

## Beyond bias: Young professional bus and truck drivers in the EU are safe



### Dispelling myths

This fact sheet demystifies misconceptions about young professional drivers in the EU.

In the context of the ongoing revision of the Driving Licence Directive, it is important to distinguish fact from fiction in counteracting the myth that all young professional drivers are unsafe on Europe's roads.

### Why act now?

Over 500,000 bus, coach and truck driver positions are unfilled in the EU at the moment, and this number is forecast to increase over the coming years without further action.

The gap between young and old drivers is growing. Less than 5% of all professional drivers in the EU are under 25 but more than 33% are over 55 and will retire over the next few years. More specifically in the bus and coach sector, the age gap is even more alarming with only 3% of profession drivers under 25 and 41% over 55.

This is despite youth unemployment rates across the EU remaining persistently high: 14.7% of under 25s are unemployed, according to the latest figures from the European Commission.

### Europe needs drivers

The current revision of the Driving License Directive is an opportune moment to bring clarity on professional driver training ages in the EU.

This would empower more capable and motivated young drivers to go through Europe's rigorous training and certification processes to become fully qualified drivers, providing Europeans with the mobility and logistics services they depend on.

IRU, the world road transport organisation, is the voice of 3.5 million mobility and logistics companies, including over 1 million in the EU.

↓ **Myth**

↓ **Fact**

**Young drivers have little experience and drive imprudently. They pose an increased safety risk on the roads. No decision should be taken that allows their presence behind the wheel.**

- In addition to basic driving licence training, professional drivers must train for up to 280 hours to be able to drive commercial heavy-duty vehicles. This compares to about 30 hours for private car drivers.
- Professional drivers must undertake regular or annual periodic training and ongoing certification to maintain their Certificate of Professional Competence (CPC). Private car drivers do not.
- Professional drivers drive to earn their living, not for fun. They are fully motivated to drive prudently to maintain their livelihood.

**17-year-old accompanied truck drivers pose an intolerable safety risk on our roads. Hence, the EU proposal to support them should be rejected.**

- The word “accompanied” is crucial when looking at the proposed text in the driving licence revision. A 17-year-old driving a truck under the supervision of an experienced truck driver sitting next to him/her in the cabin is a form of extended on-the-job training and the safest form of professional driver training.
- The advantage for the driver is that this “training” is paid and provides insights into the profession, in a similar way to apprenticeship schemes.
- The advantage for the company – who pays two drivers for the same journey – is that it secures the retention of young professional drivers at the end of the training period.

**18 years is too young an age for a truck driver; this should not be further encouraged.**

- 18-year-old truck drivers with full training already carry out domestic operations across all EU Member States and carry out international operations in 24 out of the 27 EU Member States, as stipulated in the current Driving Licence Directive.
- Yet, the current driving licence rules still present 21 years old as the rule and 18 as an exception, which has cost (i.e. increased insurance premiums) and legal implications (i.e. three Member States still prohibit cross-border travel to another EU country).

**21 years is too young an age for a bus driver; this should not be further encouraged.**

- Fully trained 21-year-old bus drivers can already drive professionally on most EU roads.
- Moreover, nine EU Member States already allow 18-year-old drivers to drive scheduled bus routes of up to 50km in length.
- Yet, the current driving licence rules still present 24 years old as the rule and 21 as an exception, which has cost (i.e. increased insurance premiums) and legal implications (i.e. Member States setting even higher age limits).

**Examples demonstrating the safe driving skills of young bus drivers**

Figure 1. Expected number of accidents per 100 AWU (annual work unit). The lines represent a 95% confidence interval.



