

Michał Rejewski, Maciej Sytek

The Labour Market in Eastern Wielkopolska during the Just and Energy Transition

– Challenges, Adaptation Instruments and the Potential of Green Jobs

**SERIES: GREEN TRANSFORMATION
POLICY IN POLAND**



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Michał Rejewski

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WIELKOPOLSKA DURING THE
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OF GREEN JOBS**



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PREFACE

It is widely recognised that Poland's green transformation policy is centred on the shift away from fossil fuels, particularly coal, towards renewable energy sources (RES), with the overarching objective of achieving climate neutrality by 2050. This transition is being pursued through the *Energy Policy of Poland until 2040* (PEP2040), the *National Recovery and Resilience Plan* (NRRP) and European Union regulatory frameworks, including the European Green Deal. These measures encompass the development of renewable energy sources, the modernisation of the energy sector, including the development of nuclear power, improvements in the energy efficiency of buildings, the promotion of low-emission transport and support for innovation. Their implementation requires substantial investment, financed, inter alia, through European Union (EU) funding. Research indicates growing optimism among the Polish public

regarding the potential economic and social benefits of the transition. Nevertheless, the process requires significant levels of investment and entails considerable challenges, particularly for coal-mining regions. It also poses important theoretical, descriptive and practical challenges for the academic community.

The present series of publications, devoted to green transformation policy in Poland, provides an in-depth examination of the issues associated with this field of research. Spanning six volumes, the series enables a multifaceted exploration of the subject matter, integrating theoretical perspectives with practical considerations.

The publication series adopts an interdisciplinary approach, with the aforementioned subject matter providing a common thematic framework for the individual monographs. The authors address issues relating to public policy, management, environmental protection, law and public administration. By bringing these studies together within a single series, the research provides a comprehensive and multidimensional perspective on the issues under consideration.

The fourth volume in the series presents and analyses selected, specifically targeted instruments designed to support the labour market in Eastern Wielkopolska. The analysis demonstrates that no single mechanism can, in isolation, ensure the effective adaptation of the region's

labour market. The experience of Eastern Wielkopolska indicates that the successful evolution of the labour market in the context of a just transition depends primarily on the complementarity of the measures implemented.

INTRODUCTION

The just transition of regions dependent on the extraction and use of fossil fuels is a process aimed at achieving climate neutrality, but in a manner that is fair and socially inclusive. It encompasses the restructuring of local labour markets, business models and the competences of employees and public institutions. Of particular importance in this context are measures aimed at maintaining the labour market participation of people losing their existing jobs in the mining and energy sector and related industries, creating new jobs, and developing new competences that respond to the needs of a changing economy, including a low- and zero-emission economy.

Eastern Wielkopolska, comprising the Koło, Konin, Słupca and Turek Counties and the city of Konin, is an example of a region whose economy and labour market have for decades been closely linked to the activities of the mining and energy complex of the ZE PAK Capital Group

(hereinafter also referred to as the ZE PAK Group). The scale of the changes under way is reflected in the decline in employment within the Group — from 8,676 employees in 2011 to 2,132 at the end of 2025 and approximately 1,833 at the end of the first quarter of 2026¹. It is projected that by 2028 the number of employees will fall to approximately 1,100. This represents a reduction in employment of approximately 87% compared with 2011, significantly affecting not only the Group's employees themselves, but also their family members, businesses cooperating with the mining and energy sector, and local communities. Consequently, Eastern Wielkopolska is among the coal regions most advanced in the transition process in Poland.

This area was identified in the *Spatial Development Plan for the Wielkopolska Voivodeship 2020+²* and the *Development*

¹ ZE PAK S.A., *Sprawozdanie Zarządu z działalności Grupy Kapitałowej w 2012 r.* [Management Board Report on the Activities of the Capital Group in 2012], ZE PAK S.A., 2012 Annual Report webpage; ZE PAK S.A., *Sprawozdanie Zarządu z działalności ZE PAK oraz Grupy Kapitałowej ZE PAK S.A. w 2025 roku* [Management Board Report on the Activities of ZE PAK and the ZE PAK Capital Group in 2025], ZE PAK S.A., 2025 Annual Report webpage; ZE PAK S.A., *Wyniki finansowe 1Q 2026* [Financial Results Q1 2026], 29 May 2026, p. 15 [data from the quarterly report], ZE PAK Q1 2026 Financial Results [access: 02.08.2026].

² *Plan zagospodarowania przestrzennego województwa wielkopolskiego. Wielkopolska 2020+* [Spatial Development Plan for the Wielkopolska Voivodeship. Wielkopolska 2020+], Resolution No. V/70/19 of the Sejmik of the Wielkopolska Voivodeship of 25 March 2019, Public Information Bulletin of the Marshal's Office of the

*Strategy for the Wielkopolska Voivodeship until 2030*³ as a fuel and energy area particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change and requiring integrated and coordinated measures to support its socio-economic transformation.

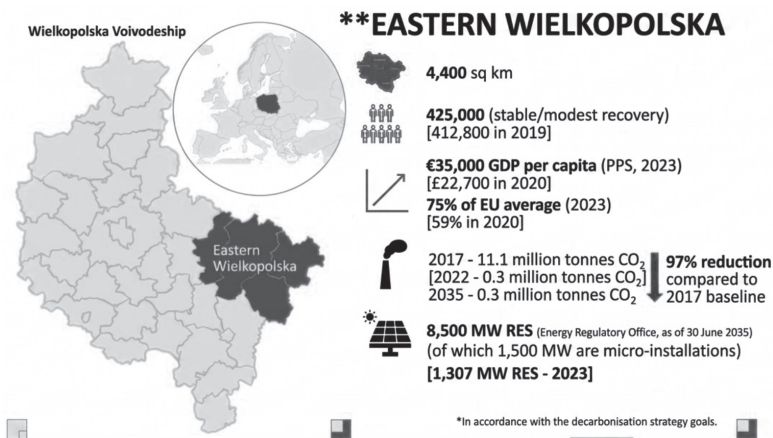


Figure 1. Location and Selected Development Indicators of Eastern Wielkopolska

Source: Author's own compilation based on materials from ARR and data from Statistics Poland and the Energy Regulatory Office.

Wielkopolska Voivodeship, https://bip.umww.pl/292---k_96---plan-zagospodarowania-przestrzennego-wojewodztwa-wielkopolskiego [access: 02.08.2026].

- ³ *Strategia rozwoju województwa wielkopolskiego do 2030 roku* [Development Strategy for the Wielkopolska Voivodeship until 2030], Resolution No. XVI/287/20 of the Sejmik of the Wielkopolska Voivodeship of 27 January 2020, Public Information Bulletin of the Marshal's Office of the Wielkopolska Voivodeship, https://bip.umww.pl/292---k_91---k_207---strategia-rozwoju-wojodztwa-wielkopolskiego-do-2030 [access: 02.08.2026].

The restructuring of the ZE PAK Group and the gradual reduction in employment began even before the formal launch of the regional just transition process. The energy transition accelerated in 2018, when Eastern Wielkopolska became involved in the work of the European Commission's Platform for Coal Regions in Transition, thereby beginning cooperation with other European regions on solutions aimed at supporting the transformation of the existing economic model and mitigating the adverse social impacts of the transition away from coal.

Furthermore, in March 2018, the Working Group for the Restructuring of the Economic Potential of the Konin Subregion⁴ was established, followed by the appointment of the Representative of the Board of the Wielkopolska Voivodeship for the Restructuring of Eastern Wielkopolska⁵.

⁴ *Uchwała Nr 5085/2018 Zarządu Województwa Wielkopolskiego z dnia 27 marca 2018 roku w sprawie ustanowienia Zespołu Roboczego ds. restrukturyzacji potencjału gospodarczego subregionu konińskiego*, https://bip.umwww.pl/artykuly/2823988/pliki/20180427090527_5085.pdf [access: 02.08.2026].

⁵ *Uchwała Nr 391/2019 Zarządu Województwa Wielkopolskiego z dnia 26 lutego 2019 r. w sprawie ustanowienia Pełnomocnika Zarządu Województwa Wielkopolskiego do spraw Restrukturyzacji Wielkopolski Wschodniej* [Resolution No. 391/2019 of the Board of the Wielkopolska Voivodeship of 26 February 2019 on the Appointment of the Representative of the Board of the Wielkopolska Voivodeship for the Restructuring of Eastern Wielkopolska], Public Information Bulletin of the Marshal's Office of the Wielkopolska Voivodeship, https://bip.umwww.pl/artykuly/2824947/pliki/20190326121425_391.pdf [access: 02.08.2026].



Figure 2. Signatories to the Agreement for the Just Energy Transition of Eastern Wielkopolska

Source: ARR S.A. in Konin.

The next stage was the conclusion, in April 2019, of the *Agreement for the Just Energy Transition of Eastern Wielkopolska*⁶. Initially, 40 entities joined the Agreement, while in subsequent years the number of signatories increased to more than 70. The parties to the Agreement declared their willingness to cooperate in developing new just transition initiatives in the subregion. The Agreement provided the basis for establishing the Eastern Wielkopolska Working Groups, in which nearly 200 people representing various stakeholder groups declared their willingness to participate.

⁶ *Porozumienie na rzecz sprawiedliwej transformacji energetycznej Wielkopolski Wschodniej* [*Agreement for the Just Energy Transition of Eastern Wielkopolska*], <https://arrtransformacja.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Porozumienie-z-dn.-03.04.2019r..pdf> [access: 02.08.2026].

In Eastern Wielkopolska, from the very outset, the success of the just transition has been made dependent on the involvement of a broad range of stakeholders, i.e. representatives of the municipalities and Counties affected by the transition, the management, trade unions and employee representatives of the ZE PAK Group, other enterprises and their associations (particularly those whose activities are linked to the extraction and use of lignite for energy generation), as well as various non-governmental organisations and local residents themselves. Indeed, a prerequisite for effectively mitigating the socio-economic and environmental impacts of the subregion's transition away from coal is the assumption of responsibility for this process by all parties involved⁷.

In subsequent years, with the participation of local government units (hereinafter: LGUs), business organisations, trade unions, non-governmental organisations, research institutions and representatives of enterprises, the regional framework for the transition was developed. It was set out in the *Koncepcja sprawiedliwej transformacji Wielkopolski Wschodniej* [Concept for the Just Transition of Eastern Wielkopolska], which subsequently provided one

⁷ I. Kurzawińska, M. Szymczak, *Raport z partycypacji społecznej w ramach procesu sprawiedliwej transformacji w Wielkopolsce Wschodniej* [Report on Public Participation in the Just Transition Process in Eastern Wielkopolska], Konin 2021, <https://arrtransformacja.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Raport-z-partycypacji-spoolecznej.pdf> [access: 02.08.2026].

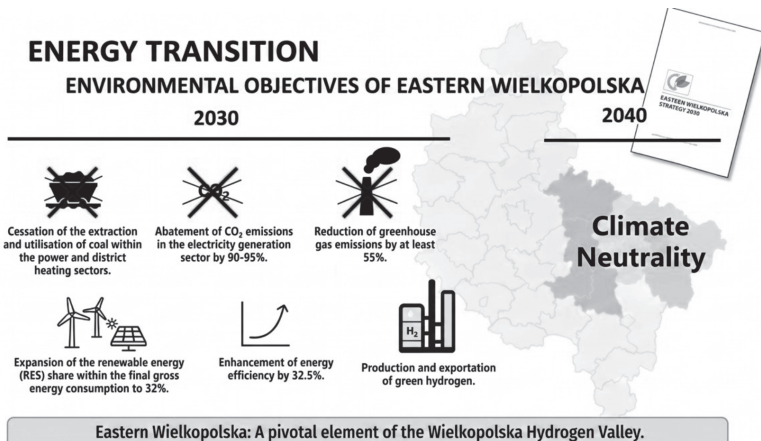


Figure 3. Environmental and Energy Targets for Eastern Wielkopolska in the Transition Process

Source: Author's own compilation.

of the foundations for the preparation of the *Terytorialny Plan Sprawiedliwej Transformacji Wielkopolski Wschodniej* [Territorial Just Transition Plan for Eastern Wielkopolska].

One of the key objectives of the transition process in Eastern Wielkopolska became the phasing out of lignite extraction and its use for energy generation. According to current plans, operations at the last open-cast mine and the last coal-fired generating units are to cease by the end of 2026, earlier than the year 2030 originally envisaged in the strategic documents. At the same time, the region adopted the *Strategia na rzecz neutralności klimatycznej Wielkopolska Wschodnia 2040* [Strategy for Climate Neutrality of Eastern

Wielkopolska 2040]⁸, which provides for achieving climate neutrality by 2040, a decade earlier than the target adopted for the European Union as a whole (hereinafter also: EU).

The transition of Eastern Wielkopolska, however, is not limited solely to ending lignite extraction and its use for energy generation. The targets set for Eastern Wielkopolska to be achieved by 2030 also include:

- reducing CO₂ emissions from the power sector by 90–95%;
- reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55%;
- increasing the share of energy from renewable sources in total energy consumption to 32%;
- improving energy efficiency by 32.5%; and
- developing the production and use of green hydrogen.

The implementation of some of these objectives is already well advanced. By the end of 2025, CO₂ emissions from plants classified as particularly environmentally burdensome had been reduced by 75% compared with 2017, while the installed capacity of renewable energy sources increased from 780 MW in 2023 to 1,307 MW as at 30 September 2025. In addition, approximately 250 MW of installed capacity was operating in micro-installations.

⁸ Zarząd Województwa Wielkopolskiego, *Strategia na rzecz neutralności klimatycznej Wielkopolska Wschodnia 2040* [Strategy for Climate Neutrality of Eastern Wielkopolska 2040], Poznań 2021, <https://lifeaftercoal.pl/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Strategia-na-rzecz-neutralnosci-klimatycznej-Wielkopolska-Wschodnia-2040.pdf> [access: 02.08.2026].

Another important area of the transition is improving the energy efficiency of buildings and developing distributed energy sources. This objective is being pursued through support for the thermal modernisation of public and municipal buildings, as well as for the installation of renewable energy micro-installations (hereinafter also: RES) and energy storage systems in households. Funding from the Just Transition Fund (hereinafter also: JTF) plays an important role in this area, covering, among other measures, umbrella projects under which more than 6,000 households in Eastern Wielkopolska have received support, as well as the *Czyste Powietrze* [Clean Air] Programme.

In parallel, a regional green hydrogen market is being developed. Green hydrogen produced by ZE PAK is used by Miejski Zakład Komunikacji w Koninie [Konin Municipal Transport Company] to power buses. The city has 11 hydrogen-powered vehicles, with a further 10 planned to be added to the fleet by the end of 2026. In addition, a new bus depot for the Konin Municipal Transport Company is under construction in Konin, together with a hydrogen production and refuelling station.

Achieving the objectives set for Eastern Wielkopolska requires the simultaneous implementation of measures related to the development of renewable energy sources, improvements in energy efficiency, transport modernisation, the reclamation of post-mining areas, the development

of new economic activities, and the adaptation of the regional labour market. It also requires the development of new sectors of economic activity and the preparation of an appropriately skilled workforce. The growing importance of technologies and solutions supporting the energy transition — such as renewable energy sources, energy storage, improvements in energy efficiency, heat pumps, electromobility and hydrogen technologies — is increasing demand for designers, installers, service technicians, energy auditors, climate advisers, automation and energy management specialists, as well as workers with environmental and digital competences. Climate and energy targets are therefore becoming one of the main factors shaping the direction of change in the regional labour market.

Eastern Wielkopolska has been allocated approximately EUR 414.8 million in support from the Just Transition Fund, of which EUR 398.2 million has been earmarked directly for intervention, with the remaining amount constituting technical assistance for the institutions involved in the implementation of the Just Transition Fund. These resources have been incorporated into the *European Funds for Wielkopolska 2021–2027*⁹ programme (hereinafter also: FEW), in which measures relating to the transition constitute Priority 10. The intervention encompasses not only

⁹ Marshal's Office of the Wielkopolska Voivodeship, *Fundusze Europejskie [European Funds]*, source webpage [access: 09.08.2026].

TERRITORIAL JUST TRANSITION PLAN FOR EASTERN WIELKOPOLSKA

Source: Wielkopolska Marshal's Office (2021).

Priority 10, European Funds for Greater Poland (FEW 2021+)

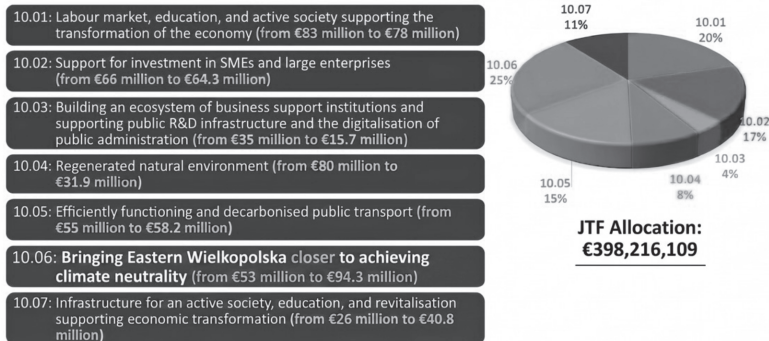


Figure 4. Structure of Just Transition Fund Intervention in Eastern Wielkopolska by FEW Priorities

Source: Agencja Rozwoju Regionalnego S.A. in Konin.

energy and environmental investments, but also labour market activation, enterprise development, the creation of new jobs, skills development, the development of public transport, and the strengthening of the institutional capacity of local governments.

The Self-Government of the Wielkopolska Voivodeship also decided that the institution responsible for coordinating the just transition process would be Agencja Rozwoju Regionalnego S.A. in Konin [Regional Development Agency S.A. in Konin] (hereinafter also: ARR), which also acts as an intermediate body for the Just Transition Fund. Measures financed by the JTF are complemented by the LIFE

AFTER COAL PL project, whose objective is to implement the *Strategy for Climate Neutrality of Eastern Wielkopolska 2040*, as well as by other regional and national instruments supporting the transition.

