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LEZ4all
Low Emission Zone for all

Which needs do LEZ professionals have to influence the social impact of car-restrictive policies?

Summary of needs assessment

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Objectives : This report is a key output of the first phase of the LEZ4all-project, which has the overall objective of a better comprehension of the relation between mobility and a just transition and improvement of the associated competences by professionals whose work is related to mobility poverty, social exclusion and/or sustainable mobility. It synthesizes the assessment of needs that took place during spring and summer of 2025. The assessment explores the training needs, both perceived and experienced, of the large scope of professionals whose work can influence the social impact of car-restrictive policies.

Study method : The study draws on different sources and study methods, both qualitative and quantitative in nature, to develop a well-rounded assessment. The initial steps consisted of a **concise study of existing academic literature** on mobility poverty, social effects of sustainable mobility policies, the association between social inequality and sustainable transition and the impact of professional biases and skills on policy implementation. In parallel, lived experiences of professionals were collected by means of **12 interviews with key informants in three countries** (Belgium, France, Spain) and contributions of project partners who have already valuable on-the-ground experience with the challenges in addressing social impact of UVARs. The observations from this qualitative research informed a next phase of quantitative research to extrapolate findings. An **in-depth survey for professionals on training needs related to attitudes, knowledge and skills** allowed to identify larger patterns in experienced and perceived training needs among professionals in different job positions and fields of expertise. The **survey received 337 individual responses**. The results of this multi-track research are synthesized in this document.



LEZ4all (Low Emission Zones for All) is a two-year EU-funded project that wants to help cities make car-restrictive and mobility policies more socially fair. Auxilia, Àrea Metropolitana de Barcelona, Bruxelles Environnement and University of Antwerp partner up in this project to support professionals in understanding and reducing the social impacts of car-restrictive measures. The project develops tools, training, and practical methods to better include the needs and challenges of vulnerable population groups in mobility planning. By connecting experts in transport and social inclusion, LEZ4all strengthens cooperation across sectors and cities. Pilot activities take place in Brussels, Barcelona, and Lyon, with lessons shared across Belgium, France, and Spain. Join our [LinkedIn community](#) to keep updated!

Social impact of car-restrictive policies

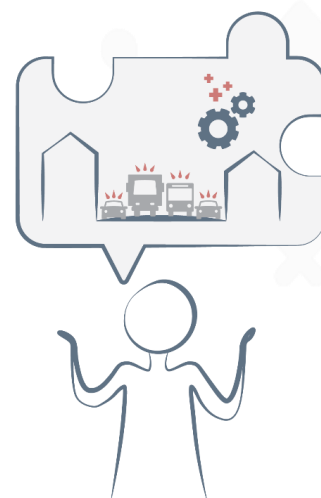
In the quest to create sustainable, liveable neighbourhoods, reduce air pollution levels and decrease pollution-related health risks, policies that limit the use of cars gained a lot of attention in the last two decades and have become especially popular in Europe. Authorities can use car-restrictive policies to regulate the presence of cars in certain generally densely populated areas, for certain time windows or 24/7. Often, this type of policy doesn't only concern cars; it can target specific vehicle types or restrict access for all motorized vehicles. Such policies are also described by the term Urban Vehicle Access Regulations (UVAR). One of the most well-known types of UVAR is the Low Emission Zone (LEZ), where access is regulated based on the amount of pollutants a vehicle emits.

Ever since cars have become widely available, urban mobility has developed with a growing reliance on automobility. **This dependency has spatial, environmental and socio-economic consequences for our cities that were long overlooked.** Car-restrictive policies and specifically LEZ target the environmental consequences of automobility and leverage on personal accountability for environmental impact; everyone should contribute their part in improving the environmental quality of our cities.

Besides the unwillingness to switch to alternative ways of travel of some people who find it unquestionable to 'give up' personal freedom for a common good, not everyone has the same resources to make sustainable changes in their behaviour. Those who have sufficient means can afford the choice to make environmentally friendly adaptations, for example by buying a new electric car, or continue polluting behaviour, for example by purchasing a day pass to access the LEZ with a non-complaint vehicle, a measure that is offered in many cities and adds the possibility to 'pay for polluting'. Neither of those options will drastically affect the socio-economic status and quality of life for people with average or above average income.

