



## **WP3 National Report: BULGARIA**

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Sofia, Bulgaria

Last revised: January 2024

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## General overview of the current state of industrial relations and social dialogue in Bulgaria

Already after the changes of 1989, the huge role that the social dialogue and tripartite cooperation will have in Bulgaria became evident. The development of labour legislation, the formation and regularisation of the status of social partners became serious prerequisites for social dialogue and the establishment of tripartite cooperation institutions.

In 1990, general rules for collective labour agreements were adopted and the Law on Settlement of Collective Labour Bargaining was adopted. In 1991, a Social Peace Agreement was signed between the government, trade unions and employers, which effectively launched social dialogue in the country. General recommendations were adopted for the negotiation, signing and implementation of collective agreements as part of state-regulated bipartisan cooperation. The Council of Ministers adopts a regulation on wage negotiations. In 1992, amendments to the Labour Code were adopted, regulating the criteria for the representativeness of non-governmental organisations and defining "Tripartite Cooperation". In 1993, the National Council for Social Partnership was established on the basis of the Labour Code, renamed later that year the National Council for Tripartite Cooperation.

Over the years, this cooperation has been consolidated and the State currently consults the social partners in the implementation of various policies in the field of labour and directly related employment relations, social security relations and living standards. Tripartite cooperation in Bulgaria is regulated in several legal acts and is implemented by a number of bodies, both at national and at sectoral, branch, regional and municipal level.

Social dialogue at national level is carried out by the National Council for Tripartite Cooperation (NCTC) and advisory councils set up to consult on specific topics. The social partners also participate in the supervisory boards of several institutions (National Insurance Institute, Guaranteed Employees' Claims Fund, National Health Insurance Fund, etc.).

According to the set objectives of the tripartite cooperation in Bulgaria, the NCTC influences a number of policies in the country, including the determination of the minimum wage and minimum insurance thresholds, the level of the guaranteed minimum income, the parameters of the pension system and its reform. Discusses and gives opinions on draft legislation regulating: labour and directly related relations; health and safety at work; employment, unemployment and vocational training; public and health insurance; income and living standards;

budgetary policy issues; the social consequences of restructuring and privatisation. Carries out consultations and cooperation at national level on labour and directly related relations, social security,

Carries out consultations and cooperation at national level on labour and directly related labour relations, social security relations, as well as on living standards issues; coordinates work at national level on social dialogue programmes with national and international funding, in which all parties represented in the National Council for Tripartite Cooperation participate.

The NCTC has standing committees on: 1. income and living standards; 2. social security relations; 3. labour legislation; 4. the social consequences of restructuring and privatisation; 5. budgetary policy.

Tripartite cooperation in Bulgaria is playing an increasing role in the country's economy and politics. Since government decisions, following consultations with the social partners, usually affect every citizen and company directly or indirectly, it is crucial that tripartite cooperation bodies operate effectively and transparently.

#### 1.1. Tripartite dialogue at national level.

a) Tripartite cooperation based on dialogue and constructive solutions is crucial for the timely correction of shortcomings in the drafted normative and non-normative acts, for reaching an agreement on the implementation of reforms at a price acceptable to the social partners, for an economic environment protected from grounds for conflict, for the development of a consensual culture in social relations. The social dialogue has developed and progressed significantly, but at the same time it has shown weaknesses, especially in terms of transparency and publicity of the whole social dialogue process.

(b) The procedure for carrying out tripartite cooperation activities at national level is laid down in the Labour Code and the Regulations on the Organisation and Activities of Tripartite Cooperation Councils. The regulation is relatively short is unchanging.

(c) Regarding the criteria for representativeness, every four years employers' and employees' organizations take a census of their members to certify that they meet the criteria for national representativeness.

- for trade unions, with membership of at least 5 % of employees in each economic activity or at least 50 organisations with at least 5 members in each economic activity; most representative trade unions meet the second criterion;

- for employers' organisations, with not less than 5 % of the employees in the industry employed under an employment contract, or with at least 10 members; most of the industry organisations meet the second criterion.

