C/2025/492

29.1.2025

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Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: application EGF/2024/001 BE/Match-Smatch

European Parliament resolution of 22 October 2024 on the proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on the mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund for Displaced Workers (application from Belgium – EGF/2024/001 BE/Match-Smatch) (COM(2024)0275 – C10-0101/2024 – 2024/0226(BUD))

(C/2025/492)

The European Parliament,

— having regard to the Commission proposal to the European Parliament and the Council (COM(2024)0275 – C10-0101/2024),

— having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/691 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 April 2021 on the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund for Displaced Workers (EGF) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1309/2013 ([1])('EGF Regulation'),

— having regard to Council Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2020/2093 of 17 December 2020 laying down the multiannual financial framework for the years 2021-2027 ([2]) as amended by Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/765 ([3]), and in particular Article 8 thereof,

— having regard to the Interinstitutional Agreement of 16 December 2020 between the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission on budgetary discipline, on cooperation in budgetary matters and on sound financial management, as well as on new own resources, including a roadmap towards the introduction of new own resources ([4]), and in particular point 9 thereof,

— having regard to the letter from the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs,

— having regard to the report of the Committee on Budgets (A10-0009/2024),

A. whereas the Union has set up legislative and budgetary instruments to provide additional support to workers who are suffering from the consequences of major structural changes in world trade patterns or of the global financial and economic crisis, and to assist their reintegration into the labour market; whereas this assistance is made through a financial support given to workers and the companies for which they worked;

B. whereas Belgium submitted application EGF/2024/001 BE/Match-Smatch for a financial contribution from the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF), following a total number of 513 displacements ([5]) in the economic sector classified under the NACE Revision 2 division 47 (Retail trade, except of motor vehicles and motorcycles) in the provinces of Hainaut (BE32), Liège (BE33), and Namur (BE35) with 444 displacements within a reference period for the application from 11 December 2023 to 11 April 2024, and 69 displacements before or after the reference period;

C. whereas the application relates to 444 displacements within the reference period for the application whose activity has ceased in Match-Smatch;

D. whereas the application relates to 69 displacements whose activity ceased before or after the reference period of four months, where a clear causal link can be established with the event that triggered the cessations of activity of the displaced workers during the reference period as required by Article 6, second paragraph of the EGF Regulation;

([1]) OJ L 153, 3.5.2021, p. 48, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/691/oj.
([2]) OJ L 433 I, 22.12.2020, p. 11, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2020/2093/oj.
([3]) Council Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/765 of 29 February 2024 amending Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2020/2093 laying down the multiannual financial framework for the years 2021 to 2027 (OJ L, 2024/765, 29.2.2024, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/765/oj).
([4]) OJ L 433 I, 22.12.2020, p. 28, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/agree_interinstit/2020/1222/oj.
([5]) Within the meaning of Article 3 of the EGF Regulation.

E. whereas the application is based on the intervention criteria of Article 4(2), point (a), of the EGF Regulation, which requires the cessation of activity of at least 200 displaced workers over a reference period of four months in an enterprise in a Member State, including workers displaced in suppliers and downstream producers and/or self-employed persons whose activity has ceased;

F. whereas the Belgian food retail sector recorded a significant decline in volumes sold in 2023, due to the energy and inflationary crisis, and increased cross-border shopping and e-commerce;

G. whereas Match-Smatch faced a difficult economic situation for several years and eventually reported a gross operating loss of EUR 36,5 million in 2022,and in order to prevent a further accumulation of losses, Match-Smatch accepted the Colruyt Group's offer to acquire 57 of the 84 stores in September 2023, also taking over the stores' staff (1 069 people); whereas eight additional stores went to Carrefour, Delhaize, Intermarche and Delfood;

H. whereas as a result a total of 513 employees were subject to a collective redundancy procedure; 339 employees of the 19 stores for which no buyer could be found, as well as the 174 employees of the Match-Smatch headquarters;

I. whereas the requirements laid down in national and Union legislation concerning collective redundancies have been complied with;

J. whereas the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the demand for more qualified workers in the Belgian labour market, making it more difficult for the former Match-Smatch workers to reintegrate into employment;

K. whereas financial contributions from the EGF should be primarily directed at active labour market policy measures and personalised services that aim to reintegrate beneficiaries rapidly into decent and sustainable employment within or outside their initial sector of activity, while preparing them for a greener and more digital European economy;

L. whereas the multiannual financial framework (MFF) revision reduces the maximum annual amount of the EGF from EUR 186 million to EUR 30 million (in 2018 prices), as laid down in Article 8 of Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2020/2093 as amended by Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/765; whereas the Commission should closely monitor the implementation of the EGF and all institutions should take any and all necessary measures to ensure that, despite these cuts, workers made redundant can count on Union solidarity via support of the EGF;

1. Agrees with the Commission that the conditions set out in Article 4(2), point (a), of the EGF Regulation are met and that Belgium is entitled to a financial contribution of EUR 2 661 564 under that Regulation, which represents 85 % of the total cost of EUR 3 131 252, comprising expenditure for personalised services of EUR 3 009 752 and expenditure for preparatory, management, information and publicity, control and reporting activities of EUR 121 500;

