

Education and training of future car drivers in Flanders

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ABSTRACT

Despite a positive evolution over the last decade, car drivers aged 18 to 25 remain over-represented in road accident statistics in Flanders. Therefore, the Flemish road safety policy includes specific objectives to lower the number of fatalities in young, novice car drivers and focuses on improving the driver training. Commissioned by the Flemish minister for Transport and together with other partners in the field, the VSV (the Flemish Foundation For Traffic Knowledge) has elaborated an extensive revision of the driver training in Flanders. This revision has been adopted by the Flemish government in 2016 and is currently in the course of implementation.

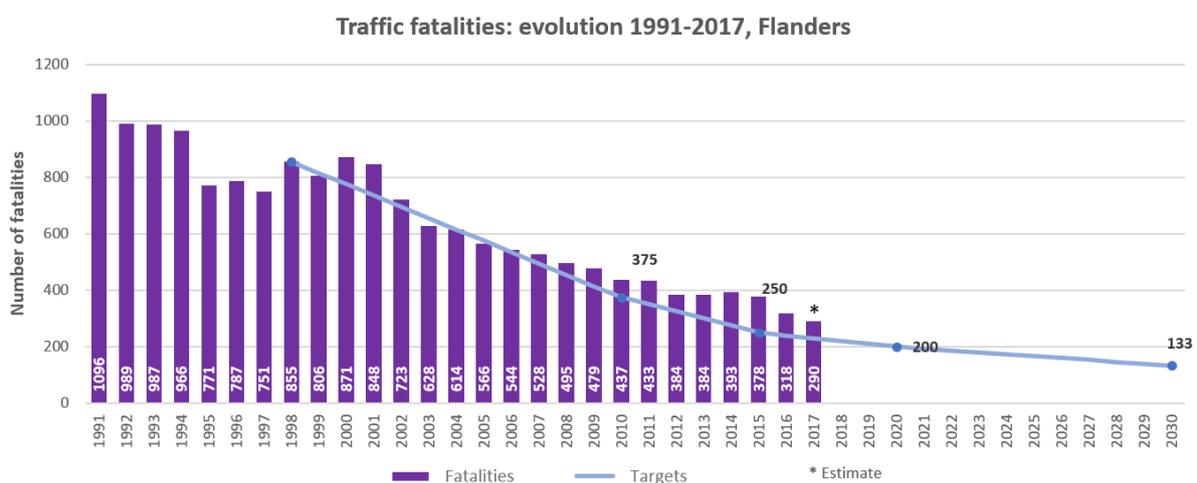
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1 ROAD SAFETY IN FLANDERS

1.1 General

Based on the most recent preliminary data (2017), Flanders counts 48 traffic fatalities per million inhabitants, which is almost the same as the EU average (49). The number of road deaths for 2017 is estimated at 290, and there was a record low for all accident indicators. Although the death toll has considerably decreased over the last decade, further measures are needed to reach the goal of maximum 200 fatalities in 2020, adopted by the Flemish government (Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Evolution of traffic fatalities in Flanders



1.2 Car occupants

Despite recent record lows in fatality numbers, car occupants remains the biggest group in the accident statistics (Figure 2). Especially young car drivers aged 18 to 25 are over-represented, although the general positive evolution also applies to them (Figure 3). The Flemish road safety policy therefore includes specific objectives to lower the number of fatalities in young car drivers, and focuses on improving the driver training,

among other measures (Vlaamse overheid, 2016).

Figure 2 – Number of on-the-spot fatalities according to road user type, Flanders

