the government to design the JTF in a way that optimises its impact, notably ensuring that relevant stakeholders are consulted, including the social partners and any businesses that may be directly affected (CIP, 2020).

There is a clear expectation on the part of the Slovak employer organisations (for instance, the Association of Industrial Unions and Transport, the National Union of Employers, and the Association of Employers' Unions and Associations of the Slovak Republic, as well as the Slovak Chamber of Commerce and Industry) that they will be involved in commissions specifically created for the implementation of the TJTP. In addition, a capacity issue is raised by the Slovak employer organisation, the Association of Industrial Unions and Transport (but also trade unions) in navigating the green agenda and the interaction of various governance levels (EU, national and regional). More meaningful and effective involvement is also advocated by the Lithuanian Business Confederation. Sometimes, it argues, the social partners' involvement is rather formal and not impactful in terms of shaping policy decisions. Some of the barriers to meaningful cooperation in the country are lack of time, insufficient awareness, lack of involvement in the early stages of planning and social partners' capacity.

Reskilling and retraining workers for new jobs

There is general agreement among Swedish employer organisations and trade unions on the importance of reskilling and upskilling. The TJTP reflects this but without providing much detail. However, the plan does provide for investments in certain academic fields to help workers to acquire the knowledge and skills required for green production in the mining and mineral industries. Agreeing on the need for industrial transformation and the urgent need to provide workers with the essential skills, the Portuguese employer organisations (for example, CIP) argue that individual employers should be encouraged and supported to invest in reskilling workers.

The issue of coordination between national and local authorities and mining companies for reskilling and re-employment is stressed by the Konin Chamber of Commerce in Eastern Greater Poland, a region well advanced in terms of transition plans. The chamber makes the point that local employers willing to recruit miners who are about to be laid off require some information regarding the number of workers available for hiring and their skills. It also states that they would be happy to assist with retraining provided that funds for that training were offered. On the other hand, it points out that it is hard to obtain data and information from the mining companies about prospective layoffs. It is essential that such information is centralised by national or regional authorities or employment services, and shared with training providers and prospective employers. Without such coordination, it would be difficult to prepare plans for workers and effectively use the funding provided within the specified time horizon.

Both the Malta Employers' Association and the Malta Chamber emphasise the need for new skills in the transport sector, specifically the automotive sector, but also the maritime sector. As they pointed out, educational and training institutions need to align their teaching and training with the national employment policies for the next 10 years and deliver on providing green skills for entry into green jobs. Those skills can range from repairing electric vehicles to ensuring compliance with regulations or legal rules on commercial exports and aviation.

Trade unions

The information collected through the Network of Eurofound Correspondents shows that trade unions from various countries, regardless of whether they are happy or not with the process of developing the TJTPs, agree that the structures of the plans should assure their involvement. Not all trade unions are happy with their involvement in the drafting of the plans. They argue that sharing the opinions of workers with other institutional partners on plans affecting their members is part of a democratic process, and the just transition needs to be 'just' for the workers. They also raised the issue of promoting social justice during the transition. These views on strengthening social justice and the 'just' element of the just transition are echoed in all Member States.

It is not surprising that both trade unions and employer organisations, while generally agreeing on the need for climate neutrality, place emphasis on different aspects. Obviously, trade unions are concerned about employment, re-employment and the quality of jobs for workers losing their jobs due to the closure of mines, power plants, shale oil plants and so on. Training and reskilling are also among their priorities, and they raise other, wider, issues about the design of the plans. Overall, trade unions have developed quite elaborate proposals on national just transition policies. Other issues shared by many trade unions across Europe are presented below.

Achieving a just transition through social dialogue

It is clear to trade unions that the economic makeup of regions cannot be transformed in a technical and bureaucratic way but rather should be modified as part of a social process. This would essentially include social dialogue whereby the two sides of industry can discuss and agree on the implications of the transition and measures to address them. Social dialogue requires strong cooperation between social partners and collective agreements but also respect for co-determination practices, as argued by the German trade unions. The transition is a process of socioecological change and needs to involve the social partners and be

based on the principle of partnership (as emphasised in Slovakia), and particularly at the regional level, as it is not as strong (as highlighted in France). Some trade unions suggest that social measures included in the TJTPs should be part of a proper social dialogue process beyond public consultation and ad hoc meetings (Cyprus, Greece and Portugal). Others ask for the setting up of a specific just transition body operating to facilitate social dialogue and covering an entire country rather than specific regions, or a commission for the transition in the energy sector (including nuclear energy) (Belgium and Ireland).

Ensuring good-quality jobs, working conditions and social support

Securing jobs for those who are about to become redundant (for example, miners and peat workers) is a priority issue. Many of those workers are already in well-paid jobs, and there is an expectation that there will be equivalent new jobs for them. Furthermore, there is an expectation that social support will be provided for their families. Spanish trade unions point out that 48 months after the Framework Agreement for a Just Transition of Coal Mining and Sustainable Development of Mining Regions for 2019–2027 was signed there were significant delays in implementation, including in finding new jobs for redundant workers (they argued that only 55 people had been hired from the job bank after the restoration of the closed mines) and in providing the workers with new skills (as well as in the development of mining regions) (CCOO de Industria, 2022). It is notable that the issue of ensuring the availability of good-quality jobs is of fundamental importance to all workers and their representatives. Trade unions argue that in the design phase plans should be focused on the quality of jobs. Clearly, this applies to all jobs, including green jobs to be created in various sectors (beyond the regions covered through TJTPs). In the same vein, the General Confederation of Portuguese Workers says that the green transition should create decent and socially useful jobs. Its position is reflected in the campaign *Jobs for Green (Empregos para o Clima)*, launched in 2016 and also in other countries, and has been supported by the association Climaximo and several civil society organisations, such as trade unions, non-governmental organisations and environmental collectives. Green jobs campaigns bring together the demands of climate movements and of labour movements by proposing massive public investment in the creation of green jobs, advocating a people's plan for a just transition.