At the end of 2023, Bulgaria has two nationally representative employee organisations (trade unions) and five nationally representative employers' organisations.

The nationally representative employee organisations are:

- Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria (CITUB), composed of 35 sectoral and branch federations, 4 associate members, 27 regional and 192 municipal councils, trade unions and covering all major sectors of the economy and. The CITUB is the largest national trade union organisation, covering about 75% of all trade union members in Bulgaria and

- Confederation of Labour "Podkrepa", comprising 35 trade union regional unions, 24 federations and national trade unions and 1 associate organisation.

The two confederations are members of the European Trade Union Confederation and the International Trade Union Confederation.

The nationally representative employers' organisations are:

- Association of Industrial Capital in Bulgaria - Its members include over 100 chambers representing 3/4 of the economic activities in the country, over 10,000 companies employing nearly 500,000 people. AICB has an established network of regional chambers covering 2/3 of the country's municipalities.

- The Bulgarian Industrial Association was established on 25 April 1980 and includes more than 120 branch organisations. There is an established network of regional and municipal organisations. The BIA is an active participant in the sectoral social dialogue and are party to the sectoral collective labour agreements in force in Bulgaria. BIA is a member of BUSINESSEUROPE, through which it represents the interests of Bulgarian companies and employers at European level.

- The Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, founded in 1895 and comprising over 52,000 members, supports, promotes and represents the interests of its members and contributes to the development of international economic cooperation. It offers a wide range of services covering the whole territory of Bulgaria through its nationally represented membership and its network of 28 regional chambers.

- Confederation of Employers and Industrialists in Bulgaria - unites over 12 000 companies, collective and individual members, which produce three-quarters of Bulgaria's GDP and employ over 900 000 people. It accounts for over three-quarters of Bulgaria's exports. CEIB is a member of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC).

- The Union for Economic Initiative was founded in 1989 by the first entrepreneurs in Bulgaria to promote economic initiative and to represent the collective interests of employers in the field of labour market and industrial relations. UIA is a member of the International Organisation of Employers (IOE) and the European Union of Craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises - UEAPME.

1.2. Tripartite cooperation at sectoral/industry level is carried out by sectoral councils, the activities of which are also regulated by the Labour Code and the Regulations on the Activities of Tripartite Cooperation Councils. According to Article 36(8) of the Labour Code and Article 18 of the Regulations on the organisation and operation of tripartite cooperation councils, the associations designated by the nationally representative organisations are representative at sectoral level. The associations referred to in the documents establishing the representativeness of the national organisations and meeting the requirements laid down in the Labour Code, which are referred to in point 1.1, shall be considered representative at sectoral level.

There is no publicly available information/publicity on the work of the individual sectoral councils (composition, meetings, acts discussed, decisions adopted, etc.).

### 1.3. Industrial relations, bipartisan cooperation

Collective bargaining in Bulgaria takes place only at branch/sector or company level. Only branch/sectoral organisations that are members of nationally representative employers' or workers' organisations have the right to conclude collective agreements (CBAs). According to official statistics provided by the National Statistical Institute of the Republic of Bulgaria, as of the end of 2018, the scope of collective bargaining in Bulgaria represented 29.4% of all employees, or a total of 600,272 employees out of a total of 2,038,040 employees.

According to the NSI publication "Wage Structure 2018"<sup>1</sup>, collective bargaining has the largest coverage in the economic activities "Education" and "Mining", where 92% and 74% of all employees are covered by CBAs, respectively. The other activities with more than 50% coverage of employees by

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.nsi.bg/sites/default/files/files/publications/Strzapl2018.pdf>

CBA are "Production and distribution of electricity, heat and gaseous fuels" (73%), "Water supply; sewerage, waste management and remediation" (59%), "Human health and social work" (54%). The smallest coverage of CBAs is in the "Trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles" and "Real estate operations" sectors - only 8% of employees, which is also due to the prevalence of small enterprises (1 to 9 employees) in these economic activities.

