

Challenges to cross-border mobility of workers in the EU

Anatolii P. Getman¹, †Oleg M. Yaroshenko¹, Vladyslav S. Tkachenko¹, Olena Ye. Lutsenko¹, Natalya M. Vapnyarchuk^{2,*}

¹ Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University, Ukraine

² National Academy of Legal Sciences of Ukraine, Ukraine

* Corresponding author: 130398@ukr.net

† Deceased 23 February 2025

ABSTRACT

This article explores the challenges and opportunities of cross-border labour mobility within the European Union. It aims to systematically assess the key drivers and barriers to cross-border labour mobility and develop evidence-based practical recommendations for improving European Union labour mobility policies. Rapid changes in the labour market due to the COVID-19 pandemic have prompted the adoption of new forms of work organisation, such as remote work and flexible schedules. These changes have created new opportunities to enhance worker mobility, but also present challenges related to coordinating work across different time zones and cultural environments, and ensuring equal working conditions. We analyse the impacts of these challenges on the effectiveness and accessibility of labour mobility within the European Union. This analysis then allows us to formulate practical recommendations for improving the European Union labour mobility policy.

KEYWORDS

cross-border mobility; working hours; flexible work arrangements; cultural differences; legal regulation

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1. Introduction

The topic of cross-border labor mobility within the European Union (EU) has garnered significant academic and policy attention due to its critical role in the broader process of European integration. Scholars and policymakers alike have explored various dimensions of this phenomenon, including its legal, economic, and social implications. In the process of European integration, the realization of social rights initially played a minor role. The EU member states focused on economic development and introduced four basic economic freedoms: freedom of movement of goods, services, persons, and capital. These freedoms were supposed to ensure an open market economy with free competition (Semihina et al. 2022).

Enshrining the free movement of workers as the basis of the European economic integration association was made possible by understanding how wages and working conditions in different member states affect the capabilities of the internal market. These conditions are an important component of the cost of goods and services (Rym 2019). The competition of social norms between Member States on wages and working conditions promotes competition between employees for better conditions, which can be used as an instrument of economic pressure. Harmonization of legal protection of employment at the European level has been recognized as a prerequisite for building an effective EU internal market. As a result, the free movement of workers across the EU was recognized as an important economic freedom that contributed to further social, economic and political integration (Oliynyk 2019).

In today's context of globalization and integration of European markets, the issue of cross-border employee mobility is of particular importance. Cross-border workers within the EU are defined as EU or EFTA nationals who reside in one EU or EFTA country and work in another, performing their work duties as employees or self-employed persons. Cross-border workers therefore cross borders regularly or irregularly to perform their work. This category may include legally defined groups of workers, in particular seasonal workers and frontier workers (Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion and European Commission 2023). However, it is important to distinguish between cross-border mobility and long-term labour mobility, which involves workers moving within the EU for a longer period to work in another country.

In addition, it is worth noting the specificities of posted workers, who are an important category within the European labour market. Posted workers temporarily perform work in another EU Member State, while remaining in an employment relationship with their employer from their country of origin. Directive 96/71/EC and its amendment 2018/957/EU define the working conditions for this category of workers,

in particular regarding pay, working hours and social protection (European Parliament and Council of Europe 2018). This distinction is important for understanding the complexity of labour mobility processes within the EU and the need to develop policies that take into account the different forms of mobility, including short-term and long-term movements of workers, as well as the working conditions of posted workers.

Cross-border mobility of employees is the process of moving labor between countries in order to fulfill their employment duties. In the context of the European Union, this term means the free movement of workers between member states. The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union contains a provision implementing the free movement policy (Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union 2012). This principle ensures the right of every EU citizen to work in another member state without restrictions related to nationality or residence.

Cross-border mobility contributes to economic growth and development by enabling employers to find skilled workers and workers to access a wider labor market (Barslund and Busse 2016). However, despite its significant benefits, this process is also accompanied by a number of challenges, such as differences in legal regulations, work cultures, and working conditions. Changes in working hours and work organization, such as the introduction of flexible work schedules and remote work options, are creating new opportunities for employees that contribute to their mobility. These changes are particularly relevant in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has forced many companies to rethink their approaches to work organization (Bruurs 2023). However, such changes can also make it difficult to coordinate work processes between employees from different time zones and cultural backgrounds, which requires additional analysis and recommendations to overcome.

In addition, different working cultures in EU member states may affect employee performance and adaptation to new working conditions. Employers face the challenge of integrating employees with different approaches to working hours, which can lead to conflicts and reduced productivity. Analyzing these aspects and developing recommendations to overcome them is an important step towards improving working conditions and increasing the EU's competitiveness on the global stage. Research on this topic will help to understand how to optimize work processes and facilitate effective cross-border mobility of workers in the European Union.

2. Methodology

This study adopts an interdisciplinary approach, encompassing legal and social aspects of cross-border labor mobility within the European Union.

A comprehensive analysis of legal documents, academic literature is employed to explore the topic. The data collection process for this study was multi-faceted, drawing from a range of sources to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the topic. First, an extensive review of EU regulatory frameworks was conducted. This included examining key regulations and directives that directly influence cross-border labor mobility. These documents were analyzed to understand the legal context and the specific provisions that affect the movement of workers across EU borders.

In addition to EU-level regulations, the study also delved into national legislation from various EU member states. This was crucial for understanding how different countries interpret and implement EU directives and regulations in their domestic legal systems. The national laws were selected based on their relevance to labor mobility, such as laws governing working hours, social security coordination, and employment contracts. By examining these laws, the study aimed to identify both commonalities and differences in national approaches, which could influence the ease or difficulty of cross-border labor mobility.

