



MOBILITY POVERTY

MOBILITY POVERTY OVERVIEW IN CENTRAL
AND EASTERN EUROPE

COMPARISON OF OVERVIEWS

Project: Mobility Poverty in CEE and SE Europe

Authors: Suzie Vanoosten

City, date: Ljubljana, March 2023



RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Mobility poverty (MP) in some countries has been relatively unexamined and no clear definitions are available at EU or national levels. However, it is a problem that is becoming more pressing as fuel prices are rising and some countries face high car dependency thus commuting to work or for daily errands can become very expensive. The most important factor that causes MP is the household's income. But then the mobility expenses are lower if the family members have good access to public transport and can go on foot/by bicycle to do their daily errands. It seems that the low-income households in peripheral and (by public transport) less accessible areas might be the most affected and vulnerable groups.

Against this backdrop, project Mobility poverty in Central and Eastern Europe aims at reviewing the policies and assessing the state of mobility poverty in Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. It also aims to raise awareness of policy- and decision- makers about the mobility poverty issue. The overview in selected countries will result in a 4-pager policy brief for each country. The policy briefs will be disseminated to 20-30 stakeholders in each country. These reports will be based on an accessible EU database and quality insight (e.g. interviews). These policy briefs will be a good basis for further project activities, especially stakeholder awareness and communication.

Here, the aim was to provide a genuine comparison of all overviews produced in each country.

The project is financed by the European Climate Foundation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1/** Mobility poverty definition and indicators (p.3)
- 2/** Situation in the field of mobility poverty (p.4)
- 3/** Mobility poverty policies and measures (p.6)
- 4/** Key actors in the mobility poverty field (p.7)
- 5/** Research gaps (p.8)
- 6/** Expert evaluation (p.9)
- 7/** Graphs (p.10)
- 8/** Conclusion (p.16)

1/ MOBILITY POVERTY DEFINITION AND INDICATORS

The first point that was studied was naturally the question of the existence in those countries of a definition or indicators to highlight mobility poverty within their boundaries. The response is unanimously **NO**. Indeed, in none of the countries surveyed is there an official and complete definition or an indicator of this phenomenon, reflecting the novelty of this concept. Thus, the awareness towards those issues among the local populations or even the public authorities is very low and the search for solutions very infrequent.

However, some **national statistics** in some countries reflect that the issue of mobility poverty is already considered, even if not in itself. For instance, in Hungary, transport is statistically considered as a basic need, along with food and energy, while in Croatia, traffic poverty is reflected in numerous documents, especially when studying poverty in its globality. But mobility poverty is still not defined as a notion in itself.

Fortunately, the recent efforts made at the European level, especially through the **EU Climate Law** and the **Social Climate Fund**, raise big hopes among all the countries we surveyed. Indeed, all of them will benefit from a certain percentage of the SCF (for instance 10% for Romania, or one billion euros for Croatia), obliging them to make efforts to solve, for instance, the issue of mobility poverty. Thus, our experts encourage public authorities to draw their inspiration from those laws to build their own definition, while taking into account their own particularities and problems.

2/ SITUATION IN THE FIELD OF MOBILITY POVERTY

The second step was to determine how mobility poverty reveals itself in each country. Even if we can notice some differences between them, we can also note that this phenomenon is globally occurring in a same way everywhere. We can sort the different dimensions of mobility poverty as followed:

- ◆ Affordability of mobility
- ◆ Accessibility/Availability of means of transport
- ◆ Car dependency
- ◆ Consideration of people with disabilities, gender inequalities, and health risks

What is genuinely striking while going through the different overviews is that mobility poverty is mainly the result of **unaffordability of public transport** and is tightly linked to **economic poverty**. Indeed, it is obvious for every country we surveyed, with an exception for Slovakia where many discounts for the most vulnerable groups exist, reducing the risk of unaffordability of public transports. In Hungary, mobility poverty is exclusively tied to the unaffordability of public transport, especially for the most vulnerable groups (young people, the unemployed, those beneath the poverty line). In Romania, economic poverty remains the first cause of difficulties for moving around, especially as the poorest live mainly in rural areas. In Croatia, transport is becoming an increasing burden on the household budget (15.8% of household's expenditures in 2019 against only 12% in 2008). In Bulgaria, the low expenditures for transport of the poorest households indicate their likely deprivation of transport. Thus, all these elements allow us to understand that mobility poverty is mainly an issue related to economic poverty.