Reskilling and retraining workers during the transition

As training and reskilling are essential dimensions of working conditions, their importance is emphasised by all trade unions and is also highlighted by employer organisations. For example, the Austrian trade unions advocate that emphasis should be placed on educating and training workers in the 'green sectors' (making use of a stipend and unemployment schemes). In a statement (UGT, 2021), the Portuguese General Union of Workers welcomes the government's commitment to guaranteeing access to professional requalification training for Pego power plant workers (the funding for which will be subsidised by the state up to 100% of the workers' salaries). Such measures, along with social support guaranteeing no loss of income, will ensure that the climate transition is achieved with respect to the environment and social justice.

Alignment with other plans

Better connections between the various governance levels and the alignment of plans, strategies, legislation and so on are among the requests of trade unions (for example, in Austria and Estonia). Consistency with national energy and coal plans, and other relevant national, regional or territorial strategies and plans, is essential to improve the coordination of policies and achieve synergistic effects.

Employing a broader perspective including other sectors

Trade unions maintain that the impact of the green transition on various sectors (particularly energy-intensive ones) should be assessed. Trade unions argue that support schemes and investments should apply to sectors beyond those covered by TJTPs (in Austria, Croatia, Finland, Ireland, Latvia, Malta and Portugal). These sectors are arguably most affected by the transition (and include agriculture, automotive, construction, forestry, maritime, transport and wood, among others). The Swedish trade unions agree with the employers and the government about the need to introduce investments in green technologies in various sectors of the economy. The Swedish Trade Union Confederation has several members in industries affected by the transition. Its report on its environmental and climate policy programme called for a targeted approach to investments in climate policies (LO, 2018). Among their priorities are renewables, transport, wood construction, creating new jobs while reducing emissions, bio-based industrial symbiosis and

ensuring better working conditions for the green industries. The Irish trade unions made the point that the just transition affects not only peat workers but also workers in other sectors, while the Latvian trade unions stress the need to include the transport sector in just transition plans. The campaign Jobs for Climate (Empregos para o Clima), supported by the General Confederation of Portuguese Workers, promotes the creation of new jobs and the requalification of workers in sectors with a direct impact on emissions (beyond the energy sector), including the transport, construction, forest management and agriculture sectors. Agreement on the broader, economy-wide approach is also voiced by the employers, as noted earlier.

Capacity issues

Finally, it should be noted that capacity issues have been mentioned by some trade unions. The topic of the just transition, while not entirely new, requires new technical knowledge and expertise. This may stretch the capacity of some organisations, particularly small sectoral organisations in weak social dialogue regimes. More importantly, the design, monitoring and implementation of projects that are part of TJTPs require local knowledge: contextual information about specific regions and their industries, the challenges faced by local workers and potential employment opportunities. Countries with well-established, well-organised and well-resourced trade union structures are better equipped to deal with challenges and responses (for example, to provide reviews of plans, projects and opinions, often at short notice, as shown in practice).

4 Social dialogue and collective bargaining: The road to a just transition

Just transition and social dialogue at EU level

This chapter focuses on whether and how just transition topics are integrated into social dialogue and collective bargaining at national and subnational levels. While previous chapters have demonstrated the uneven involvement of social partners and the uneven take-up of their recommendations in TJTPs, this chapter casts a broader net, analysing how social dialogue and collective bargaining contribute to addressing the policy challenges posed by the climate emergency. As the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC, 2022) notes, ‘social dialogue cannot be reduced to a formality’; it needs to take place as part of a comprehensive framework with the meaningful involvement of social partners at all levels.

Given this, a non-exhaustive list of instances of social dialogue or collective agreements that include green clauses or references to the just transition is provided. The examples illustrate the various practices, topics and adaptations that social dialogue and collective bargaining consider in response to the need to ensure a just transition.

The role of social dialogue in ensuring a just transition is recognised in several international agreements that commit signatories to promoting an inclusive and environmentally sustainable economy. For example, the International Labour Organization’s 2015 guidelines for a just transition argue that a strong social consensus on pathways to sustainability is fundamental. In this sense, the guidelines require governments to promote social dialogue at all stages, and social partners to include environmental provisions in collective bargaining, as a strategy for facilitating cooperation and ensuring compliance with environmental regulations (ILO, 2015). Similarly, the EU, together with 12 Member States, signed the declaration ‘Supporting the Conditions for a Just Transition Internationally’ at the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Glasgow. That committed signatories to supporting and promoting social dialogue between governments and representative social partners, including social partners in carbon-intensive industries (National Archives, 2021).

Several social partner initiatives indicate the commitment of European employers and trade unions to achieving carbon neutrality. However, the number of joint social partner initiatives focusing on the just transition is relatively small, especially compared with the number of initiatives focusing on digitalisation. This difference is explained by the relative novelty of the just transition on the policy agenda, and the complexity of the issues the just transition raises for social dialogue and collective bargaining (IPOL, 2022). Existing statements therefore focus on the support of social partners for decarbonisation goals and outline the key principles that should inform policymaking at national, regional and local levels.

Therefore, several joint statements highlight the consensus among social partners on implementing the just transition through social dialogue. For example, the joint statement from the European social partners in the gas sector recognises the need to mainstream sustainability objectives across sectors, calling for the development of solidarity mechanisms to support the regions most affected by the green transition, the implementation of rigorous socioeconomic impact assessments and long-term development strategies, and effective social dialogue and collective bargaining (EPSU et al, 2020). In 2023, social partners in the gas sector announced their intention to enter into negotiations towards a European framework agreement. The social partners recognise that these ‘negotiations will be the first of their kind’ to centre around just transition issues in a bid to align policy actions at European level and deploy solutions to reduce carbon emissions (IndustriALL, 2023).

A joint statement of the European social partners in the electricity sector calls for ambitious policies to address the climate challenge, including comprehensive regional industrial strategies, investments in high-quality employment supported by well-funded active labour market policies, adequate social protection systems and effective social dialogue (IndustriALL et al, 2021). The European social partners’ recommendations for a circular economy call for social partners to discuss just transition strategies to move towards a circular economy and, where applicable, use social dialogue and collective bargaining to negotiate circular economy pathways (ETUC et al, 2021).

Furthermore, the 2022–2024 work programme of the European social partners states that social partners should play an active role in ensuring a just transition (ETUC et al, 2022).

