

MOVING AWAY FROM COAL

A Just Transition in Eastern
Wielkopolska



May 2024

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Any mistakes are ours.
The usual caveats apply.

Konin, May 2024

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WIELKOPOLSKA
REGION



1

Introduction



This study documents the most important processes and events related to the Just Transition in Eastern Wielkopolska over the last three years. We hope that it will be an interesting read and that the experiences and lessons learned from the activities carried out in Eastern Wielkopolska will support the fair energy transition processes in the other coal regions in Poland.



Shifting focus to the European Green Deal. ZE PAK, a significant producer of electricity from lignite and the most crucial employer in Eastern Wielkopolska embarked on its energy transition at the end of 2020. The strategic decisions made in the initial months of this transformation have not only set the course for everything that has occurred at ZE PAK over the past three years but also serve as an inspiration for the potential of the energy transition.

The application for the rights to exploit the Ościsłowo open-cast was abandoned and the end of lignite electricity generation by 2030 was announced in line with the Paris Agreement, which defined the framework for the process.



Continuation of the transformation process despite the energy crisis. It is worth noting that the backdrop to ZE PAK's energy transformation was events affecting the global and European economies, particularly the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The war destabilised the European energy market, contributing to unprecedented increases in electricity prices and directions of supply of energy carriers. These events forced a series of public interventions in Poland to stabilise the energy cost for consumers, creating a volatile market and regulatory environment for energy producers.



Responsibility for employees and the impact of the transformation. Despite this market turmoil, ZE PAK has consistently pursued its energy transformation. The focus was not only on limiting electricity production from lignite and decommissioning the lignite open pits it owned (Adamów, Drzewce and Józwin). Also noteworthy is active participation of ZE PAK in efforts to create support and assistance programmes for employees of coal and energy companies in connection with the transition.



Comprehensive people-focused support. The complete commitment of the ZE PAK Group and its trade unions and an explicit declaration to move away from coal by 2030 resulted in the award of EU funds from the Fair Transformation Fund (FST) of almost PLN 2 billion for the whole of Eastern Wielkopolska. These funds enabled the implementation of the workers' fundamental 'Pathway to Employment after Coal' programme – the most generous support scheme for coal workers in Poland. In addition, at the last session of the Ninth Chamber of Parliament (2019–2023), a law on social security cover for lignite miners and power generators was passed to support primarily the oldest employees of the concern.



Paying off debts to the environment. In recent years, ZE PAK has also carried out several activities in cooperation with the State Water Management Company Wody Polskie and local governments. These aim to rebuild water relations in a region affected by climatic drought and the negative environmental consequences caused by lignite mining.

Activities include creating a network of interconnected multifunctional water reservoirs in the post-mining areas of Eastern Wielkopolska and cooperating with local self-governments to construct recreational complexes next to the new reservoirs. These reservoirs will help improve water relations in the region, which will also benefit agricultural development.



2

Fair dialogue with employees

ZE PAK Group's activities in supporting employees in the transition process have been based primarily on **dialogue and an understanding of the situation of people** for whom the energy transition means a change in their living conditions. In addition to its involvement in public consultations conducted by the European Commission (e.g. within the framework of the EU Platform for Coal Regions in Transition) and regional authorities, ZE PAK cooperates with representatives of the social side in offsetting the effects of redundancies or creating new jobs.

With the end of 2020, the decision of ZE PAK's management and supervisory board was to stop applying for new investments (the Ościslów opencast). This decision, despite the long-standing expectations and efforts of trade union representatives, was finally accepted by them with understanding. It also became **the basis for building realistic expectations** in line with economic and climatic conditions.

More than 50% of employees according to their employment status at the end of 2020 could acquire pension rights by 2030. – this is the key conclusion of an analysis of employee data carried out by the Instrat Foundation on behalf of the WWF Poland Foundation and the Regional Development Agency in Konin (ARR Konin).

