

Revision of the Driving Licence Directive

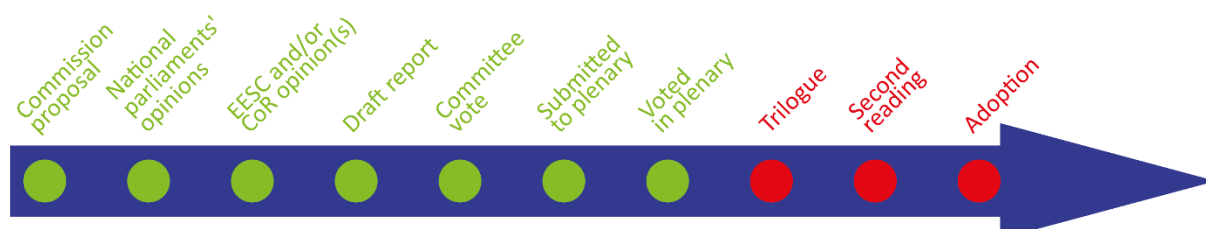
OVERVIEW

On 1 March 2023, the European Commission published its legislative proposal on driving licences – a matter of EU competence – to facilitate the free movement of persons and goods throughout the EU by modernising the driving licence system. This involves future-proofing the driving licence rules, improving road safety and simplifying the rules for those wanting to get a driving licence. The proposal provides for accompanied driving for young learners, zero tolerance for drink-driving, better preparation for micro-mobility, and the introduction of digital driving licences.

In the European Parliament, the legislative file was assigned to the Committee on Transport and Tourism (TRAN) (rapporteur: Jutta Paulus, Greens/EFA, Germany). The TRAN committee report was adopted on 7 December 2023. On 28 February 2024, Parliament voted in plenary on its first reading position on the file. On 7 October, the TRAN committee voted to start trilogue negotiations.

Revision of the Directive on Driving Licences, COM(2023) 0127, repealing Directive 2006/126 2003/0252(COD) amending Regulation 2018/1724 2017/0086(COD), amending Directive 2022/2561 2021/0018(COD)

<i>Committee responsible:</i>	Transport and Tourism (TRAN)	COM (2023) 0127 1.3.2023
<i>Rapporteur:</i>	Jutta Paulus (Greens/EFA, Germany)	2023/0053(COD)
<i>Shadow rapporteurs:</i>	Elzbieta Katarzyna Łukacijewska (EPP, Poland) Matteo Ricci (S&D, Italy) Paolo Borchia (P/E, Italy) Valérie Devaux (Renew, France) Carlo Fidanza (ECR, Italy) Elena Kountoura (The Left, Greece) Siegbert Frank Droese (ESN, Germany)	Ordinary legislative procedure (COD) (Parliament and Council on equal footing – formerly 'co-decision')
<i>Next step expected:</i>	Trilogue negotiations	



Introduction

Under [Vision Zero](#), part of the EU's [road safety policy framework](#) for 2021–2030, the European Commission strives for **zero deaths** on EU roads by **2050**. More than [20 000 lives](#) were lost on EU roads in 2022 (up 3 % from 2021), where the majority of victims were pedestrians, cyclists and users of scooters and motorbikes.

The [proposal](#) for a revised Directive on Driving Licences will help to achieve the EU's Vision Zero and take into account the European sustainable and smart mobility [strategy](#) of December 2020, in particular its flagship 10 (enhancing transport safety and security) and flagship 6 (making connected and automated multimodal mobility a reality).

Young drivers represent [8 %](#) of all car drivers, however two out of five fatal collisions involve a driver or rider aged under the age of 30. This is why the proposal for a revised directive takes into account novice drivers in particular. Overall [fatalities](#) remain below pre-pandemic levels, but progress is slow.

The proposal has the objective to find the right balance between improving road safety for all road users, ensuring freedom of movement, and easing the administrative burden.

Existing situation

Prior to the current proposal for a revised Directive on Driving Licences, three previous [directives](#) have been in place. The [first directive](#) (1980) focussed on matters such as the Community model, vehicle categories, issuance (driving test and medical fitness), as well as exchange of licences. The [second directive](#) (1991) consolidated the areas covered by its predecessor and established the principle of mutual recognition and a minimum age. The third and currently existing [directive](#) (2006) consolidated the areas covered by the previous two directives and established administrative validity, periodic medical checks for bus and lorry drivers, as well as standards for examiners and a network covering the Member States, known as [RESPER](#).

