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# Inclusion and Marginalization in Higher Education (Luxembourg)

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## FULL ARTICLE

### Glossary

#### DAES:

Diplôme d'accès aux études supérieures is a diploma that allows adult learners to access higher education studies.

**"En alternance"**—literally meaning "alternating"—:

Part-time evening courses for professional adults who alternate between work and study rather than being full-time students.

#### Schools of the second chance:

These schools were created in 2012 following passage of the law of May 12, 2009. These are post-primary schools designed for students aged 16–24. The schools are in line with the lifelong learning approach of the government and its social cohesion objectives. It targets all learners who have left before obtaining a recognized degree as well as those who qualify for training. The Second Chance Schools are under the authority of the Ministry of Education and are to provide general and practical education in addition to assisting students towards social and academic integration in Luxembourg.

Europe 2020 was a 10-year strategy launched by the European Commission begun in 2010 aiming to ensure advancement of European economic development through "smart, sustainable, inclusive growth" and a greater coordination of national and European policies.

#### UL:

University of Luxembourg

## Inclusion and Marginalization Policies on Access and Opportunities

Several policy initiatives have been adopted in recent years to tackle persistent educational inequalities in higher education in Luxembourg which is among the world's most internationalized system.

The policies are formulated to address difficulties that certain categories of students continuously face; however, they do not wholly question the system's stratification. Those with lower socioeconomic backgrounds or with migration experience and speaking other languages than the national ones of Luxembourgish, French, and German (in the multilingual context of Luxembourg) "rarely reach higher education studies" as again emphasized in the 2022 report of Luxembourg's Observatory of Schooling Quality in Luxembourg (ONQS 2022).

Starting from the 2018–19 academic year, for instance, adults who prematurely left schooling have been offered an adapted pathway to HE qualification hence enabling them to pursue a professional activity while preparing the DAES access diploma to higher education. Organized as evening classes at the "School of the Second Chance" and at the Athénée de Luxembourg, a leading secondary school, the DAES diploma is recognized as equivalent to the secondary school diploma (diplôme de fin d'études secondaires) and is offered at the end of a study program that may take place both in either day-time classes or in the evening programs ("en alternance"). The DAES meets a necessary condition to access high-paying and secure jobs in the public sector as well as facilitating access to higher education studies. It is noteworthy to mention this national policy is in line with the European initiative called Europe 2020 that aims to improve social cohesion and economic development by reducing the number of dropouts to less than 10 percent across Europe and to increase the percentage of higher education graduates to 40 percent among 30–34 years old population (OECD 2016). Luxembourg has the highest rates of both higher education attainment and international student mobility in Europe (Kmiotek-Meier, Karl, and Powell 2020); however, this does not mean that students' economic and social capital is not an essential factor in the spatial or social destinations, especially since a semester of study abroad is a requirement of BA studies at the country's national university (Kmiotek-Meier and Powell 2022).

In one of the most expensive places to live anywhere, Luxembourg now provides free public transportation (since 2020), considered as a policy with a positive impact on higher education accessibility. It reduces students' expenses in Luxembourg—where housing and rental prices have risen and risen, with an increase of 17 percent in the last quarter of 2020 (Monaghan 2021). The University cannot yet provide sufficient dormitory space to meet demand, especially among international graduate students; many Luxembourg natives live at home and commute to campus.

Responding to the superdiversity of its faculty, staff, and students, the University of Luxembourg (UL)'s Code of Conduct (2020: 7) emphasizes the significance of a positive working environment in which "all members of the University community feel respected" hence the promotion of "fairness, inclusion, individual dignity, courtesy, sustainability, transparency, integrity, including scientific and research integrity, and professional growth, and to avoiding any unethical actions, which detract from our reputation for integrity and our commitment to trust and respect." The Student Service Inclusion Office has expanded its support services, especially mental health, during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the University strives to be more inclusive in all its programs.

## Inequalities in HE

Educational inequalities in Luxembourg are due to a mix of structural and systemic mechanisms that characterize the education system, including early selection into tracks and school types and multilingualism and their intersection with the ascribed characteristics of students including their gender, SES, linguistic, and migration backgrounds. Such inequalities have a long history. In effect, as indicated in PISA 2018 report and other studies (e.g., OECD 2016; ONQS 2020; Hadjar and Backes 2021), Luxembourg has a highly stratified educational system that places students with lower SES and migration backgrounds at risk of "alienation" and disadvantage. These educational inequalities limit access to higher education studies, although higher education policy focuses on improving access and on inclusion and equal opportunities.

## Scholarships and Financial Assistance

In Luxembourg, traditionally higher education participation occurred in the neighboring countries and financial aid for studying abroad has played an important role in providing this level of education, especially before the national university was founded in 2003. Public financial aid exists for all nationals as well as for the children of cross-border workers.<sup>[1]</sup> Out-bound student mobility remains considerable, with this financial aid originally available to students from higher and lower socioeconomic backgrounds. In 2018, the reform of financial aid lowered the annual sum paid to all students, which was previously paid regardless of their background. The reform means that funding is now subject to eligibility criteria and means-testing, with the revised system focusing more on students from less advantaged backgrounds. Consequently, actual costs incurred by students and their socioeconomic background are considered in calculating the amount of the relatively generous grants.

In addition, as the only national public university of Luxembourg, the UL charges very low tuition fees, possible due to the generous funding provided by the state. The amount of state funding the university receives depends on the 4-year plan established by the university; in the two decades since its founding, the university has consistently, and increasingly, attracted third-party funding, enabling further differentiation of its numerous study programs. State financial support is available for all higher education students regardless of their age, performance, socioeconomic background, or the country in which they are pursuing their studies, for the normal duration of a study program plus 1 year.

International students admitted to the UL can also take advantage of certain state-funded scholarship options, including merit scholarships as well as those for deserving students and financial aid for students in precarious situations.<sup>[2]</sup> Nevertheless, the high living costs, especially in the city of Luxembourg, imply financial burdens on students and their families.

## Successful Programs

The lifelong learning initiatives in Luxembourg have been rather successful in re-skilling and upskilling as well as in fostering integration of those marginalized. The National School for Adult Learners (ENAD), for example, addresses two types of student population, including (a) those who have failed to succeed in the general school system and can benefit from re-integration programs, and (b) those who want to upskill their competencies and obtain an additional degree while respecting their actual living conditions. It is aimed at people who have left school before achieving a recognized qualification as well as those who qualify for training.

The House of Training, too, provides specialist training for adult learners through on-site, blended, and e-learning courses, hence improving their professional integration through micro credentials.

Alongside dozens of regular degree programs, the UL also has a Competence Centre that provides professional and academic continuing education. Located on Belval Campus, the Competence Centre develops and manages training programs for adults designed to meet the immediate needs of the labor market and support Luxembourg's economic development.

## Key Challenges

The key challenges for marginalized learners hoping to participate in higher learning and attain post-secondary degrees include the stratification, selectivity, and social segregation experienced in primary and secondary schooling (and transitions between them); the expected fluency in several languages spoken in Luxembourg daily (Luxembourgish, French, German, English, and Portuguese); and the increasing costs of living and study abroad.

## Further Reading and Online Resources

Lifelong learning in Luxembourg (webpage). Accessible at: <https://www.lifelong-learning.lu/Detail/Article/Orientation/ecole-nationale-pour-adultes/fr>.

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