

Chaire Histoire & Migrations
uni.lu/C²DH, Ville de Dudelange & CDMH

LIENS MIGRATIONS

CAPE VERDEAN PRESENCES



Directed by Sarah Maya Vercruysse, Heidi Martins and Denis Scuto

Avec Elisabeth Boesen, José Henrique de Burgo Mendes, Anne Kremers, Roxane Kostigoff, Antoinette Reuter, Bernardino Tavares et Aleida Vieira

Liens Migrations is the multidisciplinary journal of the History and Migrations Chair, established in 2025 as a collaborative undertaking between the University of Luxembourg/Luxembourg Centre for Contemporary and Digital History (C²DH) and the City of Dudelange, in partnership with the Documentation Centre for Human Migrations (CDMH).

Given the important role played by international migration in European history and society, notably in Luxembourg, the aim of the Chair is to deepen understanding of the migratory flows that shaped Luxembourg and the Greater Region in the 19th and 20th centuries, and to showcase the history and memory of immigration and emigration in the region. The Chair involves three strands: research, teaching and public dissemination of research results.

Liens Migrations is a space for sharing and presenting research findings. Published on a quarterly basis in digital and print format, in French and English, it is a way of making new knowledge about the history of migration accessible to a broad audience. Each issue is structured around a central theme and organised into nine sections. Particular emphasis is also given to research about Dudelange and the latest news from the Chair and the CDMH.

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Editorial

Editorial

Editorial

The first issue of the multidisciplinary journal *Liens Migrations*, published by the History & Migrations Chair, focuses on the Cape Verdean presence in Luxembourg. The idea for the topic came from an anniversary: just over 50 years ago, on 5 July 1975, Cape Verde, an African archipelago in the Atlantic Ocean, proclaimed its independence after a struggle led by the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (*Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde* – PAIGC), led by Amílcar Cabral until his assassination in 1973. The independence of Guinea-Bissau had been recognised a few months earlier, on 10 September 1974.

The first Cape Verdeans arrived in Luxembourg as part of a wave of labour migration from the southern European country of Portugal – a migration wave that included a “non-European” colonial component, although Cape Verdeans were in fact European through their Portuguese nationality. The resulting Afro-Portuguese population, almost exclusively from the islands of Cape Verde, only gradually found its place in Luxembourg’s political discourse and public life. This phenomenon clearly illustrates the processes by which immigrants experience social visibility/invisibility, influenced by colonial heritage and postcolonial relations. A minority group or an individual may be physically visible yet at the same time “transparent”, in other words not recognised by the majority and relegated to a position of social non-existence.

Independent university research on the Cape Verdean presence in Luxembourg only began around ten years ago, with ethnolinguistic studies on individual migration[1], several Master’s dissertations[2], ethnolinguistic studies on individual migration trajectories[3] and comparative research on Cape Verdean and Portuguese funeral cultures[4]. Some authors have explored the question of visibility/invisibility by discussing the use of the Cape Verdean language, clothes and music, but specific research in this field is still very much in its infancy. Historical research on immigration policy in Luxembourg and public discourses regarding this specific group is also lacking – and that was another reason for publishing a special issue on the subject.

The journal is organised into several sections designed to offer a variety of perspectives and voices and to present the topic at different scales of observation. The first section by Denis Scuto looks at the early days of Cape Verdean migration in the 1970s and the debates surrounding it. This sets the scene. The following sections then turn to academic research. Cultural anthropologist Elisabeth Boesen presents her research fields, especially her project on the funeral culture of Cape Verdean and Portuguese populations in Luxembourg. Sociolinguist Bernardino Tavares and research and development specialist Aleida Vieira present their research project DisPOSEG (uni.lu/FNR, 2021-2024), which analysed the social, linguistic and professional interactions of Portuguese-speaking migrants from Europe, Africa and Brazil, and their descendants, in Luxembourg’s multilingual society.

The perspective then changes, with two interviews conducted by sociologist Heidi Martins, who spoke to the representative of the *Fédération des Associations Capverdiennes au Luxembourg* (FACVL) and the director of the recently inaugurated Fenix museum in Rotterdam, which is located on the site where the first Cape Verdean migrants

arrived in the Netherlands. In the article by Antoinette Reuter and Roxane Kostigoff, the authors turn their attention to a book from the library in the Documentation Centre for Human Migrations (CDMH) which explores the question of Cape Verdean migration in Luxembourg society at the time of its publication in 1991.

Finally, the last two sections introduce a different dynamic. In the column “Migratory traces of Dudelange”, Antoinette Reuter presents the BAMI project, short for “Banque de données du Bassin Minier” (Mining Region Database), which is compiling information about the migration of tens of thousands of people to and from the town of Dudelange. The last section presents the latest news from the journal’s founders, the History & Migrations Chair and the CDMH.

By compiling these wide-ranging insights and information, the aim of this issue is to broaden understanding of Cape Verdean migration and the Cape Verdean presence in Luxembourg, while also problematising and challenging certain dominant representations. The journal will pursue this mission by exploring other aspects of migratory dynamics in future issues.

Sarah Maya Vercruysse, Heidi Martins and Denis Scuto
Coordinators of this issue

[1] Alieva, A. & Valentova, M., *Intégration structurelle et sociale des ressortissants de pays tiers et d'autres immigrants au Luxembourg. L'accès à une éducation de qualité*, Esch/Alzette: Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research (LISER), 2015; CEFIS, *“Diaspora capverdienne” au Luxembourg. Panorama socio-économique, rôles dans les mouvements migratoires et solidarité avec les pays d'origine*, RED (Recherche-Etude-Documentation) No. 21, Luxembourg, 2017.

[2] e.g. Lang, E., “Transnationale Vernetzung und lokale Integration. KapverdianerInnen in Luxemburg”, Master thesis, University of Vienna, 2011; Correia Da Veiga, M., “Die Entwicklung der kapverdischen Einwanderung in Luxemburg (1965-1993)”, Master thesis, University of Luxembourg, 2017.

[3] Tavares, B., “Cape Verdean Migration Trajectories into Luxembourg: A Multisited Sociolinguistic Investigation”, Doctoral dissertation, University of Luxembourg, 2018; Tavares, B. & Vieira, A., “Lived experiences of coloniality in third space: from colonial to contemporary lusophone migration into Luxembourg”, *Language, Culture and Society* 5:1(2023), p. 121-155.

[4] e.g. Boesen, E., “Flowers and stones. Portugiesische und kapverdische Begräbniskulturen in Luxemburg”, in: Kmec, S./Philippart, R./Reuter, A., *Ewige Ruhe?/Concession à perpétuité? Grabkulturen in Luxemburg und den Nachbarregionen/Cultures funéraires au Luxembourg et dans les régions voisines*, Luxembourg, capybara books, 2019, p. 95-102; Boesen, E., “Negotiating the aesthetics of mourning in Luxembourg: on pre-modern forms in post-modern spaces”, dans: House, D./Westendorp, M./Maddrell, A. (eds), *New Perspectives on Urban Deathscapes. Continuity, Change, and Contestation*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2023, p. 83-106; Boesen, E. et al. (eds), *Changing lusospheres – Europe, Brazil, Africa. On old and new connections between centers and peripheries*, Esch-sur-Alzette/Luxembourg, 2025.

In focus

In focus

Cape Verdean immigration and Luxembourg's colonial past: A look back at the 1970s

(By Denis Scuto)



Artwork by the Cape Verdean artist Jennifer Lopes Santos, created as part of the CDMH project "À fleur de peau" in partnership with the Department of Integration and the association Finkapé (2021).
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On 9 January 2022, the Luxembourg Minister of Defence, François Bausch, gave an interview to the daily newspaper *Luxemburger Wort* on the situation in Mali and the presence of Luxembourgish soldiers in this West African country. In the interview, he said: "The fact that we do not have a colonial past is clearly to our advantage."^[1] This statement was plainly called into question by an exhibition that opened three months later at the National Museum of Archaeology, History and Art. The very title of the exhibition, "Luxembourg's colonial past", disputed the minister's version of history.

The introductory text presenting the exhibition drives the point home: "Although the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg never exercised political authority over any foreign territory or any of the populations residing there, during the 19th and 20th centuries numerous Luxembourg men and women left to live and work in the colonies of other European states.

Abroad, they held all kinds of positions and worked as soldiers, scientists, businessmen, missionaries and even as colonial officials. In fact, Luxembourg actively recruited people for colonial service in the Belgian Congo. The colonial system was based on the principle of inequality between the colonists and the colonised. Referring to pseudo-scientific racial theories, the colonial masters justified their belief in their own superiority as well as their legitimacy to take possession of non-European territories and to control the native populations. Even in Luxembourg's society, the ideology of colonialism was anchored and shaped its politics, economy and culture from the middle of the 19th century until the 1960s. From today's perspective, the discriminative racial ideology, that was prevalent for a long time, lacks any scientific basis. And society's attitude in this respect has also changed over the years. However, the Black Lives Matter movement shows that racist thinking continues to have an effect all over the world, including in the Grand Duchy."

In Kevin Goergen's PhD thesis (Luxembourg Centre for Contemporary and Digital History, C²DH), which he defended on 13 March 2026 at the University of Luxembourg, he draws on multiple previously unexplored European and African archives and shows the extent to which Luxembourg had a colonial sphere which both facilitated the emigration of Luxembourgers to colonial territories and sought to inform the general public in Luxembourg about the colonies through courses, lectures and exhibitions. He describes how many Luxembourgish citizens chose to serve the colonial state, colonial missions and colonial companies, and how they were assisted in this by the Luxembourg government. He also demonstrates that the Luxembourg government avoided any colonial issues which arose by hiding behind the Belgian government, thereby avoiding taking responsibility in areas such as social security, mixed-race children born to Luxembourgish fathers and cases of violence towards Africans. Kevin Goergen's conclusion is unequivocal: "The Belgian colonial project, and the pan-European colonial dynamics more broadly, allowed Luxembourg - its state, church, industry, and bourgeoisie - to profit from colonialism while simultaneously constructing and sustaining a narrative of distance and detachment. This interplay fostered a form of 'comfortable colonial complicity' that endured and continues to influence Luxembourg's approach to Africa."^[2]

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The Cape Verdean presence in Luxembourg highlights the importance of colonial and postcolonial relations in the recent formation of European immigrant societies.

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The same attitude can be observed when examining another aspect of Luxembourg's colonial past, namely the immigration of hundreds of Cape Verdeans to Luxembourg from the 1960s onwards. The phenomenon of labour migration to Luxembourg from Portugal, a European country, also had a strong non-European component, since Cape Verde was part of Portugal's colonial empire. Cape Verdeans were second-class citizens of that empire until Cape Verde became independent in 1975.

The Cape Verdean presence in Luxembourg highlights the importance of colonial and postcolonial relations in the recent formation of European immigrant societies.

Immigration as a structural phenomenon in Luxembourg in the 1970s

To start, we need to take a brief look at the history of immigration to Luxembourg in the post-war period. According to population censuses there were just 26 Portuguese citizens in Luxembourg in 1960, a figure which rose sharply to 1,147 in 1966 and 6,300 in 1971 (5,000 men and 1,300 women).^[3] Immigration from Portugal to Luxembourg gradually overtook immigration from Italy, which began to wane as Italy embarked on a period of economic growth from the late 1950s onwards, especially in the Milan-Turin-Genoa triangle. Portuguese men worked primarily in the construction sector and women worked as housekeepers or cleaners.

