

**LABOR RELATIONS AND UNION ACTION IN GREENFIELD TERRITORIES:
THE CASE OF STELLANTIS IN GOIANA (PE)¹**

***RELAÇÕES DE TRABALHO E AÇÃO SINDICAL EM TERRITÓRIOS GREENFIELD:
O CASO DA STELLANTIS EM GOIANA (PE)***

***RELACIONES LABORALES Y ACCIÓN SINDICAL EN TERRITORIOS
GREENFIELD: EL CASO DE STELLANTIS EN GOIANA (PE)***



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How to reference this paper:

LIMA, Raphael Jonathas da Costa; BARCELLOS, Maria Carolina. Labor relations and union action in Greenfield territories: the case of Stellantis in Goiana (PE). *Estudos de Sociologia*, Araraquara, v. 31, n. esp. 1, e026007, 2026. e-ISSN: 1982-4718. DOI: 10.52780/res.v31iesp.1.21018.



| **Submitted:** 20/03/2026
| **Revisions required:** 15/04/2026
| **Approved:** 03/05/2026
| **Published:** 27/07/2026

Editor: Prof. Dr. Maria Chaves Jardim

¹ Thanks to the Carlos Chagas Filho Foundation for Research Support of the State of Rio de Janeiro (FAPERJ), the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES), and colleagues Cristiano Monteiro (PPGS/UFF), Fernanda Cavalcante (PPGS/UFF), and Lucas Afonso (PPGS/UFF), who participated in the research that resulted in this article.

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ABSTRACT: The article investigates how union action is constituted in a greenfield productive context, taking as a case study the performance of the Union of Workers in the Metallurgical, Mechanical, and Electrical Material Industries of Pernambuco (SINDMETAL-PE) at the Stellantis plant in Goiana (PE). Based on qualitative research utilizing direct observation and interviews conducted in 2022 and 2026, the study analyzes how the union interprets and responds to transformations in labor relations and the productive organization of the hub. The results reveal an ambiguous scenario, in which anti-union practices, high turnover, and wage inequalities persist, while simultaneously showing processes of adaptation and the strengthening of trade union representation. It is argued that although productive expansion relies on territorial inequalities, it also engenders socio-productive dynamics that reconfigure collective action and labor institutions in recently established territories.

KEYWORDS: Regional inequalities. Automotive industry. Inovar-Auto Program. Trade union.

RESUMO: O artigo investiga como a ação sindical se constitui em um contexto produtivo greenfield, tomando como estudo de caso a atuação do Sindicato dos Trabalhadores nas Indústrias Metalúrgicas, Mecânicas e de Material Elétrico de Pernambuco (SINDMETAL-PE) na planta da Stellantis em Goiana (PE). A partir de pesquisa qualitativa baseada em observação direta e entrevistas realizadas em 2022 e 2026, analisa-se como o sindicato interpreta e responde às transformações nas relações de trabalho e na organização produtiva do polo. Os resultados evidenciam um quadro ambíguo, no qual persistem práticas antissindicais, rotatividade elevada e desigualdades salariais, ao mesmo tempo em que se observam processos de adaptação e fortalecimento da representação sindical. Argumenta-se que, embora a expansão produtiva se apoie em desigualdades territoriais, ela também engendra dinâmicas socioprodutivas que reconfiguram a ação coletiva e as institucionalidades do trabalho em territórios de implantação recente.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Desigualdades regionais. Indústria automotiva. Programa Inovar-Auto. Sindicato.

RESUMEN: El artículo investiga cómo se constituye la acción sindical en un contexto productivo greenfield, tomando como estudio de caso la actuación del Sindicato de Trabajadores en las Industrias Metalúrgicas, Mecánicas y de Material Eléctrico de Pernambuco (SINDMETAL-PE) en la planta de Stellantis en Goiana (PE). A partir de una investigación cualitativa basada en la observación directa y entrevistas realizadas en 2022 y 2026, se analiza cómo el sindicato interpreta y responde a las transformaciones en las relaciones laborales y en la organización productiva del polo. Los resultados evidencian un panorama ambiguo, en el cual persisten prácticas antisindicales, una elevada rotación y desigualdades salariales, al mismo tiempo que se observan procesos de adaptación y fortalecimiento de la representación sindical. Se argumenta que, si bien la expansión productiva se apoya en desigualdades territoriales, también engendra dinámicas socioprodutivas que reconfiguran la acción colectiva y las institucionalidades del trabajo en territorios de implantación reciente.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Desigualdades regionales. Industria automotriz. Programa Inovar-Auto. Sindicato.

Introduction

For decades, the trajectory of Brazilian automotive production was marked by strong concentration in the so-called industrial belt of the ABC Paulista. A turning point in this pattern occurred in 1976, with the installation of FIAT's first plant in Betim (MG), considered a pioneering strategy of territorial deconcentration in this industry. In the 1990s, this trend expanded with the Novo Regime Automotivo [New Automotive Regime] (NRA), in 1994. As Cardoso (2003) observes, the program drove the technological restructuring of the sector and encouraged the respatialization of Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs). They began directing new investments to regions outside the ABC Paulista, motivated by the offer of tax incentives by states with no tradition in automotive production.

