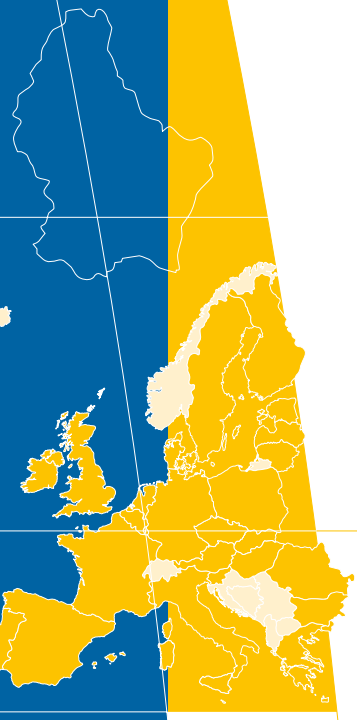


About…

Languages in Luxembourg

The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg is one of those rare countries in the world where several languages are spoken and written throughout its territory and in different spheres of life – private, professional, social, cultural and political. This multilingualism has been legally defined since 1984 with *Lëtzebuergesch* (Luxembourg language) as the national language and French as the language used for legislative matters, while French, German and *Lëtzebuergesch* all share the status of administrative and judiciary languages. This trilingualism is a reality lived by 277,900 native Luxembourg people. In recent decades, as a side effect of the country's strong economic growth and a policy of social promotion, the mother tongues of the 205,900 foreign nationals residing in Luxembourg have also joined the linguistic landscape of the Grand Duchy.

Grand Duchy of Luxembourg

Capital: Luxembourg

Form of government: constitutional monarchy

Neighbouring countries: Germany, Belgium, France

Area: 2,586 km^2

Population: 483,800 inhabitants, of which 205,900 are foreigners

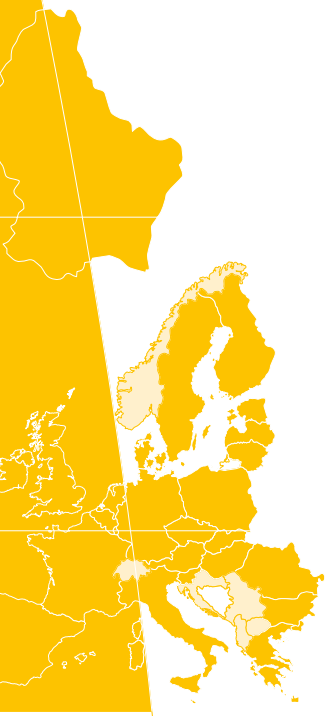
Population density: 184 inhab./km^2 (2007)

© Noriko Cooper

Languages intimately associated with the country's history

The origins of Luxembourg's characteristic linguistic situation can be traced back to the Middle Ages. To fully understand the current situation, it is essential to evoke some of the key stages of the country's history, marked by several centuries of foreign sovereignties.

Grand-Duché de luxembourg.

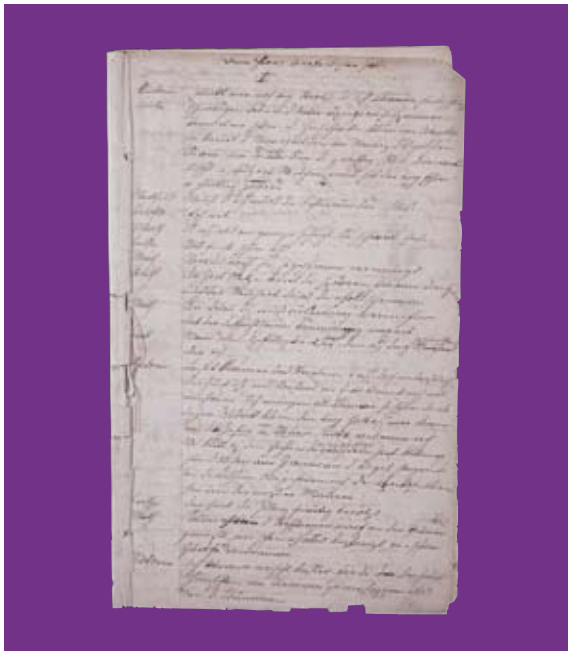


963

The name Lützelburg ("Luxembourg" from the 19th century onwards) stems from a small fortress built by Count Siegfried, the ruins of which can still be seen on the rocky outcrop known as the Bock. The name Lucilinburhuc means "small castle" in Old German. The territory at that time was part of the Holy Roman Empire and the language spoken was High German.