*Sweden*

A recent study by Swedish bus company Arriva, on its own drivers, demonstrated that professional bus drivers aged 18 to 23 have a comparable or lower expected number of accidents per annual work unit than older drivers (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup>

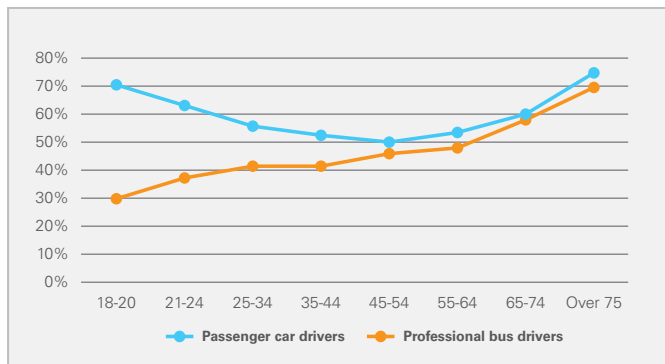
*Germany*

In Germany, research on driver responsibility in accidents involving buses shows that younger drivers have the best safety record.

Bus drivers between 18 and 20 were responsible for 29.4% of the accidents they were involved in. This is the lowest value across all age groups.

In comparison, private passenger car drivers aged between 18 and 20 were responsible for 70.6% of the accidents they were involved in (Figure 2).<sup>2</sup>

Figure 2. Rate of accidents where the driver was the main party responsible / total accidents in which the driver was involved, by age and driver category (all accidents 2022).

