

Flash report Meeting with Amazon on 29.10.2021

Participants:

- **Commission:** Commissioner Nicolas Schmit, Anne Calteux (Head of Representation Luxembourg), Anouk Faber (Cabinet Member)
- **Amazon:** Jorrit van der Meulen (VP Europe, Amazon), Ms. Izabela Milewska-Swiebocka, M. Waterworth, M. Perego

Amazon has grown fast over the last years, with 175 000 permanent employees in Europe. In Luxembourg over 3000 people work for the company and they still have many open jobs. Asked about their assessment of the labour market in Europe, Amazon described that it is a major effort for them to attract and retain staff, especially in some regions. They are spending a lot of efforts on a good working environment as it is very expensive to lose an employee, be it in management or in the warehouses. Amazon insisted that safety in the warehouses is a priority for them and that they perform better than other logistic firms do.

The Commissioner mentioned how important skills are, at all levels. He described that VET and short intensive trainings are very well adapted to close skills gaps, also when it comes to IT. He described the EAfA and Pact for Skills initiatives.

Amazon described that they invest heavily in apprenticeships as they are very attractive, meaning employers invest in people and offer them good pathways to gain experience while at the same time working and earning money. Amazon has indeed many initiatives in this area and is also partly covering tuition fees for workers (10 000 people have benefitted from this in Europe), including for trainings that could lead to workers changing their jobs to outside Amazon. Amazon has not joined the Pact for Skills yet, but they will look into it.

Asked about automation, digitalisation and algorithmic management, Amazon replied that indeed workers in the warehouses need better skills now because of automation. Amazon is also offering trainings for SMEs and individuals they work with e.g. on e-commerce, cross-border business. Many aspects of the work and training has changed because more machine-human interaction takes place. However, workers always have a human they can speak to.

The Commissioner mentioned the upcoming initiative on platform work that addresses bogus self-employment, ensuring the social protection of employees. He insisted that indeed, it is important that a human dimension is preserved also when it comes to algorithmic management.

Amazon described that this would concern only a very small part of their business and that the people taking those flex jobs/delivery jobs do it because they want to have the flexibility, as there are so many vacancies that they could also take a permanent job if they wanted to.

The Commissioner insisted that workers should of course be able to be self-employed if they wish so and that there should be no third status apart from genuine self-employed and employees.

Asked about social dialog and trade unions, Amazon insisted that they leave it open to their employees to join trade unions, that their wages are above the Minimum Wage, that they are open to interact with workers' representatives and trade unions locally and nationally. They also insisted that reports about

bad working conditions are inaccurate and that they follow-up all those reports to address any issues that may exist.

To close off the meeting, the Commissioner agreed that technology drives many changes but that it is important to keep a human dimension in the working relationship at all stages.