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## **BORDERS IN PERSPECTIVE**

UniGR-CBS Thematic Issue 3/2020

# **BORDERS AND CROSS-BORDER LABOR MARKETS: Opportunities and Challenges**

UNIVERSITY OF LORRAINE & UNIVERSITY OF LUXEMBOURG  
Rachid Belkacem, Isabelle Pigeron-Piroth (Eds.)

## EDITORS

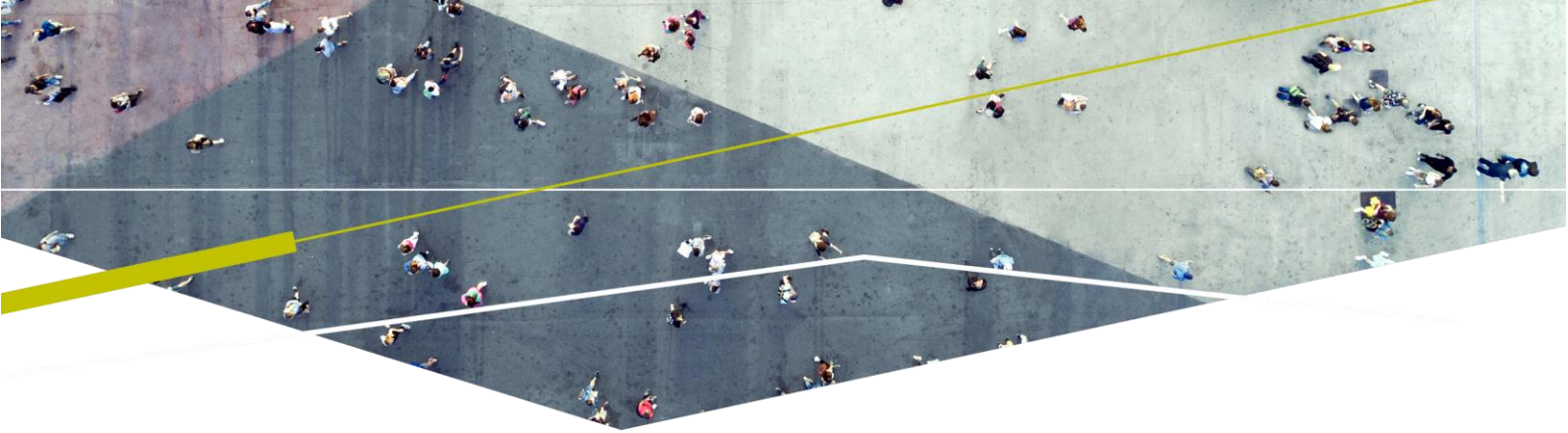
### **Rachid Belkacem**

University of Lorraine  
UniGR-Center for Border Studies  
Laboratoire Lorrain des Sciences Sociales  
23, boulevard Albert 1er  
BP 13397  
F-54015 Nancy Cedex

### **Isabelle Pigeron-Piroth**

University of Luxembourg  
UniGR-Center for Border Studies  
Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning  
11, Porte des Sciences  
L-4366 Esch-sur-Alzette

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# UniGR-Center for Border Studies

CENTRE EUROPEEN D'ETUDES SUR LES FRONTIERES  
EUROPÄISCHES ZENTRUM FÜR GRENZRAUMFORSCHUNG

**EN** The UniGR-CBS is a thematic cross-border network of approximately 80 researchers within the university grouping University of the Greater Region (UniGR) conducting research on borders, their meanings and challenges. Due to its geographical position in the “heart of Europe”, its expertise and disciplinary diversity, the UniGRCBS has the best prerequisites for becoming a European network of excellence. For the creation of a “European Center for Competence and Knowledge in Border Studies”, the Interreg VA Greater Region program provides the UniGR-CBS network with approximately EUR 2 million ERDF funding between 2018 and 2020. Within this project, the UniGR-CBS aims at developing harmonized research tools, embedding Border Studies in teaching, promoting the dialogue on cross-border challenges between academia and institutional actors and supporting the spatial development strategy of the Greater Region.

**FR** L’UniGR-CBS est un réseau transfrontalier et thématique qui réunit environ 80 chercheuses et chercheurs des universités membres de l’Université de la Grande Région (UniGR) spécialistes des études sur les frontières, leurs significations et enjeux. Grâce à sa position géographique au « coeur de l’Europe », à sa capacité d’expertise et à la diversité des disciplines participantes, l’UniGR-CBS revêt tous les atouts d’un réseau d’excellence européen. L’UniGR-CBS bénéficie d’un financement d’environ 2 M € FEDER pendant trois ans dans le cadre du programme INTERREG VA Grande Région pour mettre en place le Centre européen de ressources et de compétences en études sur les frontières. Via ce projet transfrontalier, le réseau scientifique UniGR-CBS créera des outils de recherche harmonisés. Il oeuvre en outre à l’ancrage des Border Studies dans l’enseignement, développe le dialogue entre le monde scientifique et les acteurs institutionnels autour d’enjeux transfrontaliers et apporte son expertise à la stratégie de développement territorial de la Grande Région.

**DE** Das UniGR-CBS ist ein grenzüberschreitendes thematisches Netzwerk von rund 80 Wissenschaftlerinnen und Wissenschaftlern der Mitgliedsuniversitäten des Verbunds Universität der Großregion (UniGR), die über Grenzen und ihre Bedeutungen sowie Grenzraumfragen forschen. Dank seiner geographischen Lage „im Herzen Europas“, hoher Fachkompetenz und disziplinärer Vielfalt verfügt das UniGR-CBS über alle Voraussetzungen für ein europäisches Exzellenz-Netzwerk. Für den Aufbau des Europäischen Kompetenz- und Wissenszentrums für Grenzraumforschung wird das Netzwerk UniGR-CBS drei Jahre lang mit knapp 2 Mio. Euro EFRE-Mitteln im Rahmen des INTERREG VA Großregion Programms gefördert. Im Laufe des Projekts stellt das UniGR-Netzwerk abgestimmte Forschungswerkzeuge bereit, verankert die Border Studies in der Lehre, entwickelt den Dialog zu grenzüberschreitenden Themen zwischen wissenschaftlichen und institutionellen Akteuren und trägt mit seiner Expertise zur Raumentwicklungsstrategie der Großregion bei.