Among the projects from this period are the Volkswagen Caminhões e Ônibus [Volkswagen Trucks and Buses] plant in Resende (RJ), inaugurated in 1996 under the innovative modular consortium model; the Renault complex in São José dos Pinhais (PR), created in 1998, followed by the installation of Audi-Volkswagen in the same municipality in 1999; the Mitsubishi unit in Catalão (GO); and the Mercedes-Benz plant in Juiz de Fora (MG). In the early 2000s, General Motors put its unit in Gravataí (RS) into operation, while new ventures expanded the sector's presence in different regions of the country, such as Iveco in Sete Lagoas (MG), PSA Peugeot-Citroën in Porto Real (RJ), and Ford in Camaçari (BA), inaugurated between 2000 and 2001. The creation of new productive spaces, interpreted through the notion of greenfields (Martin; Veiga, 2002; Dulci, 2018), is, in fact, a trend observed globally since the 1980s, when corporations began moving from traditional industrial regions (brownfields) to locations with no tradition in automotive manufacturing and weak union articulation. One example of this was the relocation of Japanese automakers to the southern United States (Dicken, 2010).

Beginning in 2011, with the Programa Inovar-Auto [Inovar-Auto Program], a new investment cycle began. This resulted in the arrival of a new set of automakers in Brazil, such as Nissan, Jaguar Land Rover, and Jeep, which settled in the municipality of Goiana, in the state of Pernambuco. In 2021, FIAT Chrysler Automobiles (FCA), its owner, merged with Grupo PSA [PSA Group]—owner of the Peugeot and Citroën brands—giving rise to Grupo Stellantis [Stellantis Group]. Currently, Stellantis brings together 14 European and North American brands, such as FIAT, Jeep, Peugeot, Citroën, and Ram, ranking among the world's largest automotive multinationals. In Brazil, the company holds a prominent market position, having reached a 29.4% share of sales in 2024. Among the most successful models in the

country are the FIAT Strada pickup, the best-selling vehicle in the national market, and the Jeep Compass, leader in the mid-size SUV segment (Stellantis, 2025).

From the standpoint of production, the multinational operates through three major hubs in Brazil: Betim (Minas Gerais), Porto Real (Rio de Janeiro), and Goiana (Pernambuco). Betim dates back to FIAT's creation, in the 1970s, of a strong industrial cluster composed of numerous suppliers, as well as small and medium-sized companies that emerged in its surroundings over the years (Humphrey; Schmitz, 2002). The Porto Real hub was inaugurated in 2001 by PSA Peugeot-Citroën and is still organized around the idea of a technopole with suppliers nearby. The Goiana unit, in turn, inaugurated in 2015, was conceived as an integrated industrial project and currently includes a supplier park installed around it. It is Stellantis's most recent venture in Brazil and also the group's most technologically advanced.

In this context, this article analyzes how the implementation of this production unit in Goiana (PE) affected the constitution of new institutionalities associated with work and industrial relations. In particular, it seeks to understand how union action was configured in this emerging productive territory, focusing on the activity of the Sindicato dos Trabalhadores nas Indústrias Metalúrgicas, Mecânicas e de Material Elétrico de Pernambuco [Union of Workers in the Metallurgical, Mechanical, and Electrical Material Industries of Pernambuco] (SINDMETAL-PE). The study adopted a longitudinal perspective, with field research carried out in 2022 and 2026, which made it possible to capture continuities and changes in union strategies throughout the consolidation of the hub, a dimension still little explored in the literature on automotive greenfields. The text is organized into a contextual section on the hub, followed by the methodology, the results and discussion—centered on the trajectory of SINDMETAL-PE, labor relations, health and safety, and the political economy of the hub—and, finally, the final considerations synthesize the findings and point to an open research agenda.

The presence of Stellantis in Goiana

As mentioned above, the inauguration of the Jeep plant in Goiana in 2015 was part of the reorganization of the national automotive industry, whose induction instrument was the Programa Inovar-Auto [Inovar-Auto Program] (2013–2017), one of the last major Brazilian industrial policies aimed at the sector. Among its objectives were stimulating technological

innovation and expanding national production capacity, as well as enabling the geographical deconcentration of industrial activity, with new investments directed toward regions outside traditional hubs.

For some years, the FCA-Jeep unit shared prominence in the Northeast region with Ford's hub in Camaçari (BA), until that unit ceased operations in 2021. As occurred in other cases involving the implementation of large industrial projects, the automaker's arrival was accompanied by high expectations regarding the generation of formal employment and the interiorization of development, with the potential to reduce regional inequality, as described by Ramalho (2015) concerning Southern Rio de Janeiro and by Garcia (2010) regarding Rio Grande do Sul.

The choice of Goiana as the site of the enterprise resulted from a locational selection process conducted by FCA even before the creation of Grupo Stellantis [Stellantis Group] (Lima, 2020; Ladosky, 2021; Oliveira; Ladosky; Rombaldi, 2019). Initially considered for the Complexo Industrial Portuário de Suape [Suape Industrial Port Complex], the plant was eventually redirected as a result of a combination of strategic factors. These included the low cost of the workforce, the donation of an extensive area by the João Santos business group, and a broad package of tax incentives granted by the public authorities. The path was similar to that of previous strategic decisions (Arbix; Zilbovicius, 2002), such as the formation of the automotive hub in Southern Rio de Janeiro (Dulci, 2018; 2021; Ramalho, 2005; Ramalho, 2015); Ford in Camaçari (BA) (Dulci, 2018; Dulci, 2021); and General Motors in Gravataí (RS) (Garcia, 2010).

Developed from the sugar economy and, later, from various agricultural activities, Goiana is historically characterized by social inequalities, low urbanization, and a limited supply of formal jobs. The municipality is located in the Mata Norte region of Pernambuco, equidistant from the capitals Recife (PE) and João Pessoa (PB) and stands out for sugarcane cultivation and the cement industry, with Cimentos Nassau deserving mention. Goiana also plays a relevant role as a regional commercial center, a sector from which part of the workforce later absorbed by the automotive hub originated. In the past, the municipality also housed a small textile activity, similar to that of neighboring Paulista (PE), including the presence of workers' villages (Leite Lopes, 1978).

