Minutes

1. **Nature of the meeting**

   The inaugural meeting of the special group “Labour Migration Platform” brought together representatives of Member States’ migration and employment sectors and European Social and Economic Partners.

2. **List of points discussed**

   A. **Welcome session by Commissioner Johansson and Commissioner Schmit**

   **Commissioner for Justice and Home Affairs, Ylva Johansson**, highlighted the challenges faced by the EU in terms of rising demand for skilled labour and declining supply. She noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this trend, resulting in a large number of unfilled vacancies and difficulties for employers to find the necessary workers. Commissioner Johansson stressed the economic and social costs of labour shortages, noting that the EU needs to increase labour migration in order to contribute addressing these issues. She also outlined initiatives that the EU is undertaking to make the EU more attractive for skilled workers, including Talent Partnerships with key third countries and the setting up of an EU Talent Pool. She urged the participants to provide input on how to best tailor these initiatives to the specific needs of Member States.
**Commissioner for Jobs & Social Rights, Nicolas Schmit,** confirmed the significant challenges of labour shortages across the EU. He emphasised the priority of re- and upskill the domestic workforce, but also acknowledged that this alone would not be enough to address the issue. Commissioner Schmit stressed the Platform’s role in supporting a more strategic labour migration policy involving the Public Employment Services (PES) and the European agencies (European Labour Authority, Cedefop) in identifying strategic shortages and supporting skills and qualifications recognition. He also stressed the importance of ensuring adequate labour standards and combating undeclared work in order to avoid unfair treatment of domestic workers and migrants. Commissioner Schmit concluded by stating that the Platform would be a valuable tool to address these issues in a coordinated and comprehensive way.

**B. Scene setter: envisaged role of the platform**

**COM (DG HOME)** recalled that the Platform was launched as part of the Skills and Talent package adopted by the Commission in April 2022. The importance of the Platform as a key setting for discussing and addressing the links between labour migration and employment policies was stressed as well as the need to work together to ensure migrants have the skills and support they need to succeed in the EU labour market. The issue of the recognition of skills and qualifications acquired in third countries was highlighted as a key focus for the platform, in particular in the framework of the 2023 European Year of Skills. This focus will help to maximise the potential benefits of labour migration for both migrants and host societies while also facilitating the integration of migrants in the host country, contributing to more cohesive and resilient societies. Finally, COM recalled the recent commitment by the Commission and European Social and Economic Partners for better integration of refugees and migrants into the EU labour market, under the European Partnership for Integration.

**COM (DG EMPL)** informed about the upcoming report on intra-EU labour mobility that will examine vacancy rates and employment growth across occupations in the EU. The Platform should discuss ways to better match the supply and demand for workers, taking into account legal migration opportunities. Labour/skills shortages in each EU Member State and existing mechanisms to collect this information should be considered. Public Employment Services (PES) play a key role in attracting and integrating third country nationals. They can play a greater role in identifying labour shortages and making national labour market tests more transparent. The overall objective should be to facilitate effective and sustainable labour market integration and ensure that highly qualified migrants are not employed in low-skilled jobs. Cooperation across EU institutions, EU Member States, with European Social and Economic Partners and other relevant stakeholders will be key for the success of the Platform.

**C. Labour shortages in the EU**

**COM (DG EMPL)** briefly introduced the first session on Labour shortages in the EU and means to address them and gave the floor to the European Labour Authority (ELA) for a presentation on the preliminary findings of its upcoming Report on Labour Shortages and Surpluses 2022.
The European Labour Authority (ELA) presented the preliminary findings of the upcoming Report on labour shortages and surpluses.

ELA provided an overview of the main identified shortages in the EU, in particular in the construction, IT/software, healthcare, and more recently, hospitality sectors. Additionally, ELA noted an under-representation of female workers and of young workers in some of the most widespread shortages. ELA also underlined the over-representation of workers born outside the EU in certain jobs (cleaners, waiters, kitchen helpers, etc.).

These labour shortages are caused by changes in the employment structure towards more services, demographic changes, emigration and the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions. Additionally, technological change, digitalisation, and the transition to a climate-neutral economy are major factors in the shift towards services and ‘green’ jobs.

These conclusions will be further refined before the release of the Report on Labour Shortages and Surpluses 2022.