But the phenomenon of mobility poverty also raises questions in terms of **accessibility**. Indeed, mobility poverty is also about having difficulties in accessing (public) means of transport, something that can be particularly true in **rural areas**. In fact, our studies led in the different countries highlighted big differences between urban and rural areas. In Croatia, 32.4% of people living in rural areas declared having high difficulties to access public transportation, which represents something quite common in each country. Hungary is the only one who is not deeply concerned. Meanwhile, Romania reflects the extreme opposite because a

twofold problem impacts its rural areas: on one hand, those areas know difficulties in terms of accessibility, transport systems there being much less effective than in urban areas; but on the other hand, 75% of the poorest Romanians live in those rural areas, meaning they are harshly touched by unaffordability and inaccessibility of public transports at the same time, reinforcing very badly their exclusion. Slovakia deals with a particular situation as well: it has “mobility-poor regions”, meaning mobility poverty affects entire regions. Thus, except for Hungary, inaccessibility of public transportation remains a main factor of mobility poverty.

However, those problems in terms of unaffordability and inaccessibility of public transports, especially in rural areas, create a worrying situation of **car-dependency**. And it is the case for all the countries we surveyed. For instance, in Bulgaria, when focusing on the modal split for means of transports, 84.7% are represented by the use of a personal car, which is pretty much the same everywhere. However, this situation raises worrying questions. Indeed, many people are obliged to use their car daily, in a context of climate urgency, but also of energy crisis. Having a personal car is getting more expensive through time, for example because of the increase of gasoline prices. Thus, many households cannot afford to maintain, or even to buy a private car (18% in Bulgaria for example), which creates a profound situation of mobility poverty. In the meantime, we are more and more encouraged to get rid of our personal cars for environmental reasons (Hungary promoting the purchase of electric cars for instance). However, those measures can easily become unfair and contribute to the exclusion of the poorest.

Finally, it was important to focus more on the specific challenges it exists in terms of **disability, gender, and health**. Indeed, people with disabilities, women, or the civilians themselves, are exposed to even more obstacles, leading to a more profound situation of mobility poverty. However, our experts had to face the lack of data on those topics. It shows that the phenomenon of mobility poverty, as a relatively new concept, is not yet considered through all its dimensions. Yet, for Romania, it was for example highlighted that it exists very few accommodations for people with disabilities in the public transportation systems. In Croatia, the accent was made on the gender inequalities, highlighting a marked imbalance in the gender distribution of drivers in favour of males, meaning it continues existing a female dependency on male drivers to move around. In Bulgaria, the accent was made on the harmful emissions caused by transportation, as well as unbearable noise levels. Thus, by being exposed to the most severe exceedances in terms of transportation’s externalities, the Bulgarian citizens’ health is being threatened.

3/ MOBILITY POVERTY POLICIES AND MEASURES

The third step was to determine if countries already implemented policies or measures to tackle mobility poverty, and if it was adapted. For every country surveyed, the response is that any of them, as they have not yet defined mobility poverty as a concrete problem, are not in capacity of implementing concrete solutions.

When we have a look at their **national legal framework**, each country has naturally national laws that organize and regulate public transportation within their boundaries. But never is considered mobility poverty, or not in itself, because this issue is always treated in relation to poverty in its globality, making the measures inadequate.

What we can also highlight is that, often, the implementation of measures in terms of public transportation is the work of **local authorities**, making the thinking process on a national definition of mobility poverty inexistant and making it impossible for this phenomenon to be seriously considered by national authorities. But in the meantime, the local authorities stay those who know the best what their population needs.

When measures concerning transportation and poverty are undertaken, it is often made within the form of **compensations** for those who are considered the most vulnerable, meaning students, unemployed, older persons... Those measures can be great to tackle the problem of unaffordability of public transportation, but they always stay incomplete. For instance, it does not confront the problem of inaccessibility, contributing to make car dependency more important. The problem stays the same when the authorities decide to subsidize the existing (and not new) public transportation, or the purchase of clean vehicles which stay products only accessible for upper classes.

The only country where a **case of good practice** was highlighted is Romania, with the city of Alba Iulia, where an integrated urban-rural system of public transports has been introduced. It has allowed more affordable and especially more accessible public transportation in the neighbouring rural areas. In the case of Croatia, some already existing systems (subventions, demand responsive transit, shared mobility, or virtual mobility) have been highlighted as potential tools that can be developed on an upper scale.

