



PEESD

PROMOTING SOCIAL DIALOGUE
IN EUROPEAN ENERGY SECTOR

PUBLICATION

European Industry Workers and Collective Bargaining

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Introduction

A key component of labor relations in Europe is social dialogue, which is the process of cooperation and negotiation between trade unions, employers, and other stakeholders in the world of work. The social discussion is crucial when it comes to tackling the complex issues in the energy sector that result from changes in market dynamics, regulations, and technology breakthroughs. Both short-term events and long-term trends like decarbonization, digitization, and the desire for sustainable energy solutions are causing major changes in the European energy sector. However, social dialogue in the energy sector has particular difficulties, like the requirement to maintain the supply of energy services while balancing the interests of governments, employers, and employees.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine and the COVID-19 outbreak have had a significant impact on the European energy market, adding new dynamics and making pre-existing issues worse. Workplace conditions, labor relations, and the influence of the social dialogue have all been profoundly impacted by these changes. To assess social dialogue's efficacy and pinpoint opportunities for future development in the years to come, it is essential to comprehend how it has changed in response to these developments.

The fundamental principles of EU law, which require employers and trade unions to collaborate in order to enhance working conditions, form collective bargaining agreements, and create solutions for sectoral problems are the core of the European social discourse and significantly influence the social dialogue in European countries. In order to promote social and economic stability in the energy sector, which requires highly specialized technical expertise and infrastructure, effective social interaction is essential. This involves making certain that the workforce is capable of adjusting to new technologies and is well equipped for the change of energy production and distribution networks.

Nearly every element of contemporary life has been impacted by the COVID-19 epidemic, including the energy industry. The necessity of remote work, the effect of lockdown procedures on energy consumption, and the possibility of infection for employees—particularly those engaged in on-site energy production roles—were the immediate challenges. The epidemic raised worries about health and safety procedures for employees in energy plants and other on-site facilities. In order to preserve employees' health and ensure business continuity, social dialogue helped to negotiate new health and safety regulations, including staggered shifts, personal protective equipment (PPE), and improved sanitary standards.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 was a serious problem for the European energy industry, with both geopolitical and economic implications. In order to handle the sector's crisis management and long-term planning, social dialogue became increasingly complex as European countries dealt with energy shortages and sharply rising fuel prices. The disruption of Russian energy supply forced European countries to look for alternate energy sources, accelerating the diversification of energy sources and the shift to renewable energy. By offering an opportunity for negotiating changes in energy production and distribution, social dialogue made sure that employees were included in conversations about the future energy mix and the skills needed for the energy transition.

By advocating for salary adjustments and other rights for affected workers, trade unions actively helped to ensure that workers were not disproportionately impacted by these price variations. Employers and governments simultaneously had to make sure the industry stayed stable and productive in the face of these barriers, which necessitated close cooperation from social partners. The shift to greener energy has been made more difficult by the pressing need to address energy security in the face of geopolitical uncertainty. In order to balance immediate demands (like preserving the energy supply) with long-term environmental objectives (like decarbonization), social discourse was essential.

Discussions frequently focused on striking a balance between investments in renewable energy infrastructure and reliance on fossil fuels, all the while making sure that workers impacted by these changes had access to chances for reskilling and retraining.

Workers require opportunities for ongoing education and skill development because of the quick changes in energy technology and market dynamics. Employers and unions have worked together to offer training programs, retraining, and job transition services to workers impacted by technological advancements and geopolitical changes in large part due to social dialogue. Employee participation in decision-making processes is crucial given the current energy crisis and the energy transformation. This involves including workers in discussions about the energy industry's future, the switch to renewable energy sources, and the possibilities of emerging technologies like carbon capture or hydrogen. Employee participation can guarantee that these changes are fair and that individuals who may be displaced by them have access to sufficient support networks.

Strong collective bargaining is necessary to guarantee that workers' rights—such as the rights to fair compensation, job security, and safe working conditions—are upheld in emergency situations. In the aftermath of energy price instability, unions have been instrumental in obtaining wage hikes and other protections, as well as accords pertaining to health and safety during the pandemic. The development of crisis management frameworks, which encompass longer-term plans for worker safety and sectoral recovery in addition to immediate measures (such emergency labor laws or interim benefits), has been made possible in large part by social dialogue. The energy sector is characterized by multiple stakeholders, including governments, employers, workers, and consumers. Effective social dialogue in the face of crises requires the involvement of all relevant parties in finding solutions that balance economic, social, and environmental goals.

Trade unions and employers frequently have conflicting goals, especially when it comes to striking a balance between worker protection and cost reduction or when putting short-term stability ahead of long-term sustainability. The effectiveness of social discourse can be impacted by the political climate, particularly when national interests or the desire for quick fixes to emergencies influence energy policy. This can occasionally make it more difficult for social partners to engage in productive negotiation.

Global supply networks and energy production are becoming more intertwined, and disturbances in one region of the world (like the Russian invasion of Ukraine) can have a domino impact on energy pricing and availability, making social dialogue in energy-producing countries more difficult.

In order to overcome the difficulties the European energy industry has faced recently, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing crisis brought on by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, social dialogue has shown to be an essential instrument. Even though there has been a lot of improvement in responding to these crises, more capacity-building, increased employee involvement, and improved crisis management techniques are still required. Effective social conversation will be crucial in the future to ensure a fair and just energy transition that considers the interests of all social partners, in addition to resolving current challenges.

Short overview of the project

The 24-month-long project, entitled “Promoting Social Dialogue in European Energy Sector (PEESD)”, is a multi-country partnership. The project beneficiary is FNSM from Bulgaria. Additionally as partners on this project we have:

- Malopolski zwiazek pracodawcow Lewiatan (MZPL) – Poland;
- Rada opzz Wojewodztwa Dolnoslaskiego (RADA OPZZ) – Poland;
- Samostoen Sindikat na rabotnici od energtika, rudarstvo i industrija na R.Makedonija - Sindikalna organizacija AD ELLEM (SSERI) - North Macedonia;
- Aconfederacion de Empresarios de Andalucia (CEA) – Spain;
- Unija poslodavaca Crne Gore Udruzenje (MEF) – Montenegro;
- Fiequimetal - Federacao Intersindical das industrias metalurgicas, quimicas, electricas, farmaceutica, celulose, papel, grafica, imprensa, energia e minas (FIEQUIMETAL) - Portugal.

Also the Industrial European trade union association de fait (INDUSTRIALL) from Belgium and Comisiones Obreras de Industria (CCOO) from Spain are associate organizations on this project.

Within the project, there are four work packages. The first package, "Project management and coordination," includes activity planning, deadline setting, and progress monitoring. The first online steering committee meeting marked its conclusion.

The five-month-long second phase, "Social dialogue preparation," is devoted to determining the needs for capacity-building and evaluating the present status of social dialogue in the energy sector. Recommendations for enhancing social partners' involvement in the European Social Dialogue are the aim.

To guarantee comparability and uniformity across national reports, research and analysis were carried out in each partner countries utilizing a common methodology.

The project team will work with research experts to construct an analysis that includes focus groups with employers and employees, data gathering methodologies, and in-depth interviews with up to 25 industry professionals in each partner country in order to prepare the national reports. These interviews will examine best practices, capacity-building requirements, and social dialogue problems. In order to collect relevant data, policy documents, and best practices, national experts will also perform desk analysis.

Based on the focus groups, interviews, and desk research, every country will write a 10-page report that provides insights into social discourse and suggestions for ways to improve. These reports will be distributed throughout partner countries after being translated. Before the final publication is prepared, an online discussion will be organized to review the preliminary findings and guarantee comparability.

