



# DRINK-DRIVING FACT FILE

December 2020



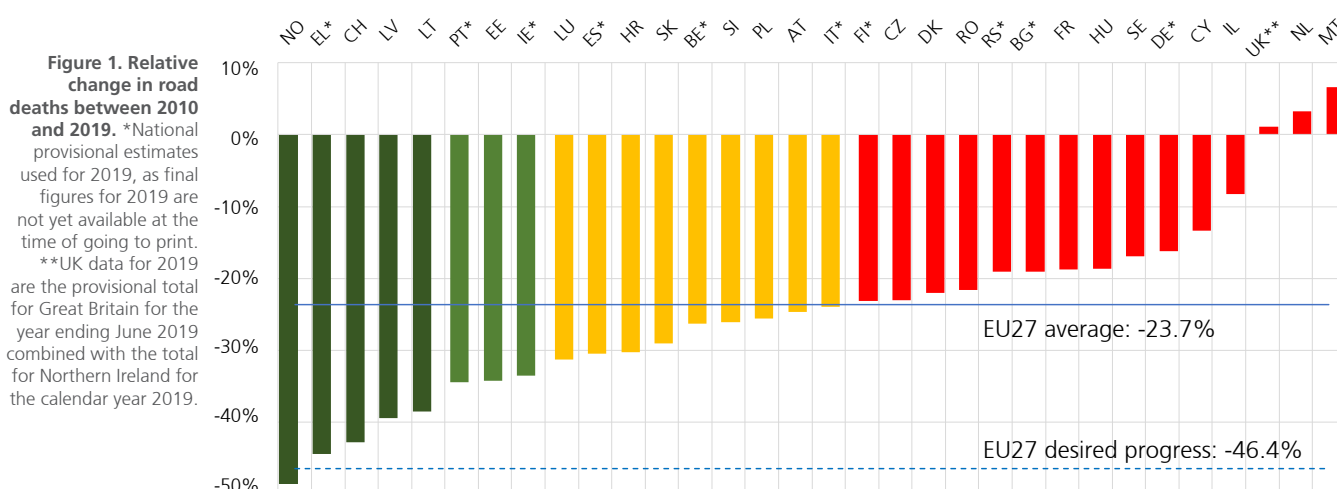
## IRELAND



### INTRODUCTION

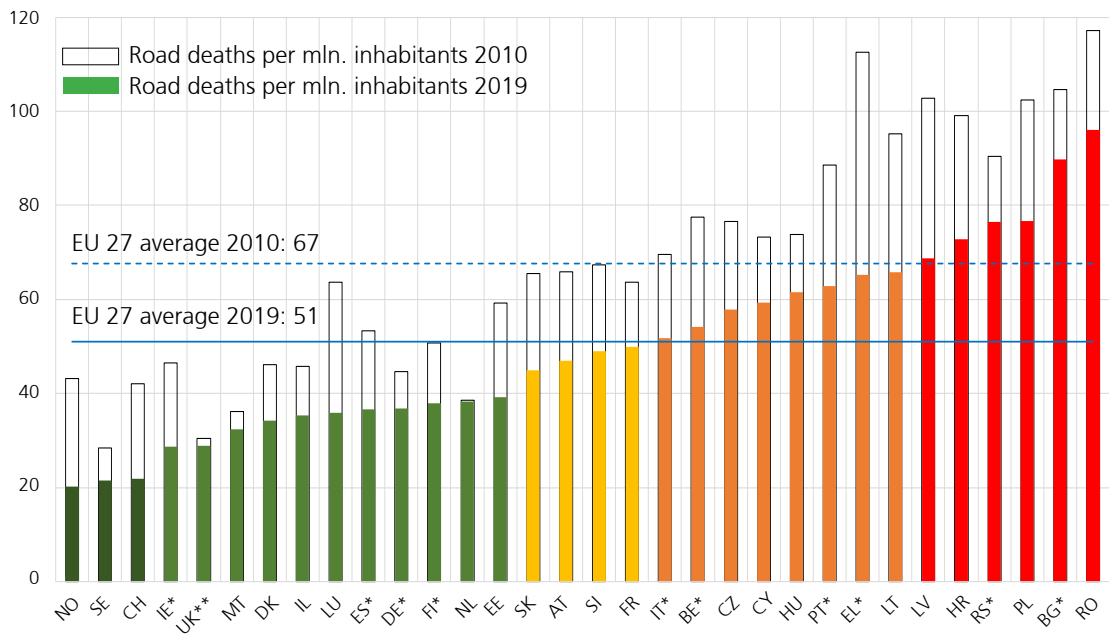
Ireland has made laudable progress on road safety since the government adopted a strategic approach to road safety in 1998. The country remains one of the good performers when it comes to reducing overall road deaths when compared to other European countries. Ireland was awarded the ETSC Road Safety Performance Index award in 2010, and again in 2019.

