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- *Belgium recorded 646 road fatalities in 2019 – a 7% increase compared with 2018. However, since 2010 the number of annual road deaths has fallen by 24%. Despite the steady progress, the national target of no more than 420 road deaths in 2020 seems difficult to achieve. Since January 2021, the default speed limit in the city of Brussels is 30 km/h.*

Impact of Covid-19

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, Belgium introduced lockdown measures on 17 March 2020. This affected the movement of people and goods on the road and in turn the exposure to road crashes.

By way of illustration, the number of road deaths decreased by 53% in April 2020 compared with the average for 2017-19 (see Table 1). In the Brussels region, traffic volume decreased by 62% in April 2020 and road deaths by 59% compared to February 2020, according to preliminary data.

While motor vehicle traffic decreased during the lockdown, bicycle traffic increased. For example, in Brussels bicycle traffic in April 2020 increased by 58% compared to April 2019 or February 2020.

Between the last month without a lockdown, February 2020, and the first month with a complete lockdown, April 2020, the number of motor vehicles per counting point in Brussels decreased by 62%. No monthly data are available for 2019 or for the whole of Belgium.

Table 1. Road fatalities by month

	Average 2017-19	2020	% change
January	31	28	-9.7
February	31	44	41.9
March	37	30	-18.9
April	38	18	-52.6
May	39	38	-2.6
June	37	28	-24.3
July	51	27	-47.1
August	40	42	5.0
September	40	48	20.0

Trends

Belgium registered an **increase in the number of road deaths in 2019**. According to latest available data, 646 persons lost their lives in traffic crashes in Belgium in 2019. This represents an increase of 7% compared to 2018.

The **longer-term trend for road deaths** in Belgium has been encouraging. Between 2000 and 2019, the number of annual road fatalities fell by 56%. The rate of road death reduction has remained relatively constant, with fatalities dropping an average of 4.7% per year during this time.

The number of **traffic deaths per 100 000 inhabitants** in Belgium fell by 61% between 2000 and 2019. In 2019, 5.6 traffic deaths per 100 000 inhabitants were recorded, compared to 14.4 in 2000. By way of comparison the average in the European Union is 5.1 deaths per 100 000 inhabitants in 2019.

Measured as **traffic deaths per billion vehicle-kilometres** (vkm) driven, the fatality risk of Belgium showed a similarly encouraging long-term trend. In 2017 this metric stood at 5.9, 64% lower than in 2000.

Belgium recorded 0.9 **road fatalities per 10 000 registered vehicles** in 2019. This represents a decrease of 65% compared to the year 2000, when the number of deaths per 100 000 registered vehicles stood at 2.6.

Country Profile

Population in 2019: 11.4 million

GDP per capita in 2019: USD 46 232

Cost of road crashes: 1.4% of GDP (2015)

Road network: 154 575 kilometres

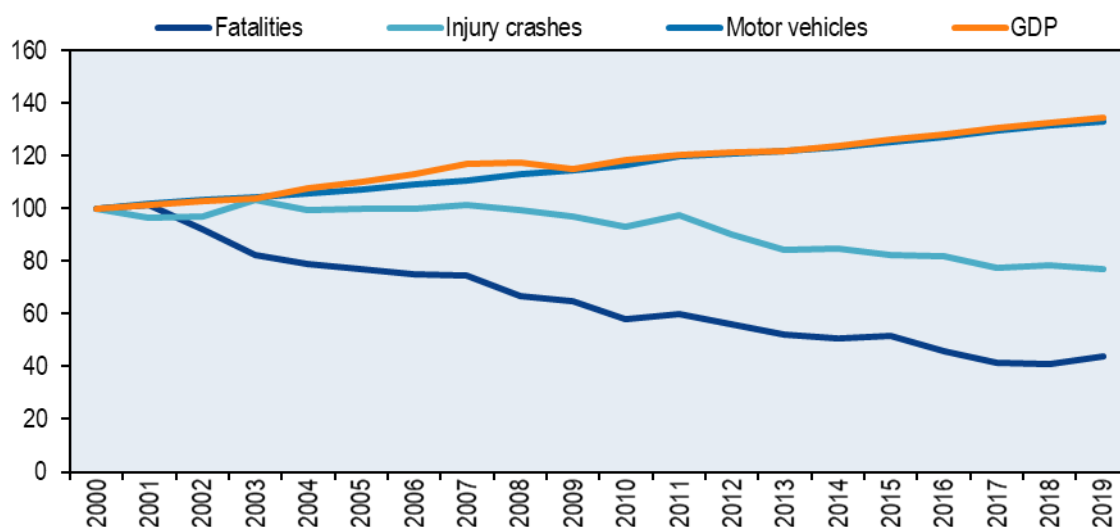
Registered motor vehicles in 2019: 7.1 million (cars 82.8%; goods vehicles 12.4%; motorcycles 7.0%)

