



European Transport Safety Council

BRIEFING | Road Safety Priorities for the EU in 2020

Memorandum to the Portuguese Presidency of the
Council of the European Union

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Introduction

Portugal will take over the EU Presidency on 1st January 2021 as the EU continues to grapple with the Covid-19 crisis, which has brought additional challenges for transport and mobility policies.

22,660 people lost their lives on EU roads in 2019, representing a 3% reduction compared to 2018. Since 2010, the EU27 achieved an overall reduction in road deaths of 24%, which equates to a 2.7% annual average reduction (Fig.1). Most of that progress was made in 2011, 2012 and 2013. The number of road deaths in the EU has declined by only 7% since 2013.

The EU, and its Member States, agreed a target to cut road deaths by half in the decade to 2020. A 6.7% year-to-year reduction was needed over the 2010-2020 period to reach the 2020 target through consistent annual progress. Since 2013, the EU as a whole has been struggling to make a breakthrough. For the EU to reach the 2020 target, road deaths now need to be reduced by around 34.5% between 2019 and 2020 – an unprecedented and highly unlikely possibility.

While it is expected that the lockdowns imposed across Europe due to the Covid-19 virus may bring about a reduction in the number of road deaths in 2020, it seems unlikely that the numbers will fall far enough.

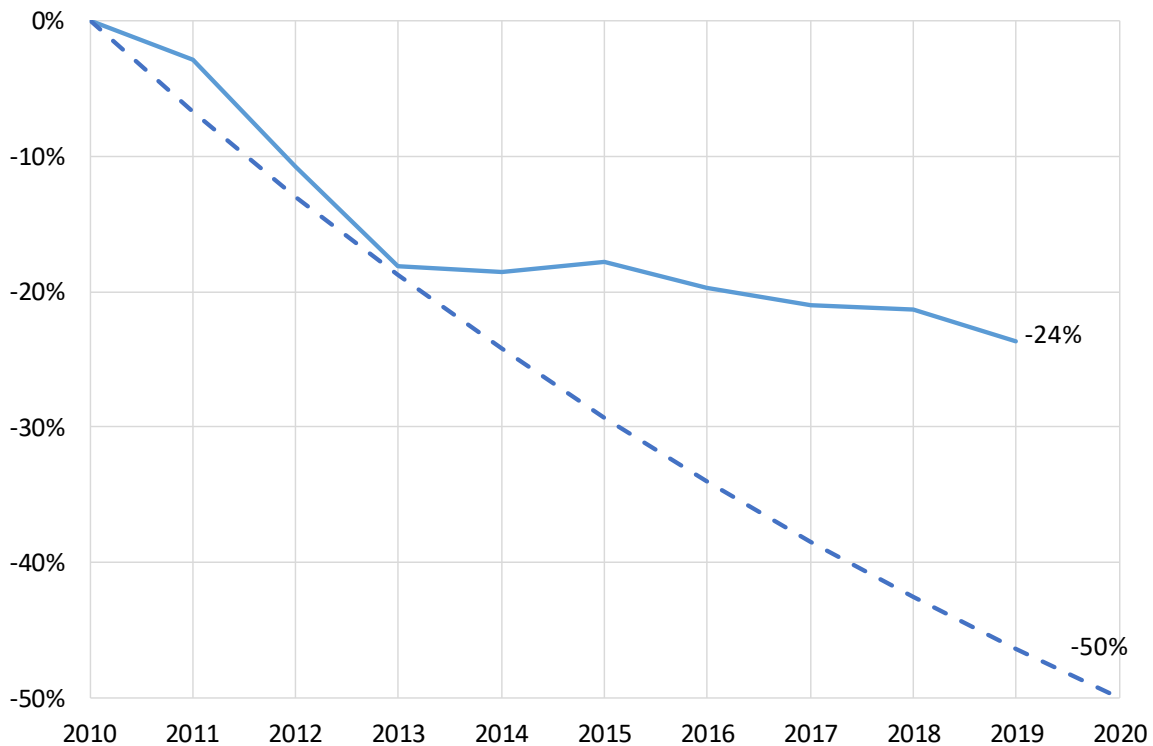


Figure 1. Reduction in the number of road deaths in the EU27 since 2010 (blue line) plotted against the EU target for 2020 (blue dotted line).

