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and International Studies**

Applied European Policy and Governance Studies



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Abstract

This thesis investigates how Franco-German cross-border cooperation enhances labour market integration, reduces regional mismatches, and facilitates human capital mobility in selected border regions. While the Franco-German axis has long been central to European integration, its role in subnational labour governance and institutional convergence remains underexplored. Adopting a multidisciplinary approach, the study draws on labour migration theory, systems theory, and institutional perspectives to assess the mechanisms that support or hinder cross-border mobility. Empirical analysis is based on semi-structured expert interviews with senior stakeholders from industry, policy, and institutional sectors engaged in Franco-German cooperation.

Findings indicate that regional labour mobility contributes to institutional convergence and economic resilience (H1), while integrated frameworks - such as language-oriented education policies, dual vocational programs, and qualification recognition mechanisms - are essential enablers of human capital mobility (H2). The study highlights the role of bilateral institutions (e.g., AHK, DFJW, AGZ), cultural and linguistic competencies, and governance innovation in translating EU-level mobility rights into practice.

Despite structural challenges - including administrative fragmentation, regulatory asymmetries, and underfunded support systems - Franco-German border regions emerge as laboratories for deepening European integration. The thesis argues that sustainable labour mobility requires not only legal frameworks but also trust-based, multi-level cooperation. Its findings contribute to ongoing debates on European cohesion, labour market resilience, and the potential for regional models to inform EU-wide policy design.

Keywords in English

Cross-Border Labour Mobility, Franco-German Economic Cooperation, Human Capital Mobility, European Single Market, Institutional Synergies, EU Labour Market Integration, Regional Economic Policy, Institutional Barriers, Labour Mobility Theory, Intra-European Labour Migration

Keywords in French

Mobilité transfrontalière de la main-d'œuvre, Coopération économique franco-allemande, Mobilité du capital humain, Marché unique européen, Synergies institutionnelles, Théorie de la mobilité du travail, Intégration du marché du travail de l'UE, Obstacles institutionnels, Politique économique régionale, Migration de travail intra-européenne

Keywords in German

Grenzüberschreitende Arbeitsmobilität, Deutsch-Französische Wirtschaftskooperation, Mobilität des Humankapitals, Europäischer Binnenmarkt, Institutionelle Synergien, EU-Arbeitsmarktintegration, Regionale Wirtschaftspolitik, Institutionelle Barrieren, Theorie der Arbeitsmobilität, Innereuropäische Arbeitsmigration

“The European Union is an imperfect Union for the Purpose of Freedom and Welfare of the People of Europe and a strong Partner for the Global Community” – thanks to my family, the CIFE & my dearest friends

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List of Abbreviations

AbiBac	Franco-German dual high school diploma (combined <i>Abitur</i> and <i>Baccalauréat</i>)
AGZ	Franco-German Cross-Border Cooperation Committee (German: <i>Deutsch-Französischer Ausschuss für Grenz-überschreitende Zusammenarbeit</i>)
AHK	German Chamber of Commerce Abroad
Azubi-BacPro	“Azubi-BacPro” vocational initiative – Franco-German apprentice exchange program (combines German <i>Azubi</i> (apprentice) and French <i>Bac Professionnel</i>)
BBSR	Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (Germany) (<i>Bundesinstitut für Bau-, Stadt- und Raumforschung</i>)
BFC	Bourgogne–Franche-Comté (French region)
BW	Baden-Württemberg (German state)
CAFA	Club d’Affaires Franco-Allemand (Franco-German Business Club)
CEFA	Club Économique Franco-Allemand (Franco-German Economic Club, Paris)
CCI	Chambre de Commerce et d’Industrie (Chamber of Commerce and Industry, in France)
CJEU	Court of Justice of the European Union
DACH	D-A-CH (Deutschland – Austria – Confoederatio Helvetica); acronym for the region comprising Germany, Austria, and Switzerland
DFH/UFA	Franco-German University (German: <i>Deutsch-Französische Hochschule</i> (DFH); French: <i>Université Franco-Allemande</i> (UFA))
DFJW	Franco-German Youth Office (German: <i>Deutsch-Französisches Jugendwerk</i>)

DIK	Deutscher Industrie Kreis (German Industry Circle, informal group of German industrial leaders in France)
EGTC	European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation
Erasmus+	Erasmus+ (European Union education, training, youth and sport programme)
ESF+	European Social Fund Plus (EU fund for investing in people)
EU	European Union
EEC	European Economic Community
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community
EURES	European Employment Services (EU job mobility network)
Eurostat	Eurostat (Statistical Office of the European Union)
Interreg	Interreg (EU interregional cooperation funding programme under European Cohesion Policy)
NELM	New Economics of Labour Migration (theory)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAMINA	Eurodistrict “PAMINA” – cross-border region named after Palatinate, Mittlerer (Middle) Oberrhein, Na (North) Alsace
PROTANDEM	ProTandem – Franco-German Agency for Exchange in Vocational Education (<i>Deutsch-Französische Agentur für den Austausch in der beruflichen Bildung</i>)
RLP	Rhineland-Palatinate (German state)
SMEs	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
TEU	Treaty on European Union
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

1 Introduction

The Franco-German partnership has historically served as the driving force of European integration, shaping major institutional, economic, and political developments within the European Union. While extensive scholarship has examined this bilateral axis in the context of treaty negotiations, fiscal policy, and industrial cooperation (e.g., Bulmer & Paterson, 2013), less attention has been given to the functional and regional dimensions of cooperation, particularly with regard to *labour market integration* and *cross-border human capital mobility*. This thesis investigates how Franco-German cross-border cooperation contributes to reducing labour market mismatches, enhancing institutional convergence, and facilitating mobility in selected border regions. It positions these regional dynamics not only as pragmatic responses to workforce asymmetries but also as potential blueprints for deepening the European internal market.

The relevance of this topic is underscored by several EU-wide challenges: demographic imbalances, a shortage of skilled labour, and the green and digital transitions outlined in the European Commission's long-term growth strategy. Labour mobility within the EU is a key mechanism for addressing these issues - yet despite legal foundations such as the Single Market, the Services Directive, and Schengen, mobility across borders remains hindered by persistent legal, linguistic, and institutional barriers (Recchi & Triandafyllidou, 2010; Schmidtke, 2021). The Franco-German border regions, with their dense networks of cooperation and socio-economic interdependence, offer a rich empirical context for analysing how such barriers can be overcome in practice.

This thesis engages with a multidisciplinary body of literature to frame and analyse these dynamics. Studies on *European integration and cross-border governance* (Becker & Gehring, 2022; Blatter, 2004; Perkmann, 2003) offer conceptual tools to understand the institutional embeddedness of regional cooperation. Economic contributions such as Borjas (2013), (Stark & Bloom, 1985), and the Dual Labour Market Theory (Piore, 1979) provide insights into the drivers of labour migration and human capital flows. Moreover, recent empirical studies highlight the importance of *policy coordination*, *mutual recognition mechanisms*, and *language-oriented education* in enabling functional mobility (Eppler et al., 2016). By combining these strands, the thesis contributes to a growing research agenda on how subnational and bilateral cooperation can support the goals of EU cohesion and market integration. In the research process Chat GPT was used to design ideas around the research questions, hypotheses, literature review, and transcription of expert interviews with a close reflection of limitations of using artificial intelligence

in scientific writing. AI were used for paraphrasing while adjusting for the logic of the research question and hypotheses.

To empirically examine these questions, the thesis employs a qualitative methodology based on semi-structured expert interviews. Interviews were conducted with senior stakeholders from business, institutional, and policy spheres engaged in Franco-German cooperation - such as representatives of multinational firms, the bilateral chamber of commerce, and regional policy platforms. This qualitative design enables an actor-centred exploration of how cooperation is implemented on the ground and how it is shaped by institutional, administrative, and labour market logics. Interview data are analysed thematically, with coding aligned to the two central hypotheses of the study.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The following research questions guide this investigation:

1. **How does Franco-German cross-border cooperation contribute to reducing labour market mismatches in border regions?**
2. **Which institutional mechanisms facilitate or hinder cross-border human capital mobility, and how do they reflect broader patterns of European integration?**

Based on these questions, two hypotheses are developed:

- **H1:** *Franco-German regional labour mobility contributes to institutional convergence and economic resilience in border regions, while serving as a model for EU-wide initiatives.*
- **H2:** *Integrated regional frameworks, characterised by language-oriented education policies, bilateral vocational initiatives, and institutionally supported labour recognition mechanisms, enhance cross-border human capital mobility.*

Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is structured in six chapters. Following this introduction, Chapter 2 explores the historical evolution and institutional architecture of Franco-German economic cooperation, with a focus on cross-border mobility policies and best practices in selected regions. Chapter 3 presents a theoretical framework grounded in labour migration theory, human capital economics, and institutional perspectives. Chapter 4 provides the empirical analysis based on expert interviews, offering insights into institutional synergies and structural labour complementarities in practice. Chapter 5 discusses the findings in relation to the hypotheses and broader EU policy

goals. Chapter 6 concludes the thesis with a reflection on its contributions and policy implications, and outlines potential directions for future research.

2 Franco-German Economic Cooperation

Franco-German cooperation must be understood within the broader dynamics of European integration, where political and economic logics are intertwined. As Svendsen (2003) emphasizes, the European Union represents a political economy hybrid that weaves together market integration and institutionalized political cooperation to sustain long-term regional stability.

The Franco-German relationship has served as a cornerstone for European integration since the aftermath of the Second World War. As two of Europe's largest economies and founding members of the European Union, France and Germany have built a model of bilateral cooperation that has shaped not only their own trajectories but also the broader contours of the European internal market. This chapter examines the historical evolution, institutional foundations, regional cooperation practices, and the dynamics of human capital mobility within the Franco-German partnership.

The research focus lies in understanding how historically embedded relations and the development of robust political, legal, and economic institutions have facilitated cross-border economic integration and human capital exchange. The central research question addressed here is: How have historical, institutional, and regional cooperation mechanisms between France and Germany fostered cross-border human capital mobility and contributed to the strengthening of the European internal market (see section 2.4.6)?

To answer the research question and develop hypotheses, Section 2.1 discusses the historical development of Franco-German relations. Section 2.2 analyses the political and economic institutions underpinning cooperation, integrating the Treaty on European Union (TEU), the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU), and Schengen legal frameworks (European Union, 2004, 2012a, 2012b). Section 2.3 examines cross-border cooperation best practices and section 2.4 focuses on cross-border human capital mobility, considering European programs like Erasmus+ (European Community Action Scheme for Mobility of University Students) and EURES (European Employment Services) (European Commission, 2025a, 2025b).

2.1 Historical Perspectives of Franco-German Relations

The Franco-German relationship has evolved from centuries of conflict into a model of political reconciliation and economic interdependence, From 'hereditary enmity' to Franco-German

entente (Trouille, 2003). In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the relationship was marked by military confrontation and nationalistic rivalry, notably the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71), and both World Wars. Despite these antagonisms, industrial and economic ties, especially in coal and steel, had already created patterns of interdependence before World War II (Hudemann, 1997, pp. 310–311).

Following World War II, political leaders on both sides recognized that lasting peace could only be achieved through economic integration and institutional cooperation. The Schuman Plan (European Union, 1950), proposing joint control over coal and steel production, led to the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951 (EUR-Lex – European Union Law, 2025). As Munte (2008, p. 167) argues, the ECSC institutionalized interdependence in strategic sectors and served as a first step towards European unity.

The Treaty of Paris (European Parliament, 1951) and the Treaties of Rome (European Parliament, 1957) laid the legal groundwork for broader European integration. The ECSC and later the European Economic Community (EEC) transformed economic cooperation from a voluntary partnership into a binding legal framework. These treaties were rooted in the values now codified in Articles 2-3 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), including the respect for human dignity, democracy, rule of law, and the internal market (European Union, 2012b).

Moreover, Lappenküper (2008) highlights that the Franco-German Elysée Treaty (Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, France, 1963) further institutionalized bilateral consultations, setting expectations for political alignment on European matters. However, reconciliation was not limited to political elites. Societal initiatives, such as youth exchanges and municipal partnerships, fostered grassroots trust and understanding (Fasanaro, 2008).

By embedding their bilateral relations within supranational institutions, France and Germany ensured that economic cooperation became self-reinforcing and legally protected. The development of mutual trust and institutionalized coordination created the foundation for later cross-border labor mobility and vocational cooperation.

Other cooperation initiatives - such as the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom) or the proposed but ultimately failed European Defence Community (EDC) - demonstrate that integration was not limited to the economic realm (*The Euratom Treaty*, 2024; *The European Defence Community (EDC)*, 2016). While the unratified European Constitution marked the high point of political ambitions, the European Union remains, in practice, a hybrid between economic union and political project. Sector-specific institutions like the European Central Bank

(ECB), whose monetary policy indirectly affects labour mobility, reflect this intermediate character (*European Central Bank, 2024*).

2.2 Political and Economic Institutions of Regional Cooperation

The transformation of Franco-German relations into a central axis of European integration owes much to the progressive development of political and economic institutions. These institutions provided legal certainty, stabilized economic interdependence, and fostered cross-border cooperation frameworks essential for enhancing labour mobility and human capital development. This section examines the evolution of European constitutionalism, economic integration, and experimentalist governance approaches within the broader context of Franco-German collaboration.

The durability of Franco-German cooperation can be attributed to its early embedding in supranational institutions characterized by legal enforcement, trust, and credible commitment mechanisms. According to Svendsen (2003), successful regional integration depends not merely on economic gains but on the existence of trust-based institutional frameworks that reduce transaction costs and prevent opportunistic behaviour among states.

