



WP3 Final Report

February 2024



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The project SOCIAL GREEN DEAL (101052243) has been financed by the European Commission. The content of this paper solely reflects the thoughts of the authors, and the Commission is not responsible for the use that might be made of it.

Contents

Executive Summary.....	5
Introduction to the Report.....	5
Methodology Overview	5
Key Findings from Comparative Analysis and Case Studies.....	6
Recommendations for Policy and Practice	7
Conclusions and Implications for Future Research.....	8
1. Introduction	9
1.1 Background on Just Transition	9
1.2 Objectives of the Report	10
1.3 Scope and Methodology	11
1.4 Relevance of National Contexts	13
1.5 Structure of the Report.....	14
2. State of Social Dialogue related to Just Transition in Partner Countries.....	15
Belgium	15
Bulgaria	16
Croatia.....	17
Italy	17
Spain.....	18
3. Comparative insights.....	19
4. Comparative Analysis of Case Study Research	22
4.1 Clarification on Case Study Selection Criteria.....	22
4.2 Belgium	23
4.2.1 Chemical Industry Initiatives.....	23
4.2.2 Renewable Energy and Sustainability	24
4.2.3 Stakeholder Engagement and Policy Impact: <i>Klimaat sprong</i>	24
4.2.4 Employee Engagement, Training, and Adaptation	25
4.2.5 Best Practices, Challenges, and Lessons Learned	25

4.3 Bulgaria	26
4.3.1 Introduction to Bulgarian Context	26
4.3.2 Overview of Social Dialogue Mechanisms	26
4.3.3 Case Studies of Successful Collaboration.....	26
4.3.4 Challenges and Opportunities.....	27
4.3.5 Conclusion and Future Directions.....	27
4.4 Croatia.....	28
4.5 Italy.....	29
4.5.1 Renewable Energy Development:.....	29
4.5.2 Carbon Neutrality Initiatives:.....	29
4.5.3 Stakeholder Engagement:.....	30
4.6 Spain.....	30
4.6.1 Region-Specific Strategies:.....	30
4.6.2 Collaborative Efforts:	31
4.6.3 Diversification and Innovation:.....	31
4.7 Comparative Insights and Synthesis	32
4.7.1 Role of Social Dialogue in Just Transition	32
4.7.2 Employment Transitions and Workforce Adaptation	34
4.7.3 Involvement of Trade Unions and Employers.....	36
4.7.4 Challenges and Opportunities.....	39
4.7.5 Synthesis and Recommendations	40
5. Analysis of Focus Group Research	42
5.1 Introduction	42
5.2 Belgian Focus Group Findings	43
5.3 Bulgarian Focus Group Findings.....	43
5.4 Croatian Focus Group Findings	47
5.5 Italian Focus Group Findings.....	47
5.6 Spanish Focus Group Findings	48

5.7 Comparative Analysis and Synthesis of the Focus Group Research	48
5.7.1 Introduction to Comparative Analysis	48
5.7.2 Methodological Approach Across Countries.....	49
5.7.3 Stakeholder Engagement and Participation	50
5.7.4 Themes of Social Dialogue in Just Transition	51
5.7.5 Challenges Identified Across Countries.....	52
5.7.6 Opportunities and Best Practices.....	54
5.7.7 Government Role and Policy Implications.....	55
5.7.8 Recommendations for Enhancing Just Transition Processes.....	56
5.7.9 Conclusion.....	57
6. Conclusions and Recommendations	58
6.1 Summary of Key Findings.....	58
6.2 Conclusions	59
6.3 Recommendations for Policy	60
6.3.1 Strengthen Social Dialogue Mechanisms:.....	60
6.3.2 Enhance Workforce Training Programs:	61
6.3.3 Support Sector- and Region-Specific Just Transition Strategies:	61
6.3.4 Implementation Strategy Suggestions.....	61
6.4 Recommendations for Social Partners.....	62
6.5 Future Research Directions and Final thoughts.....	63
References	63

Executive Summary

Introduction to the Report

The WP3 Final Report embarks on a comprehensive exploration of the Just Transition across five European nations: Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, and Spain, utilizing a dual research approach that combines focus group discussions with extensive case study research. This innovative methodology was designed to delve deeply into the mechanisms of social dialogue surrounding Just Transition, aiming to uncover how these dialogues are conducted, the stakeholders involved, and the outcomes achieved in different industrial and regional contexts. The focus group discussions provided a platform for direct engagement with key stakeholders, including trade unions, employers, government entities, and NGOs, facilitating rich, nuanced conversations about the challenges, opportunities, and best practices associated with transitioning to a green economy. Complementing this, the case study research examined five specific instances per country where Just Transition principles have been applied, offering a tangible, detailed examination of how these processes unfold in real-world scenarios. Together, these methodologies offer a multidimensional view of Just Transition processes, highlighting the diversity of approaches, the complexity of stakeholder interactions, and the varied outcomes of these initiatives across Europe. The objective is to distil actionable insights and recommendations that can guide policymakers, social partners, and communities in effectively navigating the Just Transition to a sustainable future.

Methodology Overview

The methodology underpinning the WP3 Final Report is designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Just Transition's multifaceted nature. It combines two primary research methodologies: case study research and focus group discussions, each selected for its ability to illuminate different aspects of the Just Transition process.

Case Study Research involved a meticulous selection process, identifying five representative cases per country that exemplify Just Transition initiatives. These cases were analysed to understand the specific contexts, strategies, successes, and setbacks experienced. The case studies provided detailed, grounded examples of how Just Transition principles are applied in practice, offering valuable lessons and insights.

Focus Group Discussions were conducted in Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, and Spain, bringing together a diverse array of stakeholders from trade unions, employers, government bodies, and NGOs. These discussions aimed to capture a wide range of perspectives on the challenges, opportunities, and mechanisms of social dialogue within the context of Just Transition. The dialogues facilitated an in-

depth exploration of stakeholder experiences, perceptions, and recommendations, enriching the analysis with qualitative insights.

Together, these complementary approaches enabled a layered analysis of Just Transition. While focus groups allowed for the gathering of broad, thematic insights across countries, the case studies offered a deep dive into specific instances of Just Transition, enabling a richer, more nuanced understanding of how social dialogue and transition strategies unfold in diverse settings. This dual methodology ensured that the research captured both the macro-level trends and the micro-level dynamics of Just Transition, providing a solid foundation for the report's findings and recommendations.

Key Findings from Comparative Analysis and Case Studies

Integrating insights from both the comparative analysis of focus group discussions and the case studies across Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, and Spain, several key themes emerge, underscoring the multifaceted approach to Just Transition. A common thread across the discussions and case studies is the importance of inclusive social dialogue. This dialogue is pivotal for ensuring that the voices of all stakeholders, including workers, employers, government entities, and NGOs, are heard and considered in the transition process. Such inclusivity fosters mutual understanding, shared commitment, and collaborative action towards sustainable outcomes.

The case studies illuminate innovative practices and sector-specific strategies, showcasing Just Transition in action. For instance, in **Belgium**, the creation of a sectoral working group for decarbonization represents an innovative approach to embedding environmental sustainability within industrial dialogue. **Bulgaria's** development of a comprehensive national strategy for sustainable energy underscores the importance of strategic planning and stakeholder cooperation in navigating the transition.

Croatia's emphasis on leveraging local capabilities highlights the significance of regional adaptation, demonstrating how Just Transition can be tailored to exploit local strengths and address specific challenges. **Italy's** focus on aligning educational programs with the demands of the green economy showcases the critical role of human capital development in facilitating a successful transition.

Spain's case studies provide concrete examples of managing employment transitions through agreements, highlighting the proactive steps taken to mitigate employment impacts and support worker re-skilling. These examples not only illustrate the practical application of Just Transition principles but also the innovative approaches adopted by stakeholders to address specific challenges and capitalize on opportunities.

Together, the comparative analysis and case studies paint a comprehensive picture of Just Transition efforts across Europe. They reveal a landscape marked by diversity in strategies and approaches, driven by the unique industrial, economic, and social contexts of each country. The insights gathered underscore the necessity of tailored, context-specific strategies for Just Transition, emphasizing the critical role of social dialogue in fostering effective, inclusive, and sustainable outcomes. Through these examples, the report highlights the potential for learning and adaptation, offering valuable lessons for stakeholders involved in Just Transition processes globally.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Drawing on the comprehensive insights from both focus group discussions and case studies across Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, and Spain, this section outlines detailed recommendations for advancing Just Transition strategies effectively. These recommendations encompass policy actions, stakeholder collaboration, and innovative approaches, underpinned by concrete examples from the case studies.

1. Strengthen Policy Support for Inclusive Social Dialogue:

Governments should enact policies that mandate and facilitate inclusive social dialogue, ensuring all stakeholder voices are heard. For example, Spain's agreements to manage worker transitions can serve as a model, showcasing how government facilitation can help negotiate terms that benefit workers and communities alike.

2. Enhance Sector-Specific Transition Strategies:

Policies should support the development of sector-specific transition strategies that address unique industry challenges. The Belgian sectoral working group for decarbonization illustrates how targeted dialogue can lead to actionable strategies for environmental sustainability within specific industries.

3. Invest in Education and Skill Development:

Investment in education and training programs aligned with the needs of the green economy is crucial. Italy's emphasis on aligning educational programs with labour market demands highlights the importance of preparing the workforce for future opportunities in green sectors.

4. Foster Regional Adaptation and Economic Diversification:

Encourage policies that support regional adaptation and economic diversification, leveraging local strengths. Croatia's approach to leveraging local capabilities for economic diversification provides a blueprint for tailoring Just Transition strategies to regional contexts.

5. Promote Stakeholder Collaboration and Partnership:

Foster collaborations between governments, businesses, and educational institutions to drive the transition. Bulgaria's comprehensive approach to developing a national strategy for sustainable energy, involving a wide range of stakeholders, underscores the effectiveness of collaborative planning.

6. Implement Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms:

Establish robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the progress of Just Transition initiatives. These mechanisms can ensure that strategies are adapted based on effectiveness and stakeholder feedback, ensuring continuous improvement.

7. Support Innovation and Best Practice Sharing:

Encourage the sharing of innovative practices and lessons learned through platforms that connect stakeholders across countries. This can facilitate the adoption of successful approaches and technologies, as seen in the diverse case studies, enhancing the overall effectiveness of Just Transition strategies.

By implementing these recommendations, policymakers and stakeholders can enhance the effectiveness of Just Transition strategies, ensuring they are inclusive, responsive, and aligned with the long-term goal of sustainable development.

[Conclusions and Implications for Future Research](#)

The insights from the focus group and case study research across Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, and Spain illuminate the complexities and opportunities within Just Transition strategies. This comprehensive analysis underscores the essential role of inclusive social dialogue and robust stakeholder engagement, highlighting the necessity for collaborative efforts from trade unions, employers, governments, NGOs, and the scientific community. The government's role emerges as pivotal in facilitating transitions through supportive policies, investment, and innovation to achieve environmental sustainability alongside social equity and economic viability.

Future research directions should focus on deepening our understanding of stakeholder collaboration dynamics, evaluating the long-term impacts of Just Transition initiatives on employment, community resilience, and environmental outcomes. Exploring the contributions of technology and innovation, alongside the effects of policy coherence across different governance levels, will offer further insights into enhancing Just Transition processes.

In essence, the findings from this report set the stage for ongoing refinement of Just Transition strategies, advocating for approaches that are not only environmentally sound but also socially just and economically inclusive. Stakeholders are encouraged to leverage these insights to foster transitions that effectively address the challenges of our times, ensuring a sustainable and equitable future for all.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background on Just Transition

The concept of Just Transition in the context of European industrial relations refers to a principle and a process that aims to secure the future and livelihoods of workers and communities as economies shift towards sustainable production, primarily in response to climate change and environmental degradation. This concept is deeply rooted in the dialogue between workers, employers, governments, and communities to ensure that the shift towards a green economy is fair and inclusive, minimizing hardships for workers and communities during this transition.

Key elements of Just Transition in European industrial relations include:

2. **Social Dialogue:** It involves negotiations, consultations, and collaborations between trade unions, employers, and government entities. Social dialogue is critical for developing strategies that ensure workers' rights, job security, and fair working conditions during the transition to a greener economy.
3. **Skills Training and Education:** Re-skilling and up-skilling of workers is a significant aspect. It ensures that the workforce can adapt to new technologies and sectors emerging in a green economy, such as renewable energy, energy efficiency, and sustainable agriculture.
4. **Employment Policies:** Development of employment policies that support job creation in new green sectors, while also providing safety nets for workers who may lose their jobs in declining industries like coal, oil, and gas.
5. **Community Participation and Support:** Engaging communities in the transition process, particularly those heavily reliant on high-carbon industries, to ensure they are not left behind. This includes investments in local infrastructure, health, education, and other social services.

In the current global environmental and economic landscape, the relevance of Just Transition is underscored by several factors:

1. **Climate Change and Environmental Policies:** European countries, in line with the Paris Agreement and the European Green Deal, are committed to reducing greenhouse gas

emissions and moving towards a sustainable economy. This shift necessitates a transformation in industries and labour markets.

2. **Economic Resilience:** The transition to a green economy offers opportunities for economic growth and innovation. However, it must be managed carefully to ensure economic stability and the protection of workers' rights.
3. **Social Equity:** Just Transition is integral to ensuring that the move towards a sustainable future does not disproportionately impact vulnerable workers and communities. It emphasizes the importance of equitable distribution of the benefits and burdens of economic and environmental changes.
4. **Policy Integration:** There is a growing recognition that environmental policies need to be integrated with social and economic policies to be truly effective. Just Transition provides a framework for this integration.

For more in-depth information, please refer to the Preliminary Report (Turk, Vereycken and Pulignano, 2023) as well as the resources of the following organisations:

The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) has extensive resources on Just Transition, focusing on the European context (ETUC, no date).

The International Labour Organization (ILO) offers a global perspective on Just Transition, with specific references to Europe (especially relevant: ILO, 2015).

European Commission's documents on the European Green Deal and related strategies provide insights into the policy framework surrounding Just Transition in Europe (European Commission, no date).

1.2 Objectives of the Report

The purpose of this report is to critically analyse and evaluate the role of social dialogue in managing the Just Transition process across various European countries. Social dialogue, encompassing negotiations, consultations, and joint actions undertaken by governments, employers, and workers' organizations, is a cornerstone in shaping the pathways towards a sustainable and equitable green economy. The report aims to delve into how this collaborative process is being utilized and its effectiveness in addressing the multifaceted challenges of transitioning to environmentally sustainable industrial practices while ensuring social equity and job security.

The main objectives of the report include:

1. **Assessing the Current State of Social Dialogue:** To examine the existing frameworks, mechanisms, and practices of social dialogue in different European countries, particularly

focusing on Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy and Spain. This assessment will consider the institutional, legislative, and cultural contexts that influence how social dialogue is conducted and its impact on Just Transition strategies.

