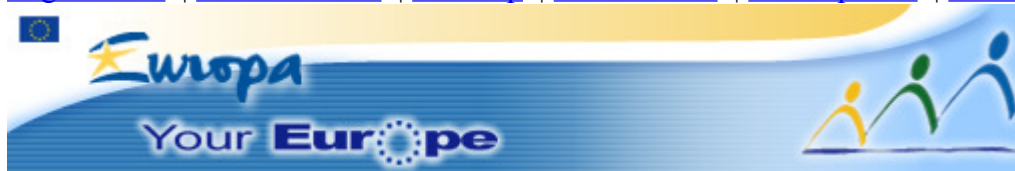


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# Driving license (European Union)



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## GENERAL OVERVIEW

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## FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

Strictly speaking, there is no Community driving licence. Since 1 July 1996, Member States have issued a "Community model" driving licence in order to make it easier to understand driving licences issued by individual Member States and to facilitate their mutual recognition.

According to the Court of Justice ([Case C-230/97 Awoyemi](#)), this principle of mutual recognition is deemed to have a number of direct effects and, as a result, to be applicable from the date of application of the Directive (1 July 1996) (see Article 12 of the Directive)

Any driving licence issued by a Member State must be recognised by the other Member States, even if the licence is old and does not correspond to the Community model, provided it is still valid. This is why the Directive provides equivalence tables for licences issued before 1 July 1996, subject to the Commission's agreement (an agreement concluded in the legal form of a Decision, and adopted on 21 March 2000 by the Commission).

**Important:** You no longer have to exchange your original licence if you go to live in another Member State but you can apply to do so if you wish.

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## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

If you hold a valid driving licence and take up "normal residence" in a Member State other than the one that issued the licence, the host Member State may enter on the licence any information needed for administration purposes and may apply its national rules on:

- the period of validity of the licence;
- medical checks (same frequency as for nationals);
- tax arrangements (connected with the holding of a licence);
- penalties (e.g. a penalty-points licence);
- restriction, suspension, withdrawal or cancellation of the licence.

They may exchange the original licence, if necessary.

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### Definition of "normal residence"

"Normal residence" means the place where people usually live, i.e. for at least 185 days in each calendar year, because of personal and occupational ties, or, in the case of people with no occupational ties, because of personal ties that show close links between them and the place where they are living.

However, the normal residence of people whose occupational ties are in a different place from their personal ties and who consequently live in turn in different places in two or more Member States is regarded as being the place where they have their personal ties, provided that they return there regularly. This latter condition need not be met where people are living in a Member State in order to carry out a task of a definite duration. Attendance at a university or school does not imply the transfer of normal residence.

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## THE COMPETENT AUTHORITY

Country	Competent authority for legislation	Competent authority for issuing licences
<b>Belgium</b>	Ministry of Communications and Infrastructure	Local authority
<b>Denmark</b>	Ministry of Transport	Police (driving licence section)
<b>Germany</b>	Federal Ministry of Transport	The Länder Road Traffic Office
<b>Greece</b>	Ministry of Transport and Communications	Ministry of Transport offices in each prefecture
<b>Spain</b>	Directorate-General for Road Traffic	Local Directorates for Road Traffic (Ministry of the Interior)
<b>Finland</b>	Vehicle Administration Centre (Ajoneuvohallintokeskus)	Police in the local-authority area of residence
<b>France</b>	Ministry of the Interior Ministry of Transport	Prefecture
<b>Ireland</b>	Driver Testing Section Department of the Environment	Driver Testing Section
<b>Italy</b>	Motorizzazione Civile	Prefecture
<b>Luxembourg</b>	Ministry of Transport Driving licences department	Ministry of Transport
<b>Netherlands</b>	Rijksdienst voor het Wegverkeer (National Road Traffic Authority)	Council offices, Town Hall
<b>Austria</b>		District authorities (Bezirkshauptmannschaft); offices of the federal police (Bundespolizeidirektion)
<b>Portugal</b>	Directorate-General for Road Traffic, Lisbon	Offices of the road traffic authority (Delegação Distrital de Viação) in each district of mainland Portugal Direcção Regional de Transportes das Regiões Autónomas dos Açores e da Madeira
<b>Sweden</b>	Vägverket (national road administration)	Länstyrelsen (county administrative board)
<b>UK</b>	Department of Transport	DVLA (Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency)

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## REFERENCES

- Council Directive 91/439/EEC of 29 July 1991 on driving licences, OJ No L 237 of 24.08.1991.

