



BRIEFING | Road Safety Priorities for the EU in 2024

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

January 2024

Introduction

Belgium took over the EU Presidency on 1 January 2024 ahead of EU elections and nomination of a new European Commission College and President later in the year.

ETSC would like to see road safety policy prioritised in this period after several years of stagnation and recent increases in road deaths in the EU.

There were 20,678 road deaths on EU roads in 2022. Thanks to earlier road safety initiatives, in the last decade, there were 39,554 fewer deaths than would have occurred if deaths had continued at the same level as in 2012. Using 2012 as the baseline, ETSC estimates that the total value of the human losses avoided by the reductions in the years 2013-2022 taken together is about €104 billion. Although it can feel uncomfortable to put a price on the value of human life, policymakers need to understand the economic value of road safety initiatives when considering how to spend precious financial resources.

The EU, and its Member States, have agreed on targets to cut road deaths by half in the decade to 2020 and again by half by 2030. The overall progress in reducing road deaths on EU roads was good between 2012 and 2013, with an 8% decrease. But the positive start to that decade was followed by six consecutive years of stagnation with only a 6% reduction over the 2014-2019 period. In 2020 there was an exceptional drop of 17% compared to 2019. But the 2020 result was strongly related to travel restrictions across Europe due to the Covid-19 pandemic. 2021 also saw a large drop of 13% with respect to 2019, but the number of road deaths increased by 5% with respect to 2020, influenced by a gradual relaxation of travel restrictions and lockdown requirements across Europe. 2022 saw a decrease of 9% with respect to 2019– the pre-Covid year – but the number of road deaths increased by 4% with respect to 2021, confirming the trend in increasing road deaths after the Covid-19 pandemic ended.

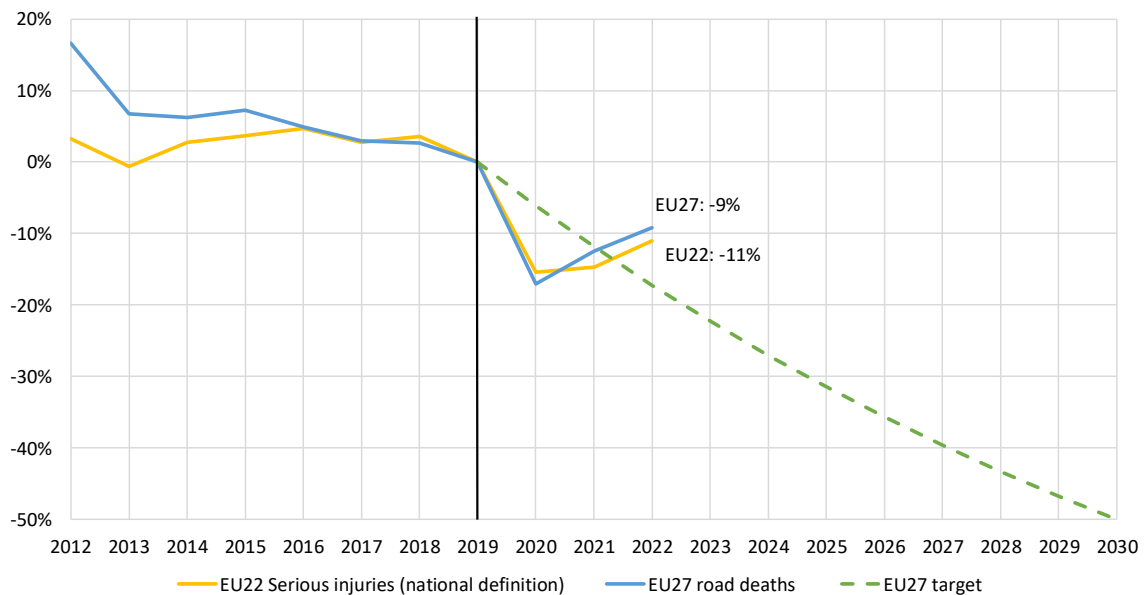


Figure 1. Change in the number of road deaths in the EU27 since 2012 compared with the EU target for 2030 and change in the number of serious road traffic injuries in the EU22 based on countries' national definitions. EU22: EU27 excluding FI, NL and SE due to lack of updated data and LT and IE due to inconsistent trend data. EU27 level of road deaths in 2022 and EU22 level of serious road traffic injuries in 2022 are an ETSC estimate as road deaths and serious injury data for 2022 were not available for some countries at the time this report went to print.