1364

The expansion policy pursued by the counts of Luxembourg as well as a series of conquests to the north and west entailed that the territory was divided into two major areas, in which different dialects were spoken: Walloon in the French-speaking part and the Luxembourg dialect in the German-speaking part. The written and administrative languages were French and German, respectively, used in their ancient forms. This period marked a time of juxtaposed bilingualism (a term coined by the historian Gilbert Trausch), with the two languages not spoken by one and the same person. Nevertheless, the city of Luxembourg, while situated in the German-speaking part, escaped this unyielding logic of a juxtaposed distribution of languages, since French was chosen as the administrative language.



Manuscript of a folk tale entitled *Dem Grow Siegfried seï Gold,* written in 1872 by Luxembourg author Michel Rodange

1684

Under the first French occupation by King Louis XIV, the use of German was virtually banned. A century later, under the impact of the French Revolution, French continued to gain lasting ground, infiltrating the local administration of the German-speaking zone. The Napoleonic Code was introduced in 1804. *Lëtzebuergesch* remained the everyday language spoken by all the inhabitants.

1839

The London Treaty saw the great powers declare Luxembourg's independence and organise the division of the country. Luxembourg was reduced to its present size (2,586 km^2), with its new territory situated entirely in the German-speaking zone. The German language could have toppled the superiority of French once and for all. But the lack of support shown by William II, king of the Netherlands and grand duke of Luxembourg, to German officials allowed the influential Luxembourg notables to enforce French as the administrative, legislative and political language.

1843

The industrialisation of the country brought about profound changes in population: while Germans and Italians immigrated to Luxembourg in great numbers, many Luxembourg citizens left the country, emigrating to France or the United States. Linguistic positioning became a political issue. In fact, in order to set the country apart from the rest of the German Confederation and to shield it from nationalist "germanisation" attempts, a crucial law was passed: French was henceforth to be a compulsory school subject, in the same capacity as German. French lessons were introduced from primary school onwards and the linguistic syllabus was implemented once and for all by the school reform of 1912.

Stamp illustrating Luxembourg's international development
© P&TLuxembourg

1941

The Luxembourg people once again asserted their language as a symbol of national identity when they – courageously and unequivocally – transformed a census held by the German occupants into a referendum, in which they, among other things, proclaimed *Lëtzebuergesch* as their only mother tongue. After the war, fortified by its status as the language of the Resistance, *Lëtzebuergesch* was no longer under threat. Its vocabulary gradually grew with the inclusion of French words, in reaction to the identity crisis and linguistic trauma caused by the German military occupations during the First and Second World Wars. Finally, the revised Constitution of 1948, more explicit than that of 1848, stated that the law regulate the use of languages in administrative and legal matters.

1960

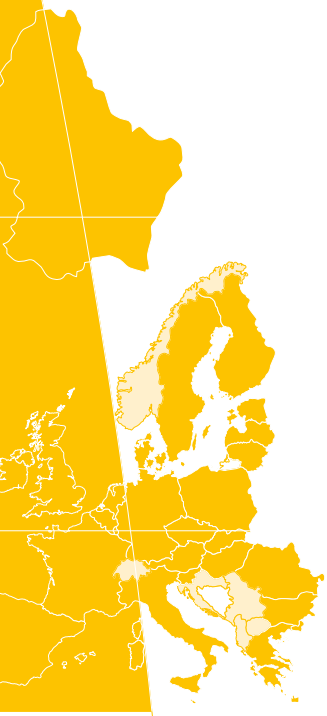
From the 1960s onwards, after the opening of the borders laid down by the Treaties of Rome in 1957, new immigration waves to Luxembourg started changing the linguistic landscape. Three quarters of these communities hailed from countries speaking Romance languages and used French to communicate with the Luxembourg people. The use of French, a symbol of the old bourgeoisie and perpetuated as such, became more accessible, whilst *Lëtzebuergesch* underwent a process of emancipation through the integration of younger generations in the national education system.

1984

The law regulating the use of languages elevated *Lëtzebuergesch* to the rank of national language of the Grand Duchy. For the first time, this law stipulated that an application submitted to a public authority in *Lëtzebuergesch,* French or German be met, insofar as possible, with a response by the administration in the language chosen by the applicant. The restrictive distinction is obviously aimed at *Lëtzebuergesch*: nonetheless, the fact remains that the law of 1984 saw the Luxembourg language enter administration. Its recognition at European level by the "Lingua" programme in 1989 represented a further endorsement, a confirmation of the sociocultural revival of *Lëtzebuergesch* in relation to French and German, as observed since the 1970s.