The publication, "European Industry Workers and Collective Bargaining" provides a comprehensive overview of the state of social dialogue today, as well as the growth of social dialogue capacity in partner countries and the energy industry. The publication's objective is to offer suggestions to national social partners on how to contribute to and improve discussions within the European social dialogue. It also makes recommendations for encouraging employee involvement in social discourse at the national level during the twin transition and restructuring in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukraine conflict. This publication will be translated to English and to all the partner's languages.

"Capacity Building and European Social Dialogue," the third work package, aims to increase social partners' ability to engage in national and European social discussion on issues pertaining to the energy industry. It includes a number of important activities and lasts for eleven months. The first activity is holding National Social Dialogue Consultations, in all partner countries, Bulgaria, Portugal, North Macedonia, Poland, Montenegro, and Spain. The meeting will be held online. There will be eight consultations in total, five for employees and three for employers. In addition to addressing issues related to the COVID-19 epidemic and

the Ukraine conflict, these consultations seek to improve social dialogue skills. The opinions and recommendations of the participants will be recorded in reports that summarize the consultations.

The EU-Level Consultation is the next activity. National social partners will participate in this one-day online consultation to offer policy suggestions for the EU. By enabling them to impact EU policymaking and participate in conversations on social issues in the energy industry, it seeks to strengthen their position in European social discourse.

European Social dialogue Toolkit (E-Platform): To support national partners in conducting social dialogue, a digital toolkit will be created. It will increase their capacity to solve issues in the energy sector and enhance working conditions by supplying information on the key stakeholders, best practices, and procedures.

EU-Level Policy Proposal: Taking into account the effects of COVID-19 and the Ukraine crisis on the energy sector, this proposal will address the reorganization of European businesses based on the results of national and EU consultations. Its main goals will be to support the industry's innovation, resilience, and sustainable growth.

The last package aims to raise public awareness of the national and European social dialogue, promote project outcomes and outputs (including publications, E-platforms, and policy proposals), and disseminate information about social partners' capacity building needs through a final conference and dissemination activities. Project newsletters, online articles, social media-boosted posts and advertisements, a project brochure, and a film with subtitles will all be developed. In addition to English, dissemination materials will be available in the languages of all partners.

The project has three main objectives:

Study and Analysis: As part of this project, extensive research and analysis will be carried out to gain a better understanding of the needs for capacity building as well as the current state of social dialogue in the energy sector at the national and European levels. In order to identify crucial areas where social partners require support and to formulate relevant recommendations that will allow them to engage in the European Social Dialogue effectively, the project will examine existing practices and challenges.

Building Capacity: Because the project understands how crucial it is for social partners to actively engage in social dialogue activities, it will focus on enhancing their capacity. The program enables social partners to address challenges specific to the energy industry and contribute to the development of policies that address these issues.

Raising awareness: In addition to enhancing capacity, the project seeks to raise awareness of the need of social dialogue on a national and European level. The project aims to raise awareness of the benefits of social dialogue and its ability to address difficulties specific to a particular industry by organizing awareness campaigns, exchanging resources, and engaging with stakeholders.

Assessment of the current state of social dialogue and social dialogue capacity building in all partner countries

The social dialogue in Europe is still a very important part of labor relations, with the sole goal of encouraging bigger collaboration between the social partners, governments, trade unions, and employers in order to solve social, economic and workplace issues. Economic changes, technological developments, and changing labor markets have all put pressure on the social discourse in the recent years. In spite of these obstacles, attempts are still being made to improve the social dialogue's ability through a number of programs, including enhancing institutional frameworks, improving negotiating techniques, and encouraging inclusive discourse both inside and between EU member states. However, the effectiveness of social dialogue and its capacity building face some challenges, both within the EU member states and the candidate countries.

In some countries, social dialogue processes are fragmented, with numerous trade unions and employer organizations, leading to a lack of coherence and effectiveness. There are many employer groups and trade unions in various nations, which causes social dialogue methods to be disjointed and ineffective. Concerns have also been raised about the underrepresentation of some groups in the discussion, especially informal or non-unionized workers, which could restrict how inclusive the process is. This frequently comes from a lack of trust among governments, workers, and companies. Sometimes there is even a deeper root cause, such as past conflicts or hostile relationships, which obstruct productive communication and collaboration.

Social dialogue can be challenged by political instability and economic difficulties (like the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukrainian crisis). There may be pressure on governments to implement labor market changes or budget cuts that compromise workers' rights, which would restrict the opportunity for productive discussion. Traditional social dialogue

institutions face challenges from the rise of digitization, platform work, gig economy jobs, and other new employment types. Fair terms are difficult to negotiate between companies and employees because these new employment arrangements frequently lack clear regulations. Many social dialogue frameworks might not be adaptable enough to handle the difficulties presented by these new trends because they were created for conventional job arrangements.

The candidate countries, on the other hand, frequently have less developed institutional frameworks for social discussion, which presents very special obstacle. These countries might not have well-established labor negotiation mechanisms or powerful social partners, such as trade unions and employers' associations. It is more challenging to create inclusive, productive discourse systems because of this institutional instability. Most of this countries have relatively recent transitions from authoritarian regimes or centrally planned economies, where social dialogue was either non-existent or weak. Because of this, there is no institutional memory or knowledge about good social dialogue techniques; fortunately, things are quickly changing.

Employer groups and trade unions frequently lack the organizational capacity, personnel, and financial means to have effective social dialogue. Additionally, some unions might be dispersed or lack substantial worker credibility, which would make them less effective in negotiations.

Although there is pressure on candidate countries to harmonize their labor market policies with EU norms, this process may lead to conflicts between national customs and EU laws. Significant changes may be needed to implement EU directives on collective bargaining, worker rights, and social dialogue; these changes may encounter opposition from a range of groups.

Political leaders in certain candidate nations might not be entirely dedicated to fostering social discourse for ideological or practical reasons, or they might be more focused on more

urgent economic reforms. The establishment of strong, long-lasting social dialogue may be impeded by this lack of political will.

The goal of capacity-building initiatives is to enable social partners—especially those in countries with less developed dialogue systems—to participate in negotiations successfully. These initiatives seek to enhance social partners' capacity to adjust to changing economic environments, guarantee equitable working conditions, and tackle concerns such as sustainability and digitization. Overall, there is a persistent drive to strengthen social dialogue's role in addressing present and upcoming labor-related issues, even as it continues to develop throughout Europe.

Capacity building is crucial for strengthening social dialogue in EU member states and candidate countries. This includes encouraging diversity, providing technological support to put best practices into effect, supporting organizations that promote communication, and training programs for social partners. Which involves encouraging flexibility to changing labor market conditions, guaranteeing that all workers, especially those in informal or non-traditional employment arrangements, have access to social dialogue mechanisms, and enhancing knowledge of social dialogue processes and labor legislation.

Targeted capacity training, institutional assistance, and making sure that all workers—including those in new or informal employment arrangements—are represented are necessary to strengthen social conversation in these circumstances. Social dialogue can be a more powerful instrument for advancing just labor practices and social solidarity throughout Europe by addressing these issues.

Given that this project represents a symbiosis and joint work of several partner countries, the publication itself includes data from the national analyses of each partner. Therefore, taking into account that some of the partners are member states of the European Union, but some are candidates for membership in the European Union, they show different degrees of

development of social dialogue within national frameworks. Also, the challenges they face, but also the opportunities for advancement and development are different.

Montenegro

Following the global and European trend that acknowledges clean energy as a product of particular importance and the environment as one of the most significant resources of all is something that Montenegro is firmly and strategically committed to. In addition, as an ecological state, Montenegro strongly supports initiatives aimed at reducing the effects of climate change by pursuing economic expansion while preserving the environment to the greatest extent possible. In order to attain sustained economic growth and become a member of the European Union, Montenegro has realized that it must prioritize an energy-efficient economy.

