

Cross-border labor market participation in the Greater Region for young people – challenges for social work(ers)

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1 Historical Context and Current Situation

The Greater Region (formerly known as the SaarLorLux-Region) spans the boundaries of four nations (the German federal states of Saarland and Rhineland-Palatinate, the French region of Lorraine, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, as well as the Wallonia region of Belgium with the German-speaking community) and can be characterized as a European cooperation area (Schriftenreihe der Großregion, 2018, p. 9).

After 1957, the Saarland was politically integrated into the Federal Republic of Germany. Before its political integration, the Saarland economy was strongly oriented towards the French economy. Due to the political situation, the Saarland became a peripheral region. The term SaarLorLux was coined at the end of the 1960s to describe the cross-border cooperation between sites and companies of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). Many enterprises of the ECSC have fallen victim to the structural change. However, cross-border employment is now firmly established in the Greater Region, and the number of cross-border commuters is constantly increasing (Meyer & Rampeltshammer, 2012, p. 11). In 2017, the Greater Region recorded some 232,000 cross-border mobile employees (commuters) (Schriftenreihe der Großregion, 2018, p. 59). According to this publication, more than half of all cross-border commuters in the Greater Region come from France and more than three-fourths work in Luxembourg. Moreover, Luxembourg has a steadily growing number of commuters due to its still attractive labor market (Schriftenreihe der Großregion, 2018, p. 61). Sixty percent of commuters under the age of 30 in the Greater Region are French. They commute to Luxembourg and Wallonia. This figure can probably be explained by the high youth unemployment in Lorraine. With its dual system, the German labour market appears to be less attractive for young French people (IBA, 2019, p. 46).

One of the main objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy is to raise the employment rate to 75%; especially women, young people and older workers are to play a more important role in the work life of the Greater Region (Schriftenreihe der Großregion, 2018, p. 46). In addition, the percentage of early school leavers in the Greater Region should be reduced to below 10% (Schriftenreihe der Großregion, 2018, p. 12). Neither of these objectives could be achieved in the Greater Region (Schriftenreihe der Großregion, 2018, p. 10). In this context it is interesting that cross-border youth mobility is viewed as an instrument for increasing the opportunities for integration into the work force and for combating youth unemployment (Schlimbach, Hemming, & Reißig, 2018, p. 9) and thus should contribute to achieving the main objectives. For the advancement of vocational and educational mobility, the EU Commission launched three programs that are being jointly followed and implemented in the Greater Region within the framework of projects (co-)financed by the EU in pursuit of the main objectives outlined in its Europe 2020 strategy (INTERREG V A Greater Region EURES, Erasmus+).

In the following, a brief description of these three programs is provided:

- INTERREG V A Greater Region: Focusing on “cross-border collaboration” within the “European Territorial” objective, the Interreg A programs are funded by the EU from 2014 to 2020. The aim is to promote improved cross-border cooperation. Accessible at: https://www.interreg.de/INTERREG2014/EN/Home/home_node.html;jsessionid=C130D0DB2F0477E90B0870386E0399C2.live11294
- EURES: European Network for Job Placement (EURES) helps job seekers to go abroad and find work in Europe. Accessible at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/economy/20150622STO69009/eures-network-helping-people-to-find-a-job-in-another-eu-country>
- Erasmus+: Erasmus+ is the European Union’s program for Education, Youth, and Sport. Various EU programs once offered separately, such as Lifelong Learning, Youth and Sport, as well as the European Cooperation Programs in Higher Education, are now offered through Erasmus+. Accessible at: <https://www.erasmusplus.de/>.

