Visual fields and driver´s licences: paragraphs, perimetry and politics

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Visual field loss is a common reason for losing a driving licence, but how is the European legislation applied in each member state, and can a new perimetry algorithm better predict who is fit or unfit to drive? This lecture presents a doctoral thesis on the European visual field standards for driving, together with an assessment of European and Norwegian legislation, some personal reflections and an update on the ongoing regulatory process.

Three studies from the thesis are presented. First, a survey of national experts in 25 European countries showed that the EU directive is interpreted and applied very differently, with the number of passed cases ranging from 5 to 12 out of 15. Second, a study of 30 healthy participants showed that thick or ill-fitting spectacle frames could cause artefactual visual field defects on the new European Driving Test (EDT). Third, in a simulator study of 70 participants with visual field loss, neither the EDT nor the Esterman test predicted driving ability better than chance (AUC $\approx$ 0.5), whereas contrast sensitivity showed acceptable discrimination (AUC 0.73). Roughly two in three participants who had lost their licence solely because they did not meet the visual field criteria could potentially have been safe drivers.

The findings prompted the Norwegian Directorate of Health to revise its driving licence guidelines. The revision is expected to be completed in December 2026 and to include practical driving assessments for these individuals. The thesis also contributed to the Norwegian Parliament’s decision in April 2026 that visual field testing alone should no longer determine driving eligibility. The lecture concludes with reflections on what this means for ophthalmologists’ assessments going forward.