2. **Comparative Analysis of National Approaches:** To conduct a comparative analysis of how various European countries are utilizing social dialogue in the Just Transition process. This will involve identifying both common trends and unique approaches, highlighting successful strategies and areas where challenges persist.
3. **Evaluating the Effectiveness of Social Dialogue in Just Transition:** To critically evaluate the effectiveness of social dialogue in facilitating the Just Transition process. This includes assessing its role in policy formulation, implementation of green initiatives, safeguarding workers' rights, and ensuring equitable distribution of the benefits and burdens of the transition.
4. **Identifying Best Practices and Lessons Learned:** To extract and document best practices, lessons learned, and innovative approaches from different national experiences. This will provide valuable insights and guidance for policymakers, social partners, and other stakeholders involved in Just Transition processes.
5. **Making Recommendations:** To provide actionable recommendations based on the findings of the report. These recommendations will be aimed at enhancing the role and efficacy of social dialogue in managing Just Transition processes, ensuring that they are inclusive, equitable, and supportive of sustainable development goals.
6. **Facilitating Knowledge Exchange and Capacity Building:** To serve as a resource for knowledge exchange among European countries, fostering a deeper understanding of the role of social dialogue in Just Transition and building capacities for effective collaboration among social partners.

By achieving these objectives, the report seeks to contribute significantly to the discourse on Just Transition in Europe, providing a comprehensive analysis of the role of social dialogue in navigating the challenges and opportunities presented by the shift towards a sustainable future.

1.3 Scope and Methodology

The scope of this report is to provide an in-depth analysis of the Just Transition process, with a particular focus on the role of social dialogue and industrial relations within five European countries: Belgium (Vereycken, Turk & Pulignano, 2024), Bulgaria (Todorova, Sabcheva & Ivcheva, 2024), Croatia (Denona Bogovic, Krstinic Nizic, & Sverko Grdic, 2024), Italy (Alessandrini & Rugiero, 2024), and Spain (Martínez Poza & Cruces Aguilera, 2024). These participant countries offer diverse perspectives due

to their unique economic structures, labour markets, and environmental policies, making them ideal for exploring the varied approaches to Just Transition:

In **Belgium**, the report examines the country's sophisticated industrial relations system and its impact on facilitating a smooth transition towards greener practices, particularly in sectors like manufacturing and energy. The Belgian case study will highlight how social dialogue mechanisms have been utilised to negotiate transitions in traditional industries and the role of government policies in supporting these efforts.

In **Bulgaria**, the focus is on navigating the complex transition of energy-intensive sectors towards sustainability, with particular attention to the challenges facing coal-dependent regions. The report delves into Bulgaria's efforts to stimulate social dialogue and implement strategic initiatives aimed at balancing economic sustainability with environmental goals. Through the lens of Bulgaria's evolving industrial relations and social dialogue mechanisms, the report examines the integration of environmental objectives within economic and labour market policies, reflecting the country's commitment to a Just Transition that is both inclusive and equitable. This analysis provides critical insights into how Bulgaria is addressing the socio-economic impacts of the green transition, emphasizing the importance of stakeholder engagement and the development of sector-specific strategies to ensure a smooth and just transition to a low-carbon economy.

Croatia, with its emerging economy and recent EU membership, provides insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by countries at different stages of economic development. The report explores how Croatia balances its economic growth aspirations with environmental responsibilities, and the role of social dialogue in managing these competing demands .

Italy's rich industrial history and its current focus on sustainable development provide a backdrop for examining the interplay between established industrial relations frameworks and emerging green initiatives. The report delves into how Italian workers, employers, and government entities collaborate to navigate the economic shifts brought about by the Just Transition.

Spain's experience with renewable energy and its transition away from coal mining presents a unique case of how a country can leverage social dialogue to manage both the opportunities and challenges of a green transition. The report assesses Spain's strategies for re-skilling workers, creating new employment opportunities in green sectors, and ensuring community involvement and support.

Across all these countries, the report aims to analyse the effectiveness of social dialogue and industrial relations in facilitating Just Transition, identify best practices, and highlight areas where improvements are needed. By drawing comparative insights from these diverse European contexts,

the report contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities and nuances involved in managing Just Transition processes. This analysis is intended to inform policymakers, social partners, and stakeholders involved in shaping sustainable and equitable transitions in the European labour market.

The methodology of this report is anchored in a multi-dimensional approach, combining national reports, case studies, and focus group research to comprehensively analyse the Just Transition process in the context of social dialogue and industrial relations.

National Reports: Utilises detailed reports from Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, and Spain, providing a foundational understanding of each country's approach to Just Transition. These reports offer insights into national policies, economic structures, and industrial relations systems.

Case Studies: In-depth case studies from the selected countries highlight specific examples of Just Transition in action. These studies offer practical insights into the successes and challenges faced in implementing Just Transition strategies at the industry and community levels.

Focus Group Research: Complements the national reports and case studies with qualitative data gathered from focus groups. These discussions involve various stakeholders, including workers, employers, and policymakers, providing diverse perspectives on the role of social dialogue in managing Just Transition processes.

This triangulation of data sources ensures a robust and comprehensive analysis, combining theoretical perspectives with practical insights and stakeholder viewpoints.

1.4 Relevance of National Contexts

Understanding the unique industrial relations landscape in each of the five countries - Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, and Spain - is crucial for several reasons:

Diverse Economic and Political Contexts: Each country has its own economic and political history that shapes its approach to industrial relations. For instance, Belgium's mature economy and strong union presence might approach Just Transition differently from Croatia's emerging economy. Recognising these contexts is essential to understanding how each country navigates the transition to a sustainable economy.

Varied Industrial Structures: The industrial makeup of each country influences its Just Transition strategies. Countries with heavy reliance on traditional industries such as coal might face different challenges compared to those with a more diversified industrial base. Understanding these structures

helps in formulating tailored strategies that are sensitive to the specific needs and opportunities within each country.

Distinct Social Dialogue Mechanisms: The nature of social dialogue varies across countries, influenced by historical, cultural, and political factors. Some countries may have more collaborative models of dialogue, while others might have a more contentious relationship between employers and employees. Understanding these mechanisms is vital in designing Just Transition strategies that are effective and inclusive.

Policy and Legal Frameworks: Each country operates within its own legal and policy framework, which governs industrial relations and environmental policies. Understanding these frameworks is key to identifying opportunities and constraints in implementing Just Transition policies, ensuring that strategies are not only effective but also compliant with national regulations.

In essence, appreciating these unique landscapes allows for a nuanced and effective approach to managing Just Transition processes, ensuring they are equitable, practical, and sustainable.

1.5 Structure of the Report

The report is designed to offer an encompassing analysis of Just Transition in European industrial relations. The Introduction section set the stage by discussing Just Transition's concept, relevance, objectives of the report, and its scope and limitations. Following this, the State of Social Dialogue in Partner Countries provides a detailed analysis of Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, and Spain, delving into the specifics of social dialogue in each context. Comparative Insights then bridge these analyses, examining the similarities and differences across these countries, enriching the understanding of diverse approaches. The Comparative Analysis of Case Study Research further deepens this exploration by synthesizing case study results, highlighting the application of social dialogue in green transition efforts. The Analysis of Focus Group Research contributes an additional layer of depth in assessing the effectiveness of social dialogue. Finally, the report culminates in the Conclusions and Recommendations section, summarizing the efficacy of social dialogue in the green transition and suggesting best practices and strategies for enhancement. Each chapter contributes to the overarching aim of understanding and advancing the role of social dialogue in Just Transition.

2. State of Social Dialogue related to Just Transition in Partner Countries

Belgium

The Belgian industrial relations framework, deeply rooted in its historical development, is characterized by a strong collaborative tradition involving trade unions, employer associations, and government bodies. Historically, this system evolved through significant labour movements, leading to the establishment of robust unions and structured employer organizations. Currently, the framework is marked by extensive social dialogue, where trade unions and employer associations actively participate in shaping labour policies and practices. The government plays a facilitative role, mediating and sometimes arbitrating to ensure balanced outcomes. This tripartite collaboration is fundamental in addressing labour issues, negotiating collective agreements, and framing policies, thereby maintaining a stable industrial environment.

Just Transition principles are intricately woven into Belgium's industrial and environmental policies. The country's approach integrates environmental sustainability with socio-economic fairness, ensuring that the transition towards a low-carbon economy does not adversely impact workers and communities. National strategies reflect this by promoting green jobs and sustainable industries, while legislative frameworks mandate the involvement of social partners in decision-making processes. These frameworks ensure that policies not only meet environmental goals but also address the social and economic implications of such transitions, balancing ecological imperatives with workers' rights and industrial development.

The Flemish approach to Just Transition, detailed in the Belgian national report, emphasizes a collaborative framework involving trade unions, employer associations, and government bodies. This approach is geared towards managing the socio-economic impacts of transitioning to a sustainable, low-carbon economy. In Flanders, there's a focus on industrial transformation, particularly in energy-intensive sectors. The region leverages its robust system of social dialogue to facilitate these changes. Strategies include comprehensive industrial transition programs like "*Klimaatprong*," which shapes regional-level industrial policies related to climate change. The approach in Flanders aligns with the broader Belgian strategies for Just Transition, demonstrating an inclusive model of industrial relations, essential for a balanced and just green transition.

Implementing Just Transition in Belgium and Flanders involves several key challenges and opportunities. These include economic diversification, where the focus is on developing new, sustainable industries while transforming traditional sectors. Workforce re-skilling is another critical

aspect, as it's essential to prepare workers for emerging green jobs. Balancing economic growth with environmental sustainability is also a significant challenge, requiring a nuanced approach to ensure that economic development does not come at the expense of environmental health. These aspects underscore the need for an integrated strategy that considers both economic and environmental imperatives.

Bulgaria

The industrial relations framework in Bulgaria is evolving, with a focus on enhancing social dialogue amid the challenges of transitioning to a green economy. The country is characterized by a mix of post-socialist industrial relations dynamics and the ongoing efforts to align with European Union standards and practices. Historically, the transition from a centrally planned to a market economy has impacted the structure and effectiveness of trade unions and employer associations. In recent years, there has been a concerted effort to revitalize social dialogue mechanisms, particularly in the context of Just Transition policies.

Just Transition principles are beginning to shape Bulgaria's approach to environmental and industrial policy. The country faces significant challenges in managing the transition of its coal-dependent regions towards renewable energy sources. This includes addressing the socio-economic impacts on communities reliant on traditional industries, while also seizing the opportunities presented by green growth. The Bulgarian national report highlights the role of social dialogue in engaging a wide range of stakeholders, including workers, employers, government bodies, and NGOs, in the formulation and implementation of Just Transition strategies. Efforts are underway to foster inclusive dialogue that can support the development of equitable and sustainable policies, reflecting a balance between environmental objectives and the needs of the workforce.

In particular, the Bulgarian case study underscores the importance of sector-specific dialogues, especially in the energy sector, where the need for decarbonization intersects with concerns about energy security, employment, and regional development. The country's approach emphasizes the creation of new job opportunities in green sectors, the re-skilling of workers from traditional industries, and the development of comprehensive support mechanisms for affected communities. These efforts are supported by national and EU funding, aimed at facilitating a just and smooth transition to a low-carbon economy.

The challenges and opportunities identified in Bulgaria's journey towards a sustainable future highlight the critical role of effective social dialogue. By engaging all relevant stakeholders, Bulgaria aims to navigate the complexities of the green transition, ensuring that policies are not only environmentally sound but also socially equitable.

Croatia

The state of social dialogue in Croatia is characterized by a diverse and evolving framework. The main legal framework regulating social dialogue includes the Labour Act and the Act on the Representation of Employers and Trade Union Associations. There is no uniform pattern of collective bargaining; it varies across sectors and levels, including public sector education and health, as well as private sectors like construction and tourism. As of 2021, Croatia had a stable number of collective agreements in force, covering a significant proportion of employees, although the overall coverage rate has declined slightly due to changes in employment structures and growth in sectors with less collective bargaining practice. The country faces challenges like labour emigration and demographic changes, impacting the labour market and the future of social dialogue.

The status of Just Transition in Croatia is increasingly gaining recognition, especially in sectors most affected by climate change. Key trade unions are starting to address the green transition, focusing on the waste management sector as a prime example. There is an emerging awareness of the need to adapt to a sustainable, low-carbon economy, which will involve transitioning jobs and developing new green sectors. However, comprehensive strategies and specific plans for managing the transition, including job creation, re-skilling of workers, and adapting work conditions, are still developing. The involvement of trade unions in various bodies discussing green transition indicates an evolving dialogue, although their influence on EU-level strategies remains limited.

In Istria County, Croatia, the social dialogue regarding Just Transition is focused on industries like cement production and energy generation. These sectors are key to the region's economy but face significant challenges in aligning with the green transition objectives. Companies in Istria are at different stages of implementing sustainable practices, with some actively investing in greener technologies, while others are yet to take substantial steps. The transition in this region highlights the need for a balanced approach that supports economic development while meeting environmental sustainability goals, a process that will require collaboration among trade unions, employers, and government bodies.

Italy

The Italian industrial relations system is marked by a high degree of voluntarism, especially in the private sector. The most representative trade unions are CGIL (Italian General Confederation of Labour), CISL (Italian Confederation of Workers' Trade Unions), and UIL (Italian Union of Labour), and there are over ten employers' associations. The system is known for its close cooperation between trade unions and other social movements. However, tripartite social dialogue has weakened since the 1990s, with a shift towards bilateral consultations or unilateral government actions. Collective

bargaining in Italy is centrally organized and maintains high coverage, exceeding 80%. There's a growing number of unrepresented jobs and concerns over 'pirate contracts'. The system faces challenges such as unclear national bargaining structures and limited vertical coordination in collective bargaining. Despite these issues, the Italian industrial relations system remains solid and structured, playing a crucial role in the country's social and economic landscape.

The status of Just Transition in Italy, as outlined in the Italian national report, shows a growing awareness and integration of these principles into the country's industrial relations and environmental policies. Italy's approach involves collaboration among trade unions, employer associations, and government entities, focusing on sectors vulnerable to climate change impacts. The country is developing strategies to transition to a sustainable, low-carbon economy while ensuring socio-economic fairness and job security. However, comprehensive plans and training for workers to adapt to the green transition are still in the process of being formulated and implemented.

The state of social dialogue related to Just Transition in Sicily, as outlined in the regional report, focuses on addressing the ecological transition challenges within its unique socio-economic context. Sicily's economy, with significant involvement in oil and gas, faces the need to renovate industrial plants to meet climate neutrality goals. The region's transition strategy involves not just technological shifts but also socio-economic considerations, balancing ecological goals with local economic and social needs. This approach underlines the importance of inclusive social dialogue, involving a range of stakeholders, to navigate these complex transitions effectively.