The data analysis phase of this study involved a qualitative content analysis, aimed at identifying key themes and patterns related to cross-border labor mobility. The first step in this process was to systematically code the legal texts, academic literature, and statistical reports. This involved breaking down the documents into manageable segments and tagging them with relevant codes that represented various aspects of labor mobility, such as regulatory barriers,

economic incentives, or social challenges. This coding process allowed for the organization of data into meaningful categories, facilitating a deeper understanding of the complex factors influencing labor mobility.

To ensure clarity of the analysis, the following codes were used: *legal regulation* (EU regulations, national laws), *working hours* (difference in duration, flexible schedules), *time zones* (work coordination, impact of time differences), *working cultures* (employee adaptation, cultural barriers).

Once the coding was complete, the next step was to perform a thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and significant findings across the different data sources. Key themes included the impact of differences in national regulation, the role of the EU directive in practical harmonisation, the socio-economic consequences of mobility and the importance of cultural adaptation. These themes were further analysed to understand their interrelationships and their relevance to the larger context of labour mobility in the EU.

In addition to thematic analysis, a comparative legal method was employed to contrast the regulatory approaches of different EU member states. This involved comparing national laws on key issues such as working hours, social security, and employment rights, and analyzing how these differences might affect cross-border mobility. The comparative analysis was particularly useful for identifying potential legal barriers to mobility and understanding how different countries balance national interests with EU obligations. This method also highlighted best practices that

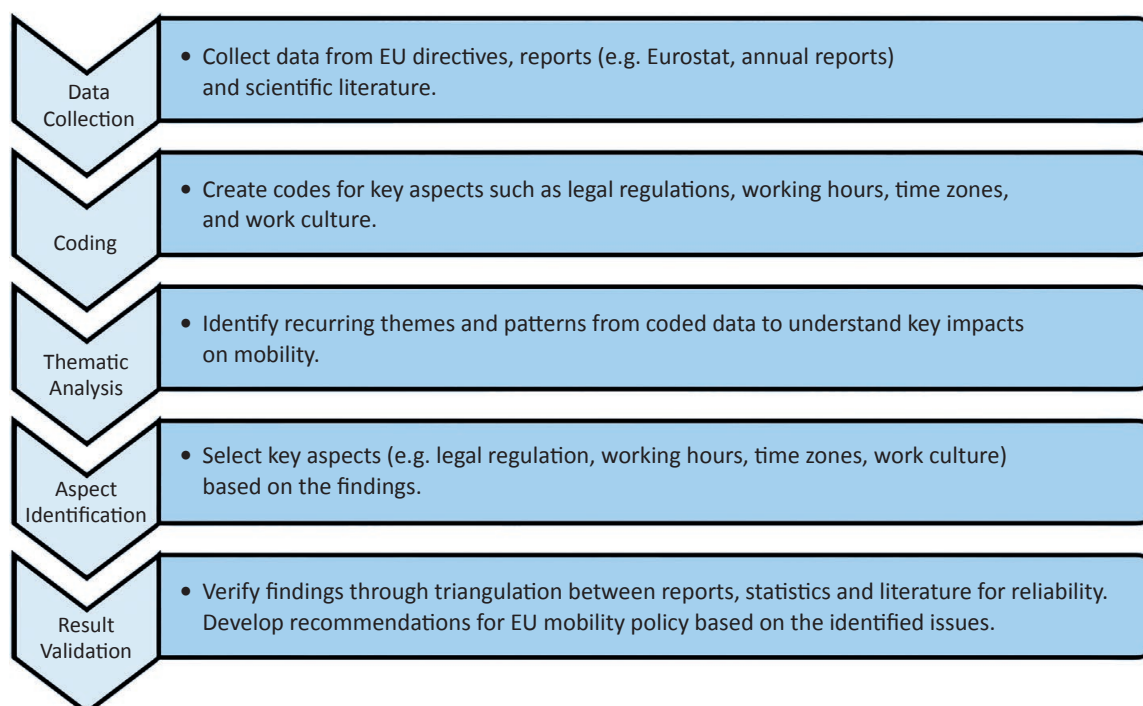


Fig. 1 Research methodology for EU mobility policy analysis.

could be adopted by other member states to facilitate labor mobility.

Finally, the study engaged in a critical analysis of the data, questioning assumptions and considering alternative interpretations of the findings. This step was crucial for ensuring that the analysis was not only descriptive but also analytical and interpretative. By critically examining the data, the study aimed to provide insights that go beyond surface-level observations, offering a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with cross-border labor mobility in the EU. This comprehensive approach to data analysis ensured that the study's findings were robust, well-supported by evidence, and relevant to both policymakers and scholars.

In this study, the author used many analytical reports, which, among other things, included statistical data. In particular, the annual reports of the European Commission, Eurostat data and analytics of international organizations were analyzed. The author identified and analyzed a number of indicators, including the number of cross-border workers; employment levels in different EU member states; working week duration; data on social protection. The collected data were systematized and presented in the form of tables and plans for further analysis. Statistical information served as the basis for identifying key features in the field of cross-border mobility of workers (Fig. 1).

The limitations of this study include the lack of access to some primary data and statistical information, which could provide a more precise understanding of the situation. Furthermore, the study primarily focuses on the analysis of the legal framework and does not fully address socio-cultural aspects that may also influence cross-border labor mobility. The results obtained can be used to enhance EU policy in the field of labor mobility, as well as to develop recommendations for member states on optimizing national policies in this area.