Through the adoption of the Law on Efficient Use of Energy and more than 50 bylaws passed in previous years, which control specific concerns in the field of EE, special attention has been placed on developing a sufficient legislative framework. The European Union's legislative framework serves as the foundation for Montenegro's energy efficiency program. Domestic laws now incorporate the standards outlined in European Union directives and regulations, and the harmonization process is anticipated to continue in the following years.

Although the energy industry in Montenegro is a fairly steady part of the economy, the sector's stability in terms of electricity generation and commerce can vary based on weather and other factors that are frequently present outside of Montenegro's borders. As a result, the COVID-19 outbreak and the conflict in Ukraine also had an effect on Montenegro's energy industry, although a favorable one, mostly due to the sharp increase in electricity costs on the global market brought on by the natural gas shortages. Regarding the part of this industry devoted to trading in oil and oil derivatives, Montenegro does not produce any of these goods domestically; instead, it imports them. As a result, the state of the market, as well as supply and prices, are primarily determined by outside factors.

Montenegro has a comprehensive regulatory framework that facilitates and encourages social dialogue. Additionally, the General Collective Agreement and the Labor Law have controlled the entire institute with regard to employee engagement, information sharing, and consultation in the decision-making process. However it is significant to remember that Montenegrin legislation does not recognize workers' councils. It is crucial to consider the structure of the private sector in Montenegro while discussing the social dialogue growth, and its quality. Micro, small, and medium-sized businesses make approximately 99 percent of the Montenegrin economy, with over 90 percent of them employing ten or less people. Bipartite social dialogue is not on same level with tripartite social dialogue because of its specific economic structure.

Employees in this industry have an advantage over those in other sectors of the economy because of the high degree of trade union organization and the readiness of both parties to decide working conditions and terms of doing business through dialogue. The main element is the extensive use of collective bargaining agreements, which address almost every aspect of labor relations, including pay, working conditions, and other benefits. The general collective agreement and the labor law serve as the foundations of workers' rights in Montenegro, although employees in the energy sector additionally have further protection thanks to their branch collective agreement.

One of the best collective agreements in the private sector is the energy sector's branch collective agreement, which sets criteria that frequently go above and above the legal minimum requirements. The viability of the social discourse is largely dependent on the large state-owned businesses that generate, distribute, and trade electricity. These businesses have individual collective agreements in place that add to the branch collective agreement and allow for even greater precision when it comes to regulating particular working conditions. Examples of these companies are the electric power distribution company Elektroprivreda Crne Gore and other affiliated entities.

Concerns regarding the lack of trade union visibility in the workplace, particularly with relation to benefits, rights, and working conditions, were voiced by unionized employees. Many employees are unaware of their rights and have doubts about union leaders because they think that trade unions are more concerned with formalities than with pressing concerns like pay, safety, and working conditions. They suggest more individualized support for workers in various energy industries, frequent updates on accomplishments, and greater transparency in union activities. In order to increase knowledge of the advantages of union membership and the significance of collective action, they also demanded improved educational initiatives.

Employees also pointed out that workers are becoming more passive and that there is a lack of support for workers' rights awareness, which limits social discourse and union expansion. They recommended use social media and other platforms to interact with employees and make unions more approachable and less official. The workers also underlined the necessity of training programs and workshops for both employers and employees, emphasizing the significance of enhancing social dialogue at the sectoral and corporate levels.

Employees expressed concerns about job security throughout the transition to renewable energy sources, highlighting the significance of offering sufficient training and possibilities for reskilling. During the shift to renewable energy jobs, they proposed a "just transition," which would guarantee the protection of workers' rights and the provision of social support. In order to protect workers during this process, trade unions recommended setting up forums for discussion. They also emphasized the significance of international cooperation in tackling global issues.

Employer representatives promoted a partnership-based approach to social discourse because they understood the need to balance the interests of the corporation and its employees. Although they acknowledged the difficulties faced by trade unions' inflexible

positions, they suggested working together to address problems. Employers recommended supporting unions with work facilities and educational materials, emphasizing the value of open communication and fostering trust. In order to help the energy transition, they also emphasized the necessity of financial and regulatory assistance, such as tax breaks, subsidies, and R&D expenditures to keep the industry competitive.

Bulgaria

Industrial relations are becoming more tense as a result of recent government reforms that have not always been supported by a completely successful social dialogue. Strengthening the role of social partners at all levels is essential to ending this crisis while maintaining the undeniable advantages of the European social model. Resolving the issues caused by climate change, improving working conditions, and fostering more thorough social cohesiveness all depend on well-organized social dialogue.

Social cooperation and discussion in Bulgaria have their roots in the early stages of the breakdown of authoritarian control over the country's economy and society. The first serious attempts at collaboration and cooperation between the government and the most powerful employers' and workers' organizations were also influenced by the uncertain economic, political, and social processes that accompanied this fragmentation. The first talks between the government, employers, and trade unions in Bulgaria began on March 6, 1990. As a result, on March 15, 1990, the first agreement between the aforementioned parties was signed, marking the start of a formal social partnership in the nation. In 1993, the Social Partnership became legally binding due to changes made to the Labor Code. . The national tripartite cooperation system in Bulgaria was fully established in 2001.

There haven't been many adjustments to Bulgaria's legal framework concerning new types of employment, especially in reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic. During the emergency, the majority of changes were made, mostly to working hours and the possibility of working remotely. Regulations pertaining to teleworkers' tools, working environment, and

occupational health and safety, however, remained largely unchanged because they were already specified in the Labor Code. During this time, no particular legislation pertaining to work breaks or work-life balance was introduced. While companies found it difficult to evaluate workers' daily work performance, trade unions expressed concerns about the possible overwork of teleworkers, which could upset their work-life balance. Telecommuting was not a new concept in Bulgaria, as many employers had already implemented it during the state of emergency.

Labor relations and working conditions have not received as much attention in the major political news as social policy problems. Revaluation of pensions, changes to electricity prices, and possible assistance for employers during the crises have all been topics of discussion. But there haven't been any significant developments in collective bargaining or social discourse. Although political unrest prevented progress, the incoming administration has expressed interest in continuing the conversation. There has been minimal change in sectoral collective bargaining, tripartite collaboration has been put on hold and forums have primarily been conducted online. In certain businesses, ownership changes and ongoing difficulties like the pandemic, rising electricity rates, and decreased supply volumes made negotiations difficult.

Some viewpoints were determined in addition to the fresh elements that surfaced in the following areas: Motivation is necessary and can be attained by always looking ahead to raise pay and enhance working circumstances; enhancing the information flow to employees and the efficient operations of all social dialogue bodies; eliminating the fragmentation of trade unions in businesses and employers' groups across; Social dialogue seeks to discover solutions to disagreements and help reduce the amount of social conflicts, but it cannot make problems go away. Instead, it seeks to offer a framework for resolving them through collective bargaining and consultation. Improving workers' chances of having good and productive jobs through social partnership and dialogue in an environment of freedom,

fairness, security, and human dignity is crucial for the mining industry's long-term success, as is the case with trade union and association rights.

The main way that employers and trade unions engage in social dialogue is through collective bargaining. The strength of trade union movements, management systems, economic structures, and legal frameworks all influence the various kinds of employee involvement at the board level. Decisions about business development, finances, technology, and social issues are made by employee representatives. For instance, in a state-owned mining firm with a collective bargaining agreement, the employer and trade unions collaborate to guarantee favorable conditions for the company and its workers. Ensuring employee well-being, enhancing job quality, and promoting economic development are the objectives of the agreement. While trade unions seek to enhance social welfare, wages, and working conditions, employers prioritize the company's performance and worker safety.

