ROAD SAFETY
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BRSI

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF ROAD TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS RESULTING IN DEATH OR INJURY RECORDED IN 2012 - SUMMARY

The full report is available in French and Dutch on our website (www.ibsr.be or www.bivv.be)

Focant, N. (2013) Analyse statistique des accidents de la route avec tués ou blessés enregistrés en 2012. Bruxelles, Belgique : Institut Belge pour la Sécurité Routière – Centre de connaissance Sécurité Routière.

Focant, N. (2013) Statistische analyse van de in 2012 geregistreerde verkeersongevallen met doden of gewonden. Brussel, België: Belgisch Instituut voor de Verkeersveiligheid – Kenniscentrum voor de Verkeersveiligheid.

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1.1 Scope

This statistical report presents the characteristics of road traffic accidents and victims recorded by police forces in Belgium in 2012. This report only includes accidents in which at least one person was injured or killed. The figures published in this report have been taken from a database compiled by the police services. The data were collected using accident analysis forms completed by the police following an accident that resulted in physical injury.

As is the case for any database relating to accidents, the database used in this report does not include all accidents resulting in physical injury that actually occurred. In fact, accidents resulting in physical injury and their victims are under-reported. The main reason for this under-reporting is the failure to systematically report accidents to the police, even though this is obligatory if the damage caused by an accident is not restricted to material damage. It is estimated that between 5 and 10% of deaths and two-thirds of injured parties are not included in the database. Under-reporting is more common in certain situations, such as when an accident involves a cyclist or if no other party is involved.

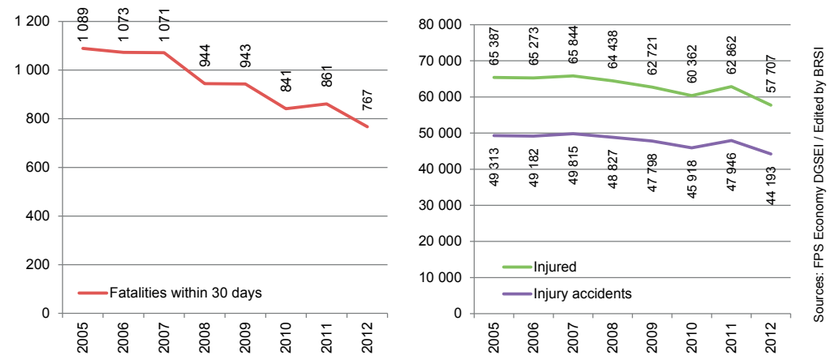
1.2 Key results for 2012

There were 44,193 accidents resulting in physical injury, 57,707 injured parties and 767 deaths within 30 days recorded in 2012. This represents the lowest number of accidents and victims ever recorded in Belgium since comparable statistics first became available in 1973.

The change compared with 2011 is quite exceptional: the number of accidents fell by 7.8% and the number of victims by 8.2%, also representing the biggest decrease ever observed. This positive development allows us to pick up the downward trend once again after more than five years of relative stability.

The number of deaths within 30 days fell by 10.9%. This is not a record but the decrease is no less significant: in absolute terms there were almost 100 fewer deaths in 2012 than in 2011. This decrease is, moreover, perfectly consistent with the trend observed in neighbouring countries.

FIGURE 1
Short-term trend relating to the number of deaths within 30 days, injured parties and accidents resulting in physical injury (weighted)



Nevertheless, despite these encouraging results there is no guarantee that the goal of a maximum of 420 fatalities in 2020 will be achieved. In fact, projections estimate the number of fatalities within 30 days at 510 in 2020 if the current trend in efforts is maintained (for example, if the current trend involves an increased number of checks for driving under the influence of alcohol, then simply maintaining the existing number of checks will not suffice and it will be necessary to continue the upward trend in the number of checks).