COM (EMPL) opened the floor for participants to exchange views on key labour market issues and challenges and the potential of labour migration in mitigating them, based on the following questions shared with participants ahead of the meeting:

Questions for steering the discussion:
- *What are the main labour market shortages in your respective Member State and what is your perspective for addressing them?*
- *Which mechanisms do you use to identify the main shortages on the labour market of your Member State? Is there a national public database?*
- *Do you see scope for relevant EU-level intervention to address labour market shortages?*
- *In your view, what role can migration play in addressing these shortages and related challenges (currently and in the future)?*

BusinessEurope welcomed the launch of the Platform and emphasised the need to continue creating synergies between EMPL and HOME. BusinessEurope recalled that the determination of volumes of admission of migrant workers remains a national competence. Non-EU citizens already present in the EU have low employment rates and their participation in the labour market must be increased. BusinessEurope stated the need for workers at all skill levels, especially highly skilled workers, which the EU fails to attract in comparison to countries like the United-States and Canada. BusinessEurope suggested having discussions with EU sectoral employers’ organisations in the future for more granularity on sectoral labour shortages and needs. Labour market tests should not be a barrier for recruitment. BusinessEurope expressed support for the ongoing work on the EU Talent Pool.

LV welcomed the launch of the Platform. There are important labour shortages in the construction, hospitality and ICT sectors. Certain sectors struggle to attract workers due to the working conditions offered, which must be improved. Long-term and shorter-term labour
market forecasts as well as employers surveys are carried out to analyse future labour market needs. Sectors relevant for migration are transport, construction, and temporary work agencies, which also links to the discussion on posting of workers. Options for activating the domestic workforce also need to be explored. Intra-EU mobility can be an additional solution.

**NL** agreed that to tackle labour shortages, legal migration is not the only solution, working conditions have also to be improved. Lifelong learning is essential to create a well-skilled workforce. Labour market shortages are present across almost all sectors. Much attention is paid to forecasting and labour force surveys, but these forecasting methods do not play a role in migration policies. NL considers the potential increase in labour migration challenging, in view of increasing pressure on the housing, education and care sectors. NL confirmed that employers are encouraged to use labour market tests when recruiting non-EU workers.

**IE** identified many shortages across different sectors, notably in the IT, construction, care, retail, logistics, and transport sectors. IE also mentioned recent and ongoing reforms in view of introducing better working conditions for sectors suffering severe shortages, in close cooperation with employers. In 2022, a new methodology for identifying skill shortages was trialled.

**ES** identified most shortages in the construction, health and IT sectors. There are also shortages in the tourism and agricultural sectors due to seasonality. ES has set up an observatory at a national level to monitor labour market developments, especially shortages. The EU is losing the race to attract talent, with the USA, Canada or Australia offering more attractive salaries to migrants, including Spanish nationals. Spain sees legal migration as one of the important pillars to fill these shortages, alongside improving labour conditions.

**HU** preliminary noted that labour shortages are a widespread issue across the EU, often shifting from one Member State to another, as some of them are able to offer workers better working conditions. HU also faces important labour shortages. Main solutions should be the activation of the local workforce and support to the return of HU workers living abroad. Vocational training should be a priority both at the national and EU levels. Legal migration should be considered only in cases of specific persisting skills shortages and remain temporary. For this reason, HU indicated that the current EU legal migration initiatives do not seem appropriate methods to solve labour shortages.

**MT** welcomed the launch of the Platform and emphasised the need for a more streamlined EU labour migration policy, including for low- and medium-skilled workers. MT mentioned important labour shortages in construction, healthcare and low- and medium-skilled services (cleaners, waiters, etc.), where third-country nationals workers already represent an important part of the workforce. MT gives priority to hiring Maltese and EU workers to fill shortages. Nevertheless, Malta underlined that while migration is a complex issue, it also provides tangible solutions for demographic problems in the EU.

**EL** mentioned important shortages in hospitality and tourism in addition to highly skilled occupations, agriculture and construction sectors. EL plans to implement targeted policies to upskill and reskill the workforce, including with regard to digital skills. EL also aims to improve working conditions, notably through increased wages. IT tools to measure and
forecast trends in the labour market are being developed and a new department within the Public Employment Service (PES) was created to monitor labour market trends and implement active labour market policies. Well-targeted policies are needed, designed in consultation with appropriate stakeholders at the national but also regional level. While acknowledging the important role of labour migration, it should be complementary to national employment policies.

