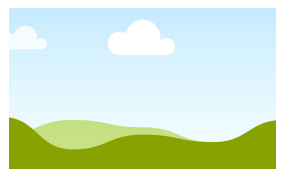


The role of alcohol in casualty collisions

Presented by Ms Velma Burns
RSA Research Manager

Driving Road Deaths to Zero Webinar

23/07/2026



Background



This presentation provides an overview of information available on alcohol test results for surviving drivers involved in fatal and serious injury collisions, as well as toxicology results for deceased drivers.

The RSA has a statutory remit to report on injury collisions that have occurred on a public road using collision data provided by AGS*.

Drivers involved in casualty collisions may have been tested for alcohol at the scene, station or hospital. The RTC data tells us at which (if any) of these locations a test was conducted and the result of this test (positive/negative).

The blood alcohol level (BAC) level is not recorded.

The analysis from road traffic collision data in this report relates to surviving drivers only. Toxicology results for deceased drivers are collected and reported separately.

The Health Research Board (HRB) collects road traffic collision fatalities data annually on behalf of the RSA from closed coronial files using the National Drug-Related Deaths Index (NDRDI) methodology. These data are collected from closed coronial files (i.e., once the inquest has been completed).

These data include detailed, definitive toxicology results for road user fatalities.

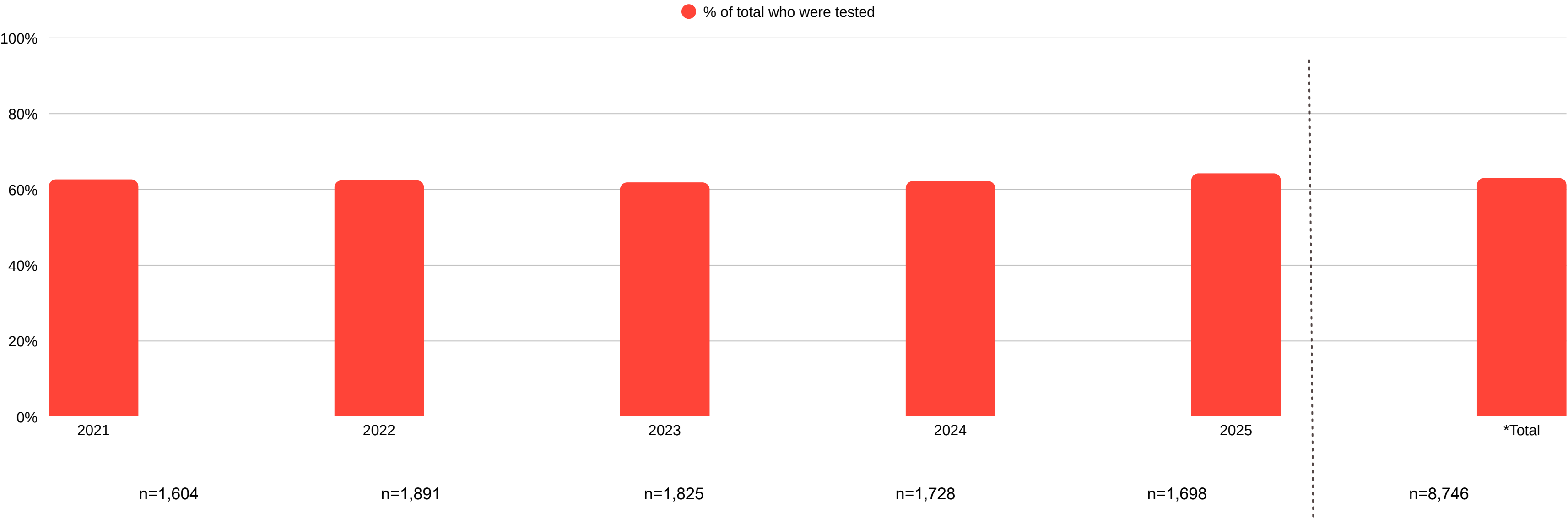
This presentation also includes some findings in relation to alcohol from a nationally representative self-report driver attitudes and behaviour survey (2025).

*Note, incidents that occur in car parks and other non-public roads are not reported in the RSA official figures per convention and consistent with all EU member states. However, AGS may include these collisions as they record incidents that have occurred in public places. This means RSA and AGS collision figures may differ.

Surviving Drivers involved in fatal and serious injury collisions



Alcohol testing trend 2021-2025



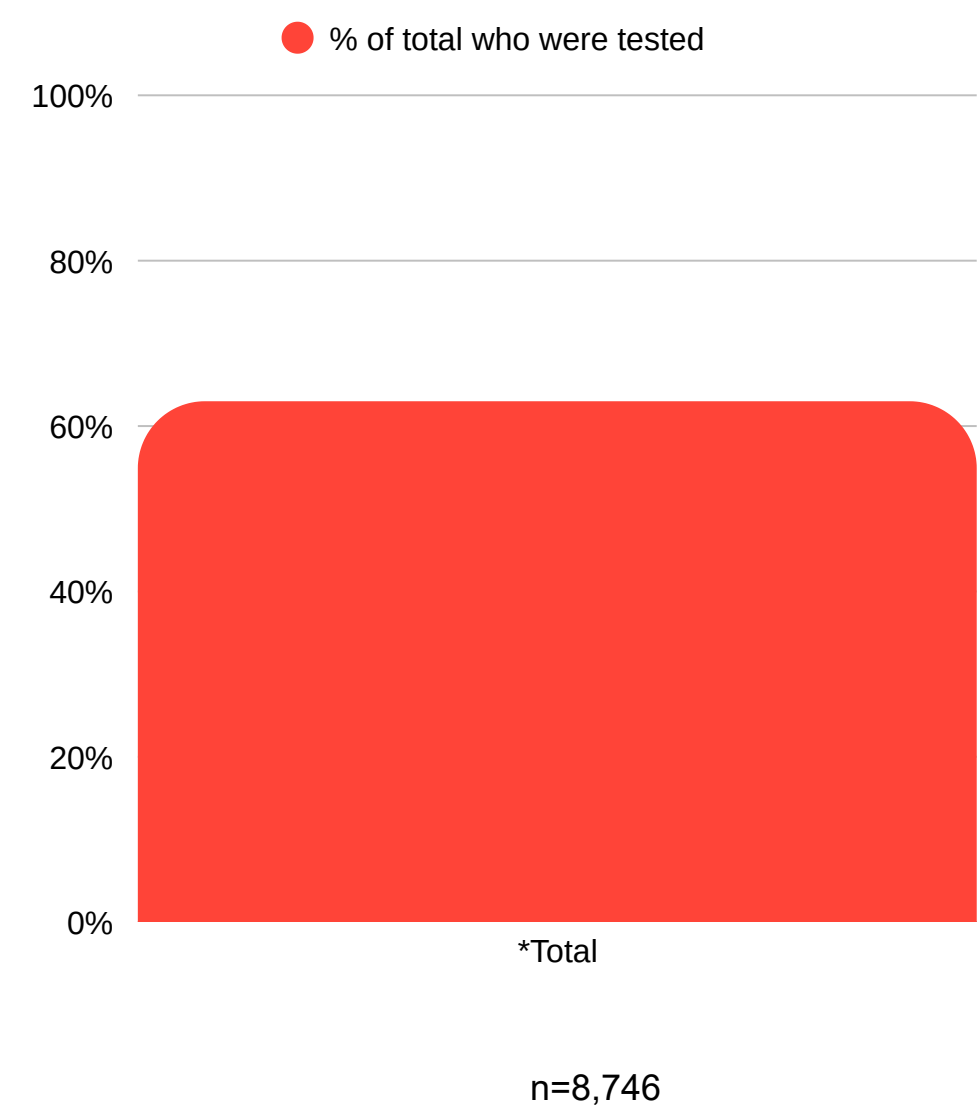
Data for 2022 onwards is provisional and subject to change.