Just transition and social dialogue at national level

Role of national tripartite bodies

National-level social dialogue around the just transition remains fragmented, with contributions from tripartite bodies and cross-sectoral social dialogue on the just transition being restricted to a handful of Member States. Information gathered for this report shows that national-level tripartite bodies have been involved in policies linked to the just transition in Bulgaria, France, Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Malta, the Netherlands and Spain. Their involvement includes contributions through conducting studies and providing opinions on various issues linked to the just transition (for example, investments, inequalities or its impact on employment) and through issuing recommendations on broader goals of achieving a just transition or, specifically, on TJTPs. In some of the countries, including France, the Netherlands and Spain, the involvement of national tripartite bodies in the just transition has a longer history and is embedded in broader national plans and strategies for decarbonisation. In these countries, research and policy opinions issued by the tripartite bodies have informed the development of national and regional just transition plans and strategies. In contrast, in Bulgaria and Greece, the opinions issued by the relevant national councils reveal the lack of a framework for social dialogue at national level for just transition policies.

In **Ireland**, the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) has produced several policy studies focusing on the just transition (NESC, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c) in view of supporting decarbonisation goals. The studies adopt a broad definition of a just transition, which is considered to be ‘one which seeks to ensure transition is fair, equitable and inclusive in terms of processes and outcomes’ (NESC, 2020a, p. 57), and draw on evidence available in the grey literature⁴ and case studies to develop lessons and recommendations for the just transition in Ireland. They also identify the key elements that contribute to a just transition, which include a participative approach to governance, appropriate social protection for those at risk from transition impacts, supportive arrangements and sectoral measures to enable good-quality jobs, local support for

investments in digital and green infrastructures, and evidence-informed policymaking drawing on international experiences and practices. Research by the National Economic and Social Council also notes that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to the just transition and that even in the best-case scenario, in which policy takes into account lessons learned and adopts interventions to address employment vulnerabilities, the transition is likely to be complex and messy and to take time (NESC, 2020a).

Similarly, in the **Netherlands**, the Social and Economic Council produced several reports that focus on greening and the just transition. One of the studies conducted by the council focused on the employment effects of the energy transition and argued, among other things, that an integrated approach to the transition in the labour market is needed in order to capitalise on the opportunities provided by the green transition. The study also argues for targeted labour market policy that is designed with the involvement of social partners and public authorities, and for the integration of employment policies into broader regional economic agendas (SER, 2018). Importantly, input provided by the Social and Economic Council contributed to the Dutch Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan and to the National Climate Agreement, which was concluded in 2019. The latter sets the national policy framework for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the country in line with the European and international targets. In relation to the just transition, the agreement aims to ensure the adoption of a fair and inclusive approach to addressing the employment effects of climate change, through facilitating the development and mobility of workers and providing financial compensation if necessary (Government of the Netherlands, 2019).

In **France**, the Economic, Social and Environmental Council (ESEC) contributes to ongoing debates and national policy initiatives linked to the just transition. Research published by ESEC argues that the green transition will not be possible without reducing inequalities and without the involvement of all stakeholders in policymaking. ESEC also questions the alignment of public policies presently responding to the energy crisis with longer-term environmental objectives. The council favours an anticipatory approach to future crises, and efficient investments in the public sector that take into account environmental impacts. With respect to employment, ESEC argues for an increased role for the ‘Forward-looking management of jobs and skills’ system (*Gestion prévisionnelle des emplois et des compétences*, GPEC) at regional level (Goguet and Kacprzak, 2022).

⁴ Grey literature refers to any literature that is not produced by traditional, commercial or academic publishers. Examples of grey literature include research reports, working papers, conference proceedings and policy documents.

In **Spain**, the Economic and Social Council has played an important role in fostering debates and contributing to policies on the just transition. In 2017, in its report on the electricity sector in Spain, the council called for the establishment of a national just transition strategy that would ensure the balancing of the environmental objectives with the economic and social objectives of the green transition (CES, 2017). In 2019, the government adopted the Just Transition Strategy as part of its broader Strategic Energy and Climate Framework. The strategy, which was submitted for public consultation at the beginning of 2019, received 49 submissions from trade unions, 83 from non-governmental organisations and 49 from business associations. It sets out 11 strategic objectives, two of which focus on promoting the participation of social partners and other stakeholders in policies aimed at tackling the social consequences of the green transition. The main tools for the implementation of the strategy are just transition agreements, which serve as territorial action plans to support planned investments. A broad range of stakeholders, including social partners, are invited to participate in the design of the agreements. The agreements are designed through an established development process that includes an assessment of the level of vulnerability of regions, the commitment of the parties to the agreement, the definition of interventions to achieve the objectives of the agreement and a timetable for action. The Just Transition Strategy also established an institute for the just transition, with the aim of providing specialised support for policy interventions in their development phase.

In **Latvia**, the National Tripartite Cooperation Council issued an opinion on climate change policies. The council argued that the impact of the transition towards a green economy on businesses and employment is not properly assessed in the country. It also prepared proposals to the Prime Minister on how Latvia should implement policies for achieving climate neutrality. These included the need for interinstitutional coordination in the achievement of climate goals and improving state capacity to manage climate change policies; reactivating the National Energy and Climate Council and expanding its competence; assessing the employment and economic impacts of achieving climate goals, including the risks of not achieving targets in terms of competitiveness at enterprise and sectoral levels; providing practical support for enterprises and individuals to achieve climate goals; and formulating a tax regime that facilitates the reduction of carbon emissions and enhances the attractiveness of energy-efficient investments.

Tripartite bodies in Bulgaria, Greece and Malta also issued opinions or have been consulted on the green transition.

In **Bulgaria**, the Economic and Social Council included the green deal and sustainable development in its strategic priorities for 2021–2025. In 2022, the council issued its own initiative opinion on the aims and challenges of TJTPs, drawing attention to the need to observe the partnership principle throughout the lifecycle of TJTPs. The opinion also highlights some of the challenges associated with the just transition in Bulgaria, including the geographical mismatch between jobs created in green industries and jobs destroyed in brown sectors, the potential skills mismatches generated by the green transition, and the manifold impacts of climate change on citizens and workers, requiring holistic policy interventions (ESC, 2022). Furthermore, in 2023, the council issued an opinion on the national climate strategy, emphasising the lack of a national consensus around decarbonisation plans (ESC, 2023). The council also highlighted the significant delays in the development and approval of TJTPs and the lack of a detailed strategy concerning decarbonisation and public investments in coal-dependent regions.

