VOICE Country Sheet

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Vulnerable road users in Greece

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; Health and Environment Alliance; 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

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Part I - Greece

Introduction

Greece has experienced a significant drop in the number of road injuries and deaths over the past few years but the fact remains that it still has a very low level of safety. With 152 deaths per million inhabitants against the EU average of 86[1], it ranks fourth worst country among the EU-25.[2] During the last two decades, road accidents in Greece have been the cause for the death of almost 5 citizens per day. Every year over 20.000 road accidents with casualties are registered on Greek roads, in which more than 2.000 drivers, passengers and pedestrians are killed and about 30.000 are injured.[3]

Fragmentary implementation of road safety measures with regard to road user behaviour, vehicle inspection and the improvement of road infrastructure, as well as insufficient enforcement and lack of coordination among the authorities involved, are the main reasons for the low road safety levels in Greece.[4]

All these have had a negative impact on effective formulation and implementation of road safety policies. Furthermore, no evaluation of road safety measures has been undertaken in Greece, apart from a few initiatives taken by universities.[5]

In this respect, the second five-year Strategic Plan (2006-2010) developed by the Department of Transportation Planning and Engineering at the National Technical University of Athens is a step forward. Aiming to achieve the EU target of a 50% reduction in fatalities by 2010, it focuses on driver behaviour, particularly road safety enforcement (mainly speeding and drink-driving), campaigns for the promotion of road safety and a programme to develop the motorway network and the maintenance of the interurban road network.[6]

Pedestrians and other VRUs

Pedestrian fatalities were almost equal to passenger car driver fatalities in the previous decades.[7] It is only in the past decade that a visible decrease has been recorded, from 417 deaths in 1998 to 234 (according to data of the National Statistical Service of Greece) in 2005[8]. However, the pedestrian fatality rate remains relatively high, corresponding to 15% of total road deaths. More attention should be given to pedestrian safety in through roads and new measures should be studied (artificial lighting, improvement of pedestrian visibility, etc.)[9]

Road traffic injuries involving TWMVs comprise more than 25% of all road traffic injuries in Greece, whereas the majority of TWMV riders involved in road accidents are



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adolescents and young adults. In 2005, 395 persons were killed, of whom 130 were in the age-group of 15-24 years old. It has been estimated that about 200 live could have been saved if all TWMV riders wore their helmets.[10]

Traffic congestion has become more intense over the past decades, resulting in more road fatalities inside urban areas.[11] Ironically, however, increased congestion has also led to a decrease in the mean travel speed, and thus less serious injuries, according to the Road Safety Institute Panos Mylonas in Greece.

A road accident factor analysis, elaborated in the context of the Strategic Plan for 2001-2005, indicates that the road user – in addition to the road environment – constitutes one of the main causes of accidents in the country.[12] The Greek driver's behaviour, including speeding, is assessed to have a major impact on injury and fatal accidents. Even though driver behaviour has been recognised to be improving, systematic enforcement of all road safety related infringements is still lacking.[13] There is a need for tighter enforcement and more public awareness campaigns.

Speed

Vehicle ownership increased steeply in Greece over the past decades, which subsequently led to reduced average speed in the urban and interurban road network of Greece.[14]

The general speed limit in urban areas is 50 km/h, down to

40 km/h for some vehicles transporting passengers as well as mopeds, agricultural vehicles (tractors, etc) and vehicles used in the construction sector (cement mixers, road rollers, etc). Other cases, where drivers have to reduce speed, include mostly traffic calming zones in built-up areas. School vicinities or a vehicle's stop for passengers to get on/off can serve as typical examples.[15]

According to the Greek Road Traffic Code, speed adjustment is required under certain conditions, especially at signalised intersections and more specifically in places



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designated for pedestrian crossings, and during direction changes in general. Drivers caught violating these rules are expected to pay a 100 EUR fine and a penalty of 5 "bonus malus" points (at 25 points within 3 year's period -2 years for professional drivers- the licence is cancelled). Nevertheless, in practice, this is not effectively enforced in urban areas and therefore is not established as common practice yet.[16] While the number of speeding offences decreased from 382,970 in 2004 to 374,712 in 2005, a more recently observed fatality increase can be attributed to less intensive enforcement efforts. [17]

