18 Mobility poverty in Luxembourg

Crossing borders, real estate,
vulnerable groups and migrants

Patrick Van Egmond and Joanne Wirtz

Abstract

The economic and political relevance of the city of Luxembourg to its Greater Region leads to increased mobility issues (along with urban sprawl). The main urban centre is like a magnet that pulls people and goods, but, on the other hand, pushes out low-income residents, due to the high cost of living. This chapter presents the results of fieldwork carried out in Luxembourg with a focus on the mobility poverty of migrants and persons living in rural areas, in particular cross-border areas. There is not much recognition of mobility poverty as a topic in the Greater Region. Nevertheless, a lack of efficient connections between the transport systems of neighbouring countries, the hinterland and Luxembourg is a regular topic of debate. Luxembourg is heavily investing in cross-border infrastructure and its regional bus network to improve this situation. Free public transport will reduce the cost of transportation, yet high costs of housing and further economic growth will most likely worsen the mobility situation of some vulnerable groups.

Contextualisation

Luxembourg is a small country of 2,586 square metres, with about 602,000 inhabitants (Statec 2019). However, for transport-related issues we should consider the Greater Region, which comprises Luxembourg and neighbouring parts of France, Belgium and the Saarland region of Germany. From the 1960s onwards, Luxembourg was transformed from a mining and steel production-led industrial area to an important banking and service hub. The declining heavy industry sector led to increased poverty in the former steel industry area in Luxembourg and bordering areas of Belgium and France.

Today, most of the economic activity in the Greater Region takes place in the south of Luxembourg, around the capital. Most of the jobs are concentrated in and around the city of Luxembourg. The country's transformation led to an increasing cross-border exchange of labour towards Luxembourg. Nowadays, almost 45% of the approximately 432,000-strong national

workforce commutes daily between Luxembourg and neighbouring regions in Belgium, France and Germany. The north of Luxembourg can be considered rural. The area is more dispersedly populated and accounts for about 80,000 inhabitants. Accessibility to public transport both in the former steel areas and the north is less dense than in the economic centre.

Luxembourg also welcomes about 2,000–2,500 refugees annually. The Luxembourg National Reception Office (ONA) oversees the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg's reception and integration policy. The integration policy applies to all foreigners, i.e. to European Union citizens as well as to third-country nationals. ONA also organises the reception, accommodation and social supervision of applicants for international protection. All refugees are offered a free public transport pass.

Luxembourg has the highest number of vehicles per capita (669 cars /1,000 inhabitants) in Europe. About 97% of households within Luxembourg have at least one private car (Statec 2019). On average, there are about 1.4 cars per household. Most households without a private vehicle are in the city of Luxembourg and they are mostly single-person households whose age is between 18 and 24 years old, followed by those aged above 75.

The main public transport provision is organised by the Ministry of Mobility and Public Works for the regional transport (RGTR), by the city of Luxembourg (AVL) and by the communities of the south (TICE). Train transport is organised by the national rail operator (CFL). The Transport Community (Verkëiersverbond) is responsible for the ticketing and information system.

Since 1 March 2020, public transport is free for the whole country when travelling second class. While tariffs remain for those travelling in the cross-border areas, most of them benefit from this new measure during their daily commute. In addition to the main public transport offer, specific transport services are being offered for the residents of Luxembourg with specific needs. The transport offer is organised and adapted to the needs of people with reduced mobility, allowing them active participation in social life and an increase in autonomy.

Initiatives

The “CAPABS” service transports students who need differentiated education as well as disabled employees to social workplaces or centres for the physically and/or multi-handicapped. In 2016, this service carried out 686 trips daily and is organised by the Ministry of Mobility and Public Works.

The “ADAPTO” service provides transport for employees with reduced mobility to their place of work as well as occasional transport for disabled citizens. At the end of 2015, about 5,500 residents had an Adapto card (CES 2017).

The service can be used for occasional trips and may be taken up to a maximum of 15 times a month. The service is available in the territory of

the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg seven days a week from 7 am to 10 pm (on Fridays and Saturdays, departures are allowed until midnight). In addition, the Adapto services have become free of cost since March 2020. A trip has to be booked long enough, at least one and up to two days, in advance. A passenger may use any of the 27 aggregated transporters.

The Bummelbus is transport on demand running in the northern part of Luxembourg and it includes 39 municipalities. The Bummelbus is a supplement to available public transport and private means of the 80,000 inhabitants in those northern municipalities. All citizens have access to this service for short-distance journeys, especially within the municipalities and neighbouring villages/towns. The service is presently run using 50 vans (in up to nine places). Part of a social reintegration initiative, the drivers are all unemployed and are offered an opportunity to requalify for the job market through a two-year maximum contract.

