



# Role of road safety educational and awareness campaigns

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## ABSTRACT

The main aim of this paper is to present road safety campaigns as powerful tool to increase safety on our roads. It is based on findings of international project SOL – Save our lives. Paper sums the aim of all pilot actions developed within the project, based on realization of traffic safety educational and awareness campaigns. It also highlights main topics to which a particular attention was given during the project realization, following the results of the road safety situational assessment of participating Central European countries. In the final part of paper there is a short description of methodology proposed for design and conduction of effective road safety campaigns provided together with conclusions of the pilot implementation.

**Keywords: road safety, campaigns, project**

## 1. Introduction

Each year around one million people are killed and 50 million people injured on roads around the world and more than 40,000 people lose their lives on Europe's roads.

There is universal recognition of the tremendous global burden resulting from road traffic crashes, and that road traffic injuries constitute a major but neglected public health problem that has significant consequences in terms of mortality and morbidity and considerable social and economic costs. According to the WHO and the World Bank [1], a multi-sectoral approach is required to successfully address this problem. While the number of deaths and seriously injured people is falling, studies have shown that faster progress is possible if all effective means are applied [2].

Road crashes and road crash injury should not have to be seen anymore as an inevitable outcome of road transport anymore because they are largely preventable and predictable. A core component of this process is recognition that road safety is mostly influenced by road users and that their behaviour could be changed [3-7]. And it is one of today challenges in increasement of road safety – change the behaviour of road users via well adressed and effective campaigns [8].

## 2. Basic information about project SOL – Save our lives

Project “SOL – Save our lives. A Comprehensive Road Safety Strategy for Central Europe” was international project co-financed in frame of Programme of Territorial Cooperation Central Europe. It was launched in April 2010 and has duration of 3 years. It represented a significant regional road safety programme and contributed to the global road safety with critical knowledge, experience and tools. SOL involved partners from 8 countries of Central Europe area.

The project aimed at giving professional qualities, experiences and tools to local public administrations to increase the road safety in their competence areas.

The main goal of the project was to promote sustainable mobility and increase awareness for safety issues as well as contributing to the achievement of higher quality of living conditions.

Within this project several materials and tools was produced to help benefit road safety in the region and to inform and contribute to similar action in other regions of the world.

## 2.1. SOL pilot activities

The main aim of the project SOL was to develop concrete activities to prevent road crashes, deaths and injuries in participating Central European countries. In 12 pilot areas of these countries (Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Italy and Austria) targeted strategies were developed implementing effective programmes to build a transnational road safety network. The pilot actions focused on different aspects related to road safety were addressed to some of following targets (one or several of them):

- children injury prevention in road traffic,
- drink and driving prevention,
- decreasing the number of car accidents and their serious consequences in long-term horizon,
- building a Road Safety Programme and spread among communities through the help of communicators,
- enhancing road safety connected with freight transport,
- enhancing road safety connected with public transport,
- increasing safety of children when cycling,
- improving children's safety on the journey to school, increasing correct the use of seat belts.

The pilot actions were selected basing on the results of road safety assessment, taking into account also the interest of the local stakeholders, the national road safety concerns and the aims and goals of the SOL project. In almost all of them road safety campaigns took important role with one of the following objectives:

- to involve stakeholders and planners in order to change their attitudes while planning and projecting roads;
- to enhance people's awareness about road safety issues concerning specific topics in order to change their behavior when approaching the road.

## 2.2. Overview of SOL pilot activities` aims

As was mentioned above, following the results of the situational assessment, different pilot activities were developed in SOL partners countries. Next text is presenting short resume of each one of these actions together with their aims to be possible to make future evaluation related to results obtained in medium and long term.