Surviving Drivers involved in fatal and serious injury collisions



Alcohol testing trend 2021-2025



Testing location	%
Scene of the collision	55%
Hospital	8%
Station	2%

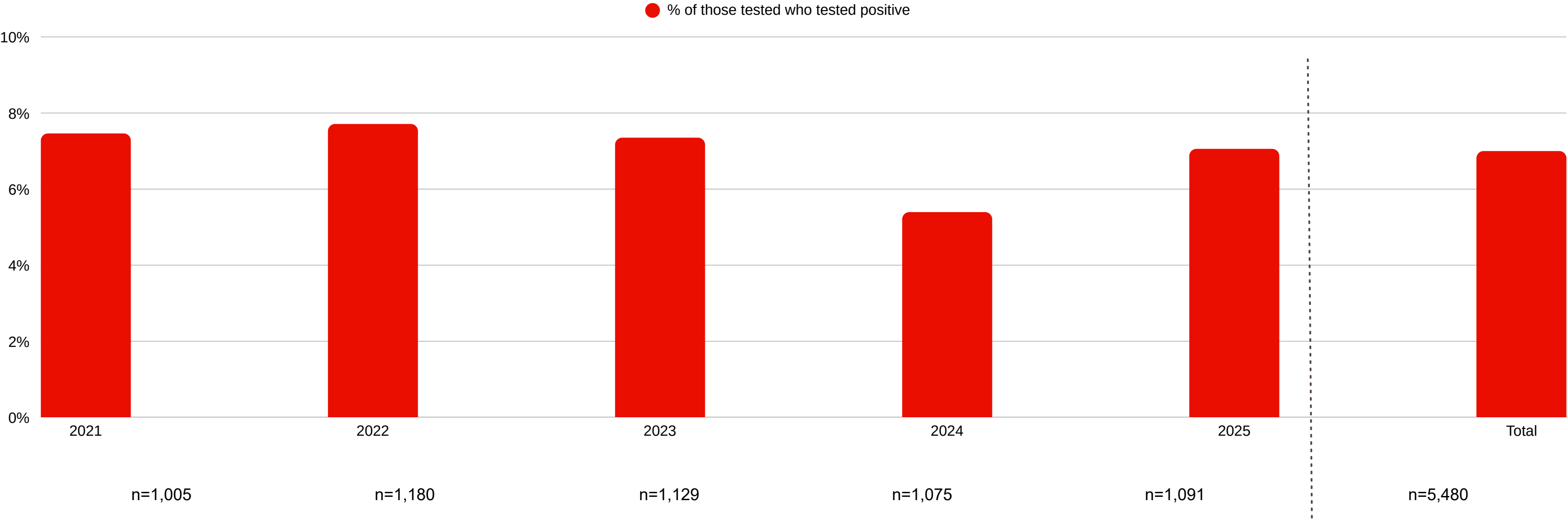
Reason test not taken	% of all drivers not
Driver gone to hospital	28%
Insufficient time (3 hours)	25%
Medical grounds	10%
No screening device	7%
Hit and run	4%

Data for 2022 onwards is provisional and subject to change. Note, drivers may have been tested at more than one location and may be included in more than one test scene.

Surviving Drivers involved in fatal and serious injury collisions



Positive result on alcohol test 2021-2025



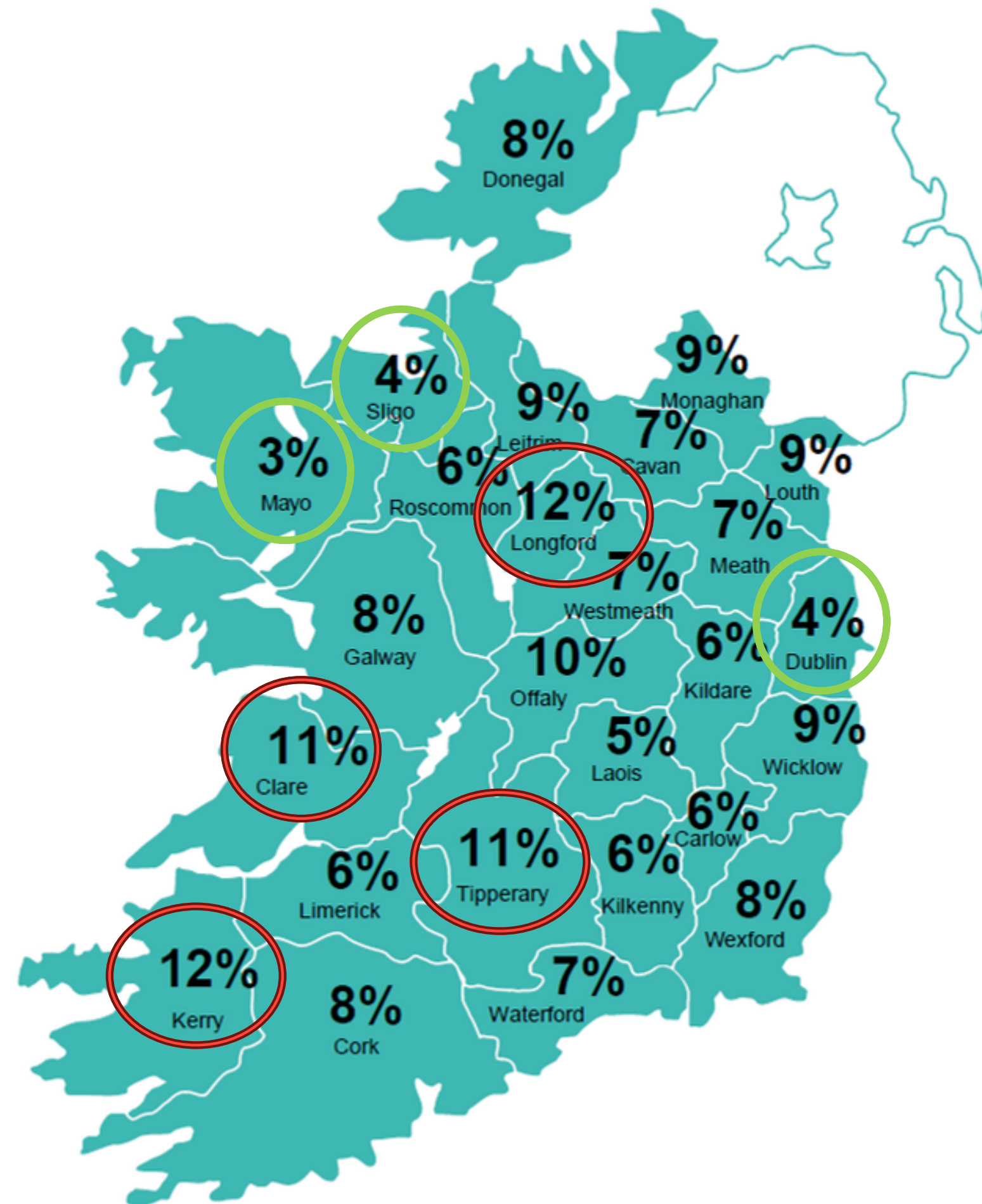
Data for 2022 onwards is provisional and subject to change. Please note, over this five year time period, <1% of drivers had an unknown test result. The remaining drivers had a negative test result.



