

Vulnerable road users in Austria

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 - Austria

Introduction

Even though the number of motor vehicles and traffic volume has more than tripled since 1970, the proportion of road injuries and deaths has decreased dramatically. The general speed limits on federal roads and motorways were reduced in the early 70s, which led to a vast reduction of deaths in the following years. The number of accidents on urban roads fell,¹ and the number of pedestrians and cyclists killed or injured also showed a considerable drop.²

Despite progress, Austria still finds itself above the EU average with 86 deaths per million inhabitants in 2005.³ However, a more effective implementation of road safety programmes on regional and local levels is needed in order to improve safety on urban roads where most vulnerable road users are to be found.

Alcohol

Since 1998, the Austrian legal blood alcohol level has been 0.5 mg/ml. Offences for driving under 0.8 mg/ml BAC but over the 0.5 mg/ml limit are now part of the new penalty point system.⁴ Although new legislation was introduced in 2005 to enable random breath testing to be carried out, alcohol surveillance is less frequent than in other EU countries. According to a recent report,⁵ there is too little surveillance on Friday and Saturday evenings.

A decrease of 6% in fatal accidents involving persons under the influence of alcohol, has however, been recorded in 2006 as opposed to 2005.⁶ There is still no discussion focusing on drunken pedestrians. It is therefore important that not only strict enforcement and surveillance of drink driving is kept up

but also that more awareness of the risks posed by drunk drivers and pedestrians is raised.

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.⁷

Speed

Speeding remains relatively high and is still the main cause of fatal accidents in Austria. Speed enforcement is focused on 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.⁸ However, due to shortage of police force manpower, there will be an increase in automatic speed enforcement.



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The percentage of drivers over the posted speed limit remains high on rural roads (18%) and particularly in urban areas (with 51% of cases occurring on urban arterial roads and 78% in 30 km/h zones). This is especially worrying since children are more likely to be found in 30 km/h areas which normally correspond to residential and school areas.

Infrastructure

There are some ongoing infrastructure improvements to roundabouts, tactile edges, etc. However, no major infrastructure improvement programmes were conducted in 2002-2005.¹⁰

Approximately 25% of all road accidents occur at high risk sites.¹¹ Yet no compulsory or harmonised definition of "high risk sites" exists in Austria. This means that some federal states have no adequate measures in place.¹²

An integrated approach is needed in order to improve road safety in urban areas. Austrian road safety policy makers need to concentrate on integrated demonstration and implementation programmes.¹³ Furthermore, a greater effort

is necessary to improve infrastructure for vulnerable road users in cities and villages. 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.¹⁴

In the year 2000, the first multifunctional control site was established on an Austrian motorway. It allowed the automatic and safe flow of vehicles to a technically equipped area. Until 2007, a further 15 multifunctional control sites have come into operation, several more are planned. Technical inspections, as well as additional surveillance on all types of vehicles (mostly HGVs), are regularly carried out in these places.

Education



Traffic education has been a compulsory subject in primary and secondary schools since 1960, with recent media developments greatly facilitating communication with youngsters via CD-ROMs and internet sites. Other educational priorities include raising awareness among parents of young children (from 12 months old), providing traffic education for the elderly and training for

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people with restricted mobility (e.g. disabled persons) as a prerequisite for their integration in active social life.

The accompanied driving “L17” (i.e. combined professional and lay instruction of driver education) was implemented in 1999 in Austria. Evaluation of the measure indicated a reduction of accidents by L17-drivers, especially within the second and third year of driving. L17-drivers show a better attitude towards driving and legal behaviour, including less drink driving and fewer speeding offences.

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 Austria. Addressing common traffic violations by drivers such as 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**, a driving licence penalty point system, 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.¹⁵

Penalty point systems are increasingly being used in European countries. In **Italy**, road deaths fell by 30% the first year following the implementation of a penalty point system. In the **UK**, drivers are penalised not just for speeding but also for drink driving.

In **Sweden**, speed surveillance has been enhanced with the use of cameras. Speed enforcement has become a priority with the introduction of a new digital speed camera system and an increase in fines.¹⁶ In urban areas, a 30 km/h limit was also widely introduced.

In **Austria** itself, the first section control system (which calculates the average speed by means of passage time in a defined road-section) was implemented in the Kaisermühlen Tunnel on the A 22 motorway in Vienna in August 2003. Section Control is a widely accepted instrument for automatic speed surveillance on road sections with an increased safety risk. Since then, two more section control systems were installed in Austria: on the motorway A 2 at mount Wechsel, and a mobile system in zones of road works on the motorways A1, A10 and A2. First statistics indicate a reduction of accidents at mount Wechsel and in motorway roadwork zones by about 50%.

