



May 2021

UK



INTRODUCTION

In terms of overall road safety, the UK saw a change of direction over the period 2010 – 2019. The previous long-term decline changed to a plateau, with a decrease of only 5% in annual road deaths. However, with an increase in population, in terms of road mortality in 2019, the UK still ranks among the best performers with 27 deaths per million inhabitants in 2019 compared to the EU average of 51.

Figure 1. Relative change in road deaths between 2010 and 2019. *National provisional estimates used for 2019, as final figures for 2019 are not yet available at the time of going to print. **UK data for 2019 are the provisional total for Great Britain for the year ending June 2019 combined with the total for Northern Ireland for the calendar year 2019.

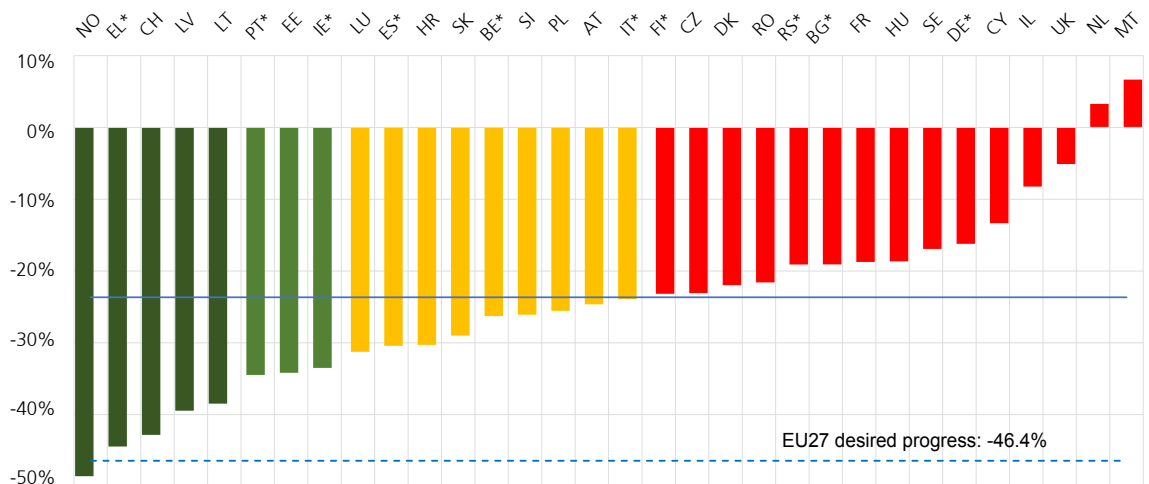
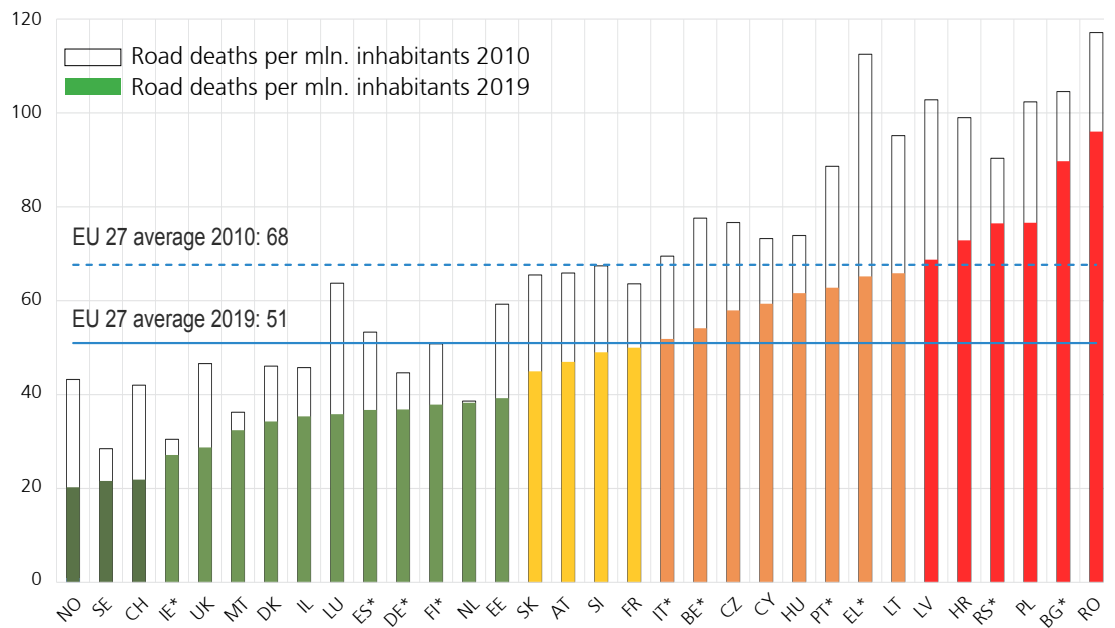


