

## **Affordability and Accessibility as Dimensions of Transport Poverty: Survey-Based Evidence Towards Sustainable Mobility**

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Transport has been recognised as one of the essential services in the Action Plan for the European Pillar of Social Rights by European Commission, highlighting its critical role in ensuring social inclusion and equal opportunities. There is an EU target of reducing the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion by at least 15 million by 2030. However, despite this policy recognition, challenges remain in tackling transport poverty, in particular in terms of affordability and accessibility.

This study builds on the findings of Grinberga-Šilaua and Zemīte (2025), who studied transport poverty and its related indicators in Latvia. Taking these findings into account, the current study examines in depth the dimensions of affordability and accessibility as components of transport poverty. In 2023, the European Union established its first definition of transport poverty in Regulation 2023/955 on the Social Climate Fund. According to this regulation, transport poverty is defined as the inability or difficulty of individuals and households to afford private or public transport or their limited access to transport services necessary to achieve essential socio-economic activities. This definition highlights the importance of national and spatial context in addressing mobility disparities.

This study contributes to the growing discourse on sustainable mobility, highlighting the critical need to address transport poverty in the context of Latvia. It incorporates the transport poverty indicators identified in the European Commission's final report (2024) and uses data from various national and European sources to assess the situation in Latvia compared to EU average and neighboring countries.

This study aims to examine the dimensions of affordability and accessibility in literature and survey data available.

This study uses qualitative and quantitative methods in the context of transport poverty.

The research methodology includes a policy analysis and descriptive statistics sourced from official statistics databases. The data sources selected for this purpose included time series from 2019 where possible and using the latest available data for comparisons and ranking of the indicators. The study is based on expert assessments, in particular on the conclusions drawn and the results of ranking the selected indicators. The experts were invited to familiarize themselves with the dimensions and indicators of transport poverty and to rank the 14 indicators based on their relevance for measuring transport poverty in Latvia, with "1" being the most relevant and "14" the least.

Latvia's main policy framework, the Transport Development Guidelines for 2021–2027, emphasises the objective of creating an integrated transport system that is safe, efficient, accessible, smart and sustainable. It aims to promote economic growth, regional development and the move towards a climate-neutral economy. Thus, sustainable mobility is officially defined as putting the interests of transport users first, ensuring accessible, well-being-oriented and low-emission options. However, existing definitions often fail to take into account the practical realities of everyday travellers. The assessment of the 2024 Transport Development Guidelines shows that the planned reductions in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from the transport sector have not been achieved, mainly because private cars are still used. This is due to constraints related to the availability and cost of alternative mobility

options, making private vehicles the most affordable choice for many people across Latvia. In several areas, public and active mobility options cannot compete with private cars in terms of travel time or convenience, creating behavioural patterns that correspond to the problems of transport poverty observed elsewhere in Europe.

Addressing these mobility inequalities is critical. Transport poverty limits and lowers people's ability to access their basic needs, such as employment, social, educational and healthcare opportunities. Exploring the specific roles of affordability and accessibility and measuring their measurement potential in the travel or other surveys, can highlight geographical and social disparities that need to be addressed.

Key findings include proposals for promoting active mobility and the transition to low-emission vehicle technologies, as well as how to make mobility more equitable. Although obstacles such as uneven infrastructure development, the high cost of sustainable transport options and the lack of integration of urban and rural transport networks continue to perpetuate inequalities in mobility access.

## References

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## Keywords

rural mobility, sustainable people mobility, transport poverty, sustainable mobility