European Parliament
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TEXTS ADOPTED

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Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: application EGF/2024/002 BE/Limburg machinery and paper - Belgium

European Parliament resolution of 17 December 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 following an application from Belgium – EGF/2024/002 BE/Limburg machinery and paper (COM(2024)0370 – C10-0166/2024 – 2024/0286(BUD))

The European Parliament,

– having regard to the Commission proposal to the European Parliament and the Council (COM(2024)0370 – C10-0166/2024),

– 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 Council 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

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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).

management, as well as on new own resources, including a roadmap towards the introduction of new own resources[1], and in particular point 9 thereof,

– having regard to the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, and the targets set up in the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan,

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

– having regard to the report of the Committee on Budgets (A10-0019/2024),

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/2024/002 BE/Limburg machinery and paper for a financial contribution from the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF), following 681 redundancies[2] in the economic sector classified under the NACE Revision 2 division 17 (Manufacture of paper and paper products) and 28 (Manufacture of machinery and equipment) in the region of Provincie Limburg within a reference period for the application from 31 December 2023 to 30 April 2024;

C. whereas the application relates to 567 workers made redundant in the company Sappi Lanaken NV (paper) and 114 workers made redundant in the company Purmo Group Belgium NV (machinery);

D. whereas the application is based on the intervention criteria of Article 4(2), point (c), of the EGF Regulation, which requires at least 200 workers being made redundant over a reference period of four months in in enterprises operating in the same or different economic sectors and located in the same region;

E. whereas the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine have reduced economic competitiveness and have a negative impact on economic growth in Belgium;

F. whereas Sappi Lanaken was specialised in the production of woodfree coated paper (WCP); whereas the declining demand for

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1 OJ L 433 I, 22.12.2020, p. 28, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/agree_interinstit/2020/1222/oj.

2 Within the meaning of Article 3 of the EGF Regulation.

graphics products resulting from increased digitalisation has led to a growing overcapacity of the European WCP industry; whereas the production at Sappi Lanaken could not be shifted to other paper products more in demand without heavy investments and the Sappi Group therefore decided to stop production in Lanaken and close the plant, as no suitable buyer could be identified, because of structural overcapacity in the industry;

G. whereas Purmo Group’s production volume of panel radiators has been steadily declining over the period 2018-2023, from 820 000 units in 2018 to 320 000 in 2023 (-60 %); whereas when comparing the production costs of the various Purmo Group’s plants in Europe, the site in Zonhoven is at a disadvantage, as its costs are 17 % to 35 % higher; whereas the Purmo Group decided to stop production of 50 mm panel radiators in its Zonhoven plant and close the relevant production line; whereas following the unexpected situation regarding gas availability and prices, resulting from the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, and Union legislation benefiting low-temperature heating systems to the detriment of panel radiators, demand recovery is unlikely as the panel radiator market will increasingly be limited to replacing units in use;

H. whereas the two companies, in compliance with Belgian law, followed the mandatory procedure for informing and consulting workers' representatives and have set up an employment unit, whose purpose is to provide workers laid off in the context of collective redundancies with outplacement services;

I. 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;

J. whereas the EGF shall not exceed a maximum annual amount of EUR 30 million (in 2018 prices), as laid down in Article 8 of Council Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2020/2093 as amended by Council Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/765;

1. Agrees with the Commission that the conditions set out in Article 4(2), point (c), of the EGF Regulation are met and that Belgium is entitled to a financial contribution of EUR 704 135 under that Regulation, which represents 60 % of the total cost of EUR 1 173 559, comprising expenditure for personalised services of EUR 1 126 559 and expenditure for preparatory, management, information and publicity, control and reporting activities of EUR 47 000;

2. Notes that the Belgian authorities submitted the application on 19

July 2024, and that, following the provision of additional information by Belgium, the Commission finalised its assessment on 5 November 2024 and notified it to Parliament on the same day;

3. Notes that the application relates to 567 workers made redundant in the company Sappi Lanaken and 114 workers made redundant in Purmo Group Belgium; notes further that 632 workers will be targeted beneficiaries in total, almost exclusively men;

4. Underlines that Lanaken’s and Zonhoven’s labour markets are at disadvantage when compared to Limburg as a whole or to Flanders with a ratio of the working population to available jobs significantly lower than in Limburg as a whole or in Flanders; highlights that the number of industrial jobs available in Limburg decreased by 15 % in 2023;

5. Points out that the profiles of the displaced workers, one third of which are aged 55 years or more and 30 % are with low education, translate into severe barriers on the labour market; stresses that taking into account the downward trend in vacancies and its geographical distribution, the workers will need additional tailored support to help them succeed the transition to employment;

6. 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;

7. Considers it as a social responsibility of the Union and Member States to provide the affected workers a possibility to obtain the necessary qualifications for future employment, considering the digital and ecological transition having a significant impact on their sectors whilst leading to a reduction of demand; welcomes the fact that the co-ordinated package of personalised services was drawn up by Belgium in consultation with targeted beneficiaries, their representatives and social partners;

8. Stresses that the support provided by the EGF needs to be embedded in a larger strategy for the affected workers and the region, on all political levels, including by support of relevant funding instruments of the Union, with the aim to ensure that nobody gets left behind in the digital and climate transitions;

9. Recalls that personalised services to be provided to the workers consist of the following actions: social intervention advisor, guidance, counselling, and vocational orientation, active job-search support, training, retraining and vocational training, including training in digital skills, as well as training at the workplace;

10. Notes that Belgium started providing personalised services to the targeted beneficiaries on 26 December 2023 and that the period of eligibility for a financial contribution from the EGF will therefore be from that date until 24 months after the date of the entry into force of the financing decision;

11. Notes that Belgium started incurring administrative expenditure to implement the EGF on 20 November 2023 and that such expenditure shall therefore be eligible for a financial contribution from the EGF from that date until 31 months after the date of the entry into force of the financing decision;

12. Stresses that the Belgian authorities have confirmed that the principles of equality of treatment and non-discrimination will be respected in the access to the proposed actions and their implementation, and that any double financing will be prevented;

13. 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;

14. Calls on the Belgian authorities and other Member States to undertake the preventive measures in a proactive manner in order to adapt industries to the globalisation and of technological and environmental changes and protect workers from losing their jobs and other negative impact of the globalisation;

15. Approves the decision annexed to this resolution;

16. 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*;

17. 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/2024/002 BE/Limburg machinery and paper

(The text of this annex is not reproduced here since it corresponds to the final act, Decision (EU) 2025/47.)