Foreign residents and cross-border commuters currently represent more than 70 % of the working population: as a result, several language schools for adults as well as numerous other different initiatives are endeavouring to respond to a growing demand for *Lëtzebuergesch* classes. A government bill has been submitted to Parliament establishing an Institut national des langues (National Language Institute) and aiming, among others, to create the "Diplom Lëtzebuerger Sprooch a Kultur" (diploma of Luxembourg language and culture). This qualification will allow *Lëtzebuergesch* teachers to improve their professional knowledge of all aspects of the language (spelling, linguistics, literature). This government bill also confers a status upon teachers of *Lëtzebuergesch* through legally defining the teaching profession of the Luxembourg language.

In addition, the government bill on double nationality will in future create new certification requirements in *Lëtzebuergesch.* The new National Language Institute will thus be entrusted with holding the tests required with a view to acquiring double nationality.

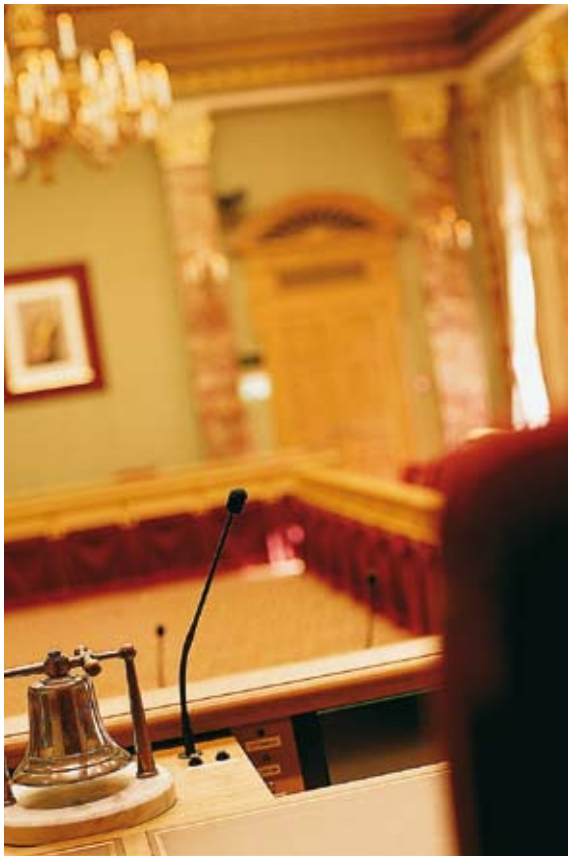


Official uses with no official language

The state, school and the church – three institutions that call for an interesting analysis of linguistic practices. In fact, since no language can lay claim to the status of official language in the Grand Duchy, French, German and *Lëtzebuergesch* are omnipresent to varying degrees, and between them share the roles of language in the workplace and that used for publication and communication purposes, on both a formal and informal level.

Which languages for the state?

Legislative acts are written in French and an important consequence of this on a judicial level is that only the French language text is deemed authentic for all levels of public administration.



Parliament (Chamber of Deputies)
© Jeanine Unsen/SIP

In contrast, spoken French has gradually disappeared from Parliament (Chamber of Deputies), despite the fact that occasionally members of government still prefer it to *Lëtzebuergesch* when making important declarations. In this very official context, no language of expression has been officially laid down and to a certain degree this gives politicians the freedom to express themselves in their preferred language.

The fact is that these days the regular debates in Parliament are held in *Lëtzebuergesch*. Hence, the accounts of the public parliamentary sessions enclosed as an insert in the daily newspapers illustrate a skilful mix of languages: the debates are transcribed in *Lëtzebuergesch* (representing the largest regularly written volume in this language), while questions to the government are mostly articulated in French. Legal texts, for their part, are always in French.

It is important to note that the law of February 1984 states that, in administrative and judicial matters, use may be made of French, German or *Lëtzebuergesch*. Citizens enjoy this same choice when submitting an administrative application, without the administration nevertheless being strictly bound to respect their preference.