Figure 2. Mortality (road deaths per million inhabitants) in 2019 (with mortality in 2010 for comparison). *National provisional estimates used for 2019, as final figures for 2019 are not yet available at the time of going to print. **UK data for 2019 are the provisional total for Great Britain for the year ending June 2019 combined with the total for Northern Ireland for the calendar year 2019.



A study published by the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety (PACTS) in 2020 showed that in 2018 in Great Britain*, an estimated 240 people were killed in collisions in which a driver was over the legal BAC limit or refused a test. Since 2010, no notable progress has been made. The number of drink-driving related deaths has remained stable at around 240 deaths a year since 2010, accounting for around 13% of all road deaths in 2018.¹

Road users killed in road collision are not necessarily tested for alcohol by the police in the UK. The coroner can request alcohol data for any road death, though does not always do so. The number of alcohol-related road deaths reported above therefore does not necessarily include those where a pedestrian or cyclist consumed alcohol.

*Northern Ireland data are collected separately and were not available to be included in the study.

¹ <https://www.pacts.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/PACTS-Drink-Driving-Taking-stock-moving-forward-Report-6.0.pdf>



NATIONAL POLICIES

Timeline of the main measures adopted to tackle drink-driving since 2010:

2010

Sir Peter North reviewed the legal framework in Britain for both drink- and drug-driving. He recommended a number of measures including lowering the legal Blood Alcohol Limit (BAC) to 0.5g/l

2015

Removal of the "statutory option" whereby a driver could insist on an evidential blood test, not a breath test

2019

The Department for Transport committed to investigating the feasibility of using alcohol interlocks as part of drink-drive offender rehabilitation programmes in the UK.

2010

2014

2015

2016

2019

2014

BAC reduced to 0.5g/l for all drivers in Scotland

2016

Lower BAC limits (0.5g/l for all drivers/0.2g/l for novice and professionals) approved for Northern Ireland (but not yet in force for technical reasons)



Within the Road Safety Statement of 2019, police enforcement was seen as a key factor in tackling drink-driving: a competition was therefore launched, run by the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety (PACTS), to encourage manufacturers to develop a Mobile Evidential Breath Test Instrument, a device that enables police to obtain a breath sample at the roadside accurate enough to be used in court.

Currently, when a UK driver provides a positive alcohol screening test at the roadside, the police are required to take the driver back to the police station to obtain an evidential sample. The government, as long ago as the 2011 Strategic Framework for Road Safety, committed to obtaining type approval for roadside evidential equipment. These instruments may be available as from 2022. How they would actually be deployed has yet to be determined.



BAC LIMITS AND SANCTIONS

The legal limit for **ALL drivers** in England, Wales and Northern Ireland is:

0.8g/l



In 2016, lower BAC limits (0.5g/l for all drivers/0.2g/l for novice and professionals) were approved for Northern Ireland but are not yet in force for technical reasons.

The legal BAC limit has been 0.5g/l for all drivers in Scotland since December 2014.

No other European country has a limit above 0.5g/l. The limit of 0.8g/l was set in Great Britain in 1967 and over the last 30 years the question of whether the limit should be lower has been increasingly debated. In 2010, the North Report recommended a reduction of the drink-drive limit in the UK to 0.5g/l. In 2015, Professor Richard Allsop estimated that, had the drink-drive limit been lowered to 0.5g/l in 2010, around 25 deaths would have been avoided and 95 serious injuries prevented each year.²

In its 2020 study, PACTS called on the government to reduce the limit in England and Scotland to 0.5g/l with a "zero" limit (enforced at 0.2 g/l BAC) for professional drivers and young and novice drivers.³

Concerning sanctions, if a person is found guilty of drink-driving they can be fined, banned from driving or even imprisoned. These punishments depend on the charge brought, the seriousness of the offence, and any mitigating circumstances. The maximum penalties are shown in the table below.



