

Action plan and recommendations on labour mobility

The “**South Baltic Professionals**” project was established within the framework of the South Baltic Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2007-2013, in order to facilitate the mobility of workforce and to support a positive development of the South Baltic labour market.

To take on these challenges between 2012 and 2014, South Baltic Professionals brought together labour market stakeholders from Poland, Lithuania and Germany. Together with 14 associated organisations from six South Baltic countries (Denmark, Germany, Lithuania, Poland, Sweden and Russia), they have been working to develop and disseminate cross-border job information, to propose joint concepts and elaborate recommendations to increase labour mobility and to make the South Baltic labour market more accessible.

As part of South Baltic Professionals activities and outputs, this document

- briefly sums up the labour market situation in the South Baltic region;
- summarizes activities and goals of the South Baltic Professionals project;
- clarifies added values of labour mobility and its challenges;
- recalls the aspects shared between South Baltic Professionals and EU strategies and policies;
- presents achievements and policy recommendations on workforce mobility, elaborated by the partners of the South Baltic Professionals project.

PART I: BACKGROUND

Labour markets and mobility in the South Baltic Region

The local and regional labour markets of the South Baltic area are differently characterised, but at the same present similarities as well. As for other European regions, populations are ageing, and this influences the socio-economic development. Moreover, the southern rim of the Baltic Sea region is affected by a high overall unemployment and an outflow of young qualified people that seek better education and job opportunities in other regions or in urban areas (“brain drain”). For these reasons, the establishment of a sustainable social and economic development, balanced national and international labour markets as well as competitiveness and attractiveness within the whole South Baltic region are of major importance – today and in the long run.

The improvement of labour markets, the reduction of unemployment and the better match between workforce demand and supply depends on numerous factors. The most influential are EU, national and regional policies for economic growth and labour market, global economy trends, structure and restructure of economic systems (traditional versus emerging industries), investments in human capital and social policies. To face these issues, the South Baltic Professionals project has launched actions to support labour mobility. The project produces considerable added value for job seekers, employees, employers and society. At the same time, it also identifies challenges that must be taken on. Fostering interregional workforce mobility is an important practical measure for the improvement of regional labour markets, which needs to be supported and coordinated with other related policies, projects and initiatives as well.

Labour mobility in EU strategies and policies

The Europe 2020 Strategy¹, launched in 2012 by the European Commission, as one of the most important overall EU policy documents, has stated a “high-employment economy” as a fundamental factor to reach a smart, inclusive, sustainable growth and social and territorial cohesion; in order to increase employment rates. It calls for the promotion of labour mobility across Europe. In line with the Europe 2020 Strategy, the European Employment Strategy (EES) provides employment guidelines, national reform programmes and country-specific recommendations for each member state, aiming to coordinate the different employment policies and to create more jobs across Europe. In April 2012, the European Commission presented the current “employment package”, with the promotion of a fairer EU labour market, more labour mobility and better match between jobs and job-seekers.

With the focus on the Baltic region, the topic of labour mobility has been also included into the macro-regional EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR). The practical solutions provided by the South Baltic Professional project are in line with the EUSBSR Action Plan². Here the project helps to implement actions of the Priority Area ‘Education’ as well as Horizontal Action focusing on cooperation with neighbouring countries.

Despite the inclusion of labour mobility and employment measures in the main strategies, the latest Joint Employment Report³, analysing low cross-border flows of workers, states that barriers to geographical labour mobility still exist and may prevent European and regional labour markets from functioning.

¹ European Commission (2010): Europe 2020 – A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

² European Commission (2013): EUSBSR Action Plan.

³ EU Employment Committee (2014): Joint Employment Report.

PART II: Achievements and recommendations

Aims of the action plan

This Action Plan provides guidance to tackle existing barriers and proposals to take on the challenges of labour mobility. Together with the recommendations, also some national and international initiatives of South Baltic Professionals and similar projects are mentioned, in order to give successful examples of practical solutions and measures. It allows taking advantage from previous experiences, good practices and existing know-how and to learn from other (cross-border) regions.

Concrete actions and policy recommendation to foster labour mobility

These policy recommendations are targeted at decision makers working at EU, national, regional levels (in particular cross-border regions), and aim to guide the elaboration of new policies and projects in this field, especially in the South Baltic region. Therefore, it is suggested to:

Create a stable network and interactions among stakeholders involved in labour mobility

The intensity and effectiveness of cooperation among relevant stakeholders are crucial for the success of a project. They are a sign of progressing synergies among policies and practices of different states and a significant element of regional competitiveness.

The stakeholders recommended to involve in projects concerning labour mobility issues, are European Employment Services (EURES), job agencies, trade unions, SMEs and companies, municipalities, ministries or regional authorities, European institutions and organisations, educational institutions, experts, and partners of current or former similar projects and programmes.

It is useful to create parallel thematic task forces including experts and representatives of partners, who can work together to benefit from each other's knowledge and experiences, dealing with specific issues and initiating or implementing future project and initiatives.