In **Greece**, the Economic and Social Council published in 2022 its own initiative opinion on climate change policies, which argues in favour of a balanced approach to the just transition that considers social and employment effects and the impact on businesses' competitiveness. The opinion also highlights several structural weaknesses in existing policies implemented in Greece, including the lack of integration of adaptation and mitigation objectives into sectoral policies and the absence of consultation in the planning and implementation phases of policies, the lack of coordination between different policies included in the national climate strategy, the absence of socioeconomic mapping of adaptation and mitigation costs at national level, the absence of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for implemented policies and the absence of a framework for multi-level consultation of social partners on issues related to the green transition (OKE, 2022).

In **Malta**, meetings of the Malta Council for Economic and Social Development focused on the broad topics of the green and digital transitions, with discussions revolving around issues of competitiveness, transport connectivity, inclusivity, shore-to-ship electrification and enhancing the use of electric vehicles.

National-level social dialogue and agreements on the just transition

National-level collective agreements and social dialogue on the just transition are equally rare. Examples of social dialogue or collective agreements linked to the green transition were identified in Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Poland, Spain and Sweden.

In Germany, Poland and Spain, social dialogue concerns the restructuring of the coal and other mining sectors, setting out plans for phasing out coal and detailing measures for compensating affected employees. In 2018, **Germany** established a commission on growth, structural change and employment (the Coal Commission), which was tasked with formulating a socially and economically acceptable path for the transition to a carbon-neutral economy. The commission includes a broad range of stakeholders, including employers and trade unions. The latter assessed the recommendations put forward in the 2019 final report as the outcome of ‘a true social consensus’ (DGB, 2021). Among other things, the report highlights the need for investments in vocational training and the creation of high-quality future-proof jobs as well as issues such as the need for regional investments, support for SMEs and structural changes in the labour market (Commission on Growth, Structural Change and Employment, 2019). The 2021 German Coal Phase-out Act incorporated into law the recommendations put forward by the Coal Commission. Several types of interventions are planned to be implemented at regional level in order to address the socioeconomic effects of the transition, including investments in infrastructure and renewable energy, support for workers to reskill and upskill and to find new jobs, and investments in research and development activities (Eurofound, 2022).

In **Poland**, the National Social Contract with Miners was adopted in 2021, following the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the mining union and the government. The contract sets out the timetable for the discontinuation of coal mining, which is set to end by 2049, with most mines scheduled to be closed after 2030. A key element of the contract is a package of social protection measures for employees from mines in liquidation. This package includes pre-retirement benefits (miners’ leave) that amount to 80% of workers’ salaries or a one-time severance payment amounting to PLN 120,000 (€26,777 as of 7 June 2023) and the opportunity for workers to enter a retraining programme. The contract specifies that workers have the right to maintain their jobs until they retire or, if that is not possible, find employment in another mining unit.

Spain has a comprehensive institutional framework that seeks to address the socioeconomic impacts of the green transition. Aside from the tripartite structures discussed in the previous section, two national agreements have been signed since 2018 that include interventions aimed at mitigating the consequences of the transition for regions, companies and workers. The first national agreement, signed in 2018 between the Federation of Industry, Construction and Agriculture of the General Union of Workers, CCOO de Industria and the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Tourism, sets out the framework for a just transition in the coal mining regions for 2019–2027. The agreement specifies

the measures to be implemented to ensure the phasing out of coal mining in the regions concerned (UGT-FICA et al, 2019). These include investments in the restoration of mining sites and a social plan for workers in the companies affected. The social plan includes subsidised leave, early retirement benefits for workers who are at least 48 years old and workers’ one-time right to receive unemployment benefits for the maximum legal contributory period. The right is a measure specifically aimed at workers who do not qualify for paid leave or early retirement benefits. The agreement also specifies that a job bank will be created and that a priority will be finding new jobs in activities linked to restoration for workers who were made redundant as a result of mine closures.

A second agreement for a just transition for thermal power plants was signed in 2020 between the Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge, the Ministry of Labour and Social Economy, power plant companies (Endesa, Iberdrola and Naturgy) and the trade unions (CCOO de Industria and the Federation of Industry, Construction and Agriculture of the General Union of Workers). The company Energias de Portugal signed the agreement in March 2021. The agreement concerns 2,300 workers and commits companies, the government and unions to fostering and maintaining employment while also identifying long-term solutions for sustainable growth. It provides a list of responsibilities for each stakeholder (Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge et al, 2020). The government aims to create a special register at the Just Transition Institute (see the previous section) enabling affected workers to seek requalification opportunities and obtain support to search for new jobs. It also agrees to provide tailored measures to facilitate the employment of workers made redundant, paying special attention to those aged over 52, for whom relocation is more difficult, and to create vocational training and employability support plans for workers in affected areas. As part of the agreement, companies will maintain employment through relocation plans, giving priority to workers of ancillary companies, and draw up new investment proposals in the same region. Unions are responsible for ensuring compliance with and monitoring the fulfilment of commitments included in the agreement and for participating in actions, especially in actions concerning training, occupational health and safety, reindustrialisation and outreach.

In **Greece**, the 2021 National General Collective Bargaining Agreement makes explicit reference to the need to ensure a just transition to a low-carbon economy for workers. Through the agreement, national social partners highlighted the need for their involvement in policies to address the consequences of the green transition and agreed to set up a joint monitoring mechanism for skills needs and investments in vulnerable sectors. The social partners also agreed to

send a joint letter to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs concerning the establishment of a new department for the environment and labour in the Supreme Labour Council, involving the national social partners and a representative of the Ministry of the Environment and Energy.

In **Finland**, a climate policy roundtable was established in 2020 that brings together trade unions, employers, the government and other relevant stakeholders. The main purpose of the roundtable is to conduct discussions specifically on how the transition to a climate-neutral economy can be socially and regionally fair and just (Ministry of the Environment, 2020). One of the key issues discussed in the climate policy roundtable was that of the link between justice and the green transition, with members of the roundtable stressing the need to consider social and economic aspects and distributive aspects in the implementation of climate policies in Finland (Ministry of the Environment, 2022).