2.2.1 Franco-German and Subnational Institutions of Cross-Border Governance

Franco-German labour mobility is enabled not only by EU-level frameworks but also by a complex, multilevel system of institutions operating across national, regional, and local levels. These actors implement, coordinate, and often co-design policies that support vocational training, qualification recognition, and human capital mobility. The following table provides an overview of the key institutions and their roles in this cross-border governance structure.

Table 1: Institutional Architecture of Franco-German Cross-Border Governance

Level	Institution / Instrument	Function and Contribution
EU	European Commission (DG REGIO, DG EMPL)	Manages funding (Interreg, ESF+); policy coordination on regional and labour issues
EU	CJEU	Ensures enforceability of EU freedoms (e.g. free movement, non-discrimination)

EU	EURES, Erasmus+, PRO-TANDEM	Facilitate job matching, mobility for students and apprentices, language acquisition
Bilateral (Franco-German)	Treaty of Aachen (2019)	Legal framework for cooperation in education, labour, and digital services
Bilateral (Franco-German)	AGZ (Franco-German Cross-Border Cooperation Committee)	Identifies barriers, proposes legal and institutional solutions
Bilateral (Franco-German)	Franco-German Council of Ministers / Parliamentary Assembly	Political steering and oversight of bilateral initiatives
Bilateral (Franco-German)	DFJW / DFH	Promote youth exchange and academic mobility, over 200 binational study programmes
Regional and Local	Länder (e.g. Saarland, BW) & Régions (e.g. Grand Est)	Design and fund regional mobility policies, dual education links
Regional and Local	Eurodistricts (e.g. SaarMoselle, PAMINA)	Coordinate local public services, bilingual education, infrastructure, EGTC format
Regional and Local	AHK / CCI	Facilitate business cooperation and recognition of vocational qualifications

Source: *Based on information from European Commission (2024); Federal Republic of Germany & French Republic (2019); Deutsch-Französischer Jugendwerk (2015); Deutsch-Französische Hochschule (2023); Eurodistrict SaarMoselle (2024); Gänzle & Mirtl (2019); Unfried et al. (2022).*

This governance architecture reflects the principles of experimentalist governance (Gänzle & Mirtl, 2019), in which actors jointly define goals, adapt implementation to local conditions, and coordinate through iterative feedback loops. It is precisely this layered system - linking EU norms, bilateral treaties, and territorial cooperation - that allows for sustained and scalable cross-border labour mobility in the Franco-German context.

2.2.2 European Constitutionalism and Rule of Law

The evolution of Franco-German cooperation was anchored in the supranational constitutional framework of the European Union. The Treaty on European Union (TEU), particularly Articles 2 and 3, outlines the Union's founding values: respect for human rights, democracy, the rule of law, and the promotion of the internal market (European Union, 2012b). These principles created a climate of legal certainty and mutual accountability, enabling bilateral economic and social initiatives to flourish within the Franco-German context.

European integration has long relied on mutual trust, credible commitments, and legal certainty as cornerstones of successful cross-border cooperation. Scholars have argued that Member States must be able to credibly commit to common rules (often by empowering supranational institutions to enforce them) in order to assure each other that no one will backtrack on obligations (Majone, 1995). This ability to make and honour commitments under a stable legal framework builds the trust necessary for cooperation across borders, while the principle of legal certainty ensures that citizens and businesses can confidently engage in cross-border activities without fear of sudden rule changes or discriminatory treatment.

An excellent source underscoring these points is the European Commission's official analysis linking the rule of law to trust in the EU's internal cooperation. In its 2017 reasoned proposal under Article 7 TEU (regarding Poland), the Commission explicitly noted that respect for the rule of law in every Member State is *"a prerequisite for (...) establishing mutual trust"* among national authorities, businesses, and citizens, and is *"essential for (...) the seamless operation of the Internal Market because economic operators need to have the certainty that they will be treated equally under the law"* (European Commission, 2017b, p. 244) In other words, the EU's own framework recognizes that mutual trust - underpinned by each state's credible commitment to uphold EU law and by robust legal certainty - is indispensable for effective regional cooperation. This trust-based foundation is what enables initiatives like labour mobility and institutional integration to flourish. For example, the free movement of workers depends on each country trusting that others will apply common standards fairly and predictably. Likewise, supranational enforcement mechanisms (such as the EU Court of Justice and agencies like the European Labour Authority) exist to bolster credible commitments and ensure legal certainty, thereby reinforcing the trust that "glues" the Union's legal order together (European Commission, 2017b).

Furthermore, the TFEU Articles 45-48 guarantee the free movement of workers and the elimination of discrimination based on nationality, thus legally enabling cross-border labour mobility

(European Union, 2012a). These constitutional elements institutionalize trust and reduce transaction costs between Member States (Henning, 2011, p. 5).

2.2.3 Economic Integration and the European Union

Economic interdependence between France and Germany evolved rapidly after World War II. Hudemann emphasizes that economic integration, beginning with the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), was designed to lock the two economies into a mutually beneficial framework, preventing future conflict (Hudemann, 1997, pp. 310–312).

The creation of the European Economic Community (EEC) via the Treaty of Rome (1957) institutionalized interdependence, promoting the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people. As Munte (2008, pp. 165–168) explains, Articles 48-51 of the Treaty addressed labour mobility directly, requiring the mutual recognition of qualifications and the coordination of social security systems. Henning (2011, p. 4) highlights that deeper economic integration, especially when underpinned by institutional resilience, makes cooperation more stable and less vulnerable to political crises. Franco-German leadership in promoting the internal market reflects this dynamic.

The *Annual report on intra-EU labour mobility - 2024* further shows that today's cross-border mobility programs, including EURES and Erasmus+, are built on this legacy. They institutionalize access to jobs and training opportunities across borders, contributing to both economic cohesion and human capital enhancement. Gänzle and Mirtl add that economic integration increasingly operates through experimentalist governance, where common goals are agreed centrally but implementation is decentralized and adaptive (2019, p. 242). Macro-regional strategies, like the Danube and Adriatic-Ionian strategies, illustrate how regions can experiment with policy tools, furthering integration without rigid centralized control (Gänzle & Mirtl, 2019).

Moreover, as the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (2017) shows in its *Connectivity Agenda: Co-financing of Investment Projects in the Western Balkans*, regional cooperation frameworks within the Enlargement Policy, such as those supporting the Western Balkans, mirror this approach. They aim to strengthen territorial cooperation, economic integration, and cross-border mobility, offering insights that also apply to the Franco-German context (European Commission, Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, 2017).

2.2.4 European Single Market Act, Schengen Agreement and Labour Mobility

The late 1980s and early 1990s marked a transformative period for European integration, particularly concerning cross-border labour mobility. The adoption of the Single European Act (European Parliament, 1986) initiated the goal of completing the internal market by 1992, a process that had profound effects on Franco-German cooperation and regional labour dynamics. The Single Market Act removed barriers to the free movement of goods, services, capital, and, crucially, people, setting legal standards that directly facilitated cross-border employment (European Commission, 2011).

The Single Market introduced legal instruments that allowed European citizens to move, work, and reside across borders with fewer restrictions. As detailed in the Annual Report on Intra-EU Labour Mobility (European Commission et al., 2025), by 2023, approximately 10.1 million working-age EU citizens resided in a different member state, illustrating the significance of labour mobility enabled by these legal changes (2025, p. 13).

Complementing the Single Market reforms, the Schengen Agreement (1985) and its full implementation in 1995 abolished internal border controls among participating states. Schengen enables over 400 million Europeans to travel freely across borders without checks, significantly enhancing labour mobility (European Union, 2004). In the Franco-German context, Schengen particularly benefited regions such as Baden-Württemberg and Grand Est, where daily commuting and economic integration flourished (Hudemann, 1997, p. 316).

Rainer Hudemann further explains that the removal of borders enabled a substantial increase in cross-border workers, particularly those commuting between Germany and France. The Labour Mobility Report of 2024 also shows that intra-EU mobility has continued to expand, with Germany alone hosting 3.4 million EU movers in 2023, a substantial share of which were Franco-German cross-border commuters (European Commission et al., 2025, p. 14; Hudemann, 1997).

Institutional initiatives reinforced these freedoms. The EURES network facilitated cross-border job placements by connecting employers and job seekers throughout the EU. Programs like Erasmus+ encouraged mobility at the educational and vocational levels, while PROTANDEM focused specifically on Franco-German vocational exchanges (European Commission, 2025a, 2025b; *ProTandem – Deutsch-Französische Agentur für den Austausch in der beruflichen Bildung*, 2025).

According to the Annual Report on Intra-EU Labour Mobility the number of cross-border workers reached around 1.83 million by 2023, with steady growth (+2.8% compared to the previous year) particularly evident in border regions such as Saarland and Grand Est (European

Commission et al., 2025, p. 13). Notably, mobility flows between France and Germany have maintained their strength, driven by proximity, linguistic initiatives, and sector-specific cooperation frameworks.

C. Randall Henning stresses that robust institutions and continuous policy feedback mechanisms are essential to sustain regional cooperation and the mobility of capital, particularly in responding to crises (Henning, 2011, p. 5). The Franco-German case illustrates how continuous institutional innovation, through macro-regional strategies, keeps cross-border labour mobility resilient and adaptive. Thus, the Franco-German relationship within the European Single Market and the Schengen framework serves as a paradigm for how institutional, legal, and economic mechanisms can converge to promote sustainable cross-border human capital mobility in the European Union.

2.3 Best Practices in Cross Border Cooperation

Cross-border cooperation has become one of the most structured and institutionally embedded components of Franco-German bilateral relations. It has evolved from informal partnerships into a sophisticated system of governance that reflects both supranational European principles and treaty-based bilateral innovation. Drawing on a range of academic, legal, and policy sources, this section synthesizes the key institutional, legal, and programmatic mechanisms that constitute best practices in Cross-border-cooperation, while also identifying the conceptual foundations that underpin their effectiveness.

At the European level, the legal and political framework for cross-border cooperation is embedded in the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). Article 3 of the TEU commits the Union to promoting economic, social, and territorial cohesion (European Union, 2012b), while Articles 174 to 178 of the TFEU define cohesion policy and support for border regions as shared legal priorities of the EU (European Union, 2012a, 2012b). These provisions create a constitutional mandate for territorial integration and justify the establishment of financial and legal instruments tailored to cross-border coordination. Building on these foundations, the 2019 Treaty of Aachen added a distinctly Franco-German dimension to cross-border governance. Article 14 of the treaty established the Franco-German Cross-Border Cooperation Committee (AGZ), a formal mechanism for identifying legal and administrative obstacles in border regions (Rhineland-Palatinate, Saarland, Baden-Wuerttemberg, Grand-Est) and developing coordinated solutions across different levels of governance (Federal Republic of Germany & French Republic, 2019). The AGZ has been designed as a hybrid body composed of national ministries, regional authorities, and civil society

actors. It is empowered to propose legal derogations and institutional reforms, reflecting a strategic shift from reactive to anticipatory governance.

This institutional model exemplifies what Gänzle and Mirtl describe as experimentalist governance. In contrast to rigid hierarchical models, experimentalist governance enables decentralised implementation, regular evaluation, and adaptive learning through feedback loops (2019). The AGZ reflects this model by facilitating iterative coordination between national and regional administrations while allowing for legal experimentation to resolve regulatory frictions. This view is reinforced by Unfried et al. (2022), who argue that one of the primary innovations introduced by the AGZ is the capacity for structured cross-border regulatory assessments. Their study advocates the systematic application of *border area impact assessment* (german: *Grenzraumfolgenabschätzungen*) to assess in advance how proposed national legislation may impact cross-border dynamics and legal coherence. Such instruments can identify asymmetries in legal systems, reduce policy-induced uncertainty, and ensure that the principle of territorial cohesion is upheld in practice.

The conceptual logic of such diagnostics finds further support in the Council of Europe's Manual on Removing Obstacles to Cross-Border Cooperation (2013), which provides an operational typology of barriers to effective cooperation. These include legal incompatibilities, administrative fragmentation, institutional asymmetries, and divergent political priorities. The manual identifies six categories of success factors for Cross-Border Cooperation: legal compatibility, strong mandates, administrative capacity, political will, financial sustainability, and shared cultural identity (Council of Europe, 2013, pp. 10–13). These elements form a cross-cutting matrix that aligns well with both the AGZ's practical role and the theoretical propositions of experimentalist governance.

Beyond legal and administrative mechanisms, several long-standing Franco-German institutions offer practical models for cooperation. The Franco-German University (DFH/UFA) exemplifies best practice in the higher education sector. As of 2022, it coordinated over 200 binational degree programs and supported more than 6,300 students in mobility, double-degree, and doctoral exchange tracks (Deutsch-Französische Hochschule, 2023, p. 4). With joint funding and quality assurance mechanisms, the FGU institutionalizes academic mobility and fosters professional qualifications that are recognized in both countries. In a complementary domain, the Franco-German Youth Office (DFJW) has, since the 1960s, served as a central actor in youth exchange and civic education. In 2015 alone, the *DFJW* reached nearly 190 000 participants, including targeted programs for disadvantaged youth, bilingual language promotion, and

voluntary services (Deutsch-Französisches Jugendwerk, 2015, p. 6). These institutions demonstrate that successful cross-border cooperation is not limited to administrative coordination but also includes structured, long-term societal cooperation with multilevel support.