In 1964, under the impetus of the European Social Charter and European Commission recommendations, the Luxembourg government established a Reception and Welfare Department for Foreign Workers, which in 1972 became the Department of Immigration. Welfare for migrants had previously been provided mainly by Catholic organisations such as the Italian Catholic Mission or Caritas, by local social services offices and by humanitarian organisations like the Red Cross and the League against Tuberculosis. At political level, alongside the Luxembourg Communist Party, which was particularly active on the issue of migrants, they were supported by branches of foreign political organisations in Luxembourg (e.g. the Italian Communist Party (PCI), INCA and Christian Associations of Italian Workers (ACLI)), and from the 1960s onwards by Luxembourg trade unions.

For the first time in its history, the Luxembourg government then decided to pursue an active recruitment policy, reaching out to foreign workers to address labour shortages. In May 1970, Luxembourg signed two bilateral agreements, one with Portugal and one with Yugoslavia, “regulating the employment in Luxembourg of workers” from these two countries. In its opinion on the agreement with Portugal, the Council of State presented immigration as a structural phenomenon: “For many years now, the availability of native workers in Luxembourg is entirely insufficient to meet the country’s needs. The few dozen workers from the agricultural sector who may become available over the next few years will not make any difference to the overall labour shortage. Without the supply of a large number of foreign workers, companies in the craft and industrial sectors will find themselves in a critical situation. At the end of 1970, the number of foreign workers (men and women) was 33,100, compared with 30,100 in 1969, 28,600 in 1968 and 27,900 in 1967. These figures include cross-border workers (7,400), seasonal workers and foreign workers living in Luxembourg. In general, we are witnessing a gradual reduction in seasonal workers and an increase in foreigners settling permanently in Luxembourg. This development obviously raises the issue of housing, especially as many married foreign workers want to settle in Luxembourg with their families. In these cases, the women and adult children will work in homes as cleaners, in washing or cleaning companies, or at factories and manufacturing plants. The immigration of family members would therefore bring significant additional labour. As well as the problem of housing, other issues such as assimilation, morality, public security and health will remain.”^[4]

The two bilateral agreements were ratified by the Chamber of Deputies in 1972^[5] and the new Act on the Entry and Residence of Foreigners came into force on 28 March 1972. This highly restrictive legislation laid down the conditions for immigration, especially for citizens of countries outside the European Community. Immigration was governed by a complex, rigid system of residence permits and work permits.

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Without the supply of a large number of foreign workers, companies in the craft and industrial sectors will find themselves in a critical situation. [Conseil d'État, 1971]

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Racism in a letter from the Ministry of Justice and a draft law in 1972

A debate that occurred in 1972 shows how the question of immigration entered the public arena at the same time as the issue of colonial and post-colonial relations. On 18 February 1972, the Ministry of Justice informed the federations of industry and craft trades that “because of difficulties with assimilation and potential repatriation, people from Africa and Asia applying for jobs will no longer be granted residence permits”.^[6] According to population statistics by country of birth for Luxembourg in 1970, out of a population of 339,841 people, 280,250 had been born in Luxembourg, 59,341 in another European country, 614 in the United States, 498 in an African country and 169 in an Asian country.^[7]

The letter from the Ministry of Justice to employers in Luxembourg needs to be viewed in the context of the bilateral negotiations between Luxembourg and Portugal on employment and social security. According to Point I of the Special Protocol, the Agreement between Luxembourg and Portugal on Social Security, signed on 12 February 1965, only applied to “continental Portugal and the adjacent islands (Azores and Madeira)”.^[8] The many immigrants with Portuguese citizenship who were originally from Cape Verde, an African colony belonging to Portugal, were therefore excluded. When the Portuguese government insisted on amending this point, Luxembourg’s government representatives and diplomats engaged in intense diplomacy so that, while agreeing to the request from Portugal, they could limit the consequences and the growing numbers of non-European immigrants arriving in Luxembourg.

The explanatory statement for the June 1972 draft law on the Amendment to the 1965 Agreement between Luxembourg and Portugal stipulates that: “The Luxembourg government, while agreeing with the Portuguese government’s argument that there is no justification for eliminating a specific category of workers of Portuguese nationality from the scope of the agreement, nevertheless highlighted the potential difficulties for these workers in adjusting to the social, economic and cultural realities of Luxembourg society. At the insistence of the Luxembourg government, the Portuguese delegation agreed to liaise with the relevant authorities so that no measures would be taken to encourage workers from Cape Verde and their families to emigrate to Luxembourg.”^[9] In its opinion, the Council of State expressed its agreement, “given the agreement that was reached and officially recorded in the minutes of the negotiations between the delegations of the two contracting Parties regarding the emigration of Portuguese workers from Cape Verde and their families to Luxembourg”.^[10]

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[...] the Agreement between Luxembourg and Portugal [...], only applied to “continental Portugal and the adjacent islands (Azores and Madeira)”. The many immigrants with Portuguese citizenship who were originally from Cape Verde [...] were therefore excluded.

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This measure not only reveals an explicit intention to limit immigration to a white, European population; it is also firmly in line with the strategy pursued by the Luxembourg government regarding its participation in the Belgian colonial project – it again wanted to settle into a “comfortable colonial complicity” and leave the partner to assume the burden of responsibility.

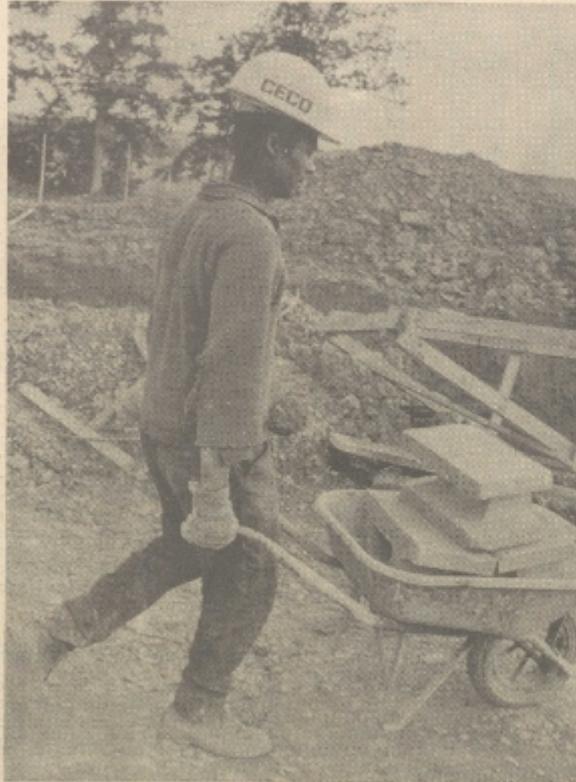
During the debates in the Chamber of Deputies on 13 February 1973, Jean Spautz, a member of the Christian Social People’s Party, head of the LCGB trade union and rapporteur for the bill, also insisted on this point: “I would also like to emphasise that the Portuguese delegation agreed – and this agreement was recorded in the minutes of the negotiations – to liaise with the relevant authorities to ensure that no measure would be taken to encourage the emigration of Portuguese workers from Cape Verde and their families to Luxembourg. You will remember that at the time this sparked outrage in the country.”^[11] The bill was passed unanimously, with the support of both the majority (Christian Socials and Liberals) and the opposition (Socialists and Communists).

“Weißes Land Luxemburg”: A debate that revealed colonial stereotypes

Jean Spautz was alluding to a controversy that had arisen in part of the Luxembourg press in summer 1972.

On 16 June 1972, the independent Liberal weekly publication *d’Lëtzebuurger Land* had reacted to the letter from the Ministry of Justice to employers by publishing a photo for its front page feature “*L’image actuelle*” (“Image of the week”) of a Cape Verdean construction worker employed by Luxembourg’s biggest construction firm, CECO, and deploring the administrative racism (“*behördlicher Rassismus*”) and the “xenophobic atmosphere cultivated by chauvinist right-wing politicians”. The Minister for Justice at the time was the Liberal Eugène Schaus from the Democratic Party.^[12] The youth wing of the Democratic Party, the *Jeunesse démocratique*, also criticised the minister and his ministry for their attitude, which was seen as racist and xenophobic.

This criticism sparked reactions from readers of *d’Lëtzebuurger Land* in support of the authorities and against the position of the newspaper. These were published on 14 July 1972 and included an array of colonial stereotypes. A first reader thought that the Luxembourg authorities were right to stop the emergence of a “*Farbigenproblem*” (“colour problem”), as these “men of colour” from a “primitive environment” would be unable to



Das aktuelle Bild *Einer Mitteilung des Justizministeriums an die Arbeitgeberverbände zufolge sind Negot und Assaten in Luxemburg als Fremdarbeiter anerkannt: sie erhalten die Aufenthaltsgenehmigung nicht mehr, die sie benötigen, um in unserem Lande arbeiten und leben zu dürfen. In der erwähnten Mitteilung wird die menschenrechtswidrige Maßnahme mit Assimilierungsschwierigkeiten gerechtfertigt. Geistiger Nährboden dieses einseitigen Rassismus ist die fremdenfeindliche Atmosphäre, die von chauvinistischen Rechtspolitikern geüchtet wird. Diesmal wurde jedoch die Grenze des Erträglichen überschritten, der behördliche Rassismus steht jetzt am Pranger . . .* (Photo : Jacques Bohler)

Front page of the *Lëtzebuurger Land* of 16 June 197.
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integrate into "industrial civilisation". [13] A second also believed that the authorities had acted wisely and that their recommendation was intended not only to preclude "crimes perpetrated by racial minorities who feel rejected by everyone" but also to prevent racism: "We will only have racism here if we claim that we are not racist like you and agree to welcome an unlimited number of those people. Don't you think that we have enough to do in trying to assimilate our 'Gastarbeiter' from Italy, Portugal, Yugoslavia and Greece?" [14] That already represents a considerable long-term effort." [15] This argument turns the tables on those who were criticising the government, suggesting that it was foreigners themselves who were responsible for xenophobia.

On 4 and 5 August, in the *Luxemburger Wort* (the newspaper of the Archdiocese of Luxembourg), the Christian Social member of parliament Jean Wolter defended Schaus and cited the practical hurdles of repatriation and the difficulties associated with assimilation

("Assimilationsschwierigkeiten") to justify the letter from the ministry to employers, while again reversing the burden of responsibility and suggesting that the attitude of the *Jeunesse démocratique* was to blame for the problem. "For just as racism exists and should be condemned, there is also clearly a well-intentioned but poorly understood "anti-racism", which ultimately creates racial problems where there were none before." [16]

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This argument turns the tables on those who were criticising the government, suggesting that it was foreigners themselves who were responsible for xenophobia.