Volume of traffic: +15% between 2000 and 2017

Speed limits: 30-50 km/h on urban roads; 70-90 km/h on rural roads; 120 km/h on motorways

Limits on blood alcohol content (BAC): 0.5 g/l for general drivers; 0.2 g/l for professional drivers

Figure 1. Road safety, vehicle stock and GDP trends
Index 2000 = 100

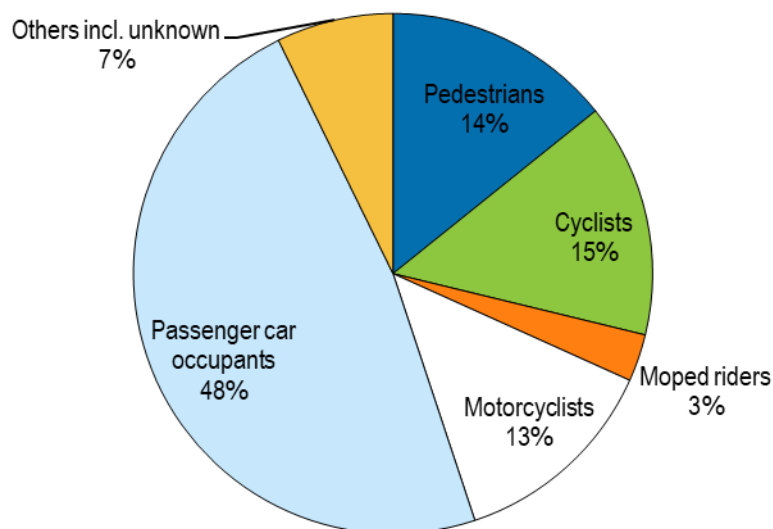


Note: registered vehicles do not include mopeds.

Data for **fatalities by road user groups** show that passenger car occupants continue to be the group most affected by road crashes. In 2019, passenger car occupants accounted for a majority of road deaths, with 48% of the total. They were followed by motorcyclists (13%), cyclists (15%), pedestrians (14%) and moped riders (3%).

All road user groups registered an increase in their number of road deaths in 2019, with the exception of motorcyclists. The latter registered three fewer deaths (-3.4%) compared to 2018. On the contrary, the largest increase was registered among pedestrians, with 18 additional road fatalities (+24.3%) compared to 2018. Passenger car occupants registered a 12.4% increase, cyclists a 6.8% increase and moped riders a 5.6% increase.

The long-term trend shows traffic in Belgium has become safer for all road user groups since 2000. Fatalities have declined 70% for moped riders and 67% for passenger car occupants over this period. On the other hand, crash deaths for cyclists have fallen 30% and 28% for motorcyclists. More recently, against an 24% overall reduction in the number of road deaths since 2010, there has been a 29% increase in the number of cyclists killed, from 73 to 94 (see Figure 6).

Figure 2. Road fatalities by road user group, 2019

Road deaths by age group in 2019 showed some changes compared to 2018. There was a decrease in the number of annual road deaths among the youngest and the oldest. Indeed, the 0-14 age group had a 21.4% decrease in fatalities, and those over 65 had a 1.2% drop year-on-year. On the contrary, the other age groups saw a sharp increase in their number of road fatalities. The largest increase was registered among the 18-20 age group, with 14 additional fatalities (+70%) compared to 2018.

Looking at the longer-term trend, since 2000 the number of road deaths has decreased for all groups. Young people benefitted the most from road safety improvements during this time, with every age category below 25 seeing road fatalities drop by a degree of around 73% or greater. Older people saw lesser, but still significant, gains during this period, with those above 65 seeing annual road fatalities drop by 30% compared to figures from 2000. More recently, road deaths for those under 24 has decreased more than the average of 24% since 2010, while the number of road deaths has increased for people over 65 (Figure 6).

Despite recent improvements, young people continue to be at high risk in traffic. The 21-24 age group has the highest mortality rate, with 9.8 road fatalities per 100 000 persons.

However, where mortality rates for young people have more than halved since 2010, rates have remained stagnant for the elderly people. Those over 75 now have a mortality rate of 9.6 road deaths per 100 000 persons.