For further information, see the “Driving licences” fact sheet, or check our website: [http://ec.europa.eu/transport/home/drivinglicence/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/transport/home/drivinglicence/index_en.htm).

The site has the answers to the most frequently asked questions and also allows you to browse the Community legislation in force, find out about Community research in this field and follow links to other websites on the subject of driving licences.

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## POSSIBLE SCENARIOS

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**A number of different situations can arise:**

### **1) You already possess a driving licence issued by a Member State**

You are no longer required to exchange it if your "normal residence" (1) is in a Member State other than that which issued your licence. But you may ask to exchange it if you wish.

### **2) You already possess a driving licence issued by a Member State, but it is about to expire**

You must renew it by applying to the appropriate authorities of the Member State in which you are normally resident (1).

### **3) You already possess a driving licence issued by a Member State, but you wish to add a new category of vehicle**

You must apply to the appropriate authorities of the Member State in which you are normally resident (1). You must exchange your original licence if the new category is added.

### **4) You already possess a driving licence issued by a Member State, but you lose it or it is stolen**

You must apply for a new licence to the appropriate authorities of the Member State in which you are normally resident (1). You must provide the proof supplied to you by the authorities of the Member State which issued the lost or stolen licence. You cannot ask for a duplicate of your original licence if, in the meantime, you have changed the Member State in which you are normally resident.

### **5) You possess a driving licence issued by non-member country**

Recognition of such a driving licence is not mandatory (even if it is recognised by one or more Member States), so you should ask the authority responsible whether your licence is valid so that you can act accordingly.

### **6) You possess an international driving licence (or permit)**

Such a licence is not valid within the European Union unless you can produce a national driving licence issued by a Member State and provided your national licence is still valid. You may keep your international driving licence and use it when travelling outside the European Union.

### **7) You do not possess a driving licence, but you would like to obtain one**

You must satisfy a number of conditions:

- you must be normally resident in the Member State in which you make the application;
- you must pass the theory examination (knowledge of the highway code) and the practical test (practical driving skills);
- you must meet the medical standards (physical and mental fitness), particularly those relating to eyesight, hearing, co-ordination and movement disabilities, cardiovascular diseases, kidney disorders, neurological diseases, diabetes, alcohol, drugs and medicines, mental disorders;
- you must satisfy the minimum age requirement for the category of vehicle in question;
- you cannot hold more than one driving licence issued by a Member State, even if your licence has been suspended or withdrawn.

**For further information consult the following website:**

[http://ec.europa.eu/transport/home/drivinglicence/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/transport/home/drivinglicence/index_en.htm). The site has the answers to frequently asked questions. It also allows you to browse the Community legislation in force, find out about Community research in this field and follow links to other websites on the subject of driving licences.

(1) "Normal residence" means the place where you live for at least 185 days in each calendar year because of personal and occupational ties. Where your occupational ties are in a different place from your personal ties, the place of your personal ties will be taken into account provided that you return there regularly.

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## PRESENTATION, CATEGORIES AND VALIDITY

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#### THE COMMUNITY MODEL

The Community model driving licence still bears the name of the Member State issuing the licence and specifies the vehicle categories for which the licence is valid.

In addition, the licence lists the conditions under which the holder is entitled to drive. For instance, when the wearing of corrective lenses is recognised by the issuing authority as necessary for driving, this must be recorded on the driving licence.

Furthermore, licences issued to disabled persons bear a special indication of the conditions in which such persons may drive a vehicle.

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#### VEHICLE CATEGORIES

**The definitions of the various categories of vehicles have been harmonised as follows:**

**Category A:** motorcycles, with or without a side-car.

**Category B:** motor vehicles with a maximum authorized mass not exceeding 3 500 kg and having not more than eight seats in addition to the driver's seat; motor vehicles in this category may be combined with a trailer having a maximum authorised mass which does not exceed 750 kilograms; combinations of a tractor vehicle in category B and a trailer, where the maximum authorized mass of the combination does not exceed 3 500 kilograms and the maximum authorized mass of the trailer does not exceed the unladen mass of the tractor vehicle.