Negotiations frequently revolve around on issues like living conditions, social security, pay, benefits, and employee health and safety. Initiatives like health rehabilitation programs and support for community projects are the result of constructive social discourse. Members can contribute without worrying about criticism because to the trade union's participatory method, which promotes candid communication, creativity, and the free exchange of ideas.

North Macedonia

The Law on Labor Relations establishes the legislative foundation for social dialogue in Macedonia, which is applicable to all industries, including the energy industry. Employers or the representative organization of employers and the representative union enter into collective agreements. According to the Law on Labor Relations, social partners that wish to take part in the collective bargaining process must demonstrate that they are representative. The energy sector has legal grounds for collective bargaining; workers at all Power Plants of North Macedonia subsidiaries, including REK Bitola, REK Oslomej, HES Mavrovo, HEC Tikvesh, HES Crn Drim, HES Treska, TEC Negotino, and Power Plant, are organized in trade

union organizations. These organizations are members of national confederations of trade unions, while branch unions are members of national confederations.

Due to legal limitations on trade union rights, the expanding informal sector, and changes in the world economy, trade union representatives at the national and branch levels claim a drop in trade union membership. Their capacity to represent and organize employees is limited by this reduction. Employees have little influence on important business choices and are only marginally involved in decision-making processes, primarily through trade unions on employment-related matters. Although union membership in the energy sector is adequate, trade union independence is undermined by abuses of the right to freedom of association, such as forced transfers to other unions and management intervention.

Although union officials and management usually consult on employment-related matters, social dialogue in the energy sector is selective and challenging for union leaders to participate in. Social dialogue was previously nonexistent, according to trade union leaders, but they anticipate improvements with management changes at the corporate and national levels. Union leaders believe that building up the capacity of European social partners at the national and European levels is crucial to fostering European social dialogue. According to the European Commission's 2023 report, the national trade union KSS has expressed concerns about the status of social dialogue, especially in the energy industry, through its European affiliations.

In general, workers in the energy sector feel that more workers should join trade unions, as they are unsure if the current number of members is sufficient. Instead of direct participation, they believe that trade unions and their leaders have a greater influence on decision-making. Despite being aware of the difficulties trade unions encounter in fostering social discourse and inclusivity, workers demand more meetings, information, and improved trade union promotion, especially among younger workers. Due to their union membership, some employees also claim to be under pressure. Raising awareness of the union's activities and setting up joint meetings with management are two suggestions for development.

Both union representatives and employees give the sector's social dialogue a low rating, with workers feeling left out of conversations and unhappy with how it operates. They are happy with the union's communication efforts, nevertheless. Employees are not familiar with social conversation at the European level, but they think it should lead to regulations that increase living standards, wages, and workers' rights in order to make social partners more competitive.

Employers' representatives feel that the nation's worker union organization is not at a high level and should be expanded. Trade unions primarily negotiate wages and working conditions, but they do not directly participate in decisions that are strategically important to the business. As far as worker representation goes, the stance is that trade union leaders are the voice of the workers and represent them at the national, sectoral, and corporate levels.

Employers feel that the trade unions should focus on better promoting the advantages of union membership and providing workers with more appropriate information about the unions' activities in order to increase membership. Employers' representatives think that social dialogue has to be developed further and is still immature. They also think that directives that are designed to encourage social dialogue are a valuable tool at the European level. According to them, it is crucial to make investments in social partners' capacity building, and social dialogue at the European level can be facilitated by the application of recommendations and the sharing of best practices.

Spain

For a number of strategic, economic, social, and environmental reasons, Spain's energy sector is crucial. Looking from an economic perspective, its contribution to GDP is one of the main reasons why this sector is so important. One of the main drivers of the Spanish economy is energy. Development is impossible without industries that create jobs and investment, such as electricity, gas, oil, and renewable energy. The ability to provide employment is another important component that supports economic importance. Jobs in renewable energy sources like wind and solar have increased as a result of the energy revolution, particularly in rural areas. Additionally, it is a historically significant sector for the production of high-quality jobs. In terms of exports, Spain exports infrastructure, technology, and information to other nations and is a leader in renewable energy technologies.

Regarding renewable energy, Spain is among Europe's top producers of solar and wind power. The necessity of developing and innovating in energy storage is another crucial element. To effectively manage the expanding capacity of renewable energy, Spain and its businesses are investing in smart grids and storage technology.

Energy security is one of the sector's primary priorities, and it is strengthened by two primary initiatives. First, because Spain depends on importing fossil fuels like oil and natural gas, it is imperative to diversify its energy sources. Reducing reliance on outside sources requires both strengthening ties with other European nations and increasing the generation of renewable energy. The second factor that strengthens Spain's position as a major energy hub is its strategic infrastructure, which includes its vast network of gas pipelines and liquefied natural gas (LNG) facilities.

Sustainable environmental practices are yet another important driver of the energy industry. As part of its larger initiatives to fulfill the Paris Agreement and the EU's climate targets for 2030 and 2050, Spain is dedicated to decarbonization. In order to lower Spain's greenhouse

gas emissions and promote long-term environmental objectives, the country must make the switch to renewable energy. Research, development, and invention are key components of innovation in the energy business. Innovations in smart networks, energy generation, and storage technologies are essential for increasing productivity and fostering the growth of sustainable mobility, including infrastructure for electric vehicles and urban sustainability projects.

The energy sector has an equally important impact on society. The welfare of Spanish people depends on consistent and reasonably priced energy access, particularly in the fight against energy poverty. Furthermore, by promoting economic expansion in areas with limited population and the decentralization of energy production, renewable energy contributes to rural development and advancing regional development.

In order to address the labor, economic, and environmental issues facing Spain's energy sector, social dialogue is an essential step. Issues like fair energy transition, working conditions, innovation, and inclusiveness are addressed through cooperation between the government, unions, business associations, and other stakeholders. The provision of sufficient assistance, such as employment relocation programs, training, and benefits, to employees affected by the shutdown of coal and nuclear reactors is a primary priority. In addition to fostering innovation and digitalization through employee training in new technologies and renewable energy, negotiations seek to enhance working conditions, pay, and safety in a very risky industry. Additionally, initiatives are taken to promote youth engagement in the industry as well as gender equality.

Trade unions like UGT and CCOO, sector-specific unions, large energy businesses like Iberdrola and Endesa, and government organizations—especially the Ministry of Labor and the Ministry for Ecological Transition—are the main players in this discussion. NGOs and civil society are also involved, particularly in social and environmental issues.

The National Integrated Energy and Climate Plan (PNIEC), which establishes decarbonization targets, the Just Transition Agreements, which were signed by the government, unions, and businesses to lessen the social effects of the energy transition, and sectoral collective agreements that guarantee workers' labor rights are some of the tools that support the social dialogue framework.

Spain's social dialogue is defined by a high degree of national and regional participation, with numerous autonomous communities actively participating in the conversations. At the municipal level, there is a shortage of social dialogue and very little understanding of the labor and social effects of the energy sector. The dialogue between the political parties is also active. However, even if stakeholder's engagement is increasing, efforts must be made to guarantee that social discourse has positive results. In addition Spain has so far signed 17 fair transition agreements.

Strong tradition and dedication at the national and regional levels define the social discourse in the energy industry, and all stakeholders are actively interested in promoting this dialogue. Businesses and unions have a strong working relationship that is backed by a long tradition of tripartite negotiations. There is an increasing emphasis on the necessity of the energy transition, and the industry acknowledges the vital role that energy will play in determining the future.