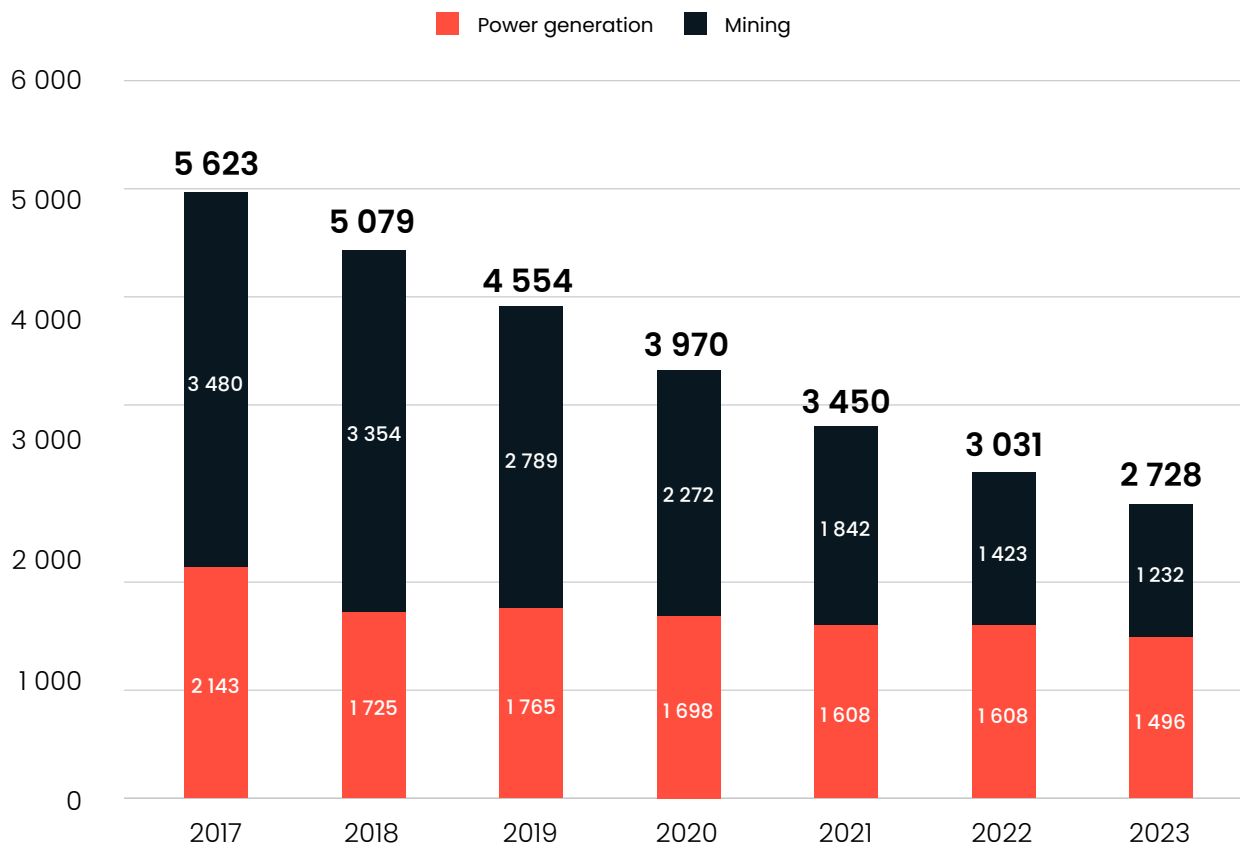
The in-depth study served as an input to the *Territorial Plan for Equitable Transformation of Eastern Wielkopolska* (TJTP) and, above all, clearly indicated what percentage of employees will acquire pension rights in the following quarters and years and how many people will continue to be employed to maintain the closing coal assets (KWB Konin – Józwin, Drzewce, Tomiśławice opencasts; Pątnów and Pątnów II power plants) and other assets fuelled by other fuels (e.g. Konin Power Plant).

Consequently, **a group of people requiring support** under this two key instruments was identified:

- ◇ **Job After Coal** programme funded by the Just Transition Fund,
- ◇ the then-proposed **shield law** guaranteeing early retirement rights and severance pay.

A detailed description of these instruments can be found later in the report.

FIGURE 1. DECREASE IN EMPLOYMENT AT ZE PAK GROUP BY MORE THAN 50% BETWEEN 2017 AND 2023



Source: ZE PAK own study. Status at the end of 2023.

2.1. ZE PAK's pilot job creation initiatives

The first action related to the implementation of the EU climate policy was the closure on 1 January 2018. Adamów Power Plant, followed by the closure of the Adamów Lignite Mine (February 2021). At the same time, the corporation began the process of **mitigating the effects of the downsizing** associated with the energy transition. ZE PAK's activities have focused on assisting re-

dundant employees in retraining and finding new jobs, as well as including support for departing employees in the *Territorial Just Transition Plan for Eastern Wielkopolska* and the Just Transition Fund.

In connection with the decommissioning of the Adamów opencast mine and mass redundancies at the ZE PAK CG, **training for the position of photovoltaic installation fitter was carried out** in October 2020 with the support of the Regional Development Agency in Konin (ARR Konin)¹. This allowed employees to gain new qualifications and qualifications to become electricians (SEP), which are key to working in the RES sector. The training courses were attended by 70 people, 14 of whom found employment in companies of the Cyfrowy Polsat Capital Group in positions related to photovoltaics, including ESOLEO.

Recognizing the importance of the relationship with the local community, ZE PAK initiated a collaboration with the municipalities of Kazimierz Biskupi and Rychwał² in April 2021. As part of this partnership, the employer committed to providing a substantial subsidy for the employment of selected employees residing in these municipalities and working in municipal enterprises for at least 24 months, with the potential for permanent employment.

In October 2021. ZE PAK partnered with employment agency Jobs First and launched a pilot of outplacement activities to facilitate the job search of laid-off employees³. The aim of these activities was to find new jobs for up to 100 people and guarantee them comprehensive support in the form of individual counselling and psychological support. A dozen workers participated in the pilot, which took off in January 2022. These activities continue today as part of the 'Job After Coal' employee programme.