3. Literature review

The legal foundation for cross-border labor mobility in the EU is grounded in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (1957), which establishes the free movement of workers as one of the fundamental freedoms. Key legal instruments, such as Directive 2004/38/EC (European Parliament and Council of Europe 2004a) on the right of EU citizens to move and reside freely and Regulation (EC) No 883/2004 (European Parliament and Council of Europe 2004b) on the coordination of social security systems, are crucial in ensuring that workers can exercise this right while maintaining their social protection across borders. Scholars have emphasized the importance of these legal frameworks in facilitating labor mobility

while protecting workers' rights. For instance, Mörsdorf (2012) discusses the legal mobility of companies and its impact on workers' rights within the EU, highlighting the role of EU-wide regulations in harmonizing employment conditions across member states. Similarly, Medeiros (2019) explores the challenges of cross-border mobility in EU border regions, particularly in terms of legal and social security coordination.

A comprehensive view of cross-border labor mobility was also highlighted. Barslund and Busse (2016) argue that labor mobility is essential for the functioning of the single market, as it allows for a more efficient matching of labor supply and demand across different regions. However, they also note the challenges posed by disparities in wages, working conditions, and social security systems among member states. Other studies, such as those by Rym (2019), emphasize the potential benefits of labor mobility but also highlight the risks of social dumping. These findings are complemented by Dowlah (2020), who offers a historical and contemporary perspective on cross-border labor mobility, highlighting its evolution and current research for globalized labor markets. Other studies, such as Rome (2019), emphasize the notable benefits of labor mobility, but also highlight the risks of social dumping, when workers face declining working conditions due to competitive pressures.

The cultural and social aspects of cross-border labor mobility are also well-documented in the literature. Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions theory has been widely applied to understand how national cultures influence labor practices and organizational behavior in different EU countries. For example, differences in power distance, individualism versus collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance can impact how workers from different cultural backgrounds adapt to new working environments (Cîmpeanu and Pîrju 2010). Studies by Steindl and Jonas (2012) and Nakonechna (2024) further explore the challenges of cultural adaptation in cross-border mobility, highlighting the role of cultural differences in shaping workers' experiences and integration into new workplaces. These studies underscore the importance of cultural sensitivity and the need for tailored support mechanisms to help workers navigate the complexities of cross-cultural interactions in the workplace.

The rise of flexible work arrangements, particularly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, has introduced new dynamics into the discourse on cross-border labor mobility. Research by Tang et al. (2011) and Sivunen et al. (2016) examines the impact of time zone differences on global collaboration, noting that while flexible work schedules can enhance mobility, they also pose significant challenges for coordination and communication within multinational teams. Prychepa et al. (2018) and Watson-Manheim et al. (2012) provide further insights into how organizations can manage these challenges, emphasizing the importance of effective time management, clear

communication protocols, and the use of digital tools to bridge the gaps created by time zone differences. These studies highlight the need for organizations to develop strategies that support workers in maintaining a healthy work-life balance while adapting to the demands of flexible and remote work arrangements.

The literature on cross-border labor mobility in the EU provides a rich and diverse understanding of the factors that influence this phenomenon. While the legal and economic frameworks are well-established, ongoing research continues to explore the cultural and organizational challenges that arise in the context of increasing labor mobility. The synthesis of these perspectives underscores the complexity of cross-border labor mobility and the need for a multifaceted approach to policy development that takes into account the legal, economic, cultural, and social dimensions of this issue. Further research is needed to address the emerging challenges posed by flexible work arrangements and to develop best practices for managing a diverse and mobile workforce within the EU.

4. Results

4.1 Legal regulation of cross-border mobility of employees in EU legislation

Cross-border mobility of workers is a key element of European integration and one of the fundamental

principles of the European Union. Free movement of workers contributes to economic growth, social integration and equal opportunities for all EU citizens (Mörsdorf 2012). However, in order to ensure effective mobility of workers, it is necessary to create an appropriate legal framework that regulates all aspects of their movement, employment and social protection (Medeiros 2019). In this context, the main EU regulations and directives play an important role. In Tab. 1 below, we provide a brief overview of the main legislation. This list is not exhaustive, but includes those documents that, in our opinion, are most important for ensuring effective labor mobility in the EU. These legal acts provide a comprehensive legal framework for regulating all aspects of movement, employment and social protection of workers within the EU, ensuring harmonization of social standards and promoting a level playing field for all labor market participants.

The legal acts regulating this process play a key role in ensuring effective mobility and protecting workers' rights. An analysis of the main documents shows how important it is to ensure legal protection for workers moving between EU member states. Each of these legal acts is aimed at regulating certain aspects of cross-border employee mobility. In general, EU legislation creates a comprehensive and interconnected legal framework for ensuring effective cross-border mobility of workers. It regulates all aspects of this process, from the right to free movement to working conditions and social security, which provides workers with the necessary protection and support.

Tab. 1 Key legal acts regulating cross-border mobility of workers within the European Union.

