



# DRINK-DRIVING FACT FILE

December 2020

## SWEDEN



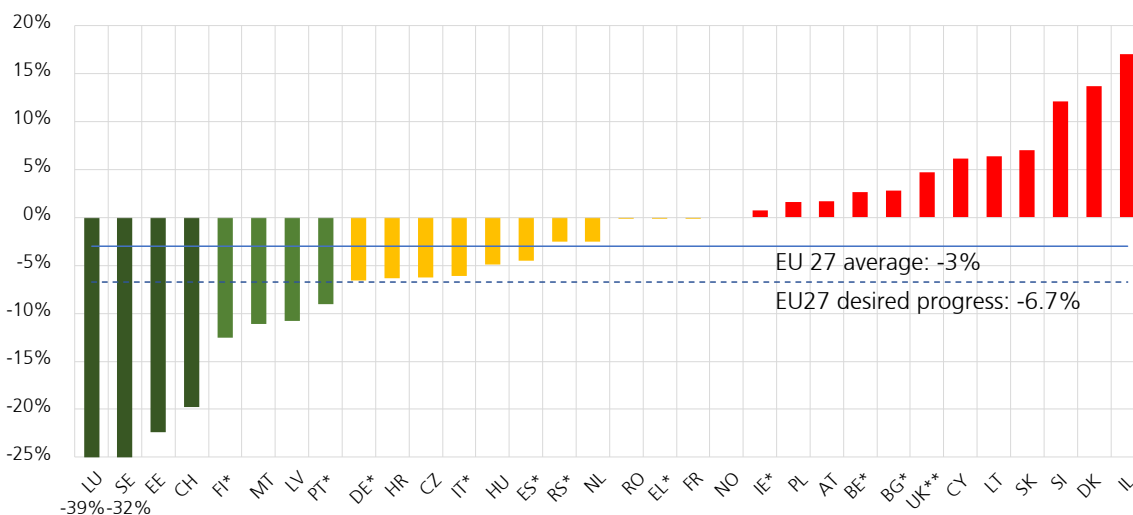
### INTRODUCTION

Sweden has achieved one of the highest levels of road safety in Europe together with a strong political commitment as the country that developed the “Vision Zero” approach.

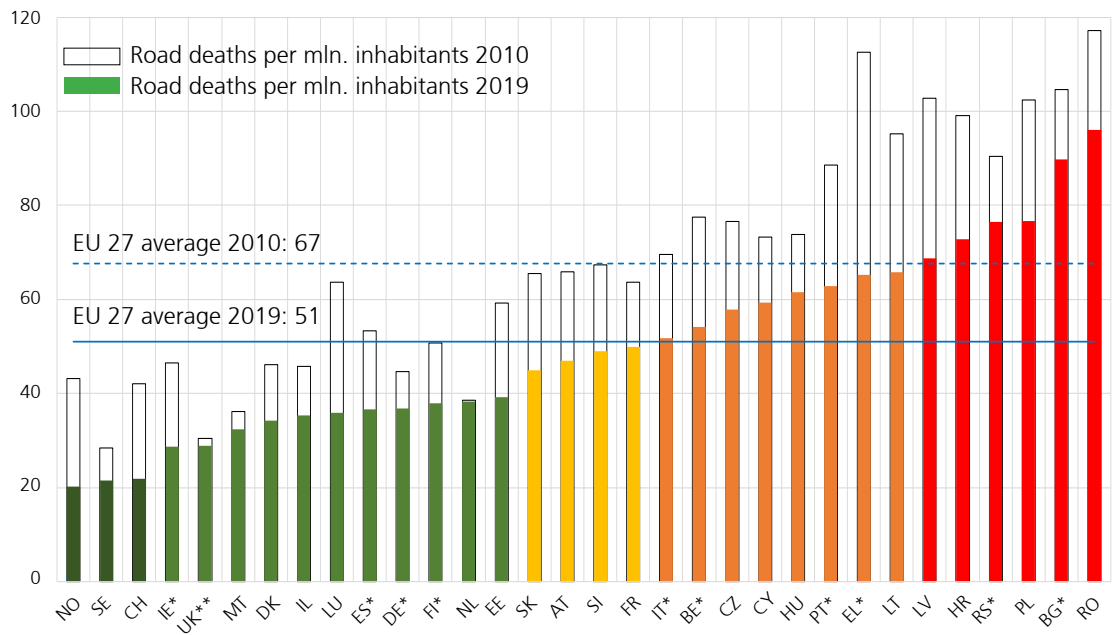
Despite a stagnation in progress on reducing the number of road deaths over the period 2010-2018, Sweden registered a 32% decrease between 2018 and 2019, with 221 total road deaths, the best result in the EU after Luxembourg last year. Sweden has also one of the lowest levels of road mortality, with 22 deaths per million inhabitants in 2019.

