

Language as a barrier in the cross-border labour market

*Dr Alexander Ressos, TEP
Attorney-at-Law (Switzerland), Solicitor (Hong Kong),
Solicitor (England & Wales)*

Outside the large groups, language remains a serious barrier. Small and medium-sized firms in Basel, care homes, hospitals, craft businesses and retail shops expect German and often an understanding of dialect. Studies by the cross-border information and advice centres, the *Infobest* network, and by the public employment services on both sides of the border have identified insufficient German as one of the main obstacles for Alsatian jobseekers.¹ The French public employment service, which was renamed France Travail in 2024, cooperates with the employment agencies in Baden-Württemberg and the cantonal employment offices in north-western Switzerland in offering language courses, placement services and joint job fairs.²

The barrier works in the other direction as well. Employees from Basel or Baden who want to work in Alsace need French. Employers there expect a level of written French that many German speakers do not reach. Since salaries in Alsace are considerably lower than in Basel, very few residents of Basel seek work there. Language thus reinforces the asymmetry of a labour market in which the flows run mainly from France to Switzerland.³ Vocational training is a promising field for change. The trinational apprenticeship projects of the Upper Rhine allow young people to complete parts of their training in a neighbouring country. Several bilingual vocational diplomas have also been developed in cooperation between the Alsatian education authority and German chambers of commerce.⁴

1 Notes

1. On the Infobest network of information and advice centres for cross-border questions on the Upper Rhine and the studies of the cross-

border labour market, see the publications of Infobest Palmrain and of the EURES-T Upper Rhine partnership. To be verified. ↩

2. On the renaming of Pôle emploi as France Travail on 1 January 2024 and its cross-border cooperation in the Upper Rhine region, see the publications of France Travail and the EURES cross-border partnership. Status to be verified. ↩
3. On the asymmetry of cross-border commuting flows in the Upper Rhine region and the very small number of Swiss residents working in France, see the statistics of the Federal Statistical Office (cross-border commuter statistics) and of INSEE. Figures to be verified. ↩
4. On cross-border vocational training projects in the Upper Rhine region, including the framework agreement on cross-border vocational training of 2013, see the publications of the Upper Rhine Conference. To be verified. ↩

For general information only. This article does not constitute legal or tax advice, does not replace advice on an individual case and creates no lawyer-client relationship. It reflects the legal position as of September 2026.

Online version: helveticaregister.com/basel-language-as-a-barrier-in-the-cross-border-labour-market