In **Sweden**, job security councils provide workers with support for job transitions in the event of a collective redundancy. The two main job security councils are the Job Security Council (Trygghetsrådet), which was established in 1974 and serves white-collar workers, and the Job Security Foundation (Trygghetsfonden), which was established in 2004 and serves blue-collar workers. Conditions for both job security councils were renegotiated in 2021 between social partners, which expanded the generosity and scope of financial support for employees affected by collective redundancies. Importantly, assistance for upskilling was introduced for workers who had worked for at least 8 years in the past 14 years. The aid package includes a grant that covers 80% of their reduced income up to a ceiling of approximately €2,500 and a loan that amounts to approximately €1,170 a month. The grant is provided for full-time studies of up to 44 weeks, with the possibility of a 22-week extension (IndustriALL, 2022).

In addition, informal or ad hoc consultations or social dialogue between national social partners and the government were reported in Croatia and Romania.

In **Croatia**, discussions between the government and social partners revolved around necessary adaptations to national active labour market policies to address the impact of the green and digital transitions. The main outcome of these discussions was a new plan for active labour market policies to encourage the employment of disadvantaged labour market groups in green and digital sectors. The policy includes a flat-rate subsidy paid to employers for hiring, for a period of at least 12 months, registered unemployed people belonging to one of the disadvantaged categories (for example, young or old workers, people who have been unemployed for longer than six months, workers with a disability and workers who did not complete their high school education).

In **Romania**, consultations were organised by the government and were largely unidirectional. The working group at ministry level included only one trade union confederation (emphasising reskilling services) and several employer organisations that represent the oil and gas sector and that were generally interested in obtaining favourable conditions for new investments in oil and gas to compensate for coal mine closures.

Just transition and social dialogue at sectoral and company levels

Sectoral and regional social dialogue and collective bargaining

Sectoral social dialogue and collective agreements in relation to the green transition are predominantly present in the energy sector, where social partners in electricity, peat or chemical industries include clauses that seek to adapt the labour force to the demands of the green economy. Thus, the core measures included in collective agreements focus on the reskilling and upskilling of workers and on the forward-looking monitoring of changes triggered by the digital and green transitions. Sectoral collective agreements that include just transition elements were identified in only five Member States: Finland, France, Germany, Italy and Spain. Even in these countries, the number of collective agreements that include just transition elements is low.

In **Finland**, analyses of the collective bargaining system demonstrate that, compared with other Nordic or continental countries, the country lags behind in its preparation for the green transition (Service Union United PAM, 2022). The analyses show that the responsibility for the social protection of the employees lies with the state, rather than being agreed in social dialogue or collective agreements by the social partners. Still, two collective agreements in the peat and chemical industries do include elements that can contribute to a just transition. The 2023–2024 collective agreement for the mining sector specifies that an employer has the right to lay off an employee if the work on offer is significantly reduced due to the restructuring of the company's operations or for economic reasons. In these circumstances, the employee has a right to up to 10 days of paid 'employability leave', during which the employee can participate in education and training activities or traineeships, or search for a new job. The provision is based on the Finnish Employment Contracts Act, which regulates the rights of employees during notice periods and grants them the right to fully paid leave to participate in training or engage in job-seeking activities. Furthermore, the 2022–2023 collective agreement for white-collar employees in the chemical industry contains a provision regarding the development of skills in the workplace. The agreement gives recommendations on skills needs and states that

the signatory parties should examine good practices in the area of skills development in the workplace.

In **France**, since 2021, more than a dozen collective agreements at sectoral level have included elements linked to the just transition. The agreements include clauses that specify the need to approach skills development in a forward-looking manner. The clauses are a response to the 2021 reform in the collective bargaining framework, which requires environmental issues to be discussed at all levels (see Box 1). As part of the 'Forward-looking management of jobs and skills' system (*Gestion prévisionnelle des emplois et des compétences*, GPEC), professional branches are obliged to negotiate at least once every three years. From 2021 onwards, negotiations on the GPEC must respond to the challenges of the green transition. The anticipation of skill requirements under the GPEC requires analysing in a forward-looking manner the changes that affect the branches; defining the priority areas in terms of work study, training and professional certification; helping organisations to set up skills development initiatives; and improving the capacity of representative structures at branch level.

In **Germany**, an alliance was established in 2021 between 26 large German companies from different sectors, which is also supported by the Mining, Chemical and Energy Industrial Union. The purpose of the alliance is to respond to changes brought about by the twin transition and help workers to retrain for professions or occupations where there are labour shortages in order to avoid redundancies.

In **Italy**, two new collective agreements for the electricity and oil sectors recognise the significant transformations that the sectors are undergoing as a result of the green transition. The agreement for the electricity sector introduced an innovation through the establishment of a charter on the value of people. The charter focuses on ensuring adequate working conditions for workers in the sector that meet the aspirations of individuals. The document also commits companies and trade unions to training to ensure the re-employability of workers and their work-life balance, and to the development of practices to support working parents and encourage employee participation. As part of the agreement, a commission was set up to study the impact of the twin transition on jobs and identify new

skills needs in the sector (Planet Labor, 2022a). Similarly, the collective agreement for the oil sector focuses on, among other things, the need to reskill and upskill employees, who will be given access to certified training courses (Planet Labor, 2022b).

In **Spain**, in addition to the national agreements in the energy and mining industries described in the previous section, sectoral agreements in the recycling, hospital and care service sectors refer to the just transition. However, agreements contain general statements and references rather than describing in detail measures to be implemented to ensure a just transition. For example, the agreement for the recycling and waste sector states that 'the sector must adopt a permanent, responsible and visible attitude towards the environment and, at the same time, ensure that the effort being developed by the industry in this field, future actions, as well as its results, are known and adequately valued by society and the competent administrations' (Ministry of Labour and Social Economy, 2022). Similarly, the agreement for the care sector argues that 'the defence of health in the workplace cannot be effective if, at the same time, one does not assume one's own responsibility in relation to the management of the environmental repercussions of work activities and does not embrace environmental protection' (Ministry of Labour and Social Economy, 2018).