4/ KEY ACTORS IN THE MOBILITY POVERTY FIELD

It is hard to find differences between the countries surveyed in the fourth step as well. This step was about listing key actors that could implement solutions to fight mobility poverty. In each country, it was highlighted that **national authorities** could do more. Whether it is governments or ministries, they can implement top-down regulations and create a concrete legal framework, which is essential to act against mobility poverty. In the meantime, **regional and local authorities** are considered as even more essential. They are often those who must maintain the transportation infrastructures, who determine the fares, who receive and allocate subventions, and who have the possibility to implement intercommunity projects, essential to erase mobility poverty. Thus, they have a particular influence and a role to play in terms of mobility poverty. The **research and scientific institutions**, as well as the **associations and activists**, are considered as very important as well, especially in the early stages of this growing notion. Their importance ties to their ability of raising awareness, within the public authorities and the local populations. The academic institutions would contribute to provide scientific knowledge to raise mobility poverty as a genuine issue, while the associations would make sure this problem is taken seriously. Also, our experts agree when considering the **Social Climate Fund** and the money it will leave available for countries. They highlight the necessity to clearly oversee the good use of these funds and to check that it is well-used to erase mobility poverty. Finally, it was also mentioned that **employers** could have influence by being more flexible about their employees' work schedule and encourage more teleworking, as well as the **medias** that could enlarge people's knowledge and bring examples of good practice.

Thus, everyone here agrees on who must get involved in the mobility poverty field. It shows the importance of having diverse actors from diverse grounds that get involved around those questions, to make sure this issue is treated globally and efficiently. Yet, some of our experts consider, sometimes according to the specific situation known by their country, that **local authorities** might be more important and more influent in the fight against mobility poverty: in Romania where it exists specific challenges in rural areas; also in Croatia where the risks of corruption and mismanagement led our experts to strongly promote the parallel commitment of organizations led by representatives; finally, in Slovakia where the issues of mobility poverty are mostly occurring in "mobility-poor regions".

5/ RESEARCH GAPS

This step was about determining what needs to be changed and done in the research field. Indeed, what we were able to notice earlier is that it exists a problematic lack of knowledge concerning mobility poverty, its causes, and consequences. However, we are in a situation of **emergency**: an environmental emergency, that was confirmed through the introduction of the EU Climate Law, that leaves the European countries in the obligation to do more to reach concrete improvements.

First, the most urgent thing to do is to provide, through a deeper analysis of the issue, a concrete and complete **definition** of mobility poverty. Otherwise, this question could never be treated seriously and adequately.

Then, how can the different authorities from a country do things correctly and efficiently if they do not have access to **concrete data and information** on how mobility poverty is operating within their boundaries? Indeed, our experts unanimously raised that the lack of awareness and knowledge are total barriers to the implementation of adapted and coordinated solutions. Thus, an important work needs to be done in the research field to make sure awareness about this issue rise among public authorities and populations.

Moreover, the research field also needs to focus more on more precise dimensions of mobility poverty. Indeed, our experts highlighted the **multidimensional aspect** of this phenomenon. Only studying it through its global form, as it is currently done, do not allow its complete comprehension and the implementation of concrete solutions in the end. Thus, the academic and scientific research must focus more on social aspects of mobility poverty, but also its territorial aspects, and the specific difficulties some groups can experience in terms of mobility and transportation. It exists an urgent need for in-depth qualitative insights.

Finally, it was intelligently mentioned that, in the **future**, academic research will have to evaluate the **efficiency** of the measures implemented. Indeed, the risk of introducing inadequate solutions is real, making this mission of counter-verification essential.