1.3 Regional results

At the regional level, both Flanders and Wallonia share in the positive results observed at national level. In both regions, the decrease in the number of deaths within 30 days exceeds 11% and the number of injured parties and accidents resulting in physical injury fell by between 8 and 9%. Whereas these two regions are clearly on track to reach their 2020 goal in terms of fatalities, they must also maintain their current efforts.

The Brussels-Capital Region faces more mixed results, however, with an increase in the number of deaths and a stable number of accidents and injured parties. This does not necessarily jeopardise the achievement of its 2020 objective as the number of fatalities in Brussels varies greatly (due to the small numbers), both in positive and negative terms, from one year to another.

TABLE 1

Key figures for accidents in 2012 in Belgium and its regions, and the evolution compared with 2011 (weighted)

		Belgium	Flemish Region	Walloon Region	Brussels-Capital Region
2012	Deaths within 30 days	767	381	349	37
	Injured	57,707	36,372	16,610	4,725
	Accidents resulting in physical injury	44,193	28,051	12,260	3,882
2011	Deaths within 30 days	861	432	404	25
	Injured	62,862	40,125	17,980	4,758
	Accidents resulting in physical injury	47,946	30,573	13,448	3,925
Evolution	Deaths within 30 days	-94	-51	-55	+12
		-10.9%	**-11.8%**	**-13.6%**	**+48.0%**
	Injured	-5,155	-3,753	-1,369	-33
		-8.2%	**-9.4%**	**-7.6%**	**-0.7%**
	Accidents resulting in physical injury	-3,753	-2,522	-1,188	-43
		-7.8%	**-8.2%**	**-8.0%**	**-1.1%**

Source: FPS Economy DG SEI / Graphics: BRSI

As in previous years, in 2012 the severity of accidents (number of deaths per 1,000 accidents) was twice as high in the Walloon Region as in the Flemish Region (the severity in the Brussels-Capital Region was even lower): Wallonia counted 28.5 deaths per 1,000 accidents, compared with 13.6 in Flanders. This disparity can probably be explained by differences in mobility, behaviour, infrastructure and law enforcement.

1.4 Seven prominent issues

There are a number of prominent issues that stand out in the road traffic accident statistics for 2012. Although the majority of them are not new, others emerge for the first time and they all demand specific attention from the various actors involved in road safety.

1.4.1 Increasing numbers of senior citizens

Between 2005 and 2012, the number of road traffic victims aged over 75 increased by 12% while the number of victims fell for almost all the other age groups. Even taking the aging population into account, it appears that the elderly represent the only group not to have registered a decrease in the number of road traffic victims. With regard to cyclists one even observes an increase in the number of elderly victims (per 100,000 inhabitants). This may be the result of an increase in the number of journeys made by elderly people, particularly by bicycle.

1.4.2 No downward trend for pedestrians, cyclists and buses/coaches

Unlike other types of users, indicators relating to accidents involving pedestrians, cyclists or buses/coaches do not (or hardly) display a decrease compared to 2011: the number of accidents and victims only decreased by roughly 3% compared with decreases greater than 8% for other users. The contrast is even more striking compared with 2005. For pedestrians and buses/coaches, the number of accidents and victims decreased by less than 4% compared with 10% for other users. With regard to cyclists, the latter are the only users for which an increase is observed compared with 2005: +6.7% accidents resulting in physical injury and +6.2% in the number of victims. Fortunately, the number of cyclists killed in road traffic accidents continues to decrease (-4.2%). An increase in the number of journeys made using these three modes of transport could explain why they do not show the same downward trend as the other transport modes.

1.4.3 Numerous and dangerous accidents involving a single party

The number of accidents involving a single road user (or single-party accidents) was still extremely high in 2012: they represent a quarter of all accidents resulting in physical injury and a third of all fatal accidents. They (still) constitute more severe accidents than other types of accidents: they account for 28 deaths per 1,000 accidents compared with only 13 for accidents involving (at least) two road users.