**Figure 1. Relative change in road deaths between 2018 and 2019.**

\*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.



**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.



However, even with an impressively low overall number of deaths, drink-driving remains one of the main road safety priorities. The total number of car drivers killed after consuming alcohol has stagnated since 2010 in Sweden. Estimates from the Swedish Transport Administration show that 24% of drivers killed on Swedish roads in 2012 were involved in an alcohol-related crash. Sweden is a relatively poor performer when looking at progress on reducing drink-driving deaths as compared to overall road death reductions over the period 2010-2018.

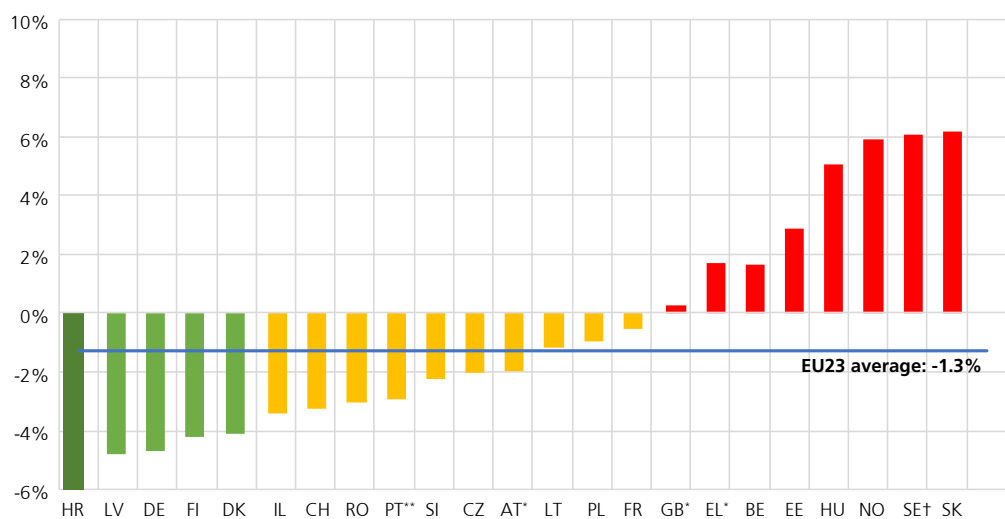
Sweden has adopted the following definition for road crashes attributed to alcohol:

**“Killed car drivers who tested positive (BAC > 0.2) in post-mortem blood alcohol tests”.**

In 2018, Sweden recorded 25 road deaths attributed to alcohol, only taking into account passenger car drivers killed with a BAC above 0.2g/l. Provisional figures from 2019 show 15 killed impaired drivers of passenger cars.

**Figure 3. Difference between the average annual (%) changes in the number of road deaths attributed to alcohol and the corresponding reduction for other road deaths over the period 2010-2018**

\*2010-2017 \*\*2010-2015  
 SE† - driver deaths only  
 BG excluded from fig.3 due to insufficient data. LU and CY excluded from fig.3 as numbers of road deaths are relatively small and are subject of substantial annual fluctuations. IE is excluded as the methodology changed in 2013. RS excluded from fig.3 as the methodology changed in 2016. But BG, LU and CY data are included in the EU23 average.  
 EU23 average: EU28 average excluding ES, IT, MT and NL as data on alcohol-related road deaths were not available in these countries.  
 GB data used instead of the UK.





## NATIONAL POLICIES

Approved by the Swedish Parliament in 1997, 'Vision Zero' is the foundation for road traffic safety in Sweden and is based on the ethical principle that "no loss of life in traffic is acceptable": it requires road deaths and serious injuries to be reduced to zero as the ultimate goal to be reached in the long term.

The Swedish government set up interim targets in accordance with the adoption of Vision Zero. The latest commitment was made in 2008, with deaths to be reduced by 50% and seriously injured by 25% between 2007 and 2020. In other words, there should be a maximum of 220 road deaths in 2020. With 221 road deaths registered in 2019 Sweden seems to have followed the right path to reach its target by the end of this year.