Currently, Member States' [practices](#) on driving licences differ, for instance, as regards issuance, form and procedure. The proposal would increase harmonisation in these areas. There is extensive Court of Justice of the European Union ([CJEU](#)) case law on the principle of mutual recognition of driving licences, as set out in Article 2 of the current directive. A Member State being obliged to recognise a licence issued by another Member State is not entitled to investigate if the conditions needed for issuing that licence have been met. However, several Member States, among them Germany, found that these licences were frequently issued in violation of the current directive. Violations involved inter alia issuing licences to persons not officially resident in the Member State concerned. In some cases, the [CJEU](#) acknowledged a Member State's right to refuse recognition of a driving licence.

Parliament's starting position

In 2017, in a [resolution](#) on car safety in the EU, Parliament stressed the need for drivers' instruction to include periodic and additional training in using obligatory driver assistance mechanisms, paying special attention to the elderly and to persons with reduced mobility. Parliament urged driving schools to incorporate these systems into their learner training and to couple the obtaining of a driving licence with professional, on-road practical training.

In a [resolution](#) of October 2021 on the EU road safety policy framework 2021–2030, Parliament deplored the fact that progress in reducing EU fatality rates had stagnated and that the respective EU target for 2020 had been missed. Further, the parallel presence, on the one hand, of vehicles with automated and connected features and, on the other hand, traditional vehicles in mixed traffic would pose a new risk in the near future, in particular for vulnerable road users, such as motorcyclists, cyclists and pedestrians. Therefore, Parliament highlighted the need to keep the Driving Licences Directive up to date regarding new technological developments in vehicle automation and in training curricula, especially for professional drivers. Moreover, Parliament asked

the Commission to develop minimum standards for driver training and traffic safety education, thereby gradually aligning driving courses across the EU. In this context, knowledge and skills, risk-increasing aspects and self-assessment should be included in the revision. Parliament proposed a graduated licensing system, encouraging novice drivers to gain more experience in higher-order skills. It insisted on further harmonisation of the minimum standards for trainers. Parliament also asked to assess the option to make theoretical and practical training and tests mandatory for obtaining a licence for, in particular, mopeds. Besides, Parliament noted that there are gender, age and social inequalities in mobility and road safety, which should also be taken into account.

Preparation of the proposal

The [European Commission](#) started [putting together](#) the proposal on the basis of the existing Directive on Driving Licences (2006).

The proposal was preceded by several [preparatory steps](#): stakeholder consultations, an ex-post [evaluation](#) of the existing directive, published on 21 January 2022, and an inception impact [assessment](#) (2021). The [ex-post evaluation](#) concluded that the directive had been most effective in meeting its original objectives to improve road safety and facilitate the free movement of citizens. The directive had had the effect of reducing the number of road accident fatalities until 2018 by 7 %. At the same time it was noted that differences remained in several areas such as: the administrative validity periods; the requirements for medical checks, training and testing; the requirements for driving examiners; and the recognition of driving licences issued by non-EU countries. Regarding the directive's relevance, the evaluation concluded that the means to achieve its objectives needed updating, in particular with regard to: novice drivers; skills to reflect new technological solutions such as semi-automated and automated driving; vehicles with automatic transmission; advanced driver-assistance systems; and alternative fuel vehicles. The evaluation found that the directive had had a clear added value regarding increased harmonisation of driving licence rules across the EU.

In the context of the evaluation, an open public [consultation](#) was held from October 2020 to January 2021, where a majority of respondents considered the directive to have had a positive effect on road safety and to have helped facilitate the movement of both professional and non-professional drivers.

EPRS has published an [implementation appraisal](#) of the current legal framework.

The changes the proposal would bring

When analysing the situation while preparing the [proposal](#), the Commission established the presence of a number of unresolved issues, such as an excessive number of road crashes with fatalities and serious injuries owing to low medical fitness, skills or knowledge, or dangerous behaviour. Other issues were the remaining barriers to obtaining, renewing or exchanging a driving licence, the lack of recognition of digital or virtual driving licences, and a possible sub-optimal use of technologies and mobility concepts for environmental performance.

