



# REMINDER

ROLE OF EUROPEAN MOBILITY AND ITS IMPACTS  
IN NARRATIVES, DEBATES AND EU REFORMS

## A Multitude of Mobilities: Cross-Border Practices in the Austrian-Hungarian and Austrian-Slovak Border Regions

### WORKING PAPER

**Authors:** Bernhard Perchinig  
Veronika Horváth  
Dániel Molnár  
Lenka Ťavodová

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Authors: Bernhard Perchinig (principal author), with Veronika Horváth & Dániel Molnár, and  
Lenka Ťavodová

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Correspondence address:

[Bernhard.Perchinig@icmpd.org](mailto:Bernhard.Perchinig@icmpd.org)

International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)

Gonzagagasse 1, A-1010 Vienna, Austria



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## Abstract

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In the European Union, the status of Union Citizenship and Freedom of Movement have largely dissolved the distinction between nationals of another EU Member state and citizens. With the imposition of the Schengen regulations internal border controls between the Schengen countries have been abolished, thus the function of the border as a locus of control of entry has vanished. Nevertheless, crossing a border to another EU Member State still includes a move to different polity and a place with different legislation, and sometimes a different state language.

While in the “old” EU Member States, the now largely defunct borders have separated areas with usually similar levels of economic development, this is not the case along the borders between the “old” and the “new” EU, where still sizeable differences in income levels and levels of economic performance persist on both sides of the borders. Cross-border commuting and other forms of economically based cross-border relations, e.g. posting of workers, thus have become relevant.

This report analyses the perceptions of the effects of Eastern enlargement of the European Union in the Austrian-Hungarian and the Austrian-Slovak border regions by experts and civil servants involved in enlargement management, with a particular view on the labour market and the field of education. Following a theoretical discussion on the linkages between cross-border mobility and international migration, a thorough literature overview gives an impression about the perception of EU-enlargement among the scientific community of these three countries. The third part is made up by a qualitative study on the perception of cross-border mobility over the Austrian-Hungarian and Austrian-Slovak border and its effects by experts and institutional stakeholders in Austria, Hungary and Slovakia.

As the report shows, the border regions are characterised by a multitude of mobilities, which are shaped by both persisting differences in employment opportunities and income levels and the specific regional economic and spatial opportunity structures.<sup>1</sup> These

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<sup>1</sup> According to Galster & Sharke (2017, 7), the “spatial opportunity structure” is conceptualised as “panoply of markets, institutions, services, and other natural and human-made systems that have a geographic connection and play important roles in people’s socioeconomic status achievements.”



mobilities are not covered well by migration theory, which needs to refocus on the role of mobility for the social relations of the individual migrant.

Labour mobility between these countries is mainly unilaterally directed towards Austria. There are relevant differences in the development of the border region between Slovakia and Austria and the border region between Hungary and Austria. While the Austrian-Slovak border region is characterised not only by labour, but also by residential mobility towards Austria, and a slightly growing mobility of managers, the interviewed experts agreed, that labour mobility between Hungary and Austria would stay unidirectional. Experts characterised the Austrian-Slovak border region as moulded by the proximity of two large cities, Vienna and Bratislava, with Bratislava being a regional economic centre with a large automotive industry and a growing financial sector, and improved road and fast train connections between Vienna and Bratislava. In the Austrian-Hungarian border region, there have been sizeable investments into retail and tourism in the northern part of the Burgenland region, leading to cross-border commuting from Hungary, while the southern part of the border region remains mainly agrarian, with no economic centres comparable with Bratislava in Hungary.

Cross-border mobility in the region goes beyond labour mobility and includes cross-border residential mobility and cross-border educational mobility. Residential mobility mainly concerns Slovak citizens building a house in Austria and commuting back to Bratislava. This decision is supported by cheaper real estate prices in Austria and public support for young families building a residential home, and has led to regional integration beyond labour mobility. As with labour mobility, educational mobility – which was mainly reported as an issue of Hungarian citizens - is mainly geared towards Austria, but limited by Austrian regulations demanding that pupils in compulsory schools have their main residence registration in the municipality of the school. This regulation hampers freedom of movement of commuters, who would prefer the enrolment of their children close to their place of work.

Overall, cross-border mobility stays to be shaped by the specific spatial, economic and cultural conditions characteristic for a border region. The abolition of the borders between the EU Member States thus are only a necessary, but not a sufficient condition, for stronger



regional integration which still mainly depends on the politics of Member States and regional and municipal administrations regarding cross-border mobility.



## 1. Introduction

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Migration studies usually focus on international migration, loosely defined as the transfer of one's place of residence over an international border for a longer period of time. Other than in internal migration, defined as the shift of the place of residence over an essentially administrative border, international migration also includes the shift of the status from citizen to a foreigner, which is often linked to a weaker legal position and restricted access to the labour market and social rights.

In the European Union, the status of Union citizenship and freedom of movement have largely dissolved the status distinction between nationals of another EU Member state and citizens, but for third-country nationals this differentiation still holds. With the imposition of the Schengen regulations, internal border controls between the Schengen countries have been abolished, thus the function of the border as a locus of control of entry has vanished. Nevertheless, crossing a border to another EU Member State still includes a move to different polity and a place with different legislation, and sometimes a different state language. While legal differences between citizens and Union citizens with regard to civil law and labour law are marginal, voting rights beyond the municipal level are limited to citizens. Furthermore, different institutional systems, e.g. in education, jurisdiction or health, continue to mark a difference between the societies on both sides of the border, in particular with regard to the de-facto recognition of educational and professional qualifications and experiences. Finally, different state languages are not only signals of belonging, but also designate the labour markets as different linguistic spheres and may function as a barrier to equal (access to) employment.

Freedom of movement regulations did not only ease international migration within the European Union<sup>2</sup>, but also have largely reduced the functional relevance of borders. No controls are involved in crossing a Schengen-border, and only different colours of highway signs or a different language will tell the driver that they are in another country.

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<sup>2</sup> EU documents reserve the term "migration" for the migration of third-country nationals to an EU Member State, while the term "mobility" is used for migration between the EU Member States. This terminology is at odds with the definition of international migration as a move of the place of residence over an international border. According to international law, borders between the EU Member States are international borders, even if they are not regularly controlled any more, and migration between the Member States is international migration, albeit within the territory of the supranational European Union (Perchinig 2011, 23 f.).



While in the “old” EU Member States, the now largely defunct borders have separated areas with usually similar levels of economic development, this is not the case along the borders between the “old” and the “new” EU, where still sizeable differences in income levels and levels of economic performance persist on both sides of the border. Cross-border commuting and other forms of economically based cross-border relations, e.g. posting of workers, thus have become a relevant phenomenon along these borders since the abolition of border controls, the granting of freedom of services even before the EU-accession, and the abolition of waiting periods for free labour market access in 2011 and 2014 respectively.

This report will analyse the perceptions of the effects of Eastern enlargement of the European Union in the Austrian-Hungarian and the Austrian-Slovak border regions by experts and civil servants involved in enlargement management, with a particular view on the labour market and the field of education.

The paper is divided into three sections:

- The first section discusses the relations between the concepts of international migration, international cross-border commuting and international cross-border residential mobility in order to set the theoretical frame for the understanding of the developments in these regions. Aiming to highlight the deficiencies of current migration theories in understanding other forms of cross-border mobility, it suggests refocusing the definition of migration from the crossing of an international border to the social-spatial relations of mobile people.
- A thorough literature review giving an overview about studies on EU enlargement and cross-border mobility written in Austria, Hungary and Slovakia from the 1990s until today for the first time gives an overview on the perception of EU-enlargement among the scientific community of these three countries. As the report highlights, most studies focused on the economic effects of EU enlargement, other aspects of mobility on the border regions were only discussed by very few authors.
- The third part is made up by a qualitative study on the perception of cross-border mobility over the Austrian-Hungarian and Austrian-Slovak border and its effects by experts and institutional stakeholders in Austria, Hungary and Slovakia. It aims to highlight the main developments and challenges of cross-border mobility in this area. Interview-partners comprised representatives of regional governments, trade unions and employers’ organisations and academic experts in each of the three countries. Austrian interview-partners were selected by Bernhard Perchinig, Hungarian interview-partners by Dániel Molnár and Veronika Hórvath, and Slovak



interview-partners by Lenka Ťavodová based on their knowledge of the institutional structure of the region in the respective country. The interviews followed interview guidelines (see Annex) and were conducted in the mother tongue of the interviewee. As the report shows, the border regions meanwhile are characterised by a multitude of mobilities beyond international migration which are shaped by both persisting differences in employment opportunities and income levels and the specific regional opportunity structures.<sup>3</sup>

- The concluding chapter highlights the main results of the study and suggest policy recommendations.

## **2. Migration and mobility – theoretical considerations**

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International migration is not the only practice of cross-border mobility. Apart from tourism and consumer-mobility, which are not of concern for this paper, cross-border commuting and cross-border residential mobility are the most relevant practices of border-crossing influencing both the spatial relationship between the place of residence and the place of work or education, and the social relations and networks at these places. The following chapters will discuss the main aspects of migration, commuting and residential mobility and link the debate with the discussion of transnationalism in order to develop a theoretical frame for the understanding of cross-border practices in the regions under discussion.

### ***International migration***

Changing one's place of residence over an international border for a longer period of time stands at the core of the definition of international migration from the UN Recommendations on Statistics of Migration from 1998. According to the recommendation, an international migrant is defined as

*“a person who moves to a country other than that of his or her usual residence for a period of at least a year (12 months), so that the country of destination effectively becomes his or her new country of usual residence. From the perspective of the country of departure the*

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<sup>3</sup> Interviews in Austria were conducted by Bernhard Perchinig, in Hungary by Dániel Molnár and Veronika Horváth, and in Slovakia by Lenka Ťavodová. In total, 13 interviews were conducted both in Austria and in Slovakia, and 11 interviews in Hungary. In Hungary, the Head of the Government Office did not allow the research team to interview any of the civil servants of Vas County without giving a reason, thus no representatives of Vas County, one of the districts bordering Austria, could be interviewed. Interview partners were asked to select the degree of anonymity with regard to verbal quotes. Most agreed on the naming of the institution and their function, but some also asked for complete anonymity. In these cases, no institutional affiliation of the interviewee is mentioned in the report.



*person will be a long-term emigrant and from that of the country of arrival the person will be a long-term immigrant.” (UN 1998, 9).*

A further distinction is made between short-term or temporary migration, covering movements with lasting between three and twelve months, and long-term or permanent migration, referring to a change of country of residence for a duration of one year or more.

In this definition, a person’s “country of usual residence” is defined as the country “in which the person lives, that is to say, the country in which the person has a place to live where he or she normally spends the daily period of rest” (UN 1998, 9).

This definition clearly excludes persons moving regularly in short intervals between their country of residence and their country of work or education. Daily commuting about an international border does not constitute migration. The definition also excludes all other forms of commuting below the three-month threshold – cross-border mobility leading to a change of the place of residence for less than three months is regarded as tourism. Persons commuting each fourth month to their previous country of residence would be regarded as “short term migrants”. Short-time commuters – in the UN-terminology “border workers” do not meet the decisive criterion, the change of the place of residence over an international border (UN 1998, 11 ff.).

### ***Commuting***

As Sandow and Westin (2010, 435) have argued, “commuting is a consequence of spatial split between place of residence and place of work and can be regarded as an alternative to migration; likewise, migration can be seen as an alternative to commuting”. The spatial split between the place of residence and the place of work or education, the time spent and the mode of travel for covering the distance are core elements of understanding the difference between these two forms of mobility. While in the case of migration, the place of residence usually is moved closer to the place of work, commuting upholds the distance between the two places.

Commuting is a central aspect of regional labour or educational mobility. Although there is no generally agreed definition of commuting, most attempts at a definition focus on the



periodically recurring travel between the place of residence and the place of work (or education) as the central element of commuting (Öhmann & Lindgren 2003, 2). Commuting may or may not entail the crossing of an administrative (internal commuting) or international (cross-border commuting) border (Huber & Nowotny 2008, 2). While from a geographical perspective commuting distance, time spent for commuting, and means of travel are the main analytical aspects for understanding commuting behaviour (Van Ommeren 2000, 5), for migration research the differentiation between an internal and an international border is essential. Commuting over an international border will change the legal position of the commuter from a citizen to a foreigner, and will often include restrictions with regard to access to the labour market, employment conditions and social rights.<sup>4</sup>

In the discussion on commuting, travel time and travel frequency are decisive factors. While in the case of daily commuting, no change in the place of residence occurs, long-term commuters – those staying overnight at their place of residence for a number of days before returning to the place of residence - will need a second place of residence in the proximity of their work-place, either provided by the employer, or organised by themselves. There are no clear-cut boundaries between long-time commuting and seasonal work. If seasonal work entails some regular returns to the place of residence, it is a specific form of long-term commuting.

### ***Commuting as gendered spatial practice***

Both in the case of internal and international commuting, the time spent for transport will lead to a compression of the time available for private and family life and for participation in the social life at the place of residence. Mobility studies highlight the gendered dimension of commuting: Already early studies of commuting have proven substantial differences in commuting times between men and women with women's trip length staying substantially

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<sup>4</sup> In the European Union, Union Citizenship grants far-reaching equal treatment to all citizens of another EU member State, in particular equal access to the labour market, except of high-ranking positions in the public administration linked to the exercise of state sovereignty, like e.g. the police, the military or diplomatic services. Nevertheless, the "old" EU Member States were entitled to limit equal access to the labour market for citizens of the "new" Member States for a period of up to seven years. Austria was one of the Member States making full use of the transition period, thus citizens from the new Member States joining the European Union in 2004 only got full access to the Austrian labour market in 2011, and Bulgarian and Romanian citizens in 2014.



below those of men (Kain 1962, Giuliano 1979, Crane 2007).<sup>5</sup> Gendered differences in commuting are usually explained by the “household responsibility hypothesis” (Turner & Neimeier 1997) which argues that gender roles assigning the responsibility for managing the household to women make them less inclined to choose commuting and are the reason for on average shorter commuting distances of women compared to men.

Commuting can lead to “commuting stress” which negatively affects reported quality of life (Koslowsky, Kluger, Reich 1995). Variability in commuting time, lack of predictability of commuting time and crowding may also negatively impact commuters' health outcomes (Hanssen et al 2011, 834). Although commuting time is not the sole indicator for negative impacts on reported health, commuting for more than 60 minutes into one direction with public transport and between 30 to 60 minutes by private car showed persistent negative impacts on reported health (Hanssen et al 2011, 843). According to a British study, the negative effects of commuting on well-being are stronger for women than for men (Hodgson & Dolan 2009).

While daily commuting does not entail establishing a place of residence at the location of the work place, long-term commuting, be it at weekly, monthly or longer intervals, includes a second place of (temporary) residence. Weekly labour commuting has been widely discussed in the 1960s and 1970s as a phenomenon characteristic for workers with low qualifications from rural, economically depressed areas seeking jobs in urban centres in construction and industrial production. In many cases, commuting men did not manage their own household at the place of work, but were housed in workers' homes provided by the employer or shared flats with their colleagues (Vielhaber 1987, Hackl 1992). Based on the dominance of the male-breadwinner-model in rural areas and linked to property ownership there, households refrained from moving to the urban locations of their workplace and instead developed a multi-local family-model with the women staying in the household and caring for the children, or in part-time employment at the place of residence of the household.

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<sup>5</sup> While, according to a case study in Sweden, this difference was insensible to employment sector, education level, and family situation (Sandow & Westin 2010), other studies have highlighted a convergence of commuting times between men and women, regardless of family situation and number of children (Doyle & Taylor 2000).



### ***Commuting and household rationalities***

As studies on household decisions about migration have shown, households decide calculating the gains and costs of migration, but also consider immaterial gains and costs as highly relevant (Reuschke 2011, 140). Whereas for a one-person household the calculation is simple, couples and households with children have to gauge the costs and gains for all household members. In this respect, further to property ownership and the quality of life at the place of residence, the local integration of children into kindergarten and school has been shown to be a relevant factor for decision making (Mulder 1993). In particular, in households with children, the prevailing gender roles allocating household responsibility to women lead to a household decision tying the female partner to the place of residence of the household (“tied stayer”), even if it would be economically rational for her to also engage in migration. As children's needs have to be cared for locally, their existence in a household is a main factor inhibiting household migration (Mulder and Hooimeijer 1999). Only if the individual gains for all household members surpass their individual costs, will these households consider to move their place of residence (Bielby/Bielby 1992, quoted in Reuschke 2011, 140).

A growing number of couples composed of partners working in highly qualified positions in their respective place of residence, with little or limited options to gain a comparable position at the place of residence of the partner (Green 1995), are today opting for multilocality (Reuschke 2011, 137). Although these “double career couples” (Solga/Wimbauer 2005, 9) or “commuting partnerships” (Van der Klis 2009) “shuttle” between two places of residence, one place of residence is usually mainly used by one of the partners, and the other defined as the place of family residence, if there are children living in the household (ibid., 341). In these cases, the decision for multilocal residence is taken despite the fact that it might be more costly in material terms than sedentariness in one location.

### ***Posting of workers***

Although not covered by the definition of migration (transfer of place of residence to another country or region) and of commuting (employment/education in another region or



country as residence), “posting of workers” is another type of labour mobility involving a change of the relationship between place of residence and place of work or education.

While in the case of commuting the commuter has decided to accept an employment (or in the case of a student: education) contract with a company (or educational institution) residing in another region or country, a posted worker stays employed with his company but delivers his work in another region or country for a limited period of time.

Posting of workers to a place where the company is involved in a project is a practice common mainly in construction, mechanical engineering, or the IT-sector, where specialised services are delivered temporarily at different locations. In this case, the place of delivery of work changes temporarily, while the place of employment does not change. While the commuter, who decides to accept a job offer, also decides about the distance and (roughly) the travelling time s/he is ready to accept, posted workers have no choice over the place where their work is delivered.

The living conditions of posted workers resemble those of long-time commuters with regard to a prolonged time of absence from the household, but differ insofar, as commuters commute between the place of residence and a fixed place of work, while the place of work of posted workers changes depending on the projects they are working on.

In the case of posting of workers within the European Union, specific regulations apply. Posting of workers is based on the freedom of services in the European Union and regulated in the revised version of the Directive 96/71/EC concerning the posting of workers in the framework of the provision of services.<sup>6</sup> The Directive regulates three variants of posting: the direct provision of services by a company under a service contract, posting in the context of an establishment or company belonging to the same group (“intra-group posting”), and posting through hiring out a worker through a temporary work agency established in another Member State. It also limits posting of workers to a maximum period of time of 18 months and regulates minimum conditions for accommodation provided by the employer, and subsistence and housing allowances if no accommodation is provided. Despite working in another EU Member State, posted workers do not constitute a part of

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<sup>6</sup> The Council adopted the revision of the posting of workers directive on June 2018, thus the Directive has not been numbered yet.



the labour force of the Member State they are posted to. Their salaries have to correspond to the minimum salary for the same occupation in the country they are posted to, but social security deductions and taxes are calculated based on the regulations of the country of residence of the company employing them. Companies employing posted workers usually can thus deliver cheaper offers for services than local companies.

### ***International cross-border commuting***

In the case of international cross-border commuting, several aspects related to the crossing of an international border add to the general specificities of commuting:

- a) Access to and the legal position of workers in the labour market are regulated by the country of employment and may differ from the regulations in the country of origin. Commuters might need a work permit to participate in the labour market, and their employment conditions and labour rights may differ from those of nationals. This is not the case for commuting in the European Union, where Union citizens and nationals have to be treated equally in all labour-related aspects, except of access to a limited number of posts in administration.
- b) Systems of vocational (and academic) education are regulated at the national level, thus commuters within a state usually will not be confronted with issues regarding the recognition of their formal education. While the ongoing process of harmonisation of post-secondary and tertiary education in the European Union has led to a certain degree of transportability of academic degrees, the systems of vocational training are still not coordinated well. The recognition of vocational qualifications, as the recognition of work experience, most likely will be a challenge in cross-border commuting.
- c) While in the case of internal commuting regional income differences will be small, and better options for employment or better career prospects, or differences in costs of living will be the main factors influencing decision-making, in the case of international commuting over a border between the “old” and the “new” EU Member States income differences will be more prominent. In 2011, household income differences in purchasing-power-parities between the border regions in Austria, the state of Burgenland, and the two Hungarian border regions, Közép-Dunántúl and Nyugat-Dunántúl, were between 1:2,25 and 1:3,5. Differences are much lower between the region of Bratislava and bordering Lower Austria (1:1,3), but are nearly 1:2 between Lower Austria and Northeast Slovakia (Verwiebe et al. 2013, slide 14), while consumer prices in Austria and Slovakia did not differ much (Index values vis-à-vis EU 27 average 119,44 vs. 122,73), but were much higher in Hungary (144,99) (ibid., slide 20).
- d) In Europe, state borders often also demarcate language borders. In most European countries, competence in the official language of a state is a prerequisite for successful integration into the labour market in most occupations. While internal commuting usually (except in the case of multilingual countries like e.g. Belgium or



Switzerland) is not related to a change of the language used for day-to-day communication, international commuting often also includes the challenge to perform one's work in a second (or third) language. Real or perceived lack of language competency can restrict access to qualified professions, be a reason for discrimination, and might hamper the development of social contacts in the country of employment.