The *LIFE AFTER COAL PL – Implementation of the Strategy for Climate Neutrality. Eastern Wielkopolska 2040* project is implemented as a partnership involving a broad range of entities representing different stakeholder groups engaged in the transition process, including the Self-Government of the Wielkopolska Voivodeship, local government units, business support institutions, non-governmental organisations, and academic and research institutions. This partnership structure makes it possible to carry out measures simultaneously at regional and local levels and to combine the expertise of institutions responsible for climate policy, economic development, business support, education and cooperation with local residents. Individual partners are responsible for different areas of transition implementation — ranging from the operation of a network of municipal and county climate advisers, through support for enterprises in adapting to new economic conditions, to measures relating to green public procurement. The results of selected activities undertaken by the project partners, in particular local government units, Agencja Rozwoju Regionalnego S.A. in Konin [Regional Development Agency S.A. in Konin], Izba Gospodarcza Wielkopolski

Wschodniej [Eastern Wielkopolska Chamber of Commerce], Poznań Science and Technology Park, and Stowarzyszenie na rzecz Spółdzielni Socjalnych [Association for Social Cooperatives], have been used in subsequent sections of this study.

The approach adopted in Eastern Wielkopolska indicates that the restructuring of its labour market is taking place through several interconnected mechanisms. The first is direct support for people at risk of losing their jobs or who are unemployed, encompassing counselling, retraining, job placement, subsidised employment and support for entrepreneurship. In the region undergoing the just transition, these instruments are targeted particularly at employees and former employees of the mining and energy sector, people employed by enterprises linked to that sector, and other groups affected by the consequences of the transition. The second mechanism is the creation of new occupational roles, exemplified by municipal and county climate advisers employed by local government units. The third mechanism is the adaptation of enterprises operating within the economic environment of the mining and energy sector through changes to their business models, diversification of their activities, and the adaptation of employees' competences.

Another group of instruments comprises measures that generate demand for low- and zero-emission and

environmentally sustainable solutions. Green public procurement is of particular importance in this respect, as it can stimulate the development of climate-friendly solutions, increase demand for new technologies, and encourage enterprises to enhance their employees' competences. At the same time, this process requires access to appropriately designed development services for residents, employees and entrepreneurs, including services available through the Development Services Database¹⁰ (hereinafter also: BUR), as well as projects supporting the upgrading and acquisition of new qualifications. These measures are complemented by financial instruments enabling enterprises to undertake investment, change their business profiles, and retain and create jobs.

The effectiveness of the labour market transition therefore depends not on any single project or measure, but on the complementarity of different measures relating to the labour market, enterprise development, education, public procurement and investment financing.

The aim of this article is to identify and analyse the mechanisms for retaining and creating jobs and for developing new occupational roles and competences in the process of the just transition of Eastern Wielkopolska. The

¹⁰ Polska Agencja Rozwoju Przedsiębiorczości (PARP), *Baza Usług Rozwojowych* [Development Services Database], PARP – Baza Usług Rozwojowych [access: 09.08.2026].

study seeks to answer the question of how labour market activation instruments, the development of new functions within public administration, changes in enterprise business models, green public procurement, development services and financial instruments can jointly support the restructuring of the regional labour market.

The study draws on an analysis of programming and strategic documents, data on the implementation of the Just Transition Fund, and the results of initiatives implemented under the *European Funds for Wielkopolska 2021–2027* programme and the LIFE AFTER COAL PL project.

Table 1. Number of Unemployed People in Eastern Wielkopolska

	Wielkopolska Voivodeship	Eastern Wielkopolska	Kolo County	Konin County	Slupca County	Turek County	City of Konin
2015	93 311	20 312	4 286	6 942	2 557	2 585	3 942
2016	77 697	17 600	3 304	6 561	2 160	1 933	3 642
2017	58 857	13 147	1 989	5 038	1 848	1 607	2 665
2018	50 867	10 963	1 413	3 935	1 753	1 637	2 225
2019	46 313	9 968	1 283	3 796	1 536	1 381	1 972
2020	60 958	11 880	1 518	4 372	1 812	1 682	2 496
2021	49 850	9 508	949	3 712	1 509	1 235	2 103
2022	46 289	9 125	929	3 559	1 488	1 275	1 874
2023	46 531	9 042	1 076	3 423	1 508	1 278	1 757
2024	46 625	8 982	1 021	3 424	1 532	1 167	1 838
2025	56 059	10 559	1 302	3 849	1 654	1 575	2 179

Source: Author's own compilation based on the Local Data Bank of Statistics Poland, Local Data Bank [access: 02.08.2026].

CHAPTER I

THE LABOUR MARKET IN EASTERN WIELKOPOLSKA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE TRANSITION

1.1. Changes in the Number of Unemployed People

An analysis of changes in the number of unemployed people between 2015 and 2025 indicates a long-term downward trend in the labour market. The number of unemployed people decreased from 20,312 in 2015 to 10,559 in 2025, representing a decline of 9,753 people, or 48%. This means that, in 2025, the number of unemployed people stood at 52% of the level recorded a decade earlier.

These changes varied over time. Following a systematic decline in the number of unemployed people between 2015 and 2019, this trend was interrupted in 2020, when labour market conditions deteriorated as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In subsequent years, the number of unemployed people declined again, reaching its lowest level of 8,982 in 2024. In 2025, however, this trend was reversed once more. The number of registered unemployed people increased by 1,577 over the course of the year, equivalent to 17.6%. According to the assessment of the Voivodeship Labour Office in Poznań, one of the main reasons for the increase in the number of people remaining on the registers of labour offices across the voivodeship was a decline in the number of deregistrations, associated, among other factors, with weakening labour demand.

Another contributing factor was the entry into force, in June 2025, of the Act of 20 March 2025 on the Labour Market and Employment Services¹¹. The new Act changed the rules governing the maintenance of contact between unemployed people and county labour offices, including by relaxing the restrictions applicable in cases of failure to report at an appointed time or refusal to accept a job

¹¹ Ustawa z dnia 20 marca 2025 r. o rynku pracy i służbach zatrudnienia [Act of 20 March 2025 on the Labour Market and Employment Services], Dz.U. 2025, item 620.

offer. Some unemployed people now remain on the register for longer, partly because contact with the labour office is required once every 90 days rather than, as previously, once every 30 days, and may take place by telephone or online rather than exclusively in person. Moreover, refusal to accept a job offer or another form of labour market activation no longer constitutes automatic grounds for the loss of unemployed status¹².

The measures introduced may therefore extend the period during which individuals remain on the register, thereby contributing to an increase in the statistical number of unemployed people. Consequently, the increase in unemployment recorded in 2025 does not necessarily indicate, in its entirety, a sudden deterioration in the employment situation of the residents of Eastern Wielkopolska.

The scale of the long-term decline in the number of unemployed people varied across the subregion. The largest reduction was recorded in Koło County, where the number of unemployed people fell by 70%. In the remaining

¹² Wojewódzki Urząd Pracy w Poznaniu, *Ocena sytuacji na wielkopolskim rynku pracy i realizacji zadań w zakresie polityki rynku pracy w 2025 roku* [Assessment of the Situation in the Wielkopolska Labour Market and the Implementation of Labour Market Policy Tasks in 2025], Poznań 2026, <https://wuppozn.praca.gov.pl/documents/d/wojewodzki-urzad-pracy-w-poznaniu/ocena-sytuacji-na-wielkopolskim-ryнку-pracy-i-realizacji-zadan-w-zakresie-polityki-rynku-pracy-w-2025-roku> [access: 02.08.2026].

counties, the reductions in unemployment were broadly similar. In Konin County and the City of Konin, the decline amounted to approximately 45% in each case, compared with 39% in Turek County and 35% in Słupca County.

1.2. Changes in the Unemployment Rate

One indicator of labour market conditions is the registered unemployment rate, which represents the share of people registered as unemployed in the economically active civilian population. In December 2025, the registered unemployment rate in Eastern Wielkopolska stood at 7.0%. This was twice the rate recorded in the Wielkopolska Voivodeship, where it stood at 3.5%, and was also the highest among all the subregions of the voivodeship.

The situation in the local labour markets of Eastern Wielkopolska varied considerably. In 2025, the highest unemployment rates were recorded in Konin County and Słupca County, at 9.6% and 7.9%, respectively. In the City of Konin, the unemployment rate stood at 7.0%. The situation was more favourable in Koło County and Turek County, where the unemployment rates were 4.8% and 5.0%, respectively.

Table 2. Registered Unemployment Rate at the End of December, 2015–2025

Year	Wielkopolska Voivodeship	Eastern Wielkopolska	Kolo County	Konin County	Slupca County	Turek County	City of Konin
2015	6,2	11,7	12,8	15,3	11,4	7,1	11,2
2016	5,0	10,2	10,1	14,2	9,6	5,3	10,3
2017	3,7	7,7	6,2	11,1	8,2	4,3	7,8
2018	3,1	6,4	4,4	9,0	7,7	4,4	6,2
2019	2,8	5,8	4,0	8,5	6,8	3,7	5,5
2020	3,7	6,9	4,7	9,7	4,5	7,9	7,1
2021	3,1	5,6	3,0	8,3	6,7	3,4	6,1
2022	2,9	6,1	3,5	9,4	7,3	4,0	5,6
2023	3,0	5,9	3,9	8,3	7,2	4,1	5,6
2024	3,0	6,0	3,8	8,5	7,4	3,7	6,0
2025	3,5	7,0	4,8	9,6	7,9	5,0	7,0

Source: Author's own compilation based on data from the Voivodeship Labour Office in Poznań.

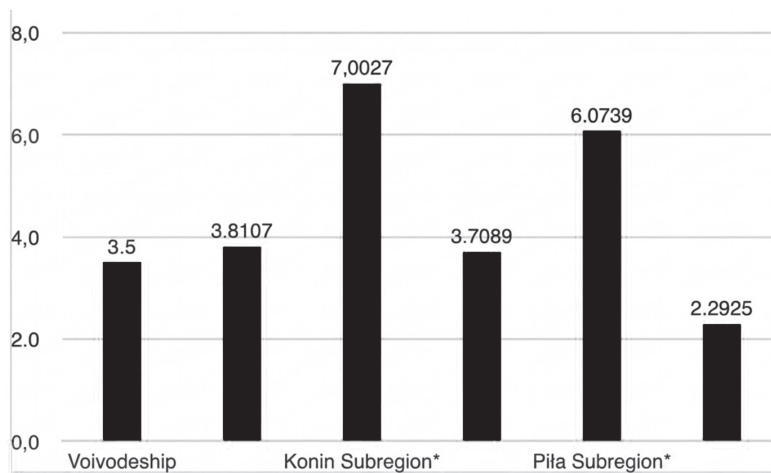


Figure 5. Registered Unemployment Rate at the End of December 2025 by Subregion

*Calculations by the Voivodeship Labour Office in Poznań.

Source: Author's own compilation based on data from the Voivodeship Labour Office in Poznań, Registered Unemployment [access: 02.08.2026].

Between 2015 and 2025, Eastern Wielkopolska and all of its counties recorded a decline in the unemployment rate. The largest decrease occurred in Koło County, where the unemployment rate fell from 12.8% to 4.8%, representing a decline of 8.0 percentage points. In Konin County, the unemployment rate decreased from 15.3% to 9.6%, while in Słupca County it fell from 11.4% to 7.9%. Despite this improvement, these two counties continue to record the highest unemployment rates.

1.3. Occupations with the Potential to Replace Employment in the Mining and Energy Sector

A significant challenge of the just transition is to identify industries and occupations that can provide new employment opportunities for people leaving the mining and energy sector. The expert study *Czasoprzestrzenna analiza zmian lokalnego rynku pracy podregionu konińskiego w konsekwencji sprawiedliwej transformacji* [Spatio-Temporal Analysis of Changes in the Local Labour Market of the Konin Subregion as a Consequence of the Just Transition]¹³ identified a range of occupations considered to have the greatest potential to absorb some of the workers leaving this sector. These include:

- **manufacturing:** machine operator, mechatronics technician, automation technician, welder, fitter, lathe operator;
- **energy sector:** electrician, electrical fitter, photovoltaic (PV) system installer, ventilation and air-conditioning specialist, heating systems specialist, water, gas and sanitary systems installer;

¹³ P. Churski, R. Perdał, M. Burchardt, *Czasoprzestrzenna analiza zmian lokalnego rynku pracy podregionu konińskiego w konsekwencji sprawiedliwej transformacji* [Spatio-Temporal Analysis of Changes in the Local Labour Market of the Konin Subregion as a Consequence of the Just Transition], Poznań–Konin 2021, https://arrtransformacja.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/3.-RYNEK_PRACY_PODREG.KONINSKI_20210708.pdf [access: 02.08.2026].

- **construction:** thermal insulation specialist, construction worker, bricklayer, plasterer, roofer;
- **logistics:** machine operator, heavy goods vehicle (HGV) driver, mechanic.

This range of occupations corresponds, to a considerable extent, to the existing skills profile of workers in the mining and energy sector.

The above-mentioned expert study, based on 2019 data, indicated that most of the occupations identified as having the potential to provide alternative employment to that in the mining and energy sector were classified as surplus occupations. This meant that the number of vacancies was lower than the number of people interested in taking up employment and meeting employers' requirements, and consequently that jobseekers faced the greatest difficulty in finding employment in these occupations.

More recent findings from the *Occupational Barometer 2025*¹⁴ indicate that this situation has changed to some extent. The occupations forecast to be in shortage (i.e. those in which the number of vacancies exceeds the number of people interested in taking up employment) in individual

¹⁴ M. Komasa, M. Rybak, *Barometr zawodów 2025. Edycja X. Raport podsumowujący badanie w województwie wielkopolskim [Occupational Barometer 2025. 10th Edition. Report Summarising the Survey in Wielkopolska Voivodeship]*, Kraków–Poznań 2024, https://barometrzwodow.pl/forecast-card-zip/2025/report_pl/raport_wojewodztwo_wielkopolskie_2025.pdf [access: 02.08.2026].

counties of Eastern Wielkopolska include occupations that could be undertaken by workers previously employed in the mining and energy industry, such as electricians, electromechanics and electrical fitters, heavy goods vehicle and articulated lorry drivers, building services installers, and bricklayers and plasterers.

Some of the other occupations identified as alternatives to employment in the mining and energy sector fall within the category of balanced occupations, i.e. those in which the number of vacancies is broadly comparable to the number of people interested in taking up employment and meeting employers' requirements. The situation, however, varies between counties, as illustrated in the figure below with regard to shortage occupations.

Table 3. Shortage Occupations in the Counties of Eastern Wielkopolska in 2025

County	Shortage Occupations
Koło County	Concrete Workers and Steel Fixers Paving Workers Carpenters and Construction Joiners Pastry Chefs Roofers and Construction Sheet Metal Workers Electricians, Electromechanics and Electrical Fitters Pharmacists Physiotherapists and Massage Therapists Bus Drivers Heavy Goods Vehicle and Articulated Lorry Drivers Medical Doctors Warehouse Workers Motor Vehicle Mechanics Building Services Installers Bricklayers and Plasterers Practical Vocational Training Teachers General Education Subject Teachers Vocational Subject Teachers Teachers in Special Schools and Inclusive Classes Earthmoving Equipment Operators and Mechanics Machine Tool Operators Lifting and Material Handling Equipment Operators Carers for Older People and People with Disabilities Education Specialists Bakers Nurses and Midwives Accounting and Bookkeeping Staff Production and General Labourers Construction Finishing Workers Uniformed Services Personnel Meat and Fish Processing Workers Psychologists and Psychotherapists Paramedics Construction Workers Woodworking Workers and Joiners Independent Accountants Welders Fitters
Konin County and the City of Konin	Concrete Workers and Steel Fixers Electricians, Electromechanics and Electrical Fitters Bus Drivers Heavy Goods Vehicle and Articulated Lorry Drivers Medical Doctors Warehouse Workers Building Services Installers Bricklayers and Plasterers Practical Vocational Training Teachers General Education Subject Teachers Vocational Subject Teachers Earthmoving Equipment Operators and Mechanics Bakers Road and Railway Construction Workers Production and General Labourers Construction Finishing Workers Uniformed Services Personnel Psychologists and Psychotherapists Construction Workers Independent Accountants Sales Assistants and Cashiers
Ślupca County	Vehicle Body Repairers and Automotive Painters Roofers and Construction Sheet Metal Workers Electricians, Electromechanics and Electrical Fitters Physiotherapists and Massage Therapists Bus Drivers Heavy Goods Vehicle and Articulated Lorry Drivers Medical Doctors Motor Vehicle Mechanics Building Services Installers Bricklayers and Plasterers Practical Vocational Training Teachers Vocational Subject Teachers Earthmoving Equipment Operators and Mechanics Lifting and Material Handling Equipment Operators Carers for Older People and People with Disabilities Bakers Nurses and Midwives Accounting and Bookkeeping Staff Production and General Labourers Construction Finishing Workers Uniformed Services Personnel Social Workers Psychologists and Psychotherapists Construction Workers Woodworking Workers and Joiners Independent Accountants Welders Fitters

**Turek
County**

ICT Systems Analysts, Testers and Operators	Machine Tool Operators
Concrete Workers and Steel Fixers	Lifting and Material Handling Equipment Operators
Paving Workers	Education Specialists
Carpenters and Construction Joiners	Bakers
Roofers and Construction Sheet Metal Workers	Kitchen Assistants
Electricians, Electromechanics and Electrical Fitters	Quality Assurance Staff
Driving Instructors	Accounting and Bookkeeping Staff
Chemical Engineers and Chemists	Production and General Labourers
Electrical and Power Engineers	Food Processing Workers
Mechanical Engineers	Construction Finishing Workers
Bus Drivers	Uniformed Services Personnel
Heavy Goods Vehicle and Articulated Lorry Drivers	Telephone and Online Customer Service Staff
Construction Site Managers	Survey Interviewers and Telephone Interviewers
Production Managers	Psychologists and Psychotherapists
Cooks	Construction Workers
Painters and Coating Specialists	Woodworking Workers and Joiners
Medical Doctors	Independent Accountants
Speech and Language Therapists and Audiologists	Welders
Warehouse Workers	Finance Specialists
Machinery and Equipment Mechanics and Fitters	Production Organisation Specialists
Building Services Installers	Public Relations, Advertising
Metal Structure Fitters	Marketing and Sales Specialists
Bricklayers and Plasterers	Human Resources and Recruitment Specialists
Practical Vocational Training Teachers	Electronics, Automation and Robotics Specialists
General Education Subject Teachers	Fitters
Vocational Subject Teachers	Upholsterers
Medical Equipment Operators	Construction Technicians
Earthmoving Equipment Operators and Mechanics	Mechanical Engineering Technicians
Textile Machinery Operators	Procurement and Delivery Staff

Source: M. Komasa, M. Rybak, *Barometr zawodów 2025. Edycja X. Raport podsumowujący badanie w województwie wielkopolskim* [Occupational Barometer 2025. 10th Edition. Report Summarising the Survey in the Wielkopolska Voivodeship], Kraków–Poznań 2024, https://barometrzwodow.pl/forecast-card-zip/2025/report_pl/raport_wojewodztwo_wielkopolskie_2025.pdf [access: 02.08.2026].