Type of offence



Fine in £



Driving ban



Imprisonment

Being in charge of a vehicle while above the legal limit or unfit through drink	Up to 2,500	Possible	Up to 3 months
Driving or attempting to drive while above the legal limit or unfit through drink	Unlimited	At least one year (3 if convicted twice in 10 years)	Up to 6 months
Refusing to provide a specimen of breath, blood or urine for analysis	Unlimited	At least one year	Up to 6 months
Causing death by careless driving when under the influence of drink	Unlimited	At least two years	Up to 14 years

² Allsop, R. (2015). Saving Lives by Lowering the Legal Drink-Drive Limit. PACTS, RAC Foundation

³ <https://www.pacts.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/PACTS-Drink-Driving-Taking-stock-moving-forward-Report-3.0.pdf>



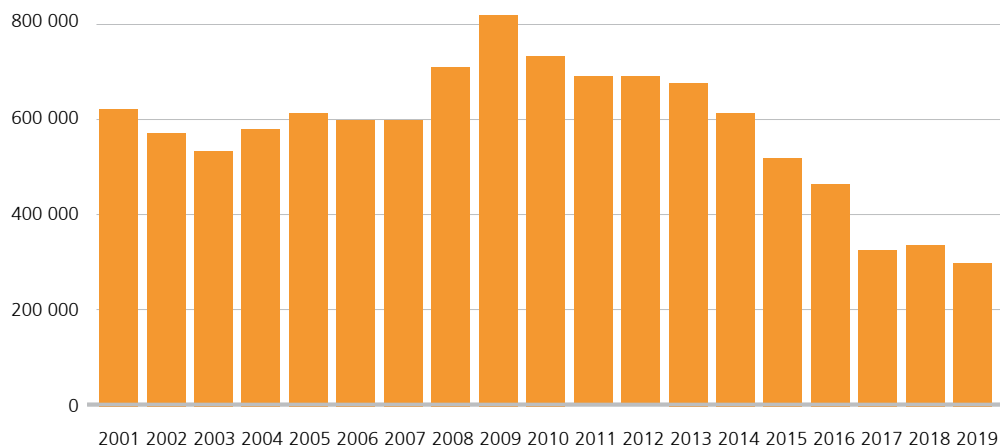
ENFORCEMENT

Police in UK have unlimited powers to stop vehicles. However, they can conduct a breath test only if they suspect the driver has been drinking, has been involved in a collision or has committed a moving traffic offence. Except in Northern Ireland, they do not have powers of “random” breath testing. While existing powers allow the police to test for drink-driving in most cases they would wish to, the powers do not make it possible to convey the simple message that whenever you drive you may be subject to a breath test even if you are driving carefully to avoid attracting police attention.

Since November 2016 the police in Northern Ireland have had the power to conduct mandatory breath testing at organised checkpoints. While the impact on drink driving has not been assessed it is clear that the introduction of the power had an immediate impact on the numbers of tests conducted (27,446 tests in 2015 up to 43,712 in 2017). The number of roadside screening breath tests undertaken by the police has fallen significantly in England and Wales since a peak of 815,290 in 2009 to just 302,281 in 2019. The figure for 2019 is the lowest since at least 2002 when records were first available. This is the result of substantial reductions in the number of roads policing officers over this period.

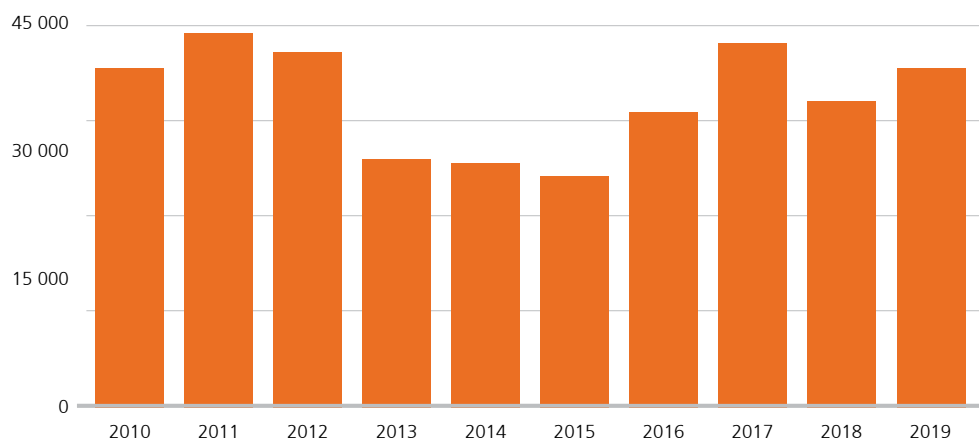
17.8% of breath tests conducted in 2019 were either positive or refused, the highest figure since 2004. The percentage of breath tests being failed or refused has increased steadily year on year since 2013, as the number of tests conducted has fallen. This suggests that, whilst testing may now be better targeted, a substantial number of drink-drivers are not being tested.