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On 21 July, in *d'Letzeburger Land*, Michel Delvaux,^[17] a young legal expert who would subsequently become a socialist councillor for Luxembourg City, expressed his view on the letter from the ministry: “regardless of who wrote it, even if it was just intended to curb the irregular entry of workers, any discrimination exercised by public authorities based on race is extremely serious”.^[18]

The fact that the arrival of workers from a European country, in this case Portugal, encompassed a non-European, colonial element had led the Luxembourg government to introduce selective procedures that amounted to a more or less explicit form of racism. Recently, Serge Kollwelter, one of the founders of the NGO *União*, set up in 1972 to assist immigrants in Luxembourg, raised the question in this context as to whether Luxembourg’s systematic abstention in the 1970s during UN votes on resolutions condemning Portugal for its colonial policy was not a quid pro quo for Portugal’s efforts to deter Cape Verdeans from coming to Luxembourg.^[19] As we do not have access to the archives of the Luxembourg Ministries of Justice and Foreign Affairs for these periods, the question remains unanswered.

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The fact that the arrival of workers from a European country, in this case Portugal, encompassed a non-European, colonial element had led the Luxembourg government to introduce selective procedures [...].

”

On 2 March 1973, two weeks after the unanimous vote adopting the Amendment to the Agreement between Luxembourg and Portugal, René Vesqué,^[20] the Jesuit chaplain of *Jeunesse étudiante chrétienne* (JEC) and founder in 1969 of *Action formation de cadres*, the forerunner to *Action Solidarité Tiers Monde*, wrote that by passing this “racist law”, members of parliament and the Council of State were recognising Portugal’s colonial domination over Cape Verde. The headline of his opinion piece in the *Luxemburger Wort* was: “Weißes Land Luxemburg”.^[21] He offered this ironic take on the unanimous vote: “No comment needed. The average citizen did not notice anything at all. They had already approved the government’s position, as they also wanted our country to remain clean. The average Christian did not notice anything either. It was nothing to do with them. Nowhere in the Scriptures do we read: ‘I am black and you did not welcome me.’ P.S. We did not find any comments on this racist law in the daily press; the news was drowned out by the general coverage of the parliamentary session.”^[22]

One interesting fact with a colonial bearing is that at this time there were direct flights between Luxembourg and South Africa, which had introduced the apartheid regime in 1948, and most companies operating in Luxembourg’s fledgling financial centre had economic relations with the country. And a little-known, or forgotten, detail is that during the early years, one of the routes for these flights was via Cape Verde.^[23]

Foreign population by nationalities in Luxembourg (1970–2025)

Nationality	1970	1981	1991	2001	2011	2021	2025
Total pop.	339.841	364.602	384.634	439.539	512.353	643.941	681.973
Lux. Pop	277.337	268.813	269.269	277.254	291.831	339.890	361.247
Foreign population	62.504	95.789	114.152	162.285	220.522	304.051	320.726
Proportion of foreigners	18.4 %	26.3 %	29.4 %	36.9 %	43.0 %	47.2 %	47.0 %
Portugal	5.743	29.309	39.303	58.657	82.363	93.659	89.671
France	8.473	11.940	13.203	19.979	31.456	49.701	49.185
Italy	23.490	22.257	19.077	18.996	18.059	23.881	25.374
Belgium	6.455	7.854	10.255	14.800	16.926	19.692	18.582
Germany	7.800	8.851	8.874	10.052	12.049	12.906	12.288
Spain	2.155	2.073	2.505	2.799	3.657	7.651	9.917
Yugoslavia and former Yugoslavia	476	1.501	2.241	11.065	11.364	9.938	9.983
			Montenegro	7.429*	3.814	2.944	2.808
			Bosnia-Herzegovina	2.487	2.261	1.508	1.480
			Serbia		2.161	1.772	1.861
			Croatia	426	362	1.358	1.465
			Kosovo		1.324	1.171	1.201
United Kingdom	394	2.027	3.190	4.331	5.471	4.289	3.601
Poland	498	344	364	666	2.709	4.941	5.150
Greece	95	236	801	1.147	1.541	3.811	4.596
Cape Verde	-	301	1.101	1.660	2.472	2.562	2.894
United States	717	694	1.215	1.127	1.295	2.196	2.182
Brazil	-	64	147	307	1.203	2.859	3.504
Marocco	-	74	120	252	524	1.612	2.248
China	-	35	290	1.070	1.610	4.130	4.755
India	-	65	132	199	569	3.641	5.474

Source: STATEC based on Population Census (1970–2021) and Registre National des Personnes Physiques (2025); * From 1992 to 2003, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia included Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo.

The limits of a selective migration policy

This selective migration policy was only relatively successful. Statistics on population by nationality in the general census of 1970 did not include nationals from Africa and Asia, so we only have the figures for 1960 and 1981. In 1960, there were four citizens from African countries in Luxembourg, and by 1981 there were 624.^[24] In 1960, 31 nationals from Asian countries were living in Luxembourg, a number which had risen to 579 by 1981. A large proportion of the 624 nationals from African countries in 1981 were Cape Verdean (a nationality that had existed since Cape Verde's independence in 1975): there were 301 Cape

Verdeans compared with just 74 Moroccans.[25] As many Cape Verdean immigrants had Portuguese citizenship, we need to refer to another statistic to measure the real trends in Cape Verdean immigration to Luxembourg, namely the population in Luxembourg by country of birth.[26] The number of people whose country of birth was in Africa rose from 366 in 1960 to 498 in 1970 and 1,603 in 1981. In 1960, the vast majority of the 366 residents in Luxembourg who were born in Africa were probably Luxembourgers born in the colonies of European countries, such as the Belgian Congo or French Algeria. But the sharp increase (1,100 additional residents) during the decade from 1970 to 1981 was primarily down to the immigration of people born in Cape Verde, those with Portuguese nationality and those with Cape Verdean nationality.

So despite the introduction of a selective policy on immigration, many Cape Verdeans continued to migrate to Luxembourg. If they had Portuguese citizenship, they would have benefited from the family reunification measures provided by the 1972 agreement between Luxembourg and Portugal. Others migrated outside any legal framework, either by land from Portugal via Spain and France, or by sea from Cape Verde via the port of Rotterdam. The fact that this immigration continued is hardly surprising, bearing in mind that Cape Verdeans generally came to work in the construction sector, which, unlike the steel industry, was not hit by crisis or declining workforce numbers in Luxembourg in the 1970s. While the number of workers in steel plants and mines in Luxembourg dropped from 15,530 in 1970 to 8,027 in 1981,[27] the number of workers in the construction industry increased from 9,335 in 1970 to 11,854 in 1981.[28] Employers in the construction sector were clearly continuing to recruit Cape Verdeans.

In his 2024 article, Serge Kollwelter discussed how this immigration policy was bypassed by the realities of the Luxembourg labour market: "The reality was entirely different. It can be summed up by the fact that migrants who came outside the legal framework – later they would be referred to as undocumented migrants – were regularised almost immediately. The migrants would use smugglers to cross the Spanish border and other smugglers to cross the Pyrenees on foot via a route known as the 'chemin des lapins'. This crossing was by no means easy. Amadeu Q., for example, described how his group was targeted by the Guardia Civil and one of them was shot. The migrants would then arrive in the Paris area, which for many years was home to the third largest community of Portuguese nationals, then some would head to eastern France and others to Luxembourg. As they left the main railway station in Luxembourg City, immigrants just had to cross the road to reach the CDC construction firm, and they would be up and running. This method for getting round the system also suited the Portuguese government, which had an ambiguous stance on emigration: it served as a pressure valve, offering a way out for workers who were struggling to make ends meet, while also revealing the arrogance of an empire that refused to admit that it was unable to feed its population but was happy to accept foreign currency sent by its emigrants." [29]

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[...] a 2017 study by CEFIS revealed that if individuals with a Cape Verdean migration background were included, the Cape Verdean population in Luxembourg was actually between 8,000 and 9,000 people, or 1.6% of the total population.

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Immigration from Cape Verde to Luxembourg continued. The number of Cape Verdean nationals in Luxembourg grew from 301 in 1981 to 1,101 in 1991 and 1,660 in 2001. Referring to demographic data from 2011, a 2017 study by CEFIS revealed that if individuals with a Cape Verdean migration background were included in the figures, the Cape Verdean population in Luxembourg was actually between 8,000 and 9,000 people, or 1.6% of the total population of Luxembourg: "This group is composed of three broad subgroups, all of a similar size: Luxembourgers of Cape Verdean origin (2,374 people), Cape Verdeans (2,068 people) and foreigners (mostly Portuguese) whose two parents were both born in Cape Verde (2,304 people)."[30] From 2011 to 2025, the number of residents with Cape Verdean citizenship increased further, from 2,472 to 2,894 people (409 in Esch, 295 in Luxembourg City, 246 in Differdange, 167 in Ettelbruck, 150 in Wiltz, 141 in Pétange, 107 in Dudelange, 104 in Schifflange),[31] and over the same period 1,684 Cape Verdeans acquired Luxembourgish citizenship.[32] The descendants of Cape Verdean construction workers from the 1960s and 1970s now work in Luxembourg mainly in public, semi-public and local government bodies, as well as in the social and education sectors.

It is both revealing and surprising to note that this Afro-Portuguese population in Luxembourg disappeared from political speeches and public life for many years after the debates of 1972-1973, clearly illustrating the concept of social visibility/invisibility. One example of this is the fact that until 2011, Cape Verdeans remained absent from public statistics – they were not included in the statistical yearbooks published from the 1980s to the 2000s.[33]

One of the aims of this first issue of *Liens Migrations* is to shine a light on them.

I would like to thank Sylvain Besch (CEFIS researcher) and François Peltier (Head of the Population and Housing Unit at STATEC) for their assistance with the research.

[1] Original text: "Gewiss kommt uns zugute, dass wir keine Kolonialvergangenheit haben." Quoted in: Schlamme, M., "Mali ist nicht Afghanistan." Interview mit Armeeminister François Bausch, *Luxemburger Wort*, 9.1.2022, <https://www.wort.lu/politik/mali-ist-nicht-afghanistan/1137872.html> (consulted on 28.1.2026).

[2] Goergen, K., "Luxembourg's Colonial History: Negotiating Engagement in Africa", thesis defended on 13 March 2026 in Esch-sur-Alzette with a view to obtaining a PhD in History from the University of Luxembourg, University of Luxembourg, 2026, p. 529.

[3] Statec, *Statistiques historiques 1839-1989*, Luxembourg, 1989, p. 33ff.; Rapport de la Commission des Affaires étrangères sur le projet de loi portant approbation de l'Avenant à la Convention entre le Luxembourg et le Portugal sur la sécurité sociale de 1965, le 13 février 1973 à la Chambre des députés, Compte rendu de la Chambre des députés (CRCD), 1972-1973, p. 1840.

