VOICE Country Sheet

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Vulnerable road users in Lithuania

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

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

Part I - Lithuania

Introduction

At 223 people killed per 1 mn inhabitants in 2006, Lithuania is the most unsafe country in the EU, the average for which is 86.[1] The growing number of cars and traffic volume are key reasons behind increasing road safety problems, but this growth is seen by the population as something positive – a sign of development and modernisation.[2]

In a country of 3.5 million people, almost 10,000 people died and over 60,000 were injured as the result of road accidents between 1992 and 2006. The number of accidents, injuries and fatalities was on the rise during the late 1990's with a peak level in 1998-1999. A significant reduction in all three indicators up to 2000 has been followed by a further deterioration until 2004.[3]

Statistical analysis indicate that 80% of all accidents arise due to driver/pedestrian error.[4] The main causes of accidents are speeding, disregarding rules for overtaking and keeping safe distances, driving without license, and drink driving.[5]

The current national action plan for road safety, entitled "Complex Traffic Safety Development Programme until 2010", follows the previous "Road Safety Programme for 2001-2005". The main target of the current strategy is a 50% reduction in road fatalities and a 20% reduction in road injuries from 2004 to 2010. The current road safety programme lists a number of actions to be implemented in order to achieve the target. In a general context it is proposed to give priority to the main problem areas which seem to be vulnerable road users, road lighting problems, drink-driving and the condition of municipal roads.[6]

Pedestrians and other VRUs

Pedestrian safety is regarded as one of the major road safety problems in the country. In 2004, the proportion of pedestrian casualties was high, with 263 pedestrians killed (34% of total number of deaths, compared to 27% among drivers). Drivers were responsible for 64% of crashes.[7]

According to the Lithuanian Road Administration, the most common type of accident on national roads between 1999-2004 involved a vehicle running into pedestrians.[8] Drivers without license are a particular feature of the road situation in Lithuania and along with intoxicated drivers constitute one of the two most dangerous road users groups in the country.[9]



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Speed

According to the traffic police, each year excessive speed causes around 1200 traffic accidents, 200 deaths, and around 1500 injuries. In 2004, between 20% and 50% of drivers (depending on the type of roads) exceeded the speed limit, half of them by more than 10 km/h. The number of speeding drivers increased from 43% in 2000 to 47% in 2003 on rural roads, and decreased from 46 % in 2000 to 42 % in 2003 on motorways.[10]

Speed limit in urban areas was reduced from 60 to 50 km/h in 2003, followed by an immediate reduction by 12% in the number of fatal accidents in the last four months of that year. In 2004, there was a further 4% reduction in fatalities. Overall, this new speed limit largely contributed to the improvement of the road safety situation in Lithuania in built-up areas, where the number of fatalities decreased from 314 to 199 between 2000 and 2004. In comparison the road safety situation in other parts of the road network has deteriorated (17% more fatalities between 2000 and 2004).[11]

Some of the most highly sensitive areas are those with a high share of young pedestrians and/or cyclists, and therefore a general speed limit of 40 km/h is in force in most of them.

A reduction to the standard of 30 km/h will be considered for these areas in the future.[12]

The current 130 km/h speed limit at motorways seems too high in view of the condition of these roads, especially given that they are used by different types of road users, including pedestrians. [13]



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Proper enforcement by the traffic police, adequate awareness campaigns and reconsideration of urban road layout are the prerequisites for the introduction of lower speed limits.[14]

Alcohol

Alcohol level is controlled through breathe/blood test. After an accident involving injuries, all implicated drivers are tested for alcohol. According to Lithuanian law, the permissible level of BAC level is 0.4 g/l. Despite this rather low level drunk drivers present a clear danger on Lithuanian roads. In 2004, they caused 850 car accidents, in which 90 road users were killed and 1 257 were injured. However, the number of alcohol-related fatal accidents has been going down in the recent years, from 14% in 2000 to 11% in 2004.[15]


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Infrastructure

Since 1999 road safety inspections have been carried out twice a year by a team comprised of Lithuanian Road Administration under the Ministry of Transport and Communications, road maintenance enterprises and the police. Based on the findings of the inspections mentioned above, measures to remedy the found defects are implemented.