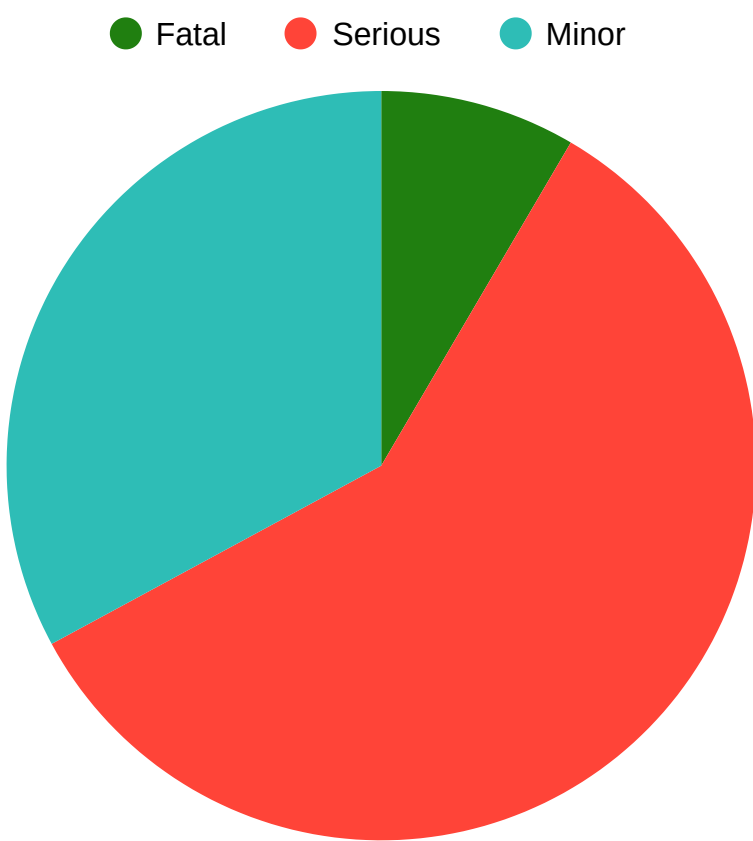
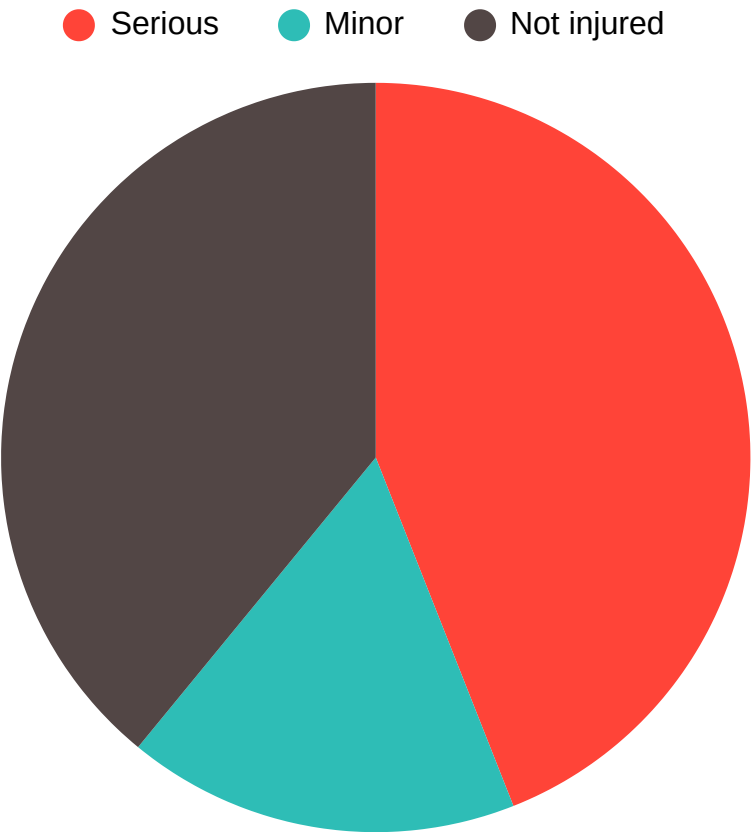
as a % of drivers tested by county (2021-2025)

The highest positivity rates were reported in Kerry, Longford, Clare and Tipperary.

The lowest positivity rates were reported in Mayo, Dublin and Sligo



Injuries sustained in fatal and serious injury collisions where a driver had a positive alcohol result (2021-2025)

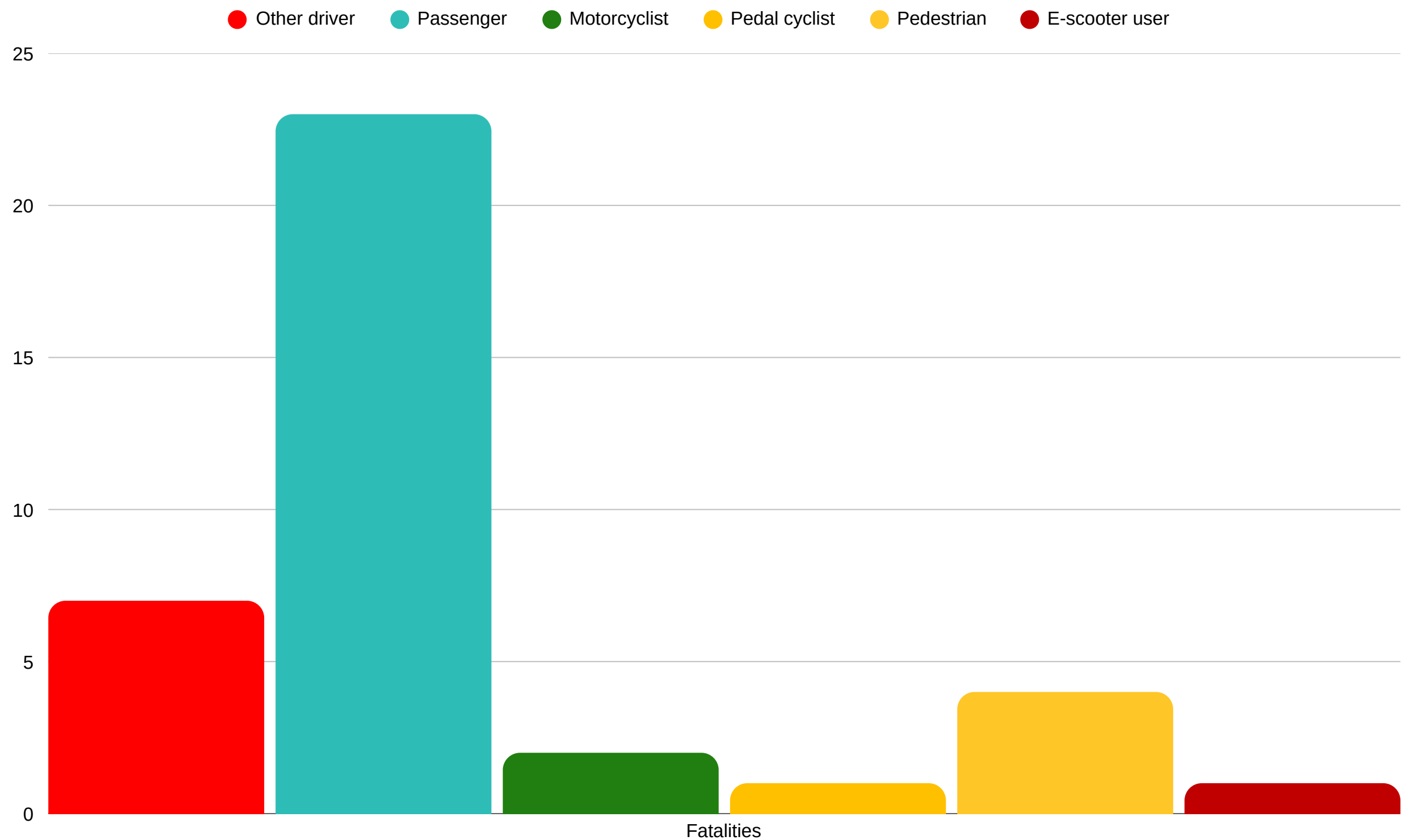


There were 384 surviving drivers involved in fatal and serious injury collisions, who tested positive for alcohol. Almost half (169, 44%) of these drivers were seriously injured. In addition, 38 people died and a further 264 road users were seriously injured.

Data is provisional and subject to change.