But there are a number of issues that need to be resolved. Making sure that information regarding social dialogue reaches every relevant stakeholder is one of the main issues. Additionally, the public has unfairly criticized and frequently presented energy firms badly. Furthermore, local public authorities must strengthen their support for and belief in social discourse. The situation is made more complex by the fact that the industry is impacted by a wide range of outside variables, such as various public administrations. Excessive bureaucratic procedures are viewed as unnecessary, and the sector's potential—including its prospects for job creation, new company initiatives, and training—is not adequately

communicated. Additionally, there are substantial technological obstacles that call for increased funding, in addition to the difficulty of navigating a field that is intertwined with numerous other businesses.

Portugal

In order to gather more thorough and comprehensive information and opinions on the research topic, the project's research methods include analyzing the data that has already been collected and conducting in-depth, in-person interviews with trade union representatives and company representatives from energy-related companies. This is a summary of information from the interviews conducted in Portugal.

The data reveals that workers and their representatives are generally involved in decision-making processes of unions and company management. In Workers' Representative Organizations (TSOs), 13.04% of respondents reported reasonable participation, while 73.91% reported high participation. However, company representatives (13.04%) did not issue any comments. Employer Entities (EPs) reported good or very good participation of workers in matters decided by company management, while all ORTs respondents stated that workers are not consulted except for matters relating to wages, occupational health and safety, and training.

Even while it appears that employees participate in management choices, every employee who responded said they are totally shut out of decisions that the company promotes, with the exception of the aforementioned issues with pay, occupational health and safety, and training.

There have even been reports of decisions being put into action that, from the viewpoint of the employees, would have been improper and that, since they were made solely by management, they were characterized as a waste of time and money.

The company representatives confirmed that workers and their representatives are consulted on measures and decisions, specifically regarding salary matters, OSH, and training, under legally established terms. However, they also confirmed that these consultations are limited to these topics and exclude all other issues.

Workers and their representatives are often not informed in advance about decisions made by companies. This issue is partly contradictory, with representatives of employers reporting that they inform the workers in advance, while the workers representatives report that communication rarely occurs, often only during or after the implementation of decisions. Workers' involvement is primarily carried out through trade unions and personal consultations/meetings with workers. Direct decision-making processes are non-existent, and workers' participation is collected through meetings/plenaries organized by workers organizations. The employer's representatives state that direct involvement of workers rarely occurs, preferring direct negotiation with trade unions.

There are several ways to increase workers' participation in social discourse and trade unions. Employers' representatives can do this through active listening, social dialogue awareness campaigns, encouraging sharing and involvement, and incorporating ORTs into professional certification. For trade unions, this involves organizing information sessions about the function and activities of trade unions, simplifying the admission of worker representatives, and making it simpler for workers to attend meetings. By encouraging active listening, creating awareness campaigns, fostering participation, and acknowledging the critical role that employees and their representatives play in the development of social dialogue, these initiatives seek to improve worker involvement from the viewpoint of employers' representatives.

The evaluation of social dialogue on a company level varies between worker's representatives and trade union representatives, with the latter stating that it is a "regular situation" or "non-existent". The introduction of collective bargaining agreements into labor legislation and lack of timely information are pointed out as one of the weaknesses of the social dialogue. Also the need to simplify processes, making them more agile and inclusive, and the rigidity of collective bargaining are identified as weaknesses. Mutual respect is a strong point, but mutual respect is only registered in few companies.

Social dialogue in the energy sector is largely absent at the sectoral level, with only meetings held with company and union representatives. This lack of dialogue is attributed to the expiry of collective bargaining in labor legislation, which can be blocked by employers by rejecting worker proposals. However, the ability of workers for their development is a strong point, as it allows for the resolution of issues not limited to financial concerns. The representatives of employers are active in social dialogue, as it is seen as a priority due to the nature of work and safety. Strong points include the existence of regulatory mechanisms that ensure worker consultation. However, weak points include resistance from workers to changes and the desire to maintain positions of privilege, which are considered obsolete in the evolving labor market.

A number of recommendations were made regarding ways to improve social dialogue at the European level, such as making company dialogue mandatory, encouraging management and employee training, and sharing best practices by showing sustainable businesses and better working conditions. These recommendations are meant to improve the process of social dialogue in general and are based on the questionnaire results.

Poland

The following represents an overview of Poland's energy transition, an assessment of the course of the transition, an assessment of the social dialogue in the energy sector given analysed from the information given in their national report.

The proposed Energy Policy of Poland to 2040 (PEP2040), which was released by the Polish government at the end of 2018, is widely regarded as the start of the country's energy transition. It was adopted in 2021 and it is considered as a difficult beginning. There were so few photovoltaic installations that solar power output was insignificant in national statistics in 2018, 82% of Poland's electricity was generated by burning coal, and wind farm building was stopped by restrictive laws.

According the polish experts, the situation was made much more challenging by the fact that, at the time, there was very little public willingness to discuss moving away from coal, and many prominent Polish journalists and politicians publicly disputed climate change or its causes. Given this, it is not unexpected that PEP2040 was so careful that some of its objectives, which were spaced out over more than ten years, were accomplished in just five.

It should be emphasized that the majority of Poland's recent developments are the result of pressure from the EU and the market, as well as the work of investors and private organizations. The actual, systemic energy revolution is still in the planning stages and will take time to complete. The strategic documents that will comprise the Polish transition roadmap are currently being created or updated by the Polish government.

On October 14, 2024, the National Plan for Energy and Climate until 2030 (aKPEiK), the most significant of them, was put out for public comment. The report makes several assumptions, including that the percentage of renewable energy sources (RES) in the electrical sector will rise to 56.1% and that greenhouse gas emissions will be reduced by 50.4% by 2030

compared to 1990. This percentage is expected to approach 70% in 2040. This goal will be achieved in part by offshore, onshore, and solar power plants.

The construction of energy and heat storage facilities, as well as biogas and bio-methane plants, will be a crucial component of this transitional phase. Furthermore, nuclear power will stabilize Poland's energy mix in the future. In light of the global climate challenges, the National Energy Policy and Climate Change Plan update appears to be sufficient.

Regarding how Poland's energy sector currently compares to other EU countries, the national experts state that Poland had the most CO₂/MWh emissions from power production in the EU in 2022, with 666 kg. The competitiveness of the domestic industry is obviously threatened by such outcomes. Poland continues to be the EU's largest producer of hard coal, accounting for 97% of total production in 2023, despite steadily reducing extraction. Unfortunately, Polish coal is a difficult export product because of the extremely high extraction costs and the quality that frequently falls short of contractors' expectations. In this instance, being in the lead does not convert into financial gains.

The Bełchatów complex, Europe's largest point source of greenhouse gas emissions, is the primary producer and user of lignite, which Poland ranks second in Europe in terms of output (Germany continues to lead). In addition, the complex still employs more than 7,000 people and was, until recently, in charge of producing 20% of Poland's electricity. The Bełchatów complex is one of the most significant locations on the transition map of Poland and the European Union as a whole due to its magnitude of activity and influence.

The majority of survey participants in Poland believe the country lacks an understanding of how to maintain energy security, independence, and job protection in the energy sector. Between 2013 and 2023, Poland earned 94% of its EU Emissions Trading (ETS) funds from emission charges, but only 1.3% was allocated to emission reduction or green transition

objectives. This neglect has negatively impacted employees and Polish companies' competitiveness. Anxiety and frustration are prevalent among workers, with older workers uncertain about their future after retirement, middle-aged employees unsure of state support, and younger employees less optimistic about their future in the sector.