The progress in reducing serious road traffic injuries over the last decade in the EU22 collectively was poor, especially in comparison with the reduction in road deaths. There has been only a 14% reduction over the period 2012-2022 (Fig.1). The number of serious injuries remained almost unchanged until 2019. As with road deaths, there was a substantial drop of 15% in 2020 compared to 2019, most likely due to the various measures imposed during the Covid-19 pandemic. The number of seriously injured remained stable in 2021 with a 1% decrease compared to 2020, yet increased again by 4% in 2022 compared to 2021. As we can observe in 2022, there is no guarantee that this progress can be maintained under a return to business as-usual.

In this briefing, ETSC sets out recommendations on the main EU road safety policy dossiers to be steered by the Belgian Presidency in the first half of 2024. Progress is crucial ahead of the end of the European Commission's current mandate and EU elections in June 2024.

Cross Border Enforcement of Traffic Offences

Increased, effective and well-publicised traffic law enforcement targeting the main risks of speeding, drink and drug driving, distraction and non-use of seat belts on the road are fundamental to achieving the EU's 2030 road death and serious injury targets.

According to the European Commission, non-resident drivers account for approximately 5% of road traffic in the EU, and a foreign-registered car is around three times more likely to commit a traffic offence than a domestically registered one.

The Council and European Parliament have reached their positions on the proposal to revise the Cross-Border Enforcement Directive and it is now up to the Belgian EU Presidency to broker a deal. The proposal builds on the Directive on Cross Border Enforcement 2015/413 (CBE) which introduced the enforcement of financial penalties against drivers who commit an offence in a different EU Member State to the one where the vehicle is registered.

The proposal includes new efforts to further enable cross-border cooperation and improve mutual assistance between EU Member States, an aspect which has been further developed in the Council position.

The proposal includes an extension of the scope to seven new road safety-related offences (all of which ETSC supports) including: dangerous overtaking, dangerous parking, crossing one or more solid white lines, wrong-way driving, not respecting the rules on the creation and use of emergency corridors (if in place) and use of an overloaded vehicle. The Council wants to add: not respecting the rules on vehicle-access-restrictions, hit-and-run, and not respecting the rules at a railway level-crossing. ETSC would also like to see the same cooperation on penalties for failure of a vehicle to respect requirements of access zones e.g. pedestrian zones. ETSC also recognises the research that cites the road safety benefits of Urban Vehicle Access Regulations (UVARs). When London and Stockholm introduced congestion charging schemes the cities saw reductions in deaths and serious injuries. MEPs also want offences followed up more quickly by the home Member State once a penalty has been issued to a foreign resident driver.

To raise awareness that traffic law compliance is being monitored, enforcement must be highly visible and publicised. Research indicates that it is the drivers' subjective risk of being caught that must be increased if enforcement is to be successful. ETSC supports the new proposal's aims to further improve communication with citizens on road traffic

rules with the new and improved 'CBE Portal' including information on follow-up procedures of offences committed.

ETSC would welcome an agreement on the revision of this important piece of road safety legislation under the Belgian presidency.

Driving Licence Directive

Every week in the EU an average of 100 young people die on the roads and hundreds more are seriously injured. Improvements to driver licensing could help prevent many of these deaths and injuries.

The European Commission published its proposal to revise the driving license directive in March 2023. Since then the Council has adopted its position and the European Parliament is due to vote on its report early in 2024.

The original proposal included a probationary period of two years where a zero-alcohol limit would apply to novice drivers. This valuable road safety initiative has not been taken up in this form either by the European Parliament's transport committee or by Member States. We hope that the Commission's initial proposal on this point can still be agreed upon.

ETSC supports maintaining, and not lowering, the current minimum age for solo driving or riding. The younger a person starts unrestricted solo driving, the more likely it is that they will have a fatal collision, particularly below the age of 18. Thus, as a first step, it is extremely important to set an appropriate age for first unrestricted solo driving in all categories including for professional drivers. At present both Transport Committee MEPs and Member States have backed a new requirement that in future, all EU Member States must issue driving licences to 17-year-olds to drive cars under an accompanied driving scheme. While ETSC supports accompanied driving, it is unwise and unnecessary to require Member States to offer this to 17-year-olds – when most still set a minimum age for solo driving of 18.

In its position, the Council implies that Member States should not be forced into allowing such young drivers to get behind the wheel of an HGV, a requirement in the original Commission proposal. ETSC says allowing teenagers to drive lorries will increase the numbers of young lorry drivers, with very negative consequences for road safety. Today, only five countries allow teenagers as young as 18 to drive a lorry: Finland, Germany, Ireland, Poland and Spain. Data from Finland, Germany and Poland clearly show that the

youngest lorry drivers (18-19 years) are much more likely to cause a crash. From a road safety perspective ETSC calls for the 'recommended' minimum age in the EU for lorry drivers to remain at 21.

