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Professional drivers

Thematic File Road Safety N° 21



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Summary

Driving a vehicle is a very demanding task, given that it involves the simultaneous execution of multiple physical and cognitive tasks over relatively long periods of time and with inflexible margins of error. And the demanding nature of driving is emphasised – exacerbated, one might say – when it is part of a business activity. Commonly speaking, the term 'professional driver' (i.e. someone who drives for a living) designates drivers whose job it is to drive a vehicle for business purposes. In the context of this report, we will focus specifically and strictly on drivers who drive – carrying passengers or freight – for a living. However, we will exclude from this category users whose working activity is transport-related and who get about using motorcycles or bicycles (e.g. delivery people). This is because there is a lack of available scientific data.

Section 1 of this report focuses on the various factors that may have an impact on the risk of accidents occurring to and involving a professional driver: personal factors, factors linked to employers, factors linked to the vehicle and the infrastructure and/or environment. Among the most striking factors are fatigue (and the factors that contribute to tiredness) and the often difficult working conditions for this category of workers.

As far as the prevalence of accidents is concerned, professional drivers, including taxi drivers, are exposed in particular to the risk of a road accident and the injuries linked to road accidents on account of their high level of exposure in a working context to what is a dangerous environment. This question is also broached in this report, both on a national scale – i.e. for Belgium – and internationally.

Section 2 of the report looks at the various different sets of regulations that apply to the carriage of goods and/or passengers and which are intended to increase and ensure the safety of people who drive for a living. These regulations concern in particular their aptitude for driving, their professional skills, tachographs (which control the time that drivers work and take rest periods), as well as the regulations and sanctions that are specific to this category of workers (sanctions/regulations relative to rest times, the stricter alcohol limit, bus lanes and other special restricted parts of the road, etc.).

Section 3 of the report provides key figures for Belgium (about the risk and seriousness of accidents, the number of victims injured or killed, etc.) for various categories of professional drivers. In 2017, there were almost 38,000 accidents in Belgium. These resulted in nearly 50,000 people being injured or killed – 48,451 injured and 615 victims dying within 30 days of the accident. The vast majority of road accidents involve cars. The number of accidents involving a van, truck (around 2,000-3,000 for these two categories) or coach/bus (some 700) is much lower than for cars. Nevertheless, the numbers are considerable (more than 6,000 accidents for these three categories combined). Also, the relative seriousness of these accidents – expressed, for example, in numbers of victims per billion kilometres driven or per 1,000 accidents – is generally much greater than for cars and emphasises the many collateral victims (who are not necessarily people who drive for a living themselves, but rather other users of the roads involved in these accidents).

Finally, section 4 of the report aims to give details of the various existing measures and good practices in place, designed to increase road safety specifically for professional drivers. These measures and practices are many and varied and concern more particularly the legal aspects of the issue and the application of the law (e.g. on tachographs and the professional training of drivers), as well as educational or psycho-educational measures (e.g. programmes based on changing risk behaviour) and the 'safety' policies and cultures of companies (e.g. risk prevention).



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