



Language learning in the Land of Lower Austria

## LANGUAGES, CULTURES AND ADAPTING TRAINING TO THE NEEDS OF THE MARKET

Notwithstanding the advantages related to cross-border professional mobility and the incentive and information programmes, one other decisive factor still needs to be examined: the linguistic and intercultural aspect.

- **The French territories bordering Flanders, Germany and German-speaking Switzerland** are characterised by declining proficiency in the language of the neighbouring country, which is a major obstacle to the movement of workers and trainees to territories where there is a real need for labour. Finding candidates for cross-border apprenticeships is particularly difficult. Unskilled workers, who filled manufacturing jobs in the industrial areas in Flanders, Baden and the Basel region, have not been able to adapt to the increasing complexity of jobs in recent decades and have become less competitive, despite their geographical proximity, than highly-skilled workers from southern Europe.

Improving the cross-border employability of these populations necessarily requires the strengthening of language skills and a better correlation between training provided and the needs of the cross-border labour market.

- **Regarding languages, the Land of Lower Austria** has implemented a project to enable children to access the languages of neighbouring countries right from nursery school. This initiative was replicated first of all by the neighbouring Länder, then by the bordering countries (Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary). Exposure to the language and culture of the neighbouring country at a very young age is considered to be an asset for establishing cross-border economic cooperation and employment areas.

As competence with respect to education and languages is not decentralised in France, the involvement of France's national Ministry of Education is a prerequisite for developing widespread instruction of the language of the neighbouring country in the educational system.