



Towards a European road safety performance indicator on driving under the influence of drugs: the role of Trendline

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Introduction

Driving under the influence of drugs has been identified as a growing concern for road safety. Drugs, due to their numbing, stimulating or mind-changing effect on the brain, or a combination of these effects, impair driving performance (WHO, 2016; SWOV, 2020). The risk of being involved in a fatal crash is found to increase moderately for cannabis (1.3 times higher risk), more seriously for opiates (1.7 times higher), cocaine (3 times higher), amphetamines (5.2 times higher), and highest for alcohol-drugs combination or multiple drugs (5–30 times higher) (SWOV, 2020).

The European Trendline project brings together EU Member states for collecting and analyzing data related to road safety Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and for using these within road safety policies. KPIs are indicators that provide information about factors that are associated with crash and injury risks. One of the new experimental KPIs indicators that is being explored in Trendline is the share of drivers under the influence of drugs.

Research Methodology

The aim of the part of the Trendline project dealing with new experimental KPIs is to provide a definition, to propose and assess a methodology for each indicator. For the KPI Driving under the influence of drugs a Key Expert Group (KEG) led by SWOV (The Netherlands) and including experts from Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, France, Spain, Sweden, and Portugal was established for this purpose. The following definition of the KPI Driving under the influence of drugs was proposed by the KEG: “Percentage of drivers not driving under the influence of drugs”. To measure the KPI, two research methods were proposed as most feasible and reliable: 1) random oral fluid test data gathered during roadside checks by the police and 2) self-reported behaviour data collected through questionnaire survey.

A first pilot in the Netherlands has been conducted in the spring of 2024. Pilots in Czech Republic, Portugal, Spain will be conducted in the second half of 2024. In these pilots, primarily the first research method will be explored to test the feasibility and the reliability of the methodology and to adapt the methodology in the light of the experiences gained. Based on the results of the pilots, the KEG will propose a unique definition of the KPI and draft methodological guidelines that will support countries, regions and cities to calculate the value of the KPI. This proposal for a common definition will be presented during the conference.



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Results

The preliminary results of the pilot in the Netherlands show that oral drug testing requires a lot of police capacity. It poses a challenge for the police to combine random drug testing with responding to emergencies and performing other police tasks. The results of this (and other) pilots will become available in the course of 2024; these results will be presented at the ICTCT conference.

Discussion and conclusions

Following the pilots undertaken it will be possible to: (1) agree to a proposed definition and scope of the KPI on Driving under the influence of drugs, (2) to assess the advantages and limitations of different research methods, and (3) to provide common methodological guidelines for the KPI on Driving under the influence of drugs. The activities and findings of the Trendline KEG on Driving under the influence of drugs are likely to help monitor the drug use in traffic in Europe, allowing benchmarking at national, regional and city level.

WHO (2016). Drug Use and Road Safety. A Policy Brief. Geneva: World Health Organization

SWOV (2020). Drugs and medicines. SWOV fact sheet, March 2020 SWOV, The Hague