Other binational initiatives confirm this multidimensional approach. Arte, the Franco-German public broadcaster, represents a unique model of cross-border media cooperation (*ARTE – Der deutsch-französische Kultursender*, 2025). It operates under joint editorial oversight and provides bilingual programming to promote a shared European cultural space. Meanwhile, the Franco-German Brigade, a joint military unit, illustrates the depth of political trust and shared sovereignty that underpins the Franco-German partnership (*Deutsch-Französische Brigade*, 2025). Finally, innovation-oriented initiatives such as *La French Tech* are beginning to bridge economic ecosystems across borders, particularly in the field of entrepreneurship and digitalization, indicating that cross-border cooperation is also expanding into the domain of knowledge economies and start-up ecosystems (*La French Tech – the French Start-up Ecosystem*, 2025).

The Club Économique Franco-Allemand (CEFA) and the Club d’Affaires Franco-Allemand (CAFA) Baden-Württemberg are complementary pillars of Franco-German economic cooperation within a binational network of 21 regional business clubs (together encompassing nearly 2,000 members across both countries). Founded in 2005, CEFA is the only Franco-German business club in Paris - an exclusive forum of about 300 French and German corporate leaders (largely from industrial sectors) admitted by co-optation. It convenes monthly meetings featuring high-profile economic and political figures, thereby directly connecting top executives with policymakers in a Franco-German context. In contrast, the CAFA in Baden-Württemberg (established 1985 in Stuttgart) serves as a broad-based regional network for Franco-German economic actors, from company representatives and entrepreneurs to public officials. Reflecting its cross-border mission, CAFA-BW’s governance is binational - it has co-presidents (one German, one French) and a board with equal representation - and it operates bilingually. It organises frequent on-the-ground exchanges (e.g. conferences, site visits, and networking soirées) designed to foster personal contacts and partnerships among businesses on both sides of the Rhine. Both clubs thus facilitate cross-border dialogue among industry and policymakers: CEFA provides a platform at the national level for sharing insights on Franco-German economic developments and engaging decision-makers, while CAFA-BW strengthens regional ties by cultivating grassroots business cooperation with support from local institutions (e.g. the French Consulate in Stuttgart). Notably, two interviewees from this research are regular participants in these forums, underscoring the practical relevance of such networks in sustaining Franco-

German economic collaboration (Club d'affaires franco-allemand du Bade-Wurtemberg, 2024; Club d'Affaires Franco-Allemand Hauts-de-France, 2025; Etaix, 2024).

The institutional effectiveness of these best practices is further enhanced by European Union instruments. Programs such as EURES and Erasmus+ provide financial and administrative infrastructure for labour and educational mobility. EURES facilitates cross-border employment services, while Erasmus+ supports both academic and vocational mobility, enabling thousands of participants annually to gain experience and qualifications abroad. The Annual Report on Intra-EU Labour Mobility (2025) confirms the relevance of such instruments, noting that approximately 1.83 million EU citizens were employed as cross-border workers in 2023 (European Commission et al., 2025, p. 13). These mobility flows rely on coordinated institutional frameworks and would be far less effective in the absence of structured cross-border cooperation mechanisms.

In sum, best practices in Franco-German cross-border cooperation are not the result of spontaneous bilateral goodwill but are deeply embedded in legal mandates, institutional design, and cultural integration strategies. They are supported by treaty-based frameworks (TEU, TFEU, Treaty of Aachen), empowered by multilevel coordination bodies (AGZ), and operationalized through longstanding institutions in education, youth, defence, and culture. These practices offer both empirical validation and conceptual insights into how structured cooperation across national borders can strengthen cohesion, resilience, and integration within the European internal market.

2.4 Franco-German Cross Border Mobility of Human Capital

Human capital mobility is a central pillar of European integration, yet it remains unevenly distributed across regions. In border areas, particularly between France and Germany, cross-border labour and educational mobility are shaped not only by the European Union's legal framework, but also by the existence and quality of structured institutional cooperation. The Franco-German border represents one of the most functionally integrated zones within the EU, with the French region Grand Est sharing boundaries with three German Länder: Baden-Württemberg, Rhineland-Palatinate, and Saarland. These territories constitute the spatial and political context for some of the most advanced regional frameworks in Europe for transnational human capital development.

Franco-German mobility frameworks are grounded in EU primary law, most notably in Articles 45 to 48 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), which establish the freedom of movement for workers, and in Articles 165 and 166, which serve as the legal basis

for cooperation in education, vocational training, and youth policy (European Union, 2012b). These principles are operationalized through multilateral instruments such as EURES and Erasmus+, and are further enhanced by bilateral and regional agreements including the Treaty of Aachen (Federal Republic of Germany & French Republic, 2019), and the AGZ work program 2025 (Deutsch-Französischer Ausschuss für Grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit). The AGZ (Franco-German Cross-Border Cooperation Committee) plays a pivotal role in coordinating a wide range of cross-border activities, ranging from labour law alignment and vocational training to infrastructure development across regional and national levels.

This institutional structure reflects what Gänzle and Mirtl (2019) describe as experimentalist governance, a model characterised by flexible goal-setting, iterative learning, and decentralised implementation. The AGZ exemplifies this approach by enabling the involved partners to identify regulatory barriers, test local solutions, and transfer best practices within a structured legal and political framework.

The following chapter analyses the institutional, legal, and political conditions that facilitate human capital mobility between Grand Est and its German neighbours. The case of Baden-Württemberg illustrates how infrastructure coordination and political alignment can improve access to education and employment across the border. Saarland offers a unique approach, grounded in its France Strategy+, where bilingualism, vocational training, and cross-border recognition of qualifications are explicitly integrated into regional policy (Staatskanzlei Saarland, 2025). The partnership between Rhineland-Palatinate and Bourgogne-Franche-Comté, established in 1962 and thus predating the Elysée Treaty, is the oldest regional cooperation of its kind in Europe and serves as a model for interregional engagement; it encompasses joint initiatives in education, culture, youth mobility, environmental policy, and viticulture, supported by over 150 active town twinnings and a vibrant civil society network (Landtag Rheinland-Pfalz, 2024).

The chapter is structured as follows: Section 2.4.1 introduces the broader EU context of labour and educational mobility, drawing on recent reports and comparative data. Sections 2.4.2 to 2.4.5 provide a closer examination of each regional cooperation framework between the Grand Est and the respective German partner region. Finally, Section 2.4.6 proposes a research hypothesis based on the patterns observed, arguing that structured institutional cooperation significantly enhances the capacity for human capital to circulate across borders.

2.4.1 Labour Mobility in the European Union

Labour mobility within the European Union constitutes one of the four fundamental freedoms of the internal market and is codified in Articles 45 to 48 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). These articles establish the right of EU citizens to move freely for work purposes, including entitlement to equal treatment in access to employment, working conditions, and social advantages (European Union, 2012a). Complementing this legal framework are policy initiatives and coordination mechanisms such as EURES, Erasmus+, and the Regulation on social security coordination (EUR-Lex – European Union Law, 2005), which aim to enable practical access to the internal labour market.

According to the 2024 Annual Report on Intra-EU Labour Mobility, an estimated 10.1 million EU citizens of working age (20-64) resided in another EU or EFTA Member State in 2023, representing a modest 2% increase from 2022 and marking a return to pre-pandemic levels (European Commission et al., 2025, p. 14). The report also notes that approximately 1,8 million people were cross-border workers, meaning they lived in one Member State but worked in another. France, Germany, and Poland were among the most important countries of origin, while Germany and Switzerland were the top destinations for cross-border workers. Notably, Germany hosted 34% of all working-age movers, the highest share in the EU, making it a structural anchor of intra-European labour mobility (European Commission et al., 2025, p. 14).

The demographic profile of mobile workers shows that 53% were between 20 and 34 years old, and 57% were male. Countries such as the Netherlands, Denmark, and Malta recorded the highest proportions of younger movers, while eastern and central European countries displayed a stronger male dominance among mobile workers (European Commission et al., 2025, p. 14). This age and gender composition is particularly important for regions facing demographic decline or sector-specific labour shortages.

Additional insights are provided by Eurostat's labour market flow statistics, which reported that in Q4 2024, 24,2% of the unemployed moved into employment, while 26,3% exited the labour force, reflecting an active but segmented EU labour market (Eurostat, 2024b). At the macro level, the OECD confirmed that the EU achieved near record-high levels of labour force participation (73,9%) and employment (70,2%) in Q4 2024, suggesting that while mobility potential exists, access barriers and mismatches persist (OECD, 2025).

Labour mismatch becomes more evident when considering the Beveridge curve, which plots job vacancy rates against unemployment. Eurostat's 2024 analysis observed a decline in vacancy rates without a corresponding rise in unemployment, indicating improved labour market

matching efficiency in some Member States (Eurostat, 2024a). However, regional disparities remain pronounced: while Germany, Czechia, and the Netherlands continue to offer robust labour demand, countries such as Spain and Greece still face higher structural unemployment.

Beyond numerical flows, the quality and sustainability of mobility are increasingly determined by the existence, or absence of cross-border institutional support. A major legal coordination instrument is the Portable Document A1 (PD A1), used to certify posted workers who temporarily work abroad while remaining under their home country's social security system. In 2023, over 5,5 million PD A1 forms were issued - a 19,5% increase from 2022 - reflecting the continued importance of short-term mobility as part of the broader labour integration strategy (European Commission et al., 2025, pp. 14–15).

Yet, legal entitlements and mobility programs alone are not sufficient. As the *Manual on Removing Obstacles to Cross-Border Cooperation* of the Council of Europe (2013) shows, effective cross-border mobility also depends on the removal of administrative, legal, and institutional obstacles. These include fragmented tax systems, lack of automatic recognition of vocational qualifications, and incompatible healthcare and pension regulations. While several EU initiatives have sought to streamline these barriers, such as the 2018 European Labour Authority and updated EURES platform, friction points persist - especially in border regions where national systems directly intersect (Council of Europe, 2013).

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored these structural weaknesses. Border closures, inconsistencies in social security rights, and insufficient digital coordination led to significant disruptions for mobile workers and highlighted the fragility of cross-border labour governance (Baumgartner & Ross, 2022, p. 19). The Franco-German Cross-Border Cooperation Committee (AGZ) was active in coordinating some of the response, but Baumgartner and Ross criticise a lack of vertical integration between local, regional, and national actors.

Lastly, the long-term sustainability of EU labour mobility is challenged by demographic decline. European Commission et al. (2025) and the OECD (2025) both emphasize that the share of younger mobile workers is shrinking, and ageing workforces in many Member States may limit future mobility unless offset by proactive educational, linguistic, and regulatory reforms.

In summary, while legal and programmatic frameworks for labour mobility in the EU exist, implementation varies significantly across Member States and regions. Persistent barriers - legal, administrative, linguistic, and institutional - contribute to underperformance in labour matching and discourage mobile workers from realising their full potential. The Franco-German

experience reveals both the promise and the complexity of cross-border labour governance, setting the stage for the regional analyses that follow in this chapter.

2.4.2 Effects of Germany's 2024 Internal Border Controls on EU Labour Mobility

In late 2024, Germany reintroduced temporary checks at all nine of its land borders - a significant rollback of Schengen's passport-free travel norms. Prior to this, Germany had maintained checks on some frontiers (notably the Austrian border since 2015, and Polish, Czech, and Swiss borders since late 2023) due to ongoing migration and security concerns. The expansion in September 2024 extended controls to Germany's western and northern neighbours (France, Luxembourg, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark) for an initial six-month period. German authorities cited "*acute dangers*" - including a series of deadly knife attacks by asylum seekers and a surge in far-right political pressure - as justification for the decision. Interior Minister Nancy Faeser stated that the checks were intended to curb irregular migration and "*protect against the acute dangers posed by Islamist terrorism and serious crime*" (Henley, 2024). This move drew criticism from several European partners but was praised by far-right figures across Europe, underscoring the politically charged context. By November 2024, Germany's policy meant that travellers from any neighbouring Schengen country faced at least spot identity checks when entering Germany, marking a stark departure from the normally seamless internal EU borders. (Henley, 2024; Lambiotte, 2024)

Germany's actions must be viewed against the legal backdrop of the Schengen Agreement and its implementing code. The Schengen Borders Code allows a member state to temporarily reinstate internal border controls "*in exceptional circumstances*" that threaten public order or internal security (Ernst & Young Global Limited, 2024). Such measures are meant to be last-resort and time-limited. For foreseeable events (e.g. major sports tournaments or summits), controls can initially last up to 30 days and be renewed up to a six-month maximum. In emergency situations, a state can act faster (for up to 10 days, extendable to two months) but must promptly notify the European Commission. Germany duly notified the EU of its border checks and initially limited them to six months. (Ernst & Young Global Limited, 2024; Lambiotte, 2024)

Recent Schengen reforms in 2024 have tightened these rules, generally capping internal border controls at no more than one to two years total under strict conditions. Legally, Germany's November 2024 controls were justified on paper by citing security and migration control needs, which fall under the accepted grounds. German officials emphasized that the checks were

“flexible” and not fully systematic - focusing on risk-based spot checks rather than a hard border closure. (Verdes, 2024)

This approach was intended to comply with Schengen’s proportionality principle by minimizing disruption. Nonetheless, the move raised alarms about the integrity of Schengen: Poland’s Prime Minister Donald Tusk warned that Germany’s unilateral step risked a “*de facto suspension of the Schengen agreement on a large scale*” if prolonged (Henley, 2024). Likewise, Luxembourg formally lodged a complaint with the European Commission, arguing that Germany’s continued extensions of the checks “*do not meet the legal criteria*” of necessity and proportionality under Schengen rules (Bishop, 2025). In essence, while Germany operated within the legal option for temporary controls, the spirit of open borders enshrined in Schengen has been called into question by this protracted national measure.

