

LABOUR MARKET

At the end of 2013, on the French side of the border, the rate of unemployment ranged between 6.9% (Ain) and 11.3% (Territoire de Belfort). On the Swiss side of the border, the unemployment rate was between 3.3% (Valais) and 5.5% (Geneva).⁴³ The border region on the French side has an unemployment rate that is lower than the national, and even regional, average.⁴⁴ On the Swiss side, the unemployment rate is often regarded as a cause for concern, compared with the national average (2.9% in June 2014), especially in the Cantons of Geneva and Neuchâtel (which have the highest rates of unemployment in Switzerland). There are therefore political tensions surrounding cross-border workers (almost 150,000 commuted from France to Switzerland in 2014⁴⁵) who can sometimes accept lower wages.⁴⁶ However, French workers make up for the lack of skilled labour in Switzerland, which is why businesses fear the decisions that are due to be adopted following the vote of 9 February 2014, which are expected to impose limits on freedom of movement.

In terms of training, there is little cross-border cooperation (there are a few cooperation initiatives in higher education) despite numerous projects, especially in the Jura Arc region. There is sometimes a feeling within companies that they are “training workers for Switzerland”, which makes any more extensive cooperation difficult. Cross-border apprenticeships do not exist – in the Geneva area administrative barriers were removed, but there were no candidates to take them up. The focus has therefore been on facilitating the professional mobility of cross-border workers by working jointly on the mutual recognition of professional experience and the other country’s qualifications.

PLAYERS IN CROSS-BORDER ECONOMIC GOVERNANCE

Public action in the economic sphere marked by greater involvement on the French side of the border, where the economic situation is also worse. On the Swiss side, the strength of the economy and a tradition of a more *laissez-faire* approach means the public players are more hands-off. Cross-border cooperation in the area of economic development must therefore accommodate two different modes of intervention, which makes working together difficult.

In the Jura Arc region and Greater Geneva, cross-border cooperation bodies (the Trans-Jura Conference⁴⁷ and the Greater Geneva LGCC⁴⁸) carry out consultations among economic stakeholders via working groups or units.

- ✚ **In Greater Geneva**, joint promotion activities have ended (joint promotion at MIPIM – an annual international property event in Cannes) as the results were not commensurate with the efforts made. But the bodies still seek a more effective form of cooperation, which is proving difficult given the competition between the two national territories (a joint consultation working unit on economic development exists in the LGCC, but meetings are rare and it has proved difficult to find common interests).
- ✚ **In the Jura Arc region**, the greater specialism in the form of microtechnology specialism leads to hopes of developing partnerships between businesses, also including universities, thanks to greater coordination and networking between companies. The INNOVARC project is interesting in this regard.

The consular players whose structures are not comparable (no mandatory funding or public service on the Swiss side), are not accustomed to working together, with the exception of the ULAM (Lemanic Union of Crafts and Trades), which brings together the CMAs (Chambers of Trades and Crafts) of the two French Departments and their Swiss counterparts in the Cantons of Geneva, Vaud and Valais⁴⁹ and offers comprehensive information about work and training on both sides of the border.

The INTERREG Euregio Meuse-Rhine programme financed numerous economic development projects between 2007 and 2013 and will continue its support in the area during the period 2014-2020 (with special focus on innovation, energy and the labour market).

⁴³ Switzerland’s State Secretariat for Economic Affairs, June 2014.

⁴⁴ For more on this subject, see the study for the Trans-Jura Conference carried out by the MOT: “Diagnostic territorial – Stratégie transfrontalière de développement de l’Arc jurassien franco-suisse” (Territorial assessment – cross-border development strategy for the French-Swiss Jura Arc region), op. cit.

⁴⁵ Source: OFS, first quarter 2014, 148,207 cross-border workers resident in France.

⁴⁶ For more on this subject, see the study for the Trans-Jura Conference carried out by the MOT: “Diagnostic territorial – Stratégie transfrontalière de développement de l’Arc jurassien franco-suisse” (Territorial assessment – cross-border development strategy for the French-Swiss Jura Arc region), op. cit.: the fear of wage dumping is a theme that plays regularly in the Swiss media, fuelled by contradictory studies: a Geneva study (by the Geneva School of Business Administration, presented in September 2013) showed that the depression of wages was not generally a risk in the Canton, except for women on short-term contracts in hotel and catering jobs. On the other hand, the problem is more significant in the Jura: according to a study carried out by the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs, which surveyed employees in the Jura, 31% were underpaid in 2013 (wages below the minimum for the relevant sectors), whereas the Swiss average is 6%.

⁴⁷ Bringing together the Region of Franche-Comté, the Prefecture of the Franche-Comté Region and of the Swiss Jura Arc group arcjurassien.ch, an association bringing together the four Cantons of Bern, Jura, Neuchâtel and Vaud.

⁴⁸ Bringing together the Canton and the City of Geneva, the Canton of Vaud, the Nyon District, and the Departments of Ain and Haute-Savoie, the Rhône-Alpes Region and the Arc Syndicat mixte (French Geneva area regional assembly for cooperation).

⁴⁹ Fédération Patronale Vaudoise (Vaud Employers Federation), Union des Associations Patronales Genevoises (Geneva Union of Employers Associations) and Union Valaisanne des Arts et Métiers (Valais Union of Crafts and Trades).