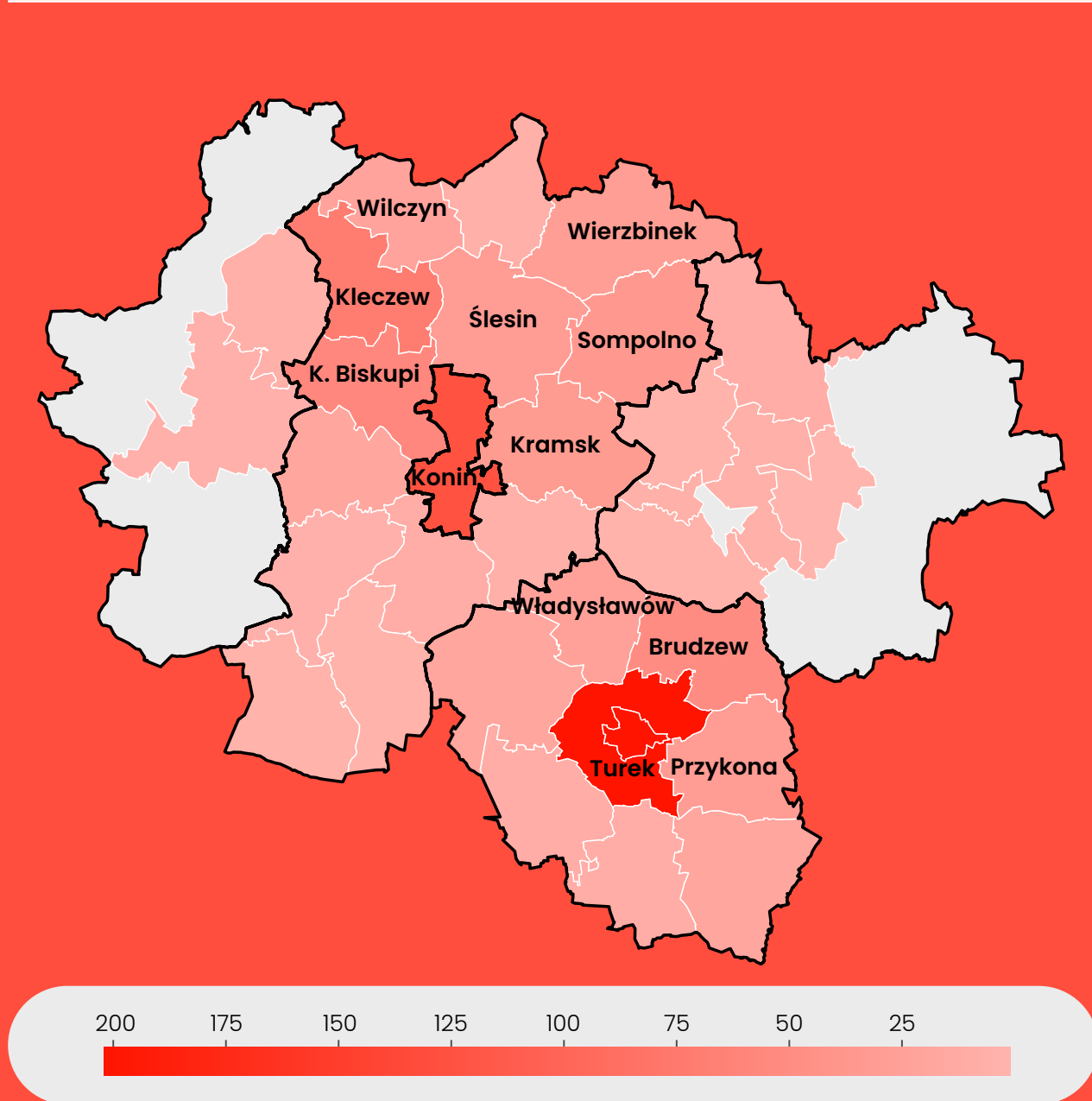
The initiatives undertaken by ZE PAK targeted a limited number of people due to the lack of public funding. For this reason, it was not possible to provide support to all workers who lost their jobs or to encourage a sufficient number of people to look for a new job themselves. Such measures were intended to provide a temporary solution until the workers expected support from EU funds, in particular the Just Transition Fund. As a result, many of the 647 workers who ended their employment between 1 January 2018 and 31 December 2023 were not supported in finding new jobs.

1 ZE PAK, RES Training Centre, <https://www.zepak.com.pl/pl/o-firmie/biuro-prasowe/aktualnosci/11519-centrum-szkoleniowe-oze.html> [accessed 29.04.2024].

2 LM.pl, *Pilot programme of Kazimierz Biskupi and ZE PAK. Municipality will employ five employees of the capital group*, https://www.lm.pl/aktualnosci/informacja/132296/pilotazowy_program_kazimierza_biskupiego_i_ze_pak_gmina_zatrudni_pieciu_pracownikow_grupy [accessed 29.04.2024].

3 ZielonaInteria.pl, ZEPAK Group: *We help those leaving mining jobs*, <https://zielona.interia.pl/aktualnosci/news-grupa-zepak-pomagamy-odchodzacych-z-pracy-w-gornictwie,nld,5579398> [accessed 29.04.2024].

MAP 1. PLACE OF RESIDENCE OF PEOPLE LEAVING THE ZE PAK GROUP SINCE THE BEGINNING OF 2018, BY MUNICIPALITY.



Source: ZE PAK own study. Data for the city of Turek and the rural municipality of Turek are presented in combination. Includes municipalities for the number of persons greater than 20 for a given municipality.

For those ZE PAK Group employees who have left their jobs in the last five years and are now retired, living abroad or in another mining region of the country, **assistance from the Just Transition Fund has proved unavailable**. However, it should be noted that the lack of this aid is not directly the fault of the ZE PAK Group, but is due to the lengthy and complicated procedures for mobilising and distributing public funds, including protracted negotiations between the Polish government and the European Commission.

2.2. Missed opportunities and lessons for the future

The 'Smooth transition' project – funds from the regional programme 2014–2020

In anticipation of funding from the Just Transition Fund, the trade unions of GK ZE PAK initiated the launch of interim support from the REACT-EU pool of funds allocated to the Wielkopolska local government (Office of the Marshal of the Wielkopolska Region).⁴ As a result of an appeal in April 2021 by all trade unions of GK ZE PAK to the Vice-President of the European Commission, Commissioner Frans Timmermans, the Wielkopolska local government launched the "Smooth Transition" programme.

