

Press Release

DEKRA presents the “Old-Age Mobility” Road Safety Report 2021

Senior Citizens at Greater Risk of Accidents

- Particular risk for elderly people traveling on foot or by bicycle
- Technology can compensate for age-related deficits to a certain extent
- A proactive strategy that factors in all types of mobility is required

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Whether traveling in their own cars, on their bicycles, or on foot, senior citizens across the globe are becoming increasingly mobile, and many are continuing to use the roads well into their later years in a variety of ways. Such mobility comes with a much higher risk of accidents for this demographic than for younger age groups. “We need to act fast to minimize this risk while still enabling older people to retain their mobility, so that they can continue to play an active role in society,” commented Jann Fehlauer, Managing Director of DEKRA Automobil GmbH on the findings of the DEKRA Road Safety Report 2021 entitled “Old-Age Mobility.” This is all the more important given the fact that the 65+ demographic will make up an ever-greater part of our overall population in the coming decades. This DEKRA Road Safety Report is the 14th edition to be published. It states there are plenty of places to start if we want to achieve these goals, shown by the many examples in the report of the roles played by the human factor, technology, and infrastructure.

Around 30 percent of all traffic fatalities that have occurred in the EU in recent years were aged 65 or over, and among pedestrians and cyclists, senior citizens even accounted for around half of all those killed on the road. These few facts alone illustrate the often life-threatening dilemma older people face when using the road in any capacity.

This becomes particularly clear if we look at how many senior citizens were killed on the road relative to younger demographics. According to the International Traffic Safety Data and Analysis Group (IRTAD), the number of 18 to 24-year-olds who died in road accidents in the countries that were analyzed (OECD countries except Argentina, Canada, Columbia and Slovenia) dropped by 25 percent between 2010 and 2018, and the same figure dropped by 6.9 percent for 25 to 64-year-olds. In the same period, the number of over-65s who were fatally injured in accidents rose by around seven percent, while there was a 4.7 percent increase among over-75s. If the United Nations’ forecasts prove accurate, the situation could get even worse in many parts of the world. According to these figures, for

Date Stuttgart, August 5, 2021 / No. 044-A
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example, one in four residents in Europe and North America will be aged 65 or over by 2050.

“As we move up the age groups, we see an increasing risk of suffering more severe or fatal injuries compared against younger people given the same kinds of accidents. As such, there is a danger that the number of road accident fatalities occurring in the 65+ demographic will continue to rise,” explained Jann Fehlauer. The DEKRA Road Safety Report 2021 highlights the areas to focus on if we want to effectively take advantage of all the opportunities available to us to further improve road safety for senior citizens.

One of the challenges will be to solve the conflicting goals of helping senior citizens retain their independent mobility well into old age, while also minimizing the potential risks posed to them – and occasionally posed by them. The best preventive approach to counteracting this problem would seem to be a combination of various solutions. “We need to consider monitoring, advice and appraisal measures just as seriously as vehicle technology, infrastructure design solutions and inclusive mobility concepts,” adds Fehlauer.

A renewed focus on the human factor

Many experts endorse the use and further development of driver assistance systems as a means of improving road safety for senior citizens. These systems can, to a certain extent, compensate for age-related performance deficits and can help to reduce the extent to which older drivers are involved in car accidents – or indeed cause them – as a result of driver error, for example. As a survey commissioned by DEKRA has shown, the 65+ age group is fundamentally very open to the idea of electronic assistants. However, it is important to note that it will take a long time for vehicles with assistance systems to achieve a high level of market penetration. For new safety systems, this will take an average of around 15 years after they become a mandatory requirement.

Since infrastructural measures like structural changes to the road also often take a long time to get from the planning stage to implementation, for now we need to focus on the human factor if we want to achieve fast positive results with regard to road safety, especially that of senior citizens. “Our mental processing capacity reduces as we age, which has a major influence on the amount of information that an individual can handle at any given time,” commented Jann Fehlauer. This makes dealing with a driving task more strenuous, which in turn leads more quickly to overloading in the form of tiredness and mental stress. “It also explains the increased risk of being involved in an accident, especially in complex traffic situations,” he adds.

He went on to stress: “Generally speaking, in order to improve road safety for senior citizens, a proactive strategy that takes all types of mobility into account is required at international, national, regional, and local levels.” The explicit objective of this strategy must be to enable senior citizens to retain safe personal mobility – and we must all make a social commitment to achieve this aim.

The DEKRA Road Safety Report 2021 entitled “Old-Age Mobility” is available to download online from www.dekra-roadsafety.com. You will also find all previous reports there as well as additional information, including video clips and interactive graphics.

To increase road safety for senior citizens, DEKRA is calling for the following:

- To ensure that they use the roads safely, older people must be provided with intensive education on their performance and limitations.
- Regular practical evaluations should be mandatory for senior citizens over the age of 75; these play an important role in helping them maintain their skills.
- All the relevant players in the health care system must be given awareness training and the qualifications to provide older people with advice regarding whether it is safe for them to drive.
- To boost safety, driver assistance systems must become more widely used on the market.
- In-vehicle safety features across all vehicle models should become largely standardized so that they are as intuitive as possible to use.
- Depending on the prevailing local conditions, light signaling systems, pedestrian crossings (crosswalks), central islands or protruding curbs must be used to make crossings safer, especially for older pedestrians.
- In light of the fact that more and more people aged 65 and over are using bicycles and pedelecs, the expansion of the bicycle path network in accordance with road safety concerns and the maintenance of bicycle paths must be made a top priority.
- Anyone buying a pedelec – in particular older people – should be provided with in-depth advice and the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the unusual way they work before buying.
- In order to prevent cars from driving in the wrong direction on freeways as much as possible, suitable measures that help drivers to (intuitively) orient themselves in good time are required.
- Particularly in rural regions, models must be developed to enable older people to retain their mobility without having to drive a car themselves.

Picture Caption

DEKRA CEO Stefan Kölbl (right) and Jann Fehlauer, Managing Director of DEKRA Automobil GmbH, at the first presentation of the DEKRA Road Safety Report 2021 in Germany.

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 2020, DEKRA generated turnover totaling almost EUR 3.2 billion. The company currently employs around 44,000 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.