Goiana can be characterized as a *greenfield* because of its potentially lower costs and institutional conditions considered more favorable to productive implementation (Oliveira; Ladosky; Rombaldi, 2019; Bubbico, 2021; Monteiro; Lima; Afonso, 2024). The

implementation of an automotive unit in a territory with no tradition in the sector was frequently highlighted by business management itself as a factor that enabled greater freedom in the organizational, logistical, and productive design of the factory. In 2023, the unit's Plant Manager, Jasson Azevedo, told the press that the plant's *greenfield* characteristics are one of its distinctive features. According to him, the absence of prior links between the region and the automotive sector made it possible to "think of a purer, more optimized factory, with logistical and operational gains" (Souza, 2023). This interpretation also aligns with the idea that the company was able to develop its own *know-how* in that territory and shape the workforce according to the desired production standards, without the influence of previously established industrial and institutional practices.

An investment of this magnitude in a territory historically marked by low socioeconomic indicators tends to produce significant impacts on employment, income, and local occupational trajectories. Studies on the case indicate positive effects associated with the expansion of formal employment, increased professional qualification, and the expansion of schooling (Jatobá, 2025). These processes are also associated with other positive externalities, such as the attraction of new investments, the formation of industrial *clusters*, and improvements in urban and logistical infrastructure.

From a productive standpoint, the unit installed in Goiana has characteristics that help qualify this process. The unit is an automobile manufacturer; that is, it carries out all stages of the production process, from stamping to assembly, including bodywork and painting. With the exception of assembly, the other three stages are highly automated and operate through approximately 600 robots, which help make this the multinational's most modern plant in the world. It produces *premium* models, that is, higher value-added products, such as the Jeep Renegade, Compass, and Commander, as well as the FIAT Toro and the RAM Rampage. The production line operates in three shifts, 24 hours a day, from Monday to Friday, with a daily output of one thousand vehicles. In addition, a new line is under development to produce electric vehicles from the Chinese company Leapmotor, recently acquired by Stellantis.

Beyond the characteristics of the production line, the Goiana enterprise was conceived from its origin as an integrated production complex, structured around a *supplier park* model that articulates the automaker and its main suppliers in the immediate surroundings of the plant. The project's feasibility relied on significant public support, including subsidized credit lines from state financial institutions, such as the Banco Nacional de Desenvolvimento Econômico e Social [Brazilian Development Bank] (BNDES). According to recent data, the Polo

Automotivo Stellantis de Goiana [Stellantis Automotive Hub of Goiana] has about 38 local suppliers, approximately 20 of which are installed in the *supplier park* itself, while the others are distributed among neighboring municipalities. This number represents significant growth compared with the beginning of operations, when the hub had around 22 suppliers (Belfort, 2025). All these factors contribute to shaping a specific industrial environment and a form of union action subject to analysis (Ladosky, 2018; Ladosky, 2021; Bubbico, 2021; Oliveira; Ladosky; Rombaldi, 2019).

Methodology

The research underpinning this article is part of a broader qualitative project aimed at analyzing the territorial effects of the automotive industry in Goiana (PE), following the implementation of the Polo Automotivo Stellantis [Stellantis Automotive Hub]. This broader effort involved two stages of fieldwork carried out in the municipality: the first in August 2022 and the second in February 2026⁴. In this sense, the approach adopted is epistemologically oriented by Ragin's (1987) perspective, treating the Goiana case as a complex configuration involving the interaction among multiple actors and dimensions—including companies, workers, the State, and trade union organizations. The broader research has encompassed this diversity of perspectives.

For the purposes of this article, however, a specific analytical focus was adopted, centered on the perceptions and strategies of trade union actors. The objective was to understand how local unionism interprets and acts in response to recent transformations in labor relations and in the productive organization of the territory.

In the 2022 stage, exploratory semi-structured interviews were conducted, aimed at mapping strategic actors and contextualizing the arrival and consolidation of Stellantis in the region. The 2026 stage, in turn, made it possible to revisit some of these actors and deepen the analysis of continuities and changes in union perceptions and strategies over the period. On that occasion, four union leaders (two men and two women) were interviewed, and a seminar organized by the Confederação Nacional dos Metalúrgicos da Central Única dos Trabalhadores

⁴ The fieldwork involved direct observation of institutional spaces (such as the Goiana Automotive Complex, educational and vocational training institutions, among others) and interviews with trade union and employer leaders, municipality technicians, former secretaries, and social movement leaders.

[National Confederation of Metalworkers of the Unified Workers' Central] (CUT) at the SINDMETAL-PE headquarters in Recife was recorded.

Table 1 below summarizes the main dimensions investigated:

Table 1 – Research design

Variables of interest	Central analytical dimension: the configuration of union action in a <i>greenfield</i> productive territory, focusing on the union's perceptions, interpretations, and strategies regarding the formation of new industrial relations in the Goiana automotive hub. Observed dimensions: • Union perceptions of the implementation process of the automotive hub; • Strategies of union action and collective bargaining; • Relations established with the company and public authorities; • Interpretations of changes in working conditions and in the local labor market over time. •
Techniques	• Semi-structured interviews with union leaders representing Stellantis workers (2022 and 2026); • Direct observation at the SINDMETAL-PE headquarters.

Source: Prepared by the authors.