Figure 3. Number of breath tests conducted in England and Wales from 2001 to 2019
Source: PACTS.



While the number of breath tests is not recorded in Scotland, data from Northern Ireland shows a different picture. As previously said, the number of breath tests being conducted in Northern Ireland has increased significantly since 2015 (after random breath tests were introduced) before a slight fall in 2018. As in England and Wales, the positive or failed rate in Northern Ireland is higher in years with less breath testing (though the number of failed tests remains lower).

Figure 4. Number of breath tests conducted in Northern Ireland from 2001 to 2019.
Source: PACTS.



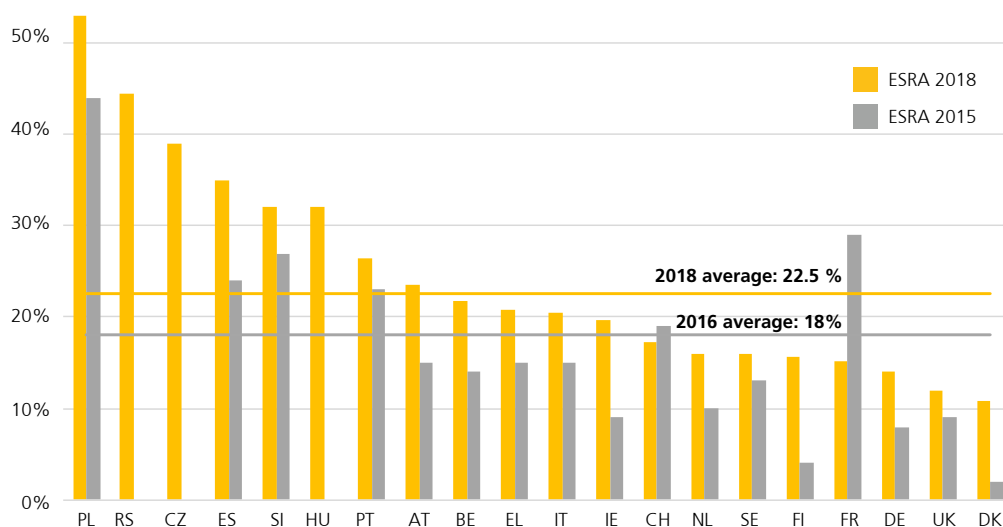
Similarly, the number of drivers and riders being breath tested after a collision in England and Wales has been decreasing since 2007, as has the number who failed a breath test. The percentage of drivers who failed a breath test having been involved in a collision has remained broadly stable at 3-4%. In 2019, 179,572 drivers and riders were breath tested having been involved in a collision (56% of those involved in collisions), 6,279 failed the breath test (3.5% of those tested). In 2017, 78,044 were tested (39% of those involved in collisions) and 3,791 failed the breath test (4.9% of those tested).



DRIVERS' PERCEPTION

In its 2020 report, PACTS states that levels of police enforcement have decreased by 63% since 2009.⁴ It comes as no surprise that drivers' perception of being caught by the police is extremely low in the UK, when we compare results from the E-Survey on Road Safety Attitudes from 2018.

Figure 5. Proportion (%) of car drivers who considered themselves likely to be checked by the police for drink-driving.
Source: ESRA survey (2015 and 2018)



Only 12% of drivers thought they were likely to be checked by the police for alcohol. The downward trend in the level of drink-drive enforcement should be reversed, and police should be given the powers to conduct mandatory alcohol testing, according to some of the key recommendations on enforcement from the PACTS 2020 study.