With regard to Germany, we observe that young people coming from difficult living circumstances are frequently underrepresented when it comes to stays abroad, international youth work, and programs promoting European educational mobility (Jugend für Europa, 2017, p. 7). The difficulties encountered when implementing cross-border opportunities for this particular group of young people primarily stem from organizational and structural issues. For example, youth services organizations in Germany are only rarely, if at all, prepared to open up their offers and services to European and international citizens. Moreover, the professionals engaged in youth social work are generally not adequately qualified for such an expansion of their professional activities (Jugend für Europa 2017, p. 7.). However, through “internationalization (almost) at home”, the Greater Region provides fertile ground to realize cross-border mobility for labor market integration opportunities. Barriers such as potential expenses can be minimized through the option of continuing to live at home and offering lowered costs for travel. Thimmel (2018, p. 15) succinctly summarizes this aspect with his observation that financing is constitutive “because it makes possible for some what it excludes for the others”. Whereas privileged youth, predominantly from academic families, can rely on their parents to finance their cross-border mobility, this is hardly ever an option for less privileged young people (Thimmel, 2018). Thus, social background in Germany is decisive here, too, for the opportunities that young people are given along their path to greater educational success. The German National Report on Education (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2016) points out that insufficient educational resources are clearly disadvantageous for any subsequent placement into the education and labor market. The lack of professional qualifications is a risk factor for social exclusion. Likewise in France, the 2009 PISA study showed that educational attainment is highly dependent on social background. Social disadvantages, such as unemployment among young people, continue to rise dramatically in France as well. According to Eurostat, the unemployment rate in 2016 for under 25-year-olds was around 24 percent. The poverty rate among 18- to 24-year-olds rose by almost six percentage points between 2002 and 2012 (Peugny, 2016).

The idea that cross-border mobility indeed increases the opportunities for young people, regardless of their nationality, to obtain a vocational qualification clearly suggests that efforts should be made in the Greater Region to increase cross-border mobility. This is especially

important for young people who receive support within the context of youth social work, and these efforts would also be linked to the goal of social participation.

The Greater Region established the framework agreement on cross-border occupational training in 2014 with the aim of promoting cross-border mobility in both occupational education and training and in active labor market policy (Groß/Grande REGION I, n.d.). However, we can assume that the full potential of the Greater Region for the opportunities provided by EU labor market has been insufficiently exploited to date, and especially by young people in socio-demographically precarious circumstances. The transregional mission needs to be addressed by youth vocational assistance in the Greater Region to work for creating a social policy of investment in a secure future for young people and for their social participation in the Greater Region. Cross-border measures should thus be more strongly represented in the range of measures implemented in the area of youth social work as provided for by German law in § 13 SGB VIII (Brandtner & Wisser, 2016, p. 17).

These considerations raise the following questions:

1. How is mobility, as an opportunity for young people to enter the labor market in the Greater Region, being put into practice?
2. What contribution can the field of youth vocational assistance make with regard to cross-border mobility in the Greater Region so as to boost the integration of young people into the world of gainful employment?
3. To set the context for the research questions, the next section presents the key socio-structural data on the economic and social situation of the Greater Region.

2 Inequality and Trends in the Greater Region¹

As of 2017, almost 11.6 million people were living in the Greater Region (Schriftenreihe der Großregion, 2018, p. 14). They speak the French, Luxembourgish, and German languages. Among the member countries of the Greater Region, a wide variety of trends in development are projected. A population increase is expected for Luxembourg in particular, while the Saarland will continue to experience a decrease in its population (Schriftenreihe der Großregion, p. 17). The structure of the economy within the Greater Region is also experiencing a process of transformation. Former dominating sectors of production have disappeared due to industrial restructuring and have either been or are being modernized. The value-added share of the manufacturing sector has declined in all the subregions, while that of the service sector is on the rise. In 2016, the tertiary sector accounted for 72.2% of the gross value added of the Greater Region. Due to the flourishing financial sector in Luxembourg, the tertiary sector has a very large share in this country (Schriftenreihe der Großregion, p. 20). In 2015, the Greater Region recorded a positive growth rate of 3.2% (Schriftenreihe der Großregion, p. 21).

¹ This presentation of the key socio-structural figures is meant to provide initial orientation regarding the social circumstances in the Greater Region. The data were obtained from a statistical-quantitative catalogue of indicators (Schriftenreihe der Großregion, 2017, p. 7). To delve into greater detail, it is recommended to read the report on the economic and social situation of the Greater Region in 2017/2018 for the Greater Region's Economic and Social Committee (Wirtschafts- and Sozialausschuss der Großregion, WSAGR). This is accessible through the following link: https://iba-oie.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/Berichte/WSAGR-Berichte/WSAGR_17-18_web.pdf