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# CROSS-BORDER LABOR MARKETS: dynamics and perspectives

RACHID BELKACEM and ISABELLE PIGERON-PIROTH

The work presented in this Thematic Issue aims to contribute to knowledge of the dynamics of cross-border labor markets, their institutions and the practices of actors in cross-border context. The various chapters provide a better understanding of the functioning of cross-border labor markets in all their complexity. First, the socio-economic profiles of cross-border workers according to the different border territories of France were presented, as well as the geographic mobility in relation to the rhythms of life. This was followed by analyses of institutions through training systems, industrial relations from the point of view of cross-border trade union cooperation, and finally the impact of economic dynamics, especially finance, on the development of cross-border work in Luxembourg.

## Do the borders still prevent integrated cross-border labor markets?

Trying to understand the whole system that goes beyond the cross-border flows, the question we addressed in this thematic issue was about the organization of the labor markets: is the system organized in a cross-border way? Are there some brakes that prevent an integrated cross-border labor market in the Greater Region, for example? Analyzing different cross-border labor markets at the borders of France, the first chapter sheds light on the socioeconomic characteristics of cross-border work according to the local productive fabric. The authors report on the one hand the territorial specificities of cross-border work according to the markets considered, depending on the territories on which they operate. These

results confirm that cross-border work is a regulator. It fulfills both a quantitative and a qualitative adjustment function between the needs of enterprises and the availability of labor and qualifications across borders. These needs vary from one area to another and not all cross-border workers have the same profiles. On the other hand, there are common characteristics of cross-border workers (underrepresentation in certain sectors, underrepresentation of women, etc.), linked to the prevalence of borders and the specificity of the status of cross-border worker. While cross-border work can push boundaries to widen recruitment zones for companies and areas of investigation for individuals (geographic expansion of supply and demand), the border persists and has impacts on sectors of activity of cross-border workers, for example (underrepresentation in non-salaried activities, agricultural or administrative jobs, for example).

On institutional issues, including the organization of training (Chapter 2) or cross-border trade union cooperation (Chapter 3), the border remains present. Concerning vocational training and the education system (Chapter 2), in the absence of a common and integrated training system the border situation then appears as a possibility of diversification of the training offers. The analysis shows us that the geographical border situation constitutes an advantage. Indeed, from the example of Luxembourg, it appears that its labor market feeds on the inflow of labor and skills from neighboring countries. This central geographic position also allows it to draw inspiration from neighboring models of vocational training, notably Germany and France, to build its own model of vocational training. This leads to an original Luxembourgish model of training built by mixing principles that are not necessarily complementary, according to the authors. It is an institutional tinkering of princi-

ples borrowed from the vocational training systems of neighboring countries.

By analyzing the feasibility conditions of cross-border trade union cooperation, it appears that the border can also act as a break because of the institutional, organizational and cultural differences in national union practices (Chapter 3). However, despite the difficulties encountered, cross-border initiatives are multiplying. Through day-to-day practices, mixing and local arrangements, relationships are formed between unions across borders, to provide the basis for cross-border trade union cooperation.

The daily crossing of the border also helps to speed up the rhythm of life of cross-border workers (Chapter 4). They may have difficulty reconciling professional activities and carrying out domestic activities. This rapid pace can end up altering the quality of life. Few border workers have activities outside their daily home/work shuttle, because of the length of these commutes. The authors, however, highlight an important heterogeneity in both the practices and the profiles of these workers.

Sectoral economic dynamics (notably finance, the driving sector of the Luxembourg economy) impact the evolution of the number of cross-border workers (Chapter 5). Although relations between economic dynamics, sectoral dynamics and evolutions in the number of cross-border workers are difficult to analyze, a causal link appears. This result in some way corroborates our hypothesis that cross-border work is a regulator of the cross-border labor market.

## Theoretical, methodological and empirical perspectives

From a theoretical point of view, the analysis of cross-border labor markets can be seen in connection with the assumptions of the different schools of thought in economics. If the dominant theory approaches the labor market as a place, where rationally considered job seekers

and employers meet and where adjustments are made according to the level of wages, our results show that other elements have to be taken into account, such as the cross-border practices of the actors or the institutions (e.g. education). The approaches in terms of regulation should be discussed.

From a methodological point of view, a multidisciplinary orientation of research (sociology, political science, economics, geography and management science) facilitates a better understanding of the complexity of cross-border labor markets. The contribution of spatiotemporal approaches to understanding the dynamics of labor market development and mapping techniques to capture and spatialize these dynamics at the cross-border scale are necessary. This work also teaches us about another necessity: building flow data alongside stock data, to better analyze flows and movements in the labor market. If the spatiotemporal approach or econometric modeling approaches this complexity, these must be coupled with qualitative methodologies.

From an empirical point of view, there is a need to develop studies in order to anticipate future developments in the cross-border labor market. Technological innovations, aging of the population, the need to integrate new environmental standards are factors that will impact both supply and demand in cross-border markets. This requires cross-border reflection, as shown in several chapters of this Thematic Issue, one of whose major lessons is that border proximity (and the needs of employment) make it possible to overcome the rigidities caused by the border.

### **SUGGESTED CITATION**

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