

ESV 2005 – ITALIAN GOVERNMENT STATUS REPORT

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ABSTRACT

This paper will provide an overview of the main results achieved by Italy in the field of road safety during the last two years. It focuses on the follow-up of the “National Plan on Road Safety”, adopted four years ago and subsequent introduction of new provisions in the “Highway Code”.

Italy has started an unprecedented plan and legislative instruments to manage the many factors that affect road safety. Also minor subjects involved in this field have been encompassed in a holistic strategy giving to each of them the deserved priority. The plan has taken nothing for granted about the role of the Administration at any level: Central Administration, Local Administrations, Road Management Authority etc. All the aspects regarding their synergy and effectiveness have been revised to foster the best integration of all the bodies of the public administration. This document describes the ways of the application of the National Plan.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Road accidents in Italy: the human factor.

Each year in Italy over 6,000 dead, 300,000 injured and 200,000 vehicle accidents are recorded. Among the major elements affecting road safety, the Italian government has particularly focused on the human factor. Since 2001 the problem has been dealt with a series of legislative embitterments. The accident data recorded each year in Italy shows that 90% of them are caused by the human factor¹. Very often road users have been responsible of mistakes due to their arrogance and overstimation of their abilities. The social costs of road accidents are huge. ISTAT² has assessed an approximative cost of 34 billion euros.

About 75% of the accidents occur in the urban areas:

¹ E.g.: lack of respect of road signs and safety distances, dangerous overtaking, excess of speed, unwary use of the mobile phone, alcohol and drug assumption, weariness, inattention.

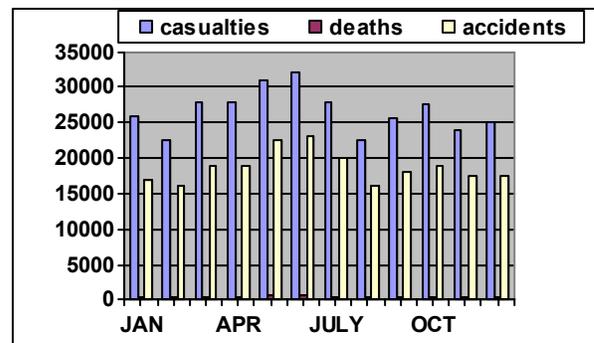
² Italian Statistical Institute.

	YEAR 2003		
	ACCIDENTS	DEAD	INJURED
URBAN ROAD	168,572	2,421	227,357
MOTORWAYS	13,422	671	23,049
OTHER ROADS	43,147	2,923	68,555
TOTAL	225,141	6,015	318,961

While the distribution of accidents is the following:

Year 2003 (ISTAT source)	
	%ACCIDENTS
URBAN ROADS	75%
MOTORWAYS	6%
STATE ROADS	10%
PROVINCE ROADS	6%
COMMUNAL EXTRAURBAN ROADS	3%
TOTAL	100%

Distribution of accidents during the year:



2. Actions undertaken

The political and public dismay comes out by comparing the Italian situation with other European countries. Italy that was formerly among the four road safest European countries, has dropped dramatically to a lower level in the last few years.

The need of a “National plan on road safety” has originated from the growing importance given to road safety in Italy and from the need to keep up with European standards.

In such a context, in line with European Community recommendation, the Government has focused on a series of interventions devoted to reduce road accidents. At this aim urgent provisions have been waged to modify the road users’ behaviour.

Among the different actions undertaken the following have given a real accomplishment:

- Penalty point system based driving licence.
- Driving ability certificate for mopeds
- Norms for the proper use of mobile phone.
- Procedures to verify alcohol and drug assumption.
- Use of reflecting vest to protect people who leave the vehicle.
- The use of dipped headlights during day time.
- Retro-reflective markings for goods vehicles.

The innovative contribution of these norms is a strong recall to sense of responsibility and awareness of road users. None of these have reached the excellence in term of results, but the beneficial effects caused by their enforcement give a good perspective for the future and confirms that the right direction has been undertaken.

The application of these new legislative actions has been supported by a restless activity of control by police. A hard duty to accomplish, due to the huge length of the roadway network (700,000 km), more than 49,000 in use vehicles and 34,000 active driving licences. That is the reason why a responsible and convinced participation of all road users is strongly required.

This new legislative deal supported by the road police activity and the individual sense of responsibility has allowed the Road Safety National Plan to cope successfully with the main road accident risk factors.