## Analysis of the case study research: Five cases of social dialogue in action

In addition to all the national and regional challenges associated with the Green Deal, it will have an impact on companies (including multinationals). The sectors most affected are mining and manufacturing, energy, water and sewerage, construction, transport and agriculture. To meet the new environmental requirements, these sectors need to reengineer their production processes. This can be achieved through investments in green technologies, circular economy, new energy sources. But in addition, investment in human capital - new skills, retraining and accelerated adaptability of the workforce - is needed to reap the benefits of the green transition.

There is a need for a comprehensive modernisation of the **construction sector**. In order to achieve the objectives of the Green Deal, it is important to identify measures in this direction, such as digitisation, improving the functioning of the internal market for construction products, the policy for "sustainable products" in support of the circular economy. The regulation on construction products must ensure that the design of new and renovated buildings meets the needs of the circular economy at all stages and will lead to increased digitisation and climate resilience of the building stock. A good example of adapting to the new requirements and meeting the challenges in the sector is provided by Glavbolgarstroy.

- „Glavbolgarstroy“ is one of the largest construction companies in Bulgaria, established in 1969. In 1999 „Glavbolgarstroy“ became the first construction company in Bulgaria certified under ISO 9001 - recognition for excellence in quality management in accordance with European standards. In order to meet the European requirements for the sector, which are set out in the Green Deal, the company opened a representative office in Brussels in 2019, where it is working on the implementation of green innovative projects, aims at further opportunities exchange of ideas, knowledge and know-how on advanced technologies and innovations in the construction industry. In 2020, the holding company will begin work on an energy innovation. In 2021, Glavbolgarstroy becomes a member of the European Clean Hydrogen Alliance. In 2023, Glavbolgarstroy starts work on two key energy projects for the region:
  - construction and commissioning of new aboveground facilities in connection with the expansion of the capacity of the Chiren underground gas storage facility (UGS): a compressor station with all associated



technical facilities to ensure reliable and uninterrupted operation in gas injection and production mode, a new gas metering station and a  
- construction and commissioning of the Bulgaria-Serbia Interconnector (IBS) on Bulgarian territory.

In the **transport sector**, in order to accelerate the transition towards sustainable and smart mobility, a focus on the some key priorities at EU level is needed. At national level, emissions from the transport sector are a major concern. They account for approximately 15% of the country's total emissions and are second only to emissions from energy, exceeding those from industry. Another challenge is limiting the use of old diesel and petrol vehicles. The average age of the country's vehicle fleet is significantly higher than the European average (over 18 years), despite the trend of a gradual increase in the number of new vehicles registered.

More than BGN 745 million will be invested through the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works to modernise public transport in 50 municipalities with more than 15,000 inhabitants. Around BGN 645 million of the resource is earmarked under the European Regional Development Programme for the period up to 2027. The remaining BGN 100 million are funds in the ministry's planned budget under the Recovery and Sustainability Plan, for the Green Mobility pilot scheme.

- From the beginning of January 2023 in Stara Zagora municipality starts the phased delivery of 18 out of 33 electric buses under the project for innovative vehicles, which also includes the delivery of 18 double charging stations. The delivery of the latest-generation electric buses and dual charging stations is being made possible as part of a major EU project, making the city one of the most environmentally friendly modes of transport in the country. Two transformer stations

and one auxiliary station have also been built. An electric bus can travel 240 km from the moment of full charge. The charging time is 135 minutes. The machines are equipped with an anti-cavity system, which consists in the fact that the seats have no textile and do not retain viruses. They also have an air filtration and purification system. But in order to reduce pollution in cities, it is not only urban transport that needs to be green, but also electric mobility needs to be encouraged.