**Category B + E:** combinations of vehicles consisting of a tractor vehicle in category B and a trailer, where the combination does not come within category B.

**Category C:** motor vehicles other than those in category D and whose maximum authorized mass is over 3 500 kilograms. Motor vehicles in this category may be combined with a trailer having a maximum authorised mass which does not exceed 750 kilograms.

**Category C + E:** combinations of vehicles where the tractor vehicle is in category C and its trailer has a maximum authorised mass of over 750 kilograms.

Category D: motor vehicles used for the carriage of persons and having more than eight seats in addition to the driver's seat. Motor vehicles in this category may be combined with a trailer having a maximum authorised mass which does not exceed 750 kilograms.

**Category D + E:** combinations of vehicles where the tractor vehicle is in category D and its trailer has a maximum authorised mass of over 750 kilograms.

**Within the above categories A, B, B+E, C, C+E, D and D+E, Member States are allowed to issue a specific driving licence for the driving of a vehicle in the following optional subcategories:**

**Subcategory A1:** light motorcycles with a cubic capacity not exceeding 125 cm<sup>3</sup> and of a power not exceeding 11 kW.

**Subcategory B1:** motor-powered tricycles and quadricycles.

**Subcategory C1:** motor vehicles other than in category D and whose maximum authorized mass is over 3 500 kilograms but not more than 7 500 kilograms; motor vehicles in this subcategory may be combined with a trailer having a maximum authorised mass which does not exceed 750 kilograms.

**Subcategory C1 + E:** combinations of vehicles where the tractor vehicle is in subcategory C1 and its trailer has a maximum authorised mass of over 750 kilograms, provided that the maximum authorized mass of the combination thus formed does not exceed 12 000 kilograms, and that the maximum authorized mass of the trailer does not exceed the unladen mass of the tractor vehicle.

**Subcategory D1:** motor vehicles used for the carriage of passengers and having more than eight seats in addition to the driver's seat but not more than 16 seats in addition to the driver's seat; motor vehicles in this subcategory may be combined with a trailer having a maximum authorized mass which does not exceed 750 kilograms.

**Subcategory D1 + E:** combinations of vehicles where the tractor vehicle is in subcategory D1 and its trailer has a maximum authorized mass of over 750 kilograms, provided that: firstly, the maximum authorized mass of the combination thus formed does not exceed 12 000 kilograms and the maximum authorized mass of the trailer does not exceed the unladen mass of the tractor vehicle; secondly, the trailer is not used for the transport of persons.

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## VALIDITY OF THE LICENCE

The Member States are introducing a national driving licence based on the Community model. This entitles the holder to drive, both on national and international journeys, vehicles of the categories for which it has been granted.

THE VALIDITY OF THE DRIVING LICENCE IS DETERMINED AS FOLLOWS:

- Licences granted for categories C and D are also valid for the driving of vehicles in category B.
- Licences for vehicles in categories B + E, C + E and D + E will be granted only to drivers already entitled to drive vehicles in category B, C and D respectively.
- The Member States will fix the period of validity of the licences they issue.

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## REFERENCES

- The Directive 80/1263/EEC been replaced by the Directive 91/439/EEC which modifies the old model to incorporate, notably, the harmonisation of vehicle categories and to make the presentation

easier to understand. This Directive came into effect on 1 July 1996.

- Council Directive 96/47/EEC of 23 July 1996 amends Directive 91/439/EEC in order to allow the Member States the possibility of opting for an alternative format ("credit card" format). The directive also states that a space shall be reserved on the Community model licence to allow for the possible introduction of a microchip or similar computer device. After consulting the Commission, Member States may add colour markings, such as bar codes, national symbols and security features. In the context of mutual recognition of licences, the bar code may not contain information other than which can already be read on the driving licence or which is essential to the process of issuing the licence.
- Council Directive 97/26/EC of 2 June 1997 amends Directive 91/439/EEC in order to introduce Community codes allowing persons with a restriction or an adapted car to freely circulate throughout the EU.
- Commission Directive 2000/56/EC of 14 September 2000 amends Directive 91/439/EEC. Both the list of Community codes and the Annex II concerning the theory and practical test are revised.
- On 21 March 2000, the Commission adopted Decision 2000/275/EC aiming to ensure the mutual recognition of all driving licences issued by the Member States, including all licences issued before the adoption and application of Council Directive 91/439/EEC. This Decision establishes the list of equivalences referred to in the first paragraph of article 10 of Directive 91/439/EEC.
- On 21 October 2003, the Commission adopted a proposal, COM (2003) 621, with a view to replace all existing acts by a new text integrating important further changes with regard to the anti-fraud protection of driving licence models, to the validity periods of driving licences and to improve road safety.