Figure 3. Road fatality rates by age group, 2010-19
Deaths per 100 000 inhabitants according to age group

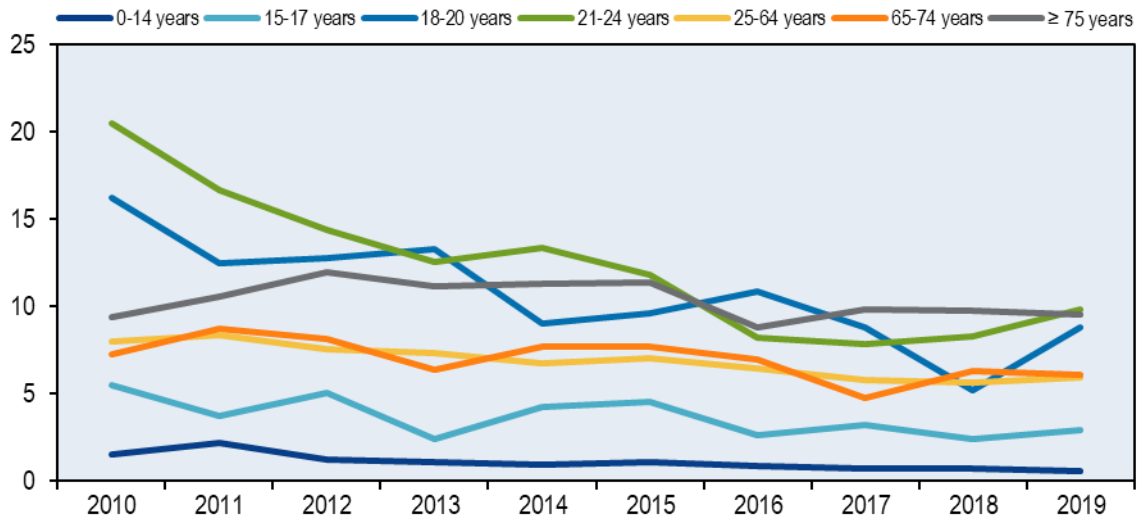
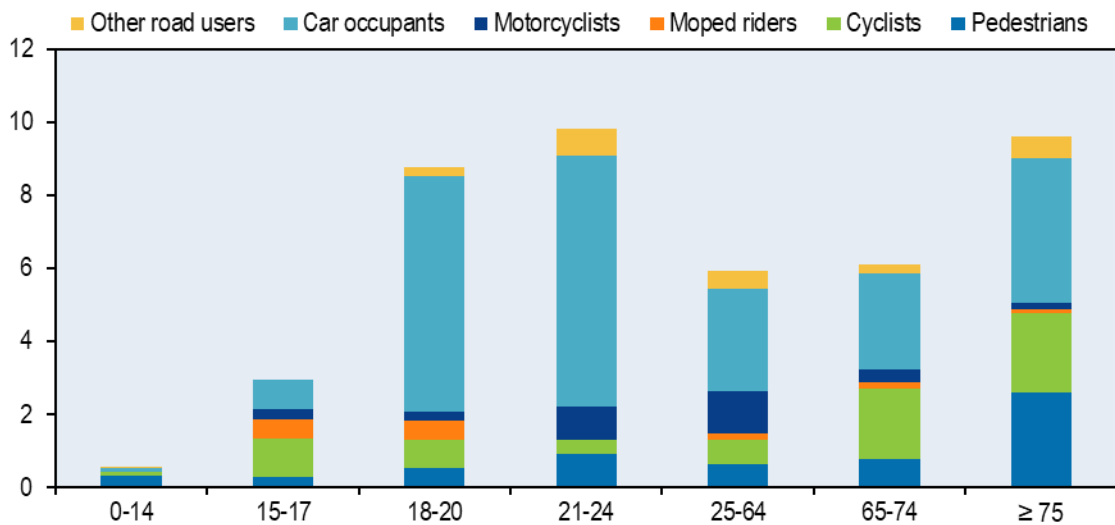


Figure 4. Road fatality rate by age and road user group, 2019
Fatalities per 100 000 inhabitants



Analysis of **fatalities by road type** shows the rural network is the deadliest. In 2019, a slight majority, 48%, of deaths occurred on rural roads, 33% on urban roads and 18% on motorways. This repartition has remained relatively stable in recent years.

In 2019, the number of road deaths increased by 21.3% year-on-year on motorways while increasing 9.2% on urban roads and 0.6% on rural roads.

Since 2000, road safety has improved the most on rural roads, where annual road fatalities have decreased by 62.7%. They have dropped 46.6% on urban roads and 51.0% on

motorways. Since 2010, road deaths have increased on motorways and decreased more than average on rural roads (Figure 6).