The weekly number of road deaths in the EU is equivalent to two typical passenger airliners crashing and killing everyone on board.

In addition, around 120,000 people were seriously injured on EU27 roads in 2019 according to European Commission estimates, based on the MAIS3+ standard definition of a serious injury.¹

In this briefing, ETSC outlines its recommendations on the key EU road safety policy dossiers to be steered by the Portuguese Presidency of the European Union in the first part of 2021.

The EC is currently preparing the revision of two important pieces of road safety related legislation: the Driving Licence Directive 2006/126 and the Cross Border Enforcement Directive 2015/413. The preparations from the side of the Presidency will most likely only

¹ European Commission Press release (11 June 2020), Road safety: Europe's roads are getting safer but progress remains too slow <https://bit.ly/38CDjFT>

start to feature on the agenda at the end of 2021, when Slovenia will have taken over.

Seven years of extremely slow progress in road death reductions since 2013 highlight the urgent need for strong action at EU level. In 2018, the European Commission adopted its EU Strategic Action Plan for Road Safety² which includes a new target to halve road deaths by 2030 compared to 2020 levels, as well as, for the first time, a target to halve the number of seriously injured over the same period. It was followed up in 2019 with the publication of the EU Road Safety Policy Framework 2021-2030, which introduced a number of Key Performance Indicators with which the EU will measure the overall safety performance of EU Member States. The EC's new Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy in December 2020 reaffirmed the EU road safety targets and priority actions.³

The EU Strategic Action Plan on Road Safety was published as part of the third mobility package, which also included new vehicle safety standards, updated rules on road infrastructure safety management and a strategy for automated driving. Now road safety in the EU is likely to see a boost over the next decade thanks to the new legislations on minimum vehicle and infrastructure safety standards agreed last year.

The political will to improve on recent poor progress is important. The lack of it in some EU Member States has contributed to a decline in levels of police enforcement, a failure to invest in safer infrastructure and limited action on tackling speed and drink driving in a number of countries.

Portugal takes the helm of the EU Presidency as Europe exits from one of the biggest challenges it has ever faced: Covid-19. It's a once-in-a-lifetime crisis that presents great threats, but also great opportunities for road safety.

On the one hand, there have been many reports of excessive speed during lockdown, this is clearly a challenge that must be dealt with to avoid a new normal of speeding with impunity. On the other hand, ETSC has seen incredible examples of cities and towns across the continent responding to the new demand for safe cycling and walking. ETSC, has been making the case for many years that cities need to be redesigned to promote the safest and most sustainable forms of transport – keeping vulnerable road users separate from cars, vans and lorries. The transition out of lockdown could lead to a transport safety revolution, or a

² ETSC Briefing: EU Strategic Action Plan on Road Safety <https://bit.ly/2TQZEP4>

³ European Commission Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy <https://bit.ly/2XxH8MZ>

return to business as usual. The Portuguese Presidency can also play its part now in making sure that road safety finds its place high on the list of priorities within the Exit Strategy and Recovery Plan.

Given the fact that the Portuguese EU Presidency coincides with the preparation of a new Portuguese Road Safety Programme for the next decade, road safety issues ought to rank high on the Presidency agenda.

Key Priorities for the Portuguese Presidency

Road Safety within the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy

The new Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy was adopted in December 2020 and at the core of the proposals is a target of a 50% cut in road deaths and serious injuries by 2030, with Vision Zero the aim by 2050⁴. Those targets were first agreed under the previous Commission, headed by Jean-Claude Juncker, in its EU Strategic Action Plan.⁵ This new overarching mobility strategy reaffirms the political commitment to this level of ambition.