One of the clearest consequences of Germany’s internal border checks has been their disruptive effect on EU labour mobility, particularly for cross-border workers and frontier communities. The Schengen zone’s abolition of routine border controls has long facilitated a high degree of daily labour movement: prior to these measures, over 3,5 million people crossed internal EU borders each day for work or other activities (European Commission, 2025c).

Germany’s reintroduced checks - even if selective - have reintroduced time delays and uncertainty for commuters. For example, about 44% of Luxembourg’s workforce consists of cross-border workers from France, Belgium, and Germany, many of whom drive into Luxembourg each morning. Since the German checks began, some of these commuters have seen their travel times increase by one to two hours due to waiting at control points. (Peschel, 2025)

Such delays not only inconvenience workers but may alter their employment decisions: Luxembourg’s minister Gloden reported receiving daily complaints from workers “*questioning whether they’ll continue working in Luxembourg*” given the hassle. Similarly, many Luxembourg residents have curtailed routine trips into Germany (for shopping or leisure), indicating a chilling effect on cross-border exchange (Bishop, 2025).

2.4.3 Cross Border Mobility between Baden-Württemberg and Grand Est

The cross-border cooperation between Baden-Württemberg and the French region Grand Est has intensified significantly in recent years, culminating in two major agreements signed in January 2025. These declarations “Position on Interreg VI Upper Rhine” and the “Position on EU Cohesion Policy post-2027”, were formalised as part of a shared agenda to deepen institutional collaboration, enhance workforce mobility, and create tangible benefits for citizens in the Upper Rhine region. As Minister-President Winfried Kretschmann emphasised, Franco-

German friendship is not merely an administrative process; rather, it must be “revived again and again with life” through concrete cross-border action (Staatsministerium Baden-Württemberg, 2025a). The Interreg statement focuses on reducing bureaucratic barriers and securing stable long-term funding for joint infrastructure, education, and labour market projects. (Staatsministerium Baden-Württemberg, 2025b). In parallel, the cohesion policy declaration aligns both regions in their advocacy for a stronger territorial dimension in future EU structural funding cycles (Staatsministerium Baden-Württemberg, 2025c). These new commitments build upon an already dense network of regional cooperation mechanisms developed over the past two decades. A central framework in this regard is the Arbeitsprogramm 2025 of the AGZ (Deutsch-Französischer Ausschuss für Grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit), which supports practical instruments such as *Grenzraumfolgenabschätzungen*, ex-ante impact assessments for national regulations with potential effects on border regions. These tools are designed to prevent unintended spillovers from uncoordinated legislation and foster anticipatory, border-sensitive policymaking. Complementing these efforts, the Treaty of Aachen (2019) provides the legal scaffolding for a deeper institutional alignment in cross-border contexts. It obliges both France and Germany to intensify cooperation in key areas such as dual vocational education, social security coordination, and the interoperability of digital public services (Federal Republic of Germany & French Republic, 2019), all of which are essential for enabling seamless labour mobility in the Upper Rhine region.

A key concern in these agreements is institutional convergence, a cornerstone for effective labour mobility in the region. Both the Interreg and cohesion declarations call for more streamlined administrative procedures, including simplified reporting duties and clearer funding rules for small and medium-sized enterprises (SME’s), training institutions, and mobility actors. These measures align with broader EU objectives to enhance the functionality of border regions as cohesive labour markets. The Council of Europe (2013) has long argued that dismantling legal and administrative barriers is vital to making EU mobility rights genuinely effective, especially in complex fields such as tax, pension entitlements, and healthcare coordination.

Empirical studies further highlight the strategic value and structural challenges of the Franco-German labour corridor in the Upper Rhine. According to Baumgartner and Ross (2022), Grand Est ranks among the leading French regions for cross-border commuting into Germany, particularly driven by wage differentials, sectoral complementarities, and industrial demand in southern Baden-Württemberg. Yet these benefits are constrained by persistent structural asymmetries, notably language barriers, regulatory fragmentation, and the limited uptake of binational vocational training programmes. While regional authorities actively promote Franco-German

apprenticeships, uptake remains low due to difficulties aligning curricula, certification frameworks, and financing models (Baumgartner & Ross, 2022, pp. 16–18).

Language and intercultural competence play a critical role in this regard. Despite support from institutions such as the *Franco-German Youth Office* (DFJW) and the *Franco-German University* (DFH/UFA), structural limitations in school curricula and training programmes hinder widespread bilingual capacity. This presents a bottleneck to the full realisation of human capital mobility and complicates employer-side integration of cross-border apprentices (Deutsch-Französische Hochschule, 2023; Deutsch-Französisches Jugendwerk, 2015).

Transport infrastructure also remains a central pillar for fostering labour mobility. In a 2024 presentation on “Political Schemes to Foster Cross-Border Public Transport,” *The Ministry of Transport Baden-Württemberg* (2024) highlights that reliable and accessible cross-border connections, both rail and road, are essential for commuters, apprentices, and vocational trainees alike. Several investment projects are underway to improve daily flows across the Rhine, co-financed through Interreg and national instruments. These align with the findings of the *Konzeptstudie Grenzregionen*, which recommends combining physical infrastructure with administrative interoperability in order to unlock the full potential of cross-border economic integration (Unfried et al., 2022).

Recent strategy documents also reframe border regions not as peripheral zones, but as centres of European experimentation and integration. The AGZ work programme for the year 2025 presents a vision of the Upper Rhine as a “European laboratory”, a space where multi-level governance, digital interoperability, and cross-border innovation can be tested and refined (Deutsch-Französischer Ausschuss für Grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit, 2024). This aligns with broader frameworks promoted by the *Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière* (Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière, 2024) and the European Union, which argue for empowering border regions as co-shapers of European integration rather than passive beneficiaries (European Commission, 2017a).

Taken together, these initiatives demonstrate how legal frameworks, sustained political will, and institutional innovation are converging to foster a truly integrated labour market in the Upper Rhine region. Through instruments implemented in the Interreg VI and Cohesion declarations, Baden-Württemberg and Grand Est exemplify the transformative potential of strategic cross-border cooperation. Their case offers important insights into the practical governance of labour mobility and into the role that regional actors can play in shaping European integration from the bottom up.

These observations also lay the groundwork for the formulation of two central hypotheses in Section 2.4.6. Specifically, the initiatives described here reflect how regional labour mobility can promote institutional convergence and economic resilience **(H1)**, while also demonstrating how language-oriented education strategies and qualification recognition mechanisms can enhance cross-border human capital mobility **(H2)**.

2.4.4 Cross Border Mobility between Saarland and Grand Est

The Saarland-Grand Est region represents one of the most symbolically and strategically integrated cross-border spaces within Franco-German cooperation. While smaller in scale than Baden-Württemberg, Saarland has developed a unique profile that combines institutional ambition with a long-standing cultural and linguistic orientation towards France. This ambition is best encapsulated in the *Frankreichstrategie*, a long-term initiative launched in 2014 and updated ten years later in 2024 with the *Frankreichstrategie+*, which aims to render the Saarland structurally bilingual and to strengthen its role as a European interface (Staatskanzlei Saarland, 2025).

Saarland's labour mobility efforts are embedded in a multi-level framework of institutional cooperation. The *AGZ* working strategy 2025 highlights cross-border employment and vocational training as one of its core priorities. The *Eurodistrict SaarMoselle*, established in 2010 as a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), serves as a key driver of cross-border integration for nearly one million residents, promoting bilingual education, coordinated public services, and practical solutions to everyday challenges in a shared Franco-German living and working space. coordination of bilingual educational offers and shared administrative services is being promoted, especially to facilitate commuter flows and vocational transitions (Deutsch-Französischer Ausschuss für Grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit, 2024; Eurodistrict Saar-Moselle, 2024). On the infrastructure side, Saarland and Grand Est are investing in the modernisation of cross-border rail lines such as Saarbrücken-Metz, with operations expected to be enhanced by 2027. These transport corridors are considered exemplary within Europe and are supported through Interreg instruments (Staatskanzlei Saarland, 2025).

However, despite the dense institutional network and infrastructure investments, deeper labour market integration remains constrained by systemic mismatches in vocational education. French and German training systems differ markedly in terms of structure and societal valuation. The German dual system emphasises firm-based practice and occupational identity, whereas the French model is more school-centred and academically oriented. This leads to challenges in aligning curricula and recognising qualifications across the border (Wille, 2004).

Christian Wille illustrates that in Germany, practical components dominate with about 75% of training taking place in firms, compared to just 25% in France (Wille, 2004, p. 9).

The Saarland strategy for France seeks to address this gap through bilingual education initiatives and increased cooperation with vocational chambers. Measures such as bilingual *Berufsschultage* and binational internship programmes aim to bridge systemic divides (Staatskanzlei Saarland, 2025). Yet, Lüsebrink, Wille, and Philippi (2017) warn that such initiatives tend to remain pilot projects, often benefiting only a limited, socially privileged group. Broader implementation is hampered by a lack of institutional incentives for companies and low scalability due to administrative and curricular differences (Lüsebrink et al., 2017). Henrik Uterwedde (2017) observes in his essay from this publication that while the goals outlined in the *Frankreichstrategie*, particularly the harmonisation of tax, health, and social security systems, are highly ambitious and dependent on national-level political will, they nonetheless reflect a broader European aspiration, positioning Franco-German cooperation as a potential model for integration across the EU (Lüsebrink et al., 2017, p. 37).

Language acquisition and intercultural competence are at the heart of Saarland's integration strategy. Unlike administrative-heavy approaches in larger Länder, Saarland's narrative leans on identity and cultural proximity. French is framed not only as a means of communication but as an essential element of regional identity. Early bilingual education, from preschool to secondary school, is a strategic focus, designed to raise the next generation of cross-border professionals. The strategy also emphasises oral proficiency in everyday and vocational settings, aligning language education with labour market needs (Staatskanzlei Saarland, 2025). The authors of *Alles Frankreich, oder was?* (Lüsebrink et al.) point out that linguistic proficiency, while essential, is not sufficient on its own; without institutional coordination and mutual recognition of vocational and legal frameworks, the scope of cross-border mobility remains significantly limited.

Persistent administrative barriers, such as social security discrepancies, tax reporting differences, and the lack of digital interoperability in cross-border services, remain an impediment. Persistent administrative barriers, such as discrepancies in social security coordination, tax procedures, and regulatory requirements, continue to hinder cross-border labour mobility. These structural challenges are particularly burdensome in vocational professions and for small and medium-sized enterprises. According to the *Bundesinstitut für Bau-, Stadt- und Raumforschung*, many of these impediments exceed the competencies of regional actors and require coordinated action at the national and European levels. In this regard, the BBSR

classifies the Saarland-Moselle region as a functionally integrated cross-border area but underlines that further convergence in regulatory and institutional practices is needed to unlock its full labour market potential (Bundesinstitut für Bau-, Stadt- und Raumforschung, 2023, pp. 27–35).

Overall, the Saarland-Grand Est case exemplifies the potential of coordinated regional strategies in fostering cross-border labour mobility and thus supports **Hypothesis 1**. Institutions like the *AGZ* and *Eurodistrict SaarMoselle* enable regional governance that goes beyond symbolic declarations. Likewise, **Hypothesis 2** is substantiated through the implementation of language-oriented education policies, vocational training cooperation, and policy experimentation. Yet, the success of such frameworks remains contingent upon their translation into systemic, inclusive, and scalable solutions across borders.

2.4.5 Cross-Border Mobility, language and educational cooperation between Rhineland-Palatinate and Bourgogne Franche-Comté

Rhineland-Palatinate (RLP) has cultivated extensive cross-border mobility and educational partnerships with its French partner regions, notably Bourgogne-Franche-Comté (BFC) and Grand Est. These cooperative ties encompass institutional collaborations, language and cultural exchange programs, and joint vocational training initiatives, often supported by European frameworks such as Interreg and Erasmus+. Notably, RLP's partnership with Burgundy (now part of BFC) dates back to 1962 - the earliest twinning between a German Land and a French region (Dörner, 2023). This pioneering agreement pre-dates the 1963 Élysée Treaty and laid the foundation for six decades of grassroots exchange.

Promotion of bilingualism and mutual language learning is at the heart of RLP's cooperation with both BFC and Grand Est. Within RLP, French is a prominent second language in schools, and the state supports numerous school partnerships and exchange programs to reinforce language skills. Indeed, the RLP-Burgundy partnership alone encompasses around 100 school partnerships linking schools in the two regions (Dörner, 2023). These school twinings facilitate class trips and joint projects that immerse pupils in each other's language and culture. Complementing this, universities and *Fachhochschulen* (universities of applied sciences) in RLP and BFC have developed Franco-German dual degree courses (Dörner, 2023), enabling students to study in both countries and earn degrees recognized by both education systems. Such programs often draw on EU support (Erasmus+ funding) to allow semester exchanges and foster intercultural competencies. For example, the University of Burgundy and institutions in RLP (like Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz or RPTU Kaiserslautern-Landau) have Erasmus

agreements that swap students and researchers, strengthening academic mobility in the partnership. At the municipal level, dozens of town twinnings between RLP and French cities further bolster youth exchanges - for instance, apart from Mainz-Dijon, towns like Bad Kreuznach (RLP) and Bourg-en-Bresse (BFC) have been sister cities since the 1960s (“France/60th Anniversary of the Twinning: The Burgundy Region and Rhineland-Palatinate Celebrate,” 2025), organizing regular student visits and homestays. These people-to-people encounters, supported by local governments and the Franco-German Youth Office (DFJW), serve to deepen language proficiency and cross-cultural understanding among young participants.

