



# BRSI

## **Do we drink too much while driving?**

National behavioural survey “Driving under the influence of alcohol” 2012

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## Summary

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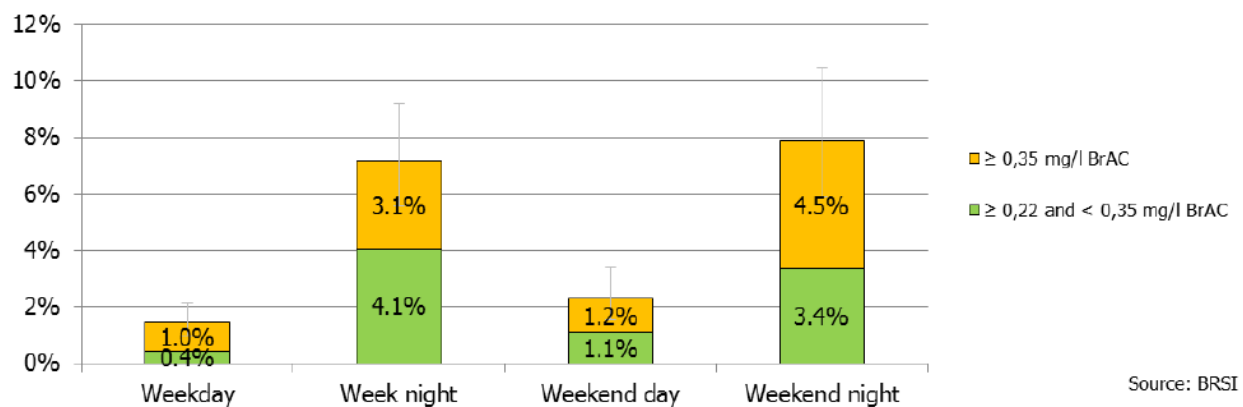
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## Summary

### Noteworthy information

- The 'driving under the influence of alcohol' behavioural study 2012 constitutes the **fifth edition** of this survey since 2003. As in previous editions, it was performed with the cooperation of local and federal police.
- The locations and times selected by the BRSI (IBSR/BIVV) for carrying out checks, and the random way in which drivers were checked, guarantee that the **results are representative** of all motorists and van drivers in Belgium.
- The 2012 survey does not reveal **any significant improvement** compared with previous editions. The overall rate for driving under the influence (DUI) comes to 2.4% and the number of people with a blood alcohol level in excess of 0.35 mg/l BAC) represents 59% of the total number of drivers under the influence of alcohol.
- **A reduction is nonetheless observed in the rate representing those driving under the influence at night during the weekend** (from 12.7% in 2009 to 7.8% in 2012).
- Nights at the weekend continue to represent the period when the percentage of persons **driving under the influence is the highest**.



- As in previous measurement surveys, **in 2012 motorists aged between 40 and 54 represent a higher DUI rate** (2.8%) than those younger than 25 years of age (1.6%) and those aged over 55 (2.1%). Drivers aged between 25 and 39 also represent a DUI percentage (2.4%) that is significantly higher than that of people younger than 25.
- The **DUI percentage related to van drivers is higher than that for motorists**. (3.7% compared with 2.4%). Van drivers are generally middle-aged men and represent a section of the population that includes more people who drive after having consumed alcohol.
- **On the whole, the Belgian results related to driving under the influence are poor compared to those from other countries.**
- **Therefore the fight against driving under the influence of alcohol must remain a priority** for everyone in Belgium. We recommend new efforts in relation to education, increasing awareness and a clampdown that encompasses the entire process (starting with the habits of alcohol consumption) leading people to get behind the wheel after having consumed alcohol.

### Background

Driving under the influence of alcohol constitutes a major risk to road safety. Although it only involves a small percentage of journeys made by car, it is nevertheless a factor that is involved in around one accident out of four in the European Union (SafetyNet, 2009). It is therefore logical that the Federal Commission on Road Safety (CFSR/FCVV) devotes particular attention to driving under the influence.

In order to be able to monitor the evolution of DUI among Belgian drivers, the FCRS has recommended the establishment of a national study of this behaviour. The BRSI was responsible for organising the first measurement survey in 2003. Since then new editions were carried out in 2005, 2007, 2009 and 2012.

## Methodology

This behavioural study was performed in October and November 2012 thanks to the cooperation of the integrated police services. 139 police districts and 7 traffic police units participated in a total of 478 checks. The locations where the checks were performed were randomly selected by the BRSI in order to obtain a sample that was as representative as possible of all Belgian roads. The BRSI then assigned time slots to each checkpoint (day of the week, night of the week, at weekends during the day or at weekends during the night). The police districts had the option of scheduling the exact time and date of the check depending on their own constraints, on the condition that the schedule respected the requested time slots.