Spain

The state of social dialogue in Spain is complex and multifaceted, characterized by a blend of traditional industrial relations and modern challenges. The system involves structured interactions among trade unions, employer organizations, and the government. However, it faces contemporary challenges such as the need to adapt to changing economic and social landscapes, the integration of new sectors and workforce demographics, and the balancing of global economic pressures with local labour standards. This dynamic landscape requires continuous adaptation and engagement from all social dialogue stakeholders to address these evolving challenges effectively.

The status of Just Transition in Spain focuses on transitioning towards a low-carbon, sustainable economy while ensuring social equity and job security. This transition involves comprehensive policy strategies and plans, with emphasis on decarbonisation and sustainable development. The role of social dialogue and industrial relations in these processes is crucial, involving various stakeholders including trade unions, employers, and government entities. Spain's approach includes territorial

initiatives and sector-specific strategies, highlighting the importance of adapting to local contexts and ensuring that the transition is equitable and inclusive.

The Just Transition process in the Andorra region of Spain is a significant case study in managing the socio-economic impacts of transitioning to a green economy. This region, particularly affected by the closure of coal-related industries, is undergoing substantial changes. Efforts are being made to retrain and relocate workers, promote economic diversification, and invest in renewable energy projects. The approach emphasizes the creation of new job opportunities and the development of sustainable industrial practices. This process is a crucial example of the broader Just Transition strategy in Spain, highlighting the complex interplay between economic development, social equity, and environmental sustainability.

The Just Transition in the region of Meirama in Spain involves addressing the challenges and opportunities arising from the closure of coal-related industries and the transition towards a sustainable economy. The region's approach includes strategies for economic diversification, re-skilling of workers, and the development of renewable energy projects, while ensuring social equity and job security. This process highlights the critical role of social dialogue in managing these transitions effectively.

3. Comparative insights

The purpose of this comparative analysis is to illuminate the diverse approaches to social dialogue and Just Transition across Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, and Spain. Understanding these varied strategies is crucial as it provides insight into how different countries navigate the complex interplay between economic, social, and environmental objectives. This analysis not only highlights unique national experiences but also uncovers common challenges and opportunities, offering valuable lessons for the broader European context in managing the shift towards a sustainable, low-carbon future.

The social dialogue structures in Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, and Spain offer both similarities and differences, reflecting the unique historical, economic, and social landscapes of each country. Belgium's tradition of social dialogue is well-established, with robust trade unions and employer associations actively shaping policy formulation through collaborative efforts. This system ensures a stable and proactive approach to labour relations and industrial transitions. Bulgaria, transitioning within a post-socialist economic framework and adapting to EU membership standards, is working to revitalize and enhance social dialogue. Efforts are focused on managing the green transition challenges, particularly in coal-dependent regions, by fostering inclusive dialogue among various

stakeholders to develop equitable and sustainable policies. Croatia showcases a diverse collective bargaining system with significant sectoral variations, reflecting its journey from a socialist to a market economy and the ongoing integration of EU directives. This system adapts to contemporary challenges, balancing economic growth with environmental responsibilities.

Italy is marked by strong trade unions and extensive collective bargaining coverage, despite facing challenges such as unclear national bargaining structures and limited coordination between different bargaining levels. The Italian social dialogue emphasizes cooperation between trade unions and other social movements, playing a crucial role in the country's social and economic framework. Spain's system involves structured interactions among trade unions, employer organizations, and the government, adapting to modern economic and social landscapes to address the evolving labour market needs and environmental sustainability goals.

Across these countries, government bodies typically play a facilitative or mediating role in social dialogue, ensuring that the outcomes are balanced and that policies are both practical and reflective of diverse stakeholder interests. This comparative analysis underscores the foundational role of social dialogue in managing industrial transitions, highlighting the varied approaches each country takes to integrate social, economic, and environmental imperatives.

Likewise, the policies and strategies related to Just Transition and social dialogue in Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, and Spain show varied approaches.

Belgium's strong tradition in social dialogue is well placed to support its Just Transition initiatives, especially in sectors like energy. An example is the collaborative efforts in transitioning from coal-based energy production to more sustainable alternatives. This involves negotiations and agreements between government bodies, energy companies, trade unions, and other stakeholders to ensure a smooth transition for workers and communities. Another instance is the focus on renewable energy projects, where social dialogue plays a key role in addressing workforce re-skilling and local economic impacts. These examples illustrate how entrenched social dialogue practice could facilitate effective and equitable Just Transition strategies. However, while Belgium's approach exemplifies the positive role of entrenched social dialogue practices, it remains imperative to evaluate how well climate issues are actually integrated into the actual social dialogue processes in facilitating effective and equitable Just Transition strategies.

Bulgaria's approach to Just Transition is informed by its need to balance environmental objectives with socio-economic challenges, particularly in coal-dependent regions. Efforts focus on creating a comprehensive framework that includes the development of renewable energy sources, improving

energy efficiency, and reducing the environmental impact of industrial activities. A key aspect of Bulgaria's strategy involves enhancing social dialogue between the government, industry stakeholders, trade unions, and communities to address the transition's impacts. For example, initiatives have been launched to explore sustainable economic diversification for regions heavily reliant on coal mining, involving consultations and agreements to ensure workforce re-skilling and social protection measures. Another significant focus is on leveraging EU funds and national investments to support green innovation and infrastructure projects, facilitating a shift towards a more sustainable economy. These actions exemplify Bulgaria's commitment to a Just Transition that is both environmentally responsible and attentive to the needs of its workforce and communities, showcasing the essential role of social dialogue in crafting and implementing these strategies.

Croatia, with its evolving market economy, focuses on balancing economic growth with environmental responsibilities. This can be exemplified by initiatives that focus on sustainable development and environmental protection. For instance, Croatia has been involved in projects aimed at transitioning from traditional industries to more sustainable practices, such as the development of renewable energy sources. Another example is the emphasis on environmental regulations and policies that encourage companies to adopt greener practices. These initiatives illustrate Croatia's commitment to integrating environmental sustainability into its economic growth strategy.

Italy's approach, influenced by its robust industrial relations, integrates Just Transition into industrial and environmental policies. For instance, Italy has been focusing on enhancing renewable energy sectors and developing sustainable manufacturing practices. Another key aspect is the involvement of social partners in formulating and implementing these policies, ensuring that transitions in sectors like manufacturing and energy are both environmentally sustainable and socially equitable. These efforts demonstrate Italy's commitment to aligning its industrial strategies with environmental goals.

Spain's strategy includes territorial initiatives and sector-specific plans, highlighting the importance of adapting to local contexts. These efforts focus on adapting to local contexts and the unique challenges faced by different regions. For instance, in the Andorra region, the closure of coal-related industries necessitated strategies for economic diversification and workforce retraining. Spain's approach encompasses the development of renewable energy projects and sustainable industrial practices, emphasizing the creation of new job opportunities. This localized focus ensures that the transition to a greener economy is equitable and inclusive, considering the specific needs and characteristics of each region.

In conclusion, this comparative analysis of social dialogue and Just Transition in Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, and Spain reveals a tapestry of diverse yet interconnected approaches. Each country,

with its unique industrial relations and socio-economic contexts, demonstrates a commitment to weaving environmental sustainability into their economic frameworks. From Belgium's robust tradition of collaborative social dialogue, Bulgaria's strategic efforts to address the socio-economic impacts of transitioning coal-dependent regions, Croatia's balanced focus on economic growth and environmental responsibilities, Italy's integration of Just Transition principles into industrial and environmental policies, to Spain's localized, region-specific initiatives, these nations collectively underscore the complexity and necessity of Just Transition in Europe. Together, their experiences offer invaluable insights into navigating the intricate challenges of a sustainable future, highlighting the indispensable role of inclusive social dialogue and proactive policy-making in achieving equitable and effective transitions.

4. Comparative Analysis of Case Study Research

The purpose of the case study analysis in this chapter is to explore how the principles of social dialogue and Just Transition are applied in different contexts across Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, and Spain. The scope includes a range of sectors and regional specifics, providing a comprehensive view of practices and outcomes in these countries. The methodology for selecting and analysing the case studies involved identifying representative examples from each country that illustrate the key aspects of social dialogue and Just Transition. The analysis focuses on the strategies employed, the engagement of stakeholders, the challenges faced, and the achievements in terms of sustainable and equitable economic transition. This approach ensures a diverse and insightful understanding of Just Transition across different European contexts. More complete information on each of the case studies is available in the individual national reports: Belgium (Vereycken, Turk & Pulignano, 2024), Bulgaria (Todorova, Sabcheva & Ivcheva, 2024), Croatia (Denona Bogovic, Krstinic Nizic, & Sverko Grdic, 2024), Italy (Alessandrini & Rugiero, 2024), and Spain (Martínez Poza & Cruces Aguilera, 2024).

4.1 Clarification on Case Study Selection Criteria

Introduction: In compiling this Final Report, our analysis draws upon a rich collection of case studies from national reports, each selected for its unique contribution to understanding the Just Transition across different European contexts. This section aims to articulate the implicit criteria guiding these selections, reflecting the multifaceted nature of Just Transition efforts.

Selection Basis: The case studies showcased within this report were chosen based on their exemplary representation of diverse challenges and innovative approaches to social dialogue within the Just Transition framework. These include:

1. **Sectoral Representation:** Ensuring a wide range of industries, from energy-intensive sectors to emerging green technologies, are represented.
2. **Geographical Diversity:** Highlighting efforts across various European regions, underscoring the local and national nuances in Just Transition strategies.
3. **Social Dialogue Mechanisms:** Showcasing the role of social dialogue, including negotiations between workers, employers, and government bodies, in facilitating a just and equitable transition.
4. **Innovation and Impact:** Selecting cases that demonstrate innovative solutions to transition challenges and measurable impacts on economic, social, and environmental outcomes.

Purpose of Selection: The intention behind this selection is to provide a comprehensive overview that not only highlights successful initiatives but also draws lessons from the challenges encountered. This comparative lens aims to equip policymakers, social partners, and stakeholders with actionable insights for replicating and scaling effective Just Transition strategies.

Conclusion: While the selection of case studies is inherently influenced by the scope and focus of national reports, this report strives to present a balanced and insightful analysis. By clarifying our selection criteria, we aim to enhance the transparency and utility of our comparative analysis, contributing to a more informed and effective Just Transition process across Europe.

4.2 Belgium

Belgium's established tradition of social dialogue faces new challenges in integrating climate change into its agenda, despite a strong foundation in collective bargaining and stakeholder engagement. The nation's efforts to balance economic, social, and environmental goals in the Just Transition are hindered by the complexities of aligning established dialogue processes with urgent climate initiatives. This situation highlights a pressing need for Belgium's industrial relations system to evolve, ensuring climate issues are central in social dialogue and reflecting a commitment to sustainable development alongside economic and social equity. We take a closer look at some initiatives in the Just Transition area.

4.2.1 Chemical Industry Initiatives

Just Transition initiatives in the chemical industry focus on sustainable production methods, reducing emissions, and energy consumption. One prominent example is the case of "Chemli" (pseudonym), a key player in the chemical industry known for producing PVC, caustic soda, and chlorine derivatives. The company's approach to environmental challenges, such as emission control, energy consumption, and resource management, demonstrates a strong commitment to sustainable production practices. This includes significant investment in research and development for more sustainable production

methods and collaborations with stakeholders for enhanced environmental management. The role of social dialogue in Chemli's environmental initiatives is pivotal, involving a dynamic interaction among management, employees, and trade unions. This collaborative approach to decision-making, advocacy, employee engagement, and conflict resolution in environmental matters reflects a collective commitment to environmental stewardship. It exemplifies how social dialogue can effectively address environmental challenges, emphasizing collaboration among stakeholders, and underpins the development and implementation of sustainable environmental policies.

4.2.2 Renewable Energy and Sustainability

Chemea Ghent, part of a US-based global chemical company in Belgium, leads in adopting green technologies to align industrial productivity with environmental sustainability, notably in reducing fossil fuel use and the impact of oil-based pesticides. Its efforts towards global sustainability goals reflect a commitment to ecological stewardship within the EU's climate framework. Central to Chemea's approach is engaging major trade unions in Flanders—ACV, ABVV, and ACLVB—to foster a positive dialogue on sustainability. An ACV representative has been instrumental since 2019 in raising climate change awareness, despite initial lukewarm reactions from leadership and peers, highlighting the difficulty of prioritizing climate issues in social discussions. This journey of overcoming initial resistance to foster a more engaged response and structured climate initiatives underscores the ongoing challenge and progress in integrating environmental concerns into corporate practices and labour relations.

4.2.3 Stakeholder Engagement and Policy Impact: *Klimaatsprong*

The *Klimaatsprong* (Climate Leap) initiative offers an intricate case study on the complexities of stakeholder engagement in the realm of environmental policy within Flanders, Belgium. Aimed at decarbonizing the regional industry, this initiative reveals the nuanced challenges and cautious progress inherent in fostering collaborative policy development. It encapsulates the efforts of a diverse coalition, including government entities, employers' organizations, environmental groups, and notably, trade unions, in striving for a transition that balances environmental ambitions with socio-economic considerations.

Trade unions, crucial to this initiative, act to integrate the workforce's perspective into the decarbonization discourse. Their participation, while crucial, encounters the intricate realities of aligning socio-economic impacts with environmental policy aims. The consultative involvement through bodies like the Permanent Consultative Body highlights the attempt to bridge these objectives, advocating for job security and sustainable practices amidst evolving industrial landscapes.

The governance structure of *Klimaatsprong*, marked by its 'quadruple helix' collaboration, endeavours to amalgamate insights from government, industry, academia, and civil society. This model, though aspirational, grapples with the inherent complexities of integrating diverse perspectives into a cohesive policy strategy. The initiative's ambition to achieve a comprehensive and inclusive approach is tempered by the pragmatic challenges of actualizing such a collaborative governance framework in the pursuit of its decarbonization goals.

In summary, the *Klimaatsprong* initiative presents a reflective examination of the efforts and challenges in advancing industrial decarbonization through stakeholder collaboration in Flanders. It highlights the critical yet complex role of trade unions in ensuring that environmental policy considerations do not overshadow the workforce's socio-economic well-being. This case study, while illuminating the potential of collaborative policy-making in environmental sustainability, underscores the cautious optimism and ongoing challenges in realizing sustainable industrial transformation, offering a sober perspective on the journey towards a balanced and just transition.

4.2.4 Employee Engagement, Training, and Adaptation

In the Belgian context, efforts to educate and train the workforce in sustainable practices and technologies manifest through initiatives that intertwine environmental sustainability with industrial relations. For instance, specialized training programs for union representatives and employees on environmental issues, sustainability practices, and green technologies are emphasized as pivotal for raising awareness and preparing the workforce for the green transition. This approach underscores the importance of proactive employee involvement and skill development in Just Transition processes, ensuring that workers are not only aware of but also equipped to participate in sustainable transformations within their industries.