Updated rules on cross-border enforcement of traffic offences, vehicle roadworthiness, automated vehicles, and driving licenses and a proposal to add eCall automated emergency calling devices to motorcycles, trucks and buses are among a major package of new legislative measures for the transport sector announced in the strategy. The Commission also says it will work on new guidance on Blood Alcohol Limits and alcohol interlocks, again reaffirming the actions detailed in the original EU Road Safety Strategy.⁶ A number of other non-binding initiatives were also announced in the field of sustainable urban mobility with a revised urban mobility strategy due in 2021.

The Commission has also said it will assess the need for a new agency “to support safe, smart and sustainable transport operations”. ETSC has been calling for such an agency for some time to increase capacity on road safety management at EU level and particularly to oversee the safe rollout of automated vehicles through market surveillance, real-world testing and in-depth crash investigation.

The EU Road Safety Framework (2019) set up a new governance framework and action within four themes including: infrastructure safety, vehicle safety, safe road use (including speed, alcohol and drugs, distraction and the use of protective equipment), emergency response as

⁴ European Commission (2020) Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy, Staff Working Document <https://bit.ly/3bxcpe>

⁵ ETSC Briefing: EU Strategic Action Plan on Road Safety <https://bit.ly/2TQZEP4>

⁶ ibid

well as the two cross-cutting issues of enforcement and training.⁷

The Road Safety Framework proposes eight new Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) against which EU Member State performance will be analysed, as well as the intention, in a second phase, to set outcome targets based on the indicators. EU Member States will meet for the first time at an “EU Results Conference” on 20 April 2021 to discuss the progress that has been tracked and measured by these new KPIs. This is a key step to improving road safety governance monitoring impact and delivering the EU’s road safety strategy to 2030. This is welcomed by ETSC who calls on the Portuguese Presidency to play an active role in the conference.

ETSC invites the Portuguese Presidency to galvanise EU Member State support for road safety initiatives to be prioritised for action within the implementation of the new EC Mobility Strategy.

EU Africa Co-operation on Road Safety

Globally, each year, nearly 1.3 million people die as a result of a road traffic collision: 90% of road deaths occur in low-and middle-income countries, which claim less than half the world's registered vehicle fleet.⁸ Seen within a global context, the EU is a world leader in road safety and know-how and good practice from the EU and its Member States is in high demand. The EU takes its leadership role seriously, for example in supporting the road safety work of its immediate neighbours (Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership), in intensified cooperation with Africa (following the work of the EU-Africa Taskforce on Transport) and in contributing to the UN Road Safety Fund.⁹ ETSC fully supports the further developing of road safety cooperation, in particular by sharing best practice and supporting capacity building, including the new KPIs and management approach in the road safety 2021-2030 framework and as mentioned in the EC’s new Mobility Strategy.¹⁰ Further, as the world's biggest aid donor, the EC should follow through on new obligations to ensure that EU road safety policy objectives apply to external programming.

Most recently, in February 2020, the EU Africa Transport and Connectivity Task Force, which is part of the 'Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs' delivered its final

⁷ ibid

⁸ ibid

⁹ ibid

¹⁰ ibid

report which included road safety.¹¹ On road safety, recommendations addressed five main priority areas, namely road safety management and data collection, infrastructure safety, vehicle safety, safety of road users and post-crash care. The Report also includes an idea to further formally establish an African Road Safety Observatory¹² with the support of the EU.¹³ This builds on the work of the EU Horizon 2020 SaferAfrica project which ran from 2016-2019 and aimed at establishing a Dialogue Platform between Africa and Europe focusing on road safety and traffic management issues.¹⁴

ETSC welcomes the initiative of the Portuguese Presidency to further deepen co-operation within the partnership of the EU and the African Union on road safety and take this important work forward.