Legal act title	The main point	Regulation of cross-border mobility of Workers	Significance for Workers
Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union 1957	Foundational document of the EU, establishing the legal framework for its functioning.	Guarantees the freedom of movement for workers within the Union.	Establishes the legal basis for the free movement of workers.
Directive 2004/38/EC	Regulates the rights of EU citizens and their families to move and reside freely.	Establishes the right to enter and reside for up to three months, and the right to permanent residence after five years.	Ensures social integration and access to the labor market.
Regulation (EC) No 883/2004	Coordination of social security systems.	Coordinates social security systems to ensure continuity of social protection.	Protects social rights of workers when moving between Member States.
Directive 96/71/EC	Working conditions for posted workers.	Establishes minimum working conditions and employment terms for posted workers.	Protects the rights of workers temporarily posted in another Member State.
Regulation (EU) No 492/2011	Freedom of movement for workers within the EU.	Ensures equal access to employment and equal treatment of workers from other Member States.	Guarantees equal employment opportunities.
Directive 2014/54/EU	Measures to facilitate the free movement of workers.	Defines measures to support and protect the rights of workers exercising their right to free movement.	Supports workers' rights and facilitates their mobility.
Regulation (EU) No 2016/589	European Employment Services (EURES).	Establishes the EURES network to facilitate worker mobility within the EU.	Supports job search and employment in different Member States.
Directive 2018/957/EU	Amendments to Directive 96/71/EC on posting of workers.	Enhances rules for posted workers, particularly regarding pay and working conditions.	Increases protection for posted workers.

Source: European Parliament and Council of Europe (1997; 2004a; 2004b; 2011; 2014; 2016; 2018).

4.2 Differences in working hours between Member States and their impact on cross-border mobility

Working time in the European Union is regulated by both national legislation and European directives that set minimum standards. The main legal act at the EU level is Directive 2003/88/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 4 November 2003 concerning certain aspects of the organization of working time, which establishes general principles on maximum working hours, minimum rest periods and other aspects related to the organization of working time. Directive 2003/88/EC stipulates that the maximum working week in the EU should not exceed 48 hours, including overtime. In addition, employees are entitled to a minimum of 11 hours of uninterrupted rest per day and a minimum of 24 hours of uninterrupted rest per week. The Directive also sets minimum requirements for annual paid vacation, which must be at least four weeks (European Parliament and Council of Europe 2003).

Despite the general framework established by the Directive, specific rules on working time may vary depending on the laws of the Member State. The choice of countries for a more detailed analysis in this study is based on their different roles and patterns in the context of cross-border labor mobility within the European Union. The focus on specific countries reflects their role as major destinations for cross-border workers. These countries have significant economic pull factors, such as higher wages or demand for skilled labor. Let us consider some of them:

- 1) Germany: The Working Time Act 1994 stipulates that a standard working day should not exceed 8 hours. However, provided that the average working day within six months or 24 weeks does not exceed 8 hours, it is possible to work up to 10 hours per day (Arbeitszeitgesetz 1994).
- 2) France: the standard working week is 35 hours. This issue is regulated by the Labor Code (Code du travail 1910). Any work beyond this limit is considered overtime and must be paid accordingly (Oqunsanya 2023). The legislation also provides for additional breaks and reduced working hours for certain categories of workers, such as young workers (Troadec 2022).
- 3) Italy: according to Legislative Decree No. 66/2003 (Decreto Legislativo 2003), in Italy, the working week is usually 40 hours and the maximum working hours per week should not exceed 48 hours, including overtime. Overtime is also limited and must be paid at higher rates.
- 4) Spain: The standard working week in Spain is 40 hours according to the Workers' Statute. The legislation provides for a 12-hour rest period between working days and mandatory breaks for employees if the working day exceeds 6 hours (Real Decreto Legislativo 2/2015; Estatuto de los Trabajadores 2024).

- 5) Sweden: The Working Time Act stipulates that in Sweden, the working week is usually 40 hours according to the Working Time Act, but national collective bargaining agreements may provide for fewer hours or additional holidays. The maximum working week, including overtime, should not exceed 48 hours (Arbetstidslagen 1982).
- 6) The Netherlands: the working week should generally not exceed 40 hours according to the Working Time Act. The law also regulates flexible working hours and remote work (Arbeidstijdenwet 2022).
- 7) Denmark: The Employer-Employee Relations Act establishes a standard working week of 37 hours. The law regulates working time issues, including flexible working hours and vacation (Arbejdsgiverens pligt til at underrette arbejdstageren om vilkårene for ansættelsesforholdet 2002).
- 8) Finland: the standard working week in this country is 40 hours according to the Working Time Act. The law also provides for flexible working hours and remote work (Työaikalaki 2019).

The legislation of the European Union establishes general principles and minimum standards regarding working hours that must be adhered to by all Member States. These standards, particularly Directive 2003/88/EC (European Parliament and Council of Europe 2003), guarantee a basic level of protection for workers' rights, including limitations on the maximum duration of the workweek, minimum rest periods, and paid leave. This creates a unified legal framework that promotes the harmonization of working conditions within the EU, ensuring equal conditions for all workers regardless of their country of employment.

At the same time, EU legislation allows Member States some flexibility in defining more detailed provisions regarding working hours, enabling them to take into account national specificities and labor market needs. In some countries, stricter norms than those set by European standards are established, aimed at providing additional protection for workers' rights (Tkachenko 2024a). For example, in France, the standard workweek is reduced to 35 hours, which represents a more progressive approach to protecting the balance between work and personal life. Such national initiatives demonstrate the Member States' commitment to improving labor standards in their respective markets.

This flexibility allows Member States to adapt general European norms to their own realities while ensuring that the minimum standards set by the EU are not violated. This contributes to the development of a single labor market in the EU, where workers' rights are protected at a high level, regardless of their place of employment. It is important to note that while Member States can establish stricter rules, they must do so in a way that does not create unjustified barriers to economic activity or violate the fundamental freedoms of the EU.