13 Road Safety Indicators were proposed in order to reach the overall objective by 2020. One of the indicators established the target that 99.90% of traffic volume should be with sober drivers, to be achieved by 2020. Based on the latest figures, the proportion of sober drivers (defined as drivers with a BAC limit below 0.2g/l) has increased from 99.71% in 2007 to 99.75% in 2019.

In February 2020, the government decided on a new interim target for 2030 which says that the number of deaths as a result of traffic accidents in road traffic will be halved and the number of seriously injured will be reduced by at least 25% by 2030.



## BAC LIMITS AND SANCTIONS

As long ago as 1990, the Swedish Traffic Offence Act set:

The legal limit is **0.2g/l** for **ALL CATEGORIES OF DRIVERS**

Young and professional drivers and riders are not treated differently in terms of BAC level.

In the SARTRE4 survey on Social Attitudes to Road Traffic Risk in Europe, published in 2012, 76.5% of Swedish drivers supported an even lower limit compared to the 59.8% average from the 19 EU participating countries. More than half of Swedish drivers thought that car drivers should not drink any alcohol at all when they drive (65.4%). Only 1.2% of drivers thought that the alcohol limit of BAC 0.2 g/l is too low.

Sanctions related to drink-driving vary depending on the severity of the offence ('drink-driving' and 'severe drink-driving'). The sanctions imposed by the Swedish legislation are as follows:

TYPE OF OFFENCE	Blood Alcohol Concentration	Sanction	Driving licence suspension
Drink-driving	From 0.2g/l up to 0.99g/l	'Day fines' or imprisonment up to six months (although extremely unusual)	One year (standard length) For lower concentration (0.2 – about 0.3) a warning instead of a suspension is possible
Severe drink-driving	From 1.0g/l	Imprisonment from one month to two years. Can be on probation.	Two years (standard length) but can be longer.



## ENFORCEMENT

Police undertake both random breath testing and targeted alcohol checks, choosing a site on the basis of the expectation that there will be a high percentage of drink-drivers in that specific spot. Also, drivers stopped for whatever reason (speeding, seatbelt use), will be systematically checked for drink-driving. Each police officer is equipped with a breathalyser to carry out alcohol testing. No suspicion of crime is needed to carry out a test. If the breathalyser indicates alcohol above the limit, the driver will be taken to the police station for confirmatory tests. The test can also be taken in police vans equipped with the necessary apparatus.

The number of alcohol roadside police tests in Sweden has decreased dramatically since 2010, moving from almost 2.7 million to 1.3 million in 2019, a more than 50% reduction in less than a decade.

To cope with limited police resources, discussions are ongoing on the possibility of allowing non-police-personnel to perform random breath tests. The police have also started a new way of organising drink-driving controls in some regions, with several short visible checks geographically widespread and lasting about 20 minutes, combined with media and Facebook communication.

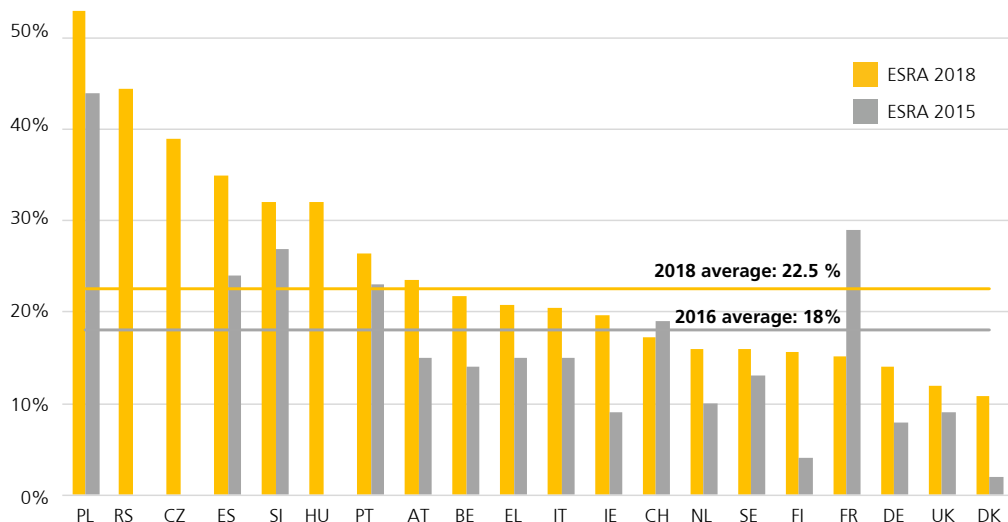


## DRIVERS' PERCEPTION

The huge decrease in drink-driving checks performed by the police is also reflected in driver perception of being caught, as shown in the latest ESRA survey on road users attitudes from 2018. Sweden ranks among those countries below the EU average, with only 16% of those interviewed considering themselves likely to be checked by the police.