6/ EXPERT EVALUATION

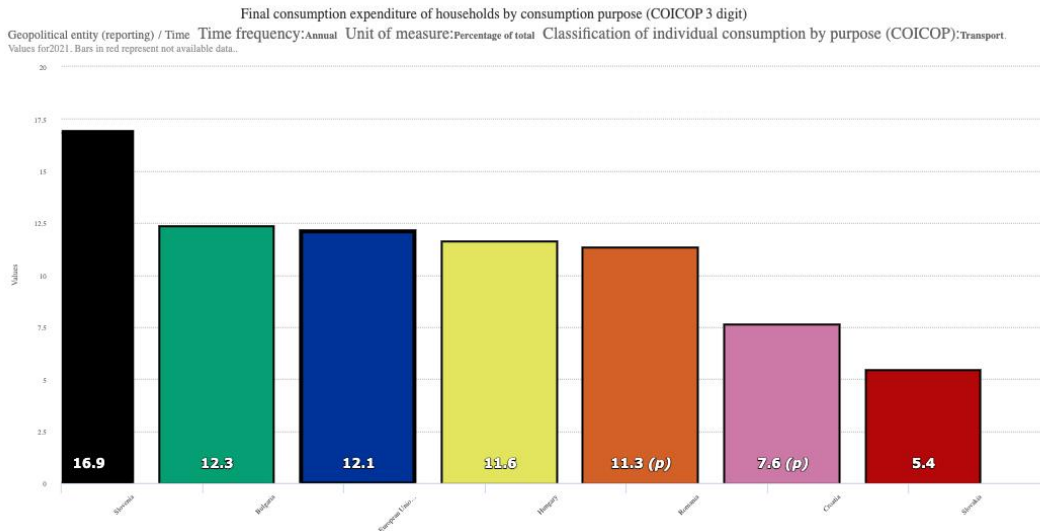
This part was probably the most interesting in the scope of the overviews' comparison. Indeed, even if our experts all highlighted globally the same problems in terms of mobility poverty in their countries, they also showed particularities, making them produce different visions on how to solve the problem.

First, our experts from Hungary and Romania promote a management of mobility poverty issues mainly through the work and influence of **public authorities**. They consider the great influence they can have, first concerning the necessary recognition of this phenomenon within the legal framework, then to implement concrete solutions. However, we can notice that the more specific points to work on totally differ between the two countries: Hungary is already engaged in low-carbon policy efforts that our experts encourage, while our experts from Romania consider that those types of efforts should not be the priority, as the main problem remains the inaccessibility in the rural areas.

Our experts from Croatia, on the other hand, encourage another vision, that implies a bit less the public authorities. Indeed, they insist on the necessity to create an **independent institution**, and to give significant (financial) means to other (public) **organizations of representation** (Ombudsperson's Offices) to tackle the issues of energy and transport poverty. They must also become key actors in the future monitoring of SCF measures. All of this would be a way to avoid risks of bad management and corruption within the public authorities.

Finally, our experts from Bulgaria suggest another vision. Here, the accent is made on the **"research"** aspect. Indeed, according to them, the preparatory work is the key step to then guide the authorities to legally define mobility poverty and to create effective indicators. For that, they insist on the necessity to conduct surveys, especially locally, to then allow (local) authorities to implement adapted solutions thanks to the data they will have access to. In the meantime, our experts from Slovakia also followed this way by highlighting the urgent necessity to provide a concrete and adequate definition of mobility poverty and also to improve and deepen research to quantify better the impacts and causes of this phenomenon to ultimately allow the implementation of adapted solutions.

6/ GRAPHS



Final consumption expenditure of households by consumption purpose (COICOP 3 digit)

Source of data: Eurostat (online data code: NAMA_10_CO3_P3)

Last update: 05/04/2023 23:00

This graph has been created automatically by ESTAT/EC software according to external user specifications for which ESTAT/EC is not responsible. Graphic included.

General disclaimer of the EC website: https://ec.europa.eu/info/legal/notice_en.html