In *Austria*, where results of the ssituational aassessment showed that the main target group of accidents on the streets under influence of alcohol are young male qualified skilled workers with less education and according to the priorities of existing road safety strategy, the objective of the pilot was to increase the knowledge about the Road Safety Programme within communities and to raise awareness concerning road safety risk factors. Therefore the main action foreseen was to increase the knowledge about the Road Safety Programme within the community with the help of „communicators“. For this purpose several kinds of communicators were used, according to their appropriateness case by case:

- External communicators - communities were visited by one Communicator to motivate the mayors and citizens to implement Road Safety Strategies and measures concerning risk factors and mobility education;

- Young communicators - Young teams of communicators visited schools to provide accident prevention workshops and produce a Road Safety Rap;
- Local communicators - interested people from the community get trained to be Communicators situated in their community to get aware of Road Safety Strategies and measures concerning risk factors and mobility education.

In *Czech Republic* SOL participating region had been involved in road safety issues especially since November 2003 when regional council adopted the Road Safety Strategy, that was subsequently evaluated and updated regularly. In the following years, the region implemented a number of already proved measures, but also several new ones, to improve road safety. It managed with all these activities to achieve the desired target, halving the number of fatalities from road accidents between 2001 and 2010.

Nevertheless the commitment in reducing the number of road accidents and fatalities continued within the SOL experience where the actions listed below were implemented.

- Step by step in traffic without injury - The pilot focused on increasing the children awareness about road safety and sustainability of transport (use of public transport), and their understanding of wrong (unsafe, unsustainable) behavior in traffic.
- Short road safety inspection of sites with higher implication of vulnerable road users in traffic accidents - Within the SOL pilot were inspected 40 new places in participating region; made 40 re-inspections with a lot of former recommendations in place and 40 inspections in the capital city.
- Safety Journey to School implementation – The aim of this pilot was increasing children co-operation in injury prevention and road safety and their road safety awareness. The children studied same topic related to the safety on roads and they choose activities that were familiar to them. Three workshops in two different schools were arranged together with final event in each of them.

In *Hungary* the following main pilot actions were implemented:

- Increasing the road safety of children as cyclists – The aim was to reduce the number and severity of road accidents involving cycling children, promoting sustainable forms of mobility;
- Information campaign about the risks of driving under the influence of alcohol – The aim was to reduce the number and severity of road accidents including fatalities connected to drink driving. Raise awareness of the importance of sober driving and the amount of time required for degradation of alcohol in the body before driving a vehicle;
- Improve the safety of children on the journey to and from school – The aim was to improve road safety knowledge and awareness of children, enhanced infrastructure around selected schools, motivated and trained teachers and professionals.

In *Italy* the focus of pilot actions concerned two main topics: collective transport and freight transport. In participating province the aim to halve road deaths was in line with a broader vision of the mobility system, focusing on the revitalization of the public transport system. This province has been characterized for a long time by its focus on sustainable mobility, the transport of goods and the objective of reducing road accidents. In order to

accomplish this objective black spots have been monitored and studied along provincial roads. Interventions were planned in line with existing provincial plans. The province has also undertaken several initiatives of prevention, information and enforcement for reducing accidents involving heavy good vehicles.

Specifically following pilot action were performed:

- Road safety and public transport – this action was based on investigation of public transport system safety problems related to the location/design of bus stops and verification of the safety efficiency and the effectiveness of existing bus stops (through safety inspections on demo lines). This pilot has integrated road safety inspections of existing bus stops with awareness raising of dangerous situations involving different road users, in particular the vulnerable ones such as pedestrian and cyclists, in proximity of dedicated bus stops. The outcome of this study was a guide for technicians for the planning and projecting bus stops.
- Road safety and truck mobility – this action was based on investigation of truck mobility system to detect the most important threats of truck mobility. The road safety campaigns involved teens from high schools and truck drivers to produce a cultural shift in truck drivers toward a more responsible drive style.

In *Poland* the pilot were focused on strengthening existing road safety management structures, especially in three main areas: speed management, alcohol impairment in road traffic and child prevention from road crashes. Pilots aimed to increase the involvement of promotion campaigns in road safety activities in participating regions as well as strengthen relationships with the main stakeholders in the process of road safety development.