Figure 5. Road fatalities by road type

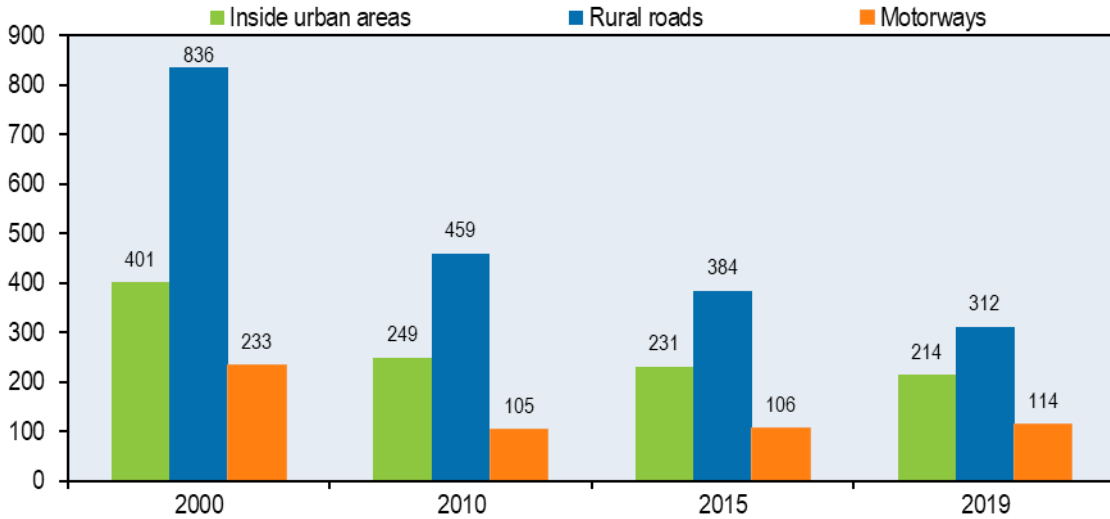
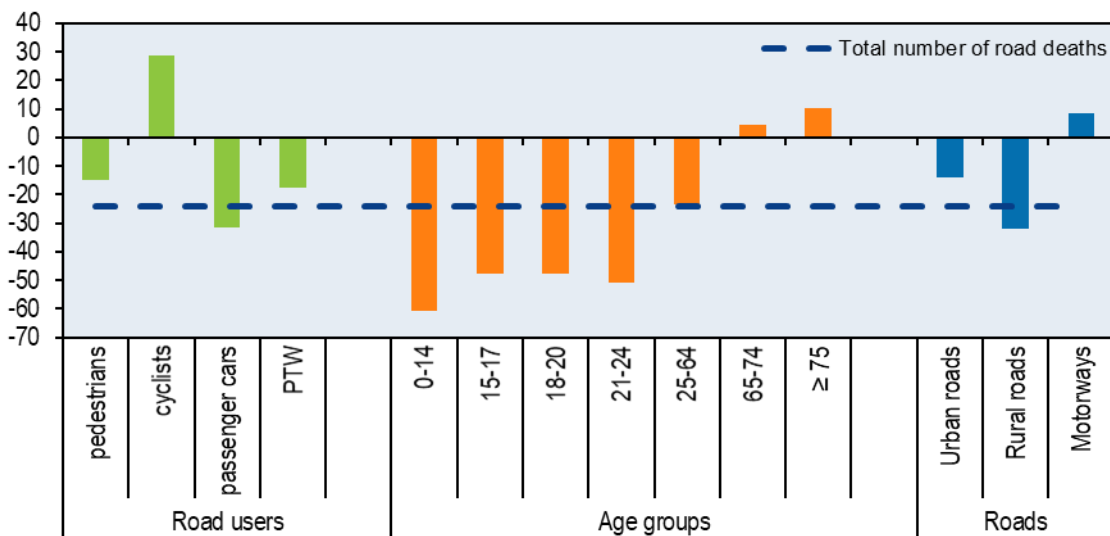


Figure 6. Evolution of road deaths by user category, age group and road type, 2010-19



Fatality data are essential to understanding road safety issues but hardly sufficient. Information on **serious injuries from crashes** is also critically important. Yet injury data are much more difficult to obtain, validate and – where available – compare. In 2019, 3 704 road users were hospitalised, a decrease of 1.8% on 2018 and 62.4% on 2000.

Economic costs of road crashes

The most recent information on the cost of crashes in Belgium is from 2015. Unit costs for this year are based on value transfers from European medians (Wijnen et al., 2017). If these unit costs are projected to 2019 levels, road crash costs in 2019 amount to EUR 5.7 billion, or 1.2% of Belgium's GDP.