There are significant differences in the average disposable annual income (17,972 Euros per inhabitant in Lorraine in contrast to 30,336 Euros per inhabitant in Luxembourg). The unemployment rate is 11% in Lorraine and 4.5% in Saarland. One interesting aspect is the absolute number of commuters from the Greater Region to Luxembourg, with a total of 180,050 people commuting for work daily (Schriftenreihe der Großregion, p. 9). In terms of social conditions there are considerable subregional differences within the Greater Region. The high unemployment rates in Lorraine (11.0%) and Wallonia (9.7%) (Schriftenreihe der Großregion, p. 54) are cause for concern. The long-term unemployment rate is 5.8% in both regions. This has been shown to lead to a high poverty risk in both of these regions. In the German federal states, the development has been positive (1.2% in Rhineland-Palatinate and 1.9% in Saarland; Schriftenreihe der Großregion, p. 57). In 2017, unemployment among young people between the ages of 15 and 24 in the Greater Region continued to be precarious. For Wallonia this is 29.0% and for Lorraine 22.4%, whereas Saarland and Rhineland-Palatinate have lower rates of 10.2% and 7.0%, respectively (Schriftenreihe der Großregion, p. 55). The educational and training systems of the sub-regions of the Greater Region differ in terms of structure, content, educational and training periods, and access conditions (Schriftenreihe der Großregion, p. 63). Whereas fewer than 30% of persons between the ages of 30 and 34 in the German federal states have attained tertiary degrees, substantially more tertiary degrees are awarded by the Greater Regions's cooperation partners. However, Germany has a strong strong intermediate level qualification segment (Schriftenreihe der Großregion, p. 63). In 2017, on average, 14.3% of young adults aged 18 to 24 in the EU were neither employed nor integrated into a training system (Schriftenreihe der Großregion, p. 56). This alarming statistic is reflected differently among the members of the Greater Region. At 15.5%, the rate in Wallonia is above average. Lorraine reports 14%, and in Saarland and Rhineland-Palatinate the percentage of young people who are not engaged in education, vocational training, or employment (so-called NEET rate) is 10.4% and 9.5%, respectively. Luxembourg reports a lower rate, 8.2% (Schriftenreihe der Großregion 2018, p. 56). The proportion of early school leavers and vocational training leavers in the Greater Region is currently around 10.2% (Schriftenreihe der Großregion, p. 67). Rhineland-Palatinate and Saarland exhibit very high rates with over 11%. Luxembourg and Lorraine report the lowest percentages, with 7% each (Schriftenreihe der Großregion, p. 67). The poverty risk rate can be considered critical in both Saarland (plus 1.8 percentage points) and in Wallonia (plus 4.5 percentage points) (Schriftenreihe der Großregion, p. 74). Moreover, it is alarming that the poverty risk has risen in almost all subregions since 2012 (Schriftenreihe der Großregion, p. 74).

3 Overview of the Specific Features of the Transition Between School to Work in Germany and France

This discussion begins by focusing on the transition from school to working life in Germany and in France. By briefly portraying the fraught nature of the transition from school to employment, this excursus uncovers the exclusionary processes and consequences of social inequality which can persist during the course of the rest of one's life (Solga & Menze, 2013). Around 1.3 million trainees in Germany were enrolled in dual vocational training programs in 2018. This type of training provides practical learning in the company that is supplemented by specialized instruction at the vocational school. This educational model is the joint responsibility of the employers, trade unions and the country. It is regarded as the "backbone of the German economy" (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung 2018). In political terms, dual training represents greater social integration, since it is assumed that the high level of practical orientation would traditionally also provide opportunities to those who leave school

early. In addition, school-based vocational training has established itself as a public responsibility, especially for the health, education and social professions (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung 2018).

Vocational schools, qualified training organizations and a large number of other institutions offer support for vocational transitions in Germany. Subordinate to the educational and training system, this transition system on the one hand compensates for a lack of available apprenticeships; on the other hand, even if there are sufficient openings for trainees, it acts as a catchment basin for young people who are considered as not "ready for training" or who are not in a position to start vocational training for "personal reasons" (Schultheis & Sell, 2014). In the course of the transition from school to work, the various measures implemented within the framework of youth social work (as dictated by § 13 SGB VIII) aim to reduce the risk of poverty among young people and to contribute to promoting their social participation.