Thus, national laws on working hours in EU Member States not only complement the overall European norms but also enhance the level of worker protection by adapting rules to local conditions. This allows for the creation of more favorable conditions for workers while also supporting economic stability and competition in the European labor market. In the next section, we will examine how these legal frameworks and national specificities affect cross-border worker mobility, particularly in the context of different time zones and work cultures.

It is worth noting that the study of the impact of working time on employee mobility cannot be complete without analyzing flexible working hours and regulations governing remote work. They have become important elements of the modern labor market in the European Union, especially in the context of rapid technological change and the COVID-19 pandemic. These forms of work organization allow employees to better balance their professional responsibilities with their personal lives, increase productivity and job satisfaction, and help attract and retain qualified personnel. At the same time, EU member states have different approaches to regulating and implementing flexible work arrangements and remote work, taking into account national peculiarities and labor market needs. Telework offers a solution to social challenges related to transportation and the environment, while also providing individuals with greater flexibility to organize their personal and professional lives. It enhances opportunities for learning and education, fosters independence, and boosts creativity, enabling employees to make meaningful contributions to their organizations (Wojčák and Baráth 2017).

In the Netherlands, for example, flexible working hours and remote work are well integrated into labor law. The Flexible Work Act (*Wet Flexibel Werken* 2022) allows employees to submit formal requests to change their work schedule, workplace, or number of working hours. Employers are obliged to consider such requests and provide reasonable responses. This approach helps to ensure that flexible working becomes the standard rather than the exception, providing employees with the opportunity to customize their work to meet their personal needs (Fiontar 2021).

Sweden is also one of the leaders in the implementation of flexible working hours and remote work. Swedish labor law provides employees with considerable freedom in choosing their working hours, especially for parents with young children. The Working Time Act (*Arbetsbetslagen* 1982) stipulates that employees can negotiate flexible working arrangements with employers, including the possibility of remote work (Government Communication 2020). This practice is widely supported by employers, as it contributes to increased employee satisfaction and loyalty to the company.

In Italy, the Law on Flexible Work, also known as “smart work”, was adopted in 2017. It allows

employees to negotiate flexible working hours and the possibility of remote work with their employers. Italian law provides for considerable freedom in determining working conditions, allowing employees to work from home or any other location without a fixed workplace, thus increasing efficiency and job satisfaction (*Tutela del Lavoro Autonomo e Lavoro Agile* 2017).

In France, flexible work arrangements and remote work are also actively developing. The law on remote work, which was adopted in 2017, simplified the procedure for implementing remote work by allowing employers and employees to agree on such conditions without the need to amend employment contracts (*Loi Travail* 2017). France has also introduced the concept of the “right to disconnect” (*droit à la déconnexion*), which obliges companies to define periods when employees have the right not to respond to work-related messages, which is an important element in ensuring work-life balance (Sampaio 2022).

Spain is actively adapting its labor legislation to the new realities of the labor market. The Teleworking Law, adopted in 2020, establishes the rights and obligations of employees and employers in the field of teleworking, including compensation for equipment and other work-related expenses. The law also defines the right of employees to a flexible work schedule, allowing them to organize their work in a way that meets their personal and family needs (*Ley 10/2021*).

From a broader perspective, these examples demonstrate that certain EU countries (such as the Netherlands, Sweden, Italy, France, and Spain) are actively developing legal frameworks for flexible and remote work. Such actions create significant opportunities for cross-border workers. Legislation in these countries often provides clear guidelines and encourages employers to implement flexible work arrangements. This reduces administrative barriers and facilitates cooperation between companies and professionals from different countries. Ultimately, this reduces obstacles to cross-border employment. At the same time, there are still EU countries where such innovations are still at an early stage or are not sufficiently detailed in legislation. For employees working abroad, this may mean additional problems. For example, the lack of clear rules on remote work expenses, obstacles in negotiating flexible working hours, etc.

Flexible working hours and remote work have become essential elements of labor relations in EU Member States, contributing to the creation of a more adaptable and balanced work environment. Despite the common European framework, each country develops its own approaches to regulating these forms of work, taking into account national traditions and labor market needs. This allows for additional protection and flexibility for employees, which is necessary for successfully adapting to changes in the modern world of work. In the next section, we will examine the

impact of different work cultures and time zones on cross-border worker mobility within the EU, as well as how flexible working arrangements may facilitate or complicate this process.

The differences in approaches to organizing working hours and implementing flexible work schedules and remote work across various EU Member States have a significant impact on cross-border worker mobility. On one hand, the diversity of national regulatory models can create barriers to mobility, as workers may face challenges adapting to new working conditions. For example, a worker from a country with strict control over working hours and limited flexibility might struggle when transitioning to work in a state where such practices are more widespread and expected.

On the other hand, flexible work schedules and the possibility of remote work can greatly enhance cross-border mobility by giving workers more freedom in choosing their work location and organizing their work hours. This is particularly relevant for highly skilled workers, who often have the option to work from anywhere in Europe, without being confined to a physical workplace. In such circumstances, mobility becomes not just a matter of relocating between countries but also a way to maintain employment in international companies while working from different locations. In conclusion, while differences in the organization of working hours can present challenges for cross-border mobility, they also open up new opportunities for both workers and employers. Flexibility in approaches to work organization can facilitate a more effective adaptation to different working conditions, which is a key factor in the successful integration of workers into new working environments within the European Union.

4.3 The impact of different time zones on the workflow

The European Union covers three main time zones (Tab. 2). At first glance, these differences may seem insignificant. Especially when compared to the fluctuations of global time zones. Nevertheless, they still pose problems for cross-border labor mobility and international cooperation.

