

## ***Why the mobility of workers between France and Germany is so limited\****

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With a worker mobility rate of 3.3% among the workforce of the European Union, mobility levels remain rather modest across Europe as a whole, with a little over seven million European citizens working and living in an EU country other than their own in 2013. To this figure, of course, we must add cross-border workers and those posted in another member state, which amount to around 1.1 million and 1.3 million workers respectively. Having long remained stable at around 2.0%, the mobility rate has increased in recent years as a result of varying standards of living and employment opportunities resulting from the expansion to the east and the Eurozone crisis<sup>1</sup>.

In this changing landscape, mobility among active individuals between France and Germany appears to be in decline if we look at it in terms of relations between the two countries (each being the other's primary commercial partner), the size of their working populations and their employment markets. Spontaneous mobility flows (individual mobility on the part of job seekers, cross-border workers, etc.) remain limited and have even shown signs of decline over the past fifteen years, with cross-border mobility from France to Germany down nearly 20% since the late 1990s.

*Mixed results regarding the mobility of active individuals between France and Germany.* Depending on the category of mobile active individual in question – worker, posted worker or cross-border worker – France and Germany are certainly popular destination countries for each other. The relationship, however, between the two is asymmetrical in this respect, and neither is the top-ranking destination country for nationals of the other (Table No. 1).

**Table No. 1: Mobility of the active population between France and Germany (estimation)**

<b>Category of active individual</b>	<b>Germany to France</b>	<b>Ranking (destination)</b>	<b>France to Germany</b>	<b>Ranking (destination)</b>
<b>Active individuals*</b>	43,000	6 <sup>th</sup>	100,000	3 <sup>th</sup>
<b>Workers**</b>	(not specified)		(74,136)	
<b>Cross-border workers***</b>	4,000	(not specified)	50,000	3 <sup>th</sup>
<b>Posted workers****</b>	20,726	4 <sup>th</sup>	18,540	2 <sup>th</sup>

*Source: Eurostat-LFS, Bundesagentur für Arbeit, INSEE, Network Statistics FMSSFE (Administrative data PD A1 Questionnaire 2014) \* Residents of working age - 15 to 64 years (2013) \*\* French nationals employed in Germany according to social insurance data (September 2014) \*\*\* Cross-border commuters (2011) \*\*\*\* Employees and freelancers posted on a temporary basis (less than 24 months) in a member state other than that in which they usually practice (2013).*

Furthermore, according to data from the French employment agency (*Pôle Emploi*), around 15,000 out of 150,000 French job seekers applying for European or international mobility claim to be

<sup>1</sup> For a summary of the situation see European Commission (2014), *Les travailleurs mobiles au sein de l'UE*, MEMO, 25 September; for a detailed review see European Commission (2014), *Supplement to the EU Employment and Social Situation Quarterly Review. Recent trends in the geographical mobility of workers in the EU*, June.

available to move to Germany to work, placing it in only fifth place in the ranking of European destination countries, a long way behind the United Kingdom.

*However, the potential is there.* The current situation is conducive to the development of practical initiatives in this field. The need for skilled labour in Germany is clear. The latter is becoming increasingly open to European workers and was in fact in 2013 home to 1.9 million workers who were nationals of other member states, representing 4.7% of all employment. With over 400,000 jobs to be filled by the EURES (European Employment Services), it is by far the largest supplier of jobs, ahead of the United Kingdom, with its 180,000 positions. It has also introduced the 'MobiPro EU' programme, designed to support young Europeans interested in local work-based training (a programme that has adapted and generalised the co-operation agreement of 21 May 2013, which aimed to enable 5,000 young Spaniards to obtain work-based vocational training or skilled employment in Germany), as well as other initiatives relating to the recruitment of skilled foreign workers (recognition of foreign qualifications, a decrease in the income threshold for foreign citizens seeking to obtain the EU Blue Card, etc.).

*The political will is evident and funding is available.* There is no shortage of EU initiatives, or indeed bilateral initiatives between France and Germany, when it comes to mobility. With regard to intra-European mobility in general, the placement offering is already structured in the framework of the EURES network. This provides support and circulates information regarding professional mobility within the EU (job vacancies, CV submissions, employment market trends, living and working conditions, education and training opportunities, etc.), as well as managing a number of mobility support programmes. The EURES network is becoming increasingly involved, with the number of job seekers recorded increasing from 175,000 in 2007 to 1,200,000 in 2013. It is in the process of being reformed and strengthened, with the emphasis notably on a more systematic sharing of job vacancies and searches at both national and European levels. A proposal regarding European regulation is also in the process of being examined.<sup>2</sup> With regard to mobility between France and Germany, a number of *ad hoc* initiatives have been implemented by national public employment services, particularly in cross-border regions, such as the introduction of a Franco-German employment agency in Kehl in 2013, for example. With regard to apprenticeships, meanwhile, various initiatives organised and funded by the French regions benefit from significant political and institutional support but are nevertheless still in their infancy with a still limited audience. The Alsace region, for example, has provided 130 cross-border apprenticeship contracts since 2010.

Mobility, however, can't be governed by decree. Indeed, imposing mobility – particularly if it is perceived as forced – can be counter-productive. Firstly, mobility can't be confined to the purposes of reconciling labour supply and demand, justified by a significant difference in unemployment levels on either side of the Rhine. Mobility is dependent upon a number of other realities. These include individual and social situations, acquiring skills that are more easily obtained in another country and economic considerations in a context where cross-border employment markets are structured in such a way that the demand for labour and skills trumps borders. Secondly, obstacles to mobility, particularly between France and Germany, should not be underestimated.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Proposed regulation regarding a European employment services network, workers' access to mobility services and the continued integration of employment markets, 2014/002 (COD), which is currently at the stage of its first reading by the Council.

*In actual fact, workforce mobility between France and Germany, particularly where job seekers and young apprentices are concerned, faces a number of obstacles.*

Such obstacles relate primarily to the individual:

- Insufficient language skills are often an issue, while in Germany both the required and technical levels of linguistic competency are on the rise.
- In more general terms, applicants are not always able to find employment or access the relevant information.
- There is sometimes a lack of desire to relocate to another country.
- Employers and young people can be reluctant to adopt any type of approach that is perceived as being complex, etc.

There are also a number of structural obstacles to be overcome:

- Not all countries hold the same appeal, beyond the prospects offered by their respective employment markets.
- The structure of the corporate fabric is very different in France than it is in Germany, with certain pre-requisites regarding skills and recruitment methods varying greatly.
- Mutual recognition of qualifications is limited in terms of both its formal (recognition of diplomas, degrees, etc.) and more informal aspects (varying definitions of roles and skills).
- Generally speaking, the material and subjective costs associated with mobility appear to be significant and require more evident innovation with regard to the systems that could be implemented.
- The portability of social security benefits is still too limited and too complex, particularly where the rights to unemployment insurance and pension benefits are concerned.

These observations regarding such obstacles to the mobility of active individuals, both at the European level and between France and Germany, indicate a number of avenues for improvement that may be pursued at a community level, bilaterally, nationally and on a cross-border level. National institutions responsible for supporting active individuals are currently facing various issues regarding the Europeanisation of placement systems, the recognition of certifications, the portability of rights and the need for innovation where human capital mobility support systems are concerned. Certain sectors have already successfully pulled off this Europeanisation revolution. This is demonstrated by the implementation of the Bologna Process and the emblematic Erasmus programme in the higher education sector. Initiatives relating to the mobility of active individuals must have higher aims if they are to embody the principle of the free circulation of people within the EU Single Market.

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