Focus group characteristics and definitions of vulnerable groups at risk

There is little recognition of mobility poverty as a topic in the Greater Region. Nevertheless, a lack of efficient connections between the transport systems of neighbouring countries and Luxembourg is a regular topic of debate.

In Luxembourg, among the groups most at risk are migrants and people living in remote rural and deprived areas. We should also consider cross-border workers. In the preparatory stage of the fieldwork, conducted in 2018 and 2019, it became clear that a more careful distinction between vulnerable groups needs to be developed, considering that there is a combination of multiple factors that determines the risk to mobility poverty. Naturally, not all migrants are at risk of mobility poverty, nor all persons living in remote and rural areas.¹

Migrants

In relation to migrants, a distinction must be made between refugees who receive political shelter and mainly Europeans who migrate to Luxembourg for work purposes. Moreover, there is a distinction between migrants in highly paid employment and migrants in a less favourable economic situation. The migrants participating in the HiReach focus groups, living in urban centres, considered themselves relatively well served in terms of transport options; more problems arise for those living in remote and deprived rural areas with lower levels of income. The focus group discussions made it clear that even if the latter group had free public transport, the poor offer of transport connections hindered their integration. Importantly, many of them had no resources presently available to buy a private car.

People living in remote rural and deprived areas

There is no one single level of mobility poverty for persons living in remote rural, deprived and cross-border areas. There is a clear link with the socio-economic situation of the household. In the case of Luxembourg, the level of mobility poverty bears some relation to nationality. During the focus groups, it was reported that people travelling cross-border and dwelling beyond five kilometres from the border have higher levels of mobility poverty due to a lack of available cross-border transport services.

Comparing the results of women and men in the focus groups, it was evident that women living in remote rural and deprived areas can be identified as a vulnerable group. This relates to the specific wider socioeconomic situation of the household. When a single car is available, it is often the man who uses it. Also, safety, harassment and fear of potential aggression were listed as causes of limiting full use of the transport offer. This was even more applicable to public transport in the evenings or at night and indeed to services such as car-pooling too. “Women only” options were favourably considered.

Cross-border commuters

The focus groups overall brought together a large group of nationalities (e.g. French, Cameroon, Syrian, Iranian, Kosovan), but the focus group with cross-border commuters was more homogenous, as only French citizens participated. This reflected the constituency of the cross-border population in the Greater Region on the French side. Indeed, many different nationalities live in the country. Only 52.1% of the population is of Luxembourgish nationality, of which a high proportion has parents of another nationality. Over 16.4% of residents have Portuguese nationality, 6.6% French and 21.5% have another nationality (Statec 2019). The cross-border commuters and families are mostly the nationality of residence. Presently, families including Luxembourgish, move cross border due to the high prices of housing.

There is a large difference in terms of risk of poverty per nationality and social group within Luxembourg. The poverty risk is as high as nearly 12% for residents with Luxembourgish nationality, yet rises up to 30% for those with Portuguese heritage (Statec 2017). This seems mainly related to the difference in access to the job market as well as the time spent in the country. The share of cross-border commuters amongst those employed decreases the higher one moves up into management level.

About 5% of the population suffers from material and social poverty and 15% has an income lower than 60% of the average income (21,200 euro per year). Most people suffering from poverty are single parent families. Likewise, there is a risk for the elderly aged over 65, yet these groups are compensated with social support.

Tertiary service jobs (e.g. in shops, restaurants, day care and commerce) are filled by cross-border commuters and other jobs (e.g. cleaning, company catering and the construction sector) by lower skilled residents of which the latter is made up of a large share of residents with Portuguese nationality. There is a trend of eastern European workers entering this specific job market.

Women

This focus group specifically brought together women working in the tertiary sector who commute daily across the border. They have in general complex work patterns and related travel patterns. They leave home very early and arrive back late in the evening, spending about one hour and 15 minutes travelling each way. One of the participants also reported her experience as a holder of two jobs: one in the morning and one later in the afternoon/evening, both in Luxembourg. She leaves home early in the morning by car. She leaves her car at the first workplace. Then, in the early afternoon, she sleeps for two hours in her car and then takes public transport (a short train trip plus bus) to the second job. She leaves work at 7 pm and goes back to her car, arriving home at 8 pm. As confirmed in the focus group discussion, poorer households in particular spend up to 30% of their household income on mobility, which is far above average.

Compared to France, the advantage for cross-border workers is the higher wages in Luxembourg. The price to pay is the higher financial cost and more intrusive time budget for travelling, which is mainly based on the private car, well-functioning public transport along the main corridors and alternative forms like car-pooling.

