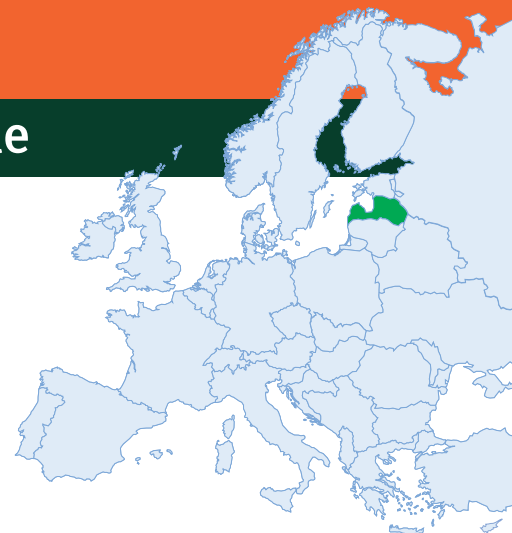


Road Safety Country Profile



COUNTRY FACTS

Area:	64 600 km²
Inhabitants:	2 345 768 (2003)
Road Network:	69 732 km (2000)
Passenger Car Ratio:	264 per 1 000 inhabitants (2002)

The national road safety programme covers the period 2000-2006 and sets a primary target of reducing the number of fatalities by 50 % throughout the period. A wide range of measures have been identified for improving road safety and achieving the primary target. However, the resources available in terms of manpower and financial means are very limited. Although approximately three quarters of the safety programme has been realised, road safety has generally not improved over recent years.

The main problems requiring measures are accidents involving vulnerable road users, drink-driving accidents, speeding accidents, accidents occurring in darkness and twilight, accidents in built-up areas and reducing the consequences of accidents. Furthermore a lack of resources in terms of specialists and financial means is considered an obstacle to major improvements in road safety. The main achievements in recent years comprise a reduction of the number of alcohol-related accidents, an increase in seatbelt use and the introduction of administrative penalties. The latter determined both more severe penalties for violation of road traffic rules as well as precise and detailed classification of violations. The implementation of the penalty point system has been very effective in terms of reducing the number of injuries and fatalities.

Table 1 shows that in the period from 1991 to 2004, the number of accidents and injuries has increased, whereas the number of fatalities has decreased.

Table 1. Annual development in injury accidents, injuries and fatalities in Latvia, 1991-2004. Please note that only the number of fatalities is comparable to similar statistics for the other Member States due to differences in data collection procedures for the number of accidents and injuries.

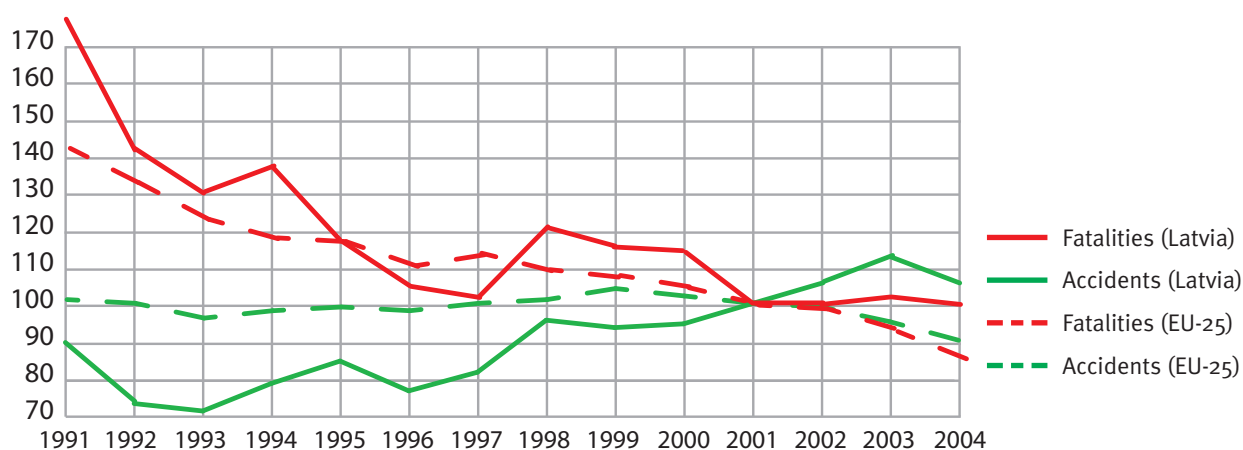
	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Accidents *	4 271	3 474	3 389	3 814	4 056	3 711	3 925	4 540	4 442	4 482	4 766	5 083	5 379	5 081
Injuries	4 543	3 766	3 721	4 380	4 903	4 324	4 674	5 414	5 244	5 449	5 852	6 300	6 639	6 416
Fatalities **	923	729	670	717	611	550	525	627	604	588	517	518	532	516
per million inhabitants	346	274	257	279	242	220	212	255	248	247	219	221	227	220