**As good practices in Bulgaria in terms of initiating a fair green transition, we can point to the following three examples:**

- Campaigns to stimulate social dialogue and raise awareness. Examples of such activities include the green campaign of the CITUB launched in 2020.

Concrete manifestations of this campaign are the initiative organised by the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of the Light Industry - CITUB "Together we can do anything! A green transition only with the participation of all workers. Another campaign initiated by the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Agriculture at the CITUB is the "Think Green - The Earth Deserves It!" campaign. The initiative focuses on the interconnectedness of environmental, economic and social issues along the food chain - clean nature - clean food - a healthy and prosperous society, as well as the harm and damage of pesticides and glyphosate on humans. The Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Agriculture is sounding the alarm on the urgent need to reduce the use of pesticides, herbicides and other chemicals in the agricultural production cycle (in the context of also the Green Deal, the F2F Farm to Fork Strategy and CAP2020+). The campaign calls for a total ban on GLYPHOSATE and aims for change, including legislative change on the subject of pesticides in Bulgaria.

- Another example of good practice in Bulgaria is the Memorandum of Cooperation and Joint Actions signed in 2020 by the social partners in 5 sectors to focus more on workers in the context of COVID-19 and the green challenges and targets in the light of the Green Deal. This Memorandum is an expression of the political will and social commitment of the partners to

unite their efforts to care for the human factor and to take action together. The sectors in which there is a signed Memorandum of Cooperation and Joint Action for more focus on workers in the context of COVID-19 and in the light of the Green Deal are: the Plumbing Sector, the Agriculture Sector, the Metals Sector, the Construction Sector, the Light Industry Sector and the Food Sector (See Annex 1).

- The last example of good practice is the establishment of the Institute for Sustainable Transition and Development in the structure of the University of Thrace - Stara Zagora. The main objective of the institute is to contribute both to the transformation of the economic model in the regions affected by the energy transition and to the achievement of the goals of a low-carbon and carbon-neutral economy at regional and national level.

As regards **employment and social policy**, given that in Bulgaria the energy transformation will have a significant impact on employment in the energy and coal sectors, as well as in almost all other sectors of the economy, it is important to note that in addition to the impact on jobs (which are the direct effects of the transition), so-called indirect negative effects are also foreseen for the family members of those directly affected by the transition. The impact of this transformation in Bulgaria has another extremely important impact, which affects domestic energy consumption in terms of the type and structure of energy sources used. And this will have an impact on large population groups, especially in small settlements, where finding an alternative to transform the structure of energy consumption will be a lengthy and resource-intensive process.

As we have already mentioned, the state of social dialogue, industrial relations and collective bargaining varies from sector to sector. At present, collective bargaining at sectoral and industry level follows a traditional structure and content. The issues of digitalisation, the Green Deal and the Covid crisis are relatively new and are not reflected in the CBA. However, this does not mean that

they are not the subject of discussion, consultation and the search for solutions. The Covid crisis and the European Commission's mid-2020 Recovery and Sustainability Plan, which sets out a dual ('green' and digital) transition, have triggered corresponding reactions from the social partners.

To respond to the new challenges, the structures of the CITUB intensified their activities. As a result, a series of memoranda were signed at sectoral and industry level, which address these topical issues and propose various forms of cooperation, instruments and mechanisms to prevent and overcome the risks already faced by the development of the respective economic activities and sectors.

## Analysis of the focus group research

This part of the report presents the main results of a focus group held on 24 January 2024 in Sofia. The aim of the focus group was to explore the views and expectations of representatives of employers, trade unions, government, NGOs and the scientific community on the green transition in Bulgaria. The group consisted of 10 participants selected on the basis of diversity in terms of sector, organisation, position and experience. The questions posed to the participants were related to their roles, goals, issues and suggestions to support the green transition in their areas of activity.

For employers, a fair green transition means adapting to new energy efficiency, waste reduction and carbon footprint requirements of the business without losing competitiveness and revenue. The biggest challenges relate to the investments that need to be made to upgrade equipment, train staff and meet regulations. The biggest opportunities relate to opening new markets, increasing customer loyalty and improving the company's reputation.