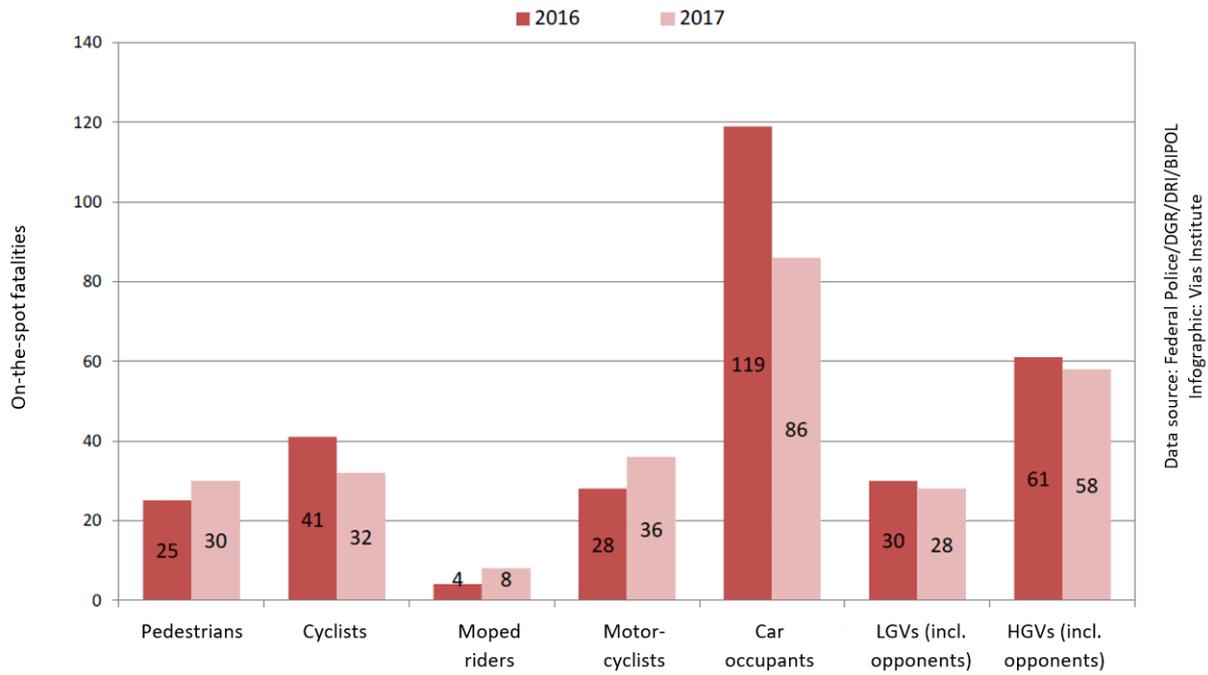
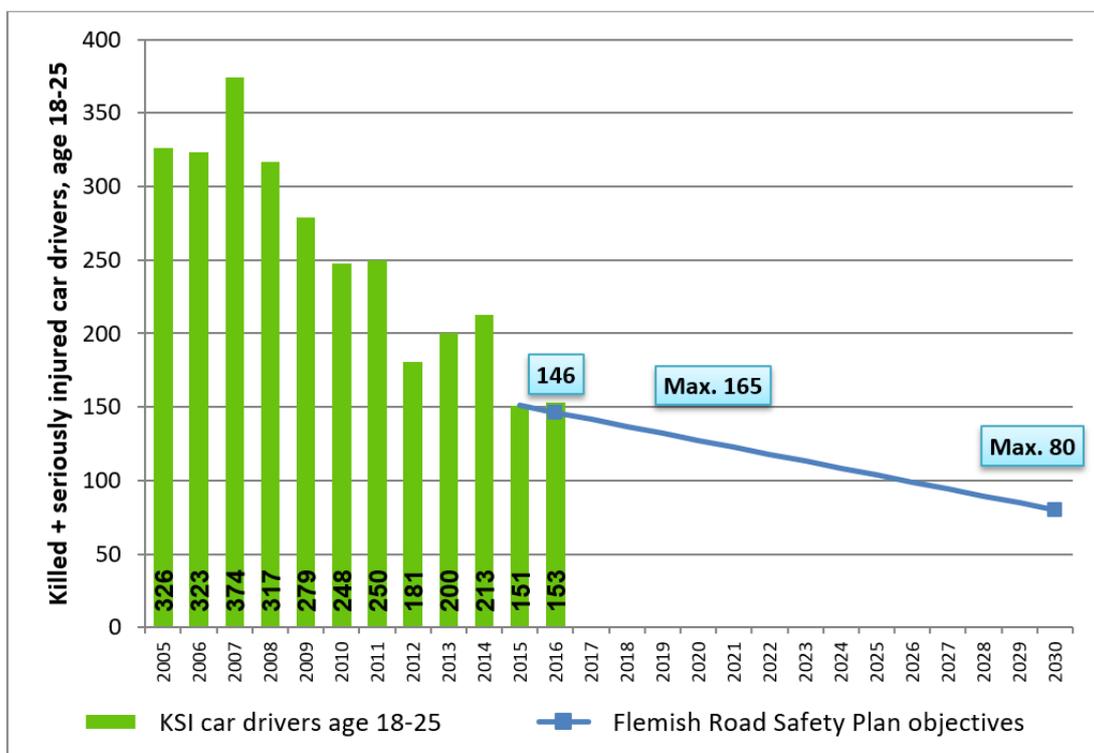


Figure 3 – Evolution of killed and seriously injured young car drivers, Flanders, 2005-2016



Source: FPS Economy, GD Statistics – Statistics Belgium

2. LIFELONG LEARNING CONCEPT

Traffic education in Flanders already starts in the kindergarten. To enable and promote lifelong learning in traffic, VSV has developed a learning path and steps that ensure that pupils learn in a step-by-step manner how to behave safely and independently in traffic as pedestrians and cyclists. In general, the accident risk increases when children or youngsters start using a new mode of transport independently: there is a clear rise in the number of victims among bicycle riders between the ages of 12 to 14 and among moped riders between the ages of 16 to 18. Likewise, the accident risk increases even more sharply in car drivers aged between 18 and 24 (Lammar, 2016).

