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## European Court of Auditors sees Vision Zero in danger

If the member states of the European Union do not shift up a gear, the long-term goals of road safety are unlikely to be achieved. At least that is what the European Court of Auditors fears. The EU initially wants to halve the number of deaths and serious injuries in road traffic accidents and then reduce them to almost zero by 2050 as part of its "Vision Zero" mission. However, despite extensive efforts in recent years, hardly any progress has been made, the Court of Auditors states. It is therefore highly questionable whether the EU will succeed in reducing this figure to almost zero by 2050. By 2030, the number of road deaths is expected to fall by only a quarter compared to 2019, when 22,800 people lost their lives, instead of the targeted halving.

Road traffic accidents are a common cause of premature death in Europe. Vulnerable road users such as pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists are particularly at risk. They account for almost half of all road deaths, followed by car occupants (45 percent). It is estimated that there are five seriously injured people for every road fatality.

"The EU has already achieved a lot in the area of road safety, but people are still dying on our roads every day," said Eva Lindström, the Member of the European Court of Auditors responsible for the audit. "If progress continues at the current rate, the goal of halving the number of road deaths by the end of the decade will not be achieved. If the EU and its Member States want to reach their targets, they need to step up a gear."

In 2022 (the last year for which full figures are available), 20,640 people were killed on the roads across the EU. The average number of road deaths per million inhabitants in Europe was 46, with Sweden recording the lowest figure of 22 road deaths per million inhabitants and Romania bringing up the rear with a rate of 86. In order to achieve the 2030 target, the number of road deaths in the EU would have to fall by 4.6 percent annually, according to the EU auditors. Over the past five years, however, the annual average has only been 2.5 percent.

The EU's goals for greater road safety could only be achieved if the member states developed and financed the necessary concepts. The implementation of concrete measures that can directly improve safety is in the hands of the Member States. Their approaches are correct, but are not sufficiently monitored and do not yet adequately cover all factors, such as the risks of speeding, which - along with drunk driving, driving without a seatbelt and driver distraction - is one of the main causes of accidents.

Between 2014 and 2020, the EU provided around 6.7 billion euros for projects that contributed to road safety. However, the corresponding EU requirements do not relate to the areas of infrastructure where most road deaths occur, such as urban areas, cycle paths and secondary roads. At the same time, the progress made in the individual EU countries in the area of road safety concepts differs considerably. In addition, when assessing the economic benefits of projects, the value placed on individual lives varies greatly from one Member State to another. When selecting projects, the improvement of road safety was not a key criterion, as it competed with other priority objectives such as the promotion of more environmentally friendly means of transport. Furthermore, accident blackspots often played no role in the selection criteria.

As there may be less EU funding available for road safety in the coming years, it is all the more important to ensure that the funds available are used in the best possible way to save lives. (aum)

## Images for article



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