According to the Commission proposal, driver testing should include a new hazard perception component as well as requirements to include the use of new technologies such as preparation for semi and fully-automated driving. These additions are supported by both MEPs and Council. Common EU minimum standards for driver training and requirements for instructors were proposed by MEPs but, regrettably, did not find majority support but would still be strongly welcomed by ETSC if still integrated into a final agreement.

On medical checks, ETSC has called for the introduction of a new protocol in order to increase consistency in assessing medical fitness to drive across the EU at all ages. Specific medical conditions such as substance abuse, psychiatric disorders, epilepsy, diabetes, heart conditions and sleep apnoea are more important factors than age alone when it comes to medical fitness to drive. This is why ETSC would not support the proposed introduction of compulsory medical checks on licence renewal at 70. Instead, ETSC calls for the development of evidence-based guidelines for family doctors and other medical professionals to help assess the functional capabilities of someone suspected of being an unfit driver and co-ordinate with the licencing authorities. This concept is supported by MEPs on the European Parliament's Transport Committee.

The current Council position states that Member States may reduce administrative validity from 65 to apply increased medical checks, self-assessment or other specific measures including refresher courses. Member States may, instead of requiring a medical examination, either require the applicant or holder to fill in a self-assessment form when issuing or renewing a driving licence. Alternatively they may establish a 'national mechanism' to ensure that significant changes in the physical or mental fitness are acted upon in order to comply with minimum standards of physical and mental fitness, after the licence has been issued to the applicant, following a medical examination or self-assessment.

At present, Transport Committee MEPs support the policy that 'when issuing or renewing driving licences in categories A and B, Member States shall require an examination applying the minimum standards of physical and mental fitness for driving via a reasoned medical opinion from a medical authority'.

Furthermore, also under medical fitness, minimum standards for assessing physical and mental fitness have been updated taking into account advances in medical treatment for diseases such as diabetes.

The proposed Directive would now allow drivers with alcohol dependency to participate in rehabilitation programmes that include alcohol interlock installation – where the vehicle can only be driven sober. Previously alcohol dependent people were prohibited from being issued with a driving licence. ETSC welcomes this change, though medical supervision in such programmes should be added as a pre-requisite. Both Member States and the European Parliament’s Transport Committee currently support this change.

ETSC is also calling for action to improve Light Goods Vehicle (LGV) safety under the Driving Licence Directive. A total of 2630 people were killed in collisions involving LGVs in the EU in 2018 alone, representing 11% of all road deaths. LGV use in Europe is likely to continue to rise due to the increased demand for home deliveries. ETSC supports extending the provisions set out for lorry and coach drivers to apply also to drivers of cars and vans using their licence for professional purposes. In a second step, extending the current legislative framework for professional driver training to these groups is recommended.

While motorcycle rider road deaths have been decreasing, they have not been decreasing at the same rate as other road deaths. 4,000 riders were killed in the EU in 2021. ETSC would like to see theoretical and practical training as well as a comprehensive practical test becoming mandatory for an AM (moped) driving license. Transport Committee MEPs voted to support mandatory practical exams for both the AM and A1 categories. The Council supports only the obligation of a mandatory theoretical test and not practical skills tests for AM. In addition, the Council proposes that for category A1 or A2 after two years' experience, applicants can either: (i) pass a test of skills and behaviour only, or (ii) complete a training course. ETSC would also like to see minimum standards set for theoretical and practical training for all categories of motorcycles in the revised Driving Licence Directive.

The Commission’s proposal also includes provisions for Member States to allow youngsters as young as 16 to drive a full-size car with a speed limiter set at 45 km/h, on a B1 licence. ETSC is very concerned about this part of the proposal and suggests that it be deleted. Unfortunately, the measure is currently supported by both the European Parliament Transport Committee and the Council.

Depending on progress in the European Parliament, ETSC calls on the Belgian Presidency to work to prioritise reaching a political agreement, taking into consideration the road safety impacts described above.

EU-Wide Effect of Driving Disqualifications

ETSC fully supported the original Commission proposal, also presented in March 2023, which provides for a Union-wide effect of driving disqualifications for major road-safety-related traffic offences committed in a Member State other than the one that issued the driving licence. The proposal covers offences such as excessive speeding, driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, and causing death or serious bodily injury as a result of any traffic offence.

