

Joint Declaration of the ministers of labour of the Visegrád Group countries
18 October 2021, Budapest

(1) We the ministers of labour of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia have attended a meeting of ministers of labour on 18 October 2021 within the framework of the 2021-2022 Hungarian Presidency of the Visegrád Group. The event took place in the year that marks the 30th anniversary of the Visegrad Group. The meeting again attested to the rationale and key role of the Visegrád Group within the European Union, and the importance of cooperation between the Visegrád Group countries. The event provided an appropriate framework for discussing the labour market measures of the countries in the region, preparation for future challenges and for sharing experience acquired in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, and it also provided an opportunity for substantial discussions, and for drafting and affirming our joint position in relation to ongoing and forthcoming European Union initiatives.

(2) The coronavirus pandemic emerging in the spring of 2020 posed unprecedented challenges for countries in the region. The effects of the pandemic rapidly passed through to the labour market, but the introduced measures have helped to mitigate the initial decline in the labour market. Owing to the job protection measures, and the job creation subsidies supplementing and gradually replacing them, we are pleased to say that labour market situation in the region have now stabilised. In our experience, immediate response, adaptation to the changing epidemiological situation, the fast granting of aids and their broad and easy accessibility were the key to the success of such measures.

(3) As a result of the implemented measures, including the swift and smooth implementation of SURE instrument in our countries, labour markets in the region have regained pre-pandemic levels in terms of labour market indicators, but the pandemic has also created longer-term challenges. Deterioration of the labour market situation of certain groups, particularly young people not in employment, education or training, the reappearance of labour shortages and the acceleration of technological changes in response to the pandemic can be identified as common challenges. We intend to manage these by strengthening active labour market measures and adapting them to changing demand, the prioritised targeting of disadvantaged groups on the labour market, the reinforcement of the Youth Guarantee, and the further development and capacity increase of public employment services, on the one hand, and by the development of the labour force adjusted to transforming labour market demand, on the other.

(4) The crisis, however, also created new opportunities. First, the pandemic may lead to the reorganisation of supply chains and the relocation of certain production activities, which potentially result in the creation of more and better new jobs for all, where small and medium-sized enterprises (including social enterprises) play a substantial role in the region. Second, it gave a significant boost to the spread of flexible forms of work, and the necessity to enhanced enforcement of occupational health and safety. We are committed to exploring these opportunities, as they can contribute to the creation of new quality jobs in the region, improve

work-life balance, employee satisfaction and productivity, and even the region's overall competitiveness. At the same time, we stand ready to consider challenges which new flexible forms of work may pose in respect of labour law standards and social protection.

(5) We are committed to the principles set out in the European Pillar of Social Rights and welcome the impetus for their implementation provided by the Action Plan proposed by the Commission and endorsed by Porto Social Summit. Adoption of the Porto Declaration confirms the importance of social cohesion and the European social model, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the digital and green transitions. We plan to schedule and ensure the implementation of measures contributing to these principles at national level, taking into account national circumstances, and needs arising for recovery and longer-term sustainability. We welcome the three EU headline targets and believe that the defined national targets should be ambitious, yet realistic, and we apply this principle as well during their determination.

(6) The structural funds and the resources of the European Social Fund (Plus) related to the area of employment play a key role in the convergence of the region and fulfilment of employment related targets. Fast and flexible use of these funds and Member States' ownership are important factors for their efficient use. We are therefore committed to strengthening these elements, the early conclusion of negotiations concerning operational programmes, and the use of funds available within the framework of the new programming period as soon as possible.

(7) We consider the current establishment of the European Labour Authority (ELA) to be an important initiative. Building on the ELA mandate, there is a potential to strengthen the cooperation of Member States and bring it to a higher level. To provide real added value, ELA's activities should reflect the Member States' needs and requirements while making sure that unnecessary additional administrative burden, as well as duplication of work done by other specialised bodies, is avoided.

(8) Currently the provision of information is of primary importance in the European Union concerning individual Member States and other labour market actors alike. The increasingly complex European legal framework and the increasingly elaborate employment structures evolving in parallel, as well as the labour market environment pose serious challenges for employers, employees, social partners and the respective authorities of Member States. Based on the foregoing, we believe that the ELA can generate added value if facilitation of access to and exchange of information on rights and obligations regarding labour mobility across the Union will be now at the centre of its attention. We would like to maintain the voluntary nature of the joint and concerted labour inspections as set out in the Founding Regulation of the ELA. We believe that ELA can only be successful in the long run if competences of national authorities are fully respected in this field and the result of these inspections can achieve an all-round added value.

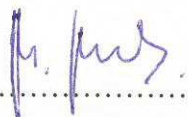
(9) A varied workforce is considered an important factor for better performance of organisations. Owing to the cohesion of diverse perspectives, organisations composed of employees of diverse backgrounds, knowledge, experience, and age operate more efficiently and with a higher level of innovation than their competitors of homogeneous composition. In case of complex problems, workplaces with mixed groups of employees can build on their individual strengths, integrate various forms of knowledge, experience, competencies, and ideas. Support of individual creativity leads to a more positive working environment and enhances employee loyalty, which contributes to improving competitiveness and resilience as well. We are committed to enforcing these principles at Member State level.

Budapest, 18 October 2021.

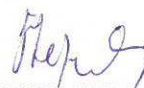


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