**Figure 4. Proportion (%) of car drivers who considered themselves likely to be checked by the police for drink-driving.**

Source: ESRA survey (2015 and 2018)



The Swedish population does, however, seem to be aware of the risks related to drink-driving. There is a low tolerance from the population towards drink-driving as a road user behaviour and Sweden appears to be one of the European countries in which citizens are more conscious of the effects that driving under the influence of alcohol/drugs can trigger. Surveys and research, done at EU level, clearly illustrate attitudes of European citizens towards alcohol and road safety and show that the opinion of Swedish citizens tends to differ from other EU countries in that they are keenly in favour of stronger measures to tackle drink-driving.

In the Eurobarometer published in April 2010, when asked after how many alcoholic drinks should someone not drive, 45% of Swedish people, one of the highest percentages among European respondents, considered zero as the safest option.

The SARTRE4 survey results from 2012 also supported this finding, showing that Sweden was the country where the lowest percentage of drivers think most of their friends would drink and drive a car. Only 2.7% of car drivers agreed with this statement compared to 19.5% average of the other 19 participating countries.



# REHABILITATION AND ALCOHOL INTERLOCK PROGRAMMES

## Rehabilitation programmes

Sweden offers rehabilitation and an alcohol interlock programme to drink-driving offenders. Driver rehabilitation is often part of a probation sentence but Sweden also has a voluntary programme called SMADIT (Joint action against alcohol and drugs in traffic). SMADIT is a collaboration between the police, the social services and the dependency care and treatment services. The aim of SMADIT is to quickly offer treatment to suspected drink and drug drivers if they need help to overcome their addiction. They can enter the programme as soon as they are suspected and do not need to wait for the sentence. Moreover, since 2012, a person that is suspected or convicted of drink driving can apply to the Swedish Transport Agency to take part in the alcohol interlock programme, instead of getting their licence revoked.

## Alcohol interlock programme

In Sweden, the alcohol interlock programme is voluntary and applies to all types of driving licences. However, an offender cannot participate if he/she was drink-driving at the same time as using an illicit drug. The duration of the Swedish alcohol interlock programme is either one or two years depending on the blood alcohol concentration of the offender:

- one year for drivers convicted of drink-driving with a BAC level between 0.2 and 0.9 g/l;
- two years for convicted repeat drink-driving offenders (within a five-year period) and persons convicted for drink-driving with a BAC level higher than 1.0 g/l.

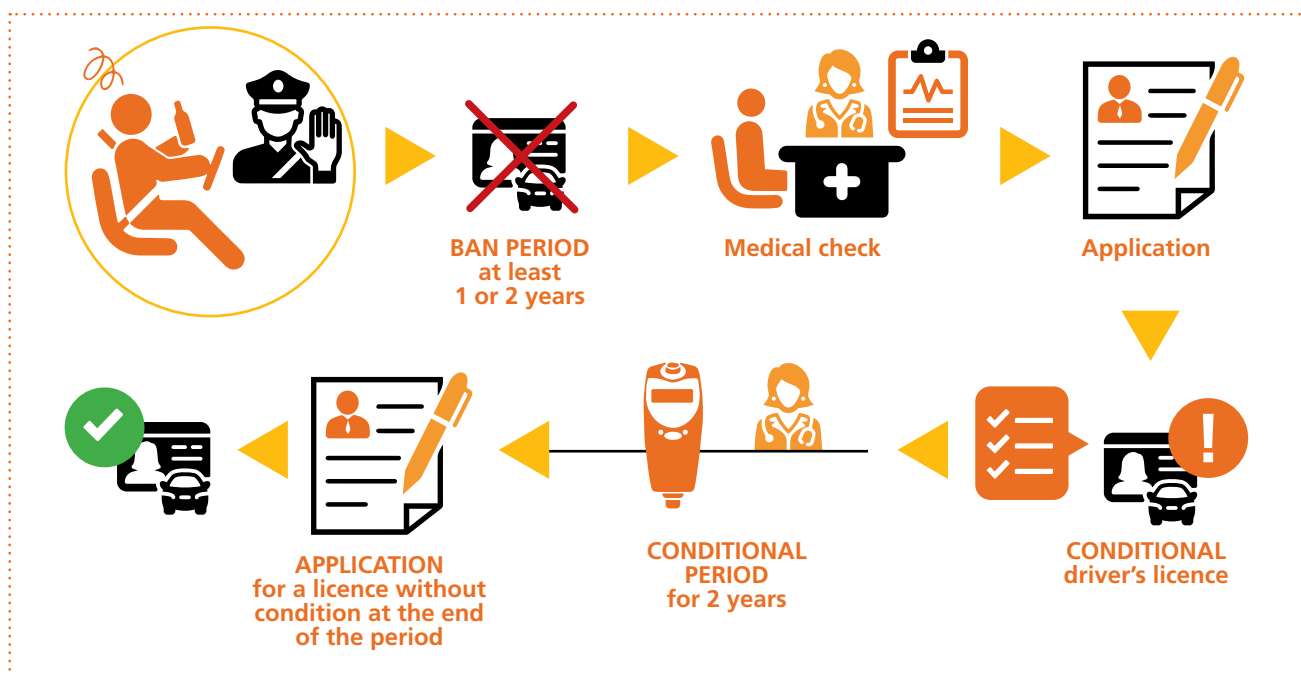
The withdrawal period for those that do not participate in the programme is usually one or two years depending on the severity of the offence. One year applies, generally, to those with a BAC less than 1 g/l and two years to those with 1 g/l or higher.