### ***Residential mobility***

Residential mobility - the move of the place of residence away from the place of work – is a phenomenon widely discussed in human geography (Short 1978, Coulter et al 2015).

Literature on residential mobility is deeply linked to the life-course approach, understanding short-distance residential moves as reactions to life-course events and unfolding life course perspectives (Bailey 2009), in particular those linking two or more people in partnership or parentage (Mulder & Hooimeijer 1999). The main driving factors of residential mobility are either life-events triggering different housing needs (e.g. couple formation, birth of children), termination of housing contracts, changes of property prices, or renting and/or income conditions allowing or enforcing a change of place of residence. The subjective preference of movers, and their readiness and ability to choose a different housing location are moderating factors in decision making. Residential mobility often is linked to spatial processes like suburbanisation or gentrification, as residential mobility often occurs in context of professional careers or the formation of a two or more person household, which both might increase the spending power of the household (Sharkey 2012).

Residential mobility within a state mainly changes the embedding of people into local networks, affects social ties and interactions and regulates the access to localised institutional settings. The latter is of particular relevance with regard to compulsory schooling: Many European states (e.g. Austria and Germany) limit parental choice of schools and demand school attendance in a pre-defined school district at the place of residence of the child. Combined with half-day-schooling, which is standard in e.g. Austria and Germany, educational policies limit mobility options of parents and contribute to the development of “tied partnerships” (Mulder & Hooimeijer 1999, 163).



### ***International cross-border residential mobility***

International cross-border residential mobility – the move of the place of residence over an international border, while maintaining the place of employment in the previous country of residence and daily cross-border commuting - is a specific form of cross-border mobility. As internal residential mobility, it is mainly driven by lower property prices and perceived differences in housing and quality of life across the border. Within the EU, it is facilitated by the almost entire removal of border controls (Balogh 2013). International cross-border residential mobility most often is linked to cross-border suburbanisation processes of cities close to an international border (e.g. Bratislava, Copenhagen, Frankfurt an der Oder, Trieste) (Decoville et al 2010, 13).

International cross-border residential mobility reverses the challenges of migration and of commuting. While in international migration, the challenge of integration concerns both integration at the workplace and at the place of residence, commuting only concerns integration at the workplace. In international cross-border residential mobility, the integration at the workplace is unchanged, and there is no risk of de-qualification because of lack of recognition of training certificates or work experience in the country. But as the place of residence has moved to another country, challenges of social integration akin to those of international migrants will have to be met, in particular with regard to the acquisition of the state language, integration in the local community and teaching of the mother-tongue to the children of movers. As compulsory education is the remit of the Member States, in many countries children will have to attend local compulsory schools, and will not easily be able to attend schools in the country of employment of their parents.

### ***Commuting, migration and the “centre of life”***

As highlighted above, international migration is only one form of mobility across international borders.

Criticising the static definition of migration based on place of residence, Ingrid Oswald (2007, 13 ff.) has suggested to understand migration not primarily as a move of the place of residence, but of the “centre of life” (“Lebensmittelpunkt”) - a concept based on subjective definition, and not on legal registration alone. Although the “centre of life” usually is located



at the place of residence of a person, it can also be located at the place of work, if a person's social network is focused on colleagues and s/he spends most of his/her spare time with them. On the other hand, "commuting partners" or partners "living apart together" will have two or more "centres of life", as is the case in transnational households and families (ibid., 18).

Migration does not only concern resettling - a shift of the place of residence, but also a change in the web of social relations, and the experience of relevant borders, whereby the concept of "border" is not limited to national or regional borders delimiting different polities, but also includes any non-spatial boundaries linked to language, ethnicity religion or dominant culture.

Changing the centre of life may affect five different dimensions (Oswald 2007, 15):

- Housing (resettling, administrative registration, neighbourhood inclusion)
- Family (family status, family composition, schooling of children)
- Employment and income generation (employment status, education, social status, contact with colleagues, income)
- Social networks (relatives, friends, neighbours, school-friends of children, care for elderly family members)
- Cultural and political orientation (competency in the official language at the place of residence, religious orientation, citizenship rights and active citizenship, value-orientations).

Migration and mobility may affect all these dimensions, but need not affect all of them at the same time and in the same intensity. So, for example, international migration may include the move to an area with a different state language than the mother-tongue of the migrant. On the other hand, existing social networks at the place of previous residence may continue to stay relevant, either through the usage of digital communication, or if international migration is short-distance migration (ibid.). Changes of the place of residence thus will influence living conditions differently, depending on the ability to uphold contacts to social networks either physically or via using technical means.

The model suggested by Oswald can be applied for a better understanding of commonalities and differences in commuting, posting of workers, cross-border residential mobility and



migration. As the table below shows, different dimensions of the “centre of life” will be affected by these different forms of mobility.

Table 1: Dimension of change of the “centre of life” in migration and commuting

Dimension of change	International migration	Daily International cross-border commuting	Long-term international cross-border commuting	Posting of workers	International cross-border residential mobility
Place of residence	Shift to another country, or dual residence		Dual residence, one dominant place of residence	Dual residence, one dominant place of residence	Shift to another country, or dual residence
Place of work	Shift to another country	Shift to another country	Shift to another country	Shift to another country	No change
Place of education of children	Country of residence	Country of origin	Country of origin	Country of origin	Country of residence
Social networks	New networks as place of residence and work	New networks at place of work	New networks at place of work	New networks at place of work	New networks at place of residence



As the table shows, (international) cross-border mobility may entail a broad range of configurations of the place of residence and the place of work or education, influencing the involvement in social networks and access to locally bound institutions.

- The change of the place of residence in the case of international migration and international cross-border mobility will most likely lead to a change of social networks at the place of residence. Travel time and distance to the previous place of residence, and access to electronic means of communication will influence the intensity of this change. With regard to family constellations, in both cases the enrolment of children in compulsory schools will be limited to schools at the place of residence, as legal regulations in most countries demand attendance of compulsory schools in the country and near the place of residence. While in the case of international migration, practical aspects speak for schooling close to the place of residence, in the case of international cross-border residential mobility combined with daily commuting to the former country of residence for work schooling near the place of work might be the preferred solution for the parents, but might be made impossible due to existing legal regulations.
- Cross-border commuting is characterised by a workplace in a different country than the country of residence, but social networks in the country of work are likely to stay limited to colleagues in the case of daily cross-border commuting, while social networks at the place of residence may persist despite time constraints. Also, in the case of long-time commuting, social networks at the temporary place of residence may develop, depending on the conditions of work, working hours and the frequency at which people return home, while inclusion into social networks at the place of residence will most likely suffer due to the protracted phases of absence. In the case of international migration, new social networks have to be developed at the place of residence and the place of work.
- In the case of cross-border residential mobility the workplace and networks at the workplace usually do not change. Depending on distance and commuting time, it might be possible to continue meeting friends and relatives at the place of previous residence, which is usually still the place of work. This will not be possible in most cases of long-distance international migration. Like international migrants, persons performing international cross-border residential mobility will face the challenge of (social) integration at their new place of residence.
- Posting of workers is akin to cross-border commuting, but while cross-border commuting entails working at a specific workplace for a longer period of time and thus allows the development of social networks among colleagues, posted workers usually are employed for a shorter period of time at a specific workplace.

### ***Cross-border practices and transnationalism***

The different configurations of place of residence and place of work linked to the diverse forms of international cross-border mobility have given rise to a critical evaluation of theories of transnationalism by human geographers.



Until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, migration was mainly understood as a process of mobility leading to settlement in another country than the country of origin, which necessitated the migrant to surrender the greater part of his or her involvement and interest in the society of origin (Colic-Peisker 2002, 32). Although historians of migration have continuously pointed to the fact, that – at least among free labour migrants – return visits to the country of origin have existed since the emergence of migration (Noiriel 1995), the effects of the connectedness of migrants to their country of origin were widely neglected in the literature.

This view changed in the 1990s, when migration researchers started to critically evaluate the nation-state boundedness of social sciences and developed the first definitions of transnationalism as a new framework for the understanding of migration. In their path-breaking article, Nina Glick-Schiller, Linda Basch and Cristina Blanc-Stanon (1992) described transnationalism as the development of a transnational social field by migrants, who stay connected in both their country of origin and their country of destination. In their understanding, migrants do not leave one country to settle in another, but construct socio-spatial relations beyond the boundaries of the nation-state linking the areas of origin and destination:

*“We have defined transnationalism as the process by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement. Immigrants who build up such social fields are designated “transmigrants”. Transmigrants develop and maintain multiple relations – familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political that span borders. Transmigrants take actions, make decisions, and feel concern, and develop identities within social networks that connect them to two or more societies simultaneously” (Glick Schiller et al. 1992, 26f.).*

Understanding transnationalism as “those multiple ties and interactions linking people and institutions across the borders of the nation-state” (Vertovec 1999, 447), it has soon become a buzz-word in migration studies and has been applied to all forms of interactions between country of origin and country of destination of migrants.

Despite the broad echo of the concept in European migration studies, no definition regarding the duration, intensity and character of cross-border relations has been put



forward in the literature. Whereas in the 1990s most researches of transnationalism linked these contacts to regular travel to the country of origin (twice a year serving as the minimum, Portes et al. 1999, 222), some theorists of transnationalism claim that the development of communication technologies has made this limitation widely obsolete today. Internet-based telephone and video services like Skype or Facebook and the spread of mobile phones allow continuous involvement in both the society of origin and the society of settlement despite physical absence. Belonging to a community today does not depend any more on physical presence, but can be exercised by communication via the internet: “Culture and community have been separated from locality, as a result, distance is no longer an impediment to community.” (Kennedy and Roudometof 2002, 15, in Mammatah 2006, 13).

Not all authors share this view. Portes et al. have argued, that the concept of transnationalism should be “delimit(ed) to occupations and activities which require regular and sustained social contacts over time across national borders for their implementation” (Portes et al. 1999, 219). Referring to this definition, which stresses the regularity of social contacts across national borders, several scholars have understood international cross-border commuting and international cross-border residential mobility as a prime example of transnationalism. Daily, weekly or even monthly commuting between the place of residence and the place of work would give much more room to sustaining social contacts across-borders than long-distance migration with two or three annual returns to the previous place of residence. Thus “short-distance transnationalism” (Strüver 2005, 339) or “short-distance transmigration” (Van Houtum and Gielis 2009, 605) has even been declared the prime example of transnationalism (Gielis 2009, quoted in Balogh 2013, 202).

Balogh (2013, 193 ff.) has criticised the subsumption of all forms of border practices under the term “transnationalism” highlighting that the concept of transnationalism denotes *transcending* (not only physical) boundaries, whereas commuting and cross-border residential mobility are related to the *crossing* and *experience* of boundaries. In fact, the daily crossing of a (national) border should be better understood from the perspective of bordering, the “continuous search for the legitimisation and justification of the location and demarcation of a border, which is seen as manifestation of one’s own claimed, distinct, and



exclusive territory/identity/sovereignty.” (Van Houtum 2010, 959, quoted in Balogh 2013, 192).

Bordering does not only entail the crossing of borders, but is essentially linked to the processes of ordering and othering. Ordering as “the process of making and re-making a socio-spatial order” through the “production of belonging and nostalgia and through the selective invention and narration of community” (ibid) is a process independent from the functional dimension of a border, the demarcation of the limes between two polities and areas of sovereignty. Thus also in the case of a far-reaching dissolution of national borders, like e.g. in European integration, processes of ordering and defining belonging and community along the defunct border will continue to exist. Social boundaries will be upheld and redefined by a variety of forms of othering, “the production of categorical difference between ours and theirs, here and there, and natives versus non-natives” (ibid.).

Empirical studies at the German-Polish and the Dutch-Danish borders have proven, that there is no easy linkage between cross-border residential mobility and transnationalism, as most of the daily activities of persons engaged in cross-border residential mobility stayed oriented towards the country of origin. While the functional dimension of the borders between the states have vanished, mental and cultural borders persist (Strüver 2005, quoted in Balogh 2013, 202). The daily crossing of a border need not at all be a sign for transnational lifestyles and orientations, the theoretical concept prognosticating a growth of transnational orientation linked to short-distance mobility did not hold for this study.

Waldinger (2008, 9) has formulated several further critical arguments against the discourse on transnationalism. According to him, the concept of transnationalism puts a myriad of migrants border-crossing activities under one umbrella, without giving room to systematically differentiating between activities linking different countries and those simply involving contacts and relations to two or more countries. Empirically measurable changes in the relationship between country of origin and country of residence over time are neglected, and thus the concept contributes to the construction of migrants as “others”, who hold a fixed and stable relation to their country of origin (Waldinger 2008, 24 ff.).



The overstretching of the concept and the lack of sound empirical studies also have motivated Recci et al (2011, 19) and Favell et al (2011, 19ff.) to refrain from the usage of the term. They instead speak of “cross-border practices” – a term reflecting the variety of individual border experiences and their effects on the construction of social-spatial networks, belonging and identity. The concept of “transnationalism” should be better replaced by this less value-laden term, which would allow an open view on the multitude and diversity of mobility in border regions.

Although based on only expert-interviews and not going into depth with regard to individual experiences of borders and border-crossing in the research area, the empirical results of this study also show the development of a multitude of mobilities. Instead of conceptualising as “transnationalism”, a new, empirically based reflection on the changing role and relevance of borders for mobility between the EU Member States is needed.

### **3. Migration and mobility in the border regions Austria-Hungary and Austria-Slovakia**

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The following chapter gives an overview of the development and actual situation of migration and mobility in the border region Austria–Hungary and Austria–Slovakia.

Migration and mobility in this region is characterised by unidirectional movements from the two Eastern countries to Austria and there is virtually no labour or educational migration from Austria to the two other countries. The report will thus describe the literature on the development of migration from Hungary to Austria), and the literature on EU-enlargement, migration and mobility written in Austria between the 1990s and 2017.<sup>7</sup>

#### ***Hungarian studies on migration and commuting in the Austrian-Hungarian border region***

##### *Introduction*

While the flow of the population of the Eastern European countries to the West, following the disintegration of the socialist bloc, was relatively minor, this migration process grew stronger post- millennium, due primarily to the enlargement of the European Union in 2004 (Blaskó & Gödri, 2014; Földházi, 2011; Gödri & Tóth, 2010; Hárs, 2012). Migration flows

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<sup>7</sup> Sections on Austria authored by Bernhard Perchinig, on Hungary by Dániel Molnár and Veronika Horváth, and Slovakia by Lenka Ťavodová.



from Hungary, however, failed to reach the forecasted level (Hárs, 2008), while unforeseen tendencies emerged for each host and issuing country (Blaskó & Gödri, 2014).

While there are various reasons for this (e.g. lack of economic growth in the issuing countries, economic and welfare structure and traditions of host countries, economic and political relations between countries, etc.), the deferral of Austria and Germany in the introduction of free employment, coupled with the limited availability of the labour market, are seen as having greatly contributed to the fact that the main migratory lines were drawn towards countries not implementing transition periods (primarily the United Kingdom and Ireland). However, at this time the migration of Hungarians to the West was not significant, beginning to intensify only in the second half of the 2000's and gaining substantial momentum after the opening of the Austrian labour market on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011. The flow of Hungarians abroad exceeded 85,000 per annum by 2013 (Blaskó & Gödri, 2014), and today the flow comprises 2% of the population aged 15-74 (Sik & Szeitl, 2016).

The exact definition of the number of people living or working abroad is difficult to ascertain, due, in part, to definitional and methodological problems (i.e. "Who is considered a migrant?"), and due to the lack of domestic migration statistics<sup>8</sup> and mirror statistics of host countries. In Hungary, reports of departure from the country are haphazard<sup>9</sup>, the National Movement Statistical System contains data on migrants only from 1980, and the question of citizenship was only part of the 2001 and 2011 censuses (Dickmann et al., 2016). Mirror statistics show the number of immigrants who live in the host country and fulfill the registration obligation for legally and prolonged periods of residence, but which often ignore changes in the actual place of residence, thus circumventing the notification and highlighting differences in international practices (Blaskó, Ligeti & Sik, 2014; Lakatos, 2015).

Dickmann et al. (2016) also noted a number of additional problems (e.g. the small likelihood of a target group being sampled, if the whole family goes abroad these families are excluded

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<sup>8</sup> In Hungary the measurement of international migration is based on the records of the Immigration and Nationality Office (Bevándorlási és Állampolgársági Hivatal, BÁH) and the National Health Insurance Fund (Országos Egészségbiztosítási Pénztár, OEP), as well as additional important registers such as the Personal Data and Address Register of the Central Office of Public Administration and Electronic Public Administration Services (Közigazgatási és Elektronikus Közszolgáltatások Központi Hivatala, KEKKH) and the database of the National Tax and Customs Office (Nemzeti Adó- és Vámhivatal, NAV). In addition, censuses and regular labour surveys provide immigration-related statistics (Dickmann et al., 2016).

<sup>9</sup> From 1 March 2013, only the permanent establishment abroad shall be reported to any district office or consulate (formerly this was the rule for the temporary, but longer than 3 months stay abroad). The law does not set a time limit, the finality is based upon the intention of the citizen. However, the obligation to notify foreign employment of more than 3 months is still valid for social security bodies and the National Tax and Customs Office.



from the sample, and that the failure rate of the surveys is high due to language difficulties). Hárs (2011) also estimates, based on surveys with similar sample sizes<sup>10</sup>, that among the data source types, despite shortcomings, the immigration statistics of the host countries reflect at least the number and main characteristics of the country's emigrants. As a final point, while measuring migration is a major challenge, nonetheless, all data sources show an increase in Hungarian migration abroad.

Migration is mostly targeted at Austria, Germany and the United Kingdom. Research shows that the majority of migrants are the younger and the more educated of the populace, i.e. the students, with the majority being unmarried and male (Sík & Szeitl, 2016; Szeitl, 2015; Blaskó & Gödri, 2014; KSH, 2014; Landshore, 2011). However, several important differences in the demographic composition of the Hungarian population living in these three countries can be observed; while the proportion of younger and higher educated people in the United Kingdom is high, in Austria and Germany, traditional destination countries, receive more skilled workers and older individuals (Blaskó & Gödri, 2014).

#### *Hungarian studies on migration*

In Hungary, surveys of the adult population's migratory intentions and plans have been conducted on a regular basis since 1993, enabling the study of changes in migration potential over time. An individual's chances of realizing a particular migration plan are influenced by various factors (human, material, social and psychological resources, the potential demand of the target countries, as well as institutional conditions), indicating that migration does not occur without prior intention, although individuals also abandon their plans (Gödri, 2016). Gödri and Feleky (2013), also indicate that migration intentions are good predictors of later emigration - in their study on the selection mechanism of the migration of Transylvanian Hungarians, they found that the intent of migration increased the chance of actual migration more than three times.

According to the results of TÁRKI Hungarian Household Monitor and Omnibus data surveys, the migration potential of the Hungarian population, when compared to the 1990s (5-6% of the population), increased somewhat during the early 2000s. The proportion of short-term

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<sup>10</sup> Labour Force Survey-LFS, the research of the Central Statistical Office "Turning points of our lives", migration research, research related to remittances, and research based on the data recorded by the Central Office of Public Administration and Electronic Public Administration. n.



jobseekers in the EU increased to 13% in 2005 (after joining the EU); in 2012 – after Germany and Austria eliminated labour market restrictions – the migration potential was at its highest levels (19%) along with the proportion of long-term jobseekers (16%) (Sik, 2012; Sik, 2013). While the percentage of migrant workers over the age of 39 has only slightly increased since the turn of the millennium, these percentages researched 40% in the 18-39 age group in 2012, while the percentage of those planning long-term employment abroad was 34%. In the case of the elderly, the potential destination country in the short- and long-term for employment and emigration was primarily Austria, while for young people Austria was mainly involved in short-term employment plans. Germany and Great Britain were viewed as the two most important destination countries for planning long-term employment abroad or emigration (Feleky, 2014). After 2012, the Hungarian population's migration potential for short-term and long-term employment declined, and, since 2014, has remained small, yet consistent, at levels of 9-11% (Sik and Szeitl, 2016).

Between April and July 2013, the Hungarian Demographic Research Institute examined the migration intentions, plans, seriousness and background of the 18-40 year old population in Hungary. The total sample size was 1464, and represented the population by age, level of education, and type of settlement. The results showed that, at the time of questioning, every third individual in the 18-40 year old range, was planning to move abroad for a short period of time: 25% of the respondents planned short-term foreign employment, 26% planned long-term foreign employment (14% would stay permanently abroad), and 6% planned to emigrate (Gödri, 2016). These high percentages indicate, as estimated by the Hungarian Demographic Research Institute, that approximately 7.4% of the 18-49 yearold Hungarian citizens with permanent residence (335,000) were permanently residing abroad during the 2012 and 2013 rounds (Kapitány & Rohr, 2014).

In terms of target countries for migration, three countries, Austria, Germany, and Great Britain, were mentioned in two-thirds of all surveys: 30.7% of survey respondents named Austria as their primary destination (30.4% short-term, 33% long-term, 21.4% planning to emigrate); 22.1% of respondents would move to Germany; 19.4% would move to Great Britain.