According to a representative of one of the country's employers' organizations, energy is a key sector in the economy facing challenges and opportunities. The priorities for Bulgaria in the field of energy and the green transition, according to him, include correcting the distortions in the wholesale electricity market at extreme prices by compensating consumers on the free market. This includes the signing of long-term contracts with energy intensive companies.

In addition, the employer proposes the formation of a national market for greenhouse gas emissions and the development of a national strategy for sustainable energy development by 2030 with a horizon of 2050.

However, employers whose companies are at risk due to the green transition express concerns about the progress of the green transition in the country and stress the importance of coal as a reserve and an integral part of the country's energy independence. They believe that technological advances could allow combining coal combustion with biomass or waste, which would reduce carbon dioxide emissions. Another option, they say, is to invest in existing plants to increase their efficiency and produce the same amount of electricity with less coal.

For employees, a fair green transition means keeping their jobs and income while improving their quality of life and the environment. The biggest challenges are related to the risk of job loss or the need for retraining. The biggest opportunities are related to improved working conditions and social security if the employer invests in green practices and technologies.

The main concern among workers in TPPs relates to the fear of job losses. The 40% carbon reduction plan by 2026 in the Green Transition Roadmap

threatens to close half of these plants. This scenario carries with it severe consequences such as halting electricity exports and the loss of at least half of the jobs. Workers fear that this process will deprive them of income and security in the absence of alternatives. In working-class communities, families are equally threatened, as in many cases both adults in the household are employed by the TPP. Workers emphasize that coal power represents the only 100% independent power generation in Bulgaria. They remind the government of the need for job preservation and economic sustainability, expressing their concerns for the future of their families and communities.

In the proposed last territorial plan for the Stara Zagora region it is stated that in 2026 the reduction of emissions from coal-fired power plants is expected to lead to the loss of at least 12 thousand jobs in these structures, which "will have to be transferred to other economic sectors". A further 15 thousand jobs are expected to be affected by 2038 as the transition period continues towards the completion of the coal phase-out. The plan also states that the economic impact of this will be a potential loss of GVA of £877 million per annum unless mitigating measures are taken. However, no specific measures are mentioned anywhere in the plan. In view of the latest data from the National Institute of Statistics (as of January 2024), the abolition of 27 thousand jobs (assuming that all of them are currently employed) would lead to a reduction in the number of employees by 27% and in the employment rate by 6 percentage points.

For this reason, the trade unions reaffirmed their efforts to develop an energy strategy for the country, in which the Maritsa Iztokcomplex will play a key role. They also propose drawing up a plan to preserve the complex until coal reserves are exhausted and express opposition to the idea of creating a battery park within Maritsa East.

The CITUB (Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria) proposes the creation of a coal region conversion enterprise focused on reclamation and preparation for various business activities that could attract investors. As for the capital of this company, it is proposed that 60% would belong to the National Company Industrial Zones EAD, 20% to Maritsa Iztok Mines, and 20% would be reserved for the employees and workers of Maritsa East. The CITUB proposes to reassign at least 1,500 workers from the mines to this project who are not retrained. Regarding the Maritsa Iztok-2 power plant, the CITUB proposes the creation of a virtual photovoltaic power plant, including 100 photovoltaic installations in the district, especially in the towns of Radnevo and Galabovo, located on private and municipal buildings, with a total cost of about EUR 3.4 million.

For government representatives, a fair green transition means achieving the European Union's 2050 climate neutrality target, ensuring that no one is left

behind and that all sectors and groups contribute to the process. The biggest challenges are related to balancing the different interests and needs of economic actors, workers, consumers and citizens, as well as ensuring sufficient financial and human resources for the implementation of green reforms. The biggest opportunities are related to improving the health, well-being and security of the population, stimulating economic growth and innovation and strengthening the international position of Bulgaria and Europe.