**PT** identified shortages in several sectors, including IT, construction, seasonal sectors (tourism, agriculture) and customer services (e.g., sales, and accountancy positions), with healthcare being the most affected. PT lacks workers with the necessary educational and professional background. Language skills are an essential element. PT does not have an official database of shortages and relies in this regard on coordination with EURES. Working conditions can also be an obstacle to attracting workers to PT, as the salaries are below the EU average. The emigration of Portuguese citizens living abroad is also an important element to address shortages. Labour migration from non-EU countries is equally important. For this reason, Portugal welcomes EU initiatives in this regard.

**SMEunited** welcomes the skills and demand-driven approach linking migration to the real needs of the labour market and of SMEs. SMEunited works closely with its members to identify the best tools for recognising labour market shortages, based on information and forecasts of skills needs and shortages for every sector and depending on regional and local labour markets. SMEunited identified several challenges, the first being bureaucracy, particularly in relation to qualifications recognition and procedures to issue permits. SMEunited welcomes the dialogue on this and suggested having national focus groups in future discussions of the Platform.

**BE (Flemish Region)** highlighted that a demand-driven approach is important in addressing labour shortages and labour migration plays an important role in this context. BE faces important shortages of highly skilled and medium-skilled workers, notably in the healthcare and construction sectors. Salaries of non-EU workers should be in line with the market, noting cases where minimum working conditions are not respected by employers. Housing and integration are also important topics. Recent EU initiatives under the Skills and Talent package are relevant, especially as regards the EU Talent Pool and Talent Partnerships (BE indicated participating in several talent partnership pilots). Discussions on the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) could be helpful to assess the skills of non-EU citizens and facilitate further talent attraction.

**BG** mentioned shortages of highly qualified workers, notably in the healthcare, construction, and educational sectors. Surveys with relevant stakeholders are conducted twice a year to identify labour shortages. BG welcomed the launch of the Platform.

### 3. Relevant EU-level initiatives

**COM (DG HOME)**, briefly introduced the second session. The comprehensive approach to migration set out in the 2020 New Pact on Migration and Asylum recognises the crucial role
that legal migration plays in building strong partnerships with partner countries as well as, at the same time, addressing skills shortages across EU Member States.

**COM (DG HOME)** presented the main elements of the Skills and Talent package of April 2022 and how the Platform could support the initiatives identified therein.

**COM (DG HOME)** mentioned the revision of the existing legal framework to increase the EU’s attractiveness and make it easier for third-country nationals to come and move within the EU. The proposed revisions – currently in negotiations - include:

- A revision of the Long-Term Residents Directive to improve the rights and mobility within the EU of migrants who are already well integrated into our societies.
- A revision of the Single Permit Directive to simplify the single application procedure for the admission of all third-country workers and to better protect third-country workers from the risk of exploitation.

**COM (DG HOME)** also gave an update on the ongoing work to develop the EU Talent Pool, notably the preparation of an impact assessment that will look at different options for its design and roll-out. DG HOME further mentioned ongoing work on Talent Partnerships with specific key partner countries to address the market and skills’ needs of Member States and partner countries in a tailor-made and mutually-beneficial way, as part of a comprehensive approach to the management of migration.

DG HOME finally mentioned the need to continue to improve the potential avenues for legal migration in the medium to longer term, responding to evolving socio-economic needs and challenges. To this end, three areas of interest have been identified: attracting long-term care workers, promoting youth mobility and facilitating the admission of start-up founders at EU level.

**COM (DG EMPL)** informed on the 2023 European Year of Skills announced by President Von der Leyen in October 2022, which will include an initiative on enhancing the recognition of qualifications of third-country nationals to attract the right skills to the EU.

**DG EMPL** presented different EU transparency tools on skills and qualifications, notably the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) which seeks to improve the transparency, comparability and portability of people's qualifications to boost employability, mobility and social and integration of workers and learners. DG EMPL used the comparison between the EQF and the Ukrainian qualification framework (awaiting publication) as a concrete example; based on a standard methodology and focused on transparency, it will facilitate the understanding of qualifications from other national and regional qualification frameworks in Europe and vice versa.

