

Point-based driving licences

Point systems that penalise driving offences via points with licence suspension at defined thresholds, combining deterrence with re-education and complementary enforcement/awareness measures.

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Effect scale	Quality of evidence				
	Effect Impact on crime	Mechanism How it works	Moderator Where it works	Implementation How to do it	Economic cost What it costs
 Overall reduction	 Moderate	 Low	 Low	 Strong	No information

Focus of the intervention

Point-based driving licence systems allocate points to specified driving offences. When drivers reach a defined threshold, their licence is suspended and drivers are disqualified from driving. Systems vary by country and jurisdiction, but typically include:

- clear schedules linking offences to points
- driver re?education or awareness courses to recover points
- active enforcement (for example, police controls and [speed cameras](#))
- public communication to raise awareness

In some countries, including the UK and Ireland, the system works on an accrual (gain) basis. With each driving offence, a driver gains points on their licence, and drivers are disqualified when the threshold is reached ([currently 12 points in the UK](#)). In other countries, such as Italy and Spain, the

system works on a loss basis. Drivers are allocated a certain number of points when they first receive their licence, and points are deducted with each offence. When the allocation of points is exhausted, the driver is disqualified.

In both types of system (accrual and loss-based), the logic of deterrence is the same, with the gain or loss of points, and potential suspension of a licence believed to discourage drivers from committing driving offences. Stricter conditions may be applied to novice drivers and there may also be targeted provisions for repeat offenders and drink or drug drivers. Point-based driving licence systems target licenced drivers in general, with a particular focus on novice drivers and those with previous offences.

What research is this summary based on?

This [crime reduction toolkit](#) summary is based on the findings of one systematic review and meta-analysis covering 26 primary studies. The primary studies covered by the review were carried out in the UK, Spain, France, Italy, Canada, Ireland, Brazil, the United States, Norway, Austria, Australia and Bangladesh. 10 primary studies contributed 25 effect sizes to a meta-analysis.

This summary focuses on the impact of point-based driving licence systems on adverse traffic outcomes in general, including crime-related outcomes such as speeding, drink- or drug-driving and the non-use of seatbelts. Non-crime outcomes also captured by the review included fatalities, non-fatal injuries, accidents, public perceptions of point-based licence schemes and self-reported behaviours.

Effect – how effective is it?

- The research suggests that point-based driving licence systems reduce crime overall.

Across the meta-analysis, point-based driving licence systems were associated with an average 22% decrease in adverse traffic outcomes. 22 out of 25 effect sizes included in the meta-analysis showed statistically significant decreases across a range of crime and non-crime related outcomes, including speeding, non-use of seatbelts, alcohol traffic tickets, fatalities and non-fatal injuries. Three effect sizes included in the meta-analysis indicated no effect in relation to certain outcomes, or when longer follow-up intervals were used.

The review conducted further analysis of two non-crime related outcomes: fatalities and non-fatal injuries. Point-based driving licences were associated with a 10% decrease in fatalities, and a 9% decrease in non-fatal injuries.

How robust is the review evidence?

- The quality of review methods used to assess the impact of point-based driving licence systems was moderate.

The review conducted a transparent search, conducted appropriate weighting of individual effect sizes when calculating overall effect, and was attentive to variability between studies. However, although the review was systematic, some potential sources of bias remained. The authors noted significant variability in the data from primary studies, and potential language and publication biases. Robust comparative analyses for crime-related outcomes, including speeding, were limited by the small number of eligible studies for these outcomes.

According to the review, the methodological quality of primary studies varied. The review used Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) quality assessment to appraise study quality, and included studies judged to be at low risk of bias. However, the review did not report an explicit risk of bias assessment.

Mechanism – how does it work?

- The quality of evidence in the review to assess how point-based driving licence systems work was low.

Point-based driving licence systems are assumed to work via behaviour modification principles and a deterrence-based theory of change. Assigning (or deducting) points and the credible threat of licence suspension and driving disqualification is believed to discourage risky driving and offences. There may be an escalating deterrent effect associated with points, with drivers who have already received points following traffic laws more closely when loss of licence is threatened.

Complementary re-education courses and awareness campaigns are expected to reinforce behaviour change, and stricter conditions (for example, lower thresholds) for high-risk groups such as novice drivers add further leverage.

While the review discussed these potential mechanisms, they were not empirically tested.

Moderators – in which contexts does it work best?

- The quality of evidence in the review to assess the contexts where point-based driving licences might work best was low.

The review mentioned several potentially relevant contexts which may affect the impact of point-based driving licence systems, such as effects for novice drivers (versus experienced drivers) and variation by country or jurisdiction. However, due to insufficient data the review did not undertake formal context-based moderator analysis.

Implementation – what can be said about implementing this initiative?

- The quality of evidence in the review to assess how to implement point-based driving licences was strong.

Implementation considerations identified in the review included the following features, facilitators and challenges.

Enablers

The review suggested that successful implementation of point-based driving licence systems depends on several factors and conditions:

- clear legal schedules linking offences to points and suspension thresholds, with greater fairness of sanctions compared to financial penalties (which disproportionately affect those on lower incomes and may have less impact for higher income individuals)
- active enforcement (for example, police controls and automated enforcement)
- public communication, education and awareness campaigns
- re-education pathways for point recovery
- novice-driver conditions (for example, tighter thresholds)
- integration with complementary measures (for example, surveillance systems and improvement of road infrastructure)

Obstacles

The review noted that if point-based driving licence systems are newly introduced, their impact may diminish over time as drivers become used to the system. Thus, there is a need for sustained enforcement and periodic updating of penalties, especially for risky behaviours such as mobile phone use and speeding. The review suggested that to maximise effectiveness, point-based driving licence systems could be combined with:

- surveillance controls and enforcement
- driver awareness campaigns via mass media
- re?education pathways for drivers who lose their licence

Economic considerations – how much might it cost?

- The review provided insufficient evidence to assess how much point-based driving licence systems cost to implement.

The review did not conduct formal economic analyses or provide cost data for implementation or cost?effectiveness.

General considerations

- Evidence was concentrated in continental Europe (especially Spain, Italy and France), which may limit applicability to other settings with different legal frameworks or sub?national systems.
- The review reported significant differences in data from primary studies, which suggests that effects vary across contexts and over time. Complementary measures (for example, enforcement campaigns) often coincided with implementation, making attribution challenging.
- The review reported potential language/publication bias and limited data for some outcomes (for example, drink/drug driving, mobile phone use), indicating a need for further high?quality evaluations.

Summary

- Overall, the research suggests that point-based driving licence systems reduce crime.

Point-based driving licence systems were associated with a 22% decrease in adverse traffic outcomes, encompassing crime-related outcomes such as speeding and drink driving. Point-based driving licence systems reduced fatalities on average by 10%, and non-fatal injuries by 9%.

Reviews

Review one

Reference

- Alonso F and others. (2025). 'Assessing the impact of point-based license systems on road safety: A systematic review and meta-analysis'. European Journal of Psychology Applied to Legal Context, volume 17, issue 1, pages 11–24. [Read open access article](#)

Additional resources

HM Government. (2022). [Penalty points, fines and driving bans: Penalty points \(endorsements\)](#). Viewed 3 August 2026.

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