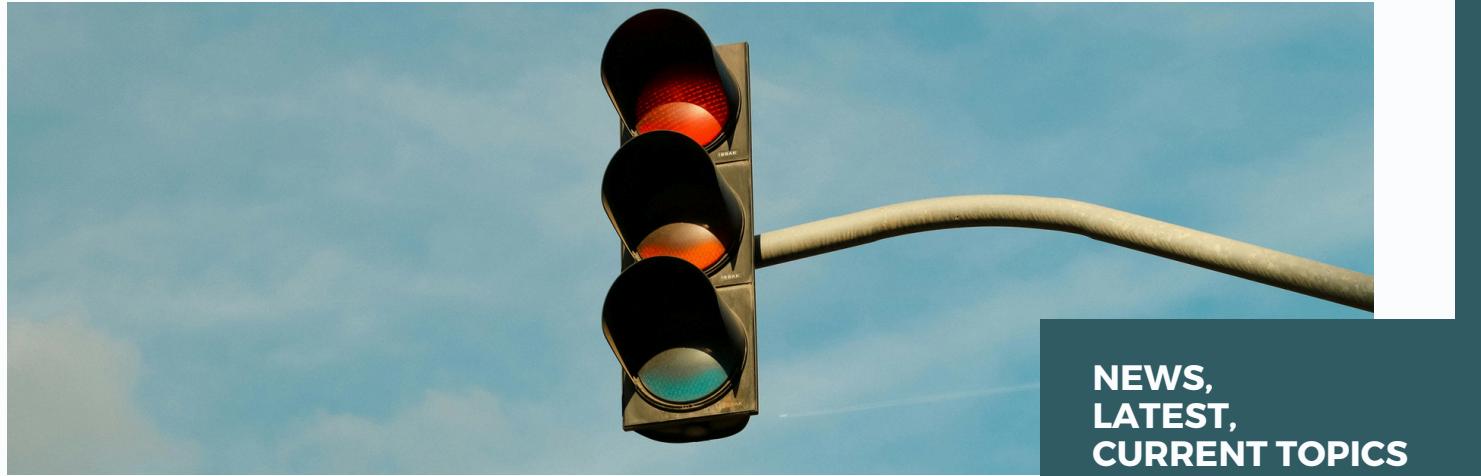


THE NEW EUROPEAN DRIVING LICENCE SYSTEM



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“MEMBER STATES WILL NOW BE REQUIRED TO PROVIDE A DRIVING LICENCE IN DIGITAL FORMAT, ACCESSIBLE THROUGH A EUROPEAN DIGITAL IDENTITY WALLET.”

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Currently, mobility within the European Union is an everyday reality for citizens, workers, students and businesses. In this context, access to and maintenance of the right to drive are no longer strictly national matters, but are now part of an increasingly harmonised European legal regime.

In 2025, the EU approved a new regulatory framework for driving licences, with the aim of improving road safety. This framework aims to improve road safety, modernise administrative procedures and ensure more effective enforcement of sanctions in a cross-border context. The regime will take full effect from November 2029. By that date, Member States, including Portugal, must adapt their national legislation.

During this transition period, it is essential that drivers understand the upcoming changes and their practical effects.

Digitalisation: the European Digital Driving Licence

Among the main innovations, the implementation of the European Union's digital driving license stands out. Member States will now be required to provide a driving licence in digital format, accessible through a European Digital Identity Wallet. This format will have legal validity throughout the European Union and aims to facilitate cross-border recognition, reduce administrative burdens, and simplify interactions with public authorities and security forces.

However, the digital license does not replace the physical license, so drivers retain the right to opt for a physical document, and both formats will have equal legal validity. This measure will be particularly useful for citizens residing in Portugal, in situations of international mobility or temporary residence in other Member States.

Stricter Rules for First-Time Drivers

Road safety is a central axis of the reform, with a special focus on new drivers, with a mandatory minimum probationary period of two years, applicable throughout the European Union. During this period, Member States must apply stricter rules, particularly with regard to alcohol or drug use, seat belt use, and the carriage of children.

The new regime establishes the creation of a European accompanied driving system, allowing 17-year-olds to drive cars under the guidance of an experienced driver, promoting safer and more gradual learning, outside the exclusive context of driving school.



Infractions

Among the most relevant changes is the application of new sanctions at European level that establish that certain serious offences committed in one Member State may result in driving bans valid throughout the European Union, preventing offenders from circumventing the sanctions when moving to another country.

When the ban lasts for at least three months and all legal remedies have been exhausted, the state where the offence occurred will notify the state that issued the driving licence and the latter will decide whether to extend the ban to the entire EU territory.

Validity periods

The new system harmonises the periods of validity: Cars and motorcycles in categories A and B have a maximum validity of 15 years. However, this can be reduced to 10 years if the card is used as a national identification document.

Heavy goods vehicles, both for freight and passenger transport, are subject to a mandatory renewal every five years. Member States are empowered to reduce the validity for drivers aged 65 and over, and it is essential that medical assessments are carried out at the time of renewal.

In this regard, Portugal will retain a margin of discretion as to the applicable medical and administrative criteria.

“LICENCES ISSUED BY NON-EU THIRD COUNTRIES WHOSE ROAD SAFETY STANDARDS ARE CONSIDERED EQUIVALENT MAY BE EXCHANGED FOR A LICENCE VALID THROUGHOUT THE EUROPEAN UNION. THE LIST OF COUNTRIES WILL BE DEFINED BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION IN LIAISON WITH THE MEMBER STATES. THIS MATTER IS OF PARTICULAR IMPORTANCE FOR ALL THIRD-COUNTRY NATIONALS RESIDING IN PORTUGAL OR IN ANY MEMBER STATE OF THE UNION.”

Letters from third countries

The new framework sets out clear guidelines on the application of the scheme to charters from third countries.

Licences issued by non-EU third countries whose road safety standards are considered equivalent may be exchanged for a licence valid throughout the European Union. The list of countries will be defined by the European Commission in liaison with the Member States. This matter is of particular importance for all third-country nationals residing in Portugal or in any Member State of the Union.

Driver Training

In addition, new guidelines will be implemented in the field of driver training. The theoretical and practical exams now give greater relevance to the risks of blind spot, driver assistance systems, safe opening of doors and the risks of distraction with the use of mobile phones, with a view to promoting the awareness of new drivers of the risks associated with pedestrian, child and cycling circulation.

The new rules, which have been in force since November 2025, give Portugal and the other Member States of the European Union a period of three years to transpose the European directive into national law and another year of preparation for its full application.