While 46% of 18-24 yearolds were planning some form of migration (nearly 40% of them indicated a plan of long-term employment), less than one quarter of 35-40 year olds did this. The prevalence of migration plans was the highest among students (53%) and the unemployed (41.5%) and averaged to around 33% among university graduates. Those groups with a higher migration potential than the average were unmarried, single people (41%), divorced people living alone (45%), childless individuals (40.8%), people with financial difficulties (40.1%) and foreign language speakers (55.4%). At the same time, among Roma people, only the intention to work abroad for the short-term was significant (34%) (Gödri, 2016).

In June 2012, the SEEMIG (Managing Migration and Its Effects in South-East Europe) project, co-financed by the European Union and Hungary, was launched. Combining various databases, it studied complex long-term migration and demographic processes and human resources of South-East Europe. The main objective of the project was to gather existing data on migration flows, evaluate them critically, and make recommendations for the methods of data collection<sup>11</sup>.

In Hungary, SEEMIG compiled a questionnaire for emigrants, which was attached to the labour force survey of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office in the first quarter of 2013. Data was provided from family and household members living in Hungary (about 30,000 households) about their relatives living abroad (former members of the households currently living abroad). Within the framework of the project, a total of 1,908 persons residing abroad were identified, however, data identifying only 1,430 persons was provided by relatives, which according to the authors, indicates that emigration is a rather sensitive topic among Hungarians.

The survey data further showed that the vast majority of immigrants from Hungary lived in the countries of the European Union, including Germany, Great Britain and Austria. At the same time, the authors point out that Hungary's western neighbours play a much bigger role in the employment of the Hungarian population than is reflected in the data, as the large number of people regularly commuting was not reflected in the analysis as living abroad. The majority of people living abroad are in the younger age group (25% are under

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<sup>11</sup> See <https://www.demografia.hu/en/seemig>, accessed 12.08.2018



30, 63% still have not reached the age of 40), and the percentage of graduates is significantly higher than in Hungary (32% vs. 18%). According to the results, Austria attracts mainly skilled workers (41% of Hungarians living there are skilled workers, while only 18% have a higher education degree).

Additional information from the survey indicates that while 25% of Hungarians living abroad are providing regular financial support to family members staying home, 32% of Hungarians living in Austria do so. Hungarians living in Austria remit at least 30% of their income on a monthly basis, however, despite this, 25% of respondents believe that their relatives abroad have no intention of returning home (KSH, 2014).

As of June 2013, under the auspices of SEEMIG, another migration research project entitled, "Hungarians abroad", was launched in coordination with the Hungarian Demographic Research Institute.<sup>12</sup> The purpose of the project was to gather information on the demographic composition, the motives and the intended time of stay abroad of emigrants. The results of the project indicate that the percentage of men abroad was somewhat higher (52%) than women and that age was relatively consistent across category - 26-35 (39%) and 36-50 year old (34%). Regarding education of the respondents 33% reported as having secondary education, 32% having some higher education, 25% work as skilled workers, and 6% reported as having only a primary school education.

According to the study, among the migrants, Germany (25%), the United Kingdom (24%) and Austria (12%) are the three most important target countries. The distribution of target countries described here - and the dominance of the three, German, Austrian and the United Kingdom - shows the same picture as the census data, mirror statistics, and migration potential research. Among those staying in Germany and Austria, the percentage of people arriving from Budapest and from county seats is lower (26% in Germany, 23% in Austria), but increases to 41% for Hungarians staying in the UK. 67% of those in Austria come from one of the Transdanubian regions, indicating that living in Austria is mostly determined by geography. In the United Kingdom, Hungarians are mostly from Central Hungary (27%).

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<sup>12</sup> See <http://www.demografia.hu/en/migration-mobility>, accessed 18.08.2018



Language proficiency in all three countries is strongly correlated with the chances of migration: 57% of those in Germany and 74% of those in Austria speak German, but it is not clear that language knowledge is a consequence of emigration or that existing language proficiency determined country choice (Blaskó, Ligeti & Sik, 2014).

Zsuzsa Blaskó and Irén Gödri (2014) also examined the "Hungarians Abroad" data, separating those "new migrants" (618 people) who left the country after 2009 from the total of 1,198 who migrated abroad after 1989, in order to explore the characteristics of the new wave of migration and the composition and characteristics of these "new migrants".

For "new migrants", Austria and Germany are considered traditional destinations because of their spatial proximity and historical connections, but the younger generations are increasingly familiar with English and have a strong sense of Anglo-Saxon culture, which in turn makes the UK an increasingly popular destination. Among the Hungarians living in Austria, the proportion of post-graduates was relatively low (19%), while the number of skilled workers and those with secondary education was slightly higher than the average. The authors also found that the accelerated migration of recent years represents a major brain drain from Hungary, and that migration with leaving the family behind is not an unknown phenomenon (Blaskó & Gödri, 2014).

In 2012-2013, the supplementary module of the survey of the Hungarian Demographic Research Institute "Turning Points of Our Lives" aimed at making it possible to estimate the percentage and total number of Hungarian citizens living abroad, and to identify the most important destinations and residence reasons based on a sample of 8,917 18-49 year old Hungarian citizens who had permanent residence in Hungary.

According to estimates by Balázs Kapitány and Rohr Adél (2014) - as previously mentioned - around 7.4% of the 18-49 year old Hungarian citizens with declared permanent residence in Hungary permanently resided abroad in 2012 and 2013. 60% of them were in the 18-34 age group and the largest group (23.2%) was the 30-34 year olds. The sex ratio was balanced, but while a quarter of men were over the age of 40, less than one fifth (19%) of women were in this age group. The results for the target country are similar to that of other studies on this subject. According to Kapitány & Rohr (2014), most of the Hungarians living abroad



lived in Germany (25.8%), in the United Kingdom (25.6%) and in Austria (12.7%). The lower percentage of those staying in Austria, however, can be explained by the fact that, due to its proximity, it is the primary destination country of commuters, who were not represented in this survey (Kapitány & Rohr, 2014). At the beginning of 2017, the Hungarian Demographic Research Institute reiterated the 2013 estimation process, in the hope that further national data on emigration will be provided in the future (Dickman et al., 2016).

The 2011 population census also collected data on the population abroad. On October 1, 2011, 213,000 people were reported to live abroad: 143,000 Hungarians were permanently (over one year) and 70,059 people temporarily (less than one year) living abroad. However, it is important to emphasize that these are the minimum numbers for both groups, because the census failed to always provide information "in which the entire household lived abroad and their Hungarian dwellings were vacant or rented by tenants, the census did not always provide information" (KSH, 2013, p. 10). According to the data of immigrant and returnee Hungarian citizens born in Hungary registered in the Social Security Number system of the National Health Insurance Fund, the migration balance of Hungarian citizens was 20,000 between Hungary and other Member States of the European Union in 2014 (Dickmann et al., 2016). However, the aggregation of the mirror statistics of each Member State showed a migration difference of 30,000 (Ibid).

Subsequently, the supplementary questionnaire on the international migration of the micro-census of 2016 may also provide an opportunity to analyse the migratory acts and their circumstances (the time of migration, displacement spatiality, goals and causes) Péter Pál Tóth, a senior researcher at the Hungarian Demographic Research Institute, however, considers it a problematic situation and notes that "in particular, since April 2015, real, correct, up-to-date, analytical migration research has come to a standstill" (Dickmann et al., 2016, 180).

*Data on Hungarian migration to Austria*

### Stocks and Flows

According to data provided by Statistik Austria, from 2002 to the end of 2015, the number of Hungarians migrating to Austria grew every year - while 2,640 Hungarians arrived in the



country in 2002, the number of arrivals in 2015 exceeded 14,000. Although it is true that the number of Hungarian citizens leaving the country has also increased steadily, their numbers have proportionally decreased compared to immigrants during the period under examination: in 2015, the number of immigrants exceeded the number of those leaving the country by 7,535.<sup>13</sup>

The number of Hungarian migrants was highest after the labour market opening of May 2011. This year saw the number of immigrants increase significantly (by 150% compared to 2010 data), a trend which then continued over the next four years. In 2016, immigration waves fell somewhat - compared to 2015, the number of Hungarian immigrants dropped by 8%, and net migration dropped by 21%.

According to the 2016 data, the gender distribution of Hungarians migrating to Austria was almost the same (52.07% (6.939) men), and this distribution characterizes the gender proportion throughout the period under investigation. Migrants' age is typically between 15 and 44 years, although the percentage of those over the age of 60 and those under the age of 14 increased slightly compared to 2002.

The population of migrants living in Austria, but born in Hungary, also grew steadily during the study's time frame. In 2016, 67,729 people living in Austria were born in Hungary. Finally, among the immigrants born in Hungary, the percentage of women was somewhat higher than the percentage of men throughout the time frame in question (54.1% in 2016).

In 2016, 31.9% of foreigners born in Hungary lived in Vienna, 16.2% in Upper Austria (mainly in Linz, Wels and Braunau am Inn districts), 12.6% in Lower Austria (mainly in Baden and Mödling districts), and 10.8% in Styria (mostly in Graz). In the other regions there were significantly fewer Hungarians residing, and this area distribution remained characteristic throughout the study's time frame.

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<sup>13</sup> The data presented here are based on data-set provided by the STATcube-database of Statistik Austria; [http://www.statistik.at/web\\_de/services/statcube/index.html](http://www.statistik.at/web_de/services/statcube/index.html), own calculations.



## Employment of migrant works and commuting

Austria is an important migration destination for the Hungarians, mainly due to its geographical proximity and the resulting benefits. This neighboring situation provides not only an opportunity for commuting, but is also seen beneficial for immigration (Blaskó & Gödri 2014).

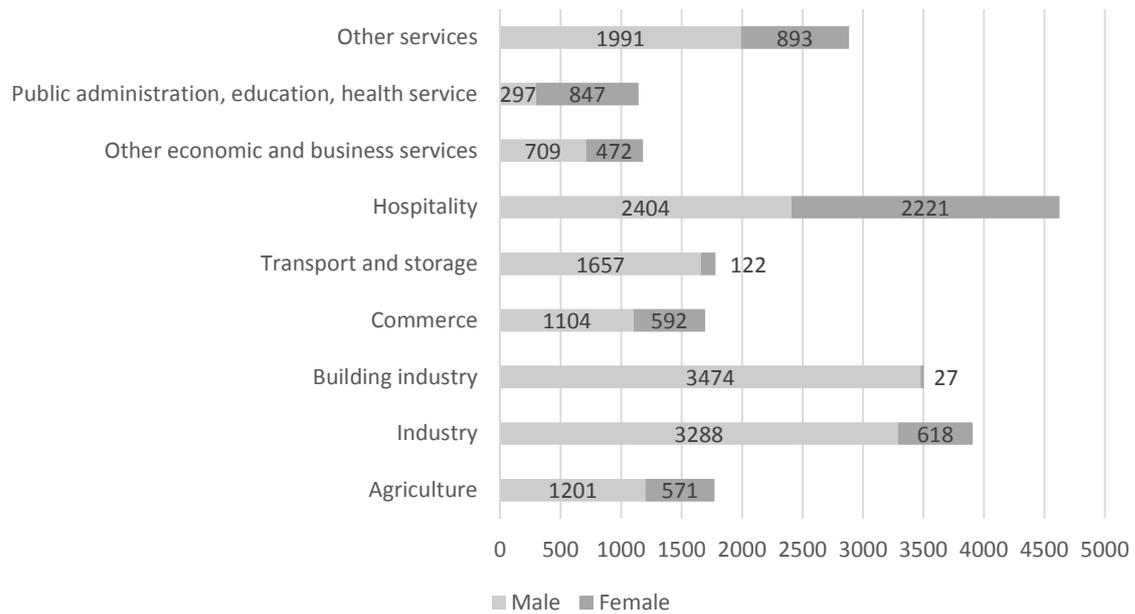
According to data from the Hungarian 2011 census, 83% (22,500) of the employees commuting abroad worked in Austria. 42% of the Hungarian settlements have at least one inhabitant working in the Austrian labour market. Commuting was the most prevalent characteristic of people living in the western parts of the country: 12,252 people from Győr-Moson-Sopron county, 4,812 from Vas county, 893 from Zala county commuted to Austria, while the total number of commuters from the capital (Budapest) and other counties did not reach 5,000.

72% of those who came to Austria were male and 60% of them had not yet reached the age of 40. Nearly 50% of them were married, one third was unmarried, one-tenth identified as divorced, and only one out of hundred commuters was a widow. Almost seven-tenths of the commuters spoke German, but three-quarters of the women and two-thirds of men could understand the language of the neighbouring country. 48% of the commuters in Austria had completed vocational training or school, one-third of them matriculated, one-tenth of them graduated, and 7.2% of them had at most elementary education.

60% of commuters in Austria worked in service branches; 20% in catering, 17% in industry and 16% in the construction industry. 7.9% of the commuters worked in agriculture (mainly in Burgenland and in field farming, horticulture and vineyards in Lower Austria), and the proportion of Hungarian commuters in transport, warehousing and trade was similar. Except for education, healthcare and other services, men have worked in all branches of the economy.



Chart 1: Number of employees commuting to Austria by economic branches (2011)



Source: Adapted from Hungarian Central Statistical Office (2013)

Most of the commuters worked in some type of job that required physical labour, almost one third of them worked in industry and construction, and more than a fifth worked in commercial and service jobs. A further significant part (comprised of a quarter of women) occupied a non-qualifying job. Operators, assemblers, and drivers accounted for 12% of the employees traveling to Austria, while 4.4% of the commuters worked in occupations requiring the use of higher education.



Table 2: Distribution of the number of employees commuting to Austria according to the occupational group (2011)

Occupation groups	Male	Female	Total
Economic, administrative, advocacy leaders, legislators	1.2	1.2	1.2
Occupations requiring independent application of higher education	3.7	6.3	4.4
Other professions requiring tertiary or secondary education	5.0	12.0	7.0
Office and administration (customer relationship) occupations	1.4	3.9	2.1
Trade and service occupations	16.1	38.5	22.4
Agriculture and forestry occupations	3.6	3.8	3.7
Industrial and construction occupations	44.1	3.0	32.4
Operators, assemblers, drivers	15.1	5.6	12,4
Non-professional (simple) occupations	9.7	25.8	14.3
Non-professional (simple) occupations	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Adapted from Hungarian Central Statistics Office (2013)

Since scheduled services by Austrian and Hungarian bus companies are less adapted to the needs of workers, only 3.3% of commuters used this form of public transportation. Similarly, only 3.1% commuted by train, although thanks to large-scale EU developments, the importance of rail transport is expected to increase. Most people (88% of commuters) travelled by car and 72% of commuters drove for up to one hour (KSH, 2015). Work is



mainly done in Burgenland and Vienna, and it can be stated that, in general, the further one moves from the western border of Hungary, the less likely is the presence of Hungarian workers in the Austrian labour market (Hárs, 2009).

According to the Austrian Social Insurance Organization (Hauptverband der österreichischen Sozialversicherungsträger), in 2016, 77,871 Hungarians worked in Austria, which accounted for 12% of all foreign workers (651,694 persons). In Austria, after the Germans, the Hungarians were the second largest group of foreign workers. The majority worked in Vienna (19.16%), Burgenland (19.14%) and Lower Austria (18.93%) (Hauptverband der Österreichischen Sozialversicherungsträger, 2016).

### Commuter studies

There exist several studies on the socio-demographic composition and employment patterns of Hungarian commuters to Austria. In order to assess the opportunities, strategies and situation of Hungarian workers in Austria, for the period between November 2008 and February 2009, Hárs (2013) conducted in-depth interviews with individuals working as commuters (255 persons from the border counties and 160 people from the more distant counties of Hungary) in the Austrian labour market from 1989/1990. The majority of the employees were men around 30 years of age and every third interviewee had previous foreign work experience. While men with families were working in neighbouring regions, single men were more likely to work in more remote areas. For Western Hungary migrants, higher Austrian wages, the scarcity of workplaces in Hungary and the lack of attractive jobs were the main reasons of migration. In the case of workers from more remote regions of Hungary, the possibility of gaining professional experience and the possibility of language learning motivated foreign employment. Three quarters of interviewees worked legally in Austria, and most mentioned that Hungarian friends helped them find their first job. Every fifth Hungarian employee had a Hungarian employer, despite this, for most of the interviewees (mainly commuters and skilled workers from Western Transdanubia for whom worse jobs are believed to be available by the authors), the job placement, the relationship with the boss and colleagues, working time and the work schedule were evaluated negatively. The biggest problems often cited were the distance to the workplace and the availability of work. At the same time, no one was worried about working in Austria, but



most of them wanted to stay in Austria until they were financially strengthened (Hárs, 2009).

In a 2012 study by EURES-T Pannonia (EMPIRICA 2012), 30 commuters were surveyed on their ideas and experiences. The majority of interviewees (22 persons) were male, with an average age of 32.5 years. 60% had some secondary education, 40% had a higher education degree, and 53% worked in a job appropriate to their qualifications. Most of them (27 people) commuted daily, while those working up to a distance of over 180 kilometres commuted weekly. Of the interviewees, 24 people went to Austria for higher earnings, but several mentioned that better working conditions, lack of job opportunities in Hungary and language learning were the main motivating factors. 14 people did not have any negative comments about the Austrian working conditions. They argued that Austrian work is the same as Hungarian and that Austrians behaved positively towards Hungarian workers. In addition, taxation conditions were considered to be better, five mentioned the compensation for traveling costs (Pendlerpauschale), which reduces the income tax. 25 people indicated a desire to continue commuting in the future (EMPIRICA, 2012).

### ***Slovak studies on migration and commuting from Slovakia to Austria***

#### *Introduction*

The Slovak Accession to the European Union (EU) in 2004, the entry into the Schengen area in 2007 and the gradual opening of EU member labour markets for Slovak citizens have resulted in a significant increase in international mobility both in terms of transnational migration and cross-border commuting. The impact of EU enlargement on labour mobility has been the subject of various studies. Most studies provide estimations of the number of migrants, with special attention paid to migration flows' directionality and their compositions in terms of gender, educational attainment, occupation etc. (eg. Divinský 2004, Divinský 2010, Bahna 2010, Kahanec and Kureková 2014, Káčerová and Horvathová 2014, Baláž and Karasová 2015). Research studies on cross-border commuting in Slovak language are virtually non-existent.

There is a lack of reliable statistics on migration and cross-border commuting in Slovakia and current estimates significantly underestimate the real scope of migration (see more in the



data section). Out of the available sources, the Labour Force Survey (LFS) is widely used to measure the number of migrants working abroad. Based on the LFS, in 2016 more than 160,000 Slovaks worked abroad. The target countries of the migration were mainly Austria (31.7%), the Czech Republic (23.7%), Germany (18.6%) and the United Kingdom (7.7%). The industry, health and care sectors constituted 45% of Slovaks' employment abroad.

In 2017, Haluš et al conducted a study using data from the registers of social insurance agencies (Haluš et al 2017). In their study they found that during the last 15 years around 300,000 Slovaks migrated abroad, constituting around 5% of the total population. The data also shows that more than half of those who have left were below 30. This figure aligns better than the LFS with statistics of the receiving countries which show that an estimated 280,000 Slovak citizens worked or resided in another EU member state in 2013 (Baláž and Karasová 2016).

The reasons for labour migration from Slovakia are mainly the high degree of unemployment in Slovakia, higher income levels in other EU member states, and better employment opportunities in receiving countries (eg. Baláž and Karasová 2016, Bahna 2011, Andruchová and Bútorová 2007).

#### *Migration and cross-border commuting between Slovakia and Austria – literature overview*

Cross-border mobility and social exchange between Slovakia and Austria have a long history. Several significant events such as the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and, more importantly, EU enlargement in 2004 and the subsequent removal of the last barriers to the free movement of labour, have led to an interplay of new political, legal and social factors that affected cross-border commuting and migration between Austria and Slovakia .

Prior to Slovak accession to the EU, Kollár (2000) conducted two empirical studies with Slovakia-Austria cross-border commuters and migrants. The first study was conducted during a three-day period in the autumn of 1994 on all borders between Slovakia and Austria (Jarovce-Kittsee, Petržalka-Berg, Devinská Nová Ves-Marcheg, and Moravský Svätý Ján-Hohenau). Through random sampling and systemized selection of every tenth cross-border passenger, 921 people were selected to participate in the survey. Based on the results from the study and study of Austrian datasets, 250 participants were interviewed in



a second empirical study in 1996 aiming to describe the character of cross-border migration between Austria and Slovakia. Kollár (2000) found that Slovak migration to Austria was characterized by commuting, or circulatory intercity migration. 51.4% of the respondents in the first empirical study had Bratislava as the previous employment site and 49.8% of respondents worked in Vienna. Kollár also found that the relatively short geographical distance between Slovakia and Austria allowed job seekers to find work in line with their qualification and in a cost efficient way. 74.6% of Slovak citizens who worked in highly qualified employment prior to their migration to Austria found highly qualified employment in Austria. Higher income level, better working conditions coupled with a high level of unemployment in Slovakia led to an increase in the number of Slovak migrants and cross-border commuters to Austria.

