

Measure 50: Seat and head restraints

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Policy package:

ID: Road Safety, quality and environment

Measure 50:

Seat and head restraints: require to fit seat belts in motor vehicles other than passenger cars

What is the problem being addressed ?

The evidence of the benefits of wearing a seatbelt seems to be clear-cut and indisputable (see second page). Most countries have made the use of seatbelts in passenger cars mandatory. Part 3, Sect. I B of the WP addresses just this issue, which is the object of the EU Parliament Resolutions of 13 March 1984 and 18 February 1986 and of Directives indicated below. This measure makes explicit the goal indicated in the WP, which stresses more the reminders to use seat belts – and obviously to fit seat belts as it is already for passenger cars is a prerequisite in the cases of coaches.

Indeed, work is currently under way to introduces seat belts in coaches (not urban buses) and on a specification for audible or visual reminder systems for seat belt use in passenger cars. This type of equipment indicate that seat belt reminders could reduce car occupant deaths by about 20%. For the EU as a whole this would save more than 4.000 lives each year.

The Commission has in addition launched work aimed at identifying the specific problems arising concerning the transport of children with a view, where appropriate, to introducing protection rules for school transport vehicles.

Measure's costs and/or benefits:

Increased costs incurred by manufacturers will be reflected into prices paid by motorists, however the cost/benefit ratio is overwhelmingly in favour of belts installation. Note that half the fatalities in road incidents in Sweden were not wearing belts. It would be appropriate to gather this type of statistic for other countries.

Legislative implementation at the EU level:

Directive 2003/20/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 8 April 2003 amending Council Directive 91/671/EEC on the approximation of the laws of the Member States relating to compulsory use of safety belts in vehicles of less than 3,5 tonnes.

Proposal amending Directive 74/408/EEC relating to seats for motor vehicles with a view to impose the fitting of safety belts in motor vehicle other than passenger cars. This proposal is connected to two correspondent proposals COM (2003) 362 and 363 amending Directives 77/541/EEC and 76/115/EEC.

What are the objectives ?

Apart from the need of better and wider statistics as indicated above under "Measure's cost", the likelihood of coach manufacturers installing belts on all seats of their vehicles appears to be high and would have to be passed into laws. There is a vital need, though, for harmonisation of the corresponding laws in all countries. A case in point is Italy, where drivers are subjected to a fine and a subtraction of 5 points from the max value of 20 on their licence in case they are caught not fastening belt or having passengers who are minors and don't fasten belt. Adult passengers not wearing belts are exempt.

Interactions with other WP measures:

Increased safety of road transport will tend to make choice of road mode more attractive, hence counteracting the desired shift from road to rail.

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Output indicators:

If the measure will be actually enforced, the key output indicator should be the seat belt use by drivers and passengers of coaches (percentage).

Data on seatbelt use are available for passenger cars, and are briefly discussed below. However, it is questionable whether the results achieved in terms of reduction of fatalities by enforcing the seatbelts on passenger cars can be repeated in the cases of coaches. The table below (source: OECD, 2002) shows how seatbelt use varies across countries (most of the information gathered refers to cars). For drivers, wearing rates exceed 80% in around half the countries in the table, including most northern European countries. Seatbelt usage is much lower in Denmark, Austria, France (except on rural roads), and Eastern Europe. There is a tendency for driver wearing rates to be higher on rural than on urban roads, an exception being Spain where urban rates are twice those on rural roads.

Seatbelt use by drivers and passengers

Percentages

Country	Year	Urban			Rural		
		Driver	Front pass.	Rear pass.	Driver	Front pass.	Rear pass.
Austria	1996	86			78		
Canada	1996	92		51			
Czech Republic	1996	32	25	12	62	62	13
Denmark	1993	60		31	78		33
Finland	1997	82	82	66	92	92	66
France	1995	70			92		
Germany	1995	96			93		
Hungary	1996	48	48	9	59		
Iceland	1999	80	80	80	90	92	92
Japan	1998	87	80		87	80	
Netherlands	1998	67	72	46	80	82	48
New Zealand	1998	87	87	62	91	91	62
Norway	1999	82	92	82	91	93	82
Poland	1997	73		9	82		9
Spain	1996	81	85	23	42	51	17
Sweden	1999	77	81		90	92	74
United Kingdom	1999	88	92	71	94	95	80
United States	1996	61	56	38	60		

Poland: Differences across areas for rear seats is not known.

Canada: Number for rear seatbelts comes from Quebec.

Italy: Seatbelt use in general is estimated to be 10-20%.

Australia: 95% for all car occupants, up to 98% in some cities, rear seat 80-86%.

Source: OECD, Safety on Roads: what's the vision ?, Paris, 2002

According to the OECD Study, some countries provided information on how many lives could have been saved by using seatbelts. Finland states that according to international studies (including Finnish studies) nearly 50% of lives could have been saved. Norway states that a car driver's risk of being killed is reduced by 50% if a seatbelt is worn. Denmark highlights a 20-30% reduction in the number of hospitalised front-seat drivers and passenger after the use of seatbelts became compulsory. In the United Kingdom, it is estimated that since seatbelt wearing was made compulsory, there have been at least 370 fewer deaths and 7000 fewer serious injuries per year to front-seat occupants. Savings to rear-seat passengers are estimated at 70 deaths and 1000 serious injuries per year.

Therefore, reduction in the severity of incidents and hence of fatalities is to be expected by extending the compulsory use of seat restraints. However, a major revision of procedures to be followed by highway and urban police to record accident circumstances is in order to the end of better understanding the causal relationships between injuries/fatalities and technical/ behavioural variables. In order to assess correctly actual situations, trends and causal links, the following variables will be recorded and analysed:

- adoption of laws enforcing installation of belts, obligation to fasten them and penalties
- statistics on use of belts, spot checks and results (fines, etc.)

Outcome indicators: intermediate impacts on transport markets

Changes in costs incurred by manufactures due to the new safety requirements.

Outcome indicators: final impacts on transport users and non users

Suggested outcome indicators and expected impacts of the measure are:

- Reduction in the number of fatalities and serious injuries due to road accidents
- Consequent reductions of losses in production and value of life risk