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Beefier law puts tweens back in booster seats

A new Swiss law that took effect a year ago requires kids younger than 13 and under 150cm to ride in booster seats. It is one of the strictest of its kind in Europe.

The regulations seek to bring the country in line with European Union standards, but some say the law has gone too far.

Until last year children up to seven years old required safety seats when riding in private vehicles. The EU as a whole has no age requirement, but a minimum-height limit has been in place for years: Children can only ride in cars without special seats once they are at least 135cm tall.

Some parents, taxi drivers and sports groups worry that the new law penalizes them unfairly since most cars simply don't have room for three or more children to ride in booster seats. The Swiss Football Association has asked the government to rescind the law.

The Touring Club of Switzerland (TCS), however, supports the more stringent regulations, noting that seat belts alone are not enough to protect bigger children.

About 500 children are injured on Swiss roads each year, TCS said, a figure confirmed by the Swiss Office for Accident Prevention. On average 11 children aged 0-17 are killed.

"We are finding it's just much too much, and frankly, stupid," said Pascal Prince, president of Mobilitant.org, a group that champions drivers' rights. As the father of a young girl he said he understands the concerns but believes the government has overstepped its bounds.

Mobilitant has collected more than 20,000 signatures asking lawmakers to modify the law. The regulations would be sufficient with no age limit and a 135cm-height minimum, he said.

Some of the most vocal opposition to the law has come from the French-speaking regions of the country, with politicians in cantons Valais and Vaud leading the fight. Mobilitant is based in French-speaking canton Jura.

Romands generally don't like things that impede their mobility. In 1980, French-speaking cantons voted overwhelmingly against making seatbelts mandatory - up to 87 per cent were against it in canton Valais. On the other hand, Basel City (71 per cent) and Zurich (75 per cent) voted overwhelmingly for the measure. It passed overall with 51.6 per cent of the vote.

from swissinfo

Whether you believe you can or you believe you can't - you're right either way.

Henry Ford

School rankings list touches raw nerve

A decision by Zurich's Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) to list the schools their most successful students enrolled from has touched upon a Swiss educational taboo.

The list has been perceived as a ranking system revealing which schools produced the best students for the highly rated science and technology university - and which delivered the worst.

The Federal Institute insisted that it was not trying to create competition amongst schools when it published its list last. The ranking list was contained in a general profile of factors common to successful students and was designed to inform future intakes about the best path to follow. However, the ranking should send out a message to those schools whose students did not come up to scratch.

The list clearly hit a nerve with some of the schools ranked lower down the scale. The Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education said the list should be taken with a pinch of salt because it only compared 60 out of 160 secondary schools in Switzerland.

The Swiss engineering sector is currently facing a shortfall of around 3,000 skilled workers as fewer students opt for science and technology subjects in higher education.

The Federal Institute of Technology Zurich looked at the performance record of 5,216 students. It looked at where they had attended secondary school, what subjects they had taken and compared their school diploma (Matura) grade with their performance at the Institute. Unsurprisingly, those who had come away from school with a good Matura usually continued with good grades in further studies. Younger students, who did not take a break from education, came up with the best exam results at the Institute.

from swissinfo

Known child abuse cases are "tip of iceberg"

Around 785 children were abused last year in Switzerland according to the biggest statistical snapshot to date, but experts say the real number would certainly be higher. Of the total, 299 children were subjected to physical violence, another 219 cases were of sexual abuse, 213 children suffered neglect and 121 suffered mental ill-treatment. More than half of the cases affected children aged under six.

The overwhelming number of perpetrators are people known to the child; 80% are family members, and only 6.7% are strangers.

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