The analysis of the interviews was conducted through thematic coding, seeking to identify recurring patterns in the interviewees' narratives (Ragin, 1987). Initially, the transcribed empirical material was read in full, followed by the assignment of codes to relevant excerpts from the interviews (Bardin, 2011). These codes were constructed both from themes that emerged from the interviewees' own statements, following Bryman's (2012) open coding approach, and from analytical dimensions related to the study's theoretical framework (Ragin, 1987). Subsequently, the codes were organized into analytical categories and subcategories, making it possible to systematize the different thematic axes present in the empirical material:

Table 2 – Thematic categories and coding

Categories	Codes used
Labor relations and union conflict	ANTISSIN: Anti-union practices (use of police, pressure, and monitoring).
	SUBSEDE: Management of the union's physical presence in Goiana vs. Recife.
	NEG_COLET: Negotiation processes for collective agreements (ACT) and collective conventions (CCT).
Workers' health and safety	SAU_MENT: Reports of mental illness, breakdowns, and psychological pressure.
	SUB_CAT: Underreporting of accidents and resistance to issuing CAT forms.
	ERGON: Repetitive strain injuries and ergonomic problems.
	ACID_FAT: Memory and records of fatal accidents in the hub.
Economy and industrial policy	DISP_REG: Wage and benefits disparity among the Goiana, Betim, and Porto Real plants.
	ROT_ESTR: Turnover as a management tool or policy.
	INC_GOV: Relationship with governments and use of tax incentives.
Future perspectives	AUTO_IA: Impact of automation on jobs.
	CARRO_ELET: Transition to electric vehicles (Leapmotor project).

Categories	Codes used
	REINV_SIND: Reinvention of image and attraction of young workers.

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Results and discussion

The trajectory of SINDMETAL-PE

The Sindicato dos Trabalhadores nas Indústrias Metalúrgicas, Mecânicas e de Material Elétrico de Pernambuco [Union of Workers in the Metallurgical, Mechanical, and Electrical Material Industries of Pernambuco] (SINDMETAL-PE), founded in 1935 and headquartered in Recife, represents about 40,000 workers in the metallurgical industry across different regions of the state. In general, SINDMETAL-PE's base is composed of companies in the automotive, steel, technology, and wind energy sectors. Historically, its activity was structured around broader collective bargaining, through the signing of Convenções Coletivas de Trabalho [Collective Bargaining Agreements] with the employers' union, covering a diverse set of companies within its base.

The Polo Automotivo Stellantis de Goiana [Stellantis Automotive Hub of Goiana], however, redefined part of the union's scope of action by incorporating workers linked to the automotive industry and to supplier companies located in the industrial complex and surrounding region. In this new context, an internal differentiation of collective bargaining forms can be observed, which began to be organized across multiple fronts through Acordos Coletivos de Trabalho [Company-Level Collective Agreements] signed directly with companies in the hub. Within this front, the union estimates that it represents about 14,000 workers linked to Stellantis's automotive chain.

Table 3 – Representation of Stellantis and supplier workers

Workers' union	Address	Central	Collective instrument	Number represented
Sindicato dos Trabalhadores Metalúrgicos de Pernambuco [Metalworkers' Union of Pernambuco] (SINDMETAL-PE). CNPJ: 11.010.501/0001-75	Rua Almeida Cunha, 364 – Santo Amaro, Recife -PE	Central Única dos Trabalhadores [Unified Workers' Central] (CUT)	Acordo Coletivo de Trabalho [Company-Level Collective Agreement] (ACT)	Stellantis: ≈ 4,000 + Auto sector: ≈ 14,700

Source: Prepared by the authors.

The constitution of union representation inside the plant occurred gradually and was strongly associated with the individual trajectories of some workers who began to act as leaders in the workplace. In the interviews conducted, the accounts reveal different paths of approximation to union activity. In one case, this approximation was related to prior union experience, which initially led the worker to seek a position on the Comissão Interna de Prevenção de Acidentes e Assédio [Internal Commission for Accident and Harassment Prevention] (CIPA). According to Interviewee A⁵, participation in the CIPA represented a first institutional space for participation within the company, which made it possible to become closer to union activity:

Then I ran for CIPA, and I was the second most voted at that time. [...] I knew the union election was coming up, and I kept thinking: 'Should I do it or not?', knowing that there were many things there for the union to help workers with, because many workers are laypeople, they have no training, and sometimes it is the first job for many of them there (Interviewee A, SINDMETAL-PE, 2022).

In another case, engagement in collective representation emerged from experiences of conflict in the workplace. After joining the plant as a mechanical technician and taking on leadership roles on the production line, Interviewee B describes a context of deteriorating

⁵ The names of the interviewees were omitted to preserve their anonymity, and they are identified in the text only by their position or institutional affiliation.

relations with management, including episodes of persecution and frustration regarding promises of promotion. According to him, this process was decisive for his approximation to worker representation: “To be honest, I was a company lackey until it kicked me in the backside. [...] That was when I started looking for the union and talking to H. He showed me what the union actually was” (Interviewee B, SINDMETAL-PE, 2026).

Labor relations and union conflict

The account also mentions that, within the company environment, the union’s image was initially mediated by management discourse itself. As the interviewee states, when union representatives distributed informational materials at the factory gate, supervisors instructed workers to observe who accepted the leaflets: “depending on the pressure they (company managers) put on them, they are even afraid to take a leaflet” (SINDMETAL-PE, 2022). This type of practice is perceived by union leaders as a constant anti-union stance on the part of the company, appearing in interviews both in 2022 and 2026. For them, one of its most visible effects would be the low level of unionization among workers in the automotive hub, probably not exceeding 5% of the worker base. According to one of the leaders, “the company is extremely anti-union. If you join today, you run the risk of being fired” (SINDMETAL-PE, 2022). According to the accounts, most unionized workers are precisely those who have some form of job stability, such as members of the Comissão Interna de Prevenção de Acidentes e Assédio [Internal Commission for Accident and Harassment Prevention] (CIPA) or workers on leave due to health issues.