In France, achieving equal opportunities is, according to Estèbe (2005), a challenge which the French education system must also meet in the face of the continuing unequal treatment of general education and vocational training. A characteristic feature of the French educational system is the substantial integration of vocational training into the school system. About 40% of the students leaving secondary school begin vocational training, the majority of them in a full school form in a vocational upper secondary school, and a smaller proportion in the form of vocational training comparable to the German dual system. Estèbe (2005) stresses that this does not seem to be based on the young people's own choice, but rather on an orientation towards a particular profession due to poor academic performance. As Estèbe (2005) notes, it has become firmly established in the minds of the young people affected and in the perception of the public that the vocational training branches are reserved for school failures. Furthermore, Estèbe points out that a large proportion of the approximately 90,000 young people leaving the school system every year without any qualifications are from vocational upper secondary schools. Only the general upper secondary educational pathways are widely recognized in society. Until the 1980s, vocational training in companies was reserved for sectors with little economic prosperity such as the craft and retail trades, and only the least advanced vocational training diplomas could be acquired within this framework (Estèbe, 2005). Work is currently underway to strengthen the dual training system in France (IBA, 2017, p. 50). The qualifications completed in France have a strong influence on the entire professional career. The type and attainment level of the qualification are decisive for both the rapid transition to gainful employment and the overall quality of the first job (Peugny, 2016).

The initial situation on the training and labor market in Germany has changed fundamentally in recent years, moving away from a shortage of training and gainful employment positions toward a sufficient supply of training opportunities which, nonetheless, is not suitable for all persons seeking employment. The National Report on Education 2016 describes the situation in the vocational training system as contradictory and dynamic: On the one hand, there are warnings of (further) shortages of skilled labor while on the other hand, new arrivals to vocational education and training have either been declining (in the work-study dual system) or stagnating (in the school-based vocational training system) for some time now (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2016, p. 101). Additionally, this report points out the high numbers of youths in the school-to-work transition system, and these discrepancies are discussed in different ways. For instance, some blame runaway "academization madness" and others point to the limited skills and lack of readiness for vocational training of school leavers. Still others cite the tendency for companies to withdraw from vocational training (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2016, p. 101). It should be noted that the

politically favored demand for higher formal educational qualifications in Germany is high and continues to rise (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2016, p. 101). There are differences in this respect compared to the neighboring countries of the Greater Region, where 40% of the population between the ages of 30 and 40 have a university degree, whereas in Saarland and Rhineland-Palatinate fewer than 30% have a university degree (Schriftenreihe der Großregion, 2018, p. 65). This stands in contrast to the group of youths and young adults who acquired a lower secondary school leaving certificate at most or who start their work lives without vocational qualifications. These groups are still too large in spite of these positive trends, and recently, due to the influx of refugees and asylum seekers, they are again on the rise. Added to this is the fact that individuals from socially disadvantaged families as well as young people with migration backgrounds are disproportionately represented in this group of low-skilled or unskilled youth at an above average rate (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2016, p.101). This reveals a structural paradox: There are still a substantial number of young people experiencing difficulties with the transition from school to vocational training, and at the same time there will always be companies that — as a result of demographic change — will have to select their trainees from a steadily dwindling pool of applicants (Schneider, 2009). As a result, the situation in the transition system has changed. Currently, the main focus is on creating a successful "fit" with regard to supporting the readiness for training and reducing personal problems so that young people can meet the vocational training goals. (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (2017, p. 9) Problems of fit represent a central challenge in the vocational training placement market and are countered through the use of supporting instruments such as ability assessments, vocational orientation lasting several weeks and individual career entry guidance (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, p. 11).

There has also been a further change on the vocational training market because more youths with an upper secondary school leaving certificate (i.e., Abitur) are crowding into the dual training system, with the result that the overall fit requirements may have risen (ECS 2017). According to statements made by the coordinator of the International Office of the Federal Employment Agency, Regional Directorate Rhineland-Palatinate-Saarland, one interesting aspect in the Greater Region is that there are certainly young French people who are completing dual vocational training in Saarland, but often when they have little chance of obtaining a diploma in France due to poor school leaving certificates. Their participation in the dual system is primarily based on their bilingual status and the availability of sufficient mobility options. This could also indicate a shift from France to Germany in the context of fit requirements.

The 2016 National Report on Education stresses the challenge to educational policymakers to continue to direct their focus on those individuals with low or nonexistent formal qualifications in the future (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2016, p. 13). Specifically, this involves restructuring the interface between the first school leaving degree in general education (Hauptschulabschluss), vocational preparation in the transition system, and vocational training (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2016., p. 13). Referencing the results from 2016, the 2018 National Report on Education (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2018, p. 10) emphasizes that in the coming years, massive efforts will be required to satisfy the main objectives for vocational education, namely the securing of vocational training opportunities that correspond to the young people's individual needs, as well as the securing of a demand-responsive labor market supply of skilled workers. The question to be asked in relation to the Greater Region is to what extent could cross-border

vocational projects in the context of youth vocational assistance make a contribution to counteracting the identified disparities.