⁴ <https://www.pacts.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/PACTS-Drink-Driving-Taking-stock-moving-forward-Report-6.0.pdf>

⁵ Ibid.



REHABILITATION AND ALCOHOL INTERLOCK PROGRAMMES

No alcohol Interlock rehabilitation programme is currently in place in the UK. However, in 2019 the UK Department for Transport announced that it would investigate the feasibility of using alcohol interlocks in association with drink-drive offender rehabilitation programmes. The Department for Transport subsequently awarded the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety (PACTS) a grant to lead a consortium to undertake the research.

Prior to that, a trial of interlock use was conducted in the UK in 2006 and independently evaluated. It was decided not to proceed with wider use. More recently, a small-scale initiative by one police force was started. The PACTS study has reviewed these and also taken into account findings from the trials and programmes in Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand.

With this information, as well as evidence from scientific research, PACTS has explored how an alcohol interlock programme could be introduced into the UK, with consideration for the technical, legal and other essential programme aspects, and overall benefits that might be delivered. The report was published in March 2021.⁶ Since the publication of the report, the Department for Transport has not made any specific commitment yet.

Main recommendations:

1. The government should consult on proposals to introduce a UK alcohol interlock programme as soon as possible.
2. The courts should have the powers to offer or require alcohol interlocks for all offenders, including first-time offenders.
3. The government should consider mandating participation in an alcohol interlock programme for all offenders as a pre-requisite to being fully re-licensed.
4. Alcohol interlock programmes should contain a requirement to attend a rehabilitation course.
5. Additional treatment or remedial programmes should be made available to programme participants who exhibit signs of alcohol dependency.
6. Programme participants should be comprehensively monitored, with sanctions for interlock programme violations.
7. Offenders should be responsible for the cost of the interlock programme.

⁶ <https://www.pacts.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/PACTS-Alcohol-Interlocks-Report-7.0.pdf>

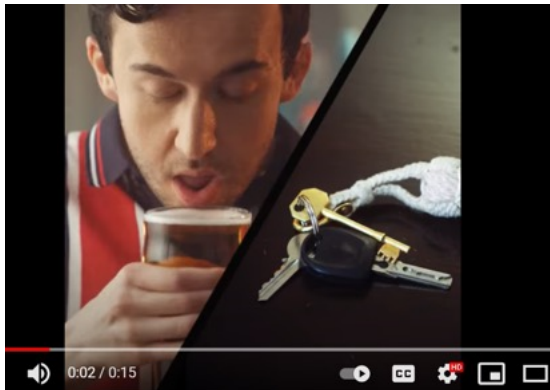


CAMPAIGNS

The UK government has been running road safety campaigns for more than 75 years. In 2000, the THINK! campaign was officially established as the government's designated overarching road safety campaign.

Since then THINK! has become recognised internationally for its campaigns that have challenged dangerous behaviours on Britain's roads.

One of the most recent campaigns on drink-driving run by THINK! was launched in 2019. The campaign called on young men to intervene and 'Pint Block' their friends. The campaign used social and online video, and messaging in pubs, bars and sports clubs, to bring the message to life through a series of humorous and surreal interventions. The campaign focussed on young men aged 17-24, as they are 4 times more likely to be killed or seriously injured on the road than drivers aged 25 or over.



<https://youtu.be/dKckS5AUuZI>



SOURCES

PACTS reports:

PACTS-Drink-Driving-Taking-stock-moving-forward-Report-6.0.pdf

<https://www.pacts.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/PACTS-Alcohol-Interlocks-Report-7.0.pdf>

Sanctions:

<https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/facts/alcohol-and-the-law/drink-driving-penalties>

<https://www.gov.uk/drink-driving-penalties>

Drink-driving campaigns:

<https://bit.ly/3tBUNjL>

Road Safety Statement, Dept for Transport UK:

<https://bit.ly/2SIWtvf>

ETSC, Progress in reducing drink driving and other alcohol-related road deaths in Europe (2019)

https://etsc.eu/wp-content/uploads/reducingdrinkdriving_031219_design_final.pdf

Drivers' perception:

ESRA survey 2018 <https://www.esranet.eu/en/publications/>

ETSC, 14th PIN Annual Report: <https://etsc.eu/wp-content/uploads/14-PIN-annual-report-FINAL.pdf>