[4] Original text: "Depuis des années déjà les disponibilités en main-d'oeuvre autochtone du Grand-Duché sont totalement insuffisantes pour couvrir les besoins du pays. Les quelques douzaines de travailleurs en provenance du secteur agricole pouvant devenir disponibles encore dans les années à venir ne changent rien à l'aspect général du problème de la pénurie de main-d'oeuvre. Sans l'apport d'un grand nombre de travailleurs étrangers les entreprises artisanales et industrielles se trouveraient dans une situation

très critique. Fin 1970 le nombre des travailleurs étrangers (hommes et femmes) était de 33.100 contre 30.100 en 1969 et 28.600 en 1968, voire 27.900 en 1967. Ces chiffres comprennent les frontaliers (7.400), les saisonniers et les travailleurs étrangers sédentaires au Grand-Duché. En général on constate une réduction progressive des saisonniers en faveur des étrangers résidant en permanence au Grand-Duché. Cette évolution pose évidemment le problème du logement d'autant plus que pas mal de travailleurs étrangers mariés désirent se fixer avec leur famille au pays. Dans ce cas les femmes et les enfants adultes travailleront soit dans les ménages, soit dans les établissements de lavage et de nettoyage, soit dans les ateliers et les fabriques. L'immigration des membres de la famille apporterait donc un supplément sensible de main-d'oeuvre. En dehors du problème soulevé du logement, d'autres, tels que ceux de l'assimilation, de la moralité, de la sûreté publique et de la santé resteront posés." Avis du Conseil d'État du 21 juillet 1971 sur le projet de loi portant approbation de l'accord entre le Grand-Duché de Luxembourg et la République Portugaise relatif à l'emploi des travailleurs portugais au Luxembourg, signé à Lisbonne, le 20 mai 1971, CRCD, 1971-1972, p. 955.

[5] "Loi du 11 avril 1972 portant approbation de l'accord entre le Grand-Duché de Luxembourg et la République Portugaise relatif à l'emploi des travailleurs portugais au Luxembourg" and "Loi du 11 avril 1972 portant approbation de l'Accord entre le Grand-Duché de Luxembourg et la République socialiste fédérale de Yougoslavie réglementant l'emploi au Luxembourg des travailleurs yougoslaves".

[6] Quoted in: M. Delvaux, "Le racisme, un problème au Luxembourg?", *d'Lëtzebuenger Land*, no. 30, 21.7.1972, p. 3.

[7] Statec, *Statistiques historiques 1839-1989*, p. 35 (Tableau B. 105: Population totale par pays de naissance 1880-1981).

[8] Loi du 17 juin 1966 portant approbation de la Convention entre le Luxembourg et le Portugal sur la sécurité sociale, signée à Luxembourg, le 12 février 1965 (avec la Convention et le Protocole spécial en annexe), *Mémorial du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg*, A, no. 31/1966, p. 549.

[9] Original text: "Le Gouvernement luxembourgeois, tout en accédant à l'argumentation du Gouvernement portugais suivant laquelle il n'est pas justifié d'éliminer du champ d'application de la convention une partie déterminée des travailleurs de nationalité portugaise, a tenu à souligner néanmoins les difficultés d'adaptation des travailleurs en cause à la vie sociale, économique et culturelle de la collectivité luxembourgeoise. Sur ses insistance la délégation portugaise s'est déclarée d'accord pour intervenir auprès des autorités compétentes afin qu'aucune mesure tendant à stimuler l'émigration vers le Grand-Duché des travailleurs du Cap-Vert et de leurs familles ne soit prise." Exposé des motifs du Projet de loi portant approbation de l'Avenant à la Convention entre le Luxembourg et le Portugal sur la sécurité sociale signée le 12 février 1965, fait à Luxembourg, le 5 juin 1972, déposé en janvier 1973 à la Chambre des Députés, CRCD, 1972-1973, p. 1711.

[10] Avis du Conseil d'Etat sur le projet de loi portant approbation de l'Avenant à la Convention entre le Luxembourg et le Portugal sur la sécurité sociale signée le 12 février 1965, CRCD, 1972-1973, p. 1713.

[11] Original text: "Ech wollt ower och nach drop hiweisen, datt d'portugiesesch Délégiati'o'n dermat averstane war - an den Accord ass am Procès-verbal vun de Négociati'o'ne festgehale gi - fir bei dénen z'ostännegen Instanzen ze intervenéieren, fir datt keng Mesüeren ergraff géngen, fir d'Awanderung vu portugieseschen Arbechter vum Cap-Vert an hire Familje no Letzebuerg ze stimuléieren. Dir erënnert iech, dat hat seiner Zeit am Land ganz vill Stëbs opgewierbelt." (CRCD, 1972-1973, p. 1840-1841).

[12] Eugène Schaus (1901-1978) served several ministerial terms during the post-war period. He was Foreign Minister from 1959 to 1964, just before and after the Belgian Congo

gained independence. On his role and attitude during this period, see: Moes, R., *Cette colonie qui nous appartient un peu. La communauté luxembourgeoise au Congo belge 1883-1960*, Luxembourg, Editions d'Lëtzebuenger Land, 2012.

[13] Comment by a reader signing with the initial H., *d'Lëtzebuenger Land*, no. 29, 14.7.1972, p. 6.

[14] It is always interesting to see the extent to which these letters from readers in Luxembourg draw on arguments from debates raging in neighbouring countries, especially Germany. But unlike in Germany, there were virtually no Greek immigrants in Luxembourg. In 1970, the population census revealed that there were 95 people of Greek nationality. The number of Yugoslavian immigrants recorded at the time was also just 476.

[15] Original text: "Nous aurons le racisme ici seulement si nous prétendons de ne pas être racistes comme vous et accueillir un gros nombre de ces gens-là à volonté. Ne croyez-vous pas que nous avons assez à faire à tâcher d'assimiler nos 'Gastarbeiter' d'Italie, de Portugal, de Yougoslavie et de Grèce? Cela représente déjà un effort de longue haleine." Comment from a second letter signed J. Nickels. The two comments were grouped together by the editors under the title "Die Angst vor einem Rassenproblem", *d'Lëtzebuenger Land*, no. 29, 14.7.1972, p. 6.

[16] Original text: "Denn so wie es einen verdammenswerten Rassismus gibt, so gibt es sonder Zweifel auch einen zwar gutgemeinten, doch falsch verstandenen Antirassismus, der im Endeffekt Rassenprobleme dort heraufbeschwört, wo vorher keine bestanden haben." Quoted in: Wolter, J., "Ist Herr Eug. Schaus ein Rassist?", *Luxemburger Wort*, 4.8.1972, p. 3; see also the article by Wolterm J., "Rassenprobleme in Luxemburg?", *Luxemburger Wort*, 5.8.1972, p. 3.

[17] On Michel Delvaux, see: Fayot, B., "Un hommage à Michel Delvaux (1948-1983). Un espoir de la gauche réformiste", *d'Lëtzebuenger Land*, 24.3.2023, p. 10.

[18] Michel Delvaux, see note 6. Original text: "quel qu'en soit l'auteur, même s'il ne s'agissait que d'endiguer l'entrée irrégulière de travailleurs, toute discrimination fondée sur la race commise par les pouvoirs publics est d'une extrême gravité."

[19] Kollwelter, S., "Les gouvernements luxembourgeois et les Cap-Verdiens", in: *forum 438* (Relations luso-luxembourgeoises), July 2024, p. 48-51.

[20] On René Vesqué, see: Pauly, M., "René Vesqué (1930-2010)", in: *forum 302*, December 2010, p. 57-58.

[21] Vesqué sj, R., "Weißes Land Luxemburg, Freie Tribüne", *Luxemburger Wort*, 2.3.1973, p. 12.

[22] Original text: "Kommentar überflüssig. Der gewöhnliche Bürger hat überhaupt nichts gemerkt. Er hatte ja auch sowieso die Haltung der Regierung bejaht, denn auch ihm ist es ja daran gelegen, daß unser Land sauber bleibt. Der gewöhnliche Christ hat auch nichts gemerkt. Ihn geht das Ganze ja auch nichts an. Nirgends in der Schrift steht geschrieben: "Ich bin ein Schwarzer, und ihr habt mich nicht angenommen." P.S. In keiner Tageszeitung fanden wir einen Kommentar zu diesem rassistischen Gesetz; die Nachricht ging in der allgemeinen Kammerberichterstattung unter."

[23] Hoffmann, E. & Thilman, D., "Luxembourg-Johannesburg direct (1954-1994). Histoire(s) d'une liaison aérienne pas comme les autres", in: *Luxembourg - Afrique du Sud. Etude des relations entre le Luxembourg et l'Afrique du Sud réalisée dans le cadre de l'exposition "Nelson Mandela - From Prisoner to President"*, Luxembourg, 2015, p. 22-33.

[24] Statec, *Statistiques historiques 1839-1989*, p. 33 (Tableau B.104: Population totale par nationalité 1875-1981).

[25] Statec, *La démographie luxembourgeoise en chiffres*. Édition 2025, Luxembourg, 2025, p. 13 (Tableau 3: La population étrangère par nationalité entre 1981 et 2025).

[26] Statec, *Statistiques historiques 1839-1989*, p. 35 (Tableau B.105: Population totale par pays de naissance 1880-1981).

[27] Statec, *Statistiques historiques 1839-1989*, p. 207 (Tableau E.301: Ouvriers occupés dans les minières suivant la nationalité) and 235 (Tableau E.408: Ouvriers occupés dans l'industrie sidérurgique et productivité technique par ouvrier).

[28] Statec, *Statistiques historiques 1839-1989*, p. 38 (Tableau B.200 Population active par branche d'activité selon le statut professionnel et le sexe).

[29] Original text: "La réalité était cependant toute autre. On peut la résumer en disant que la régularisation des migrants venant en dehors du cadre prévu – plus tard on les appellera des sans-papiers – était quasiment immédiate. Les migrants partaient avec des passeurs pour traverser la frontière espagnole, et faisaient appel à d'autres passeurs pour franchir à pied les Pyrénées en empruntant ce qu'ils appelaient le «chemin des lapins». Ce passage était loin d'être une partie de plaisir. Amadeu Q. racontait par exemple que son groupe avait été pris comme cible par la Guardia Civil et qu'un des leurs avait été abattu. La prochaine étape était la région parisienne, longtemps la troisième plus grande agglomération de Portugais, puis pour certains l'Est de la France, et pour d'autres enfin le Luxembourg. Sortant de la gare centrale, l'immigré traversait la rue pour tomber sur les bureaux de la firme de construction CDC et le tour était joué. Cette façon de contourner le dispositif prévu convenait aussi au gouvernement portugais, dont la position face à l'émigration était ambiguë: d'une part, c'était une soupape pour se défaire d'une main d'oeuvre sans ressources, d'autre part, on y décèle l'arrogance d'un empire qui ne pouvait avouer qu'il n'arrivait pas à nourrir sa population mais accueillait les devises envoyées par ses émigrés."

[30] Original text: "Si, à la date du recensement de la population en 2011, on dénombre 2.472 personnes de nationalité cap-verdienne au Luxembourg, la communauté d'origine cap-verdienne (avec un arrière-plan migratoire) est trois fois plus nombreuse avec 8.358 personnes. Dans ce groupe on peut identifier trois grands sous-groupes de taille identique : les Luxembourgeois d'origine cap-verdienne (2.374 personnes), les Cap-Verdiens (2.068 personnes) et les étrangers (en majorité des Portugais) qui ont leurs deux parents nés au Cap-Vert (2.304 personnes)." CEFIS, "*Diaspora capverdienne*" au Luxembourg. *Panorama socio-économique, rôles dans les mouvements migratoires et solidarité avec les pays d'origine*, RED (Recherche-Etude-Documentation) No. 21, Luxembourg, 2017, p. 19.

[31] Statec, *La démographie luxembourgeoise en chiffres*. Édition 2025, p. 13.

[32] Data from : <https://mj.gouvernement.lu/fr/dossiers/2020/nationalite-luxembourgeoise.html#bloub-4> (consulted on 30 January 2026).