Table 2. Estimation of the costs of road crashes, 2015

	Unit cost [EUR]	Total [EUR]
Fatalities	2 716 384	1.8 billion
Serious injuries	336 276	1.2 billion
Slight injuries	32 562	1.4 billion
Property damage costs	4 269	1.3 billion
Total		5.7 billion
Total as % of GDP		1.21%

Behaviour

The behaviour of road users is an important determinant of a country's road safety performance. **Speed**, and especially inappropriate speed, is one of the main causes of crashes in Belgium.

In 2015, speed outside built-up areas was measured through floating car data (FCD), recorded by GPS or mobile phones. The measurement showed Belgian drivers drive too fast. Speeding issues are the most problematic on motorways and two-lane roads (90 km/h), with more than 30% of speeding violations being in excess of 10 km/h over the limit.

In 2015, speed inside built-up areas was measured with a radar system. The measurement showed that in 30 km/h zones, 36% of car drivers complied with the speed limit, and 64% drove more than 10 km/h too fast. In school zones, 10% of drivers respected the 30 km/h speed limit and 60% drove more than 10 km/h too fast. In 50 km/h zones, 64% of drivers complied with the speed limit, and 10% drove more than 10 km/h too fast. The results demonstrate frequent speed infringements, especially at night and in school zones.

While in 2017, there were only seven speed camera systems to control average speed on a section of a road, in 2020 there were more than 1 200, most of them in Flanders, seven in Wallonia, with the Brussels-Capital Region having none. However, because the available cameras are rotated across the systems, only a relatively small number of the systems (377) actually make recordings at any given time.

Default speed limits are not the same all over Belgium but change at regional borders. Flanders lowered the general speed limit outside built-up areas from 90 to 70 km/h on 1 January 2017; however most of these roads were already limited to 70 km/h. Moreover, as of 2017 local decision makers needed to justify a speed higher than 70 km/h, whereas

previously they needed to give reasons for not allowing 90 km/h as the limit. Since 1 January 2021, the default speed limit in the city of Brussels is 30 km/h.

The table below summarises the main speed limits in Belgium.

Table 3. Passenger car speed limits by road type, 2020

	General speed limit
Urban roads	30-50 km/h
Rural roads	70-90 km/h
Motorways	120 km/h

Driving under the influence of alcohol is another major cause of road crashes in Belgium, as in most IRTAD countries. In 2018, 1.9% of car drivers tested had a blood alcohol level above the legal limit, the same proportion as 2005 and 2007 but slightly lower than in 2012 (2.7%) and 2015 (2.7%). Furthermore, the share of highly intoxicated drivers (more than 0.35 mg or 0.8 g/l BAC) among offenders remains stable (from 69.0% in 2015 to 68.0% in 2018). Behavioural measurement highlights an alarming upward trend of driving under the influence of alcohol during the week and on week-end nights.

The maximum authorised BAC is 0.5 g/l. The limit for professional drivers has been 0.2 g/l since January 2015.

An alcohol-related crash is defined as a crash involving a road user (including a pedestrian) who was subjected to a test and either refused to be tested or had a BAC of 0.5 g/l or higher.

In Belgium, legislation sets limits for driving under the **influence of drugs**: cannabis – THC of 1 ng/ml; amphetamines – 25 ng/ml; MDMA or ecstasy – 25 ng/ml; morphine – 10 ng/ml); and cocaine – 25 ng/ml). Drivers suspected of being impaired are tested for drugs. They can also be tested if the driver transports drugs, admits having taken drugs or is involved in a crash. Since December 2015, a new executive decree under the road traffic law went into force. It offers additional tools and quicker ways to determine psychoactive substances in blood and saliva.

In 2009, the European research project, "Driving Under the Influence of Drugs, Alcohol and Medicines" (DRUID), found for the sample in Belgium that 0.5% of all drivers drove under the influence of cannabis, 0.4% under the influence of cocaine and 0.2% under the influence of heroin. No trace of amphetamines ("speed" and/or "ecstasy") was found among those Belgian drivers tested.

An increasing problem for traffic safety in Belgium is **distraction**, for instance, through the use of mobile phones while driving. The use of hand-held phones while driving is forbidden. The use of hands-free devices while driving is authorised. A pilot observation survey was undertaken in 2015 in three large Belgian cities on the use of mobile phones by road users waiting at traffic lights. It showed that 7% of car drivers, 9% of drivers of

light goods vehicles, 5% of cyclists and 18% of pedestrians used their mobile phone while stopped at traffic lights.

Recent research on the use of **hands-free devices** showed that hands-free phoning has a clear influence on driving behaviour: less and shorter fixations at a number of areas relevant for traffic safety and modification of the visual scan pattern. This suggests that during hands-free phoning the driver focuses less on the traffic situation (Desmet et al., 2017).