However, while there is a clear recognition of the need for such educational initiatives, there are indications that comprehensive training in sustainable practices and technologies is not yet uniformly provided or integrated into all sectors. The challenge lies in balancing economic competitiveness with environmental mandates, which sometimes leads to a nascent state of collaboration among stakeholders and tepid engagement with sustainability from some unions. This gap highlights the necessity for a more focused dialogue and training on environmental issues within unions and greater involvement of unions in strategic decarbonization discussions at the employer level.

4.2.5 Best Practices, Challenges, and Lessons Learned

Belgium exemplifies a robust model of Just Transition through its multi-level social dialogue framework, engaging trade unions, employer associations, and government bodies in a collaborative approach that integrates environmental sustainability with socio-economic fairness. This inclusive

model, particularly evident in Flanders, leverages structured collective bargaining and sector-specific strategies, such as the comprehensive industrial transition program 'Klimaatsprong', to manage the socio-economic impacts of transitioning to a sustainable, low-carbon economy. The Belgian case studies reflect a landscape where the potential for significant transformation towards sustainability is evident, yet the full realization of these educational and training initiatives remains a work in progress. The synthesis of these efforts and challenges suggests a path forward that includes enhancing collaborative dialogue, investing in workforce training, and integrating sustainability into collective bargaining, aiming for a balanced and just transition that fully harnesses the capabilities and insights of the workforce.

4.3 Bulgaria

4.3.1 Introduction to Bulgarian Context

The current state of industrial relations and social dialogue in Bulgaria is characterized by a system where social dialogue and tripartite cooperation play a crucial role in shaping labour legislation and the status of social partners. This cooperation has evolved since the early 1990s, with institutions like the National Council for Tripartite Cooperation facilitating dialogue at various levels. Despite these structures, challenges remain, particularly in integrating the Just Transition's environmental goals into the broader dialogue, requiring continuous efforts to ensure that economic and social equity considerations are aligned with environmental sustainability.

4.3.2 Overview of Social Dialogue Mechanisms

In Bulgaria, social dialogue operates at both national and sectoral levels, facilitated by structures such as the National Council for Tripartite Cooperation (NCTC) and various sectoral councils. These councils engage in collaborative policy-making, influencing a wide range of national policies including wage determinations, social security, and employment relations. The NCTC, in particular, plays a crucial role in consulting with social partners on legislation affecting labour, health and safety at work, and social security relations, among others. This collaborative framework aims to ensure that policies reflect a balanced consideration of labour market needs, social welfare, and economic development, demonstrating social dialogue's critical impact on policy formulation and implementation in Bulgaria.

4.3.3 Case Studies of Successful Collaboration

In Bulgaria, successful social dialogue between trade unions, employers, and the government has been instrumental in facilitating the green transition in sectors such as construction and energy. For instance, Glavbolgarstroy, a leading construction company, has been proactive in aligning with the Green Deal by implementing green innovative projects and joining the European Clean Hydrogen Alliance. This showcases the company's commitment to sustainability and the circular economy.

Furthermore, the transport sector's transition towards sustainable mobility is highlighted by significant investments in modernizing public transport, including the introduction of electric buses in Stara Zagora municipality, demonstrating a comprehensive approach to environmental sustainability supported by collaborative efforts across various stakeholders. Campaigns to stimulate dialogue and raise environmental awareness provide additional examples of successful social dialogue facilitating green transitions. One campaign, launched by the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria (CITUB) in 2020, aimed to ensure green transition participation across all worker levels. Another initiative focused on reducing pesticide use in agriculture, highlighting environmental, economic, and social interconnections. Furthermore, a Memorandum of Cooperation signed in 2020 across five sectors emphasized workers' focus amidst COVID-19 and green challenges, showcasing a commitment to uniting efforts for human care and joint action towards green objectives. These examples illustrate the proactive role of social dialogue in integrating green transitions within various sectors, emphasizing collaborative efforts among trade unions, employers, and government entities.

4.3.4 Challenges and Opportunities

The main challenges in integrating the green transition within Bulgaria's social dialogue include ensuring transparency and publicity throughout the process. Despite significant progress, there's a need for more clarity and openness in social dialogue activities. The representativeness criteria for employers' and workers' organizations, updated every four years, aim to certify national representativeness, ensuring that social dialogue includes a broad spectrum of societal interests. Bulgaria's approach to social dialogue, particularly at the sectoral level, involves sectoral councils regulated by the Labour Code, emphasizing the importance of representative associations in these discussions. However, the lack of public information on the work of individual sectoral councils indicates a gap in communication and engagement with the broader public about these critical discussions.

4.3.5 Conclusion and Future Directions

Bulgaria's approach to the Just Transition emphasizes the essential role of sector-specific dialogues and collaborative policy-making, particularly in the energy sector where decarbonization efforts intersect with concerns about energy security, employment, and regional development. Successful initiatives, such as the integration of electric buses in Stara Zagora and the proactive campaigns by trade unions to engage workers in the green transition, showcase Bulgaria's commitment to balancing environmental objectives with the socioeconomic needs of the workforce. These efforts are supported by both national and EU funding, highlighting a model of transition that leverages collaborative, multi-stakeholder engagement to navigate the complexities of moving towards a sustainable, low-carbon economy. In Bulgaria, social dialogue has been central to advancing the Just Transition, fostering

collaboration among trade unions, employers, and the government in sectors like construction and energy. This collaborative approach has led to significant projects aligning with environmental sustainability goals, such as the Green Deal and the introduction of electric buses in Stara Zagora, underpinned by initiatives to enhance green transition participation and awareness. Challenges include ensuring transparency and broad representativeness in social dialogue, indicating areas for future improvement. Strengthening communication and public engagement can enhance the impact of social dialogue on policy and practice, promoting a more inclusive and effective Just Transition.

4.4 Croatia

The case studies presented in the Croatian National Report make it evident that the country faces unique challenges in its Just Transition process. The case studies demonstrate Croatia's focus on adapting traditional industries to more sustainable practices, balancing environmental responsibilities with economic growth. These include efforts in sectors like construction materials and electricity generation. Companies like Holcim Hrvatska and TE Plomin are highlighted, showcasing their initiatives in reducing environmental impact and transitioning towards greener operations. The case studies reflect Croatia's evolving market economy and its effort to integrate sustainable practices within its industrial framework.

The effectiveness of social dialogue in these case studies appears to vary. In some instances, it has been instrumental in facilitating the transition towards greener practices, particularly where there's active collaboration between employers, workers, and government entities. However, challenges exist in sectors where such dialogue is less established or where the rapid pace of economic and environmental changes poses difficulties for traditional social dialogue structures to keep up.

One of the best illustrations of social dialogue facilitating the transition to greener practices is the case study of the TE Plomin thermal power plant. This example showcases the collaboration among employers, workers, and government entities to address the challenges of transitioning from coal-fired power generation. TE Plomin's efforts to adapt to energy standards of the transition and explore alternative fuels like waste and biomass are highlighted. This case represents the importance of social dialogue in managing the shift towards sustainable energy sources and the overall green transition, ensuring considerations for labour impact and community involvement are addressed.

Croatia's Just Transition process uniquely integrates the engagement of local communities and sectors directly impacted by environmental policies, exemplified by proactive approaches in industries such as construction materials and energy production. Noteworthy is the emphasis on adapting traditional industries to sustainable practices, balancing economic growth with environmental responsibilities. Initiatives like the sustainable transformation of TE Plomin highlight Croatia's commitment to greener

operations, showcasing the potential for collaborative efforts between employers, workers, and government entities to facilitate a smooth transition towards sustainability. These efforts reflect the evolving nature of Croatia's market economy and the critical role of inclusive social dialogue in addressing both the opportunities and challenges presented by the green transition. Overall, the effectiveness seems to depend largely on the sector and the strength of the relationships between social partners.

4.5 Italy

The Italian case studies demonstrate how Just Transition principles are integrated into various industrial sectors. Key themes include:

4.5.1 Renewable Energy Development:

Projects like offshore wind farms demonstrate an alignment with Just Transition goals and involve comprehensive social dialogue with local stakeholders and trade unions. The Med Wind project is an excellent example of renewable energy development in terms of social dialogue and Just Transition. This project, involving the construction of an offshore wind farm off the coast of Sicily, exemplifies extensive stakeholder engagement. The company behind Med Wind has actively involved local stakeholders from the design phase, adopting an approach of extended and multistakeholder social dialogue. This includes continuous engagement with environmental associations, local communities, direct and indirect suppliers, and government entities at various levels. The project's focus on engaging stakeholders at all stages, from design to operation, demonstrates the importance of social dialogue in renewable energy development. This approach ensures that the project is not only environmentally sustainable but also socially inclusive and economically beneficial for the local community.

4.5.2 Carbon Neutrality Initiatives:

Analysis of companies in the beverage industry aiming for carbon neutrality, illustrating the engagement of workers and unions in strategic decision-making. Sibeg S.r.l., a company in the agri-food industry, is an exemplary case of carbon neutrality initiatives in the context of social dialogue and Just Transition. Sibeg is strategically aiming for carbon neutrality and has developed a comprehensive decarbonization plan. This includes the installation of photovoltaic systems, adoption of trigeneration plants, fleet renewal with electric cars, and reduction of indirect emissions through circular economy practices. The company's transparent and inclusive approach with both workers and union representatives in planning and implementing these strategies is a key aspect of their success. This case demonstrates the integration of environmental sustainability into business practices, emphasizing the importance of social dialogue in facilitating this transition.

4.5.3 Stakeholder Engagement:

The cases demonstrate the critical role of local communities, unions, and regional authorities in shaping and implementing Just Transition strategies. The Med Wind project is again a notable example of stakeholder engagement in terms of social dialogue and Just Transition. This project, involving the construction of an offshore wind farm, highlights extensive stakeholder engagement. The company behind Med Wind actively engaged with environmental associations, local communities, direct and indirect suppliers, and government entities at various levels throughout the project, from design to operation. This approach of proactive and continuous dialogue has allowed the company to consider various concerns and adapt the project's impact, demonstrating the significance of multistakeholder social dialogue in the context of renewable energy development.

The Italian case studies highlight the crucial role of social dialogue in the successful implementation of Just Transition initiatives. This dialogue, involving trade unions, employers, and government entities, has had a significant impact on the outcomes. The collaborative approach facilitated by social dialogue has been essential in addressing worker concerns, ensuring job security, and promoting skill development in the face of industrial changes. Moreover, it has contributed to more sustainable decision-making processes within companies, leading to better alignment of industrial activities with environmental goals.

Italy's approach to Just Transition is thus exemplified by its emphasis on inclusive social dialogue and innovative renewable energy projects, such as the Med Wind offshore wind farm. This project demonstrates Italy's commitment to engaging a wide array of stakeholders, including local communities, environmental organizations, and governmental entities, in the transition process. The proactive involvement of these groups from the early stages of project development underscores the importance Italy places on ensuring that the shift towards a sustainable, low-carbon economy is both environmentally beneficial and socially equitable. Such initiatives highlight Italy's forward-thinking strategy in aligning economic development with environmental sustainability goals, showcasing the vital role of social dialogue in facilitating effective and inclusive Just Transition efforts.

4.6 Spain

The Spanish case studies, as outlined in the national report, emphasize region-specific approaches and the implementation of Just Transition strategies. Key elements include:

4.6.1 Region-Specific Strategies:

There is an emphasis on localized solutions to address the unique challenges faced by different regions, especially those heavily dependent on traditional industries like coal mining. A good example here of region-specific strategies is the Just Transition Agreement for the region of Andorra. This

agreement involves comprehensive stakeholder engagement, including local communities, government entities, and the private sector, focusing on transitioning from coal-based energy production to renewable energy sources. This case illustrates the importance of social dialogue in addressing the economic and social impacts of industrial transitions, ensuring that workers and communities are supported throughout the process.

4.6.2 Collaborative Efforts:

There is involvement of various stakeholders, including trade unions, local governments, and businesses, in the transition process, ensuring a participatory approach to Just Transition. An excellent example of this is the Just Transition agreement in the coal mining region of Asturias. This agreement represents a comprehensive approach to social dialogue, involving unions, business associations, and government bodies working together to ensure a smooth transition for workers and communities affected by the closure of coal mines. The collaboration focuses on re-skilling workers, creating new job opportunities in sustainable industries, and supporting economic diversification, demonstrating a commitment to a socially equitable Just Transition.

4.6.3 Diversification and Innovation:

There is emphasis on diversifying the economy and promoting innovation in green technologies and sustainable practices. For example, the closure of the coal mine in Puertollano was addressed through diversification and innovation. This transition focused on developing renewable energy sources and creating a research centre for clean energy technologies. This example underscores the significance of social dialogue in facilitating Just Transition, ensuring stakeholder collaboration in developing new economic opportunities and sustainable practices.

These case studies demonstrate Spain's commitment to implementing Just Transition strategies that are tailored to the specific needs and circumstances of each region. The comprehensive approach seeks to balance environmental sustainability with economic and social considerations.

The case studies reveal both successes and challenges in implementing Just Transition strategies. Successes include effective regional adaptation of policies, meaningful stakeholder engagement, and progress in diversifying local economies. However, challenges persist, such as ensuring equitable distribution of resources, addressing the needs of workers in declining industries, and overcoming resistance from sectors affected by the transition. These case studies illustrate the complexity of managing a Just Transition that balances economic, social, and environmental objectives.

Spain's Just Transition strategy thus illustrates a pioneering approach in integrating comprehensive social dialogue and tripartite agreements to navigate the ecological transition effectively. Distinctively,

Spain has successfully facilitated collaboration among government entities, trade unions, and employers to develop and implement Just Transition agreements. These agreements aim to ensure that transitions in sectors affected by decarbonization do not leave workers behind but rather support them through re-skilling, job creation, and social protection measures. A notable example is the agreement related to the closure of coal mines and coal-fired power stations, which includes provisions for alternative economic activities and the development of renewable energy projects, demonstrating a balanced approach to economic, environmental, and social sustainability.

4.7 Comparative Insights and Synthesis

Building upon the foundational exploration of social dialogue and Just Transition principles across Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, and Spain, this section delves into a synthesized comparative analysis, drawing from the diverse sectoral and regional specifics illuminated in the national reports. Reflecting on the diverse strategies employed across Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, and Spain, we observe a rich tapestry of approaches to Just Transition. From Belgium's proactive sectoral dialogue to Spain's regional adaptation strategies, these insights underscore the importance of tailored approaches that consider unique industrial and socio-economic contexts. Acknowledging the rich tapestry of practices, outcomes, and methodologies outlined, this synthesis aims to distil the essence of how different European contexts navigate the intricate balance between environmental sustainability and equitable economic transformation. By weaving together the strands of strategies employed, stakeholder engagement dynamics, challenges encountered, and achievements secured, we aim to present a cohesive narrative that enriches our understanding of the Just Transition's multifaceted nature.