It is not surprising that many of these accidents occur at night (more than one accident in two) and on motorways (44% of accidents). The likelihood of encountering someone is in fact lower at night. Moreover higher speeds increase the chance of a driver losing control over his/her vehicle. The number of accidents involving a single party is particularly high for motorcyclists, cars, and male and young drivers.

1.4.4 “Dangerous” nights

In 2012, the number of fatalities that occurred during the night at weekends decreased significantly (44 fewer fatalities, or -28%), to such a degree that this period now accounts for less deaths per 100 hours than weekdays and days at the weekend. The severity of accidents occurring during this period has also fallen dramatically, which means that weeknights now take first place as the period with the most serious accidents.

However, there is still a significant difference in severity between weekday nights and weekend nights on the one hand (approximately 30 deaths for every 1,000 accidents), and weekdays and weekend days on the other (fewer than 20 deaths per 1,000 accidents). Moreover, in terms of kilometres driven the risk of fatality still remains highest during the night (when 9% of kilometres are driven but 25% of fatalities are recorded), and particularly during weekend nights. Elements such as less light, higher speeds, more frequent alcohol consumption and increased tiredness during this period offer some explanation for this situation.

1.4.5 Increased risk of accidents due to alcohol

The percentage of drivers involved in a road traffic accident resulting in physical injury who were driving under the influence of alcohol remains unchanged compared with last year's report: one driver in ten involved in an accident exceeded the legal alcohol limit of 0.5 g/l. Almost 90% of these drivers under the influence even had a blood alcohol concentration greater than 0.8 g/l. In total, almost one in 16 deaths caused by traffic accidents involved a driver under the influence of alcohol.

The record for driving under the influence of alcohol with regard to accidents is held by car drivers, with 12% exceeding BAC legal limits. The percentage of motorists under the influence not involved in an accident is just 2.4%, which proves the increased risk of an accident due to excessive alcohol consumption. The percentage of motorists under the influence is highest during the weekend, especially during weekend nights when almost one driver out of two involved in an accident has been drinking. Alcohol leads to a particularly high increased risk of an accident among young drivers: the percentage of drivers under the influence involved in accidents is in fact higher among this group as among experienced drivers although the younger driver do not drink and drive more often.

1.4.6 Over-representation of young people

If one views the number of road traffic victims in relation to the size of the population, it appears that the road is particularly "deadly" for adolescents and young adults. For example, those aged between 16 and 24 represent 11% of the Belgian population but account for 24% of injuries and 19% of fatalities caused by road traffic accidents. Road accidents are the main cause of death for those aged between 15 and 24. Police figures demonstrate, however, that the over-representation in terms of population is observed beyond the age of 24 years, in fact until the early thirties. Fortunately, for these young age groups the situation improved the most between 2005 and 2012 (their significant over-representation actually allows them considerable potential for improvement).

The over-involvement of young people in accidents emerges in an equally striking manner if one takes account of the proportion of traffic they represent. Whatever time of the week, young motorists are in fact far too numerously involved in fatal accidents compared to their proportion of all drivers in traffic. This over-representation of young people in fatal road traffic accidents is very pronounced at night and particularly at weekend nights: while they represent 21% of motorists on the road at this time, young people (aged 18-25 years) account for 35% of motorists involved in a fatal accident. The reasons why young people are over-represented in accidents are manifold and complex. Let us cite among other things their lack of driving experience and the motives for their journeys (more frequently involving a social aspect than for adults).

1.4.7 Over-representation of men

Just like young people, men are also over-represented among road traffic victims when one takes into account their proportion of the Belgian population: they represent 49% of the population, but account for 57% of victims and 77% of fatalities. Similarly, there are far too many male motorists involved in fatal road traffic accidents than the proportion of motorists they represent would lead us to expect. Their over-representation is highest at night-time during weekends: men account for 65% of motorists but for 85% of motorists involved in a fatal accident.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