Sweden had to adapt its legislation concerning the implementation of alcohol interlock programmes following an infringement procedure by the EU: the EU Driving Licence Directive does not allow in fact people dependent on alcohol to hold a driving licence. The European Commission challenged therefore the possibility for drink-driving offenders with an alcohol dependency to participate in the two-year programme allowing them to continue driving a car fitted with an alcohol interlock.

The new legislation came into force as of March 2018 and does not allow offenders with a dependency or an addiction to enter the alcohol interlock programme in Sweden, unless they can prove that they fulfil all the medical demands beforehand, e.g. prove sobriety six months prior to entering the programme.

The alcohol interlock programme for offenders is placed under administrative law and permits the installation of alcohol interlocks as an alternative to revocation of the driving licence. The steps needed to apply for the programme are explained below:

1. In most cases, the police confiscates the driving licence immediately once the suspect has been tested and has shown an illegal BAC level. The offender's licence is then sent to the Swedish Transport Agency together with the evidence.
2. If the evidence is judged convincing then a letter is sent to the offender informing him/her that the licence will be revoked temporarily (temporary driving ban) until the licence holder has been convicted of drink-driving. In that letter the offender is also informed of the possibility to apply to join the alcohol interlock programme.
3. The offender can apply to the alcohol interlock programme from the moment he/she is suspected of drink-driving and during the temporary driving ban. It's possible to join until the final decision of revoking the driving licence.
4. When the Swedish Transport Agency is notified that a driving licence holder has been convicted, another letter is sent to the offender informing him/her that the driving licence will be finally revoked. Once the letter is sent, the offender has four weeks to apply before the licence will be totally revoked.



### Alcohol interlock in commercial transport and public procurement

Alcohol interlocks are widely employed within commercial transport on a voluntary basis. From 2003 onwards many municipalities began having alcohol interlocks fitted in their own fleets and many more asked their transport providers to use alcohol interlocks as a priority requirement.

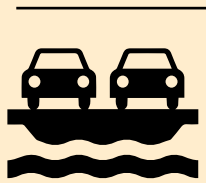
From the government side, a number of measures were also taken to encourage the development and use of alcohol interlock devices. In 2007, the Swedish government adopted an alcohol interlock strategy recommending:

1. Alcohol interlocks to be a condition for drink-driving offenders to regain their driving licence;
2. Alcohol interlocks to be fitted in all new commercial buses and lorries;
3. Compulsory rules for alcohol interlocks for vehicles used by governmental authorities;
4. Further promotion of introducing alcohol interlocks as a guarantee of quality among enterprises;
5. Improvement of the devices.

Following the 2007 strategy, the government committed to having most government vehicles equipped with an alcohol interlock; moreover all trucks of 3.5 tons and over, which are contracted by the Swedish Transport Administration for more than 100 hours per year, have to be fitted with alcohol interlocks. Since January 2010, all those authorities who purchase, lease, and use vehicles for certain contracted road transport including all school transport vehicles had to be fitted with alcohol interlocks.

To date, alcohol interlocks can be found in most buses, taxis, trucks, cars, school buses, locomotives/ trains, ferries, etc. There are no official data on the number of systems in use, so the extent of the implementation is not known but experts confirmed that the numbers are quite significant.