Generally speaking, the weak presence of German at the national level of public life is partly counterbalanced by its strong presence at local level, both spoken and written (local council publications). The Luxembourg state administration operates according to a stable balance, preferring French as the written and *Lëtzebuergesch* as the spoken language (in the workplace and for communication purposes).

This situation has since become standard practice at the highest level: in 1996, for the first time in the history of Luxembourg, Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker presented the annual government statement on the country's economic, social and financial situation in *Lëtzebuergesch*.

© Christof Weber/SIP

Which languages at school?

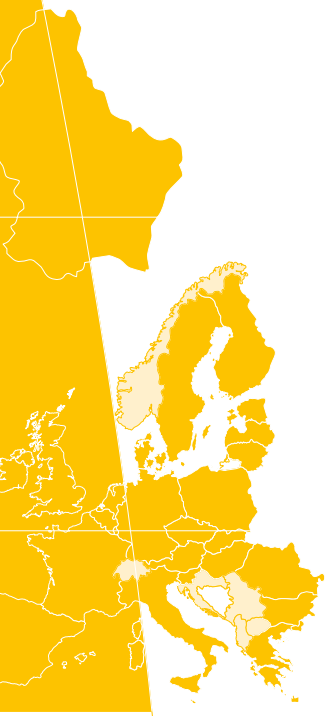
Since the years of mass immigration, school attendance has been compulsory from the age of four, whereas it once used to be from the age of five. This initiative, launched primarily to familiarise immigrant children with the Luxembourg language as early as possible, has been supplemented by the implementation of a scheme offering preschool education to children from the age of three.

In preschool education and during the two years of compulsory nursery school, teachers use *Lëtzebuergesch,* in so far as possible, when speaking to their young pupils. The main concern is to develop the linguistic abilities of all the children present, particularly those of foreign origins, for whom school often provides the first contact with the Luxembourg language.

Primary school education introduces the other languages. At the age of six, children learn to read and write in German. The following year they start learning French. The lingua franca of primary school education is German. However, depending on the composition of the class – i.e. the proportion of children from immigrant families – teachers are sometimes led to alternate German with *Lëtzebuergesch* and French.

In 1991, local schools started offering classes in Portuguese and Italian. Since then, these courses, taught in parallel with the official curriculum, have been replaced by integrated mother tongue courses at primary school level. They give children the opportunity to develop their mother tongue while also maintaining contact with their native culture. This concerns subjects that form part of the official curriculum and are taught in Italian or Portuguese.

During the first years of secondary education, most subjects continue to be taught in German. In the classical secondary education system, the lingua franca for all subjects other than language courses becomes French, while German prevails in the vocationally-orientated secondary education system.



The University of Luxembourg, which was established by the law of 12 August 2003 and replaces a certain number of post-secondary education structures, such as the Centre universitaire, is also marked by multilingualism: one of the university's fundamental principles includes the multilingual character of its teaching. Nevertheless, numerous Luxembourg students still continue to study abroad, be it in German-, French- or English-speaking countries: in theory there is no such thing as a linguistic border preventing them from doing so!

Last but not least, a handful of foreign schools in Luxembourg – French, British and international – account for around 7% of school-attending pupils. In these private schools, where high tuition fees restrict access primarily to the well-off classes of the population, French and English are the prevailing languages, although a certain emphasis is still placed on teaching German and even *Lëtzebuergesch.*

Incidentally, the first international conference discussing the issue of bilingualism in education was held in the Grand Duchy in 1928. Today, the number of hours dedicated to foreign language teaching during the compulsory school years (primary and secondary education combined) accounts for on average 38% of the complete syllabus taught. The restrictions imposed on the teaching system through the linguistic situation include, on the one hand, the obstacle it embodies to educational success depending on educational programme aspects and, on the other hand, the requirement – unique in Europe – for future language teachers to study in the actual country of which they intend to teach the language and culture.

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For those students who succeed in the Luxembourg school system, multilingualism undoubtedly constitutes an important asset. It can also, however, mean failure for some young people, limiting their future training and career prospects as a result of deficiencies in one or the other language. Immigrant children tend to be affected the most by this. The debate surrounding the establishment of an educational system placing more emphasis on equality of chance, including on a linguistic level, has been going on for years now and is one of the major challenges that national education must face.

Which languages for the church?

The Catholic Church has the largest congregation in Luxembourg. Communications are published in German, while sermons and services are generally held in *Lëtzebuergesch;* the same applies to christenings, weddings and funerals. Nevertheless, priests do also address their parishioners in French or German, depending on the size of the immigrant community or their own linguistic preferences. Some parishes offer services in Portuguese, Italian and Spanish when addressing immigrant believers.