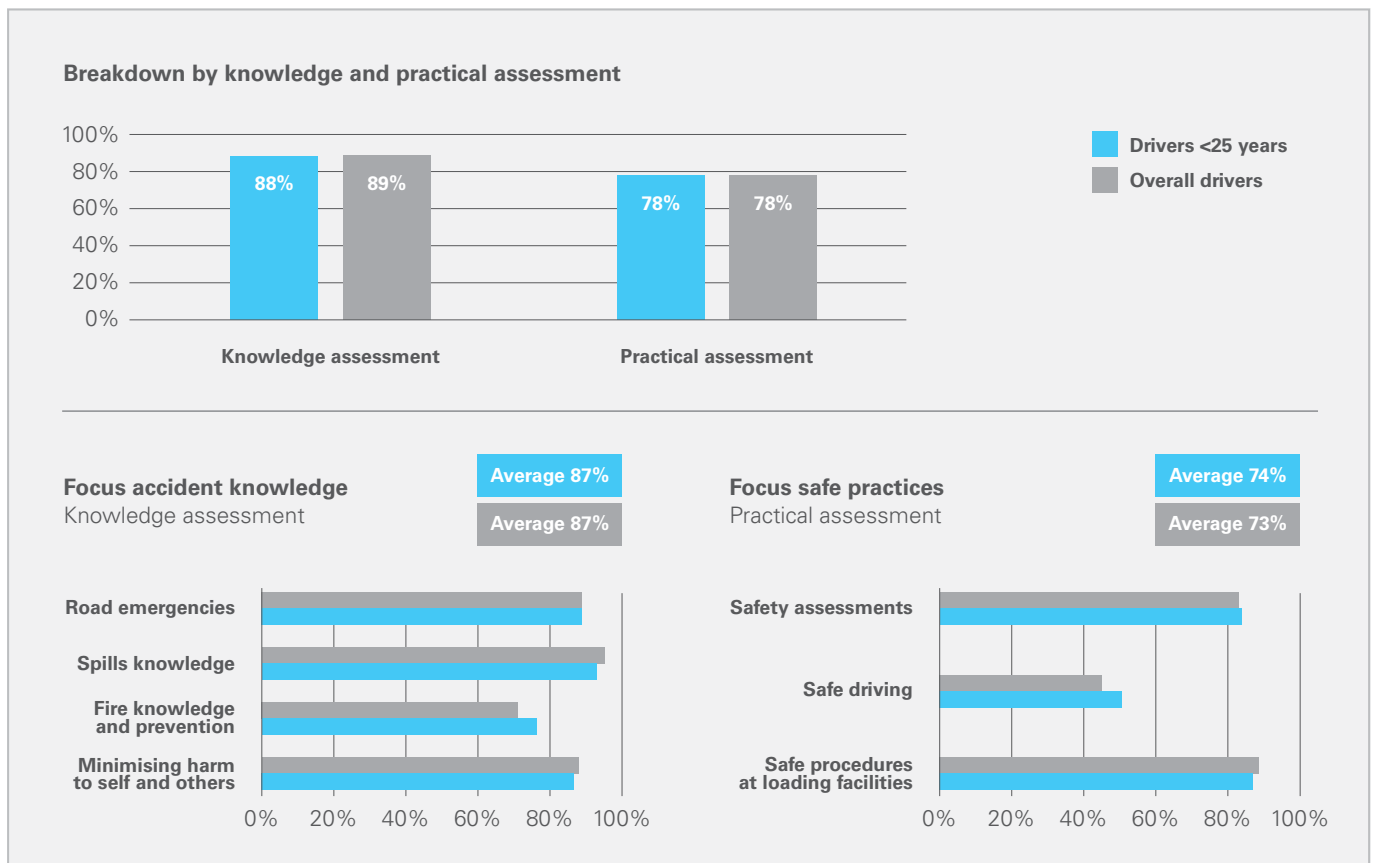


**Examples demonstrating the safe driving skills of young truck drivers**

Truck drivers aged 25 or younger have similar safety performance scores as older truck drivers, as shown by data from the IRU RoadMasters assessment and certification programme.<sup>3</sup>

Young truck drivers also perform well on accident knowledge and safety assessments (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Safety performance of commercial heavy-duty truck drivers below 25 versus the safety performance of all truck drivers.



## How can the EU support young professional drivers through the driving licence rules while being mindful of safety?

1. Clearly confirm 18 years old as the rule for truck drivers, nationally and internationally, as proposed by the report of the European Parliament's Committee on Transport and Tourism (TRAN).
2. Clearly confirm 21 years old as the rule for bus drivers as proposed by the TRAN report. In addition, allow Member States to decrease the driving age below 21 for all types of services, including those longer than 50km.
3. Allow young people to easily enter the truck driver profession immediately after school graduation by allowing 17-year-olds to drive trucks alongside an experienced driver, as also proposed in the TRAN report.

### Views from the ground

The report from the German Federal Highway Research Institute showed that in Germany, where accompanied B-licence driver training is allowed for 17-year-olds, drivers who have undergone accompanied driving have 19% less chance of being involved in accidents and commit 18% fewer traffic offences during their first year.<sup>4</sup>

This was confirmed by the President of the German Road Safety Council, according to whom accompanied driving from the age of 17 has proven to be very successful in reducing the risk of young B-licence holders being involved in road traffic accidents.<sup>5</sup>

Why should the safety assumption be different and the same chance denied to young truck drivers?

*"The best training anyone can and should receive is from within the industry and its people while on the road in a working vehicle."*

**– Paul Jackman, Irish Road Haulage Association**

*"Young drivers are safe. But they require longer and more thorough training, including driving alongside an instructor for a longer period than an older and more experienced driver."*

**– Christer Ekelund, VR Sverige**

*"To ensure young drivers become safe professional drivers, we are engaged in a multi-faceted approach, including rigorous training, mentorship and supervision, continuous education and evaluation, and new technologies."*

**– Theresa-Jasmin Meyering, Meyering Verkehrsbetrieb**

### Sources and notes:

1) Analysis of young driver data from Arriva for Transportföretagen (the Swedish Confederation of Transport Enterprises), 15/03/2022; author Johan Bring, reviewed by Åsa Greijer.

2) German Federal Statistical Office, 2022 statistics on "Parties involved in the accident, main party responsible for the accident: Germany, years, sex, age groups, type of road use, accident category, area" (46241-0011).

3) The sample had 2,000 drivers, including 59 young drivers below 25, from selected countries in Europe and the Middle East.

4) The [report](#) from the German Federal Highway Research Institute compared the driving behaviour at the beginning of the independent driving period of drivers having obtained their licence through the BF17 with beginner drivers of the same age having obtained their driving licence in a conventional way at 18. The results showed that BF17 drivers have 19% less chance of being involved in accidents and commit 18% fewer traffic offences during their first year of driving.

The results were statistically significant and applied to both men and women. They were also confirmed by a repeat investigation based on data on traffic offences (with a sample of 75,000 drivers) from the [German Central Traffic Register](#).

5) The [Dekra report](#).