This analysis not only seeks to highlight the unique approaches and innovations each country brings to the fore but also to identify commonalities and divergences that can inform future policy directions, stakeholder interventions, and collaborative efforts towards achieving a sustainable and just economic transition. Through this comparative lens, we endeavour to contribute to a more profound and actionable insight into fostering environments where social dialogue effectively underpins the transition to a greener, more equitable future.

4.7.1 Role of Social Dialogue in Just Transition

The analysis of the 25 case studies across Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, and Spain provides a rich overview of the function of social dialogue in the context of the Just Transition towards sustainable futures. The case studies highlight the varying degrees of engagement and collaboration among trade unions, employers, and governmental entities, reflecting both common strategies and distinct national approaches in addressing environmental sustainability within industrial relations.

Common Functions of Social Dialogue: Negotiation and Agreement Formation: Across all countries, social dialogue serves as a crucial mechanism for negotiating agreements related to closures, transitions, and the establishment of new, sustainable projects. These agreements often include provisions for worker retraining, relocation, and social protection measures to mitigate the impacts of industrial transformation.

Stakeholder Engagement and Collaboration: A key function of social dialogue in these case studies is to facilitate broad stakeholder engagement, including workers, employers, governmental entities, and sometimes the wider community. This engagement aims to ensure that transition strategies are comprehensive, inclusive, and consider the interests of all affected parties.

Employment Protection and Creation: Across the board, social dialogue focuses on protecting existing jobs and creating new employment opportunities in emerging green industries. This includes discussions on retraining programs and investments in renewable energy sectors to foster job growth.

Sustainable Development and Innovation: Social dialogue functions as a platform for discussing and implementing strategies for sustainable development and innovation within industries undergoing transition. This includes the adoption of green technologies and practices, as well as the exploration of new business models aligned with environmental sustainability goals.

Variations in Engagement and Collaboration:

- **Belgium:** The case studies from Belgium illustrate a proactive approach to integrating environmental concerns into industrial relations, with a strong emphasis on innovative practices and collaborative efforts between trade unions and employers in the chemical sector. Governmental support is implied through the framework of Just Transition initiatives, indicating a coordinated approach to sustainable industrial development.
- **Bulgaria:** In Bulgaria, social dialogue emphasizes the need for investment in human capital, skills retraining, and the modernization of sectors like construction and transport to meet environmental goals. The engagement tends to focus more on the adaptation of existing industries to green standards, with less emphasis on the creation of new green industries compared to other countries.
- **Croatia:** Croatian case studies highlight significant efforts in engaging local communities and workers in the transition process, particularly in the construction materials and electricity generation sectors. The dialogue often revolves around technological upgrades and shifts towards less impactful environmental practices within existing industries.

- **Italy:** Italy showcases an extensive multistakeholder dialogue, with trade unions playing a pivotal role in advocating for workers' interests and sustainable development. The Italian case studies demonstrate a balanced engagement between public and private sectors, especially in renewable energy projects, highlighting the potential of Sicily as a Euro-Mediterranean energy hub.
- **Spain:** Spain's case studies are characterized by comprehensive Just Transition Agreements in response to thermal power plant closures, with a strong focus on renewable energy projects and re-skilling workers. These agreements are notable for their inclusion of plans for economic diversification and community support, although challenges remain in fully realizing the goals of these agreements due to varying degrees of public sector involvement.

Conclusion

Across all case studies, social dialogue functions as a vital mechanism for managing the transition to a sustainable future, with variations in the depth of engagement and the roles of stakeholders reflecting diverse national contexts and industrial sectors. While all countries demonstrate a commitment to protecting workers and fostering sustainable development, the approaches vary, from focusing on adapting existing industries to green standards to investing in entirely new green industries. The effectiveness of social dialogue in facilitating a Just Transition is contingent upon the collaboration between trade unions, employers, and governmental entities, highlighting the need for a coordinated and inclusive approach to achieve both environmental sustainability and social equity.

4.7.2 Employment Transitions and Workforce Adaptation

The transition to a green economy necessitates significant shifts in workforce dynamics, including the need for skill development, ensuring job security, and creating new employment opportunities. The case studies from Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, and Spain provide insights into various national strategies employed to manage these workforce transitions. Here, we compare these strategies focusing on three key areas: skill development, job security, and the creation of new employment opportunities within the green economy.

Skill Development

- **Belgium** emphasizes the integration of environmental concerns into existing industries, particularly in the chemical sector, highlighting the need for workforce training in sustainable practices and technologies. The Chemli case illustrates a collaborative approach to employee training in green processes.

- **Bulgaria** focuses on the comprehensive modernization of sectors like construction, emphasizing the need for investments in green technologies and workforce retraining to meet new environmental standards. Initiatives such as those by Glavbolgarstroy highlight the shift towards sustainable construction practices requiring new skill sets.
- **Croatia** showcases efforts in sectors like construction materials and electricity generation, where companies like Holcim are investing in greening their operations. Skill development here is oriented towards technological upgrades and the adoption of less environmentally impactful practices.
- **Italy** demonstrates a proactive approach in engaging the workforce in renewable energy projects, such as the Renexia offshore wind farm. The significant involvement of trade unions in discussions on strategic plans for environmental and social sustainability indicates a concerted effort towards skill development in new green technologies.
- **Spain's** Just Transition Agreements, particularly in response to the closure of thermal power plants, include comprehensive plans for worker retraining and skill development in renewable energy sectors. The Nudo Mudéjar project and others highlight a focus on training for new green technologies.

Job Security

- **Belgium** and **Croatia's** case studies do not explicitly detail mechanisms for ensuring job security beyond the scope of training and adaptation to green practices within existing industries.
- **Bulgaria's** approach, through the adaptation of industries to green standards, implicitly suggests a focus on retaining employment through industry modernization rather than detailing specific measures for job security.
- **Italy's** involvement of trade unions in the transition process suggests an underlying concern for job security as industries shift towards sustainability, though specific strategies are not detailed in the case studies.
- **Spain** explicitly addresses job security in its Just Transition Agreements, with provisions for the relocation of workers affected by industrial closures and commitments to create stable employment in new green industries.

Creation of New Employment Opportunities

- **Belgium's** innovative practices in integrating environmental concerns into industrial relations hint at the creation of new employment opportunities in green sectors, although specific examples are limited.
- **Bulgaria's** emphasis on modernizing sectors like construction to meet environmental standards suggests an indirect approach to creating new jobs through industry transformation.
- **Croatia's** initiatives, such as those by Holcim, indicate a shift towards sustainable operations, potentially leading to new employment opportunities in green construction and electricity generation.
- **Italy's** Renexia project and its focus on renewable energy highlight a direct approach to creating new jobs in the green economy, supported by strategic planning and social dialogue.
- **Spain's** focus on renewable energy projects and re-skilling workers as part of its Just Transition Agreements directly addresses the creation of new employment opportunities in the green economy, with specific projects outlined for renewable energy production and related industries.

Conclusion

While all the countries studied recognize the importance of managing workforce transitions in the face of industrial shifts towards sustainability, their approaches vary. Italy and Spain stand out for their direct engagement in creating new employment opportunities in the green economy, supported by comprehensive plans for skill development and job security. Belgium, Bulgaria, and Croatia emphasize industry adaptation and modernization, with a less direct but still significant focus on preparing the workforce for emerging green sectors. Spain's Just Transition Agreements represent a comprehensive model, combining skill development, job security, and the creation of new green jobs, showcasing a concerted effort to manage workforce transitions effectively in the face of industrial shifts towards sustainability.

4.7.3 Involvement of Trade Unions and Employers

The involvement of trade unions and employers across Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, and Spain demonstrates a varied landscape of engagement and contributions toward advocating for workers' rights, shaping sustainable practices, and participating in the Just Transition process. Each country presents a unique collaboration model between these social partners, reflecting different degrees of initiative, advocacy, and impact.

Belgium

- **Trade Unions:** In Belgium, particularly in the Flemish region, trade unions play a proactive role in negotiating environmental initiatives and advocating for workers' rights within the green transition. They engage in social dialogue to ensure that workers are not only protected during industry shifts but also benefit from new opportunities arising from sustainability efforts. Trade unions have been instrumental in shaping policies that consider the workforce's needs, emphasizing training and re-skilling programs.
- **Employers:** Employers, especially in the chemical sector, have shown a commitment to integrating sustainable practices into their operations. Companies like Chemli demonstrate an openness to collaborate with trade unions and government entities to implement environmental stewardship and innovation while maintaining a focus on job security and workforce development.

Bulgaria

- **Trade Unions:** Bulgarian trade unions appear to focus on raising awareness about the green transition's implications for the workforce and advocating for necessary investments in human capital. Their involvement seems oriented towards ensuring that the transition does not negatively impact workers and that adequate training and adaptability measures are in place.
- **Employers:** Employers in Bulgaria, such as Glavbolgarstroy, are adapting to European environmental standards by investing in green technologies and practices. Their engagement in the Just Transition process seems to lean towards modernizing existing sectors with an emphasis on sustainability, though direct collaboration with trade unions in this regard is less evident from the case studies.

Croatia

- **Trade Unions:** Croatian trade unions' roles in advocating for workers' rights in the context of the Just Transition are not explicitly detailed in the case studies. However, the involvement of social dialogue suggests that unions are part of the conversation, likely focusing on worker training and adaptation to new sustainable practices.
- **Employers:** Employers, such as Holcim Croatia, are taking significant steps towards greening their operations, with investments in technologies that reduce environmental impact. While direct engagement with trade unions in these sustainability efforts is not explicitly outlined, employer initiatives indicate a commitment to contributing to the Just Transition.

Italy

- **Trade Unions:** Italian trade unions are actively involved in the Just Transition process, particularly in renewable energy projects like Renexia. They play a crucial role in ensuring that workers' interests are represented in strategic planning for environmental and social sustainability. Unions advocate for comprehensive involvement in shaping sustainable practices and ensuring that the transition opens up new employment opportunities for the workforce.
- **Employers:** In Italy, employers in the renewable energy sector, exemplified by Renexia, show a commitment to working alongside trade unions and local communities to develop sustainable projects that benefit both the environment and the local economy. Their involvement demonstrates a balanced approach to pursuing economic growth and environmental sustainability.

Spain

- **Trade Unions:** Spanish trade unions are deeply engaged in the Just Transition Agreements, negotiating terms that ensure job security, re-skilling opportunities, and the creation of new jobs in the green economy. They are vocal advocates for workers' rights, pushing for agreements that comprehensively address the socio-economic impacts of transitioning away from fossil fuels.
- **Employers:** Employers, particularly in the energy sector, are key players in Spain's Just Transition process. Companies like Endesa and Naturgy are involved in developing new renewable energy projects and are committed to investing in local communities affected by the closure of thermal power plants. Their participation in Just Transition Agreements, alongside trade unions and government entities, showcases a collaborative approach to managing the industrial shift towards sustainability.

Conclusion

Across the countries studied, trade unions play a vital role in advocating for workers' rights and ensuring that the transition towards a sustainable future is just and inclusive. Employers, on their part, contribute by integrating sustainable practices into their operations and collaborating with unions and governments to develop new green industries. While the degree of involvement and collaboration varies by country, the collective efforts of trade unions and employers are crucial to achieving a successful and equitable Just Transition.

4.7.4 Challenges and Opportunities

The case study research across Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, and Spain reveals a complex landscape of challenges and opportunities regarding social dialogue in the Just Transition. These insights provide a multifaceted understanding of how different stakeholders, including trade unions, employers, and government entities, navigate the transition towards a sustainable future. Here, we summarize the key challenges and opportunities identified through the case studies.

Challenges

- **Engagement and Representation:** A recurring challenge across the countries is ensuring meaningful engagement and representation of all relevant stakeholders in the Just Transition process. This includes adequately involving trade unions, employers, and especially those workers and communities directly impacted by the transition. Ensuring that social dialogue is inclusive and representative remains a challenge.
- **Skill Gaps and Workforce Adaptation:** The transition to a green economy requires significant reskilling and upskilling of the workforce. Addressing skill gaps and ensuring that the workforce can adapt to new green technologies and industries pose challenges, particularly in regions heavily reliant on traditional industries.
- **Securing Job Security and Creation:** While the transition offers opportunities for new green jobs, there is also the challenge of ensuring job security for workers in declining sectors and creating quality, sustainable employment in new industries. Balancing job losses with new job creation and ensuring that these new jobs offer fair wages and conditions is a critical challenge.
- **Investment and Infrastructure:** Adequate investment in green technologies and the necessary infrastructure to support the Just Transition is a challenge. This includes financing for innovation, renewable energy projects, and the development of new industrial sectors, as well as public infrastructure to support these changes.
- **Policy Coherence and Regulatory Frameworks:** Achieving coherence across different levels of policy and regulation that support the Just Transition is challenging. This includes aligning local, national, and European policies and regulations to support a cohesive and comprehensive transition strategy.
- **Public Acceptance and Social Resistance:** Gaining public acceptance for new green projects, particularly renewable energy installations, can be challenging. Social resistance to changes in local landscapes and concerns over environmental impacts can hinder progress.

Opportunities

- **Strengthening Social Dialogue:** The Just Transition process offers an opportunity to strengthen social dialogue mechanisms, enhancing collaboration between trade unions, employers, and governments. This can lead to more democratic and participatory approaches to managing economic and environmental challenges.
- **Innovation and Economic Diversification:** The transition presents opportunities for innovation and diversification of economies, particularly in regions previously reliant on fossil fuels or declining industries. This includes developing renewable energy sectors, circular economy practices, and other sustainable industries.
- **Community Revitalization and Development:** There is an opportunity to use the Just Transition as a catalyst for community revitalization, particularly in rural or economically disadvantaged areas. Investments in green industries can lead to local development, infrastructure improvements, and enhanced community services.
- **Enhanced Sustainability and Environmental Protection:** The transition towards a green economy offers significant opportunities for enhanced sustainability and environmental protection. This includes reducing greenhouse gas emissions, conserving biodiversity, and promoting sustainable use of natural resources.
- **Global Leadership and Competitiveness:** By embracing the Just Transition, countries can position themselves as leaders in the global shift towards sustainability. This can enhance national competitiveness, create export opportunities in green technologies, and contribute to global efforts to combat climate change.

Conclusion

The Just Transition process, as reflected in the case studies from Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, and Spain, presents a complex mix of challenges and opportunities. Effective social dialogue is crucial in navigating these challenges and seizing the opportunities to ensure that the transition to a sustainable future is equitable, inclusive, and beneficial for all stakeholders involved.

4.7.5 Synthesis and Recommendations

The case study research across Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, and Spain provides valuable insights into the diverse approaches adopted by different countries in navigating the Just Transition towards sustainable industrial transformation. Despite the varied economic, social, and environmental contexts, several parallels and distinctions emerge, offering a comprehensive perspective on the challenges and opportunities inherent in the Just Transition process. Drawing on these insights, this conclusion provides recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of social dialogue, stakeholder

engagement, and policy frameworks in supporting sustainable industrial transformation and labour market adaptation.

