

Helmet laws in progress

Apparently laws about bicycle helmets are becoming increasingly common. As far as the 29 European countries covered by a recent survey are concerned, four countries (France, Italy, The Netherlands, Russia) require competitive cyclists - but not regular cyclists - to wear helmets.

Another six countries (Croatia, Finland, Iceland, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden) have laws for regular cyclists. In four of these countries the law covers children only, while in Finland and Spain everybody should wear a helmet when cycling.

In yet another five countries (Estonia, Ireland, Serbia and Montenegro, Switzerland and United Kingdom) similar laws have been proposed or are in preparation.

Survey among ECF members

Information about helmet laws is just one out of several bits of information achieved by numerous responses to a questionnaire on bicycle issues sent to members and associate members of ECF (European Cyclists' Federation) October 2004, and a few countries later.

Main questions of the questionnaire are shown below^a.

The responses show a great variation between countries on the different issues. A table summarising the results is shown on the next page.

Helmet laws in question

Usually - with Croatia as the exception - bicycle user organisations are opposing laws requiring regular bicycle users to wear helmets.

ECF has written a publication on efficient bicycle safety promotion measures. Bicycle helmet laws are, due to lacking efficiency and adverse side effects, not included in these measures.

The publication is from 1998 and can be found electronically on www.ecf.com (www.ecf.com/publications/Read/public_helmetgb1.htm). It can also be ordered in paper format from the ECF office in Bremen (office@ecf.com, phone +49 421 346 29 39).

Thomas Krag for ECF (European Cyclists' Federation), June 2005.

^a Survey questions:

1. Are (some) cyclists required to wear a bicycle helmet in «country» (y/n)?
2. If "yes" to question 1, since when has the law been effective (year)?
3. If "no" to question 1, is such a law in preparation (y/n)?
4. If "yes" to question 3, how far is the process (indicate when the law will be effective, if this is known)?
5. If "yes" to question 1 or 3, is the law for everybody or only for certain groups (e.g. children) or roads (indicate ages/road types in this case)?
- 6: If "yes" to question 1 or 3, how is the law (foreseen to be) enforced, and what is the punishment if one cycle without a helmet?
- 7: Is the use of bicycle helmets promoted in «country»?
- 8: If "yes" to question 7, who is behind the promotion (e.g. public authorities, private initiative) and how effective is the promotion (e.g. "known by almost everybody", "mainly known by those being especially interested")?
- 9: What is the helmet wearing rate in «country» (please indicate what percentage of adults and children cycle with helmets, if you have figures readily available, and quote the source if possible)?
- 10: What is the minimum age, if any, required to cycle independently (with or without a helmet) on the streets of «country»?

Bicycle helmets laws, figures for helmet usage and age limits to childrens' cycling

Country	Helmet law for...	Enforcement	Promotion	Helmet wearing rate	Cycling age limit
Australia	All, since 1991-92	Police, 20 Euro fine	not any more	>90% (199x)	none
Austria	none		no	unknown	12 yr, 10 yr with license
Belgium	none		some, limited effect		none, children up to 9 can go on pavements
Canada	All in 3 states, children in another; none in the remaining states	Max fine 100 \$ CDN	some, less than before	25-30% in Quebec, probably max 50%	18 yr if unaccompanied on roads with speed limit over 50 km/h
Croatia	children up to 16 yr, since 2004	Police, 40 Euro fine	yes	almost all kids, 20-25% adults on road	16 yr alone, 9 yr with adults
Denmark	none		not much, maybe in 2005	Adults 3%, children 50%	6 yr
Estonia	law for children up to 15 yr in preparation	probably fine 15-35 Euro	some	maybe 10% adults, 30% children	16 yr, 10 yr with a license
Finland	all, since 2003	none	some, law well known	adults 25%	none, but many schools set limit 9-10
France	only competitive cyclists since 2002		yes	sport 80%, other 10%	none
Germany	none		yes, well known	6%, children 38% (2003)	under 8 yr only on pavements
Hungary	none		yes, moderate effect	children 50-60%, adults 15-20%	12 yr on main roads
Iceland	children under 15 yr, since Oct 1999	unknown	yes, well known	60-90%	none (but even adults don't ride on streets)
Ireland	none, but attempts for children	fine /penalty points	yes		none, 12 yr proposed
Italy	only competitive cyclists, since some years		no	Children 30%, adults rarely except racing	children must be accompanied by adults
Japan	none		yes	very small	none
Latvia	none		no	small	12 yr with a license
Lithuania	none		some	6%	12 yr, 10 yr with a license
Luxembourg	no		some	some, but unknown	10 yr
Malta	no		some		
The Netherlands	competitive cyclists, since 2004	disclosurement from match/tour	some, but minor	children maybe 5%, adults 0%	none
Norway	none		yes, well known	children 70%, adults < 30%	none, 10 yr recommended
Poland	none		a little	cities 5%, countryside nil	10 yr alone, permit required up to 17 yr.
Portugal	none		not much	unknown	none (but discussed)
Romania	none, but law recommends use		yes	children < .2%, adults < .1%	14 yr at roads with intense traffic
Russia	competitive cyclists and at rallies, since long	disclosurement from match/tour	no	varying	14 yr
Serbia and Montenegro	none, but law in preparation				12 yr on motorways and regional roads. 9 yr on local roads if educated. 7 yr only with adults.
Slovakia	none			children ~ 50%, adults <1%	
Slovenia	kids up to 14 yr since 2000	only admonishment	yes, well known		14 yr unless cycling exam or attended, 6 yr on sidewalks
Spain	everybody outside urban areas, professional cyclists exempted, since 2004	Police, fine 91 up to Euro. Not a priority!	yes, but not well known	19% (2003 study)	none
Sweden	children up to 14 yr, from 2005	No punishment possible	yes, intensively	10-15% overall, over 50% in Stockholm	none
Switzerland	none, but considerations	a fine is expected, in case	yes	27%	school age (6-7 yr)
Turkey	none		no	1%	
United Kingdom	none (children up to 15 proposed)		yes, moderate effect	Adults 11-26%, children 7-15%	none
USA	Several states, usually children under 16 yr, most laws 1993-2001	enforcement is rare	yes, well known	varying - 85% in BC	none