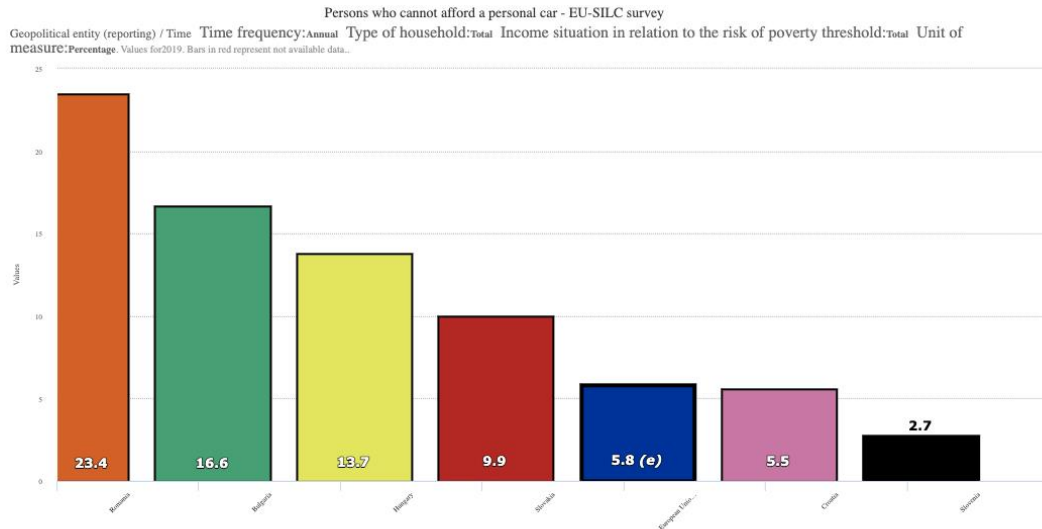
Graph n°1: Final consumption expenditure of households by consumption purpose. Here, consumption purpose: Transport. (2021).

Source: Eurostat – NAMA_10_CO3_P3

= Percentage within the total expenditure of households dedicated to transport and mobility in 2021.

→ Useful to highlight the fact that “transport” represents important expenses for households, with a European average representing 12.1%. The countries we surveyed find themselves around that average. In the meantime, Croatia and Slovakia have good levels (“only” 7.6% and 5.4%). However, the situation is pretty worrying in Slovenia, the expenses in transport representing almost 17%.

MOBILITY POVERTY OVERVIEW – COMPARISON OF OVERVIEWS



Persons who cannot afford a personal car - EU-SILC survey

Source of data: Eurostat (online data code: ILC_MDDU05)

Last update 03/04/2023 23:00

This graph has been created automatically by ESTATDEC software according to external user specifications for which ESTATDEC is not responsible. Graphics included.

General disclaimer of the EC website: https://ec.europa.eu/info/legal-notice_en.html

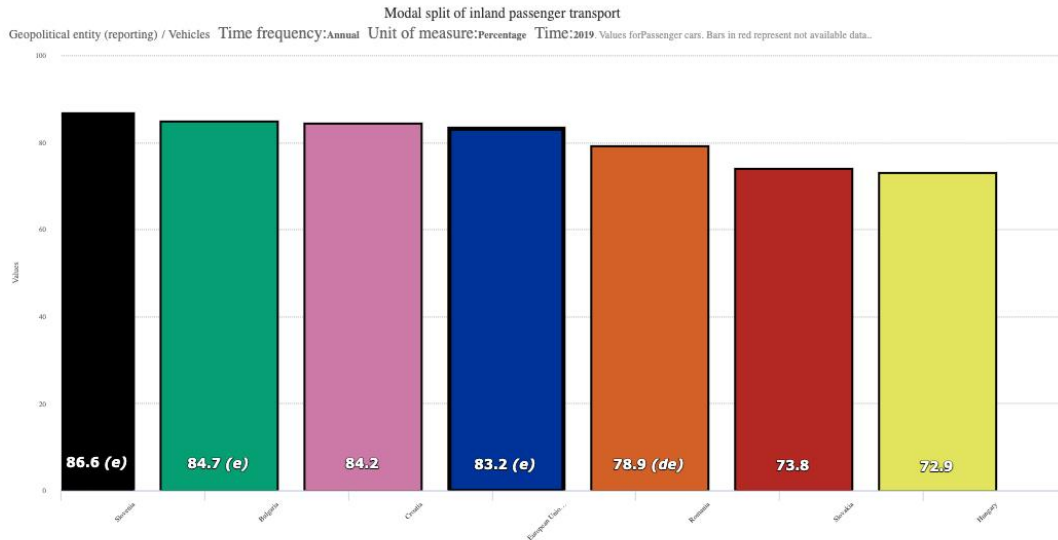
eurostat

Graph n°2: Persons who cannot afford a personal car. (2019).

Source: Eurostat – ILC_MDDU05

= Percentage of persons, within the national population, that do not have the financial means to buy and/or maintain a personal car in 2019.

→ Useful to highlight the fact that a personal car represents huge daily expenses (purchase, maintenance, insurance...). However, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, and Hungary are situated way beyond the European average, which is worrying.