Following the Slovak accession to EU, several opinion surveys and empirical studies of migration potential have been conducted and Austria has featured as a preferred destination country in many of them. As part of their study of Slovak labour force migration in 2006, Reichová, Hanzelová and Kostolná conducted an empirical study on labour migration potential with clients of the EURES<sup>14</sup> services (Reichová, Hanzelová, and Kostolná, 2006). The study found that among the preferred countries of labour migration, Germany and Austria were in the top despite the labour migration restrictions they imposed then. According to Jurčová (2008), an opinion survey done by GfK Slovakia, found that 67% of all respondents were not satisfied with the situation of the labour market in Slovakia, and as the main potential labour migration destination countries they stated Great Britain, Ireland, the Czech Republic, Germany and Austria.

Of special interest to the present case study are the investigations on the regional labour market at the border zone of Austria and the Czech Republic, Hungary and the Slovak Republic. These were part of the project “Labour Market Monitoring (LAMO) – Development of Application and Validation of a Monitoring Tool to Regularly Observe the Changes on the Labour Market in the Course of EU Enlargement“ which aimed to collect information on the willingness to migrate and commute in the Centrope region (Austria-Slovakia-Czech Republic-Hungary) as well as to describe the labour force demand in the

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<sup>14</sup> The association of labour market service agencies of EU Member States.



private sector (Bittner et al. 2004). The data was collected in two waves during the winters of 2004/2005 and 2006/2007 through surveys of households and enterprises and through qualitative expert interviews. On the Slovak side, 1500 respondents participated in the household survey and 130 companies participated in the enterprise surveys. In 2008, the Paul Lazarsfeld Society for Social Research (as a lead partner), the Austrian Institute of Economic Research and Institute for Labour and Family Research in Slovakia carried out a follow up project called “Monitoring of Skilled Workers (FAMO) on the Slovak and Austrian Border” between the periods of 2008/2009 and 2010/2011 (Bittner et al. 2011). The same methodology consisting of households and enterprise surveys and qualitative interviews was used. The specific focus of the FAMO project was on qualification needed to match employment demand of the private sector.

The FAMO study concluded that the willingness for labour migration and labour commuting decreased following Slovak Accession to EU. While in LAMO I (2004/2005) the interest for labour migration and commuting was 36%, in the last FAMO II study carried out in 2010/2011, it was only 9%. In 2010, within the group of potential migrants and commuters, 60% were men and 61% were single. There had been no significant change in this regard since 2004/2005 studies. Over time, the proportion of those willing to migrate who had a higher level of education has risen, with 63% of all potential migrants and commuters having obtained higher secondary school certificates. By age, the strongest migration potential was found among young adults aged 15 to 24. In all LAMO and FAMO surveys, potential migrants and commuters indicated Austria as their preferred option, mainly because of geographical proximity and higher income. Other popular choices were Germany and Great Britain (Bittner et al. 2011).

Based on the review of research outputs written in Slovak, the summary report from FAMO I carried out between 2008 and 2009 provides good insights into Slovak citizens' potential (willingness) to migrate or commute to Austria. Some of the main findings are presented in the paragraph below (Bittner et al 2010).

FAMO I found that in 2009/2008 more than half (52.9%) of all respondents were interested in commuting or migrating to Austria. Almost two thirds of potential migrants and commuters who stated Austria as their preferred destination were 15-34 years old. 57.7%



of those interested in Austria were men and 42.3% were women. Concerning educational attainment, 22.5% had finished basic education, 30.2% had secondary vocational education, 2.2% had finished secondary education without “Matura”, 30.2% obtained secondary education with “Matura”, 1.6% had higher professional education and 9.8% had university education, including postgraduate university education. 70.3% of all respondents would prefer a permanent contract compared to 20.9 % who would prefer to work in seasonal employment.

Only 11% of all respondents were interested in moving permanently to Austria. 89.1% preferred commuting on a weekly (49.5%), daily (22%) and monthly (17.6%) basis. Of those interested in commuting, almost half would prefer using their own vehicle. For daily commuters, 65% would accept a traveling time ranging from 1 hour to 2.5 hours (tour-retour). A time ranging from 2.5 hours to a maximum of 6 hours would be the most accepted option (76.7%) for weekly commuters. More than one third of respondents (34.3 %) would be interested in migrating or commuting to Vienna, followed by 28% of those interested in the cross-border region.

Potential cross-border workers would be interested in finding work in commerce, the automobile industry, construction, manufacturing, agriculture, accommodation and food services, and in the health and care-taking sector. The three most common drivers for migrating or commuting to Austria were geographical proximity (58.2%), financial reward (79.1%) and good situation on the Austrian labour market (19.2%).

It is also important to state that 18.1% of all respondents had already worked in Austria. The majority of respondents (92.3%) who were willing to migrate or commute were planning to find employment in line with their qualifications but almost one fifth of the respondents were willing to accept employment below their qualifications.

Social networks played a significant role in affecting the migration potential and the way to find employment in Austria. 55% of those interested in migration already knew someone working or living in Austria. Use of employment agencies and internet were also key in finding employment. 20.5% of potential migrants and commuters were interested in finding a job through private employment agency.



Michniak (2016) studied the commuting patterns and trends of Slovak citizens, including cross-border commuters, based on the data of censuses held in 2001 and 2011. Michniak argues that the data on commuting from population censuses in Slovakia have some drawbacks. One important drawback is the definition of a commuter. According to the Statistical Office of Slovakia, a commuter is defined as a person “who works outside their commune of permanent residence” (Michniak 2016, 11). This contrasts with commuting data collected in other member states of the EU, where the data is collected based on the habitual residence of the inhabitants. In Slovakia, people often do not deregister from their permanent residence even though this is stipulated by law. This directly affects migration statistics and can, to a lesser degree, also affect commuting statistics. Another drawback is that for cross-border commuting, the data typically does not include information on the destination of commuting unless specifically requested (see data overview section). However, despite the drawbacks, censuses are valuable sources of information on the commuting patterns of the economically active population in Slovakia.

Based on the censuses data, Michniak found that while in 2001 only 47,542 or 5.7% of all commuters (796,484) commuted abroad, in 2011 the number of cross-border commuters reached 127,149 or 14.64% of all commuters (868,322). The main factors that contributed to this increase were Slovak integration into the EU in 2004, entry into the Schengen area in 2007 and the gradual opening of the EU member states' labour markets. According to the author, commuting in Slovakia is regionally differentiated and the most intensive cross-border commuting in 2011 was in the region of Bratislava.

Under the auspices of the Brawisimo project (2011-2015), co-financed by the European Development Fund, the Austrian and Slovak Ministries of Transport conducted a joint survey on cross-border mobility in 2013 (Roider, Klementschtz and Riegler, 2015). The main aim of the survey was to quantify the number of people crossing the border at both sides of the Slovakia-Austria border as well as to collect information on the purpose of the trips. The methodology was based on the manual count at all cross-border sections between Slovakia and Austria and on structured face to face interviews with people crossing the border. The study found that “in total, more than 50,000 persons cross the border between Austria and Slovakia on an average workday. People crossing the border are mainly Slovak citizens



(more than two thirds of all trips). The majority of trips is undertaken in order to get to or to return from work (about 50% on an average workday). Even on Sundays the share of work-related trips from Slovakia to Austria is almost 50%, which seems to be caused by weekly commuters. On workdays more than 20,000 trips are made between Bratislava and other Austrian regions than the city of Vienna. In comparison, approximately 10,000 trips are made between the two capital cities on an average workday” (Roider, Klementschtz and Riegler, 2015, 713).

#### *Facilitating and constraining factors to cross-border mobility between Slovakia and Austria*

In 2009, European Commission DG Social Affairs commissioned a study on cross-border labour mobility, with specific focus on cross-border commuting within EU member states (Nerb et al. 2009). In total 41 European cross-border regions were covered in the study. The applied methodology was based on a literature research and analysis of available data, as well as on online surveys and qualitative interviews with labour market experts. In addition to difference in wages, Slovak accession to the EU, the widening of the Schengen area in 2007, and developed infrastructure and transport systems are mentioned as key facilitators of Austria-Slovakia cross-border commuting. On the other hand, factors related to labour market restrictions, type of available jobs and recognition of foreign diplomas constitute some of the constraining factors to cross-border mobility between Slovakia and Austria.

#### *Ways to find employment*

Slovakia-Austria cross-border commuters and migrants use personal networks consisting of friends, relatives and acquaintances, internet and employment placement agencies as the main ways to find employment. In their study on non-public actors’ employment services providers, Hanzelová, Kešelová and Kostolná (2001) found that private employment agencies (“Agentúry sprostredkovania zamestnania za úhradu”) allowed to charge for their services, have been playing a significant role in helping to find employment for those interested in working abroad. In 2004, 74.6% (8,919) of all placements through such agencies were international and in 2009 only 65.6% of (6,149). The decrease in international placements was consecutive to the financial crisis of 2008/2009. According to the same study, Austria is the most common destination for jobs conveyed through these agencies. In 2009, 24% of all placements were in Austria. The study does not provide fully disaggregated



data on destination countries and employment sectors but generally speaking, the placements in 2009 were in the manufacturing industry (2,246), hotel and food services (906), agriculture (732), the health sector (895) and care taking sector (597). Hanzelová, Kešelová and Kostolná's findings on the popularity of these employment agencies among commuters and migrants in Austria are in line with FAMO I findings on potential migrants and commuters to Austria, which found out that almost 20% of them would be interested in using employment agencies in finding the jobs.

#### *Type of work conducted by cross-border commuters and migrants*

In the previously discussed LAMO/FAMO studies, qualitative interviews were conducted with experts on the regional labour markets. The experts agreed that the "typical" migrant can be described as single, younger and most often a man (with the exception of Slovak women working as care workers or household help in Austria). They also agreed that those with university education prefer longer-term migration (and work as middle senior managers) while those with lower education prefer temporary and seasonal jobs. The major branches where migrants and commuters work are the health sector and social work activities, accommodation and food services, manufacturing, construction, and agriculture. There are gender disparities in employment - while women tend to concentrate in health and social work sector, men tend to concentrate in construction, food and accommodation services and manufacturing.

More in-depth studies on the type of work cross-border commuters engage in are rare. The bulk of studies are made on the care worker and health sector. These studies provide insights into ways to find employment, migrants' perspectives on their work and working conditions, reasons for migration, the impacts of migration etc. As care migration is dealt with extensively in another part of the report<sup>15</sup>, these studies are not described here.

#### *Impact of migration and cross-border commuting on the sending countries*

Studies on the impact of Slovakia-Austria cross-border mobility on the sending countries are limited, with the exception of emerging studies on care-taker migration to Austria and its effects in Slovakia. (eg. Sekulová 2013). Baláž and Kusá (2012) in an article about the impact

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<sup>15</sup> See the report of Mădălina Rogoz and Martina Sekulová on "Impacts and particularities of care migration directed towards long-term care" (REMINDER deliverable 6.1), and their report on "Perceived impacts of care mobility on sending countries and institutional responses: healthcare, long-term care and education in Romania and Slovakia" (REMINDER deliverable 6.2).



of emigration and migration between villages and cities within the territory of Slovakia, argue that to contradict the negative impacts of migration, the enhancement and improvement of the possibilities for circular migration is recommended.

Generally speaking, a decrease in the unemployment rate, sending of remittances and skills gained are among the most positive effects of labour migration (Baláž and Kusá 2012, Divinský 2010, Baláž and Karasová 2016). For example, in a study carried out by Reichová et. al (2006) about Slovak accession to EU, labour migration was seen to lead to a decrease in unemployment rates in Slovakia. Based on a comparison of data from 2004 and 2009, the level of unemployment decreased by 3.9 percentage points from 14.5% to 10.6% and according to the authors this is partly attributed to the labour migration. According to their estimations, between 2004 and 2009, 19,811 people were de-registered from the unemployment registry due to finding employment abroad. During the same time period, 35,806 of those registered as looking for employment deregistered and migrated abroad to look for employment. Altogether this constituted 2.2 percentage points of the unemployment rate in Slovakia. While the authors agree that this type of calculation presents several challenges, the estimation can offer an illustration of the effect of international labour mobility on Slovak labour market. Divinský (2010) further found that remittances in 2008 constituted 2.1% of Slovak GDP, something which has led to improved living standards among families with labour migrants.

There is agreement among the scholars that migration and labour force migration in particular have led to a loss of those in reproductive and productive age in society, as the bulk of those who are leaving are young. Kureková (2014) found that the fertility rate in Slovakia is significantly below the replacement rate, and that the population is likely to decrease in upcoming years. In 2060, more than a million Slovak inhabitants will be aged 65 or over. According to the author, immigration remains low (1.9% of the population in 2017 were foreign born<sup>16</sup>), and it cannot be expected to sufficiently compensate for these negative demographic trends.

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<sup>16</sup> According to the Annual Statistical Overview published by the Bureau of Border and Alien Police foreigners (foreign born persons with a residence permit in Slovakia) for 2017, [http://www.minv.sk/swift\\_data/source/policia/hranicna\\_a\\_cudzinecka\\_policia/rocnky/rok\\_2017/2017-rocenka-UHCP-EN.pdf](http://www.minv.sk/swift_data/source/policia/hranicna_a_cudzinecka_policia/rocnky/rok_2017/2017-rocenka-UHCP-EN.pdf), accessed 01.06.2018



Migration has also led to brain drain, which might consequently have led to lower GDP growth and slower increase in the level of education among the population. Divinský (2010) has estimated that around 1/3 of all graduates from the university migrate abroad, which is significantly higher than in neighbouring countries. Haluš et al (2017) on the other hand argues that every tenth university student leaves for abroad, which he calculates corresponds to 44.8 million EUR of state investment into education. Regardless which of the estimates is more accurate, the costs are substantial.

*Overview of migration related data from Slovak Statistical Office*

### Population registry and Labour Force Survey

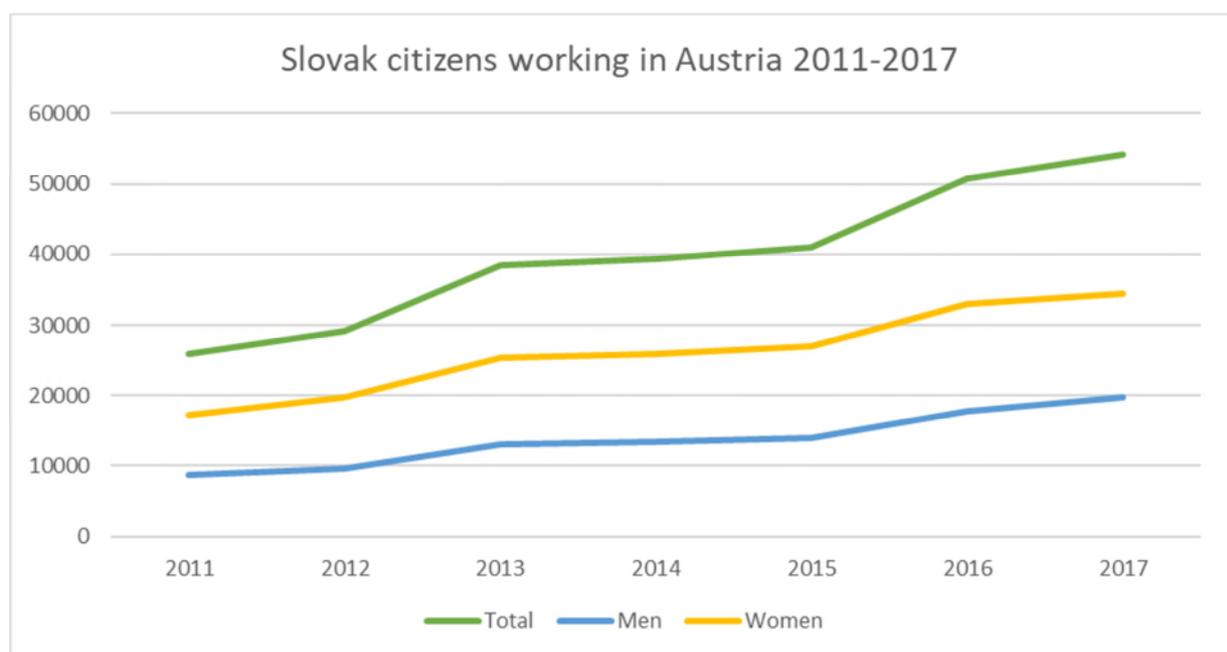
In Slovakia, migration related statistics are based on the concept of permanent residence. According to the Statistical Office of Slovakia, in 2016, 3,674 Slovak citizens moved out of Slovakia- (change of permanent residence from Slovakia), out of which 1,466 were men and 2,208 were women. 670 were 0-14 years old, 2,917 were between 15 and 64 years old and 87 were above 65 years. For 877 (men 314 and women 563) of those who moved away from Slovakia, the country of next residence was Austria. Austria was second popular destination with the Czech Republic being first with 1,223 of Slovak citizens who moved there. The data significantly underestimates the real scope of phenomenon as many citizens do not comply with their duty to report their movement if they plan to reside in another country of the EU for more than 90 days (Bleha et al. 2013, Baláž and Karasová 2016 etc.). In order to know how many citizens are living in another EU member state, there is a need to look into the statistics of the receiving countries.

The most used survey to estimate the number of labour migrants is the Labour Force Survey (LFS). The Labour Force Survey has been conducted by the Statistical Office of Slovakia since the beginning of 1993. The Labour Force Survey is done quarterly on a sample of 10,250 households. There is a considerable agreement among the scholars that using the LFS to measure migration is cumbersome and present several challenges. Baláž (2011) argues that the survey only covers short-term migration of less than one year and for those who are still considered members of households. The survey as such does not consider those who are abroad for one year or more or independent single or multiple family units. Bahna (2011)



argues while measuring migration with the LFS has several drawbacks, the LFS has a potential to cover commuters, especially those who are in the position of heads of households and their spouses. According to the 2017 survey, an estimated 149,167 Slovak citizens worked abroad. With regards to the labour migration of Slovak citizens to Austria, using the LFS, labour force migration has been on a steady rise since 2004. While in 2004 only 7% of all Slovak citizens working abroad went to Austria, in 2017 this was 36%. The chart below provides an overview of the number of women and men working in Austria since 2011, when the Austrian labour market was completely opened to Slovak citizens after the transition period.

Chart 2: Slovak citizens working in Austria 2011 - 2017



Source: Labour Force Survey 2017, own calculations

From the chart it can be seen that the number of Slovak citizens working in Austria since the removal of last barrier to labour mobility is rising. The number of Slovak citizens working in Austria almost doubled from 2011 to 2017. While in 2011, 25,975 of Slovak citizens worked in Austria, in 2017, the number was 54,200. In all years, women are significantly overrepresented among Slovak citizens working in Austria. During recent years, Austria has become the most popular destination for short term labour migration. In 2017, 36% of all



Slovak citizens working abroad worked in Austria followed by 25% (36,933) working in the Czech Republic and 16% (23,666) in Germany.

The LFS provides data on which economic sectors Slovak citizens worked in, their educational attainment and their age. Disaggregation for such a small subset into Slovaks working abroad and in Austria, is however not possible with the data sample size.

### Census-data

Since Slovakia's independence in 1993, two censuses were conducted in 2001 and 2011.<sup>17</sup> The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic is responsible for preparing and conducting censuses. Each census includes Slovak nationals and foreign nationals residing in Slovakia. Every respondent had to specify "her/his place of residence (permanent or usual) in Slovakia or abroad, her/his living abroad at least 1 year at any time in the past years, previous place of residence, date and reason for immigration to current permanent residence" (Bleha et al 2013,25).

According to data from the Census in 2011, 20,278 people had been commuting to Austria for the purpose of work. 70% (14,387) of commuters were female and 59% (8,549) of them were 40 – 60 years old. 38% (5,587) females were between 20 and 40 years old. 56% (3,313) of all male commuters (5,891) had not yet reached the age of 40 and 42% (2,475) were between 40 and 60 years old.

People from the whole territory of Slovakia commuted to Austria for work. For example, in 2011, 4,276 commuters came from Bratislava and the Trnava region which border with Austria and 3,514 came from the Prešov region which is located in the north-east of Slovakia. Commuters from the Košice (2,970) and Banská Bystrica (2,948) regions are similarly highly represented. The districts and regions with higher numbers of out-commuters and out-migration are characterized by higher levels of unemployment, a lower level of urbanization, less-developed transportation and service infrastructure, and low foreign investment (Baláž and Kusá 2012).

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<sup>17</sup> The census data is accessible at <https://slovak.statistics.sk/wps/portal>



Concerning economic activities (NACE Rev. 2), the major sector for incoming female commuters was health and social work activities with more than a third (5,914) of the female commuters. The second most common sector for women was manufacturing (1,092 female commuters), followed by wholesale and retail (1,023 female commuters). The three most popular economic activities for men were agriculture (796 male commuters), followed by manufacturing (716 male commuters) and accommodation and food services (618 male commuters).