Alcohol

Drink driving also appears to be a problem, but to a lower degree.[18] The general BAC limit is 0.5g/l. Violations are sub-divided in three categories with increasing severity of punishment: BAC of 0.5-0.8 g/l entails a 200 euro fine and a penalty of 5 "bonus malus" points; BAC 0.8-1.1 g/l leads to a 700 euro fine and a penalty of 9 "bonus malus" points as well as suspension of the driver's licence for 3 months; BAC above 1.1 g/l results in a 1200 euro fine, the suspension of driver's licence for 6 months and imprisonment for at least 2 months.[19]

Drink driving enforcement has been intensified over the past years, while the number of infringements seems to have reduced slightly.[20] The number of drink driving checks increased from 1,281,102 (2004) to 1,376,307 (2005), while the number of offences detected went up from 40,986 (2004) to 46,938 (2005). Nowadays, most drivers in Greece believe that there is a higher probability of being controlled for alcohol than it was the case before.[21]

Infrastructure

Road network in Greece is insufficient and its maintenance is inadequate, both inside and outside urban areas. A lot of interventions have taken place over the years, but they have been piecemeal and not always oriented towards road safety.[22]

Facilities for pedestrians and VRUs have not been provided systematically. In some cases, this has happened as a result of some special events. For instance, when the city of Athens was selected to host the Olympic Games, an extended renovation of existing sidewalks along central arterials and other roads was carried out. Reconstruction included the provision of especially designed tracks for the convenience of disabled road users such as blind pedestrians and wheelchair users.[23]

Several actions concerning road environment improvement are included in the 2006-2010 Strategic Plan: Identification and treatment of hazardous locations, improvement of road markings and signalization and improvement of lighting conditions are some of the measures concerning the road network. However, many of these actions are not yet implemented. Some low-cost measures, like divided road (median barrier), roadside safety barriers, fewer obstacles further from roadway, on both the urban and inter-urban network have been implemented to a limited extent.[24]

More attention should therefore be devoted to pedestrian safety in through roads and new measures should be studied such as artificial lighting, improvement of pedestrian visibility, and so on.

Awareness raising campaigns and education

Campaigns are very scarce in Greece, with one big national campaign organised every two years. The Ministry of Public Order, Ministry of Transport and Communications, and a few private bodies sometimes undertake specific campaigns.[25] Even though road safety education at schools has been compulsory since 2002, information programmes have not been implemented so far, with the exception of a few rare initiatives. Among them is the education programme "Getting around safely" developped by the Center for Research and Prevention of Injuries (CEREPRI) in order to promote road safety among children and adolescents. Up to now, about 80,000 students have attended the programme. Also, within the frame of the European Project APOLLO ("Strategies and Best Practices for the Reduction of Injuries"), CEREPRI has recently developed the European Code Against Injuries (ECAI), which aims to raise public awareness about available preventive measures for all types of unintentional injuries.

However, there is still very little coordination regarding road safety policy, which affects the way information is conveyed to the public.

Campaigns aiming at the enhancement of people's awareness of pedestrian-related dangers have been organised from time to time on a national basis. The Road Safety Institute Panos Mylonas organized public campaigns in the areas of speeding, drink driving, belt & helmet wearing, in-car child safety devices, as well as drawing the public attention to the statistics with high number of fatalities in Greece. Most of the TV and radio stations in Greece have been regularly broadcasting these social advertisements throughout 2006 and 2007. Also, during the 1st Global Road Safety Week in April 2007 some 5.000

posters with similar messages have been displayed in the public transport in Athens and other cities in Greece.
Representatives of Greek Road Safety Police visit schools throughout the country at the beginning of every academic year. The Police have also been involved in the organisation of campaigns, for instance underling the need for pedestrians to pay more attention to safety when crossing streets at intersections and so on.[26] Nevertheless, a more systematic organisation and dissemination of awareness campaigns targeting both pedestrians and drivers is necessary.



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Part II - What works best? Examples from Europe.

Measures targeting both vulnerable road users and drivers are necessary in order to improve behaviour and increase road safety in Greece. Addressing common traffic violations by drivers such as speeding and drink driving has proven effective in a number of countries. The examples below illustrate what other European countries have done to address similar issues.

