



CALL FOR TENDERS

Research on Driver Distraction and In-Vehicle Information Overload

The Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) Region I invites proposals for a comprehensive research study examining the road safety implications of driver distraction and in-vehicle information overload. This research will focus specifically on road safety risks beyond manual smartphone use, evaluating how screen-dominated infotainment systems and complex menu designs affect driver cognitive and visual workload, and translating these empirical safety insights into robust evidence to support FIA Region I's European safety standards and driver advocacy.

The primary objective of this study is to establish a clear, evidence-based policy foundation to support FIA Region I's advocacy efforts directed at EU institutions (European Commission and European Parliament), safety rating bodies (Euro NCAP), and international standards organizations (UNECE). The study will evaluate the safety consequences of modern, digital cockpits, providing the technical and empirical backing required to lobby for safer, more intuitive vehicle design standards that protect consumers on European roads.

Context of the study:

In recent years, passenger vehicle cabins have undergone a massive digital transformation. The traditional dashboard, characterized by dedicated tactile buttons, switches, and analog dials, has largely been replaced by expansive touchscreens, software-driven interfaces, and digital control panels. However, market trends are currently diverging: while some European vehicle manufacturers (e.g., Volkswagen with "Physical buttons are back") are actively reintroducing physical controls for key functions due to persistent safety concerns and customer feedback, Tesla and many emerging Chinese brands continue to rely heavily on screen-dominated architectures.

Unlike tactile controls, which drivers can locate and operate using muscle memory and peripheral vision, touchscreen interfaces require direct visual confirmation. Selecting a function on a screen, such as adjusting climate control, changing audio settings, or navigating multi-layered menus, often requires taking eyes off the road for prolonged periods. The visual and cognitive demands of complex screen interactions significantly increase reaction times and collision risks. This risk extends beyond handheld smartphone use the traditional focus of policy and now resides directly within standard in-vehicle controls.

The European regulatory and safety assessment landscape is adapting to these emerging risks. Under the updated EU General Safety Regulation (GSR), new vehicle registrations are mandated to feature Advanced Driver Distraction Warning (ADDW) systems. While ADDW provides vital monitoring, it acts as a reactive mitigation tool (warning the driver after distraction occurs) rather than addressing the root cause: interface design.

Concurrently, Euro NCAP's 2026 protocols incentivize dedicated physical controls for essential driving tasks (turn signals, hazard lights, wipers, horn, and eCall SOS) to secure top safety ratings. This marks a major shift in safety policy. This study will build the empirical evidence needed to support advocacy efforts to extend physical control requirements or strict design rules to secondary critical functions (such as climate control and demisting) and address systemic cognitive overload.



Scope of work:

The selected contractor will execute a desk-based evidence synthesis, regulatory assessment, and policy strategy study structured into three distinct Work Packages. The research will build upon existing empirical literature, naturalistic driving data, published industry test results (such as the ADAC 2022 Driver Distraction Study), and current safety standards.

Technical Risk Assessment & Driver Attention Evidence Base

- **Infotainment & Interface Complexity:** Analyze how touchscreen-dominated interfaces, multi-step sub-menu navigation, and connected services impact driver cognitive and visual workload compared to tactile controls. Specifically evaluate voice assistants as a potential distraction-mitigation technology for complex tasks (such as entering navigation destinations). Evaluate the physical and cognitive friction of multi-click task sequences required to access essential vehicle functions (e.g., 3–4 clicks through sub-menus to adjust wipers, climate control, or demisting). Identify specific interface design characteristics and interaction depths that heighten distraction risk, including touch-sensitive control sliders (unlit volume/temperature bars), touch controls integrated into steering wheels, airflow adjustments buried in screen menus, and non-standard control placements (such as hazard warning light buttons located in the roof headliner)
- **Driver Attention Metrics & Crash Data:** Synthesize experimental, simulator, and naturalistic driving evidence regarding eyes-off-road time, visual scanning, and situational awareness. Assess crash data trends across EU Member States and highlight reporting gaps in distinguishing in-vehicle system distraction from handheld phone use.
- **End-User & Vulnerable Group Impact:** Evaluate the specific safety implications and usability barriers for vulnerable driver groups, such as novice and older drivers.

Policy, Regulatory & Safety Standards Analysis

- **Regulatory Assessment:** Review current and emerging frameworks, including the EU General Safety Regulation (GSR / ADDW mandates), UNECE regulations, ISO/SAE standards, and Euro NCAP 2026 assessment protocols.
- **Regulatory Gaps:** Identify regulatory gaps where standards fail to keep pace with rapid digital cockpit trends, focusing on the distinction between reactive mitigation (ADDW) and proactive design safeguards.

Strategic Recommendations & Advocacy Deliverables

- **EU Policy & Advocacy Proposals:** Formulate concrete, evidence-based position proposals for FIA Region I to support advocacy with EU institutions, Euro NCAP, and UNECE (e.g., advocating for mandatory physical controls for safety-critical and secondary functions like climate control/demisting, manufacturer-independent standardized operating logic, and strict limits on menu depth/click-counts).
- **Safer HMI Design Guidelines:** Establish practical, safety-first HMI design recommendations for vehicle manufacturers and system designers, defining specific parameters for Function Lockout (disabling high-distraction tasks while driving, such as reading news/messages, browsing websites, deep menu configuration, and long text



entries). This should also consider vehicle functions like configuring menu system while driving etc.

- **FIA Member Club Operational Toolkit:** Develop actionable guidance for FIA Member Clubs to adapt core operational services specifically driver training curricula, roadside assistance advice, and consumer awareness campaigns on digital cockpit safety.

Proposal submission:

Interested parties are invited to submit detailed proposals outlining their approach, methodology, timeline, and budget for the research project. Proposals should include:

- Detailed approach and methodology
- Proposed timeline and budget breakdown
- Team profiles, credentials, and relevant experience
- Examples of previous research projects

Proposals should be sent to Rajesh Babu Tamanara, FIA RI Policy Officer, at rbtamanara@fia.com by **4th September 2026**

Selection criteria:

The selection will be based on the following criteria:

- Expertise and experience in road safety, human factors, and vehicle HMI research, particularly driver distraction and attention.
- Feasibility and clarity of the proposed research methodology.
- Budget competitiveness.
- Feasibility of the proposed timeline.

Timeline:

- **Proposal Submission Deadline:** 04/09/2026
- **Contractor Selection:** 18/09/2026
- **Research Commencement:** 24/09/2026
- **Interim Progress Report:** 09/11/2026
- **Delivery of final report in English (including executive summary and policy recommendations):** 11/12/2026

Budget and payment:

A maximum budget of 50,000€ (including VAT, if applicable) is available. 40% of the agreed costs will be paid once the candidate is appointed, and 60% will be paid once the research is concluded and the final report is approved. The budget should include all expenses, including potential travel costs.