### Cross-border residential mobility

Following Slovakia's entry into the Schengen area in 2007, a new phenomenon of cross-border commuting developed, where Slovak citizens moved to neighbouring communes in Austria and commuted to Bratislava for work. This cross-border suburbanization is mainly concentrated in the Austrian regions of Burgenland and Niederösterreich. The decision to move is facilitated by proximity to Bratislava, good infrastructural networks as well as better prices of real estate and access to subsidies for young families for the construction of private homes in Austria ("Wohnbauförderung"). Slovak citizens residing in Austria (e.g in Wolfsthal or Hainburg) commute to Bratislava on a daily basis using predominantly cars as their main transportation mean, but the use of public transportation is not uncommon (Michniak 2016).

### ***Migration and mobility from Hungary and Slovakia to Austria – Austrian studies and data***

Since the accession of Hungary and Slovakia to the EU, Austrian studies on migration and commuting from Hungary and Slovakia to Austria have focused mainly on several aspects:

- Estimates of expected migration on the Austrian labour market before and after accession and the end of the labour-market transition period in 2011 and 2013 respectively.
- Working and living conditions and social integration of commuters and migrants and
- Occupational mobility and job search strategies.

#### *Labour market studies*

The access of the former communist Eastern European countries to the European Union has triggered a broad variety of economic studies on the effects of EU enlargement on the Austrian labour market, most of them funded by the Austrian government. Most accession



studies did not focus on migration, but on the general economic effects of EU enlargement which were widely regarded as positive (Busch et al 1995, Breuss and Tesche 1997).

Migration was the focus of only a few dedicated studies and papers.

Already in 1998 the WIFO published an analysis forecasting some 25,000 daily commuters and a total of labour migrants and commuters of 50,000 for Slovakia and 100,000 for Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovenia (Walterskirchen 1998, 537). The foreseeable growth of the number of commuters from Slovakia was characterised as a "specific problem" (Walterskirchen 1998, 536) and one of the reasons to demand long transition periods before granting freedom of movement to citizens of the new EU Member States.

The analysis of cross-border labour relations between Western Hungary and the Burgenland by Arató et al (2002) showed both a strong absolute and relative increase of Hungarian workers and employees from 474 (36.9% of all foreign workers) in 1989 to 4,420 (56.02% of all foreign workers) in 2001 (Arató et al 2002, 6). According to the study, the 1997 commuters' agreement between Austria and Hungary which allowed a certain amount of cross-border employment permits in defined districts, had triggered a significant growth of cross-border commuting from 500 Hungarian commuters in 1998 to some 1,800 in 2001, the majority of them employed in agriculture (24%), tourism (23%), trade and professions (53%) (Arató et al 2002, 8, 80). According to the study, migration from Germany to Austria nevertheless was double the size than migration to Austria from the new Member States (ibid., 78).

As an overview of accession studies published between 1997 and 2003 shows, eleven studies published between 1997 and 2003 estimated the migration potential from the accession states to Austria at 21,000 to 40,000 persons annually (Prettner & Stieglbauer 2007, 60). Only four of them (Walterskirchen & Dietz 1998, Birner et al. 1999, Huber 2001, Huber & Brückner 2003) did not only estimate the general migration potential, but also differentiated between migration and cross-border commuting (Prettner & Stieglbauer 2007, 61). According to these studies, between 41,000 and 164,000 daily commuters from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia and Slovakia to Austria were to be expected in the first years after accession, between half and two thirds of them from Hungary and Slovakia (ibid., 62). A study of Brückner and Boeri (2000, 123) not mentioned in this overview also



estimated some 40,000 migrants to Austria in the first year after accession, which was to decline to 5,000 immigrants annually until 2022.

A second wave of studies was published after the end of the transition period. According to Berger et al. (2011), the favourable labour market conditions and the economic recovery were expected to attract between 20,000 and 25,000 workers from the eight new Member States in the years 2011 and 2012 (Berger et al 2011, 16). As labour market access for the low-skilled was restricted until 2011, the study anticipated that a high share of the additional inflows from 2011 onwards would be lower qualified workers. The increase of labour supply should have a small dampening effect on wages of lower skilled workers, but also a slightly positive impact on wages of high-skilled workers in the medium- and long-run, and a general positive economic impact (Berger et al 2011, 36 ff.).

In their analysis of labour migration from the new EU Member States since the end of the transition period in May 2011, Huber & Böhs (2012) reported a growth of some 38,000 employed foreigners between May 2011 and April 2012 (ibid., 851). Of the 75,000 foreign workers and employees, who were registered as belonging to the Austrian labour force for the first time between May 2011 and April 2012, some 37.5% kept their place of residence in their country of origin and were commuting daily, mainly to Vienna, the Burgenland and Styria. In the Burgenland, 90.6% of the newly registered foreign workers and employees were commuters or seasonal employees<sup>18</sup> (ibid., 851). Also, the growth of foreign employment was particularly prominent in the Burgenland, where it amounted to approx. 3% of the labour force (ibid., 861). Proximity of a given region to a border determined the structure of the influx, in particular workers from Hungary, Slovenia, Slovakia and the Czech Republic preferred working in regions in Austria close to their own area of residence.

According to the monitoring – study on labour migration from the new EU Member States to Austria Huber & Böhs (2012, 209) – labour migration peaked and reached a figure of some 25,000 persons annually in 2011, but then declined again. More than half of the labour migrants from the "new" EU countries worked in construction, tourism and services; and more than half in Eastern Austria, in particular the Burgenland, Lower Austria and

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<sup>18</sup> The available data do not allow differentiating between commuters and seasonal workers. While commuters per definition have no registered residence in Austria, seasonal workers in agriculture in most cases are also not registered with the authorities, although the legal regulations demand it (Expert-interview Labour Market Service Burgenland).



Vienna (ibid., 212). Some 40% of the new labour migrants kept their main residence in their country of origin and thus had to be considered as commuters.<sup>19</sup> The study also mentioned a high degree of fluctuation and temporary employment and de-qualification (ibid., 213).

According to Riesenfellner et al (2012), there was only a moderate increase of mobility from Eastern Europe to Austria since the end of the transition period, as most of mobility growth had already happened before. A sizeable part of growth of measured mobility was not based in actual growth of migrants or commuters, but on the de-facto legalisation of existing irregular employment or the transfer of (bogus) self-employment contracts to regular employment contracts. Self-employment contracts had already been allowed under pre-accession rules and were widely used as a means to bypass labour migration restrictions, but were not reflected in labour-market statistics (Riesenfellner et al. 2012, 17f.).

The study also highlighted that posting of workers from Eastern Europe had grown considerably, leading to a massive rise of labour exploitation, underpayment, fraudulent employment contracts and "social dumping" (e.g. part-time contracts with de-facto full time employment and cash payment of parts of the salary) (ibid., 17f.). A growing number of Austrian companies had set up sister-companies in Slovakia and Hungary, and would "post" Hungarian and Slovak workers who previously had been employed by the Austrian company in Austria and commuted to their place of work in order to save costs. Posting of workers thus often would de-facto reflect fulltime employment in Austria and would be used to undercut salaries (ibid., 21ff). In conclusion, the study suggested improvements of the Austrian anti-social-dumping legislation adapted in 2011, which in general would be an important instrument to tackle labour exploitation of posted workers (ibid., 103).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> According to interviewed experts, the percentage of commuters might be higher, as a relevant number also register a residence in Austria, which is a simple administrative act only needing the signature of a person already having a residence in Austria at a certain address, and there is allegedly a black market for fake registrations. Union citizens not registered in Austria have to report to the labour market services in their country of origin in the case of unemployment, thus a number of commuters prefer being registered in Austria in order to be able to report unemployment at the Austrian labour market service, as in this case unemployment benefits are higher due to the different ways of calculation, and they have to be offered jobs in Austria, which is a cumbersome procedure in the countries of origin. As both representatives of the Labour Market Service in Burgenland and Lower Austria stated, the unemployment rate (percentage share of unemployed of total number of workforce holding respective nationality) of Hungarians and Slovaks is significantly lower than the unemployment rate of Austrians.

<sup>20</sup> The legislation was amended again in 2016. According to the Chamber of Labour, the legal representation of employees and workers in Austria with mandatory membership for any person holding an employment contract, salary- and social-dumping through posting of workers would still be a main issue of labour-exploitation ([https://www.arbeiterkammer.at/interessenvertretung/arbeitsmarkt/Sicherheit\\_fuer\\_Lohn- und\\_Sozialstandards.html](https://www.arbeiterkammer.at/interessenvertretung/arbeitsmarkt/Sicherheit_fuer_Lohn- und_Sozialstandards.html))



*Working and living conditions and social integration of commuters and migrants*

Whereas the studies on labour migration flows mentioned focused on a data-based analysis of the effects of labour migration on the Austrian labour market and the quantitative development of migration and commuting, a few other studies also included a more in-depth analysis of working and living conditions of commuters and migrants (Lechner et al. 2010, Haindorfer 2013).

The study on Hungarian commuters to Austria (Lechner et al 2010) was conducted before the end of the transition period. It was based on intensive qualitative interviews with commuters from Hungary working in the three Austrian provinces Burgenland, Lower Austria and Styria in qualified professions holding a work permit. It highlighted higher incomes and better working conditions in Austria and a lack of professional perspective in Hungary as the main motives for commuting. Positions in Austria were found through personal contacts, with limited or no involvement of the Austrian labour market service. Commuting was seen as a possibility to improve working and income conditions while continuing family life in Hungary. In particular women mentioned stress due to long working times and overtime limiting the daily contact time with children and partners, and three of the ten interviewees had experienced discrimination in employment and underpayment. According to the study, there would be a need for better information of commuters on Austrian labour standards and payment conditions published in Hungarian, as understanding the available information brochures would require a high level of language competency in German.

Haindorfer's (2013) ethnographic study focused on social integration of commuters in their countries of origin, in particular with regard to attitudes to commuters by non-commuters and the effects of commuting on social relations. Based on the literature on social remittances and the role of returning migrants as change-agents (Levitt 1998, Kandel/Massey 2002), he challenged the view of a transformative impact of commuting on communities of origin and highlighted, that existing studies in Southern European countries had instead shown a growth of social tensions in the communities of origin (Haindorfer 2013, 114). Based on participant observation and qualitative interviews with 11 commuters and four non-commuters in the small Hungarian town of Köszeg, he concluded, that there



was a growth of social distance between the commuters and non-commuters based on different consumption options and a reduction of available time for common activities. Commuters started to perceive non-commuters as lazy, slow and having a low working-moral, while, according to the commuters, they were increasingly perceived as arrogant by their non-commuting former friends and their relatives. In effect, commuters tended to form a closed milieu and limit their social contacts to commuting peers (Haindorfer 2013, 125).

The study INTERREG-funded “Fairwork” currently implemented on behalf of the Austrian and the Hungarian Trade Union Federation is based on 318 face-to-face interviews with commuters from Hungary to Austria and aims at the implementation of a sustainable cooperation between the Austrian and Hungarian labour market authorities and institutions (ÖGB 2018, 1). Although not being representative for the commuters from Hungary to the Burgenland, the study nevertheless yielded some relevant results.

According to the interim results, 61% of the commuters interviewed commuted daily, 15% daily, but only on four days a week, and 16% daily between one and three days weekly, and 8% in other intervals. Daily commuting time is on average 90 minutes tour-retour. The vast majority of commuters work in the tourism (29%) and the service sector (31%), followed by construction (19%) and manufacturing (14%). A little more than one third of the commuters (37%) have finished vocational training, and 35% vocational secondary school education, and 21% hold an academic degree. According to the interviews, their earnings in Austria are between two and four times higher than in a comparable position in Hungary, and they enjoy a better working climate and working conditions than with Hungarian employers. 45% of the commuters already commuted up to five years, and 34% between six and ten years.

A staggering 71% of the interviews stated they would not want to work in Hungary again, and 72% stated they intended to commute their whole working life or would not know how long to commute. Despite the long history of commuting, the vast majority of the interviewees kept their social relations centered around their place of residence in Hungary, sent the children to school in Hungary and spent their spare time there. Asked about their perception of the future economic development in Hungary, they were very critical and did



not expect a harmonization of income and living conditions between Austria and Hungary in the near future (ÖGB 2018, 4ff).

### *Occupational mobility and job search – strategies*

The TRANSLAB- project yielded several publications on cross-border labour mobility in the “CENTROPE”- region<sup>21</sup> (border regions of Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia and Austria (Verwiebe et al 2015, Wiesböck et al 2016, Verwiebe 2016, Wiesböck & Verwiebe 2017). The project was based on face-to-face interviews with 1,347 commuters from the three “new” EU Member States to Austria, and 1,340 non-commuters living in these countries.

According to the study, the socio-demographic composition of commuters<sup>22</sup> differs considerably from the non-commuters. Cross-border commuters mainly held mid-level qualifications (ISCED 3 – 4: 77%), only 9% held low-level qualifications. Still, commuters held lower qualification than resident immigrants from the new EU–member states and Austrians did (Verwiebe et al 2015, 17). The majority of cross-border commuters worked in services (restaurant trade: 19%, health: 17%) and in construction (18%), a small group in agriculture and manufacturing. The majority of cross–border commuters (53%) worked in medium-sized companies.

Cross-border commuting in the region is characterised by a skewed gender distribution, 58% of the commuters were male, and only 42% female. Nearly half of the commutes (48%) were younger than 35, and only 14.5% older than 50 (Verwiebe et al 2015, 18f.). Roughly 25% of the commuters also realised a change of the occupational field (Wiesböck & Verwiebe 2017, 173). Despite the burden of commuting, cross-border commuters reported a higher life-satisfaction as the non-mobile control group (Wiesböck et al 2016, 196).

Depending on educational level and access to a social network of Austrians, commuting yielded different economic rewards. Cross-border commuters with Austrian friends

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<sup>21</sup> CENTROPE was an EU-funded regional programme supporting the development of an integrated cross-border region in Central Europe. The CENTROPE-Region covers the border regions between Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia. See <https://www.wien.gv.at/english/politics/international/eu/centrope.html>.

<sup>22</sup> “Commuters” were defined as those working at least 20 hours a week with a place of employment outside of the country of residence and a place of residence in the regions bordering Austria, who repeatedly and regularly (daily, weekly, monthly or seasonal) travelled to the place of work across an international border (Wiesböck & Verwiebe 2017, 169). The definition includes “posted workers”, who are employed at their place of residence, but have their workplace in another EU country.



reported higher wage rises than those without, and while cross-border commuting resulted in upward wage and social mobility for many with middle-level qualifications, mainly younger men, daily commuters and those working in construction and service experienced a wage-rise, but at the same time a downgrading of their occupational position (ibid., 176). Commuting thus has to be understood as a social practice which may lead to a re-combination of status and income (ibid., 175).

Job-search strategies of cross-border commuters with middle qualifications were mainly based on social networks, with little or no relevance of state agencies – *“the transnational labour market in the Central European Region is largely structured by social networks”* (Verwiebe et al 2015, 27). According to the study, commuting has to be seen as a distinct form of bordering practice, *“a form of transnational mobility that results neither in definitely leaving one’s region of origin nor in definitely integrating in a host society (...)a prototypic example of versatile postmodern life concept, as both mobile and multilocal”* (Wiesböck & Verwiebe 2017, 175).

A dedicated part of the study examined the attitudes of Austrian employers in the border regions vis-à-vis commuters from the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia (Wiesböck 2016). Interviewed employers showed a clear preference for the recruitment of cross-border commuters over the recruitment of Austrians. Employers perceived commuters as more eager to work and more committed and loyal to the employer than Austrians, in particular those unemployed workers sent by the labour market services, which they regarded as lazy and unmotivated. According to the employers, due to the good economic situation in the border regions, those Austrians wanting to work would already be in employment, while the unemployed would either have alcohol problems or shy away from work. On the other hand, there would be a high number of individual job requests from persons from the new EU Member States eager to find a job showing that workers from the East were to be preferred for recruitment (Wiesböck 2016, 397f). As even salaries in the low-wage sectors in Austria would compare favourably to income conditions in the countries of origin and commuting would de facto double or triple the income, employers would be able to base recruitment on the earning prospects in the country of origin and thus would also find workers for comparably low salaries (ibid., 401).



According to the study, the construction of an integrated European labour market had led to a growth of the imbalance of employers and workers in the border regions linking the “old” and “new” EU Member States. While employers could make use of a growing workforce ready to accept lower payments as compared to national workers, the local workforce on both sides of the borders was confronted with growing vulnerability to exploitation. Instead of integrating the region, persisting inequalities between commuters and locals might in future well damage social cohesion, thus the preservation of wages and labour-rights in cross-border regions should be understood as a major challenges for the future of European integration (ibid., 404).

#### *Commuting in the border region - data and figures*

There are two different data sources on cross-border commuting available:

1.) The population register gives information on the country of birth and the nationality of the resident population living in a certain municipality for more than three months. The “Hauptverband der Sozialversicherungsträger” holds a register of employment contracts containing information on the nationality of the contract-holder, but not necessarily of his/her country of birth. Changes of nationality due to naturalisation are not registered unless a new labour contract is issued which reflects such as a (nationality) change. Linking these two data sets thus could provide information on those holding a labour contract in Austria but not having a registered place of residence in the country. Only the authorities entitled by the Data Protection Act can perform this task. Unfortunately, no such analysis is available publicly.

#### 2.) The Labour Force Survey

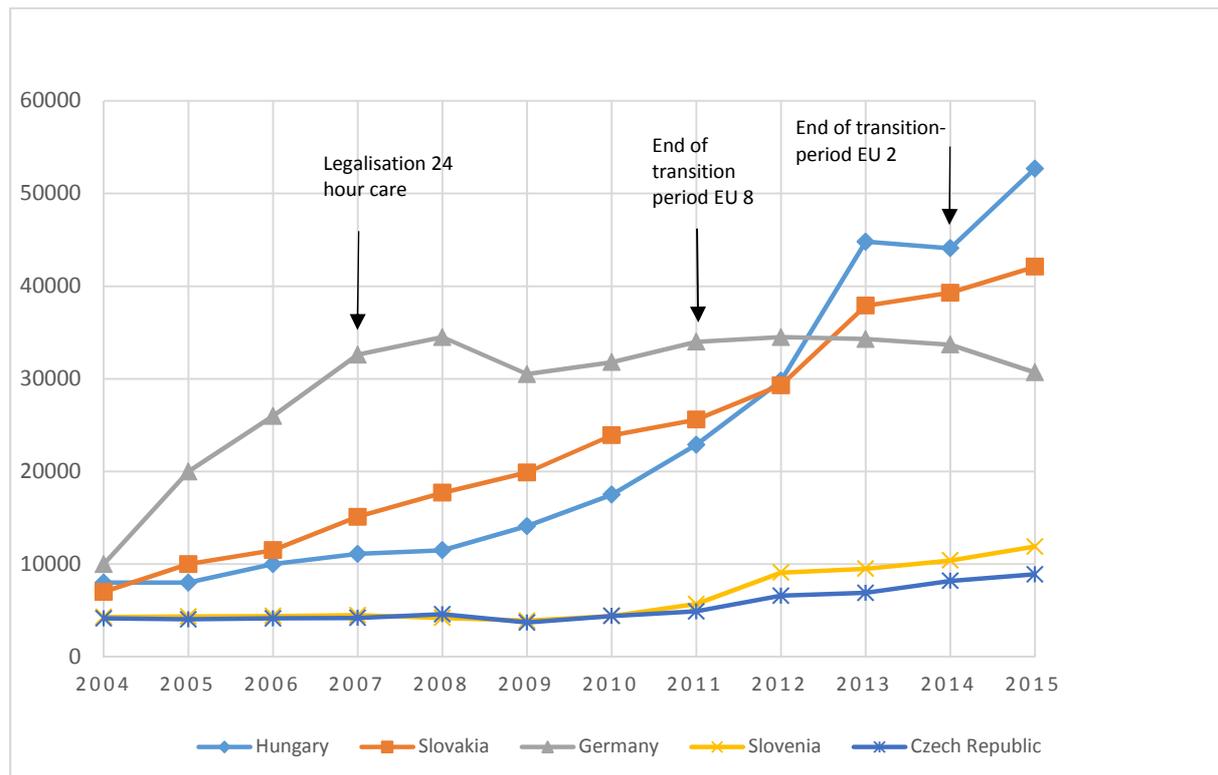
The EU Labour Force Survey (LFS) contains data on the place of residence and the place of work and thus can be used to analyse cross-border commuting. Cross-border commuters are defined as those with a work-place in another country as that of residence and there is no information on the frequency of commuting (Baumgartner et al 2017, 1f.)

In their analysis of the LFS 2015 (weighted annual data), Baumgartner et al (2017) highlight a significant growth of incoming cross-border workers to Austria from 76,200 in 2007 to 163,600 in 2015. Most of the in-coming workers (90.9%) commuted from neighbouring



countries. Hungary accounted for the main share of 32.2%, followed by Slovakia (25.7%), Germany (18.8%), Slovenia (7.3%) and the Czech Republic (5.4%) respectively (Baumgartner et al 2017, 3). The largest rise in numbers was recorded for Hungary, followed by Slovakia. The following graph gives an overview of the development of cross-border commuting to Austria between 2004 and 2015.

Chart 3: In-coming commuters to Austria 2004 – 2015 by country of origin



Source: Baumgartner et al (2017, 4).