2.1 Results achieved

According to accidents data recorded by road police, a meaningful improvement has been achieved thanks to the new rules adopted in the Highway Code. Data concerning the first year after the entry into force of new measures (1st July 2003 – 30th June 2004) compared to the same period of the previous year, have shown remarkable differences:

- Reduction of the 14.5% of the total number of accidents;
- Reduction of the 18.8% of the dead;

- Reduction of the 17.95% of the injured;

It results a reduction of 27,485 accidents, 857 dead and 24,505 injured

The “High Institute for Health” has appraised a saving of 2 billion euros for the health expenses only, ensued from the enforcement of the last rules.

These data can be read as a reduction of the accident severity, represented by the *rate of mortality*, namely the rate between dead toll and accidents. Such beneficial effects display also a better vehicle passive safety, more effective in the event of a collision; a higher improvement of safety devices such as safety belts and air-bags and better medical emergency technologies.

2.1.1 Penalty point system based driving licence.

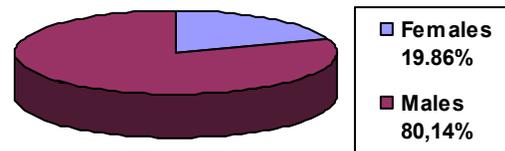
One of the most efficient legislative actions, able to cope with the human factor is the penalty point driving licence. It has been also a good marker device to identify the relation between law infringements and driving risk factors. The causes of major point reduction have been pin pointed by the police forces:

- Lack of use of safety belts
- Speed limits violation
- Red light crossing
- Use of mobile phone

This new system also gives a chance to display the driving behaviour in relation to the gender of the driver.

Apparently women are more flexible to comply with the new rules :

Distribution of erased scores from driving licences with reference to the gender of the driver (situation updated on 22nd January 2005):



2.1.2 Driving ability certificate for mopeds

The law n° 214/2003 introduced also the compulsory achievement for minors of the driving ability certificate for mopeds.

This enforcement represents a remarkable step to rule over six million circulating vehicles. An uncomparable situation with the rest of Europe.

The aim is to intervene on high risk categories of “weak users”, such as youths., by means of promoting and spreading the culture of safety in lectures suited to achieve the “certificate”.

At the date of 18 January 2005 almost 583,000 certificates had been granted with over 851,000 tests carried out.

3. Changes in progress of driving behaviour

The changes in progress of driving behaviour are demonstrated even by the reduction of law breaches recorded by the road police on the use of helmets and safety belts. These are respectively of -52.77% and -43.56% in the period from 1st July 2003 to 30 June 2004.

Definitely it is possible to affirm that the undertaken actions have produced a higher level of safety in the road traffic as a whole so far. They have strongly contributed to improve the driving behaviour of the road users.

Furthermore, it is important to underline that the adoption of new intervention rules have ignited beneficial results in spite of increasing road traffic.

4. Future developments

Great importance has been addressed to a clearer and efficient management of driving license examination with the aim to devise a proper selection of candidates.

In order to improve effectiveness of the present examination procedure, the Department for Land Transport is going to adopt a computer based test. This innovative procedure will allow to pursue the Governmental goal to achieve fast and modern administrative procedures.

In this respect, the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport in close collaboration with the Interior and Justice Ministries, has proposed a draft law which would enable the Government to take action in the whole revision of the Highway Code.

The goal is to completely revise the Highway Code in order to make its provisions easy to read and to apply. The future text should only encompass behavior rules, penalties and general principles dealing with the penalty point system based driving licence.

The present 240 articles of the Highway Code will be sharply reduced to no more than 60-70 articles while technical requirements formerly included in it will be contained in specific Regulations which can be easily adapted to technical progress.

Moreover, both the Highway Code and the Regulations will match the need to integrate and harmonize the new norms with the former rules on the matter.

5. Other initiatives

The Ministry commitment on road safety matters will not be limited to legislative actions but it will also aim to a wider address:

- New infrastructures;
- Improvement of the present road infrastructures;
- Road sign updating;
- Enforcement of new norms to protect “weak users”;
- Use of new technologies to improve the safety of both vehicles and infrastructures;
- A steady control of accident occurrences and causes;
- Planning of new series of media road safety campaigns;
- Projects on road safety education;

6. Conclusion

An effective and strict road safety politics, shored up by more stringent laws was needed to tackle the negative figures on safety recorded in the past few years.

The high social-economical cost was unbearable. The lack of safety absorbed huge resources from the national public health, produced a loss of working hours and often imposed unaffordable expenses to Italian families.

The indications contained in the second program on road safety devised by the European Commission have been the framework to set off the “National Plan on Road Safety”. This new law enforcements, a social change in thinking and driving behaviour, the renewal of the road network and infrastructures joined to pressing actions to car manufacturers in order to fit safer vehicles are all part of an holistic approach to the issue. The combination of all these elements allows us to depict an optimistic scenario for our next future and to nourish the realistic expectation to be in line with the European Commission target of 50% reduction of injured-dead toll by 2010.