[33] The yearbooks did not completely deny the presence and integration of Cape Verdean immigrants: from 1991 onwards, they mentioned Cape Verdean pupils at the Luxembourg City Conservatoire (music school).

Interview with a researcher

Interview with a researcher

Elisabeth Boesen, Institute of History, University of Luxembourg

(By Denis Scuto)



Interview with Elisabeth Boesen
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In this section, Denis Scuto speaks to the research scientist Elisabeth Boesen. Elisabeth Boesen studied cultural anthropology and history at the Free University of Berlin and the University of Bayreuth, where she completed a PhD in cultural anthropology in 1998. She continued her ethnographic research on West African nomadic people at the University of Bayreuth, Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich and the Leibniz Centre for Modern Oriental Studies (ZMO) in Berlin. In 2007, she joined the Institute for History at the University of Luxembourg as a senior researcher. Her fields of study are mobility and social change, especially in rural communities, and issues related to cultural identity and identity expression, including aesthetic modes of self-representation, in Western Europe (particularly the Greater Region (SaarLorLux)) and West Africa. She has extensive experience in qualitative research, having conducted detailed ethnographic field research in West Africa, and she also specialises in oral history research.

Her publications focus on migration and borderland issues, memory studies, and cultural identity. They include:

- Boesen, E. & Schnuer, G. (eds), *European Borderlands. Living with Barriers and Bridges* (Border Regions Series), Oxford, Routledge, 2017.
- Boesen, E., Marfaing, L. & de Bruijn, M., "Nomadism and mobility in the Sahara-Sahel: introduction", *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 48/1, 2014, p.1-12 (Special Issue).
- Boesen, E., "Flowers and stones. Portugiesische und kapverdische Begräbniskulturen in Luxemburg", in: Kmec, S., Philippart, R. & Reuter, A., *Ewige Ruhe?/Concession à perpétuité? Grabkulturen in Luxemburg und den Nachbarregionen/Cultures funéraires au Luxembourg et dans les régions voisines*, Luxembourg, capybara books, 2019, p. 95-102.
- Boesen, E., "Negotiating the aesthetics of mourning in Luxembourg: on pre-modern forms in post-modern spaces", in: House, D., Westendorp, M. & Maddrell, A. (eds), *New Perspectives on Urban Deathscapes. Continuity, Change, and Contestation*, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar, 2023, p. 83-106.
- Boesen, E. et al. (eds), *Changing lusospheres – Europe, Brazil, Africa. On old and new connections between centers and peripheries*, Esch-sur-Alzette/Luxembourg, Melusina Press, 2025.

The interview focuses on Elisabeth Boesen's recent research into the funeral traditions of Portuguese and Cape Verdean people in Luxembourg and the Greater Region. It also considers the importance of researching Cape Verdean migration and, more broadly, on changing lusospheres.

Access the full interview on our website, on the University of Luxembourg's YouTube channel, or by scanning the QR code.



Research portraits

Research portraits

DisPOSEG – Disentangling postcolonial encounters in globalisation: a sociolinguistic-ethnographic study of Lusophone migrant workers’ positioning in third space

(By Bernardino Tavares and Aleida Vieira)

The project

Lusofonia, a term that refers to the community of countries, regions and peoples who share the Portuguese language and cultural heritage, covers a diverse range of groups and individuals. Although they share a language, they do not necessarily share the same historical positions. In this globalised world, movements of capital, ideas and people no longer follow the familiar colonial path from centre to periphery and vice versa; rather they involve more complicated flows and networks of power.

DisPOSEG, a sociolinguistic-ethnographic project funded by the Luxembourg National Research Fund (FNR) which ran between 2021 and 2024 at the University of Luxembourg, investigated the social, linguistic and workplace encounters and interactions of Lusophone migrants, i.e. people originally from Portuguese-speaking countries in Europe, Africa and Brazil, and their descendants, in the multilingual country that is Luxembourg.



The purpose of this ethnographic study was to provide a detailed and in-depth account of Lusophone migrants’ relations with Luxembourg and the extent to which they are shaped by colonialism, language and migration regimes. It particularly investigated their workplace encounters and social interactions in Luxembourg, bearing in mind that Lusophone migrants and their descendants often share the same workplaces. The project aimed to develop an enhanced understanding of mobility and migration by exploring (re)arrangements and solidarities between these migrants in a third space, Luxembourg, beyond the old dichotomy

of (former) coloniser and colonised countries. Additionally, the project sought to observe how language can be an important tool for both reversing and perpetuating colonial hierarchies, taking into account the complex language policy in Luxembourg – branded as a multicultural and multilingual country par excellence. Finally, it explored how the Portuguese language is positioned in the “linguistic market” of Luxembourg.

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The purpose of this ethnographic study was to provide a detailed and in-depth account of Lusophone migrants' relations with Luxembourg and the extent to which they are shaped by colonialism, language and migration regimes.

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The multifaceted methodology of the DisPOSEG project led to a comprehensive multimodal database of discursive products and practices. The methodology involved open-ended and semi-structured interviews, participant observation, fieldnotes, audio/video recordings in workplace settings, and collecting relevant visual and material data. The project took into account Lusophone migration routes both via and/or beyond Portugal. The investigation took place in four fieldwork settings where Lusophone people and the Portuguese language are highly prominent. The settings were all entrepreneurial and alternative spaces in which migrants occupy both subaltern and senior positions.



The President of the Republic of Cape Verde, José Maria Neves, the First Lady, Debora Katisa Carvalho and H.R.H. Grand Duke Henri with researchers from the DisPOSEG project and DHUM during the state visit in 2023.

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Documentary: "INATTENDU"



One output of the DisPOSEG Project was the documentary "INATTENDU", which proved to be an effective form of research dissemination to reach a broader audience including academics and the general public. Producing the documentary helped us to understand the continued impact of colonial interactions on global (im)mobility today. The life a person lives as a migrant is often only a small part of their reality, and yet it is the only part that is visible to outside observers. The first move may inadvertently lead to further moves, raising hopes but also leading to unexpected events, both for the people who move and for the place they move to. This documentary seeks to make the other parts of their lives more visible by presenting the struggles of three Cape Verdean families in the areas of work, education, language and identity, from

their point of departure, along the way (through Portugal and other countries) and up to their point of arrival in Luxembourg. Most of these families migrated to Luxembourg during the colonial period, when Cape Verde was a Portuguese colony. By sharing their migration trajectories and challenges, the documentary shows how migration trajectories are not clear-cut processes; they involve an enduring and complex web of power and inequalities.

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The life a person lives as a migrant is often only a small part of his or her reality, and yet it is the only part that is visible to outside observers.

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Bernardino Tavares worked as a Research Scientist and the Principal Investigator (PI) of the DisPOSEG Project. He is a sociolinguist whose research particularly explores postcolonial and ethnographic perspectives. Since 2014, he has researched language, inequalities and mobilities in/between the global south and Europe. Born in Cape Verde, he migrated to Portugal and later to Luxembourg, where he pursued his Master's and PhD studies. After arriving in Luxembourg in 2014, he realised that despite the abundance of research on Portuguese migrants and different aspects of their presence in Luxembourg, there was no study that thoroughly examined and fully investigated the relations between these individuals/groups with colonial links. As a researcher, this inspired him to continue this research by starting the DisPOSEG Project.

Aleida Vieira worked as a Research and Development Specialist for the DisPOSEG Project. She was born in Cape Verde but grew up in Portugal, where she started exploring migration and social justice issues. With a background in linguistics and a Master's degree in Conflict Mediation from Luxembourg, she is a communicator deeply engaged with issues of social and linguistic inequality, social justice, and interpersonal and intercultural communication. The DisPOSEG Project enabled her to explore the concept of Lusofonia and to understand the impact of migration processes, language policies, migration regimes and interactions among individuals who share a colonial history - Lusophones - in their host country.



Bernardino Tavares and Aleida Vieira
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Contact Information

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Website: <https://disposeg.wordpress.com/>

Spotlight on

Spotlight on

Spotlight on: Local community associations

(By Heidi Martins)

In Luxembourg, more than two hundred community-based associations working actively in the field of migration are currently affiliated with the *Comité de liaison des associations d'étrangers* (Liaison and Action Committee for Foreigners - CLAE).[1] These associations play a key role in integration by offering spaces for civic and social participation, addressing the needs and aspirations of the populations they represent and building bridges between societies in home and host countries. A study carried out in 2022 by the Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research (LISER) described their role as follows: "Community-based associations can be a springboard for the development of a bilateral process of integration, enabling newcomers to reach out to a specific group first before opening up to the rest of society." [2]

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Community-based associations can be a springboard for the development of a bilateral process of integration, enabling newcomers to reach out to a specific group first before opening up to the rest of society. [LISER, 2022]

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Sociologist Alexia Serré explains that these associations are extremely diverse in nature, shaped by specific migratory histories and by the stories of their founders, members and users, and also that they develop over time.[3] She identifies three major areas in which they are active: cultural and community activities, social and administrative support, and political engagement and rights advocacy. But the associations' efforts in each of these fields can vary depending on the period, the availability and sensitivities of their members and the networks they are involved in.[4]

In their book *La bourgeoisie. Les trois âges de la vie associative issue de l'immigration*, Catherine Wihtol de Wenden, a political scientist specialising in immigration, and Remy Leveau, a political scientist focusing on the Arab world, analyse the changing nature of associations set up by immigrant populations and show that they generally go through three successive phases related to the social, economic and political integration of their members.[5] During the first phase, which reflects community-based, survival-related needs, associations are established by first-generation immigrants to address the material and social difficulties arising from migration. They offer mutual support, solidarity and a way of maintaining links with one's home culture and country. The second phase emerges with the second generation, when associations begin taking on a more engaged, political role, tackling discrimination and calling for equal rights and social and civic recognition. Finally, the third phase is a time of stabilisation and social integration, with higher educational, cultural and professional attainment among associations' members. In this phase, community-based involvement is a matter of choice rather than necessity, and associations come to resemble more conventional cultural, educational or charitable organisations.

For this issue, an interview was carried out in September 2025, with José Henrique de Burgo Mendes, President of the Fédération des Associations Capverdiennes du Luxembourg (FACVL). This was an opportunity to directly learn about the federation's history, its goals and some of its key initiatives.

La Fédération des Associations Capverdiennes du Luxembourg (FACVL) : serving the Cape Verdean community in Luxembourg and the wider world



Creation and background

The FACVL was set up in 1999 to represent the country's Cape Verdean community, following the visit to Luxembourg by Cape Verdean President António Mascarenhas Monteiro. It currently serves as an umbrella organisation for around thirty social, cultural, sporting and religious associations. FACVL President José Henrique de Burgo Mendes explains that when he arrived in Luxembourg in 2009 he got involved in local associations and journalism to support the Portuguese-speaking community. He says that while each member association has its own goals, they all share the same purpose: creating links, promoting Cape Verdean identity and helping individuals settle into Luxembourg society.

Focusing on mutual support and culture

The FACVL is not just there to organise events and get-togethers. It supports members of the community in their daily lives, whether in their efforts to look for work, deal with administrative procedures, access language courses or find the right office or institution.

“

[...] while each member association has its own goals, they all share the same purpose: creating links, promoting Cape Verdean identity and helping individuals settle into Luxembourg society.