These considerations must take into account the fact that the explanation for origin-specific disparities due in the transition from school to vocational training and work is currently a controversial issue in transition research. According to Skrobanek (2015), the first threshold represents a major critical point in the course of educational careers where educational inequalities can occur, yet this point still receives too little attention in research. Hence, a number of references to the problematic transition to the so-called first threshold can be found, but substantial, comprehensive explanations of these transition processes at this critical point are still lacking due to the insufficient availability of data (Skrobanek, p. 69). It can be assumed that the processes of fit occur precisely within the course of these transition processes, which can serve to hinder young people in changing their status. Yet the relative importance of mobility for young people in connection with their integration into gainful employment is ranked high by experts.

Finally the extent to which cross-border mobility can contribute to greater participation in the Greater Region within the framework of these reflections must be clarified by further research efforts.

4 The Importance of Mobility for Youth Integration into the World of Gainful Employment and Barriers to Mobility

The “Border Crossings and European Mobility Opportunities” expert group has compiled the results of existing programs, initiatives, and projects for advancing the mobility of socially disadvantaged young people (Brandtner & Wisser, 2016). In this context, the focus was on international and European youth work as well as labor market opportunities. The report concludes that cross-border European mobility options have the potential to compensate for social disadvantages and improve career opportunities (Brandtner & Wisser, 2016, p. 6). Socially disadvantaged young people can be offered experiential settings and informal learning situations that would not otherwise be accessible to them within the context of their own life circumstances. These learning experiences foster personal and social development and impart attitudes and skills that are important for becoming an adult (Brandtner & Wisser, 2016, p. 6). European mobility opportunities are particularly valuable for the design of effective programs for disadvantaged young people in their transitions from school to work (Brandtner & Wisser, 2016, p. 8).

However, there are strong socio-demographic imbalances in terms of the access to cross-border mobility. In this context, Schlimbach et al. (2018, p. 9) point out that even though cross-border youth mobility is discussed as an instrument for improving vocational integration opportunities and for combating youth unemployment, mobility is particularly scarce for those youth with low educational backgrounds. Here, the authors refer to the results of Thimmel’s (2018, p. 9) recent study on access, which shows that there is in fact positive interest in international mobility across socio-cultural milieus (Schlimbach et al, 2018). However, it is essential that cross-border activities for underprivileged youths are meaningfully integrated into the daily routine of youth social work programs (Naddaf & Thimmel, 2018, p. 19). Socioeconomic inequalities hamper the process of becoming mobile and are considered as one of the main obstacles to mobility (Naddaf & Thimmel, p. 4).

Another obstacle to mobility in the Greater Region may be that the dual vocational training system is very closely tied to Germany’s economic development and is not found to this

extent in neighboring France (Wieck & Baethge, 2015). As described above, on-the-job vocational training plays only a subordinate role in France. Approximately 10% of professional/vocational degree programs are completed in the form of company-based training rather than full-time school-based training (Coudray & Hestermann, 2015). This is supported by the results of the MOVE project (focusing on mobility mapping by investigating the paths, institutions and structural effects of youth mobility), showing that mobility with regard to the transition from vocational training to work or from youth unemployment to employment displays a structure that is different from the types of mobility associated with higher education settings, volunteer activities, employment, and school exchange programs. Entry into the labor market can thus be problematic for this group, and many young people are unaware of their mobility opportunities (European Policy Brief II, 2018, pp. 9-10). Another obvious conjecture here might be that the youth social work professionals also know very little about mobility opportunities and rarely consider the beneficial effects of (vocational) mobility.