In the Grand Est region, efforts to promote German-French bilingual education create a strong basis for partnership with RLP. Alsace, now part of Grand Est, features over 500 schools offering bilingual French–German education from the early grades (Alsace Region, 2024). Many high schools in Alsace also offer the AbiBac program (a dual diploma recognized in both countries), and since 2014 a specialized “Azubi-BacPro” initiative has enabled French and German vocational students to obtain a certificate of professional-language competence alongside their national qualifications (Alsace Region, 2024). These programs ensure that graduates on either side of the border enter adulthood with solid language skills and familiarity with their neighbor’s system. Such language partnerships are often facilitated by bilateral and European channels - the Franco-German Youth Office provides grants for school exchanges, and Erasmus+ funds support language-assistant placements and curriculum development. The practical impact of these initiatives is evident in the numerous exchange stories: RLP students frequently spend part of their training in Burgundy or Alsace, while French students from the partner regions intern or study in RLP to improve their German. These experiences not only enhance language proficiency but also prepare the younger generation for working in the transnational Upper Rhine and Greater Region labor markets.

Beyond general education, RLP’s cooperation with its French neighbours places a strong emphasis on vocational training and youth mobility. A flagship endeavour in this realm is the creation of a cross-border vocational training area in the Upper Rhine. In 2013, at the initiative of the Upper Rhine Conference, RLP joined Baden-Württemberg and French authorities (then Alsace/Grand Est) in signing a framework agreement to facilitate cross-border apprenticeships (Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière, 2013). This agreement - *Réussir sans frontières / Erfolg ohne Grenzen* - established a common structure for companies and vocational schools to train apprentices from the neighbouring country, with mutual recognition of training standards. It enabled the launch of joint apprenticeship classes (Azubi-BacPro) bringing together German and French trainees in blended programs. For example, a German apprentice from RLP can

fulfill part of his practical training in an Alsatian company while a French *lycéen* from Grand Est attends vocational school in RLP, with each earning credentials valid on both sides of the border. Such joint training initiatives address skill gaps and youth unemployment in the cross-border region by improving mobility and qualification transfer. They also often include supplemental language instruction to ensure apprentices can operate in bilingual work environments. By targeting young jobseekers and students, the program has sought to “provide French jobseekers with appropriate training so that they can respond to job offers on the German side” (Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière, 2013), thus easing labor market asymmetries.

Several institutional actors support these vocational partnerships. Chambers of commerce and crafts (*Industrie- und Handelskammer, Handwerkskammer*) from RLP and Grand Est collaborate on apprentice placement and curriculum alignment (Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière, 2013). The *Eurodistricts* (such as PAMINA and Strasbourg-Ortenau) and the Inter-regional Council of the Greater Region also coordinate efforts to streamline recognition of diplomas and improve advice services for cross-border trainees and workers. RLP has participated in the Task Force on Cross-Border Commuters in the Greater Region, which, among other issues, worked on removing legal obstacles to recognition of vocational qualifications (Dörrenbächer, 2022, p. 312). These concrete partnerships in vocational education exemplify how RLP and its French counterparts are creating a *laboratory* for European integration - young people acquire not only technical skills but also valuable cross-cultural competencies through mobility.

2.4.6 Strategic Labour Mobility in Franco-German Cooperation: Hypotheses on Institutional Convergence and Economic Resilience

This section formulates the central research hypotheses derived from the preceding analysis of institutional structures, mobility mechanisms, and policy frameworks in Franco-German border regions. The guiding question is whether regional labour market integration, grounded in bilateral cooperation, can serve not only as a functional response to local mismatches but also as a blueprint for broader European coordination, as stated at the beginning of chapter 2.

The first hypothesis (H1) posits that Franco-German regional labour mobility contributes to institutional convergence and economic resilience in border regions, while offering a model for EU-wide initiatives. In this context, strategic cooperation - including inter-agency collaboration, qualification frameworks, and governance structures - enables the mobility of workers across national boundaries, addressing structural mismatches between supply and demand. In the Franco-German case, the convergence process is both functional and political, driven by the

need to adapt to demographic shifts, sectoral imbalances, and economic transformation pressures.

The second hypothesis (H2) holds that integrated regional frameworks - characterised by language-oriented education policies, bilateral vocational programmes, and the mutual recognition of qualifications - enhance cross-border human capital mobility. These frameworks operate as institutional enablers of mobility, reducing frictions that typically arise from legal, cultural, or administrative divergence. In doing so, they form the infrastructure of what may be termed transnational labour governance.

These hypotheses are supported by emerging evidence of:

- **Functional institutional synergies**, such as the harmonisation of vocational training standards, coordination between employment agencies, and the operationalisation of dual education pathways.
- **Labour market complementarities**, particularly the demographic and structural contrast between France's youth labour surplus and Germany's demand for skilled workers in technical and industrial sectors.

In light of the EU's broader goals, such as the Green Deal (European Commission, 2024) and digital transformation, Franco-German border regions may increasingly function as laboratories for continental integration. By aligning regional skills development with European strategic priorities, these cooperations can contribute to reducing labour market fragmentation, strengthening cohesion, and enhancing the resilience of the EU's internal market.

3 Theory of Labour and Human Capital Mobility

This chapter presents the theoretical foundations relevant to the analysis of cross-border labour mobility and institutional convergence in Franco-German border regions. The aim is to contextualise the two research hypotheses within a multidisciplinary theoretical framework, drawing from labour economics, sociology, and migration studies. Each subsection introduces a key theoretical lens, assessing its explanatory value with regard to *institutional synergies*, *labour market mismatch*, and *human capital flows* in the European regional context. The chapter concludes with a theoretical synthesis that integrates these perspectives in relation to the Franco-German case.

3.1 Neoclassical Labour Market Theory

Neoclassical labour market theory serves as a foundational approach for understanding labour allocation and **mobility as the outcome of rational decision-making** in a competitive market environment. The theory assumes that wages adjust to equate the supply and demand for labour, thereby ensuring full employment in equilibrium (Vercherand, 2014, p. 53). In this model, firms demand labour based on its marginal productivity, and individuals supply labour based on a rational trade-off between income and leisure, aiming to maximise utility (Vercherand, 2014, pp. 54–57).

On the supply side, workers decide how many hours to work based on the marginal utility of income versus the marginal disutility of effort and lost leisure. This relationship is represented through *indifference curves* that capture the trade-off between working hours and leisure (Vercherand, 2014, p. 56). On the demand side, firms hire workers up to the point where the marginal product of labour equals the real wage rate. In both cases, wages function as a price mechanism: when demand exceeds supply, wages rise to attract more workers; when supply exceeds demand, wages fall to restore balance (Vercherand, 2014, pp. 62–63).

In the neoclassical model of migration, which extends this logic across regions, individuals are expected to migrate from low-wage to high-wage areas to maximise expected income. This version of the theory is most commonly associated with Harris and Todaro (1970), who introduced the role of employment probability into the wage-based decision framework. According to their model, labour mobility is an efficient response to regional imbalances: over time, migration should eliminate wage disparities and equalise employment conditions. (*The New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics*, 2016)

While the neoclassical approach offers a useful starting point for understanding the economic rationale behind labour migration and mobility, it is also marked by important limitations. First, it assumes perfect information, homogeneity of labour, and unrestricted movement, which are rarely met in reality (Vercherand, 2014, p. 53). Second, it neglects institutional and non-monetary factors, such as qualification recognition, language barriers, administrative complexity, and cultural embeddedness, that strongly influence real-world mobility decisions (Vercherand, 2014, pp. 58–59). In particular, the assumption that workers autonomously optimise their labour supply under flexible wage conditions fails to account for the asymmetry of power in the employment relationship and the binding nature of labour law.

Applied to the Franco-German context, the model's limitations become particularly clear. Wage differentials do exist, and they partially explain cross-border commuting patterns. However, as

shown in the empirical analysis (Chapter 4), workers' mobility is far more constrained by institutional frictions, including the lack of harmonised training standards, slow qualification recognition procedures, and differing labour law regimes. Moreover, actors such as the AHK, regional employment agencies, and binational educational institutions play a decisive role in coordinating labour flows, something the neoclassical model does not account for.

In sum, while the neoclassical model provides a basic economic logic for **H1** - which links labour mobility to the adjustment of mismatches - it offers little insight into **H2**, which emphasises institutional frameworks as drivers of mobility. The model's core assumptions are too narrow to explain why mobility does not automatically occur even when wage incentives are present. As such, it requires substantial complementing by institutional and structural perspectives.

3.2 New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM)

The New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) emerged in response to the limitations of neoclassical migration theory, particularly its narrow focus on individual decision-making and wage differentials. First developed by Stark and Bloom (1985) and further refined by Taylor (1999), NELM reframes migration as a household-level strategy to diversify income, insure against risks, and overcome market imperfections, especially in credit, insurance, and labour markets.

Unlike classical models such as Harris and Todaro (1970), which isolate the migrant as an autonomous agent responding to income differentials, NELM views migration as part of a collective household response to structural constraints. These include missing or underdeveloped rural credit markets, lack of social protection, and limited access to productive resources. Migration and the remittances it generates thus serve dual functions: they compensate for production risks and finance new investments in education, housing, or business formation (Stark & Bloom, 1985; Taylor, 1999, pp. 64–75).

Taylor's empirical work supports these claims. Migrants often remit not only for altruistic reasons but also within informal intrafamilial contracts that ensure reciprocal benefits such as future inheritance rights or risk-sharing arrangements (Robert E. B. Lucas & Stark, 1985). These remittances, particularly when directed toward productive use, may unlock local development potential, stimulating income multipliers and investment linkages within both migrant and non-migrant households.

However, institutional capacity is critical to the developmental potential of migration. Poor infrastructure, weak financial institutions, and policy environments that fail to leverage

remittances for broader investment frequently undermine the effectiveness of migration as a development tool (Taylor, 1999, p. 74). Where functional institutions exist - such as accessible credit systems or mechanisms to pool remittances into community investment - migration can support self-sustaining growth.

In the context of Franco-German border regions, the NELM framework provides an important lens for analysing **household-level incentives for mobility**. In areas such as Saarland–Grand Est (see section 2.4.4), households may choose cross-border commuting not solely based on wage gaps but also to diversify household income portfolios, access higher-quality vocational training, or benefit from more favourable welfare or taxation systems. For example, empirical findings in Chapter 4 indicate that some workers benefit from working in France while residing in Germany to optimise healthcare access or schooling opportunities—illustrating household strategies that cross institutional borders.

Yet, NELM’s explanatory power is limited when it comes to meso- and macro-level governance structures, such as the role of binational chambers of commerce, mutual qualification recognition, or educational harmonisation. These institutional frameworks - central to **H2** - lie beyond the original scope of NELM, which focuses on **household choices under imperfect market conditions**.

Nevertheless, NELM remains highly relevant for **H1** and partially for **H2**, as it explains why labour mobility persists despite persistent frictions, and how households make rational decisions that integrate economic, social, and institutional factors. It underscores the importance of embedding micro-level decisions within institutional contexts, a key analytical direction pursued in this thesis.

3.3 Dual Labour Market Theory

The Dual Labour Market Theory, developed by Piore (1979), offers a structuralist explanation of labour migration, positioning it as a demand-driven phenomenon. According to this theory, advanced economies are characterised by a **segmented labour market**: a primary sector composed of stable, high-wage, high-status jobs, and a secondary sector made up of precarious, low-paid, low-status positions. Migrants are typically absorbed into the secondary sector, not because they are necessarily less qualified, but because native workers tend to avoid these roles due to their low social and economic value.

In this framework, migration is not primarily driven by wage differentials or individual choice, but by the **structural needs** of receiving economies for flexible and low-cost labour. Labour

shortages in the secondary sector are structural and persistent, stemming from the demographic, cultural, and economic dynamics of high-income societies.

Applied to the Franco-German context, Piore's theory helps to explain labour market complementarities between France and Germany. Germany's ageing population and sustained demand for technically skilled workers function as pull factors, while France's relatively younger population and surplus of vocationally trained youth act as push factors. Cross-border mobility therefore serves as a **functional mechanism** to address sectoral mismatches.

However, the theory does not account for institutional mediators, such as bilateral agreements, qualification recognition systems, or language policy frameworks, elements that are crucial for understanding the effectiveness of cross-border cooperation. While **H1** is partially supported by the structural rationale for migration identified by Piore, the theory remains insufficient to explain the institutional convergence mechanisms addressed in **H2**.

3.4 System Theory of Labour Migration

System theory approaches migration not as a linear decision process, but as part of complex transnational systems that evolve through **multiple feedback loops** between institutions, markets, and individuals (Kritz et al., 1992). Migration is shaped by interdependent **macro-level conditions** (economic development, policy regimes), **meso-level institutions** (governance frameworks, intermediaries), and **micro-level actor strategies** (household decisions, social networks), which integrates theoretical perspectives of Neoclassical Theory (see section 3.1), NELM Theory (see section 3.2), and Dual Labour Market Theory (see section 3.3) into a unified analytical framework.

In the context of EU border regions, system theory offers a holistic analytical lens. It helps explain how European legal frameworks (e.g., the Schengen Agreement), bilateral treaties (e.g., Treaty of Aachen), and cross-border bodies (e.g., AGZ, AHKs, binational chambers) interact to shape labour mobility. Unlike individualist or market-based theories, system theory recognises the recursive and institutional nature of mobility: individuals' decisions both influence and are influenced by the broader institutional and policy environment.