As the graph shows, the number of Hungarian and Slovak commuters grew significantly after the legalisation of 24 hours care, and did not even decline during the peak of the financial crisis of 2007 – 2009. After the end of the transition period limiting access to the labour market for citizens of the eight countries acceding the EU in 2004, again a considerable rise in the number of commuters from Hungary and Slovakia could be registered, while the number of commuters from the Czech Republic and Slovenia only rose slightly.



According to the study, more than 50% of the incoming workers were younger than 40 years. The major branches of activity were health and health related activities (19.6%), the tourism and hospitality industry (18.7%), manufacturing (17.4%) and construction (14.9%), reflecting the specific niches in the labour market filled by commuters and the high relevance of 24 hours care. This is also reflected in the rise of the percentage of female commuters from 21.5% in 2004 to 40% in 2015, nearly half of them working in health-related fields (Baumgartner et al 2017, 5f.)

#### **4. The perception of mobility – expert views**

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##### ***Introduction***

The following chapter is based on interviews with experts and civil servants knowledgeable on the effects of mobility on the border regions on the Austrian-Hungarian and Austrian-Slovak border. The main aim of the chapter is to get an understanding of the perceptions of mobility and regional integration by a select number of experts in order to be able to highlight general developments, conflictual issues and perspectives for the future.

Interview-partners comprised representatives of local governments and administrations, trade unions and employer organisations, and academic experts. Austrian interview-partners were selected by Bernhard Perchinig, Hungarian interview-partners by Dániel Molnár and Veronika Hórvath, and Slovak interview-partners by Lenka Ťavodová based on their knowledge of the institutional structure of the region in the respective country. The interviews followed interview guidelines (see Annex) and were conducted in the mother tongue of the respondent.<sup>23</sup> The interviews were summarised in English, and relevant verbal quotes highlighted.

The computer software MAXQDA 12 was used for the analysis of the interview summaries. The interpretation of the interviews largely follows the issues addressed in the interview guidelines. As the commuting of care-workers for 24 hours care from Slovakia to Austria is

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<sup>23</sup> Interviews in Austria were conducted by Bernhard Perchinig, in Hungary by Dániel Molnár and Veronika Hórvath, and in Slovakia by Lenka Ťavodová. Interviews were summarised in English and relevant quotes highlighted.



discussed in a separate deliverable<sup>24</sup>, this issue, which was mentioned in most interviews of the Slovak interview partners, is not dealt with in this report.

Interview partners were asked to select the degree of anonymity with regard to verbal quotes. Most agreed on naming of the institution and their function, but some also asked for complete anonymity. In these cases, no institutional affiliation of the interviewee is mentioned in the report.

### ***General development of mobility in the border regions***

There was a common agreement between interviewees in Austria, Hungary and Slovakia that labour mobility, in particular cross-border commuting, had been on the rise in the last 10 – 15 years. Asked about concrete figures, all interview partners mentioned a massive lack on data on cross-border commuting and thus highlighted that they could only report perceptions based on their daily experience. According to the interview-partners, neither in Austria, nor in Hungary or Slovakia, a reliable data collection system on commuting exists, as freedom of movement regulations do not allow data to be collected beyond data on registration of residence and place of work. Even these data-sets are not accessible to the public and are not evaluated regularly. Experts agreed that data on the region of the place of residence and the place of work, or the frequency and distance of travel are missing completely in these datasets. The only data-set including some of these variables is the LFS, but sample size and regional distribution only allows rough estimates.

Mobility in the border regions developed, according to interview partners, after the demise of the “Iron Curtain”, as cooperation agreements between the EU, the then Czechoslovakia and Hungary had reduced barriers to freedom of service provision. While access to the labour market in Austria was blocked by migration regulations, pre-accession labour migration made use of already existing freedom of services using one-person companies as means to bypass labour market regulations, in particular in the construction sector. The lack of public control of the misuse of freedom of services in order to bypass labour law was one of their main areas of concern in the 1990s and early 2000s, representatives of the Chamber

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<sup>24</sup> See the report of Mădălina Rogoz and Martina Sekulová on “Impacts and particularities of care migration directed towards long-term care” (REMINDER deliverable 6.1), and their report on “Perceived impacts of care mobility on sending countries and institutional responses: healthcare, long-term care and education in Romania and Slovakia” (REMINDER deliverable 6.2).

of Labour said. In other areas – e.g. care or cleaning in private households – irregular employment prevailed. According to the Chamber of Labour, the de-facto opening of the labour market by the spread of bogus self-employment since the 1990s was the main reason why the increase of migration and commuting after the end of the transition period in 2011 was limited. Most of those interested in working in Austria already did so under bogus self-employment contracts which now were transformed into normal labour contracts.

According to several interview-partners, educational policies in Hungary and Slovakia strongly had influenced the interest in commuting to Austria. In both countries, German was the first (compulsory) foreign language taught at high schools until the end of the 1990s, so many of the generation 35+ acquired some knowledge of German at school, which eased finding a job in Austria. Furthermore, during communism the radio and TV-broadcast of the public Austrian Broadcasting Company ORF which could be received in the border regions was watched by many, as they were regarded as more trustworthy than the state-controlled broadcasting stations of their own country. Thus, German was in daily usage among many Slovaks and Hungarians living close to the border. Meanwhile, the situation has changed – English has replaced German as the first foreign language in schools in the early 2000s, and only few pupils now choose German as a second foreign language, and French and Spanish now dominate, interviewees said. As in all EU countries, a broad range of TV stations is offered in cable and satellite-TV, thus the relevance of the ORF as source of information has declined.

As a civil servant (Interview A 09) stated, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, both in the states of Burgenland, Lower Austria and the state of Vienna there was wide-spread political resistance towards the influx of Slovak and Hungarian workers. As EU-accession did not allow upholding border controls, the governments of these federal provinces delayed investments into traffic infrastructure. The highway between Vienna and Bratislava was only finalised in 2007, although, according to the interview-partner, it had been clear since 1989 that the existing street would not suffice. In the same vein, the Austrian Federal Railways only started in 2017 to modernise the railway line between Vienna and Bratislava, which now takes 60 minutes, and will link the two central stations in 40 minutes in 2023.



Technically, this modernisation could have started years ago, but there also was no political will to improve traffic infrastructure swiftly. While international migration is controlled by border and visa politics controls, traffic infrastructure is the main tool to govern regional mobility, as mentioned by the interviewee:

*“You can control international migration controlling borders, but you cannot restrict freedom of movement. What you can do is influencing travel time and convenience of travel. (...) Traffic infrastructure is the main means to foster or restrict mobility. All the EU-projects bringing together people on both sides of the borders are nice – but you have to look at investments into traffic infrastructure to see if mobility is really wanted, or if it is window-dressing.” (Civil servant, interview A 09)*

### **From unidirectional to bidirectional mobility?**

*The view of interview-partners from Slovakia*

According to most interview-partners, commuting is mainly driven by persisting high income differentials between Austria and Hungary and Slovakia respectively and high unemployment in particular in Eastern Hungary and Eastern Slovakia, but also by better working conditions, career perspectives and social protection in Austria. While commuting is unidirectional in the Austrian–Hungarian border region, interviewees painted a more diverse picture with regard to the Austrian-Slovak border. While the majority of interview-partners highlighted the persisting dominance of East-West migration, some also reported recent changes. The number of Austrians working in Slovakia is still very low compared to the number of Slovaks working in Austria, and most Austrians working in Slovakia work in Austrian companies. Nevertheless, there is also a growth of managers residing in Vienna who commute to their companies in Bratislava.

Migration and commuting was, according to our interviews, mainly unidirectional from East to West in the first ten years after accession. Except for a few Austrians working in management positions mainly in Bratislava in the IT sector, the financial industry and car manufacturing, there was virtually no migration or commuting from Austria to the new Member States. Meanwhile the situation started to change, as a representative of the Slovak regional administration stated:



*“These days, the mobility is however no only one-directional. There is also cross-border mobility of Austrian citizens commuting for work to Slovakia. They for instance work in management positions.” (Labour market expert, Slovakia, Interview SL 06)*

As many interview-partners highlighted, the situation in the Bratislava region is very different from the situation in other districts in Slovakia. Since accession to the EU, Bratislava has become a regional centre for the finance industry. IT services and the automotive industry. According to them, the Slovak government’s strategy to develop a regional automotive industry cluster with plants of Volkswagen, PSA and KIA near Bratislava has led to the growth of supply industries in the region employing some 70,000 people and raised the demand for trained labour, which already has reduced the readiness for commuting among the well qualified.

This view was echoed by some Austrian interview partners. According to experts from the Chamber of Commerce and the Labour Market Services, a slight decline of the growth in commuting from Slovakia to Austria could be seen in the last two or three years. Salaries in the automotive industry around Bratislava have risen considerably, and there is a high demand for trained labour there. Meanwhile, automotive industry companies in Slovakia have started trying to recruit managers and technicians in Austria. According to a representative of the Austrian Chamber of Commerce, the planned building of a large car manufacturing plant by Jaguar near Bratislava could in future lead to a further growth of salaries in this sector, then income levels and career possibilities might reach a dimension also attractive for Austrians. Nevertheless he does not expect massive flows – while most Slovaks working in Austria speak German well, only few Austrians are ready to learn the Slovak language, so the flows will most likely, he expects, stay limited to management and technical positions where English is the working language.

There was a common agreement that commuting from Slovakia to Austria is shaped by two different streams: On the one hand, daily commuters working in construction, manufacturing, trade and tourism; and on the other hand care-workers commuting in a two-weeks schedule engaged in 24 hours care in Austria. In the first group, the relation between males and females is approx. 2:1, the second group is more or less 100% female. Whereas higher unemployment in Slovakia and higher salaries and better development



perspectives in Austria are the main motivation for the first group, both the low payment and the devastating working conditions in the care-sector in Slovakia are a main trigger for care-migration to Austria:

*“If we take for instance the care-taking sector, the salaries in this sector are very low and the labour conditions are very hard. I received stories where two care takers were responsible for 70 clients in a care facility and earned around Euro 400.- to Euro 500.- per month despite having years of experience in this sector. Euro 400.- to 500.- per month is an average salary in this sector in Slovakia. I am not surprised that these women leave to Austria to work for one client for a much higher salary.” (Representative of Slovak Trade Union Confederation, Interview SL 1).*

Several Slovak interview-partners also highlighted the fact that a sizeable percentage of daily commuters also have been born and raised in the more Eastern province and moved to the region of Bratislava, from where they finally had started to commute to Austria or the Czech Republic. Most daily commuters to Austria commute to Vienna and the surrounding areas in Lower Austria and the Burgenland, which are easy to reach by public transport and car, and where demand for workers is high. Commuters to Vienna mainly use the train or bus, while commuters to lower Austria mainly commute with their own car.

*The view of interview partners from Hungary*

While there were some hints on a stabilisation of commuting from Slovakia to Austria, Hungarian experts on the other hand stressed the continuous growth of commuting from Hungary to Austria. This information was confirmed by Austrian interviewees. Daily commuting mainly targets Northern Burgenland, Vienna and the Styrian capital of Graz and its surroundings which is located some 80km off the Hungarian border. Due to the lack of public transport, most commuters use their private cars.

Hungarians mainly work in construction, manufacturing, and tourism, but also in the care sector and medicine, an interviewee observed: *“In Eastern Austria, there is no hospital where you do not find a Hungarian doctor, and out of five nurses you have a 100% chance that one of them speaks Hungarian.” (Hungarian Expert, Interview HU 2)*



Both Austrian and Hungarian experts agreed that in the region around Lake Neusiedl in the Northern Burgenland, where there have been massive investments into touristic infrastructure and facilities in the 1990s and 2000s funded by the EU regional funds, the hospitality industry would not have been able to survive without Hungarian workers. *“The Austrians are now in a need to hire everyone and they are happy to give them work”*, one Hungarian interviewee (Interview HU 2) stated. An expert from the Austrian State Labour Market Service in Burgenland echoed this impression. Hungarians react much faster than Austrians to offers of open positions posted on their webpage. The Labour Market Service Burgenland would not be able to fill vacancies in the tourism sector with applicants from Austria alone.

There was wide agreement among the interview-partners that the sizeable differences in salaries for comparable positions (between 1:2 to 1:3.5) and better working conditions in Austria are the main drivers for labour mobility from Hungary. For people living in the border region, commuting to Győr, the next larger city with a population of some 130,000, or to Budapest, entails a longer trip than commuting to the Burgenland or Vienna. Combined with the higher salaries in Austria and better working conditions – *“employment is less stressful over there”* (MP Jobbik Movement, Interview HU 3) many Hungarians prefer commuting to Austria to working in Hungary.

In this context, several Hungarian experts highlighted the development of combined daily and weekly commuting. Due to the persistent differences in the level of economic development, employment opportunities and unemployment within Hungary, a growing number of people have moved from Eastern and Central Hungary to Western Hungary close to the Austrian border in order to be able to commute to Austria on a daily base. Not only families and young couples move their place of residence from Eastern to Western Hungary. A growing number of – mostly male - workers combine weekly commuting between their place of residence in Eastern and Central Hungary to an interim place of residence – often a rented room shared with colleagues –, from where they commute daily to their place of work in Hungary (Interviews HU 4, HU 5, HU 7).



### *The view of interview partners from Austria*

Austrian interview partners largely confirmed the view of their Hungarian and Slovak peers. According to them commuting is mainly driven by unemployment and lower incomes in Hungary and Slovakia, and better employment opportunities and higher salaries in Austria. While the employment and income situation in the region around Bratislava has improved significantly in the last five to ten years, the differences remain high with regard to Eastern Slovakia and the whole of Hungary. Most commuters from Slovakia already have a longer commuting history. While the interest of younger and better-educated Slovaks in commuting to Austria is declining, there is still massive interest by Hungarians in commuting into positions requiring low or no qualifications. Asked about the potential effects of a reduction of family benefits paid to children of commuters in their country of origin as announced by the Austrian government, experts agreed, that it would not be likely to have an effect on commuting, except for care-workers working in 24/7 hours care in Austria which pays far less than any formal employment.

According to an Austrian expert, there is also a growing demand of trade personnel fluent in the Hungarian, Czech and Slovak language in the Austrian border regions. While construction, manufacturing, IT services and tourism have a long tradition in commuting, in the last ten, fifteen years demand for trade personnel speaking Eastern European languages in Austria has grown. This demand is the effect of the growth of shopping tourism from Eastern Europe to Austria, where prices of consumer goods often are lower than in the Eastern European countries. The construction of huge shopping centres close to the Hungarian and Slovak border since the 1990s has attracted a growing number of customers mainly from Eastern Europe. Many staff members in these centres are daily commuters from Hungary and Slovakia respectively.

### *Summary*

According to all interview-partners, labour-related mobility in the border regions is predominantly unidirectional from Hungary and respectively Slovakia to Austria. While there is a limited and slightly growing labour-mobility of experts and managers from Austria to Bratislava, no signs of labour mobility from Austria to Hungary were reported. Experts agreed, that the specific situation at the Austrian-Slovak border as compared to the



Austrian-Hungarian border could explain this difference. While the Austrian-Slovak border region hosts two large cities (Vienna and Bratislava) within a distance of some 60km, and a highly successful automotive industry producing one million cars a year near Bratislava, the border region between Austria and Hungary is largely an agrarian region. There are only some medium sized and smaller cities, which did not develop into centres of regional economic growth like Bratislava.

Commuting is seen as mainly driven by economic factors – differences in employment opportunities, unemployment rates and income levels, and to a lesser extent by different qualities of employment on both sides of the borders. Due to the persistently high income differences between Austria and Hungary, a growing number of Hungarians living in Eastern Hungary would engage in combined commuting linking weekly commuting from East Hungary to the Austrian-Hungarian border with daily commuting to Austria.

### ***Cross-border residential mobility and cross-border suburbanisation***

While cross-border commuting is regarded to still be the dominant element of cross-border mobility by most experts, several interview-partners also highlighted the growing relevance of cross-border residential mobility in the context of cross-border suburbanisation of Bratislava. This development is rooted in the specific geographic location of Bratislava, which borders with both, Hungary and Austria - with the border to Austria situated five kilometres west of the City centre, and the border to Hungary situated twenty kilometres south of the City Centre. While until 1989 the “Iron Curtain” prevented suburbanisation to the West, suburbanisation has spread to Austria and Hungary since the accession of Slovakia to the European Union, and the abolition of border controls. In the early 2000s the Austrian villages close to the border, like e.g. Berg, Kittsee and Wolfsthal, which are situated only a few kilometres from the centre of Bratislava, have attracted a growing number of young Slovak families wanting to live in the countryside near Bratislava. Meanwhile, Slovak families have bought or constructed houses in virtually all Austrian municipalities in a radius of some 50km from Bratislava, but exact data on the number of commuters to Bratislava is missing. According to an expert of the State Government of Lower Austria, approximately a third of the Slovak citizens residing in Lower Austria are estimated to commute daily to Bratislava, or have at least one family member commuting back to his country of origin. But there also is



a growing number of people finding work in Austria and quitting cross—border commuting.

According to the interview-partners, economic motives are the key for this development: Building sites in the Austrian villages close to the border are on offer on average at half the price of building sites close to Bratislava in the North and West. Young families also have access to generous house building subsidies in Lower Austria and the Burgenland.<sup>25</sup> Being familiar with the Slovak language and construction prices, Slovak families are often able to conclude contracts with Slovak construction companies for prices well below those of Austrian competitors. Slovak middle-class families working in Bratislava are thus able to make use of “the best of both worlds” and to build private homes they would not be able to fund in Slovakia.

Both the state governments of the Burgenland and Lower Austria and the villages and municipalities close to the state border, which have suffered a continuous decline of population during the cold war, when they were adjoining the “Iron Curtain”, welcome this development. As the funding of municipalities depends on the number of inhabitants, mayors try to attract young families.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, according to interviewees, the municipalities reach out actively trying to attract new residents from across the border, e.g. through development of building sites and support for accessing construction subsidies. The municipality of Kittsee even has installed a bilingual German-Slovak kindergarten and developed bilingual school projects subsidised by the EU regional funds and implemented together with partners from Slovakia.

*“There is an observable shift from the cross-border commuting of Slovak citizens to Vienna and other bigger cities for the purpose of work, to more residential mobility. In the process of sub-urbanization of Bratislava, a significant number of Slovak inhabitants moved to Austrian border regions. Some facilitating factors of this process relate to geographical proximity,*

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<sup>25</sup> The construction of family homes is subsidised in all federal provinces in Austria. In the Burgenland and Lower Austria, the subsidy can amount to up to Euro 40.000.- for the family and an extra Euro 11.000.- per child under 16 years of age (<https://www.burgenland.at/wohnen-energie/wohnen/wohnbauforderung/foerderung/>; [http://www.noe.gv.at/noe/Wohnen-Leben/NOE\\_Wohnungsfoerderungsrichtlinien\\_Aktuell.pdf](http://www.noe.gv.at/noe/Wohnen-Leben/NOE_Wohnungsfoerderungsrichtlinien_Aktuell.pdf))

<sup>26</sup> The funding of municipalities in Austria is based on a complex tax sharing mechanism (“Finanzausgleich”), which is based on the number of inhabitants having their main place of residence registered in the municipality. Depending on the size of the municipality, the municipal budget receives between Euro 603.- and Euro 1,354.- per registered inhabitant annually. Thus municipalities are highly interested to increase the number of inhabitants not only because of the associated growth of spending in the municipality, but also because of direct effects on their budget. See <https://www.bmf.gv.at/budget/finanzbeziehungen-zu-laendern-und-gemeinden/unterlagen-zum-finanzausgleich.html>



*developed infrastructure as well as good prices of real estate in Austria. The local authorities in Austria also helped to facilitate these processes, e.g. by offering plot of land permissions for building homes (...).” (Researcher, Interview SL 13)*

While most interview partners highlighted the economic drivers of cross-border commuting and cross-border residential mobility, a few pointed to a growth of interaction and regional integration due to growing mobility, both with regard to labour and consumer migration. Also several cooperation projects between the Austrian and the Slovak administrations are trying to improve regional cooperation, e.g. by the development of shared hospital facilities or cooperation of emergency services.

*“One of the advantages of the cross-border mobility is interaction and integration of communities. The inhabitants become more culturally aware and open to new cultures. I believe that this interconnection between the border regions also leads to economic and social development of the whole border region. We also see it as another opportunity for our citizens to find work.” (Representative of regional administration, SL 6)*

There were no reports on cross-border mobility in other regions than the surroundings of Bratislava, highlighting that this phenomenon directly links to suburbanisation processes and different property prices allowing the inhabitants to make use of the potential gains on both sides of the borders.