* Accidents with injuries

** Death within 30 days of accident

Source: CARE project data (see also: http://europa.eu.int/comm/transport/care/index_en.htm)

Figure 1. Annual developments (year 2001 = 100) in fatalities and accidents on national and EU-25 level.



Source: CARE project data (see also: http://europa.eu.int/comm/transport/care/index_en.htm)

Country organisation, responsibilities and resources

The **Ministry of Transport** has the general responsibility for road safety. Other organisations involved are the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, the National Road Safety Council, the police force and local authorities. The role of some of the key organisations is elaborated in the following.

The **Ministry of Transport** – “Latvian State Roads” is responsible for the state roads. As part of the Ministry of Transport, the **Road Traffic Safety Directorate** (CSDD) is responsible for vehicle registration, vehicle technical inspection, driver training and testing, campaigns to change the behaviour of roads users, road audits, maintenance of a road accident database and analyses of accident data.

The **National Road Safety Council** is chaired by the Minister of Transport. The Council includes representatives from other ministries and interest groups and acts as an advisory body on state policy on road safety and on the coordination of road safety activities. The Safety Council manages 2 % of the financial resources from third party insurance.

The **Road Traffic Safety Directorate** is a secretariat of the National Road Safety Council.

The **Ministry of the Interior** including the **State Police** (Road Police) is responsible for enforcement of infringements by road users and for reporting and investigating accidents. The **State Fire Fighting and Rescue Service** is responsible for rescue services on accident scenes.

The **Ministry of Education** is responsible for education on road safety for children at schools and pre-schools.

The **Ministry of Health** including the **Emergency Medical Centre** is responsible for first aid and post-accident care.

The **local authorities** are responsible for county roads and local roads. In general, the resources available for improving road safety are very limited, and the measures applied are generally not coordinated.

The source of financing for improving road safety is the state budget, although concrete measures applied to local roads are financed by the municipal budget. Road safety is not declared a priority of state policy, thus there is no special budget for road safety in Latvia. At present, it is regarded as difficult to increase the level of road safety without additional financing. The resources applied to road safety in terms of manpower and financial budgets for Latvia as a whole are difficult to extract, as they are part of the total effort on maintenance and development of the road network.

A road safety observatory does not exist as a separate organization in Latvia. However the Road Traffic Safety Directorate covers some of the functions that could be expected of a road safety observatory.

Transport policies

Latvian road traffic rules are harmonised with EU directives. Since Latvia gained independence in 1991, traffic rules have been changed on several occasions. In 1996, speed limits in built-up areas were fixed at 50 km/h, the use of seatbelts and crash helmets became compulsory and daytime running lights were to be used from October to April.

Since 1999, daytime running lights have been compulsory at all times. The same goes for the use of child restraint systems and light reflectors for pedestrians. The speed limits in areas marked “residential area” were generally reduced to 30 km/h, and requirements for use of hands-free installations for mobile phones were introduced. Finally, the use of winter tyres became compulsory for vehicles up to 3.5 tonnes in the period from December to March.