The European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS) issued an [opinion](#) on the proposal on 25 April 2023, which it transmitted to the Commission and the co-legislators. The EDPS recognises the legitimate objectives of the proposal, while at the same time stressing the importance of ensuring that measures contain appropriate tools to reach these objectives. The EDPS welcomes the proposed alignment with EU legislation on data protection. It regrets, however, the absence of a specific assessment on the necessity and proportionality of broadening the use of the network for the exchange of information related to driving licences between national authorities in order to prevent, detect and investigate criminal offences. It also recommends limiting the processing of driver licence data to road traffic related offences. The EDPS furthermore considers that regarding the use of an electronic application for the verification of mobile driving licences, it should be ensured that no personal data other than those necessary for the verification of driving rights of the holder of the mobile driving licence are used for this purpose. It recommends making optional the use of the EU digital identity wallet for implementing the app holding the digital licence.

To address these outstanding issues, the main goals of the proposal were set as follows: to help improve road safety, contribute to sustainable mobility, and facilitate free movement by, for instance, enabling digital licences. To achieve these goals, the proposal would amend the relevant existing EU law, in particular the existing third Directive on Driving Licences, and make use of the best practices applied by several EU Member States

The proposed rules would improve the safety of all road users. They would also prepare drivers for zero-emission vehicles and for driving on city roads alongside more bicycles and two-wheelers, in the presence of many pedestrians. To address the current driver shortage, they would furthermore allow young drivers to gain experience through accompanied driving. The proposal would also introduce digital driving licences.

The new elements and measures the proposal introduces in relation to driving and driving licences are as follows:

- **A digital driving licence**, loadable in particular on a mobile phone and fully equivalent to the physical driving licence. Member States would need to assign all uses of the mobile document to the physical document and vice versa. The use of a digital licence is an individual choice of the driver;
- Permission to drive a vehicle weighing up to **4 250 kg** with a **B-category driving licence** if the alternative vehicle is powered (the current weight allowed for this category is 3 500 kg). This change is mainly intended to encourage the purchase of or conversion to electric propulsion, the battery pack of which is heavier than a conventional internal combustion engine;
- Creation of a **single digital gateway** for information, procedures, support and problem-solving services. A change in this context is that there would be less need to 'stack' exams for driving licences categories C or D (in particular for lorries and buses);
- The obligation to have **A- and B-category driving licences** (motorcycles and cars) valid for **15 years until** the age of **70**. After that, the driving licence would be valid for 5 years upon renewal, during which one's medical fitness to drive would be assessed more frequently;
- The possibility for the **Member States to administratively extend** the validity of driving licences, in particular in times of **crisis**, as happened for example during the coronavirus pandemic. In addition, the proposal introduces the possibility to shorten the period of validity of the driving licence for novice drivers and whenever more frequent medical checks need to be made;
- A **probation period of at least 2 years for novice drivers** after passing the test and **a zero-tolerance rule on alcohol/drink-driving**. This is essential, even if young drivers only represent 8 % of all car drivers, as two out of five fatal collisions involve a driver or rider under the age of 30;
- Allowing **young people to take their test and commence accompanied driving** of cars and lorries from the age of **17**, in order to gain driving experience. Young people interested in a driver's profession will thereby be able to learn to drive earlier and complete their training under the supervision of experienced drivers;
- **Adapting driver training and testing to better prepare drivers** for real driving situations, and to develop their risk awareness, in particular to **vulnerable users** on the road. This will help improve safety for pedestrians, cyclists, as well as users of e-scooters and e-bikes, as the EU changes to more sustainable urban mobility;
- Making a **medical self-assessment mandatory** for every application and every administrative renewal of a driving licence. This assessment should address the medical requirements and identify whether the applicant is physically and mentally sufficiently in order.

Advisory committees

In 2019, the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) adopted an [opinion](#) on road safety and automated mobility, proposing that training for a driving licence should cover the technology of assistance systems. In this regard, the automotive industry, together with municipalities, could offer training courses and training areas for private and professional drivers. The CoR has not adopted an opinion on the current proposal.