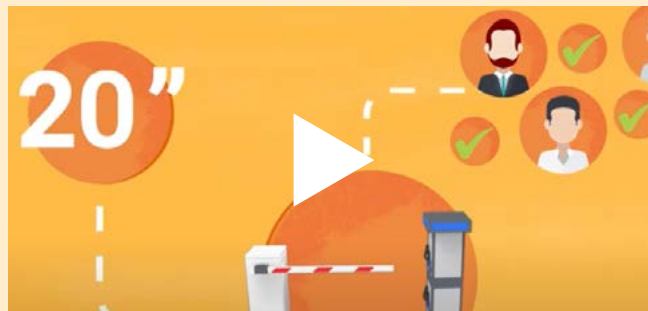
### The Alco Gates trial



A pilot project on alcohol checks in ports (using the so called 'alco gates') was carried out by the Abstaining Motorists Association (MHF) between August and December 2013 in one of the ports of Gothenburg. A second trial followed in 2014-2015 in one of the ports of Stockholm. The purpose of both projects was to gain experience regarding methodology, use, technology and collaboration. And from these results gather knowledge for future decisions and installations for drink-driving controls along the maritime borders.

During the 2013 trials, drivers entering the country via ferries were required to blow into a breathalyser linked to a gate before being able to enter the country. The automated-control process took only a few seconds for each driver and checks had no impact on the traffic flow. The trials were linked with a direct contact to the police in case of a positive test result.

Watch a video on the Alco Gate trial at:



<https://youtu.be/-GFjk47juql>

### Alco checks in Swedish ports

Based on experience from previous trials with alco gates (2013 - 2015) and changed conditions for continued implementation and operation of alco gates, The Swedish Transport Administration, in collaboration with the Swedish Police, has developed new methods and technology that enable efficient alco checks in ports during the period 2018-2020. The system applies both to the traffic that travels by ferry and the traffic that drives in and out of the port to load and reload from ships.

Three ports in Sweden (Gothenburg, Trelleborg and Kapellskär) are so far using the technology while negotiations are ongoing with several other ports, which are planned to be implemented during 2021. The goal is to establish alco checks in around twenty Swedish ports in total.



## CAMPAIGNS

A 'Day of Traffic Sobriety' is organised by the Abstaining Motorists Association (MHF) every year during the month of May. On that day, demonstrations for sober traffic occur in many places across the country. Car testing stations distribute leaflets to all customers and the police carry out extra sobriety tests. The campaign is also covered by media and TV news, during which victims of a drink-driving offender are also invited to share their experience.

MHF also usually get to be part of morning TV news where traffic accident victims are also included. See a few by clicking here (in Swedish only):



[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mp79GZyK-JQ&ab\\_channel=Nyhetsmorgon](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mp79GZyK-JQ&ab_channel=Nyhetsmorgon)



<https://www.tv4.se/clipp/va/12912283/cecilia-11-dodades-av-rattfyllerist-skrek-rakt-ut-ar-hon-dod>





## SOURCES

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### **SARTRE4 survey (2012):**

[https://ec.europa.eu/transport/road\\_safety/sites/roadsafety/files/pdf/projects\\_sources/sartre4\\_final\\_report.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/transport/road_safety/sites/roadsafety/files/pdf/projects_sources/sartre4_final_report.pdf)

### **EU Driving licence Directive (2006):**

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32006L0126&from=EN#d1e732-18-1>

### **EU citizens' attitudes towards alcohol (EC, 2010):**

[https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/health/files/alcohol/docs/ebs\\_331\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/health/files/alcohol/docs/ebs_331_en.pdf)

### **Alco gates fact sheets:**

[https://etsc.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014\\_06\\_smart\\_factsheet\\_alco\\_gate\\_sweden.pdf](https://etsc.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014_06_smart_factsheet_alco_gate_sweden.pdf)  
<https://www.mhf.se/alltomalkolas/koprad/alkolas/>

### **14th ETSC PIN Annual Report:**

<https://etsc.eu/wp-content/uploads/14-PIN-annual-report-FINAL.pdf>

### **Progress in reducing drink-driving and other alcohol-related road deaths in Europe (2019):**

[https://etsc.eu/wp-content/uploads/reducingdrinkdriving\\_031219\\_design\\_final.pdf](https://etsc.eu/wp-content/uploads/reducingdrinkdriving_031219_design_final.pdf)

### **ETSC Drink-Driving - Towards Zero Tolerance (2012):**

[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)



European Transport Safety Council

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