A rainbow of languages in daily life

For a Luxembourg person to be spending an entire day speaking just one language would be quite a feat! Similarly, among foreigners, all generations combined, how many of them could survive with no language other than their mother tongue? In this land of mixed marriages, the following figures provide some clues:

- 17 % of residents speak more than one language with their children,
- 53 % speak more than one language with their friends,
- 56 % speak more than one language in their workplace.

(Source: SESOPI – Centre intercommunautaire, *Sondage Baleine,* 1998)

There is no doubting the fact that everybody chooses different linguistic paths in their daily lives. Today, these colourful linguistic arcs blend together and are superimposed: people are speaking more and more languages in increasingly varied places. The juxtaposed bilingualism of days gone by has given way to a superimposed multilingualism: now the same people juggle with different languages according to place and circumstance.

Regional differences come into play as well. From a geographical point of view, the regions with the highest density of *Lëtzebuergesch* speakers include the north (85 %) and the east (81 %) of the country. *Lëtzebuergesch* is the most widely spoken language in the home (74 %), followed by French (32 %) and Portuguese (15 %). In contrast, in the workplace, 84 % use primarily French, followed by *Lëtzebuergesch* (73 %), German (51 %) and English (37 %). In a social context, French (81 %) narrowly outstrips *Lëtzebuergesch* (77 %): the latter is the preferred language in particular among young people aged 15 to 24 (92 %) and those aged 65 and above (80 %) in the context of their free time.

© Marcel Schmitz/SIP

Consequently, languages tolerate one another, rubbing shoulders without jealousy, while borrowing and lending among themselves without any false modesty. This phenomenon is apparent in particular in code switching, an art in which Luxembourg people excel, sometimes borrowing an idea from one language and an expression from another. A communication method in its own right!

Everyday words

"Tell me what languages you speak and I will tell you who you are!" In this tiny cosmopolitan country, individual personalities are also reflected in the knowledge of languages and in the way the latter are used.

In *Lëtzebuergesch,* for instance, it is almost impossible to "talk for the sake of talking"! From one home to another, preferences vary: some watch the *"télé",* others the *"Fernseh",* some use the *"Fernbedienung",* others the *"télécommande".* An indication of the social standing or geographical origin of an individual can be revealed in this way. The same applies to immigrant families who have been living in Luxembourg for a long time. Different generations display different linguistic reflexes. Depending on age, they mix *Lëtzebuergesch* with their Portuguese, French with their Italian, and so forth.

© Jeanine Unsen/SIP

The following table shows some interesting figures relating to which languages are used the most between foreigners and Luxembourg nationals:

Languages of the media

The written press

Whilst German has always been the language par excellence of the press, slowly but surely, the country's dailies, such as the *Luxemburger Wort* founded in 1848, and the *Tageblatt* created in 1913, have seen French taking up about 20 to 30 % of the editorial space. From the 1960s onwards, while new weeklies were appearing in German, other newly created newspapers were giving a voice to Portuguese (the weeklies *Contacto* since 1970 and *Correio* since 1999, for instance), but also to English and French speakers. In 2001, two French-language newspapers arrived on the Luxembourg media scene: *La Voix du Luxembourg* and *Le Quotidien.* The weekly *Le Jeudi,* for its part, first appeared in 1997. All in all, despite German making the front page, other languages are also making their own headlines.

It can therefore be said that the Luxembourg press has always been polyglot. Even though it is generally dominated by the German language, no journalist would have an issue with slipping an extract from a law drafted in French into an article written in German – and likewise the reader would not be perturbed by this either. If, as a foreigner, the reader wants to consult all the daily newspapers, he or she has every interest in mastering at least these two languages. It could well happen that an article on antiterrorist measures in the USA or a summit of European heads of state appears in one language one day and another the next: there is no hard and fast rule.