The latest available figures from Ireland show road deaths have been cut by 33% since 2010, going down from 212 in 2010 to 140 in 2019 (provisional figures). The progress is also visible when measured in terms of road mortality: the number went down from 47 road deaths per million inhabitants in 2010 to 28 in 2019. Ireland was the second safest European Union Member State in 2019 in terms of road mortality and has moved up five places in the ETSC ranking since 2010 when it held 7th place.



**Figure 2. Mortality (road deaths per million inhabitants) in 2019 (with mortality in 2010 for comparison).**

\*National provisional estimates used for 2019, as final figures for 2019 are not yet available at the time of going to print. \*\*UK data for 2019 are the provisional total for Great Britain for the year ending June 2019 combined with the total for Northern Ireland for the calendar year 2019.



Drink-driving has remained a top priority on the political agenda in Ireland with several measures adopted recently to address the problem.

According to a report published by the Irish Road Safety Authority (RSA) in 2016<sup>1</sup>, alcohol was a factor in 38% of fatal road traffic collisions in Ireland during 2008-2012, with 29% of the collisions involving at least one driver / motorcyclist who had consumed alcohol, and 9% involving at least one pedestrian who had consumed alcohol.

This also led the Irish government to the recent decision (October 2018) to increase the penalty for drink-driving at lower levels, introducing automatic disqualification for drink-drivers caught with a BAC between 0.5g/l and 0.8 g/l. Previously, this had been only a penalty point offence (see section below on enforcement).

A more recent report from July 2020<sup>2</sup>, examined data collected from closed coronial files for road deaths that occurred during 2013-2017. Data were available for 705 of the 880 total road users killed during this time period; 600 of these had a toxicology result available.

Of the 600 dead road users with a toxicology result available, 36.5% (219) had a positive toxicology for alcohol (confirmed by a BAC > 0.2g/l or equivalent in urine). The report focused on these 219 deaths.



**KEY FINDINGS FROM THE REPORT:**

**Over a third of road users with a toxicology result available, killed between 2013-2017, on Irish roads, had a positive toxicology for alcohol. The dead were typically male, and under the age of 45. The majority had a high BAC (e.g. seven in ten had a BAC >1.5g/l). These deaths typically occurred in the late evening/early hours of the morning, and over the weekend. The majority took place on rural roads (particularly 80km/h roads). For driver deaths with a positive toxicology for alcohol, the majority were driving a car. They too were primarily male, also under the age of 45, and the majority had high BACs. Of those driver deaths with a record of whether they were wearing a seatbelt, over half were not.**

**The findings of the report demonstrate that alcohol is still a significant factor in road traffic deaths in Ireland. The report will be used, in conjunction with the ongoing work to design the next national government Road Safety Strategy (2021-2030), to inform the design of targeted road safety interventions, enforcement strategies and education initiatives to prevent further alcohol-related road deaths in Ireland.**

<sup>1</sup> RSA, Fatal Collisions 2008-2012; <https://bit.ly/39sqjdl>

<sup>2</sup> RSA, Road deaths and Alcohol 2013-2017; <https://bit.ly/2Ju5W4E>



## NATIONAL POLICIES

Some of the most important measures aimed at combating drink-driving in Ireland in recent years are summarised below:

**2006**

An Garda Síochána (the Irish police) gained the power to breathalyse any driver stopped at a mandatory alcohol testing checkpoint without the need to form an opinion in relation to the driver of the vehicle.

**2014**

Policy changed to allow a specimen of blood from a driver who is incapacitated following a serious road traffic collision to be taken and tested for intoxicants.

**2018**

Tougher penalties for lower levels of drink-driving adopted.

**2011**

**2011**

- A lower legal BAC limit of 0.2g/l for novice and professional drivers and 0.5g/l for all other road users was introduced.
- Mandatory alcohol testing for drivers involved in road traffic collisions introduced.

**2017**

**2017**

Introduction of mandatory intoxicant testing checkpoints.

2006

2014

2018

In addition - hard-hitting TV and radio campaigns in recent years have contributed in making drink-driving more and more socially unacceptable.