Modal split of inland passenger transport

Source of data: Eurostat (online data code: TRAN_HV_PSMOD)
Last update: 13/07/2022 23:00

This graph has been created automatically by ESTAT/EC software according to external user specifications for which ESTAT/EC is not responsible. Graphic included.
General disclaimer of the EC website: http://ec.europa.eu/info/legal-notice_en.html



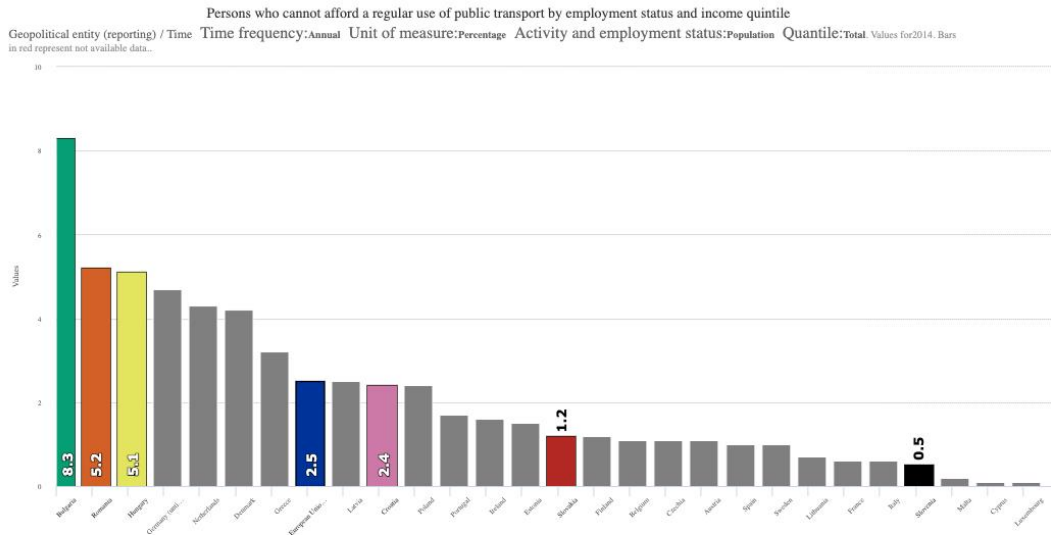
Graph n°3: Modal split of inland passenger transport. Here, values for passenger cars. (2019).

Source: Eurostat – TRAN_HV_PSMOD

= Percentage represented by the use of personal cars within the global use of all means of transports within each country in 2019.

→ Useful to highlight this tremendous dependency to personal cars at a European scale (the European average being at 83.2%). Even though Romania, Slovakia, and Hungary show percentages below this European average, the situation in Slovenia, Bulgaria, and Croatia are quite worrying. It demonstrates the necessity to encourage more an evolution of our habits.

MOBILITY POVERTY OVERVIEW – COMPARISON OF OVERVIEWS



Persons who cannot afford a regular use of public transport by employment status and income quintile

Source of data: Eurostat (online data code: ILC_MDES13B)
Last update 08/02/2021 23:00

This graph has been created automatically by ESTAT/EC software according to external user specifications for which ESTAT/EC is not responsible. Graphic included. General disclaimer of the EC website: https://ec.europa.eu/info/legal/notice_en.html

eurostat

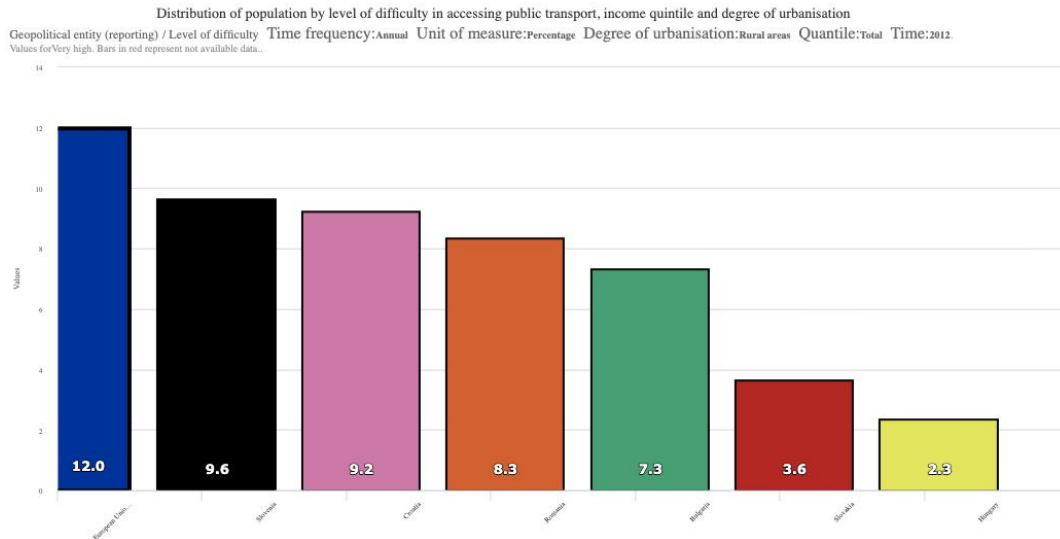
Graph n°4: Persons who cannot afford a regular use of public transport by employment status and income quintile. (2014).