5 Projects Promoting Mobility for Young People in the Greater Region

A framework agreement was established in 2014 to support cross-border vocational education in the Greater Region (Dritter Bericht zur Umsetzung der Rahmenvereinbarung über grenzüberschreitende Berufsbildung in der Großregion, 2017). The activities outlined in the agreement are implemented in the areas of vocational training, continuing in-service training, and active labor market policy on behalf of youths, or in support of supplementary or higher-level measures. For example, they enable youths from the border region to complete the theoretical phase of their dual vocational training program at a vocational school in their home country, and to complete the practical phase in a company in the neighboring country (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, n.d.). The treaty for cross-border vocational training between Saarland and Lorraine was signed in 2014. Agreements on cross-border measures between the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and Lorraine and between Rhineland-Palatinate and Lorraine are currently under development or in the trial phase. Wallonia is active in the EURES Network of the Greater Region (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, n.d.). With measures to encourage cross-border vocational training, actors in the Greater Region are indeed contributing to occupational mobility.²

In 2017, there were a total of 14 job and training fairs offering opportunities of a cross-border nature. The majority of these events took place in the German subregions and in Luxembourg. In many cases they are organized by public employment agencies with support from EURES. Beyond that, several trade fairs were organized by the local municipalities.

The Chamber of Industry and Commerce in Saarbrücken has employed a mobility consultant for cross-border vocational training in the Greater Region since 2017. Similarly, for questions of cross-border vocational training, there are two placement coordinators working in an advisory capacity at the Saarland state employment agency. According to the mobility

² The projects to the end of 2017 can be viewed in the report on the implementation of the framework agreement on cross-border vocational training in the Greater Region (<http://www.grossregion.net/Mediathek/Veroeffentlichungen/3.-Bericht-ueber-die-Umsetzung-der-Rahmenvereinbarung-ueber-borderueberschreitende-Berufsbildung-in-der-Grossregion-2018>). Many of the existing projects are (co)financed by EU funds, e.g. by the program INTERREG V A Großregion, by EURES funds, or by Erasmus+. For the promotion of cross-border vocational training, information on existing opportunities for cross-border vocational or continuing training is accessible at the vocational training portal on the Greater Region's website (<http://www.grossregion.net/Buerger/Berufsbildung/Borderueberschreitende-Berufsbildung>).

consultant at the Chamber of Industry and Commerce in Saarbrücken, she has personally informed and/or consulted with about young 70 individuals (German and French) as well as 125 separate companies on cross-border vocational training information since taking up this position in 2017 (Ch. Schneiders, personal communication, January 11, 2019). Currently, there are 27 young people taking part in cross-border vocational training; 95% of them are French participants who are completing the practical phase of their French program at a company in Saarland. For the most part, the youths are being trained to work in business fields. In the industrial/technical sector, a separate vocational training course was founded in Sarreguemines/Lorraine at the beginning of 2019, with five apprentices beginning their training as electronics specialists specializing in operational electronics. This sector is considered to have the greatest potential in terms of the number of trainees alongside occupations in the retail trades.

According to the mobility consultant, it is certainly desirable to encourage cross-border training for as many career fields as possible, but there is still a great deal of consulting effort with the companies as well as the young training candidates to consider, along with the bureaucratic as well as linguistic hurdles (Ch. Schneiders, personal communication, January 11, 2019). One challenge is that many companies and young training seekers are unaware of the possibility of cross-border vocational training. In terms of actual mobility, concrete forms of support are being sought for both trainees and companies. Up to now there are only a few available funding initiatives (e.g., from the German state employment agency and the Franco-German youth office), and these can only be utilized by a portion rather than all members of the target group in the Greater Region. A survey conducted in the spring of 2018 revealed that for most trainees it was necessary to use a car to get to both their companies and vocational schools, since the public transportation system was inadequate. Consequently, the target group is even more restricted, which clearly implies that other solutions are needed here.

Based on two narrative interviews, a recent study investigated the significance of dual cross-border vocational training for female graduates in terms of their (employment) biography (Kluck, 2019). Both interviewees describe cross-border training as an opportunity for successful vocational integration due to both their bilingualism and cross-border acquisition of skills at the technical, but also the cultural and the personal level. This enabled them to master their entry into the employment system and to pursue very good opportunities on the labor market (Kluck, 2019). At the same time, however, other challenges are mentioned, including the language difficulties, the adaptation of the vocational training content learned in France and the practical work experience at the company in Saarland, the regulations governing the examinations and the recognition of the respective qualifications at the organizational and administrative level (Kluck, 2019, p. 57).

Alongside the cross-border vocational training opportunities, there are several other ongoing projects in the Greater Region to promote mobility.