In the 2022 interview, they described different mechanisms that, in their view, contribute to restricting union activity inside the industrial complex. Worth highlighting are the union’s difficulties in accessing workers within the factory space and the need to notify the company about the carrying out of outreach activities: “we have to send a notice 48 hours in advance and inform what we are going to distribute” (SINDMETAL-PE, 2022). Another practice is the calling of police forces during union mobilizations held near the plant. As one of the leaders reports, even when the activities are communicated to the company, police presence may occur during actions to distribute informational materials at the factory gate. According to

the interviewee, this is “Jeep⁶’s own guidance for the entire hub. They do not want unionization inside” (SINDMETAL-PE, 2022).

In the 2026 interview, union representatives (two of whom had also been interviewed in 2022) stated that this set of practices is not limited to the Goiana context, but reflects a company orientation in different countries where it maintains production units. This reading dialogues with Bubbico (2021), who identifies, in the case of FIAT’s unit in Melfi (Italy), also a *greenfield*, the existence of practices aimed at limiting union activity. In the Pernambuco case, however, activity inside the plant appears more restricted, with limitations on holding internal assemblies. These elements suggest that union action tends to be configured less as an institutionalized presence in the productive space and more as an activity mediated by indirect strategies external to the factory. In the interviews conducted during this period, however, no direct evidence was mentioned of the continuation of more forceful practices previously reported, such as control over union communication or the activation of the state apparatus.

The most recent accounts focus on two main dimensions: the persistence of a climate of fear among workers regarding interaction with union representatives and the perception, on the part of the leaders, that the company encourages practices of opposition to the union. This opposition is expressed above all in the refusal to pay the bargaining fee provided for in the *Acordos Coletivos de Trabalho* [Company-Level Collective Agreements]. This is a contribution intended to finance union activities, such as professional training for the category and investments in infrastructure. According to one of the leaders:

After the wage campaign, we open a ten-day period for opposition. Then workers have the opportunity to oppose or not. Today there is already a considerable number of workers who leave Goiana to file opposition at the union, in Recife. [...] something between [...] roughly 3,000 and 3,500 workers. [...] If we allowed this in Goiana, it would double or triple. Because of this, we withdrew the branch office from Goiana. Today there is no union assistance there. All assistance—medical, legal—remains at the union, in Recife, for members and non-members. Our aim, obviously, is that the fewer workers file opposition, the better. Because this is a totally anti-union company. It sends workers out during working hours to go to the union to file opposition. What was our fear regarding the branch office? It was precisely what began to happen. The company even provided cars for workers to go there. Since Goiana is nearby, the worker would leave, file opposition, and return (SINDMETAL-PE, 2026).

⁶ The plant was initially designed for the production of Jeep vehicles, which is why the production unit is frequently referred to simply as ‘Jeep’.

The position reported contrasts with the 2022 statements, in which representatives defended reopening a branch office in Goiana as a way to expand the union's presence in the territory. At that time, the closure was attributed mainly to the effects of the Reforma Trabalhista [Labor Reform] and to the reduction in demand for in-person assistance after the end of homologations carried out by the union. The more recent interviews indicate, however, that maintaining union activities in Recife came to be incorporated as an adaptive strategy to deal with manifestations of opposition to the bargaining fee. This dynamic is connected to the union's forms of organization, which may vary over time. It reflects the tensions among different dimensions of union action—such as the need to secure financial resources, maintain representation of the base, and preserve its capacity for action. This occurs within an unstable balance that Hyman (2001) calls the “geometry of trade unionism.”⁷

In the sphere of collective bargaining, this reconfiguration is also expressed in the forms of action of SINDMETAL-PE alongside the automotive hub. As mentioned earlier, the union has negotiated with Stellantis and its suppliers through Acordos Coletivos de Trabalho [Company-Level Collective Agreements], signed directly with the companies, unlike the entity's traditional pattern, based on Convenções Coletivas [Collective Bargaining Agreements] signed with the employers' union. Union leaders emphasize that these negotiations follow the logic of the state-level base date for the category. Initially, the collective agreement that establishes the general parameters for the metallurgical sector in the state is negotiated in September. Based on this reference, the wage campaign for the automotive sector is developed, involving both Stellantis and the supplier companies in the industrial complex, as one union representative explains:

First, the convention is negotiated. Then Jeep negotiates its own specific agreement. (The agreement) depends a lot on the negotiation. In terms of wage adjustment, it depends on inflation and on what we are able to negotiate. Sometimes the category achieves real gains. In other negotiations, we choose to improve other things. For example, in the last negotiation, the discussion was between a real wage gain or an improvement in PLR (Participação nos Lucros e Resultados [Profit Sharing]). There was consensus between the parties, and we ended up improving PLR for Jeep and *supplier park* workers, but without a real wage gain at that moment. But one important thing: there has never been wage loss (SINDMETAL-PE, 2026).

⁷ Hyman (2001) understands trade unionism as an unstable equilibrium between market, class, and society, the combinations of which produce different strategies over time.

Although these negotiations are part of the same wage campaign process, they result in distinct collective agreements with specific base dates: in the case of Stellantis, the base date is November, while agreements with supplier companies generally have base dates in December. In the union's assessment, this differentiation is used strategically by the company both to fragment collective mobilization and to obtain advantages in negotiations:

For example, if you follow inflation in November, it is usually a little higher than in December; the trend is December... if the situation is already not so good in November, in December the tendency is to be worse. So they also use it in this way, with the November adjustment being one and the December adjustment another (SINDMETAL-PE, 2022).