Source: Eurostat – ILC_MDES13B

= Percentage of people who do not have the financial means to use public transportation. Percentage calculated according to employment status and income in 2014.

→ The European average is 2.5%. Slovenia and Slovakia demonstrate really good scores while considering this European average (0.5% and 1.2%), which shows that they are less concerned by problems of unaffordability of their transports. However, the situation is particularly concerning in Bulgaria (8.3%) and, to a lesser extent, in Romania (5.2%) and Hungary (5.1%).

→ Having a look not only at the countries we surveyed but at all the European countries allow us to highlight that this issue of unaffordability of public transports concern “Western” European countries as well, Hungary being followed in the results by Germany, the Netherlands, and Denmark.



Distribution of population by level of difficulty in accessing public transport, income quintile and degree of urbanisation

Source of data: Eurostat (online data code: ILC_HCMP06)
 Last update 08/02/2021 23:00

This graph has been created automatically by ESTAT/EC software according to external user specifications for which ESTAT/EC is not responsible. Graphic included.
 General disclaimer of the EC website: https://ec.europa.eu/info/legal-notice_en.html



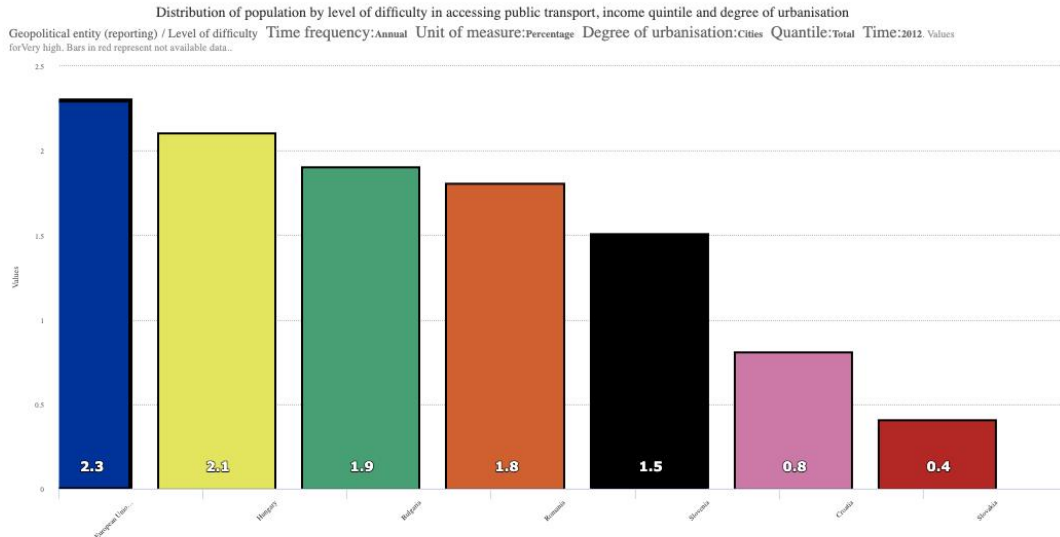
Graph n°5: Distribution of population by level of difficulty in accessing public transport, income quintile and degree of urbanization. Here, level of difficulty = very high. Here, degree of urbanization = rural areas. (2012).

Source: Eurostat – ILC_HCMP06

= Here, the degree of urbanization considered is the rural areas. So, we have here the percentage of people having very high difficulties accessing public transport within rural areas in each country in 2012.

