

## Press Release

Findings from the 2022 DEKRA Road Safety Report

# Narrow Country Roads: Extra-High Accident Risk for Novice Drivers

- Tight bends in particular cause difficulties
- Goal: a self-explanatory road, with safe roadside areas
- Driver training should cover all road characteristics

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**Across the EU, more than 50% of traffic fatalities occur on rural roads. This has been the case for years. Roads in non-built-up areas are particularly dangerous for young people between the ages of 18 and 24. Two thirds of road deaths among this age group occur on country roads. There are many reasons for this. “Excessive speed, driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, and overconfidence play a role. Added to this is the fact that young drivers are not yet proficient at correctly assessing the course of these roads with their potentially tight bends and adjusting their driving style accordingly,” explains DEKRA expert Walter Niewöhner. This makes it all the more important to have functional and efficient infrastructure, says the DEKRA expert, referring to the 2022 DEKRA Road Safety Report on the Mobility of Young People.**

When it comes to increasing road safety, infrastructure plays an important role alongside the vehicle’s technical capabilities and the human factor. It is not without reason, then, that the European Commission, for example, sees infrastructure as a key area in its policy for reducing the number of accidents. This goes beyond new construction projects, with enhancing the safety of existing roads in a targeted manner being a particularly important consideration. “The main aspects to be scrutinized are the condition of the road surface, the predictability of the road layout, the recognizability of the roadway, the design of the area along the roadside, road markings, the design of intersections, and providing opportunities to overtake and safe spaces to evade accidents,” Walter Niewöhner notes.

The role that infrastructure plays in accidents, especially those involving young drivers, is shown by an analysis of the data from the unique road safety screening tool developed by the Baden-Württemberg Ministry of Transport. The analysis of this data from 2016 to 2020 for DEKRA’s 2022 Road Safety Report showed that on federal, state, and district roads in Baden-Württemberg, around 20% of those causing accidents at the wheel of a car belonged to the 18 to 24 age group. By

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way of comparison, in the much larger 25-64 age group, the total was just under 60%. When the accident statistics are broken down for this period, it is evident that young people behind the wheel of a car were involved in driving accidents (that is, losing control of a vehicle) about twice as often as 25-64 year-olds (28.6% vs. 14.5%).

### **Informative data collection**

A breakdown by road type shows a significantly higher proportion of such driving accidents for young people in Germany (30.9% as compared to 14.9%), in particular on state and district roads. The reasons for this are obvious – state and district roads contain a higher proportion of roads with narrower lanes, which therefore also have tighter curve radii. These state and district roads make up 13,774 miles of the road network in Baden-Württemberg, while federal roads account for 2,611 miles. “This means that inexperienced drivers in particular have more problems following the course of the road with their vehicle,” says DEKRA expert Niewöhner.

Young people were involved in accidents with a turning or crossing vehicle in non-built-up areas (excluding freeways) in 25.3% of cases (compared to 25 to 64-year-olds in 33.3% of cases). 26.4% of accidents in parallel traffic with vehicles in the same or opposite direction were caused by young people (25 to 64 year-olds: 27.5%). Proportionally, young people were responsible for inappropriate speed or breaking the speed limit up to five times as often as 25 to 64 year-olds, depending on the cause of the accident and road category. About one in three accidents caused by young people took place at night – for 25 to 64 year-olds, this “only” came to one in four accidents. “Even though the data in question is confined to Baden-Württemberg, it is likely to be representative of comparable road accidents in many other countries around the world,” says the DEKRA expert.

### **Eliminate factors that cause accidents and defuse danger spots**

In fact, in addition to the condition of the road surface, the ability to see the road ahead and distinguish individual lanes in different light and weather conditions is a key factor for rural road safety. Niewöhner points out another important element: “The way roadside areas are designed along country roads also plays a major role both in preventing accidents and in reducing the consequences of accidents.” He believes these serve as an initial reference point for the driver as to how the road will continue. At the same time, they create expectations about the condition of the road ahead, meaning they have a direct influence on factors like the chosen speed. As a result, it is crucial to avoid any discrepancies between the how the road’s course and condition might be perceived and how they actually are.

Another problem associated with accidents on rural roads is that overtaking maneuvers can often end in head-on collisions or skidding off the roadway. Insufficient visibility, misjudging distances and speeds, and impatience are just some of the reasons for the often fatal decision to overtake. Rural road safety can

also be increased by introducing overtaking lanes on certain sections in combination with prohibitions on overtaking, and imposing speed limits.

“The ultimate goal of all measures must be a self-explanatory road that ‘forgives’ drivers’ mistakes,” the DEKRA expert insists. In other words, the user should intuitively recognize which type of driving behavior and what speed are required of them based on the road design alone. It should be possible to identify dangerous spots. At the same time, the road should offer sufficient safety margins so that a driver can quickly regain control of their vehicle after a mistake, resulting in no accident or an accident with less serious consequences.

In addition, as an important preventive measure, practical driver training in all countries should be as comprehensive as possible with regard to road characteristics (built-up areas, narrow country roads, freeways) and lighting conditions (driving at night).

Background information on this topic and much more can be found in the 2022 DEKRA Road Safety Report entitled Mobility of Young People. It is available to download from [www.dekra-roadsafety.com](http://www.dekra-roadsafety.com). You will also find all previous reports there, as well as additional information, including video clips and interactive graphics.

### **About DEKRA**

*DEKRA has been active in the field of safety for almost 100 years. Founded in 1925 in Berlin as Deutscher Kraftfahrzeug-Überwachungs-Verein e.V., it is today one of the world's leading expert organizations. DEKRA SE is a subsidiary of DEKRA e.V. and manages the Group's operating business. In 2021, DEKRA generated sales totaling more than EUR 3.5 billion. The company currently employs almost 48,000 people in approximately 60 countries on all continents. With qualified and independent expert services, they work for safety on the road, at work and at home. These services range from vehicle inspection and expert appraisals to claims services, industrial and building inspections, safety consultancy, testing and certification of products and systems, as well as training courses and temporary work. The vision for the company's 100th birthday in 2025 is that DEKRA will be the global partner for a safe, secure and sustainable world. With a platinum rating from EcoVadis, DEKRA is now in the top one percent of sustainable businesses ranked.*