According to NGOs, pollution in the Thermal Power Plants (TPP) region is high and requires measures to improve air quality. The organizations are pushing for investment in multiple renewable sources, noting that pollution is a serious problem that requires immediate attention. Following a lawsuit filed by environmental organizations, the European Court of Justice concluded that Bulgaria is in violation of European law by allowing the Maritsa Iztok2 thermal power plant to go beyond the stipulated sulphur dioxide standards without a timeframe and a plan to address the harmful emissions. The organisations are demanding that energy producers comply with environmental standards to ensure that the country's energy sector is in line with the times, using the best available technology and achieving the highest standards to protect human health.

The organisations stress that extreme weather conditions are causing serious material damage and that water scarcity is a growing challenge for society, industry and energy in many European countries, including Bulgaria. However, carbon emission levels continue to increase, and the main cause remains our way of life, which is still heavily dependent on the burning of fossil fuels.

Representatives of the NGO sector highlight several challenges in our country in the transition to green energy, which are also recorded in the report "Mission Green Bulgaria: How to make Bulgaria a green and innovative leader"<sup>2</sup>. These include the lack of a certification system for green innovations. At present, only the European Ecolabel system is applied in the country, which, however, monitors the environmental effect of traditional businesses, lack of an effective national strategy for smart specialization, delayed reforms to stimulate scientific transfer, lack of accessible experimentation facilities for testing innovative ideas - the bases that have experimentation facilities are either not accessible to entrepreneurs or the financial conditions are too high for start-ups, lack of integration between industrial parks and innovative hubs, lack of innovation and innovation in the country.

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<sup>2</sup> "Мисия Зелена България: Как да превърнем България в зелен и иновативен лидер", Издание на MOVE.BG в партньорство с WWF България, "Грийнпийс" – България и "Институт Кръгова Икономика (ИКИ)": <https://move.bg/wp/wp-content/uploads/Doklad-Misiya-Zelena-Blgariya-MOVE.BG-WWF-Grijnpijs-IKI-yuli-2022.pdf>

For their part, the representatives of the scientific community drew attention to another sector that will also experience difficulties in moving towards a carbon-neutral economy and that is agriculture. Researchers predict that intensive sectors where high inputs and significant investments are used, such as crop and livestock production, will experience greater challenges due to limitations in the use of chemical fertilizers and PP-preparations to reduce carbon emissions. Although Bulgaria is not expected to be one of the most affected countries, sectors with high technology and productivity as well as high production standards will experience greater challenges. This shift towards greener farming methods poses a threat to the competitiveness of European farms and could lead to a loss of market share in a global context.

Citing a recent study<sup>3</sup>, a representative of the scientific community said that banks will play a central role in the green transition process, requiring them to undergo a profound transformation. In the past, commercial banks often financed businesses that promised a quick return on investment. Now, however, they must gradually change their focus and direct their efforts towards sustainable projects in the field of renewable energy, the circular economy and the development of smaller and medium-sized enterprises. If all the announced renewable energy capacities are currently financed by the banks, with 30% co-financing from the project owner, the total bank exposure would reach around BGN 31 billion and BGN 500 million.

Even citizens who were previously not subject to lending or were otherwise lent to are becoming part of the banks' focus. Lending to individuals for energy efficient projects may prove challenging due to restrictions on collateral for mortgage loans. The green transition also requires changes in banks' strategies and business plans. They should encourage and provide financing for 'green projects' that include not only renewable energy but also energy efficiency improvements. In addition, banks need to reduce their carbon footprint from their own activities and provide advice to customers on sustainable financial options. Information campaigns are also essential to inform the public and the business sector about the benefits and opportunities that come with the green transition. All of these elements form part of the broad adaptation process that banks need to experience in order to play an active role in sustainable economic development. The significant transformation also includes the provision of financing and professional advice to support the industrial growth of the Bulgarian economy, in a similar way as development banks do.