A new road safety strategy for the decade 2021-2030 is currently being prepared by the Irish government and the estimated publication date is during the first quarter of 2021.



## BAC LIMITS AND SANCTIONS

Since the introduction of lower BAC limits in 2011:

The legal limit for  
**fully licenced  
drivers in  
CATEGORY B**  
is:

**0.5g/l**



The legal limit for  
**professional,  
learner and  
novice drivers**  
is:

**0.2g/l**

Penalties for drink-driving offences range from disqualification periods from three months to six years depending on the classification of driver (learner, novice, professional), level of alcohol detected, and whether it is a first or subsequent offence.

The offence of refusing to provide a sample of blood, urine, or breath for evidential purposes attracts an automatic disqualification of four years for a first offence and six years for a second or subsequent offence.

Penalties for a conviction for drink-driving vary depending on the amount of alcohol that has been detected. Another factor the court takes into account is whether the conviction is a first or subsequent offence.

### LATEST CHANGES - OCTOBER 2018

As from October 2018, drivers caught with a BAC between 0.5 and 0.8g/l (or a BAC between 0.2 and 0.8g/l for learner, novice or professional drivers), will be disqualified from holding a driving licence for a period of three months and receive a fine of €200.

The new penalties are managed by the police as an administrative penalty, the driver is not required to make a court appearance. This legislation did not change the legal limits for drink-driving, rather it increased the penalties so that drink-drivers now risk losing their licence for three months at lower drink-driving levels. This is considered necessary to change the behaviour of the small group of people who continue to drink and drive.

Driver Category	Blood Alcohol Concentration	Previous Penalty	Current Penalty
Learner, Novice, Professional	0.2 to 0.8g/l	€200 fine 3 month driving ban	€200 fine 3 month driving ban
Ordinary driver	0.5 to 0.8g/l	€200 fine 3 penalty points	€200 fine 3 month driving ban
Ordinary driver	0.8 to 1.0g/l	€400 fine 6 month driving ban	€400 fine 6 month driving ban



## ENFORCEMENT

A police officer in Ireland must conduct a preliminary breath test when they believe a driver has consumed alcohol, or at the scene of a collision where someone has been injured and requires medical attention. Officers can also breathalyse any driver stopped at a mandatory alcohol checkpoint, without the need to form an opinion in relation to the driver of the vehicle.

It is possible to take a specimen of blood from a driver taken to hospital who is incapacitated following a serious road traffic collision and to test the specimen for intoxicants. The doctor must give consent for the specimen of blood to be taken. The driver is asked, on regaining capacity, whether they consent to the issuing of a certificate of the test result. Refusal is considered an offence.

Data from the police on number of drink-driving arrests in Ireland are shown in the table below:

YEAR	Drink driving arrests
2016	8067
2017	8920
2018	8858
2019	8428

Data from the Medical Bureau of Road Safety from August 2020 showed that 4,723 successful breath tests were taken in police stations in 2019 (94 % had positive alcohol, 6% had an alcohol level of zero). When compared to specimens from 2018, a slight reduction in the percentage of drivers driving with a lower level of alcohol can be seen (e.g. moving from 18% to 16% for breath tests). This may reflect the introduction of tougher sanctions for drink-driving at low levels towards the end of 2018.

Also from the same research, during the 14 weeks of the Covid-19 restrictions (from 27 March to 29 June) 1,367 blood and urine specimens were received compared to 1,262 in the same period for 2019. This was an increase of 8% although there was a 70% reduction in traffic for most of that time. This increase may reflect a combination of factors, such as increased levels of enforcement during the pandemic and/or increased alcohol/drug use during this time period.



## DRIVERS' PERCEPTION

In 2019, the RSA commissioned an independent research company to survey the public with regard to enforcement of road safety in Ireland.

When asked about enforcement, 35% of Irish adults recalled passing through a police checkpoint at least once a month in the past six months. The corresponding figure in 2013 was 23%.

79% believe the government should prioritise funding of national police to support their efforts to enforce road safety laws. This is a level of support largely consistent with previous years.

In a 2017 RSA survey, 9 out of 10 respondents said they trusted police to conduct breath tests. This shows that the public's trust in the efforts of the police to tackle drink-driving has not been negatively impacted.

Furthermore, 97% of those surveyed agreed with the statement that the police have a vital role to play in making Irish roads safer for all.