In addition, the union perspective in 2026 points to the centrality of the automaker in defining the parameters negotiated within the hub, since the agreements signed with Stellantis tend to guide those established with the supplier companies. As one of the leaders summarizes:

[...] one thing we negotiate only with Jeep. We negotiate with Jeep, and Jeep passes it on to everyone. The rest, everyone follows the same standard [regarding the system suppliers]. [...] It is the one that defines the amount everyone will pay. At the table, we deal directly with it (SINDMETAL-PE, 2026).

Within this arrangement, although the automaker concentrates power in defining negotiated standards, the accounts indicate a progressive expansion of union agency and presence. Whereas in 2022 there were only two representatives directly linked to the factory base, in the following years there was an expansion of this structure, with the incorporation of delegates in supplier companies and an increase in the number of elected directors active in the hub. In 2026, the structure came to include 26 representatives, including union directors and delegates. This movement dialogues with Ramalho's (2015) perspective, based on his analysis of Southern Rio de Janeiro. He suggests that the presence of industry in *greenfield* contexts, even when marked by power asymmetries, can stimulate the recomposition and articulation of collective forces in the territory.

Workers' health and safety

A recurring challenge in the interviews conducted concerns occupational health and safety issues, especially with regard to mental illness and the ergonomic conditions of

production. 2022 accounts indicate a significant increase in cases of mental distress, associated both with intense organizational changes and with uncertainties regarding job retention. As highlighted by one union leader, the volume of illness would have “increased fourfold,” especially among workers with longer tenure at the company, who face difficulties adapting to the pace and transformations of the production process. According to the unionist:

[...] In the company, unfortunately, that is how it is: if you worked at Jeep and were dismissed, you cannot get into another company. Very rarely can you. It is as if there were a blockade across this whole system. To get in, no one hires you; if you worked in the hub, they do not call you for another company (SINDMETAL-PE, 2022).

The situation becomes more serious when considering the psychological pressure associated with this type of experience narrated by the leaders. It involves a diffuse fear of unemployment and of the possibility of being “blocked” in the local labor market, which has the potential to operate as a disciplinary mechanism alongside workers’ psychological strain. These elements appear in the interviews and are frequently associated with episodes of more acute suffering, such as breakdowns, which are linked both to occupational insecurity and to the intense pace of work on the production lines. The production pace, imposed through *World Class Manufacturing* (WCM)⁸, contributes to the internalization of a logic of commitment and performance that directly engages workers in corporate targets (Ladosky, 2018; Bubbico, 2021). In these terms, although it cannot be reduced to specific instruments, this dynamic comes close to what Pina and Stotz (2011) characterize as a form of “management by stress.” In it, pressure for results and job insecurity operate in combination in the regulation of the workforce.

According to recent union accounts, the issue of mental health remains present, but the point that has drawn attention is the discrepancy between the number of leaves of absence for health problems and the relatively low number of Comunicações de Acidente de Trabalho [Work Accident Reports] (CAT) issued by companies. One interviewee mentions, for example, the filing of a public civil action by the Ministério Público do Trabalho [Public Labor Prosecutor’s Office] after identifying that the company simultaneously concentrated a high number of leaves and a low volume of formal work accident records: “It was the largest company in Pernambuco in number of leaves, but at the same time the smallest in issuing CATs” (SINDMETAL-PE, 2026). In this case, even in the absence of formal communication

⁸ WCM is a global production management system by FCA/Stellantis, based on efficiency targets such as ‘zero defects’ and ‘zero waste’.

by the company, in some cases the Instituto Nacional do Seguro Social [National Social Security Institute] (INSS) itself recognizes the link between illness and work when analyzing leave requests. Fatal accidents, in turn, are not described as frequent at the unit. But the accounts also emphasize that, in certain situations, the worker's death occurs later in the hospital. This may mean that the death is not formally recorded as having occurred in the workplace.

According to Pina and Stotz (2011), this set of practices seeks to “muffle” the relationship between the intense pace of work and illness or accidents, attempting to individualize the health problem as something “biological” rather than “occupational.” Although there is no confirmation that all these elements apply to the Goiana hub, safety indicators may be associated with bonus instruments, such as PLR (Participação nos Lucros e Resultados [Profit Sharing]). In this context, pressure not to report accidents or illnesses, whether from the company or from the work group itself (aiming not to jeopardize the financial bonus), may function as an additional factor of underreporting.

In any case, the illnesses most frequently mentioned in the interviews are related to ergonomic problems and repetitive strain injuries, especially in parts of the body such as the shoulder, wrist, and hands, associated with activities performed on the production lines. According to union leaders, workers who present this type of problem often end up being dismissed by companies. This reveals a recurring practice in the labor market: turning workers with health problems, low performance, or who return from leaves granted by the INSS into “preferred targets” for dismissals (Pina; Stotz, 2010). In these situations, the union reports resorting to legal action to challenge dismissals considered irregular and to seek the worker's reinstatement. Informally, union representatives mentioned that these difficulties end up granting the union a unique legitimacy in moments of workers' vulnerability, transforming direct assistance into a tool of affirmation before the rank and file (Ramalho, 2015).