The Interreg project FAGA/CAMT is designed to foster the willingness of young people to gain professional experience in a neighboring country. The organization of internships and vocational training phases in the neighboring country is an important component of the project (IBA, 2017, p. 57). The goal of the SESAM'GR project is to impart key skills to children and youths, enabling them to live and work in the transnational Greater Region. To this end, collaboration partners from Lorraine, Saarland, Luxembourg, Rhineland-Palatinate, and Belgium are jointly developing various measures and making them available to the entire educational community. These include measures designed to accompany and strengthen

multilingual instruction from kindergarten to secondary school. Specifically, there will be projects and campaigns to develop the intercultural skills of young people, to promote a sense of common citizenship, and to prepare them, as members of our future work force, for their career prospects in the Greater Region (INTEREG Grande Region SESAM'GR, 2018).

Improving educational resources for less privileged young people in the Greater Region is the aim of the Interreg project MobiPro.GR, which is based at the Saarland University of Applied Sciences (htw saar). Students from the Greater Region have the opportunity to establish contacts with local companies and work on a joint study project (<http://www.mobipro-gr.eu/>).

Research to date has shown that mobility opportunities in vocational education and training are being offered, but mobility projects with disadvantaged youth as defined by German law (SGB VIII, § 13) have so far been not a focus of these efforts. This void has been taken up by the SESAM'GR project, especially because the language barrier is still considered to be the main obstacle to cross-border occupational mobility in spite of the fact that Saarland pursues a "France strategy" as part of its policy. However, it is interesting that the Missions Locales based in France - with a similar low threshold structure as the youth career counseling agencies for unemployed youth in Germany - work together with France's employment agencies. Cross-border projects could potentially be established and developed within this organization (Coudray & Hestermann 2015). Such an arrangement is possible because the factual infrastructure and long-term cooperation already exist in the Greater Region, and because the EU programs described above promote various forms of cooperation via the European Union. One of the focal points is support of employment through coordinated projects in the areas of education, training and the reduction of obstacles to mobility for employees and trainees (Groß/Grande REGION I, n.d.).

6 Can Youth Vocational Assistance Advance Cross-Border Mobility Opportunities in the Greater Region to Increase the Integration of (Disadvantaged) Young People?

Existing research indicates that there is little involvement of youth vocational assistance in the area of cross-border mobility opportunities in the Greater Region. This is regrettable given that for the field of social work in the "critically ambitious" sense it is specifically here where there is the possibility of shaping the competing interests that converge in the transition from school to work as discussed in section three with respect to the challenge of fit (Gebrande, Melter, & Bliemetsrieder, 2016). On the one hand, people involved in social work must fulfill their state-mandated mission of "fitting" young people into the system of gainful employment; on the other hand, it is a matter of enabling participation and (politically) securing fair conditions for participation through change and inclusion processes (Gebrande et al., 2016). As a part of youth social work, the social obligation is to develop measures for social justice that take a preventive approach to combating social inequality and that enable opportunities for participation. Here, a key consideration is that the development potentials of young people are not only dependent on the availability of material resources, they also rest on social and individual factors - such as the corresponding infrastructure, entitlement to receive or do something, favorable balances of power and personal qualities - which, taken together, make it possible to deploy resources in a way that is beneficial to them (Nadai, 2012, p. 72). A consistent focus of resources aligned with the question of what these youths have to offer and what they are capable of should be pursued here, and the (widespread) deficit-oriented thinking needs to be called into question. Youth social work in the Greater Region should be asking questions about possibilities, that is, asking what actions can be taken and what the chances for local implementation are, and also looking for the skills and resources that young people can and want to offer to society. An understanding of social work

that acts both within and across borders, thereby producing cross-border interconnections and demarcations (Graßhoff, Homfeldt, & Schröer, 2016, p. 14), can be groundbreaking.

In addition to these normative considerations, there are challenges that will arise in the process of active implementation.

In the Federal Republic of Germany, this can be based on the mission of youth welfare in accordance with the German Social Code (§ 1 SGB VIII): It is the right of every young person to be encouraged in his or her development and to be nurtured to become an autonomous and responsible member of society. Furthermore, § 3 SGB VIII emphasizes that young people should be promoted in their personal and social development and that efforts should be made to prevent or eliminate disadvantages. This fundamental aspect of social participation can be transregionally clarified, developed and implemented by the people involved in social work.