# REHABILITATION AND ALCOHOL INTERLOCK PROGRAMMES

Ireland does not currently have any specific rehabilitation programme in place for drink-driving offenders. This is a topical issue however, and one that will be considered in line with national and international recommendations and best practice in the course of designing the next government Road Safety Strategy (2021-2030).

Concerning alcohol interlock programmes, a cost benefit analysis on this technology as a sanction for repeat offenders has been commissioned by the RSA, and will be completed by the end of 2020.

## Alcohol interlocks on a voluntary basis: Matthews Coach Hire



Matthews Coach Hire is a passenger transport company in the north east of Ireland with a fleet of approximately 40 coaches. In 2008, the company decided to invest in alcohol interlocks to be installed on the entire fleet. Matthews Coaches became the first company in Ireland making use of the technology in its vehicles.

A zero tolerance policy has been adopted so the alcohol limit set is below the legal limit of 0.2g/l for professional drivers. The employees were actively involved with full training and support once the alcohol interlocks were installed in the vehicles. The feedback from employees as well as customers was very positive and the company initiative received good media coverage, delivering a message to the Irish government that all public service vehicles should have such a device installed.



# CAMPAIGNS

The introduction of new measures to tackle drink-driving in Ireland has always been supported by hard-hitting TV and online campaigns. Ireland is one of the countries where mass media TV campaigns are frequently used to spread road safety messages and to change attitudes and behaviours towards the main causes of road crashes, including drink-driving. As a result, there has been a progressive cultural change in attitudes towards drink-driving, as road users are more aware of the risks related to getting behind the wheel after consuming alcohol.

In 2019, the RSA commissioned their regular Driver Attitudes and Behaviour survey (DAB) from a nationally representative sample of 1,000 adult motorists. This survey includes a number of questions on drink driving. The findings showed:

- The number of people who say that there is NO acceptable amount of alcohol that a driver can consume and be safe to drive has increased from 61% (2015) to 68% (2019).
- The number who say driving after two drinks is safe has reduced from 11% (2015) to 7% (2019).

Ireland has extensive experience in road safety mass media campaigns, adopting a direct and hard-hitting way to convey their message. The first all-island campaign against drink-driving, "Shame," was aired in 2000 with the aim of presenting motorists with the stark reality and consequences of drinking and driving.

Since then, a significant number of campaigns and initiatives were carried out and advertised on the TV, radio and social media. In December 2007 the RSA launched a new campaign approach called 'Crashed Lives', which tells the true life stories of people experiencing the consequences of a crash or the loss of loved ones in road collisions and how this has changed their lives forever.

The message behind the Crashed Lives campaigns is that drink-driving destroys lives, families and communities. The latest campaign is the 2016 Ciarán Treacy campaign, which tells the devastating true story of a four-year-old boy who was killed in a head-on collision with a drunk driver in 2014. It shows his immediate family, learning to cope with physical and emotional trauma, the emergency service workers, people who arrived at the scene, nurses, the wider family and community and how this terrible and unnecessary tragedy continues to impact their lives.





## SOURCES

### **History of DD legislation:**

<https://www.drinkdriversdestroylives.ie/history-of-drink-driving-legislation/>

### **Campaigns:**

<https://www.rsa.ie/en/RSA/Road-Safety/Campaigns/Current-road-safety-campaigns/Crashed-Lives/>

<https://www.drinkdriversdestroylives.ie/anti-drink-driving-ad-campaigns/>

<https://www.drinkdriversdestroylives.ie/attitudes-towards-drink-driving-in-ireland/>

<https://www.drinkaware.ie/facts/drink-driving>

<https://www.drinkdriversdestroylives.ie/drink-driving-enforcement/>

### **Irish Road safety strategy 2013 – 2020:**

<https://bit.ly/33wr8yb>

### **Mid-term review 2016 of RS strategy:**

<https://bit.ly/2VjuH6s>

### **13th PIN Annual Report:**

[https://etsc.eu/wp-content/uploads/AR\\_2019-Final.pdf](https://etsc.eu/wp-content/uploads/AR_2019-Final.pdf)

### **ETSC Drink Driving Towards Zero Tolerance:**

[https://etsc.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Drink\\_Driving\\_Towards\\_Zero\\_Tolerance.pdf](https://etsc.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Drink_Driving_Towards_Zero_Tolerance.pdf)

### **Irish Medical Bureau of Road Safety 2020 figures:**

<https://bit.ly/39vJDXk>

### **RSA report on Drink Driving collisions 2013-2017:**

<https://bit.ly/2Ju5W4E>



European Transport Safety Council

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