# VOICE Country Sheet

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# Vulnerable road users in The Czech Republic

VOICE

**VOICE : Vulnerable Road User Organisations in cooperation across Europe**

VOICE is a network to ensure that usually neglected VOICEs are heard in the transport debate – those of vulnerable road users.

**The VOICE coalition currently consists of:**
AGE - the European Older People's Platform; ANEC - the European consumer voice in standardisation; EPHA Environment Network European Child Safety Alliance; European Disability Forum European Public Health Alliance; European Federation for Transport and Environment; Voetgangersbeweging - Pedestrian Movement, BEUC; European Transport Safety Council

**More information: www.etsc.be/Voice.php**

## Part I - The Czech Republic

### Introduction

The Czech Republic had an above EU average fatality rate of 135 per million inhabitants in 2004.[1] The rate has been dropping since 2003 but it will have to make great efforts to reach its target of halving road deaths (in relation to 2002) by 2010. As it stands, the number of deaths per million inhabitants is twice as much as best performers such as Sweden or the UK.[2] Road traffic deaths are a serious health and social problem and the socio-economic costs are estimated at over 1.6 billion EUR annually.

The 2004-2005 National Road Safety Strategy includes special measures devoted to child accident prevention through improvements in infrastructure, traffic education and training.[3] It remains to be seen whether such measures will prove effective. In the period 2000-2004, accidents involving vulnerable road users (VRUs) remained relatively stable, with the exception of 2001 when accidents involving both cyclists and pedestrians increased dramatically in relation to 2000[4]. Since then, numbers have started to drop again but not significantly.

As a general rule, the awareness of the road safety problem in the country is rather low, as strong political support and commitment have historically been insufficient.[5]

### Road users' compliance

In 1997, the Czech Republic introduced the 50km/h speed limit in urban areas but compliance rates are still low. According to police sources, roughly 30% of motorists do not comply with urban speed limits and 20% drive over the limit on rural roads.[6] Furthermore, almost 2/3 of road accidents caused by drivers of motor vehicles was caused by what has been termed by the police as "inadequate driving", followed by "not giving way" (18%), and speeding (17%).[7] According to figures collected by the Czech Police, speeding was responsible for 47% of deaths in 2005.[8]

Pedestrians are particularly vulnerable accounting for 22% of accident fatalities while cyclists account for 8%.[9] Indeed, pedestrian deaths are not far below that of drivers of personal cars.[10] Measures benefiting pedestrians have been introduced recently – one example is priority for pedestrians on pedestrian crossings, which has been in force since 1 January 2001. Sadly, accidents are still very frequent. In 2003 18.3% of pedestrian fatalities occurred on crossings.[11] Furthermore, the poor quality and maintenance of pedestrian crossings is no doubt a contributing factor. Inappropriate placement of crossings too close to horizontal curves[12] or in places with obstacles obscuring visibility often discourages drivers from giving priority to pedestrians (see infrastructure section).

There is no denying that aggressive drivers have their share of responsibility. Nevertheless, pedestrians themselves often cause accidents. Alcohol is a common cause.[13] In the Czech Republic, the presence of alcohol in a pedestrian's blood is recorded only if he or she has caused the accident. In 2003, that was the case of 71 (26%) pedestrian fatalities. Among them only 7% had BAC above the zero-limit but the other 20% were not tested.[14]



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Among cyclists, 15.1% of those fatally injured rode under the influence of alcohol. Other than intoxication, a significant proportion of accidents caused by cyclists results from improper driving techniques or failure to respect traffic rules. This is due in part to insufficient knowledge of the Highway Code.

Finally, children also represent a high proportion in the cause of accidents. In 2004, 681 accidents were caused by children.[15]

This calls for a combination of proper education, accident prevention campaigns and police enforcement targeting both drivers and vulnerable road users, in particular those who disregard traffic rules and behave dangerously when under the influence of alcohol.

## Infrastructure

Vulnerable road users (pedestrians and cyclists in particular) make the majority of their trips in the urban environment in which there are a lot of interfaces between them and other road users. In order to reduce casualties, it is important that road conditions are made particularly safe for VRUs. A combination of measures (traffic calming, upgrade or maintenance of existing facilities, among others) will usually deliver the most effective results.

Infrastructure designed for VRUs in the Czech Republic still leaves much to be desired. The quality of technical standards used for setting up pedestrian crossings has been a subject of wide criticism from road safety professionals. This was largely due to inappropriate physical parameters such as unrestricted length. The revised standard for road design limits the length of crossings to 6.5 metres. However, that is the requirement for newly built crossings whereas most of the old ones remain in dangerous condition.[16] In rural areas, the percentage of pedestrian fatal accidents (36%) is high mainly because of improper or lacking pedestrian surfaces.