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) adopted its [opinion](#) on the proposal on 14 June 2023.

National parliaments

National parliaments were invited to scrutinise the proposal for possible [subsidiarity](#) and proportionality issues. The scrutiny deadline was 7 June 2023. Fifteen Member States reacted. The reactions included a [letter](#) to the European Commission from Czechia in the framework of political dialogue.

Stakeholder views¹

Stakeholder [consultations](#) linked to the proposal were held from 25 February to 20 May 2022. Feedback was received from 7 025 EU-citizens, 157 non-EU citizens, 125 companies, 54 business associations, 33 public authorities, 32 non-governmental organisations (NGOs), 14 consumer organisations, 3 trade unions and 88 other stakeholders. After the proposal was submitted in March 2023, an open public [consultation](#) ran until 31 May 2023. This consultation received [feedback](#) from 2 595 stakeholders, including 2 396 EU citizens, 69 companies, 36 non-EU citizens, 27 business associations, 25 NGOs, 9 consumer organisations, 6 public authorities, 3 trade unions and 24 other stakeholders.

The International Road Transport Union (IRU) welcomed the provision that 18-year-old professional truck drivers with full training could drive freight transport vehicles in both national and international traffic. They also want to align the minimum driving age limit for bus and coach drivers with those applicable to truck drivers (18 years of age). The IRU also insists on allowing trained 17-year-old professional road transport drivers to accompany competent and experienced professional drivers. They advocate the possibility to use a B driving licence to drive light commercial vehicles above the 3.5 tonne threshold and passenger transport vehicles of up to 8+1 seats. The IRU also proposes adding recommendations to the recitals of the directive to encourage Member States to deploy appropriate *passerelle* schemes and provisions to support holders of a B licence with experience in commercial transport and under certain conditions. The IRU has advocated digitalising driving licences and making digital platforms interoperable. Lastly, it proposes to adapt and modernise professional driver training.

The International Association of Public Transport (UITP Europe), is of the opinion that because of the different ways in which Member States transposed the Driving Licence Directive into their national legislation, its impact on and the situation of public transport companies varies quite significantly from one Member State to another. UITP would like to skip the reference to the length of bus and coach lines (less than 50 km) and to allow for workshop employees like mechatronics engineers holding a category C driving licence to move buses without passengers and carry out the necessary inspection drives. UITP expects that the deployment of new technologies will affect the situation by changing the demand and skills set for drivers. To deal with the current shortage of drivers and to attract new but also young workers to the sector, it is crucial to adapt the minimum age requirement in the proposed revision of the directive, in particular for D driving licences.

The European Association for Forwarding, Transport Logistics and Customs Services (CLECAT) welcomes the proposal for its aim to improve safety for all road users and alleviate the shortage of professional drivers. The proposals made jointly by CLECLAT, the European Express Association

and the European Shipper's Council have all been taken up in the proposal. These included an EU-wide increase in maximum vehicle weights for B licences for alternatively fuelled vehicles and the further digitalisation of the EU driving licence. Their proposal on earlier training, from the age of 17, to enhance drivers' access to the industry, has been taken into account as well, as long as trainees are accompanied by an experienced trainer.

The **European Cyclists' Federation (ECF)** advocates: common minimum requirements for training and standards for professional instructors; minimum requirements for probation periods; a graduated licensing system; and specific requirements for interactions with cyclists. In addition, knowledge of uses, risks and benefits of advanced driving systems should be an integral part of driving training and testing. A new category for micro-mobility should be created, or this category should be included in the existing AM category (scooters, mopeds, speed pedelecs and microcars). The ECF also insists that training should be envisaged for drivers of light goods vehicles and the maximum weight of the B-category should be increased from 3.5 tonnes to 4.25 tonnes. Age limits for any category should not be reduced for either private or professional drivers. A screening protocol is needed for assessing drivers' – in particular elderly drivers' – medical fitness to drive, including medical checks at licence renewal. ECF recommends that Member States set up provisions for assisting people in the transition from driving to other forms of mobility such as walking, cycling or using public transport.

Legislative process

The European Commission presented its proposal for a revision of the Directive on Driving Licences on 1 March 2023.