DG EMPL mentioned the comprehensive approach to the validation of skills acquired through non-formal and informal learning that can help ensure they are recognised and valued in the labour market. DG EMPL stressed its close collaboration with the European Centre for the
Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) and EU Member States in developing validation systems such as the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning or the European guidelines for validating of non-formal and informal learning.

DG EMPL also presented EU Skills assessment and communication tools such as the Europass set of online tools and the multilingual EU Skills Profile Tool for third-country nationals that supports early profiling of the skills of refugees, migrants and citizens of non-EU countries who are staying in the EU.

Finally, DG EMPL provided a short picture of where the EU Skills Agenda 2020, a five-year plan to help individuals and businesses develop more and better skills, stands so far, mentioning several achievements out of the twelve actions foreseen in it.

COM (DG HOME) opened the floor for participants to exchange views on how to better attract skills and talent to the EU. To this end, the following questions were shared with participants ahead of the meeting:

**Questions for steering the discussion:**
- What are your views on the Commission’s initiatives’ potential impact on reducing the labour and skills shortages on your labour market and what are the main challenges?
- To what extent would the recognition and validation of skills obtained in third-countries help you address these challenges?
- In your view, what are the most effective tools to attract skills and talent to the EU?

AT considered it a priority to help re- and up-skilling the domestic labour force, including integrated third-country nationals, but also to make better use of women’s workforce potential in general. AT noted that skilled third-country nationals with recognised qualifications can contribute to fill shortage occupations. AT stressed the need to keep flexibility to be able to react to national market developments more efficiently. AT mentioned the expected Comprehensive Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement with India, which relates to readmission and includes information exchange on legal migration and no preferential quotas.

FI mentioned similar concerns regarding labour shortages as most EU Member States. Labour migration is part of the solution, in addition to reskilling and upskilling the domestic workforce. FI expressed interest in the Platform as well as other EU initiatives under the Skills and Talent package, such as Talent Partnerships (so far, not geographically aligned with Finland’s interests). FI stressed the importance of win-win strategies, where partner countries are not only a source of labour and skills but also true partners who should benefit from such schemes in practical terms (school system, occupational training, etc.).

IT welcomed the initiative and encouraged further synergies on this complex topic. IT mentioned facing similar shortages as most EU Member States, with severe shortages in the ICT, construction, logistical and agricultural sectors. IT underlined the difficulty of having a systematic collection of labour and occupational shortages (list updated every two to three
years at the national level) considering the regional legal competencies and labour market specificities.

**DE** welcomed the initiative and suggested having more focused discussions in future meetings. **DE** mentioned interest in the development of the EU Talent Pool while stressing the need for deeper discussions to identify beforehand synergies and avoid creating double structures. **DE** stressed the need for a good internal dialogue between employment and migration authorities to identify labour shortages and help attract a much-needed skilled workforce. It also suggested a coordinated approach in the context of the discussions in the IMEX working group, where **DE** sends one delegate dealing with employment issues and another with migration issues, which has proven to be a good option. Different tools are implemented, such as bottleneck analysis for some professions and long-term reviews of labour market needs. **DE** identified acute shortages in healthcare, construction, and skilled crafts. Finally, **DE** informed being in the midst of a process to adapt immigration law to attract more people from third countries.

**HR** identified main labour shortages in construction, transport, healthcare and ICT and stressed the need for re/up-skilling as well as for finding an adequate balance between labour market needs and education system opportunities. **HR** mentioned the example of its employment services, which try to find jobs for unemployed persons on the basis of their skills, and also conduct programmes to support the development of skills useful for the green and digital transition. In the framework of the national recovery plan, the government established a voucher system for unemployed persons to acquire green and digital skills. **HR** explained that most foreign workers come from neighbouring countries and numbers are increasing. The majority of third-country nationals work in seasonal jobs. **HR** mentioned its participation in the EU Talent Pool pilot and expressed support for the development of the EU Talent Pool, which could have a positive effect on matching job-seekers and employers. On Talent Partnerships, **Croatia** highlighted the need for them to be mutually beneficial.

**IE** mentioned that it is currently analysing operational, policy and legal consideration at national level related to the Single Permit Directive, through an inter-departmental working group. Analysis has including focus on the timelines for processing employment permits, visas, and residence permits.

**LV** suggested grouping topics for future meetings to allow more tailored discussions. Depending on the topic on the agenda, relevant experts and stakeholders might be invited. **LV** mentioned an interest in discussing qualifications, working conditions, as well as circular migration and brain drain.