The findings of the *Occupational Barometer* should be regarded as an expert forecast of the relationship between the availability of workers and employers' needs. They indicate that some of the qualifications held by workers in the mining and energy sector and related industries

may correspond to the current needs of employers. This creates genuine opportunities for workers to transition into new employment, provided that appropriate training, certification, career guidance and access to information on job vacancies are available.

1.4. Number and Structure of Employed Persons in Eastern Wielkopolska

In 2024, there were 338 employed persons per 1,000 inhabitants in Eastern Wielkopolska, based on their actual place of work. The value of this indicator was markedly lower than the averages for the Wielkopolska Voivodeship and Poland. At the same time, between 2022 and 2024, the number of employed persons per 1,000 inhabitants decreased by 0.5% in the subregion, whereas it increased by 0.6% in the Wielkopolska Voivodeship and by 0.5% in Poland.

At county level, an increase in the indicator was recorded in Słupca County and Turek County. By contrast, a decline was recorded in Koło County, the City of Konin and Konin County.

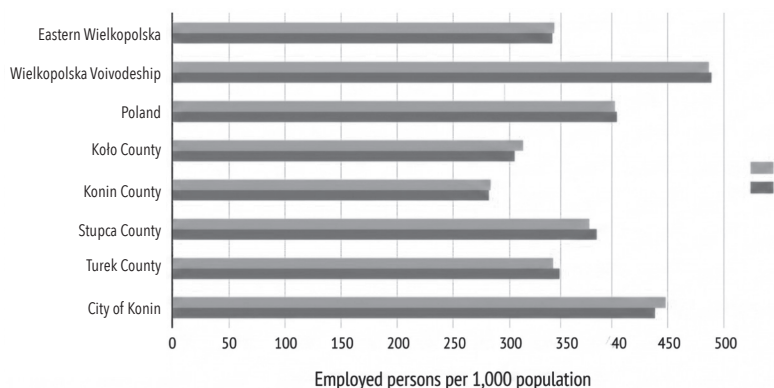


Figure 6. Employed Persons per 1,000 Inhabitants by Actual Place of Work in 2024

Source: *Wielkopolska Wschodnia w ujęciu statystycznym 2024* [Eastern Wielkopolska in Statistical Terms 2024], prepared under the supervision of A. Owczarkowski, Poznań-Konin: ARR S.A., 2026, https://arrtransformacja.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/Wielkopolska_wschodnia_2024-RGB-WWW-2.pdf [access: 02.08.2026].

In 2024, the number of employed residents of Eastern Wielkopolska stood at 159,986, accounting for 10.4% of all employed persons in the Wielkopolska Voivodeship. Industry and construction accounted for the largest share of employment in the subregion, at 32.7%. These were followed by other services (27.7%) and the group comprising trade, repair of motor vehicles, transportation and storage, accommodation and food service activities, as well as information and communication (23.8%). Agriculture, forestry, hunting and fishing accounted for 14.1% of employed persons, while financial and insurance activities and real estate activities accounted for 1.8%.

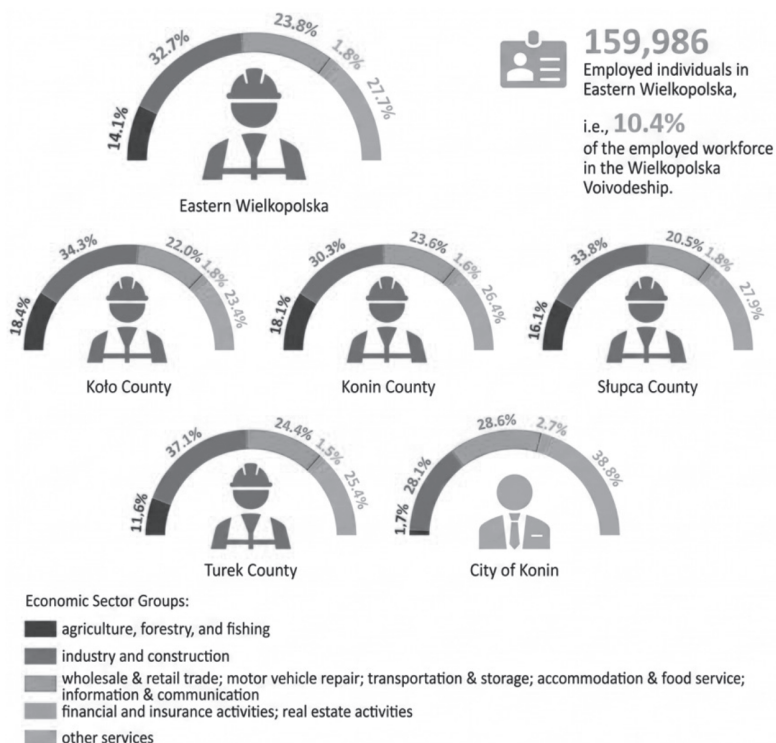


Figure 7. Structure of Employment by Groups of PKD Sections in 2024.

Source: *Wielkopolska Wschodnia w ujęciu statystycznym 2024* [Eastern Wielkopolska in Statistical Terms 2024].

The employment structure confirms the continuing importance of industrial and construction activities to the economy of Eastern Wielkopolska. The highest share of employment in this group of sections of the Polish Classification of Activities (hereinafter also: PKD) was recorded in

Turek County (37.1%), followed by Koło County (34.3%) and Słupca County (33.8%). Agriculture also played an important role in Konin County and Koło County, accounting for 18.1% and 18.4% of employed persons, respectively.

The City of Konin had a different employment structure. The share of employed persons working in agriculture was only 1.7%, while 38.8% were employed in other services and 28.6% in the broadly defined group comprising trade, transport and market services, confirming Konin's administrative and service functions.

The data presented indicate that Eastern Wielkopolska constitutes a diverse labour market. The non-city counties have an industrial and agricultural profile, while the City of Konin, as well as other county capitals, have a more service-oriented employment structure. The diversity of the employment structure indicates that the transition process should take into account the economic characteristics of individual Counties and even individual municipalities.

The scope of support should be tailored, on the one hand, to the needs and competences of those receiving assistance and, on the other, to the current and future demand of employers. Particular importance should therefore be attached to identifying qualifications that can be utilised in other industries and to determining potential skills gaps that may hinder the transition to new employment.

CHAPTER II

INSTRUMENTS SUPPORTING THE LABOUR MARKET TRANSITION

2.1. Project for the Labour Market Activation of People Affected by the Transformation of the Mining and Energy Sector

The project *“Upgrading and Changing Qualifications and Labour Market Activation of Employees of the Pątnów-Adamów-Konin Power Plant Group, Oriented towards Job Creation and Retention”* is being implemented under Measure 10.1, *“Labour Market, Education and an Active Society Supporting Economic Transition”*, of the *European Funds for Wielkopolska 2021–2027* programme. The initiative falls within the category of projects aimed at the labour market activation of people affected by the consequences of the transition.

The project is being implemented by the Voivodeship Labour Office in Poznań in partnership with ZE PAK S.A., DGA S.A., Jobs First Sp. z o.o., Stowarzyszenie na rzecz Spółdzielni Socjalnych [Association for Social Cooperatives], Wielkopolska Agencja Rozwoju Przedsiębiorczości Sp. z o.o. [Wielkopolska Agency for Enterprise Development], and the county labour offices (hereinafter also: PUP) in Konin, Koło, Słupca and Turek. It is the largest labour market activation initiative financed by the JTF in Eastern Wielkopolska. The total value of the project is PLN 257.1 million, of which PLN 180 million is provided by the JTF. The project is being implemented from 29 December 2023 to 30 June 2029.

Objective and Scope of the Project

One of the most important challenges facing the transition of Eastern Wielkopolska is the adaptation of the regional labour market to the new socio-economic conditions associated with the phasing out of mining activities and lignite-based power generation. For several decades, the mining and energy sector played an important role in the region, providing, among other things, stable employment for thousands of people.

From the very outset of planning the just transition, it was assumed that providing effective support to employees of the ZE PAK Group, people previously made redundant from companies belonging to the Group, employees of enterprises operating in related industries, and members of their families would be one of the key conditions for the success of the entire process.

The negative experiences of restructuring traditional industrial regions in Poland in the 1990s, including Wałbrzych and parts of Upper Silesia, demonstrate that job losses without sufficient support for workers, including appropriately planned protective measures, can lead to long-term social and economic problems. For this reason, measures in Eastern Wielkopolska were designed as a proactive intervention, providing workers with genuine opportunities for retraining, taking up new employment and gradually adapting to the changing labour market. A lack of adequate support for people losing their jobs could result in rising unemployment, declining household incomes and a weakening of the local economy.

An important feature of the project preparation process was its participatory nature. It was assumed that the involvement of trade unions, the employer, the Marshal's Office of the Wielkopolska Voivodeship, Agencja Rozwoju Regionalnego S.A. in Konin [Regional Development Agency S.A. in Konin], and non-governmental

organisations operating in the Konin subregion would enable solutions to be developed that respond to the actual needs of workers. The involvement of the employer and trade unions was intended to increase workers' confidence in the planned measures and to enable the scope of the intervention to be better aligned with the actual needs of people affected by the adverse consequences of the energy transition.

The main objective of the project is to mitigate the adverse social and economic consequences of the transition by supporting people at risk of losing their jobs or who are unemployed as a result of changes taking place in the regional economy, and by improving their prospects for sustainable participation in the labour market. Support is targeted not only at employees of the mining and energy sector, but also at people made redundant from the sector since 2017, employees of companies linked to the fuel and energy industry, and family members/persons sharing a household with members of the groups identified above.

Such a broad definition of the target group was related, among other factors, to the consequences of the closure of the Adamów Power Plant on 1 January 2018 and the phasing out of mining activities in the Turek area in 2020, as well as to the need to protect households and enterprises operating within the economic environment of the mining

and energy sector from the consequences of the loss of stable jobs.

All stakeholders involved in the just transition recognised that support for workers leaving the lignite mining and energy sector could determine the success of the entire process. The importance of measures targeted at employees of the ZE PAK Group is confirmed by the *Territorial Just Transition Plan for Eastern Wielkopolska*, which states:

“Taking measures to mitigate the effects of the transition is important from the perspective of the labour market, in which the ZE PAK Group plays a significant role. As a result of the Group’s restructuring, which has been under way since 2012, the number of employees has been steadily declining — by more than 50% since 2012. At the end of 2019, the Group employed more than 4,600 people (i.e. 4% of employed persons in Eastern Wielkopolska), of whom 9% were women. A total of 98% of its employees came from Eastern Wielkopolska, including 51% from Konin County, 28% from Konin and 16% from Turek County. More than 2% of employees lived in Słupca and Koło Counties, from which historically a larger number of people had been employed by ZE PAK. Approximately 31% of all ZE PAK Group employees will become eligible for retirement by 2025, while by 2030 a total of approximately 55% of employees will have acquired such eligibility. It is estimated that, within five years, approximately 2,200 Group employees

(also taking into account some employees of retirement age and those made redundant since 2017) will require support in changing jobs and upgrading or changing their qualifications. The final number of people losing their jobs will depend, among other factors, on the Group's business decisions, including the pace at which open-cast mines and coal-fired generating units are closed.”¹⁵.

On this basis, the project envisaged providing support to 2,200 people through comprehensive measures covering labour market activation, the upgrading and acquisition of new qualifications, and occupational mobility. This figure was established through discussions with the ZE PAK Group and was linked to the original plan for a gradual transition away from coal by 2030. The conditions under which the project is being implemented have, however, changed as a result of the accelerated phasing out of coal assets, including the planned closure of the last open-cast mine and coal-fired generating units by the end of 2026, as well as the inclusion of some employees within statutory social protection measures.

¹⁵ *Terytorialny Plan Sprawiedliwej Transformacji Wielkopolski Wschodniej. Aktualizacja*, Konin 2026, pp. 5–6, https://arrtransformacja.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/2026.03-TPSTWW-przegląd-srodkr_.pdf [access: 02.08.2026].

Organisational Structure of the Project and Partnership Model

The project has a unique organisational structure compared with the approaches previously applied in Poland. It is based on combining the capacity of public employment services with the experience of private entities and organisations specialising in labour market activation, outplacement, entrepreneurship and the social economy. The involvement of different types of entities was intended to enable participants to receive support addressing both the needs of those seeking a new employer and those planning to start a business or become economically active in the social economy sector.

It was also recognised that relying exclusively on public employment services could reduce the willingness of workers from the mining and energy sector to participate in the project, as contact with a labour office might be perceived by some of them as a sign of a loss of employment stability.

The project is coordinated and led by the Voivodeship Labour Office in Poznań.

ZE PAK, as the employer and a project partner with the most comprehensive knowledge of the circumstances of its employees, is responsible in particular for providing information about the project, carrying out promotional activities among employees of ZE PAK Group companies, preparing individual assessments of needs and support

pathways, and referring potential participants to appropriate forms of support. It also participates in the ongoing assessment of the quality of services provided by the other partners and provides the project leader with the contact details of project participants/employees currently employed by the ZE PAK Group.

Private employment agencies, namely DGA S.A., one of the largest companies supporting restructuring processes, and Jobs First, an agency specialising in supporting private entities in the field of outplacement, carry out tasks relating to labour market activation and participants' transition into new employment. These include, among other measures, the preparation of an Individual Action Plan, career guidance, the organisation of vocational training, subsidised employment, the provision or upgrading of workplace equipment, reintegration support, and cooperation with employers in the open labour market. They are responsible for supporting participants in securing new employment and ensuring the sustainability of their employment in the new workplace.

Wielkopolska Agencja Rozwoju Przedsiębiorczości Sp. z o.o. [Wielkopolska Agency for Enterprise Development] supports people interested in starting a business.

Stowarzyszenie na rzecz Spółdzielni Socjalnych [Association for Social Cooperatives], in turn, implements comprehensive measures relating to business start-up,

social entrepreneurship and the social economy. Support includes the preparation of an Individual Action Plan and the incubation of new ventures, particularly social cooperatives and social enterprises, as well as assistance to participants in taking up employment in existing social economy entities. Participants may benefit, among other forms of support, from non-repayable funding for starting a business or creating jobs, financial bridging support, subsidised employment, and funding for the provision or upgrading of workplace equipment.

The Association's tasks also include the provision of specialist advisory services, including legal, accounting and marketing assistance, as well as mentoring, psychological support, career guidance and reintegration measures. An important element of this pathway is engagement within local communities and the creation of conditions conducive to the long-term sustainability of the initiatives established. To this end, the Association cooperates with local government units, entrepreneurs, non-governmental organisations and support institutions. Assistance does not end once an entity or a job has been created, but also includes measures aimed at sustaining the activity and ensuring the continued employment of participants.

The project also involves the county labour offices in Konin, Koło, Słupca and Turek, thereby enabling the use

of local institutional capacity and knowledge of conditions in the individual labour markets.

Due to the partnership model adopted for the implementation of the initiative, its preparation proceeded in two stages. In the first stage, the Voivodeship Labour Office in Poznań conducted a selection procedure for partners from outside the public finance sector. The purpose of the procedure was to select entities with the experience and capacity required to implement the individual areas of support, particularly labour market activation and outplacement, entrepreneurship development and the social economy. The selection procedure determined the final composition of the partnership and the allocation of tasks among its participants. Only after this stage had been completed was it possible for the Voivodeship Labour Office in Poznań and the selected partners to jointly prepare the application for funding and subsequently submit it under a non-competitive call for proposals.

The non-competitive call for proposals for the project was launched on 12 May 2023, with applications for funding accepted until 30 September 2023. The call was specifically designated for the Voivodeship Labour Office in Poznań together with the selected partners, namely ZE PAK S.A. in Konin, DGA S.A., Stowarzyszenie na rzecz Spółdzielni Socjalnych [Association for Social Cooperatives] (hereinafter also: SNRSS), Wielkopolska Agencja Rozwoju

Przedsiębiorczości Sp. z o.o. [Wielkopolska Agency for Enterprise Development] (hereinafter also: WARP), Konin County/County Labour Office in Konin, Turek County/County Labour Office in Turek, Koło County/County Labour Office in Koło, Słupca County/County Labour Office in Słupca, and Jobs First Sp. z o.o.

The total value of the project therefore amounted to approximately PLN 257.1 million, of which PLN 180 million, representing 70% of the project value, was provided by the JTF. The remaining 30% was financed through a contribution from the state budget, thereby covering 100% of the eligible expenditure incurred under the project.