The Dar Edukacji Foundation was in charge of a project aimed at 248 employees of the ZE PAK Group with a budget of PLN 4.1 million. The project started on 1 January 2022 and was scheduled to end on 31 October 2023. Nevertheless, the initiative failed. The goal of employing even one person from the envisaged group of participants was not achieved, prompting the applicants to terminate the grant agreement and return the funds received. An attempt to limit the project to 72 people and new assumptions, such as employing a minimum of 36 people, also failed. The failure of the project was the result of several factors:

- ❖ The project provider did not have sufficient knowledge of the specifics of the target group and the expectations of the participants, and the recruitment process was not tailored to their needs.
- ❖ The target group was limited to people threatened with redundancy, planned for redundancy or made redundant for reasons beyond their control (up to 6 months before the decision to participate in the project). This excluded support for people who left the ZE PAK concern between the beginning of 2018 and Q3 2021 and their family members, as well as cases of leaving by mutual agreement, while this form of termination of employment was common practice at the time.
- ❖ The project contained a financially unattractive, mismatched to the target group and incomplete set of support instruments, e.g. the average cost of a vocational training course including an exam assumed a budget of only 2.5 thousand PLN. In turn, the suggested grant for starting a business provided for approximately 23 thousand PLN of support, which created incentives for self-employment and was inconsistent with the preferences of the participants themselves.
- ❖ The project focused on providing only job search support (e.g. through the delivery of training) instead of creating a new job and keeping it (the required minimum duration of the new job was only 1 month).

⁴ ZE PAK, *Letter from Trade Unions to the Vice-President of the EC*, <https://www.zepak.com.pl/pl/o-firmie/biuro-prasowe/aktualnosci/12214-list-zwiazkow-zawodowych-do-wiceprzewodniczacego-ke.html> [accessed 29.04.2024].

Priority Programme Just Transition – Modernisation Fund measures

The National Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management (NFOŚiGW), as the national operator of the Modernisation Fund, has undertaken preparatory work to launch funding for projects with a social dimension in coal regions, including Eastern Wielkopolska. Despite the development of an initial concept for the Just Transition Priority Programme among experts and representatives of the regions affected by the transition the work on securing a budget for it was not completed⁵.

The work carried out in 2021 and 2022 is another example of an attempt to create an alternative support programme financed by national public funds, given the then-lack of JTF funding, which was delayed along with other EU budget funds for the 2021–2027 perspective.

According to the trade unions and ZE PAK, the levelling of the negative effects of the transformation should be covered primarily from this source, since it is the income from the sale of CO₂ emission allowances at national and EU level that goes to the NFOŚiGW or the Modernisation Fund. However, the programme was not launched in this form, and the unused funds were allocated at the NFOŚiGW for other energy and environmental initiatives.

2.3. ‘Job After Coal’ – the flagship employee programme of the trade unions and the ZE PAK Group

In April 2021, the management of the ZE PAK Group and the trade unions prepared, as part of the process of setting up the Wielkopolska TPJT, a project proposal (so-called fiche) for the project ‘Upgrading and retraining and professional activation of ZE PAK Group employees oriented towards the creation and maintenance of jobs’. It became the starting point for the creation of the ‘Job After Coal’ project. It also signalled the need to organise coherent and comprehensive support from public funds (including JTF) for 2,200 ZE PAK Group employees and the priority implementation of the project.

Key stakeholders received the project concept: Regional Development Agency S.A. in Konin, the Marshal’s Office of the Wielkopolska Region, ministries and government institutions involved in JTF programming, and the European Commission.

⁵ An important component of this programme was to be an offer of outplacement activities aimed at employees affected by the energy transition, modelled on the one launched in Konin and the Eastern Wielkopolska region.

Key assumptions of the first version of the programme, derived from the first conception of the project:

clearly defined needs and expectations

- ◆ parallel financial and counselling support that promotes sustainable and stable employment – not just oriented towards grant payments that promote bogus business and self-employment
 - ◆ a comprehensive and long-term programme – instead of many smaller project activities with a vague offer
 - ◆ more generous financial support – than in the previous practice of EU measures – including a participation bonus for employees, employers and project implementers
 - ◆ consideration of the specificity of the group supported – people who have been employed for almost their entire working life with their current employer – with an average age of 50 years
-

a defined group of people requiring support

- ◆ based on a detailed analysis of employee data, taking into account education, age and place of residence
 - ◆ inclusion of people who have left their jobs since 2018, i.e. the closure of the Adamów Power Plant (Turek region)
-

identification of alternative sources of funding other than JTF

- ◆ National Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management
 - ◆ Modernisation Fund
 - ◆ REACT EU
-

The first version of the programme was updated in September 2021 and enriched with information on the required budget for the implementation of the tasks, ranging from PLN 220 to 330 million. Subsequently, the project initiators asked the Konin ARR to include expert support from the World Bank – working with the European Commission's Directorate of Energy (DG ENER) for technical assistance. Between October 2022 and March 2023. The World Bank, in cooperation with the originators of the programme, developed an expert report with options for implementation solutions for the workforce programme⁶.

⁶ World Bank, *Options to Support Workers through a Transition away from Coal in Eastern Wielkopolska*, 2022, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/14310428-f573-4d84-bd10-8ce-a87513e6e> [accessed 29.04.2024].