”

It also seeks to preserve and promote Cape Verdean culture in Luxembourg through traditional celebrations, exhibitions and art projects. The development of the federation illustrates this twofold mission: supporting the practical needs of the community while also safeguarding and showcasing cultural heritage.

Local, national and international visibility

Nowadays, the FACVL plays a strategic role at various levels. Locally, it organises and coordinates social, educational and cultural activities. At a national level, it represents the Cape Verdean community to Luxembourg authorities, taking part in consultations and initiatives that affect all Cape Verdeans. And on the international stage, it is active among the diaspora, with cooperation projects in Cape Verde and initiatives like the gathering in Lisbon in 2023 aimed at mapping Cape Verdeans living abroad, which was attended by associations from all over Europe.



Cape Verde Independence Day - community in Luxembourg, Place du Parc Bonnevoie, 5 July 2025
© FACVL

Collaboration and partnerships

José Henrique de Burgo believes that the federation draws strength from its cooperative approach. Partnerships with the CLAE, the OGBL, *One People* and the Camões Institute, as well as with municipalities in Luxembourg and the Cape Verdean Embassy, create opportunities to pool resources and organise more ambitious activities. These collaborations strengthen the impact of the federation, which acts as both a spokesperson and a bridge between the various member associations and institutions.

Challenges and prospects

Like many community-based associations, the FACVL has to deal with several challenges, including limited funds, a lack of premises and increasing demands from volunteers. But despite these logistical difficulties, the federation is committed to tackling the major social needs among the community, including literacy, academic achievement, integration into the workplace and access to housing. José Henrique de Burgo sees preserving cultural identity and promoting education as key in enabling young Cape Verdeans to develop their full potential and flourish in Luxembourg today.

Contact Information

To follow the FACVL's activities, get involved in its projects or receive support, please email info@facvl.lu or facvl2010@gmail.com or go to the website <https://facvl.lu>.

[1] "CLAE élit ses nouveaux représentants", CLAE, 2025, consulted on 24 February 2026 (<https://www.clae.lu/le-clae-elit-ses-nouveaux-representants-2>).

[2] Lejealle, B. et al., *Vie associative et Vivre ensemble au Luxembourg – Participation des ressortissants de pays tiers*. Luxembourg: Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research, 2022.

[3] Serré, A., "Vous avez dit Intégration ?" Du rôle des associations nées de l'immigration au Luxembourg", in *Asti 30+ : 30 ans de migrations – 30 ans de recherches – 30 ans d'engagements*, edited by Association de Soutien aux Travailleurs Immigrés. Luxembourg : Éditions Guy Binsfeld, 2010, p. 185.

[4] Serré, "Vous avez dit Intégration ?", p. 186 et 188.

[5] Wihtol de Wenden, C. & Leveau, R., *La bourgeoisie : les trois âges de la vie associative issue de l'immigration*, Paris : CNRS Éditions, 2001.

Museums and migration heritage

Museums and migration heritage

Fenix: the new art museum about migration in Rotterdam

(By Heidi Martins)



Fenix Tornado Museum entrance waterside
© Iwan Baa

On the morning of 10 September 2025, Heidi Martins had the pleasure of speaking to Anne Kremers, the director of the recently inaugurated Fenix museum in Rotterdam, via a Zoom call. The conversation explored the museum's bold curatorial vision as well as the complex challenges of telling migration stories in an era when the movement of people, ideas and cultures is both increasingly visible and often contested.

Housed in a historic 1920s harbour warehouse on Rotterdam's Katendrecht peninsula, Fenix is an important cultural institution and art museum dedicated to exploring the many facets of migration. More than a traditional museum, Fenix is a dynamic space of encounter, memory and reflection, on a site where countless emigrants once began their journeys to new lives across the globe.

Before we delve into Fenix, could you introduce yourself and tell us a little about your career leading up to your current role as director?

Of course. Following studies in cultural sciences and art history, I began my career aged 24 at a brand-new museum, Villa Mondriaan – at the time, I was the youngest museum director in the Netherlands. After that, I worked for several years in Hong Kong for an art foundation, launching cultural projects in Hong Kong and China. Then I returned to Rotterdam, my home city, where I was invited to develop Fenix. Creating meaningful cultural venues for society is what I've done throughout my career – and being able to do that in my own city has been a dream come true.



Anne Kremers, director
© Sylvana Lansu

Could you tell us more about Fenix: its origins, its mission, the team, the architecture and the name?

Fenix is an initiative led by the *Droom en Daad* Foundation, a philanthropic foundation in Rotterdam. Fenix is therefore a private museum, privately funded. The foundation aims to make Rotterdam a more beautiful city by supporting existing cultural organisations and creating new ones.

The museum is housed in a former warehouse for the Holland-America Line, dating back to 1923, from where millions of people boarded ships to start new lives in the Americas, Canada, Brazil, Australia and New Zealand. Rotterdam is a harbour city with a long migration history – today over 179 nationalities live here. Originally named the San Francisco Warehouse, the building was partly demolished after WWII and later damaged by a fire in the 1950s. When it was rebuilt in two parts, it was renamed “Fenix”, like the bird rising from the ashes. We thought that was such a fitting and neutral name that we decided to keep it.

This is where it all started about six years ago, with a small team of just three people; now we have over a hundred staff members. We literally built the museum from the ground up – the building, the collection, and the organisation – and in May 2025 we officially opened.

What would you say is the mission of Fenix?

We had many discussions as to whether we are an immigration museum, a migration museum or a “*Landverhuizersmuseum*” –, a term used until the 1930s to refer to people who left for America – but we realised we wanted to focus on art, and thereby broaden perspectives on migration. Migration is an emotional and universal theme. Since the beginning of humanity, people have been moving – our lives are shaped by migration. There is a migration story in every family – sometimes big, sometimes small, but it’s always there. Art is also emotional and artists have the power to tell emotional stories – without telling you what to think.



**Since the beginning of humanity, people have been moving –
our lives are shaped by migration.**



How would you summarise the role of your institution in society?

We want to show that migration is a topic about society – about all of us. It’s not about the other. We hope every visitor recognises themselves in one of the stories and realises: “Oh, this is also about me.” Dialogue and empathy are sometimes missing today, and we hope to contribute a little to that movement.

Migration is also highly political. How does the museum navigate diverse and even opposing narratives?

Migration is often given a political dimension, but first and foremost it’s a human issue, and that’s what we want to show. We present many personal stories and a broad range of perspectives, reflecting both the positive and the more difficult, even painful, sides of migration. We don’t shy away from sadness, but we don’t tell you what to think as a visitor.

How do you include the many different migrant stories present in Rotterdam?

We didn’t want small corners for each migrant group. But Cape Verde, for example, is very important for Rotterdam and especially for Katendrecht. The first Cape Verdean migrants arrived right where Fenix stands. The neighbourhood was the first Chinatown in continental Europe and there has always been a melting pot of nationalities connected to the harbour.

Dutch artist Raquel van Haver created a work for us on Cape Verde with the Cape Verdean sound artist Ivan Barbosa. The double-sided painting shows Cape Verdeans in Rotterdam on one side and Cape Verdeans still in Cape Verde on the other. It’s about the connection between the people who left and the people who stayed. It’s about longing, leaving, and the part of yourself you miss – something shared by many migrant communities.

What is your approach to audiences? How does the museum understand its “publics”? Do you try to encourage collaboration and participation?

We’ve already had over 250,000 visitors – far more than we expected. We see people of all



Raquel van Haver, *Luz Brilhante e Cintilante*, 2023-2025,
Collection Fenix
©TITIA HAHNE

“
It’s about longing, leaving, and the part of yourself you miss –
something shared by many migrant communities.
”

ages and backgrounds. The exhibitions are open, accessible and high quality. A good example is our Suitcase Labyrinth. We collected over 2,000 suitcases from donors across the country; more than 1,400 people donated suitcases with personal stories. We turned these into a labyrinth that you can walk through while listening to an audio tour. It’s a perfect example of co-creation. Another is the *Plein*, a 2,000m² indoor square open almost daily. People can do homework, drink coffee, play table tennis or chess, or have lunch. Every six weeks we have a new chef – Cape Verdean, Chinese, Syrian – so you can taste cuisines from around the world. We put on events almost every day with different institutions and organisations from the city. It’s never just Fenix – it’s always with a partner.

If you had to describe the museum’s most distinctive feature in one sentence, what would it be?

Visiting Fenix is an experience – and that experience is different for everyone, but we aim for it to be a truly emotional one.

Contact information

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Treasures of the CDMH

Treasures of the CDMH

The book as archive, the book as witness

(By Roxane Kostigoff and Antoinette Reuter)



The extensive collection held by the library at the Documentation Centre for Human Migrations (CDMH) contains not only books exploring current academic debates related to migration but also a number of volumes that, over the decades, have become archives in their own right, offering a snapshot of a specific issue at a given moment in time. One such book is the iconic "Di nos. Nous des Capverdiens au Luxembourg", by Charles Laplanche (photos) and Michel Vanderkam (texts),^[1] which examines the question of migration from Cape Verde to Luxembourg.

The publication arose out of an exhibition developed in 1991 by the Centre national de l'Audiovisuel (CNA) in partnership with the Friendship Association with Cape Verdeans in Luxembourg (*Association d'amitié avec le peuple capverdien au Luxembourg*). This project, which required two years of prior field work and research in both Cape Verde and Luxembourg, revealed the pioneering and original role of the CNA - then the country's



Photographs from the book *"Di nos. Nous des Capverdiens au Luxembourg"*

Photographer: Charles Laplanche

newest heritage institution – within the local cultural scene. At that time it was very unusual for a national institution to join forces with a non-profit association and focus on a subject related to a group on the margins of Luxembourg society. The aim of the book by Laplanche and Vanderkam was to make the Cape Verdean population in Luxembourg more visible. That may seem paradoxical, since the Cape Verdeans, the first racialised group to permanently settle in large numbers in Luxembourg, were highly exposed because of the colour of their skin. But the book's authors wanted to give the general public a deeper understanding that went beyond simply perceiving this difference, by presenting a sociological survey illustrated with black and white photos.

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The aim of the book by Laplanche and Vanderkam was to make the Cape Verdean population in Luxembourg more visible.

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Charles Laplanche's photos are aesthetically appealing and pleasing to the eye. The decision to focus on visual appeal as a criterion of representation can also be seen in the work of other European players involved in debates on migration at that time. In France, the *"Génériques"* association adopted this approach in a deliberate attempt to counter the poor quality (in terms of paper, typography, etc.) generally found in publications about migration issues.^[2] There is also a striking resemblance between the CNA project and the

work of German photographer Brigitte Kraemer, produced at the same time and currently on display at the Ruhr Museum in the Zeche Zollverein complex in Essen – a partner of the CDMH in the Association of European Migration Institutions (AEMI).[3] The strategy adopted by the CNA and the authors is therefore in line with a broader avant-garde European approach to social photography, and they should be recognised in this respect.