Scope of Support

The project provides for measures aimed at reducing social exclusion and supporting the socio-occupational activation of people affected by the transition towards climate neutrality. The project envisages supporting 2,200 participants from Eastern Wielkopolska between 29 December 2023 and 30 June 2029, with the aim of increasing their opportunities to take up or continue employment through an individualised support pathway and instruments tailored to their chosen direction of development:

- **Development Pathway No. 1**, implemented by private employment agencies – a comprehensive service supporting an employee's transition to a new place of employment: career guidance, job placement, incentives for new employers and participants (vocational training, subsidised employment, the provision or upgrading of workplace equipment, co-financing of commuting costs, and reintegration support);
- **Development Pathway No. 2**, implemented by entities with experience in social entrepreneurship – comprehensive incubation for people interested in starting a business, including comprehensive support from an employment adviser and development support, a non-repayable grant for establishing a business/cooperative, subsidised employment, the provision or upgrading of workplace equipment, financial bridging support, and support services for the entity and participating employees (legal, marketing and accounting advice, mentoring, reintegration training and reintegration services).

The selection of a pathway is preceded by the preparation of an Individual Action Plan for each participant. This document is used to assess the participant's employment situation, identify their aptitudes and needs, and enable the selection of an individualised support pathway.

The conditions under which the project is being implemented were affected by the entry into force of the *Ustawa z dnia 17 sierpnia 2023 r. o osłonach socjalnych dla pracowników sektora elektroenergetycznego i branży górnictwa węgla brunatnego* [Act of 17 August 2023 on Social Protection Measures for Employees of the Power Sector and the Lignite Mining Industry]¹⁶. As a result of the efforts of ZE PAK trade unions, provisions were introduced enabling employees working under specific conditions to take mining leave. Where an employee at risk of redundancy has no more than four years remaining until reaching retirement age, they may take such leave and receive a benefit amounting to 80% of their most recent remuneration until they reach retirement age. The availability of these instruments reduced the interest of some employees in participating in the labour market activation project.

In response to recruitment difficulties, in 2026 the range of potential participants was extended to include jobseekers who work, study or live in Eastern Wielkopolska, excluding self-employed persons. This change was introduced by Resolution No. 138/2026 of the Monitoring Committee for the *European Funds for Wielkopolska 2021–2027 Programme* of 23 June 2026, amending Resolution No. 14/2023 of the

¹⁶ Ustawa z dnia 17 sierpnia 2023 r. o osłonach socjalnych dla pracowników sektora elektroenergetycznego i branży górnictwa węgla brunatnego [Act of 17 August 2023 on Social Protection Measures for Employees of the Power Sector and the Lignite Mining Industry], Dz.U. 2023, item 1737.

Table 4. Number of Participants by Project Partner and Assigned Participant Group

Data as at	Partner	Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D	Group E	Participants Transferring Between Partners	Total
17 July 2026	DGA S.A.:	84	57	1	159	0	10	301
including:	* YES Completed successfully	0	0	0	0			0
	* NOT Completed successfully	0	0	0	0			0
17 July 2026	SNRSS:	165	65	3	220	4	5	457
including:	* YES Completed successfully	0	0	0	0			0
	* NOT Completed successfully	0	2	0	2			4
17 July 2026	WARP:	20	35	0	127	0	6	182
including:	* YES Completed successfully	0	0	0	2			2
	* NOT Completed successfully	2	10	0	15			27
17 July 2026	Jobs First:	105	116	5	203	29	9	458
including:	* YES Completed successfully	0	3	0	1			4
	* NOT Completed successfully	0	0	0	0			0
17 July 2026	County Labour Office in Konin:	9	24	0	57	0	0	90

Data as at	Partner	Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D	Group E	Participants Transferring Between Partners	Total
including:	* YES Completed successfully	0	0	0	0	0		0
	* NOT Completed successfully	0	4	0	16			20
17 July 2026	County Labour Office in Turek:	3	37	0	62	0	1	102
including:	* YES Completed successfully	0	5	0	5			10
	* NOT Completed successfully	1	7	0	10		1	18
17 July 2026	County Labour Office in Kolo:	1	9	0	11	0	0	21
including:	* YES Completed successfully	0	0	0	3			3
	* NOT Completed successfully	0	0	0	1			1
17 July 2026	County Labour Office in Stupca:	2	5	0	11	0	0	18
including:	* NOT Completed successfully	0	0	0	1			1
		0	0	0	2			2
Total		389	348	9	850	33	31	1629

Group A – ZE PAK Group employees at risk of losing their jobs;
Group B – former ZE PAK Group employees who have lost their jobs;
Group C – employees in industries related to the mining and energy sector;
Group D – family members or persons sharing a household with individuals from Groups A, B and C;
Group E – jobseekers who work, study or reside in Eastern Wielkopolska.

Source: Materials provided by the Voivodeship Labour Office in Poznań.

Monitoring Committee for the *European Funds for Wielkopolska 2021–2027* Programme of 28 March 2023 on the adoption of the project concept concerning the Employee Programme for the ZE PAK Group for 2021–2027 – “*Path to Employment after Coal*” – under the *European Funds for Wielkopolska 2021–2027* Programme within the scope of the Just Transition Fund¹⁷. The amendment was intended to increase the number of potential participants and enable fuller utilisation of the available funding allocated to mitigating the adverse consequences of the transition.

Output and Result Indicators

The project envisages providing support to **2,200 people**. The same target value was adopted for the indicator measuring the number of people receiving outplacement support.

The target values for the result indicators are:

- **1,100** – the number of people who, as a result of receiving outplacement support/measures to improve the working environment, entered employment or continued in employment;

¹⁷ Uchwała Nr 138/2026 Komitetu Monitorującego Program Fundusze Europejskie dla Wielkopolski 2021–2027 z dnia 23 czerwca 2026 roku [...] [Resolution No. 138/2026 of the Monitoring Committee for the European Funds for Wielkopolska 2021–2027 Programme of 23 June 2026 [...]], <https://funduszeue.wielkopolskie.pl/institucje-w-programie/uchwaly-komitetu-monitorujacego> [access: 09.08.2026].

- **1,166** – the number of people who obtained qualifications after leaving the programme.

Assessment of the extent to which the result indicators have been achieved requires consideration of the point at which they are measured. They are reported after a participant has completed their participation in the project; consequently, during the initial and intermediate stages of implementation, their values may remain substantially lower than those of the output indicators.

According to data compiled by the Voivodeship Labour Office in Poznań as at 17 July 2026, 1,629 participants had received support, corresponding to approximately 74.0% of the target value of the output indicator. In addition, the table records 31 cases in which participants transferred between project partners. These cases were not included again in the total number of participants in order to avoid double-counting the same individuals.

Project Implementation Status

As at 30 June 2026, eligible expenditure amounting to PLN 34.62 million had been accounted for, of which PLN 24.24 million was financed by the Just Transition Fund. The amount of expenditure accounted for represented approximately 13.5% of the total project value.

According to data compiled by the Voivodeship Labour Office in Poznań as at 17 July 2026, 1,629 participants had received support, corresponding to approximately 74.0% of the target value of the output indicator. In addition, the table records 31 cases of participants transferring between project partners. These cases were not included again in the total number of participants in order to avoid double-counting the same individuals.

A considerably lower level of achievement was recorded for the result indicators, which should be considered in the context of the current stage of project implementation. These indicators relate to outcomes achieved after participants have completed their participation in the project; consequently, they are measured progressively as successive participants leave the project.

As at 30 June 2026, the indicator “Number of people who, as a result of receiving outplacement support, entered employment or continued in employment” stood at 23 people, while 20 participants had obtained qualifications after leaving the programme. Relative to the target values, this represents an achievement rate of approximately 2% for both indicators. These figures should be interpreted with caution, given that a substantial proportion of participants are still participating in the project and that results are measured only after the completion of support.

Key Challenges in Project Implementation

The implementation of the project to date has revealed a number of challenges affecting the pace of its delivery.

The most significant challenge has been recruiting participants from the originally defined target group. Interest in participating in the project was lower than anticipated at the project preparation stage. This was influenced, among other factors, by changes to the timetable for the sector's transition, the availability of statutory social protection measures, and individual decisions by employees concerning their future participation in the labour market. This became one of the main reasons for broadening the range of potential participants in 2026.

The implementation of support measures has also revealed the limited availability of some participants and insufficient engagement in the activities planned under the project. Cases have been observed in which participants withdraw from training, experience difficulties in maintaining continuity of participation, or display attitudes that hinder the efficient delivery of support. These factors affect both the pace at which individual instruments are implemented and the settlement of the related expenditure.

Difficulties in sustaining employment have also arisen in connection with subsidised employment measures. Some participants leave the jobs they have taken up or

do not remain in employment for the required period, which may affect the achievement of the target result indicators. In response, the project partners provide additional advisory and motivational support to assist participants in adapting to their new workplaces and remaining economically active.

Limited interest has also been observed in instruments related to workplace equipment and business start-ups. One of the reasons identified is the restrictions governing the use of these instruments, including applicable limits on financing the purchase of machinery and equipment powered by fossil fuels, which in some industries reduce the attractiveness of the support offered.

Assessment of Implementation to Date

The progress of the project to date presents a mixed picture. On the one hand, by 17 July 2026, approximately 74% of the planned number of participants had received support, indicating substantial progress towards achieving the output indicator. On the other hand, as at 30 June 2026, expenditure accounted for represented approximately 13.5% of the total project value, while the result indicators remained at a low level. This discrepancy is attributable in particular to the multi-stage nature of the support and

the timing of result measurement, and therefore requires continued monitoring.

The measures taken to adapt the project to changing circumstances, particularly the broadening of the target group, should be viewed positively. This change increases access to support and creates greater scope for fuller utilisation of the available funding allocation. At the same time, the scale of the adjustments confirms that the original assumptions concerning the composition of the target group and the level of interest among individual groups of participants required revision.

At the current stage, there are no indications that the timely completion of the project is at risk. However, its further implementation will require systematic monitoring, particularly with regard to the effectiveness of participant recruitment, the pace of expenditure settlement and the achievement of result indicators. The project is ongoing and is scheduled for completion on 30 June 2029. In the coming periods, a marked increase in financial implementation and employment outcomes will be essential, as these will be key to assessing the effectiveness of the intervention and its contribution to mitigating the social consequences of the transition in Eastern Wielkopolska.

From the perspective of the just transition, particular importance will attach not only to the number of participants receiving support, but also to the quality and

sustainability of the outcomes achieved. The project's ultimate value as a labour market policy instrument will be determined by its ability to enable participants to secure stable employment, obtain qualifications that correspond to the needs of the regional economy, and create sustainable jobs outside the lignite-based sector.

2.2. Investment Support for Enterprises as an Instrument of Economic Diversification and Job Creation

An important element of the just transition in Eastern Wielkopolska, complementary to instruments targeted directly at workers, is support for enterprise development. In Eastern Wielkopolska, these two areas were designed to operate in conjunction with one another. Protective and activation measures in the labour market are intended to prevent well-qualified workers from involuntarily dropping out of the labour market and to reduce the risk of their impoverishment. Support for enterprises, in turn, is intended to stimulate their development, with particular emphasis on the creation of new jobs. For this reason, interventions targeted at workers and enterprises have been implemented in parallel since 2023.

The concept underlying these measures is based on the interrelationship between labour supply and labour

demand. If the contraction of the mining and energy sector results in highly qualified and experienced workers becoming available on the regional labour market, their skills and experience should be utilised by other businesses. Supporting people who lose their jobs through training, reskilling or career guidance alone may prove insufficient if enterprises capable of offering them new and attractive employment opportunities do not develop in the region at the same time. From this perspective, financial support for business investment is intended not only to increase the competitiveness of enterprises but also to create conditions for the employment of new workers, including those leaving the mining and energy sector. This approach makes it possible to regard enterprise support policy and labour market policy as two complementary components of the just transition process.

The importance of support for enterprises stems from the specific economic structure of Eastern Wielkopolska, which for decades was shaped by the dominant role of the mining and energy sector. Mines and power plants were among the largest and most attractive employers, offering stable employment and relatively high wages. At the same time, they carried out many services and processes in-house, which limited the scope for the development of the micro, small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) sector and made it more difficult for smaller businesses

to compete for skilled workers. During the expansion of the coal sector, this model provided the region with well-paid jobs and substantial revenues for local government budgets. However, its weaknesses have become apparent as mining and energy activities have been scaled down. An insufficiently diversified economy is unable, without adjustment, to provide an adequate number of alternative jobs, increasing the risk of an outflow of workers and limiting employment prospects for the younger generation. The energy transition therefore requires not only the reskilling of workers but also the strengthening of the SME sector and the creation of a more diversified economic structure capable of generating new jobs across a range of industries.

During the programming of the just transition, support for entrepreneurship was identified as one of the conditions for the successful transition of Eastern Wielkopolska. The Just Transition Fund plays a particularly important role in this respect. In the 2021–2027 financial perspective, repayable financial instruments for enterprises, such as loans, gained considerably greater prominence, while the JTF made it possible to retain the option of providing non-repayable investment support.

Under the *European Funds for Wielkopolska 2021–2027* programme, JTF support for enterprises was provided for under Priority 10, Measure 10.2, “*Support for Investment in SMEs and Large Enterprises*”, with an allocation of EUR

66 million. Enterprises could obtain investment support under two principal models: *de minimis*¹⁸ aid and regional investment aid (RIA). An important element of this support was its employment effect: job creation in the enterprises receiving support was one of the criteria awarded additional points during project appraisal.

The first support model, based on *de minimis* aid, provided for aid of up to EUR 300,000, with a maximum co-financing rate of 70% of eligible expenditure. Construction investment could not be financed under this model. The second model, based on regional investment aid, allowed investments to receive a maximum grant of PLN 8 million, with a maximum aid intensity of 45% of eligible expenditure. Unlike *de minimis* aid, this model also allowed the financing of construction works and the purchase of construction materials.

The first calls for proposals under Measure 10.2 were launched in parallel with the support targeted at workers, with the aim of maintaining synergy between the two interventions. Support was available for SME investment projects involving:

¹⁸ *De minimis* aid is a specific form of State aid granted to undertakings that is not subject to notification to the European Commission. It may be provided in various forms, including support for training and investment, tax exemptions or cancellation of interest on social security contributions. Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (PARP), *De minimis aid*, PARP, <https://www.parp.gov.pl/pomoc-de-minimis> [access: 09.08.2026].

- productive investment by SMEs in fixed assets or intangible assets for the production of goods and services, thereby contributing to gross capital formation and employment, including, among other things, through the implementation of new or improved product, process, organisational or marketing solutions; investment necessary to change the profile of business activity, including the introduction of new climate-friendly products, services and processes;
- the implementation of modern digital solutions in enterprises' business processes;
- the development of sustainable tourism infrastructure that harnesses the endogenous potential of a given area for economic development, contributes to job creation, and supports the transition towards a climate-neutral circular economy (hereinafter also: CE);
- international promotion (as a component of a project in the case of productive investment aimed at the internationalisation of an enterprise's activities).

Two calls for proposals were conducted under the *de minimis* aid scheme for investment support to SMEs aimed at adapting to changing market and technological conditions and creating new jobs, as well as supporting digitalisation and internationalisation. The first call attracted considerable interest from enterprises: 140 applications were submitted and 55 projects were selected for funding.

Their total value amounted to PLN 30.8 million, while the funding awarded amounted to PLN 21.6 million.

An even larger number of applications — 156 — was submitted under the second call. Ultimately, 94 funding agreements were signed. The total value of the projects covered by these agreements amounted to PLN 93.8 million, with PLN 54.4 million awarded in funding. Overall, the two calls under the *de minimis* aid scheme therefore provided support to 149 projects.

The projects selected for funding are primarily aimed at increasing the competitiveness and resilience of SMEs in response to changing market and technological conditions. They include the purchase of modern machinery, equipment and specialised tools, the introduction of new or improved products and services, the digitalisation of business processes, including the purchase and implementation of software, and investment in renewable energy sources. Some projects also involve the development of sustainable tourism infrastructure, the expansion of enterprises' product and service offerings, and the creation of new jobs. The support is therefore intended not only to strengthen the capacity of individual enterprises but also to contribute to the broader economic and environmental transition of the region.

The second support model comprises investments implemented under the regional investment aid scheme.

Table 5. Planned Number of Jobs to Be Created under Funding Agreements for Measure 10.2 of the European Funds for Wielkopolska 2021-2027 Programme

Call Number	Type of Call	Identifier	Indicator Name	Unit of Measurement	Value Based on Funding Agreements	Value Achieved
FEWP.10.02-IZ.00-001/23	<i>de minimis</i>	WLWK-RCR001	Jobs Created in Supported Entities	FTEs	65	47,9
FEWP.10.02-IZ.00-001/25	<i>de minimis</i>	WLWK-RCR001	Jobs Created in Supported Entities	FTEs	112	-
FEWP.10.02-IZ.00-002/23	RIA	WLWK-RCR001	Jobs Created in Supported Entities	FTEs	88	14
FEWP.10.02-IZ.00-002/25	RIA	WLWK-RCR001	Jobs Created in Supported Entities	FTEs	18	-
Total Jobs Created					283	61,9

Source: Materials provided by the Marshal's Office of the Wielkopolska Voivodeship in Poznań.

The range of eligible projects is similar to that available under *de minimis* aid, while an important extension of the catalogue of eligible costs is the possibility of financing construction works and construction materials, enabling enterprises to undertake more comprehensive development projects. Two calls for proposals were also conducted under this scheme.

Under the first call for regional investment aid, 57 applications were submitted and ultimately 29 funding agreements were signed. The total value of the projects amounted to PLN 190.4 million, with PLN 62.7 million awarded in funding. Under the second call, 39 applications were submitted and 22 funding agreements were signed, covering projects with a total value of PLN 231.8 million and funding amounting to PLN 74.9 million.