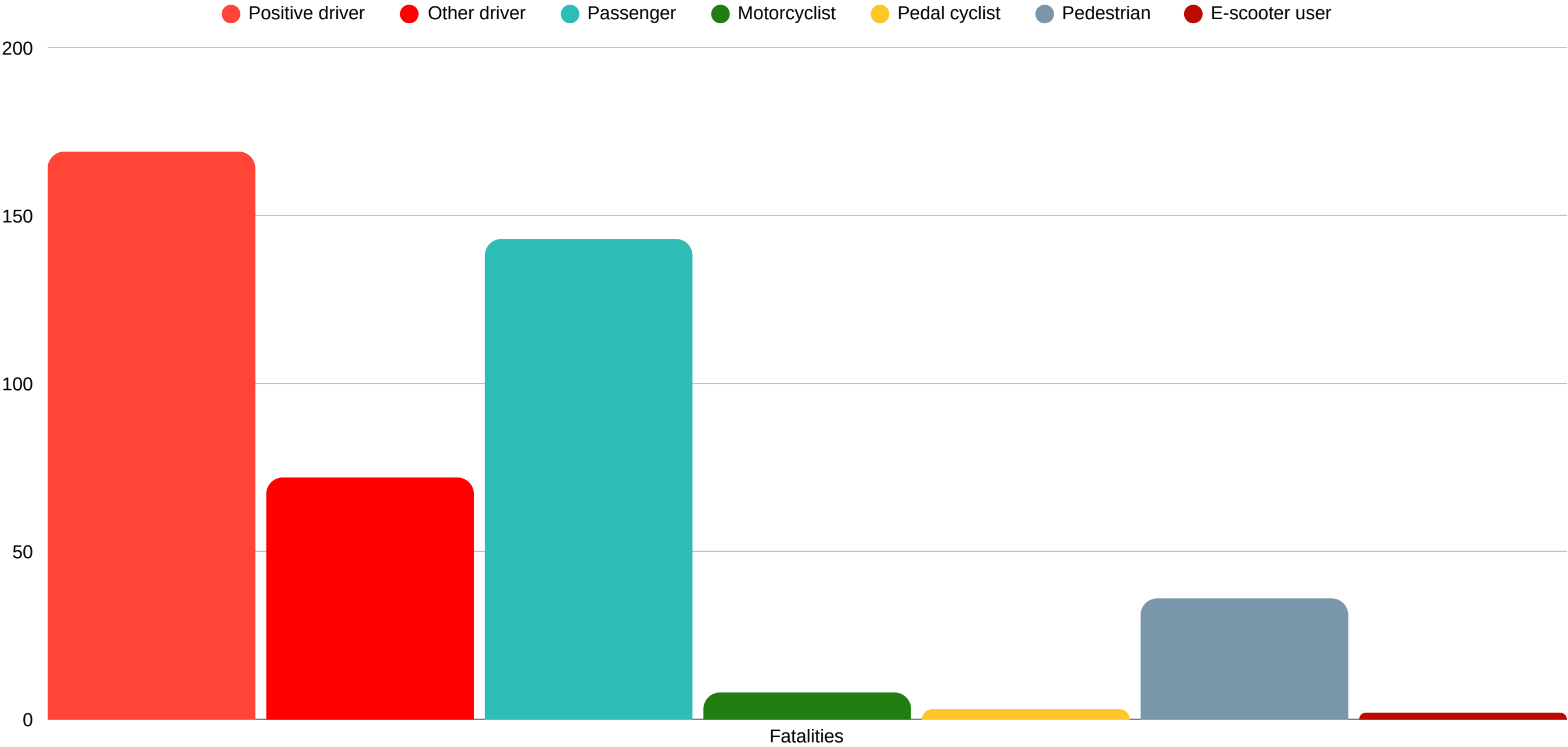
Fatalities in collisions where a driver had a positive alcohol result (2021-2025)



23 passengers died, of which 20 (87%) were in the same vehicle as the alcohol positive driver. 3 were in another vehicle.



Serious injuries in collisions where a driver had a positive alcohol result (2021-2025)



143 passengers were seriously injured, of which 105 (73%) were in the same vehicle as the alcohol positive driver. 38 were in another vehicle.

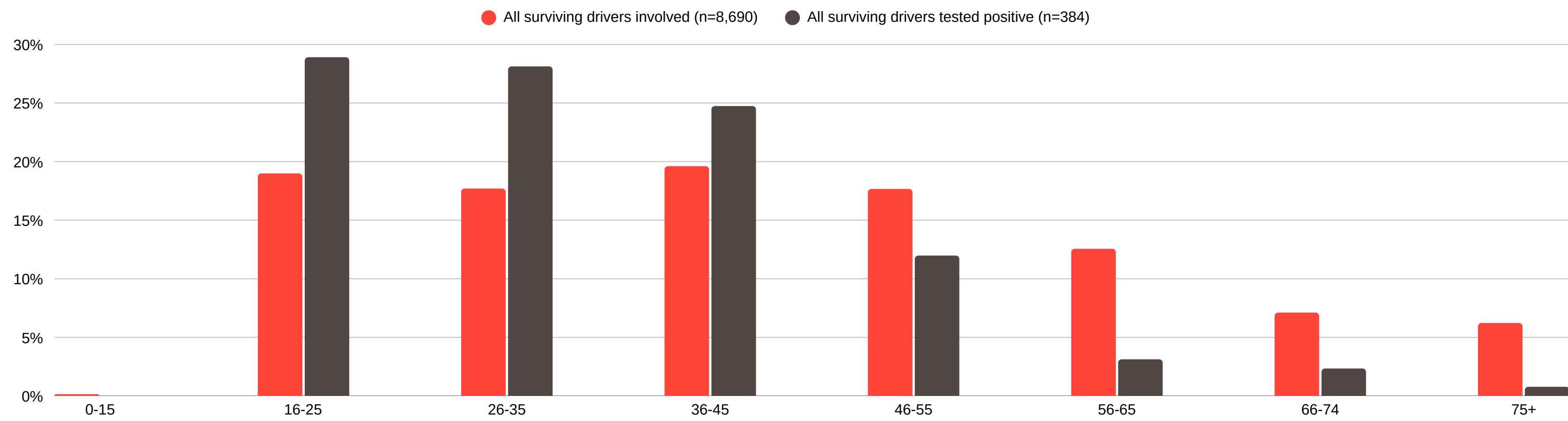




Profile of surviving drivers involved fatal and serious injury collisions, 2021-2025

Younger drivers more likely to test positive for alcohol

Comparison vs age profile of all drivers involved



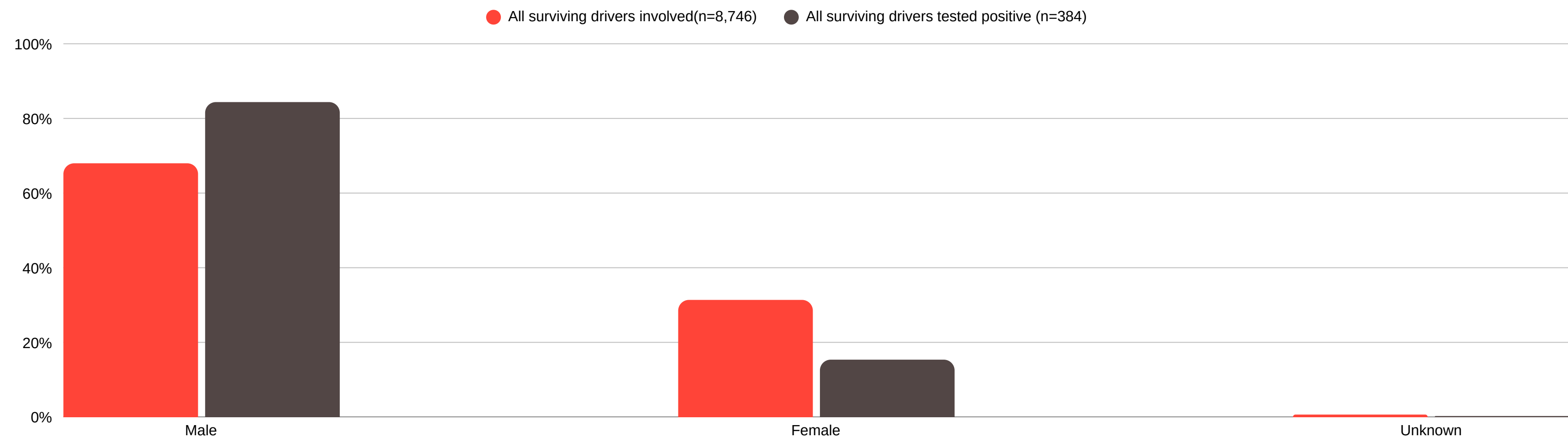
Of all surviving drivers who tested positive for alcohol, 29% were aged 16-25 years and a further 28% were aged 26-35 years. Over half (57%) were in these two age groups.