Language spoken between:	Luxembourg people and foreigners	Foreigners and Luxembourg people
Lëtzebuergesch	15 %	33 %
French	79 %	58 %
German	2 %	8 %
English	2 %	1 %

Source: Philippe Magère, Bernard Esmein and Max Poty, *La situation de la langue française parmi les autres langues en usage au Grand-Duché de Luxembourg,* 1998

The same also applies to the language in which journalists choose to express themselves. Some of them – albeit a minority – use more than one language. The choice sometimes depends on the country in which the writer was educated, and sometimes on the subject treated: those who cover domestic politics and local news generally prefer German, and those dealing with issues of the economy or culture most often opt for French. The target readership also plays a role in the choice of language: given that weeklies such as *Revue* and *Télécran* are aimed more at a Luxembourg and family-oriented audience, German is deemed appropriate. Nevertheless, the use of languages is undergoing constant change, in both daily life and the press.

Television

Since 1991, *Lëtzebuergesch* has gained significant ground on the screen following the launch of a daily news programme on RTL Télé Lëtzebuerg. Since 2007, the channel also features subtitles in French and German to meet the increasing demand of foreign resident viewers.

Radio

This is the medium featuring the richest abundance of programmes in *Lëtzebuergesch*. Naturally, Luxembourg radio stations, both national and local, enjoy the highest ratings. These results, combined with the success of the television news programme, underline the attachment the Luxembourg people feel towards their language.

© Bizart/SIP

Moreover, immigrant communities are not overlooked. Apart from the fact that the main radio stations from the neighbouring countries are available to their nationals, the Romance languages and English have for several years enjoyed a daily presence on radio waves that address a resident foreign audience.

Languages generally preferred by Luxembourg residents when watching TV:	Luxembourg nationals	All residents
Lëtzebuergesch	24 %	18 %
French	24 %	34 %
German	50 %	40 %
Other	1 %	8 %

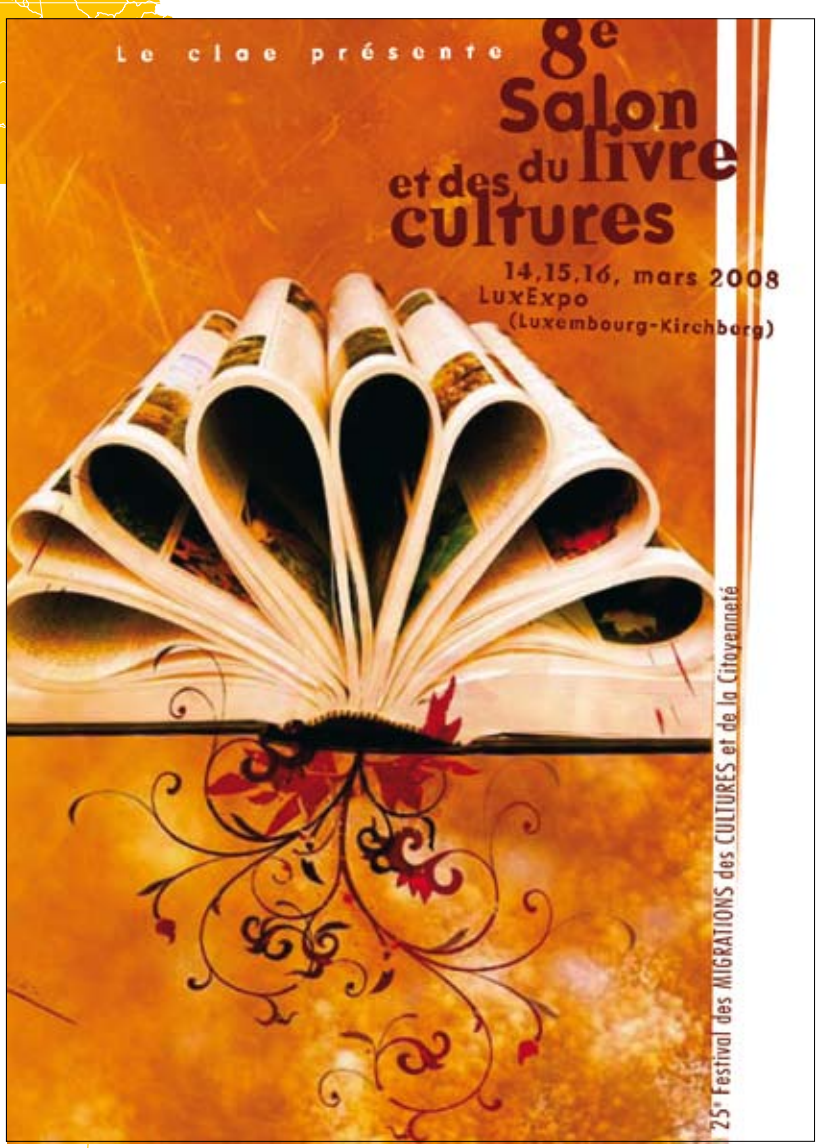
Source: SESOPI – Centre intercommunautaire, *Sondage Baleine, une étude sociologique sur les trajectoires migratoires, les langues et la vie associative au Luxembourg,* 1998

Words of culture

Luxembourg naturally benefits from its historical assets to set itself apart on the European cultural scene.