So, for example, an employee in Portugal (GMT) collaborating with a company in Germany (CET, UTC+1) or Greece (EET, UTC+2) may need to adjust their working hours to match those of their colleagues or clients. Knowledge-intensive industries such as IT, finance, and consulting rely heavily on real-time collaboration. A one- or two-hour time gap can delay decision-making, requiring companies to adopt asynchronous communication strategies. Employees may have problems with irregular working hours. This leads to stress and disruption in their personal lives.

The impact of different time zones on the work process is a crucial factor to consider in the context of cross-border worker mobility and international collaboration (Tang et al. 2011). Watson-Manheim, Chudoba, and Crowston (2012) suggest that these inconsistencies might arise because researchers have not adequately distinguished between the boundaries themselves and the effects they produce when crossed. Organizational discontinuity theory conceptualizes these boundary-crossing effects as “discontinuities” and “continuities”. Discontinuities occur at a boundary when information and communication flows demand conscious effort and attention to manage, while continuities exist when these flows occur as expected, requiring minimal coordination across boundaries. Although boundaries may appear similar across different contexts it is through the presence of discontinuities and continuities that they exert different impacts on collaboration. This framework is valuable for understanding the varied experiences of global virtual workers as they collaborate across boundaries (Sivunen et al. 2016). Firstly, different time zones can complicate coordination between employees working in different countries.

The added value in cross-border labor mobility, along with the economic development of participating countries, is further influenced by the ability to manage time zone differences effectively. Due to the diverse nature of labor sectors, findings highlight the importance of considering the impact of time zones on various industries. Managing time zone challenges is especially critical for knowledge-intensive sectors, such as professional, scientific, technical, and information services, where seamless communication and coordination are vital (Christen 2012).

Secondly, different time zones can affect the efficiency of communication with clients and partners, particularly if they are located in different countries. For example, clients in one time zone may require an immediate response when the workday has already ended in another country. This can lead to delays in response and a reduction in the level of customer service. Building continuities across temporal boundaries in global work was also linked to how informants managed their personal work-life boundaries. Specifically, the need for constant availability through various communication channels in global work posed

Tab. 2 The distribution of time zones in the EU countries.

Member State	Time Zone
Ireland, Portugal	GMT (UTC+0)
Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden	CET (UTC+1)
Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania Romania	EET (UTC+2)

a potential discontinuity that collaborators needed to navigate, and they employed different strategies to handle this challenge (Sivunen et al. 2016). On the other hand, time zone differences can be advantageous if the work process is properly organized (Prychepa et al. 2018). For example, companies can use time gaps to ensure continuous work processes, where work started in one office can be completed in another, where the workday is just beginning. This can increase overall company productivity by allowing more efficient use of time.

It is also important to consider the impact of time zones on the health and well-being of employees (Myronchuk 2020). Prolonged work in conditions requiring adaptation to different time zones can lead to stress and disrupt the balance between work and personal life. Therefore, companies should develop strategies that help employees effectively manage these challenges by providing flexibility in work schedules and supporting a healthy work environment. In conclusion, the impact of different time zones on the work process can be both a challenge and an opportunity. Success depends on how well an organization can adapt its processes to these conditions, ensuring effective communication, coordination, and support for its employees in an international context.

4.4 Work cultures in different EU Member States and their impact on mobility

The importance of corporate culture in creating organizational unity, shaping employee behavior, and driving strategic goals is immense. It encompasses the shared values, beliefs, and practices that define an organization, impacting both internal operations and external relations. Schein's foundational work on organizational culture provides a framework for understanding its layers, including artifacts, espoused values, and underlying assumptions, all of which collectively influence organizational behavior (Schein 1985).

However, corporate culture is far from uniform; it varies greatly across different cultural contexts. National culture, shaped by historical, social, and institutional factors, plays a significant role in influencing organizational practices and behaviors. Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions' theory highlights key dimensions such as power distance, individualism versus collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity versus femininity, offering valuable insights into the cultural differences that exist among nations (Hofstede 1980; Cîmpeanu and Pîrju 2010; Nakonechna 2024). Work cultures in the EU are multifaceted and reflect the national traditions, historical development and social norms of each country. They include different approaches to working hours, hierarchical structures, work-life balance, and ways of communicating and making decisions (Steindl and Jonas 2012).

For example, in the Nordic EU countries, such as Sweden and Denmark, the work culture emphasizes the importance of work-life balance (Hofstede et al. 2010). Flexible working hours, the ability to work remotely, and a strong emphasis on collective decision-making prevail here. In contrast, in southern countries, such as Italy and Spain, work cultures are often characterized by more traditional approaches with a clear hierarchical division of responsibilities and a strong emphasis on personal relationships in the professional environment (Nakonechna 2024). In Germany and Austria, the work culture is highly structured and punctual, with working hours being a priority. In contrast, France often has a more flexible approach to working hours, albeit with an emphasis on protecting employee rights (Wojčák and Baráth 2017; Nakonechna 2024).

These differences affect the cross-border mobility of employees in the EU, as they have to adapt to new work environments, understand and take into account the cultural characteristics of the country to which they move (Casis 2022; Yaroshenko et al. 2024). Adapting to new working conditions is one of the key challenges to cross-border mobility within the EU. When employees move to another country, they face not only a new cultural environment but also different standards, practices, and workplace expectations. These changes can significantly impact their ability to effectively integrate into a new team and perform their professional duties.