- Alcohol prevention in road traffic – The aim was to raise awareness and knowledge on the consequences of drink and driving. Training programme based on alcohol prevention was implemented in secondary and driving schools.
- Child injury prevention in road traffic – The aim was to improve children and youth safety on their route to school through increasing the knowledge of children and parents on safe behavior in road traffic, improved infrastructure in selected the schools surroundings, increased traffic enforcement and raised awareness of the citizens on safe behavior in road traffic.

In *Slovakia* the pilot was focused on young drivers and communicators. One part of this pilot was strongly connected with the development of a regional Road Safety Programme, as it was the first document of this kind in the country.

- Young Drivers – The aim was to increase young drivers' skills at skid surface by additional training and enhance the number of interested drivers in more road safety preparation.
- Communicators – The aim was to increase of children school education in pilot area and involve more children in more attractive road safety education.

In *Slovenia* the pilot was developed in following areas:

- Child Injury Prevention, Road Safety Management – The aim was to improve road safety management developing a sustainable road safety prevention system at the local level to increase correct use of child restraints and increase wearing seat belt in rear seats position.

### 2.3. Topics of the road safety campaigns developed within SOL pilot activities

Among the issues faced by pilots of the SOL project particular attention was provided to the topics presented below that regarding the results on situational assessment resulted the most important ones.

#### **Driving under the influence of alcohol**

Driving under the influence of alcohol is among the “three main killers” worldwide and it seems to be a growing problem in many regions (e.g. in Győr, HU and Poland). The number of people injured in accidents involving drivers under the influence of alcohol is low from a statistical point of view, but there is visible tendency to reinforce this opinion.

The campaigns did not want to motivate people not to drink, it rather wanted to raise awareness of the importance of choosing different transport options when drinking, enhance the importance of sober driving and give knowledge about the amount of time required for the degradation of the alcohol in the body before driving a vehicle. It also wanted to contribute to setting social norms to make drink driving unacceptable in the community and raise awareness for passengers not to take a ride with a drunk driver.

#### **Increasing the road safety of children**

This issue was tackled from different point of view, targeting children and families.

*Children as cyclists* - One of the main goals in the field of sustainable mobility is to increase cycling. The physical activeness of children is unfortunately far from being adequate nowadays. Increasing the number of cyclists and cycling time positive influences on health can be reached, both by increasing physical activity and reducing air pollution influencing their attitudes in using of motor vehicles when they become adults. The long term benefits of the reduction of motor vehicle traffic is the enhancement of air quality along with the reduction of noise and the increased physical condition that all contribute to less stress, hence supporting biking as a mode of transport is very advantageous. Cycling is undoubtedly healthy but holds high road safety risk. Cyclists are one of the most vulnerable road user groups, so as children.

When promoting cycling for children it is especially important to take their safety into account. The appropriate knowledge of rules and “cycling technique” is required, but in addition, it is also good to know which places are safe, or less safe to ride a bicycle, so that they choose their route accordingly. The objective of the campaigns related to this topic (e.g. Hungarian one) were to enhance the theoretical and technical knowledge of cycling elementary school children hence reduce the road safety risks of cycling and the accidents as a consequence taking into account also the importance to have properly equipped bikes in good conditions for use and to promote the use of safe cycling routes.

*Children going to school* – Nowadays the majority of children are carried to school (and not only) usually by car, and only few of them walk to school regularly. There are several reasons for the decrease in walking to school. Firstly, the journey between home and school has become longer and more dangerous because

of decades of auto-oriented development. This pattern has been compounded by the trend towards building new schools far away from residential areas. The fear and concern of parents about exposing their children to threats from strangers and motor vehicles contributes to less walking time. The distance between home and school has quite much influence on the chosen transport mode and also on the risk factors along the way from road safety aspect. Therefore the aim was to increase the safety of children on their way to and from school. According to SOL local situational assessment, based on the opinion of the citizens, sidewalks, crosswalks, bike lanes and trails are either missing or inadequate (e.g. in Győr, HU and Poland). The road safety knowledge of children about traffic rules and regulations, the way of applying them and the practice of safe walking and cycling also need further improvement. The goal of the campaign (Hungary) was to get the school community working together to make the journey to the school safer, healthier and more enjoyable.