Social dialogue also takes place at regional level on topics related to the just transition. However, examples of such instances are even less numerous, most likely because regions are not the usual units at which social partners engage in social dialogue. One example of a country where social dialogue takes place at regional level is **Denmark**, where social partners discussed the need for business restructuring in both of the regions that are eligible for just transition funding because they will face significant socioeconomic and employment challenges. Social dialogue focused on the need to promote investments in new technologies and in programmes for the reskilling and upskilling of workers. Social partners also agreed on the need for investments aiding the green transition in small and medium-sized businesses. Investments should be directed towards helping businesses to become more resource- and energy-efficient and thus more competitive.

Box 1: Updated national framework to promote collective bargaining on environmental issues in France

In 2021, Act No. 2021-1104 on combating climate change and strengthening resilience to its effects provided that the periodic supplementary negotiations at both branch and company levels must consider the challenges posed by the green transition. The law thereby integrates an environmental dimension into the recurrent branch- and company-level collective bargaining. The aim of this law is to aid in anticipating the effects of the green transition on the evolution of the structure of jobs and on the training needs of employees.

In this context, branches and companies may be supported by an observatory set up at branch level (or including several branches), the Observatoire prospectif des métiers et des qualifications, and by skills operators (*opérateurs de compétences*), whom the law has entrusted with informing companies about the issues linked to sustainable development and supporting them in their projects to adapt to the environmental transition, in particular by analysing and defining their skills needs.

In addition to making negotiations around the green transition compulsory, the law has also strengthened works councils' right to information and consultation. The law requires that works councils should be informed and consulted on the environmental consequences of measures affecting the organisation, management and general running of companies, in particular on:

- measures likely to affect the size or structure of the workforce
- the modification of the company's economic or legal organisation
- employment and working conditions, in particular working hours and vocational training
- the introduction of new technologies and any major changes (including to health and safety conditions or working conditions)
- measures taken to facilitate the introduction, return to work or continued employment of people injured in the workplace, people who acquired a disability in war, other people with disabilities and people suffering from progressive chronic illnesses, particularly with regard to the adaptation of workstations

Company-level social dialogue and collective bargaining

Company-level collective agreements that include just transition elements are by far the most common. In many countries, particularly in those with strong industrial relations systems, company-level collective agreements that include clauses aimed at responding to the green transition in a way that minimises impacts for workers and companies are not new. Rather, they are part of longer-standing efforts to minimise the potential social and economic impacts of restructuring events triggered by the green transition through a variety of interventions. These include vocational training plans, social programmes such as early retirement schemes for eligible workers, occupational safety and health regulations and protection against weather-related loss of income, and local investments in climate protection and nature conservation.

While an exhaustive analysis of company-level collective agreements that include just transition elements is impossible due to a lack of data, this section provides several examples demonstrating the variety of strategies used at company level to address the socioeconomic impact of the green transition.

As highlighted in the previous section, in **France**, collective bargaining must include workforce adaptation strategies that anticipate and address the challenges posed by the transition to a green economy. In this context, company-level agreements should focus on several interrelated objectives, including anticipating changes in occupations in order to adapt skills; attracting and integrating new employees, paying particular attention to the company's commitment to inclusion; developing internal talent and the skills and employability of employees in line with the company's needs and environmental requirements; and supporting workers at the end of their career and those leaving the company, by encouraging them to pass on their knowledge (through tutoring/mentoring) and facilitating the transition between work and retirement. Still, very few company-level collective agreements in France include such elements. For example, the collective agreement for Gestion des Emplois et des Parcours Professionnels Bouygues Immobilier, signed in December 2021, specified that the company must raise employees' awareness of environmental issues and provide related training, and develop its actions in relation to corporate social responsibility, and climate and carbon policy. To this end, the company set up a 'low-carbon' pathway and launched a 'biodiversity'

pathway in early 2022. Similarly, the Sanofi collective agreement, signed in February 2022, states in its preamble that ‘the aim of this agreement is to pursue and strengthen the approach taken to forward-looking management of jobs and skills, to respond as far as necessary to the challenges of the ecological transition, to promote a policy of development and voluntary active mobility, and to put in place a transparent, regular and shared approach to ensure better visibility of individual and collective career paths’ (Planet Labor, 2022c). Among other things, the agreement specifies that employees occupying a position classified as ‘sensitive’ may benefit from specific and reinforced support measures, including professional development assistance, professional mobility assistance, the recognition of acquired qualifications, and information on labour needs and shortages.

In **Germany**, several company-level collective agreements in the coal and electricity sectors focus on providing a safety net for workers affected by the phasing out of coal. The 2020 collective agreement for RWE provides for the general exclusion of redundancies for operational reasons and a substantial increase in the state adjustment allowance (*Übergangsgeld*) by the company. The agreement also includes a comprehensive package of measures seeking to ensure the employability of workers through reskilling and upskilling, which is paid for by the employer; the establishment of a generous severance programme for those who leave the company voluntarily; and instruments to reduce the number of excess staff, including part-time work and job sharing, the insourcing of external services, reduction of overtime, a reduction in collectively agreed weekly working hours and the phasing out of temporary employment (IGBCE, 2020). Similar agreements were concluded by two local energy providers, STEAG in 2020 and Enercity in 2022.

In **Ireland**, Bord na Mona, the owner of the peatlands and the largest employer in the Midlands, signed two collective agreements that aim to ensure that the

company transitions to sustainable energy sources in a socially responsible manner. The 2019 just transition agreement covers a four-year period and establishes a system of annual pay increases to compensate the workforce for its cooperation with the cessation of operational requirements, such as those in relation to bog locations, workshops and stores; its engagement with a new flexible operating model across the energy division; and its buy-in to planned changes, including the implementation of new technologies, methods, procedures and training programmes. A second agreement from October 2020 concerns the transfer of 350 workers from peat harvesting (which ceased in 2020) to bog rehabilitation work that restores peatland. The parties will engage in a new flexible operational work model, to replace the pre-existing payment by results system, which has provided significant bonuses. The new system will provide ‘an equivalent earnings opportunity’, and, while it is being developed, employees are receiving a temporary, individual just transition allowance based on their payment by results averaged over the previous three years.

In **Italy**, company-level collective agreements in the energy sector focus primarily on adapting the skills of the workforce in response to the green transition. These measures are combined with social protection measures such as early retirement schemes for workers who are close to the retirement age. An innovative agreement signed by Enel, an energy company, introduced a statute that seeks to increase the involvement of workers in crucial aspects of their work. The statute has three core elements. The first is promoting the participation of workers in workplace processes to ensure their dignity and inclusion at work and work-life balance. The second concerns investments in skills and lifelong learning. Lastly, the statute seeks to promote a culture of safety at work, through ex ante and ex post analyses of accident risk and the use of innovative technologies for accident prevention.