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## INFORMATION REGARDING DRIVING LICENCES

Extensive information regarding driving licences can be found on the following [http://ec.europa.eu/transport/home/drivinglicence/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/transport/home/drivinglicence/index_en.htm). This website allows to download all EU legislation in force, to have useful links to national authorities and other related websites, to obtain answers to the most frequently asked questions and to obtain other information that is important in the field of driver licensing such as ongoing research or latest developments.

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## ISSUING DRIVING LICENCES

Although driving licences are issued by the Member States in accordance with their national legislation, the latter must incorporate the provisions concerning the Community model. This means that an applicant must meet certain conditions before a licence can be granted. He must:

- have his normal residence in the Member State where the application is made;
- pass a practical and theoretical test, for which requirements vary according to the Member State but they may not be less stringent than the minimum Community requirements (Annex II of the Directive);
- meet fitness standards: there are also minimum Community standards concerning physical and

mental fitness, in particular as regards sight, hearing, locomotor problems, cardiovascular diseases, renal disorders, neurological diseases, diabetes mellitus, alcohol, drugs, medicinal products, mental disorders, and so on (Annex III of the Directive);

- meet the minimum age conditions for the category of vehicle concerned;
- not hold more than one driving licence, even if his licence is suspended or withdrawn.

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## WITHDRAWAL OF DRIVING LICENCES

Member States may, for reasons of road safety, enforce their national legislation on the withdrawal, suspension or cancellation of the licences of holders who have taken up normal residence in their territory. The national rules therefore apply whatever the nationality of the licence.

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## REPLACEMENT OF DRIVING LICENCES

### Expiry of licences

If your licence expires, you must renew it by applying to the competent authorities of the Member State in which you are normally resident.

### Additional licences

If you wish to obtain a licence for an additional category, you must exchange your original licence by applying to the competent authority in the Member State where you are normally resident.

### Loss or theft

If you lose your driving licence or it is stolen, you must apply for a new one from the competent authorities of the Member State in which you are normally resident. You may have to provide them with a certificate from the competent authorities of the Member State that issued the original licence.

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## INFORMATION REGARDING DRIVING LICENCES

Extensive information regarding driving licences can be found on the following website:

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## **General rule**

Driving licences issued by the Member States are mutually recognised.

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## **Exceptions**

Driving licences issued by a Member State in exchange for a driving licence issued by a non-Community country will not automatically be recognised on a mutual basis by the others. Even if such a licence has already been recognised by one Member State, you should contact the competent authority to establish whether your licence is valid.

Member States may refuse to recognise driving licences issued to drivers under the age of 18.

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# **EXCHANGING OF DRIVING LICENCE**

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If holders of driving licences changed residence or place of work from one Member State to another they used to have to exchange their licence within one year (Directive 80/1263/EEC). This obligation was abolished on 1 July 1996 and exchanging of driving licences has been voluntary since then.

In the event of voluntary exchange, loss or theft, the Member State in which holders have taken up their normal residence will issue the person concerned with a Community model driving licence for the corresponding category or categories without requiring that person to take a theoretical or practical test.

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## **APPLICATIONS BY HOLDERS**

Applications for exchange must be made to the competent authorities in the normal country of residence, at the request of holders and on surrender of their current licence.

Before the exchange is made, applicants must submit a statement to the effect that their driving licence is currently valid. It is up to the Member State responsible for making the exchange to check the truth of the statement, if necessary.

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## **REFUSAL OF EXCHANGE**

Exchange may be refused:

- if the driving licence was issued by a non-Community country; Member States are free to recognise such driving licences if they wish, and recognition by one Member State is not binding on the others.

For further information, see:

[http://ec.europa.eu/transport/home/drivinglicence/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/transport/home/drivinglicence/index_en.htm). At this site you can find answers to the most frequently asked questions and obtain the Community legislation in force and information on Community research in this field. There are also links to other websites dealing with driving licences.

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