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Further treatment is therefore important and urgent in rural and especially urban areas. Cycling issues are discussed in the next section.

## The private car versus other forms of sustainable transport

Over the past decades the increasing volume of road traffic has been perceived as a symbol of progress. Nowadays most Czech citizens of driving age possess a driving licence. This has led to dropping rates of public transport use. Yet encouraging people to leave their cars at home could be the key to decreasing traffic as well as accidents. However, the effect of promotional campaigns seems to be rather low. In Prague, the use of public transport has dropped from about 90% in 1988 to 50% in 2005.[17]

Cycling is another sustainable form of transport in urban areas. According to the SUNFlower+6 report, the major obstacles for its widespread use are poor infrastructure, risk of theft and risk of accidents in traffic. Moreover, in the Czech Republic, cycling as a means of transport, or even as an integrated part of the transport network, still lacks systematic support. In 2004, the National Cycling Strategy (including road safety measures) was approved by the Czech Government. However, it does not clearly specify how the proposed measures, especially new infrastructure, should be financed.

There should be more investment in campaigns both in favour of road safety for VRUs as well as promoting the use of sustainable transport. The campaigns introduced by the government in the last few years have not addressed effectively enough the different target groups of road users and their real impact on behavioural changes is minimal. There are a few exceptions, as in the case of some initiatives coming from the public and private sectors.

### Czech campaigns and organisations

Even though there is no national non-governmental road safety organisation, there are a number of NGOs, foundations and other entities active in the field that specialise in awareness campaigns and education. The Ministry of Transport and other governmental bodies are also responsible for a number of initiatives: The **Ministry of Transport** (www.mdcr.cz/en/) has run a number of campaigns such as Visibility in 2004 to promote the use of retroflective clothing among child pedestrians and cyclists; Safe Routes to School based on a British initiative co-organised with CDV, HCCZ, and the Centre for Injury Prevention; the **Transport Research Centre (CDV)** (www.cdv.cz) is a research institute on transport issues; the **Healthy Cities of the Czech Republic (HCCZ)** (http://nszm.internet.cz/cb21/asp/egate.asp?id=1022) is a national association of active cities, towns and regions that implement the WHO Healthy Cities Project for long-term health and sustainable development, including road safety.

The **Czech Environmental Partnership Foundation** (www.nadacepartnerstvi.cz/enindex.php#) supports environmental but also transport and road safety initiatives such as Transportation for the 21st Century, which promotes transportation policies with a focus on public transport, pedestrians and cyclists; **Oživení** (www.greenways.cz) or Revival is a civic association working with a number of issues including road safety; the environmental group **Prague Mothers** (www.pmatky.ecn.cz) also deals with aspects of road safety.

# PART II

## What works best? Examples from Europe

The examples below illustrate what other European countries or specific cities in the Czech Republic have done to address similar issues.

## Behaviour

Measures targeting both vulnerable road users and drivers are necessary in order to improve behaviour and increase safety in the streets. Addressing common traffic violations by drivers such as drink driving and speeding has proven effective in a number of countries.[18] A driving licence penalty point system in order to penalise drivers who speed coupled with increased enforcement has reduced road fatalities in **France** by 17% between 2002 and 2003. In **Italy**, road deaths fell by 30% the first year following the implementation of a penalty point system. In the **Czech**

**Republic**, it was introduced in July 2006 so authorities need to make sure that it is properly enforced. Experience from other Member States, such as Italy, shows the need to keep up the profile of the penalty point system well after it has been introduced with police controls and campaigns in order to ensure that the momentum is not lost.[19]

Education and campaigns to raise awareness of road and traffic risks amongst pedestrians and cyclists have been implemented in many EU countries. Educating children from an early age with a view to making them more responsible road users in adult life has obvious benefits. **Slovenia**, like the Czech Republic, is a new EU member state but with much lower children accident rates.[20] The Slovenian Road Safety Council organises campaigns promoting pedestrian safety. At the beginning of the school year it performs actions for schools in every town called "Safe Way to School".

### Infrastructure

Even though the following examples do not come with accident figures, they still demonstrate the benefits that a more comprehensive urban-planning policy can bring to pedestrians and cyclists, which have implications on the overall level of road safety as well.