At the cinema, audiences systematically enjoy films shown in their original version with subtitles in either French and Dutch or German. *Lëtzebuergesch,* for its part, has its moment of fame during the advertising sequences.

At the theatre, plays are staged in *Lëtzebuergesch,* but also in French, German or English, a uniquely valuable and appreciated feature. In addition to Luxembourg's own theatre troupes, prestigious companies from Germany, France and Belgium also regale Luxembourg's international audience with a repertoire of which the diversity and quality are worthy of any major European capital – relatively speaking, of course.



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Certain bookshops and libraries are known for supplying publications largely in both French and German, but also in English and occasionally in other languages also. Other bookshops deal in exclusively French, German, English, Italian or Portuguese publications.

The Grand Duchy is home to about twenty publishing houses. Luxembourg literature is increasingly proclaiming its linguistic plurality as a true asset enabling it to better diversify its forms of distribution: coediting with foreign companies, translation (e.g. from *Lëtzebuergesch* into Russian for the poems of Anise Koltz, or from *Lëtzebuergesch* into German for the novels of Roger Manderscheid) and adaptation are some of the ways in which Luxembourg's works and authors can break down linguistic barriers. From the 1980s onwards, literary production in *Lëtzebuergesch* has witnessed an unparalleled upsurge. The readership of these works, however, too often remains limited. This situation is undoubtedly associated with the fact that Luxembourg's most prolific writers are also, and increasingly, going back to publishing texts and novels in German or in French.

Words from elsewhere

A country saturated with languages? On the contrary, the country's linguistic environment has allowed many other languages – such as English, Italian and Portuguese – to carve out a significant place for themselves.

In the banking centre, as well as in trade and in industry, English is the common language uniting the different nationalities working alongside each other, despite the fact that numerous banks in the capital are German and that, for several years now, French-speaking cross-border commuters have been leaving their mark on the Luxembourg labour market.

Encountering English in evening dress? No great surprise when taking into account the capital's sizeable international community that enjoys its nightlife. English remains the preferred language for all these international interactions, both in and out of work.

The larger immigrant groups – Portuguese, French, Italian – stand out through the presence of a considerable number of meeting places in Luxembourg (associations, clubs, bars and restaurants, etc.), as well as the frequent use of their respective mother tongues in their workplace (especially in the building sector, the hotel industry and the cleaning business).

French, for its part, exhibits some unusual features. It is not quite identical to the French from France, owing to the influences of Walloon French (Belgium) which, although present, are nevertheless difficult to detect. When they have to speak French, Luxembourg people – marked by the memory of a strict enforcement of its rules at school – are very concerned about correctly using its grammar. They speak a French that evokes prudence and formality, sometimes bordering on hypercorrection, which runs wild only when penned by poets and authors, or when spoken by younger generations.

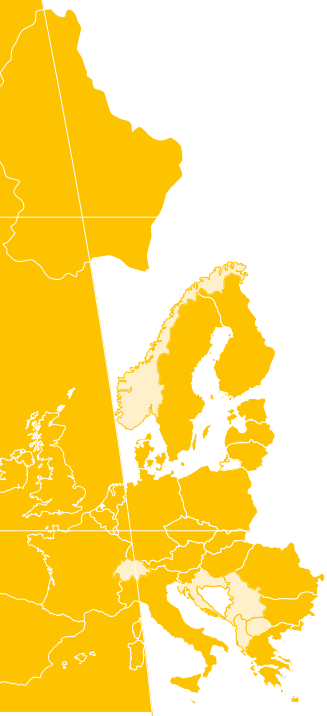
Passport of the Luxembourg language

Surname
Western Moselle-Franconian dialect

First name
Lëtzebuergesch

Visas
- Germany (Saarland *platt*)
- France (Thionville *platt*)
- Belgium (border region dialects)

Particular features
A borrowing language
- German: *Wirtschaft, Kino,* etc.
- English: weekend, back office, etc.
- French: *plus ou moins, à peu près,* etc.



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