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<sup>3</sup> Бобева, Д., Желязкова, В., Александрова-Златанска, С., Пальова, Я. (2023). Преходът към зелена икономика на Европейския съюз и предизвикателства пред финансовия сектор и публичните финанси на България. "Черният лебед" вече е "зелен". Пловдив: Университетско издателство "Паисий Хилендарски", ISBN 978-619-202-878-7.



Based on the focus group, we can draw several conclusions about the views and expectations of different sectors of society about the green transition in Bulgaria. The views of the participants are focused on sustainable development, with all participants showing interest in green technologies, energy solutions and environmental practices that would help to improve the environment. There is a clear understanding that a successful green transition requires a partnership between the public and private sectors, the active role of civil society and the scientific community, and effective engagement with trade unions. Participants stress the need for clear policies and effective regulations to stimulate green innovation and facilitate the transition to sustainable production. Participants' views underline the importance of education and training to prepare the workforce for green technology and environmental sustainability.

## Synthesis

Collective bargaining and social dialogue in Bulgaria are developing and are influenced by processes in Europe and the world. As has become clear over the last decades, industrial relations have undergone a number of changes. In the new EU member states, the influence and growing role of joint ILO and OECD documents is noticeable, which strengthen the role of social dialogue and emphasize the promotion of collective bargaining to achieve decent work and quality jobs, to overcome inequalities, to design the future of work.

To meet the challenges of digitalisation, the green transition and a changing labour market, trade unions will need to use their strongest tools - collective bargaining and social dialogue. Therefore, their recognition as relevant by more international organisations and the promotion of CBAs definitely allows trade unions to adapt to new forms of employment. Collective agreements are an important tool for social dialogue in terms of promoting environmental commitments. Within companies and at sectoral level, they enable clear, coherent and sustainable policies to 'green' industry and create green jobs.

In Bulgaria, the social dialogue has not been interrupted and is generally assessed as good, persisting in all sectors. It has been built on respect and trust for sustained and productive dialogue over the years. Industrial relations are maintained even in industries and sectors where there are no sectoral/industry collective agreements through active social partnership, which in turn could also facilitate the initiation of bargaining. However, a strengthening of social dialogue is necessary to achieve a truly just transition. New jobs must not only be green, but decent and productive, provide adequate incomes and respect workers' rights. Social protection must be at the heart of social and labour policies for a green

transition because it can provide income security through the opportunity to acquire new skills.

The conclusions we can draw from the focus group are that the priorities in the energy sector include correcting market distortions, a national emissions market and a strategy for sustainable energy development. Trade unions propose concrete measures to safeguard jobs through the conversion of coal regions and investment in reclamation. The creation of a conversion company focused on reclamation and new business activities is presented as an opportunity to attract investment and support economic sustainability. In summary, the information presented highlights the need for a balanced approach to green transition that takes into account economic and social impacts, ensures fairness for employers and employees, and provides concrete solutions to preserve jobs and economic diversity in coal regions. A comprehensive and balanced approach, taking into account economic, social and environmental aspects, is needed to achieve sustainable and community-wide growth.

These good examples in some sectors where the green transition is already a reality are proof enough that the labour market transformation is inevitable and already happening. It is important that we can be sufficiently adaptable to new challenges and allow retraining and new technologies to benefit us. Acquiring new skills will facilitate the transition to new forms of employment, allowing us to remain active on the labour market. Raising awareness through campaigns, such as the examples we have given, is an extremely effective mechanism for explaining to workers in a more accessible way that the green transition could be alternative and innovative. On the role of collective bargaining and social dialogue, the trade unions have quickly stepped up and started to find a way, albeit not directly through clauses in the CBAs but through the signing of framework agreements and memoranda in individual sectors, to integrate and give workers peace of mind that they will again be protected and supported throughout the transition process. Last but not least, it is important to add that trade unions and employers' associations participate in the European sectoral social dialogue through their membership of the relevant European sectoral trade union federations and European employers'/business associations, where they exchange experiences and good practices at sectoral level.