Parallels Across Countries

- **Collaborative Efforts:** All countries demonstrate a commitment to collaborative efforts among trade unions, employers, and governmental entities, recognizing the importance of social dialogue in facilitating the Just Transition. However, the depth and effectiveness of these collaborations vary, reflecting different levels of stakeholder engagement and institutional support.
- **Focus on Reskilling and Job Creation:** There is a unanimous recognition of the need for reskilling and upskilling the workforce to meet the demands of new green industries. Additionally, the creation of sustainable employment opportunities is a common goal, with initiatives aimed at mitigating job losses in declining sectors.
- **Investment in Green Technologies:** Each country is investing in green technologies and infrastructure as part of their transition strategies. This includes renewable energy projects, sustainable manufacturing processes, and initiatives aimed at reducing carbon emissions.

Distinctions Among Countries

- **Degree of Government Involvement:** The level of governmental involvement and support for the Just Transition varies significantly. Some countries, like Spain, exhibit strong government-led initiatives and funding mechanisms, while others rely more on private sector initiatives and localized efforts.
- **Impact on Local Communities:** The socio-economic impact of the Just Transition on local communities and the strategies adopted to address these impacts differ across countries. Some regions face greater challenges related to depopulation, unemployment, and economic diversification.
- **Policy and Regulatory Frameworks:** There are differences in the policy and regulatory frameworks supporting the Just Transition, with some countries having more coherent and comprehensive strategies that integrate environmental, economic, and social policies.

Recommendations

- **Strengthen Social Dialogue Mechanisms:** Enhance the structures and processes for social dialogue to ensure inclusive and representative engagement of all stakeholders. This includes establishing regular platforms for discussion, transparent communication channels, and mechanisms for conflict resolution.

- **Develop Comprehensive Policy Frameworks:** Governments should develop and implement comprehensive policy frameworks that support sustainable industrial transformation. This includes aligning local, national, and European policies, providing clear regulatory guidelines, and ensuring coherent strategies for economic diversification and environmental sustainability.
- **Invest in Education and Training:** Increase investment in education and training programs to address skill gaps and prepare the workforce for new green industries. This includes vocational training, higher education programs focused on sustainability, and continuous learning opportunities for existing workers.
- **Support Local Communities:** Implement targeted support programs for local communities affected by the Just Transition. This includes economic development initiatives, infrastructure investments, and social support services to mitigate the impacts of industrial shifts.
- **Foster Innovation and Sustainable Practices:** Encourage innovation and the adoption of sustainable practices across industries. This includes providing incentives for research and development, supporting startups in green technologies, and promoting circular economy practices.
- **Enhance Stakeholder Collaboration:** Promote stronger collaboration among trade unions, employers, government entities, and local communities. This includes joint initiatives, shared investment projects, and collaborative planning processes to ensure a cohesive approach to the Just Transition.

By addressing these recommendations, countries can enhance the effectiveness of social dialogue, stakeholder engagement, and policy frameworks, thereby supporting a just and equitable transition towards a sustainable industrial future. The lessons learned from the case studies across Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, and Spain offer valuable insights for other regions navigating similar transitions, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach that considers environmental sustainability, economic vitality, and social equity.

5. Analysis of Focus Group Research

5.1 Introduction

The objectives of the focus group research conducted in Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, and Spain were to explore and understand the perspectives of various stakeholders on the implementation of Just Transition within their respective countries. This research aimed to identify the challenges and opportunities presented by Just Transition, assess the effectiveness of social dialogue mechanisms in facilitating this transition, and gather insights on best practices and areas for improvement. Through

these discussions, the research sought to contribute to the development of more inclusive and effective Just Transition strategies.

The methodology for the focus group research involved selecting diverse participants across sectors impacted by the transition to a green economy. This included workers, employers, policymakers, and NGOs. The focus groups were designed to facilitate open discussions, allowing participants to share their experiences, perceptions, and suggestions regarding Just Transition and social dialogue. The research aimed to capture a broad spectrum of viewpoints to inform comprehensive analysis and recommendations for enhancing Just Transition processes.

5.2 Belgian Focus Group Findings

The Belgian focus group included representatives from three major trade unions at various levels: two union representatives from ACV (Confederation of Christian Trade Unions) at the corporate level and one environmental advisor at the national level; an environmental advisor from FGTB (General Federation of Belgian Labour) at the Flemish level; and a member from ACLVB (General Confederation of Liberal Trade Unions of Belgium) involved in the petrochemical sector. Despite requests, management representatives were unable to participate. However, the group successfully brought together voices from company, sectoral, regional (Flanders), and national (Belgian) perspectives.

The focus group research reveals a complex picture of social dialogue related to decarbonisation in the Flemish chemical sector. Key takeaways include the recognition of the importance of social dialogue by employers, particularly for decarbonisation efforts, though practically, at the company level, dialogue on this subject is almost non-existent. Employers and trade unions acknowledge the urgency of addressing climate change but face challenges in integrating decarbonisation into their strategic discussions. The research suggests a need for enhancing trade union training on decarbonisation, securing employment through negotiations, and improving the involvement of trade unions in strategic planning for a greener transition.

5.3 Bulgarian Focus Group Findings

The Bulgarian focus group research aimed to delve into the impact and perception of Just Transition within the country. It sought to gather insights from a diverse group of stakeholders, including representatives from employers, trade unions, government bodies, NGOs, and the scientific community. The main objective was to understand the multifaceted views on how Just Transition initiatives are being implemented and perceived across different sectors and to identify the challenges and opportunities these initiatives present within the Bulgarian context.

From the Bulgarian focus group research, the views of employers on adapting their businesses to new environmental standards without losing competitiveness reveal a multifaceted challenge intertwined with significant opportunities. Employers acknowledge the necessity of adapting to energy efficiency, waste reduction, and carbon footprint requirements as fundamental to maintaining competitiveness and revenue. The main challenges they face include the substantial investments required to upgrade equipment, train staff, and comply with regulations. These investments are pivotal for businesses to stay aligned with evolving environmental standards and societal expectations.

Despite these challenges, employers also see significant opportunities in the green transition. Opening new markets, increasing customer loyalty, and enhancing the company's reputation are viewed as direct benefits of adopting green practices. Employers recognize that aligning with environmental sustainability not only meets regulatory requirements but also positions their businesses favorably in a market that increasingly values eco-friendly practices. This alignment with the green transition is seen as a strategic advantage that can drive business growth, attract environmentally conscious consumers, and foster a positive corporate image.

Thus, while the transition to greener practices involves upfront costs and challenges, it also offers avenues for market expansion and reputation enhancement. Employers are aware that navigating this transition successfully requires balancing the immediate financial investments against the long-term benefits of sustainability, market leadership in eco-friendly practices, and improved stakeholder relations.

On the other hand, trade unions are deeply concerned about job security and income amidst the challenges posed by the green transition, especially in the energy sector. Key concerns include the risk of significant job losses due to the closure of coal-fired power plants as part of Bulgaria's commitment to reducing carbon emissions by 40% by 2026. Workers fear that such a rapid transition could lead to a loss of income and security, affecting not only those employed in the thermal power plants (TPPs) but also their families, particularly in communities where TPPs are a major employer.

In response to these challenges, trade unions have actively proposed strategies to preserve jobs while supporting the country's transition to more sustainable energy sources. Key proposals include:

- Developing a comprehensive energy strategy for Bulgaria, with a focus on maintaining the Maritsa Iztok complex as a pivotal energy source until coal reserves are depleted.
- Opposing the creation of a battery park within the Maritsa East complex, suggesting instead the development of a coal region conversion enterprise. This entity would be dedicated to land reclamation and preparation for various business activities, potentially attracting new

investments. It is proposed that a significant portion of the capital for this enterprise would come from national and local sources, including a percentage reserved for employees and workers of Maritsa East.

- Specifically for the Maritsa Iztok-2 power plant, there's a proposal to create a virtual photovoltaic power plant, leveraging 100 photovoltaic installations to promote renewable energy within the region.

These initiatives reflect the trade unions' efforts to balance the need for environmental sustainability with economic and social equity. They emphasize the importance of developing transition plans that do not merely focus on closing coal plants but also on creating alternative employment opportunities and ensuring a just transition for all affected workers.

The government representatives involved in the focus group articulated their perspective on achieving the European Union's climate goals while ensuring economic and social inclusivity. They emphasized the significance of attaining the EU's 2050 climate neutrality target, stressing that the transition should leave no one behind and that all sectors and groups must contribute. The principal challenges identified involve balancing the diverse interests and needs of economic actors, workers, consumers, and citizens, alongside ensuring sufficient financial and human resources for implementing green reforms.

The government representatives recognized the opportunities presented by the green transition, including improving health, well-being, and security of the population, stimulating economic growth and innovation, and strengthening Bulgaria's and Europe's position internationally. However, they also noted the complexity of balancing these various interests and the substantial resources required to support the transition towards sustainability and inclusivity.

This focus on inclusive and balanced green transition reflects a comprehensive approach that seeks to harmonize environmental objectives with economic development and social equity. The government's perspective underscores the necessity of collaborative efforts across all sectors and highlights the critical role of social dialogue in facilitating these complex transitions. Through such dialogue, stakeholders can identify shared goals, negotiate the allocation of resources, and work together to overcome the challenges of transitioning to a more sustainable and equitable economy.

In the Bulgarian context, NGOs have played a significant role in addressing pollution and advocating for the transition towards renewable energy. They have been actively involved in legal actions against entities non-compliant with environmental standards, exemplified by a lawsuit that led the European Court of Justice to conclude that Bulgaria violated European law by allowing excessive sulphur dioxide

emissions from the Maritsa Iztok2 thermal power plant. This legal action underscores the NGOs' commitment to enforcing compliance with environmental standards.

Moreover, these organizations are pushing for the energy sector to adopt the best available technology and meet the highest protection measures to safeguard human health. They emphasize the urgent need for investment in diverse renewable energy sources, arguing that addressing pollution requires immediate and significant action. Through these efforts, NGOs aim to ensure that Bulgaria's energy sector evolves to reflect contemporary environmental priorities and technological advancements, aligning with broader European environmental objectives.

The scientific community highlighted that agriculture, especially intensive sectors like crop and livestock production, faces significant challenges due to limitations on the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides to reduce carbon emissions. These restrictions pose threats to the competitiveness of European farms, potentially leading to a loss of market share globally. The transition towards greener farming methods, while necessary for environmental sustainability, requires careful consideration to ensure that agriculture remains viable and competitive.

Banks are recognized as central to the green transition, with a need for a profound transformation in their lending practices. Historically, banks favoured investments promising quick returns. Now, there's a shift towards financing sustainable projects in renewable energy and the circular economy. This shift includes directing efforts towards small and medium-sized enterprises and projects that not only promise environmental benefits but also contribute to sustainable economic development. The banking sector's adaptation to finance the green transition represents a significant opportunity to support sustainable projects, highlighting the need for banks to reduce their carbon footprint and provide advice on sustainable financial options.

These insights underscore the complexity of transitioning to a carbon-neutral economy, emphasizing the need for strategic investments in human capital, green technologies, and sustainable practices. The role of banks in this transition is crucial, requiring changes in their strategies and business models to support and finance the green transition effectively.

In conclusion, the Bulgarian focus group findings underscore a collective call for clear policies, effective regulation, and comprehensive education and training programs to support a balanced green transition. Participants advocate for a holistic approach that harmoniously considers economic, social, and environmental impacts, ensuring that the transition does not compromise economic stability while advancing environmental sustainability and social equity. This emphasis on an integrated

strategy highlights the need for robust stakeholder engagement and a strong regulatory framework to guide Bulgaria's journey toward a sustainable future.

5.4 Croatian Focus Group Findings

The focus group research in Croatia involved representatives from various sectors and highlighted significant concerns related to the environmental impacts of industrial activities, particularly in the Istria region. Key issues included pollution from thermal power plants and other factories, waste management, and the health implications for local communities. The research emphasized the need for a just transition that addresses these environmental challenges while considering the socio-economic impacts on workers and communities. The discussions pointed to the importance of engaging all stakeholders, including trade unions, in the transition process to ensure that it is inclusive and equitable.

The Croatian focus group findings highlighted both challenges and opportunities in the Just Transition process. Key challenges include the need for workforce re-skilling and the socio-economic impacts on communities reliant on traditional industries. Opportunities identified involve leveraging renewable energy potential and developing sustainable tourism. The findings underscore the importance of inclusive social dialogue in navigating the transition, ensuring that policies are responsive to the needs of workers and communities while advancing environmental goals.

5.5 Italian Focus Group Findings

The focus group research in Italy, conducted as part of the "Ecological Transition: An Inescapable Challenge for Sicily" event, highlighted key perspectives on Just Transition and social dialogue. This research was particularly relevant for Sicily due to its unique socio-economic context and significant potential for renewable energy development. Sicily's strategic position and abundant natural resources present unique opportunities and challenges for the Just Transition process, making it essential to explore stakeholder perspectives and develop tailored strategies that consider the region's specific needs and capabilities.

Participants in the focus group included trade union representatives, company representatives from Renexia and Sibeg S.r.l., and experts in education and research. Discussions revolved around experiences of social dialogue in the region, the impact of energy transition on the Sicilian industrial sector, and the role of education in transforming the labour market and skills. The union emphasized the importance of social dialogue in facilitating energy transition processes, updating bargaining tools, and integrating just transition principles to benefit workers and local communities. Challenges were identified in the lack of clear intervention by government entities in supporting just transition efforts,

highlighting a gap that impacts bargaining power and the broader Southern Italian context of transitioning from a fossil fuel-based economy.

5.6 Spanish Focus Group Findings

The focus group in Spain included trade unionists representing a range of levels, from company to sectoral within the industrial and energy sectors, and also featured trade union experts knowledgeable about Spain's green transition. The outcomes of the focus group research emphasized the significance of region-specific strategies and collaborative efforts in the Just Transition process. The discussions highlighted how different regions in Spain are adopting tailored approaches to address their unique environmental, economic, and social contexts. For Andorra, the focus was on transitioning from coal-based energy production, with initiatives aimed at economic diversification and sustainable development, including renewable energy projects. In Meirama, the closure of the thermal power plant led to agreements focusing on re-skilling workers and promoting new economic activities in renewable energy sectors. These examples illustrate Spain's tailored strategies to address the unique challenges of each region, emphasizing collaborative efforts between government, unions, and companies for a Just Transition. The role of collaborative efforts, involving government, industry, unions, and communities, was underlined as crucial for developing and implementing effective Just Transition strategies. The Just Transition agreement in the coal mining region of Asturias is a prime example of collaborative efforts. This agreement represents a comprehensive approach to social dialogue, involving unions, business associations, and government bodies working together to ensure a smooth transition for workers and communities affected by the closure of coal mines. The collaboration focuses on re-skilling workers, creating new job opportunities in sustainable industries, and supporting economic diversification, demonstrating a commitment to a socially equitable Just Transition. These collaborative efforts ensure that the transition is inclusive, equitable, and responsive to the specific needs of each region.

