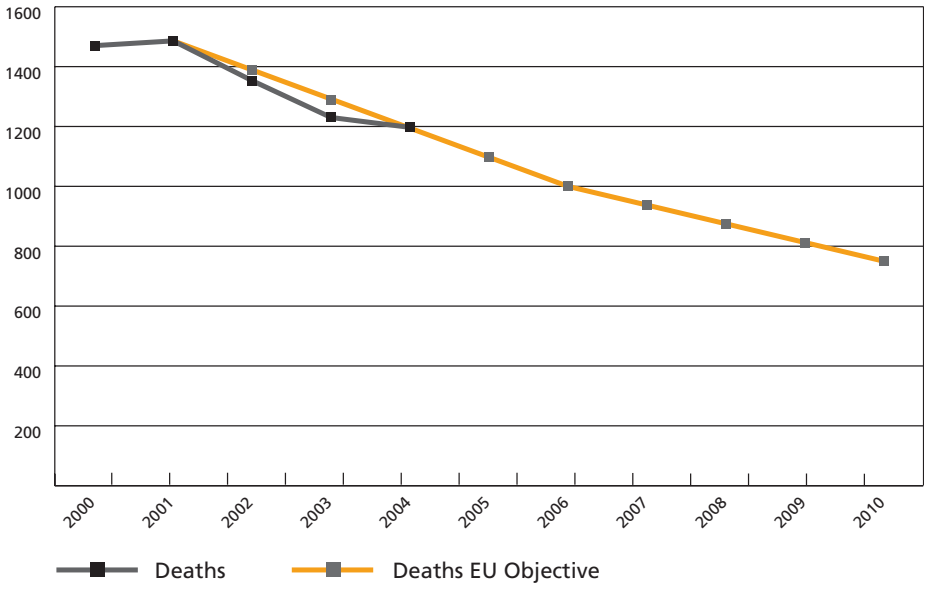
6.2 BELGIUM



**Values for 2003 and 2004 are based on estimates.*

General road safety: In Belgium road safety has gained a higher priority since May 2001 when all relevant stakeholders were brought together in an États-Généraux meeting at the highest level. Consequently, the EU goal of halving road deaths by 2010 was adopted for Belgium and a new strategy elaborated to achieve this target. At the heart of the new strategy there were measures to improve driver behaviour, including an increase in speed and alcohol checks by 10% per year until 2005 and higher penalties. Concrete sub-targets related to speeding, drink driving and seat belt use were also adopted.

To monitor success, a road safety quick indicator ("Barometer") was set up in late 2004. The rates of drink driving and speeding were measured for the first time in 2003 and seat belt use continued to be monitored.

In Belgium, traffic law enforcement is the responsibility of local police forces and the Federal Police, which control the motorway network and some larger regional roads. All police forces set up yearly action plans with target figures for controls in all areas including speeding, drink driving and seat belts. Moreover, local police zones signed for the first time in 2004 a yearly Road Safety Convention with the Ministers of Transport and of the Interior, in which they committed to a set of road safety measures. In turn, they received 41 million € additional funding for their activities from a newly created Traffic Penalty Funds. The Belgian Road Safety Institute (IBSR/BIVV) also set up a network of police officers in 2005 to promote a uniform approach in enforcement based on best practice.

The year 2004 was a time of transition in a number of ways. The reform of the police forces was still ongoing, and new follow-up procedures for traffic offences were introduced in March 2004. Moreover, police had other priorities (e.g. the Dutroux trial, the European summits) and experienced financial problems. Yet the level of checks – which was increased heavily in 2003 – was sustained in 2004 and traffic safety could be improved. Preliminary figures show that the number of injury accidents dropped by 3.5%, and fatal accidents by 2.7%. On motorways the number of on-the-spot deaths dropped by 14% from 2003 to 2004.

Speeding: To check speeds there are both mobile controls using radar and video equipment and enforcement through fixed speed cameras. Most of these cameras are located in Flanders where 350 devices operate in about 1,000 places. Speed checks on motorways and national roads were increased by 10% from 2002 to 2003. For 2004, this goal was not reached but the number of controls remained roughly the same. The target set for 2010 is to bring up checks to 40 million vehicles per year, which would amount to 8 controls per vehicle per year.

The number of speeding offences detected increased sharply from 2002 to 2003, but dropped dramatically in 2004. In that year, sanctions were increased heavily while the level of checks was sustained. As a result, speeds decreased significantly for all types of road. A survey carried out in 2003-2004 has shown that 61.6% of drivers still admit to driving at 125 km/h and more on the motorway where the speed limit is at 120 km/h. According to this research, 48.4% of the Belgian drivers think that the chance of speed controls by the police is (very) high (Silverans et al 2005).

Alcohol. The number of breath tests carried out on motorways and national roads was brought up by 25% from 2003 to 2004. Enforcement has also been increased on other types of roads. The number of checks carried out around Christmas has continued to rise over the last years. By 2010 there should be at least 625,000 breath tests yearly.

As a result, drink driving has decreased in Belgium. The number of alcohol offences dropped from 2003 to 2004 despite stepped-up controls. In 2003, 3.3% of all Belgian drivers were under the influence of alcohol. The target is that by 2010, there should be no more than 3% of people driving with an illegal BAC at any moment of the week.

Seat belts: The Federal Police slightly increased the time spent controlling the use of seat belts and child seats in 2004, but it did no longer carry out any targeted actions. In March 2004, higher penalties ranging from 25 to 50 euros were introduced.

The number of offences detected decreased by 11% from 2003 to 2004. At the same time, seat belt use among drivers went up from 52.6% to 66.7%. The government's target is to reach 61% of seat belt wearing (67% in the front and 55% in the back of the car) by 2005, and 81% (87% in the front and 75% in the back) by 2010.

Follow-up of offences. A new Traffic Law came into force in March 2004 including higher sanctions for traffic offences. Minimum fines for speeding are now at 138 euros, for drink driving at 137,50 euros. Despite the increase in sanctions, the total of fines issued was only 10% more than in 2003 as offences have dropped. The number of severe offences alone (for which fines of 550 € and over have to be paid) decreased by one third from 2003 to 2004.

In Belgium, offences are dealt with by a number of different authorities. Moreover, public prosecutors in the various police districts enjoy a high level of autonomy, which leads to differences in the follow-up of offences. For example, while prosecutors have been advised to handle the same tolerance levels for speeding offences, approaches still differ and the same offence will result in penalties differing from district to district. It is expected however that all "technical" margins will be abolished when the revised Traffic Law comes into force in 2006.

There is no effective system in place to discourage repeat offenders. In fact, repeat offenders will not even be recognised as long as they have not been caught and fined in the same district.

Information: Half of all mobile speed controls by the Federal Police are announced on the Internet. Locations of fixed speed cameras are also publicly available. The Belgian Road Safety Institute is responsible for awareness campaigns regarding speed, seat belts and alcohol. It passes its campaign calendar on to the police so enforcement can be planned simultaneously.

Figures related to enforcement and detected offences are still difficult to obtain in Belgium even though their publication was part of the new road safety strategy.

Recommendations:

- Enhance high levels of police enforcement in combination with communication.
- Ensure that all police forces including the Federal Police can continuously fulfil its' task of traffic policing.
- Use digital cameras to facilitate the automated follow-up of speeding offences.
- Centralise follow-up procedures and establish a system to identify and discourage repeat offenders.