

The ESRA-project: Toward a joint European monitoring system on road users' safety attitudes

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The formulation of new road safety policy measures and the assessment of their impact requires thematic, temporal (trends) and spatial comparisons of road user behaviours. However, since the European road safety survey, SARTRE4 (2010) there is a lack of recent comparable and reliable data on road safety attitudes and behaviour within Europe. Therefore, in 2015, the Belgian Road Safety Institute launched the ESRA project (European Survey of Road users' safety Attitudes).

The overall aim of ESRA project is to provide scientific support to European road safety policy by generating comparable national data on the current road safety situation in Europe. More specifically ESRA captured national information on road users' opinions, attitudes and behaviour with respect to road traffic risks and compared these information across the involved 17 European countries. The first ESRA survey was conducted online using representative samples (N=1000) of the national adult populations. A common questionnaire was developed in English and translated into 20 different country-language versions. The subjects covered in the survey are, amongst others: "attitudes towards unsafe traffic behaviour", "self-declared (unsafe) behaviour in traffic", and "support for road safety policy measures". The ESRA questionnaire was inspired by the previous European project, SARTRE, and also includes some questions of the AAAFTS-survey (USA) "Traffic Safety Culture Index", which enables tentative comparisons with these projects. In total, data from more than 17,000 road users (of which 11,000 frequent car drivers) were collected. Hence, the ESRA survey provides comparisons on topics such as distraction and fatigue, speeding, safety feeling and risk perception, driving under the influence or the usage of seatbelt.

The results show that European people are aware of the risks related to distraction. Distraction is seen as the third cause of accident by Europeans after speeding and driving under the influence. Besides, European people have low personal and perceived social acceptability on distracted behaviours (e.g. checking social media, texting email or messages, using an hand held mobile phone) But, acceptability does not reflect self-declared behaviours. About 37% of European respondents declare reading text messages or email while driving or talking on an hand-held mobile phone. This European mean hides large variations between countries. While there only 22% to declare using an hand-held mobile phone while driving in the United Kingdom, this percentage raises to 73 % in Finland. Gender and age variations are also observed, even their range is much smaller than the country one. Finally, with regard to temporal evolution, distraction seems to be increasing as most European drivers (61%) agreed that they are more often confronted to distracted drivers than two years ago.

The ESRA project has shown the feasibility and necessity of a joint initiative for a European road safety survey based on the collaboration of national road safety institutes and universities. Currently the intention is to repeat this initiative on a biannual or triannual basis, retaining a core set of questions in every survey allowing comparisons and the development of time series of road safety performance indicators.