Driving a motor vehicle requires taking adequate decisions rapidly and without hesitation. The skills needed for this task have to be learned by practicing a lot. A number of skills can be taken over by vehicle technology, but currently this is mostly limited to driver assistance in case of emergency situations. The risk is mainly in the behaviour of the driver, especially among young people who overestimate their own abilities and underestimate the complexity of traffic, leading to unnecessary and dangerous errors. Despite technological advances, education remains indispensable to inform, convince and train young road users into adopting safe attitudes and behaviours in traffic (SWOV, 2016 automobilisten)

3 NEW DRIVER TRAINING IN FLANDERS

3.1 Framework

With the sixth institutional reform that came into effect in 2014, many competencies were transferred from the Belgian federal level to the regions, including competencies related to road safety policy. The Flemish authorities have opted to use those newly acquired competencies to thoroughly review the driver training in Flanders. The aim is to raise the bar for apprentice drivers by requiring more knowledge and skills. In addition, the system of accompanied driving is maintained and better support is provided for this.

VSV chairs the Driver Training working group within the Flemish Road Safety House, the official body that supervises the Flemish road safety policy. The working group includes representatives from all parties involved in driver training in Flanders. In 2014, the Driver Training working group approved the official curriculum for the B driving licence, which forms the basis for the driver training revision.

In 2014, CIECA analysed the effectiveness of different options for the B licence driver training (CIECA, 2014). The results of the analysis served as a basis for policy recommendations by the Driver Training working group that were eventually approved by the Flemish government. The policy recommendations included:

- the introduction of a phased driver training;
- an extension of the minimum driver training duration;
- the adaptation of the driver exams;
- supporting the supervisors (experienced drivers accompanying the learner driver);
- mutual reinforcement through the combination of professional training and exercise under supervision of an experienced driver;
- the use of a logbook to support the learning process;
- monitoring the cost;
- maintaining the good elements of the current driver training.

In 2016, the Flemish minister for Transport commissioned VSV to further elaborate the legal and regulatory framework of the driver training revision, leading to Flemish government decrees to modify the theoretical and practical exams and the driver training. In the same period, VSV also elaborated a handbook for practice instructors and a handbook for supervisors. In this way, the system of accompanied driving with supervisors is maintained with professional support.

3.2 The road to the B driving licence in Flanders

3.2.1 From 1 June 2017 onwards

As from 1 June 2017, the assessment of the theory exam has been modified. The exam consists of 50 multiple choice questions, and candidates succeed if they have a score of 41/50 or above. In case of a wrong answer, the candidate loses 1 point, but if the wrong answer implies a serious violation of traffic rules or if it is related to speeding, the candidate loses 5 points.

Also the practical exam has been modified. The exam has been extended with a computerized hazard perception test. During the exam on the road, candidates have to drive independently with the help of a satellite navigation system or by following road signs. Candidates must also perform 2 maneuvers, chosen at random from 6 possible maneuvers.

3.2.2 From 1 October 2017 onwards

As from 1 October 2017, the minimum exercise period before candidates can take the practical exam has been extended from 3 months to 9 months. A smartphone app and a practical manual are available for candidates and supervisors, allowing a step-by-step approach of the exercise period and giving examples for concrete exercises. The app also allows tracking the kilometres driven when exercising. Supervisors are obliged to follow a 3 hour introductory course before they are allowed to accompany a candidate.

The content for the course was developed by VSV with a view to pedagogy and a logical approach to the learning process of a learner driver. The basic principle is that human behaviour is the main factor in traffic

accidents and that proper behaviour should therefore be discussed from the beginning of the course.

Attention is also paid to the importance of exemplary behaviour that parents pass on to their children. The principles of the Goals for Drivers Education (GDE) matrix are incorporated in the training. Participants learn that a good driver must not only be a skilful driver but must also have the right attitude, and that the social context can lead to risky behaviour in learner drivers.

6 to 9 months after passing the practical exam and obtaining their driving licence, candidates have to follow a 4 hour post-licence training. This involves a group discussion and a number of exercises in a training ground, aimed at increasing the understanding of the own limitations as a driver, and the control of traffic risks.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Despite the decreasing trend in the accident figures in Flanders, extra efforts are needed to reach the 2020 objectives set by the Flemish government. The government wants to deploy specific measures for novice drivers, since they still represent an important risk group. The recent state reform offers opportunities to raise the bar for learner drivers and the obtention of the driving licence. It is expected that, partly due to the combination of lifelong learning and the driver training reform, Flanders will be a step closer to achieving its road safety targets by 2020. Further monitoring by the Flemish Road Safety House (VHV) will be necessary to evaluate and if necessary adjust the measures that have been taken.

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