

Governance of COVID-19

Luxembourg

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Characteristics of the governance system I

- The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg is a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary democratic regime.
 - Legislation can be initiated by the parliament (the Chambre des Députés) or by the government.
 - The parliament has to approve legislation.
 - Until 2009, the signature of the Grand Duke was required to approve bills, but a revision of article 34 of the Constitution abolished this requirement.
- Luxembourg has a unicameral parliamentary system.
 - The Chambre des Députés consists of 60 members.
 - Elections are held every five years, according to a proportional open list system.
- In addition, the Council of State comments on laws.
 - The aim is to stimulate debate and introduce another perspective in the legislative process.
- Finally, there is a Constitutional Court, a Court of Auditors and an Ombudsman.

Characteristics of the governance system II

- As a result of the proportional electoral system, the government is usually a coalition government. Since the Second World War, coalitions usually consist of two parties, but for the past two terms Luxembourg was governed by a coalition of the LSAP, the DP and the Greens.
 - Governments usually last the full five years between elections (although there have been exceptions)
- There are currently 24 ministries.
 - However, a minister is often in charge of themes (e.g. Xavier Bettel is Prime Minister, Minister of State, Minister for Communications and Media, Minister for Religious Affairs, Minister for Digitalisation, Minister for Administrative Reform)
 - There are currently 17 ministers
- Public sector employment is in Luxembourg with 24.80% (of total labour force) relatively high as compared to other EU Member States. The same also refers to general government employment. These values also remain rather stable between 2005 and 2011 or they show in other words that the size of public employment has not considerably changed in relation to the development of the total labour force. During this period, Luxembourg has – as opposed to many other EU Member States – not reduced the size of government employment through recruitment freezing or/and downsizing.
- Government employment in 2015 was 38 275. The allocation of staff between central government and local government very well illustrates the centralized structure of the Luxembourgish state. The share of central government is 78,37% as compared to a share of 13,40% for local government.