Data is provisional and subject to change. Of all drivers involved 56 have unknown ages at present.



Male drivers more likely to test positive for alcohol

Comparison vs gender of all drivers involved



Of all surviving drivers who tested positive for alcohol, 84% were male.

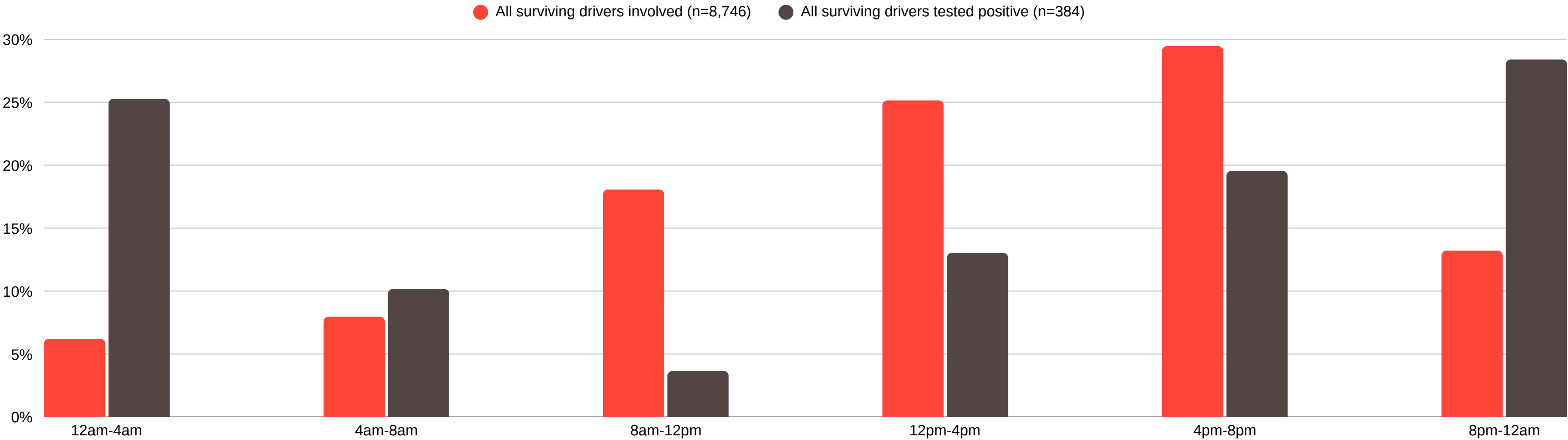
Data is provisional and subject to change.



Drivers with a positive alcohol test result, more likely to be involved in collisions late at night and early morning.



Comparison vs time of day for all drivers involved



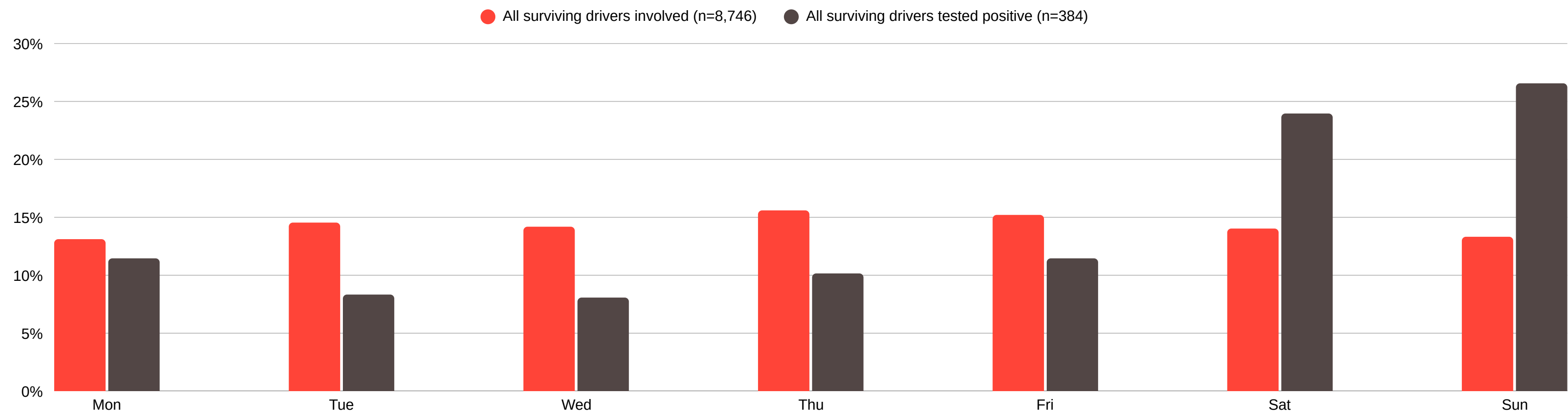
Data is provisional and subject to change.



Drivers with a positive alcohol test result, more likely to be involved in collisions at the weekend.



Comparison vs day of week for all drivers involved



Data is provisional and subject to change.