The legislative file was assigned to Parliament's Committee on Transport and Tourism (TRAN) on 27 April 2023. The committee appointed Karima Delli (Greens/EFA, France) as rapporteur on 3 May 2023. The [draft report](#) was published on 19 July 2023 and the committee adopted its [report](#) on 7 December 2023, by 22 votes in favour, 21 against and with 2 abstentions. The report includes the following elements.

- Driving licences should be valid at least for 15 years for motorcycles, cars and tractors, and five years for trucks and buses, with some exceptions. The validity of driving licences of drivers aged 60 or over should be reduced to ensure that they are still fit to drive.
- The committee is against the self-assessment of driver fitness and is of the opinion that a medical examination should be compulsory for anyone taking a driving test or renewing a driving licence.
- As novice drivers are responsible for many accidents, the report is in favour of a probationary driving period of at least two years, during which there would be certain restrictions for those drivers, such as stricter penalties for unsafe driving, or lower speed limits and alcohol limits.
- Given the shortage of professional drivers, the report favours allowing 18 year olds to obtain a licence to drive a truck or a bus with up to 16 passengers if they hold a certificate of professional competence. If they do not, the age limit should be 21 years. Furthermore, 17 year olds could already obtain a driving licence for driving trucks if accompanied by an experienced driver.
- The committee backs the Commission proposal to adapt driver training and testing to prepare drivers better for real driving situations and develop their risk awareness, in particular awareness of vulnerable users, such as pedestrians, cyclists, and users of e-scooters and e-bikes.
- Driver tests should include safe phone usage while driving, driving in difficult weather conditions, blind spot risks, driver-assistance systems, and criteria relating to the environment and emissions. Furthermore, there should be a harmonised EU-wide framework covering both instructors and training for candidates.

- The report is in favour of giving drivers the possibility to get a digital driving licence, available on a mobile phone and fully equivalent to the physical driving licence.

On 28 February, during the February II 2024 plenary session, Members reached an agreement on Parliament's first-reading [position](#) on the file, to be followed up by the new Parliament in the next legislative term.

To prevent discrimination against elderly citizens and to ensure that they can continue to enjoy their freedom of movement and participation in economic and social activities, the Members rejected the Commission's proposed measure to reduce the validity of driving licences for elderly citizens.

MEPs supported the idea that drivers should be able to self-assess their own fitness to drive when applying for renewing their driving licenses, and that EU Member State should be free to decide whether this self-assessment should be replaced by a medical examination consisting of a basic check of drivers' eyesight and cardiovascular health.

The Council adopted its [general approach](#) to the file on 4 December 2023. While it supports the Commission proposal, the Council proposes several [changes](#).

- Shortened validity periods for driving licences of older people should remain the decision of Member States.
- The physical and mental fitness tests prior to the issuance and renewal of driving licences should be outlined more clearly, and should be based on the different systems developed in the Member States.
- Requirements for the accompanying person in the accompanied driving scheme, which will be compulsory only for category B licences, must be refined.
- The conditions for the probationary period must be formulated more clearly, and adapted to the Member States' competences and established practices.
- There must be a possibility to have a theoretical exam, under certain conditions, in the Member State of citizenship when different from the Member State of residence, but no such option for the practical test.

With the new legislative term under way, Parliament's TRAN committee appointed a new rapporteur for the file on 3 September 2024 (Jutta Paulus, Greens/EFA, Germany). On 7 October 2024, the committee [voted](#) to start trilogue negotiations.

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT SUPPORTING ANALYSIS

Hahnkamper-Vandenbulcke, N., [Revision of Directive 2006/126/EC on Driving Licences](#), implementation appraisal, EPRS, European Parliament, March 2023.

OTHER SOURCES

European Parliament, [Revision of the Directive on Driving Licences](#), Legislative Observatory (OEIL), 2023.

ENDNOTE

- ¹ This section aims to provide a flavour of the debate and is not intended to be an exhaustive account of all different views on the proposal. Additional information can be found in related publications listed under 'European Parliament supporting analysis'.

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Fourth edition, the first was drafted by Karin Smit Jacobs. The 'EU Legislation in Progress' briefings are updated at key stages throughout the legislative procedure.