This is different for people and households with limited disposable income, who often already spend more time and a substantial percentage of their monthly budget on mobility. Both supporters and opponents of car-restrictive policies refer to the socio-economic dimension that this type of measure has. Supporters of car-restrictive policies highlight that lower-income groups often own fewer cars and live in more polluted areas, making them benefit most from improved air quality and urban liveability. Critics note, however, that these same groups are more likely to own non-compliant vehicles and face greater barriers to shift towards cleaner transport options. Research shows that both arguments require nuancing and the social impact of such policies depend on the spatial design of the city, implementation timeline, available transport alternatives and the strength of the social support network that can help mitigate negative effects. Either way, car-restrictive policies bring up questions of social justice and can hold the risk of increasing social inequality in the city, especially for people who already face challenges in accessing work, services, and daily activities.

Car-restrictive policies can have a positive impact on the liveability in a city, improve air quality and contribute to more sustainable and healthy urban environments. **How can negative social effects be avoided or mitigated so that everyone can first and foremost enjoy the benefits such policy can bring? As a possible answer to this question, we have explored in this study how to strengthen the positive impact that "LEZ professionals" might have on this matter.**



LEZ professionals?

What do we mean with “LEZ professionals”? LEZ and car-restrictive policies are a fairly new type of regulation that involves expertise from different fields, such as sustainable mobility, air quality, and urban planning. Professionals from different departments and agencies are directly involved in the development and implementation: this ranges from the technicians that prepare objectives and specific regulations over citizen service employees that respond to people’s questions about LEZ measures or help them find mobility alternatives to experts that provide information and data on the reasons for and effects of a LEZ or other mobility policies. There are also professionals whose work is not directly related to the implementation of car-restrictive policies but can influence how the policy is received and understood by the population and particularly by citizens who are vulnerable to more negative effects of restrictions; a social worker or community centre employee for example who can help citizens in working with digital platforms to apply for an exemption for their car, or a professional at a company for e-bike sharing that can help make an alternative mode of transport more accessible for some people.

So, who are the professionals that can influence the social effects of car-restrictive policies? And what can help these LEZ professionals to have a positive influence and make sure no one is left behind when establishing a LEZ or another type of UVAR? These are the main questions this study wants to answer. To this end, the LEZ4all project team has explored existing research, interviewed professionals in different fields and cities and launched a survey for professionals in Belgium, France and Spain to understand their capacities and their needs in responding to negative social effects of car-restrictive policies. The project’s premise is that training can improve LEZ professionals’ capacity to reduce negative social effects of car-restrictive policies for people in vulnerable situations. The study therefor focuses on the individual level of professionals and their competences and aims to inform the development of vocational training for

these professionals under LEZ4all. Nevertheless, the study also includes challenges related to existing systems and structures that should be altered; training alone will not solve these.



The study considers the important role of civil servants when addressing negative social effects. However, not only public administrations can have a positive influence on the social effects of LEZ and other car-restrictive policies. Professionals working in civil society organisations, academia or private sector such as “mobility as a service” companies can play a role as well and were invited to participate in this research. The results led to the identification of five professional profiles as key “LEZ professionals”:

- **Front office professionals** who have regular contact with citizens in their work, whether in public or in private sector, by providing services or being involved in practical implementation of regulations
- **Back-office professionals** in jobs on policy development, planning and internal processes, where there is limited or no direct contact with citizens
- **Professionals working in general citizen services or on social topics** such as social welfare, community work, inclusion & equality, social justice and/or work with one or more disadvantaged population groups such as older adults, youth or people with a disability
- **Professionals working in topics related to urban planning and the environment** such as sustainable environments, pollution, energy, housing, planning, spatial planning or public space
- **Professionals working in topics related to mobility** such as mobility planning, transportation, sustainable mobility, traffic or mobility services

Encountered challenges

When asked directly, LEZ professionals are already aware of quite a few challenges and see various learning opportunities to improve these challenges. UVAR and LEZ rules can be complex, with different vehicle categories, exemptions, and application procedures that are difficult to navigate. Support measures such as temporary free public transport passes or mobility coaching might help residents adapt, but not everyone knows how to access these measures. Understanding all these rules and supports can be challenging, both for citizens and for professionals working with citizens or on different aspects of sustainable mobility.

As such, a first group of challenges described by LEZ professionals relates to **communication**. Such communication about car restrictions to citizens is very delicate and requires great skill.

Professionals who are assumed to help residents on this topic could benefit from proper guidance on how to carry out such conversations in a respectful and positive way. The complexity of car-restrictive policies demands new types of collaboration between different departments and sectors, which comes with communication challenges as well. How to connect with professionals in a sector that works in a different way from your own field? How to align expectations on responsibilities and communicate about motivations for policy choices? How to implement communication mechanisms between front office and back office?