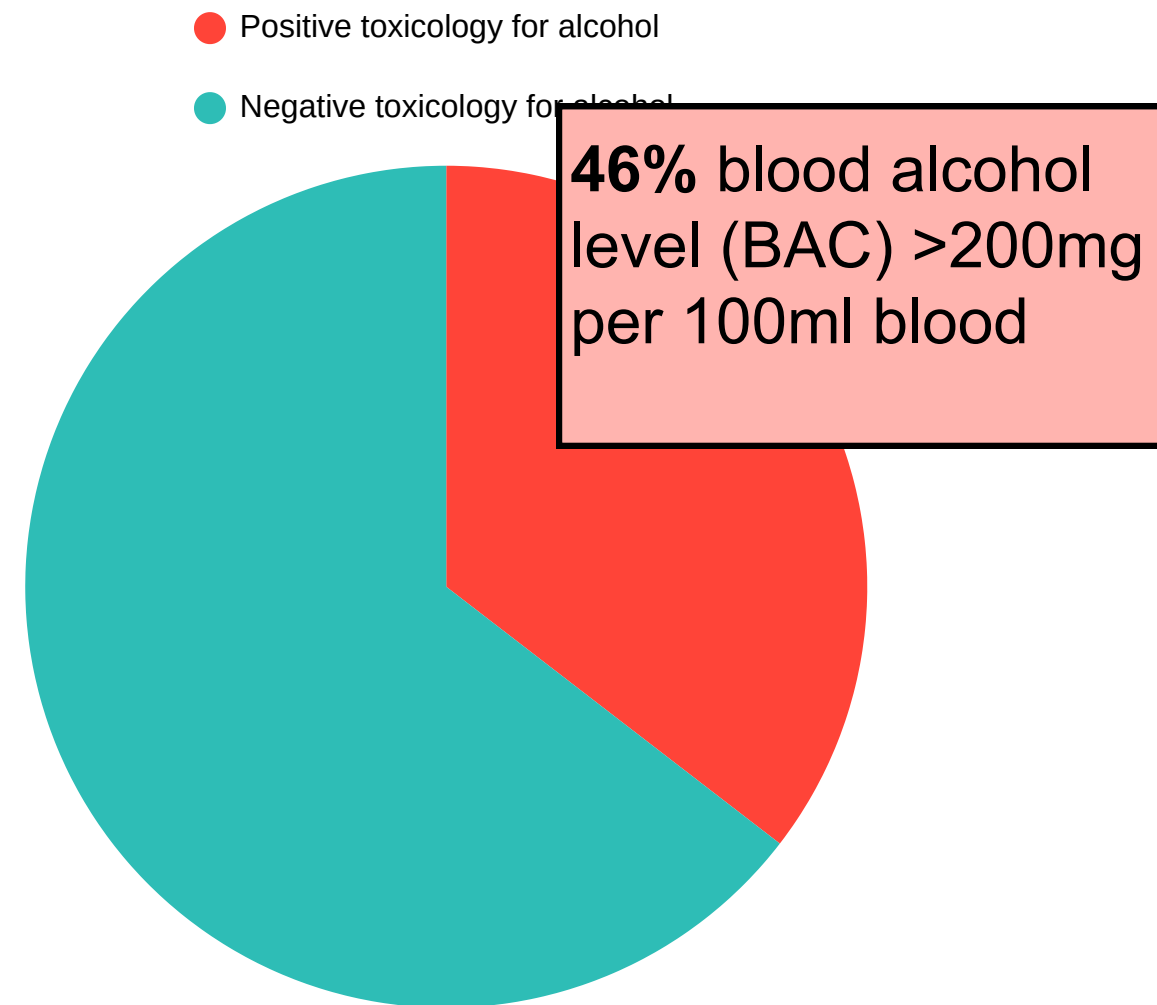
Coronial data

Driver fatalities (2016-2020)



Key findings

Coronial data



- 316 of the 340 driver fatalities (2016-2020) had a toxicology result available.
- **35%** (n =112) of the 316 driver fatalities with a toxicology result available had a positive toxicology for alcohol*.
- **93%** of the 112 driver fatalities with a positive toxicology for alcohol were **male**. **76%** were **<45 years of age**.
- **79%** of these 112 fatal collisions occurred during **Friday-Monday**, with **39%** of them occurring on **Sunday**.
- **57%** of these 112 fatal collisions occurred between **10pm-6am**.
- **75%** of these 112 fatal collisions occurred on **rural roads** (limits $\geq 80\text{km/h}$).

*A positive toxicology for alcohol was recorded where the BAC of the deceased was >20mg alcohol per 100ml blood (or equivalent in urine/vitreous humour).



Driver attitudes and behaviour survey

2025 results

Research Background & Objectives



The National Survey of Driver Attitudes & Behaviour is a cornerstone of the Road Safety Authority research programme. It establishes the incidence of errant driving behaviour and habits among Irish motorists and determines their attitudes to a series of road safety measures; and analyses the extent to which these attitudes and behaviours are consistent both across demographic criteria and over time.

The research comprised a nationally representative online survey of 1,259 motorists aged 17+:

- Quota controlled in terms of gender, age, region and area.
- Fieldwork was conducted in October 2025.

The 2025 research builds off the findings from previous RSA Driver Attitudes & Behaviour National Surveys.



B&A



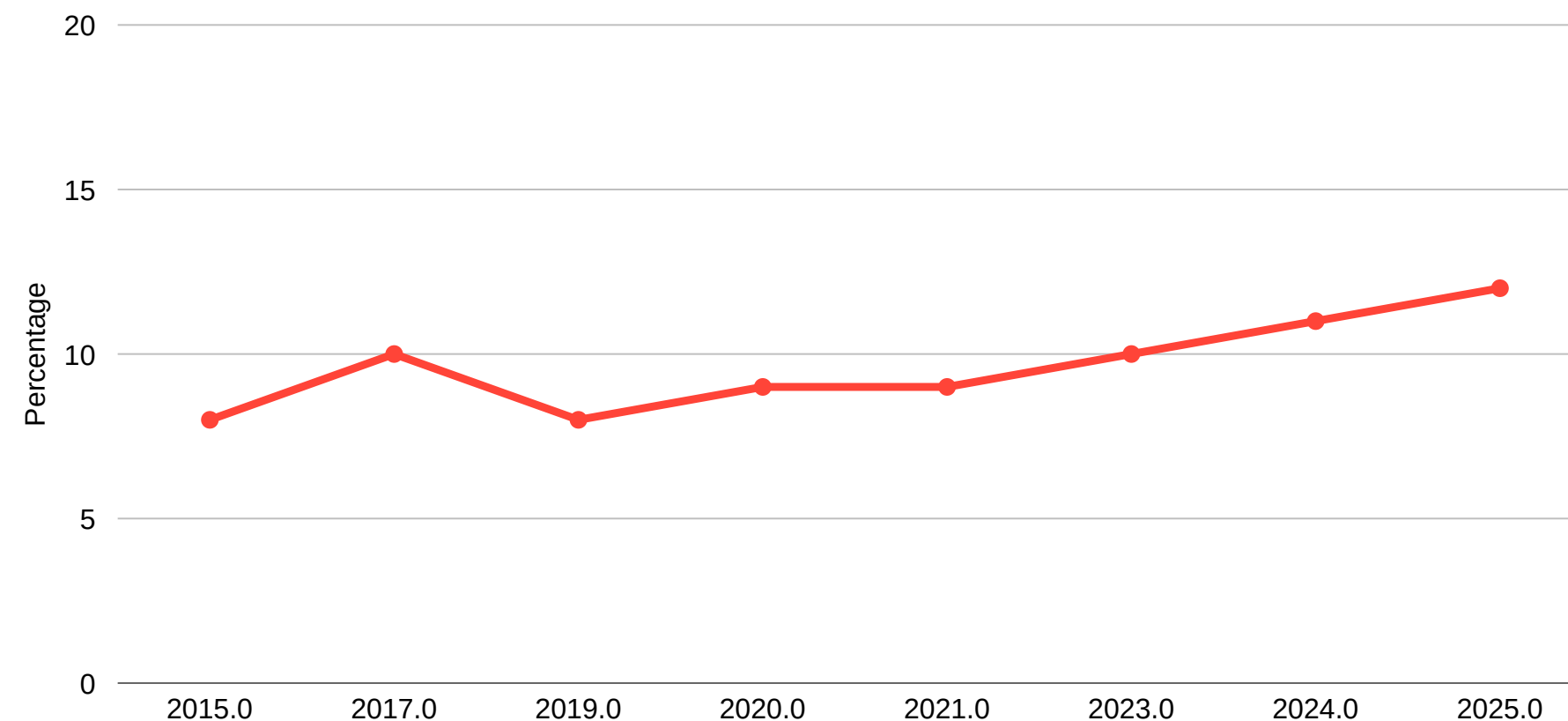
Intoxicated driving - Alcohol

Self-report survey data 2025

- Across studies, on average **1 in 10** drivers surveyed drove after consuming any alcohol in the past 12 months.

However, in 2025:

- **12%** reported driving after consuming any alcohol in the past 12 months
- This is the highest percentage of drivers since 2015.