Photographs from the book *"Di nos. Nous des Capverdiens au Luxembourg"*
Photographer: Charles Laplanche

However, this aestheticised approach has sometimes been challenged by younger generations, who suggest that by smoothing over the rough edges it gives a mollified, somewhat passive view of the Cape Verdean presence in Luxembourg.[4] In particular, it conceals the reality of daily racism, which was subsequently revealed by further studies that had an equally powerful impact.[5]



Photographs from the book *"Di nos. Nous des Capverdiens au Luxembourg"*
Photographer: Charles Laplanche

[1] Laplanche, C. and Vanderkam, M., *Di nos. Nous, des Capverdiens au Luxembourg*, Ministère de la Culture/CNA, Luxembourg, 1991.

[2] As explained by Driss El Yazami, General Secretary of "Génériques", at a training course on handling archives run by the Comité de Liaison des Associations d'étrangers (CLAE) and the CDMH in 1998.

[3] <https://fotografie-brigittekraemer.de/>

[4] Discussions related to the exhibition "Cap-Vert, allers-retours", organised by the CDMH in 2012.

[5] See the aforementioned research led by Bernardino Tavares and Aleida Vieira at the University of Luxembourg.

Migratory traces of Dudelange

Migratory traces of Dudelange

BAMI, the story behind a digital project in Dudelange

(By Antoinette Reuter)

The BAMI project, short for “Banque de données du Bassin minier” (Mining Region Database), initially set out to compile all the arrival records of foreigners arriving in Dudelange. These official documents had to be completed by any foreigners arriving in the town between 1898 and 1947.[1] They contained information about individuals’ civil status and also their professional background and job history, often revealing complex journeys crossing multiple borders. The BAMI project was subsequently extended to include the population census information from 1880, 1895, 1900 and 1910 for the towns of Dudelange, Esch-sur-Alzette, Differdange and Rumelange. The task was greatly facilitated when access was granted to the microfilms held by the National Archives, headed at the time by Cornel Meder.

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**They contained information about individuals’ civil status
and also their professional background and job history, often
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The project was launched in 1995 by historian Jean-Paul Lehnens. He had recently returned from the University of Vienna, where as a postdoctoral assistant for Michael Mitterauer in the Department of Economic and Social History he had explored the history of family structures and historical demographics. At international level, Jean-Paul Lehnens was one of the pioneers in applying digital techniques to history.[2] We tend to forget these days, but at that time very few researchers had a personal computer.

Jean-Paul Lehnens felt that Luxembourg could serve as a laboratory for historical research involving large collections of diverse data. Although small in size, Luxembourg’s economic, social, political and cultural configuration gave it the characteristics of a major state.

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The choice of Luxembourg’s mining region as a focus area was the result of another innovative approach at that time, namely the first steps into the field of industrial history, which had previously been overlooked by traditional historiography. During the 1980s and 1990s, discussions were regularly held among researchers in the Greater Region regarding their countries’ shared history in the iron and steel industry. This cross-border effort

involved working groups, conferences and exhibitions. Jean-Paul Lehnert managed to persuade the fledgling “Fondation Bassin Minier”[3] to provide material support for a data collection and research project focused on Luxembourg’s industrial south. François Hendrickx,[4] a PhD student in the Economic History Department at Radboud University Nijmegen, was chosen to lead the project. He had taken the introductory courses in applying computer techniques to history taught by Jean-Paul Lehnert at Trier University. Fernand Fehlen from the Public Research Centre Henri Tudor (CRP Henri Tudor)[5] was asked to oversee the practical aspects and provide academic supervision. The first data were recorded by modernist historian Antje Stannek.[6]

The initial focus was on data concerning Dudelange, since Dudelange was the town that had been assigned the theme of migration within the project “Circuits culturels interdisciplinaires du Bassin minier” (Interdisciplinary Cultural Circuits in the Mining Region), another initiative led by the Fondation Bassin Minier. The team of the Documentation Centre for Human Migrations (CDMH) was involved in providing logistical support for those working on the project.[7] In return, Antje Stannek and François Hendrickx participated in the CDMH’s projects, lending their expertise in particular to the exhibition “Itinéraires croisés” (Crossed Paths) developed in conjunction with Luxembourg’s tenure as European Capital of Culture in 1995. This was the CDMH’s first public event as a newly founded non-profit organisation. The exhibition housed in the Town Hall, which presented the history of Dudelange through migration, remains to this day one of the greatest achievements of the CDMH.[8] The initial results of the project were featured in conference presentations and also in the journal *Migrance*, a publication specialising in the history of migration produced by the Paris-based association “Génériques”.[9]

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Gathering wide-ranging data about individuals enables us to piece together the fascinating personal stories of otherwise anonymous figures in history.

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With the BAMl project now under way, Jean-Paul Lehnert turned his attention to other pressing concerns, such as the development of the University of Luxembourg and projects with developing countries. The CDMH took up the torch, particularly with regard to the work with the Fondation Bassin Minier – not without some hesitation, as another researcher would need to be found who, like Jean-Paul Lehnert, would have the vision to imagine potential applications for the huge quantities of data that were being collected. [10] A successor was found in the person of historian and sociologist Piero-Dominique Galloro, now a Professor of Sociology at Université de Lorraine in Metz, who had made use of digital technologies for his PhD.[11] A new round of data collection was launched, focusing on the towns of Esch-sur-Alzette and Rumelange, once again with the material support of the Fondation Bassin Minier and this time in connection with the EU-funded Interreg project “Relations interculturelles et dynamiques identitaires” (RIDI – Intercultural Relations and Identity Dynamics), led by the CDMH in partnership with the University of Metz and the Belgium-based association “Histoire Collective”. Claude Vanolst, hired for the task of data entry, demonstrated great dedication and rigour in his work.[12]

Over the years, the large-scale data collection carried out for the project came to be combined with another approach, that of microhistory. For while there may initially have been fears that BAMl would encourage a structuralist perspective and ignore the human element, in practice quite the opposite occurred. Gathering wide-ranging data about individuals enables us to piece together the fascinating personal stories of otherwise anonymous figures in history.[13]

[1] The Cultural Department in Differdange Town Council also decided to digitise its local records based on the BAMl model, but using its own resources. The process was coordinated by Tania Brugnoni.

[2] Lehnern, J.-P., "History and Computing: The Example of Luxembourg", in *Information Technology in the Teaching of History*, edited by Allan Martin, Lez Smart and David Yeomans, Routledge: London, 1997, p. 37-44.

[3] www.fondationbassinminier.lu, established in 1989.

[4] François Hendrickx subsequently turned away from history to devote himself to his other passion: photography (<https://www.francoishendrickx.com>).

[5] The Public Research Centre Henri Tudor (CRP Henri Tudor) was founded in 1987. In 2015 it was integrated into the newly formed Luxembourg Institute for Science and Technology.

[6] Antje Stannek is currently Coordinator of Studies at Justus Liebig University Giessen.

[7] Jean-Paul Lehnern was also one of the founders of the CDMH. He was the scientific guarantor of the initial CDMH project.

[8] Centre de Documentation sur les Migrations Humaines, *Mémoires croisées: regards sur l'immigration, l'exemple de Dudelange*, Dudelange : CDMH, 1995.

[9] Hendrickx, F., "Bevölkerungsbewegungen in Düdelingen zu Beginn der Industrialisierung. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Migration im Bassin Minier," in *Héritages culturels dans la Grande Région: Saar-Lor-Lux-Rhénanie-Palatinat*, edited by Jean-Paul Lehnern (Luxembourg: Publications du Centre Universitaire Luxembourg, 1996), p. 211-229; Hendrickx, François, "Guide des archives de l'immigration et des migrations internes au Luxembourg aux débuts de l'ère industrielle", *Migrance* 20 (2002), p. 10-19.

[10] CDMH archives, CDMH collection, "Networks" subcollection, "Fondation Bassin Minier" series, sub-series, deposit by Antoinette Reuter, Address at the 1998 Annual General Meeting of the Fondation Bassin Minier, handwritten notes.

[11] Galloro, P.-D., *Ouvriers du fer, princes du vent: histoire des flux de main-d'oeuvre dans la sidérurgie lorraine (1880-1939)*, Metz: Éditions Serpenoise, 2001.

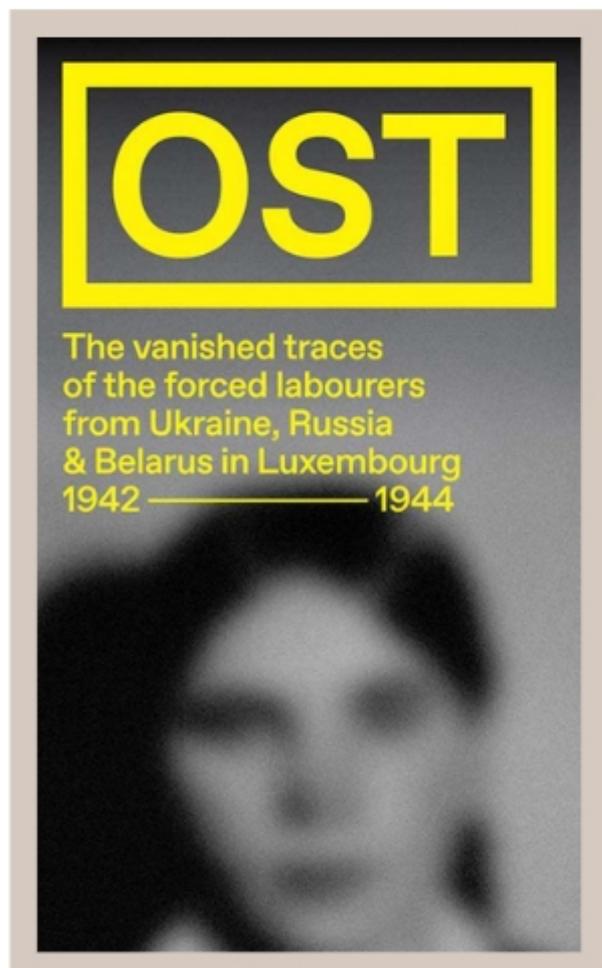
[12] CDMH archives, CDMH collection, "Multiannual projects" subcollection, "Interreg project: RIDI - Relations interculturelles et dynamiques identitaires(1996-1998)" series, "Data disks" sub-series.

[13] See for example Corbin, A., *Le Monde retrouvé de Louis-François Pinagot: sur les traces d'un inconnu (1798-1876)*, Paris, Flammarion, 1998; See also Reuter, A. (ed.). *Migrations - histoire, mémoire, patrimoine: les 20 ans du CDMH à Dudelange*, Luxembourg: Fondation Bassin Minier, 2017.