Projects implemented under this scheme comprise development investments in the SME sector, including the acquisition of fixed assets and intangible assets, as well as construction works necessary for business development. The projects also provide for the creation of new jobs, the development of employees' competences and the internationalisation of business activities, thereby contributing to increased enterprise competitiveness and to the economic and environmental transition of the region.

From the perspective of the just transition, the creation of new jobs is a particularly important outcome of support

for enterprises. Based on the funding agreements concluded under the four calls analysed, a total of 283 jobs are expected to be created, expressed in full-time equivalents (FTEs). According to the data available at the current stage, a total of 61.9 FTEs have been achieved. It should be noted, however, that a substantial proportion of the projects are still under implementation.

The total amount of funding from the Just Transition Fund under the calls analysed amounts to PLN 213.5 million, while the total value of the projects, including enterprises' own contributions, reaches PLN 546.7 million. In relation to the 283 jobs declared in the funding agreements, the amount of funding per job to be created is approximately PLN 754,600. This indicator should, however, be interpreted in a broader context: the funding finances investments that increase the productive, technological and development capacity of enterprises and is not allocated exclusively to job creation.

At the current stage, it is not yet possible to make a final assessment of the employment effects of the intervention, as most of the projects are still under implementation. An additional mechanism intended to ensure the sustainability of the results achieved is the requirement to maintain the relevant indicators after project completion. Failure to comply with these obligations may result in financial consequences for the beneficiary.

It should also be emphasised that achieving the declared number of new jobs is only one element of stimulating the labour market. The development of enterprises and the expansion of their economic capacity may lead to an increase in company value, greater market share, the development of new products and services and, in the longer term, the creation of further jobs.

2.3. Development Services Database as an Instrument for Changing Competences and Qualifications in the Just Transition Process

The just transition of mining regions requires not only the creation of new jobs but also ensuring that residents and workers have opportunities to adapt their existing competences to the changing economy and labour market needs. This applies both to individuals who, on their own initiative, wish to upgrade their qualifications or competences and to employees referred by their employers to training that responds to enterprise development needs. For this reason, instruments enabling the financing of development services, the development of human capital and the adaptation of enterprises to changing economic conditions constitute an important component of support for the transition.

One of the most important instruments of this kind is the Development Services Database (Baza Usług Rozwojowych – BUR), operated by the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development. It includes a broad range of training programmes, courses, postgraduate programmes and advisory services that may be financed from European funds. Every service provider wishing to make its courses, training programmes or postgraduate programmes eligible for financing from European funds must undergo a certification process. Only after obtaining the required accreditation may the provider list its services in the BUR. This helps to ensure the transparency and quality of the services provided.

Support provided through the BUR is based on two principal pathways for financing development services.

Under the first pathway, support is provided directly to a resident of Eastern Wielkopolska who, on their own initiative, intends to upgrade or change their qualifications or acquire new competences. Participants independently decide on the direction of their professional development and select a service from the BUR. This may be linked to seeking new employment with another employer or to upgrading qualifications and competences in order to obtain a promotion or move to a different position with their current employer.

Under this model, the participant selects a specific training programme, course or postgraduate programme from the Development Services Database and then submits an application to Agencja Rozwoju Regionalnego S.A. in Konin [Regional Development Agency S.A. in Konin] for funding. Once Agency staff have verified that the application has been correctly completed, funding is awarded. The participant pays for the service and takes part in it within the period specified in the funding agreement. After completing the service, the participant receives reimbursement of the costs at the rate specified in the funding agreement.

The second support model is targeted at employers who identify a need to develop the qualifications or competences of their employees and refer them to appropriate courses or training programmes. This model makes it possible to align employees' qualifications with the development priorities of the enterprise, the implementation of new technologies or organisational changes resulting from the transition. The application procedure is similar to that applicable to individual participants, with the difference that employers must meet additional conditions if they wish to refer one or more employees for training. The employer must have its registered office or conduct business activities (through a branch or permanent additional place of business) within the area covered by the project for at least

three months prior to submitting the documents required to obtain funding for a service from the BUR. In addition, employees must have a documented employment history of at least three months with the employer and work at least half-time. Employees engaged under a contract of mandate may also be referred for support.

The two support models implemented by the Agency are complementary. The individual model supports the development of residents and enables them to plan their own professional development pathways, while the model for enterprises assists employers in aligning their employees' qualifications with the development needs of their organisation. As a result, the BUR serves as an instrument supporting the adaptation of the labour market to the challenges arising from the just transition, digitalisation and the low- and zero-carbon economy.

Development services using the BUR in Eastern Wielkopolska are delivered through four projects implemented by Agencja Rozwoju Regionalnego S.A. in Konin [Regional Development Agency S.A. in Konin]. Two of these projects are financed by the European Social Fund Plus, while the other two are financed by the Just Transition Fund.

Project "Development Services – Investment in Human Capital in the Konin Subregion"¹⁹

The project, financed by the European Social Fund Plus, focuses on supporting the development of competences among employees and employers in the Konin subregion, comprising the Counties of Słupca, Koło, Turek, Gniezno, Września and Konin, as well as the City of Konin. The instrument is targeted at micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, large enterprises, local government units and non-governmental organisations.

Support is provided through the Development Services Database (BUR) and covers the financing of:

- development services relating, among other things, to business operations, improvements in management quality, the use of new technologies, including those related to low- and zero-emission activities or the circular economy (CE), diversity and age management, as well as enterprise development in areas corresponding to regional smart specialisations;
- the development of the skills, competences and qualifications of people employed by enterprises and other employers, including opportunities for reskilling

¹⁹ Agencja Rozwoju Regionalnego S.A. w Koninie, *Usługi rozwojowe – inwestycja w kapitał ludzki w podregionie konińskim*, ARR S.A. in Konin – project website [access: 02.08.2026].

through training services tailored to employers' needs, as well as opportunities to obtain market qualifications within the Integrated Qualifications System and to have learning outcomes formally recognised through validation.

The project aims to provide support to:

- 2,446 employees from 815 SMEs (including cooperatives and social enterprises);
- 90 employees from five large enterprises;
- 110 employees working for 11 other employers (local government units or non-governmental organisations);

as well as to enable 2,201 employees to obtain qualifications and a further 219 participants to acquire green qualifications.

The total value of the project is PLN 17.8 million, of which PLN 12.5 million is provided through EU funding.

Project "Human Capital Transformation in Eastern Wielkopolska"²⁰

The project, co-financed by the Just Transition Fund, is one of the principal instruments supporting enterprises

²⁰ Agencja Rozwoju Regionalnego S.A. w Koninie, *Transformacja kapitału ludzkiego w Wielkopolsce Wschodniej*, ARR S.A. in Konin – project website [access: 02.08.2026].

operating in Eastern Wielkopolska, the area covered by the Territorial Just Transition Plan. It is targeted at enterprises and their employees in the five Counties of Eastern Wielkopolska undergoing processes of modernisation, restructuring and adaptation to new economic conditions.

The project aims to upgrade and develop competences and skills and to adapt qualifications, particularly in areas aligned with smart specialisations and the needs of a zero-emission, resource-efficient and digital economy. In contrast to the corresponding project financed by the European Social Fund Plus, particular emphasis is placed on developing qualifications that support the region's energy transition.

As in the project “Development Services – Investment in Human Capital in the Konin Subregion”, support is provided through the Development Services Database (BUR) and includes services aimed at developing employees' competences and qualifications and enhancing enterprises' capacity to adapt. These include, among other things, training, advisory services, opportunities for employee reskilling, and the acquisition and validation of qualifications.

The project aims to improve the competences and qualifications of:

- 1,376 employees from 830 SMEs (including self-employed persons);
- 132 employees from 22 large enterprises;

and to enable 1,856 employees to obtain qualifications, including green qualifications.

The total value of the project is PLN 32.1 million, of which PLN 22.5 million is provided through EU funding.

Project "Transformation in Adult Education in Eastern Wielkopolska"²¹

The second project financed by the Just Transition Fund is targeted directly at residents of Eastern Wielkopolska who, on their own initiative, wish to acquire skills, competences or qualifications, or to reskill in areas aligned with smart specialisations or the needs of a zero-emission, resource-efficient and digital economy. An important component of the project is support for the development of green and digital qualifications, which enhance participants' employment prospects in a changing labour market. The project is intended to enable participants to plan their own professional development by providing funding for services selected individually from the Development Services Database (BUR).

²¹ Agencja Rozwoju Regionalnego S.A. w Koninie, *Transformacja w kształceniu osób dorosłych z Wielkopolski Wschodniej*, ARR S.A. in Konin – project website [access: 02.08.2026].

The project is targeted at adults who do not operate a business and who study, work/have worked or reside in Eastern Wielkopolska, as well as homeless people staying in the area who, on their own initiative, wish to obtain qualifications. The project aims to upgrade or change competences and develop the skills and qualifications of:

- 2,508 adults, including 104 unemployed persons, 176 economically inactive persons and 2,228 employed persons;
- and to enable 2,257 adults to obtain qualifications, including 677 people obtaining green qualifications and 226 adults obtaining digital qualifications.

The total value of the project is PLN 32.1 million, of which PLN 22.5 million is provided through EU funding.

Project "Support for Adult Education in the Konin Subregion"²²

The project, financed by the European Social Fund Plus, complements the support system for adults who do not operate a business by extending it to residents of the entire Konin subregion, including the Counties of Gniezno and Września. Its main objective is to increase

²² Agencja Rozwoju Regionalnego S.A. w Koninie, *Wsparcie w kształceniu osób dorosłych z podregionu konińskiego*, ARR S.A. in Konin – project website [access: 02.08.2026].

access to development services for individuals who, on their own initiative, wish to upgrade their professional qualifications or acquire new competences that correspond to the needs of the contemporary labour market.

The project aims to upgrade and change competences and to develop the skills or qualifications of 3,336 adults, including 254 unemployed persons, 413 economically inactive persons and 2,669 employed persons, as well as to enable 2,335 participants to obtain qualifications.

The total value of the project is PLN 20.8 million, of which PLN 14.6 million is provided through EU funding.

The projects described above form a complementary system of support for human capital development in Eastern Wielkopolska. Two are targeted at enterprises investing in the development of their employees' skills, while the other two support adults pursuing professional development on their own initiative. Projects financed by the Just Transition Fund play a particularly important role in the transition process. They are directly linked to the region's transition and prioritise the development of qualifications that correspond to the needs of the green and digital economy. As a result, the system of development services constitutes one of the key instruments supporting the adaptation of the labour market to contemporary challenges, including the implementation of new business models by enterprises.

Particular attention should also be paid to the possibility of extending Just Transition Fund support to a broader group of large enterprises. Under conventional cohesion policy instruments, support for development services is primarily targeted at the SME sector. In the case of the Just Transition Fund, however, the European Commission has permitted development services to be financed to a significantly greater extent for large enterprises as well. This is intended to enable enterprises to align their employees' competences with new directions of development and to mitigate the adverse effects of restructuring and organisational change.

The results achieved to date under the projects described above indicate a very high level of interest among residents and employers in development services financed through the Development Services Database (BUR). By 20 June 2026, a total of 37 calls for applications had been conducted across the four projects, resulting in 8,998 applications, of which 6,898 were positively assessed. The main reason for rejecting the remaining applications was failure to meet the formal requirements set out in the project regulations.

An important outcome of the measures implemented is the number of participants who have acquired new qualifications or competences. By June 2026, 2,561 participants had obtained qualifications, while 2,695 had acquired new competences. From the perspective of the just transition,

the results of projects financed by the Just Transition Fund are particularly significant. Under these projects, 500 participants obtained green qualifications or competences, while 121 acquired digital qualifications or competences. These figures confirm that the intervention is not limited solely to upgrading general professional qualifications but also supports the development of competences corresponding to the needs of the low- and zero-carbon, digital and circular economy.

Table 6. Progress in Project Implementation as at 20 June 2026

	“Support for Adult Education in the Konin Subregion”	“Transformation in Adult Education in Eastern Wielkopolska”	“Development Services - Investment in Human Capital in the Konin Subregion”	“Human Capital Transformation in Eastern Wielkopolska”
Number of Calls for Applications Since the Start of Project Implementation	4	10	10	13
Number of Calls for Applications Since the Start of Project Implementation	3 213	3 737	1052	996
Number of Application Forms Positively Assessed	2 467	2 676	829	926
Main Reasons for Rejection of Application Forms	* failure to meet formal requirements	* failure to meet formal requirements	* failure to meet formal requirements	* failure to meet formal requirements

	“Support for Adult Education in the Konin Subregion”	“Transformation in Adult Education in Eastern Wielkopolska”	“Development Services - Investment in Human Capital in the Konin Subregion”	“Human Capital Transformation in Eastern Wielkopolska”
Number of Participants Who Obtained Qualifications after Leaving the Programme	812	1 012	256	481
Number of Participants Who Acquired Competences after Leaving the Programme	634	259	956	846
Including the Number of Participants Who Obtained Green Qualifications/ Competences after Leaving the Programme	n/d	396	137	104
Including the Number of Participants Who Obtained Digital Qualifications/ Competences after Leaving the Programme	n/d	121	n/d	n/d
Maximum Reimbursement Rate	90%	88%	73	85%
Maximum Amount of Funding	5 000 zł	10 000 zł	PLN 6,000 per Participant / PLN 48,000 per Applicant (Enterprise)	PLN 9,500 per Participant / PLN 76,000 per Applicant (Enterprise)

Source: Agencja Rozwoju Regionalnego S.A. in Konin (Regional Development Agency in Konin).

The results presented indicate that projects involving the Development Services Database (BUR) have become an important instrument for supporting human capital development in Eastern Wielkopolska. The models for financing development services enable a rapid response to changing labour market needs, supporting both the individual development needs of residents and the modernisation of enterprises. In the context of the transition and growing demand for green and digital competences, this instrument plays an important role in strengthening the adaptability of both workers and enterprises in the regional labour market.

2.4. Development of Higher Education

An important factor for the future of workers in regions undergoing transition is the development of new competences that respond to the changing needs of the labour market. The previous section presented support for adults and employers in acquiring new qualifications and competences through short-term training programmes, courses and postgraduate programmes. This section presents measures also targeted at young people entering the labour market.

In addition to labour market support, one of the priorities of Measure 10.1 was support for vocational education, which, after years of declining prominence, is once again gaining importance and attracting increasing interest among young people. Vocational education equips young people with knowledge and skills that can be applied directly in the labour market. At the same time, alongside vocational education provided by vocational schools and technical secondary schools, those responsible for preparing the Territorial Just Transition Plan for Eastern Wielkopolska recognised that higher education was also essential to provide the region's changing economy with appropriately qualified personnel. Already at the programming stage, it was decided that support for the development of higher education would be provided through a non-competitive call for proposals dedicated to the University of Applied Sciences in Konin, as the only public higher education institution with a technical profile in the region. The call for proposals for this institution was launched on 24 November 2023.

The purpose of the call was to select a project supporting the development of higher education tailored to the needs of Eastern Wielkopolska's areas of specialisation. Funding was available for the creation of new practically oriented study programmes or the adaptation of existing ones, based on analyses and forecasts concerning the needs of Eastern

Wielkopolska's economic specialisations. Support could also cover measures aimed at improving the competences or qualifications of higher education students in areas of key importance to the region's specialisations. The call also allowed funding for the equipment and modernisation of university laboratories and workshops with modern equipment and teaching materials necessary to provide high-quality education. In addition, measures aimed at enhancing the teaching competences of university staff could be supported, including the development of innovative teaching methods and IT skills.

The allocation for the call amounted to PLN 11.0 million, including PLN 8.6 million from the Just Transition Fund and PLN 2.5 million from the state budget. The maximum funding rate for eligible expenditure was 90%. The project is being implemented from 1 July 2024 to 31 July 2029. Its total value amounts to PLN 12.3 million, of which PLN 11.0 million is provided in funding.

The forms of education planned under the project are aligned in particular with the smart specialisations of Eastern Wielkopolska, i.e. the Konin subregion (logistics and renewable energy sources). The thematic scope of the degree programmes, training programmes and courses has been tailored to the needs of the local economy and labour market. Education is provided on a part-time basis, with classes held in the afternoons and at weekends, enabling

participants to combine study with professional and family responsibilities.

The project provides for the following forms of education:

- first-cycle, practically oriented degree programmes in fields already offered by the University: (1) automation and robotics, with a focus on renewable energy sources (RES) and virtual design methods; (2) mechanics and mechanical engineering, with a focus on RES, vehicle operation and electromobility; and (3) logistics, with a focus on transport and freight forwarding, warehousing and market services;
- second-cycle, practically oriented degree programmes in a field already offered by the University, namely management and production engineering, with a focus on transport and production logistics as well as production planning and organisation;
- postgraduate programmes in energy-efficient construction and alternative energy sources, logistics and supply chain management, and lean manufacturing;
- specialist education in RES and warehouse management;
- technical courses and training in the operation of electric and hydrogen-powered vehicles, the operation of CNC (*Computerized Numerical Control*) machine tools, the installation of heat pumps and air-conditioning systems, the design and installation of photovoltaic

systems, website design, Python programming and joining technologies;

- logistics courses and training in warehousing, production optimisation methods, transport and logistics;
- specialised English- and German-language courses, including technical and logistics terminology;
- from 2026 onwards, a Chinese-language course and additional technical training in: (1) data analysis and machine learning; (2) automation of office and engineering processes using artificial intelligence; and (3) “From the Atom to the Socket – Nuclear Energy and Its Impact on Our Environment”.

To ensure high-quality education, the project also provides for additional equipment for renewable energy laboratories, logistics engineering laboratories and computer laboratories.

A total of 1,539 adults are expected to receive support under the project. It is anticipated that 1,125 participants will obtain qualifications after leaving the programme, while 265 will obtain green qualifications, highlighting the project’s close alignment with the needs of Eastern Wielkopolska’s transitioning economy.