Also, the work on identifying and mapping high risk sites (black spots) has been going on since 1996. Having analyzed "black spots" according to the type of accidents, projects to eliminate these high risk sites are prepared and implemented, such as: lighting of road sections, construction of walkways and cycle tracks, construction of metal guard rails, reconstruction of intersections, including the reconstruction of regular intersections into roundabouts, installation of traffic lights, noise lanes, road bumps, crash barriers, installation of the enhanced reflection road signs "Children" near schools.[16]

More work should be done on safety audits of various roads inside and outside built-up areas; implement speed limits according to hierarchy of road network and international rules, on all road types, inside and outside urban areas, etc.[17]


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Awareness raising campaigns and education

Special priority should be given to enhancing VRUs' safety. The current road safety programme lists a number of actions to be implemented in order to achieve this target. The key problems which must be tackled are: drink driving and municipal road conditions, including insufficient lighting; information gathering and better enforcement in speeding and drink driving; organising campaigns to improve driver behaviour and raise public awareness of safety problems related to pedestrians.[18]

So far the experience with road safety campaigns in Lithuania has shown their limited effectiveness. Successful campaigns require municipalities to be more active .[19]

Recently there have been some positive developments, with large-scale traffic safety awareness campaigns conducted in 2006-2007 and targeted at speeding, drink driving and non-use of seat belts. Pedestrians and cyclists were encouraged to use reflectors and light reflecting bands. Information was spread out nationwide through TV and radio clips and newspaper articles; publications and newsletters were handed out to pedestrians, as well as reflectors. Safety belts' efficiency and vehicle turnover simulation equipment was demonstrated.

As many as 95,000 copies of books for primary school children and 400,000 calendars, 275,000 information newsletters on reflectors, 237,000 reflectors and 850 m2 of light reflecting bands were handed out during teh campaigns through schools, police and other government offices and private companies.

Part II - What works best? Examples from Europe.

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

Speed

In France, 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[20] decreased by 5 km/h.

Some countries in Europe have imposed a speed limit of 30 km/h as well as traffic calming measures in many residential and school areas. In Belgium, the cities of Gent, Mons, Kortrijk and Antwerp have developed large "Zone 30" areas and all the areas around schools have been made "Zone 30" as of 1 September 2005. In France, "Zone 30" areas are developing in most city centres. In Slovenia, the systematic implementation of "Zone 30" in residential areas is taking shape. 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.[21]



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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.[22]

Infrastructure

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.[23]

In the Czech Republic, 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.[24]

Enforcement

Penalty point systems are increasingly being used in European countries. Addressing common traffic violations by drivers such as drink driving and speeding has proven effective in a number of countries.[25] 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% during the first year following the implementation of a penalty point system. However, experience has shown that it is crucially important to keep up the profile of the penalty point system with police controls and campaigns well after it has been introduced in order to ensure that the momentum is not lost.[26]

Road safety education

Education and campaigns to raise awareness of road and traffic risks amongst pedestrians and cyclists have proved effective 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. Countries like France, Malta and Hungary have invested in road safety education at schools. The UK is known for its many initiatives to encourage children to walk or cycle safely to school. A good example is a project known as "Safe Routes to Schools", which works with schools and local communities in the planning of safe routes and training children about road safety. This programme has, so far, experienced a large degree of success.[27]

In Córdoba, Spain the city council in cooperation with Plataforma Carrilbici, have initiated a programme linking road safety education with the use of bicycles as a way of encouraging more children to cycle.[28]

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 Lithuania, 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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Lithuanian campaigns and organisations

The **Ministry of Transport and Communications (Susisiekimo ministerija),** (*http://www.transp.lt)* is responsible for state policy on road safety, including preparation and implementation of legal acts regulating road safety, providing road safety information to the public, certifying appropriate safety level of national roads, providing driver education and technical inspections. Its two subdivisions are **Lithuanian Road Administration (Lietuvos automobilu keliu direkcija prie Susisiekimo ministerijos)** (*http://www.lra.lt)* and the **State Road Transport Inspectorate (Valstybine keliu transporto inspekcija prie Susisiekimo ministerijos)** (*http://www.vkti.lt).* The **Ministry of the Interior (Vidaus reikalu ministerija)**, (*http://www.vrm.lt)* comprises the **Traffic Police Supervision Service (Lietuvos viesosios policijos biuras)** (*http://viesoji.policija.lt/ept/)* as one of its most important subdivisions with responsibility for enforcement of road traffic rules. The **Ministry of Health (Sveikatos apsaugos ministerija)**, (*http://www.sam.lt)* is responsible for ensuring that road safety in Lithuania comprises the first aid given to motorists involved in accidents. The **Transport and Road Research Institute, TRRI (Transporto ir keliu tyrimo institutas)** (*http://tkti.lt*) and the government's **Department of Statistics (Statistikos departamentas)** (*http://www.std.lt)* carry out scientific research on road safety issues.

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27 For more information, visit the "Safe Routes to Schools" website: www.saferoutestoschools.org.uk/index.php?f=casestudies.htm
28 Fact Sheet VOICE Spain - http://www.etsc.be/documents/Fact_Sheet_VOICE_Spain.pdf

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