*In 2013, **Euroregion Baltic** founded the task force 'Labour Market' to support projects dealing with labour market issues in the Baltic Sea region. Since then, it has elaborated statistics concerning the labour market in Euroregion Baltic member regions and analysed regional development strategies aiming to improve the employment policy.*

Another suggestion concerns a better articulation and localisation of European employment services (EURES) in the different regions. Under the umbrella of EURES, online platforms and on-the-spot services should be provided. These services shall be especially targeted and orientated to the relevant sectors of employment that characterize the market of each country or region. This would enrich the services and promote specific territories as an attractive place to

live and work in. Setting up a stable network of interactions among job agencies and recruitment services will foster the exchange of current trends on regional labour markets, expected needs in specific sectors and of workforce plus chances and challenges. It will allow addressing jobseekers according to the demand.

*For some **cross-border regions**, these types of services have been already developed within **EURES**, **EUROpean Employment Services** ([cross-border partnerships](#)). Because of the potential that labour mobility can have in ensuring the territorial development and cohesion, one of the actions promoted and claimed by South Baltic Professionals partners and by the Euroregion Baltic Labour Market Task Force, is the initiation of a cross-border partnership to exchange information and to support employers and jobseekers particularly in the South Baltic region.*

Improve the quality of information about labour mobility issues and implement related online services

The increase of awareness and a better understanding of opportunities and challenges related to labour mobility are based on a better provision of information. It ensures to employees the access to more and better opportunities, the possibility of gaining intercultural capacities and experiences, the avoidance or reduction of times of unemployment. Also for employers, it brings benefits, like the replacement of labour shortages and the rise of possibilities to get capable workforce with new skills, knowledge and competences and the increase of competitive ability and cooperation opportunities.

A lot of information is already available, but it is often not well-structured or presented in a user-friendly way. It is recommended to provide services and tools with multilingual, comparable, systematic information, as well as with contact persons for practical matters and questions. The conception and creation of thematic online platforms or the implementation of the existing online advisory facilities, like EURES, have been significant within South Baltic Professionals.

The initiated [South Baltic Professionals job portal and information platform](#) aims to increase labour mobility in the South Baltic area. Therefore, the portal provides information on working abroad, detailed region specific information for interested employees and includes open job offers of important sectors in the South Baltic area.

The following platforms can also be used as good practices for the creation and implementation of thematic online platforms, targeted to specific groups.

[“Hello Norden”](#) aims at facilitating freedom of movement for private individuals in Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Faroe Islands, Finland, Åland and Iceland. On the website it is possible to read some information about living, studying and working in the Nordic countries.

The [European Business Support Network](#) offers specific information and services for entrepreneurs and SMEs in the UK, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, Poland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

Another interesting case is the [EURAXESS portal](#), which provides a complete range of information and support services for European and non-European researchers wishing to pursue research careers in Europe.

Enhance on-the-spot labour mobility advisory service

In the Baltic Sea Region there are some EURES information centers and several job agencies that provide targeted services to international job seekers. However, more and similar facilities should be established.

The typologies and quality of services provided should be increased, especially concerning education for intercultural competences. It should be possible to have access to these services both on-the-spot (with private and group counselling, courses, events and focus-groups) and online with distant learning, also called e-learning (with virtual-classes, chat-rooms, different types of materials available online, interactive exercises and whiteboards). Organizing specific courses and collecting particular information for labour mobility should allow a double expertise-related advantage: to refine and provide useful service to users and to become aware about other countries' systems and labour market trends.

Counselling and access to information about finding jobs and application procedures, working conditions, workers rights and contracts, regional distinctions regarding working hours, hierarchy and attitudes, should be the basic service of job centers to promote labour mobility. Moreover, activities to learn social and cultural competences – in particular about communication and etiquette- to manage preparatory and subsequent periods of mobility should be provided not only to workers and job seekers. Also employers and human resources managers, in charge for the recruitment and for the integration of international workers, should acquire specific communication skills regarding giving and getting feedback and about conflict management. Moreover, employers and human resource managers need counselling about the differences regarding applications and job interviews, as well as about comparative educational career and professional experiences, in order to be able to understand the diversity and the virtues of internationality. Another group, who needs specific services, are students and young professionals. They should receive particular information on available international or exchange programmes at their university as well as on internships and jobs. Coaching on how to complete proper applications for the respective countries, about differences in formal studies and the acceptance of degrees should be provided.

One of the main actions of the [VET Project](#) (INTERREG IVA), which promotes labour mobility between Northern Germany and Southern Denmark, is that the job centers of Lübeck-Ostholstein, Guldborgsund, Lolland merge their databases of job offers. Furthermore, a “Danish office” in Lübeck (Germany) for the provision of employment services to Danish students, job seekers, employees and employers will be opened. This project is supported by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Chamber of Craft of Lübeck and by the Centre of Education Lolland Falster (CELF).