An important component of the project is also the creation of appropriate facilities for practical education and training. More than PLN 1.1 million has been allocated to the purchase of equipment. These funds are being used,

among other things, to develop renewable energy and logistics engineering laboratories, as well as computer and Lean Management laboratories. The equipment purchased includes an electric vehicle with a carport equipped with a photovoltaic (PV) installation, an EV/PHEV (*Electric Vehicle/Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicle*) charging station and an energy storage system; a test rig for hydrogen co-firing; an exhaust gas analyser; a heat pump; an electrical engineering training bench; an electric pallet truck; warehouse equipment; and specialised software.

The project has attracted considerable interest among residents of Eastern Wielkopolska. The first recruitment round for four degree programmes already demonstrated strong demand for the support offered. Although 150 places had originally been planned across the four programmes, 222 students were ultimately admitted, nearly 50% more than initially anticipated. This demonstrates strong interest in the opportunity to undertake tuition-free education and indicates that the educational offer is well aligned with the needs of the regional labour market. The results of the first recruitment round also confirm the relevance of the project, which aims to develop competences and prepare a skilled workforce capable of supporting the process of a just economic transition in Eastern Wielkopolska.

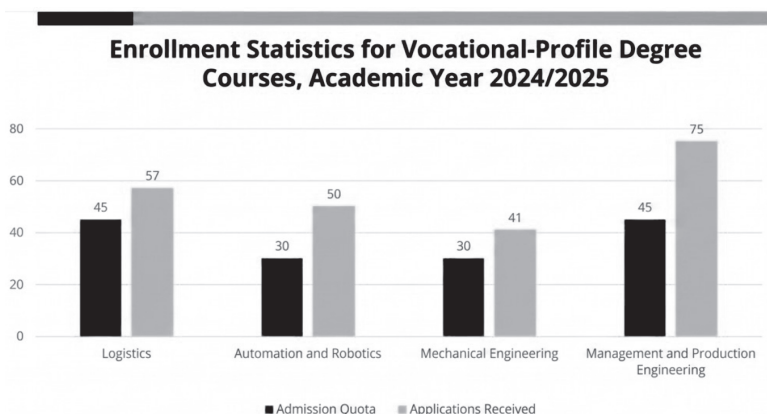


Figure 8. Recruitment Results for Practically Oriented Degree Programmes in the 2024/2025 Academic Year

Source: Materials provided by the University of Applied Sciences in Konin.

Strong interest also continued in subsequent recruitment rounds. For the degree programmes offered under the project, the University established waiting lists and applied to the Marshal's Office for approval to increase the number of available places. This further confirms the strong demand for the forms of education offered and the positive reception of the project among prospective participants.

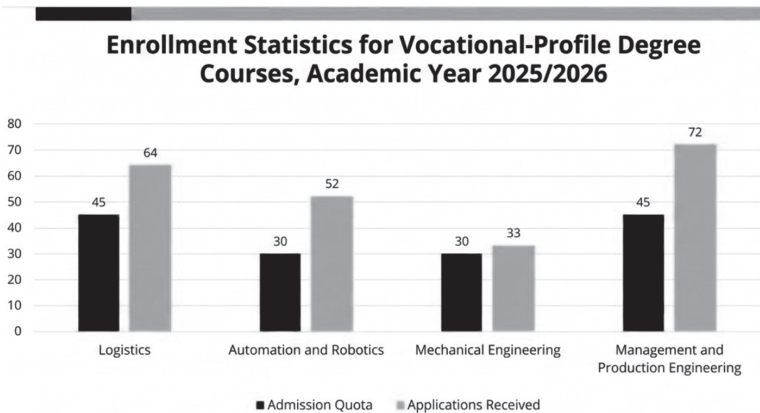


Figure 9. Recruitment Results for Practically Oriented Degree Programmes in the 2025/2026 Academic Year

Source: Materials provided by the University of Applied Sciences in Konin²³.

An analysis of the project's implementation indicates that the University continuously monitors interest in the forms of support offered and flexibly adapts its educational provision to participants' needs and changing labour market expectations. During the implementation of the project, the range of available courses and training programmes was expanded in response to new competence needs arising from the region's ongoing economic transition and the increasing internationalisation of business activities.

One example of this approach is the introduction of a Chinese-language course, which attracted considerable

²³ Materials held by the Subcommittee for Eastern Wielkopolska.

interest, with more than 100 applicants competing for 12 places. The course responds to the growing importance of international cooperation and the need to develop language skills useful in business relations.

At the same time, the educational offer was expanded to include specialised language courses such as *Green Economy English* and *English for Global Communication and Logistics*, aimed at developing vocabulary and communication skills in areas related to the green transition, logistics and modern sectors of the economy. In addition to the activities already provided, participants were also given the opportunity to take part in technical training in data analysis and machine learning, the automation of office and engineering processes using artificial intelligence, and nuclear energy (“From the Atom to the Socket – Nuclear Energy and Its Impact on Our Environment”).

The changes introduced during project implementation demonstrate that the educational offer is not fixed but is continuously adapted to the needs of participants and employers, as well as to the changing socio-economic conditions in Eastern Wielkopolska. Expanding the range of training programmes and courses to include new thematic areas makes it possible to respond to emerging competence needs while maintaining the practical orientation of the support provided.

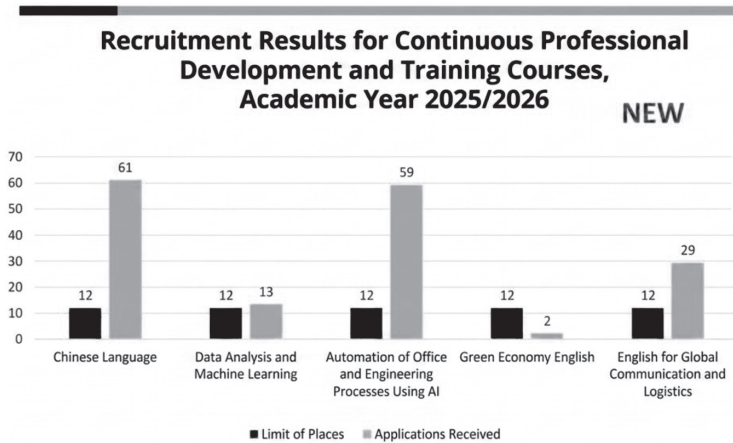


Figure 10. Recruitment Results for Courses and Training Programmes in the 2025/2026 Academic Year

Source: Materials provided by the University of Applied Sciences in Konin²⁴.

The relevance of the areas selected for support is demonstrated not only by the strong interest in the educational offer but also by the project's positive reception in the region. The project won the fourth edition of the "Łączy nas WIELkopolskiE" competition in the "Łączy nas... nauka" ("United by... Science") category, organised by the Marshal's Office of the Wielkopolska Voivodeship²⁵. The winners were selected through a vote by residents of the

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Razem zmieniamy Wielkopolskę. Za nami gala „Jak wiele nas łączy”, Łączy Nas Wielkopolskie, <https://laczynas.wielkopolskie.pl/razem-zmieniamy-wielkopolske-za-nami-gala-jak-wiele-nas-laczy/> [access: 09.08.2026].

voivodeship. The educational offer of the University of Applied Sciences in Konin was recognised for responding to the needs of people seeking to upgrade their qualifications or change their career paths in connection with the transition process in Eastern Wielkopolska.

The significance of the project extends beyond simply increasing access to education. In a region facing the consequences of the phase-out of lignite mining and lignite-based economic activities, the development of new competences is becoming one of the key conditions for a successful labour market transition. The project implemented by the University of Applied Sciences in Konin contributes to this process by preparing residents to participate in a changing economy while supporting the development of a skilled workforce capable of responding to the emerging needs of local enterprises.

2.5. Climate Advisers – A New Segment of Employment in Local Government Administration

The energy transition is significantly affecting the structure of the contemporary labour market, leading both to the gradual decline of some traditional occupations associated with a high-emission economy and to the emergence of new occupations responding to the needs of a low- and

zero-carbon economy. Discussions of the labour market in the context of the energy transition most frequently emphasise the growing demand for highly qualified professionals. This includes electricians, energy specialists and automation engineers with experience in the design, construction and operation of renewable energy installations, particularly photovoltaic farms, wind farms and energy storage systems. Technicians responsible for servicing and maintaining energy infrastructure, as well as designers of smart energy systems, are also becoming increasingly important. Demand is likewise growing for occupations related to environmental analysis and environmental impact assessment, specialists in energy and climate law, experts in ESG (*Environmental, Social and Governance*) reporting and carbon footprint management. As a result, the energy transition is not only transforming the power sector but is also becoming one of the major drivers reshaping the structure of employment and the professional competences required in the contemporary economy.

Much less attention in discussions of the green labour market is devoted to new jobs emerging in public administration, particularly at the local government level. Yet the energy transition, especially in regions dependent on fossil fuel-based economic activity, requires not only the development of new technologies but also the development of institutional capacity within public administration

to provide effective support to residents and enterprises in adapting to a low-carbon economy.

In recent years, a network of climate advisers working within local government units has been developed, primarily on a pilot basis. Their responsibilities include providing information and educational support to local communities, assisting residents in improving the energy efficiency of buildings and using renewable energy sources, and helping them obtain funding for low-carbon investments. The emergence of such positions demonstrates that the green transformation of the labour market extends beyond the industrial and energy sectors and is also creating new professional specialisations within public administration, focused on supporting the transition at the local level.

Eastern Wielkopolska provides a particularly notable example of the development of these new positions in public administration. This has been made possible by the LIFE AFTER COAL PL²⁶ project implemented in the area, which aims to support the region's transition towards climate neutrality. In 2023, municipal and county climate advisers were employed in 30 municipal and county local government units in Eastern Wielkopolska, as well as in Kalisz, Ostrów Wielkopolski and Wągrowiec. The network comprises 27 municipal climate advisers employed by

²⁶ *O projekcie*, LIFE AFTER COAL PL, <https://lifeaftercoal.pl/projekt/o-projekcie/> [access: 02.08.2026].

municipalities and cities with county status, and five county climate advisers employed by three county authorities and two cities with county status. Thus, in cities with county status (Konin and Kalisz), municipal and county climate adviser positions operate in parallel, serving different target groups and performing different sets of tasks. These positions represent an example of a new segment of green jobs emerging within public administration.



Figure 11. Municipal and County Climate Advisers Implementing Activities under the LIFE AFTER COAL PL Project

Source: LIFE AFTER COAL PL Project Archive.

Climate advisers act as local leaders of change and as intermediaries between climate policy and residents, businesses and local communities. The main target group of municipal climate advisers, employed in 27 municipalities and cities with county status, consists of residents requiring support in the energy transition of residential buildings, particularly in replacing coal-fired heating systems. Their activities focus on raising environmental awareness, encouraging residents to undertake measures supporting climate neutrality, carrying out preliminary assessments of buildings' energy needs, and providing advice on opportunities to obtain funding for the replacement of inefficient heating systems and the energy renovation of buildings. County climate advisers, employed in five Counties, including cities with county status, primarily target businesses and people starting their own businesses. Their role is to support the energy transition of enterprises, particularly by providing advice on improving energy efficiency, reducing CO₂ emissions and obtaining funding for investment projects. The activities of county climate advisers are carried out, among other things, in close cooperation with Agencja Rozwoju Regionalnego S.A. in Konin [Regional Development Agency S.A. in Konin].

The activities of climate advisers are not limited to individual energy advice. They also organise numerous local events, information meetings and consultations concerning

the Clean Air Programme, energy efficiency and opportunities to obtain funding for environmentally friendly investments. Another important element of their work is the provision of free building inspections using thermal imaging cameras, which enable residents to identify areas of heat loss and determine buildings' thermal modernisation needs, as well as participation in inspections of household heating systems. In practice, climate advisers also use activities carried out by other local government employees as opportunities for direct contact with residents. Municipal climate advisers, for example, accompany municipal officials during inspections relating to tree felling or the operation of domestic wastewater treatment systems. This makes it possible to reach residents directly at their place of residence, including in situations where standard public administration office hours coincide with residents' working hours and make personal contact difficult. Such arrangements also provide opportunities for ongoing environmental education, the dissemination of information about available support instruments and the development of greater public trust in measures related to the energy transition. Climate advisers carry out their field activities using electric vehicles operated as part of a pilot mini car-sharing network within local government units.

The activities undertaken in the Municipality of Wilczyn provide an example of the broader role that a climate adviser can play in implementing the energy transition at the local level. As part of the LIFE AFTER COAL PL project, an energy self-sufficiency and security demonstrator was developed there, one of the key elements of which was the establishment of the Wilczyn Municipality Energy Cooperative. The initiative to establish the cooperative originated with the municipal climate adviser, who, with support from the Poznań Science and Technology Park, a project partner, participated in developing the concept for its operation. This included an analysis of the municipality's existing renewable energy installations, simulations of energy settlements and a schedule of activities necessary to establish the cooperative. Following approval by the municipal authorities, the organisational and formal procedures were completed, resulting in the establishment of the Wilczyn Municipality Energy Cooperative in December 2025 by the Municipality of Wilczyn, the Municipal Cultural Centre and the Municipal Public Library²⁷. The cooperative enables joint energy balancing and more efficient use of electricity generated by municipal photovoltaic installa-

²⁷ T. Marzec, M. Lenartowicz, *Demonstrator samowystarczalności i bezpieczeństwa energetycznego na przykładzie Gminy Wilczyn*, Poznań [2026], https://lifeaftercoal.pl/baza_wiedzy/demonstrator-samowystarczalnosci-i-bezpieczenstwa-energetycznego-na-przykladzie-gminy-wilczyn/ [access: 02.08.2026].

tions. The example of Wilczyn therefore demonstrates that a climate adviser can perform not only an informational and advisory function but also act as a local initiator of specific energy transition projects, combining expertise in energy, organisation and public administration.

Effective performance of such a broad range of tasks by climate advisers requires appropriate professional preparation and systematic development of their competences. Consequently, an important component of the LIFE AFTER COAL PL project has been the development of advisers' professional competences associated with their role as local leaders of the energy and climate transition. A key support instrument in this area was the postgraduate programme "Climate Neutrality Management in Local Government", commissioned by the Self-Government of the Wielkopolska Voivodeship and delivered by the Poznań University of Life Sciences in the 2024/2025 academic year. It should be emphasised that participants included not only climate advisers employed under the LIFE AFTER COAL PL project but also 17 employees of local government units not participating in the project who were interested in developing their competences in the field of climate neutrality.



Figure 12. Graduation Ceremony for Participants of the Postgraduate Programme “Climate Neutrality Management in Local Government”

Source: Archives of the Poznań University of Life Sciences²⁸.

Poznań University of Life Sciences is currently preparing to launch a second edition of the postgraduate programme as part of its own activities, without the involvement of the LIFE AFTER COAL PL project. This confirms the growing demand for climate- and energy-related competences in local government administration and the increasing

²⁸ *Absolutorium studiów podyplomowych „Zarządzanie neutralnością klimatyczną w samorządzie terytorialnym”, Uniwersytet Przyrodniczy w Poznaniu*, <https://up.poznan.pl/aktualnosci/absolutorium-studiow-podyplomowych-zarzadzanie-neutralnoscia-klimatyczna-w-samorzadzcie> [access: 02.08.2026].

professionalisation of local structures responsible for managing the transition.

Both municipal and county climate advisers also support local government units in obtaining external funding for climate-related measures and carry out communication, information and educational activities related to achieving climate neutrality and adapting to climate change. Particularly noteworthy is the model of cooperation between municipal and county climate advisers and the climate and energy advisers of the Voivodeship Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management in Poznań, developed at the end of 2025 with the involvement of the project team operating within the Department of Environmental and Climate Management of the Marshal's Office of the Wielkopolska Voivodeship in Poznań. Under this model, meetings are organised involving climate and energy advisers, climate advisers, local government leaders and other decision-makers. Their purpose is to discuss key environmental measures planned by local authorities and to identify opportunities for financing them from funds administered by the National Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management and the Voivodeship Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management in Poznań. Such meetings have been organised, among other places, at the County Authority in Słupca and in

the municipalities of Kawęczyn, Kleczew, Łądek, Powidz, Rzgów and Wilczyn.

The activities of climate advisers in Eastern Wielkopolska have contributed to increased engagement among the region's residents in implementing environmentally friendly investments. From the beginning of 2023 to the end of the first half of 2025, nearly 8,600 agreements were signed under the Clean Air Programme in Eastern Wielkopolska, accounting for 21% of all agreements concluded under the programme in the Wielkopolska Voivodeship during this period. This result is particularly noteworthy given that Eastern Wielkopolska comprises only five of the 35 Counties and cities with county status in the Wielkopolska Voivodeship and is home to approximately 12% of the voivodeship's population. This means that more than one-fifth of all agreements concluded under the Clean Air Programme are concentrated in a relatively small part of the voivodeship.

Table 7. Number of Agreements Signed under the Clean Air Programme in 2023–2025

	Number of Agreements Signed			
	2023	2024	First Half of 2025	TOTAL
Koło County	n.a.	836	215	1 051
Konin County	n.a.	1 473	454	1 927
Ślupca County	n.a.	517	131	648

	Number of Agreements Signed			
	2023	2024	First Half of 2025	TOTAL
Turek County	n.a.	1 022	283	1 305
City of Konin	n.a.	220	51	271
Eastern Wielkopolska	3 350	4 068	1 134	8 552
Wielkopolska Voivodeship	15 625	20 424	5 342	41 391

Source: Authors' own compilation based on data from the Voivodeship Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management (WFOŚiGW) in Poznań.

Such a high share indicates the effectiveness of the activities carried out by climate advisers, particularly in the areas of environmental education, assisting residents in preparing investments and providing information on available funding opportunities. It also reflects growing public awareness of the need to improve the energy efficiency of buildings and replace inefficient heating systems.