System theory aligns closely with **H1**, which posits that labour mobility fosters institutional convergence. It also supports **H2**, by acknowledging that multi-level governance and institutional cooperation are prerequisites for functional human capital mobility. However, its abstract and descriptive character makes it less operational for empirical testing, especially when analysing concrete mechanisms such as qualification recognition or administrative interoperability.

3.5 Social Network Theory of Labour Migration

Social network theory approaches migration not as a purely individual or structural phenomenon, but as the outcome of **relational embeddedness** between actors at the meso-level between individuals (micro) and institutions (macro) (Gamper, 2022, p. 35; Klärner et al., 2022). Migration decisions are shaped by **social ties** that provide access to information, opportunities, and trust, thus reducing the uncertainty and costs of cross-border movement.

According to network theory, people are not isolated agents but socially situated actors, whose behaviour is influenced by the structure and quality of their relationships (Gamper, 2022, pp. 36–37). In migration contexts, these networks function as **mobilising structures**: once one household member or neighbour migrates, others are more likely to follow through pre-existing ties. In the Franco-German setting, institutions such as the *Deutsch-Französisches Jugendwerk* (DFJW), binational vocational programmes, and chambers of commerce help build such embedded ties across borders, reinforcing long-term mobility patterns.

This theory offers strong support for **H2**, which emphasises the role of institutional frameworks and education-based cooperation in facilitating cross-border human capital flows. However, it does not directly address broader labour market mismatches or power asymmetries, and thus has limited explanatory value for **H1**.

3.6 Theoretical Synthesis of Franco-German Labour and Human Capital Mobility

The theories discussed in this chapter offer complementary perspectives on the mechanisms shaping labour and human capital mobility across national borders. They collectively illustrate that migration is not driven solely by wage differentials or individual preferences, but emerges through the interaction of structural labour market needs, institutional coordination, and relational embeddedness.

In relation to the thesis' analytical focus, the theoretical contributions can be grouped into two core dimensions. First, they clarify how structural complementarities and governance arrangements generate cross-border interdependence, supporting **H1** on institutional convergence and regional resilience. Here, the interplay between demographic imbalances, economic demand, and legal-institutional systems creates incentives for coordinated mobility responses.

Second, the theories shed light on the micro- and meso-level mechanisms that facilitate or hinder mobility. Household strategies, trust-based networks, and embedded institutions emerge as central enablers of human capital flows, aligning closely with **H2**, which emphasises the role

of language-oriented education, vocational partnerships, and qualification recognition (see sections 2.3 and 2.4).

In relation to the research hypotheses:

- **H1**, concerning institutional convergence and economic resilience, finds theoretical grounding in **system theory** and **dual labour market theory**, which explain how cross-border complementarities and institutional feedback can stabilise labour markets.
- **H2**, which focuses on enabling frameworks for mobility, is supported by **social network theory** and **NELM**, both of which foreground the role of education, recognition mechanisms, and bilateral cooperation in facilitating human capital flows.

This multidimensional synthesis supports the empirical investigation in Chapter 4 by providing the conceptual foundation to analyse how cross-border mobility is shaped by economic, institutional, and social variables across multiple governance levels.

4 Labour Market Mismatch and Workforce Mobility

Building on the theoretical framework outlined in the previous chapter, this chapter presents the empirical analysis of Franco-German cross-border labour mobility. The goal is to assess the validity of the two central hypotheses considering qualitative data gathered from expert interviews and policy documents. The theoretical perspectives - particularly those emphasising institutional coordination, labour market segmentation, and social networks - serve as analytical lenses for interpreting how regional cooperation affects labour market mismatch and human capital mobility. The following sections describe the research design, methodology, and findings, with a focus on selected border regions where institutional mechanisms and mobility frameworks have been most actively implemented.

4.1 Research Methodology and Sample Selection

This chapter presents the methodological foundation of the empirical research conducted for this Master's thesis. The study aims to understand the institutional, structural, and cultural enablers and constraints affecting Franco-German workforce mobility and labour market integration, with a view to broader implications for the European internal market. The analysis is based on qualitative expert interviews, conducted with senior figures from German and French industry and institutional organisations.

Research Design: The research adopts a qualitative, exploratory design grounded in thematic content analysis, in line with the methodological framework of Philipp Mayring (Baur &

Blasius, 2019; Mayring & Fenzl, 2019). The qualitative approach was selected to allow for in-depth insights into complex, context-sensitive processes and to draw on the lived experiences and expertise of professionals operating within the Franco-German labour and policy landscape.

Thematic analysis was applied using a combination of deductive and inductive category formation (Mayring & Fenzl, 2019). Initial codes were derived from the theoretical framework of the thesis, particularly focusing on labour market mismatch, administrative barriers, education systems, and institutional support mechanisms. These were then complemented by inductively emerging codes throughout the interview evaluation, ensuring methodological openness and adaptability.

Sample Selection: The empirical material is based on three semi-structured expert interviews, carried out between May 19 and May 27, 2025. Interviewees were selected through purposeful sampling to ensure sectoral and institutional diversity, while maintaining thematic consistency:

1. **Heiko Carrie**, former President of Bosch West & South (France, Benelux, Spain, Italy, Portugal), current board member of the German-French Chamber of Industry and Commerce (*Deutsch-Französische Industrie- und Außenhandelskammer / Chambre Franco-Allemande de Commerce et d'Industrie*), and President of the DIK (*Deutscher Industrie Kreis*) - representing the industrial corporate perspective.
2. **Christophe de Maistre**, former President of Siemens France and Schneider Electric DACH contributing a Franco-German leadership perspective in strategic industry.
3. **Patrick Brandmaier**, Director of the German-French Chamber of Industry and Commerce, offering insights from the institutional intermediary perspective, particularly for SMEs and vocational training.

All participants provided informed consent to be named and quoted in this academic context. The interviews were conducted online (via Microsoft Teams), recorded, transcribed by *Fathom AI*, and coded in accordance with academic standards. Each conversation lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes.

Analytical Approach: The transcribed interviews were analysed using qualitative content analysis, with the coding structured around a master codebook developed during the research process. The categories include: labour market mismatch, workforce mobility barriers, administrative complexity, qualification recognition, vocational and education systems, language and intercultural aspects, institutional support mechanisms, cross-border practices, policy recommendations, and strategic industrial challenges.

Citations from interviews are included in the empirical analysis section **Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.** and refer directly to the interviewee by name and interview number (e.g., Heiko Carrie, Interview 1). The complete transcripts are available in the appendix for transparency and traceability.

This methodological framework ensures a structured yet flexible empirical analysis, tailored to the complex realities of Franco-German labour integration and its European relevance.

4.2 Thematic findings in Franco-German Labour Market Dynamics

This section presents the core findings of the empirical research on Franco-German labour market mobility, based on qualitative interviews conducted with three senior stakeholders from industry and institutional organisations. Their combined perspectives reflect both corporate and institutional dimensions of workforce mobility, education system differences, administrative barriers, and strategic integration challenges. Drawing on thematic coding, the following subsections explore how structural mismatches, qualification systems, intercultural dynamics, and institutional mechanisms shape cross-border labour integration between Germany and France. The aim is to assess whether these micro-regional dynamics offer replicable insights for broader EU labour market cohesion.

4.2.1 Structural Labour Market Mismatch

Labour market mismatch refers to structural inconsistencies between labour supply and demand across regional and sectoral dimensions. In the Franco-German context, such mismatches are driven by diverging industrial needs, demographic trends, and insufficient synchronisation between national education and training systems. This theme emerged as a central concern across all expert interviews.

From the perspective of industry, Heiko Carrie (Interview 1), former President of Bosch France, described a significant reduction in industrial employment in France over the past 15 years. "We've seen a massive erosion of industrial employment in France," he stated, referring to the shift of value creation from high-cost locations like France to lower-cost countries. This shift has been driven in part by changes in the automotive industry, particularly decisions by OEMs such as Renault and Stellantis to relocate production capacities. As a result, companies like Bosch have followed their clients geographically, exacerbating regional mismatches in skilled labour availability and employment opportunities.

Christophe de Maistre (Interview 2), former President of Siemens France, added another dimension by pointing to the contrasting innovation ecosystems in France and Germany.

According to him, “the best ideas often come from France and Northern Italy, but long-term industrial continuity functions better in Germany.” This observation reflects a deeper structural asymmetry: while France generates substantial innovation, the German system excels in industrial scaling and retention. The result is a mismatch not only in labour supply but also in the geographical sustainability of industrial jobs.

De Maistre also emphasised that successful Franco-German cooperation is often what enables larger European integration, implying that unresolved mismatches in these two countries have broader implications for the EU: “What works in Germany and France also works in Europe. The others take their lead from them.” (Interview 2).

Patrick Brandmaier (Interview 3), Director of AHK France, emphasised that labour shortages exist simultaneously in both countries. He referred to it as a “double scarcity”: in Germany as well as in France, companies are struggling to fill positions, particularly in technical sectors. As a practical example, he mentioned the Daimler electric bus project in Lorraine, which faces serious recruitment challenges. The project illustrates that even high-profile industrial initiatives are not immune to regional workforce shortages and mismatched training profiles.

The interviews consistently pointed to the absence of a coordinated Franco-German framework for aligning vocational training with regional labour market needs. As de Maistre noted, there is no integrated strategy to link innovation, industrial investment, and educational adaptation across borders. While firms continue to act in response to market signals, the lack of bilateral workforce planning limits the scalability and impact of even the most promising initiatives.

In summary, the mismatch between available qualifications and actual labour market demand constitutes a systemic constraint on Franco-German integration. While both countries exhibit labour shortages, these occur in structurally divergent sectors and regions. Without a shared vision for synchronised workforce development, the potential for cross-border economic resilience remains underutilised.

4.2.2 Mobility in Practice: Barriers and Incentives

Legal, physical Workforce mobility across the Franco-German border is constrained by a complex array of legal, administrative, linguistic, and cultural barriers. These obstacles often affect small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) more acutely, given their limited internal capacity to manage regulatory and institutional complexity.

A recurring theme in the interviews was the persistence of administrative burdens related to social security and labour regulations. Patrick Brandmaier (Interview 3) highlighted the EU's

2005 Services Directive and the subsequent introduction of compulsory social security documentation, such as the A1 certificate and, for the construction sector in France, the Carte BTP. While these measures were designed to prevent social dumping, they have introduced significant red tape, especially for SMEs. "Today, it is not worth it for a florist from Kehl to deliver a bouquet to Strasbourg, because she would need to fill out pages of paperwork for a 20-euro delivery," Brandmaier remarked. This illustrates how even small-scale cross-border services are discouraged by disproportionate bureaucratic requirements.

In addition to administrative burdens, linguistic and intercultural issues remain central obstacles. Both Heiko Carrie (Interview 1) and Christophe de Maistre (Interview 2) underlined the crucial role of language in enabling meaningful collaboration. Carrie stressed that many misunderstandings arise from the assumption that the other party speaks English fluently, when in fact communication often breaks down due to limited cross-cultural competence. De Maistre added that effective management and industrial cooperation depend not only on language but also on an understanding of the partner country's organisational culture and industrial logic: "Only if you speak the language can you understand the processes and the mentality behind them."

Furthermore, geographical, and cultural differences manifest in unexpected ways. De Maistre drew attention to a subtle but important divide: "The Rhine acts like a cultural cut - to the north, you feel a Northern European mentality; to the south, a more French approach dominates." Such spatial-cultural distinctions can create friction when it comes to implementing joint projects or aligning HR practices. These findings support the idea that labour mobility is not only about removing legal barriers but also about building mutual understanding across institutions and borders.

Finally, several interviewees suggested that existing bilateral agreements or EU initiatives do not sufficiently address the day-to-day operational realities of firms. Brandmaier called for the establishment of a "European social security card" to simplify mobility procedures and reduce administrative friction. Without such tools, he warned, mobility will remain a theoretical goal rather than a practical reality for many firms.

While workforce mobility remains vital, Heiko Carrie (Interview 1) also acknowledged that "with the internet, physical movement is less essential than before." This suggests that hybrid or remote work models may mitigate some traditional barriers, although they cannot substitute for long-term institutional coordination.

Barriers remain substantial, but several incentives were also highlighted by interviewees. Carrie (Interview 1) pointed to France's generous R&D tax credit (CIR - *Crédit d'Impôt Recherche*; in Germany the "Forschungszulage"), which significantly lowers personnel costs for firms engaged in research and innovation. This creates a compelling financial incentive for companies like Bosch to invest in and employ French talent. He also noted the structural logic behind cooperation: while Germany has multiple neighbouring countries and thus several regional options for industrial exchange, for France, Germany is the key partner for economic integration due to its central location and size.

De Maistre (Interview 2) further emphasised the attractiveness of the French labour pool, noting that regions like Saclay and Sophia Antipolis offer a high density of engineering and IT talent that is often superior in terms of creativity and problem-solving. This quality of human capital functions as a talent-driven incentive for cross-border recruitment. He similarly noted that while Germany has broader neighbourhoods, France's principal industrial partner remains Germany: "when France and Germany reach compromise, all of Europe can move forward," he remarked, pointing to the continental ripple effects of Franco-German alignment.

Brandmaier (Interview 3) also highlighted promising pilot initiatives in vocational training and cross-border dual education schemes, which serve as institutional incentives for young professionals to engage in mobility. He suggested that expanding these initiatives, especially in regions like Saarland and Grand Est, could offer replicable models for sustainable bilateral integration. in vocational training and cross-border dual education schemes, which serve as institutional incentives for young professionals to engage in mobility.