Provision of reliable data about labour markets and mobility and monitoring

Statistics and data about labour market and mobility should be further carried out in the South Baltic region. In doing so it is recommended to identify the obstacles of cross-border mobility and to have an overview on the demand and supply of jobs and qualifications in quantity and within different sectors. Moreover, the analysis should also include data on migrant flows, salaries, relevant labour costs and working time, strategies of SMEs and big companies.

***Generation Balt**, a project that promotes the inclusion of maritime education with the changing job market for a new generation of Baltic Sea workforce, undertook a foresight study showing the directions of the maritime labour market, the demands on the working force and the drawbacks of the current educational practices. The study also provides recommendations for higher education and political decision makers.*

Future labour qualification demands in the South Baltic region of the South Baltic Professionals project in 2013 presents a specific analysis of the labour market situation in maritime economy, maritime tourism, health care tourism and wellness, three of the most relevant sectors of South Baltic economy.

South Baltic Professionals project presentations and materials prepared and used for events meetings also represent a relevant source of the information.

Further, monitoring the phenomenon of labour mobility, as implementation and update of the data, is another important activity that states and institutions should perform. Un-monitored flows of workers could lead to a mismatch between services provided and users' needs, could allow the proliferation of undeclared work, which causes not only insecure working and social conditions, but also an unbalanced development and unfair competition among the labour markets in the different regions.

Since getting labour and market data is not easy, it is recommended to improve means for gathering and exchanging adequate and comparable data and statistic information about cross-border mobility between the countries. Furthermore, European, national and regional partners should act as facilitators for cooperation and promotion of common studies and joint activities between businesses, research institutes and universities in the region.

Raise awareness concerning labour mobility options

According to the experience of the South Baltic Professionals project, it is suggested to perform awareness raising campaigns. These should for example encourage the workforce (especially young people, during or after education going abroad) to look for jobs abroad and companies to employ foreign workers.

Some sensitization initiatives launched within South Baltic Professionals have already lead to positive results. Therefore the organization of events is highly recommended, especially when it comes to the advertisement of job opportunities in specific employment sectors and face-to-face

contacts with companies. Here, students and jobseekers learn more about their career possibilities and receive advice through coaching sessions, competence training and application dossier checks.

In 2013 and 2014, the University of Rostock and Klaipeda organised Career Days focusing on different sectors. Here both institutions offered job placement services to current and graduated students. So far, the project brought about 40 companies and about 330 students together. Further [thematic career days](#) about Health Care and Life Science, or Tourism, are planned in June and December 2014 in Rostock.

Job agencies should activate their networks and interact regularly with local and international employers or human resources managers to adapt their services and to orient the jobseekers to the demand of the labour market. Other good experiences include joint coordinated work between employment centers and local organisations, profiting from their collaboration providing better and diverse services. For instance, it is suggested that job agencies work together with language schools, to organize or provide courses to overcome linguistic barriers of international workers and employers. Furthermore, special educational and training programmes should be provided, as preparation of international working experiences. Positive initiatives are the agreements between employers and educational institutions (especially universities), encouraged within South Baltic Professionals.

[Główka pracuje! - Cleveres Köpfchen!](#) is an initiative run by the labour office Greifswald – represented by the office located in Pasewalk, Germany, close to the Polish border – and the City of Szczecin – office for employer service looking for Polish pupils and students who would like to go for an apprenticeship to Germany, especially in the field of tourism and retail. After recruiting, selecting and meeting the employer as well as the place of work, the suitable candidates make a vocational training for several months in Germany in order to be prepared for the vocational school, the job and the social life abroad. In doing so, there is a close communication and cooperation with the parents of these young employees and with the Polish schools.

Support cross-border and regional efforts on labour mobility

It is important to continue providing (public) funding for long terms projects, for the implementation of cross-border initiatives and for their coordination in the (South) Baltic Sea region and in Europe. Several EU policies and initiatives are aimed to increase labour mobility, although there is still a lack of synergy among them and many challenges have not yet been taken on. Therefore, the increase and implementation of regional and interregional projects and actions can play an important role.

The [Baltic Sea Labour Forum](#) (BSLF), as flagship project of EUSBSR, was established in 2011 to support a positive development of the labour markets in the Baltic Sea Region through social dialogue and cooperation between the partners and the Baltic Sea states. Its main event is the Annual Round Table Conference, a

platform for exchange of experience and communication between the key labour market actors in the Baltic Sea Region.

Moreover, keeping the topic of labour mobility as priority into overall strategies and sectoral policies is highly recommended as well. The aim should be to develop and define common approaches and projects in order to overcome barriers and challenges of labour mobility and as a result assure a balanced growth across the region and to take advantage from joint efforts.

In addition, improving visibility and advertising former, on-going and future initiatives, tools and projects can increase the chance for job- and education seekers to find suitable and customized opportunities and, at the same time, for the partners involved in the network, to enhance efficiency in the provision of information and services.