Further evidence of the changes in which climate advisers are actively involved can be found in the structure of heat sources used in Eastern Wielkopolska. The region is characterised by a relatively high share of individual renewable energy-based heat sources in the total number of heat sources declared in the Central Register of Building Emissions (Polish: Centralna Ewidencja Emisyjności Budynków, CEEB) (Figure 13).

A particularly high share was recorded, among other places, in the Municipality of Przykona (Turek County),

where the figure reached 19%, compared with an average of approximately 4% for the Wielkopolska Voivodeship. These figures can be associated not only with growing public awareness and local investment in the energy transition but also with the activities of climate advisers, who support residents in selecting and implementing modern, low-emission heating systems.

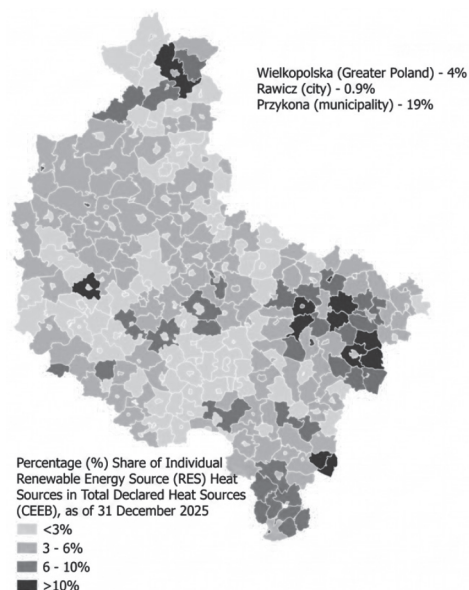


Figure 13. Share of Individual Renewable Energy Heat Sources in the Total Number of Heat Sources Declared in the CEEB

Source: Wielkopolska Spatial Planning Office in Poznań, based on CEEB data.

These data further confirm that the information, educational and advisory activities implemented under the LIFE AFTER COAL PL project, together with complementary funding instruments launched outside the project, are contributing to accelerating the energy transition of the subregion and increasing residents' interest in solutions based on renewable energy sources.

The important role of climate advisers is also emphasised in strategic documents concerning climate policy and air protection. The updated *Air Protection Programme for the Wielkopolska Zone*, adopted by Resolution No. XXI/503/26 of the Sejmik of the Wielkopolska Voivodeship of 26 January 2026²⁹, identifies the need to strengthen advisory, educational and organisational measures supporting residents in reducing pollutant emissions and improving the energy efficiency of buildings. The document emphasises the importance of developing advisory capacity within local government units to provide direct support to residents, particularly older people, people requiring assistance in everyday life, and those at risk of energy poverty.

A similar direction is also evident in the assumptions of the Social Climate Plan being prepared in connection with the implementation of the Social Climate Fund.

²⁹ Sejmik Województwa Wielkopolskiego, *Aktualizacja Programu ochrony powietrza dla strefy wielkopolskiej*, Poznań 2026, <https://edziennik.poznan.uw.gov.pl/legalact/2026/867/> [access: 02.08.2026].

The draft document of June 2025, which was submitted for public consultation³⁰, provides for extensive support for households, micro-enterprises and transport users at risk of energy and transport poverty, while also highlighting the need to develop local advisory capacity. Under the component concerning the building sector, the proposed measures include funding positions for environmental advisers and establishing local energy advisory points. These measures are intended to raise public awareness of the low-carbon economy, improve the energy efficiency of buildings, promote the development of renewable energy sources and encourage energy conservation. The assumptions of the Social Climate Plan also emphasise the social role of climate advisers, whose activities are intended to focus primarily on providing direct support to residents, particularly those at risk of social exclusion and energy poverty. It can be expected that, with the implementation of the Plan and the next EU financial perspective, the importance of local climate advisers will continue to grow, making them one of the key components of the system for implementing national climate policy.

The scope of tasks envisaged both in the *Air Protection Programme for the Wielkopolska Zone* and in the assumptions

³⁰ *Plan Społeczno-Klimatyczny*, Fundusze Europejskie, <https://www.funduszeunijne.gov.pl/strony/o-funduszach/spoleczny-fundusz-klimatyczny/plan/> [access: 02.08.2026].

of the Social Climate Plan indicates that climate and energy advisers are becoming an important component of the local system supporting the energy transition and climate policy. Their role extends beyond traditionally understood administrative functions, combining technical, social, educational and advisory competences. In practice, this means growing demand for specialised professionals capable of implementing air pollution control, energy and climate measures at the local level and supporting residents and businesses in adapting to the requirements of a low- and zero-carbon economy.

The case study of the LIFE AFTER COAL PL project demonstrates that the energy transition is leading not only to technological and economic changes but also to a gradual transformation of the way public administration operates. Local government is moving beyond a purely administrative role and becoming an active participant in the transition process, as well as an institution supporting residents and businesses in adapting to new conditions. The development of climate adviser positions demonstrates that the energy transition is not limited to creating new jobs in low- and zero-carbon sectors but is also reshaping the employment structure of public administration. Consequently, local governments are becoming institutions that create new professional specialisations in response to the challenges of climate and energy policy.

This development is particularly significant in Eastern Wielkopolska, where the mining and energy sector has traditionally played a dominant role. The emergence of new administrative and expert functions represents one element of the diversification of the regional labour market and contributes to building lasting competences that support the energy transition and the achievement of climate neutrality.

2.6. New Business Models and the Labour Market in the Context of Transition

The just transition is leading to changes not only in the energy sector but also in the way enterprises operate, including their employment structures. These changes are multidimensional and encompass technological, organisational and competence-related processes. In regions that are highly dependent on high-emission industries, such as Eastern Wielkopolska, economic transition requires enterprises to identify new development paths, diversify their activities and adapt employees' competences to changing market conditions. This applies particularly to enterprises that have traditionally operated within the economic environment of the mining and energy sector and which, as mining activities and conventional power generation are

gradually phased down, are losing established markets, contracts and business relationships. In practice, this creates a need for such enterprises to implement new business models defining optimal directions for their future operations and development, enabling them to compete effectively under changing economic, technological and environmental conditions.

This section draws on the experience and results of activities implemented by the Eastern Wielkopolska Chamber of Commerce under the LIFE AFTER COAL PL project, in particular the *Guidelines for a Model for Implementing Changes in the Labour Market and Enterprises during the Transition towards Climate Neutrality*³¹, as well as conclusions derived from 15 business models developed for enterprises associated with the ZE PAK Group and its wider business environment.

Activities implemented in Eastern Wielkopolska under the LIFE AFTER COAL PL project provided important insights into the impact of the transition on enterprises and the labour market. As part of these activities, the

³¹ Izba Gospodarcza Wielkopolski Wschodniej, *Wytyczne do modelu wdrażania zmian w obszarze rynku pracy i przedsiębiorstw w okresie transformacji związanych z dążeniem do neutralności klimatycznej*, Konin 2026, https://lifeaftercoal.pl/baza_wiedzy/wytyczne-do-modelu-wdrazania-zmian-w-obszarze-ryнку-pracy-i-przedsiębiorstw-w-okresie-transformacji-związanych-z-dążeniem-do-neutralności-klimatycznej/ [access: 02.08.2026].

Eastern Wielkopolska Chamber of Commerce identified 15 enterprises associated with the ZE PAK Group and its business environment, for which new business models were developed and advisory support was provided to facilitate their implementation. Subsequently, 150 Individual Competence Development Plans were prepared for employees of these enterprises to support their professional adaptation to the companies' new operating conditions. The enterprises analysed represented a diverse range of industries, including electrical power and maintenance services, metalworking and steel structures, construction, public transport, railways, industrial insulation services, technical trade, integrated heating, ventilation and air-conditioning systems (HVAC – *Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning*) and renewable energy sources (RES), as well as catering and hotel services. This demonstrates that the transition affects not only the energy sector itself but also the wider business environment associated with the operation of the mining and energy complex.

These experiences make it possible to view the transition not only as a process of phasing out high-emission activities but also as a process of restructuring enterprises, transforming their operating models and gradually reshaping the labour market. An analysis of the activities implemented under the project indicates that the introduction of new business models can serve as an important

transition instrument, particularly by helping to retain existing jobs, develop employees' competences and create new areas of employment associated with the low-carbon and digital economy. In some of the supported enterprises, the new business models envisaged developing activities related to renewable energy sources, energy efficiency, maintenance services for modern industrial installations, the digitalisation of management processes and specialised services for industry and construction. In other cases, activities focused on diversifying revenue streams through the development of e-commerce, the introduction of new technical services or expansion into new domestic and international markets.

The experience of enterprises participating in the LIFE AFTER COAL PL project also demonstrates that people are among the most important factors determining the successful implementation of new business models—their competences, engagement, readiness for change and ability to adapt to new operating conditions. Business transformation is not limited to technological modernisation or the reorganisation of business processes; it also requires employees to be prepared to operate effectively in new organisational and market environments.

Even the best-designed business model, modern infrastructure or advanced digital systems will not deliver the expected results without an appropriately prepared and

motivated workforce. In practice, employees themselves become the principal agents of change. The pace and effectiveness of implementing new technological, organisational and operational processes depend on their knowledge, skills, level of engagement and acceptance of the changes taking place.

Human capital should therefore be regarded as a strategic asset of an enterprise. Changing a business model requires not only investment in infrastructure and technology but also the development of new employee competences, increased employability and greater organisational flexibility of teams. In this context, competences related to the digitalisation of processes, the operation of new technologies, project management, customer communication and the implementation of environmentally sustainable solutions are becoming particularly important. In the context of the energy transition, competences related to energy efficiency, the circular economy, ESG reporting and operating under increasingly stringent environmental requirements are also becoming essential. Activities implemented under the LIFE AFTER COAL PL project indicate demand for technical and specialist competences related, among other things, to the operation of CNC (*Computerized Numerical Control*) machinery, CAD/CAM (*Computer-Aided Design/Computer-Aided Manufacturing*) programming, modern welding technologies, machinery

and equipment diagnostics, industrial automation, ERP (*Enterprise Resource Planning*) and CRM (*Customer Relationship Management*) systems, HVAC and renewable energy technologies, the design of energy-efficient installations, BIM (*Building Information Modeling*) systems in construction, and the operation of electromobility infrastructure. In some of the enterprises participating in the project, plans also included the development of competences related to smart energy management systems, Smart Home technologies, remote equipment monitoring and the digital management of production and logistics processes.

Mentoring is also an important component of the new business models, enabling experienced employees to support younger colleagues by transferring knowledge, experience and practical professional skills.

The experience of the LIFE AFTER COAL PL project confirms that successful business transformation requires competence development to be treated as a key area of investment. In the context of technological and regulatory change, enterprises cannot base their competitive advantage solely on the existing competences of their employees. In practice, this requires systematic investment in employee training, the development of managerial competences, mentoring and coaching activities supporting organisational adaptation. Preparing management staff to operate effectively in a transition environment is particularly important,

as managers are largely responsible for communicating the objectives of change, building employee engagement and reducing organisational resistance. Recommendations for enterprises participating in the project included certification training in renewable energy technologies and F-gases, courses for CNC operators and programmers, specialised welding training, training in predictive diagnostics and remote equipment monitoring, ISO, ECM and VPI quality certifications in the railway sector, as well as the development of competences in project management, technical sales and business customer communication.

Observations from project implementation indicate that a lack of employee acceptance of the transition process may constitute one of the main barriers to implementing new business models. The consequences of growing organisational resistance include declining employee motivation, increased staff turnover, deterioration in the quality of processes and reduced effectiveness of the changes being introduced. Change management should therefore be regarded as a key component of business model implementation, encompassing both organisational and communication activities. Effective internal communication is particularly important, as it ensures that employees fully understand the reasons for the changes, their successive stages and their potential benefits for both the enterprise and employees themselves. Inadequate

communication may increase uncertainty, reduce motivation and intensify resistance to organisational change. Enterprises undergoing transformation should therefore conduct regular information activities, involve employees in planning and implementing changes, and develop professional competences aligned with the enterprise's new needs. Such measures can strengthen employees' adaptability and reduce resistance to change.

In this context, employee reskilling and upskilling are particularly important. Such activities were also undertaken under the LIFE AFTER COAL PL project, which involved the preparation of Individual Competence Development Plans for 150 employees of enterprises implementing new business models. Their purpose was not only to identify competence gaps but, above all, to prepare employees for new roles arising from changes in the enterprises' business profiles. The underlying objective was to reduce the risk of job losses by creating opportunities for employees to retrain and remain employed within enterprises undergoing transformation.

The Individual Competence Development Plans were prepared through individual advisory sessions conducted directly with employees. It was assumed that effective development planning required not only an analysis of employees' formal qualifications but also an assessment of their professional experience, development potential

and readiness for change. The process therefore included an analysis of the employee's position, an assessment of existing competences, identification of the competences essential to the enterprise's operation under the new business model, and diagnosis of competence gaps.

Based on this assessment, priority areas for competence development and recommended directions for employees' further professional development were subsequently identified. The Individual Competence Development Plans took into account both the needs arising from the enterprise's strategic objectives and employees' individual aptitudes and aspirations. This made it possible to develop more realistic and effective professional development pathways. The plans recommended various forms of support, including vocational training, specialist courses, mentoring, coaching, expert advice and work-based learning. In many cases, the identified competence needs concerned both highly specialised technical qualifications and soft skills, such as team management, customer communication, business negotiations and the ability to work in a project-based environment. Particular importance was attached to measures enabling employees to acquire competences related to digitalisation, process automation and the climate transition.

The experience of the LIFE AFTER COAL PL project demonstrates that the effectiveness of employee development measures depends on closely linking competence

development with the direction of the enterprise's transformation. This requires training and advisory activities to be aligned with planned organisational changes, technologies being introduced and the enterprise's future development priorities. Only under these conditions can competence development effectively support business transformation, enhance competitiveness and strengthen an enterprise's capacity to retain employment in a changing regional economy.

An important role throughout this process is played by the adviser responsible for assessing employees' competences and formulating development recommendations. The adviser's task is not only to identify areas requiring support but also to ensure consistency between employees' needs and the enterprise's development priorities. In practice, this requires combining expertise in competence management and business processes with knowledge of the energy and climate transition.

Under the LIFE AFTER COAL PL project, it was assumed that the actual process of upgrading and changing employees' competences would take place outside the project itself, using available support instruments financed from European and national funds. Potential sources of financing included, in particular, projects implemented under the European Funds for Wielkopolska 2021–2027 programme, including development services for adults and enterprises delivered

through the Development Services Database (BUR), as well as the “Pathway to Employment after Coal” project, targeted primarily at current and former employees of the mining and energy sector and enterprises associated with that sector. An important role was also assigned to the National Training Fund, which supports continuing education and competence development among employees.

Importantly, some of the enterprises participating in the project had already begun using available competence development support instruments while implementing their new business models. Some obtained, or were taking steps to obtain, funding for employee development services, including through the BUR, the “Pathway to Employment after Coal” project and the National Training Fund. Some also obtained funding for investment activities under the European Funds for Wielkopolska 2021–2027 programme. This demonstrates that the recommendations and Individual Competence Development Plans prepared under the project have begun to serve as practical tools supporting the adaptation of enterprises and their employees to new economic conditions.

The activities undertaken under the LIFE AFTER COAL PL project therefore demonstrate that successful business transformation requires simultaneous investment in new business models and technologies, as well as in employment growth and the development of the competences of

existing employees. In this context, Individual Employee Competence Development Plans constitute an important instrument for reducing the risk of job losses and supporting employees' adaptation to change. From a broader perspective, such measures can become an important component of building a more diversified and resilient labour market in Eastern Wielkopolska, mitigating the adverse consequences of moving away from a lignite-based economy while supporting the development of new competences and green jobs.

2.7. The Environmental Dimension of Public Procurement and the Development of Enterprises and Green Jobs

Public procurement currently plays an important role not only as a mechanism for ensuring the efficient expenditure of public funds but also as an instrument through which the state can influence the direction of socio-economic development. According to the President of the Public Procurement Office, the value of public contracts awarded in accordance with the provisions of the Public Procurement Law³² amounted to approximately PLN 330.4

³² *Obwieszczenie Marszałka Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 27 maja 2026 r. w sprawie ogłoszenia jednolitego tekstu ustawy – Prawo zamówień publicznych, Dz.U. z 2026 r., poz. 793.*

billion in 2024, compared with PLN 279.8 billion in 2023. The public procurement market therefore accounted for approximately 9.07% of Poland's gross domestic product³³. Given the considerable scale of public expenditure involved, the public procurement system should serve as a strategic instrument supporting the implementation of public policies, including the energy transition. It influences not only how public funds are spent but also the level of innovation in the economy, the development of new technologies, the structure of the labour market and the pace of the green transition.

Of particular importance in this context are public procurement procedures that incorporate environmental considerations into purchasing processes, as well as procurement that directly supports the green transition of the economy. These include public contracts incorporating environmental considerations understood as requirements related to the contractor's performance of the contract and addressing environmental issues. Green procurement may also include procedures whose subject matter involves investments and purchases related to the energy transition, such as the procurement of low- and zero-emission buses,

³³ Urząd Zamówień Publicznych, *Sprawozdanie Prezesa Urzędu Zamówień Publicznych z funkcjonowania systemu zamówień publicznych w 2024 r.*, Warszawa 2025, <https://www.gov.pl/attachment/b61cce3a-f71c-4271-be11-d7eaa1a03f76> [access: 02.08.2026].

renewable energy installations or projects involving the energy renovation of buildings. Each of these categories can be regarded as green public procurement.