This new approach should end impunity; non-resident drivers should not only have to pay fines but also face driver disqualification at home and abroad. This would build upon the current CBE Directive on financial penalties as a logical next step and feed into the current revision of the Driving Licence Directive, where the Resper network already allows EU Member States to check licence withdrawal before issuing a new Driving Licence.

Very little progress has been made in the Council since the proposal was presented as several Member States have asked the Council legal services to prepare an opinion, which has still not been published. The Spanish Presidency sent out a questionnaire to gain an understanding of the different follow-up procedures in different EU Member States.

The European Parliament adopted its position in December. The initial proposal by the European Commission included an exemption whereby a driving ban resulting from speeding would not be recognised in another country if the speed limit had been exceeded by less than 50 km/h. MEPs agreed to modify this exemption so that it should only be valid on residential roads if the speed limit has been exceeded by less than 30 km/h, and on non-residential roads if exceeded by less than 50 km/h. ETSC sees this as an improvement but in principal all driving bans resulting from speeding should apply in other Member States without exception.

ETSC would also support the gradual introduction of demerit point systems in all EU Member States on road safety-related traffic offences. A 2012 meta-analysis study of European and non-European systems showed a decrease of between 15-20% in the number of collisions, deaths and injuries. Non-financial penalties such as demerit point systems, which can ultimately lead to driver disqualification, have a strong deterrent effect and can improve road safety. 22 out of 27 EU Member States now have these systems. It is essential that drivers also face these non-financial penalties when they commit traffic offences abroad. Unfortunately, the Transport Committee failed to agree to tackle the critical issue of penalty points, despite some MEPs calling for it.

ETSC calls on the Belgian Presidency to work to prioritise reaching a general approach during their term.

Vehicle Safety on Individually Approved Vehicles (IVAs)

New models of vehicles sold in the EU have to meet the world's most advanced safety standards, following the adoption of the General Safety Regulation in 2019. The life-saving technologies that are required now or will be in a couple of years include:

- Advanced driver distraction warning
- Advanced emergency braking detecting pedestrians and cyclists
- Alcohol interlock installation facilitation
- Brake assist
- Driver drowsiness and attention warning
- eCall emergency calling system
- Emergency lane keeping
- Event data recorders
- Intelligent speed assistance
- Lane departure warning
- Stability control.

The list of safety requirements for Individual Vehicle Approvals (IVAs) is also getting an update from the European Commission.

In recent years, there has been a big increase in so-called 'grey imports' of large American pick-up trucks such as the Dodge Ram or the Ford F-150. Such vehicles require the importer, whether a private individual or a specialised vehicle dealer, to get an 'individual vehicle approval' before the vehicle is used on the roads. But these vehicles do not meet EU safety standards, and that situation is likely to continue if the European Commission goes ahead with plans to exclude such vehicles from many of the key requirements of updated EU vehicle safety.

It is also not currently clear how the Commission proposes to deal with European crash tests which assess safety provided in collisions with pedestrians, as these types of tests are not carried out in other markets. There has been a huge rise in pedestrian deaths in the

United States in recent years, due in part to the huge rise in sales of large pick-up trucks and SUVs and lack of pedestrian protection regulations there.

Allowing weaker requirements for third-country imports under IVA means unfair competition from low-quality vehicles from outside the EU, and more dangerous roads. ETSC calls on the Belgian Presidency to ensure that there is one vehicle safety standard for the whole EU market, with no backdoor for unsuitable and unsafe vehicles.

Assisted and automated driving

ETSC calls on the Belgian Presidency to advance on the possibilities for ensuring the safety of automated driving presented by the creation of a new EU agency as mentioned in the EC Mobility Strategy, and urges that the type-approval and market surveillance of automated vehicles should be one of the agency's key tasks. The European Commission is currently assessing this possibility. An EU road safety agency should also collect data on, and conduct and/or oversee investigations of collisions, incidents and near misses involving automated vehicles and vehicles where the assisted driving systems were active. The findings of the investigations should be published in order for the EU and UNECE rules to be improved based on the lessons learned. The Belgian Presidency should support the European Commission's initiative and strongly support setting up such a new EU agency to improve EU road safety.

Meanwhile, the current rules for hands-on lane-keeping assistance systems are being revised at UNECE's WP.29. Human factor problems such as driver overestimation and misunderstanding as well as an increased propensity to engage in non-driving related activities have been identified. The draft rules would allow for drivers to take their eyes off the road for up to five seconds, which is 2.5 times what is considered safe. The Belgian Presidency should therefore ensure the EU's Member States and the European Commission participating in the discussions at WP.29 revise this duration before the adoption of the new rules, and ensure the old rules are being phased out. The Belgian Presidency should furthermore ensure that hands-off lane-keeping assistance systems are not permitted due to concerns regarding their risks for road safety, and similarly, that system-initiated assistance features are not allowed as they increasingly blur the line between automated and assisted driving.