In parallel, in February 2022, ZE PAK presented its own ten key principles⁷, which were to determine the effectiveness of the implementation of the employee programme. This goal seemed unattainable. The social side of the ZE PAK group could only hope that the demands it made to public institutions would be taken into account and appropriately formulated in the target project. And they depended on the decisions of the institutions of the local government of the Wielkopolska Voivodeship, the Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Family and Social Policy and the Regional and Urban Policy and Employment Directorate of the European Commission.

Making use of the World Bank's expertise and developing the implementation proposals with significant details, in July 2022, a joint effort of the social side and ZE PAK produced the detailed assumptions of the project 'Job After Coal. An employee programme for ZE PAK CG for 2021-2027'. The assumptions were in line with the principles of JTF implementation, surrounded by an appropriate institutional system and built on specific support instruments. **The document translated the needs of employees into official language.** The Association for Social Cooperatives, actively involved in developing a model for the inclusion of the social economy in a just transition in Eastern Wielkopolska, made a major contribution to the programme development process.

Approval was required for activities such as:

- ♦ identification of above-average financial instruments included in the project,
- ♦ allocation of the missing 30% of the project from national public funds,
- ♦ inclusion of criteria for the selection of partners that reward high quality outplacement and social economy services and experience in supporting people from the lignite mining-energy sector,
- ♦ preparation and approval of the funding application,
- ♦ conclusion of a partnership agreement,
- ♦ issuance of a decision by the provincial government to implement the project.

The trade union organisations negotiated an above-average financial value for the support instruments (a **budget of up to PLN 150 000 per participant** - many times more than the previous practice of EU funds) and an obligation on the future employer to **keep the workplace for at least two years** (much longer than in previous practice). **In this way, the element of a bonus for participation in the programme was realised** - for more than proportionally more funds available for each employee, a correspondingly greater commitment is required from the employer.

⁷ Baliński, D., Milczarek, P., *Just Transformation from the perspective of ZE PAK SA*, 2022, <https://zenodo.org/records/6499814>.

As the Polish energy sector transitions away from coal, the need for the program becomes increasingly urgent. Many individuals from Konin, Turek, and the region have already lost hope of receiving support from the European Union. Despite the best efforts of many, bureaucratic indifference and the neglect of the region's needs by key decision-makers have led to significant delays.

Potential implementers of the programme today and the forms of support offered were identified. The contribution of ZE PAK's existing partners and trade unions in other initiatives (see section 2.1.), including the Wielkopolski Social Economy Centre (run by the Association for Social Cooperatives) or the employment agency Jobs First, remains invaluable.

The refined concept of the programme, with its current name 'Job After Coal' was developed in 2021 – jointly by the trade unions and the ZE PAK Group with the support of experts, including from the World Bank and the Instrat Foundation. It was adopted by a resolution of the Regional Programme Monitoring Committee almost two years after the original version was conceived – in March 2023.

From the initial idea to the start of implementation, the project faced a challenging three-year journey. This period was marked by frustration and staff anxieties about their future. **Approximately 1,000 individuals left the ZE PAK Group** due to further coal mining and power generation reductions. These employees, unfortunately, did not receive the promised support from the FST funds.

Key facts about the Job After Coal Employment programme:



OBJECTIVE

Finding new jobs for miners and energy workers outside the lignite sector and keeping them effectively



6 YEARS DURATION

The project started at the end of 2023, with the first activities for programme participants starting in the first half of 2024.



2,200 PERSONS

Number of employees eligible to benefit from the scheme – not only current, but also previous employees of the ZE PAK Group who have lost their jobs since 2018, but also their family members and employees of other companies dependent on the mining and energy operations in Eastern Wielkopolska



PLN 257 MILLION

The total cost of the programme is more than 10% of the value of the Just Transition Fund for Eastern Wielkopolska – a record for the country and other coal regions. 70% of this amount comes from the Just Transition Fund and the remaining 30% from the state budget and was provided by the Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy. The project is entirely funded by public money, with no contribution from the partners, which sets it apart from similar initiatives supported by EU funds



UP TO PLN 150 000

The amount provided per employee that can be used by an employer who hires a former ZE PAK Group employee. The funds will be used to support the costs of remuneration (approx. 2/3 of this pool) and equipment for the new workplace and training (approx. 1/3 of this pool) for the employee in the new workplace employed under an employment contract. In the case of setting up a business, the subsidy can be up to PLN 120 000 per person. The support budget per employee is several times higher than the previous practice of support from other EU funds, where fictitious business activities and self-employment were very often promoted, at the expense of stable employment



2 YEARS

Minimum retention period for the employee in the new job - this is significantly higher than other employee support schemes



2 PROGRAMME TRACKS

offer tailor-made solutions - participants can take up the proposition of stable employment or create a social cooperative or their own business

The programme is implemented by the Provincial Labour Office in Poznań (WUP Poznań) acting as the project coordinator together with its partners, which are:

1. the ZE PAK Group - the employer of the miners and power engineers covered by the programme, coordinating the process of feeding the programme with data on the needs and employment history of the employees. The implementation of the programme is overseen not only by representatives of the employer, but primarily by the trade unions, which initiated the programme in 2021.

specialised labour market institutions that are responsible for placing workers into employment with new employers under one of the two programme pathways:

support for stable employment

2. Jobs First employment agency.
3. the DGA consulting and investment group
4. District Labour Offices in Konin, Koło, Słupca and Turek

support for the social economy and self-employment

5. Wielkopolska Social Economy Centre, run by the Association for Social Cooperatives
6. the Wielkopolska Agency for Enterprise Development