#### Use of seat belts

The goal was to transfer awareness, knowledge and practice from national to local level, focusing on the usage of child restraints and seat belts in rear car seats. To establish coordinated group of different local stakeholders (Slovenia) and that they will be able to work as a multisectorial and multidiscipline team, which is going to cooperate on the field of road safety and sustainable mobility at the local level.

The target groups in the campaign were on the one side families, especially children and their caregivers and on the other side relevant local stakeholders. The aim was to spread the awareness of how important road safety is - especially correct usage of child restraints and safety belt in rear seats among visitors – children and their caregivers.

#### Pedestrian safety

The goal of this campaign was to increase the awareness of road safety through messages elaborated by pupils of primary schools placed on public transport vehicles (Czech Republic). The main target group was the pedestrians. Using public transport vehicles as a message carriers meant to raise awareness about RS issues to all the citizens, especially to those used to move around the city walking and/or using public transport.

#### Young and novice drivers

One of the main target group of accidents on the streets under influence of alcohol are young male qualified skilled worker with less education. That's the reason why it is important to hold workshops in vocational schools.

The target groups were:

- young (male) pupils in vocational schools (15 – 20 years old). This group is at high risk for drink and driving, speeding and risky behavior on the street. The aim of the campaign was to raise awareness of risky driving before young people start to drive a car (Austria);
- young persons in 15-17 years of age and children (Slovakia);
- novice drivers (Slovakia).

#### Safety at bus stops

This campaign concerns public transport safety issues and the safety of vulnerable road users seeking to raise public awareness on road safety, sustainable mobility and public transport. The campaign (Italy) is addressed to children directly and indirectly to their families.

#### Safety concerning freight transport

The objective is to raise awareness of road safety and safe driving behavior among truck drivers and other road users, in particular the most vulnerable ones such as children, elderly, pedestrian and cyclists. Target Groups (in Italy) are formed by: truck drivers that were involved in the pilot during the survey (71 drivers filled in the SOL questionnaire) and through the training campaign (more than 70 drivers attended the courses); administrative bodies and technicians to which research activities were addressed; the whole local community; vulnerable road users – more than 50 students from schools – were involved in event to raise awareness of road safety and safe driving behavior among truck drivers and other.

## 3. Conclusion

Public education had an important role in the SOL project, particularly in support of other initiatives that spontaneously came out everywhere. It generally supported law enforcement, legislative amendment and changes in regulations. It was also a key element in raising public awareness and changing attitudes in order to influence road user behaviour. The transnational cooperation showed that increasing the awareness of sustainable mobility in road safety work it's a crucial issue to better citizens' lives.

At national and transnational level there were used three communication streams. Media communication and dissemination used transnational and local TV and radio networks, press releases, articles, and national and transnational conferences to publicise the project and its achievements. Moreover the transnational cooperation showed that road safety problems were nearly the same in every country. It was identified as very important for all the project partners to implement a road safety group which is responsible for implementing a road safety programme and for strengthen the road safety management structure where political commitments were very important for implementing actions and programmes.

In this sense SOL Networks helped to change the experience within countries where new emotional approaches was tested in road safety campaigns, a new approach used in Slovenia, Czech Republic and Austria that shows positive results to be developed in future activities.

To be effective, a publicity campaign should have clear objectives and should be directed at a specific target audience [9]. For this reason in many countries an important stakeholder group was represented by children, educating them during their way to school, during their free time (biking or walking) and particularly sowing them possible dangers that could become in future with inappropriate behaviour.

Other campaigns had the objective of raising risk awareness by imparting information on the results of risk taking behaviour such as speeding or drinking and driving. Each campaign focused

on the consequences in terms of causing death or injury, or on the legal sanctions. More information about experiences from SOL campaigns realizations could be find at project web site [10] where specific tools for each of thematic areas of the campaigns presented in this paper are accessible.

Based on experiences from SOL road safety campaigns implementations it is possible to conclude that the public opinion is a key stimulus to political will for road safety, and increasing public support for road safety through effective communication and education campaigns is an essential element in a comprehensive road safety strategy.

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