¹¹ EU Africa Task Force Final Report <https://bit.ly/3nDG6JS>

¹² Africa Road Safety Observatory <https://bit.ly/39M13xy>

¹³ European Commission News Africa Europe Alliance 19.02.2020 <https://bit.ly/3btFtjO>

¹⁴ Safer Africa Project Results Cordis Portal <https://bit.ly/2M1s2wL>

Road Safety as a Priority within the Urban Mobility Package

One priority area for the near future is urban mobility, as the EC will be adopting a new Urban Mobility package including actions on road safety. The EC stated recently in the new Mobility Strategy that: 'Cities and towns can facilitate safe active mobility and creation of recreational spaces allowing physical activity, parks and green zones through inclusive urban planning and design.'¹⁵

Also under the new EC's Mobility Strategy there are new actions mentioned under sustainable urban mobility, such as the aim of doubling safe bike lanes from 2300km to 5000km in the EU and urging all medium and large cities to have a Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP) by 2030, with an end goal of zero deaths. The Commission says funding from the budget for Trans-European Networks for Transport (TEN-Ts) will be made available for safer walking and cycling infrastructure.

ETSC has been monitoring with interest efforts by local authorities across Europe to rapidly improve the safety of vulnerable road users in the past year during the Covid-19 crisis. Cities including Athens, Paris, Berlin, Milan, Madrid, Budapest and Brussels have boldly introduced new or expanded pedestrian and cycling infrastructure with unprecedented haste. More appropriate speed limits are also being introduced in several cases.

ETSC supports this reprioritisation of transport infrastructure in dense, urban areas away from individual motorised transport towards public transport and sustainable, safer and healthier modes such as walking and cycling and that these changes should last into the long-term.¹⁶ ETSC welcomes the EC's intended support for such measures in the new Mobility Strategy. Especially if it's successfully combined with specific funding to support the introduction of new infrastructure for both cyclists and pedestrians as foreseen under the EU's Green Deal funding package and in the upcoming Urban Mobility Package.

¹⁵ European Commission (2020) Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy, Staff Working Document <https://bit.ly/3bxcpe>

¹⁶ ETSC PIN Flash 38, How Safe is Walking and Cycling in Europe (2020) <https://bit.ly/2LJDpJu>
ETSC PIN Flash 37 Safer Roads Safer Cities How to Improve Urban Road Safety in the EU
<https://bit.ly/3q6oXu2>

A recent report of the European Court of Auditors, which evaluated the use of EU funds in the area of urban mobility, found that, to date, the hope for 'step change' to improve sustainable urban mobility has not taken place.¹⁷ The report calls on the EC to publish better data on urban mobility, encourage more uptake of SUMP's and link access of funds to SUMP's. These recommendations echo ETSC's recommendations from its recently published PIN Reports on Urban Mobility (2019) and Pedestrian and Cyclist safety (2020).¹⁸

Moreover, the EC's Mobility Strategy announced that the EC will develop Guidance on Safe Use of Micromobility Devices. As noted by the EC, 'these new personal mobility devices, in particular shared e-scooters, which were deployed in large numbers in cities all over Europe, also raise a number of safety concerns –some related to the safety of the devices themselves (e.g. their centre of gravity, brakes, lights)'.¹⁹ The Guidance could cover where they can be used (e.g. roads, bike lanes, pavements, pedestrian areas, 30 kph areas), at what speed, after which training, as of what age and in compliance with which safety rules (e.g. protective equipment, lights, turn signals, etc.).²⁰ ETSC would furthermore call for minimum vehicle safety requirements for micromobility devices similar to those of pedal cycles.

The Portuguese Presidency should support the measures proposed to improve urban road safety within the context of the upcoming new Urban Mobility Package in preparation by the EC.