5.7 Comparative Analysis and Synthesis of the Focus Group Research

5.7.1 Introduction to Comparative Analysis

Comparing and synthesizing focus group findings from Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, and Spain enables us to identify common challenges and opportunities in the Just Transition process across diverse European contexts. This comparative analysis highlights the effectiveness of social dialogue mechanisms and the role of various stakeholders, including trade unions, employers, and governmental entities, in facilitating a transition to a green economy. By examining similarities and differences in stakeholder perspectives, practices, and experiences, we can derive valuable insights into best practices and areas requiring improvement. This approach not only enhances our

understanding of the multifaceted nature of Just Transition but also contributes to developing more inclusive, effective strategies tailored to the specific needs and circumstances of different regions. Ultimately, this comparison strengthens the knowledge base for policy recommendations, fostering a more equitable and sustainable future for all involved.

5.7.2 Methodological Approach Across Countries

The methodology used in conducting focus groups across Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, and Spain shared some commonalities, such as the focus on understanding the perspectives of various stakeholders on the Just Transition. However, there were notable differences in participant selection and discussion themes that reflect the unique contexts and priorities of each country.

Belgium primarily involved union representatives from the major Belgian trade unions, focusing on the decarbonization of the Flemish chemical sector. The absence of management representatives highlights a gap in stakeholder participation, concentrating the dialogue around union perspectives, particularly on employment and environmental sustainability within a specific industrial sector.

Bulgaria's methodology was more inclusive, involving a broader range of stakeholders, including employers, trade unions, government bodies, NGOs, and the scientific community. This diverse participant selection facilitated a multifaceted discussion on adapting businesses to environmental standards, the impact on employment, and the broader socio-economic effects of the green transition. Themes spanned from regulatory compliance and investment challenges to opportunities for market expansion and reputation enhancement.

Croatia also aimed for diversity in participation, involving representatives from various associations, local government, and the IRENA energy agency, with trade unions interviewed separately. The focus was on environmental impacts, job preservation, and the socio-economic effects of industrial activities, particularly in the Istria region. This approach allowed for a broad understanding of local concerns and opportunities for sustainable development and tourism.

Italy's focus group included trade union representatives, company representatives, and experts in education and research, concentrating on Sicily's ecological transition. The discussions were centred around social dialogue in energy transition processes, the impact on the Sicilian industrial sector, and the role of education in transforming the labour market and skills. This methodology underscored the importance of updating bargaining tools and integrating just transition principles into negotiations with companies and institutions.

Spain involved trade unionists from different levels of representation and experts on the green transition, focusing on the impacts of closing thermal power plants. The participant selection enabled

a detailed exploration of socio-economic effects at the territorial level, employment implications, and the need for retraining. Discussion themes were comprehensive, covering the management of plant closures, the role of social dialogue in facilitating transition, the impact on municipal income, and strategies for economic diversification and sustainable development.

In summary, while all five countries aimed to capture a broad spectrum of viewpoints on the Just Transition, the methodologies varied in terms of stakeholder inclusion and thematic focus. Belgium and Italy had a more narrow focus on specific sectors or regions, Croatia and Spain emphasized local socio-economic impacts, and Bulgaria adopted a holistic approach that encompassed a wide range of themes and stakeholders. These differences illustrate the tailored approaches taken by each country to address the unique challenges and opportunities of transitioning to a green economy within their specific contexts.

5.7.3 Stakeholder Engagement and Participation

The engagement and collaboration among trade unions, employers, and government entities in the Just Transition process across Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, and Spain showcase distinct dynamics and levels of participation that reflect the national contexts and priorities.

Belgium's focus group primarily involved trade union representatives, with notable absence of employer and government participation. This limited stakeholder diversity suggests a stronger union-driven dialogue on decarbonization within the chemical sector, without direct input or collaboration from employers or government entities in the focus group discussions. While trade unions play a pivotal role in advocating for workers' interests and environmental concerns, the lack of employer and government engagement might restrict comprehensive social dialogue and collaborative action towards a Just Transition.

Bulgaria demonstrated a more inclusive approach, engaging a diverse array of stakeholders including employers, trade unions, government representatives, NGOs, and the scientific community. This broad participation facilitated multifaceted discussions on the green transition's impact on employment, economic activities, and the environment. The presence of government bodies and employers alongside trade unions indicates a higher level of collaboration and mutual recognition of roles in navigating the transition challenges. Such diversity enriches the dialogue, potentially leading to more balanced and effective transition strategies that consider various perspectives and interests.

Croatia's methodology also aimed for diversity by including representatives from associations, local government, and the IRENA energy agency, with separate interviews for trade unions. This approach suggests an effort to capture a wide range of viewpoints on environmental and socio-economic issues

related to the Just Transition. However, the direct interaction among trade unions, employers, and government entities in the dialogue process appears limited, potentially affecting the depth of collaboration and consensus-building in transition planning.

Italy's focus group brought together trade union representatives, company representatives, and experts in education and research, focusing on Sicily's ecological transition. This composition indicates a balanced stakeholder involvement, with unions actively participating alongside employers in discussions on social dialogue, energy transition, and education's role in the labour market transformation. The engagement of employers in the dialogue, particularly in strategic decisions regarding environmental sustainability, showcases a collaborative effort, though the role of government entities seems less pronounced in the discussions.

Spain featured trade unionists and experts on the green transition, focusing on the socio-economic impacts of thermal power plant closures. The dialogue emphasized the crucial role of social dialogue in managing the transition, but direct participation from employers and government entities in the focus groups was not explicitly mentioned. Trade unions appear to be leading the conversation, with references to agreements and collaborations suggesting some level of engagement with employers and acknowledgment of government roles in facilitating the transition.

In summary, while Bulgaria and Italy show a higher degree of stakeholder diversity and engagement in the focus group, Belgium, Croatia, and Spain present varying degrees of collaboration among trade unions, employers, and government entities. The level of engagement and collaboration in the focus group significantly influences the parameters of understanding how effective social dialogue is in addressing Just Transition challenges, with more inclusive focus groups likely fostering a more holistic picture.

5.7.4 Themes of Social Dialogue in Just Transition

The framing and prioritization of social dialogue around Just Transition across Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, and Spain reveal distinct emphases on decarbonization, employment transition, and skill development, reflecting each country's unique industrial context and transition challenges.

Belgium's focus was squarely on the decarbonization of the chemical sector, with social dialogue primarily among trade unions highlighting the need for sectoral strategies to manage the transition's impact on employment. The discussions underscored a significant concern for employment preservation amidst the transition, with a particular focus on integrating climate and decarbonization initiatives into collective bargaining. The absence of employer participation in the dialogue indicates a potential gap in collaboration towards transition strategies.

Bulgaria presented a multifaceted approach to social dialogue, involving a broad spectrum of stakeholders. The dialogue encapsulated the challenges of adapting to new environmental standards without sacrificing competitiveness and revenue. Employment transition and skill development emerged as critical themes, with substantial emphasis on retraining workers and developing a comprehensive energy strategy that aligns with environmental sustainability while ensuring job security.

Croatia highlighted environmental impacts and the socio-economic implications of industrial activities, particularly in the Istria region. The dialogue focused on job preservation and the necessity of re-skilling the workforce to adapt to new, greener technologies. The approach suggests a broader concern for the just transition's impact on local communities, with trade unions advocating for the protection of workers in changing workplaces and climatic conditions.

Italy's dialogue centered on Sicily's unique position in the ecological transition, with a strong emphasis on social dialogue as a strategy for enhancing transformation processes. The themes of energy transition's impact on the industrial sector, the importance of worker participation in strategic decisions, and the critical role of education in labour market transformation were highlighted. The dialogue underscored the necessity of updating bargaining tools and integrating just transition principles into social dialogue.

Spain focused on the socio-economic effects of closing thermal power plants, with social dialogue addressing employment loss, the need for worker retraining, and municipal income reduction. The dialogue emphasized the importance of agreements to manage worker relocations and the development of new activities that require re-skilling.

Comparatively, while decarbonization was a common theme, the emphasis varied from technical and sector-specific strategies in Belgium and Italy to broader socio-economic considerations in Bulgaria, Croatia, and Spain. Employment transition and skill development were universally recognized as critical, with varying degrees of focus on re-skilling, worker protection, and participation in transition planning.

5.7.5 Challenges Identified Across Countries

The implementation of Just Transition across Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, and Spain reveals a common set of challenges, such as employment loss, the need for re-skilling, and the requirement for significant investment in green technologies. However, each country faces unique challenges reflective of its specific industrial, economic, and social contexts.

Common Challenges:

- **Employment Loss:** All countries express concerns over job losses, especially in sectors directly impacted by decarbonization efforts, such as the energy sector in Spain and the chemical sector in Belgium. The transition away from fossil fuels and traditional industries poses a significant risk to existing employment, highlighting the need for comprehensive transition plans that mitigate these impacts.
- **Need for Re-skilling:** The shift towards a green economy necessitates a workforce equipped with new skills. This challenge is universally recognized, with Italy and Spain, in particular, emphasizing the importance of education and training programs to prepare workers for emerging green jobs.
- **Investment in Green Technologies:** The transition requires substantial investment in renewable energy sources and green technologies. While all countries acknowledge this, the specific focus varies, from the development of renewable energy in Italy's Sicily to the modernization of the industrial base in Bulgaria.

Unique Challenges by Country:

- **Belgium:** The focus is on the decarbonization of the chemical sector, with a unique challenge being the absence of employer participation in social dialogue, potentially limiting the development of comprehensive transition strategies that involve all key stakeholders.
- **Bulgaria:** Faces the dual challenge of maintaining competitiveness while transitioning to green technologies. The need to balance environmental standards with economic viability is particularly acute, given the country's reliance on coal and the significant investments required for upgrading infrastructure and training staff.
- **Croatia:** The environmental impact of industrial activities in specific regions, like Istria, presents a unique challenge. Addressing pollution and health issues while ensuring job preservation in a context where the local economy is heavily dependent on a few industries requires targeted solutions that can support economic diversification.
- **Italy:** Sicily's transition is marked by the challenge of leveraging its geographical and natural resource advantages for renewable energy development, against a backdrop of insufficient government intervention and the need for a clear industrial policy to support the transition. The emphasis on education highlights the unique challenge of aligning skill development with the future labour market.
- **Spain:** The socio-economic impacts of thermal power plant closures in rural areas introduce unique challenges related to territorial development and the management of employment transitions in communities with limited alternative economic activities. Spain's focus on

agreements to manage worker transitions and the development of new activities underscores the complexity of ensuring a just transition in areas highly dependent on fossil fuel industries.

While these common and unique challenges underscore the complexity of implementing Just Transition strategies, they also highlight the importance of tailoring approaches to the specific needs and contexts of each country. Belgium's need for more inclusive stakeholder dialogue, Bulgaria's balancing act between environmental sustainability and economic competitiveness, Croatia's focus on addressing regional environmental and socio-economic impacts, Italy's strategic use of Sicily's natural resources, and Spain's efforts to manage the socio-economic fallout of energy sector transformations all illustrate the multifaceted nature of Just Transition. Addressing these challenges requires collaborative efforts among governments, industry, trade unions, and other stakeholders to develop comprehensive strategies that ensure economic, social, and environmental sustainability.

5.7.6 Opportunities and Best Practices

The focus groups from Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, and Spain brought to light several opportunities for advancing Just Transition, underscored by best practices and innovative approaches that cater to the unique challenges of each country. These insights reveal the potential for cross-pollination of ideas and strategies among nations navigating the complex terrain of sustainable economic transformation.

Belgium showcased an emphasis on sectoral social dialogue as a mechanism to integrate decarbonization and climate change into collective bargaining agreements, particularly in the chemical sector. A notable practice was the creation of a working group to discuss decarbonization at the sectoral level, highlighting the importance of structured dialogue in fostering mutual understanding and collaborative action between unions and employers.

Bulgaria's focus group highlighted the significance of comprehensive stakeholder engagement, including employers, trade unions, government bodies, NGOs, and the scientific community, to address the multifaceted challenges of Just Transition. The collaborative development of a national strategy for sustainable energy and the proposal for a coal region conversion enterprise exemplify innovative approaches to balance economic development with environmental sustainability while ensuring job preservation.

Croatia presented an interesting approach to addressing environmental pollution and enhancing job security through the promotion of the creative and IT industries as new employment avenues. The emphasis on leveraging local resources and capabilities for economic diversification suggests a tailored approach to Just Transition that considers regional strengths and market demands.

Italy's discussion, particularly in Sicily, highlighted the role of education and training in facilitating labour market transformation. The focus on updating skills and aligning educational programs with future labour market needs underscores the critical importance of human capital development in the transition process. Additionally, the engagement of local companies and trade unions in strategic decisions regarding environmental sustainability points towards a collaborative model of governance for Just Transition.

Spain's focus group underlined the value of agreements to manage worker transitions and develop new activities requiring re-skilling. The commitment to training workers for future activities as part of the plant closure agreements showcases a proactive approach to mitigating employment impacts. Moreover, the emphasis on territorial agreements to ensure the comprehensive development of regions affected by the transition illustrates a holistic approach to economic and social revitalization.

Across these countries, the recurring theme of stakeholder engagement — involving trade unions, employers, government entities, and local communities — emerges as a cornerstone of effective Just Transition strategies. The integration of environmental sustainability into collective bargaining, the development of sector-specific transition plans, the alignment of educational programs with emerging green jobs, and the establishment of collaborative governance frameworks represent best practices that can inspire and inform Just Transition efforts globally. These innovative approaches not only address the immediate challenges of decarbonization and employment transition but also lay the groundwork for sustainable economic development and social equity in the long term.

5.7.7 Government Role and Policy Implications

The role of government in supporting Just Transition, as perceived through focus group discussions across Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, and Spain, reveals diverse expectations and underscores the necessity for adaptive and supportive policy frameworks to navigate the complexities of transitioning to a green economy.

In **Belgium**, the focus on sectoral dialogue for decarbonization without direct mention of government action suggests an opportunity for policymakers to create more inclusive platforms for stakeholder engagement. **Policy Implication:** Enhanced government facilitation of multi-stakeholder discussions can strengthen the transition process.

Bulgaria showcases an active engagement across a broad spectrum of stakeholders, highlighting the positive view of governmental roles in facilitating comprehensive dialogues. **Policy Implication:** Continued government support for inclusive dialogue and strategic investments in green technologies is crucial for balancing economic competitiveness with environmental sustainability.

Croatia and **Italy**, with their emphasis on regional impacts and the importance of education and skill development, point towards the need for targeted government interventions that address local challenges and align educational programs with market demands. **Policy Implication:** Tailored regional policies and investment in human capital development are essential to support local economies and workforce readiness for the green economy.