Some Hungarian interview-partners however reported a slight growth of retirement migration of Austrians to Hungarian border towns. As many services are cheaper in Hungary than in Austria, cross-border consumer travels have become common. In the small town of Szentgotthárd it could be observed that *“in the daytime there are more Austrians than Hungarians in the city”*, as certain services (hospitality, dental care, beauty services) were cheaper in Hungary. In addition, recently, due to lower real estate prices, many Austrian pensioners have moved to Hungary, typically to small villages, where *“they can safely spend their retirement years, while obviously they are visiting home”*. Also Hungarians not just cross the Austro-Hungarian border because of work and schooling. *“Many people are going to shop in Austria because otherwise it can be said that the basic food is not far more expensive, moreover there are things that are cheaper over there than in Hungary while*



*their quality is better". Thus "a continuous and living relationship between the Austrians and the Hungarians had developed, and as a consequence, the relationship is closer and deeper than before". However, there is a kind of divide between workers in Austria and those in Hungary, due mostly to differences in wages and purchasing power (Regional expert, Interview HU 03).*

### ***Effects of mobility: The labour market***

*The view of interview partners from Slovakia*

The effects of mobility on the labour market in the border regions were judged differently by Slovak and Hungarian experts on the one and Austrian experts on the other side.

Most Slovak experts highlighted that migration and commuting had a strong attenuating effect on unemployment rates in Slovakia and were a trigger for the growth in internal migration and commuting in Slovakia, as commuters from the Bratislava region to Austria had to be replaced:

*"I would say that some of the labour force working in Austria created vacant job positions in the Bratislava labour market that need to be replaced. This in turn led to internal migration for work from other regions of Slovakia. I would say that there are two gradients, one Bratislava - Vienna and one "other regions of Slovakia"- Bratislava" (EURES Employee, Interview HU 11).*

According to another expert, the commuting of highly qualified people from Bratislava and its surroundings also contributed to the creation of pressure on local labour markets to increase salaries and improve labour conditions. Finding qualified people has become increasingly difficult, as they are able to leave for work to Austria. Currently, unemployment rates in Slovakia are at a historical minimum, and it is challenging to find suitable employees. Thus Slovakia has to open its borders for the employment of third country nationals:

*"The commuting to Austria contributed to the decrease of unemployment rates in Slovakia, however these days we are observing a lack of labour force in certain sectors. In Slovakia there is a big demand for qualified labour, for instance in the automobile industry, and*



*Slovakia need to find measures to remediate this and open the labour market for third country nationals.”*

*(EURES Employee, Interview SL 11)*

The situation is different with regard to care migration. Care workers do not originate from the Bratislava region, but from regions with significantly higher unemployment. As there was no sufficient support for the unemployed, many women were forced to move to Austria to work in the care sector (Researcher, Interview SL 02). According to another respondent, the commuting of nurses and care takers meanwhile had a significant negative impact on the health sector in Slovakia, as Slovakia has one of the fastest ageing populations in Europe.

*“Migration has an impact on our city. It has led to brain drain of care workers from Slovakia. We feel this drain in our care facilities for elderly. At the moment we are not able to compete with the salary levels in Austria nor their labour conditions. (...) There is a law stipulating how many care workers should work in each facility, but I can tell you that not even one facility has enough care workers to obey the law, so serious is the situation. (...) When I meet with the care facilities directors from the rest of Slovakia the situation is the same if not worse.” (Representative from administration, Interview SL 8)*

Brain drain is not limited to care, another expert mentioned, although the care and health sector are the most prominent areas with a significant lack of qualified labour, and a high proportion of staff approaching retirement age. On the regional level, the regional government also designs strategies to e.g. adjust higher secondary education to the needs of labour markets, offer vocational educations, raise the profile of higher secondary education and produce qualified labour force in lacking sectors. In this way, regional mobility also contributes to a reform of labour market and social policy governance (Representative from Regional Administration, Interview SL 09).

Further to commuting, recent years have also witnessed a growth of companies set up by Slovak owners in Austria, and vice versa. These companies often offer their services across the border using the posting-of-workers mechanism, a representative of the Austrian-Slovak Chamber of Commerce mentioned. According to the view of the Chamber of Commerce, the



potential for mobility is currently slowed down by administrative regulations regulating the posting of workers laid down in the Austrian anti-social-dumping legislation (Representative of Slovak-Austrian Chamber of Commerce, Interview SL 10).

*The view of interview-partners from Hungary*

Most experts interviewed in Hungary agreed that outmigration and commuting from Western Hungary to Austria has significantly contributed to attenuating unemployment in Hungary. There has been little new job creation in the cross-border region and the redundancies are still current, but nevertheless unemployment rates are declining, which is only based on the growth of commuting. Meanwhile companies in West Hungary do not find trained workers anymore, and thus resort to employing untrained personnel, or try to recruit from other companies: *“Human resources on the western edge of the region (...) are exhausted”*. When the Opel plant in Szentgotthárd announced job cuts, *“the HR staff of Szombathely companies and their bounty hunters have already taken people out of the gate to become their employees”*. Lack of workers is also negatively affecting the availability of craftsmen for private households, an interview partner said: *“If I want to call an electrician, then if I'm lucky, he'll come out in a month. But I'm either lucky or not. The mason came out to me last time saying »Good, I come to you on a friendly basis because there is a good relationship but please do not advertise that I'm coming and working and because I just cannot do more work«.”* (Director, research institution, Interview HU 04)

According to another expert, cross-border commuting hinders the development of companies in Western Hungary. Richer European regions absorb the Hungarian workforce ready to do physical work. Despite an increase of internal labour mobility in Hungary, many companies meanwhile are not be able to fill their open positions.

*“The Province of Burgenland does not belong to the richest provinces in Austria, yet its proximity to the western parts of Hungary itself is such an exhausting effect that it does not just hinder but also prevents the development of Western-Hungarian enterprises.”* (Associate Professor, University of Pécs, Interview HU 06)

According to an expert from Vas County, a region bordering Austria, a growing part of those between 25–40 living in the region are involved in commuting to Austria. Most of them are



in the hospitality and service sector, but many are also engaged in seasonal work in agriculture. The lack of labour force and commuting meanwhile have affected local wages, as local companies compete with those at the Austrian side of the border, leading also to a wage rise on the Hungarian side. This has led many people from the eastern counties of Hungary, and even from Ukraine and Romania to come to the western regions of Hungary, partly for work e, partly for commuting to Austria. Many local workers profit from this trend, as they have bought empty houses cheaply and rebuilt them as “workers' lodgings” rented out to internal commuters and commuters to Austria (Interview HU 01).

Several Hungarian interview-partners highlighted a high level of employment below qualification level among Hungarian commuters in Austria. Many graduates commute to Austria and work in professions or areas in the hospitality–sector below their skill–level. As a result there is a risk of growing brain drain to Austria and, to a growing degree, to the United Kingdom and other English speaking countries, as the younger generation is more fluent in English than in German.

In particular, among recent graduates, the proportion of those who leave their field, along with moving abroad, is also high. *"It is even a greater loss for us to think of generations of experienced people, aged between 25-50 with competences and social capital who do not utilize their skills at home. They do not pay social security contributions and taxes at home, which generates additional deficits and bottlenecks."* (Interview HU 1)

#### *The view of interview-partners from Austria*

Austrian interview-partners mainly highlighted the strong demand of Slovak and Hungarian workers by Austrian companies in the border regions and Vienna. While the health sector, care, trade and tourism were mentioned most often, several interview partners also highlighted the demand for workers in construction, manufacturing and seasonal work in agriculture. Here a distinct difference between interview-partners in Lower Austria and the Burgenland could be noticed. While interview-partners in Lower Austria highlighted the demand for workers in construction, manufacturing and trade and pointed to the fact, that in particular in trade the knowledge of the Slovak language was an asset for getting a job in one of the shopping centres and in trade companies, interview partners from Burgenland underlined the relevance of commuters for tourism. *"Tourism around Lake Neusiedl would*



*not have been able to grow without Hungarian and Slovak employees”,* a representative of the Chamber of Commerce of the Burgenland mentioned (Interview A 04). According to him, there was a long tradition of commuting of workers from Burgenland to Vienna, as salaries in Vienna are higher. Cross-border commuters from Hungary replace these regional commuters.

Representatives of the Chamber of Labour of Burgenland and of Lower Austria presented a more critical view of cross-border mobility.<sup>27</sup> According to them, the massive differences of salary levels on both sides of the border have led to a growing downward pressure on the salary levels in Burgenland in tourism and construction, and a high number of cases of exploitation of Hungarian and Slovak workers.

According to the interview-partners, many companies try to bypass minimum wage regulations set by collective agreements. Other than in other provinces, there is nearly no overpayment of the collective agreement and workers often are employed below their level of education and training. As in Hungary no apprenticeship training system comparable to the Austrian system exists, trained personnel are often employed at the salary level of untrained personnel.<sup>28</sup> In other cases employment contracts are part-time, although in practice people are working full time and are being paid the difference in cash without a receipt. Overtime work is not paid or paid without the legally required surcharge, and there are forged self-employment contracts. There are also a number of cases where Hungarian workers have been told that only Austrians are entitled to the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> salary.<sup>29</sup> The salience of the issue is also reflected in the high number of Hungarian citizens presented by the Chamber of Labour of the Burgenland in cases of conflict.

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<sup>27</sup> The Chamber of Labour is the official representation of workers and employees with compulsory membership for any person holding an employment contract in Austria. It is entitled to negotiate the collective agreements on wages and working conditions for workers and employees in all sectors except the civil service. As a partner to the corporatist labour market policy regime in Austria, the “social partnership”, it also contributes to labour market and social policy making. The Chamber of Labour is entitled to represent workers and employees before the courts regarding all issues linked to employment, wages and working conditions, and its members are entitled to support and representation. There is a regional Chamber of Labour in any of the nine federal provinces in Austria (see Tálos 2008).

<sup>28</sup> The collective agreements set minimum levels of payment for the different qualification groups for each economic sector. There are some 200 regulated vocations in Austria which are trained in a company and in school in a dual system of apprenticeship training. Persons having passed the final apprenticeship examination (“Lehrabschluss”) are granted higher salaries in the collective agreements than those without, and those passing a further exam of a trained foreman are earning even more. Several collective agreements also define higher payments each second, third, fourth or fifth year in employment.

<sup>29</sup> Nearly all collective agreements in Austria grant the right to the payment of a 13th and 14th salary, the “vacation payment” (“Urlaubsgeld”) and the “Christmas payment” (“Weihnachtsgeld”).



*"We have some 20% Hungarian workers and employees in the workforce of the Burgenland, both resident migrants and commuters. But when I look at the cases where we represent our members in cases of underpayment, fraudulent employment, or other breaches of labour regulations, either in direct negotiations with the employer or before the labour courts, 60% of them are Hungarian citizens. And we all know, that in a large number of cases of exploitation people do not come to us, because they do not know about their rights or simply leave Austria again. Exploitation of workers from Hungary is a very serious issue here."*  
(Representative, Chamber of Labour Burgenland, interview A 08)

In reaction to this misuse of freedom of movement regulations, the Chamber of Labour of Burgenland thus has started to reach out to Hungarian workers via a journal in Hungarian offering information on collective agreements, minimum payment regulations, regulations on working conditions etc., and consultations in Hungarian in all offices in the Burgenland. These options, according to interviews, are also promoted by Trade Union organisations in Hungary, and there are information clips sent by Hungarian radio stations. These outreach activities should be strengthened in future.

Several interview partners from Hungary also reported pertinent discrimination of Hungarian workers in the Austrian labour market. Others stated that they did not perceive discrimination, but that a lack of knowledge of German most likely leads to employment requiring low levels of qualification and/or skill in Austria. According to one interview-partner, exploitation does not only affect Hungarian workers employed with Austrian companies, but also those posted to Austria by Hungarian employers.

*"It is not just that the Austrians, the Germans, or the British are taking advantage of foreign labour, but we often find that companies with Hungarian headquarters, but working abroad, take greater advantage of the Hungarian workers who are on the job. For example, they do not want to pay them the minimum wage of the given foreign country, claiming that they are in posting."* (Researcher, Interview HU 06)

Further to issues regarding exploitation of workers, the representatives of the Chamber of Labour of the Burgenland also voiced criticism on the existing freedom of movement regulations. According to them, the Chamber of Labour is in favour of the abolishment of



unrestricted freedom of movement and supports the re-introduction of a system regulating employment of Union citizens by a quota like the system used during the transition period.<sup>30</sup> As income levels on both sides of the border have stayed stable or even increased since the accession of Hungary to the European Union, unrestricted freedom of movement has led to unfair competition, strong wage pressure, exploitation and brain-drain of well-educated people from the new Member States to Austria, Germany and the UK. The existing regulations of posting of workers contributes to this situation, according to interview-partners, as the maximum time for posting is far too long, and the regulations allow lower social security deductions from posted workers as compared to Austrian workers and are thus an invitation to exploitation. The existing anti-social-dumping legislation does not suffice to grant equal payment of all workers and employees working in Austria.

While the representatives of the Chamber of Labour in Lower Austria did not demand a revision of freedom of movement regulations like his counterpart from the Burgenland, he also highlighted the problem of posting of workers as a case of unfair employment practice and wage dumping. According to him, there are a high number of companies in Slovakia, some even belonging to Austrian owners, which offer their services in Austria at cheaper prices than Austrian companies, because they make use of the more profitable regulations for posted workers. In many cases, these workers have previously been employed as commuters in Austria, or have lived in Austria, and have never worked in Slovakia, but only in Austrian companies or at building sites in Austria. The existing regulations limiting posting of workers has hardly been implemented due to a lack of cross-border cooperation of the relevant authorities, and there has been a lack of control of the misuse of posting of workers. The Chamber of Labour is thus demanding equal payment with equal social security and tax deductions from day one of the posting, and a limitation of posting for a maximum of three months in a year to prevent fraudulent usage of the regulation.

This criticism was echoed by a representative of the Chamber of Commerce of Lower Austria, who criticised unfair competition by Slovak and Hungarian companies who are able to make use of the posting of workers regulations.

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<sup>30</sup> The governor of the State of the Burgenland, Hans Niessl from the Austrian Social-Democratic Party has demanded to restrict freedom of movement for Union Citizens for sectors with high unemployment in an interview with the Austrian Broadcasting Company (ORF) on July 8, 2018. He also argued that income differences have stayed stable and thus freedom of movement was introduced under wrong assumptions. (Der Standard, 8.7.2018, ORF ON 15.07.2018).



### *Summary*

While Slovak and Hungarian interview-partners highlighted the attenuating effects of cross-border commuting on unemployment and hinted to the negative effects of brain-drain due to commuting, Hungarian interview-partners even linked a draining of the labour market and a negative effect on economic growth in the region to commuting. Austrian interview-partners, on the other hand, stressed the need for workers from Hungary and Slovakia for the regional economy, but also pointed to their increased vulnerability and the risks of de-qualification and exploitation. In this respect, the regulations on posting of workers were seen very critically, as they ease exploitation and foster wage-dumping in the context of commuting.

### ***Effects of mobility: The education sector***

According to the interview partners, cooperation in the field of education and research was established during the pre-accession period. Supported by a number of EU-funded projects linking schools and educational establishments across the borders, cooperation increased after accession and led to a regular exchange of teachers, joint activities of schools on both sides of the border, and cooperation of schools in educational projects.

Further to this wide-spread institutional cooperation, which meanwhile is a well-established and successful practice in a large number of schools, according to interview partners, educational mobility has also risen considerably. Like labour mobility, educational mobility is unidirectional and geared towards educational facilities in Austria. In this respect, two different forms of educational mobility were highlighted: Increased student mobility to Austrian post-secondary and tertiary education facilities; and educational mobility of children of compulsory school age in Austrian villages close to the Austrian-Hungarian border. While the first does not entail significant problems, the latter highlights the lack of freedom of movement in education.

### *Mobility in post-secondary and tertiary education*

Both Austrian and Slovak interview-partners highlighted a steady rise of students commuting from Bratislava and the surrounding regions to Austrian universities, in particular to Vienna. This development is comparable to the growth of student commuters



to the Czech Republic, but while the Czech and the Slovak language hardly differ, only those who select German as a foreign language in school are able to study in Austria.

As highlighted by our interview partners, further to student mobility, there is a growth of interest in post-secondary education at Austrian professional colleges combining professional education with the high-school leaving exam allowing access to university studies.<sup>31</sup> As a large number of these schools situated in towns in Lower Austria also offer a boarding home, these pupils commute weekly between their place of residence in the new Member States bordering Austria and the school during the school year. There is also a growing interest of apprenticeship - training in Austria, as this type of dual vocational education and training has a very positive image in the new Member States. Also in these cases, knowledge of German is the main obstacle. The declining interest of pupils in learning German in recent years somehow mitigates this trend.

#### *Mobility in primary education*

A specific aspect of educational mobility mentioned by both Austrian and Hungarian interview-partners: Schooling of Hungarian primary and secondary school children of compulsory school age in Austrian schools. This issue highlights the lack of freedom of movement in the field of compulsory education and the challenge of organising work-life balance in cross-border commuting, and is based on an - unintended - interaction of demographic developments in rural areas of the Burgenland, Austrian legislation on minority protection, and freedom of movement.

According to an Austrian expert from the Burgenland school-board (Interview A 01), primary schools in the villages close to the Austrian-Hungarian border have faced a decline of pupils due to demographic changes since the 1980s and 1990s. Due to reforms of the educational system in Austria which impose a stricter minimum number of children per class and per school, many of these small schools were threatened with closure in the early 2000s.

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<sup>31</sup> The so-called "Höhere Bundeslehranstalten" are post-secondary schools combining professional training in technical, commercial or social professions with the high school-leaving exam "Matura" granting access to studies at a university. Students need to have finalised 8 years of compulsory schooling to be able access them. The curriculum usually lasts for five years.



The Burgenland is one of the Austrian states where one of the six so called “autochthonous minorities” in Austria, the Hungarians of the Burgenland, are residing.<sup>32</sup> Access to bilingual compulsory schooling in German and Hungarian is a right granted to them by the Minority Education Act of the Burgenland.<sup>33</sup> According to the Act, any person belonging to the Hungarian minority has the right to education in Hungarian at any compulsory school in Burgenland. As there is no definition of who is a member of the minority, any Austrian citizen claiming to belong to a minority can make use of this right. In 1998, a decision of the European Court of Justice has extended the right to use provisions related to minority language protection implemented in one EU Member State to all Union Citizens on the territory of the respective Member State, independent of their nationality.<sup>34</sup>

If requested, all primary and secondary schools in Burgenland have to offer education in Hungarian, and all may declare themselves bilingual schools, offering either education in Hungarian as a foreign language, or making use of both German and Hungarian as a language of education. Bilingual schools are largely exempt from the stricter regulations on the minimum number of pupils per class and per school, and receive better funding than “normal” schools.

In order to keep the village schools threatened by closure, a number of mayors of villages along the Austrian-Hungarian border declared their schools as bilingual schools in the early 2000s. With the accession of Hungary to the EU in 2004 and the abolition of border controls, mayors of these villages started to inform the adjacent regions in Hungary about the bilingual German-Hungarian schools in Austria in order to attract Hungarian pupils. A growing number of Hungarians commuting to Austria, but also families living close to the border in Hungary, started sending their children to these schools. Further to the attractiveness of schools teaching German and Hungarian for Hungarian commuters, this move was also motivated both by the fact, that they more easily could manage work and family, as they could bring their children to school in the morning on their commute, and collect them on their way home.

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<sup>32</sup> On Austrian minority policy see Baumgartner and Perchinig (2005).

<sup>33</sup> Bundesgesetz über besondere Bestimmungen betreffend des Minderheitenschulwesens im Burgenland (Minderheiten-Schulgesetz für das Burgenland), BGBl. Nr. 641/1994

<sup>34</sup> ECJ Decision C-274/96 Pretura circondariale di Bolzano, sezione distaccata di Silandro – Italien against Horst Otto Bickl and Ulrich Franz.



According to the expert, the negative image of the Hungarian school-system among Hungarian families interested in educational achievement of their children motivate them to enrol their children in Austrian schools, even if they do not offer Hungarian. Many of the Hungarian parents the interviewed expert was talking with told her they intended to send their children to a "Gymnasium" in Austria with the aim of allowing them to access an Austrian or German university later. Thus the parents are keenly interested, that their children not only learn Hungarian, but also German, which, according to their view, was not to be expected in a Hungarian school.

Austrian legislation allows enrolment into compulsory primary and secondary school only for children holding a registration as a main place of residence in the municipality of the school.<sup>35</sup> In order to save their schools, several mayors cooperated with the families of the pupils and signed forged registrations at places like firefighter-garages or at the community office. According to the interview-partner, the media detected this practice and accused the mayors of abuse of office in in the early 2010s. Reacting to the media reports and the conviction of several mayors, the federal school authorities meanwhile stopped this practice. All children already enrolled into school were granted the right to finish their compulsory schooling in Austria by means of special authorisation. According to the interviewed expert, for some families with commuting parents, the decision of the school authorities to end the possibility to enrol their child in Austrian schools without a place of residence in Austria triggered their move to Austria and the purchase of a property in Burgenland.

As the interview-partner mentioned, the Burgenland school authority still is regularly contacted by Hungarian families wishing to enrol their children in schools in Burgenland, but authorities can only advise them to move to the Burgenland in order to be able to do so, as under-aged persons are not allowed to be registered without their custodians. There is also a growing number of Hungarian pupils in post-secondary education who are commuting daily to Hungary. As there are no comparable regulations for post-compulsory education, there are no problems in this respect.

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<sup>35</sup> This regulation is not applicable for post-compulsory school attendance.



