VOICE Country Sheet

July 06

Vulnerable road users in Poland

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

Introduction

Poland is one of the biggest EU countries with more than 11 million drivers and 16 million cars. The number of registered vehicles increased by 88% between 1990 and 2004, and the vehicle – kilometres travelled increased by 190% in the same period.[1]

In this context, the 1990s has been the period with the worst road safety record in the history of Poland. Despite some progress in the last years, approximately 5,444 people died in 2005 and 61,191 were injured.[2] Vulnerable road users (VRUs) accounted for 44% of all fatalities – a high percentage of whom was killed in built-up areas.[3]

Speed is the number one cause of accidents on Polish roads.[4] Speed coupled with obsolete infrastructure and badly maintained roads can be a deadly combination which exposes all road users to unnecessary risk.

GAMBIT – National Road Safety Programme

In the spring of 2005, Poland revised its national road safety strategy, replacing GAMBIT 2000 with GAMBIT 2005. Subtargets include a 75% drop in accident deaths on national roads – where currently 36% of deaths occur - and a reduction of VRU deaths from 46% to no more than 30% of all fatalities by 2013.[5]

The priorities and actions under GAMBIT focus mainly on pedestrians, children, and cyclists and comprise: the amendment of legal acts to support VRU protection, improvement of education and communication with society in the scope of VRU safety in road traffic, intensifying VRU protection by means of road traffic enforcement, common use of road measures of VRU protection, and conducting systematic research on VRU safety.[6]

It remains to be seen whether these measures will indeed be implemented in the near future. Data from the first two years of the new programme suggest that it may be difficult to reach the target.[7] In the early nineties, Poland established the National Road Safety Council (NRSC) as well as Regional Road Safety Councils (RRSC) in all sixteen regions to coordinate road safety efforts of national and regional authorities. Poland's changeable political situation, however, has meant that road safety never became a priority issue for the top state authorities. The interest of regional authorities in road safety varies from region to region. Only 5 out of 16 regions have successfully developed regional road safety programmes.

Moreover, there has been hardly any coordination of road safety measures. Funding has come from a few unrelated sources including Polish ministries, central agencies, local authorities, insurance companies, and state-owned enterprises. Many attempts have been made to establish a separate Road Safety Fund, but so far these attempts have failed.[8] A stronger commitment from the national, regional, and local authorities to the improvement of road safety is therefore necessary.



ITS

The speed factor

Speeding is a serious problem in Poland and the number one killer on national roads. This is sadly reflected in the data available for fatalities and injuries involving all road users. In 2005, inappropriate speed was responsible for 28.8% of all accidents caused by drivers. This in turn accounted for 40% of total killed[9] and 31.4% of injured in accidents. According to speed measurements taken by the NRSC in March 2006, the percentage of motorists driving over the speed limit in built-up areas is 75.4% in heavy traffic, and 77.8% in free flow conditions.[10]

VRUs are particularly vulnerable in urban areas where they are more likely to come into contact with drivers who speed and do not respect traffic rules. Pedestrians are the most at risk. In 2005, every third road accident fatality was a pedestrian. They accounted for 22% of all injuries and 22% of all fatalities, and cyclists represented 8.6% of all injuries and 6% of all fatalities in built-up areas.[11]

Poland was one of the last EU countries to introduce the 50 km/h limit on 1 May 2004. This rule, however, only applies during the day between 5-11 am.[12] Drivers often blatantly disregard speed limits as well as other road users. A case in point is the question of priority, which is normally given to drivers. As a result, approximately 36% of accidents involving pedestrians occur in areas designated for pedestrian traffic.[13] More specifically, analyses show that most accidents occur on pedestrian crossings and they are on the increase.[14]

A combination of speed reduction measures such as speed cameras and traffic calming – road narrowings, chicanes, barriers and road humps, road signs and so on - can prove to be effective in reducing the risk for VRUs. Enforcement is also essential if drivers are to stick to the speed limits.

Obsolete versus new infrastructure

Polish stakeholders agree that the country is in urgent need of better infrastructure. Poland's pre-Second World War road network has been described as one of the most dangerous of all OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries.[15]



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Nonetheless, most of the new infrastructure focuses on bigger and wider roads thus indirectly encouraging drivers to speed. This applies to national as well as urban roads. Indeed, as one expert in the National Road Safety Council points out, Poland suffers from a "driver-oriented approach" to urban infrastructure design.

There are few facilities for pedestrians and cyclists in urban areas and their quality and level of maintenance is low.[16] Cycle paths are few and far between and pavements are often narrow or non-existent, or frequently used by drivers as parking spaces. Clashes and accidents are therefore inevitable. Elderly pedestrians and other people with disabilities can be particularly affected by this.

Given that 65% of VRU fatalities take place in built-up areas, strong attention should be given to the upgrading of the current infrastructure in towns and cities. Enforcement is also essential here in order to ensure that drivers are kept off the space reserved for VRUs.

