NEWS RELEASE

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Wider seat belt use could save up to 1 in 5 drivers' lives

The fourth ranking published today under the Road Safety Performance Index (PIN)[1] of the European Transport Safety Council (ETSC)[2], shows that seat belt wearing in the front seats of cars varies greatly among European countries: from under 70% to over 95%.

The ranking shows that France, Germany and Malta reach rates of over 95% seat belt use among front seat occupants. Also Sweden, Norway, the U.K. and the Netherlands show good levels of 90% and higher. In Hungary, Italy and Belgium, on the other hand, rates are only around 70%, while no rates at all are available from Greece, Lithuania and Slovakia leaving room to assume even lower usage[3].

ETSC has estimated for each country the number of drivers who survive in road crashes thanks to using seat belts. In Germany, for example, about 2,000 drivers die in car crashes each year, and this figure would be nearly twice as high had seat belt use not been such a common habit in this country. Across Europe, more than 11,500 drivers' lives are saved every year through the use of this simple but effective device.

ETSC has also calculated for each country the potential of increasing seat belt use to the highest possible level. The figures show that in countries with low seat belt wearing, more than 20% of all driver deaths could be prevented. Across Europe, at least another 2,400 drivers' lives could be saved every year, if all countries recognised the importance of this issue and acted accordingly.

European legislation mandates the use of seat belts in all vehicles and in all seats where belts are available[4]. This is the basis for countries' efforts to raise awareness and conduct checks. While police checks should be carried out throughout the year, intensive campaigns are also needed to foster people's habit of buckling up. This week, police from across Europe join forces to run a cross-border seat belt campaign under the umbrella of TISPOL, the European Traffic Police Network. "The TISPOL campaigns are a welcome opportunity to tackle forgetful and irresponsible behaviour in many countries at once," said Georg Bartel, German member of the TISPOL Operational Group on seat belts[5].

To appreciate the outcome of such interventions, it is also important to monitor seat belt use. Fred Wegman, Managing Director of the Dutch Road Safety Institute, said: "Not all countries in Europe carry out regular seat belt observations. But this is not an end in itself. These data provide an important feedback to policymakers as to the effectiveness of their actions. They also help researchers understand the reasons why progress has been made."

The Road Safety Performance Index (PIN) monitors countries' performance in all areas of road safety. The next ranking will highlight achievements in the area of drink driving.

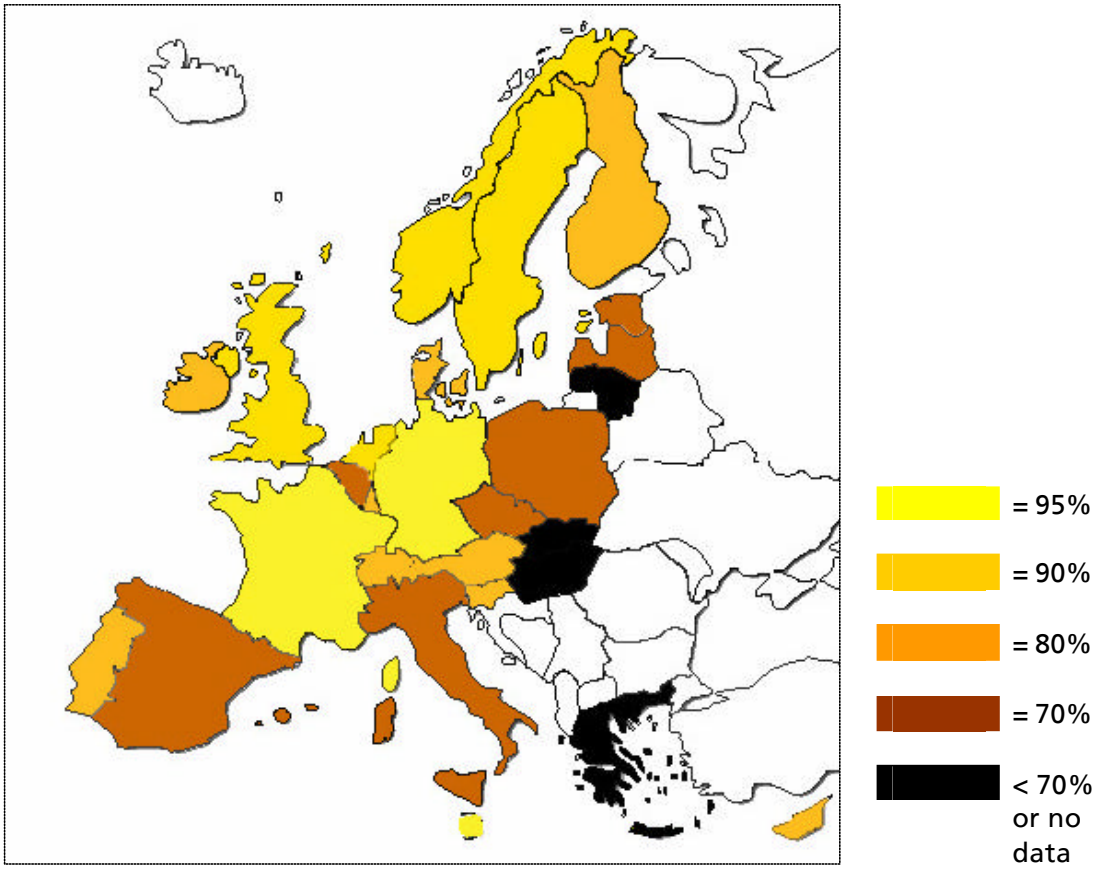
The report and detailed figures for each country are available under www.etsc.be/PIN. For further inquiries, please contact Franziska Achterberg, PIN Programme Director, at +32 2 230 4106 or information@etsc.be.

Notes.

(1) The Road Safety Performance Index (PIN) was set up in June 2006 to compare Member States' performance in all areas of road safety. It receives financial support from Swedish Road Administration and Toyota Motor Europe. See www.etsc.be/PIN.

(2) 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 37 international and national organisations concerned with transport safety from across Europe.

(3) Use of seat belts in front seats of cars and vans in 2005. Source: SafetyNet and national data



(4) Directive 2003/20/EC extends to obligation to wear seat belts to all types of vehicles, including trucks and coaches.

(5) The TISPOL campaign "Operation Seatbelt" is running from 19-25 February 2007, see www.tispol.org.