The checks were carried out in a non-selective manner, which means that the police stopped drivers to subject them to a breathalyser test without basing their selection on any external characteristic (sex, age, car model, music being played in the car, etc.). Unlike previous editions of the measurement survey, the police were instructed to stop van drivers as well as motorists. When pulled over, the drivers first performed the breathalyser test and were then asked to answer a series of questions about themselves, their passengers and their journey. If the breathalyser test revealed that the driver had consumed too much alcohol ('A' or 'P' results), the driver was subjected to a further breath analysis, the results of which were also recorded on the individual form.

The analyses were carried out by the BRSI to ensure comparability with the measurement surveys conducted in previous years.

## Results

Compared with previous editions of the behavioural study, the 2012 survey does not reveal any significant improvement in Belgian drivers' behaviour as far as driving under the influence of alcohol is concerned. The overall rate for driving under the influence is 2.4%, which does not differ statistically from the rate observed in 2009. As in 2009, the number of people with a blood alcohol level in excess of 0.35 mg/l BAC (positive in police terms) is higher (1.4%) than the number with a blood alcohol level between 0.22 and 0.35 mg/l BAC (1.0% of drivers for whom one should be on the "alert"). Similarly the average BAC rate for persons in violation amounted to 0.41 mg/l BAC (equivalent to 0.94 g/l blood).

Nevertheless, we see a decrease in the DUI rate for drivers at night during weekends (from 12.7% in 2009 to 7.8% in 2012). Even so the Relative Risk of Driving Under the Influence (RRDUI) is still the highest during this period. Moreover, even with a DUI level of 1.46% (unchanged compared with 2009) weekdays nevertheless account for 37% of journeys under the influence because of the large volume of traffic at that time of the week.

As observed in all previous editions of the measurement survey, men confirm their behaviour as being far worse than women in terms of the DUI. In 2012, 3.0% of men drove after having consumed too much alcohol compared with 1.3% of women.

What has been learnt concerning the effect of the driver's age on the level of DUI was also confirmed. In 2012, motorists aged between 40 and 54 still represent a higher DUI rate (2.8%) than drivers younger than 25 (1.6%) and those aged over 55 (2.1%). Drivers aged between 25 and 39 also represent a significantly higher DUI percentage (2.4%) than the youngest drivers. However, drivers under the age of 40 demonstrate the worst behaviour at night during the weekend. The origin of drivers' journeys obviously has a major impact on the risk of DUI; the two sources presenting the highest RRDUI are unsurprisingly 'pubs and restaurants' (15.1%) and 'discos and other social evening venues' (6.8%).

The DUI percentage observed in Flanders in 2012 (1.9%) is lower than that in Wallonia (3.1%) and in Brussels (2.5%). There is also a significant difference in the percentage of drivers with very high blood alcohol levels ( $\geq 0.35$  mg/l BAC) between Flanders and the two other Regions. The effect of the anticipated duration of the journey on the RRDUI is confirmed between 2009 and 2012. The longer the driver expects the journey to take, the less likely he or she is to consume alcohol before getting behind the wheel. On the other hand, we no longer identified the effect that transporting passengers had on driving under the influence in 2012.

The percentage of van drivers driving under the influence was shown to be higher than that for motorists (3.7% compared with 2.4%), but the difference is not statistically significant. Van drivers are generally middle-aged men and represent a section of the population representing a higher RRDU. Apart from age and gender, the level of DUI among van drivers and motorists is influenced by the same additional factors: the time of the week, origin and length of the journey.

### **Recommendations**

On the whole, Belgian results are poor compared with other international studies concerning driving under the influence, which demonstrates that considerable efforts and progress still have to be made. Therefore we recommend the following actions in relation to the fight against driving under the influence of alcohol:

1. In light of the still large-scale phenomenon of driving under the influence, give a new impetus to road safety policies concerning driving under the influence of alcohol.
2. Maintain efforts related to education and increasing awareness among all drivers, since DUI is a problem that affects all categories of drivers.
3. Empower police districts to make it possible for more checks to be organised, so that one driver out of three is tested for alcohol every year and performs the checks at any time during the week in order to reach as many drivers as possible.
4. Significantly increase the number of convictions using an alcohol interlock device for repeated offenders.
5. Systematise the breathalyser test for persons involved in accidents so that the problem of driving under the influence can be effectively quantified. This measure will also allow a more effective assessment of the link between the rates related to driving under the influence of alcohol, the driver's profile and the risk of an accident.
6. Perform regular assessments of the DUI percentage of Belgian drivers using the behavioural study.



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