Speed

In Cyprus, traffic calming measures (mainly road humps) have been introduced in the recent years. These measures were implemented mainly outside schools but also on trunk roads through villages and at locations where high speeds coupled with the crossing of vulnerable road users.[27]
Austria currently undertakes priority based high visibility speed enforcement. Police employ fixed cameras, section control points, mobile radar services, onboard video cameras in police cars and laser measuring devices for speeding enforcement. Fixed camera sites and section control sites are clearly signposted. Speed enforcement is targeted to high risk accident sites but is undertaken on the whole road network. Enforcement is more intense during the more accident prone summer months and in urban areas. As a result, road deaths have been steadily decreasing from approximately 1000 in the year 2000 to less than 900 in the year 2005.[28]
In France, a whole array of measures was introduced which led to spectacular reductions in the number of speeding offences. A driving licence penalty point system in order to penalise speeding drivers, coupled with increased enforcement and improved speed management, based on the new camera system, contributed about 75% to the massive overall reduction in fatal accidents between 2002 and 2005. From 2003 to 2005, the proportion of vehicles travelling at 10 km/h and more above the legal limit decreased from 35% to 20%. The number of vehicles exceeding the limit by more than 30 km/h went down by 80%. Average speeds decreased by 5 km/h.[29]

Alcohol

In the Netherlands, drink driving tests have been on the rise since the introduction of the "Speed Teams" between 2000 and 2003, and the number of detected violations has increased sharply. In 2004, 25,000 minor offences were dealt with by the Dutch Central Judicial Collecting Agency, representing a more than 50% increase from 2003 when it was nearly 12,500. The stepped-up enforcement goes hand in hand with Belgian-modelled 'BOB' designated driver campaign introduced in 2001. As a result, drink driving on weekend nights has dropped to 3.9% in 2003, and alcohol-related traffic deaths make up no more than 17% of the total.[30]
In Austria, new legislation was introduced in 2005 to enable roadside screening tests in drink driving enforcement. A pilot project led by the Austrian Road Safety Board (KfV) has shown that the use of screening devices can help multiply controls by ten without increasing human resources. According to KfV, the efficient implementation of these devices could save between 50 and 100 lives annually. The new instruments should therefore be applied in every roadside check.[31]

National Road Safety Plan

Full comprehensive policies are implemented through specific initiatives. At the same time, it is clear that only integrated approaches can result in better achievement of road safety goals and targets.[32]
The SUNflower project is one of the most recent efforts to assess the background of successful road safety strategies on the basis of the experience of Sweden, the UK, and the Netherlands. The methodology of the study has been designed in such a way that it can be used as a basis for comparative studies among other countries. The risk indicators can be used as benchmarks for the performance in different areas of road safety, taking into account different national problems. The results[33] suggest that EU and all Member States should foster large scale implementation of infrastructural measures as well as intensified enforcement on actions such as speeding and drink driving.

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 Greece, the areas that specifically need to be strengthened are stricter enforcement measures to counter speed-related road accidents, as well as better coordinated infrastructure improvement campaigns and continued efforts to educate all, and especially vulnerable road users.

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 between 2007 and 2009. 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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Greek campaigns and organisations

Several government bodies are involved in formulating and implementing different aspects of road safety policy: **Ministry of Transport and Communications** (www.yme.gr), **Ministry of Public Order** (*www.ydt.gr*), **Ministry of Environment, Physical Planning and Public Works** (*www.minenv.gr*), **Ministry of Public Health** (*www.ypyp.gr*), **Ministry of Interior Affairs** (*www.ypes.gr*), **Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs** (*www.ypepth.gr*), **Ministry of Development** (*www.ypan.gr*). The **National Statistical Service of Greece** (*www.statistics.gr*) collects and processes vital road transport statistics. The **Center for Research and Prevention of Injuries (CEREPRI)** (*www.euroipn.org/cerepri*), which operates on the premises of the Department of Hygiene, Epidemiology and Medical Statistics of the Medical School at the University of Athens, conducts research and surveillance, and provides scientific input for the development of road traffic safety strategies. The **Road Safety Institute Panos Mylonas** (*www.rsi-panosmylonas.gr* or *www.ioas.gr*) is dedicated to the prevention and reduction of the number of road accidents through the promotion of activities related to road safety, improvement of driving behaviour and research. The **Hellenic Institute of Transport – HIT** (*www.hit.certh.gr*) conducts and supports applied research initiatives in the field of transportation including road safety. A number of other academic centres, such as the **Hellenic Institute of Transportation Engineers** (*www.se.gr*), **Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki** (*www.auth.gr*), **National Technical University of Athens (NTUA)** (*www.ntua.gr*), **National and Kapodistrian University of Athens** (*www.uoa.gr*), contribute to the scientific aspects of road safety campaigns. Some private bodies, such as the **Association of Insurance Companies of Greece** (*www.eaee.gr*) and **Automobile and Touring Club of Greece** (*www.elpa.gr*) also undertake specific campaigns in the road safety area.

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