The share of **fatigue** as a causal factor in crashes is challenging to detect but nevertheless believed to be a serious issue. Study results show that 5.1% of car journeys in Belgium involved a driver showing signs of sleepiness (Pelsers and Diependaele, 2018). The analysis of contextual variables shows that various circumstances result in a prevalence that is considerably higher than the overall estimate of 5.1%.

Seat belt use has been compulsory in front seats since 1975 and in rear seats since 1991. Children must be protected by a child restraint device appropriate for their size and weight. In 2018, the rate of seat belt use was 95% for drivers and 96% for front seat passengers. For rear-seat passengers it was, however, 86%. Clear progress in seat belt use occurred between 2003 and 2015. However, the 2010 target of 95% seat belt use has still not been met. In 2017, 87% of the children were restrained but only 23% of them with an appropriate system and in the correct manner (Schoeters and Lequex, 2018).

Table 3. Seat belt wearing rate by car occupancy and road type
Percentages

	2000	2010	2015	2018
Front seats				
Driver	..	86	92	95
Passenger	..	86	92	96
Urban roads (driver)	50	84	91	95
Rural roads (driver)	57	87	93	96
Motorways (driver)	66	90	93	96
Rear seats				
General	..	..	86	86
Children (use of child restraint)	..	..	35/89 ¹	23/87 ²

1. In 2014, among drivers who agree to have the child seat use investigated, 89% of the children are somehow restrained but only 35% correctly so (appropriate system and correct use) (Roynard, 2015).

2. In 2017, 87% of the children were restrained but only 23% correctly so.

For motorcyclists, **helmet wearing** is the most effective passive safety habit. All riders of powered two-wheelers are required to wear helmets. Motorcyclists (>50cc) also have to wear gloves, boots that protect the ankles, a long-sleeved jacket and long trousers. The helmet-wearing rate by riders of powered two-wheelers is not systematically monitored for the whole country. In Brussels, the observed rate was 99.3% in 2013 (Riguelle and Roynard, 2013).

There is no mandatory helmet-use law for cyclists.

Road safety management and strategies

Between 1990 and 2019, the number of fatalities decreased by 67%. The biggest share of these improvements fell to the period following 2000. Around the turn of the millennium, road safety became an issue of great public interest in Belgium. While the number of fatalities had been stagnating or had even increased in the late 1990s, this number has steadily declined since 2001, the year in which the first national assembly on road safety (*Etats Généraux de la Sécurité Routière/Staten-Generaal van de Verkeersveiligheid*) initiated many improvements in infrastructure, enforcement and education. The most important measures to have contributed to the decline of mortality in Belgium are:

- a reduction of the speed limit on many rural roads
- stricter control of speed limits
- black-spot treatment and adjustment of the infrastructure
- improved safety systems in cars and trucks
- better road safety awareness through campaigns and educational measures.

Responsibility for the organisation of road safety at the **federal level** lies with the **Federal Commission for Road Safety**, which organises the General Assembly on Road Safety, where the Belgian Road Safety Programme, including the target for 2020, was decided in 2011.

As a federal country, however, the regions themselves take many decisions. In 2015, several public responsibilities in relation to road safety shifted from the federal to regional government. At a federal level, responsibility for traffic regulation (although speed limits on regional roads are a regional matter), vehicle safety regulation, licencing (although driver training is now a regional matter) and most of the enforcement chain has been kept. All other road safety matters (infrastructure, education, campaigns, training, local police controls) are now determined at the regional level.

The present national **road safety strategy** was released in 2011 and was updated at the General Road Safety Assembly in 2015. Due to the fact there was no government for more than one-and-a-half years due to problems in forming a coalition, the General Road Safety Assembly that had been foreseen for 2020 was postponed to 2021.

For the Flemish region, the regional government has set up Road safety Flanders (*Vlaams Huis voor de Verkeersveiligheid* [VHV]) to better align and coordinate all actions concerning road safety. This structure is at this moment under review in order to optimise the working process. The Road Safety Plan Flanders 2016 is still the core of the road safety policy in Flanders. The Road Safety Plan Flanders also includes short-term (2020), medium-term (2030) and long-term (2050) targets related to fatalities, injuries and the number of