One of the most challenging aspects of adaptation is understanding and embracing new workplace cultures, which can differ greatly from what the employee is accustomed to in their home country. For example, the level of formality in relationships with management, approaches to conflict resolution, expectations regarding working hours, and the degree of autonomy may vary depending on the country. These differences can be a source of stress and misunderstandings, which, in turn, affect productivity and overall job satisfaction. Furthermore, language barriers can also complicate the adaptation process. Even with a high level of language proficiency, an employee may experience difficulties in communicating with colleagues, especially when dealing with specific professional jargon or cultural idioms. This can lead to feelings of isolation and hinder effective integration into the new work environment.

An important aspect of work culture is the opportunities in the workplace that are related to gender. This has a significant impact on workforce mobility, especially in cultures with a greater emphasis on hierarchical, masculine work environments. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory identifies masculinity versus femininity as one of the key cultural indicators that shape workplace behavior. In more masculine cultures, such as Germany, Austria, and Italy, the work environment often emphasizes competition, assertiveness, and a performance-oriented attitude. In contrast, more

feminine cultures, such as Sweden, Denmark, and the Netherlands, prioritize work-life balance, collaboration, and employee well-being (Żemojtel-Piotrowska and Piotrowski 2023). For women seeking career opportunities abroad, these cultural differences can be a barrier. They may find it difficult to integrate into a hierarchical, male-dominated environment. This can affect job satisfaction.

Finally, an important aspect of adaptation is the shift in approaches to work-life balance. Different countries have different expectations regarding how much time employees should devote to work and how they can manage their personal lives (Reaney 2012). Facing new norms can be challenging for employees who are accustomed to a different level of flexibility or work intensity. Thus, adapting to new working conditions is a significant challenge that impacts the success of cross-border mobility. It requires employees not only to have professional skills but also to be flexible, culturally sensitive, and capable of quickly learning and adapting (Gallo and Lopez 2023). To facilitate workers' adaptation to the work culture of the country they move to and enhance cross-border mobility within the EU, the following approaches can be proposed.

Establishment of a European orientation and integration program for workers: to develop a unified orientation program covering key aspects of the work culture in each EU member state. This program could include courses, training sessions, and online resources that provide workers with information on local labor standards, employer expectations, cultural nuances, and language differences. This would help reduce cultural shock and ease integration. Existing resources such as EURES (European Employment Services) already provide valuable information, advice, and job-matching services for workers and employers across the EU. EURES covers essential aspects of cross-border employment. However, while these resources are extensive, several gaps remain that limit their effectiveness in fully supporting workers' integration into new work cultures. A critical analysis of EURES and similar platforms highlights several areas for improvement. First of all, there is limited attention to cultural adaptation in the workplace. EURES provides general information on living conditions and labour market rules. However, it lacks practical guidance on workplace norms and expectations in different EU countries. Additional resources should include interactive training on workplace etiquette to help employees adapt to the new corporate culture.

Furthermore, there is a lack of personalised support for integration. The platform mainly provides generalised information. Introducing individual counselling services could significantly improve its effectiveness. Although EURES provides job matching services, it does not offer comprehensive digital training to prepare workers for the modern demands

of the labour market. Therefore, it seems appropriate to expand the platform with digital training modules from professional networks.

Therefore, instead of developing a completely new integration programme, improving EURES would be a more effective solution. This approach ensures that employees gain practical knowledge about adapting to different work cultures.

- 1) Support for mentorship and partnership programs: implement a mentorship system where experienced workers or managers who have already successfully adapted to local conditions assist newly arrived workers. These mentors can help with practical issues and provide recommendations on effectively interacting in the new work environment.
- 2) Harmonization of minimum labor standards: the EU could develop guidelines to harmonize certain aspects of work culture, such as standard procedures for conflict resolution, expectations regarding working hours, formality in relationships with management, and approaches to ensuring work-life balance. While full unification is impossible due to national differences, establishing minimum standards would help reduce cultural barriers.
- 3) Expansion of language courses and cultural training: fund and support language courses and cultural training programs available to workers planning to move or who have already moved to another EU member state. This would not only improve language skills but also deepen understanding of the local culture and business etiquette.

In our opinion, these approaches would help create more favorable conditions for workers, increase cross-border mobility within the EU, ease the process of adapting to new working conditions, and promote more effective integration into the new work environment.

5. Discussion

The cross-border mobility of workers in the European Union is one of the most striking examples of integration in the context of globalization. However, despite the obvious benefits, such as access to a wider labor market, improved professional skills, and personal development, this process faces a number of profound challenges (Rym 2019). These challenges go far beyond legal and administrative obstacles, affecting the very nature of human labor, personal identity, and cultural interaction.

One of the newly analyzed issues identified in this study is the impact of different national approaches to social security systems and working conditions. This gap exacerbates the difficulties of ensuring smooth mobility of workers. While the issue of work has been extensively studied, this research highlights a critical gap: the challenges associated with coordinating

across time zones and reconciling work schedules in a way that respects both individual needs and organizational efficiency. The findings suggest that this problem has been exacerbated by the emergence of work environments. They require new approaches to regulation. Another new aspect that is being analyzed is the role of cultural adaptation in mitigating cross-border conflicts. This is especially true in environments where workplace norms are in significant conflict with employees' personal values. For example, this study provides new insights into how collectivist-oriented employees face unique challenges when integrating into individualistic workplace cultures. Such challenges require not only professional adaptation, but also profound personal transformations (Nakonechna 2024).

