

23 school children die in Spanish coach accident

Vicky Short
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Twenty-three school children died in Spain Thursday, July 6 when a bus collided with a lorry. The impact sent the bus down a steep embankment, resulting in many fatalities among the teenagers on board. Some of those with serious injuries died later in hospital.

As well as the driver and two teachers, two other adults travelling on the bus also died, bringing the total killed to 28. It took several hours to pull some of the bodies from the wreckage.

The accident took place at Golmayo near Soria in northern Spain, on the N-122 highway linking Zaragoza with the Portuguese border. The children came from two Barcelona schools—Sant Esteve de Ripollet and Modolell de Viladecans. They had left in the morning on their way to a summer holiday camp in Aranda del Duero (Burgos), owned by the Brothers of Saint Gabriel, which runs the schools.

The self-employed driver had hired the bus used to transport the children from Autocares Granados. He had organised similar trips for the schools in previous years. It has so far proved difficult to make a positive identification of the lorry driver, but he was believed to be a Polish national. The reason why the lorry veered into the path of the bus had not yet been established.

Spanish roads are infamous for their high number of fatal traffic accidents. Last weekend 51 people died and 72 were injured in heavy traffic, as many left for their holiday at the end of the school year. Fatalities for 1998 number 151 dead per million inhabitants. By comparison, the average for the European Union as a whole is 114. Sweden and Britain are 60 and 61 respectively.

The highest numbers of casualties in Spain involve coaches and buses. Thousands of people have died and many more have been injured in accidents similar to the one that took place Thursday. The greatest loss of life

has involved coaches carrying school children, pensioners and immigrants.

Thursday's accident was the second most serious of its kind in Spain in the last five years. Last September 19, 27 people died and 26 were wounded, and on February 28, 1996 in Bailen (Jaen) 29 people were killed in one accident.

Unscrupulous firms or individuals often hire out old and inadequately maintained coaches. Such vehicles are often incapable of sustaining any collision and disintegrate at the slightest impact. The coach involved in yesterday's crash was reported to be new and it had only been registered last December. But after the crash nothing was left of the original structure except pieces of twisted iron.



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