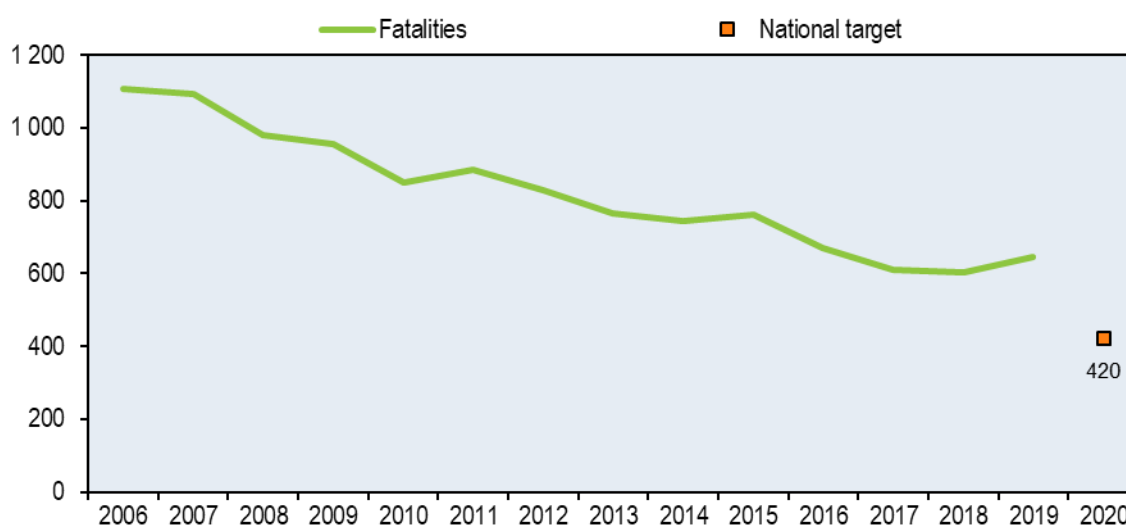
crashes. In 2021, this road safety plan will be updated to the most recent knowledge and developments.

For Wallonia, the *Conseil Supérieur Wallon de la Sécurité Routière* (CSWSR [Walloon Council for Road Safety]) has taken over this responsibility under the leadership of the *Agence Wallonne pour la Sécurité routière* (AWSR [Walloon Agency for Road Safety]). A regional general assembly was organised in December 2020, and a new road safety plan was presented, with the objective of less than 200 road deaths in Wallonia in 2020 (compared to 300 road deaths in 2016), less than 100 in 2030 and zero in 2050. Several measures were proposed, including the multiplication of zones where speed limits are limited to 20 or 30 km/h in cities.

It is not yet clear which agency will take the lead in road safety for the Brussels region.

The goal of achieving a 50% decrease in fatalities between 2001 and 2011 was renewed for the period 2011-20. The **European target of halving fatalities by 2020** was adopted, meaning fewer than 420 road fatalities. There were 646 fatalities in 2019, and forecasting based on past developments predicts between 434 and 635 fatalities for 2020. With the present efforts, Belgium will therefore not reach the 2020 target of 420 and additional efforts are required. New targets have not been defined (as of year-end 2020).

Figure 7. Trends in road fatalities towards national target



Measures

Infrastructure: For Flanders, a toolbox is planned for communes to create more space for cyclists and pedestrians. Also, as part of the coronavirus recovery plan, an extra budget is available for creating safe cycling infrastructure and safe school environments. Other priorities are black-spot treatment and section-controls for speed enforcement.

As of January 2021, the default speed limit for the Brussels region is 30 km/h.

Enforcement: Since October 2020 vehicles in a traffic jam on motorways have had to leave some space between them to form a rescue lane that can be used by priority vehicles.

Drivers' licensing: Risk perception tests, consisting of a few short movies to be evaluated by the candidate, have been part of the mandatory practical exam for the category B licence since June 2017 in Flanders, July 2018 in Wallonia and November 2018 in the Brussels-Capital Region.

In Flanders, novice drivers who started their driver training (category B) after 1 January 2017, have to attend a follow-up course six to nine months after obtaining their licence. It takes four hours, costs EUR 102 and consists of practical training on a closed circuit and group discussions about attitudes adopted on the road.

Definition, data collection, methodology

Road fatality is defined as a person who dies immediately or within 30 days of a crash.

A seriously injured person is someone who stays for treatment for more than 24 hours in a hospital following a crash, as reported by police.

A slightly injured person is someone who claims to be in need of medical treatment, as reported by police.

The differentiation between a slightly and seriously injured person is not reliable, as this distinction is determined by police at the crash scene. Most Belgian reports therefore treat slightly and seriously injured jointly.

Road safety data are electronically collected and centralised by the police force. After some validation procedures, data are transferred to the National Statistics Office, which carries out some corrections and adds the fatalities occurring within 30 days to the database. This latter operation is done by linking the notification of death (a paper form with very basic information), which the Department of Justice sends to the National Statistical Office.