Part II

What works best? Examples from Europe

Poland is facing serious road safety problems which are partly due to a massive increase in motorisation and an obsolete infrastructure inadequate under present circumstances. These are problems shared by most former communist countries. An effective national road safety programme coupled with an improvement of the existing infrastructure as well as better enforcement can go a long way in bringing down road deaths and ensuring better protection of VRUs. The examples below illustrate what other European countries have done to address similar issues.



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National Road Safety Plans

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.[17]

The SUNflower project is one of the most recent efforts to assess the background of successful strategies in road safety work and consists of a comparative study of the development of road safety in **Sweden, the UK**, and **the Netherlands**. These three countries currently feature the best road safety levels in the EU.

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 the different national problems. The results[18] 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.

Speed

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.[19]

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.[20]

Infrastructure

Copenhagen, in **Denmark**, has invested heavily on cycle lanes, and public transport (including better transfer between public transport modes). It has also reduced the environmental impact and safety risks of motorised traffic by diverting it away from the city centre and local streets, and introduced 40km/h speed limits in residential areas, amongst other measures.[21]

Barcelona[22] is one of the cities in **Spain** that has invested the most in the promotion of sustainable mobility. It has pedestrianised large parts of the historical centre, expanded pavement surfaces (thus improving accessibility for disabled road users as well), created more pedestrian crossings and traffic lights in order to make journeys more comfortable and enjoyable for all.

Polish campaigns and organisations

A number of Polish institutes and organisations run campaigns and disseminate information related to road safety, a few of which are found below:
The National Road Safety Council (www.krbrd.gov.pl) has started a series of campaigns under the motto "Turn on thinking". The NRSC has also published a campaign calendar that details the timing of national campaigns on speeding, alcohol and seat belt use in 2006, and VRUs in 2007.
Motor Transport Institute (www.its.home.pl) engages in scientific research of all aspects of road transport; **Road and Safety** (www.drogaibezpieczenstwo.org.pl) is a road safety NGO involved in a number of activities, particularly public awareness campaigns.
Although there is no record of national pedestrian or cyclist organisations, a number of cyclist organisations such as **CROTOS** (www.bicycle.pl), **Rowerowy Bialystok** (www.rowerowy.bialystok.pl), **Rowerowy Szeczecin** (http://masa.webd.pl/news.php), and **Ziclone Mazowsze** (www.zm.org.pl) cooperate closely. Cyclists' demands are also supported by many environmental organisations. Other organisations such as **Forum 50+** (www.forum.senior.info.pl), promoting the interests of senior citizens, and the **Foundation for Victims of Road Traffic Accidents** (www.fundacjazielonylisc.org) often voice their concerns in relation to pedestrian safety.

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 Poland the areas that specifically need to be strengthened are an effective national road safety policy backed by strong political will, stricter speed reduction measures and enforcement, and better infrastructure designed to protect 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. 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.

References

1 Polish National Road Safety Council (NRSC) – www.krbrd.gov.pl
2 More specifically, 15 people are killed and 168 injured in car accidents every day. From 1999 to 2005 there were 370,000 car accidents in Poland during which approximately 41,181 people were killed and 465,331 injured. This results in direct costs in 300 mld PLN or 7,5 billion euro per year – NRSC and Polish Police (www.kpg.gov.pl).
3 This figure includes pedestrians, cyclists and moped riders. In built-up areas, fatalities involving VRUs were as follows: 66% pedestrians, 53% cyclists and moped riders, and 60% of motorcyclists. In total 2,495 people died (46% of all killed in built-up areas) - NRSC and Polish Police.
4 According to the NRSC, 65% of drivers speed.
5 SEC Belt Monitor, December 05, "Poland – the long way from strategy to action" - www.etsc.be/documents/SEC%20Belt%20Monitor%2004.pdf
6 GAMBIT 2005, National Road Safety Program 2005-2007- 2013 – www.krbrd.gov.pl / www.gambit.org.pl.
7 In 2005, VRUs accounted for 44% of all road deaths. This represents only a 1% decrease since 2003 - Polish Motor Transport Institute (ITS).
8 SEC Belt Monitor, op. cit.
9 Police Headquarters (2006) : Road Accidents 2005 - www.kpg.gov.pl.
10 http://85.232.227.99/twebsiteang.nsf.
11 Figures provided by ITS - www.its.home.pl.
12 The limit of 60km/h applies the rest of the time. The 40 km/h limit is supposed to apply in residential areas with schools.
13 ITS
14 28.9% of all accidents involving pedestrians in 2000 and 30.4% in 2005 - ITS.
15 Red Cross, "Road safety is no accident" – www.redcross.int/EN/mag/magazine2005_2/4-9.html
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18 SUNflower project http://europa.eu.int/comm/transport/road/publications/projectfiles/sunflower_en.htm The SUNFlower Plus report (http://sunflower.swov.nl) includes an analysis of the experiences of The Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovenia.
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21 City of Copenhagen – Traffic & Environmental Plan 2004 – www.kk.dk.
22 For more information on Barcelona and other Spanish cities, see Revista Trafico, "En busca de la movilidad sustenible", January-February 2005 - www.dgt.es/revista/num170/pdf/num170-2005-Movilidad.pdf.

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