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Improving Road Safety for Vulnerable Road Users in Latvia

Project title for communication to a wide audience

Enhancing Road Safety for Vulnerable Road Users in Latvia

Context of the project

In recent years, Latvia has consistently ranked among the top 5 EU countries with the highest road fatality rates per million inhabitants, recording 60 fatalities in 2022.[[1]](#footnote-2) Despite ongoing efforts, there has been no decrease in traffic accident-related deaths and serious injuries. [[2]](#footnote-3) This trend is particularly concerning for vulnerable road users (VRUs), whose rates of severe injuries and fatalities remain notably high without any apparent improvement.

As the use of micro-mobility devices like bicycles and electric scooters continues to grow, so does the incidence of accidents involving VRUs. The number of traffic accidents where cyclists have been injured has increased by 62.2% since 2012, reaching 670 in 2020. At the same time, the number of pedestrians injured has decreased by 30.8%, reaching 660 in 2020. Nevertheless, still more pedestrians were killed in road traffic accidents than cyclists – 43 and 19 respectively.[[3]](#footnote-4)

Additionally, the emergence of loosely regulated sharing systems for bicycles and electric scooters presents a new challenge in Latvia and the EU, particularly in urban areas. While these micro-mobility options enhance overall mobility, especially in dense urban environments, they have led to an increase in traffic accidents. In Latvia, there has been a notable surge in traffic accidents involving electric scooter users. In 2018, two such accidents were reported, whereas in 2020, the number rose significantly to 64, resulting in two fatalities.3Currently, there is no clear EU initiative addressing this issue; however, the European Commission is facilitating the exchange of best practices among member states.[[4]](#footnote-5)

In the light of these statistics, Latvian authorities are committed to decreasing the number of injuries and fatalities among VRU. One of the pathways to achieve this goal is to substitute private cars with public transportation while improving infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists. The Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia until 2030 states that “to reduce the proportion of private vehicle use, primarily the quality and access to public transport should be improved, as well as the popularity of public transport with the society should be increased. Concurrently with improvements in the public transportation field and potential restrictions in the use of private transport environment, Latvian authorities aim to increase specific pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure”.[[5]](#footnote-6) Upon implementation of these measures, it is expected that the number of VRU will continue to increase.

Brief presentation of the beneficiary authority

The Ministry of Transport (MoT) is the central authority responsible for overseeing transport and communication in Latvia, with a strong focus on road safety. Among its various duties, the MoT develops and implements policies related to road traffic, ensuring the safety of all road users.[[6]](#footnote-7)

A key aspect of the MoT's role is enhancing VRU safety, as highlighted in the Road Traffic Safety Plan for 2021-2027. This plan prioritizes information campaigns to raise awareness about VRU safety, addressing issues such as speeding, impaired driving, and driver distraction. Additionally, the MoT collaborates with the European Commission and member states to evaluate and implement measures aimed at improving road infrastructure safety, ultimately reducing fatalities and serious injuries among VRUs.[[7]](#footnote-8)

Description of what needs were addressed

The primary goal of the project was to assist Latvia in implementing institutional, administrative, and growth-oriented structural reforms. Specifically, the service contract aimed to help national authorities reduce the frequency of traffic accidents resulting in serious injuries or fatality among vulnerable road users.

Key deliverables and activities that were undertaken

The total duration of the Project was 10 months from October 2023 till August 2024. A detailed Project workplan was developed that includes activities performed during all 5 Project phases and allowed to track the progress of all Project activities at the same time.

