

Basel on the language border

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The proximity of the French-speaking parts of Switzerland gives Basel a regional relationship with the *Romandie* that no other large German-speaking city shares to the same extent. The canton of Jura, created in 1979 after a long conflict over the separation of the French-speaking Catholic districts from the canton of Bern, lies directly south-west of Basel-Landschaft. Delémont, its capital, is about forty kilometres from Basel by rail.¹ The Laufental, a German-speaking district that had belonged to Bern, chose to join Basel-Landschaft after the separation of the Jura and became part of that canton in 1994.² The Jura question has continued into the present century. The town of Moutier voted in 2021 to leave the canton of Bern and join the canton of Jura, a change that was scheduled to take effect at the beginning of 2026.³

Further south, the Bernese Jura remains French-speaking within the bilingual canton of Bern. Biel/Bienne, the largest officially bilingual city of Switzerland, uses German and French on an equal footing in its administration, schools and street signs.⁴ For the economy of north-western Switzerland, these neighbours form a single labour market. The watchmaking and precision engineering firms of the Jura arc supply components to the medical technology industry, employees commute between Delémont and Basel, and companies in Basel recruit graduates from the universities of Neuchâtel, Fribourg and Lausanne.⁵

1 Notes

1. On the creation of the canton of Jura on 1 January 1979 and the Jura question, see HLS, article "Jurafrage". To be verified. ↩
2. On the transfer of the Laufental from Bern to Basel-Landschaft, which took effect on 1 January 1994, see HLS, article "Laufental". To be verified. ↩

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3. On the vote of Moutier of 28 March 2021 to join the canton of Jura and the transfer scheduled for 1 January 2026, see the publications of the cantons of Bern and Jura and the Federal Council. Status to be verified. ↩
4. On the bilingualism of Biel/Bienne and the arrangements for the use of German and French in its municipal administration, see the publications of the city of Biel/Bienne and of the Forum du bilinguisme. To be verified. ↩
5. On the economic links between the Jura arc and the Basel region, including commuting and supplier relationships in precision engineering and medical technology, see the regional economic reports of the cantons of Jura and Basel-Landschaft. To be verified. ↩

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