The latest general changes were introduced in 2004. These include the introduction of a penalty point system, compulsory registration of mopeds and introduction of a new testing system for obtaining driving licences for mopeds.

Road safety action plans

The first Latvian national road safety programme was accepted by the Government in January 2000. It covers the period 2000-2006 and sets a primary target of reducing the number of killed by 50 % in road traffic accidents from 1999. The strategy applies to the country as a whole, and there are no specific action plans for regional and municipal levels.

The policy is founded on three cornerstones:

- Principles ensuring road traffic safety
- Control of safety conditions of traffic
- Alleviation of the consequences of accidents

A range of activities within these fields of actions are identified in the strategy:

Principles ensuring road traffic safety

- children's road traffic education
- driver training and testing
- publicity – road safety information and campaigns on a variety of road subjects
- maintenance of roads and reconstruction of black spots
- improvement of road safety in hours of darkness
- improvement of the safety of vulnerable road users

Control of safety conditions of traffic

- police enforcement of road user behaviour
- control of road maintenance – road audits
- vehicle testing and inspection

Alleviation of the consequence of accidents

- improvement of rescue services and medical aid
- training of road users in principles of medical first aid
- increasing use of seatbelts, helmets and child restraint systems

The Road Traffic Safety Directorate together with the State Police and “Latvian state roads” are continuously monitoring and evaluating the progress of the improvement of road safety. An annual report presents thorough analyses and summaries of the main trends with identification of the main road safety problems. According to the target of the road safety programme, the number of fatalities should have been no higher than 400 in 2004. The number of fatalities in 2004 was 516. In spite of the efforts made to improve road safety, the number of killed and injured persons is unacceptably high. Among the main reasons for the deviation from the target line are poor behaviour by road users, speeding, alcohol and a disproportionately high number of accidents occurring in the hours of twilight and darkness.

The current general conclusion on the realisation of the national road safety programme is that the applied measures have not essentially improved road safety in Latvia. At this stage, roughly three-quarters of the activities have been realised. It is regarded as very important to start teaching children how to behave in road traffic and to form a positive public attitude towards safe road traffic behaviour. A continued effort on enforcement is very important. There is an urgent need for changes in legislation to support enforcement against driving without a license, gross negligence of road traffic rules and aggressive driving behaviour.

The need for strengthening the organisational framework and the lack of financial resources are regarded as being among the primary obstacles for reaching the target.

Topics

A range of measures are identified in the road safety programme. In this connection, it should be noted that financial resources are limited. Thus the expected time for implementation of these measures is uncertain.

Road users

Since Latvia regained independence in 1991, the nature of traffic has changed dramatically. The number of vehicles has risen substantially and driving behaviour has become more aggressive. The road network has not been developed at the same rate to meet the challenges that have arisen from this development.

Over the past ten years, the number of vehicles has almost doubled and the number of drivers has increased by more than 50 %. This has led to an increase in the volume of traffic and the number of accidents and injuries. On the positive side the number of fatalities has decreased although the figure is still relatively high.

The latest development from 2003 to 2004 shows a negative trend in the number of pedestrians, motorcyclists, teenagers killed and persons involved in accidents in Riga. There has been a positive trend in the number of killed and injured children and cyclists and the number of accidents involving alcohol has also decreased. Nevertheless the main problems are identified as:

- Accidents involving vulnerable road users
- Drink-driving accidents
- Accidents occurring in darkness and twilight
- Accidents in built-up areas
- Reducing consequences of accidents

In general, the primary cause of accidents is road user behaviour. Thus improvement of road safety mainly depends on the human factor. The necessary actions identified are:

- to intensify enforcement of road user behaviour
- to revise the system of administrative penalties
- to change awareness of road users through campaigns and mass media
- to improve the safety of vulnerable road users, especially the safety of pedestrians and cyclists
- improvement of road traffic safety in darkness and twilight
- post-accident assistance
- education and training of roads users
- road network engineering

Approx. 13 % of all accidents, 15 % percent of all injuries and approx. 22% of the number of fatalities are related to alcohol. Measures to reduce accidents involving alcohol comprise:

- disqualification and severe fines
- 8 penalty points which are valid for 5 years
- theoretical and driving test at the end of disqualification
- extra medical testing performed by a commission of doctors
- reduced maximum permitted blood alcohol content for novice drivers – 0.2 mg/ml

At present, the road safety education of children is not compulsory in the national curriculum. Schools do, however, attempt to provide some road safety education, particularly for the younger age groups. Some road safety literature has been produced by the Road Traffic Safety Directorate to assist teachers, but the amount of road safety teaching varies considerably from school to school. It will be necessary to facilitate a systematic approach to children's road safety education in the near future.

The legislation on the training of drivers and professional drivers in Latvia has been harmonised with EU directives, and changes have been introduced. The theory test is computerised and includes 30 questions. Only 2 mistakes are allowed in this part of the test. The drivers' skills and behaviour are tested during one hour of driving supervised by a certified instructor. Special attention is paid to the legislative system of road safety and to the items of road safety concerning the responsibility of drivers for the adherence to road traffic rules. In a thorough review by independent experts of the European Union, the driver training system in Latvia was highly commended.

Vehicles

Latvia is not a car producing country, thus the possibilities for significant influence on development of vehicle safety are naturally limited. Vehicle registration, certification and technical inspection legislation in Latvia is harmonised with EU directives. The first technical inspection stations were introduced in 1995 and completed in 2003. Technical inspection of motor vehicles is compulsory for cars once a year and twice a year for taxis and passenger buses. Furthermore, express diagnostics of the technical condition of vehicles have been performed on the roads since 2004.

In 2002, an estimation system was introduced to assess the conformity of vehicle parts to the requirements of the European Union. It bans the selling of repair parts, elements and components that are not certified.

Road infrastructure improvement

The level of activity in improving the condition of the road network is generally low. Given the limited financial resources, the main effort is to keep the condition of roads at the existing level. Thus no special attention is paid to improving road safety.

Some work is done to improve the situation at black spots. The result of such work has been positive in terms of reducing the number of accidents. Within the same field of action, a continuous reconstruction of dangerous crossings into roundabouts is regarded as a necessary measure. A revision of the location of speed limit signs on state roads is foreseen. Furthermore, it is the intention to perform an increasing number of audits of both new and existing road links. This is regarded as an effective measure for preventing accidents and reducing the consequences of accidents.

Approximately 36 % of all accidents in 2004 involving personal injury occurred in darkness and twilight. These accidents included approx. 36 % of all injured and 55 % of all persons killed. 65 % of all vulnerable road users killed were registered in accidents that occurred in darkness and twilight. For vulnerable road users on the state roads, 76 % of all fatalities were registered in accidents that occurred in darkness and twilight. The number of accidents in darkness and twilight is still increasing. The main problems with safety in darkness and twilight are the low visibility of pedestrians and cyclists, the poor shape of horizontal and vertical road markings and inadequate road lighting in towns and on black spots. The measures comprise:

- campaigns on road safety in darkness; formation of public awareness of the necessity of using reflecting materials
- upgrading of local illumination in built-up areas and potentially dangerous stretches of roads
- improvement of horizontal and vertical road markings on roads and streets

Other topics

At present, the establishment of the operation of rescue phone number 112 throughout Latvia is nearly complete. As a result of essential improvements in communication and exchange of information, the number of accidents in which the rescue service and specialists of the Emergency Medical Centre have lessened the consequences has rapidly increased in the past years. Thus the severity of the consequences of the road traffic accidents has been reduced. Further measures for post-accident assistance comprise:

- new vehicles with specific devices for rescue services will be obtained and the existing fire fighting vehicles will be equipped with new rescue devices
- the first aid system will be improved through the education of all persons who may in some way be involved in providing first aid
- a single mobile communication system for the first aid services must be developed and integrated with the communication system of the united state rescue service

Accident data is collected by the police using a detailed report form. The coded information on the form is computerised by local Road Police authorities and sent to the central Road Police office. Once a month, the Road Police sends accident data electronically to the Road Safety Directorate where the information is checked. The percentage of reported accidents is high, as hospitals must also ensure that road accident casualties are reported to the Road Police. Since 2004, a distinction between serious and slight injuries has been used, improving the possibilities for detailed analyses of statistics and to work out recommendations to reduce the consequences of injuries. The Road Traffic Safety Directorate produces an annual report with thorough analyses and summaries of accident data. This report is sent to a wide range of people involved in improving road safety. The economic losses of accidents are calculated annually. In 2003, total losses were estimated at € 315 million. The cost of a person killed is estimated at € 329 000, a seriously injured person € 8 125 and a slightly injured person € 85.

Approximately 50 % of all serious accidents in 2004 were collisions of vehicles with vulnerable road users (pedestrians, cyclists, moped riders and motorcyclists). These accidents usually have serious or fatal consequences for the vulnerable road users. Approx. 38 % of all killed and 25 % of all injured were pedestrians, 10 % of all killed and 9 % of all injured were riders of motorcycles, mopeds and bicycles. Compared to 1997 the number of killed and injured cyclists in 2004 has increased by 70 %. The measures for improving the safety for vulnerable road users comprise:

- separating vulnerable road users from vehicle flows
- improving safety at pedestrian crossings
- improving road infrastructure and traffic management through the upgrading of local illumination in built-up areas and potentially dangerous stretches of roads, pedestrian bridges, installation of safety barriers on streets and roads with heavy traffic, etc.
- improving traffic management near schools and kindergartens
- decreasing traffic intensity in the central parts of built-up areas through the construction of bypasses

In 2004, a set of changes in the Codex of Administrative Penalties came into force. They determined more severe penalties for violation of road traffic rules, as well as precise and detailed classification of violations. Furthermore, regulation No551, “The regulations for appliance of penalty registration point system”, was accepted by the Cabinet of Ministers and came into force in 2004. The main characteristics of penalty system are a detailed description of offences, fixed penalties for less severe offences, possibility of automated enforcement methods, penalties for aggressive driving and a significant increase of fines. The penalty points system is elaborated in the following.

1 – 8 penalty points are given for a single offence according to the severity of the offence. Penalty points are valid for 2 years (5 years for drink driving). The maximum number of penalty points is 10 penalty points for novice drivers and 16 penalty points for experienced drivers. The measures of improving driver behaviour within the penalty point system are:

- 4 penalty points: written notification suggesting to drive more carefully
- 8 penalty points: letter recommending participation in driving improvement courses (possibility to reduce by 2 points)
- 10 penalty points: 1-year disqualification in the case of novice drivers
- 12 penalty points: mandatory theoretical test (2 points reduced if the test is passed, 2 points added if test is not passed or driver ignores the test)
- 16 penalty points: 1-year disqualification in the case of experienced drivers
- Maximum penalty points twice within 10 years: 5-year disqualification

The penalty point system will be improved continuously to prevent exposed shortcomings in legislation and to introduce penalty points for driving without seatbelts and for speeding.

Introduction of automatic control devices for detecting speeding infringements is foreseen. However, at present there are obstacles for such an introduction, due to the lack of legislation and sources of financing the equipment.

Research on road safety is very limited in Latvia. The Technical University of Riga has a department for road traffic, but only a small part of its activities concerns road safety. Some research on road safety is done in private companies.

There has been no action from Latvia to join the European Road Safety Observatory yet.

Information

Contacts

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