Employers face challenges due to the lack of a clear vision for the transition, leading to rising production costs and reduced competitiveness. The lack of a clear vision and the costs of neglect are causing fear and frustration, leading to rumors, myths, and conspiracy theories. This radicalization of public opinion makes it increasingly difficult to have a positive attitude towards change.

The social dialogue on the energy transition in Poland is viewed positively, with a strong foundation for dialogue and unionization in the sector. Transition councils and working groups have been established at national and regional levels. Representatives of the new government, such as Minister of Industry, show openness to dialogue. Regional dialogue and successful cooperation between trade unions and employers are also seen as positive.

The National Council for Social Dialogue has been criticized for its lack of continuity, tardiness, and irregularity in its working groups. The sub-group on just transition, set up in spring, has only held its first meeting on 13 November. The survey also found that working meetings are sometimes ineffective due to weak legitimacy of dialogue bodies, insufficient preparation of coordinators, and low competence of participants. This issue is also present in all activities within the social dialogue in the energy sector.

The process of shifting to renewable energy is complex and need for collaboration between several ministries, including Development and Technology, Industry, State Assets, and Climate and Environment. Social partners argue that since this division of responsibilities hinders information sharing, responsibility shifting, and organizational issues, the Ministry of Family, Labor, and Social Policy should be included in negotiations. According to NGOs

and some respondents do not believe that the government is open to communication. For months, the administration has refrained from conducting a thorough public consultation with the National Energy and Climate Programme.

Poland is not making the most of a mature social discussion because of all the aforementioned issues. Furthermore, the decision-making process is susceptible to excessive influence from lobbying groups, which are common in the energy sector, when there is a lack of openness. The absence of standardized criteria also implies that the composition and regional-political circumstances are the primary determinants of dialogue quality.

Guidelines for national social partners

Trade unions, employer organizations, and other relevant stakeholders are important social partners that influence EU policy, especially in the vital and dynamic energy industry. Their active participation may result in more sustainable, equitable, and inclusive energy policies that benefit companies and employees alike.

Social dialogue at the sectoral level is essential for establishing minimum standards in working conditions, benefiting both workers and employers. It helps prevent a "race to the bottom" by ensuring equal opportunities and addressing the needs of both parties. Additionally, it enhances sector efficiency and service quality through structured exchanges between employers and trade unions.

The development of social dialogue in the mining industry requires respect for fundamental freedoms of association and collective bargaining, strong, representative employers and trade unions, state support for workers' and employers' organizations, laws and structures ensuring access, political will and commitment from all stakeholders, appropriate institutional support, and structures for social dialogue and collective bargaining with a large number of employers and sectors. Implementation and enforcement mechanisms, including a functioning labor market administration, such as a labor inspectorate and social partners, are also crucial.

Many issues would be resolved by establishing of an individual or organization capable of organizing such activities and serving as a trustworthy partner for the social side. Reliable information and easy communication built on cooperation and trust serve as the foundation for discourse. In addition to making decision-making and action planning easier, simplifying communication channels and giving employees easy access to information would help strengthen bonds and boost public confidence. All decisions should be supported by solid data and analysis in order for the transition process to be successful. We must make

investments to improve dialogue for change, including increasing the skills of those taking part in the conversations and involving specialists or scientific institutions in the decision-making process.

Representatives frequently prioritize political empowerment or merit over competency, which is one factor contributing to low efficacy in councils and working teams. Furthermore, there is a lack of care for the common good and a cooperative mentality. Low expectations and inaction result from some social side representatives seeing councils as arenas for defending their own interests. New tools of engagement, such non-governmental sector or foreign best practices, might be adopted to promote the dialogue culture.

Another important component of social discourse is the function of labor unions. The transition's difficulties might be a factor in trade union organizations' increasing significance and better reputation. But it's crucial to keep in mind that big, established businesses aren't everything, and that trade unions are still uncommon in new energy and renewables, which are primarily small and medium-sized businesses. The interests of the employees in these smaller businesses, who do not currently have access to trade union backing, must be protected in order to guarantee a fair transition.

Within the framework of this publication, we highlight certain guidelines for social partners that are general and apply to both EU member states and candidate countries, and are aimed at improving social dialogue, primarily in the energy sector.

Familiarize yourself with European legislation and European institutions - one of the directions that we can highlight as particularly important in this aspect is familiarizing social partners with EU policy proposals, legislative initiatives, and public consultations on energy-related issues. Tools like the EU's 'Energy Union' framework, the 'Green Deal,' and 'Fit for 55' initiative provide insight into current and future priorities.

The structure and the functioning of EU institutions, particularly the European Commission, European Parliament, and Council of the European Union, should be thoroughly understood by national social partners. Social partners can more efficiently focus their efforts if they are aware of the functions of these bodies. To guarantee that their viewpoints are taken into consideration when formulating policies, social partners should participate in the consultation procedures as soon as possible. More fruitful and constructive communication is made possible by more active involvement.

Establish a Strong Coordination Mechanism - Provide a strong platform for national social engagement between business groups and trade unions in the energy industry. A strong basis for taking part in debates at the EU level is established by strengthening this framework at the national level. Create a task group or expert group with a focus on energy policy within national social partner organizations. In order to ensure a high degree of competence and coherent national viewpoints, this group can concentrate on particular topics like the energy transition, the impact on the labor market, and sustainable growth. Additionally, establish effective, consistent, and transparent lines of communication amongst social partners at the national and EU levels. In addition to contributing to larger EU policy discussions, this will guarantee that communications and positions are consistent and represent national reality.

Bring closely the EU Social Dialogue - It is absolutely necessary for all European countries to be part of Europe's discussions and plans, especially when it comes to larger transition policies that affect a large number of countries. Actually, requests for stakeholder input on new legislative ideas or strategies, like the Clean Energy for All Europeans package, are frequently made by the European Commission and other EU agencies. In this regard, it is essential to actively participate in EU public discussions on energy policy. Formal platforms for communication between social partners and policymakers at the EU level include sectoral social dialogue committees, such those in the energy sector. To have an impact on decisions regarding issues like energy transition, job quality, and just transition policies,

national social partners ought to be involved in these committees. Numerous working groups and expert panels at the EU level address energy-related topics, such as the effects on the workforce, renewable energy, and energy efficiency. To keep updated and contribute, social partners should apply to join these organizations as observers or members.

Foster international collaboration - Boost cooperation with social partners from other EU members, particularly those in areas dealing with comparable energy transitions or difficulties. In the EU's policymaking process, forming international collaborations strengthens social partners' collective voice and aids in promoting common objectives. Participating in conferences, workshops, and exchange programs run by the EU or other relevant organizations can be beneficial. Enhancing national-level plans and expanding knowledge of EU-wide energy policy can be achieved through exchanging best practices and lessons learnt from other countries and industries.

In addition to ensuring that EU policies are sensitive of the unique requirements of various energy markets and labor situations around Europe, regional social partners—such as local energy businesses or regional trade unions—can offer insights into localized implications. It is advisable for national social partners to actively pursue partnerships with organizations in other EU member states. Bilateral talks, joint sessions, or pan-European trade union networks could be used to accomplish this. Create cooperative networks that unite employers, unions, and legislators from various industries and geographical areas to tackle common issues during the energy transition. For example, cooperation may be advantageous in the renewable energy sector since it may have similar difficulties in several countries.

Ensure just transition - Social partners ought to support laws that provide a fair transition for employees impacted by changes in the energy sector. In order to promote sustainable

economic growth, proposals should concentrate on retraining, reskilling, and establishing new jobs in the green energy sector. Promote laws that provide incentives for the growth of renewable energy, energy efficiency, and green jobs. Promoting a skills strategy for the workforce of the future is part of this, as it guarantees that workers can adjust to the changing demands of the energy sector.