Special thanks are also due to the Trade Unions involved in the Just Transition process and the preparation of the programme. These include:

- ♦ Międzyzakładowy Związek Zawodowy Pracowników Inżynieryjno – Technicznych „KADRA” przy PAK KWB „KONIN” S.A.,
- ♦ Międzyzakładowy Związek Zawodowy Pracowników Zmianowych w ZE PAK,
- ♦ Międzyzakładowy Związek Zawodowy Górników KWB „Konin” S.A.,
- ♦ Międzyzakładowa Komisja WZZ „Sierpień 80” PAK KWB Konin S.A. w Kleczewie,
- ♦ Organizacja Podzakładowa NSZZ „Solidarność” PAK KWB Adamów S.A.,
- ♦ Komisja Międzyzakładowa KNSZZ “Solidarność 80” ZE PAK i Spółek Zależnych,
- ♦ Organizacja Międzyzakładowa NSZZ “Solidarność” Górnictwa Węgla Brunatnego Zagłębia Konińsko-Turkowskiego,
- ♦ Międzyzakładowy Związek Zawodowy „Kadra” Kopalni Adamów,
- ♦ Zakładowy Związek Zawodowy Pracowników Systemu Zmianowego Ruchu Ciągłego ZE PAK S.A.,
- ♦ Międzyzakładowy Niezależny Samorządny Związek Zawodowy Pracowników Energetyki Zespołu Elektrowni Pątnów – Adamów – Konin Spółka Akcyjna i Spółek,
- ♦ Międzyzakładowy Związek Zawodowy Pracowników Ruchu Ciągłego Zespołu Elektrowni Pątnów-Adamów-Konin S.A.,
- ♦ Niezależny Związek Zawodowy Pracowników Ruchu Ciągłego „Ruch” KWB „Konin” w Kleczewie S.A.,
- ♦ Międzyzakładowy Związek Zawodowy PAK Kopalni Adamów,
- ♦ Organizacja Międzyzakładowa NSZZ „Solidarność” Grupy ZE PAK.

We present the crucial stages of the Job After Coal programme to show potential stakeholders in other coal regions how long the different stages of launching the project and building support by public institutions in Warsaw and at EU level take:



**April
2021**

ZE PAK Group trade unions submit the first version of the project, i.e. the concept "Upgrading and retraining and professional activation of ZE PAK Group employees oriented towards creating and maintaining jobs", to the Regional Development Agency S.A. in Konin, represented by Maciej Sytek.



**December
2021**

visit of a delegation of the ZE PAK Group and trade union representatives to Brussels. President of the ZE PAK trade union KADRA, Alicja Messerszmidt calls on the European Commission to help and urgently mobilise funds to support mining and energy workers who have already lost or will lose their jobs due to the energy transition.



**September
2022**

The trade unions of the ZE PAK Group together with its management submit the refined version of the concept, i.e. the document "The road to employment after coal. Employee Programme for ZE PAK Group for 2021-2027", which replaces its previous version.



**October
2022**

ZE PAK Group representatives, including Daniel Baliński, advisor to the Board of Directors, give a presentation at the EU Coal Regions Platform on the 'Job After Coal' programme, calling for the release of EU funds for former and current ZE PAK CG employees and their family members.



**September
2022–
February
2023**

meetings and consultations are held at ZE PAK's head office in Konin on simplifying the document and adapting it to the requirements of the local government while including key employee expectations regarding employment and remuneration.



**March
2023**

The Monitoring Committee of the programme European Funds for Wielkopolska (FEW 2021-2027) unanimously adopts the concept "Path to employment after coal" by resolution as a guideline for the development of the JTF application.



**May
2023**

During a visit to Konin by European Commission Vice-President Frans Timmermans, trade unions call for urgent JTF funding for the employee programme.



**April-
September
2023**

- ◆ WUP Poznań, as the project leader, selects the remaining partners to form a partnership with nine participants,
- ◆ ZE PAK Group's efforts to secure the missing 30% co-financing culminated in the Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy agreeing to use funds from the Programme Contract for the Wielkopolskie Voivodeship.



**September-
December
2023**

the partners prepare a funding application, which is then approved by the Wielkopolska local government.



**January-
February
2024**

conclusion of the partnership agreement and decision of the FEW 2021-2027 Managing Authority awarding funding for the project.



**14 May
2024**

conference inaugurating the employee programme at the Oskard Centre for Culture and the Arts in Konin and publication of this study.

These multifaceted activities have contributed to the creation of a programme for transition-affected people in Eastern Wielkopolska. It includes financial support and an implementation mechanism that responds to the real needs of workers in the sector.