2. Notes that the Belgian authorities submitted the application on 3 June 2024, and that, following the provision of additional information by Belgium, the Commission finalised its assessment on 16 September 2024 and notified it to Parliament on the same day;

3. Notes that the application relates to 513 displaced workers whose activity has ceased in Match-Smatch; notes further that 365 displaced workers in total will be targeted beneficiaries and are expected to participate in the measures;

4. Notes that Belgium applied for EGF co-financing solely to support former Match-Smatch workers living in Wallonia given the situation on the regional labour market (2023 unemployment rate of 8,2 %) and because more than 70 % of the layoffs are concentrated in Wallonia;

5. Notes that half of the Match-Smatch redundant workers (46 %) are aged fifty or older, an age group that faces more barriers to employment, and that in the last quarter of 2023 there was a difference of 18,3 percentage points between the employment rate for the 20-54 age group (76,8 %) and the employment rate for the 55+ age group (58,5 %) at national level ([6]); stresses that reskilling and upskilling the workers in line with labour-market demand for qualified jobs will thus pose a challenge, all the more considering the large number of people dismissed at the same time;

6. Welcomes the fact that the co-ordinated package of personalised services has been drawn up by Belgium in consultation with targeted beneficiaries, their representatives and the social partners to make the affected areas, and the overall labour market, more sustainable and resilient in the future;

([6]) Statbel. Emploi et chômage (13 June 2024). Chiffres.

7. Recalls that personalised services to be provided to the workers and self-employed persons consist of the following actions: information services, occupational guidance and outplacement assistance, training, retraining and vocational training, support and contribution towards business creation, as well as incentives and allowances;

8. Recalls that the Belgian authorities shall ensure that equality between men and women and the integration of the gender perspective are an integral part of and are promoted throughout the implementation period;

9. Recalls that the Belgian authorities shall acknowledge the origin and ensure the visibility of the Union funding and highlight the Union added value of the intervention, by providing coherent, effective and targeted information to multiple audiences, including targeted information to beneficiaries, local and regional authorities, the social partners, the media and the public;

10. Welcomes the fact that aiming to prepare a sound package of tailored measures to support the Match-Smatch workers' efforts to return to work, the Regional Public Employment and Vocational Training Service of Wallonia (Le Forem), trade unions (FGTB and CSC), and other partners met on several occasion in 2024 to better understand workers' retraining needs, that the social counsellors who accompanied the workers after their dismissal were also consulted, and that these meetings resulted in a coordinated package of EGF measures that complies with Article 7(4) of the EGF Regulation;

11. Welcomes the inclusion of a module on circular economy and efficient use of resources that was developed for former Swissport workers (EGF/2020/005 BE/Swissport) as part of the Regional Public Employment and Vocational Training Service (Forem) standard training offer, which will be co-financed by the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+); reiterates in this context the important role the Union should play in providing the necessary qualifications for the twin transformation; strongly supports the fact that, during the 2021-2027 MFF period, the EGF will continue to show solidarity with persons affected and maintain the focus on the impact of restructuring on workers; calls for future applications to maximise policy coherence;

12. Considers it a social responsibility of the Union to provide these workers made redundant with the necessary qualifications for the digital and green transformation of the Union industry and economy, which will also have an effect on the labour market; calls, therefore, for special attention to be paid to qualified and relevant education, including vocational training;

13. Notes that Belgium started providing the personalised services to the targeted beneficiaries on 1 January 2024 and that expenditure on the measures will therefore be eligible for a financial contribution from the EGF from 1 January 2024 until 24 months after the date of the entry into force of the financing decision;

14. Notes that Belgium started incurring the administrative expenditure to implement the EGF on 22 September 2023 and that expenditure for preparatory, management, information and publicity, control and reporting activities shall therefore be eligible for a financial contribution from the EGF from 22 September 2023 until 31 months after the date of the entry into force of the financing decision;

15. Stresses that the Belgian authorities have confirmed that the eligible actions do not receive assistance from other Union funds or financial instruments, and that the principles of equality of treatment and non-discrimination will be respected in the access to the proposed actions and their implementation;

16. Reiterates that assistance from the EGF must not replace actions which are the responsibility of companies by virtue of national law or collective agreements, or any allowances or rights of the displaced workers, to ensure full additionality of the allocation; recalls that the Member States applying for funding support from the EGF must ensure that the requirements laid down in national and Union law concerning collective redundancies have been complied with and that the company concerned has provided for its workers accordingly;

17. Approves the decision annexed to this resolution;

18. Instructs its President to sign the decision with the President of the Council and arrange for its publication in the *Official Journal of the European Union*;

19. Instructs its President to forward this resolution, including its annex, to the Council and the Commission.

ANNEX

DECISION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL

on the mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund for Displaced Workers following an application from Belgium – EGF/2024/001 BE/Match-Smatch

(The text of this annex is not reproduced here since it corresponds to the final act, Decision (EU) 2024/2854.)