

Transmitted by the expert from Italy
Child safety in buses and coaches

The European Parliament and the Council have recently adopted Directive 2003/20/EC on the compulsory use of seat belts in vehicles (O.J. L 115 of 9.5.2003), amending Directive 91/671/EEC.

The new Directive requires all occupants of vehicles of category M1, N1, N2 and N3 to use the safety systems provided (seat belts and child restraint systems for children less than 150 cm in height).

The Directive also requires that all occupants of M2 and M3 vehicles (buses and coaches) aged 3 and over shall use the safety systems provided while they are seated.

With regard to children less than 3 years of age, national requirements will apply.

During the negotiation process in the Council, some delegations (Italy and France in particular) raised some concerns on the age limit for restraining children on buses and coaches, since in their opinion the use of a seat belt may not be compatible with children of that age and could also cause serious consequences (injuries) in case of accident.

Although the above concerns the Council and the EP adopted the Directive, but asked the Commission to "continue to carry on studies on safety systems most suitable for improving the protection of all passengers against all type of accidents".

Meanwhile, following a proposal made by GRSP, WP.29 gave a mandate to this group to consider the "most appropriate means to restrain children travelling in coaches".

WP.1 (Working Party on Road Safety) might consider possible amendments to R.E.1 in order to align it with the EU Directive and could ask WP.29 for technical advice on this matter.

We believe that GRSP should consider this subject and give its technical advice in order to guarantee adequate safety to children wearing safety belts intended to be used by adults:

In particular the following question should be considered:

- What is the most suitable age limit for restraining children with a belt?
- Can age limit be different depending of the type of belt (lap belt / 3 point belt/ presence of pre-loaders)?'
- In addition to age limit should other child body parameters be taken in account (height, weight)?

We suggest taking in consideration research being carried out by EEVC, WG 18 (car child occupant safety) which is also dealing with child protection in buses and coaches.

Furthermore GRSP members are invited to contribute with the available research results.

It is important that GRSP takes action on this subject.