Countries are encouraged to actively engage in initiatives related to the Just Transition Fund, which supports regions and workers heavily dependent on fossil fuel industries. Social partners have the power to shape the allocation of these funds and guarantee that social factors like social protection and labor market integration are given top priority.

Union members, employer representatives, and other important stakeholders should receive ongoing education on the complex nature of EU energy legislation, regulations, and decision-making procedures. Data interpretation, negotiating strategies, and advocacy tactics should all be included in this training. Plan training sessions that teach social partners how to effectively participate in consultations at the EU level, create policy briefs, and represent the interests of companies and employees. To enable social partners to have more informed conversations with EU policymakers, educate them about the technical aspects of the energy transition (green jobs, energy efficiency measures, renewable energy technology, etc.).

Increase research and collecting data - Make sure that opinions are supported by reliable data, research, and expectations about labor market demands, environmental effects, and energy trends. Create evidence-based recommendations that emphasize the social and economic implications of energy policies using national information collected across the EU. Work together with national research organizations, academic institutions, and EU entities that concentrate on the social implications and energy transition. These collaborations can offer data, reports, and technological know-how that support social partners' stances in policy debates.

Raise Awareness and Educate Stakeholders - Through public campaigns, social partners can increase knowledge of the economic and social aspects of energy policy. Broader support for successful policies will result from educating the general public, decision-makers, and business sectors on the advantages of a just energy transition. Provide training on EU-level energy policy and social dialogue protocols to union members, employer groups, and other social partners. This will guarantee that representatives can participate in the European policy-making process with effectiveness and readiness.

Make use of both digital and conventional media channels to share the main points of energy strategy. For example, releasing blog entries, videos, or opinion articles that emphasize the ways in which energy changes impact industries, workers, and local communities. Collaborate with academic institutions, public policy groups, or environmental NGOs to build campaigns that link the energy transition to more general social objectives like economic growth, job creation, and climate change mitigation. Summarize complicated energy regulations into easily understood formats (fact sheets, infographics, and frequently asked questions) so that all parties involved—including employees, small businesses, and local communities—are aware of the changes and difficulties brought about by the energy transition.

Feedback Mechanisms - Following policy implementation, national social partners ought to keep an eye on how EU energy policies are being implemented locally and nationally. Social partners should offer input and demand changes to the policies if they are not fulfilling social or economic objectives. Participate in EU assessments of energy programs or policies to identify achievements and obstacles. Provide evidence-based enhancements based on real-world, hands-on experiences.

When evaluating draft policies, address the immediate concerns of employees, businesses, and local communities while offering helpful, fact-based criticism that supports the energy transition's long-term objectives. Work together to create joint statements, reports, or agreements with employers' associations and other industry trade unions. For example, the allocation of national funding can be influenced by a joint statement on the significance of retraining workers in the energy sector for green jobs.

Promote Discussion on Energy Security and Sustainability - Social partners ought to push for laws that strike a balance between energy security and sustainability. This involves encouraging the use of renewable energy sources while making sure that changes don't result in job losses or energy shortages. Discuss about the EU's initiatives to develop a more sustainable and resilient energy system that integrates environmental and social sustainability.

By following these guidelines, national social partners can maximize their influence and effectively contribute to EU-level policy-making in the energy sector. Social partners will be able to play a crucial role in establishing energy policies that benefit workers, businesses, and the environment throughout Europe by being proactive, working together across borders, supporting a just transition, and applying evidence-based practices.

Recommendations for Employee Involvement

Employee participation in decision-making, problem-solving, and innovation at all levels promotes a culture of cooperation, accountability, and ongoing development in addition to increasing productivity. In the energy sector, where environmental objectives, regulatory obstacles, and technology breakthroughs are essential, employee engagement is particularly important in determining the sector's future.

1. Fostering a Culture of Collaboration and Innovation

The desire for greener energy alternatives, energy efficiency, and technical advancements are driving the energy sector's rapid evolution. Companies in the energy sector need to cultivate a culture of cooperation and innovation if they want to remain sustainable and competitive. This can be accomplished by:

- **Cross-functional teams:** Promote project collaboration among staff members from several departments, such as engineering, operations, environmental science, and customer service. Multidisciplinary teams produce more thorough solutions because they bring a variety of viewpoints and abilities to the table.
- **Innovation hubs:** Provide opportunities for employees to suggest and create fresh concepts or solutions. These hubs, which promote idea sharing, prototyping, and testing, can be either real locations or online platforms. Innovations that promote sustainability and operational efficiency can result from giving workers the chance to try and evaluate new technology, including renewable energy sources.
- **Acknowledging contributions:** To foster an environment where employees feel encouraged to share their knowledge, recognize and honor creative ideas, no matter how modest they can be. This tendency can be strengthened by recognition initiatives like "Employee of the Month" or innovative prizes.

2. Enhancing Communication and Transparency

A key component of employee involvement is effective communication. Effective communication ensures that employees understand their role in the company, aligns organizational goals, and fosters trust. Communication is even more important in the energy sector, where operational effectiveness, safety, and regulatory compliance are of the utmost importance.

- **Regular meetings:** Provide open platforms for employees to interact with management. These gatherings give management the chance to discuss the company's goals, future initiatives, and performance reports. Employees can also voice issues, provide feedback, and ask questions. Employee engagement with the company's performance can be increased by open and honest communication about its potential and difficulties.
- **Feedback cycles:** Provide ways for staff members to offer input, such as surveys, suggestion boxes, or routine performance evaluations. In addition to being requested, feedback must be taken into consideration. Employee involvement will rise if they perceive that their contributions result in concrete outcomes.
- **Digital communication tools:** To improve communication, make use of digital platforms. Real-time communication and collaboration can be facilitated by tools like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or specialized employee portals, particularly in companies with a sizable and geographically dispersed staff. These solutions are essential for energy organizations with field-based or remote workers to keep engaged and connected.

3. Employee Empowerment and Decision-Making

Giving workers the authority to make decisions that impact both their work and the organization as a whole can increase employee involvement. Empowerment can result in faster, more efficient solutions in the energy sector, where immediate decisions are crucial.

- **Decentralized decision-making:** Bring the decision-making process closer to the work site. Give engineers or field technicians more freedom to solve technological problems without regular managerial approval, for instance. This encourages a feeling of responsibility and ownership.
- **Employee-driven initiatives:** Encourage employees to take the lead on projects or activities that support the organization's strategic objectives, such as increasing energy efficiency, cutting emissions, or investigating renewable energy sources. Employees are more inclined to devote their time and effort to identifying the best solutions when they are given ownership of certain projects.
- **Skills development:** Investing in employees' personal and professional development is another aspect of empowering them. Provide employees with reskilling and upskilling chances to help them remain competitive in a changing industry. Employees who receive training in cutting-edge technology, such smart grid systems or battery storage solutions, for example, will be better equipped to make significant contributions to new projects.

4. Safety and Well-being as Core Priorities

Safety is crucial in the energy sector, especially in industries like electrical utilities, renewable energy production, and oil and gas. For workers to be engaged and dedicated to their jobs, they must believe that their well-being is a top priority. Furthermore, focusing on safety and well-being is crucial for boosting morale and productivity because the energy sector frequently works in demanding situations.

- **Training and safety procedures:** Make sure that employees receive up-to-date training on the most recent safety regulations and update safety procedures on a regular basis. To foster a culture where safety is viewed as a shared duty rather than only a directive, involve workers in safety conversations. Employee-driven safety initiatives, frequent safety audits, and safety committees are a few examples of this.

