

DRASTIC REDUCTION OF ROAD DEATHS IN SWITZERLAND. HOW TO EXPLAIN IT?

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Road accidents still make many victims worldwide. They generate significant human suffering and high costs. The medical, functional, psychological, social, relational, professional and economic repercussions have long-lasting impacts that affect an average of three people per victim.

In Switzerland, road accident mortality represents 23 potential years of life lost per death for men and 19 for women. These accidents cost nearly CHF 4 billion (almost UHA 113 billion) a year in costs (medical treatment, material damage, loss of production due to absences from work).¹

However, although the kilometres travelled have more than doubled, the number of people killed and seriously injured on the roads decreased drastically from 1970 (1694 killed and 18314 seriously injured) to 2016 (216 killed and 3785 seriously injured).²

At the international level, Switzerland is one of the world leaders in road safety, behind Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom in 2015.²

This progress can be explained by improvements in road infrastructure and vehicle safety, but also by a commitment to improving driving behaviour. The introduction of blood alcohol limits, speed limits, mandatory seat belt use, a stricter licence revocation regime for repeating offenders, and a probationary driver's licence for new drivers have made a significant contribution to reducing the number of accidents.¹

Specific measures in relation to drink-driving include: lowering the limit from 0.8 to 0.5 g/kg in 2005, a ban on driving under the influence of alcohol for professional drivers, learner drivers and new drivers in January 2014, a driving ability expertise requested in the event of an offence of 1.6 g/kg or more in July 2014, as well as easier and more frequent blood alcohol testing (2% of drivers in 2000 to 6.3% in 2007 and 5.7% in 2011).¹

In Geneva, there has been a significant change in drivers' behaviour in relation to drink-driving in ten years. Studies that we have carried out on 1500 drivers arrested for a first-time impaired driving with a blood alcohol concentration of 0.8 g/kg or more between 2001 and 2004 and between 2011 and 2014 show that the two-year recidivism rate has almost halved (9.1% of the population included from 2001 to 2004 and 4.9% of the population included from 2011 to 2014).³

At the same time, the amount of pure alcohol consumed per inhabitant per year in Switzerland decreased from 9.2 litres in 2001 to 8.8 litres in 2004 and from 8.5 litres in 2011 to 8.1 litres in 2014.

Thus, awareness-raising and prevention measures have proven to be effective.

However, there is still room for improvement in relation to the countries with the safest roads and this commitment needs to be continued, as the massive increase in kilometres travelled and the population growth negatively influence the occurrence of accidents, and this trend will be accentuated by the increase in the proportion of poorly protected road users (soft mobility) and more vulnerable older people.

References

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