Survey results confirm these challenges. **Collaboration with other domains is not frequent**, especially among professionals working in back-office positions: 57% rarely collaborates. Many back office professionals (35%-37%) indicate they are interested in including more consultation of social expertise in their work but have no methods for that at the moment. Front office professionals are in many cases unaware about mobility challenges when working with a beneficiary (49%).

Because of the complexity of car-restrictive regulations, it is also important to have access to correct and up to date information. As a front office worker, it can be challenging to know where to find this information and apply it to someone's specific situation. Especially when mobility is not a core task, professionals rarely have time to research different channels to properly help resolve mobility restrictions.

In the survey, 33% of front office workers don't consider it their job to assist people in solving mobility challenges. **Only 45% of front office LEZ professionals is confident they know where to find accurate information on LEZ regulations.**

Another frequently brought up challenge is the human reflex to start from personal experience. It requires empathy and active engagement to properly consider barriers and mobility challenges that people in more vulnerable situations might encounter. It is also easier to start from your own travel experience when advising people on transport choices; someone who is a frequent car driver might overlook situations where bike or public transport can be a good mobility alternative for a beneficiary. In the survey, LEZ professionals report limited personal experience with situations that cause social vulnerability on the one hand and on the other hand impact of car-restrictive policies in their personal lives.

Only 6% of participants report having experience with both situations in their personal life (either in their own experience or in that of someone in their close surroundings). This shows that **empathy and being able to take other perspectives** are very important skills to work as inclusive as possible in establishing car-restrictive policies. Professionals in the fields of mobility and environment score higher than the survey's average in conceptual understanding systemic barriers but scoring results reveal they are not as skilled in **interpersonal perspective** taking as their colleagues working in social topics.

Hidden gaps

Next to the challenges that LEZ professionals are aware about themselves, the survey revealed a few competence gaps that are less obvious to them.

Less than 20% of surveyed LEZ professionals answered correctly on questions related to mobility poverty and digital illiteracy. Having conceptual knowledge on social aspects of mobility, such as factors that contribute to social vulnerability and mobility poverty allows professionals to be better aware about certain risks and gives them the vocabulary to discuss challenges.

Many professionals (75%) are aware that car-restrictive policies hold a risk of reinforcing social inequalities. Only 14% are convinced however that the current support measures in their city are effective in protecting people in disadvantaged positions from more than average negative effects. **This contrast shows the opportunity for learning and exchange on developing mobility policy frameworks that are fairer and leave no one behind.**

It's worthwhile increasing awareness on priorities and prejudices about mobility. Some professionals (44%) believe that improvements in public transport can resolve all mobility inequalities but not everyone is convinced of that, especially not among mobility professionals. Certain professionals prioritize access to urban destinations by car for inclusive liveable cities (32%) while others find it most important to address environmental and health concerns for urban liveability (68%). Neither of these attitudes is wrong, but being aware of having different values and respecting differences can help improve collaboration on car-restrictive policies.



Most of the challenges and needs we've seen are common for professionals in different fields and job positions. Some needs are only related to one or a few of the professional profiles:

- From the survey results, it seems that **professionals working in social topics and citizen services are less familiar with different mobility options** (35% of them experiences car dependency) and **find it less useful for their job to learn more on the social impact on mobility**
- **Professionals in the fields of mobility and urban environment** on the other hand could improve their **skills in perspective taking, both on personal and societal scale**. They could also become more aware and apt to respond to the risk of increasing social inequality with car-restrictive policies
- It is **challenging for back office workers to reach social sector actors and to understand how social support systems work**. Which population groups are easily reached and supported (on mobility) through existing channels and who are under the radar?
- **Front office professionals could benefit from a better understanding of car-restrictive regulations**, both in applying rules and on benefits and motivations behind such policy.

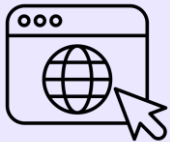
As mentioned earlier, the **social effects that people experience from car-restrictive policies depend on various contextual factors**. Local context is important, whether it is about understanding the particularities of regulations, knowing which agencies and public offices are in the best position to alleviate negative social effects or the resources that can be dedicated to this issue. The political setup of local governments shows to have a significant influence on how much energy is dedicated to social effects of sustainable policies. It is a challenge to anchor social awareness within public authorities regardless of changes in the political landscape. It is also important to provide professionals with trainings and tools that are fitting for their city or national context. The good news is that **social impact of mobility is a relevant topic for LEZ professionals and many people are interested in training to be better equipped in preventing negative social effects of car-restrictive policies**. The LEZ4all project will contribute to alleviate these training needs.



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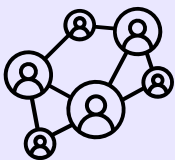
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