Spain's discussion underlines the importance of social dialogue in managing employment transitions, with a focus on the socio-economic impacts of industrial closures. **Policy Implication:** Governments are expected to ensure the implementation of transition agreements, emphasizing the need for policies that support economic diversification and community resilience in affected regions.

Collectively, these discussions suggest a shared anticipation for governments to play a crucial role in facilitating the Just Transition. While approaches may vary, the overarching policy implication across countries is the necessity for active governmental involvement in creating enabling environments for stakeholder collaboration, ensuring the fulfilment of transition agreements, and investing in the future readiness of the workforce.

5.7.8 Recommendations for Enhancing Just Transition Processes

Based on the comparative analysis of the Just Transition focus group discussions across Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, and Spain, several recommendations emerge for improving social dialogue, stakeholder engagement, and addressing the challenges identified. These recommendations encompass policy actions, stakeholder collaboration, and measures to enhance the effectiveness of Just Transition strategies.

Enhancing Social Dialogue

- **Establish Multi-Stakeholder Platforms:** Governments should facilitate the creation of inclusive platforms that bring together trade unions, employers, governmental entities, NGOs, and the scientific community to ensure a holistic approach to Just Transition discussions.
- **Promote Sector-Specific Dialogues:** Tailored dialogues that address the unique challenges and opportunities within specific sectors can foster more targeted and effective strategies for transitioning to a green economy.
- **Strengthen Transparency and Information Sharing:** Enhance transparency in Just Transition processes by ensuring that all stakeholders have access to relevant information, studies, and best practices to inform discussions and decision-making.

Fostering Stakeholder Engagement

- **Incentivize Employer Participation:** Implement policies that encourage or require employer participation in Just Transition dialogues, recognizing their critical role in the transition process.
- **Empower Local Communities:** Support initiatives that empower local communities to actively participate in Just Transition planning, particularly in regions heavily impacted by industrial transformation.
- **Enhance Governmental Role:** Governments should take a more proactive role in mediating and supporting Just Transition dialogues, offering regulatory guidance, financial incentives, and technical support to facilitate effective stakeholder engagement.

Addressing Identified Challenges

- **Invest in Skill Development:** Allocate resources for education and training programs that are aligned with the emerging needs of the green economy, ensuring that the workforce is equipped with the necessary skills for new green jobs.
- **Support Economic Diversification:** Develop and implement regional economic diversification plans that consider the specific economic, social, and environmental contexts of areas affected by the Just Transition, reducing dependency on singular industries.
- **Provide Transition Support for Workers:** Implement comprehensive support programs for workers affected by industrial transitions, including re-skilling opportunities, job placement services, and financial support during periods of unemployment.
- **Facilitate Access to Green Technology Investments:** Create policies and financial mechanisms that ease the burden of initial investments in green technologies for businesses, encouraging innovation and adoption of sustainable practices.
- **Monitor and Evaluate Just Transition Agreements:** Establish robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure that Just Transition agreements are implemented effectively, holding all parties accountable for their commitments.

By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can collaboratively work towards a Just Transition that is inclusive, equitable, and effective in achieving the dual goals of environmental sustainability and economic resilience. These policy actions and collaborative efforts are essential for addressing the challenges of transitioning to a green economy while ensuring social justice and economic opportunity for all involved.

5.7.9 Conclusion

The comparative analysis of the focus group research across Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, and Spain underscores the critical importance of inclusive and effective social dialogue in achieving a Just

Transition. Key findings highlight that engaging a wide range of stakeholders, including trade unions, employers, government entities, NGOs, and the scientific community, is essential for navigating the complex terrain of economic transformation towards sustainability. Inclusive social dialogue ensures that diverse perspectives and needs are considered, enabling the development of comprehensive and nuanced transition strategies that address environmental, economic, and social objectives.

Effective social dialogue fosters collaboration and mutual understanding among stakeholders, facilitating the identification of shared goals and the negotiation of equitable solutions to transition challenges. It is particularly crucial in addressing common concerns such as employment loss, the need for re-skilling, and investment in green technologies, by fostering consensus on approaches that mitigate adverse impacts while maximizing the benefits of the transition for all parties involved.

The analysis reveals that successful Just Transition strategies are those that prioritize stakeholder engagement, transparency, and adaptability to local contexts, demonstrating that social dialogue is not merely a procedural requirement but a foundational element of just and sustainable economic restructuring.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Summary of Key Findings

The principal insights from the analysis reveal that social dialogue is crucial for the Just Transition process, with each country showcasing unique approaches tailored to their specific contexts: Belgium's approach emphasizes sector-specific dialogues, particularly in the chemical sector, focusing on decarbonisation efforts through employer and union collaboration. Croatia highlights regional challenges, prioritizing environmental impacts and socio-economic implications, especially in the Istria region. Italy showcases innovation in Sicily with renewable energy development, emphasizing the strategic role of social dialogue in energy transition. Spain adopts tailored strategies for regions like Andorra and Meirama, focusing on economic diversification and sustainable development through collaborative efforts involving government, industry, unions, and communities.

Common challenges include the need for re-skilling workers and ensuring equitable transitions for affected communities. Innovative practices highlighted across the countries involve collaborative stakeholder engagement, sector-specific strategies for decarbonization, and the development of policies to support workers and regions during the transition to a green economy. Belgium showcases collaborative efforts in the chemical industry for decarbonization, involving dialogue between employers and trade unions. Croatia focuses on addressing the environmental impacts in the Istria region through stakeholder engagement. Italy's Sicily region highlights innovation in renewable energy

development with a strong emphasis on social dialogue. Spain demonstrates region-specific strategies, particularly in Andorra and Meirama, developing policies to support workers and communities in transitioning to a green economy. These examples reflect the diverse yet innovative approaches to implementing Just Transition across the countries. The insights gained underscore the complexity and necessity of integrating social dialogue into Just Transition efforts.

6.2 Conclusions

The comparative analysis reveals that social dialogue is crucial for the effective implementation of Just Transition, facilitating stakeholder engagement and ensuring the development of tailored strategies. The involvement of all stakeholders, including workers, employers, and government entities, is key to addressing the challenges and leveraging the opportunities presented by the transition to a green economy. Tailored regional and sector-specific strategies enhance the adaptability and effectiveness of Just Transition efforts, reflecting the unique economic, environmental, and social contexts of each area. The conclusions drawn are supported by case studies and focus group research that underscore the effectiveness of social dialogue, stakeholder engagement, and the importance of customized approaches. Each country's specific economic, environmental, and social context influences the Just Transition process, demonstrating the necessity for adaptable and inclusive strategies to achieve sustainable outcomes.

A standout example from the Belgian context is the initiative by Chemli, a company in the chemical industry, that has taken significant strides in incorporating environmental sustainability into its operations. This includes the adoption of advanced technologies to reduce emissions and energy consumption, as well as the active involvement of trade unions and employees in environmental decision-making processes. Chemli's approach exemplifies the importance of social dialogue in environmental initiatives, demonstrating how management, employees, and trade unions can collaboratively work towards sustainable industrial practices. This collaborative model not only addresses environmental challenges but also ensures the workforce is engaged and informed about sustainable practices, highlighting a successful integration of Just Transition principles.

A good example from Croatia involves the efforts of the Association of Independent Trade Unions of Croatia in addressing the green transition within the waste management sector. This includes initiatives for educating members about the impact of the green transition on jobs and the need for re-skilling, demonstrating proactive union engagement in Just Transition strategies. This example illustrates the importance of trade union involvement in strategic planning for environmental sustainability and worker protection during the transition to a green economy.

A standout example for Italy can be found in the development of the Med Wind project by Renexia. This project, focusing on the construction of an offshore wind farm, illustrates effective social dialogue and Just Transition principles through its extensive stakeholder engagement process. From its inception, Renexia aimed to involve stakeholders at all stages, from design to operation, including environmental associations, local communities, direct and indirect suppliers, and government entities at various levels. This comprehensive approach to stakeholder engagement, ensuring broad consultation and consideration of diverse concerns, represents a best practice in aligning Just Transition principles with large-scale renewable energy projects. The Med Wind project's emphasis on safeguarding local economies, such as the fishing sector, while pursuing ambitious renewable energy goals showcases a balanced approach to economic development and environmental sustainability, reflecting the core objectives of Just Transition.

A particularly notable case from Spain is the Framework Agreement for a Just Transition of Coal Mining and Sustainable Development of Mining Regions, signed by the Spanish Government, trade unions, and the National Coal Mining Federation. This agreement aims to support the fair transition for coal mining and mining districts, promoting actions that contribute to the reactivation of mining regions and improvement of the environment, aligning with the current energy transition process. Another example is the Agreement on a Just Energy Transition for Closing Thermal Power Plants, which includes commitments from the government, trade unions, and power plant owners to develop relocation plans for personnel, prioritize hiring from auxiliary companies, and invest in renewable energies and other viable business lines in the affected areas. These examples underscore Spain's strategic approach to Just Transition, emphasizing the role of collaborative efforts between government, industry, unions, and communities.

6.3 Recommendations for Policy

For policymakers at the EU and national levels, it's vital to:

6.3.1 Strengthen Social Dialogue Mechanisms:

Establish regular, structured forums for dialogue between government, employers, and workers to discuss Just Transition strategies. Implement policies that mandate stakeholder involvement in decision-making processes. For instance, the Belgian focus on creating a sectoral working group for decarbonization highlights the potential of structured multi-stakeholder dialogues to foster mutual understanding and collaborative action between unions and employers. Similarly, Bulgaria's comprehensive stakeholder engagement in developing a national strategy for sustainable energy showcases the value of including a wide range of perspectives in policy development, balancing environmental sustainability with economic competitiveness.

Furthermore, the Croatian emphasis on leveraging local capabilities for economic diversification points towards the importance of tailoring policies to regional strengths and market demands. Italy's strategic decisions involving trade unions and local companies in Sicily underscore the significance of collaborative governance and the role of education in aligning workforce skills with future labour market needs. Spain's agreements to manage worker transitions exemplify proactive approaches to addressing employment impacts, emphasizing the necessity of government policies that support economic diversification and ensure community resilience in affected regions. These examples underscore the importance of adaptive and supportive policy frameworks that foster stakeholder collaboration, enhance transparency, and prioritize investments in workforce readiness for the green economy.

6.3.2 Enhance Workforce Training Programs:

Develop and fund comprehensive re-skilling and up-skilling initiatives targeted at sectors and regions most affected by the transition to a green economy. Ensure access to lifelong learning and career transition support. Particularly useful are innovative workforce training programs such as the up-skilling and re-skilling initiatives in Spain's Andorra region, focused on transitioning workers from coal industries to renewable energy sectors. These programs include vocational training and education tailored to the needs of the green economy, demonstrating a best practice for policymakers to replicate and support at both the EU and national levels. Such initiatives are crucial for equipping workers with the skills needed for new, sustainable industries, ensuring a smooth and equitable transition.

6.3.3 Support Sector- and Region-Specific Just Transition Strategies:

Tailor policies and financial incentives to address the unique challenges and opportunities of different sectors and regions. This includes investment in green infrastructure, support for innovation in sustainable technologies, and assistance for communities in transition. This could also include the establishment of funds or grants specifically aimed at supporting green initiatives in heavily industrialized regions, creating platforms for stakeholder dialogue in sectors undergoing significant change, and designing policies that facilitate investment in green technologies within specific sectors, such as renewable energy in Spain's Andorra region. These initiatives show the importance of tailored support to meet unique regional and sectoral needs.

These recommendations aim to foster an inclusive, equitable, and effective transition towards a sustainable future.

6.3.4 Implementation Strategy Suggestions

Sector-Specific Transition Strategies:

- **Example from Belgium:** The establishment of a sectoral working group for decarbonization can be used as a model for other countries. Implementing this strategy involves identifying key sectors for transition, establishing working groups that include all relevant stakeholders, and developing sector-specific action plans that address both environmental sustainability and economic viability.

Education and Skill Development:

- **Example from Italy:** The Renexia offshore wind farm project and the emphasis on aligning educational programs with labor market demands serve as a foundation for recommendation. A strategy could involve partnerships between educational institutions, industry, and government to develop curriculum that meets the future needs of the green economy, along with training programs for current workers to transition to new green jobs.

Community Engagement and Support:

- **Example from Spain:** The Just Transition agreements, like those in response to thermal power plant closures, provide a comprehensive approach to community engagement and support. Strategies might include creating forums for community input into transition plans, ensuring that community benefits are a key component of transition agreements, and investing in local infrastructure and services to support the transition.

6.4 Recommendations for Social Partners

For trade unions, employer organizations, and other social partners it is essential to emphasize collaborative approaches, proactive engagement in Just Transition planning, and the development of negotiation strategies that prioritize sustainability and worker protection. This involves creating platforms for continuous dialogue, ensuring all stakeholders are involved in transition planning processes, and advocating for policies and practices that safeguard workers' interests while promoting environmental sustainability.

The best practice examples from our research include Belgium's collaborative decarbonization efforts in the chemical industry, Croatia's focus on environmental impacts through stakeholder engagement in Istria, Italy's renewable energy development in Sicily emphasizing social dialogue, and Spain's tailored strategies in regions like Andorra and Meirama, showcasing proactive negotiation and engagement strategies by trade unions and employer organizations in transitioning economies. These examples illustrate the importance of collaborative approaches, proactive engagement in planning, and negotiation strategies that balance sustainability with worker protection.

6.5 Future Research Directions and Final thoughts

Current research gaps include a deeper understanding of the socio-economic impacts of Just Transition across different demographics, the role of new technologies and digitalization in facilitating or hindering Just Transition, and the effectiveness of current policy frameworks at both the EU and national levels in supporting comprehensive, equitable transitions. Further investigation is needed into the mechanisms for enhancing worker participation in Just Transition processes, the integration of gender and diversity considerations, and the development of sustainable financing models for supporting Just Transition initiatives.

Despite these research games, the broader implications of our findings for the Just Transition agenda underscore the critical balance between economic development, social equity, and environmental sustainability. This report illustrates that effective social dialogue is essential for navigating the complexities of transitioning to a green economy. It highlights the importance of involving a wide range of stakeholders in the Just Transition process to ensure that it is inclusive, equitable, and takes into account the unique challenges and opportunities within different regions and sectors.

Key insights include the necessity of sector- and region-specific strategies that are adaptable to local contexts, ensuring that economic development does not come at the expense of environmental sustainability or social equity. The report also emphasizes the need for policies that support workforce re-skilling and up-skilling, ensuring that workers are equipped to participate in the emerging green economy.

These findings suggest that the success of the Just Transition agenda depends on a holistic approach that integrates environmental, economic, and social policies. Such an approach requires collaborative efforts among governments, industries, unions, and communities to develop strategies that are not only environmentally sustainable but also promote social justice and economic resilience.

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