The link between mobility poverty and housing costs

In Luxembourg Greater Region, accessibility and available forms of transport are only partly considered when searching for a place to live. Those especially at a higher risk of economic poverty are pushed away from Luxembourg City and its surroundings towards the less expensive dwelling alternatives of the Greater Region. The focus group discussions clearly pointed out that participants i) living in rural and deprived areas (but working in and around the capital of Luxembourg) as well as ii) living in cross-border areas find it difficult to live closer to their place of work due to the real estate market conditions.

Findings from the focus group sessions show that there is a clear link between housing costs and mobility. Due to the concentration of employment in the city of Luxembourg, the average advertised housing price differs greatly between Luxembourg's economic centre and its other areas, as well as cross-border areas. In 2015, the average advertised price for the purchase of an apartment in the city of Luxembourg was around 7,100 euro/m²

compared with 5,200 euro/m² for the rest of the country. This is similar for houses: 5,500 euro/m² for one in the city of Luxembourg compared with 3,900 euro/m² for the rest of the country (CES 2017).

The same differences exist for the cost of land suitable for housing. The median price of land located about 30 minutes from Luxembourg-Ville is about 38% of the median value of the capital. At a driving distance of 60 minutes from the capital into the heart of the north and cross-border areas, the median price is five times lower than the median price recorded in Luxembourg City.

Mobility poverty and accessibility

In the cross-border focus group, none of the participants currently uses public transport. They did not live close to any public transport that would bring them quickly to Luxembourg. They could drive to one of those stops, yet then prefer to organise a car-pooling scheme due to the low and poorly organised frequency of the bus timetable. In the focus group on rural and deprived areas, some trips were made using public transport due to a good direct regional bus connection and the place of work. However, this trip was only made when they did not need to pick up children (i.e. somebody else, as the spouse took care of family and household duties).

We can now better understand that only 7% of the daily cross-border commuting is done by public transport, either as the sole mode for about one third of people travelling or by combining it with a private car (park and ride). This low use of public transport is also the consequence of weak accessibility and multiple destinations for the commutes (e.g. school, work, shopping, grocery shopping).

A study carried out in 2012 (Schiebel et al. 2012, 10) identified that 40% of the cross-border regional public transport stops, mainly bus stops, are close to the Luxembourg border, in other words up to 5 km from the border. About 12% are located within 5 km and up to 10 km from the border. About 27% of the stops are in a range from 10 km up to 30 km yet are mainly train stops. From a combined spatial-transport offer point of view, there is a large difference in accessibility during peak hours towards the economic centre of Luxembourg City.

On an accessibility map created by Julien Schiebel and his team (Schiebel et al. 2012), it is shown that when it comes to accessibility, Luxembourg would contract on the main car and train arterials towards Luxembourg City. Via the main highway and mainly rail-based public transport systems, locations within Luxembourg have better access to the country's economic centre, yet all trips from cross-border residences outside of these transport corridors are comparatively long. In the case of a trip with a destination other than Luxembourg City, or in the case of multiple destinations, journeys become significantly longer and accessibility is substantially reduced. While the population in the southern area benefits from relatively high

access to public transport, such an offer is weak in the northern parts of the country.

There is a combination of the concentration of economic activity in the south, large differences in real estate market prices and yet also a widely shared desire to access home ownership. For Luxembourg, the rate of home ownership is 70.8% (STATEC 2014). This seems to lead to an increasing distance between home and job location. In particular, younger generations tend to move further away from the cities towards the urban periphery or rural areas, or even beyond the borders of the Grand Duchy. This creates extended urbanisation, resulting in longer journeys and an increased need for mobility, often triggering mobility poverty due to the gap between supply and demand.

Luxembourg and refugees

The Luxembourg population is growing annually with about 2% (circa 12,000 inhabitants). This is mainly through European citizens migrating to the country. As mentioned above, Luxembourg welcomes about 2,000 to 2,500 refugees annually (MAEE 2017). One of the focus groups was devoted to this social layer and its discussion showed mobility poverty as a result of dwelling choices. The reasons for refugee's mobility include seeing friends, personal appointments, education and sport. Due to current legislation, none of the participants had a regular job and they have been offered housing both in rural and remote areas of Luxembourg or in Luxembourg City. Most of them use the bus as their primary mode of transport to commute to Luxembourg city centre on a regular basis.

However, often the last buses in the evening are not suitable to allow social life after the late afternoon. The frequency of buses at the weekend is also low (i.e. one bus per hour), which results in limited and planned-in-advance mobility. Due to their financial situation, taxis are widely regarded as very expensive by refugees and therefore not considered a mobility option. Some refugees use a car for the first and last miles and then change to a train to go to the city centre, due to traffic jams; yet there are also parking problems and high parking prices in the city.