According to data presented in the *Report of the President of the Public Procurement Office for 2024*, green public procurement accounted for approximately 3% of the total number of public contracts awarded in 2024, while its value represented approximately 10% of the total value of public contracts awarded. These figures demonstrate that, despite the growing need to implement environmentally sustainable measures, the vast majority of the public procurement market still operates without broader use of solutions supporting energy efficiency, the circular economy, reductions in pollutant emissions or the development of low-emission technologies. At the same time, this indicates that the public procurement system still has considerable untapped potential to support the green transition of the economy, the development of eco-innovation and the modernisation of enterprises. Wider application of green public procurement may consequently also influence the structure of the labour market and foster the development of new employee competences related to environmental technologies and sustainable development.

To make greater use of this potential, however, it is necessary not only to establish appropriate regulations but also to strengthen the competences of public administration and

develop practical mechanisms supporting the implementation of green public procurement. An important example of measures aimed at strengthening public administration capacity in this area is the LIFE AFTER COAL PL project, under which the Association for Social Cooperatives carries out activities aimed at promoting green public procurement among municipal and county local governments participating in the project as co-beneficiaries³⁴. These activities demonstrate that appropriately designed institutional and advisory support can significantly increase the readiness of local government units to incorporate environmental considerations into procurement procedures.

One of the outcomes of the activities undertaken by the Association was the preparation of a draft internal regulation concerning the application of green public procurement by local government units participating in the project. Following its preparation, local governments involved in the LIFE AFTER COAL PL project began implementing the regulation, either in the original version proposed by the Association or in modified forms adapted to the individual needs of particular units, including by incorporating its provisions into existing public procurement regulations. Similar regulations were also

³⁴ Stowarzyszenie Na Rzecz Spółdzielni Socjalnych, *Life After Coal*, <https://spdev.spoldzielnie.org/projekty/life-after-coal/> [access: 02.08.2026].

implemented by the Marshal's Office of the Wielkopolska Voivodeship in Poznań and the Regional Development Agency in Konin. In addition to these measures, more than 150 consultations and training sessions concerning the procurement of services and supplies by local government units were conducted under the project, with the aim of providing practical support in implementing green public procurement. This demonstrates that advisory and systemic measures can effectively support the permanent integration of environmental considerations into local government procurement procedures by establishing internal regulations, developing staff competences and standardising practices related to green public procurement.

The experience of the LIFE AFTER COAL PL project also demonstrates that the use of environmental considerations in procurement procedures should not be understood merely as the application of individual environmental criteria when evaluating tenders. Materials prepared under the project, including a database of good practices and recommendations (Green Public Procurement – LIFE AFTER COAL PL knowledge base), together with the knowledge and experience gained through the implementation of green public procurement, point to the need for a comprehensive approach encompassing the entire process of preparing and conducting a public procurement procedure. Under the adopted model, green public procurement is

defined as procurement procedures in which environmental considerations are applied with the aim of reducing the adverse environmental impact of contract performance. These considerations relate not only to the characteristics of the product or service itself but also to the contractor's business practices, production processes, environmental management methods, resource consumption and waste generation.

Activities carried out under the project demonstrated that environmental considerations can be effectively incorporated at various stages of the procurement process. They may concern:

- a) The description of the subject matter of the contract, for example by:
 - specifying environmental requirements concerning the performance or functionality of the subject matter of the contract;
 - defining requirements concerning the environmental and climate impact of a product or service, including requirements relating to packaging, labelling, environmental labels or production methods;
 - referring to national, European or international environmental standards.
- b) Tender evaluation criteria incorporating environmental considerations, for example by:

- assessing the technical parameters of road transport vehicles, such as exhaust emission standards, where such vehicles constitute the subject matter of the contract or are used in its performance;
 - taking into account the energy efficiency of equipment and products covered by the contract, such as specified energy consumption levels for desktop computers.
- c) Conditions for participation in the procurement procedure, for example by requiring contractors to apply appropriate environmental management systems or standards.
- d) Grounds for exclusion from the procurement procedure, including the possibility of excluding contractors that have breached obligations in the field of environmental protection, pursuant to Article 109(1)(2) of the Public Procurement Law³⁵.

Such a broad approach to the environmental dimension of public procurement is particularly important from the perspective of the green transition. It demonstrates that green public procurement can influence not only the selection of more environmentally sustainable products and

³⁵ Zarządzenie Nr 41/2025 Marszałka Województwa Wielkopolskiego z dnia 28 maja 2025 r. w sprawie stosowania zielonych zamówień publicznych przez Departamenty i Biura Urzędu Marszałkowskiego Województwa Wielkopolskiego w Poznaniu.

services but also the way in which enterprises participating in the public procurement market operate. In practice, this means encouraging contractors to implement more efficient production processes, invest in renewable energy sources, develop environmental management systems and strengthen employees' competences in sustainable development. As a result, public procurement becomes an instrument for modernising enterprises, supporting eco-innovation and building competitive advantages based on quality, environmental performance and innovation.

Public procurement also contributes to creating stable demand for new environmental technologies. In the early stages of development, low-emission technologies are generally more expensive than conventional technologies, which limits the scale of their adoption by the private sector. Public procurement can, however, serve as a "first-market" mechanism, enabling production to expand and gradually reducing the unit costs of new technologies.

Electric buses used in public transport provide a good example. Although their initial investment costs remain higher than those of internal combustion engine vehicles, the development of the public procurement market for electromobility contributes to increased production volumes and greater market competition, thereby becoming one of the factors driving the gradual reduction in technology costs. As indicated in the *Electromobility Development Plan*

in Poland³⁶, one of the factors contributing to lower electric vehicle prices is their wider adoption, as the costs of developing and implementing successive technological solutions can be spread across a growing number of consumers. Public institutions play a key role in this process, as public support can stimulate demand for electric vehicles. At the same time, public-sector demand has contributed to the development of domestic electric bus manufacturers and the expansion of technological and service infrastructure. Similar processes can be observed in the case of energy-efficient LED lighting, photovoltaic panels, heat pumps and energy renovation technologies. Initially, these solutions were characterised by high investment costs; however, market development, supported among other factors by public-sector demand, has led to increased competition, technological development and significant reductions in implementation costs.

The creation of stable demand for environmental technologies also affects the way enterprises participating in the public procurement market operate. Environmental requirements imposed on contractors create a need to adapt organisational, production and management processes to standards associated with sustainable development. In practice, this increases the importance of environmental,

³⁶ Ministry of Energy, *Electromobility Development Plan in Poland: "Energy for the Future"*, Warsaw 2017.

technological and organisational competences among enterprises delivering public contracts. Contractors increasingly need knowledge and experience in areas such as energy efficiency, the circular economy, pollutant emission reduction, product life-cycle assessment, environmental and ESG reporting, environmental management systems and the use of renewable energy sources. The development of green public procurement therefore creates a need for continuous improvement of employees' qualifications and for enterprises to invest in new competences.

For example, enterprises involved in public contracts concerning the energy renovation of buildings, the installation of renewable energy systems or the modernisation of energy infrastructure need to develop competences in energy auditing, modern insulation materials, renewable energy installations and energy management systems. These are primarily examples of public contracts whose subject matter directly supports the green transition of the economy. It should be emphasised, however, that public contracts whose subject matter is not directly related to the green transition can also influence the way enterprises operate when environmental considerations are incorporated into procurement procedures. Requirements relating to energy efficiency, emission reduction, environmental management systems or the implementation of circular economy principles require contractors to strengthen their

organisational and technological capabilities. Similarly, enterprises participating in the development of electromobility need to expand their knowledge and skills relating to the operation of electric and hydrogen-powered vehicles, energy storage and charging infrastructure.

The impact of green public procurement is also evident in the labour market. Both the growth of procurement relating to investments supporting the green transition and the increasingly widespread incorporation of environmental considerations into procurement procedures contribute to the growing importance of sectors associated with sustainable development and increase demand for workers with new professional competences. This is particularly evident in areas such as renewable energy, the energy efficiency of buildings, electromobility, waste management and energy-efficient construction. Public contracts for the energy renovation of buildings contribute to increased demand for energy auditors, renewable energy system designers, heat pump installers, photovoltaic system installers and automation specialists. The growing number of contracts for low- and zero-emission buses and charging infrastructure, in turn, supports employment growth in the electromobility sector, maintenance services and advanced public transport management systems. At the same time, environmental considerations incorporated into procurement procedures stimulate the development

of competences related to the circular economy, product life-cycle assessment, environmental reporting and resource management.

The development of such technologies and standards also contributes to the emergence and expansion of economic sectors associated with the recycling and reuse of components used in low-emission technologies. Consequently, demand is increasing for specialists in raw material recovery, waste processing, circular economy logistics and the design of processes that facilitate material reuse and reduce waste generation.

The importance of public procurement that supports the green transition and incorporates environmental considerations is particularly significant in regions undergoing energy transition. The development of procurement related to energy efficiency, renewable energy sources, the circular economy and electromobility can partly offset employment losses in high-emission sectors by creating new employment opportunities for workers requiring reskilling. In this context, the environmental dimension of public procurement can serve as one of the instruments supporting the transition of regions moving away from fossil fuel-based economies towards climate neutrality.

Appropriately designed and implemented public procurement can contribute to the development of eco-innovation, the modernisation of enterprises, increased

competitiveness, the creation of new jobs and the development of competences associated with the green transition. At the same time, the experience of the LIFE AFTER COAL PL project demonstrates that the effective incorporation of environmental considerations into public procurement requires not only an appropriate legal framework but also the development of public administration competences and the provision of advisory support.

In the context of the challenges associated with the just transition, public procurement can constitute one of the key instruments supporting the development of modern technologies, green competences and new business models for enterprises. Given the scale of the public procurement market, even a moderate increase in the use of environmental considerations in procurement procedures can generate significant economic and environmental effects, supporting the development of an innovative and low-carbon economy of the future.

CONCLUSIONS

This study does not cover all issues and instruments affecting the labour market of Eastern Wielkopolska. The analysis does not address, among other areas, the specific characteristics of employment in the agricultural and processing sectors, which play a particularly important role in Eastern Wielkopolska, activities undertaken by county labour offices, or the impact of foreign workers on the regional labour market. The primary objective of the study was to present and analyse selected instruments that are either new or specifically targeted at supporting the labour market of a region undergoing transition.

Labour markets in regions undergoing transition have specific needs, and interventions should therefore be carefully designed and adapted to the circumstances of both employees and entrepreneurs. Experience from previous restructuring processes in Poland demonstrates that

limiting public intervention and leaving adjustment processes solely to market mechanisms can result in long-term adverse social and economic consequences. At that time, it was assumed that the “invisible hand of the market”, with no or only limited state intervention, would resolve the problems faced by workers losing their jobs. For this reason, measures accompanying the transition should be guided by the principle of *primum non nocere*—first, do no harm—and by the broadest possible involvement of regional stakeholders.

This approach was adopted in Eastern Wielkopolska as early as the planning stage of the just transition process. The participatory model used to develop the Territorial Just Transition Plan for Eastern Wielkopolska was one of its key elements. Working groups were established with the involvement of representatives of various stakeholder groups, including enterprises, local governments, academic institutions, civil society organisations and trade unions. Particularly important was the participation of trade unions representing employees of the ZE PAK Group, which articulated workers’ needs and concerns. These were taken into account when designing instruments targeted directly at people affected by the restructuring of the mining and energy sector. Cooperation between the employer—ZE PAK S.A.—trade unions, the Regional Development Agency S.A. in Konin and public administration made it

possible to develop solutions acceptable to employees and created a platform for dialogue on many difficult issues associated with the transition. The participatory nature of the process has also been maintained during the implementation of the Just Transition Fund, including through the activities of the Subcommittee for Eastern Wielkopolska³⁷.

The need for such an approach stems from the specific economic characteristics of Eastern Wielkopolska. For decades, the region's development was closely linked to the mining and energy complex of the ZE PAK Group, while the scale of the ongoing restructuring is reflected, among other indicators, in declining employment within the Group. This process affects not only employees directly employed in the sector but also enterprises within its wider business environment, employees' families and local communities. Supporting ZE PAK employees is therefore one of the most important, but not the only, components of the intervention. The Territorial Just Transition Plan for Eastern Wielkopolska and the LIFE AFTER COAL PL project have established a broader range of instruments targeted

³⁷ *Uchwała Nr 2/2023 Komitetu Monitorującego Fundusze Europejskie dla Wielkopolski z dnia 1 marca 2023 r. w sprawie powołania Podkomitetu (grupy roboczej) ds. Wielkopolski Wschodniej*, https://funduszeue.wielkopolskie.pl/sites/default/files/field_extended_attachment_file/2024-12/2.uchwala_nr_2-2023_komitetu_monitorujacego_few_z_dn-01.03.2023_ws-powolania_grupy_roboczej.pdf [access: 02.08.2026].

also at enterprises, local governments and non-governmental organisations, enabling different groups to adapt to new socio-economic conditions.

At the same time, changes in the labour market of Eastern Wielkopolska cannot be assessed solely from the perspective of the restructuring of the mining and energy sector. Between 2015 and 2025, the number of registered unemployed people in the subregion decreased by 48%, from 20,300 to 10,600. Despite this long-term improvement, the situation remains territorially differentiated, and the unemployment rate is higher than the average for the Wielkopolska Voivodeship. Differences are also evident in the employment structure: alongside areas with a strong industrial and agricultural profile, there are centres in which the service sector plays a more prominent role. This means that instruments supporting the transition process should be tailored both to the competences of the people receiving support and to the current and future demand of employers in different parts of the region.

Above all, the analysis demonstrates that no single instrument can independently ensure the successful adaptation of the labour market in Eastern Wielkopolska. A range of mutually complementary measures is required. Direct support for workers losing their jobs, including measures aimed at upgrading their skills and enabling reskilling, should be combined with support for business development,

the creation of demand for low- and zero-emission solutions, and ensuring that enterprises have access to the human capital required to implement new investments.

Support for people associated with the mining and energy sector is of particular importance. The employment support project financed by the Just Transition Fund provides opportunities to implement individualised support pathways, including career counselling, reskilling and upskilling, job placement services and support for entrepreneurship. The ultimate assessment of the project's effectiveness will depend, on the one hand, on the number of people participating in the project and, on the other, on whether participants acquire qualifications that correspond to the needs of enterprises and find employment outside the lignite-based sector.

At the same time, the transition of mining regions creates new competence needs and new professional roles. Municipal and county climate advisers, whose activities are associated with the practical implementation of the energy transition at the local level, provide one such example. The broader development of renewable energy sources, energy efficiency, electromobility, hydrogen technologies and the low-carbon economy will increase demand both for specialised technical competences and for skills related to advisory services, energy management and environmental

issues. The transition should therefore become a source of new employment opportunities.

Another important challenge is the adaptation of enterprises that have traditionally operated within the business environment of the mining and energy sector. Experience gained from developing and implementing new business models for 15 enterprises demonstrates that the transition requires not only technological change but also business diversification, the identification of new markets and the adaptation of employees' competences. Linking new business models with 150 Individual Competence Development Plans demonstrates that business transformation and employee competence development should be closely interconnected and treated as components of a single development process.

Equally important is environmentally oriented public procurement, which can increase demand for low- and zero-emission solutions, stimulate eco-innovation and encourage enterprises to develop new competences among their employees. At the same time, the development services system, including the Development Services Database (BUR), should enable employees and enterprises to respond flexibly to emerging development needs.

The creation of sustainable employment, however, depends not only on adequately preparing employees but also on the development of enterprises capable of

employing them. It is therefore important to support business investment in parallel with labour market measures. Labour market interventions and business development support should consequently be regarded as two mutually reinforcing components of the just transition.

The experience of Eastern Wielkopolska indicates that the success of labour market transition depends primarily on the complementarity of the measures undertaken. Reskilling an individual worker can only be successful if there is an enterprise in the local labour market that requires the worker's newly acquired competences. Green public procurement can generate demand for new products and technologies, but enterprises must have employees with the appropriate competences to deliver them. Individual instruments should therefore not operate independently. Instead, they should form a coherent mechanism linking several elements: workers and their competences, enterprises, investment and demand for new solutions. Such an approach to the transition can contribute not only to mitigating the consequences of the phase-out of lignite but also to building a diversified economy in Eastern Wielkopolska capable of creating sustainable employment.

The transition experience of mining regions such as Eastern Wielkopolska can provide an excellent basis for assessing which labour market instruments are effective. Further observation and analysis are necessary to determine

whether solutions implemented in these regions can also be applied in other sectors undergoing restructuring. The transition away from fossil fuels is not limited to mine closures and the phase-out of coal-based power generation; it will increasingly affect other branches of industry as well as households. On the one hand, this will create pressure on the economy and, consequently, on workers in affected sectors, who will need to adapt to new conditions. On the other hand, this process does not necessarily have to represent an exclusively negative scenario; it may also open up new pathways for developing workers' skills and competences in the industries and services of the future.

At the current stage, it is still difficult to fully assess the effects of the interventions and the impact of the new instruments on the labour market in Eastern Wielkopolska. A positive indication, however, is that despite the loss of several thousand jobs within the ZE PAK Group, there has been no significant increase in unemployment among miners and energy-sector workers. At the end of 2019, the ZE PAK Group employed 5,100 people³⁸, compared with 1,800 at the end of the first quarter of 2026³⁹. Employment therefore declined by approximately 3,200 people over slightly more than six years. Nevertheless,

³⁸ ZE PAK S.A., *Raport Roczny ZE PAK S.A. za rok 2019*, ZE PAK Investor Relations [access: 02.08.2026].

³⁹ ZE PAK S.A., *Wyniki finansowe 1Q 2026...*, op. cit.

no corresponding increase in the number of unemployed miners and energy-sector workers registered with county labour offices has been observed. This may indicate that the regional labour market has absorbed a substantial proportion of workers leaving the sector.

A potentially greater concern is not only the loss of jobs itself but also the outflow from the local economy of the wages previously earned by employees of the mining and energy sector. It should be remembered that employees' incomes stimulate local markets and the activities of small businesses, ranging from services to retail. Consequently, the sustainability and quality of newly created jobs, as well as the level of remuneration they provide, are just as important as the number of jobs created, since these incomes will continue to support the local economy.

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