EU budget and financing the European Green Deal

Both deaths and serious injuries carry a huge cost to society. In monetary terms alone, the yearly cost of road crashes in the EU has been estimated in a new study to be around EUR 280 billion, equivalent to about 2% of GDP.²¹ The EU Strategic Action Plan on Road Safety proposed a package of funding measures and supported by budget proposals from 2020 and

¹⁷ European Court of Auditors (2020) Special Report Sustainable Urban Mobility in the EU: No substantial improvement is possible without Member States' commitment <https://bit.ly/3oEtrHV>

¹⁸ ETSC PIN Flash 38, How Safe is Walking and Cycling in Europe (2020) <https://bit.ly/2LJDpJu>
ETSC PIN Flash 37 Safer Roads Safer Cities How to Improve Urban Road Safety in the EU <https://bit.ly/3q6oXu2>

¹⁹ European Commission Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy, Staff Working Document <https://bit.ly/38z87xY>

²⁰ *ibid*

²¹ European Commission (2019), Handbook on the External Costs of Transport <https://bit.ly/3olSwSo>

earlier.²² Portugal must still work to finalise some of the agreements on the individual funding instruments such as the Connecting Europe Facility.

In May 2020, the Commission proposed a revamped long-term EU budget boosted by an emergency recovery instrument called Next Generation EU.²³ Specifically under the 'Next Generation EU'²⁴ the EC proposals stress that the investment must be for a 'green and 'digital' transition. The enhanced InvestEU fund also includes a new envelope of 20 billion EUR for 'sustainable infrastructure', which includes transport and digital infrastructure.²⁵ ETSC calls for the clear inclusion of road safety under these headings as the discussion moves from elaboration and finding political agreement to actual implementation of the proposals at EU Member State level. Road safety must also be included in the EC's country-specific recommendations, which will be developed under the European Semester Process within the 'Recovery and Resilience' instrument.²⁶

ETSC originally welcomed that "safe and secure mobility" are included in the new CEF regulation objectives under article 3 and "actions implementing safe and secure infrastructure and mobility including road safety" are included under the eligible actions under article 9.²⁷

ETSC calls on the Portuguese Presidency to ensure the prioritisation of road safety in the finalisation of these different budgetary instruments.²⁸

²²European Commission (2019) EU Road Safety Policy Framework 2021-2030 Next Steps Towards Vision Zero <https://bit.ly/2XXX8Xh>

²³ EU Budget Proposals Overview <https://bit.ly/3oEkkqK>

²⁴ European Commission (2020) EC Communication Europe's moment: Repair and Prepare for the Next Generation <https://bit.ly/3i28bJS>

²⁵ European Commission (2020) Proposal for a Invest EU Regulation <https://bit.ly/2MWTzA1>

²⁶ European Commission (2020) Proposal for a Regulation for a 'Recovery and Resilience Facility' <https://bit.ly/3qenaDq>

²⁷ European Commission (2018), Proposal for a Regulation [...] establishing the Connecting Europe Facility and repealing Regulations (EU) No 1316/2013 and (EU) No 283/2014 <https://bit.ly/39sI5fd>

²⁸ ETSC (2018) Position Paper: EU Funds for Road Safety in the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 <https://bit.ly/3i9PZhl>

Vehicle safety

The EU has the exclusive competence to set minimum safety standards for all new vehicles sold on the EU market. These standards were updated in 2019.²⁹ They represent the most direct and effective measures the EU has to further reduce road deaths and injuries. TRL, the UK transport research laboratory, estimated in a study for the European Commission that the package of proposed vehicle safety measures could prevent around 25,000 deaths and 140,000 people seriously injured across all vehicle categories within 15 years.³⁰

Although the regulation has now been published, discussions on the specifications for each technology and safety measure are currently underway. Much will depend on the detailed technical standards for the newly mandated vehicle requirements, which are currently being worked out. ETSC is particularly concerned about the requirements for Intelligent Speed Assistance (ISA) technology for new cars³¹, and “direct vision” standards (to improve visibility around the vehicle for drivers) for new Heavy Goods Vehicles.

ETSC strongly recommends that the Portuguese Presidency continues to support the highest level of standards in the elaboration of these specifications given their critical and long-lasting importance for improving road safety in Europe.