Another outcome is that, generally speaking, refugees have no problems in understanding the public transport system; younger refugees in particular are well versed in the internet and smartphone applications. It was reported that, as soon as they have the financial means and possibility of using their driving licence, they will buy a car and use it as their primary mode of transport. The car is also seen as a convenient mode to travel outside of Luxembourg and to do weekend trips.

Shopping is usually done close to home. However, evening courses for continuing education can only be reached by car, as there is no bus connection for the return journey. Most of the activities are organised in urban centres, which is why some activities (e.g. sports classes) cannot be undertaken

if one lives in a remote village and the activity takes place on a Sunday. This is even true for activities in the city centre, as there is also only one bus per hour on Sunday (and none during the night) with bad connections on Saturdays.

For the refugees who live outside of the city centre, this leads in some cases to social exclusion, yet the risks may be higher than for the rest of the population. This mainly relates to social activities which foster integration into society. Likewise, when they obtain legal status to access employment, success on the labour market is restricted by low transport accessibility.

Conclusions

Considering the economic and political relevance of Luxembourg City, we can conclude that this urban centre is a magnet that pulls people and goods, but, on the other hand, it pushes away workers with lower wages due to the high cost of living. This creates mobility tensions with the rural parts of the Duchy and triggers increased cross-border traffic. Almost 45% of the approximately 432,000-strong national workforce commutes daily between Luxembourg and neighbouring regions in Belgium, France and Germany. Looking beyond the country's borders, apart from some medium-sized cities (Trier, Arlon, Thionville and Metz), the Luxembourg Greater Region can be considered rural or a dispersed form of urban sprawl. The choice of living in a specific part of the northern or south-eastern part of the country, or even in the Great Region, is the result of multiple factors and transport is one of the variables in such a choice. This does not apply to the majority of refugees, who have little freedom of choice regarding their settlement.

To sum up for the vulnerable groups investigated here, the causes of mobility poverty are a mix of the socio-economic situation and specific social motivations (family ties, personal preferences). Cross-border workers gain income by working in the country of Luxembourg, yet lose significantly in terms of their time budget and travel costs. The current public transport offer leads in most cases to a strong car dependency. Car-pooling or increased inter-modality could be a solution. As cross-border households are close to public transport infrastructure or are well off due to their socio-economic situation, they are not all considered mobility poor. Nevertheless, the increased use of private mobility (i.e. a car) impacts their household budget.

The focus group discussions also showed a correlation between a lack of accessibility to transportation and an increased risk of social exclusion. Mobility poverty prevents people from taking an active part in society. This was specifically the case for workers living in remote rural areas, with daily (cross-border) commuting to work, school and social activities. When depending on public transport, social activities are more restricted. Another interesting point is that the time spent in cars is a significant proportion of the day, thus reducing time spent on other social activities.

Note

- 1 Please see the [introduction](#) to this volume regarding the contextualisation and methodology of this research.

References

- Conseil Economique et Social de Luxembourg (CES). 2017. “Perspectives économiques sectorielles à moyen et long termes dans une optique de durabilité.”. *Transport, Mobilité et Logistique*. <https://ces.public.lu/dam-assets/fr/avis/politique-generale/transport1.pdf>. Accessed 6 April 2020.
- Ministère des Affaires Etrangères et Européenne (MAEE), Direction de l’Immigration. 2017. “Statistiques concernant la protection internationale au Grand-Duché de Luxembourg Mois de mars 2017.” https://maee.gouvernement.lu/content/dam/gouv_mae/directions/d8/publications/statistiques-en-mati%C3%A8re-d-asyle/2019/Mars-2019-Statistiques-protection-internationale.pdf. Accessed 6 April 2020.
- Schiebel, Julien, Sylvain Klein, and Samuel Carpentier-Postel. 2012. Simulation de l’accessibilité en transport en commun transfrontalier vers le Luxembourg. Association de Science Régionale De Langue Française, 49e colloque de l’Association de Science Régionale De Langue Française, “Industrie, villes et régions dans une économie mondialisée., UMR ThéMA; ASRDLF, Jul 2012, Belfort, France. <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-01132740/document>. Accessed 21 April 2020.
- STATEC. 2014. Home ownership. <https://statistiques.public.lu/catalogue-publications/regards/2014/PDF-26-2014.pdf>. Accessed 4 February 2020.
- STATEC. 2017. Risk-of-poverty indicators. https://statistiques.public.lu/stat/TableViewer/tableViewHTML.aspx?ReportId=12957&IF_Language=eng&MainTheme=3&RFPPath=29. Accessed 4 February 2020.
- STATEC. 2019. Luxembourg en chiffre 2018. <https://statistiques.public.lu/catalogue-publications/luxembourg-en-chiffres/2018/luxembourg-chiffres.pdf>. Accessed 4 February 2020.