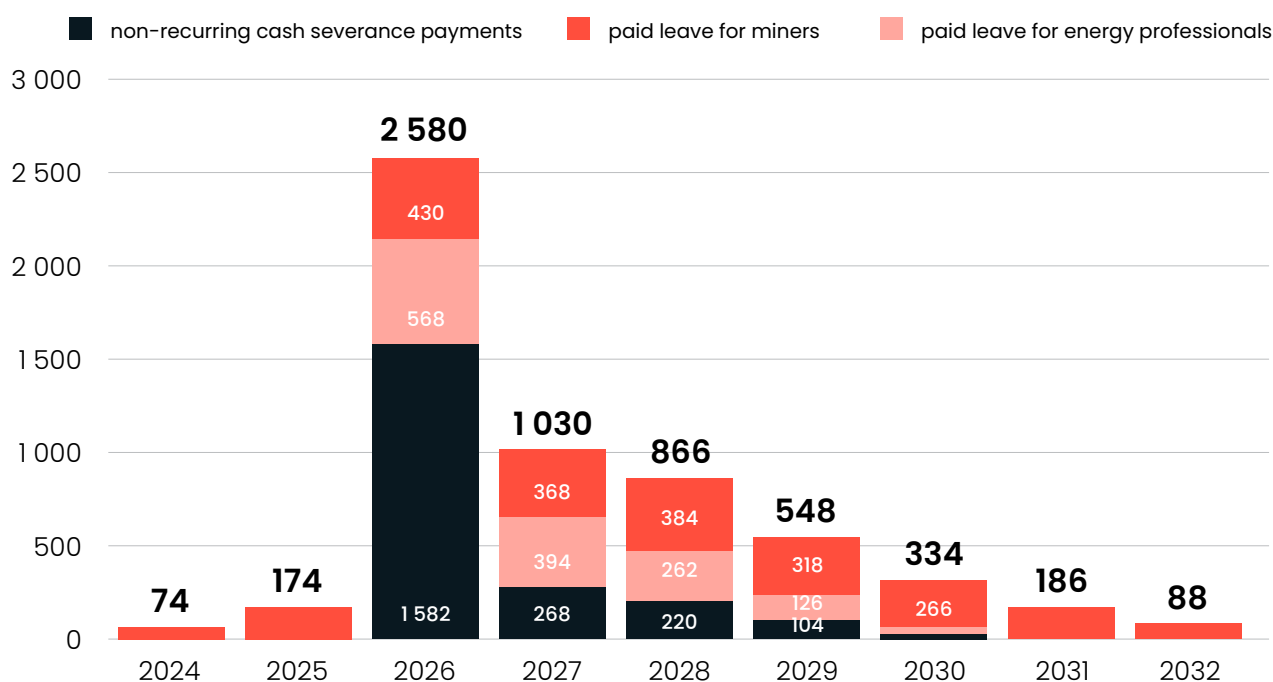
The willingness to compromise on the part of the trade unions and the other partners (the Marshal's Office of the Wielkopolskie Voivodeship, the Regional Development Agency in Konin and the Voivodeship Labour Office in Poznań) **was crucial**. This enable to launch a project aimed at creating new jobs for people who had lost their jobs due to the transformation.

2.4. Shield law – energy and mining leave and severance pay for departing employees

For the oldest group of ZE PAK’s pre-retirement employees, whose chances of finding new employment are not so high, there is support in the form of early retirement and a financial allowance from the state budget. For more than 20 years, Silesia has had an early retirement (leave) mining scheme that generously supported employees in the hard coal mining sector – however, this benefit was not available to the nearly 20,000 employees in the lignite mining and energy sector.

In order to redress this injustice, a government draft law on social protection for employees in the electricity and lignite mining sector was created at the beginning of 2022 at the initiative of the ZE PAK Group.⁸ It also became part of the initiative of the Ministry of State Assets on the creation of the National Energy Security Agency, to which ZE PAK Group, as a private company, was not a party for obvious reasons. It was adopted almost unanimously at the last session of the Ninth Sejm (2019–2023) in August 2023 and signed by the President of the Republic of Poland the same month.

FIGURE 2. NUMBER OF ZE PAK GROUP EMPLOYEES ENTITLED TO MINING AND ENERGY LEAVE AND ONE-OFF CASH SEVERANCE PAYMENTS



Source: ZE PAK’s own compilation. Updated costs and group of employees eligible to participate in the scheme, as of February 2024. Not in each category do the values add up between years.

⁸ Ministry of State Assets, *Social contract – green light for the creation of NABE*, <https://www.gov.pl/web/aktywa-panstwowe/umowa-spoleczna--zielone-swiatlo-dla-utworzenia-nabe> [accessed 29.04.2024].

Approximately 23,000 coal-fired power sector employees from across Poland, including power generation and lignite mining (ZE PAK Group, but also PGE GiEK in the Bełchatów and Turoszów regions), became eligible for four years' early retirement (energy and mining leave) and were funded with a severance payment of twelve times their monthly salary from the state budget.

The first beneficiaries of this support programme will be miners and service workers from KWB Konin and PAK Mining from the Józwin and Drzewce open pits, whose operation ended in the first half of 2023.

KEY MILESTONES IN THE PROCESS OF DRAFTING A LAW ON SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR WORKERS IN THE ELECTRICITY AND LIGNITE MINING SECTORS:



**December
2022**

- ◇ Completion of agreement negotiations at the joint meeting of the Tripartite Teams for the Lignite Industry and the Energy Industry.
- ◇ The signing of the *Social Agreement on the Transformation of the Electricity and Lignite Mining Sector (...)* by representatives of the government party, representative trade union organisations and state-owned energy companies. The agreement covered the employees of the ZE PAK Group despite the fact that, as a private company, the company is not subject to the project to separate coal assets from state-owned energy companies.

April 2023

Meeting of Minister of State Assets Jacek Sasin, Minister Zbigniew Hoffmann and Deputy Minister of State Assets Karol Rabenda with the mining and energy trade unions of the ZE PAK Group and the President of the ZE PAK Group at the company's headquarters in Konin on the launch of the shielding programme.

May 2023

During a visit to Konin by European Commission Vice-President Frans Timmermans, trade unions call for the green light to be given to the launch of the state aid notification procedure.