Assisted and Automated Driving

The new EC Mobility Strategy for 2021 proposes to set up the revised legal framework for the approval of automated vehicles in the EU and adopting implementing legislation for connected and automated vehicles. ETSC has long called for the setting up of a robust, harmonised regulatory framework for automated driving at EU level and such a framework is an essential precursor to automated vehicle technology becoming available on the market.

²⁹ <https://bit.ly/3nxMpiI>

³⁰ See page 13 of TRL on behalf of the European Commission (2018), Cost-effectiveness analysis of policy options for the mandatory implementation of different sets of vehicle safety measures - Review of the General Safety and Pedestrian Safety Regulations: technical annex to GSR2 report SI2.733025: final report <https://bit.ly/39sMkHo>

³¹ETSC position on iSafer <https://bit.ly/3qaVjns>

ETSC (2020), Ranking EU Progress on Road Safety, 14th PIN Annual Report <https://bit.ly/3oCSyLq>

ETSC (2020), How to improve the safety of goods vehicles in the EU? (PIN Flash 39) <https://bit.ly/3oCSyLq>

A risk assessment is needed to understand the transition to connected and automated vehicles.

A grave concern, especially during the introduction and transitional stage, is looking at how these vehicles will interact with vulnerable road users. Interaction between current vehicle drivers and VRUs sometimes takes the form of communication through eye contact. Vehicles and their sensors and cameras will have to go above and beyond simple detection and be able to pick up on different forms of communication. High risk scenarios should be identified and ways found to manage all these different possibilities. This is another area that should also be a priority for research and testing.

Although the EC indicates that the new GSR provides a “clear legal framework” for the type-approval of automated vehicles, detailed and robust technical standards are not yet adopted.

The framework will furthermore only apply as of 2022, and until then guidelines on the use of the type-approval exemption procedure will be used instead. ETSC already expressed safety concerns regarding the lack of transparency of the existing exemption procedure³², and furthermore considers the new guidelines insufficient to guarantee safety and transparency.

ETSC calls on the EC to place the role of the driver as well as interaction between the driver and the automated driving systems as central when preparing technical requirements. These are missing or taken for granted in the recent regulatory developments. These detailed type approval standards should ensure that automated vehicles will pass a comprehensive test equivalent to a ‘driving test’, including verifying that it complies with all specific obligations and considerations of the traffic law in all EU Member States.

In this regard, ETSC calls on the Portuguese Presidency to reflect on the possibilities for ensuring the safety of automated driving presented by the possible EU Agency mentioned in the new EC Mobility Strategy, and urges that the type approval and market surveillance of automated vehicles should be one of the agency’s key tasks. An Agency could also collect data about collisions, incidents and near misses with (semi) automated vehicles and publish the data.

Meanwhile with regards to advanced driver assistance systems, the current rules for hands-

³² ETSC (2018) Letter: Improving the Transparency of the Exemption Procedure for the Type Approval of New Vehicle Technologies <http://bit.ly/2HzUEly>

on lane keeping assistance systems should be revised, as human factor problems such as driver overestimation and misunderstanding have been identified.³³ The Portuguese Presidency should ensure that hands-off lane-keeping assistance systems are not permitted due to concerns regarding their risks for road safety.³⁴

³³ Dutch Safety Board (2019), Who is in control? Road safety and automation in road traffic. <http://bit.ly/2LESsV2>

³⁴ For more information, see the second half of the following news article: ETSC (2020), Euro NCAP launches ratings for advanced driver assistance systems. <http://bit.ly/3i3Xlmo>

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Ellen Townsend, Policy Director
ellen.townsend@etsc.eu
+32 2 230 41 06

European Transport Safety Council
20 Avenue des Celtes
B-1040 Brussels
www.etsc.eu
Follow us on twitter: [@etsc_eu](https://twitter.com/etsc_eu)

The European Transport Safety Council (ETSC) is a Brussels-based, independent non-profit making organisation dedicated to reducing the numbers of deaths and injuries in transport in Europe.