News

News

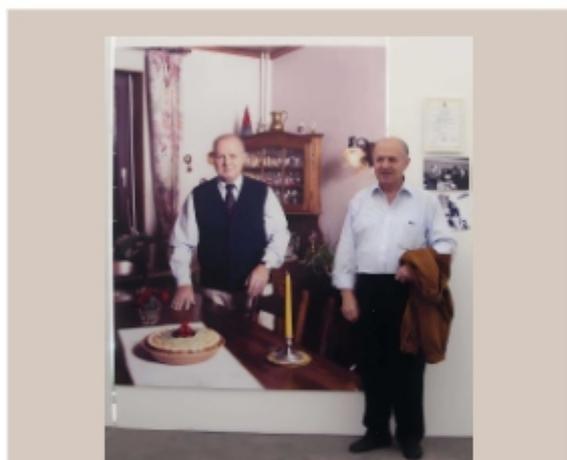
Exhibition “OST. The vanished traces of the forced labourers from Ukraine, Russia and Belarus in Luxembourg, 1942-1944”



In a highly symbolic and poignant exhibition, Inna Ganschow and Joëlla van Donkersgoed shed light on the vanished traces of 4,000 forced labourers who were brought to Luxembourg from Nazi-occupied territories in the Soviet Union. Drawing on Ganschow's award-winning book *Keiner weinte, es gab keine Tränen mehr* (2025) – also available in English as from 2026 –, the exhibition presents insights into the personal stories and fates of Ukrainian, Russian, Belarusian and Polish forced labourers through testimonies, personal objects, and maps of the many camps that were scattered across Luxembourg. Focusing primarily on Dudelange and the former Rellent camp, the exhibition not only offers insights into the human experiences of the forced labourers and the solidarity by the local population during this brutal aspect of the German occupation of Luxembourg; it also explores how their experiences impacted their later lives following the liberation of Luxembourg and their return to the Soviet Union.

Currently on display at the Documentation Centre for Human Migrations (CDMH), the exhibition has been extended until May 2026. An accompanying booklet is available free of charge in English and French to make the findings available to as many people as possible. The exhibition has also been designed so that it can be easily adapted and presented at other locations throughout Luxembourg, such as Esch-sur-Alzette (Lallange and Belval), Schifflange, Differdange, Petange, Warken, Diekirch and Luxembourg-City, with the aim of raising national awareness of this overlooked past. Institutions or municipalities interested in hosting the exhibition are invited to contact the CDMH.

Commemorative day in tribute to Louis Rech



Picture of Louis Rech taken for the exposition "Retour de Babel" (2007)
Photo: Andrés Lejona

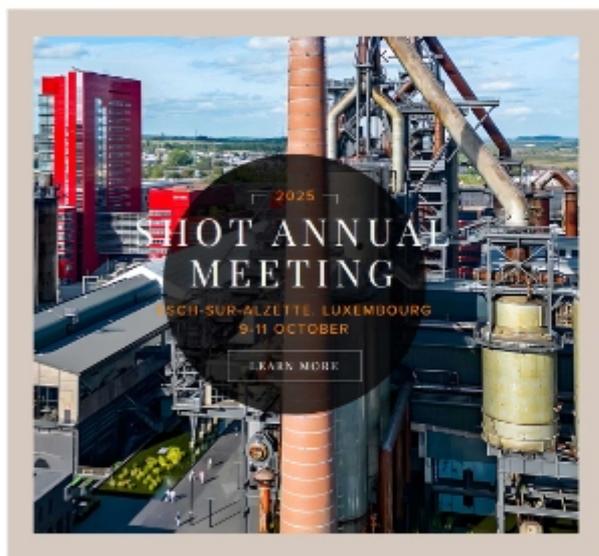
On Sunday 25 January 2026, the CDMH, the "History and Migrations" Chair and the City of Dudelange held a commemorative day at the Opderschmelz Regional Cultural Centre in Dudelange, to mark the centenary of the birth of Louis Rech (1926-2012).

Louis Rech, born in Italy, was the first mayor of a Luxembourg municipality (1985-1993) with an immigrant background. Today, many children of immigrants are involved in politics in Luxembourg. But the organisers of this tribute to the life and career of Louis Rech wanted to highlight the fact that this political emancipation was not automatic, that it was only made possible through fierce personal battles and social struggles.

The commemorative day provided a fitting framework to explore the current research on the history of migration in Dudelange and the wider mining region in southern Luxembourg. In the morning, four researchers presented the latest research on Dudelange. In the afternoon, four presentations of recent research on the city of Esch-sur-Alzette allowed for comparisons to be made.

The contributions shared throughout this day will be published in a special edition of this journal.

SHOT keynote



Denis Scuto was invited to deliver the opening keynote at the 2025 annual conference of the Society for the History of Technology (SHOT), which was held in Belval from 9 to 11 October 2025 with over 400 researchers from institutes across the globe. The theme of the conference was "Technologies of Migration - Migrating technologies".

In his keynote lecture, entitled "Migration to Luxembourg: Constructing Paper Identities and the Nation-State (1840-1940)" Denis Scuto examined the impact of the transition from the liberal era

of the 19th century to the national era of the 20th century on Luxembourg's administrative practices for identifying and registering individuals, and its contribution to the parallel development of "paper technology" and the "surveillance state". He showed how the formation of the nation-state, together with industrialisation and large-scale labour migration, connected bureaucracy with democracy. Foreigners increasingly became "paper identities", documented and categorised in ways that enabled the state to identify, monitor, channel and, when deemed necessary, exclude them from public security and social security.

Saving archives on migration: A project to collect and promote archives related to migration, supported by Œuvre nationale de Secours Grande Duchesse Charlotte.



The CDMH has always been committed to collecting archives from associations and private individuals with experiences of migration. These documents, produced by the very people and groups affected, complement and challenge more standard public archives, making them an essential tool in writing the history of migrations.

People from immigrant communities will increasingly become the Luxembourgers of the future. Documenting the story of how they came to settle in Luxembourg society is therefore crucial in exploring issues of identity. Archives such as those collected by the CDMH play an important part in this process, and as such they are part of the country's heritage.

However, the CDMH currently finds itself dealing with a unique challenge in terms of its archive collection policy. What strategy should it adopt now that paper documents have largely been replaced by digital communications?

Since summer 2025, the CDMH has been supported by Œuvre nationale de Secours Grande Duchesse Charlotte in its efforts to explore this question by focusing on three groups in Luxembourg society: Portuguese, Afghan and Indian immigrants.

The Portuguese population can be described as a conventional migratory movement driven essentially by work-related motives, resulting in what has become a significant demographic presence within Luxembourg society. Despite its numerical size, little is known about the history of the Portuguese community in Luxembourg. With the CDMH now hosting the archives of the Confederation of the Portuguese Community in Luxembourg (CCPL) – the umbrella body for Portuguese associations in Luxembourg –, the general public and researchers can learn about some of the unexpected aspects of Portuguese immigration, including a surprising theatre production.

The establishment of an Afghan community in Luxembourg is a relatively recent occurrence. Most Afghans in the country arrived after 2015 as refugees. Little is known about the daily realities of what is in many respects a minority group, yet it is the target of

considerable prejudice. The CDMH is committed to improving understanding by appealing to the Afghan community itself with the aim of gathering archives and testimonies.

Indians are currently one of the fastest-growing groups in Luxembourg society. Although they are from a neighbouring region, their situation is totally different from that of Luxembourg's Afghans. They are often categorised as "expats". While this term initially had negative connotations of being banished from one's homeland, today it has a more positive spin and is used to refer to qualified workers with sought-after skills in a globalised labour market.

Regular events will be held over the course of the project to facilitate discussions with those interested in and affected by the topic.

A first meeting with the Afghan community was an unexpected success: more than 40 people made their way to Dudelange, many with much difficulty as they had no private vehicle and had to make do with the limited Sunday public transport service.

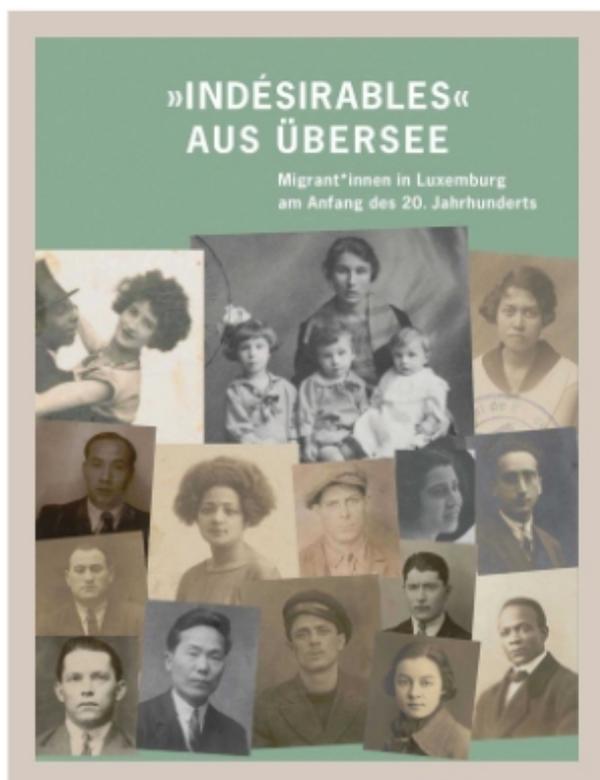
Sylvain Besch (*Centre d'Etude et de Formation Interculturelles et Sociales, CEFIS*) introduced the event by presenting a socio-demographic study of Afghans in Luxembourg. Discussions with attendees revealed the extreme hardship faced by many Afghan nationals, who sometimes have to wait many years for regular papers or decent housing away from dedicated refugee facilities. Yet there was also a clear desire on the part of a significant segment of this community to integrate into the society of their host country, reflected in higher-than-average participation in local elections and the number of individuals taking Luxembourgish nationality.

Publications

„Indésirables“ aus Übersee: Migrant*innen in Luxemburg am Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts

By Julia Harnoncourt

Published: October 2025



Following her postdoctoral research at the C²DH in connection with the COLUX project on Luxembourg's colonial history, supervised by Denis Scuto, Julia Harnoncourt has recently published a book on the migration of people from outside Europe to Luxembourg.

In the late 19th century, Luxembourg went from being a country of emigration to one of immigration. As well as migrants from Europe, at least 200 people from the Americas, Africa and Asia settled in Luxembourg up to the beginning of the Second World War. Most of them worked in the steel or construction industry, some were journalists, lawyers or doctors, many were traders and entrepreneurs, and others entertained the people of Luxembourg with their dance, circus or music shows. Several migrants ran into

immigration enforcement officers because of their communist or anarchist political views, and like those suspected of vagrancy, they were often threatened with expulsion.

In her book, Julia Harnoncourt tells the stories of some of these migrants, together with others who arrived in Luxembourg but never intended to settle there on a long-term basis. Through their individual stories, she paints a broader picture of both the history of migration and the history of international relations in Luxembourg.

Changing lusospheres: Europe, Brazil, Africa. On old and new connections between centers and peripheries

By Elisabeth Boesen, Karl Heinz Arenz, Cristina Donza Cancela, Antonio Otaviano Vieira Junior

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This volume originates from a symposium held at the University of Luxembourg in November 2022, at which scholars from various countries and disciplines explored the historical and contemporary ties linking Portugal, Brazil, Luxembourg and several African countries. Its central aim is to show how the migrations and transnational relationships between Portugal, Brazil and other parts of the world can be seen as interconnected historical-political and socio-cultural processes. The contributions address specific migration and diaspora experiences, highlighting the multiplicity and diversity of relationships within what the editors describe as “changing lusospheres”.

In her article on Cape Verdean funerary practices in Luxembourg, Elisabeth Boesen focuses on religion as a key sphere through which ties among Portuguese-speaking regions are continually renewed and sustained. By analysing Cape Verdean funeral ceremonies and drawing on recent interviews with people from the Cape Verdean islands or with Cape Verdean family backgrounds, she investigates the revival of elements of folk Catholicism, their role in historical processes of exchange and mutual transformation, and their contribution to present-day popular religious reinventions and forms of re-enchantment.

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