ETSC Fact Sheet

March 08

Drink Driving in the EU and Road Traffic Law Enforcement

Drink Driving in the EU

Driving whilst under the influence of alcohol contributes annually to at least 10,000 deaths on EU roads. Police enforcement with increased drink driving checks is an effective tool to reduce this number. The European Commission's cost-benefit analysis found that with increased enforcement of drink driving, 3,900 deaths could be prevented in the EU 15 alone (ICF 2003).

In the EU as a whole, around 2-3% of journeys are associated with an illegal Blood Alcohol Limit (BAC), resulting in 30-40% of driver deaths (ESCAPE 2003, ETSC 2003). A minor reduction of driving under the influence of alcohol would have a large effect on collision occurrence.

The impact of Police enforcement

One of the key measures to combating drink driving is the implementation of Police enforcement measures. Increasing drivers' perception of the risk of being detected for excess alcohol is a very important element in any package of measures to reduce alcohol related crashes. Enforcement procedures differ throughout the Union as does the chance of being breathalysed.

How Police enforce drink driving

Police powers, procedures, and the type of evidentiary equipment used, all play a large part in determining the extent to which this objective can be reached. Detecting offenders and deterring potential offenders are the two main objectives of Police action in relation to excess alcohol. Research and experience suggest that these objectives are most effectively met by a combination of highly visible systematic or random breath testing (to deter) and targeted testing elsewhere on the road network (to detect).

a) Random breath testing

This means power to stop and breath test randomly at highly visible roadside checkpoints sometimes accompanied by publicity. Random breath testing can also mean the power to stop and breath test drivers at random on the road network with little use of highly visible roadside checkpoints.

b) Breath testing after reasonable cause for suspicion

This includes both power to stop and breath test if there is reasonable cause for suspicion that alcohol has been consumed, and power to stop drivers at random followed by breath testing if there is reasonable cause for suspicion that alcohol has been consumed. This method is mainly focused on detection with little potential for deterrence, since it is difficult to publicise the reason for the stop in advance.

Action at an EU level

The European Commission adopted a Recommendation in October 2004 on how Member States should improve their traffic law enforcement policies. The EC Recommendation states that Member States should:

- introduce random breath testing to complement enforcement based on suspicion.
- always ensure the application of random breath testing with an alcohol screening device.
- ensure that random breath testing is carried out regularly in places where and at times when non-compliance occurs regularly and where this brings about an increased risk of accidents.
- carry out random breath testing checks using evidential breath test devices whenever they suspect drink-driving.

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In November 2006 the European Commission published its public consultation "Respecting the Rules: Better Road Safety Enforcement in the EU" on the enforcement of road traffic law in November 2006. In its Recommendation published in 2004, the Commission clearly states that if enforcement policies have not improved sufficiently across the Member States, it reserves the right to propose more binding legislation, such as a Directive. This is expected in 2008.

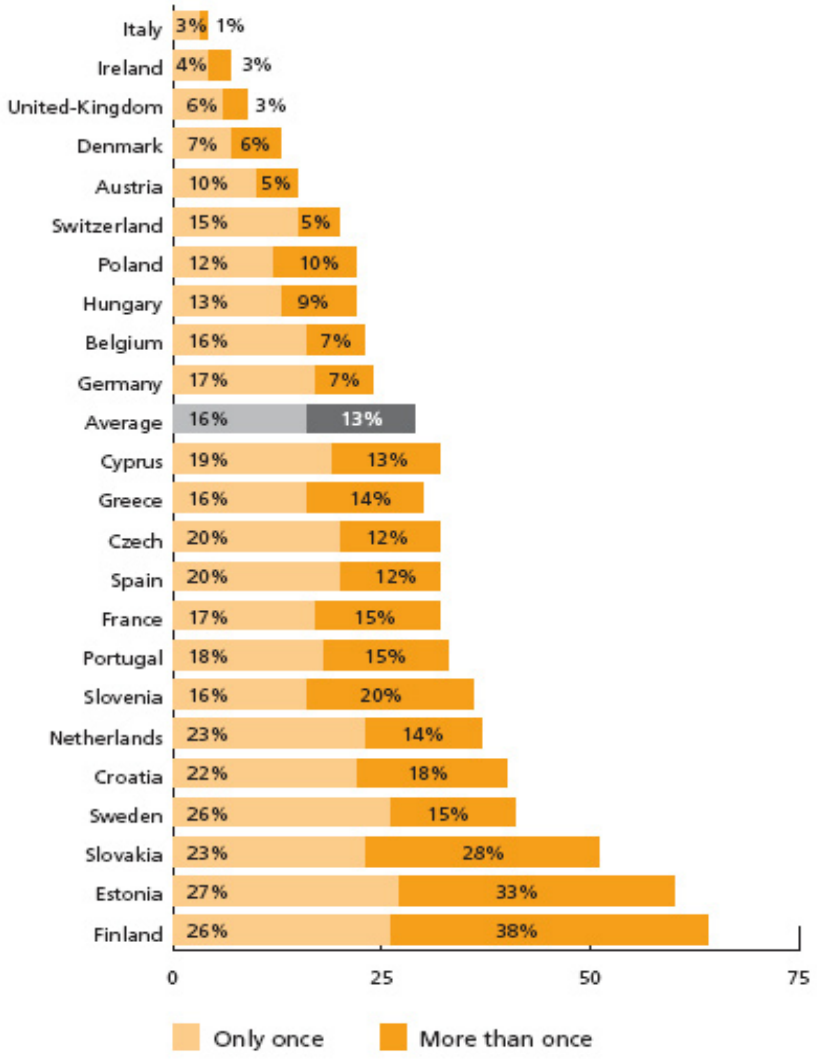
On 26th October 2006, the European Commission published a Strategy on Alcohol-related Harm Reduction. The Strategy proposes the dissemination of good practice already implemented in some Member States such as unrestricted (random) breath testing for all drivers.