→ Surprisingly, the countries we surveyed demonstrate a percentage inferior to the European average (12%). Hungary, as mentioned in the overview, is not much concerned by those problems of accessibility/availability, with a percentage of 2.3%. In the contrary, Croatia and Slovenia demonstrate percentages superior to 9%.

MOBILITY POVERTY OVERVIEW – COMPARISON OF OVERVIEWS



Distribution of population by level of difficulty in accessing public transport, income quintile and degree of urbanisation

Source of data: Eurostat (online data code: ILC_HCMP06)
Last update 08/02/2021 23:00

This graph has been created automatically by ESTAT@IC software according to external user specifications for which ESTAT@IC is not responsible. Graphic included.
General disclaimer of the IC website: https://ec.europa.eu/info/legal/notice_en.html

eurostat

Graph n°6: Distribution of population by level of difficulty in accessing public transport, income quintile and degree of urbanization. Here, level of difficulty = very high. Here, degree of urbanization = cities. (2012)

Source: Eurostat – ILC_HCMP06

= Here, the degree of urbanization considered is the cities. So, we have here the percentage of people having very high difficulties in accessing public transport within cities in 2012.

→ By comparing this graph with the previous one, we can easily highlight the fact that difficulties in accessing public transport (and, by extension, mobility poverty) concern for the most part rural areas. Here, within cities, usually less than 2% of people have difficulties in accessing public transport, while it can concern until 10% (even 12% for the European average) of people in the rural areas.

CONCLUSION

The main conclusion that we can make through this report is that **it does not exist many differences** in terms of mobility poverty between all the countries surveyed. Even when we have a look on other countries, that we can consider more advanced on mobility, for instance France, we notice that they are facing the same type of problems as well. It highlights the necessity of creating a European legal framework as well to tackle those issues, reinforcing the legitimacy of the EU Climate Law and the SCF.

We can only highlight a few main **differences** between the countries surveyed, as followed:

- ◆ **Hungary** is not concerned by problems of inaccessibility of public transportation in its rural areas, which we can put as an “anomaly”, all the other countries surveyed being concerned.
- ◆ **Romania**, on the contrary, holds problems of unaffordability and inaccessibility of mobility at the same time in its rural areas, which is explained by the important poverty of its inhabitants in those areas.
- ◆ **Bulgaria** is particularly concerned by external pollutions produced by transportation: air pollution, noise... leading to the worst exceedances in Europe, to the point that it raises concerns about Bulgarian people’s health.
- ◆ **Croatia** holds many data concerning the particular vulnerability experienced by Croatian women in terms of mobility, especially about access to their driver’s license. Yet, this phenomenon is probably not an isolated problem that the other countries surveyed do not experience as well.
- ◆ **Slovakia**, while not being concerned by problems of mobility’s unaffordability, is deeply concerned by problems of inaccessibility in its “mobility poor-regions”, also raising the existence of a phenomenon of “hidden mobility poverty”.

In the meantime, the **similarities** between the countries surveyed in terms of mobility poverty are striking, as followed:

- ◆ Mobility poverty represents, for the most part, a genuine problem of **unaffordability** and **inaccessibility** of transportation, that concerns mainly the **poorest** and those living in **rural areas**.
- ◆ This leads to a **car-dependency**, hardly avoidable in those conditions.
- ◆ Mobility poverty does not yet benefit from a concrete scientific, legal, and political **definition**.

- ◆ It exists a concerning **lack of academic and scientific knowledge** about mobility poverty, leading to a lack of awareness and to the impossibility of implementing concrete and adapted solutions.
- ◆ In the meantime, all the aspects of this phenomenon are not considered as well, despite its genuine **multidimensional aspect**, in the research field as well as in the legal field.
- ◆ In the meantime, the specific problems experienced by **specific groups** are not sufficiently taken into consideration, leading to a lack of data, ultimately leading to insufficient solutions as well.
- ◆ The **commitment of numerous spheres and diverse organizations** is essential to tackle the issue of mobility poverty.

Thus, this conclusion raises the legitimacy of this joint research action. By highlighting how mobility poverty concretely impacts the daily life of many people in several countries and that the forms this phenomenon takes are pretty much the same everywhere, we were able to confirm the importance of taking action against this exclusionary issue. Within the urgency implied by the current environmental crisis and the implementation of the European Social Climate Fund, we hope those combined data and the recommendations we provided will encourage sincere consideration and concrete action against mobility poverty.