- **Programs for health and wellness:** Provide all-inclusive wellness initiatives that take mental and physical health into account. Because the energy industry can be physically demanding and unpleasant, offering tools for stress management, work-life balance, and health benefits access can boost employee engagement and job satisfaction.
- **Support networks for employees:** Make certain that workers have access to support networks in the event of accidents, medical problems, or personal difficulties. Counseling, career development support, and employee assistance programs (EAPs) can all help workers feel appreciated and cared for.

5. Leadership Development and Support

In order to increase employee involvement, leaders are needed. For workers to succeed, they must motivate, mentor, and supply the tools they need. Strong, competent leadership is crucial for developing a motivated and cooperative workforce in the energy business, where the problems are complicated.

- **Leadership development:** To assist managers and supervisors in acquiring the abilities necessary to lead teams, settle disputes, and motivate staff, offer leadership development programs. Programs for developing leaders should emphasize decision-making, emotional intelligence, and change management since these skills are critical for managing teams in a field that is always changing.
- **Empathetic leadership:** Motivate managers to interact personally with employees, learning about their wants and difficulties. Empathetic leadership increases communication, fosters trust, and makes workers feel more invested in the mission and objectives of the company.
- **Mentorship programs:** Set up mentorship programs so that experienced employees can advise newer workers. This fosters a more welcoming and encouraging workplace where professional development and knowledge exchange are valued

highly. In the energy industry, where it is necessary to transmit complicated technical information, mentoring is especially crucial.

6. Sustainability and Social Responsibility Initiatives

Alignment with the organization's larger sustainability and social responsibility objectives and a feeling of purpose can help motivate employee involvement. Workers in the energy industry, where environmental effects are substantial, are increasingly searching for companies that place a high priority on sustainability and corporate social responsibility.

- **Sustainability initiatives:** Involve employees in sustainability projects like creating renewable energy sources, cutting carbon emissions, or energy conservation programs. Workers are more likely to be engaged and motivated at work if they believe they are making a difference in the surroundings.
- **Engagement with the community:** Motivate employees to take part in community outreach activities, such as volunteering for educational campaigns about renewable energy or taking part in regional sustainability projects. Employees' sense of purpose and bond with the organization can both be strengthened by these activities.
- **Sustainability incentives:** Offer rewards to workers who develop creative solutions or ideas regarding sustainability. Employee pride and a sense of ownership can be increased in the workplace by rewarding them for their contributions to the company's environmental goals.

The recommendations provided in this publication not only aim to improve employee performance but also align with broader industry trends towards sustainability, innovation, and corporate social responsibility. As the energy sector continues to evolve, employee involvement will be crucial to driving the changes necessary for a more sustainable and efficient future.

Conclusion

The analysis of European industry workers and collective bargaining, with a particular focus on the energy sector, reveals significant challenges and opportunities for promoting a more inclusive, fair, and sustainable labor market. Technology breakthroughs, the demand for increased energy security, and the move towards decarbonization are all driving change in the energy sector. In addition to being technically complex, this shift has deep social implications for the workers whose labor serves as the foundation for the energy infrastructure. In this quickly evolving environment, it is crucial to guarantee that workers' rights are upheld and their views heard in order to fulfill the EU's larger social and economic objectives.

Under programs like the European Green Deal, the EU has prioritized energy efficiency, renewable energy, and climate goals, causing significant changes in the European energy sector in recent years. Although this change has the potential to boost innovation and provide new jobs, it also presents serious difficulties for the labor force. Because of plant closures and the decline in the use of fossil fuels, workers in conventional energy industries like coal, oil, and gas are at risk of losing their jobs.

Future workers in this industry need to be prepared to handle the needs of developing businesses like energy storage, renewable energy production, and the digitization of energy systems. Collective bargaining is essential in this situation to guarantee that workers are not left behind. As these sectors are crucial in some of the European countries, as they employ a significant number of the workforce it is natural that these countries are not keen on closing the plants and completely changing the way of production.

The energy sector remains highly fragmented, with varying levels of industrial relations and collective bargaining across EU member states. Strong traditions of social dialogue and labor

cooperation exist in countries like Denmark, Sweden, and Germany, which results in more harmonious and successful negotiating solutions. The difficulties of defending the interests of workers, however, continues to be more noticeable in countries with smaller unions or less developed industrial relations. In order to guarantee that the transition to a greener economy is equitable and inclusive, social discourse plays an even more crucial role in determining the direction of the energy industry.

Bipartite and tripartite negotiations are both forms of social dialogue that facilitate information exchange, terms and conditions negotiation, and the development of solutions that strike a balance between social, economic, and environmental goals. European social dialogue could serve as a template for other areas if it is expanded and reinforced to tackle new issues in the energy industry. Several important elements need to be addressed for social dialogue in the energy sector to be effective. First, there needs to be a concerted effort to increase worker representation, especially in new industries where trade unions might not be as strong, like energy storage and renewables. Increasing union membership, supporting the formation of new unions in expanding industries, and promoting employee involvement in decision-making are some ways to do this. Employers and governments must simultaneously provide platforms where the rights of these workers can be protected and their concerns heard.

Furthermore, workers need to be prepared to handle changing circumstances because the energy transition involves significant investments in infrastructure and technology. This requires lifelong learning initiatives and focused training programs, which ought to be negotiated through collective bargaining procedures. The likelihood of social inequality and labor market exclusion can be reduced by making sure that people are upskilled and ready for new tasks. Making sure social discourse in the energy sector is inclusive and transparent is a critical component of promoting successful social dialogue. Employers and trade unions should collaborate to set up procedures for negotiating decent pay, safe working conditions,

and job stability. By passing labor laws that uphold workers' rights and promote social dialogue in the context of the energy transition, governments can aid in these initiatives.

European organizations are essential in fostering social dialogue in the energy industry, especially through programs that advance workers' rights and sustainability. For instance, the European Commission has called for workers to be included in debates about climate policies, highlighting the significance of social dialogue in accomplishing the objectives of the Green Deal. Programs such as the Just Transition Mechanism and the European Social Fund (ESF) provide funding for regional initiatives and reskilling programs to assist workers in making the shift from high-carbon to low-carbon industries.

In the energy sector, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and other sector-specific unions have been advocating for a just transition, stressing that workers shouldn't be left alone to deal with the costs. These groups emphasize the necessity of a fair transition, in which workers in carbon-intensive industries receive assistance through retraining, the creation of jobs in the renewable energy industry, and the preservation of respectable working conditions.

European institutions are essential in ensuring that all member states respect common labor norms and collective bargaining rights, as well as in fostering social discourse. Energy workers now have a more level playing field because to the EU's attempts to standardize labor regulations throughout its member states. Given the growing number of workers moving throughout the EU, this is especially crucial since it guarantees that decent salaries and working conditions are continuously upheld and that workers are not abused.

The strength of social discourse and the readiness of all parties to participate in cooperative, forward-thinking discussions will determine the future of European energy workers and collective bargaining in the industry. There are possibilities and problems associated with

the energy transition, and how workers are supported during this process will decide whether the transformation's advantages are distributed fairly. To ensure that the energy sector not only meets Europe's sustainability goals but also ensures decent work, social protection, and fair pay for all workers involved, a concerted effort must be made to strengthen collective bargaining frameworks, improve worker representation, invest in reskilling programs, and foster social dialogue.

Employers, trade unions, national governments, and European institutions must all collaborate and show unity in order to accomplish this. The European Union can establish an international standard for navigating the transition to a low-carbon economy while guaranteeing that the workers who enable this change are not left behind by adopting an inclusive approach to the energy transition. A fair and sustainable energy future that benefits employees, businesses, and society at large is achievable through social dialogue.



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