

Vulnerable road users in Ireland



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; Vøetgangersbeweging - Pedestrian Movement, BEUC; European Transport Safety Council

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

Part I - Ireland

In the EU ranking, Ireland finds itself just below the average of 95 road deaths per million inhabitants.¹ This is good news but much still remains to be done to improve road safety in the country.

Issues such as drink driving and speeding are particularly worrying. According to evidence, the vast majority of road accidents can be attributable to inappropriate driver behaviour.² This has clear implications for the safety of vulnerable road users , especially pedestrians, who are still one of the main causes of national concern.³ Although the number of child deaths is below the average of the EU-14, they make up a disproportionately high percentage of total road deaths.⁴

Alcohol

According to a report published by the Irish Health Service, alcohol was a factor in 110 (36.5%) of fatal crashes in 2003.⁵ Regarding pedestrians, they accounted for 18.8% of total deaths, and cyclists, 3.6%. In 38.1% of fatal pedestrian road crashes, pedestrian alcohol was considered to be a contributory factor.

In the 2004-2006 Road Safety Strategy, the Government acknowledges that the extent of the problem has not decreased and recommends legislation to implement random breath testing. The measure was finally introduced in July 2006 and approximately 30,000 motorists are now tested.⁶ This is good news but authorities must make sure that the momentum is not lost and that strict penalties are applied. Regarding blood alcohol levels (BAC), a survey carried out for the National Safety Council in 2002 indicated that over two

thirds of respondents agreed that the BAC for drivers should be lowered to 50mg of alcohol per 100ml blood.⁷ Currently, Ireland, Malta, the UK, Luxembourg and Romania are the remaining EU Member States with BAC levels of 0, 8 mg/ml.

Strict measures and penalties are necessary in order to counter the dangers posed by motorists driving under the influence of alcohol.⁸ A recent Irish survey carried out in January 2006 shows that 77% of those interviewed agreed that penalties for drink driving offences should be more severe.⁹ **Random breath testing should continue to be carried out and enforcement should be strengthened by assigning more police officers to the Traffic Corps for alcohol checks. Media campaigns alerting the public to the risks posed by drunken pedestrians to themselves and other road users should also be considered.**

Speed

Speed is the single biggest contributing factor to road deaths in Ireland. Over 40% of fatal collisions are caused by excessive or inappropriate speed.¹⁰ According to estimates, 5 out of 10 pedestrians could be killed by a car travelling at 50 km/h. A free speeds urban survey from 2003 showed that the proportion of free-speeding cars observed to be exceeding the speed limit on urban roads in 30mph (app. 48 km/h) zones fell from 99% in



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2002 to 86% in 2003, and from 82% to 75% on urban roads in 40mhp (app. 65 km/h) zones.¹¹ Although this drop is welcome, speeding remains alarmingly high.

In October 2002, Ireland introduced a penalty point system on a phased basis with speeding the first offence to be covered. Since the beginning of the introduction of the penalty point system, speed limit compliance seems to have improved but the impact of the system is waning.¹² **In urban areas where pedestrians and cyclists are most likely to be found, traffic calming through the implementation of a number of measures – such as roundabouts, road narrowings and road humps - and lower speed limits have been proven to be effective. This should be combined with a higher number of speeding cameras to ensure effective enforcement.**

Infrastructure

National Roads while representing a mere 6% of the Irish road network account for 48% of all traffic volume and 40% of fatal crashes. In urban areas, the situation is even more worrying. Regional and local roads represent 94% of the network and account for 52% of traffic volumes and 60% of fatal collisions.¹³

Vulnerable road users are also often forgotten in rural areas where road infrastructure can be poor. Common examples are lack of proper pavements for pedestrians, lack of pedestrian crossings with traffic lights, lack of facilities for road users with disabilities, to mention but a few.¹⁴

The National Roads Authority prepared guidelines on Road Safety Audits in 2004. The guidelines cover the requirements for Road Safety Audits on national road schemes. Up to the end of 2004, 124 traffic calming schemes have been installed in towns and villages on national roads. This is a worthy initiative and the momentum should not be lost as it is clear that **more needs to be done to protect vulnerable road users especially in urban areas. Special attention should be devoted to the recommendations of the review of speed limits carried out in 2003 against the background of the adoption of the metric system such as traffic calming measures of new low speed limit values for residential areas and for school entry sites to be indicated.**¹⁵



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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.¹⁶

In **Austria**, new legislation was introduced in 2005 to enable roadside screening tests in drink driving enforcement. A pilot conducted 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.¹⁷

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 decreased by 5 km/h.¹⁸

In **Sweden**, speed surveillance has been enhanced with the use of cameras. But overall, road user behaviour has not been addressed extensively. The issue has, however, received fresh emphasis lately and changes in driver training and road safety education in schools are under consideration. Moreover, speed enforcement has become a priority with the introduction of a new digital speed camera system and an increase in fines.¹⁹

Infrastructure

In **Portugal**, infrastructure developments may have been equally important as improving traffic behaviour. New motorways continued to be constructed, and low-cost traffic calming measures were applied widely in high-risk sites and on inter-urban roads intersecting small villages.²⁰

Road infrastructure improvements have also been a major focus in **Sweden** over the last years where a large share of rural roads has been changed into 2+1 lane roads with wire fences separating the opposite traffic in urban areas, 30 km/h were also widely introduced.²¹

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 Ireland, the areas that specifically need to be strengthened are stricter penalties and measures to counter alcohol-related road accidents, and a combination of effective speed enforcement and traffic calming measures.

Irish campaigns and organisations

The **Department of Transport** (www.transport.ie) is responsible for the implementation of the national road safety strategy among other policies; the **National Roads Authority** (www.nra.ie) is an independent statutory body responsible for planning and supervision of construction and maintenance works on national roads, the **Road Safety Authority** (www.nsc.ie) works towards improving safety on Irish roads through publications, awareness campaigns, and cooperation with a number of other road safety stakeholders , **Irish National Police – An Garda Síochána** (www.garda.ie) is active in the field of traffic law enforcement but also safety awareness initiatives, the **National Council for Ageing and Older People** (www.ncaop.ie) is an advisory agency to the Ministry for Health on issues relating to ageing and the welfare of older people which has organised a number of road safety awareness campaigns in the past; the **Dublin Cycling Campaign** (<http://home.connect.ie/dcc/>) and similar organisations in Cork, Galway, and so on are organisations that promote the interests of cyclists such as safer streets as well as increased awareness of the benefits of cycling, the **People with Disabilities in Ireland - PwDI** (www.pwd.ie) is an umbrella organisation that promotes the rights and needs of people with disabilities.

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.

References

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- 2 Country report on road safety performance – Ireland, Joint OECD/ECMT Transport Research Centre, July 2006.
- 3 The term "Vulnerable road users" is used here to refer to non-motorised road users, or pedestrians and cyclists.
- 4 Road Safety Observatory Country Profile – Ireland - http://ec.europa.eu/transport/roadsafety_library/care/doc/profiles/pdf/countryprofile_ie_en.pdf
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- 9 The Background to Road Safety in Ireland, Road Safety Authority - www.nsc.ie
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