Economy and Industrial Policy

One of the recurring themes in both interviews is the comparison between Goiana and other plants in the group, especially Betim (MG) and, to a lesser extent, Porto Real (RJ). In 2022, one of the interviewees mentioned as an example that, while the average remuneration of a “shop floor” worker in Goiana was around R\$ 1,470, workers in Betim could earn approximately R\$ 2,400 in equivalent positions. According to SINDMETAL-PE (2022), this difference is justified by the company on the basis of the greater “maturity” of that plant. As

summarized: “it is always that, always the same thing. Betim is forty years old.” In this sense, both union perceptions and the company’s own justification reinforce the interpretation of Goiana as a *greenfield*, in which lower wage levels appear as a relevant feature when compared with other units. This business rationale, however, is not new, but was already present in the installation of FIAT in Betim (MG) in the 1970s, associated at the time with the search for more favorable labor cost conditions in relation to the ABC Paulista. What is observed, however, is that this pattern shifts over time, so that more recent plants, such as Goiana, come to occupy this relative position of lower cost.

This dynamic becomes more evident when contrasted with the performance of the Pernambuco unit, considered the “goose that lays the golden eggs” of Grupo Stellantis [Stellantis Group]. Although described by union leaders themselves as one of the group’s most profitable plants, due to logistical, fiscal, and organizational advantages, this performance does not translate into convergence of wage levels with other units. In the 2026 interview, this disparity remains a central theme, but the interviewees also begin to emphasize factors such as the regional inequality of the Brazilian labor market: “it does not happen only at Jeep. In many companies it is like this: [...] working in the South and Southeast tends to mean higher wages” (SINDMETAL-PE, 2026). By taking regional differences as a reference for defining wages, productive expansion ultimately relies on pre-existing territorial inequalities. In this sense, the interiorization of industry does not necessarily reduce distances and may, in certain cases, reproduce them on new bases (Dulci, 2021). In the long term, this process consolidates a “regulation from below,” which makes it possible to structure new units based on standards different from those observed in more consolidated regions (Ramalho, 2015).

At the same time, the data suggest that this differentiation is not sustained only by wage levels, but also by employment dynamics, in which workforce turnover appears as a relevant element in the composition of this picture. According to one of the leaders, while in Betim it is possible to find workers with up to thirty years at the company, in Goiana employees with more than a decade of employment are rarely found, due to historically high turnover. For the interviewees, this situation also appears as part of a workforce management strategy, involving the replacement of longer-serving workers (with higher wages) by new employees hired at lower levels for similar positions. As one of the leaders summarizes: “they are dismissing longer-serving workers, with higher wages, and hiring new ones with lower wages to perform the same function” (SINDMETAL-PE, 2026).

As Pina and Stotz (2011) point out, turnover may operate precisely as a mechanism for containing the wage bill, affecting more strongly workers with longer tenure at the company. In these cases, replacement by new employees hired at lower wages tends to extend the time required for wage progression and to maintain this differential within the plant. The issue of turnover had already been mentioned in the interview conducted in 2022, when union leaders suggested that this phenomenon could be related, at least partially, to job creation targets linked to tax incentive programs. This is, however, a hypothesis raised by the interviewees, whose verification would require the analysis of additional data on incentive policies, employment levels, and hiring and dismissal dynamics over time.

In addition to these hiring and turnover dynamics, the interviewees indicate that the company seeks to establish certain wage standards across the group's different plants, especially in the case of new functions or technical positions. In this context, the circulation of qualified professionals among production units also appears, in the interpretation of union representatives, as part of the company's strategy, particularly among engineers and technical staff involved in specific projects. As one of the leaders explains, "when the professional is good, the company makes them circulate among the plants" (SINDMETAL-PE, 2026), according to the demands of each project. Among the examples mentioned, the case of an engineer from Olinda stands out. She began her trajectory at the Goiana plant as a process specialist. Later, she took on coordination and management positions and, more recently, was transferred to France to work within Stellantis's global structure.

Future perspectives

The transformations observed in the Polo Automotivo Stellantis de Goiana [Stellantis Automotive Hub of Goiana] also point to a set of future opportunities and challenges associated with technological changes and organizational reconfigurations in the automotive sector. First, the advance of automation and artificial intelligence is presented as a matter of concern, as it "tends to reduce jobs. If it is not direct replacement by robots, in any case, the need for labor becomes more limited" (SINDMETAL-PE, 2026). From the perspective of union actors, this movement is perceived as already under way, although marked by uncertainties regarding its intensity and concrete developments in the territory. Unlike other Stellantis units on a global scale, which have faced recent processes of productive contraction and capacity adjustment, the Goiana hub remains inserted in a trajectory of relative stability and expansion.

At the same time, the introduction of electric vehicle production in the hub, associated with the partnership between Stellantis and the Chinese company Leapmotor, adds new elements of uncertainty regarding the future configuration of the local production chain. According to the accounts, electrification tends to imply a reduction in labor intensity throughout the chain, since the production of electrified vehicles requires fewer components and production stages. As one leader emphasized, “the production chain of electrified vehicles uses much less labor. The estimate is something like 30% of the labor required for a combustion-engine car” (SINDMETAL-PE, 2026). This difference becomes particularly significant when compared with the current structure of the hub. While the production chain associated with combustion-engine vehicles mobilizes around 14,000 workers, the new line dedicated to electrified vehicles is expected to operate with a significantly smaller workforce, estimated at between 500 and 600 workers only in direct production. Although this is initially a specific and separate line, the data point to a potential reconfiguration of the productive and occupational base, with direct implications for employment and union organization. Even so, a movement of anticipation by the union can be observed in response to this scenario of technological transformations. In this context, the organization has engaged in initiatives aimed at discussing just transition, in coordination with entities such as ANFAVEA and CUT. This signals a perspective of action oriented toward the capacity to intervene in ongoing processes of occupational reconfiguration.

Since the 2022 interview, union representatives have also implicitly mentioned the need to reinvent the union’s image, especially with regard to attracting younger workers, who are inserted in a productive context marked by higher turnover, new technologies, and distinct expectations regarding work. As union representatives emphasized in 2026, “we want to show that the union today is not the same as before... there are many young people arriving... the union is also changing” (SINDMETAL-PE, 2026).