Characteristics of the governance system III

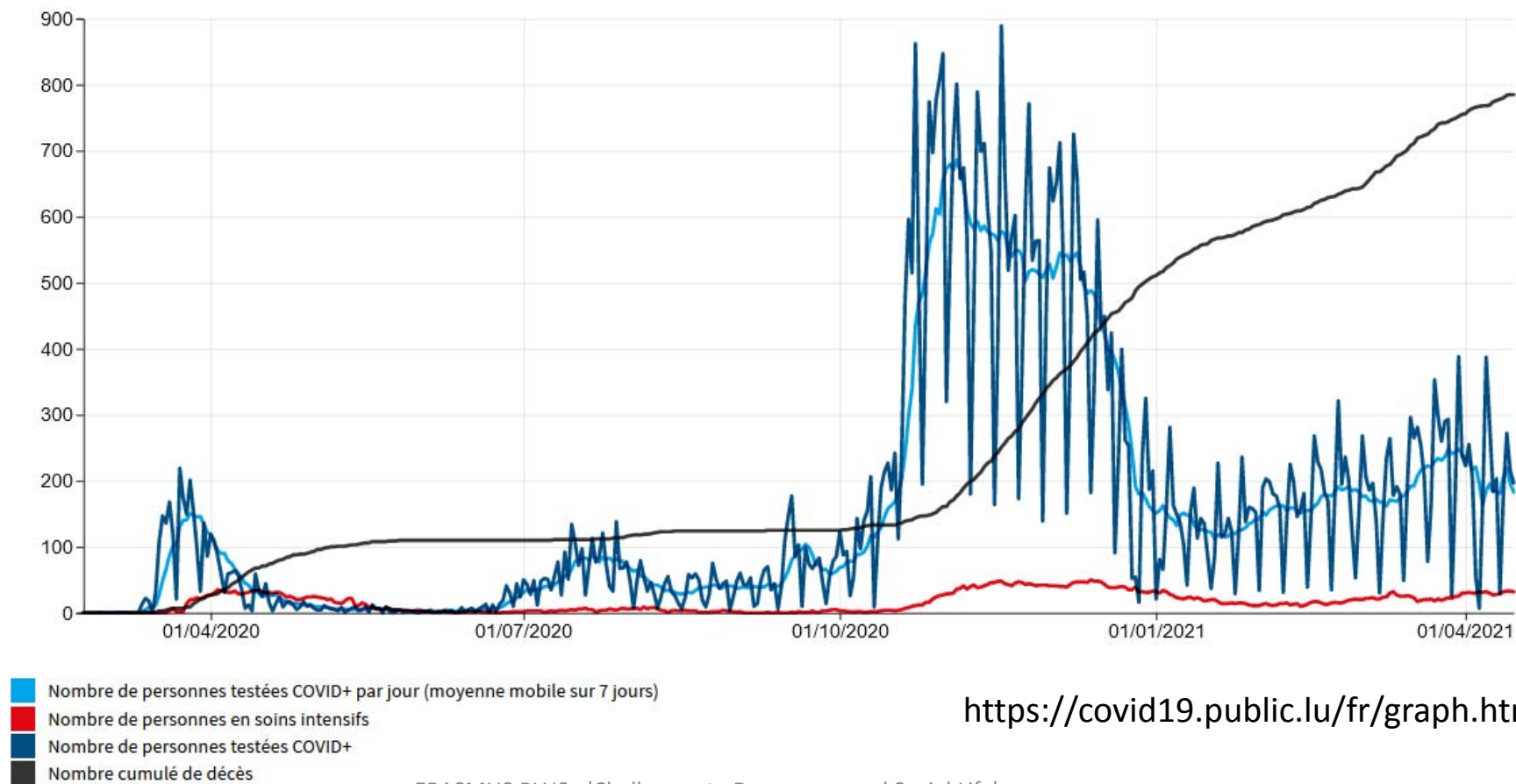
- Public sector employment is high in Luxembourg: 24.80% of the total labour force
 - In 2015: 38 275 government employees
 - Local government only employs 13,40% of these (Bossaert 2018)
- Luxembourg is highly centralized. There are only two levels of government: central and local
 - Major responsibilities of the municipalities:
 - Land use planning;
 - Pre-school;
 - Drinking water and wastewater;
 - Waste disposal;
 - Noise and air pollution;
 - The public roads network
 - The population register;
 - The social assistance office;
 - The cemetery administration.
 - In light of the small size of many municipalities, they now often form 'syndicates', i.e. associations of several municipalities, to manage services jointly.

Executive branch

- Ministry of State
- Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs
- Ministry of Agriculture, Viticulture and Rural Development
- Ministry of Culture
- Ministry for Digitalisation
- Ministry of the Economy
- Ministry of Education, Children and Youth
- Ministry of Equality between Women and Men
- Ministry of Energy and Spatial Planning
- Ministry of Higher Education and Research
- Ministry of the Environment, Climate and Sustainable Development
- Ministry of Family Affairs, Integration and the Greater Region
- Ministry of Finance
- Ministry of the Civil Service
- Ministry of Home Affairs
- Ministry of Justice
- Ministry of Housing
- Ministry of Mobility and Public Works
- Ministry for Consumer Protection
- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of Internal Security
- Ministry of Social Security
- Ministry of Sport
- Ministry of Labour, Employment and the Social and Solidarity Economy

COVID-19 pandemic

Situation générale



<https://covid19.public.lu/fr/graph.html>

Governance of COVID-19

- During the first phase, the government declared a state of emergency, which was extended by parliament to the maximum 3 months foreseen in the constitution
 - As a result, the government could rule by decree
 - The government informed the parliament about its measures, but there were some complaints from the opposition that too little information was provided and often quite late
- The health ministry played a key role in organizing the response including the creation of special Covid-19 treatment centres.
 - Other bodies (the university, several organizations...) provided expertise and support for the strategy.
 - During the first phase, the cooperation between the government and researchers worked well.
 - During the second phase, the process became more politics-focused, which led for example to a controversy about the accuracy of the data and claims of the Ministry for Education with regard to schools and Covid-19.