According to the interview-partner, the lack of freedom of movement in the field of compulsory education is a major obstacle to the mobility of Union citizens living close to the border. While everyone cherishes increased cross-border mobility, there is no freedom of movement in the education of children who are of compulsory school age, as long as the Member States insist on teaching “their” children in “their” schools by e.g. setting rules for the place of residence of pupils. According to the expert, only a European solution could solve this issue, which might violate freedom of movement regulations (Representative, School Board of the Burgenland, Interview A 01).

The aforementioned development was also reported by several Hungarian interview-partners, but was judged more negatively, as it contributes to a decrease in the number of children in the Hungarian school system and has led to closure of smaller schools. It is now a common phenomenon that Hungarian parents enrol their children in kindergarten and schools in Austria, and *“therefore, along with the decreasing number of births, the number of children in the Hungarian education system is decreasing”* (Director, Cultural Centre, Interview HU 5).

According to another Hungarian interview-partner, young people meanwhile choose their education and training based on what they could best use on the Austrian labour market. Students increasingly prefer learning German and many leave to study at the University of Vienna. Parents also encourage their children to do so. The Hungarian education system has a very negative image among many parents and is in need of improvement to meet this challenge (Regional expert, Interview HU 7).

### ***Effects of mobility: society at large***

While most interview-partners judged the economic aspects of mobility positively, there were different views of the societal effects.

The vast majority of Austrian interview-partners had a very positive view of the growth of mobility and the de-facto abolishment of the borders between Austria and Hungary and Slovakia respectively, a perspective also linked to the dissolution of communist Eastern Europe and the demise of the “Iron Curtain” for some. *“Crossing the border to Slovakia is now like crossing the border to another federal state of Austria”*, a civil servant from the



Lower Austria state government summarised his impression, *“only the language and the colour of the street signs are different”* (Civil servant, Interview A 07). He said that he had been raised close to the “Iron Curtain” and could see the barbed wire fence and the machine-gun posts from the window of his room as a child. He remembers having heard shootings at night as a child several times, most probably at refugees trying to cross the “Iron Curtain” by the then Czechoslovak border guards. The abolishment of the borders would have been unimaginable in his youth.

Meanwhile a number of Slovak families have moved residence to Lower Austria, and according to his knowledge, the relations to their neighbours are very good, and there are no problematic issues. The state government also recruits a growing number of staff in the Czech Republic and Slovakia for administrative positions, as it eases cross-border cooperation to have colleagues fluent in the language and knowing the national administrative culture. The growing regional integration along the former “Iron Curtain” has been one of the most important developments for Europe in the last twenty to thirty years.

Another civil servant was less enthusiastic about regional integration. There have been a number of EU-funded projects aiming at cultural exchange and the establishment of cross-border contacts at an institutional level. Nevertheless, only few people privately travel to the Czech Republic or Slovakia, and there is little exchange beyond labour migration and commuting and shopping tourism. There are a few new projects linking and thus strengthening services, like emergency services or hospitals, which might in future bring joint institutions closer to people. Lower Austria is currently building a hospital together with the Czech government in a border town, which according to the interview partner, will be run by an Austrian-Czech administration, will employ both Austrian and Czech staff, and will serve both Austrian and Czech patients (Civil servant, Interview A 10).

Interview-partners from the education area highlighted the normality of mobility for the younger generation. There is a large number of cooperation projects with schools across the border, and going to visit partner-schools across the border is unquestioned normality for pupils now. *“Most of my pupils cannot imagine that some thirty years ago this was the border between communism and the West, this is history for them,”* an interviewee said (Representative of State School Council, Interview A 08). Despite the good contacts between



schools and pupils, only few pupils choose Eastern European languages as a second foreign language, and most prefer French or Spanish. Likewise, only few travel to Eastern Europe in the holidays and the general outlook of the young generation is shaped by a preference for the “old” EU Member States.

This generally positive view of mobility and free movement was shared by most Hungarian and Slovak interview partners. Compared with the times of communism, when the region was a dead end street, now a new “golden triangle” has developed between the cities of Vienna, Győr and Bratislava, a researcher explained:

*“Just if we compare the situation to the Socialist Bloc times when Bratislava was the last city in front of the “IronCurtain” there was no exchange and transition of labour, services, goods etc. After the transition, we used to talk about the Golden Triangle of Vienna-Gyor (sometimes even Budapest) -Bratislava. The geographical proximity of three big cities has certain positive multiplier effects on these three countries, there is a potential for development.”*

*(Researcher, Interview SL 13)*

Further to the financial benefits linked to commuting, several interview-partners also highlighted the role of “social remittances” developed through commuting. Returning migrants and commuters bring new knowledge and experiences, but there is the risk of losing them if they do not return:

*“Positive effects are the remittances and salary spending in Slovakia. Also, those who return, with new experience and new skills can contribute to a better socio-cultural situation in Slovakia. Those who return or stop commuting have for instance an experience of higher salaries and of better working conditions. These people could contribute to putting more pressure on our system to improve salaries and the working conditions. They could serve as a catalyst for change and raise their voices. However, if they never return, we lost them forever.” (Representative Trade Union Federation, SL 01)*

While most Hungarian interview-partners also highlighted the positive financial effects of commuting on household income and consumption, some also hinted at a growth of envy directed towards commuters due to their higher spending power. The impacts of cross-



border mobility on family relationships are problematic, as due to the usually long commuting times parents are less able to spend time with the family, in many cases resulting in a semi-truncated family: *“So, having more income in the family does not replace the educational tasks and does not help solving problems with education either,” an interview-partner commented* (Representative of Vas County, Interview HU 01). Workers in Hungary are encouraged by the commuters, who do not think, that commuting puts stress on family relations. According to three Hungarian experts, cross-border mobility also had an impact on regional mobility in Hungary, as many workers and their families from the eastern part of the country have now moved to the border regions. On the one hand, they have replaced the commuters, and on the other hand have also tried to find a job as commuter themselves. This development has led to higher housing and property prices in the border regions.

### ***Language competency and mobility***

In the border region between Austria, Hungary and Slovakia three distinctly different national languages - German, a Germanic language; Hungarian, an Ugric language; and Slovak, a Slavic language – are spoken as the official languages of the three countries. While cross-border commuting in areas linked by a common language (e.g. Austria-Germany, Austria-Switzerland) or in areas where national languages are closely related (e.g. Czech Republic-Slovakia) will not be influenced by language borders, language proficiency is a major issue in cross-border labour commuting in areas characterised by distinct language differences.

The interview partners agreed about the relevance of competency in the official language of the state for labour market inclusion, in particular in trained professions. While there was a growing interest among Austrian workers and employees to learn Czech, Hungarian or Slovak after the fall of the “Iron Curtain” and after accession of the new Member States, this interest has vanished in recent years, interview partners from the Chamber of Commerce in the Burgenland and Lower Austria reported. This view was also shared by interview partners from the education sector in Austria – although there are many activities supporting the acquisition of the languages of the neighbouring countries, most pupils choose French, Spanish or Russian as a second foreign language, but not Czech, Hungarian or Slovak. On the



other hand, Hungarian interview partners highlighted the growth of interest in learning German in order to be able to find a job in Austria, while Slovak interview-partners reported a decline in the interest to learn German among the younger generation, who prefer to learn English and have generally reoriented their mobility towards English speaking countries.

According to a representative of a regional administration office in Slovakia, there was interest in learning German in Slovakia after the fall of the “Iron Curtain”, which facilitated commuting. But this interest is in decline. The situation is different in positions in trade or tourism. Here knowledge of both German and Slovak are the key for employment, as many companies prefer bilingual to monolingual German personnel because of the large number of clients from Eastern European countries. In construction, language requirements are generally lower. Here also workers without good knowledge of German would sometimes be able to find a job.

“The knowledge of language plays a significant role in obtaining all jobs. Sometimes employers accept groups of Slovak workers where only one or two speak German, so they can help each other. I don’t perceive it as advantageous as they cannot understand the instructions, and this can also present challenges when signing contracts.” (EURES Employee, Interview SL 11)

According to a Hungarian interview-partner from an educational institution, lack of knowledge of German or English are a major impediment for Hungarian workers to find employment abroad. In the last years, interest in language courses in German has risen. Attendees are not interested in acquiring a certificate, but are interested in being able to communicate in German at the workplace. A second group with a growing interest in learning German are dentists and doctors with medical practices in the towns close to the Austrian borders, as dental tourism of Austrians to Hungary are booming (Director, Educational Institute, Interview HU 04).

In general, language mobility, like labour mobility, was perceived to occur mainly from East to West. While commuters would need to learn the language spoken in the target country for successful integration into the labour market, the interest of Austrians in learning the



languages of the neighbours has diminished in recent years, reflecting the economic gap between the new Member States and Austria. According to interviewees, Austrian managers working in Slovakia mainly communicate in English at the workplace, although a few have also acquired knowledge of Slovak. Despite being offered as a second foreign language at many schools, only few Austrian pupils learn Slovak or Hungarian, mostly those with personal connections to the country, or, in the case of the Burgenland, members of the Hungarian minority of Burgenland. As one Austrian interview-partner put it, this reflects the regional economic hierarchy of the countries:

“Languages reflect the regional income hierarchy. If Slovakia were so much richer than Austria, as Austria is vis-à-vis Slovakia, and Austrians would have to commute there, then they would also start to learn Slovak, otherwise you only do it if you have a private reason. You have to learn the language of the country where you want to earn more than at home, it is as simple as that.” (Civil servant, Interview A 02)

### ***Future perspectives***

Most interview partners expected a stabilisation or only a slight rise in cross-border mobility for the next years. Experts agreed that salaries as well as unemployment levels, labour conditions and conditions of employment would be the main factors determining the degree of commuting.

With regard to commuting from Slovakia to Austria, most interview-partners expect a stagnation or only slight growth of daily commuting due to demographic developments of the region and the job growth in the Bratislava region. Those prepared to commute already do so, and the younger generation, they argue, is more interested in migrating to English speaking countries or the Czech Republic than in commuting to Austria. With regard to care migration, a decline is foreseeable, as most Slovak care givers are aged 45+ and will thus reach retirement age soon. The announced reduction of family subsidy payments to Slovak care workers by the Austrian government is also likely to work as a disincentive.

Cross-border residential mobility was expected to grow slightly rather than stagnate. Demographic decline is expected to stop suburbanisation, which is already the case in suburban areas of Bratislava in Slovakia.



*“The city is developing in certain urban phases, after the process of suburbanization we can observe the process of re-urbanization. This is already happening in suburban places of Bratislava within Slovakia. I expect a similar trend with the suburbanization process in Austria. I would say that maybe within the next 5 years the process of suburbanization to Austria will reach its peak, I don’t see a significant space for further increase there. We cannot forget the age structure of Bratislava. The population who is willing to relocate is usually the younger generation, but we have a significant ageing of the population. Within the next few years, 30 to 40 % of Bratislava’s inhabitants will be seniors. This will affect not only the residential mobility but labour mobility as well.” (Researcher, Interview SL 13)*

Regarding the future development of cross-border mobility from Hungary to Austria, the judgement of the interview-partners differed. While some interview-partners foresaw a continuous rise of cross-border commuting due to the persistent high differences of salary levels, others expected a stagnation due to the demographic development of Hungary. In the next ten to fifteen years, Hungary is expected to experience a significant decline of the population of working age. Also, the market is expected to be somehow saturated, and although workers from Eastern Hungary now commute weekly to Western Hungary in order to be able to commute daily to Austria, this region will be affected, they argue, by the aforementioned demographic development.

Furthermore, a growing number of Hungarians perceive the cuts in family support payments to Union citizens engaged in cross-border commuting as discriminatory and are reconsidering whether to commute, according to interview partners. The Hungarian government already has started an incentive-based programme to “reclaim” emigrant workers by granting tax-reductions etc. These programmes could help to remedy some of the damages Hungary has suffered because of brain-drain and the emigration of skilled workers, and, if successful, could also lower the interest of Hungarian workers in commuting to Austria.

Overall, the development of the border region between Slovakia and Austria was considered much better than that of the border region between Hungary and Austria. This is due to the proximity of two large cities growing together into a large city-region, the role of Bratislava as a regional economic centre with a large automotive industry and a growing



financial sector, sizeable - partly EU-funded - investments into retail and tourism in this area and improved road and fast train connections between Vienna and Bratislava. The situation at the border between Burgenland and Hungary is more complex, with a growing tourism industry around the Lake Neusiedl in the North, which is highly dependent on Hungarian commuters, and a largely agrarian border region to the South, where commuting is mainly directed towards the capital city of Styria, Graz. Other than in Slovakia, there is no large city close to the border, and the lack of public transport and highway connections makes commuting more complicated.

## **5. Summary and conclusions**

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Migration studies usually focus on the analysis of long-term moves of the place of residence over an international border. This focus is driven by a framing of mobility as a challenge to nation-states and conceptualises the crossing of borders as abnormal. A shift to the concept of mobility as the relationship between the place(s) of residence to the place(s) of work, education and consumption highlights a much broader range of human mobility behaviour than the nation-state centred thinking about migration.

The border-region between Austria and Hungary and Austria and Slovakia is a case study for this multitude of mobilities. Despite the de-facto abolition of the functional state border between the countries, massive economic differences persist, and the economic development of the regions has been characterised by a growth of regional disparities.

- Austria has massively profited from EU – accession of the new Member States through investments in these countries, and the Burgenland was able to profit from “Target One” – funding and has invested massively into tourism, trade and wine-production primarily in Northern Burgenland. These areas now are the areas attracting commuters from Hungary and Slovakia.
- In Slovakia, the region around Bratislava has grown to become one of the main centres for the European automotive industry and a commercial and financial centre for the region and has become the fourth-richest NUTS-region, when measured in Purchasing Power Parities. While the income differences between Austrian and the Bratislava region are diminishing, Eastern Slovakian districts did not participate in the economic upsurge, leading to a sizeable growth of migration and commuting to Bratislava from other Slovak districts.
- Although also profiting from EU-accession, the regions of Western Hungary bordering Austria did not experience comparative economic growth like Bratislava.



Income differences to Austria stayed high and there was no comparable investment by large industries as in the Bratislava region.

These regional economic differences are the reason for a mainly unidirectional labour mobility from East to West, and a growing internal mobility in Hungary and Slovakia towards the regions bordering Austria.

The development in the Bratislava region deserves specific attention, as it is a case of growing cross-border suburbanisation leading to international cross-border residential mobility of Slovaks commuting back to their country of origin. This type of mobility is fostered by the geographical location of Bratislava close to the Austrian and the Hungarian border. Migration theory does not cover this type of mobility well. Persons engaged into cross-border residential mobility are regarded as migrants, as they move their place of residence over an international border – but as their relations to the place of work and the social relations at the former place of residence usually persist, they experience mobility in a completely different way than migrants. The concept of migration needs a reformulation taking into account the subjective effects of changes of spatial relations in life.

The border regions are also unique in a historical sense. Some thirty years ago, the border between Austria and Hungary and Austria and the then Czechoslovakia demarcated the cutting line between the “West” and the “communist bloc” in a then bipolar world. For the older generation, cross-border mobility is still linked to the end of the “Iron Curtain” with its barbed wire and machine-gun towers and the demise of communism, while this association is less relevant for the younger generation. For them, a “Europe without borders” has become everyday normality.

Despite a generally positive view of mobility across these historically specific borders, several challenges persist:

- Persisting income differences between 1:2 to 1:3.5 (in favour of Austria) for comparable positions are the main trigger for unidirectional cross-border mobility in the region. These income differences are regarded a reason for pressure on wages in Austria, and for brain drain and a general draining of the labour force in Hungary and, to a far lesser extent, Slovakia by several experts. Brain drain and draining of the labour force meanwhile hinder economic development in Western Hungary, and also impact negatively on investments in the region.



- Care mobility into the 24 hours care sector in Austria by Slovak care workers commuting on a two-weekly base to their clients was regarded as a pressing problem for the care and health sector in Slovakia. Care providers in Slovakia would not be able to fill their vacancies any more, and would consider recruiting from third countries. East-West care mobility could not be a solution for the pressing problem of the ageing European societies and would need European investments.
- There was wide consensus among experts that income differentials between Austria and Hungary will not decline significantly in the near future. With regard to Slovakia, Bratislava with its booming automotive and financial industry was seen as an exception, while income differentials with other parts of Slovakia are expected to stay high. More European action to diminish these economic disparities would be needed.
- Due to the high income-differentials and lack of information on their side commuters are highly vulnerable to exploitation. Both workers at companies in Austria and, even more massively, posted workers are confronted with discrimination and exploitation. While the Austrian Chamber of Labour has started information campaigns in Hungarian on labour conditions and salaries in Austria and whilst there are legal means to address the issue, the existing regulations on posting workers is an invitation to exploitation, as periods for posting are much too long, and control mechanisms are lacking. A relevant number of companies previously employing commuters in Austria have set up companies in Slovakia and Hungary and have made use of posting, while de-facto workers do not work elsewhere than in Austria. There is a massive need to improve the protection of workers' rights in cross-border employment and to further reform the Directive on Posting of Workers.
- Cross-border educational mobility is largely hampered by Austrian regulations on access to primary schools demanding the registration of the pupil's main place of residence in the municipality of the school. In this way, parents are hindered to commute, as commuters cannot send their children to school near their place of work. The European Union has not been active in this field, but there would be the need to examine if these regulations were compatible with the right to freedom of movement.

The aspects highlighted above show that cross-border mobility largely is shaped by the specific spatial, economic and cultural conditions characteristic for a border region. The abolition of the borders between the EU Member States thus are only a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for stronger regional integration, which is still mainly dependent on the politics of Member States and regional and municipal administrations.



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## 7. Annex

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### INTERVIEW GUIDELINES FOR REMINDER - PROJECT

#### I. Introduction

- 1.) Please specify the tasks of your institution and your professional role
- 2.) What is the specific relation of your institution to the Austrian – Hungarian (Austrian – Slovak) border region?
- 3.) Is your institution involved into concrete projects regarding the Austrian-Hungarian (Austrian-Slovak) border regions?
  - a. If yes, could you please describe these projects?
  - b. If no, does your institution intend to involve itself into such projects?
- 4.) In your daily work, do you cooperate with comparable institutions in Austria/Hungary/Slovakia?
  - a. If yes, what is the field of cooperation?
  - b. If yes, how relevant is the cooperation for your work?
  - c. What have been the main results of this cooperation so far?
  - d. If no, do you intend to cooperate with comparable institutions in future?

#### II. Cross – border mobility in the region

- 1.) Looking back the last 15 – 20 years how has cross-border mobility in the Austrian-Hungarian (Austrian-Slovak) border region developed?
- 2.) What are the main characteristics of cross-border mobility? (type of mobility, sociodemographic character of mobile people)
- 3.) Have there been major changes in the patterns of cross-border mobility in the last years?
- 4.) What have been the main effects of cross-border mobility on your region and your area of work/expertise?
- 5.) Are specific segments of the population (e.g. gender, age, professions) particularly involved into cross-border mobility?
- 6.) What have been the effects of cross-border mobility on (please choose according to expertise of the interviewee, please ask for figures if available):
  - a. regional labour market
  - b. regional economy
  - c. regional housing market
  - d. education system
  - e. health system
  - f. care system
  - g. other
- 7.) What have been the effects of cross-border mobility on (please choose according to expertise of the interviewee):
  - a. relations between parents and children
  - b. relations between commuters and sedentary population
  - c. urban/municipal economic and social development
  - d. social cohesion at regional level
  - e. educational and training preferences of young people
  - f. internal migration from other areas of the country



g. regional quality of life

- 8.) Do you think that citizens of your country commuting to Austria/Hungary/Slovakia are treated equally on the labour market with Austrian/Hungarian/Slovak citizens?
- 9.) Do you think that citizens of your country making use of their right of freedom of movement are treated equally in other sectors than the labour market?
- 10.) According to your knowledge, what are the main challenges of citizens of your country making use of their right of freedom of movement?
- 11.) According to your knowledge, are there any specific obstacles to cross-border mobility which have not been resolved adequately?
- 12.) What role do – according to your experience – EU-funded regional programmes play with regard to the development of cross-border mobility?
  - a) Please ask what programmes are known
  - b) If positive answer, please ask for examples
- 13.) Overall, how do you rate the impact of EU-funded programmes on the development of your region?
- 14.) Overall, how do you rate the impact of EU-funded programmes on the development of cross-border mobility in your region?
- 15.) Overall, how do you rate the impact of cross-border mobility on the development of your region?
- 16.) Overall, do you think cross-border mobility between Hungary (Slovakia) and Austria will grow or decline in the future? Why?
- 17.) What are your main suggestions to improve the positive effects of cross-border mobility in your region?
- 18.) Do you want to add aspects not mentioned in thus guideline?

**Information on interviewee**

Institution

Role in institution

Specific role in regional cooperation





# REMINDER

ROLE OF EUROPEAN MOBILITY AND ITS IMPACTS  
IN NARRATIVES, DEBATES AND EU REFORMS

The REMINDER project is exploring the economic, social, institutional and policy factors that have shaped the impacts of free movement in the EU and public debates about it.

The project is coordinated from COMPAS and includes participation from 14 consortium partners in 9 countries across Europe



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research & innovation programme under grant agreement no 727072