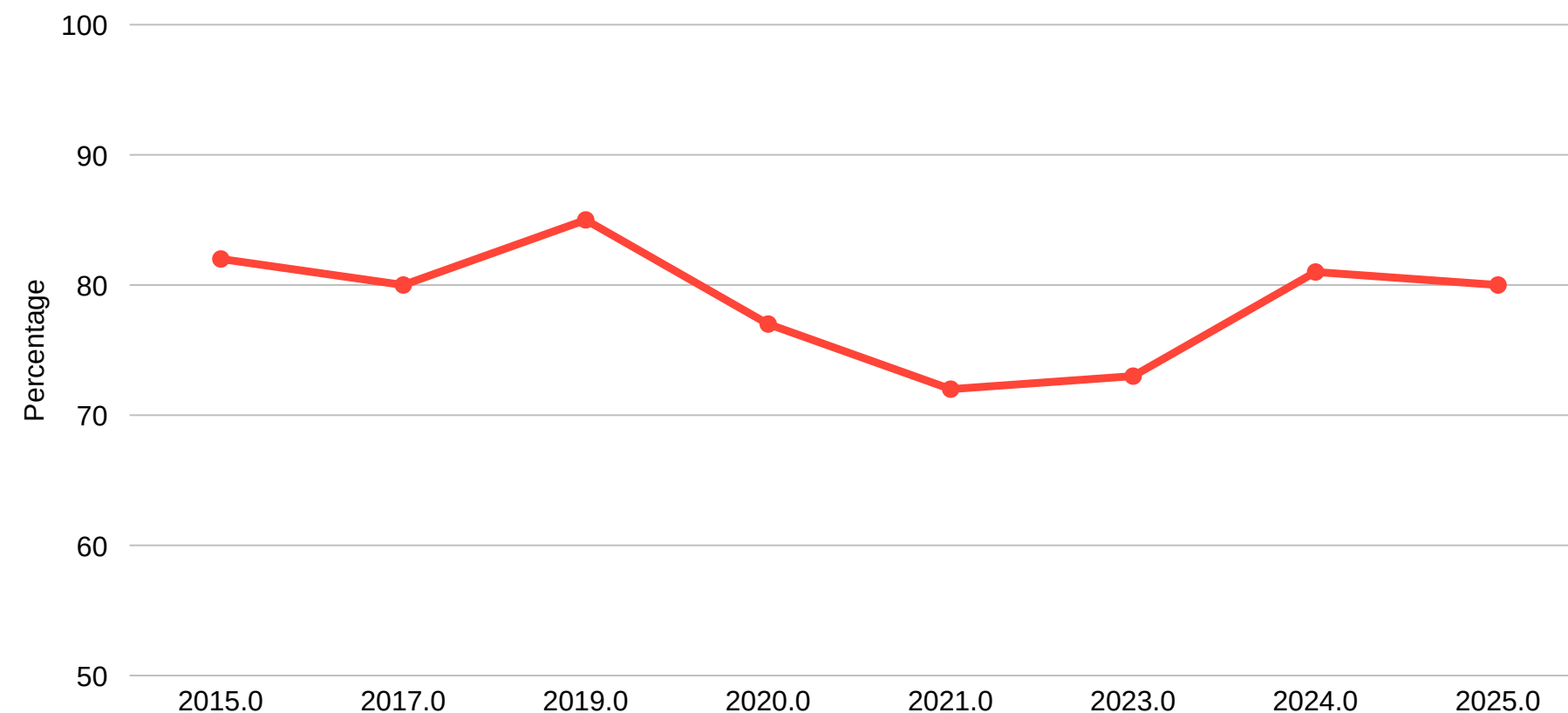




Intoxicated driving - Alcohol

Self-report survey data 2025

- **Social unacceptability** of drink-driving is improving to pre-covid levels.



However, 1 in 4 motorists agree that:

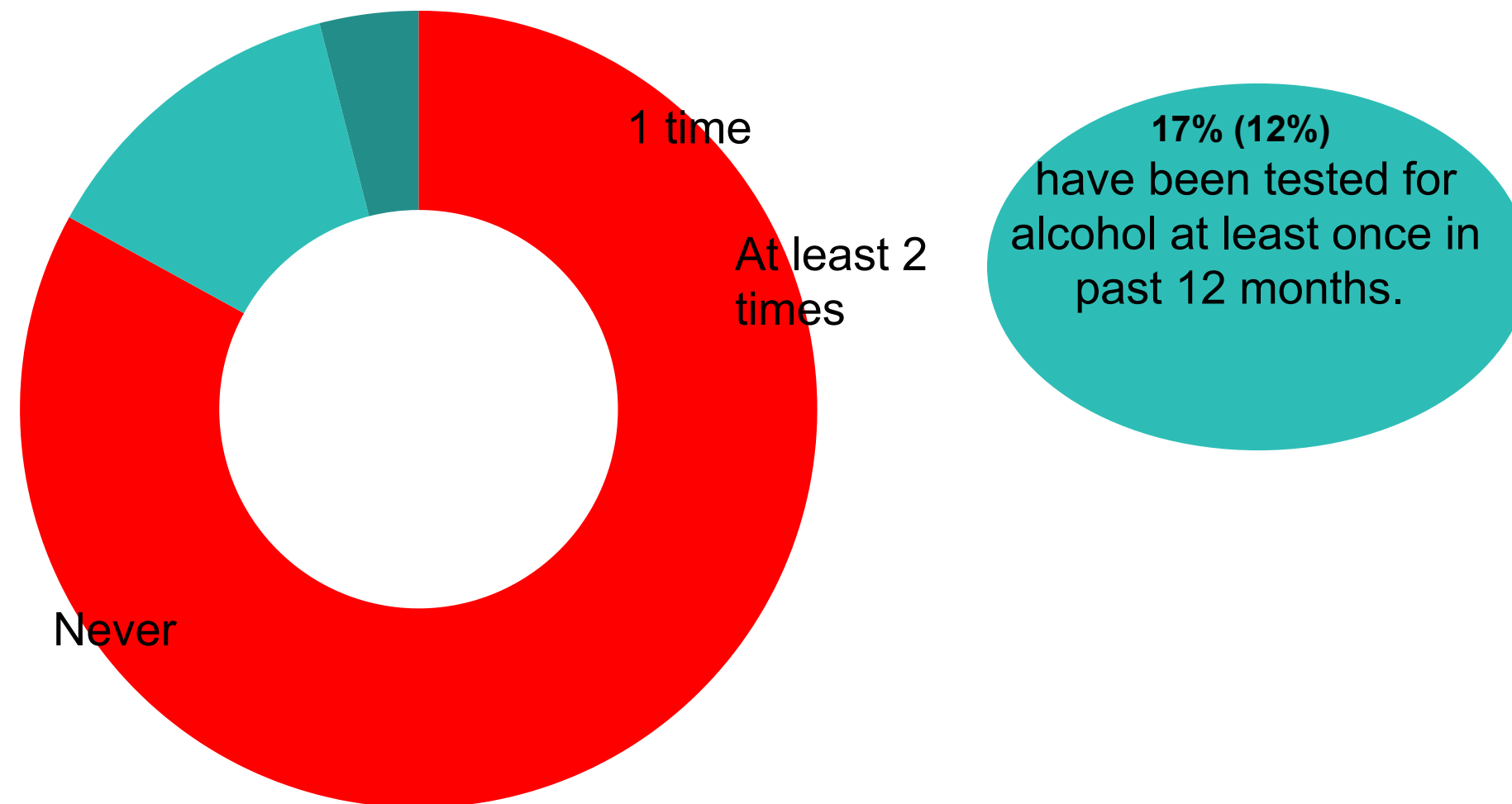
- **Driving short distances** after having a drink is acceptable
- They may have been **over the limit** when driving **the morning after** a night out

Intoxicated driving - Alcohol

Self-report survey data 2025



B&A



11% of motorists think it is likely that they will be checked by police for alcohol (i.e., breathalysed) on a typical journey.

Q.7d In the past 12 months, how many times have you been checked by the police for alcohol while driving a car (i.e., being subjected to a Breathalyser test)?

Base: All Motorists N – 1,259



Conclusions

Conclusions



Examining collision, coronial and survey data

- Drink-driving is a significant problem on Irish roads. 38 people died and a further 264 road users were seriously injured in a collision where a driver had a positive alcohol test.
- ❏ Analyses indicate that prevention initiatives should focus on younger male drivers, driving late at night/in the early morning and at weekends.
- Empowering passengers to not get into a vehicle with a drunk driver is critical.
- Further examination of barriers to alcohol testing should be considered.





Examples of prevention initiatives



1. Road Safety Matters TY Programme

2. Blood on Your Hands campaign

3. Flinebox breathalyser initiative



Alcohol ignition interlock and rehabilitation programmes



Action 23 (Phase 1 Plan 2021-2024)

- *'Establish a working group to consider and make recommendations for the implementation of an alcohol interlock programme, supported by a drink drive rehabilitation course in Ireland, for high-risk drink drive offenders'.*
- **Working group** established in Q2 2022.
- Professor Des O'Neil and Dr Margaret Ryan appointed to complete a **report** in Q2 2023.
- Report finalised in Q1 2024, incorporating **insights** and **recommendations** from the working group.
- Report presented at the 2024 **ETSC Safe and Sober seminar**.