COVID-19 and economies

- During the first 2 waves of the pandemic, the government closed shops and restaurants to combat the spread of the virus.
- During the first wave, it also strongly requested that employers let non-essential staff work from home and closed down a number of other activities that were considered 'non-essential', such as construction sites, manufactures...
 - In addition, all schools, the university and other educational establishments had to resort to remote teaching
 - The movement of people was severely restricted (e.g. all non-essential movements within the country were banned; jogging, walking, cycling near one's home were allowed)
- During the second wave, rules were far less strict, despite the fact that the wave was up to three times more severe
 - Construction sites no longer had to close (this had led to some chaos, as people could not move into newly built flats, but there were already new tenants waiting for their old flat).
 - Home office was strongly recommended, but not as widely used.
 - Schools remained open almost the entire time, as the government claimed that they did not contribute to the infection rate
 - Shops also remained open for much of this period
 - A short severe lockdown was only imposed around Christmas and until mid-January
- During the first phase, the health argument had a clear priority. During the second phase, the economic argument gained strength
- Economic support measures
 - State support for 'short-time' work
 - Some support for self-employed people
- The government only conceded in early 2021 that schools contribute significantly to the spread of the pandemic.

COVID-19 and borders

- Luxembourg has kept its borders open during the pandemic and did not set up controls.
- In light of the high number of cross-border commuters (over 200,000 people commute to Luxembourg, while Luxembourg has 600,000 residents) restrictions were not considered feasible.
- Persons returning from trips abroad had to observe a quarantine period (at first 14 days, later 10 days).
 - Covid-19 tests were available at the airport.
- Luxembourg was mainly concerned about border controls by the German, French and Belgian authorities and the possible impact on its workforce and health system (which is heavily reliant on cross-border workers)
 - Special permits were introduced to facilitate the movements of cross-border workers
 - Special agreements with France, Germany and Belgium were reached, so that cross-border workers could do home office and still pay taxes in Luxembourg (normally they can only work a limited number of days in their country of residence before having to pay taxes there)

COVID-19 vaccines

- Luxembourg has relied on the European Union to negotiate contracts for the supply of vaccines.
- It ordered a mix of different vaccines through the EU
- The Prime Minister considered ordering Sputnik V from Russia, but so far this has not happened.
- Vaccinations are conducted primarily in special centres (except for hospital staff and people in retirement homes) and follow strictly a 6-phase plan.

159.110

Total des vac-
cins adminis-
trés

113.942

Total dose 1

45.168

Total dose 2

5.686

Vaccins admi-
nistrés par jour

Dose 1: 3.505

Dose 2: 2.181

On 17 April 2021: <https://covid19.public.lu/fr/vaccination.html>

Conclusion: Lessons and prospects

- The Luxembourgish response to the Covid-19 pandemic during the first wave was surprisingly fast and effective. For example the speed with which the health system was reorganized to ensure sufficient capacity to treat Covid-19 patients
 - As additional emergency facilities for Covid-19 were set up in tents next to hospitals (for potential severe cases) and separate treatment centres (for detection and moderate cases), the health system was never overwhelmed by cases.
 - General practitioners were reorganized to ensure the support of retirement homes, the Covid-19 centres and the general population and a medical reserve list was created to be able to activate additional staff if necessary.
 - Luxemburg was one of the first European countries to introduce mass-testing.
 - There was a high degree of mobilization in the population to support the government (the University and research centres helped with medical research and issues, supply lines, logistic and economic questions; companies donated masks; volunteers went shopping for vulnerable citizens).
- During the second wave, Covid-19 fatigue set in and the government was very slow to start the lock-down, leading to rapidly rising infection figures (the day the government decided to initiate lockdown measures, the infection rate was already more than twice as high than at the peak of the first wave!)
- One of the biggest risks that emerged was the great dependency on cross-border workers, including in vital sectors like the health sector.