

Proposal for an Informal Working Group on Equitable Occupant Protection

Terms of Reference

A. Introduction

An ad-hoc group on equitable occupant protection (founded by Canada, France, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, Spain, and Sweden after the 70th session of the GRSP) started to review relevant data regarding equity of men and women in occupant protection, in early 2022.

The presented data indicate that the injury risk is higher for women than for men regarding all types of injuries and all types of crashes. The difference specifically in fatality risk between female and male occupants has decreased with newer vehicle types. Non-fatal injuries, which may lead to long-term consequences, e.g., neck injuries and injuries to extremities, remain a concern. The group has had a particular focus on neck injuries, including permanent disability, since there is evidence of significant differences in risk of injury between male and female occupants.

Further review is needed to be able to explain the injury differences that can be seen in crash statistics, and it will be required to review other relevant data, in particular data from both physical and virtual crash tests, with the view to better understand equitability. Nonetheless, the visible inequitable outcomes so far underscore a need to start reviewing the current regulatory requirements.

The ad-hoc group has discussed other aspects regarding equity further to sex, such as weight and height. In conclusion, equity should be expanded to cover other significant diversity aspects. The potential of virtual crash testing as one way to improve equitable occupant protection has also been considered.

Virtual crash testing will make it possible to test vehicles for a wider range of occupants in different crash scenarios, including both the pre-crash event (including emergency braking and evasive steering) and the in-crash event (including occupants of different size and sex, different seating positions, impact severities and impact angles, etc.). Virtual testing will most likely become the most cost-effective procedure for society to evaluate crash safety within a few years, but there will be a need for a regulatory framework or standards.

When numerical models (of vehicles, safety systems and humans) are developed and considered for regulation, it is crucial to ensure that they meet certain standards to ensure comparable and reliable results, for instance that a particular virtual testing leads to a similar level of safety performance regardless of which numerical human body model a vehicle has been assessed with.

In this regard, the ad-hoc group on equitable occupant protection has identified the following points to follow up on:

- Continue to collect and review relevant field accident data to further understand the reasons for the varying injury risks of different occupants. For the same reason, collect and review other relevant and available data, in particular data from virtual testing. The reason is to be able to separate the issues which current concerned regulations under GRSP could address directly (if upgraded) from the gaps where more research is needed.

- Explore the current state-of-the-art of virtual crash testing to determine its capability as a tool and process to evaluate equitability, including a specific assessment of the state-of-the-art virtual human body models, i.e., virtual models of humans, particularly the possibilities for a safety performance evaluation at a higher level of detail.
- Review the concerned UNECE regulations under the 1958 agreement for crashworthiness and occupant protection (passive safety), and related regulations, with a view to identify opportunities for improvement of concerned UNECE regulations regarding equity; NB, equity in its expanded definition.
- Assess whether existing regulations are sufficiently flexible to allow new technical developments regarding occupant safety resulting from new assessment possibilities of particularly virtual crash testing.

B. Objective of the informal working group

The informal working group shall,

1. Identify and present a map of issues which should be addressed by regulatory upgrades directly vs gaps where more research is needed regarding equitable occupant protection.
2. Determine in a general sense how greater diversity in terms of representation of crashes and occupants should be implemented in concerned crash safety regulations, and if needed, propose well defined changes to those regulations and further activities in GRSP.
3. Assess virtual crash testing as a method in concerned regulations to improve equity in occupant protection further, through
 - a. mapping the gaps in terms of equity in the concerned regulations that virtual crash testing could potentially fill,
 - b. assessing the current state-of-the-art of virtual crash testing tools and processes, e.g., understand the readiness of virtual human body models regarding their validation level of occupant kinematic and potential to predict injury,
 - c. drafting preliminary global guidelines for virtual models to ensure that they are inclusive,
 - d. reaching a common understanding of basic requirements that virtual crash testing models should fulfill, particularly regarding car occupants of different sex and size,
 - e. reviewing whether current regulations are sufficiently flexible to allow the new technical developments resulting from the new assessment possibilities created by virtual crash testing, for example for advanced adaptive protective systems,
 - f. assessing the possibilities, and shortcomings, of virtual crash testing when it comes to
 - i. neck injuries, including the soft tissues of the head, neck, and spine,
 - ii. increased protection of vulnerable road users (if identified as an equity issue),
 - iii. the value of new types of crash test, e.g., low-speed rear impact sled tests,
 - iv. preventing misapplication of crash test protocols,
 - v. advanced human body models that enable the assessment of all types of crashes in greater detail (omni-directional crash impacts; different seat

configurations and seat positions; all types of occupants from child to senior, from short to tall, women and men, etc.)

4. Identify any shortcomings of existing regulations and related standards, such as whether the current test protocols can be misapplied to optimise crash performance for the specific test conditions and test dummies in a narrow way that is detrimental to the protection of a diverse population.

C. Operating principles

1. The informal working group on developing equitable occupant protection is open to all Contracting Parties and Non-Governmental Organisations to the 1958 and 1998 agreements.
2. A Chair, a Vice Chair and a Secretary, will manage the informal working group.
3. The working language of the informal working group will be English.
4. An agenda and related documents shall be made available on the website of WP.29 by the Secretary of the group in advance of all scheduled meetings.
5. All documents and/or proposals shall be submitted to the Secretary of the group in a suitable electronic format in advance of the meetings. The group may postpone discussion on any item or proposal which has not been circulated 5 working days in advance of the scheduled meeting.
6. The Secretary of the group will distribute the meeting minutes to the informal group members within 15 working days after the meeting of the group.
7. Decisions and proposals of the group shall be reached by consensus within the participating contracting parties. When consensus cannot be reached, the Chairman of the group shall present the different points of view to GRSP. The Chairman may seek guidance from GRSP as appropriate.
8. Sessions shall be held in agreement with a majority of the participants after the group has been established in a constitutional meeting. Sessions may be in person or virtual using web-based technology.
9. A provisional agenda shall be drawn up by the Secretariat in accordance with the participants of the group. The first item upon the provisional agenda for each session shall be the adoption of the agenda.
10. The second item on the provisional agenda will be discussion, matters arising and adoption of the minutes of the previous session.
11. The Chair of the group or his/her representative will report back to GRSP on the progress of work on regular basis.

D. Work plan and time schedule

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