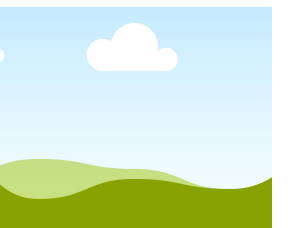
Action 10 (Phase 2 Plan 2025-2027)

- The work completed under Action 23 (Phase 1) informed the development of **Action 10** (Phase 2).
- Action 10 requests that *'proposals are brought forward, based on expert medical research, for the possible mandatory use of alcohol interlocks, alongside rehabilitation courses, as a sanction for drink driving in certain cases'.*
- This work will lay the groundwork for a further action on their deployment in **Phase 3** (2028-2030).



Thank you

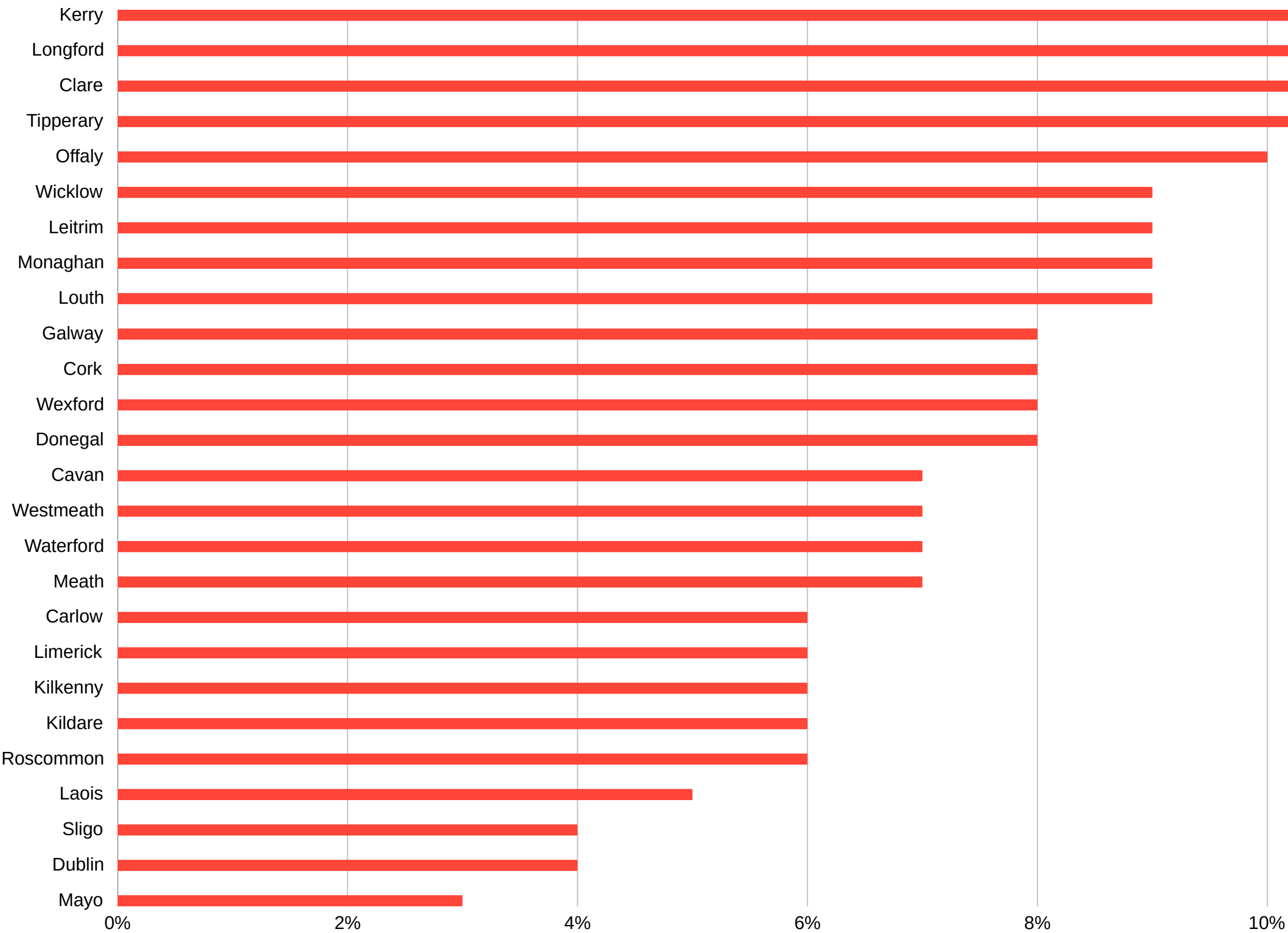
Contact: vburns@rsa.ie





Appendix

Drivers tested positive as a % of drivers tested by county



All surviving drivers (n)	Number of surviving drivers tested (n)	Number of surviving drivers tested as a % of all drivers involved
332	203	61%
112	77	69%
223	138	62%
298	166	56%
162	112	69%
216	151	70%
57	34	60%
215	150	70%
283	186	66%
414	316	76%
920	611	66%
365	223	61%
423	290	69%
182	123	68%
161	101	63%
158	101	64%
450	304	68%
98	63	64%
425	241	57%
168	97	58%
396	266	67%
134	90	67%
150	106	71%
134	93	69%
2005	1102	55%
263	136	52%



International statistics

ETSC report (2022)

- 25% of all road deaths in the EU are estimated to be alcohol-related.
- Levels of road deaths attributed to alcohol cannot be compared between countries, as there are large differences in the way countries define and record a 'road death attributed to alcohol'.

European status report on road safety 2025 (WHO, 2026)

- Forty-four countries collect data on the proportion of road-traffic deaths attributable to alcohol use; their estimates range from less than 1% to 39%. This proportion is called the alcohol attributable fraction.
- Data collected for WHO's 2018 global status report on alcohol and health found that the alcohol-attributable fraction of road-traffic deaths for the Region as a whole is 37.7%.
- Only 31 countries give police the authority to test BAC of drivers involved in crashes causing fatal injuries, even though officers may not routinely do so. Better and more complete data on BAC testing in countries are needed to estimate the potential for preventing drink-driving and reducing alcohol-related harm.



International statistics



[ITF country_profiles](#)

- [Norway](#)

Analyses of fatal crashes in 2023 showed that in 20% of the fatal crashes (19 crashes), alcohol had probably been a contributing factor. In these 19 fatal crashes, 22 people were killed. The majority of these crashes involved passenger car drivers, followed by motorcycle drivers.

- [Sweden](#)

In 2024, 11% of fatally injured car, LGV, HGV, bus and coach drivers were alcohol-impaired, 4% were drug-impaired, and 16% were impaired by alcohol and/or drugs.

- [Canada](#)

In 2021, statistics from the National Collision Database showed that approximately one in five fatal collisions were reported to have alcohol involvement as a contributing factor.

- [France](#)

In 2024, according to police reports, alcohol was one of the causes of 29% of fatal crashes. The share of alcohol-related fatalities has remained stable at around 30% since 2000.





International statistics

European Commission thematic [report](#) on alcohol and drugs (2024)

- In the framework of the SMART project (2020-2022) ETSC has produced thirty European country reports on drink-driving. The estimates of alcohol-related road deaths (2017-2020 data) in these reports range from high estimates for Portugal (37% killed drivers), Slovenia (37% all road deaths), Ireland (36% of road users), France (32% all road deaths), Spain (29% killed drivers), Croatia (27% all road deaths), Norway (25% all road deaths) to lower figures for Czechia (10% all road deaths), Lithuania (17% all road deaths), and Finland (20% all road deaths).

ESRA (2023)

- 14% of Irish participants (EU average 19%) said they were checked by police at least once in the past 12 months for alcohol (i.e., were breathalysed).
- 16% of Irish participants (EU average 17%) thought it was likely that they would be checked by police for alcohol (i.e., breathalysed) on a typical journey.