The role of the European Traffic Police network (TISPOL) with their bi-annual campaigns on drink driving has also been key to raising the profile and increasing cross border co-operation of traffic law enforcement across the EU.

Levels of Police enforcement

According to the most recent SARTRE 3 study, enforcement activity is fairly low across Europe. In this survey, only 26% of drivers said that they had been tested for alcohol over the last three years, whereas 71% of drivers said they had not been tested during the same period.

Figure 1 Proportion of drivers who have been checked for alcohol over the last three years. Source: SARTRE 2004



ETSC's studies found high levels of drink driving checks in Finland, Sweden, and France (ETSC 2006, 2007). In these countries, the Police have been empowered to check drivers at random (i.e. without the driver giving any cause for suspicion through his/her behaviour). These random breath tests may focus on times and places where drinking drivers are likely to be found (targeted testing). Forerunners such as Sweden and the Netherlands also continue to insist on an alcohol test every time a driver is stopped for whatever reason.

Mobile precision breathalysers are also increasingly common which allow evidential breath testing at the roadside. By using these devices, Police must no longer take drivers who have failed the screening test back to the Police station and can thus save valuable time. This practice is common in France.

Best results are achieved in countries that run random alcohol screening tests in conjunction with evidential breath testing. In Sweden and the Netherlands this has helped to reduce road traffic casualties significantly. CH

Support for drink driving

Opinion surveys showed wide public support for intensified breath tests by the Police. Eight in ten EU citizens believe that random Police alcohol checks on EU roads would reduce peoples' alcohol consumption before driving. (Eurobarometer 2007) Another example from a poll carried out in Ireland shows that 79% of the public said they wanted to see more road side breath testing of drink drivers (Lansdowne Market Research May 2006).

Examples of Drink Driving Enforcement and its impact from across the EU

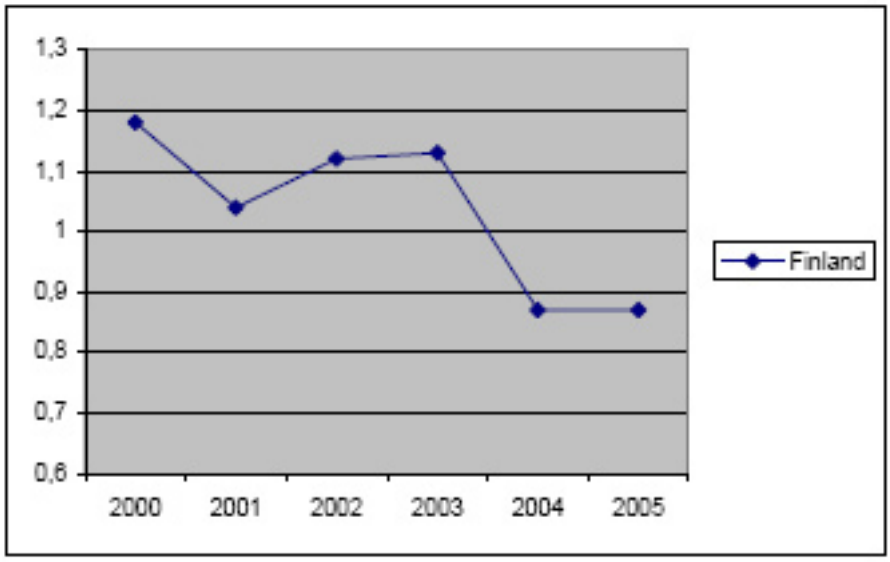
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In the **Czech Republic,** screening tests increased from 410,500 tests in 2002 to over 420,000 in 2005. The Czech "Domluven□" campaign is a variation of the Belgian BOB campaign.

In the **Netherlands**, the number of screening tests nearly doubled between 2000 and 2005. This increase was coupled with the BOB campaign. Drink driving sanctions were also increased to new levels that range between EUR 220 for BAC levels up to 0.8 g/l and to EUR 480 for levels up to 1.3 g/l. There has been a marked drop in the number of drivers over the limit during weekend nights from 4.2% in 1999 to 2.8% in 2005

Data on the prevalence of drink driving are available only for very few countries. The example of Finland shows that this country has indeed brought back drink driving below the estimated EU average of 2-3%. This is even more remarkable as alcohol consumption in Finland constantly increased in the past decades (Figure

Figure 2: Drink driving as proportion in the traffic



Another anti-drink driving campaign variation can also be found in Slovenia where it lasts for two months from November to December. This is launched to coincide with the St. Martin's Celebrations which traditionally are centred on wine. The 2005 campaign was entitled: "Waiter, Taxi please" and also included media and Police co-operation. Local Police officers also spent time going door to door to local pubs to raise the level of understanding of the dangers of drinking and driving with their owners as well as attempting to encourage them to tackle this by for example stopping to serve drunk customers or hiring a mini bus to take them home. Local public transport providers were also encouraged to provide a night service to get revelers home safely. The campaign of enforcement was also launched the day before.

In **France**, the number of preventative breath tests increased over the last years to reach just over 9 million in 2005. France also conducted the Belgian-modelled BOB ("Capitaine de soirée") campaign.

In **Poland**, the number of detected alcohol offences continued to increase over the last years. In 2001, sanctions for drink driving offences were increased dramatically. More recently, shortened court procedures were introduced to enable quick penalisation of offenders.

ETSC (2007) Traffic Law Enforcement across the EU

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