The pedestrian plan developed by the municipality of **Geneva** in **Switzerland** contains a programme of measures aimed at promoting walking as a transport mode in the urban environment. More specifically, the main objectives are to encourage walking, improve public spaces, facilitate pedestrian traffic, eliminate obstacles for pedestrians, and keep traffic in proportion with the size of neighbourhoods. This has resulted in the construction of more than one hundred new pedestrian crossings and numerous enlargements of sidewalks and modifications to crossroads.[21]

In the **Czech Republic** itself, the city of **Olomouc**, the fifth largest city in the country has developed a traffic planning policy which entails adapting the city to the increasing automobile traffic and at the same time providing systematic support for other means of transport (public transport, cycling, and walking). The Accessible Olomouc project also envisages the creation of a long-term design for improving the quality of life for citizens with different kinds of disability such as wheelchair users, blind and partially-sighted people, people with hearing difficulties, senior citizens and so on. Since 2000, more locations have been made accessible – swimming pool, cinema, post offices, etc. Several dozen pedestrian crossings were established and individual transport was provided for disabled people through especially adapted vehicles. Plans for accessibility to other public buildings and pedestrian paths have been established.[22]

### Sustainable transport

**Denmark** has been one of the leading countries in terms of sustainable transport investment. One the most well-known projects is the public bicycles scheme in the city of **Copenhagen**.[23] From April to December, public bicycles are available in the city centre, for free. City authorities have integrated it into the public transport network and also ensured that other intermodal travel chains are possible (for example, bicycles in combination with walking, car, or long distance rail). There are over 2,000 bicycles in use and 100 city bike racks spread across central Copenhagen. These city bikes are extremely popular – so much so that availability tends to be a problem. This programme has been used as model for similar systems in other cities such as Helsinki in Finland. Also, through the City of Copenhagen Cycle Policy 2002-2012 and the implementation of a number of measures, it is hoped that cycling will increase from 34% to 40% (cycling rates have in fact already been rising over the past few years).[24]

In **France**, the city of Rennes has developed a scheme known as *Vélo à la Carte*[25], which consists of bicycles available free of charge to registered users in possession of a magnetic card. It has been found that 69% of card holders use it along with other means of transport. This scheme was well-received and 92% of users were very satisfied with it. Some of the reasons given for using the bike were to go from home to work, school or university, leisure, shopping, and so on.



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# Part III

### All actors contributing

The examples of what has worked in various locations illustrate mainly what national and local authorities can do to improve the protection of vulnerable road users. But national and European decision makers also have a role to play.

At a national level the government must ensure the frameworks they establish for more local action support and stimulate the spread of initiatives that have been successful. In the Czech Republic, the areas that specifically need to be strengthened are better compliance from all road users, further treatment of infrastructure designed for VRUs both in urban and rural areas, and more effective promotion of sustainable forms of transport.

## Measures to protect vulnerable road users at EU level

In 2001, the Commission proposed an ambitious target to halve the number of road fatalities by 2010 (**White Paper on the European Policy for Transports**, **2001**). In order to pave the way towards achieving this target, the Commission subsequently published a **European Road Safety Action Programme** (**COM (2003) 311 final**). It stressed the need for better protection of vulnerable road users. In particular, it highlighted the relevance of education and awareness campaigns aimed at vulnerable road users and the importance of the tests conducted by EuroNCAP (European New Car Assessment Programme) regarding passive safety, which concerns protection against injury in the event of a crash.

Safer car fronts for pedestrians and cyclists are a priority to EU action. Mindful of the fact that every year some 8,000 pedestrians and cyclists are killed and a further 300,000 injured on European roads, the Parliament and Council adopted a **Directive** (**2003/102/EC**) which aims to reduce the severity of injuries to pedestrians by laying down tests and to introduce changes to the front of vehicles, concentrating essentially on the bonnet and bumper. These could help prevent up to 2,000 pedestrian fatalities a year. European, Japanese and Korean car manufacturers had already agreed to produce vehicles complying with the provisions of the first step of this Directive as well as a range of other safety measures, which will reduce the risk of serious or fatal injuries to pedestrians. The second stage of this Directive has been reviewed and the Commission will propose a revised standard, this time a Regulation, which will adapt the standard to ensure its feasibility. The final standard eventually adopted by the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament must give the protection of vulnerable road users the highest priority.

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3 Czech Ministry of Transport – www.mdcr.cz.
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11 SUNflower+6 – A Comparative study of the development of road safety in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovenia - http://sunflower.swov.nl/
12 Technical term used by engineers to denote a change in the alignment, direction, or slope of the road. For more information, please see: http://www.grsproadsafety.org/themes/default/pdfs/Horizontal%20Curves.pdf#search=%22Horizontal%20curve%22.
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