Weights and Dimensions Review

In July 2023, the Commission unveiled the 'Greening Freight Transport' package, aiming to enhance the sustainability of freight transport. Among the package's three proposals is the revision of the Weights and Dimensions directive, which governs limits for heavy goods vehicles in international road transport. The proposal aims to support the use of zero-emission trucks by permitting them to exceed standard weight limits.

In the process of revising the Weights and Dimensions Directive, ETSC emphasises the importance of maintaining road safety, sustainability, and a balanced transportation system. A key aspect of the EC proposal is to raise the weight limit for zero-emission vehicles from the current 40 tonnes to 44 tonnes. This change would allow operators to carry more weight if the batteries and technology become lighter over time. Additionally, the revision suggests an increase in the maximum weight for intermodal zero-emission transport. This would grant road operators involved in intermodal operations a higher weight limit (+4 tonnes) and a height limit of up to 4 meters and 30 centimetres for high cube sea containers.

ETSC supports this effort on the condition that a review monitoring any potential heightened road risk due to increased weight and height is made five years after implementation. However, ETSC is particularly worried about the approval of Longer and Heavier Vehicles (LHVs), especially under the European Modular System (EMS).

The proposal seeks to remove restrictions on the cross-border transport of LHVs without requiring them to be Zero Emission, contradicting the new requirements for zero-emission HDVs up to 44 tonnes. LHVs, comprising truck and trailer combinations 25.25 meters in length—almost 9 meters longer than typical lorries on Europe's highways—and weighing up to 60 tonnes, pose considerable challenges.

ETSC strongly opposes the proposal to permit LHVs to cross borders, expressing serious reservations about its potential impact on road safety, infrastructure integrity, sustainability goals, and the threat of a reverse modal shift. The proposed amendment, in its current form, fails to address critical issues, including challenges posed on vulnerable road users, driver training requirements for LHVs, vehicle safety technologies of such vehicles and the potential for a 'reverse modal shift,' which could lead to increased road collisions and deaths

The Commission's proposal has encountered reservations within the Council, where Member States have voiced concerns regarding the potential impact of such vehicles on road infrastructure. Presently, the Council has yet to reach a consensus on its general

approach to the proposal. The Transport Committee in the European Parliament is due to adopt its position in February.

ETSC calls on the Belgian Presidency to prioritise road safety and mitigate the potential for increased road risk for all road users when reaching a political agreement in the Council during their term.

Roadworthiness

The EU roadworthiness package was last revised in 2014 and consists of Directive 2014/45/EC on Periodic Roadworthiness tests, Directive 2014/47/EC on technical roadside inspections of commercial vehicles and Directive 2014/46/EC on the requirements for issuing registration certificates with implementation in May 2018. Both national and European law require motorists to keep their vehicles in a roadworthy condition.

ETSC recommends that passenger cars and light commercial vehicles are tested four years after their first registration date, then two years later then every year thereafter.¹

Since 2014 both cars and in-vehicle safety systems that are electronically controlled have continued to develop rapidly and preparations are well underway for automation. Vehicle examiners need to assure a rigorous testing regime for new in-vehicle technologies mandated under the GSR. Automated vehicles must also be regularly tested to evaluate safety performance within the framework of regular roadworthiness tests.

Technical failures of powered two-wheelers (PTWs) can have much more severe consequences than those for cars, and the condition of the vehicle can influence the consequences and the severity of an average occurrence. To date, 18 of 27 EU member states have required motorcycle owners to have their vehicles checked for roadworthiness. ETSC supports the inclusion of all PTWs in the testing regime.

The rules on the roadside inspection of motor vehicles and their trailers used in professional transport should also be updated. This should include improving the quality of the checks by setting and collecting KPI data and making use of the 'risk rating profile'. The inclusion of vans in roadside inspections would also be welcomed as they continue to increase in number and data on collisions involving light goods vehicles show that the number of deaths is on a par with those involving heavy goods vehicles. Just as with

¹ ETSC (2020) Position Paper Roadworthiness Package <https://etsc.eu/position-paper-vehicle-roadworthiness-package-implementation-reports/>

heavy goods vehicles, vans should be selected for inspection based on the risk profile of the operators and high-risk undertakings should be targeted in order to reduce the burden on operators that maintain their vehicles properly.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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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.