



NEWS RELEASE  
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## Buckle Up Europe: New EU Legislation for Safety Restraint Use

New seat belt wearing rates<sup>(1)</sup> published by the European Transport Safety Council (ETSC)<sup>(2)</sup> show that there is still a long way to go to ensure that EU citizens are adequately protected in their cars. This new overview of the EU-25 comes ahead of the transposition deadline of the 2003/20/EC Directive<sup>(3)</sup> which will extend the mandatory use of safety restraints.

The seat belt is the single most important safety feature in the car. Universal seat belt use could prevent 6,000 deaths and 380,000 injuries every year in the EU-15<sup>(4)</sup>. Moreover, a legal obligation to use safety restraints in passenger cars both on front and rear seats has existed for both adults and children since 1993. Yet usage rates still vary greatly across Europe.

According to ETSC's latest available data for 2004<sup>(5)</sup>, seat belt wearing rates in the EU-25 lie between 59% (Hungary) and 97% (France) for front seat occupants and between 21% (Estonia) and 90% (Germany) for rear seat passengers. Combining the two categories, Germany has the highest wearing rates (94% driver, 90% rear seat adults) followed by the U.K. (93% driver, 83% rear seat)<sup>(6)</sup>.

The new Directive will extend the obligatory use of seat belts to occupants of all motor vehicles, including trucks and coaches. Member States will have to bring the law into force by 9 May. The new Directive also mandates the use of appropriate (UN-ECE standard) child restraint systems for all children travelling in passenger cars and light vans. Some Member States such as Finland are preparing ahead. "In Finland the authorities decided to inform the public even before the implementation date of the Directive, launching an Easter campaign especially focusing on the new measures of the Directive", said Inkeri Salo, Road Safety Researcher at the Finnish Motor Insurers' Centre.

Seat belt wearing rates can be improved through a mixture of measures including intensive, highly visible and well publicised police enforcement, as well as awareness raising campaigns. "A big effort must be made in the countries where seat belt wearing rates are low, as evidence has shown that when Member States take the issue seriously, high rates of seat belt wearing can be reached and therefore more lives can be saved." ETSC's Executive Director, Jörg Beckmann said.

Notes to the Editors:

<sup>(1)</sup> Figure 1 Seat belt wearing in the EU

<sup>(2)</sup> The European Transport Safety Council (ETSC) is a Brussels-based non-profit making organisation dedicated to the reduction of transport crashes and casualties in Europe. ETSC seeks to identify and promote effective measures on the basis of international scientific research and best practice. It brings together 30 international and national organisations concerned with transport safety from across Europe.

<sup>(3)</sup> 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.

<sup>(4)</sup> ICF Consulting 2003 Cost-Benefit Analysis of Road Safety Improvements. Final Report London, U.K.

<sup>(5)</sup> ETSC Fact Sheet " Promoting Seat Belt Use" , 2006 and ETSC Fact Sheet " Promoting Child Safety" , 2006.

<sup>(6)</sup> Countries that do not yet introduce regular seat belt wearing surveys include Latvia, Lithuania, Cyprus, Slovakia and Italy.

Figure 1: Seat belt wearing in the EU. Data are for 2004 unless otherwise specified.

Country	Wearing rate, front seats (%)	Wearing rate, rear seats (%)
Austria	77	56 (adults)
Belgium	66	n/a
Cyprus	n/a	n/a
Czech Republic	75 (driver)	n/a
Denmark	84	63
Estonia	75	21
Finland	89	80
France	97	68
Germany	94 (driver)	90 (adults)
Greece	40 (2003)	15 (2003)
Hungary	59	20 (2003)
Ireland	85 (2003)	46 (adults, 2003)
Italy	n/a	n/a
Latvia	n/a	n/a
Lithuania	n/a	n/a
Luxembourg	88 (driver)	72
Malta	95 (driver)	43
Netherlands	86 (2003)	63 (2003)
Poland	71	49
Portugal	88 (driver)	25
Slovakia	n/a	n/a
Slovenia	81	40
Spain	86 (2003)	42 (2003)
Sweden	92 (driver)	79
UK	93 (driver)	83