**July-August
2023**

- ◇ The government's draft shield law is being submitted to the Sejm,
- ◇ At the last sitting of the ninth legislature of the Sejm, a law is passed with almost all MPs voting in favour,
- ◇ Visit of a delegation of ZE PAK Group trade unions to the Sejm and meeting with the Speaker of the Sejm, Elżbieta Witek,
- ◇ The Senate brings amendments to the bill,
- ◇ The Sejm accepts some of the Senate's amendments almost unanimously,
- ◇ The President signs into law *the Act of 17 August 2023 on social protection for workers in the electricity and lignite mining sectors*.

**September
2023**

- ◇ Visit to Brussels by ZE PAK Group CEO Piotr Woźny and trade union presidents to appeal to the European Commission for notification of state aid,
- ◇ The Act comes into force,
- ◇ The government sends notification of the law to the European Commission.

October 2023

Alicja Messerszmidt, Chairperson of the PIT "KADRA" MZZ at KWB "Konin", Daniel Baliński (Advisor to the Management Board of ZE PAK), Michał Hetmański (President of the Instrat Foundation) and Aleksandra Gawlikowska-Fyk (Energy Forum) meet with Regional Policy Commissioner Elisa Ferreira in Brussels, seeking European Commission approval for the shielding benefits included in the shielding law notified by the government.

February 2024

The European Commission issues a positive assessment and finds no state aid. A delegation consisting of Piotr Woźny, Daniel Baliński, Alicja Messerszmidt and Michał Hetmański gives thanks in Brussels.

PHOTO 1. MEETING OF ZE PAK REPRESENTATIVES AND PARTNERS WITH EU COMMISSIONER ELISA FERREIRA AND REPRESENTATIVES OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION IN BRUSSELS IN OCTOBER 2023.



Source: ZE PAK.

PHOTO 2. DELEGATION OF ZE PAK AND INSTRAT FOUNDATION REPRESENTATIVES IN BRUSSELS IN FEBRUARY 2024.



Source: ZE PAK.



3

Restoration of water relations

Over the last 30 years, lignite mining in Eastern Wielkopolska has resulted in lower surface and groundwater levels. This problem is particularly significant within the Powidzki Landscape Park and the catchment areas of the upper Noteć, Teleszyna and Warcica rivers. It is the result of numerous open pits and coal mining, which have created depression funnels, lowering water levels in the area. Anthropogenic factors and climate change, such as increased evaporation, less rainfall, snowless winters and an extended growing season, have also contributed to this.

In response to these challenges, ZE PAK, in cooperation with the State Water Company Wody Polskie, has undertaken a programme to restore regional water relations. This programme focuses on measures such as:

- ♦ faster filling of inactive quarries with water,
- ♦ restoration of the hydrographic network,
- ♦ the use of Warta's waters to feed post-mining pits.

This is aimed at reducing the negative effects of lignite opencast operations and accelerating the recovery of water resources after the end of mining activities in the region.



4

Cultural heritage

Part of the transformation of the mining regions in Eastern Wielkopolska is also the preservation of the region's valuable industrial cultural heritage.

Dolores excavator

In cooperation with Marek Woźniak, Marshal of the Wielkopolska Region, a project was initiated to preserve the mining identity of the Kleczew municipality, home of KWB Konin, and to save the Dolores excavator (SRs-1800). Weighing 2,500 tonnes, the excavator, along with its twin Carmen, was brought to Poland from northern Spain from a mine in the Asturias region in 2009. Both machines were crucial to mining operations in the region and have thus been given a second life. As a result of the owner's decision to keep Dolores in order to preserve the legacy of mining operations with which the region has been associated for more than 70 years, the excavator has been given another, third life and has not been scrapped. It has a chance to become a museum exhibit in the Open Air Mining Museum run by the Konin District Museum.

The Dolores excavator is already an attraction for visitors to ZE PAK and KWB Konin and is located on the edge of the closed Józwin opencast. It moved out of the opencast to level zero via a special ramp built by the company. The technical operation to bring the giant Dolores excavator to the surface took about five months. It now has the chance to become a cultural and educational attraction for a wider audience.

PHOTO 3. DOLORES EXCAVATOR AFTER RELOCATION FROM JÓŹWIN OPEN PIT (KWB KONIN)



Source: ZE PAK

Miners' orchestra

Founded in 1954, the PAK KWB Konin Brass Band is an important part of the region's cultural heritage. It is one of the most important and meritorious musical formations of Wielkopolska. Its founder was Jan Józefiak, who faced the challenge of organising and leading the band at a time when there was a shortage of both instruments and sheet music, and musical rehearsals took place in makeshift conditions.

Currently the KWB Konin Brass Band has 50 members. Thanks to the commitment of professional musicians, the orchestra can boast a wide repertoire including pieces from a variety of musical genres - from classical to popular music.

In connection with the energy transition and the abandonment of coal mining in the region, the band is facing the need to adapt to new conditions. The Konińska Orkiestra Koncertowa (Konin Concert Band) Foundation will be set up with the aim of maintaining the mining tradition and organising cultural events. As a result of the Foundation's activities, the PAK KWB Konin Brass Band played its first ticketed concert for charity on 21 September 2023 at the Culture and Arts Centre in Konin, and another jubilee concert on 12 April 2024. In addition, during Commissioner Timmermans' visit to Konin in May 2023, **the miners' band performed the European Union anthem 'Ode to Joy'.**

PHOTO 4. EUROPEAN COMMISSION VICE-PRESIDENT FRANS TIMMERMANS WITH THE PAK KWB KONIN MINING BAND



Source: Mirosław Jurgielewicz

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