This renewal is also linked to changes in the social composition of the category, particularly with regard to the entry of women into the automotive sector. Although the union structure remains predominantly male, there are organizational spaces aimed at women’s participation, such as the union’s women’s secretariat and women’s collectives. At the productive level, expanding women’s participation also remains a challenge. Although activities such as seat sewing, carried out, for example, by the system supplier Lear Corporation, concentrate a significant number of women, this insertion remains marked by the sexual division of labor. In these cases, certain tasks tend to be associated with socially constructed

skills outside the factory space, such as manual dexterity and care, which ultimately reproduces, within production, gender hierarchies already present in other spheres of social life (Oliveira, 2021).

Final considerations

Over the last few years, the Polo Automotivo de Goiana [Automotive Hub of Goiana] and the activity of SINDMETAL-PE have been the object of a relevant set of studies, which analyze everything from the implementation of the enterprise to its first socio-productive configurations (Ladosky, 2018; Ladosky, 2021; Oliveira; Ladosky; Rombaldi, 2019; Bubbico, 2021; Oliveira, 2021). Without disregarding these contributions, which largely constitute the starting point of this analysis, this article sought to contribute an overview of metallurgical union activity in Pernambuco between 2022 and 2026. The focus, in this case, was not to reconstruct the implementation process, but to observe how certain dynamics have unfolded over time, especially with regard to union strategies, working conditions, and forms of regulation within the hub. The central interest was to understand union constitution in a *greenfield*, considering what it has become and what has been possible to build, or contest, from this productive context.

In this sense, taking the reading of union actors as a reference, the comparison between the two moments makes it possible to highlight both continuities—such as the persistence of anti-union practices and mechanisms for controlling the workforce—and important changes, such as the expansion of the union representation structure, the reconfiguration of its action strategies, and transformations in patterns of illness and turnover. More than that, the findings make it possible to relativize the idea that the recent expansion of the automotive industry in Brazil would almost automatically lead to convergence in working conditions and collective organization across territories. What is observed, on the contrary, is a more ambiguous picture, in which localized gains coexist with the reproduction and, in certain respects, the updating of structural inequalities. Thus, it is concluded that SINDMETAL-PE:

- a) has dealt with elements that continue to limit union activity within the hub. The low level of unionization, associated with an environment perceived as anti-union, workers' fear of approaching the organization, and the very dynamics of

opposition to the bargaining fee, points to the presence of mechanisms that hinder the union's rootedness in the workplace.

- b) lacks articulation amid broader corporate strategies, in which the territory appears as a resource for defining standards of labor management and regulation, including the maintenance of wage disparities in relation to other plants and the use of turnover as an instrument of control. The interiorization of production, far from reducing regional asymmetries, tends to rely on them as a competitive resource, consolidating forms of labor regulation that operate from lower local standards (Dulci, 2021; Ramalho, 2015).
- c) mobilizes new strategies, such as concentrating union activities in Recife, which represents a defensive territorial retreat in response to corporate strategies that encourage opposition.
- d) has been strengthening internally, with an expansion in the number of representatives in the hub—from 2 in 2022 to 26 in 2026—indicating greater capillarity among the rank and file.
- e) has sought to diversify its repertoires of action, including judicialization and the expansion of activity in supplier companies, strategies still under development whose reach deserves continued monitoring.
- f) faces, according to the accounts of its leaders, situations of psychological distress, ergonomic problems, physical strain, and signs of underreporting of illnesses and accidents—a picture that, although it requires confirmation through independent data, deserves analytical attention.

In sum, the findings dialogue with the perspective observed by Ramalho (2015), according to which productive investments do not produce only economic effects, but also engender socio-productive dynamics capable of reconfiguring power relations, stimulating forms of collective organization, and giving rise to new institutionalities in the territory. In the case of Goiana, this is expressed both in the limits imposed on union action and in the possibilities, still under construction, for its rearticulation. It must be recognized, however, that the approach adopted, centered on the perceptions of union actors, entails analytical limitations. The absence of systematic data on employment, accidents, and workers' health, as well as the perspectives of the company and non-unionized workers, restricts broader generalizations. These gaps indicate possibilities for future deepening.

Finally, far from exhausting the analysis, the results presented here point to a research agenda that remains open. The continuity of transformations in the automotive sector—especially with the transition to electric vehicles—, the long-term effects of turnover dynamics on the constitution of a local working class, occupational trajectories within global production networks, as well as issues related to gender and workers' health, pose new analytical challenges. In this sense, the case of Goiana remains a privileged terrain for understanding the developments of the automotive industry in Brazil, especially the ways in which development, work, and collective action are articulated in *greenfield* productive territories.

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CRedit Author Statement

- ☐ **Acknowledgements:** The authors acknowledge the Carlos Chagas Filho Foundation for Research Support of the State of Rio de Janeiro (FAPERJ), the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES), and their colleagues Cristiano Monteiro (PPGS/UFF), Fernanda Cavalcante (PPGS/UFF), and Lucas Afonso (PPGS/UFF), who participated in the research that resulted in this article.
 - ☐ **Funding:** This research received no external funding.
 - ☐ **Conflicts of interest:** The authors declare no conflicts of interest.
 - ☐ **Ethical approval:** Not applicable.
 - ☐ **Data and material availability:** Not applicable.
 - ☐ **Authors' contributions:** Both authors are responsible for this article.
-

Processing and editing: Editora Ibero-Americana de Educação
Proofreading, formatting, normalization and translation