The number of slightly and seriously injured persons is the most likely to be underreported, as many crashes – especially those with cyclists – are not reported to the police. Currently, the number of MAIS+ victims is calculated based on hospital discharge data up to 2018. The numbers for 2018 will be published at the beginning of 2021. The calculation method takes into account the practical guidelines of work package 7 of Safetycube.

In 2014, the road safety database in Belgium was modified. The database now contains both injury crashes recorded by the police at the scene of the accident and injury crashes self-reported at a police station. The quality of the database has also improved thanks to changes in the data processing method, which notably allow for better identification of user types and characteristics of individuals and vehicles. The database is therefore more comprehensive. However, it also means that statistics from 2014 onwards are not fully comparable with those of previous years. In addition, due to the registration of cases that would earlier not have been registered, there is an increase in the number of cases in the

"unknown" category. Comparisons with previous years should therefore be made with caution.

Resources

Recent research

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Dashboard Victims of road traffic crashes in Belgium: <https://www.vias-roadsafety.be/en/>.

Road safety barometers: <https://www.vias.be/en/research/road-safety-monitoring-survey/>.

Conseil supérieur wallon de la sécurité routière: <http://www.cswsr.be/>.

Agence wallonne pour la Sécurité routière: <http://www.awsr.be/>.

Instituut voor Mobiliteit Universiteit Hasselt: <https://www.uhasselt.be/IMOB-EN>.

Vlaamse stichting verkeerskunde (Flemish Foundation for Traffic Knowledge):
<https://www.vsv.be/>.

Vlaamse overheid – departement MOW:
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Road safety and traffic data

	1990	2000	2010	2017	2018	2019	2019 % change over			
							2018	2010	2000	1990
Reported safety data										
Fatalities	1 976	1 470	850	609	604	646	7.0%	-24.0%	-56.1%	-67.3%
Injury crashes	62 446	49 065	45 745	38 025	38 453	37 699	-2.0%	-17.6%	-23.2%	-39.6%
Injured persons hospitalised	17 479	9 847	5 606	3 762	3 637	3 600	-1.0%	-35.8%	-63.4%	-79.4%
Deaths per 100,000 population	19.9	14.4	7.8	5.4	5.3	5.6	6.4%	-28.1%	-60.7%	-71.6%
Deaths per 10,000 registered vehicles	4.3	2.6	1.3	0.8	0.8	0.9	13.2%	-28.5%	-64.6%	-78.9%
Deaths per billion vehicle kilometres	28.1	16.3	8.6	5.9	..	..	..	..	..	..
Fatalities by road user										
Pedestrians	301	142	108	95	74	92	24.3%	-14.8%	-35.2%	-69.4%
Cyclists	196	134	73	75	88	94	6.8%	28.8%	-29.9%	-52.0%
Moped riders	110	64	23	24	18	19	5.6%	-17.4%	-70.3%	-82.7%
Motorcyclists	106	118	103	78	88	85	-3.4%	-17.5%	-28.0%	-19.8%
Passenger car occupants	1 181	922	451	285	275	309	12.4%	-31.5%	-66.5%	-73.8%
Other road users	82	90	92	52	61	47	-23.0%	-48.9%	-47.8%	-42.7%
Fatalities by age group										
0-14 years	108	52	28	14	14	11	-21.4%	-60.7%	-78.8%	-89.8%
15-17 years	72	55	21	12	9	11	22.2%	-47.6%	-80.0%	-84.7%
18-20 years	202	130	65	34	20	34	70.0%	-47.7%	-73.8%	-83.2%
21-24 years	245	198	108	43	45	53	17.8%	-50.9%	-73.2%	-78.4%
25-64 years	992	784	467	349	338	358	5.9%	-23.3%	-54.3%	-63.9%
65-74 years	..	114	67	52	71	70	-1.4%	4.5%	-38.6%	..
≥ 75 years	..	124	88	99	98	97	-1.0%	10.2%	-21.8%	..
Fatalities by road type										
Urban roads	..	401	249	203	196	214	9.2%	-14.1%	-46.6%	..
Rural roads	..	836	459	307	310	312	0.6%	-32.0%	-62.7%	..
Motorways	..	233	105	95	94	114	21.3%	8.6%	-51.1%	..
Traffic data										
Registered vehicles (thousands)	4 594	5 735	6 689	7 419	7 533	7 115	-5.6%	6.4%	24.1%	54.9%
Vehicle kilometres (millions)	70 276	90 036	98 678	103 175	..	..	..	..	..	..
Registered vehicles per 1,000 population	461.8	560.1	617.1	653.6	660.9	621.1	-6.0%	0.7%	10.9%	34.5%

Note: registered vehicles do not include mopeds.