Another important challenge is the issue of time and space. In the era of digital technologies and global markets, employees often face the need to work in different time zones, which can lead to disruption of their personal lives and exacerbate the problem of work-life balance (Barada 2013). The issue of working time is of particular importance, as each country has its own approaches to its regulation (Sivunen et al. 2016; Tkachenko 2024b). Discrepancies in the established working hours can create additional difficulties in organizing joint work and effective communication between employees from different countries (Tang et al. 2011). In addition, cross-border mobility forces us to rethink questions of identity and belonging (Hofstede 1980; Cîmpeanu and Pîrju 2010; Nakonechna 2024). In today's world, where people are increasingly moving around in search of better opportunities, the question arises: can we maintain our cultural and national identity while integrating into new social and professional environments? This process is often accompanied by an internal conflict between the desire to preserve our uniqueness and the need to adapt to new conditions, which can cause feelings of loss or dispersion.

Finally, global mobility challenges the very notion of community (Recchi 2014). Traditionally, communities were formed around shared values, customs and territory (Fernández et al. 2016; Mazzoni 2017). However, when workers are constantly on the move, the question arises: how can we maintain connection and community in such a dynamic and changing world? This requires not only new approaches to work organization, but also a new understanding of what it means to be part of a community on a global scale. Therefore, the challenges of cross-border mobility in the EU go beyond purely economic and administrative aspects. They force us to think about deeper questions concerning our identity, values, time and space, and the very meaning of community in the modern world (Mazzoni 2017). Addressing these issues requires not only legislative changes, but also a philosophical understanding of the new reality in which we live.

The study highlights several key findings:

- 1) Legislative disparities, such as differences in working hours and social security systems, remain significant obstacles to mobility.
- 2) Cultural adaptation, including language skills and knowledge of workplace norms, is crucial for effective integration.
- 3) Flexible working arrangements, including teleworking, present both opportunities and challenges, especially with regard to coordination across time zones.

A comparison with existing research supports these findings. For example, Barslund and Busse (2016) have highlighted the need for legislative harmonisation to optimise labour market efficiency, in line with the findings of this study. Similarly, Nakonechna (2024) has highlighted the importance of cultural adaptation, which echoes the focus of this study on the role of cultural differences in mobility. Furthermore, recent work by Bruurs (2023) on teleworking highlights the need for a clear regulatory framework, especially in an environment where teleworking is becoming increasingly popular.

Thus, the conducted research has demonstrated the key challenges regarding worker mobility. At the same time, the prospects for cross-border mobility are obvious. Based on the conducted analysis, we can propose a number of improvements. The differences identified in working hours and social security coordination indicate the need to unify the EU directive (Malynovska 2021; Getman et al. 2023). This will help to reduce gaps in living standards and working conditions between different countries. In turn it will stimulate the mobility of workers who will be more confident in their rights and social protection regardless of the country of work. Establishing minimum standards helps to reduce regulatory gaps. In addition, the development of technology and the introduction of digital platforms can greatly simplify the employment and adaptation of workers in new countries. For example, the creation of single online platforms for finding jobs that match a worker's qualifications, integrated with systems for recognizing diplomas and certificates, can greatly facilitate the employment and transition processes between countries.

Investments in language training and cultural adaptation are also important opportunities to improve mobility. Providing access to free language courses and cultural adaptation programs will help employees integrate into their new work environment faster, reduce communication barriers, and increase their effectiveness in the new environment. It is also worth considering the creation of intergovernmental employee exchange programs that would allow people to gain experience in different EU countries. Such programs will not only help improve professional skills, but will also help to form a common European work culture, which will be a powerful tool for further development of the common market.

The third recommendation is to ensure fair working conditions. The data on teleworking underlines the need to create pan-European standards that balance the needs of employees and employers.

This research contributes to both academic literature and policy-making by providing new perspectives on the barriers and opportunities in cross-border mobility. By addressing underexplored aspects, this article establishes a foundation for developing practical solutions. These findings highlight the need for comprehensive and coordinated actions to transform cross-border mobility into a more equitable and efficient process, ultimately strengthening the EU's labor market integration.

6. Conclusion

Cross-border labor mobility within the EU is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that requires a deep understanding of economic and legal frameworks as well as cultural and social factors. European legislation, particularly the legal acts analyzed in this article, provides the basic principles and rules that help create conditions for the free movement of labor. However, this process is not limited to the legislative framework; it also involves the active adaptation of workers to new working environments and cultures, which, in turn, requires flexible approaches and an understanding of diversity.

The flexibility of working conditions, particularly remote work and flexible schedules, significantly simplifies the process of workers adapting to new labor conditions in different countries. At the same time, they present new challenges for employers, who must ensure effective coordination and management of work processes, especially in cases of differences in time zones and cultural distinctions. This necessitates the development of new management strategies aimed at reducing the impact of these factors and increasing labor productivity.

Cultural differences among EU member states can both facilitate and complicate the process of integrating workers into a new environment. Organizational culture, reflected in the values, traditions, and practices of different countries, influences how workers perceive their role in a new team and how they adapt to the employer's demands. The role of national governments and social partners in facilitating successful worker adaptation through training programs and social support is also crucial.

Moreover, the development of European institutions aimed at harmonizing labor laws, particularly concerning the protection of workers' rights and ensuring equal opportunities, is critical for further strengthening the single market. Harmonization of legal norms helps eliminate barriers to mobility and provides a more predictable and stable environment for workers and employers alike.

In light of current challenges such as digitalization, changes in work organization, and globalization, the EU must continue to improve its legislation and support mechanisms for mobility. This will not only promote economic development but also ensure social stability and cohesion within European society. Ultimately, the success of European integration depends on the ability of member states to cooperate and find common solutions to shared problems, as well as on the willingness of workers to adapt to the new realities of the labor market.

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