Taken together, the interviews point to a multi-layered set of barriers that hinder workforce mobility between France and Germany. These include outdated or misaligned regulatory frameworks, a lack of interoperable social systems, and persistent linguistic and cultural divides. While larger firms may have the resources to navigate these complexities, SMEs are disproportionately affected, making targeted policy interventions even more urgent.

4.2.3 Administrative and Institutional Support Mechanisms

The effective coordination of administrative and institutional frameworks plays a crucial role in enabling or obstructing Franco-German labour market integration. While the previous section identified a range of barriers to mobility, interviewees also highlighted the importance, and at times, the insufficiency, of current institutional mechanisms designed to facilitate cross-border employment and cooperation.

Patrick Brandmaier (Interview 3) offered detailed insight into the role of bilateral organisations such as the German-French Chamber of Industry and Commerce (AHK Frankreich). He stressed the chamber's importance especially for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which often lack the internal administrative and legal capacity to navigate the regulatory complexities of another national system. In his words, the AHK acts as a “translator between two systems,” supporting companies with services such as market entry, payroll, social security compliance, and subsidiary formation. This intermediary function is particularly critical in the early phases of internationalisation and staff deployment.

Heiko Carrie (Interview 1), who also serves on the AHK's administrative board, confirmed the organisation's relevance, especially for SMEs unfamiliar with cross-border operations. Larger corporations like Bosch generally possess internal legal and HR departments equipped to manage bilateral mobility issues; however, for smaller firms or newcomers to the French or German market, institutional partners such as the AHK offer irreplaceable support. De Maistre (Interview 2) also pointed to the AHK's role in organising training seminars and public events, which help build long-term cross-cultural and legal literacy among businesses.

Brandmaier further emphasised the lack of an integrated Franco-German administrative platform, arguing that labour mobility remains hampered by fragmented authority structures and inconsistent bilateral coordination. He proposed the creation of a Franco-German integration agency, which could act as a permanent structure to harmonise labour law interpretations, coordinate training pathways, and oversee the mutual recognition of qualifications. He also suggested closer alignment between regional offices, such as the French Direccte (regional directorates for enterprise, competition, consumption, labour, and employment) and German employment agencies (Agentur für Arbeit), to streamline mobility-related procedures. Brandmaier pointed out that this fragmented landscape has historical roots: the German and French chambers of commerce originally operated as a joint institution but later split after French actors felt overshadowed and at a disadvantage. This episode reflects the broader challenge of creating symmetrical and genuinely cooperative bilateral structures that accommodate both institutional cultures equally. According to him, any future administrative architecture must be carefully balanced and mutually legitimised to avoid similar frictions.

Beyond formal institutions, informal industrial networks also play a role in shaping administrative dialogue. Carrie and referenced his presidency of the *Deutsch-Französischer Industriekreis* (DIK), which convenes top executives of major German firms operating in France. While not a regulatory body, the DIK regularly meets with policymakers and government representatives,

including French ministers and EU-level stakeholders. Carrie noted that these engagements offer German industry a “collective voice” in bilateral political processes, particularly in Paris, where institutional openness to German input remains high.

The interviews underscore that while institutional support structures exist, they remain fragmented, underfunded, and overly reliant on regional or voluntary initiatives. Strategic improvements - such as bilateral agencies, digital platforms, and stronger coordination between chambers, ministries, and employment bodies - would significantly improve the landscape for Franco-German labour market integration. Without such measures, administrative asymmetries and bureaucratic fatigue will continue to undermine the mobility ambitions voiced at the political level.

4.2.4 Cross-Border Education and Qualification Systems

A central pillar of labour market integration lies in the compatibility and mutual recognition of education and training systems. In the Franco-German context, significant structural divergences between vocational and academic pathways present persistent challenges. While various political declarations and bilateral committees aim to promote educational exchange and mobility, the interview findings suggest that practical implementation remains uneven and administratively burdensome.

Vocational education emerged as a key area of friction and opportunity. Patrick Brandmaier (Interview 3) referred to the structural divergence between the German dual vocational training system, which integrates on-the-job learning with vocational schooling, and different models used in France. He noted that cross-border mobility of apprentices faces both administrative and practical challenges, with a need for greater institutional coordination and support. While Brandmaier did not reference specific regional pilots, he advocated for strengthening initiatives that promote apprenticeship mobility and called for more robust bilateral frameworks to make such exchanges sustainable in the long term.

While the interview did not focus in detail on academic education systems, Christophe de Maistre (Interview 2) highlighted the strength of French engineering talent, particularly from regions like Saclay and Sophia Antipolis. He described these graduates as world-class in terms of technical and creative skills, which serve as an important incentive for German firms to recruit in France. However, he also hinted at structural and cultural differences in how industrial processes and qualifications are viewed across borders, suggesting that better institutional literacy could support smoother integration of foreign-trained professionals.

The mutual recognition of qualifications is further complicated by legal and administrative requirements. Heiko Carrie (Interview 1) offered a personal example: his wife, a German-trained doctor, took several months to complete her registration in France due to strict bureaucratic and documentation requirements. Although the recognition process eventually succeeded, Carrie stressed that it was unnecessarily slow and complex. He called for increased administrative capacity and expertise to process qualification equivalences, particularly in regulated professions. At the same time, he cautioned that systems will always differ fundamentally: “The French will never give up the *Grandes Écoles*, and Germans will not import them”, meaning the goal should not be total harmonisation, but structured interoperability and mutual trust.

Across all interviews, it became evident that while the legal basis for recognition exists in most cases, the practical implementation is still slow, inconsistent, and sometimes culturally biased. Interviewees agreed that educational cooperation should not aim at system convergence, but rather at building administrative routines, increasing mutual awareness, and institutionalising successful regional pilot initiatives.

These findings suggest that enhancing Franco-German labour mobility through education requires more than legal instruments; it depends on deep institutional cooperation, transparent information systems, and ongoing intercultural training—both in companies and in public administrations.

4.2.5 Cultural, Linguistic, and Organisational Differences

Beyond legal frameworks and institutional structures, labour market mobility is deeply shaped by cultural perceptions, linguistic barriers, and divergent organisational logics. All three interviewees highlighted that intercultural competence is a critical but underestimated factor in Franco-German cooperation, both in corporate and institutional settings.

Language remains a core barrier. Heiko Carrie (Interview 1) noted that even in multinational environments, many misunderstandings persist due to differing expectations about English proficiency. German managers often assume that French partners lack English skills, while French professionals believe the opposite. According to Carrie, these mutual assumptions create friction in communication, especially in leadership settings where nuance and trust are essential. Christophe de Maistre (Interview 2) strongly emphasised that “only if you speak the language can you understand the processes and the mentality behind them,” underlining the depth to which language and culture are interwoven in industrial practice. He argued that true cooperation requires linguistic immersion - not simply for functional communication, but for understanding how decisions are made and how people work.

Cultural asymmetries extend beyond language. De Maistre observed that the Rhine forms more than a geographic boundary, it symbolises a divided mentality. “North of the Rhine, you feel the Northern European mentality; south of it, a distinctly French one,” he remarked. This perception shapes cross-border dynamics in business, where German planning and long-term continuity often contrast with French agility and creative spontaneity. According to de Maistre, the most robust industrial strategies often emerge when these cultural styles are merged - ideas coming from France or Northern Italy, but perfected through German implementation. However, he warned that these differences can lead to misalignments unless there is mutual recognition of the other's organisational strengths and constraints.

On a practical level, both de Maistre and Carrie underscored the difficulty of navigating foreign corporate hierarchies and decision-making logics. While German firms often operate through formalised consensus-building and team-based approaches, French companies tend to value hierarchical clarity and rapid executive authority. De Maistre remarked that “the French are more individualistically oriented, often seeking out a form of ‘genius’ leadership,” and associated this with the broader Mediterranean cultural pattern, where decision-making is often centred on strong individuals rather than collective structures. “That’s why they have a tendency toward great leaders who decide everything - but not everyone is Napoleon or Charles de Gaulle. They only come along every hundred years,” he added. This mindset contrasts with the more process-driven and group-oriented approach found in German firms, where leadership tends to be distributed and embedded in institutional consensus. Such organisational divergence can affect project coordination, human resource strategies, and the perceived authority of bi-national managers. Carrie highlighted that without cultural preparation and mutual adaptation, even well-intentioned integration efforts can falter at the operational level.

From an institutional perspective, Brandmaier (Interview 3) alluded to the importance of trust-building and mutual perception when describing the split between the German and French chambers of commerce. He explained that the original unified structure was disbanded after French actors perceived institutional dominance by the German side. This experience reflects the fragility of joint initiatives when cultural sensitivity and balanced ownership are lacking. It also illustrates that institutional arrangements cannot be purely functional; they must also symbolically reflect mutual respect and parity.

These insights affirm that cultural and organisational differences are not peripheral but central variables in shaping Franco-German workforce integration. They influence not only communication and recruitment, but also how partnerships are initiated, sustained, and evaluated. Efforts

to improve labour mobility must therefore go beyond administrative harmonisation and invest in language learning, intercultural training, and institutional trust-building.

4.2.6 Industrial and Policy Recommendations

Across all three interviews, a recurring theme was the necessity of targeted reform to improve the structural and institutional conditions of Franco-German labour market integration. The suggestions made by the interviewees span both macro-level policy recommendations and micro-level industrial practices, revealing a strong consensus on the need for coordinated and pragmatic reform.

At the institutional level, Patrick Brandmaier (Interview 3) offered a set of concrete proposals. He advocated for the creation of a Franco-German integration agency as a permanent structure tasked with streamlining labour law interpretation, coordinating vocational training frameworks, and ensuring the mutual recognition of qualifications. Such an agency could close the operational gaps between national administrations, and serve as a bridge between the German *Agentur für Arbeit* and the French *Direccte*. Brandmaier's comments also reflected on the fragility of past joint institutions: the previously unified German-French chamber of commerce was split due to perceptions of German institutional dominance, which underscores the importance of mutual trust and balanced representation in future reforms.

In addition, Brandmaier proposed the introduction of a European social security card to simplify the cross-border employment process. He argued that such a card could replace burdensome paperwork like the A1 certificate and facilitate mobile employment, especially for small businesses and self-employed professionals who currently struggle with compliance. "This card could significantly simplify procedures, particularly for smaller firms and freelancers, who often fail due to bureaucracy," he explained, stressing that without such pragmatic tools, the ideal of workforce mobility remains out of reach for many actors on the ground.

The director of the AHK also highlighted persistent logistical bottlenecks that hinder regional connectivity and workforce mobility. One concrete example is the long-discussed but still absent Rhine crossing near Haguenau, which would provide a vital east-west transport link between the Strasbourg and Baden regions. Brandmaier noted that this project has garnered support from multiple stakeholders, including the French and German chambers of commerce and local political actors, yet remains unrealised due to administrative inertia.

He also proposed exploring a binational airport strategy by consolidating the operations of Strasbourg and Baden-Baden airports. This, he argued, could generate a more competitive logistics and passenger hub serving the broader France-Germany-Switzerland triangle. By

pooling infrastructure resources, such initiatives could enhance regional attractiveness, support trade flows, and enable a more integrated labour and service market. These recommendations reflect a pragmatic orientation within industrial actors toward cross-border infrastructure as a driver of mobility, competitiveness, and territorial cohesion.

Legal and regulatory reform emerged as another central theme. Christophe de Maistre (Interview 2), who was Director of Siemens France and directly involved in the attempted merger with Alstom, criticised the European Commission's rejection of the deal, citing outdated competition rules that ignore global market realities. He described the failure of the merger as a missed opportunity to build a European industrial champion, particularly in the strategic sectors of rail and energy. "That was a sad experience," he remarked, pointing out that competition law continues to be defined by internal EU borders, even though Europe now competes with global players like China and the United States. In his view, current EU regulations protect intra-European market dynamics at the expense of global industrial competitiveness.

De Maistre further argued that robust competition within Europe should not be seen as a weakness but as a driver of innovation, stating that companies "challenge each other" and thereby strengthen the collective industrial base. However, he warned that this dynamic is undermined when EU rules prevent the formation of large-scale European firms capable of operating on a global scale.

Brandmaier echoed this regulatory critique on a different level by highlighting the unintended consequences of the EU Services Directive (2005), which introduced administrative complexity that now discourages SME's from operating across borders. He specifically referenced the burdensome process of obtaining A1 certificates or Carte BTP as disincentives for small service providers, arguing that the directive, while well-intentioned, created bureaucratic hurdles that outpace the administrative capacities of smaller firms.