One of the challenges is to inform social workers about the mobility opportunities in the Greater Region and help them understand their importance. For this relatively new task, social workers require not only further training, but also long-term support that accompanies and facilitates the process of multilingual cooperation and is proficient in acquiring EU funding for structural support. This type of assistance must be financially secure. The issue of cross-border mobility in the Greater Region should be anchored in the professional discourse on youth and labor market policy at the community level (youth services planning, youth services commissions, community networks, job centers, chambers and professional associations...) to ensure that this issue is taken into account when developing youth social work services and opportunities for the Greater Region (Jugend für Europa, 2017, p. 13). The third report on the implementation of the framework agreement on cross-border vocational training in the Greater Region 2017 takes up this aspect and specifically demands improvements to and closer coordination of the communication and public relations aspects of the existing services and support programs. Any core measure should include the continuous updating of information about currently existing projects, points of contact, exchange programs, and support programs at the Greater Region's cross-border vocational training portal. The development of informational resources, also in school-based vocational orientation, is necessary in order to make mobility options public also to sociodemographically disadvantaged young people. Such an approach is necessary if cross-border mobility is to be integrated as an option for individuals to choose in the course of their own educational biographies. Essential in this process is the creation of financial framework conditions for making it possible to gain experience abroad regardless of social background (Hemming, Reißig, Schlimbach, Tillmann, 2018, p. 7).

The study program “Social Work and Early Childhood Education”, offered by the Faculty of Social Sciences at Saarland University of Applied Science, has now addressed these demands within the process of reforming its catalogue of study programs, and has recently incorporated the module “International Perspectives” into its curriculum. This module focuses on social work in the Greater Region and, within the context of comparative studies, investigates the differences in access to social work services in the Greater Region.

Beyond this, the results of the Move project point to the relative importance of peers as a central resource in the mobility process (European Policy Brief, 2018, p. 3). Likewise, the investigation of the concept of mobility should include the assessment of learning processes (European Policy Brief, 2018, p. 4). As part of group work, youth social work could address

cross-border professional mobility as a theme and implement all kinds of innovative projects with groups of peers in order to stimulate new learning processes. In section four I described the mobility projects for young people in the Greater Region, and the structures to jump-start cross-border vocational training mobility have already been created within these projects. In keeping with its political mandate, the field of youth social work can mobilize around these structures, becoming involved to expand new opportunities for youths qualifying as “disadvantaged” according to German Social Code (§ 13 SGB VIII) in terms of both the integration into the world of gainful employment as well as social inclusion within the Greater Region.

However, youth employment assistance stakeholders should take a critical look at the fact that the promotion of policy with regard to cross-border mobility is a political effort that is unilaterally directed towards the integration of young people into gainful employment, in line with the political mandate of social work. In this context, social workers should not function as vicarious agents here, but rather understand mobility as an idea of potentials in the sense of a lifeworld-oriented and life-mastery approach based on the resources of the young people. Thus, programs should be considered that promote mobility regardless of the successful integration into gainful employment, since cross-border mobility leads to knowledge that promotes self-confidence, independence and effectiveness, all of which can have a positive impact on the course of a person's life.

Beyond this, we may point out that, according to the principles and standards of the IFSW (International Federation of Social Workers, 2014) social justice, human rights, shared responsibility, and respect for diversity represent the basis of social work. The conclusion that there is a certain group of young people experiencing disadvantages while taking part in programs which can contribute to social participation, is one that runs contrary to the core objectives of social work, “which is to support people and help them attain well-being and the most self-determined life possible” (Rommelspacher, 2012, p. 43). Social work in this area is inevitably political, as it has to do with social problems that either arises as the direct result of political processes or that persist because social safety systems or political programs are insufficient to cushion their effects. Thus, it also includes partisan advocacy for the individual within the context of inclusion opportunities at various levels of society (Mührel & Röh, 2007).

7 Conclusion

Social work can facilitate cross-border mobility within the framework of youth vocational assistance in the Greater Region. It is essential that career mobility opportunities are open to all young people in order to reduce inequalities standing in the way of their participation. This is where social work stakeholders can help to ensure that, in the sense of a critically ambitious understanding, mobility structures and opportunities are provided that enable youths experiencing sociodemographic disadvantages to participate in the mobility schemes. The initial structural conditions have been created. Yet moving forward will take further political effort that, in recognizing the relevance of mobility as a professional integration opportunity for young people in the Greater Region, actually makes mobility a reality for them. This is an exciting and innovative challenge for the development of social work in the Greater Region - one which could lead to greater participation of young people across borders.

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