

Coal-fired Poland turns toward the sun

May 19 2021, by Stanislaw Waszak



Poland has long trailed other members of the European Union in solar power, but recent government subsidies have seen solar panels pop up on roofs nationwide at an unprecedented pace.

A solar boom is helping Poland take a big step towards weaning itself off coal as a new homegrown photovoltaic technology is poised to be a game-

changer in harnessing the power of the sun.

Poland has long trailed other members of the European Union in [solar power](#), but recent government subsidies have seen [solar panels](#) pop up on roofs nationwide at an unprecedented pace.

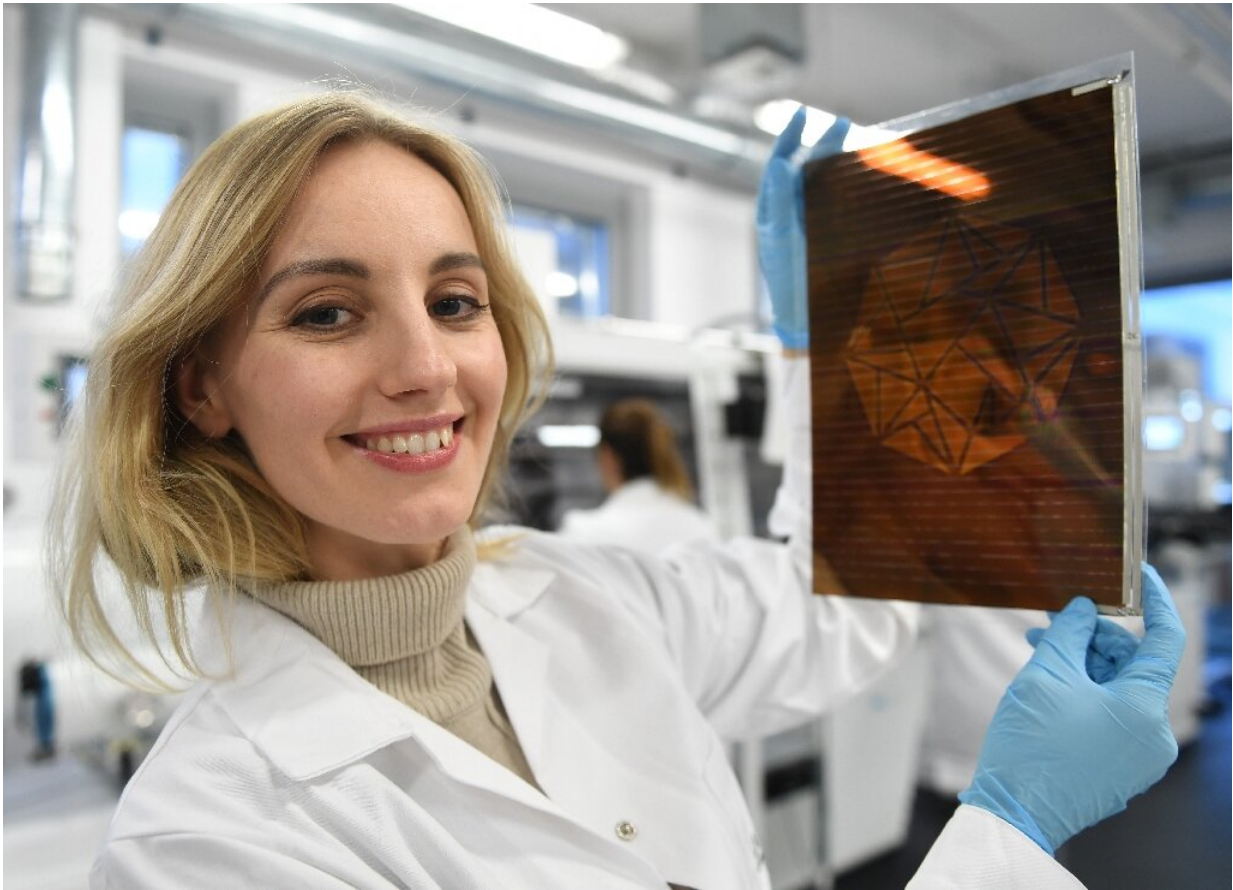
Rarely associated with blue skies, the country is instead known for the heavy smog smothering cities and villages dependent on coal, which in Poland is dubbed "black gold".

But with coal still meeting close to 80 percent of Poland's [energy](#) needs and its mines set to shut by 2049 under an EU plan to cut emissions, the country has been forced to seek and subsidise greener solutions.

In the southern town of Skawina, one of the first residents to swap out his old coal boiler for solar panels was Andrzej Machno, a 74-year-old former innkeeper.

"The town council subsidised [solar energy](#), so we seized the opportunity. Others followed. It was an excellent choice," he told AFP while playing with his grandson in the family garden.

"We can now breathe better in Skawina," said Machno, whose town had for decades been marked by pollution from a now defunct aluminium plant.



Polish physicist and businesswoman Olga Malinkiewicz with one of the printed solar panels she has developed.

'Scramble for solar'

"We're seeing a scramble for photovoltaic micro-installations in Poland," Ryszard Wnuk, a renewable energy expert at the National Energy Conservation Agency (KAPE), told AFP.

At the moment around 70 percent of Poland's solar farms are still small, consisting of equipment with an average power of 8 kilowatts.

But in five years, Poland went from having only 187 megawatts (MW) in installed photovoltaic capacity to 3,935 MW in 2020 thanks in part to the boom in rooftop installations.

Last year, the country of 38 million saw 155 percent growth in the sector, compared to a worldwide average of 22 percent, according to the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA).

Wnuk attributes Poland's enthusiasm for solar to generous public subsidies and the option to pump surplus energy generated by rooftop panels into local grids.

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