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.¹⁷

VRUs safety

In **Austria**, driving licenses for motorbikes were implemented in 1991, adjusted in 1997 to be in line with EU legislation. The new motorbike driving licenses, valid for two years, are for young people between the ages of 18-21 and are limited to “light” bikes with a maximum engine performance of 25 kW. Evaluations indicate a reduction of fatalities in the primary affected age group (18-19) by two thirds and a

reduction in injured people of 75%. In the age group partly affected (20-24), the number of fatalities and injuries was halved.

Infrastructure

Road infrastructure improvements have been a major focus in **Sweden** where a large number of rural roads has been changed into 2+1 lane roads with wire fences separating the opposite traffic. The **Netherlands** has seen a large increase in the number of roundabouts. The Dutch Road Safety Institute (SWOV) has estimated that infrastructure measures contributed to a 6% reduction in deaths and serious injuries in 2002.¹⁸



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In **Ireland**, 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. 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.

In **Austria**, Road Safety Audits and Road Safety Inspections are quite new instruments. By 2005, approximately 100 km of planned motorways have been audited and about 160 km of existing roads (mainly motorways) have been inspected. RSAs have resulted in a 70% reduction in potential deficiencies. Several measures have been recommended following the RSIs, including improvements to visibility, road markings and vertical signing.

Road Safety policy coordination

Like Austria, **Switzerland** is a country with a federal system, different levels of government, various language communities and many different road safety actors. Yet, it has a considerably better road safety record.¹⁹ In 2000, the federal government launched a new road safety policy based on the Scandinavian Vision Zero approach according to which road deaths and serious injuries should be reduced to zero, and human error taken into account. Key to the effective implementation of the proposed measures is the commitment from the federal government, the cantons (regions), the municipalities and other road safety actors to coordinate their activities and set priorities in order to achieve fixed and common goals. Quality checks and periodical reports are also foreseen.²⁰

In **Norway**, road safety policy is part of the national transport policy. Road safety work is implemented on four levels: national, regional, counties, and local. The Norwegian Public Works Administration, under the direction of the Ministry of Transport, cooperates with the Directorate for Health and Social Affairs, the Police and the National Society for Road Safety in the formulation of a national traffic safety plan of action and each actor is allocated a different task. Local authorities are also requested to formulate their own traffic safety plans. This effective sharing of responsibility and monitoring system is reflected in Norway’s road safety record, which is one of the best in Europe.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.



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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 Austria, the areas that specifically need to be strengthened are stricter enforcement measures to counter alcohol and speed-related road accidents, as well as better coordinated infrastructure improvement campaigns.

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 Transport, 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.

Within the Public Health Programme 2004 the Commission is co-financing the work package "Initiatives for interventions by the public health sector to prevent accidents among vulnerable road users (VRUs)" which is part of the umbrella project "Strategies and best practices for the reduction of injuries (APOLLO)". The work package is led by the Austrian Road Safety Board and comprises a data report on "Injuries to Vulnerable Road Users Including Falls of Pedestrians on Public Roads", resource books on good practices on EU, national and local level from a public health point of view and a software application to evaluate cost effectiveness of preventive actions. The outcomes will be available by end of 2008 and will be communicated to policy makers and safety practitioners through various networks, including the APOLLO network and the recently established Task Force on Vulnerable Road Users of the European Association of Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion (EuroSafe).²²

On 31 May 2007 a council recommendation on the prevention of injury and the promotion of safety identifying the safety of vulnerable road users as one of six key priority areas for further action within the Community Public Health Programme and other relevant Community Programmes has been adopted.²³

Austrian campaigns and organisations

The **Austrian Road Safety Board – KfV** (www.kfv.at) is a non-governmental organisation responsible for the promotion of road safety awareness and education which also advises the government; **Transport Club Austria – VCO** (www.vcoe.at) focuses on mobility issues; **Automobile, Motorcycle and Touring Club Austria** (www.arboe.at) and **Austrian Automobile, Motorcycle and Touring Club** (www.oeamtc.at) offer assistance in issues pertaining to automotive mobility and consumer protection and functions as interest groups for car drivers and motorcyclists; **Austrian Mobility Research - FGM-AMOR** (www.fgm.at) promotes environmental protection for sustainable development in mobility and is involved in a range of activities such as research, consulting, training and so on.

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- 18 ETSC PIN Flash 2 (26 September 2006) - http://www.etsc.be/documents/copy_of_copy_of_copy_of_copy_of_PIN%20Flash%202.pdf
- 19 Approximately 600 road fatalities per year in Switzerland as opposed to 1,350 in Belgium. Figures provided by the Belgian Road Safety Institute – www.ibsr.be / www.bivv.be.
- 20 For more information see www.bfu.ch / www.vision-zero.com / www.astra.admin.ch.
- 21 The number of road fatalities in Norway amounted to 1,208 deaths between 2000 and 2004 as opposed to 1,350 in Belgium in 2002 only. Figures on Norway provided by the Norwegian Public Works Administration - www.vegvesen.no.
- 22 <http://www.eurosafe.eu.com/csi/eurosafe2006.nsf>
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