5 | Conclusions

This report presents an initial overview of a subset of territorial just transition plans (TJTPs) and the involvement of social partners in them. It provides a snapshot of how policies and debates had developed across Europe by the end of 2022. The core message of the report is that **progress with TJTPs is uneven across Member States**. While some of the plans have only recently been approved and entered the implementation phase, others are still in the discussion and design phases (at the time of writing in January 2023). The recent energy crisis has compounded the issues involved in the design and selection of interventions and is likely to further hamper the progress of plans.

It should also be acknowledged that, by design, TJTPs take a partnership approach, involving various organisations at national and regional levels, including the social partners. These plans are not the only tool used to pursue the EU's climate neutrality objectives; there are numerous other EU- and national-level policies and measures (such as coal agreements, coal phase-outs and climate agreements) that can all contribute towards meeting the overall ambitious European Green Deal objectives. The term 'just transition', which is included in the title of the TJTPs and mentioned in the Green Deal, is of fundamental importance, but is not a new term. In its guidelines, the International Labour Organization recognises that ensuring a just transition means transforming the economy 'in a way that is as fair and inclusive as possible to everyone concerned, creating decent work opportunities and leaving no one behind'. The plans have set the process for the just transition in motion, and with the deadline for implementation set for 2027 **there is an urgent need to accelerate the implementation of the TJTPs**. The plans set targets, provide timetables, suggest policy measures, put in place multi-stakeholder partnerships for the regions affected and so on.

Social partners consulted through this research stressed that there have been **delays in the implementation of the plans**. These delays may be linked to the processes of drafting, negotiating with the European Commission and approval, but also to delays in their actual implementation. The recent energy crisis caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine has influenced national debates about climate policies, the projects put forward for adoption in the plans and, most importantly, the timelines of the plans. Some Member States took measures to meet the energy demands of households and industries, and it is hoped that this will not affect the overall timetables of the plans. The plans are not designed in a vacuum but reflect the national (and international) reality and challenges that governments,

regions, industries, employers, workers and their representatives face.

Regarding **the role of social partners**, a review of published national TJTPs shows that Member States have indeed provided for the participation of peak-level and sectoral organisations and, where relevant (depending on the national social dialogue and industrial relations system), regional ones. This participation took various forms, mainly through monitoring committees for EU funds and a combination of other channels (such as public consultations, tripartite bodies, regional teams, just transition platforms or other national bodies). The participation of social partners at regional level is not as strong, and it remains to be seen what shape it will take when it comes to the implementation of the various planned projects.

The **involvement of social partners in the design phase of the plans** was in line with national institutional arrangements and broad TJTP provisions; however, some social partners raised the issue of **meaningful participation**. Social partners submitted proposals regarding priorities of the regional plans; however, it was not always clear how that input was used. Opinions were split; some say that at least some of their proposals have been taken on board, whereas others are unsure, insofar as the plans did not distinguish between stakeholder groups. In a few countries, social partners were not enthusiastic about the influence their views had on the final plans.

Social partners highlighted in their proposals **employment issues** regarding workers likely to lose their jobs or relocate. Trade unions are particularly attentive to the quality of jobs, insofar as new jobs are created, or workers are moved to new jobs (which companies or industries to move them to and how to reskill them). Employer organisations and trade unions agree that **reskilling and career guidance** are crucial topics but that they need to be further adjusted to achieve the desired effects at regional and workplace levels. They also agree about the need for **investments in green technologies**, with employer organisations clearly favouring research into and innovation in technological tools measuring carbon emissions and green production. In employer organisations' proposals, they emphasise the importance of **business support measures** and subsidies for companies affected by the just transition. Both employer organisations and trade unions made suggestions about the management of just transition funding, and some favoured the setting up of **just transition funds managed in a tripartite or bipartite fashion**. The just transition affects the lives of workers and industries (as well as communities);

therefore, trade unions argued in favour of increasing social dialogue.

Social dialogue and collective bargaining in relation to just transition topics have been observed in some Member States, but **are the exception rather than the rule**. Where present, collective agreements tend to make broad references to the need for a just transition. This research aimed not to map all collective agreements in the Member States but rather to collect some as illustrative examples. **Social dialogue and some collective agreements have been identified at the cross-sectoral level. There are a few collective agreements reported at sectoral level, while the majority of identified agreements have been concluded at company level.** The topics covered by the collective agreements at sectoral and cross-sectoral levels include the reskilling and upskilling of workers and the forward-looking monitoring of changes triggered by the digital and green transitions. Reskilling and upskilling are also taken into account at company level, although often in the context of restructuring and the potential impacts of the green and digital transitions. Given this, at company level, collective agreements also include, for example, social clauses for workers who are in danger of being made redundant, employment provisions and provisions for other facilities that would ensure workers' re-employability or facilitate their potential transfer to other parts of a company.

One should not underestimate the role of tripartite bodies at national or regional level, such as social and economic councils, which for some central and eastern European countries play a much more important role than collective bargaining itself.

Finally, European sectoral-level social partners (for example, in the electricity and gas sectors) have issued some joint statements, but, overall, **there are fewer initiatives on the just transition than on digitalisation**. It is notable that Eurogas, the European Federation of Public Service Unions and IndustriALL Europe have recently notified the European Commission of their intention to enter into negotiations towards a European framework agreement focusing on the just transition. These negotiations are the first of their kind to focus on just transition, as both sides of the industry recognise. Such a dynamic form of social dialogue would complement the REPowerEU plan and the Net Zero Industry Act, enabling the rapid deployment of solutions to reduce emissions and achieve a just transition.

The way forward

Social partners have previously dealt with just transition issues. For example, the closing of mines in the 1980s provided useful experiences and lessons on how to reduce fossil fuel-based production while considering people's livelihoods, their career and employment prospects and the future of the communities they are rooted in. Choosing a development and green growth path that has been agreed at regional level and ensuring that social partners and other actors are fully involved and share the same vision for the future of the region are essential elements of a just transition. Ensuring that policies are complementary, well integrated and implemented within the agreed timetable is of the utmost importance. As this study was conducted when the plans were being prepared, it provides some indications about future actions.

