

March 5th, 2024

Mr. Nicolas Schmit

Commissioner for Employment and Social Rights

Dear Nicolas,

Occupational safety and health is at the hearts and minds of our governments. We see it as a key task for the European Union to ensure a working environment which does not harm our workers. Limit values that protect our workers against dangerous substances are an important instrument to prevent health damage caused by exposure.

The Commission has done well in advancing European legislation to set limit values for substances in the workplace. Significant progress has been made in recent years, in particular for carcinogenic substances. Health and safety at work is today one of the areas where the EU has had the biggest impact with a solid legal framework.

We need to keep up the good work, and be even more ambitious in our efforts to updating and improving EU legislation on more dangerous substances in line with the EU strategic framework on health and safety at work 2021-2027.

There is still a serious amount of work to be done, since there is still a large number of substances for which there are no limit values at European level. With the current pace of setting limit values, we will not meet the high ambitions set forth by the Commission regarding chemicals at the workplace, in particular within its strategic framework. This is the case for carcinogenic substances, but also for other categories of substances that fall under the Chemical Agents Directive (CAD) and the Carcinogens, Mutagens and Reprotoxic Substances Directive (CMRD). Therefore, we need to accelerate the process.

We, the undersigned ministers, urge the Commission to accelerate the process by the following means.

Firstly, by taking action in line with the statement of the tripartite Advisory Committee on Safety and Health at Work (ACSH) of 28 March 2022, as well as in the Opinion of the ACSH of 26 May 2021 on priority chemicals.

We therefore urge the Commission to increase the capacity of preparing scientific opinions for chemicals, including by allocating adequate resources for all actors in the chain of limit value setting work, including the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA). In addition to carcinogenic substances, priority should be given to substances that fall under Directive 98/24/EC on chemical agents at work. Member states could also, on a voluntary basis and where possible, support the Commission by giving scientific information on substances in line with the statement of the ACSH from 2022.

Secondly, these priorities should have a solid place in the next EU strategic framework on health and safety at work and work should already start in the last phase of the current Strategic Framework (2021-2027).

We believe that a stronger focus is well warranted and would not only increase the protection of our workers' safety and health, but also benefit labour productivity, employment attractiveness and the European economy overall.

We, the ministers of Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden, believe that a joint effort is needed and could pave the way to advancing European legislation to set limit values for substances in the workplace. We look forward to discussing this further as part of the upcoming process of setting the priorities for the next institutional cycle and preparing the next strategic framework on health and safety at work.

Yours sincerely,

Yiannis PANAYIOTOU

Minister of Labour and Social Insurance of Cyprus

Vlastimil VALEK

Minister of Health of the Czech Republic

Ane HALSBOE-JØRGENSEN

Minister for Employment of Denmark

Sanni GRAHN-LAASONEN

Minister of Social Security of Finland

Catherine VAUTRIN

Minister of Labour, Health and Solidarity of France

Hubertus HEIL

Federal Minister of Labour and Social Affairs of Germany

Marina Elvira CALDERONE

Minister of Labour and Social Policies of Italy

Monika NAVICKIENE

Minister of Social Security and Labour of Lithuania

Georges MISCHO

Minister for Labour of Luxembourg

Karien VAN GENNIP

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Social Affairs and Employment of the Netherlands

Ana Mendes GODINHO

Minister for Labour, Solidarity and Social Security of Portugal

Luka MESEC

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities of Slovenia

Yolanda DÍAZ PÉREZ

Second Vice-President and Minister of Labour and Social Economy of Spain

Paulina BRANDBERG

Minister for Gender Equality and Working Life of Sweden