4.2.7 Institutional Synergies and Governance Gaps

Franco-German labour market integration is underpinned by a network of bilateral institutions that provide both valuable synergies and expose governance gaps. A central pillar is the Franco-German Chamber of Commerce (AHK France) in Paris, which interviewees identify as especially crucial for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). As Heiko Carrie (former Bosch France President) explained, the AHK offers practical support with bookkeeping, branch setup and other formalities, making it "very, very good" for companies entering the French market and "of great importance" for SMEs (Heiko Carrie, Interview 1). Large multinationals "need such AHKs not at all" in operational terms, but the chamber remains "super active", running

training centres, translation services and networking support – “one of the best-organised” bilateral institutions in France, according to Christophe de Maistre (former CEO, Siemens France). The AHK thus fills an important institutional role, even stepping in to bridge regulatory gaps during crises (for example, facilitating French short-time work benefits for French employees of a German SME during COVID-19 when no official mechanism existed). These strengths underscore how a well-resourced bilateral chamber can enhance cross-border human capital mobility and business integration. Another informal yet strategic vehicle is the Deutscher Industrie Kreis (DIK) – a private circle of German industry leaders in France. Carrie, who chairs this group, describes the DIK as “a non-institutionalised interest group, almost a circle of friends” where French executives heading German firms exchange views under strict conformity with compliance rules of the respective organisations and businesses (Interview 1). Despite its informality, the DIK’s collective stature as the voice of German big business in France gives it clout in Paris. It works closely with the German Embassy and regularly invites high-level French policymakers (ministers, central bankers, even former Prime Minister Michel Barnier) to closed-door discussions. This opens political “doors and gates” for German firms (Heiko Carrie, Interview 1) and strengthens bilateral ties. While a company like Siemens “at the end of the day doesn’t need the DIK,” it still benefits from participating - speaking not just as Siemens but “as representative of the German industry,” which carries more weight (Heiko Carrie, Interview 1).

In sum, the DIK exemplifies how informal networks can generate institutional synergies by amplifying corporate voices and fostering policy dialogue, even if they operate outside any official governance framework. Balanced against these strengths are clear governance gaps and instances of institutional fragmentation. Patrick Brandmaier (Director, AHK France) observed that the Franco-German institutional landscape, while dense, can be incoherent – “perhaps a few too many” bodies sometimes “stepping on each other’s toes” (Interview 3). A prominent example is the duplication of bilateral chambers: today Germany runs the AHK in Paris, while France’s network (CCI France) maintains a separate Franco-German chamber in Saarbrücken. Notably, a single binational chamber existed in the past with a joint Franco-German presidency, but this partnership broke apart decades ago when the French side felt it was not reaping equal benefits (given Germany’s stronger export-oriented Mittelstand). Brandmaier questioned the logic of this split, asking why they should not be “thrown into one heap” again to avoid duplication. Merging the two chambers into one organization, he argued, would cut overhead costs and create “more synergies” by doing things jointly rather than twice, while also sending “a signal...that we [are] more closely harmonised” (Patrick Brandmaier, Interview 3). This

proposal reflects a broader sentiment from the interviews that closer institutional integration is both symbolically and practically important for the bilateral labour market.

Finally, the interviewees highlighted the absence of permanent bilateral coordination structures in certain labour market domains. Many cross-border workforce issues are still handled ad hoc or via national institutions with limited alignment. For instance, there is no standing mechanism linking Germany's Federal Employment Agency with its French counterparts (such as the Direccte regional labour offices) to manage cross-border job placement or worker mobility. Interviewees proposed new collaborative frameworks to address this gap – suggesting, for example, a dedicated Franco-German integration agency to institutionalise labour-market cooperation, and more consistent direct coordination between equivalent German and French regional offices. Such measures, they argued, would provide lasting governance infrastructure in place of today's patchwork approach. In summary, while existing institutions like AHK France and the DIK demonstrate the potential of institutional synergies, the Franco-German partnership still faces governance gaps - from fragmented chambers to lacking permanent coordination - that must be closed to fully unlock a unified European labour market.

5 Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings of the thesis in light of the central research questions and hypotheses introduced in Chapter 2, the theoretical insights from Chapter 3, and the empirical results presented in Chapter 4. It brings together conceptual and empirical perspectives to assess how Franco-German cross-border cooperation contributes to addressing labour market mismatches, enhancing human capital mobility, and fostering institutional convergence in selected border regions. The discussion concludes with a critical reflection on the methodological limitations and the validity of the research outcomes.

The thesis set out to investigate **how Franco-German cross-border cooperation facilitates labour market integration and reduces structural mismatches**, with a focus on selected regions such as Baden-Württemberg–Grand Est and Saarland–Moselle. The topic was guided by two research questions:

1. *How does Franco-German cross-border cooperation contribute to reducing labour market mismatches in border regions?*
2. *Which institutional mechanisms facilitate or hinder cross-border human capital mobility, and how do they reflect broader patterns of European integration?*

These questions were operationalised into two hypotheses (**H1** and **H2**) that address both the structural and institutional dimensions of labour mobility, which were reflected on through both theoretical and empirical lenses.

Chapter 3 provided a multi-perspective theoretical framework for analysing labour and human capital mobility. Neoclassical and NELM approaches emphasise wage and household-level rationales for mobility (Borjas, 2013; Stark & Bloom, 1985), yet they fall short in explaining the institutional complexity of cross-border mobility in the EU context. More relevant to this thesis are **system theory** (Kritz et al., 1992), **dual labour market theory** (Piore, 1979), and **social network theory** (Massey et al., 1993), which better capture the **structural complementarities, institutional coordination, and relational networks** that characterise Franco-German cooperation.

From a theoretical standpoint, **H1** finds support in system theory, which highlights how interconnected institutions across borders can foster **institutional convergence and regional resilience**. Meanwhile, **H2** is strongly grounded in social network theory and dual labour market theory, both of which stress the **role of vocational frameworks, educational synergies, and bilateral recognition mechanisms** in enabling effective labour mobility. Thus, the theory shows that while economic incentives are important, they are often mediated or even overridden by **regulatory, cultural, and institutional arrangements**, especially in the EU's multi-level governance system (Perkmann, 2003; Blatter, 2004).

The empirical findings in chapter 4, based on semi-structured expert interviews, complement and contextualise the theoretical expectations. Interviewees from regional institutions (AHK) and business associations (CAFA, DIK) repeatedly emphasised that **labour market mismatches are not only quantitative but qualitative**, involving differences in training systems, administrative procedures, and language proficiency. **Heiko Carrie**, for example, underlined the importance of *inter-institutional trust and language-oriented cooperation* as key enablers of mobility. He described how actors such as the **AHK France** and **regional chambers** serve as intermediaries in recognising qualifications and matching labour demand and supply. This supports **H2**, highlighting that *institutional mechanisms* - rather than economic incentives alone - are essential in creating functional cross-border labour markets.

Further evidence for **H1** was found in observations on **labour market complementarities**: French youth labour supply aligns well with German industrial demand, but actual mobility is still hampered by slow qualification recognition and limited digitalisation of administrative services. **Carrie also noted** that bilateral cooperation strengthens Europe's global market position,

indirectly linking institutional integration to broader resilience goals. Additionally, experts such as **Brandmaier** pointed to legal hurdles such as the **A1 certificate** or **Carte BTP** as significant disincentives for SMEs. While such barriers are not resolved at the regional level, institutional cooperation (e.g., AGZ, DFH, DFJW) was seen as essential for long-term convergence and capacity-building.

Bringing together theoretical and empirical perspectives, the research questions can be answered as follows:

- **Franco-German cross-border cooperation does contribute to reducing labour market mismatches**, primarily by coordinating vocational education, fostering mutual recognition mechanisms, and creating institutional trust frameworks. This affirms **H1**, although the effects are uneven across sectors and regions.
- **Institutional mechanisms such as dual education partnerships, language programmes, and binational coordination bodies are crucial facilitators of human capital mobility**, supporting **H2**. These mechanisms reduce frictions that economic theory alone cannot address, including socio-cultural and legal discrepancies.

Thus, the findings suggest that **labour mobility in the EU depends on multi-level, cooperative infrastructures** rather than simply on market liberalisation. The Franco-German experience, while not without challenges, offers a functional model of how bilateral cooperation can serve broader EU goals.

While the findings are theoretically, conceptually, and empirically robust for qualitative research, several limitations must be acknowledged:

- **Internal validity** is constrained by the **qualitative nature** of the research. The semi-structured interviews provide depth but not generalisability. Coding bias and interpretation may also influence the findings.
- **External validity is limited to the Franco-German context**. While some insights may apply to other EU border regions, the institutional density and political will in the Franco-German relationship are exceptional.
- **Reliability and consistency** may be affected by the **small sample size** and the absence of systematic quantitative data. The empirical analysis could be strengthened by triangulating with employment statistics, mobility flows, or survey-based perceptions from cross-border workers.

- Finally, the **scope of the thesis** is focused on selected border regions and sectors. The findings are indicative but not exhaustive of the broader labour market dynamics between France and Germany.

Despite these limitations, the research offers **valuable conceptual and empirical insights** into the mechanisms of regional labour mobility and institutional convergence - two pillars central to the EU's cohesion and integration goals.

6 Conclusion and further Research

This thesis has investigated how Franco-German cross-border cooperation enhances labour market integration, reduces structural mismatches, and fosters human capital mobility in selected border regions. By combining a rich theoretical framework with qualitative empirical data, it has demonstrated that regional cooperation between France and Germany is not merely a bilateral phenomenon but a functional laboratory for deeper European integration.

The findings confirm that strategic labour mobility within border regions such as Baden-Württemberg - Grand Est, Saarland - Moselle, and Rhineland-Palatinate - Bourgogne Franche-Comté contributes to institutional convergence and economic resilience. The empirical evidence supports both hypotheses introduced in Chapter 2: first, that regional mobility frameworks reinforce institutional alignment and adaptiveness (**H1**); and second, that language-oriented education strategies, mutual qualification recognition, and vocational training cooperation act as structural enablers of cross-border human capital mobility (**H2**).

This conclusion rests on several key observations. First, the thesis has shown that labour mobility in the EU context cannot be explained through market logics alone. Structural economic complementarity - such as **France's youth labour surplus** meeting **Germany's skilled labour demand** - provides a foundation, but the actual realisation of mobility depends heavily on supportive institutions. These include intermediary actors like the German-French Chamber of Commerce (AHK), policy bodies like the AGZ, and bilateral educational institutions like DFH/UFA and ProTandem. Second, the research confirms that effective cooperation is deeply embedded in trust-based, multilevel governance. Experimentalist structures such as the AGZ enable **iterative coordination between actors at EU, national, and regional levels**, providing flexible and adaptive solutions to administrative barriers. Yet, the study also reveals that despite progress, systemic obstacles remain: inconsistent qualification recognition, bureaucratic overload for SMEs, lack of interoperable social systems, and the continued underfunding of mobility-enabling structures all hinder the full potential of integration.

Furthermore, cultural and linguistic factors emerged as decisive. The empirical data illustrate that mobility is not only a matter of laws and policies but also of social perception, identity, and everyday communication. Interviewees emphasized that without intercultural competence and language proficiency, even the best-designed institutional frameworks are unlikely to succeed. Thus, cross-border education and vocational cooperation must be conceived not merely as technical solutions, but as long-term investments in mutual understanding.

It should be noted that an additional expert interview, conducted after the empirical phase of this thesis had formally concluded, could not be incorporated into the main analysis. Nonetheless, the insights provided by Christoph Roth (Interview 4), Head of the Saarland Representation to the EU, further substantiate the core findings of this study. The interview highlighted the Saarland's exceptional role in Franco-German cooperation - rooted in its historical ties to France and its long-standing *Frankreichstrategie+*, which seeks to establish a multilingual and culturally integrated region. Key developments such as the mosaHYc hydrogen pipeline project, the cross-border healthcare agreement MOSAR, and new vocational training frameworks with Lorraine illustrate the depth and diversity of institutional cooperation. Moreover, the interview underscored structural challenges that align with those identified in this thesis, including legal asymmetries, administrative complexity, and the disruptive effects of the 2024 reintroduction of German border controls. These post hoc insights reinforce the conclusion that successful mobility requires not only legal frameworks but also trust-based governance and operational institutional support (Interview 4).

The thesis also highlights the role of informal institutional actors, such as business clubs (e.g., CAFA, DIK), which serve as bridges between the economic and political spheres. These networks do not replace formal governance structures, but they complement them by building trust, facilitating dialogue, and voicing private sector concerns. Their existence not only underlines the importance of institutional density and embedding for successful regional integration processes, but also shows that company representatives organise themselves in both institutional and private settings and actively represent their interests.

At the European level, the Franco-German experience offers a valuable case study of how bilateral cooperation can operationalise EU goals such as cohesion, resilience, and labour market fluidity. The legal foundations - Schengen, TFEU, Erasmus+, EURES - are necessary but not sufficient; it is through regional experimentation and bilateral institution-building that integration becomes tangible and impactful. As such, the thesis contributes to the literature on multi-

level governance, experimentalist policymaking, and regional integration by offering both theoretical synthesis and empirical evidence.

Nevertheless, limitations must be acknowledged. The qualitative design restricts generalisability beyond the selected case studies. The reliance on expert interviews means that some grassroots perspectives, especially from workers themselves, remain underexplored. Moreover, while this thesis focuses on Germany and France, other EU border regions may exhibit different patterns of cooperation and integration. Future research would benefit from comparative studies involving other border areas, as well as quantitative analyses measuring the causal impact of specific mobility programs on employment outcomes, firm productivity, or regional cohesion indicators.

Another fruitful avenue for research would be the longitudinal tracking of institutional reforms prompted by AGZ and Interreg VI initiatives, particularly those aiming to streamline recognition procedures, modernise cross-border infrastructure, or improve social security coordination. Additionally, the integration of digital platforms for administrative interoperability - often mentioned in policy declarations - deserves more systematic academic scrutiny.

In conclusion, this thesis argues that Franco-German regional labour mobility is both a functional necessity and a strategic opportunity. As Europe faces demographic shifts, digital and green transitions, and growing socio-economic disparities, the cross-border frameworks examined here offer scalable models for EU-wide application. Their continued success, however, hinges on sustained political commitment, deeper institutional convergence, and robust societal engagement. Only by bridging not just borders, but also systems, cultures, and perceptions, can the promise of a truly integrated European labour market be fully realised.

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