Speeding up the implementation of plans with social partners' involvement

There is a need to accelerate the process of implementing TJTPs (finding jobs for redundant workers, retraining them, redeveloping the regions, coordinating actions with companies, employment services and vocational training providers so that workers can move from one company or industry to another without delays and matching the skills required), which can be achieved by taking on board the views of social partners. They can coordinate with their members in the regions affected, to improve the alignment of policy interventions at national, regional and company levels.

Engaging more closely with collective bargaining activities

The topic of the just transition is not a traditional topic of social dialogue, but as both industries and workers are heavily affected by the transition there is a need for social dialogue to consider social and economic aspects and distributional effects of climate policies. The role of national-level social partners in regulating these aspects is of fundamental importance to ensure a green transition, in a fair and inclusive way. Sector or cross-sector initiatives (for example, setting up observatories or monitoring tools for the future of jobs and skills and forward-looking management of jobs and skills) can support workers and industries in their green transformation pathway. Transforming jobs and tasks in response to the transition requires the closer

monitoring of occupations and sectors and collective regulation by social partners. It is recognised that often a single industry (or even company) is immediately affected by the transformation (for example, peat, shale oil and coal mining) in the region covered by a plan, and collective bargaining may take place at company level. However, other industries in the supply chain are affected, not only in the region but also more widely. Transforming the economy in a way that leaves no one behind will surely require solutions to be agreed between employer representative organisations and trade unions in the sectors concerned.

Supporting capacity building for social partners on just transition topics

This research revealed that social partners in some Member States may need support in dealing with the issue of the just transition, as it is complex and urgent and requires (human and financial) resources. EU-level social partners are already involved in exchanges with national-level social partners, but national- and EU-level resources should be devoted to such capacity-building exercises. Such support should not end with TJTPs; as more national activities related to the just transition are planned for the years ahead, investment in capacity building will pay off.

Key findings

- TJTPs for the regions most negatively affected by the transition have been agreed between the Member States and the European Commission. However, they are still in their initiation phase, with the deadline for their completion in 2027 looming.
 - The partnership principle, embedded in the Just Transition Mechanism, provides for the involvement of a broad range of stakeholders, including social partners, in the TJTPs. A review of the plans for all Member States shows that they used their existing governance structures to control the use of EU funds to draw up these plans, and included social partners (as members of relevant committees). Provisions of the TJTPs regarding the involvement of social partners mainly refer to peak-level and sectoral social partners. Despite the regional character of the plans, fewer opportunities for social partners at regional level are provided but this needs to be seen in the context of social dialogue structures.
- Examining how, in practice, social partners provided their input on the plans at the design stage shows that Member States overwhelmingly relied on European Social Fund monitoring committees and public consultations (open to all interested parties, not just social partners). Peak-level and sectoral organisations, especially those active in sectors directly affected by the green transition, such as coal and energy, had opportunities to provide proposals for and comments on the plans. Such opportunities were not always available to social partners at regional level.
- There is agreement between social partners on several priorities to be adopted through TJTPs. Their proposals include investments in upskilling and reskilling workers who need to change jobs or move to another industry or locality, and investments in local and regional infrastructure. Adapting the education system so that it can prepare the workforce for green jobs and provide ongoing skills enhancement for the industries undergoing transformation was also among the priorities agreed by social partners.
- Employer organisations emphasised the importance of implementing various measures to support businesses and public investments in research and innovation, and broader interventions to boost local development. Trade unions highlighted the broader social consequences of the green transition at regional and local levels, and the need to ensure employment security and maintain job quality for workers in the most affected companies.
- Social partners put forward specific proposals about managing the funding for the just transition and the policymaking process. They maintained that a cohesive approach to national climate neutrality programmes, funds and policies should be adopted and that just transition platforms involving social partners should be established.
- It was not always clear how proposals by social partners were included in the final plans. In fact, opinions were mostly split between those acknowledging that some of their input was included and others who were unclear if it was recognised, while in a smaller group of countries social partners (particularly trade unions) said that their suggestions were not seriously considered. Social partners' capacity issues were also mentioned in some countries where social dialogue regimes are not as strong.

- Social dialogue is not restricted to the design phase of TJTPs. Rather, broader social concerns raised by the green transition are discussed in social dialogue on the topic of the just transition. In a few countries, such as Germany, Ireland and Spain, social dialogue around the just transition pre-dates the establishment of TJTPs. In these cases, agreements, institutions and policies designed to respond to the need for a just transition have formed the basis for the interventions set out in the TJTPs.
- There are very few collective bargaining agreements at national and sectoral levels that explicitly mention or focus on the need to ensure a just transition for workers and companies. At local level, concerns about the employment and social impacts of climate change are embedded in collective agreements indirectly, through provisions that detail restructuring processes.
- The energy crisis has contributed to delays in the design and implementation of TJTPs in 15 Member States. While some of these delays are deemed to be temporary in nature, for instance caused by the extension of coal extraction to feed energy plants that rely on this raw material, the timeline for the medium-term phasing out of coal production may also be affected, requiring the acceleration of the policy cycle.
- Social partners are overall supportive of the climate neutrality objectives and can be key players in partnerships involving regional and national actors. They can channel the views of industries and workers affected by the transition, to shape the future of entire regions. Their contribution to the plans is crucial. Stronger forms of social dialogue and collective bargaining should be engaged to support the transformation of industries and regions and protect workers. Social partners should be supported in enhancing their capacities in dealing with the energy transition, particularly in countries with weak social dialogue regimes.

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This report investigates the involvement of social partners in the just transition to a climate-neutral economy, with a particular focus on the territorial just transition plans. These plans aim to support the regions most negatively affected by the just transition by assisting workers to retrain, relocate and find other jobs, and also support industries that need to phase out fossil fuels or other greenhouse gas-intensive activities. The role and input of the social partners in these plans and their views on the just transition are explored. An analysis of social dialogue practices and examples of collective agreements shows the range of topics covered by the social partners. The report also investigates the role of the energy crisis in the just transition and how it has contributed to delays in the implementation of territorial just transition plans in certain Member States.

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