The involvement of trade unions in the stages of the green transition are a guarantor of its social dimensions. They raise the issues for the directly affected workers and employees of the green transition and look for possible political solutions at both national and regional levels. Collaboration between the different actors in industrial relations is key to forming a comprehensive and sustainable

green transition plan that takes into account the different interests and ensures equal opportunities for all actors in society.

## APPENDIX

Name of the document	Date of signing	Signatories (social partners)	Subject areas
<b>Memorandum</b> of Partnership	September 30, 2020	FEDERATION OF INDEPENDENT TRADE UNION ORGANIZATIONS OF LIGHT INDUSTRY and BULGARIAN ASSOCIATION OF CLOTHING AND TEXTILES MANUFACTURERS	Circular Economy, European Green Deal and Digitization in Textiles and Clothing
<b>Memorandum</b> of Partnership	September 30, 2020	FEDERATION OF INDEPENDENT TRADE UNION ORGANIZATIONS OF LIGHT INDUSTRY and BULGARIAN ASSOCIATION FOR TEXTILES, CLOTHING AND LEATHER	Circular Economy, European Green Deal and Digitalization in Textiles, Clothing and Leather
<b>Memorandum</b> of Cooperation and Partnership	September 1, 2020	FEDERATION OF INDEPENDENT TRADE UNION ORGANIZATIONS OF THE FOOD INDUSTRY, UNION OF PRODUCERS OF VEGETABLE OILS AND OIL PRODUCTS IN BULGARIA, ASSOCIATION OF MANUFACTURERS OF SOFT BEVERAGES IN BULGARIA, UNION OF FRUIT	Effective measures to prevent infection with Covid-19 in the food industry; impact of the green deal and circular economy actions.

		AND VEGETABLES PROCESSORS and THE UNION of BREWERS IN BULGARIA	
<b>Memorandum</b>	September 24, 2020	NATIONAL TRADE UNION FEDERATION "METAL-ELEKTRO" and THE BULGARIAN ASSOCIATION OF ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING AND ELECTRONICS	Impact of the Green Deal on the Electrical and Electronics sector; actions for the development of a circular economy; support for businesses to implement preventive measures to limit Covid-19.
<b>Memorandum of Cooperation and Partnership</b>	September 11, 2020	NATIONAL BRANCH UNION "WATER SUPPLIER" and UNION OF WATER SUPPLY OPERATORS IN THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA	Impact of the Green Deal on the water and sanitation sector; actions for the development of a circular economy; support for businesses to implement preventive measures to limit Covid-19.
<b>Framework Cooperation Agreement</b>	September 30, 2020	FEDERATION OF INDEPENDENT CONSTRUCTION UNIONS and CHAMBER OF BUILDERS IN BULGARIA	Mutual information and consultation, identifying measures on the green deal, the transition to a low-carbon economy; qualification and employment support in the Construction sector
<b>Memorandum of Cooperation and Common Actions</b>	November 5, 2020	FEDERATION OF INDEPENDENT AGRICULTURAL TRADE UNIONS, NATIONAL UNION OF AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVES IN BULGARIA, ASSOCIATION OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCERS IN	The Covid-19 crisis; The European Green Deal and related Farm-to-Fork and Biodiversity 2030 strategies; reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy after 2020

		BULGARIA and BULGARIAN ASSOCIATION CIRCULAR ECONOMY AND BIOTECH	
<b>Roadmap</b> of the main policies and measures needed to implement the Sectoral Pillar for Labor and Social Rights and the European Green Deal	project	Social partners from the "Beer and malt production" branch	The double transition (green and digital) to a greener and low-carbon industry leading to a circular economy, social justice of the transition; "living wage"

Source: Study on Multinational Companies in Bulgaria (2014-2020), ISTUR