

In order to better grasp all of the regulatory and operational aspects of cross-border economic activity, it is in businesses' interest to have staff trained in these specific and evolving issues.

Rather than transferring staff from one country to the other, which masks local specificities, SMEs prefer to mix up nationalities within teams in order to strengthen the intercultural nature of their staff and thus maintain up-to-date knowledge of framework conditions. The new generations of workers are generally receptive to this cross-border openness. However, regarding fields of detailed expertise such as social and tax law, the level of training of the workforce appears to be increasingly crucial for monitoring in these areas to be carried out effectively. The cross-border employment market and the relevant public employment services are therefore advised of these types of requirements and of the high level of technicality expected by recruiters, which requires that greater consideration be given to the specific needs of businesses at the level of cross-border employment areas.

Assistance to businesses, especially SMEs, features in the ongoing reforms in France.

- ↘ The law of 31 December 2012, which set up the Banque Publique d'Investissement, provides for the appointment of specialists in cross-border economic development to regional policy committees in the regions concerned (border regions).
- ↘ The NOTRe law also provides for the economic development strategy document of each region concerned to include a cross-border component.
- ↘ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development is working to promote France's attractiveness in order to make it a priority for the country's embassies and diplomatic network, through special representatives, "regional ambassadors" and its new agency, Business France.

IN A NUTSHELL...

Cross-border territories along France's borders have highly diverse economic structures. Cross-border economic development is therefore assessed from different perspectives.

The knowledge and innovation economy is one of these perspectives, and has become one of the priority objectives of EU cohesion policy. It is possible to collaborate across borders on innovation and technology transfer through groupings of businesses and the linking up of research laboratories and universities on both sides of the border (competitiveness clusters).

Cross-border exports are also one of the possible areas of work with micro-enterprises and SMEs: this helps to develop expertise to export beyond the cross-border territory and thus promote the growth of these businesses.

Cross-border business transfers ensure that firms (microenterprises, SMEs) continue to operate following the retirement of the business owner.

Cross-border provision of services, facilitated by the "Services" directive, must be taken into account in cross-border economic development, with many craft enterprises working across borders (e.g. the construction sector).

Tourism is an example where competition and cooperation are inseparable, with both numerous synergies and projects (especially in rural and mountain areas) and persisting competition in the promotion and marketing of products.

Retail activities also have their own cross-border rationale, using the advantages in the territories (lower prices, more abundant supply, etc.) to extend catchment areas to the other side of the border.

Lastly, business support reveals a lack of permeability between the public and private spheres. Businesses mainly expect technical, rather than financial, assistance from the public sector, i.e. assistance in understanding (simplified) framework conditions, and especially in identifying support resources and providers, as well as their territorial coverage, which must be cross-border in nature.