1. Deliverable 1 – Inception report – outlines Project activities, implementation methods, governance details, and addresses potential implementation risks, providing mitigation measures.
2. Deliverable 2 – AS-IS report and gaps analysis – constructs a comprehensive assessment of current road safety conditions for vulnerable road users over the past five years. Reviews best practices and develops a reference model for comparison with the current situation in Latvia.
3. Deliverable 3 – Report with recommendations – encompasses a detailed set of recommendations to bridge the gaps between the reference model and the current situation in Latvia for road safety among vulnerable road users.
4. Deliverable 4 – Awareness Raising Campaign Report – aims to promote the safe integration of micro-mobility options with a focus on road safety for vulnerable road users. Based on data and recommendations from Deliverable 2 and Deliverable 3, the report emphasizes broader factors influencing road safety concerns.
5. Deliverable 5 – Final report – provides an overview of conducted activities and offers suggestions for future steps. Includes recommendations for assessing and supervising project results, along with key lessons learned. This information is valuable for presenting the project to external entities and guiding similar endeavors in different EU Member States.

Methodology and approach used to produce the final deliverables

In collaboration with the MoT of the Republic of Latvia, the project endeavors to enhance road safety policy, fostering heightened awareness and safer behavior among VRUs. This involves evaluating the current situation in Latvia, conducting a best practice analysis across Europe, and formulating recommendations, including a detailed roadmap for implementation. The project also included the development of an awareness-raising campaign aimed at highlighting existing and potential risks associated with micro-mobility.

Consultation with stakeholders and/or workshops

Consultation with stakeholders and workshops played a critical role in this project. Monthly status update meetings were scheduled to ensure regular team check-ins and progress evaluations. Workshops and OWG meetings were convened as needed, allowing for flexibility and responsiveness to the project's demands. Additionally, project deliverable reports were prepared and presented according to the established calendar, ensuring structured and timely updates on project milestones and outcomes.

Key findings and lessons learnt

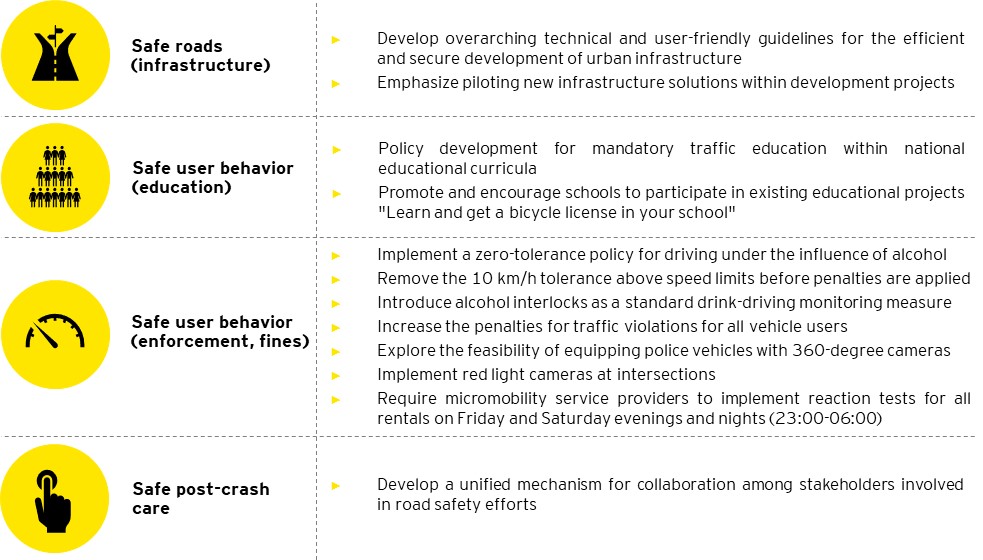
Due to the extensive research conducted and the broad range of aspects examined, the list of findings from this project is quite comprehensive. However, some of the key findings include the following:

1. Infrastructure in Latvia is fragmented, for example cycling paths end abruptly, often they are designed in non-standardized ways. VRUs often must share infrastructure and then suddenly the infrastructure is separated. Due to fragmentation in infrastructure, VRUs that are not pedestrians are forced to use infrastructure meant for cars, pedestrians, and cyclists, therefore moving around the street a lot.
2. In contrast to best practice countries, pedestrian walkways are shared between different VRUs. On roads where there are no cycling paths, cyclists, electric bicycles, electric step scooters are not prohibited to use pedestrian walkways and are permitted to use the right side of the road.
3. Latvian bicycle standards comply with best practices in infrastructure design; however they are rarely applied in real life. Most roads do not have cycling paths at all.
4. Views about infrastructure that affects vulnerable road users in Latvia are polarized and sometimes not substantiated by data and research. There is a lack of effective mechanism to facilitate communication between municipal authorities, Latvian Road Traffic Safety Directorate, Latvian State Roads, NGOs, and professionals (e.g., spatial planners, engineers etc.), although they often have information that other institutions do not have.
5. While information on road traffic accidents is available, including various additional information as type of accident, involved road users, time and location etc., there is no information about the fatal road accidents, where a criminal case has been initiated and it limits the possibility to analyze these accidents to understand root-cause of those accidents.

Throughout the project, several key lessons were learned as various critical elements were thoroughly analyzed. The most significant lessons include:

1. Effective stakeholder involvement, including urban planners, NGOs, and ministries like the Ministry of Health for post-crash care, is crucial in road safety evaluation and decision-making. Currently, these parties operate independently, lacking unified mechanisms to collaborate and create shared value.
2. Best practices in road safety must be critically assessed, as many factors, including historical and cultural beliefs, contribute to a country’s success in reducing road fatalities. These non-direct factors make it challenging to replicate similar solutions across different countries.
3. Road safety requires significant investment and is a time-consuming process. Long-term improvements often demand high financial resources, so it’s essential to prioritize medium-term recommendations that offer the greatest impact with the least financial investment.
4. In Latvia, there is a strong auto-centric culture, making it difficult to shift public perception towards the benefits of micromobility. Changing these deeply rooted beliefs will require long-term efforts and effective measures to influence cultural attitudes related to road safety.
5. Infrastructure solutions often overlook people with reduced mobility. The best solutions for vulnerable road users should also accommodate this group. Reframing the discussion to include older people, children, and those with reduced mobility as vulnerable road users could have a positive impact.
6. There is a tendency to blame vulnerable road users in road interactions. This contrasts with leading countries where the person with the greatest potential to cause harm is held more responsible and expected to be more aware of their actions.

Recommendations - highest priorities

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Expected results and impact

Latvia is expected to formally endorse the deliverables through its internal mechanisms and take action on the recommendations provided. If these recommendations are implemented at the regulatory level, the deliverables should lead to enhanced road safety policies and increased safety awareness among vulnerable road users. Although influenced by various factors, the project’s tasks and outcomes are anticipated to contribute to long-term improvements in road safety for vulnerable users, reflected in a reduction of fatal road accidents involving this group. However, achieving these outcomes and ensuring long-term impact depends largely on Latvia's commitment to following up on and enforcing the deliverables, as well as broader policy conditions, which fall outside the control of the European Commission and the contractor. The responsibility for such follow-up and implementation lies solely with Latvia.

1. European Commission. (2023). Road safety statistics 2022 in more detail. Retrieved from https://transport.ec.europa.eu/background/road-safety-statistics-2022-more-detail\_en. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. CSDD. (2024) Ikmēneša un biežāk atjaunotie CSNg dati. Retrieved from https://www.csdd.lv/celu-satiksmes-negadijumi/ikmenesa-dati. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Ministry of Transport of Latvia, 2022, Informative report ‘’On National Micro-Mobility Development’’. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. European Commission. (2020). Next steps towards ‘Vision Zero’. EU road safety policy framework 2021-2030. Retrieved from https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/d7ee4b58-4bc5-11ea-8aa5-01aa75ed71a1. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Saeima of the Republic of Latvia. (n.d.). Sustainable development strategy of Latvia until 2030. Retrieved from https://www.mk.gov.lv/en/media/15132/download?attachment. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. *Ministry of Transport*. (n.d.). Satiksmes Ministrija. https://www.sam.gov.lv/en/ministry-transport-0 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. *Ceļu satiksmes drošības plāns 2021.-2027.gadam*. (n.d.). Satiksmes Ministrija. https://www.sam.gov.lv/lv/celu-satiksmes-drosibas-plans-2021-2027gadam [↑](#footnote-ref-8)