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■ *Transborder mobility? Companies and young specialists respond*

Europe is growing together. Business structures are becoming increasingly global and intercultural skills more and more important. Action plans and programmes, therefore, endeavour to give people transborder mobility and the flexibility to adapt to situations, the most constant feature of which is change.

The exchange of young specialists with foreign partner companies is one way of transmitting and gaining intercultural learning and work experience. This prompted the Federal Institute for Vocational Training (BIBB), in co-operation with the Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF), to ask what companies actually do in order to prepare their trainees and young specialists (18-24 age group) for this challenge? On the other side, what are the experiences of the young people themselves? What are their arguments for and against transborder mobility?

The answers which we obtained within the framework of our Reference Company System (RBS) from 1,800 (training) companies are encouraging. They are supplemented and confirmed by infrascop, Munich whom we commissioned to interview a representative group of trainees and young skilled employees with a vocational qualification. Both studies provided basic information for a five-country conference entitled "Take your chance in Europe - Mobility in vocational training" in Aachen on 18 and 19 June 2002 initiated by Germany and the Netherlands.

Transborder mobility is already happening on a large scale. Just under half of the companies interviewed already had experience in the exchange of (future) specialised employees. In this context far more specialised employees/trainees are taken in from abroad (41%) than are sent there (24%). Organisational and financial support from the EU and other exchange programmes is used to a si-

milar degree by small, medium-sized and large companies. Two-thirds of the companies also make an additional commitment by providing financial support for their young employees' stays abroad. Almost all companies have garnered good to very good experience with this form of exchange; that applies across the board to companies of all sizes and in all sectors.

The range of countries involved in transborder mobility is large. This confirms the advance of globalisation. As is to be expected, the EU Member States head the field (cf. Fig. 1).

In the opinion of the companies, the advantages of transnational exchange processes seem to be social and cultural rather than economic. The main positive features of mobility, which takes people beyond their own national borders, were felt to be understanding for cultural diversity, insight into different work procedures which extends the person's own company horizons, greater standing in the public at large and stimulus for personal development.

On the other hand, organisational and bureaucratic difficulties, the costs incurred and the support required during the stays

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