

Aarhus, 3 October 2024

Hørings svar (consultation response):

## **Strategy for Recruitment and Retention of International Labor**

First and foremost, Erhverv Aarhus would like to commend the ambitious, well-developed, and important strategy, as well as the strong collaboration within the working group behind it. It is highly positive that Aarhus Municipality, business organizations, companies, and educational institutions are working together to elevate and renew the city's internationalization efforts.

Since the establishment of International Community in 2008, Erhverv Aarhus has had internationalization as a dedicated focus area. In 2023, the East Jutland branch of HEADSTART Career also became part of this initiative. Our collective internationalization efforts now encompass a wide range of activities that help businesses more easily attract, welcome, and retain the international employees they need.

Erhverv Aarhus fully supports the proposed new strategy, as it directly addresses the business community's increasing need for labor—both skilled and unskilled, highly educated and specialized. It is absolutely correct that as a city, we must intensify our internationalization efforts if we hope to attract the best talents in the face of stiff competition from other cities and countries. Aarhus must become an *even* more attractive international career destination, which requires a comprehensive 360-degree approach so that international employees and their families can thrive at every stage of their stay.

We also support the central elements of the strategy, namely the establishment of an umbrella organization and its associated tasks, ambition and goals, the outlined target group, and the recommended initiatives. These elements align perfectly with the feedback from the business community, which we received during two workshops we held as part of the strategy process. Additionally, they help address some of the challenges that businesses and international employees highlight in various surveys. The following input, therefore, focuses on specific descriptions under the umbrella organization and the recommended initiatives.

### **Umbrella Organization**

As the strategy describes, there is a long tradition of collaboration on the city's internationalization. Aarhus Municipality, business and labor market organizations, educational institutions, and other actors have long worked together to improve conditions for international citizens in Aarhus. We see this good collaboration as the core of the strategy and thus also of the umbrella organization.

We, therefore, support the creation of a coordinating body that empowers the operational actors in this area. Aarhus has many excellent initiatives aimed at international employees and their families, which more people should know about and benefit from. The umbrella's

focus on collaboration and visibility can help ensure that the low awareness of these many activities becomes a thing of the past—and, importantly, contribute to a general strengthening of Aarhus' internationalization efforts.

We also agree that the umbrella organization has an important fundraising task ahead. However, it is worth noting that most projects require significant co-financing, especially if Aarhus wants to compete for the largest projects. Therefore, it will be necessary to find a solution for a fund that can be used for new projects, allowing stakeholders to bid on and realize them. Otherwise, Aarhus will find it difficult to compete for major projects, as other municipalities prioritize co-financing.

Additionally, it is striking that the strategy does not outline how the umbrella organization will be financed after the first three years. As a starting point, we believe that the umbrella should be funded throughout the entire period until 2030. We also think it is crucial that the umbrella organization does not become a new membership organization, thus competing with existing initiatives. Any potential membership financing must be discussed with existing membership-funded organizations. Several of our close partners are clear that they prefer a focused membership approach, and therefore, they do not see it as realistic or a good solution to be members of multiple internationalization efforts.

Overall, the idea of an umbrella organization is very exciting, and Erhverv Aarhus—including International Community and the East Jutland branch of HEADSTART—sees itself as a key player in such an organization. We, therefore, look forward to engaging in further discussions with potential partners and contributing our ideas on our role in the umbrella organization.

In this context, we are pleased to have the support of our Executive Committee, affiliated with International Community, in formulating our vision for the umbrella organization when the opportunity arises. The Executive Committee includes Vestas, IFF, Grundfos, Arla, Salling Group, Aarhus University, VisitAarhus, and Aarhus Municipality (Citizen Service).

### **The Recommended Initiatives**

Erhverv Aarhus supports the proposed initiatives in the strategy, as it is essential that the effort is broad and addresses the challenges highlighted in various surveys and by our own experiences. Whether someone has just arrived in Aarhus, is job-seeking, lacks a network, wants to pursue a hobby, improve their Danish skills, enroll their children in an international school, or anything else critical to their life in Aarhus, the city must meet these needs at a high level.

We also believe that an additional initiative should focus on the significant task ahead: getting more small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to hire international employees to meet the labor demand and ensure their business's long-term success. Studies emphasize that in just a few years, we will face an even greater labor shortage, so there is also an important "educational task" in encouraging more companies to view international employees as part of the solution. In this regard, it is also important that the umbrella

organization helps prepare SMEs in terms of legislation and obligations related to recruiting international employees.

We also believe that initiatives such as 'promoting Aarhus as a career destination for internationals,' 'jobs for accompanying partners,' and 'connecting with international students' are crucial for achieving the strategy's goals. These efforts will play a significant role in determining how many international employees we successfully attract and retain. We see international students already living in Aarhus as a key target group for addressing the labor shortage, so further emphasis should be placed here.

Overall, all the recommended initiatives are important for various phases of a stay in Aarhus and are thus essential for fulfilling the strategy's ambitions.

Erhverv Aarhus looks forward to the ongoing process and discussions regarding the implementation of the strategy and umbrella organization, and we are, of course, available for further comments.

Best Regards

Erhverv Aarhus and Executive Committee