**ES** mentioned the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) classification as an important tool, the result of successful collective efforts by 25 EU Member States. Spain encouraged the development of flexible new tools such as the EQF as long as they bring benefit and do not create an additional burden for national authorities.

**NL** welcomed the Platform’s objective to join expertise on labour and migration and inquired about possible synergies with the Working Party on Integration, Migration and Expulsion (IMEX) and the International Centre for Migration Policy Development’s (ICMPD) Labour
Migration Practitioners’ Network. NL indicated not promoting actively labour migration as a solution to labour shortages and recalled the need to primarily develop an attractive business environment in the EU. Talent Partnerships are one solution but should nonetheless be tested first through pilots and with a focus on addressing skills shortages and ensuring brain gain for partner countries. NL also agreed with the suggestion to focus on targeted topics in the next meetings of the Platform. NL stressed the need for clear and coherent access to information for third-country nationals by suggesting improving the EU Immigration Portal.

FR welcomed the launch of the Platform. France mentioned facing important labour shortages in the healthcare, hospitality, cleaning, agricultural as well as tourism sectors. A national list of sectors with labour shortages exists and is updated on an ad hoc basis, in cooperation with representative employers’ and employees’ organisations as well as regional authorities. France informed about the new law on immigration to be debated in Parliament in early 2023, which contains provisions to reduce pressure on listed sectors experiencing shortages by facilitating the regularisation of undocumented migrants, provided that they work in sectors facing labour shortages.

SI mentioned a new system to better assess the skills and competences of third-country nationals, which is currently being developed together with employers and social partners. Discussions on labour shortages are held in cooperation with social partners, who set up a catalogue for skills needs (first test with ICT so far). SI highlighted the need for a skilled workforce and proper vocational training opportunities. One issue identified is the issue of diplomas and certifications. Slovenia consequently sees interest in discussing the recognition of skills and qualifications in upcoming meetings of the Platform.

EL expressed support for recent EU-level initiatives to tackle the important issue of labour shortages. Validation and recognition of skills is an important challenge, particularly for third-country nationals who are beneficiaries of temporary or international protection and do not have their diplomas at their disposal. EL mentioned ongoing projects developed with the support of UN specialised agencies, such as information campaigns providing clear information on employment prospects in different sectors or on the mapping of skills and educational backgrounds. EL also referred to the importance of promoting existing EU work permits with third-countries, in order to help reduce labour shortages. EL underlined the importance of an EU approach rather than a national one.

SMEunited highlighted the importance of further discussing the issue of recognition of skills and qualifications. SMEunited also inquired about the results of the EU Talent Pool pilot.

4. Other topics

COM indicated that the terms of reference of the “Labour Migration Platform” had been received by participants prior to the meeting. They will have the opportunity to provide written comments. Presentations will also be shared shortly after the meeting.
COM suggested convening the Platform between two to four times per year. Meetings will allow for deeper discussions on key issues, ongoing initiatives and future actions. The next meeting could take place before summer 2023 to discuss the development of the EU Talent Pool as well as Talent Partnerships. A third meeting could be organised in October 2023, with a focus on long-term care. COM informed about the upcoming launch of a study by the Commission on long-term care to explore options to enhance the attractiveness of the sector.

COM asked participants to be proactive and propose topics for future meetings and suggested the possibility of inviting other participants, depending on the topics on the agenda, to benefit from their expertise and knowledge.

5. Closing remarks and end of the meeting

COM thanked all attendees for their presence at the launch of the Platform and for valuable insights and perspectives shared during the discussions. These will be considered in future work, including on the EU Talent Pool and Talent Partnerships.

The Platform aims to foster a constructive and productive dialogue and develop a more coordinated and coherent approach to addressing the complex, interlinked issues between labour market and migration policies. The Commission is thus committed to continuing to support and strengthen the Platform in the future. Together with information on the adoption of the 2023 European Year of Skills, additional documents will be shared with the participants (terms of reference, minutes), who are encouraged to contact the Commission if needed.

6. List of participants

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**European Social and Economic Partners**

- EuroChambers
- SMEunited
- SGI Europe
- BusinessEurope

*(ETUC invited but not represented)*

**EU Institutions and Agencies**

- ELA
- COM

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